

Stilling the Flow of Thought: *Vasana Kshayam via Prati Paksha Bhavana*

A discourse given by Guruji Sri Amritananda Natha on April 4, 2006, at Devipuram.



You cannot understand the concepts of *Vasana Kshayam* (stilling the flow of one's thoughts) and *Prati Paksha Bhavana* (counteracting one thought with another) in isolation. They need to follow one another in a certain sequence. Simply put, *Prati Paksha Bhavana* means, "Whatever thought comes, oppose it." But to understand this, you also need to understand what came before the *Prati Paksha Bhavana*, what is going to come after it, and what *Vasana Kshayam* is for in the first place. These ideas have to be understood in their totality.



Dispensing With Names

Let's begin with *Vasana Kshayam*. You don't achieve this stilling of the mind's flow by merely replacing "bad" thoughts with "good" thoughts, because *vasana* refers to thoughts of all kinds – good, bad and indifferent. The moment you begin classifying things – as good or bad or whatever – the very act of naming them itself creates an attachment.

The world is full of such classifications and guidelines – hundreds of them, each naming and defining what is good and what is bad, how one should live and what proper conduct is. There are Muslim guidelines, American guidelines, Indian, Chinese ... take your pick! There are entire books of guidelines! Choose your religion; they all talk about it.

Of course, we don't choose the guidelines we grow up with. We're born into them; the moment we come into this World the guidelines and labels are there waiting for us. Brahmins have their guidelines; Kshatriyas have theirs; each group has its own set. Even dogs have guidelines; even plants! The guideline for plants might be, "Thou shalt not move from the place where you are. You must take nourishment from the soil in which you were born. If you cannot get that nourishment, then you must die."

A plant can't go wandering off in search of water – it shoots out roots as best it can, and if it does not find water it dies. That's how Nature is – compassionate to some, and not compassionate to others; or at least that's how it seems from our perspective. Because compassion is a human emotion; it does not govern Nature. Nature is beyond emotion. That is why we say Devi is both *Roudri* (the Angry One) and *Prashanti svaroopini* (the embodiment of Supreme Peace):

// ati sowmyAti roudrAyai nathAstasyai namo namaH //

She is the most pleasing among beautiful things, and the most ferocious among terrible things.

Under Nature's laws, there is no good and bad. That's just the law. "Good" and "bad" are human judgments, not Nature's. Nature is indifferent. So you can't reduce your attachments just by changing the name you apply to them. You will be no less attached. You are attached to the bad by hatred of it, and to the good by desire for it – so where have good and bad gone then?



An Absence of Thought?

Moreover, if all *vasanas* – if all of your thoughts – are deleted, then how can you recognize anything at all? You won't even recognize whether you've achieved *samadhi* or not! *Mano nasham* and *buddhi nasham* (Tantric techniques for "destruction" of the mind and the intellect, respectively) take place in the thoughts. *Buddhi* (the intellect) is part of *manas* (the mind), is it not? So if we eliminate all thought, then *buddhi* is gone too. There is no mind to contain it. How is this different from anesthesia? How is it different from death? There is no mind to see anything, no mind to recognize anything. What is there? Is it *shunyam* (emptiness)? Do you want to become nothing? Is that the goal? Is death the goal?

If you say killing a person is bad, then I say killing a person's mind is also bad. If you turn someone into a vegetable, is that good or bad? The person becomes incapable of thinking, incapable of anything. Is that what we want? Is that the goal? No. So what is the goal we're after? Are we seeking emptiness or fullness?

As long as you're having thoughts, you are not experiencing *vasana kshayam*. Whether they're good thoughts, bad thoughts, big thoughts, cosmic thoughts, powerful or powerless thoughts, you're still having *vasanas*, thoughts. Even if you experience a vast cosmic explosion of knowledge into yourself, that too is a form of *vasana*.

So does *vasana kshayam* mean a total cessation of all thoughts and experiences? Is that the goal? Should it be the goal? No. To say that nothing is in the mind is a fallacy. Certainly, flowing experiences couldn't exist in such a state; but couldn't there be non-flowing, timeless experiences? Let us do a thought experiment: Imagine that you have a piece of cardboard with a slot cut into it, and that you're viewing a book through this slot, moving it diagonally from one corner of the book to the opposite corner. As you move the slot, all you can see through it is a linear section of the book. From this perspective, it makes sense to say that the book is born in one corner as a point, grows wider and wider as the slot moves over it, then smaller and smaller again until it is reduced to just a point again at the other corner, where it dies.

This scanning view makes a two-dimensional object appear as a constantly changing one-dimensional line. But if the Time does not flow – if the scanning is not done – then you see the book as a whole. It will not be born at this corner, nor die at the other. It is there when you look at it, and it is not there when you don't look at it. It exists in one region of Space and Time, but not in another.



A Different Kind of ‘Experience’

If we increase the number of dimensions we observe in an object, that object gains in richness, it doesn’t lose. The two-dimensional view of our book, for example, is richer than its one-dimensional, linear view. Similarly, when we see the World *not* by scanning it in Time, but by seeing all of Time as if it is was also Space, then the World is there even when Time is not flowing. So obviously, there *is* an “experience” – just not in the way that we generally understand the term “experience.” It is not the same world that we experience when Time is flowing.

By “experience” we generally mean something that is moving, something that is taking place within the flow of Time. Yet a much richer experience than this Time-bound perspective exists. In the richer, Time-less view, nothing is born, nothing is moving, nothing is dying – and yet the experience is not empty, not null; rather, it is ALL. It is not *shunyam* (emptiness), but *poornam* (fullness)!

When you perform *vasana kshayam*, it means you’re trying to stop the mind from moving; that is, you’re trying to stop the flow of Time in your mind. Does an experience result from this? Consider another example: Take an audio cassette and look at it. All of the music is there inside it, but we don’t “experience” it in this way. To experience the music, we have to “scan” it in Time at a certain speed, i.e. run it through a tape player. Only then we can experience the music in the conventional sense of “hearing” it.

If we scan it too fast – say, by playing a half-hour program in one-tenth of a second – it will sound like a bullet shot. But if you can extend your imagination to the experience of hearing every wave in the music at the same time – from a perspective in which Time is like Space – then you can get close to what “hearing” an un-scanned cassette means: It subsumes all experiences of hearing the cassette at all speeds; and yet, in this view, it does not mean anything to say, “I hear the music.”

Instead, you’re in a domain where all of Time is seen at once. Every division of Space and Time is seen simultaneously. So it is certainly not “nothing.” On the contrary: It is Totality. And how can Totality be nothing? So in this understanding, if there must be a *sutra* – a short definition – to summarize what *vasana kshayam* is, it would be: “You stop thinking.”

But is that really an accurate definition? Let’s say we have a wave – a sine wave – in the form of a thought. And now let’s add another thought – an opposite sine wave. The net result is zero thought. Thought, like Life itself, must move in Time in order to exist. So basically what we’re trying to do is counter the movement of thought in Time. In other words, we are trying to gain a Time-less experience – and thus there can be no action in it, because action belongs to the realm of flowing Time. Action happens in Time. If Time is moving, then action can exist. But if Time does not move, what action can there be? What action can there be in a frozen photograph? Both killing and giving birth are actions. Both good and bad activities are actions. But when nothing is moving, when nothing is changing, what good can there be? And what bad can there be?

The laws of Nature are a constant existing outside the flow of Time. They do not change with Time. This *Mula Prakriti* – Primal Nature, the base matrix upon which manifest Nature operates – is invariant. On the other hand, *Prakriti* – the everyday, manifest Nature that is constantly being born and growing and changing and dying all around us – is a variant. And there are two kinds of variants. These are called *co-variants* if they are moving in the same direction as Time, and *contra-variants* if they are moving in the opposite direction. Both possibilities exist – both co-variant and contra-variants – with respect to Time.

So that means we must adjust our *sutra*: The aim of *vasana kshayam* is not the cessation of the mind, but rather the cessation of Time. Or maybe not even the cessation of Time, because again, in the Time-less realm, Time is like Space. Space doesn't move, and neither does Time. ... But here we are encroaching on the borderland between physics and philosophy. Since I understand neither, I had better stop now.



Accessing the Universal Memory

To return to my original point, *fullness* is our aim here; not emptiness, not destruction. We are not dealing with *mano nasham* (destruction of the mind), but *vasana nasham* (destruction of thoughts). And what is *vasana* actually? We've been calling it "thought" as a kind of shorthand translation – but more accurately *vasana* denotes the course or flow of memory. You remember some event and it begins moving in your mind as you go through the story of that memory. That is called *vasana*. An incident has happened, and you remember it. You remember the sequence.

How else can we explain the concept of *vasana*? Well, tie a piece of *hing* (in English, *asafetida*; a pungent, edible plant resin) inside a cloth for a while, then remove the *hing* – still, the cloth will retain its scent for a long time. That is what *vasana* is like. Some incident happens, it gets stored in your brain, and your mind replays it. That is to say, the memory is replayed; it is not washed out or erased. It is not shift-delete; it's there in recycle bin! You can access it in the usual way if you need to.

Nothing is ever destroyed, because there is no destruction, nor is there any birth. You can neither destroy nor create. Everything is there all the time, just waiting in the recycle bin. So memory can never be destroyed; God's memory is perfect. Instead, what we're destroying is the movement of Time within the mind. At any given moment, we're only looking at a certain part of our recycle bin, and it is that particular view that we're focusing on. That is what should be called *vasana kshayam* – a stillness of the mind, in which good thoughts are countered by bad thoughts, and bad thoughts by good thoughts.

This is not *mano nasham*; it is not the destruction of the mind. That would be more akin to reformatting the drive on your computer. All memory is erased, all programs are lost – all lives are lost, no survivors. That is *shunyam*. Is that our aim? No, it is not the aim and it could not be the aim – because you cannot destroy God. God is this world. If you destroy the world then God also dies, and God is beyond death.

So what can we do? How do we still our thoughts? Well, all thoughts are waves, right? So how do we reduce the intensity of a wave? We meet it with an equal counter-wave, making the net amplitude zero – the two waves nullify one another. And so that is what *vasana kshayam* must mean: If what we seek is a “thought-less” state, then there should be no waves. And how do we kill a wave? We create a counter-wave – and that must be *prati paksha bhavana*.

In using this technique, you might say that you enclose your mind between two shutters: A thought goes from here to there and comes back; it is reflected here, reflected there; it oscillates between the two until it finally collapses. At that point, there is no more oscillation. The mind remains still. Which means you’re moving away from your individual mind – that which you are stilling – and out toward the Universal Mind, which is the superset of everything. When Time is moving, you cannot enter the Universal Mind. You can enter it only when Time is stilled. *Vasana kshayam* is used in that sense.

Remember: It is *vasana kshayam*, not *mano layam* – stilling of the flow of thoughts, not destroying the mind. The mind consists of one’s individual memories. What we’re doing with *vasana kshayam* is replacing this individual memory with Universal Memory.



A Timeless Realm

This concept of *prati paksha bhavana* really can’t be put into practice in an everyday context, mainly because our everyday life is so totally different from the Time-less experience of God. Our daily experience, our daily life, plays out within the context of Time. And as long as Time is moving, it’s not possible to relate our experience to a Time-less experience.

Within our realm of Time, you’ve got to have *kama* (desire). How can we delete *kama*? Without *kama*, there can be no life on this Earth. Hunger is a form of *kama*, too. And why do we hunger? Because we want to live! Moreover, how can we kill *roudra* (anger) if we are worshipping Devi? If you’re doing Devi upasana, then you’re worshipping *roudra* – you’re worshipping Rudra (Shiva)! *Rudrasya BhavaH roudraH* – the essence of Rudra is *roudra*.

Kama, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, and *matsarya* (desire, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and jealousy) – these are all the juice of life! So are *shanti* (peacefulness) and *bhaya* (fear), and *punya* and *papa* (holiness and sinfulness). Each of these passions has its own particular role to play. You cannot eliminate them without eliminating the World.

Think about it: Without anger, one cannot put energy into an enterprise; the enterprise would come to a standstill. Without greed, there would be no capitalism. Why does capitalism work? Because one greedy man can provide jobs and livelihoods for hundreds of people; thus, greed sustains the distribution of wealth. Without *moha* – infatuation with possessions, and the attendant desire for more – you’d not see houses built, or dams or atomic reactors. Without *moha*, families could not survive, nor villages, nor nations. *Mada* is pride; you have to have honor too, right? “You make me proud, my son,” we say. Without pride, there is no moving ahead. So that is also required.

In sum, our ordinary, day-to-day, passion-driven experiences are totally different from the Universal Experience of the Time-less domain. You cannot translate one into the other. They are two different realities.

Let's say your computer has plenty of memory, but you kill the clock. The computer is aware of all its memory, but it doesn't sequence the data through its clock. The clock is Time, right? *Tick-tock, tick-tock*. A digital clock keeping binary time: *Zero-one, zero-one*. And you delete it.

What happens? Nothing! Nothing can move. In the Time-less domain you've created, every moment is a subset of another moment, and a superset of still another. Such an analysis is not applicable to the Time-driven domain in which we live – a qualified, controlled and limited domain. The operations and laws that are applicable here do not apply there.

Vasana kshayam is like that. Upon the database we call the World, we apply a sort of filter and look through it. Everything that's contained in our Time-driven domain is most definitely contained in that Time-less realm as well; in fact, much more is there than here. The Time-less experience cannot occur absent a concurrent experience of Totality. The Emperor's Mind, God's Mind, cannot be reached by Time-bound thoughts. That is why you've got to destroy Time. You've got to extend yourself from minus-infinity to plus-infinity, both in Time and in Space. You're such a small atom here in this Time-bound realm; how can you hope to experience the infinite without ridding yourself of Time? Time resides at the Ajna Chakra: Without crossing it, you cannot reach the Time-less domain.



Words and Infinity

Here's another phenomenon that plays out in our Time-bound domain: People talk of *more* and *less* – not only in the material sense, but in the realm of spirituality as well! There are even more-and-less arguments about Realization: If *A* has realized God and if *B* has also realized God, then what *A* says about the experience should be the same as what *B* says.

The thing is, when we're speaking in terms of infinities such comparisons simply don't apply. *A* can experience one infinity, and *B* another. Both of these infinities are equal to the Total Infinity, and yet both can still be totally different from one another. That is why there are variations in what the various seers tell us: It does not have to be same experience for everyone. Why should it be? Infinity is precisely that – an infinity of infinities! There is no concept of more or less! Such ideas are quite irrelevant in the domain of infinities.

Dattatreya tells us, “Eat, drink and fornicate, and you'll achieve your goal!” Lord Dakshinamurthy says, “Avoid all of these things, and you'll achieve your goal!” So who's right and who's wrong? The question itself is absurd in the domain of infinities! Both are right, and both are wrong. *Right* and *wrong*, like *more* and *less*, are human judgments. And what does Nature care about human judgments? Nothing! Why should it care? And we discussed

earlier, Nature cares only for its own laws; it is bound only by its own guidelines, not the ones we create!

The constitution of Nature is defined by its laws. For example, that c , the speed of light, is constant; that Time flows; that Space flows; that there's a genetic code describing how evolution will unfold. You can't modify these laws of Nature; they are the very basis upon which it operates! And where are the good and bad in these rules? Nowhere. When a bullet is aimed at a person and fired, it goes and kills the person in the crosshairs. So long as it is operating within the laws of physics, the laws of Nature, you cannot stop the bullet from killing. Nature doesn't take compassion on the person and say, "Oh bullet, please do not kill this person; that wouldn't be good." It doesn't say that. It is not bound by human judgments.

Human judgments are such a small thing in the infinity of the Cosmos. Can a single blood cell within you dictate what you should think and what you should do? No – you are an infinity of cells; how can one cell dictate what your totality should do? We get carried away by our own words and labels and judgments. We need to go behind the screen of these words and find out what's actually the Reality they're talking about. Sometimes they make sense; sometimes they're nonsense. Sometimes I'm not convinced that anybody is talking sense, including myself. So maybe that's enough for today. Thanks for listening.

