

LESSON 22

CONTEMPLATIONS (BHAVANAS)

Bhavana means reflection or contemplation. We are always thinking of something, which may be near us or could even be as far away as the other end of the world. This thinking may cause happiness, sorrow, anger, greed, jealousy, or egoism, etc. And depending upon how we react, we attract different types of karmas to our souls. No prudent person would like to attract bad karma, and at certain stages any karma at all. But ridding of oneself of karmas is not as easy as turning off a switch. So to minimize the bondage of karmas, the Jina have taught us to observe sixteen contemplations. From these contemplations the following four can easily be practiced by the householders, while the rest of twelve will be observed once we progress spiritually.

- 1) Contemplation of Being a Friend (Maitri Bhavana)
- 2) Contemplation of Appreciation (Pramod Bhavana)
- 3) Contemplation of Compassion (Karuna Bhavana)
- 4) Contemplation to stay neutral or uninvolved (Madhyastha Bhavana)

Let us understand how these contemplations play important roles in our lives, how they can keep us away from bad karmas, and ultimately how they can improve our overall chances to uplift our souls.

Contemplation of the Friendship (Maitri Bhavana)

Lord Mahavira said, “We must be friends to all living beings.” The feeling of friendship brings love and respect for others. It also initiates a feeling of brotherhood among all living beings, and in turn leaves no room for harming others, deceit or causing quarrels. If we contemplate on friendship, then our thoughts, words, and actions will not be harsh, therefore we will not hurt anyone. On the contrary, we will support and protect everybody. Friendship will lead us to be tolerant, forgiving, and caring for one another. Therefore, if we develop a friendship with all living beings, we will avoid bad karma.

Contemplation of Appreciation (Pramod Bhavana)

In this contemplation, we admire the success of our friends, spiritual leaders, and the Arihants. One of the most destructive forces in our lives is jealousy. Friendship combined with the admiration destroys jealousy. As jealousy subsides, negative impulses are turned into positive ones, and in due time, we will be at peace.

Contemplation of the Compassion (Karuna Bhavana)

Instead of succeeding, many of our friends may be getting into trouble for the things that could have been avoided and should not have been done. Even some of those who are successful may be accumulating vices such as greed and ego; they are not on the right path. They may be weak, helpless, and in distress. At such a time, we should contemplate on compassion for them instead of disgust or hate. We should show them the right path with patience, tolerance, and forgiveness, offering them needed support. This way we can avoid accumulating bad karma for us as well as for them.

Contemplation of staying neutral or uninvolved (Madhyastha Bhavana)

The life appears to be nothing but involvement. Sometimes the situation works out favorably and sometimes it does not. So instead of getting disappointed, angry, or more involved, we should contemplate on staying neutral or uninvolved which leads to the feeling that “I did my best to resolve the situation.” This leads our mind to decide that if someone does not want to understand then leave that person alone without getting further involved. We should simply hope that one of these days, that person may understand things and change. By observing neutrality, we remain in equanimity, instead of provoking turmoil in our minds. When our mind stays neutral and uninvolved, then the karma stays away.

In short, we can avoid the influx of bad karmas and live peacefully in this worldly life by developing friendships with all living beings, admiring their success, holding their hands when they are in the distress, and stay detached during favorable and unfavorable surroundings. So until it becomes the natural way of life to observe the above contemplations, one should contemplate on them as many times as needed. If there is a goal, then there is an achievement!

The rest of the 12 contemplations will be discussed in other sections. We will at least consider their names here. They are as follows:

- 1) Transmigration of everything around us (Anitya Bhavana).
- 2) Utter helplessness in the face of death (Asharan Bhavana).
- 3) Relentless cycle of birth and death with its attendant sufferings (Sansar Bhavana)
- 4) Absolute aloneness of each individual as he moves through this cycle and as he experiences fruits of his own past deeds (Ekatva Bhavana)
- 5) The fact that the soul and body are completely separate from each other (Anyatva Bhavana)
- 6) Filth and impurity as it permeates a seemingly attractive physical body (Ashuchi Bhavana).
- 7) Manner in which influx of karmic matter takes place (Asrav Bhavana)
- 8) How such inflow of karmic matter can be stopped (Sansar Bhavana)
- 9) How karmic matter already clinging to the soul can be eliminated (Nirjara Bhavana)
- 10) The real nature of the universe (Lok Bhavana)
- 11) How rare is the opportunity to attain right faith (Bodhi Durlabh Bhavana)
- 12) How the path of liberation is well set out and enlightened by the omniscient lord (Dharma Bhavana)

The Immoral Song

May the sacred stream of amity flow forever in my heart,
May the universe prosper; such is my cherished desire;
May my heart sing with ecstasy at the sight of virtuous,
And may my life be an offering at their feet;
May my heart bleed at the sight of wretched, the cruel and poor,
And may tears of compassion flow from my eyes;
May I always be here to show the path to the pathless wanderers of life,
Yet if they should not hearken to me, may I bide patiently;
May the spirit of goodwill enter into all our hearts,
May we all sing together the immortal song of brotherhood,
The immortal song of sisterhood,
The immortal song.