

Friday, 25 October 2024

Cultivating Presence:

The Power of Consciousness and Purity of Mind

One of the problems we face most of the time is being in the present. Do you agree with me? We're either lost in thoughts about the future or the past. But whenever there is joy, it happens in the present, right?

How many of you were able to be present for at least half an hour during the fire ceremony? I'm not talking about just being physically present. It's good that you were physically there, and I'm happy about that. But I mean, was your consciousness truly present—here and now? The practice is not for anything else; spiritual practice is for that experience. There is nothing more valuable than being present in the moment. So, I'll randomly ask you to share your experiences from this morning. How was it for you?

"I felt the vibrations of the mantra in my body, and the sensations of the fire within me."

"I felt a closer connection to the birds... and a consciousness that became larger."

"I was just looking at the fire and listening..."

"I felt connected to the energy of the mantras, feeling the intention in my heart, and also felt the nature around me."

"I felt joy."

I was reading again about the mind in one of the ancient scriptures. There are mainly three Sanskrit words used to describe the mind. Each represents a different aspect. One word is associated with the soul: *sat-chit-ananda*, which refers to Shiva, the consciousness. Another word used for the mind is *chitta*. For example, when they define yoga, they say *yoga chitta vritti nirodha*—yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the *chitta*. The third term is *manas*, which is the most common word for the mind.

The word *chitta* comes from the root *chaitanya*, which means life, consciousness, or awareness. It's originally used to refer to the soul, indicating that consciousness or awareness is the nature of the soul. The mind and the soul work closely together. For example, in the morning, I asked you to focus on the tip of your nose and listen to the smell. The part of the mind that senses this smell, becomes conscious of it, and receives the impulse, is *chitta*. Eventually, that sensation reaches your consciousness in your heart, but there is also something in the head that is truly listening.

It is both interesting and important to start listening to this.

Now, let's try to experience *chitta*. Look at this crystal. Everyone's focus should be here. Observe the shape of the crystal: the apex, the top point, the sloping surfaces, and the pillars on

the sides. Notice the color—how it's darker at the base and becomes lighter towards the tip. Now close your eyes and picture the same crystal within you. Focus on the tip, see the light reflecting around it, and then notice from where you are observing it. Shift your attention from the object itself to the place inside your head from which you are seeing it.

Try to remember the color of the crystal now that it's inside you, not outside. Visualize its whole shape—the three surfaces you saw. From that point inside your head, trace the path down to your heart and see who is observing this. Go back up to your head and try to picture the crystal there once more. Then return to where it was outside. Slowly open your eyes and look at the crystal again. Relax.

How far could you go? Could you see the crystal with your eyes closed? Were you able to find the point from where you were seeing it? If you couldn't, it's okay to say "no."

You see, there are three elements here: the object itself, the mental image we create, and the place inside where we observe it. And then there is a place where we truly see it.

If you manage to reach your heart, you will feel much more relaxed. When you turn inward, there is pressure because of the image there. That's a conscious aspect of the mind.

After opening her eyes, she felt it. She saw it. That's the power of *chitta*, the power of consciousness. This is the part that becomes stressed when you are lost in thoughts or obsessing over something.

The *sattva* aspect represents "being." That's what we cultivated here. After closing your eyes, you created something within. We create the whole world there. The sattvic part of your mind is where you originally look from, and when your mind is *rajasic* or *tamasic*, the image becomes distorted.

This is how your perception changes based on your mentality. For example, when you look at someone with anger—a *rajasic* trait—you are not truly seeing the person; you are creating a distorted image. You may have experienced times when everything seems problematic. Your spouse, parents, even the sun and rain appear to be problems. "Why is everything against me?" This is how a distorted image can form.

In a *tamasic* state, everything is sad or fearful. You may think, "That person is coming towards me to harm me," or "She's hiding something dangerous." Though I'm saying this humorously, it reflects what happens in psychological disorders. When the mind is in a sattvic state, it perceives reality without these distortions.

Our goal is to purify the *sattva* and remove *rajas* and *tamas*, allowing us to live in the beautiful, joyful world of reality. The mind's function is to gather sensations from the senses and deliver them to *chitta*, which then conveys them to the soul. But the mind—*manas*—can also add layers of imagination, speculation, and interpretation.

Chitta observes this activity, noticing how *sattva* and *manas* can become so busy. A key practice is to avoid generating unnecessary thought waves. This is why people with a *kapha* constitution tend to have a better life—they are less inclined to overthink.

Vata, on the other hand, is restless and constantly active. Don't let yourself get too busy; we waste so much energy this way.

In Ashtanga Yoga, this practice is called *pratyahara*—withdrawing the senses. It's like when we observed the crystal, then turned inward, and finally focused on the heart. We pulled back from external distractions and experienced the pure joy of simply being.

Try this during the fire ceremony—seek a *sattvic* experience of the event, and occasionally withdraw your attention to feel how it changes something inside you. When you encounter something painful, it brings discomfort; when you experience something positive, it brings joy.

As I mentioned yesterday, there is great joy in giving food to a hungry person and watching them eat. It's also deeply fulfilling when someone recovers from an illness. A few months ago, one of our staff members had a severe stroke and was brought back with paralysis on one side. After treatment here, he has now recovered and is working full-time. That kind of joy is irreplaceable. It's a significant experience for him and for us as well, more valuable than money or material possessions.

Appreciate the divinity within and around you, and recognize the oneness that exists here and now. Don't postpone your experience, thinking, "After this Panchakarma, I'll do this..." Be as present as possible during the whole process. That is today's message.

