**SWADHYAY**

Swadhyay means self-study, reflection on sacred words. Through self study one actually discovers one’s own divine self. It brings inner communion with that underlying natural reality. Constant study, reflection and introspection of the sacred words in the scriptures helps one to receive the real knowledge from within and raise the level of consciousness. Swadhyay is one of the five niyamas (Shaucha, Santosha, Tapah, Swadhyay, Ishvara Pranidhana) prescribed in Patanjali yoga sutras for self training. Swadhyay also means the study, knowledge, and discovery of the self. It is a journey of harmonizing the self with a network of relationships, of creating and maintaining vital connections between self, society, and God, of knowing and enriching human action with sacredness.

The scriptures are meant not only for rational, intellectual, logical understanding. The value of their teaching lies in being able to apply what we have understood in everyday life. Our study will have no benefit if we do not make an effort to live up to the teachings. The more often we read, the more we understand. We start seeing things in a new light. This is the greatness of the Holy Scriptures like Gita, Ramayan, and Bhagawat Puran etc. We gradually rise upwards. This implies elevation of the mind and expansion of its horizon, which further implies a better understanding of everything within and around. We get attuned to the authors of such scriptures who were realized souls, great saints, seers and gurus who tread the path of truth. Words in scriptures are so powerful; they give us so much strength and direction. They are universal truths and time tested. A systematic study of the spiritual texts helps us to keep us on the right track and move towards our goal of manifesting divinity. The study involves reading a chapter or some verses from Gita, Ramayan, Upanishads etc on a daily basis and reflecting upon that.

Daily reading is one of the most powerful methods of keeping the mind fully alive to one’s ideal. A host of powerful, positive ideas rushes to the mind and the mental powers are at once sharpened. The reader is inspired and uplifted, and enabled to conquer the lower forces in everyday life. Therefore, a sadhak should not give up swadhyay, even for a single day. By reading inspiring sentences over and over again, they become indelibly engraved in the heart and a part of one’s inner nature. Such repetition gives strength and pushes an idea into the innermost chambers of the heart and mind. Then the idea percolates into the subconscious mind. As a result, the negative thoughts lurking there are gradually annihilated. In the inspiring words of Swami Sivananda: “Spiritual books act as consoling companions under all vexing circumstances, ideal teachers in all difficulties, as a guiding light, as a panacea for evils and as shapers of destiny”.

Krishna gives clear directives that one should follow the guidelines given in the scriptures.

16.23 यः शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः ।  
न स सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुखं न परां गतिम् II

One who, casting aside the precepts of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desires, attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the Supreme Goal.

16. 24 तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ ।  
ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि II

Therefore, scriptural sanction should guide you in determining what is, and what is not to be done. Knowing this, you should only perform such actions in the world, as are ordained by the Scriptures.

This means that Swadhyay is mandatory for all sadhaks.

Basically the scriptures speak to us and we can use this as a springboard to self understanding, to understand our place on earth and our purpose in life. (Aunty always used to say that the scriptures are like mirrors and through reflection we can understand our own self).

Studying our own personality, being aware of our individual qualities, strengths and weaknesses, in order to know what and who we are is crucial to progress in the spiritual path. It means efforts to perceive our own self in different perspectives..Swadhyay implies continually watching our actions and reactions in different situations, circumstances and events with more awareness. We will then know the reasons for our happiness and sorrow, anger, greed and attachment. As a result, we will gradually find out how our mind works and will become more aware of the things that disturb our mind.With an understanding of our weaknesses in particular, we can make efforts for our gradual upliftment by referring to what is said in the scriptures. Naam Jap, Meditation and Satsang also aid in understanding oneself. . If these are practised with faith, sincerity and regularity, and under the right guidance, they will lead to mental peace, emotional harmony and bring the aspirant closer to the inner nature and help in manifesting divinity.