Three Minutes

What does love know about sleep?

imaiyOrgaL kuzhAm
tozhuvadum sUzhvadum sey
tollai
mAlaik kaNNArak kaNDu
kazhivadOr kaAdal
uRRarukkum uNDO kaNgaL
tunjudalE!
(nammAzhvAr, tiruviruttam – 97)

This stanza (pAsuram) is found in
the first hymn (prabandham) sung by
nammAzhvAr, who is regarded as
the chief among the AzhvArs
(kUDasthar). nammAzhvAr's four
prabhandam-s are equivalent to four
saMsK^it veda-s, and so he is
called "vedam tamizh seyda mARan"
(mARan who did the veda-s in
tamizh). Both veda-s deal with the
same fundamental ideas and arrive
at the same conclusions that
shrIman nArAyaNa is the ultimate
Lord (para tattvam). Moreover,
certain tamizh verses (pAsuram-s)
are the exact translation of
saMsK^it vedic verses.

The eternal bliss (mokSham) is filled
with ever-free (nityasUris) and
liberated (mukta) souls. They flock
together and surround the Lord who
is sitting in His serpent throne
(AdisheShan). They praise, sing and
deeply immerse in the ecstatic
feeling of looking (darshan) at the
Lord eye to eye. While, enjoying this
bliss, they don't even blink.

Many male AzhvAr-s imagine
themselves as a romantic lady love
and Lord shrIman nArAyaNa as the
lover (nAyikA bhAavam). Assuming
they have been separated from their
lover, they pour out their
exasperated feelings of love,
frustration and acts of desperation.
Here nammAzhvAr, as a girl, finds
herself so restless by the separation
from the Lord and compares her
sleeplessness to the un-winking
devotion of the residents of mokSham.

The beauty is that the Lord doesn't let you sleep while you are with Him (samshIEsha dasai) or separated from Him (vishleSha dasai). AzhvAr implicitly describes how one should behave and enjoy the darshan of the Lord. Instead of engaging in other activities, we should concentrate on the scene and retain in our minds the beautiful idol (arcA mUrti) while inside the sanctum of a temple. AzhvAr gives here the literal translation of upaniShad saying "sadA pashyanti sUrayaH".

What we learn from this –

1. **Keep your eye on the ball.**
   Remain focused on the target until it is completely fruitful, like the residents of mokSham.

2. **Strive with endurance.**
   Invest your full effort and avoid distractions. Sleep is a metaphor for engaging in other activities.

3. **Aim high.**
   Don't succumb to cheap temptations. Always remember what the ultimate goal is and be aware when you are sidetracked by other diversions. Even in mokSham, the target is only the best, the Lord. It's like the joke in which someone asked the robber why did you rob the bank? He replied that's where the money is.

4. **Life is short, use it wisely.**

The AzhvAr girl passionately tries to join with her lover, sacrificing several things including sleep. Earthly souls are separated from the Lord and permanent pleasure because of their birth/death cycle (samsAra). They should also look frantically to break that cycle, get liberated and enjoy the eternal bliss.

No gift in life will last as long, or touch the heart as deeply as the special privilege of ever looking at the Lord happily.