



DHARMA *and* HAPPINESS
TALK *at* KING'S COLLEGE



SARVAMANGALA FOUNDATION

by Āchārya Vidyābhāskar

Visit our website
www.sarvamangala.org.uk

No part of this book may be used or reproduced
in any manner without written permission from
the publisher, except in the context of reviews.

Every reasonable attempt has been made to
identify owners of copyright. Errors or omissions
will be corrected in subsequent editions.

© 2020 Translation by Āchārya Vidyābhāskar

© 2020 Sarvamangala Foundation,
Switzerland & United Kingdom

EDITOR
Āchārya Vidyābhāskar

TEMPLATE AND LAYOUT DESIGNER
Vladimir Maliutin

CONTENT DESIGNER
Divya S. Kaushik, B. Lustig

PRIMARY TYPEFACES
Cormorant Garamond
EB Garamond
Goldenbook
Monlam
Sanskrit 2003
Trajan Pro 3

SPECIAL THANKS TO
T. Laufer, Hima Bindu Rebelly,
Julian M. Stuart, Milan Amin,
Divya Sagar Kaushik, B. Lustig,
A. Prajapati, Dr. Jaimin Shukla
— *Āchārya Vidyābhāskar, publisher*



SARVAMANGALA

DHARMA *and* HAPPINESS
TALK *at* KING'S COLLEGE



AVALOKITEŚVARA OR LOKEŚVARA

Embodying absolute compassion, he guides beings to happiness.

Swat Valley, ca. 601-699 @ Metropolitan Museum of Art

DHARMA *and* HAPPINESS
TALK *at* KING'S COLLEGE

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF 'THE STUDENTS' COUNCIL
INTRODUCES THE SPEAKER

King's College student introduces Ach. Vidyabhaskar: He is a scholar from Switzerland. He was educated in the UK, Austria and Switzerland up to the age of 12. Following on from this, he went on to pursue his passion by studying Sanskrit and the ancient scriptures at Kailas Ashram in Rishikesh. He also obtained a Masters in Comparative Religion and did his postdoctoral studies in Organisational Psychology. Currently, he is teaching Sanskrit in Switzerland as well as working on some very large translation projects as well. So please give one round of applause for him.

Vidyabhaskar: My turn? (*laughter*) So, do I need a microphone? (*No*) Ok, so I'll shout. (*laughter*)

As I know most of you! – this is like a reunion in a sense. And because I saw that you all had a look at the books (*the Yoga-Sūtras of Patañjali, which were on display*), you know the texts that we translated... Ah, some more (*students*) are coming, Namaste! So (*because you have already seen the books*), theoretically we could just go and have dinner. I would not have to speak (*laughter*).

Nonetheless, I do want to talk about Dharma and Happiness, which is the subject of this talk. But before we start talking about happiness, let us talk about unhappiness. So can I ask a very simple question – and (*I know*) it looks like a Kindergarten question – but it is not: Who in this room, among these thousands of people (*joking, as only around 50 students were present*), who has never experienced unhappiness?

(*Total silence*)

Vidyabhaskar: So clearly nobody (*has never experienced unhappiness*). So, if you have experienced unhappiness, I want to ask you directly the point – the Upaniṣads use the metaphor of an arrow being shot directly at you as a question – **What causes unhappiness?** I am asking you.

WHAT CAUSES UNHAPPINESS?

A female student responds: Basically, when we do not meet our expectations, we become unhappy.

Vidyabhaskar (nodding in agreement): You do not meet expectations, okay. So let us collect collective wisdom.

Akshaya (a student from Singapore) says: When you are sad about something.

Vidyabhaskar: Okay, sure, but in a way that is like saying the circle is round because it is circular (*laughter*). Right? So we are looking for the cause. Sadness is not the cause, it is the effect! Right?

(Pointing at previous student) So you said 'not meeting expectations'.

Another female student says: The loss of someone.

Vidyabhaskar: Loss, sure. (*Seeing more people enter the assembly hall*) More people coming, namaste!

Yes?

Male student says: My attachment to objects or people.

Vidyabhaskar: Attachment to objects or people, very good.

Balakrishna from Sunningdale suggests: The feeling of emptiness.

Vidyabhaskar: The feeling of emptiness! Wow, ok, very well said. So, for the newcomers (*who have just come in*), we are talking about the causes of unhappiness. Have you ever been unhappy in your life? Maybe once or twice? (*Laughter*) So we are asking for the causes of unhappiness? So we just started, you have not missed anything.

So we have had attachment as a cause. Oh, another one! (*another student enters the assembly hall*). (*Laughter*)

Vidyabhaskar: You see, just in brackets, in Switzerland I have some Sanskrit students, and often two or three do not come regularly. So every time they come, I have to explain the previous session again. So you know, that is exactly what we are doing now as well. (*Laughter*)

So (*addressing the newcomers*) we are talking about unhappiness and the causes of unhappiness. Have you ever been unhappy?

Female newcomer answers: Yes, I have.

Vidyabhaskar: Ok, good! (*Laughter*). Then you know what we are talking about (*Laughter*).

So we have had some input now: Some have said, 'Attachment is a cause of unhappiness'. Others have said, 'Not meeting expectations is a cause of unhappiness'. Then we heard 'Emptiness, the feeling of emptiness'. So let us go deeper.

A female student says: Loneliness.

Vidyabhaskar: Loneliness? Okay!

Another female student says: Negativity from other people.

Vidyabhaskar: Negativity from other people! Okay. Not from yourself?

Female student answers: We impose negativity on others and they on us.

Vidyabhaskar: Sure, so it is reciprocal. Yes, okay! (*Addressing the entire audience again*) A little bit more...?

Male student says: Heartbreak.

Vidyabhaskar: Heartbreak? Yes, okay, but it is again like Akshaya said. That is more the effect (*rather than the actual cause; the student agrees*). We are talking about the causes.

Another male student says: Fear.

Vidyabhaskar: Fear? Yes.

Another male student says: Not getting what we want.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, that is like not meeting expectations. Yes, sure. Yes, sir?

Male student says: Not being fulfilled, not achieving the things we want to achieve.

Vidyabhaskar: Not fulfilling the things we want – that is similar to not meeting and fulfilling expectations.

Another male student says: Failure.

Vidyabhaskar: Failure, okay.

Another male student says: Neglect.

Vidyabhaskar: Neglect – neglect of what?

Male student answers: It depends, like in terms of feeling neglected.

Vidyabhaskar: Oh, so you feel neglected? – you are not neglecting someone, someone is neglecting you!

Male student responds: Right. Both?

Vidyabhaskar: Both, okay!

Akshaya suggests: A lack of perspective?

Vidyabhaskar: A lack of perspective! Could we redefine that as ‘lack of clarity’? (*Akshaya agrees*). Okay!

Maybe one more?

Female student says: Pressure from oneself or from others.

Vidyabhaskar: Pressure either from yourself or from the outside, or both together: one from up, one from down.

Okay, very well said!

So now the question is – okay, one more!

Female student says: Your own perspective on things makes you unhappy or happy.

Vidyabhaskar: Your own perspective on things – and can I ask, why? Why is that a cause of unhappiness?

Female student answers: Because when you see something as bad, you are going to see everything around it as bad. And when you see something as good, you see everything as good.

Vidyabhaskar affirms: So for example, you could see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty. (*Student agrees*). Or you could see a challenge that comes at you as an opportunity rather than as a hurdle, right? That is what you mean by perspective. Very interesting, right?

So now the question is – and now we are going a little bit deeper already – and not a word of what I am talking about is just an invention: Rather, it comes directly from this text (*pointing to the large-size book on display*), the Yoga-Sūtras.

The Yoga-Sūtra is an ancient scripture composed by Patañjali, whom we consider a great sage. So whatever we are doing here is simply – in slightly modern terms – the teaching of Patañjali. It is a very technical text, so we are unravelling it a little bit for your benefit. Okay?

THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF UNHAPPINESS IS WITHIN ONE'S OWN MIND

Vidyabhaskar: So now let us go one layer deeper. You have described the causes very well. But where do all these causes take place?

A female student says: In experiences? In experiences we have in life?

Vidyabhaskar: Okay, in the experiences you have in life.
Another female student says: In the mind.

Vidyabhaskar: In the mind! She has already given the answer, and now we can all go for dinner. *(Laughter)*.

A male student says: In the body and the soul.

Vidyabhaskar: In the body and the soul? Okay, I totally agree, but 'soul' is a difficult term, because you would have to define what you mean by that, right? So it is a slightly difficult term.

And, Ramachandranji *(the local representative of the publisher Vedic Cosmos/Nightingale)*, are you aware that we have not once used the word 'soul' in *(our translation of)* the Yoga-Sūtras? Right, intentionally! *(Ramachandranji agrees)* So they are the publisher. Intentionally, we have never used the word!

(More students enter the assembly hall). Welcome, now we are going to start again! *(Laughter)*.

So just for your benefit, we are talking about the causes of unhappiness and where these causes take place. You have been unhappy before, yes?

Shy newcomer responds: Yes.

Vidyabhaskar: Good. *(Laughter)*

So *(addressing the previous student again)* you said 'the mind', you said 'the mind'? *(Student nods)* So, what is the mind?

WHAT IS THE MIND?

Vidyabhaskar: We are not talking about philosophy here, okay?

Male student says: It is your state of consciousness.

Vidyabhaskar: A state of consciousness, excellent! Very good. And are you observing something? I am only slightly guiding you, a little bit, right? But what you are doing by yourself is, you are coming up with all these insights that are in the text! So it is not that we have to read the text: It just comes out from your own minds if you just observe a little bit more closely.

Okay, so he said a state of consciousness. So, have you ever – and now this is from my Guru, right: Have you ever observed that when you are in a state of irritation, for example, you are already in the state the moment you notice? **You never notice before you are in the state.** Have you ever observed this? Have you ever thought of this? (*Silence*). Who has thought of this? Anybody? (*All students remain silent, their attention now very sharp*).

Balakrishna from Sunningdale asks: What do you mean by ‘state’?

Vidyabhaskar: So, a state of irritation, for example. Have you ever been irritated?

Balakrishna says: Yes, of course.

Vidyabhaskar: So when you realised that you were irritated, you were already in the state of irritation. You were already irritated. You didn’t realise it **before** you became irritated. You were already **in** irritation. So in a sense, you are like ‘lagging behind your own consciousness’ (*i.e. noticing your own mental states*). Goodness gracious, right?

Kavit (one of the participants, a mathematician) asks: Is it possible, you know, like when I was young, I tried to catch myself falling asleep, but I couldn’t catch myself falling asleep.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes! Sure!

Kavit says: I could never do it.

Vidyabhaskar: Right!

Kavit: Because when you try catching yourself falling asleep, you are not asleep.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, that’s right.

Kavit: So is it the same as when you try to catch yourself getting irritated?

Vidyabhaskar: It is very similar, very similar.

Kavit: Because if you try catching yourself, if you do catch yourself, you won’t be in the state?

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, very similar, very similar.

Kavit: So is it impossible?

Vidyabhaskar: No, it is not impossible!

Kavit: My point is, if you can catch yourself before you get into the state of irritation, then you won't be irritated. You won't be in the state.

Vidyabhaskar: There you go!

Kavit: Then you won't be irritated.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, but now this sounds very simplistic, right? And now all your minds are shutting down: 'Oh, that's what it's about.' But no, no, no, it is not just so simple. It is not just 'you catch yourself and that's it, that's it'. It is much more than that! Alright? So please do not shut down your minds, please stay awake (*Laughter*).

But yes, very well said (*addressing Kavit*). So essentially, essentially, it comes to that: Your Consciousness, your Awareness becomes so sharp and heightened that you realise what the states are that are driving you. Because you are lagging behind all the time. And in Sheffield – was it at the University of Sheffield? (*addressing the organiser, Riteshbhai*) – we had a brilliant mind somewhere in the audience, and he came up with a word: 'hangry'. Do you know the word, or is it just something known in Sheffield?

(*Students smile and say they know the word: 'Hangry' is a new word meaning one is 'angry' because one is 'hungry'*)

Vidyabhaskar: I had never heard the word, so he had to explain it to me. And he (*rightly*) said, "Actually, you **do** know when you are going to get 'hangry'. Because you know, if one doesn't eat, you know you will get 'hangry'. So you can predict irritation!" And then I said, "Wow, that is so interesting." And I asked him: "But, supposing you know, approximately by 8.30 you will be so 'hangry' that you will be irritated, will you recognise the moment? So supposing it is 8.25... and you are not hangry yet! (*Laughter*)... 8.26, 8.27... will you recognise the moment the 'hangriness' sets in?" And he admitted you will not.

Amazing, right? **So you can predict it is going to happen and yet you do not recognise the moment it happens. Why?**

And then we will come to the practice.

WHY DO WE NOT RECOGNISE THE EXACT MOMENT WHEN IRRITATION AND OTHER CAUSES OF SUFFERING ARISE IN OUR MINDS?

This is not a theoretical class, right? So then we will come to the practice. (*But first we need to understand:*) Why? Why do you not recognise the (*exact*) moment (*when irritation and other negative states arise in the mind*)?

Female student: Because you are so consumed by the emotion that you might not realise, or you cannot control the negative emotion.

Vidyabhaskar says: Very correct, but now you are already talking about the moment that comes **after** it has set in. My question is: Why do you not recognise the moment it begins?

Balakrishna from Sunningdale suggests: Because you are not observing.

Vidyabhaskar says: Yes, because you are not observing these self-induced states. You are not observing, you are not observing, you are not aware of what is going on.

So what I will share with you is a practice from the text – kind of unravelled for your benefit. (*This is*) not Kindergarten.

(*One more student arrives*) So we will just wait for you to settle down. So now we will have to ask one of you to summarise what we have said. (*Laughter*).

In a nutshell – what is your name? (*Student answers 'Neeti'*) – Neeti means (*among other things*) righteousness. In a nutshell, we are talking about why we cannot recognise states of unhappiness such as irritation, annoyance, nervousness, when they actually set in in our minds. So when you are irritated, you are irritated: You do not recognise the moment you become irritated.

So now we are going to share a practice from the Yoga-Sūtras by which you become more aware, by which you become more cognisant – is that a word in English? 'Cognisant'? Somebody is nodding (*Laughter*). You know, you become more alert, attentive. So we are going to share this practice. And you see, (*pointing to Riteshbhai, the organiser*) we have been in the car for a couple of hours. And Ritesh, the poor chap, has had to listen to me for four or five hours. (*Laughter*) And I have kept him in suspense, because I didn't tell him the practice. I kept saying, "That will be the practice, that will be the practice." But then I realised that by doing that, I have made his expectation go up so high that when I tell him the practice he will think, "What, that's it?" (*Laughter*)

So please just follow the (*instructions concerning the*) practice, okay?

Do not have any expectations inside or outside. Just follow the (*instructions concerning*) the practice. It is extremely simple. But I bet you, nobody has heard of it – unless somebody has done a similar practice. You know, there are variants of this practice. You would not have heard of it. Ramachandranji has, because he participated yesterday. So that is cheating (*Laughter*).

THE PRACTICE OF ATTENTIVENESS/MINDFULNESS (SMṚTYUPASTHĀNA) AS DISTILLED FROM THE YOGA-SŪTRAS OF PATAÑJALI AND ITS COMMENTARIES

So let us start. And I want to assure you, I am not hypnotising you (*Laughter*). It is a simple practice and you can do it with eyes open, or you can do it with eyes closed. There is no instruction regarding open or closed eyes. The only little instruction is that you should sit straight. Because the scriptures and our Swamiji say that when you sit straight, then basically you are more alert. Do you agree? When you are like this (*shows a hunchback posture*) you are not really alert. So when you sit straight, you are alert. Those who know the Bhagavad-Gītā, it says: “The head, the neck and the rest of the body should be in alignment.”

Okay, I will just guide you through it – but usually this will not be a guided meditation, and it is not meditation really. So at home you would do this by yourself. But now is the first time.

So, please first pay close attention to your breathing. Because breath is life. If your breath shuts down, you are gone. So breath is really life. So your attention for just a few moments goes to your breathing.

(Students do as instructed)

And now your attention goes to your sense of hearing. And do not be distracted, we have another gentleman coming in (*another student arrives*). So your attention goes to what you hear: very, very sharply

(i.e. attentively). Pay very close attention to what you hear.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, pay very close attention to what you smell, the sense of smell.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, pay very close attention to your sense of taste, what you can taste on your tongue.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, finally, pay very close attention to your sense of feeling, so your body, the sensations you feel in the body, whatever is there in the body, the tensions, everything that is there – pay very close attention to that.

(Students do as instructed)

Feel how your body is really the place where your consciousness is residing and feel all the sensations that come, from moment to moment.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, activate all the senses at the same time: hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling – at the same time, simultaneously perceive.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, maintaining this attentiveness, watch your thoughts: See how a thought arises and then ends, because you cannot keep any thought for too long. So you do not hold on to it. You just watch it and see how it ends. And then the next thought comes and you watch that. Yet you maintain this alertness of the senses.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, very consciously let those thoughts arise that trouble you: let them arise, do not hold on to them, watch them and see how they dissolve – while maintaining the senses, the clarity, the perception of all the senses.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, very consciously let those thoughts arise that make you happy: happy thoughts – but then do not let hold on to them, observe them and let them dissolve.

(Students do as instructed)

And now, as a last step and then we are finished, be aware of your awareness – just be aware of this awareness that is perceiving the thoughts.

(Students do as instructed)

So this is really the end of the practice. And the practice, as I have mentioned before, is derived from the Yoga-Sūtras, and the specific Sūtra is called “Viṣayavatī vā pravṛttir utpannā manasaḥ sthiti-nibandhinī”. But before I explain that, I want to ask you: What did you feel? Or what do you feel?

THE EFFECTS OF THE PRACTICE

A female student says: Relatively more calm. But I struggle to focus on my breathing and my thoughts.

Vidyabhaskar asks: But when you focussed on hearing, what happened?

Female student responds: I felt everything was slightly amplified.

Vidyabhaskar: More amplified, but did your thoughts still race while you were focussing on hearing?

Female student: Yes, I struggled to just focus on hearing. I kept thinking of other things.

Vidyabhaskar: Interesting. Okay, interesting. Very valid. Anyone else?

Akshaya: I feel like I am floating, I am not on the ground.

Vidyabhaskar: You are not floating (*Laughter*).

Akshaya: I know (*More laughter*). It felt very light.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, oh yes. But you know, some people do think that they levitate and then it is good to do a reality check. (*Everyone smiles*). But yes, exactly, very well said. Anyone else?

Those who came late, you missed the point about the senses. So we started with focussing quickly on breathing, then we focussed on hearing, smelling, tasting and physical sensations, and then with that clarity we observed thoughts – as they arise and as they cease.

And nobody had to believe anything, right? This is simply empirical, what we are doing right now.

So please, anyone else? What did you feel? What insight did you have?

A female student says: Very clear.

Vidyabhaskar affirms: More clear, yes?

Another female student says: A bit detached.

Vidyabhaskar responds: Detached.

A female student says: More calm.

Vidyabhaskar says: A little bit.

Kavit says: It is like I had a shower of the brain. (*Laughter*).

Vidyabhaskar responds: Oh yes. (*More laughter*). You see, this is the language here: it is called washing the mind. Great!

Balakrishna from Sunningdale says: More aware of the different parts of the body.

Vidyabhaskar repeats: More aware of the different parts of the body.

A male student says: All-round more balanced.

Vidyabhaskar says: More balanced.

(Addressing the newcomers) Those who came late, I can appreciate that you think we are all crazy. *(Laughter)*. It is like a cult *(More laughter)*. No, I am just joking. We are talking about 2600/2500 years' old method, it is not a cult, it is a very serious, grounded method.

Anyone else? What about you?

Male student answers: Everything went away. A bit more happy!

Vidyabhaskar says: Ah, more happy!

The male student continues: It felt like things had been lifted, so more happy.

Vidyabhaskar responds: Okay, excellent. By the way, the name of the talk is 'Dharma and Happiness' *(Students smile)*.

Female student says: I feel somewhat out of focus.

Vidyabhaskar says: Out of focus? Okay. But in a negative way?

Female student answers: Neutral.

Vidyabhaskar says: Neutral – fine, good! Because remember, we let everything go. We let the troubled and the happy *(thoughts)* go. Good, okay!

Anyone else? Maybe one more.

Kavit says: It is almost like someone hit the reset button. When I was in the state and then came back, in that moment it was almost like someone hit the reset button.

Vidyabhaskar: Great! And then you were annoyed that I started talking again, right? *(Laughter)*

So now you see – did anyone keep track of how long we did this? I think it was not even seven minutes. What do you think would happen if you practised this every day – something like this, you know, there are many variants of this: so you do not have to do my version, as there are many variants – what do you think will happen if you practise something like this every day for seven minutes, or maybe for fourteen minutes: What do you think would happen?

Just extrapolate – you are all such intelligent people – extrapolate what would happen if after six or seven minutes you are saying all this: What do you think would happen?

Male student responds: You will be more aware of everything.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, you will be a bit more aware of everything – not only right now in this session.

Female student says: I think one will become more focussed, grounded and efficient.

Vidyabhaskar says: Oh yes, sure, more focussed, grounded, efficient.

Another female student suggests: One will be more mindful.

Vidyabhaskar responds: More mindful (smiling), yes, and I will come back to that in a second.

Another female student says: Happier.

Vidyabhaskar says: Happier, yes, we had that already, but now you are saying it in general. He said he felt happier now, whereas you are saying you will be generally happier. *(Student agrees).*

Another female student says: More calm.

Vidyabhaskar: More calm, yes.

Female student says: It will take away the negativity from oneself and from others.

Vidyabhaskar affirms: Correct, yes.

Another female student says: I guess it gives you time to self-reflect, so it makes you a better person.

Vidyabhaskar responds: Oh wow, exactly. And it was only six or seven minutes, right? We did not do more than that.

Anyone else? One more?

Female student suggests: One will be more peaceful and accepting of any situation.

Vidyabhaskar says: Yes! Because, did anyone hear the word ‘reject’? Right? Did anyone hear the word ‘control’? We were watching, observing, but we did not hold on. Very well said, exactly.

Can I ask: Did anyone feel nothing at all and felt “This is a total waste of my time”? *(Students remain silent).* They do not dare to *(reveal themselves)* *(Laughter).*

THE ANCIENT METHODS OF MINDFULNESS HAVE THEIR ORIGIN IN SANĀTANA DHARMA: THE YOGA-SŪTRAS AS WELL AS THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

So, now you said 'mindful', right? (addressing the student who had mentioned 'more mindful' as one of the long-term effects).

Those of you who know a little bit about the Mind Sciences – which, by the way, exist – will know that there is a very popular movement called Mindfulness, right? And what is that movement based on? What do you think?

What we just did was the **ancient version of Mindfulness!** That's all we did. And why do I say the ancient version? Because from my 'humble' point of view – and I go like this (*showing quotations marks “*”) because no point of view is ever humble – from my humble point of view, the modern mindfulness movement is very superficial, to some extent. It does not go into the depth. It kind of only looks at what you said (*pointing to the student concerned*): efficiency and the like – it is not very efficient.

Recently, in January I was at the World Economic Forum in Davos in Switzerland, and lots of people came together – you know, the world leaders and all that – and do you know what they did at eight o'clock in the morning? Mindfulness! But they were not doing it in this way (*as we just have*), where it is about Consciousness, about Awareness – they were doing it just to 'optimise efficiency, performance and all that'. And that is like shooting the arrow away from the target. Imagine you

have a target and you go like this (*turning away from the target*) and shoot the arrow in the other direction. That is not going to make you happier (*in the long run*). It is just going to make you more efficient.

So if we go back to the Yoga-Sūtras, the original text, the word for Mindfulness is probably a word you have not heard before: it is called 'Smṛtyupasthāna'. And if you type that into Google – and maybe some of you are doing it right now – you know, in one session (*in Sheffield*) they were doing it – if you type that into Google you get around 10 hits. Shocking.

But, if you type the Buddhist translation of (*the Sanskrit word 'Smṛtyupasthāna'*) into Google – Satipatthana – any linguists here? No? Only doctors and engineers (*Laughter*). If you type Satipatthana, the Pali translation – have you heard of Pali? Pali is the language of Buddhism – if you type Satipatthana, wow, you will get thousands of hits! And you know why that is? Because the Buddhists are the ones who have done research on this. And we, the Hindus, Sanātana Dharma, are lagging behind. But that is no problem, because Buddhists are part of Sanātana Dharma, so we let them do it (*the research*) and we are enjoying the fruits, right? (*Laughter*) So it is in a way like getting someone to get you coffee (*More laughter*). Like before, thank you very much, they got me a coffee from Starbucks (*Lots of laughter*).

So, this has been well-researched. And yet it is still in its infancy. The research is very serious.

(The door is pushed open and another person seems to come in but then does not enter) Is this another person coming? No, a ghost! *(Laughter)*.

So the research is very serious and it shows things like this: Eight weeks of Mindfulness already produces persistent, increased well-being: just eight weeks. Very serious research! But from my perspective, from the traditional perspective, *(the mindfulness methods being researched are)* not even particularly profound mindfulness.

What we just did is *(to a greater extent)* profound mindfulness.

So, I would encourage all of you, if I may, why do you not integrate this in your daily life? In the past sessions we did across the UK, I have heard things like “Oh, I do not have time for this”. But come on! Six minutes? You are longer in the shower than that. *(Laughter)* He *(Kavit)* said it is like a shower of the mind, right? And you do not even have to necessarily sit while doing this: You can walk, you can do it in the car. Ah, you are students, so okay, but you can do it in the train. How do you come to university, may I ask?

Female student says: I walk.

Another female student says: The tube.

Vidyabhaskar: So the tube, perfect place for smelling. *(Lots of laughter)*. And you do not have to close your eyes. So you are not going to be one of those people sitting in the tube meditating with eyes closed *(Laughter)* – which would be a nice provocation – but you are just

using your focus: attentiveness goes to your senses, one by one, and then *(all the senses together)* simultaneously, then to your thoughts and then to your feelings, and then consciously giving rise to troubled states, that which troubles you, letting it go, and then consciously giving rise to happy thoughts and letting them go. It is very simple, yes? You can do that **anywhere**.

So, this is where I finish and now it is your turn: You can ask any questions. It does not have to be about this. It can be about anything, it can be about Dharma, it can be about whatever you want – Donald Trump *(Laughter)* – whatever you like. By the way, his mind is always racing! It would be very good for him to do something like this *(Laughter)*. I would tell him: Mr Trump, please pay attention to what you are hearing *(More laughter)*. Yes, so, I am joking, but any questions please? They can be very challenging. You can ask me very challenging questions because our Dharma has always been about Jijñāsā, inquiry, investigation, the desire to know – not blind beliefs and dogmas and ideologies. It has always been about investigating for yourself. So, any questions! Please fire them like arrows.

HAPPINESS IN DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

A female student asks: What can one do when someone stores their happiness in other people?

Vidyabhaskar responds: When you say ‘stores their happiness’, what do you mean?

The female student says: Like when one stores one’s happiness in another person.

Vidyabhaskar asks: How does that storing process work? Is there like a gigabyte of storage? (*Laughter*).

The female student says: Like when one is happy only because of others, or because of a collection of people.

Vidyabhaskar says: The human being, of course, is a social being. We are not suggesting to go to the forest and sit under a tree and wait until you are bitten by a scorpion (*Laughter*). We are saying that we are social beings. So of course our happiness depends on others and others’ happiness depends on, by the way, right?

What happens when we do this practice in-depth is that our compassion increases, our sense of empathy increases – absolutely naturally, by itself, we do not even have to do much. It just increases because we are more aware, right?

But your question is: (*What do you do*) when you feel very dependent on others?

Female student says: Yes.

Vidyabhaskar says: What if you just perceive it as a thought? And let it go? What do you think might happen if you did it daily for six minutes? What will happen?

Female students: We will accept it?

Vidyabhaskar affirms: You will accept it, watch it, observe it, you realise that your Consciousness is always a little bit more than that. Your Consciousness is always pristine. Who understands the word ‘pristine’?

(*Silence*) One person? Two, another one, so four! ‘Pristine’ is one of the best words to know. It means ‘primordially pure’. But do you understand ‘primordial’? It means ‘always pure’. Your Consciousness, your Awareness, is always pure – it is just what arises in it that is the problem. Your Consciousness is not the problem, your Awareness is not the problem. What comes up in it is the problem, right?

In our Dharma view, Consciousness or Awareness is present in all beings. So when you see someone who is really irritating, what you are really seeing is Consciousness doing something. And you can respect that.

Next question.

WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?

Akshaya asks: You said ‘Consciousness’. What is Consciousness?

Vidyabhaskar responds (smiling): Oh, so are you asking me from a modern science point of view? Are you asking me from a traditional scriptural point of view? Can you define?

Akshaya says: Would you be able to talk about both?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Okay, both. How long do we have? (*Lots of laughter*). And they are getting ‘hangry’ (*Laughter*).

So, first the scriptural view, which is also the common sense point of view: Consciousness is that which knows. It is the opposite of un-consciousness. If someone hits you on the head, Consciousness is kind of somewhere else. So Consciousness is that which knows, which cognises – but you may not know the verb ‘cognising’ – it is that which perceives, that which experiences. So the Upaniṣads say it is ‘Sarvānubhūḥ’, ‘It is that which experiences everything’. It is also that which experiences the very idea of Consciousness. Can you sense the truth of this? (*Students nod*)

So Consciousness is always behind that which you think is Consciousness. So if you have an idea of what Consciousness is, then that is actually wrong! Because it is Consciousness that is perceiving that. We are going quite deep! Are you still with me? (*Only some students nod*). The mind has gone somewhere else (*Laughter*).

So this is quite deep – not only ‘quite’, this is ‘infinitely’ deep.

So our scriptures tell us – and the Yogic practices tell us – that when you explore Consciousness, you can never stay with any idea of what it is. You can just look further, look further, and you do not stay with any idea, and then you know the Knower. You know that which knows. Are you still with me? Not everybody (*Smiling*). So that is the traditional way.

Now modern science has created a ‘hard problem of consciousness’. Has anyone heard this term? (*Nobody reacts*). So if you studied the Mind Sciences everyone would be nodding. The hard problem of consciousness is exactly the same. You can Google it or learn about it on Wikipedia. It is exactly the same: The impossible condition that we know so much about things, objects, material things, but we do not know anything about that which knows these things! This is the hard problem of consciousness (*in a nutshell*): You cannot define what Consciousness is, because the moment you define it, you are talking about a content of Consciousness and not about Consciousness itself. So, beautifully, the hard problem of consciousness after 300 years of modern science says the same thing as the ancient 3000-4000 year old texts: Isn’t that beautiful, right? It is like a beautiful, beautiful symmetry.

But you have to look at it profoundly. Is that an answer? (*Akshaya nods*) An answer for everybody somehow? I just summarised 4000 years of investigation in 2 minutes, in 1.5 minutes! Very difficult.

Any other questions?

Male students: Are one's actions, which take place in Consciousness, the subject of that Consciousness or the object of Consciousness?

Vidyabhaskar responds: The object. Anything that can be perceived, anything that can be known, is always an object of Consciousness. Everyone with me? Okay.

ANICCA – ANITYA – THE FLEETING NATURE OF ALL THINGS

Male student asks: Before you talked about letting it arise and then letting it go – is that not 'anicca' (*impermanence*)?

Vidyabhaskar says: 'Anicca'? But 'anicca' is in here! (*in Yoga-Sūtra 2.5*). 'Anicca' is Pali for (*Sanskrit*) 'anitya'. It is all here.

The male student says: So it is the same?

Vidyabhaskar says: Of course! Of course it is! (*Addressing the others*) What the gentleman is saying, 'anicca', is a Pali word – beautiful! Where do you know it from? From Vipassana? (*Male student nods*). Okay, fine! You know that (*the Pali word*) 'Vipassana' is 'Vipashyana' in Sanskrit, right, which is Satipatthana, which is Smṛtyupasthāna, which is this (*pointing to the book*)? (*Students laugh*) So it is like saying, the circle is round, it is circular, it is round-shaped – you know these are all the same terms for (*what is essentially*) the same thing.

So what he is saying is 'anicca' – 'anicca' is 'anitya' in Sanskrit. Does everyone understand 'anitya', yes? 'Not permanent, impermanent'. That means it is always fleeting. And you realise that just by the nature of the object, it arises and ceases. So yes, beautiful!

THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A female student asks: I actually wanted to follow on from the other question. Is there then ever a subject of Consciousness?

Vidyabhaskar replies: No. And do you know why? I will ask you (*addressing the audience*): Why is there never a subject of Consciousness?

A male student says: Because it would just be a content of Consciousness.

Vidyabhaskar affirms: Yes, because it would be a content of Consciousness. But still, let us continue, why is there never a subject of Consciousness? Because... ?

Female student suggests: Because the subject is everything?

Vidyabhaskar says: Ah, but now you are using ‘subject’ in the sense of ‘content’. She means a ‘subject’ of Consciousness – oh wow, we are in deep mind studies now. So she means a ‘subject’ like a ‘doer’, right? (*Akshaya nods*). Someone who ‘does’ Consciousness... This is deep stuff.

Male student suggests: Is it because you need Consciousness in order to have a subject of Consciousness?

Vidyabhaskar responds: In order to perceive, right?

Male student answers: Yes. So if you want to perceive Consciousness as the subject, you need something external from Consciousness, which is not possible.

Vidyabhaskar: Which is not possible, right? Because that means you would be outside of Consciousness because somebody hit you on the head.

Male student: Exactly. If you are still alive. (*Laughter*). If you are alive, you cannot be a subject of Consciousness.

Vidyabhaskar: But let us still go deeper, and I promise I will not push you too hard. Why is there never a subject of Consciousness? I will not push you too long, because now we are really, really deep.

Female student: Is it like self-reflexivity, so that Consciousness cannot point to itself?

Vidyabhaskar says: Yes, sure. Okay, so you say ‘it cannot’, but we became so much clearer, right? So strangely it can! But very deep. So one more suggestion, and then I will tell you.

Why is there never a subject of Consciousness? One more try. (*Silence*). Ok, I will tell you. This is in the ancient Upaniṣads. Have you heard of the Upaniṣads? (*Students nod*). Because Consciousness is the subject, you cannot go beyond the subject – then it would not be the subject. Consciousness is the subject in the sense of that which experiences everything. Makes sense?

Kavit asks: How do you know that?

Vidyabhaskar responds: What do you mean? Because you see it!

Kavit says: Yes, you can see it yourself. But that is also like saying nothing can be an object... do you know what I mean? If I was to say that Consciousness is the subject, then I can say that everything that is not Consciousness is an object.

Vidyabhaskar: Correct.

Kavit: So that would mean that something has Consciousness is...

Vidyabhaskar: ...is its **own** subject.

Kavit: So it is like looking into a mirror, right?

Vidyabhaskar: Yes! And that is a scriptural description: Looking in the mirror.

Kavit: So your Consciousness is not different to my Consciousness? Is that correct?

Vidyabhaskar: In its essence, yes. This is deep, this is really deep, wow. This is great. Is this because of King's College? (*Lots of laughter*). Wow.

Akshaya asks: Just following on from that: If at its core, Consciousness is the same, that means at its very core there is no distinction between you and I and any other thing (*being*) which has Consciousness.

Vidyabhaskar: Right. And now we have gone into the Upaniṣads, right? So the Īśāvāsya-Upaniṣad says:

yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmaivābhūd vijānataḥ I
tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ II

The wise person who has realised that there is no distinction between himself or herself and other beings, how would such a person ever be confused or unhappy? – because he or she has realised the oneness! Oneness in the sense of non-distinctiveness, not separated.

(Students remain silent in awe of the ancient wisdom).

Kavit asks: What if I have contact with an alien planet? (*Laughter*). Suppose you are on an alien planet, and that thing has Consciousness, but the way we perceive something has Consciousness is through life. So if we do not see an animal moving, or a thing like a rock which does not have Consciousness – there is nothing which tells me (*it is conscious*).

Vidyabhaskar: There is no responsiveness.

Kavit: So if I am on an alien planet which has Consciousness, but the alien is not portrayed in a way that it acts or that we can understand it has Consciousness, would we still be able to recognise or portray it in a way (*that is intelligible to us*)? Do you know what I mean?

Vidyabhaskar asks: How could it happen that you would not recognise it as being conscious?

Kavit says: That is my point.

Vidyabhaskar retorts: But I am asking you, how would that happen?

Kavit: But could it happen? Could you have a being which has Consciousness but we do not recognise it?

Vidyabhaskar says: Oh, oh okay, fine!

Kavit: Like an alien.

Vidyabhaskar says: Well, 'alien'... well, just say something like 'non-human', yes? Okay, I get the question, very interesting, very sharp.

So, you are a mathematician, right?

Kavit says: I teach mathematics, I am not a mathematician.

Vidyabhaskar: That is kind of the same thing. (*Laughter*). So you see, these are the mathematicians, the logicians. And they have been doing that for thousands of years. You know we had logic in ancient India, right? In ancient Bharat. So they have been doing that for thousands of years: this kind of 'speculation'. But the question is very valid: So could there be some kind of 'realm', we could say, some kind of 'plane', where something is actually conscious – but we do not recognise it to be conscious. Right? Very clever.

Well, our response would be: Yes, sure! But that would not make it 'unconscious'. That would only mean there is a mutual (*or one-sided*) non-intelligibility. But it would not make that (*being*) unconscious and it would not make us unconscious. Right? So there is just a communication gap. Is that a simple answer?

Kavit: Yes.

Vidyabhaskar jokes: That was a very short answer for a very good question. (*Laughter*).

Vidyabhaskar (addressing Riteshbhai, the organiser): So he is the boss. You have to stop us (*when we have exceeded our time-frame*). Just say 'time out'.

OPEN AWARENESS IS LIKE A BIRD IN THE SKY

A female student asks: So when we pay attention to our senses, our hearing, smelling, tasting etc., what about our sight? Because we closed our eyes.

Vidyabhaskar says: What do you think? Initially, when we started, did you come late? (*Student says 'no'*). Remember, I said you can close your eyes, or you can keep your eyes open. It does not matter, it does not make a difference.

Female student asks: So when you stare at an object, how would you stare?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Rather than 'stare' I would use the word 'gaze'. Because 'stare' is like this (*demonstrates a frowning stare*), whereas 'gazing' is like a bird in the sky that gazes and perceives. Whereas 'staring' is like this (*again demonstrates a frowning stare*). So 'gazing' means 'perceiving', right?

And when your eyes are closed, what do you 'gaze' at? I mean, what do you see?

Female student responds: Nothing, just darkness.

Vidyabhaskar: Just darkness? Not only darkness. You still see little bits, something, so you can pay attention to that as well.

Another female student asks: Just following on from that, if your eyes are open and you are seeing things, how would you also focus on the other senses?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Oh no, no, no. It is even easier. You are gazing and simultaneously hearing, simultaneously smelling – it is a beautiful practice. You are only saying that because you have not really cultivated the practice. But it is beautiful. And then you sense a heightened awareness.

Because remember, please be very careful: This is not about concentrating. This is about attentiveness, mindfulness, right? Not about concentrating. And that is the difference between meditation and mindfulness. I am using the word mindfulness now, you know, in the sense of 'this' (*pointing to the Yoga-Sūtra book on display*). That is the difference. Meditation is focussing on a content. Mindfulness is just open awareness. It is different. Do you see the difference? (*Students nod*).

But wow, this is amazing (*addressing Riteshbhai, the organiser*): The whole discussion has been only around this.

And I have to praise you – others, you know, after 10 minutes of discussion go off into things like 'Why do we ring a bell during Pūjās?', you know? (*Students smile*). Seriously. This is amazing that you are completely looking at this.

THE UNIQUENESS OF EVERY MOMENT OF EXPERIENCE

Male student asks: So if you are saying that everyone's Consciousness is the same...

Vidyabhaskar: Careful, 'essentially' the same...

Male student continues: Yes... does that not take away from the uniqueness?

Vidyabhaskar responds: No, no. Because the manifestation through your individuality – this is called 'jīva' in Sanskrit – the manifestation through your individuality is totally unique. It is more unique than any other idea could ever express. Totally unique. And every moment that you experience is totally unique, never to be repeated. Have you ever thought of this? Every single moment is never to be repeated.

And another point is: Have you ever recognised that there never exists a past moment? There only exists a memory of a past moment. And there never exists a future moment. There only exists an anticipation of a future moment. So Bhagavān Vyāsa in the commentary on this (*text*) – there is also a commentary on it – says: “tena ekena kṣaṇena kṛtsnaṁ lokam anubhavati”, “Through that one moment – which is always just the present moment – one experiences the entire world.” And every moment is totally unique. This is not philosophy what we are doing here. This is clearest Reality what we are doing here, right?

Yes?

WHY DO WE MAKE INNUMERABLE EXPERIENCES AT ALL?

Female student asks: So if the essence is the same, who or what determines that individuality of experience?

Vidyabhaskar responds: So you see now, that is philosophy, right? Now the Buddha would say, 'Who cares? Just perceive.' The Buddha would say, 'Never ask what is the original cause and what could it have been and what might it have been – who cares? It does not matter. It is about what is happening **right** now.'

The female student responds: But if we cannot understand why things are different, how can we understand the root cause and that they are ultimately the same? There must be a reason for why I experience things differently: that keeps me aware of my own self, whereas someone else is aware of their own self. So there are different perceptions.

Vidyabhaskar responds: But if you pay close attention: What you are doing right now is, you are externalising away from Awareness or Consciousness. Do you see that? You are going into a network of thoughts. You are building a structure, like a little castle, like a Buckingham Palace, or a Windsor Castle (*Laughter*) on top of this – can you sense that?

The female student responds: Yes, I see that, but what I do not get is: Without understanding, you cannot understand. So is there a point to understand a neutral state, letting certain thoughts go...?

Vidyabhaskar says: It is only so you become happy. So the point is – I will give you an answer to the question – yet the reason I cited the Buddha is because he gives a completely opposite position, which says: ‘Who cares? You want to be happy. There is no use of you making a Windsor Castle or ten Windsor Castles of ‘What could it be?’ and ‘What might it be?’, if it does not make you happy. What makes you happy is really going into the clarity, really perceiving what is **actually** here right now – and not what could have been 13 billion years ago. Do you see that? *(Student nods)* But then I will give you an answer. But do you see that point? It does not help you, it does not help you. It really does not. It will actually make you unhappy to think: “13.6 billion years ago there might have been a Big Bang, and then 4 billion years ago life might have evolved, and then there were mindless biological processes and **somehow** we are now here, and why are we here...?” It does **not** make you happy. And the talk is about ‘Dharma and Happiness’. What truly makes you happy is the clarity: the inevitable fact that you are sitting right here and you have to deal with that.

But now I will give you an answer: The problem is that the answer is so profound that you would have to pay absolute attention to the answer to understand it. So are you ready for that *(addressing the questioning student)? (Student nods)*. Okay, so I have to put the chair like this *(rearranging the chair to face only that particular student)*. *(Laughter)*.

According to Advaita-Vedānta – who has heard of Advaita-Vedānta? *(some students nod)* – nondual Vedānta, which is the tradition of our Guru Ji, in whose lineage I stand – *(and especially according to the explanation given by him)* – the reason for all this *(the manifold appearances experienced by Consciousness in the form of the world)* is *(ultimately)* as follows. Very difficult now, and you will all space out, and you *(looking at Akshaya)* will start to float *(Laughter)*.

It is this:

The Infinite – we feel that Consciousness and Being, Existence just as it is, is infinite – and even science tells us the universe is infinite, the physical universe – “The Infinite would not be infinite if there were not an infinity of finite appearances included in the Infinite.” Do you understand that? If you were not part of the Infinite, if every little experience that you make would not exist, the Infinite would not be infinite. It would be a limited Infinite. So it requires an infinity of finite things, finite appearances, finite experiences, every little ridiculous thing that you can think of is required, every intense suffering and greatest happiness is required for the Infinite to be infinite. Okay?

(Student nods with understanding).

But amazing that you can really understand this. May I ask, what do you study?

Female student responds: History.

Vidyabhaskar: History, amazing. So does the answer convince you?

The female student says: I am starting to understand it.

Vidyabhaskar jokes: So it is like I have cracked a nut. (Laughter)

Akshaya asks: So viruses – there is a debate whether they are truly alive or not – because they depend on the host to replicate and survive. So following on from the communication gap we talked about before, would you say that when viruses are not in the host they still have a state of Consciousness?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Yes, everything that is responsive in nature has a fundamental, some absolutely fundamental ‘knowingness’. And can I just ask: Are you floating? After the answer? (Laughter)

Akshaya: Not yet. Well, actually yes! (More laughter).

DOES THE MIND GIVE RISE TO EXTERNAL REALITY?

Kavit asks: So following on from her point, if I am a conscious being – I have always wondered this...

Vidyabhaskar jokes: Are you? (Laughter)

Kavit smiles and continues: ... so I am looking at a rock, is it the qualities of the rock itself which I am experiencing as a rock, or is it my Consciousness portraying, or my mind portraying the feeling of that rock, while the rock does not actually have that texture in reality? If that makes sense? When I touch things, or I see things, or I hear things, is it the quality of the thing which is being heard, or is it simply me who experiences that thing as that thing? So for example, another alien example... (Laughter)

Vidyabhaskar jokes: The mathematicians... (More laughter)

Kavit continues: Supposing aliens exist, then the way they perceive things, for example, if they were watching a film, they would not watch it in the same way, or if they were smelling something, it might not be in the same way.

Vidyabhaskar says: Wow, the mathematicians, amazing! So you should, if I may, you should study Philosophy of Mind. It is a very serious subject. Has anyone heard of it? But we do not actually want to go into philosophy, because we are talking about happiness, right? But just to answer your question, what you are talking about

is called 'Qualia' in Philosophy of Mind. You can Google it, or find it on Wikipedia – the texture of how it feels to perceive something is well-discussed, it is well-discussed. In Sanskrit is called 'guṇa', 'the quality', right?

So the answer is this that there is no evidence whatsoever in the Mind Sciences that the way I perceive 'red' is the same way that you perceive 'red'. We are just conventionally agreeing that this is 'red'. But objectively there is no such thing as red. It only appears to Consciousness, to the mind, right?

So what you are asking is: Is the way the rock feels an inherent quality of the rock? Or is it something that Consciousness, the mind, gives rise to? Now think of the following: What is really happening all the time is sensory input is coming to you, right, it is like on a plate, a golden plate – and your senses convey that to the brain, slash mind, because to say 'to the brain' is like a no-brainer – they convey it to the mind, and the mind in a sense creates a coherent experience of the universe. That does not mean the mind creates the universe. The universe is there, no doubt. But the mind generates a coherent experience, which is a miracle. And nobody in modern science – I am sure there are some medical students here, right? – are there? Nobody can explain that. How on earth do firing neurons in something liquid sitting inside a skull generate a coherent experience of a universe? It is beautiful to study this. But now we are in philosophy, not in mindfulness, so please remember that.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE PRACTICE PROCEEDS FROM SIMPLY PRACTISING

Kavit asks: I think that point links to the mindfulness point. Because supposing we take that as fact – so we say, your perception of 'red' may not be the same perception of 'red', but we universally agree on the linguistics of 'red', the semantics of it, then how can I know that when you are telling me to do this Awareness, this sensory thing, meditation whatever – (*Vidyabhaskar interjects with 'mindfulness'*) – how can I know that what you are explaining to me, or experiencing, that you are expressing the same as 'this is what it is', whatever it is – how do I know that? How do I know it in terms of 'this is a method of doing it', and how do I qualify that the method is what I am actually following and that I am actually doing it right? If that makes sense?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Oh oh, are you asking "How do you know that you have understood it?"

Kavit answers: Yes, basically. How do I know that? Because we have been talking about different experiences – I mean we all had similar words.

Vidyabhaskar says: Yes, exactly, exactly. There is a consensual commonality at play. But my question would then simply be: "You agree you are conscious, right?" So that is like the basic thing. And then from there onward, did I tell you "It is going to be this"? Did I tell you? I did not do that. I only gave you slight steps which are mentioned here. And then you did it yourself. And there is no doubt

– and the scripture says ‘yogo yogāt pravartate’, ‘Yoga progresses onward from Yoga’. And by Yoga we do not mean physical postures. It progresses onward from Yoga. And you find out what it is by practising.

And here is something interesting – just in brackets – what do you think would ancient Hindus and Buddhists and Jains, who were practitioners of this, have said: Would they have said I practise ‘Smṛtyupasthāna’? It is in the Yoga-Sūtras. What do you think would they have said they are practising? Yoga! They would have said we are Yogīs!

And now you are all Yogīs and Yoginīs! We are not Smṛtyupasthānīs, that would be much too complicated to pronounce, right? So the point is nobody would claim – and this is also right here in the text – that your and my discovery of Consciousness is the same: Nobody would claim that. It is always uniquely different. He (*pointing at another student*) asked about uniqueness. It is always uniquely different **until** the ultimate essence of Consciousness is known. Does that make sense?

Kavit responds: Yes, yes, it does. And it is quite beautiful as well, because it is very different from what all the other religions say. Do you know what I mean? It is like happiness or whatever is inherent in Consciousness or Awareness, but there is no strict method, even though you are giving us a tool.

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, it is just a guideline. But now we have so moved into the Windsor Castle – can you sense that? The clarity you sensed before, the calmness, has now become Windsor Castle. Can you sense that? And why is that? Because I can sense it! Because I am mindful I can sense it in your faces, in the way you are reacting. Why have we now turned into a castle?

Balakrishna: Because it has become more like a mental exercise?

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, because now we are talking about mental things. That is what I meant: We have externalised ourselves away. So remember the practice is very practical. You always come back to just breathing, and then experiencing the senses and Awareness or Consciousness, mindfully. You always come back to that. You do not do this what we just did now. Okay? And now you are back.

HOW THE PRACTICE HELPS WITH FINDING OUR WAY THROUGH LIFE

Male student: How would this practice of mindfulness help us towards fulfilling our duties, knowing what we should do with our lives?

Vidyabhaskar answers: Now look at this: Most of the time when you do not know which way to go, what is the root cause of that?

Male student answers: Just not knowing what I should do?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Okay, but that is just saying the circle is round, right? But if you look closely, what is really at play when you do not know which way to go? I do not mean which way to go when you are driving. I mean in life. What is really at play?

Male student says: Conflict of the mind.

Vidyabhaskar says: Yes, conflict of the mind! But if you practise, then clarity – a state of clarity – arises. Now you may think ‘he is romanticising it by saying this is the solution for everything’. But what I mean is simply: When the mind is clearer, when Awareness is clearer, that means your perception is clearer, and that means automatically the probability that you will make better decisions, clearer decisions, but also listening to others, being more compassionate with others, being less self-centred – this automatically arises. In a sense, automatically you are going to navigate through life in a much clearer

way. In a sense you will be instead of riding on a scooter, you know, which is quite risky, you will be driving a Rolls Royce.

Does that make sense? I mean, you have to see, you have been doing it for six minutes only. So it is like really difficult to convince you now that this is really valuable – but it is.

Male student asks: So when something comes up, you just let it go?

Vidyabhaskar responds: Careful, we did not just say ‘it comes up’, like ‘pop’, like a pingpong ball – not like that. You perceive it very clearly, what it is, and then you let it go. And then later it becomes much clearer.

Male student says: So you do need to focus on the thing that comes up? Like several bits of meditation together?

Vidyabhaskar says: Mindfulness. Remember when I said, ‘Now give rise to troubled things consciously’? That is when you give rise to them consciously and then you let them go. Then it becomes clearer and your mind becomes very heightened and sharp.

Now I see all your minds are shutting down, so I feel we should conclude. Is there anything that someone wanted to say? One more?

Balakrishna says: Something that bothers me is that things like this, a lot of the time we compartmentalise: We say, ‘this is amazing’, but then we do not think about or do it again.

Vidyabhaskar: Sure.

Balakrishna continues: And, you know, is there any advice in the Yoga-Sūtras to say you should practise in reality and actually winning over what we could call the mental exercise? – instead of it remaining a mental exercise and a sort of egotistical thing, actually practising it?

Vidyabhaskar: Yes, very good question. I always say suffering solves the whole problem. Because suffering makes us suffer. And then we feel, ‘Oh we need something to reduce suffering.’ Now you are all young, you are full of energy, full of hormones, right? Except Ramachandranji (*Lots of laughter*). No, I am joking. So, you feel that life is eternal and it is all going to go on forever. It does not, right? So at some point you will feel suffering. You already have. But it will get more.

Then you will remember this strange person who came from Switzerland and talked something about the Yoga-Sūtras and yes, ‘It was something about the senses?’ And then you try it again and say: ‘Ah, I feel so much clearer and calmer. Why did I not do this before?’ So to avoid going through this process, you could just do it from tomorrow, right? Start doing it. And very rightly said, not selfishly – but knowing that you will relate to others better, you will be more compassionate. The Yoga-Sūtra says, this increases compassion, it increases friendliness, it increases equanimity, it increases steadfastness, resilience, it increases all these things.

Right? So just do it. Very simple.

Female student asks: Could you give us like a structure of how to do it? Obviously I was doing it, but more just that I do not forget, in case I do not start tomorrow.

Vidyabhaskar responds: So, I have a very mean suggestion, and nobody will like it. Would you like to do it again? (*Shock, then laughter*). Haha, don’t worry, we will not do it again – because it would take six minutes of your time! (*Laughter*). Alright, so first you focus on the breathing, because breath is life. Without breath you are gone. Then you focus on the senses, one by one, and then simultaneously on all the senses – and you know the problem of the racing mind is immediately solved. Immediately solved. Simultaneously maintaining awareness of all the senses. And then, when you sense the clarity there, then you watch thoughts. Not before! Because when you do it before, there is not much use. You have to look at thoughts with clarity. So then you look at thoughts, first you just look at thoughts – and you do not hold on to them. And then you consciously give rise to troubled thoughts – and let go. And then you consciously give rise to and perceive happy thoughts – and also let them go. And then you direct awareness completely upon itself: pristine awareness. And that is it. Then you finishing by saying OM.

Okay? Alright? So thank you very much. (*Applause*)

May I make one postscriptum? Postscriptum means P.S. (*Laughter*). So if you do not remember, write me a WhatsApp, right? I will just text it to you. Do not write me, write Riteshbhai (*Lots of laughter*), we will channel the communication through him.

King's College Student gives vote of thanks: Thank you very much, Acharyaji. That was very insightful and thought-provoking, I am sure we can all agree. And thank you again for taking out your time to do this.

PRAYER *to* GODDESS SARASVATĪ *to*
INCREASE *our* INTELLIGENCE

PRAYER to GODDESS SARASVATĪ to
INCREASE our INTELLIGENCE

ॐ नमस्ते शारदे देवि काश्मीरपुरवासिनि ।
त्वामहं प्रार्थये नित्यं विद्यादानं च देहि मे ॥

om namaste śārade devi kāśmīra-pura-vāsini |
tvām ahaṁ prārthaye nityaṁ vidyā-dānaṁ ca dehi me ||

Om Obeisance to you, O Goddess Śāradā,
You who are like the Full-Moon in Autumn,
You who dwell in the Region of Kaśmīr!
I ever beseech you: Grant me the gift of knowledge!



GODDESS SARASVATĪ, THE SANSKRIT LANGUAGE PERSONIFIED

Ancient Nepali Painting of Goddess Sarasvatī © Himalayan Art Resources

