

Satsang with Om Baba

(January 2016, Tiruvannamalai, India)

On the Witness and the witnessing

Welcome to the Satsang.

What shall we speak about today?

Question: About the witness and the process of witnessing.

OK. So the suggested issue is the witness. What is this witness? And what is this process of witnessing? How can we be a witness?

Many people on the spiritual path, they try to be a witness. But to become a witness would be something artificial. That would be just the mind saying, "Look! I have become a witness". So, becoming a witness is not an option. This, we have to understand very clearly. The effort is not to become a witness. The point is simply to recognise the witness that is already present. That is the true witness – the one that is present this very moment. It doesn't make any effort to witness. Witnessing is its nature. It cannot stop witnessing. It cannot stop being aware.

One way to realise this presence, that it cannot stop being aware, is a very simple exercise; it can be done in two minutes. I want everyone here to close your eyes and just stop being aware. Don't be aware of your thoughts. Don't be aware of your sensations. Don't be aware of the silence. Don't be aware of the noises. Don't be aware of anything!

(After a couple of minutes) How is it going?

How is it going not being aware of anything? Just stop being aware. Does it work?

It's not possible!

It's so simple. It is not possible to not be aware. It is not possible not to witness. That source of witnessing, That is the witness. That is the subject. That is the Self. That, which is impossible not to be aware.

It can be aware at this moment of its environment. If you try to shut off this environment, it will be aware of all sensations. If there is absolutely no sensation in the body, it will be aware of thoughts, that is, all previously accumulated impressions.

If we go deeper than that, and there are no impressions, it will be aware of the silence. It will be aware of the void. It will never stop being aware. There is no way to stop it from being aware. If you cut the head, it will be aware. You can do anything; you can throw a nuclear bomb – it will be aware.

The Awareness is nuclear-bomb-proof. It is immune to any sort of pain, to any sort of obstruction. It just cannot stop being there. It is not a faculty of the body. It works independently of the body. Many people, for example, they have some very difficult experiences in the body; they have an accident. A serious accident. And they see that the body has fallen down – maybe they have been hit by a car – and they rise above the body. And they see their body lying down and everything else around. They don't stop being aware.

Some other people, they completely lose consciousness. They see just blackness.

But still, they see blackness.

It is not limited by the body. It has taken, it has inhabited infinite bodies. It is inhabiting, at this very moment, infinite bodies. It is entertained by infinite minds. It is looking at infinite experiences; experiences come, experiences go, but it never stops looking. It sees the coming of the experience, it sees the going of the experience. It sees the presence of an experience, it sees the absence of an experience.

It sees the complaints of the ego when the experience is present; people say, "I don't like this, I wish it would stop". It sees that; it knows it. It sees when the experience goes and the ego again complains. It says, "Oh, I wish it could come again". In other words, It sees the internal complaints of the ego. It looks at everything, but It cannot be looked upon.

In self-enquiry – this is a very sensitive point – we have somehow to look at the looking. We want to know the subject, to look at the subject, to look at the Self, to take a picture of it, somehow capture it, grasp it. To say, "Yes, now I know". But that is impossible, because this comes from the ego. It is the ego that is an object that wants to be the subject. Do you follow this? The ego is an object – a movement that we perceive – but it wants to be the subject, and that's not possible. So whatever becomes the object of the ego is only a fabrication. The ego can never look at the Truth of our Being. It can never look at the Witness. Don't waste your time. It is the Witness that looks at the ego all the time.

So, in the act of witnessing, there is nothing to try. Just be silent and recognise the witnessing that is already taking place. It cannot stop happening. Without this witnessing, we wouldn't be aware of any experience.

We are constantly aware of experiences, but somehow we try to improve the experiences according to the standards of each individual ego; one ego wants to have this experience, another ego wants to have a different experience. They have a competition. They have a quarrel.

If you really want to find out who is the Witness, don't focus on the experience itself. Let the experiences come according to your destiny. Focus on That which is aware of the experience. This is very important. We should find and remember it. Without it, any experience becomes empty. It becomes meaningless. This is what spirituality is all about – simply remembering It, holding It, loving It. This is your true Self. Everything else comes and goes. This is your true abode. This is your home.

So, instead of spending all your energy and all your life to improve your experiences, just spend a little time to see and to know and remember the Witness. To know your true Self that is completely independent of all experience, completely immune to all experience, completely free of all experience. Supremely beautiful. Supremely pure. Worth knowing. Worth loving. Worth remembering.

So says Shri Dattatreya, "I am the infinite and immutable one. I am pure consciousness without any form. I don't know how or to whom joy and sorrow appear in this world". That is a very beautiful verse.

All this, I can see the joy, I can see the sorrow, but to whom do they appear? All of us, we can see our joys, we can see our sorrows. We can see our boredom and our fascination. We can see all these things, but to whom do they appear?

I will add one more question: whom do they affect? Because it's two different beings. Whom do they affect and to whom do they appear? We think it's one and the same person, don't we?

They affect exclusively the ego. The ego wants something, it gets it, and it is happy. We experience what you might call joy. If the ego does not get it, it is miserable; it takes the form of misery. And then there is something that stands behind that is aware of this, that is not affected in Itself – it is just aware. It says, “I know now, I am joyful.” You say to your friend, “Today, I am so joyful.” How do you know? There is something that knows. That is the Witness. It is not itself joyful or miserable. It only knows the joy or misery of the ego.

I will repeat this; it is very important! When the ego gets what it wants, it is joyful. When the ego does not get what it wants, it becomes miserable. Joy and misery are exclusively qualities of the ego, and not of the Self, which is just aware of them.

It is a sort of chemistry. If you take a little bit of joy and a little bit of sorrow and add it to the ego, there will be a reaction; sparks coming out. If you take the same joy and sorrow and add it to the Self, nothing will happen. Absolutely nothing.

If you take a saint and bring him in front of the sun, the sun shines upon him. And you say, “Oh sun, this is a saint.” And you take a criminal, a murderer, and you put him in front of the sun, and you say, “Oh sun, behold! A murderer”, the sun will be completely the same. He will shine the same upon both of them. For a judge, it will be different. For the ego it will be different; it will praise the one and condemn the other. But, for the sun, it is the same thing.

Know the Self to be like the sun. Know the ego to be like the judge, with a hammer; it has its ‘white list’ – “These things I like. I like this food. I like this entertainment. I like this person”. It has the ‘black list’ also – “These things I don’t like”. So, if an experience comes and it belongs to the black list, the ego is miserable.

So, he asks to whom does the joy or sorrow come. This is a very accurate question for someone who has gone beyond the ego. When the ego has been dispelled, where would the joy or sorrow go? They have no place to stay. Some might say, it is a result of karma. But says the Avadhutta: “I have no mental karma, neither good nor bad. I have no physical karma, neither good nor bad. I have no verbal karma, neither good nor bad. I am beyond the senses. I am the pure nectar of the knowledge of the Self”. This is very good news, I tell you! The Self has no Karma!

The Karma that everybody is afraid of, from which nobody can escape – no manifestation can escape the Karma. This very manifestation, this very form that we have, is as a result of Karma. Birth is a result of Karma. Death is a result of Karma. The diverse events that happen throughout life are the result of Karma.

So we say we are like in a prison; we cannot do anything. The body, yes, it has a destiny to fulfil. But the Self is not the body. The Awareness, the Witness has no destiny. It is aware of the destiny unfolding. It looks upon the universal scenario somehow unfolding. But Itself, does not play a part in this scenario. That is freedom from Karma.

Karma binds and squeezes everyone, as long as they are identified with the form. There are three kinds of Karma: physical Karma – actions that are performed with my body are physical Karma. If you do a good action, a good action will come back to you. If you give a flower, a flower will come back to you. If you give food to somebody who is hungry, you will be given food when you are hungry.

There is a certain physical principle: for every action there is a reaction. Very, very simple and straightforward. Not only is there a reaction but there is an equivalent reaction.

That is the physical Karma, and then there is the verbal Karma – the Karma that is spoken. We speak sweetly, we will receive sweet words. And then there is the mental Karma – the most important of all – the thoughts that we have.

The intelligent person, who understands how Karma works, he starts working exclusively on the mind. If there are positive thoughts in the mind, both the words and the actions will also be positive. If there are negative thoughts in the mind, how long can you suppress them? Sooner or later, they will be expressed in negative actions or negative words.

So, truly, the base of all action, of all Karma, is the mind. It's where the Karma comes from. And it is the place where Karma is mostly experienced. It's very interesting.

I see many people on my travels, they have everything in their life. They have all they need in great abundance. They have good health, good work, everything. And yet they are always complaining about something. They are always dramatising about something, even the smallest things.

So, where is the bad Karma experienced? In the mind alone. Everything's so beautiful in their life, but they are so miserable. They live in a drama. The source of the Karma is the mind, and the place where the Karma is experienced is again the mind.

You see some ascetics or saints who have nothing. They have just one cloth like Ramana Maharshi, a simple cloth. They don't even have food to eat for this day. They have no family, no friends, no house – nothing. And yet they are so happy. Their mind is so blissful. In this state of simplicity, they have no distraction. They have no cares. They have nothing to worry about. Nothing to block the bliss of their own Being. Nothing to disturb their natural joy. If, of course, the mind is pure. You see the kings who have everything, they go and bow at their feet.

There is a story about the guru of the guru of my guru. His name was Katcha Baba. He lived in Varanasi. He had a small hut close to the Ganga. He was very popular, but he didn't have many people around him. He had only one simple cloth, just like Ramana Maharshi; it was his only possession.

So, at this time, India was under British rule. It was the 19th century. So, the son of the King, Prince George IV, he wanted to come to India. He had an interest to witness the spiritual aspect of India, so he came to India with his big army and everything; his horses, elephants, everything.

He asked what was a spiritual place he should go, and they said to him, "Varanasi, Sir, it's very special". Varanasi was a very popular spiritual centre at that time.

So, the prince went to Varanasi, followed by 10,000 followers. And when he got there he asked, "Where can I find a true saint? I want to meet him". They told him: "Katcha Baba". So he said, "OK, I will go to visit that Katcha Baba".

So, he went with his 1,000 horses, elephants and his riches. And as he got close, he saw the hut from a distance. Something stopped him. Suddenly, he felt very embarrassed. He stepped down from the horse. He said, "I will go alone". He took off his shoes and he went barefoot to the hut of the saint.

The saint was sitting inside. Very small place, just enough room for two people to sit there. He had only a simple cloth. So, very slowly and carefully, the prince opened the door and looked inside. "Can I come in?". The saint looked at him and grunted. So, he came inside very respectfully, looked around. There was not much space – he somehow managed to sit down.

He was very nervous. He didn't know what to do or say at this moment. He looked at the simplicity that was surrounding the saint. There was absolutely nothing there. He said, "Oh, Saint, I feel very much inclined to help you, to offer you something".

The saint just looked at him and smiled and said to him, “What can you offer to me? I am the Lord of the whole universe. The whole of the universe comes out of my Heart, and it is sustained by me alone. I have all that I need in perfect abundance. But tell me, prince, what would you like to receive from me?”

The prince didn't even know about spirituality. He found himself bowing at the feet of the saint. His body, remarkably, fell to the ground. He touched with his golden crown the feet of the saint and, with a trembling voice, he said, “Oh, Saint, please bless me and my family, as well as my country”. Katcha Baba said to him: “So be it. You will all prosper”. And the prince left.

They say that at this time England entered in a very prosperous period. Probably, not just a coincidence...

So, my question is which of the two had the better Karma? And my second question is, if you had a choice, which of the two would you like to be?

Or, if you say these examples are both extremes, “I wouldn't like to go into any state”. Towards which direction would you like to go? Towards simplicity in material things and abundance in spirit, or great abundance of material enjoyments and poverty in spirit? Which inspires you more?

In this example, in this story that I told, and since we were speaking about Karma, the prince had a very good Karma, a very high Karma. The great saint Katcha Baba – he was free from Karma.

Good Karma comes out of good deeds, good thoughts, loving thoughts, beneficial thoughts, good, sweet words, sweet, truthful and beneficial words – beneficial deeds as well. By acting like this, we can all become princes, or princesses. We can all go to heaven. Heaven is a product of Karma. A good life is a product of good Karma. But still, you will be inside the boundaries of Karma. If we want to be free from Karma, we have to realise our true Self. We have to recognise the Witness, to recognise that which cannot possibly stop being aware, which cannot possibly stop witnessing, which is constant Life, constant Presence.

You have to identify yourself with It, because you are It. That is the way to be free from Karma. And this is why the saint says, “I have no mental Karma, either good or bad. I have no physical Karma, either good or bad. I have no verbal Karma either good or bad. I am beyond the senses. I am the pure nectar of the knowledge of the Self”.

That is the way to attain freedom from Karma.
That is the way to attain freedom.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti!