

ENTERING THE SACRED SPACE

INTRODUCTION

A great treasure lies hidden in our hearts. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8 Prapāthaka) compares the human body to a city. In this city the house of the heart stands out, and within that house is a special room called the *dahara ākāṣa*.



Materially speaking this room is tiny, but spiritually speaking it's huge. This is the room where the eternal *ātmā* resides with the Lord. The *Upaniṣad* declares that one who finds this room will discover his or her true heart's desire. This room has been designated in various ways, but it is known to any genuine spiritual tradition. Some call it "the sky of the heart" (*antarākāṣa*), others "the lotus of the heart," "the sacred space," or the "temple of the heart." All refer to the *dahara ākāṣa*.

We walk past this room regularly, but we never enter it because we are in ignorance. The *Upaniṣads* compare our behavior to someone who lives near a hidden cache of gold but who doesn't know it's there. Ignorance of the presence of the treasure means we can never enjoy it.

The goal of this Amṛta Vāṇī series "Entering the Sacred Space" is to help you apply the three steps to enter the sacred space:

1. *Becoming conscious of the self*
2. *Observing from your position as soul*
3. *Connecting with the Divine*

BECOMING CONSCIOUS OF THE SELF

The first step is to become conscious of your identity as the soul. We are not the body that encases us. When we hear this we may find ourselves switching the mind off. After all, we've heard this many times. It's a beginner's instruction. Well, it is a beginner's instruction, but there are layers of realization. We have to understand this concept on a deep level. As Śrīla Prabhupāda expresses it,

The very first step in self-realization is realizing one's identity as separate from the body. "I am not this body but am spirit soul" is an essential realization for anyone who wants to tran-

scend death and enter into the spiritual world beyond. It is not simply a matter of saying "I am not this body" but of actually realizing it.

(Beyond Birth and Death)

Ask yourself this question: How much time do I spend being aware that I am an eternal, transcendental soul, different from the body and mind? Observe your own spiritual awareness! If you feel you want to deepen it, you will have to practice. From time to time, you may want to try the following meditation.

MEDITATION FOR PRACTICING SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

1. Relax your body and mind in whatever way you know how – perhaps with the help of *prāṇāyāma* or a simple slow, deep breathing while relaxing the different muscle groups in your body.

2. Bring your attention to the heart. Imagine a bright sun. When you inhale the sun expands: you see a golden color, and feel warmth and light expanding. When you exhale the sun contracts slightly. The sun is pulsating with your breath – expanding when you breathe in and contracting when you breathe out. Stay with this practice for a while.

3. Now meditate on verses that describe the soul's nature. For example:



That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul. (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 2.17)

For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain. (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 2.20)

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 2.22)

The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind. (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 2.23)

The soul – you – exists in the sacred space. When you find it, you have found the sacred space.

4. Stay in this awareness for a while, observe what it feels like and try to engrave the experience on your mind. When you are ready to finish the exercise, remind yourself, “Now I will return to my body with my consciousness. I will experience different situations, but I am always part of Kṛṣṇa, an unaffected soul. As I have experienced expected and unexpected situations in the past, so I will continue to experience life in this body. But it is only my body that will be affected.”

PRACTICE SPIRITUAL AWARENESS IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

The only way to come to a stage where we are always aware of our identity as soul is to practice this awareness regularly. Remind yourself what you felt during your meditation on the soul and try to bring this feeling and the awareness fully into your mind every time you think about it.

To help you remember, it's good to set yourself reminders throughout the day. Choose an activity you do every day. This could be for example: the first time you look into the mirror in the morning, while brushing your teeth, while offering obeisances to your Deities, before you start chanting, or while driving to work etc. If possible, try to practice this remembrance in the morning so that the shifting of your consciousness can shape your day. Have you found your situation? If not, take some more time to find it.

Once you've decided when you want to practice your daily soul awareness, make sure you do it steadily over the next few days. Otherwise you might forget it. Once the practice

has become a habit you won't need to remind yourself, but until then, consider placing a small sticker or sign on the mirror or wherever you plan to do this practice. At best – do this now!

