

Start with Meditation

The fifth concept of Sanatan Dharma is Shaucha.

Shaucha is the cleanliness of body and mind. One has to learn to clean one's body, one's mind and one's heart, and for that one has to find a System and a teacher.

We are fortunate. One has only got to think what life would have been like if we had not found a teacher or teachers to realise their importance. They have been absolutely essential to our growth in understanding.

The Shankaracharya has told us that we have to come out of what we are not – those turning thoughts and multiple desires. So, Who am I? That is the question. We have to move out of the little house with bars on the windows and move into our mansion house with rich furnishings and plenty of servants.

We learned in our Western tradition that Man is a complete cosmos, a self-creative being, with three nervous systems fully complete and laid down. This means that he is able to change his level to a higher place in the universe. According to the Western System for this evolution or metamorphosis to take place a man has to be reborn. And to be reborn he has to die, and to die he must first **awake**.

Now the fifth concept of Sanatan Dharma shows us that in order to **awake**, it is necessary to clean the body, the mind and the heart.

Body: Our body is the 'temple of the Holy Spirit'. The Shankaracharya quoted a Sanskrit poem to his audience in 1977 which contained the following:

My body is a temple in which I worship you.

Whatever I eat, or wear, or do is part of the worship which I keep on performing at the temple.

Even when this body goes to sleep I feel I am in Samadhi with You.

Whenever I walk or anything, I feel I am going on a pilgrimage with you.

This veneration shows the requirement to keep our body clean and not abuse it in any manner. Our Western system had a saying: 'Look after your body as though it had 100 years to live, but be prepared to die to-morrow.

In all traditions it is expected that we should present ourselves at our best before the supreme deity that we are worshipping or holding in our attention. Hence the natural requirement to wash our hands and face before meditation, or our feet, hands and face before a Mukabeleh. A trained body is an asset in practicing control. We find, for instance, in the Movements, Turning and Yoga that doing movements correctly, engenders attention. And it is attention that creates the Sattva necessary to **awake**.

Mind: Paying attention to the Mantra, to the exclusion of reverberating thoughts creates attention providing Sattva that puts one in the way of Grace. In other words, through meditation we learn to tune out the static (turning thoughts and desires) from our mind, and so tune in to the guiding voice. During the day, between the two half hours, the practice of having an observer present in the mind also creates Sattva and preserves one from wrong action and creates an ambience where good things can happen.

Cleansing the mind also requires seeing patterns in one's behaviour. This should lead one to forming strong attitudes that create barriers to actions that take us away from our aim of remembering the Param-Atman.

Heart: This is the centre of our true emotions. But first we must get rid of negative emotions which we are told have no centre. These, we know, are very fast and very strong. Hence they are difficult to control. This is why strong mental attitudes to negative emotions can prevent them from exercising any power. One cannot meet these emotions head on. They are too strong. But a strong attitude that enables one to turn away before being caught in their web is the way to deal with the situation. Just like a diabetic seeing sugar on the table avoids picking up a lump because he knows that for him it is poison. The need to raise this subject of negative emotions is because they burn off the Sattva that we are trying to store. What is really important is to soften one's heart by reaching that emotional energy which cannot turn negative. In 1972 the Shankaracharya explained:

If once during our life-time an unshakable faith in Param-Atman is established, that we belong to Param-Atman and Param-Atman belongs to us, then we are out of reach of all harm. At that stage things change their properties for us, a harmful drug becoming harmless. This is how a cup of deadly poison given to Mira, a perfect devotee, lost all its poisonous properties in her hands. We know that substances change their properties during a chemical reaction, ie on a chemical plane. Then why can this not happen on a more subtle plane, where much more powerful forces come into play? Bhakti can do all that. It cleanses you, purifies you, decorates you and presents you before the Param-Atman at your best.

The Shankaracharya's words encourage us to have recourse to some devotional exercise everyday, to read the Scriptures and to take in good impressions through enjoying good company. All these activities such as enjoying good theatre, music and the arts, the study of philosophy, science and religion help to cleanse the emotions.

Param-Atman has provided us with endless opportunities to change. And a clean body, mind and heart is the hallmark of a rounded being on the way to liberation.

Pause

Man is by nature a spiritual being and in 1975 the Shankaracharya said:

What are the methods of purifying and cleaning the Antakarana? I will explain in detail, though some are already known: Good Action, Holy Action, Holy Thought and service, considering everybody to be part of the same Param-Atman, treating other people as our own selves. Remembering that the same pure Param-Atman permeates all living beings which we come across, as a universal brotherhood. These are the things that purify the Antakarana and provide light with which the Antakarana is purified.