

Ideal State for the Final Moment

B Mahadevan¹

Whenever there is a special moment or an event in our lives we make adequate preparation for the same. Think of the child's birthday or one's own wedding day. The more precious we think the event is the more elaborate is the preparation. We also start thinking about it several days before the event itself. This holds true not only for individuals but also for institutions. The foundation (or Founder's Day) of an organization, the Convocation day in an educational institution are typical examples of this category. More than the prior thinking, the minute by minute actual happening along the line of thought on the D-day makes the whole exercise a success. During such events, good things are remembered and several good initiatives are also started.

If this is the case then what about that final day when we want to say good bye to everyone in this world and go? After all with a life expectancy of over 70 years, most of us would live long. There would have been numerous learnings for us, we would have become much wiser as life experiences ought to have taught us larger aspects of life. Many of us would have made a difference to a few around us. With all these nice things that summarise one's life, is the final moment a helpless, painful, stressful or a pathetic situation for a person or one where he/she can take control of and be extremely contented, happy and peaceful?

The Notion of a Peaceful Sleep

This is not a utopian idea or an undesirable subject for discussion if we think more objectively. There is a German saying which suggests that we all strive various thing in our life with the ultimate goal that our *last sleep is indeed peaceful*. The question is, "Why do we strive for a peaceful last sleep?" In the framework of *Sanātana Dharma*, every soul goes through multiple birth – death cycle through a process of reincarnation before it purifies and perfects itself. At the final stage the purified and evolved soul liberates itself. In this journey, the continuity from one cycle to the next and the transformative path are provided, among other things, by the mental state of the soul in the final moments as it prepares to end one edition of "birth – death" cycle.

As Shri Krishna pointed out in the chapter 8 of the *Gītā* our thoughts in the final moments are very important and they determine the journey forward. A peaceful mind enables the soul to collect serene and noble thoughts as it prepares to make the exit out of the physical body. It is these thoughts and experiences that become the basis for its further journey. Therefore the next question pertains to the ideal set of conditions that will ensure that the final sleep is indeed peaceful. How does one ensure that the thoughts in the final moments are as ideal as it could be to achieve this objective? Does this simply mean that we close our eyes and think of God, or is it something else such as doing a meditation?

The fact of the matter is that we do not know when the final moment will arrive. Therefore, from a practical standpoint, the best thing to do is to begin training our minds

¹ *B Mahadevan, a Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore is currently the Vice Chancellor of Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth, a University for Sanskrit and Indic Traditions.*

much earlier to be in the ideal state, provided we know what that ideal state is. In order to provide some help in this direction, Shri Krishna describes in two *ślokas* in chapter 8 an ideal state of mind that one can have at the final moment when the soul leaves the body.

The Final Moment: Thoughts and Actions

The final state consists of two dimensions. One is the state of the mind and the senses, the other is the thought and the words uttered. The mental state is explained by Shri Krishna in the following manner: By a proper control of all senses (*sarva-dwārāṇi samyamya*), also by establishing the mind in the heart centre (*mano hṛudi nirudhya ca*), focusing the vital force on one's own forehead (*mūrdhny prāṇam ādhāya*), usually between the two eye brows and resting oneself (*ātmanah āsthitah*) in the constant state of yoga (*yoga dhāraṇām*).

सर्वद्वाराणि संयम्य मनो हृदि निरुध्य च ।

मूर्ध्याधायात्मनः प्राणमास्थितो योगधारणाम् ॥ 8.12

*sarva-dwārāṇi samyamya mano hṛudi nirudhya ca
mūrdhnyādhāyātmanah prāṇam-āsthitō yoga-dhāraṇām*

In summary, the description suggests that the numerous distractions of the mind that usually happens need to be filtered out and instead transformed into a single pointed focus. We cannot reach this mental state by taking a momentary decision. To do this, we need continuous effort over a long period of time in a repeated basis.

Once the mind is brought to a state of single pointed focus, the next issue that crops up is “what exactly to focus on and how”. Shri Krishna describes this aspect as follows: After establishing in such a state of mind deeply immersed in a yogic state, one should remember Me - the ultimate Brahman (*mām-anusmaran*) and utter (*vyāharan*) OM, the ultimate monosyllable (*omityekākṣaram*) representing Brahman (*brahma*) and leave (*prayāti*) this mortal body (*tyajandeham*). Such a person will reach (*sa yāti*) the ultimate position to be reached (*paramāṃ gatim*).

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।

यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥ 8.13

*omityekākṣaram brahma vyāharan-mām-anusmaran
yah prayāti tyajandeham sa yāti paramāṃ gatim*

There are two important aspects to observe in this description. One is “remembering Him, the Lord” and the other is “uttering OM and knowing that it is indeed Brahman”. This is easier said than done and we need to understand how this will exactly happen.

The real value of Satsang

What are we likely to remember in our life? Memory is a matter of habit. Think of a person who is very concerned about the wealth he/she has accumulated and grown over time. Such a person will be constantly on the lookout for new investment opportunities that will yield better return on the investment. Such a person who is all the time mentally engaged in such an exercise will be constantly thinking only about money, interest, bank accounts, investment details, maturity of investments, stock market movements etc. Naturally for such a person the thoughts in his/her final moments ought to belong to the world of investments and asset management. Similarly, a person who is so much attached to his wife and family will be thinking of them at every moment and therefore his last moments have to be family related issues (and problems?).

Further, if we happen to interact with the person passionate about growing money through intelligent investments, most of what he/she talk will pertain to this theme only. This is simply because in his/her "world", these are very important issues. The same will be true of the family oriented person also. Whatever is the subject matter discussed, it will revolve only around the family members.

These two examples clearly show that if we want to remember the Lord in the final moment and utter his name or OM, it cannot happen all on a sudden. It requires practice for a long time on a daily basis. Furthermore, he/she also needs an enabling framework for this to happen and a conducive environment to sustain it. This is exactly the value provided by a true satsang. There is a misconstrued notion that satsang is for elderly and retired people. Young, upcoming professionals and middle aged people can also have satsang, albeit in less frequent intervals on account of family and professional commitments. Sundays and holidays provide opportunities to have satsang for such category of people. What begins as a weekly satsang, say on Sundays, will gradually grow and turn out to be a bi-weekly satsang and over time the frequency will increase.

The moot point remains; notwithstanding these variations and opportunities available to an individual, the sooner we find a satsang in our daily life, the better the chances are that we get to the ideal state of our mind in the final moments of our life.