

# Being Divine Here and Now

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2 Being Divine: Here and Now

**Publishers**

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Release :            January, 2020   3000 copies



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## Publisher's Note

Swami Vivekananda famously said that “Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God.” Becoming divine is the sole purpose of life. That divinity needs to show fully in man's personality.

Leave alone understanding, most people do not know this. Once again, Swami Vivekananda said, “To men, therefore, who never rise higher than eating, drinking, begetting progeny, and dying, the only gain is in sense enjoyments; and they must wait and go through many more births and reincarnations to learn to feel even the faintest necessity for anything higher.”

In moments of despair and tragedy, we try to evaluate life and temporarily realize its vanity. In those moments of evanescent dispassion, we long to look for something higher than ordinary. That is the first step towards spirituality.

We need to recognize that the roots of spiritual life of a human being are deeply entwined with his mundane life. Small acts of daily life, the routine transactions, seemingly shallow conversations and patterns of thinking, actually affect our psychological life and ultimately our spiritual life.

To begin with, spiritual life is fairly simple. Swami Vivekananda said, “to encourage people in living simple, quiet, wholesome lives--that the life shall be the religion, not something separate and apart.” “To be Good and to do good” is the idea of religion he preached. In fact, he goes as far to say, “The man who is perfectly moral has nothing more to do; he is free.”

The scriptures of Sanatana Dharma talk more about a clean regulated life than anything else. This book presents those invaluable virtues in the modern context in the light of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. It provides simple explanations and commentary on the Divine Virtues elucidated in the Bhagawad Gita.

Is such a life really possible in practice? Yes. It is possible.

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Swami Vivekananda says, “...But those to whom the eternal interests of the soul are of much higher value than the fleeting interests of this mundane life, to whom the gratification of the senses is but like the thoughtless play of the baby, to them God and the love of God form the highest and the only utility of human existence. Thank God there are some such still living in this world of too much worldliness.”

And, life is all about starting somewhere and working towards the goal with perseverance. Swami Vivekananda emphasizes, “One ounce of the practice of righteousness and of spiritual Self-realization outweighs tons and tons of frothy talk and nonsensical sentiments.” Sri Ramakrishna said about self-effort: “The winds of God’s grace are always blowing, it is for us to raise our sails” and “Let your lotus bloom, the bees would come of themselves!”

It is time to start here and now. We should emulate the traits discussed in the book with diligence and urgency. Swami Vivekananda taught: “Who cares for great things? Why not do small things as well? One is as good as the other. The greatness of little things, that is what the Gita teaches — bless the old book!!”

We are indebted to Revered Swami Dayatmanandaji Maharaj for graciously permitting us to publish this book. His simple style with lucid understanding of the modern world makes this book invaluable to appreciating the fundamentals spiritual life.

We would like to thank the young members of the samithi who helped in several ways and Chi. Arun Vikas for designing the coverpage.

Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samithi, Bapatla is celebrating its golden jubilee this year: 1970-2020. We are commemorating the occasion through various activities. Most Revered Swami Divyanandaji Maharaj, Senior Trustee, Ramakrishna Math and Mission and Secretary, Saradapitha, Belur Math, Kolkata released this book on 1 Jan, 2020 on the occasion of the inauguration of “Golden Jubilee Vivekananda Bhavan”. Our most humble pranams at his feet.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the donors for this publication.

May we all become divine is our prayer!

Publishers

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# Being Divine: Here and Now

## 1 Tyāga (Renunciation)

Disciple: Shri Ramakrishna used to say that a man cannot progress far towards God realisation unless he first relinquishes *Kāma-Kāanchana* (lust and greed). If so, what will become of householders, for their whole minds are set on these two things?

Swamiji: It is true that the mind can never turn to God until the desire for lust and wealth has gone from it, be the man a householder or a Sannyasin. Know this for a fact, that as long as the mind is caught in these, so long true devotion, firmness, and *Shraddha* (faith) can never come.

Disciple: Where will the householders be, then? What way are they to follow?

Swamiji: To satisfy smaller desires and have done with them forever, and to relinquish the greater ones by discrimination - that is the way. Without renunciation God can never be realised - even if Brahma himself enjoined otherwise!

Disciple: But does renunciation of everything come as soon as one becomes a monk?

Swamiji: Sannyasins are at least struggling to make themselves ready for renunciation, whereas householders are in this matter like boatmen who work at their oars while the boat lies at anchor. "Is the desire for enjoyment ever appeased - It increases ever and ever!"

Disciple: Why? May not world-weariness come, after enjoying the objects of the senses over and over for a long time?

Swamiji: To how many does that come? The mind becomes tarnished by constant contact with the objects of the senses and receives a permanent moulding and impress from them. Renunciation, and renunciation alone, is the real secret, the *Moola-mantra*, of all Realisation.

Disciple: But there are such injunctions of the seers in the scriptures as these:

• 'To restrain the five senses while living with one's wife and children is *Tapas*.'

• “For him whose desires are under control, living in the midst of his family is the same as retiring into a forest for *Tapasya*.”

Swamiji: Blessed indeed are those who can renounce *Kama-Kanchana*, living in their homes with their family! But how many can do that?

Disciple: But then, what about the Sannyasins? Are they all able to relinquish lust and love for riches fully?

Swamiji: As I said just now, Sannyasins are on the path of renunciation, they have taken the field, at least, to fight for the goal; but the householders, on the other hand, having no knowledge as yet of the danger that comes through lust and greed, do not even attempt to realise the Self; that they must struggle to get rid of these is an idea that has not yet entered their minds.

*Tyaga* means renunciation or sacrifice. Renunciation is one of the most important spiritual quality; it is the very foundation of spirituality. Without it no one can progress in any field of life. Man becomes great in proportion to all that he can give up.

The Bhagavad Gita is an exposition on renunciation. There are hundreds of commentaries on it, but Sri Ramakrishna's commentary is the shortest and the most succinct: "*The essence of the Gita is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes 'tagi', which refers to renunciation. The essence of the Gita is: 'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God.'*"

The word renunciation does appear to be negative, life-denying, and almost abnormal, especially these days. The progress made by science and technology has brought many changes in the ideals and attitudes of people everywhere. One of the results of progress in science is that we have lost faith in God and religion and our preoccupation with this world has increased.

All the great teachers of the world proclaimed again and again that man is divine and without manifesting this innate divinity man cannot attain true peace and happiness. There is a teleological urge in every one of us which will not allow us to rest until we reach perfection and infinity.

It is in this context of spiritual life alone that the idea of renunciation makes sense. Renunciation or sacrifice is a most natural thing in the world. Parents make great sacrifices of their time, energy, wealth and happiness for the sake of their children.

Great men forgo their happiness for the sake of art, freedom or some new discovery. Patriots cheerfully give up their life for the good of their country. People are doing it all the time albeit without being aware of it most of the time; without renunciation life becomes impossible.

Only when it comes to spiritual life people balk at the idea of renunciation. Saints and sages renounce the joys of life willingly, cheerfully and undergo lots of suffering for realizing God. There is no religion which does not advocate renunciation; there is no scripture which does not extol renunciation. Without renunciation there can be no spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *"Knowledge never comes without renunciation of lust and possessions. With the dawn of renunciation is destroyed all ignorance, all Avidya."*

What is renunciation? It is the giving up of the finite and mortal in order to attain the Infinite and Immortal; it is the giving up of the lower for the attainment of the higher. Renunciation is not in giving up of the external. It is not in putting on the ochre dress and wandering about. True renunciation is in the giving up of egoism, of lust and gold.

Here is a relevant passage from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:

Narendra said to the Master with a smile, referring to Bhavanath, "He has given up fish and betel-leaf."

Master: "Why so? What is the matter with fish and betel-leaf? They aren't harmful. The renunciation of 'lust and gold' is the true renunciation."

Here is a beautiful story: Once a famous scholar, respected and wealthy, longed for the realization of God. He approached a holy man and asked him for instruction. The holy man smiled, and said: "You must renounce. That is the way to the Self." Accordingly, the scholar gave away all he possessed, his treasured books, his gold, even his house. He was left with only a simple loin-cloth to cover his body, a blanket, and a bowl with which to beg his food. Time passed, but he still was unable to find peace. He went again to the holy man and asked him for instruction. Again he was given the same answer: "Renounce. That is the way to the Self." The scholar owned only a bowl, simple cloth, and blanket; he gave these away also. A long time passed, but he did not find peace. So he approached the holy man and was given the same advice. He said to himself: "I

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renounced everything except this body. If it is this which stands in my way of realization, I shall give it up also." He built a large fire and was on the point of throwing himself into the flames when his teacher arrived and held him back. "What are you doing?" he said. "Do you think you will realize God by destroying your body?" Then the scholar realized it was his "ego" he must renounce, and at last understood the true meaning of renunciation. In time he realized the imperishable Self, which is beyond all change and attained peace.

A rich young man asked Jesus, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus said unto him, "One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow me."

Renunciation is the turning point in all the various Yogas. Swami Brahmananda said: "Sri Ramakrishna's message in this age is renunciation of lust and gold." Renunciation of lust and gold is the ornament of a holy man, and it is the only means of attaining God.

This also is the message of the Gita and all scriptures. Without renunciation one cannot attain Self-Realization.

As the Kaivalya Upanishad says:

न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैके असृतत्वमानशुः ।  
परेण नाकं निपितं गृहायां विभ्राजदे तद्यतयो विशन्ति ॥

Neither by actions, nor by progeny and wealth, but by renunciation alone is immortality attained. That Supreme State is far beyond the highest heaven, hidden in the cave of the heart, shining brilliantly therein; only the sages perceive it constantly.



## 2 Yajna (Sacrifice)

It is said in the Vedas that the Lord (*Purusha*) made a sacrifice of himself for the sake of creation, and he is sustaining it through continual sacrifice; for it is he who is manifest in the form of the sun, the moon, air, water, fire, earth etc. Creation came out of sacrifice; hence sacrifice is the law of life; Life is a continual act of sacrifice. Willingly or unwillingly everyone is forced to participate in this sacrifice.

We receive and we give out. If we do not give we will not be able to receive! Lord Krishna tells us in the Gita (3:12) that one who does not live a life of sacrifice lives in vain, that is, he remains ignorant and suffers.

One of the most important spiritual qualities is to make life a sacrificial act. In Vedic times the ancient seers used to light a fire and perform varieties of sacrificial rites. Most of these were performed either for the fulfilment of some personal desires or for the general welfare.

In course of time the Vedic seers acquired a holistic vision. They understood that the whole universe is an integrated whole and that everything depends upon everything else, both the living and the non-living.

This understanding gave rise to the concept of the five great sacrifices (*Pancha Maha Yajnah*). Devout study of the scriptures and teaching them to students, worship of the gods, worship of the ancestors, feeding the lower animals, and serving fellow human beings, are the five sacrifices. This is the concept which led Hinduism to deify rivers, mountains, animals etc.

By the time of the Gita the term "sacrifice" had acquired new and deeper spiritual connotations. Any act which brings us nearer to God, helps us to become less selfish, and leads to the welfare of society, came to be considered as a sacrifice. The Bhagavad Gita (4th chapter) enumerates twelve types of sacrifices, such as the worship of gods, charity, the study of scriptures, sense-control, food-control, the acquisition of knowledge etc. All these are

considered sacrifices because they lead one gradually to the unfoldment of one's divinity.

Of all sacrifices *Brahma-Yajna*, seeing Brahman in everything, is considered the best; it is the goal of all spiritual endeavour.

Sacrifice becomes valid only when it entails some amount of loss, pain or inconvenience. If a rich man donates even a large amount of money it cannot really be called a sacrifice since it does not deprive him of much. The widow's mite is a far greater sacrifice. (Perhaps some readers might recall the story of the mongoose in the Mahabharata!)

Spiritual life is an attempt to transform every action into an act of sacrifice. For an act to become a sacrifice it must fulfil four conditions.

1. It must entail some amount of deprivation.
2. It must be done without the expectation of any return.
3. It must be done for pleasing the divine only.
4. It must help reduce selfishness and egotism, and must be done unselfconsciously.

There are, again, four stages through which the sacrificial journey progresses. The first stage of sacrifice is where we feel enormous gratitude for all that life is providing us, including loss, failure, pain, suffering etc., for pain is a great teacher and leads us Godward. In the second stage we express our gratefulness in some form of return - charity, service, prayer etc. In the third stage we feel strongly that the whole world is a manifestation of God and that everything in it really belongs to Him only. In the last stage one becomes firmly established in this knowledge, and joyously participates in the divine sport, *Leela*.

Swami Vivekananda described Sri Ramakrishna as '*prānārpana*', i.e., one who has offered his life as a sacrifice at the altar of humanity. Christ accepted crucifixion for the sake of mankind. The same may be said of Rama, Krishna, Buddha and every great person. It is through sacrifice that one becomes great and glorious.

Greatness is directly proportionate to sacrifice, sacrifice of time, energy, wealth, comforts etc. Giving up of selfishness, self-pity, sloth, pessimism, fault-finding, stubborn false opinions, bearing criticism and calamities calmly, sincerely attempting to reduce one's ego, all these, are spiritually helpful forms of sacrifice.

Complete self-surrender (*Atma-Yajna*) to the divine is the ultimate act of sacrifice.

*“Let us ...give up our whole body and mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice unto the Lord... In search of wealth in this world, Thou art the only wealth I have found; I sacrifice myself unto Thee. In search of someone to be loved, Thou art the only one beloved I have found: I sacrifice myself unto Thee. Let us repeat this day and night...”* (Swami Vivekananda)

Lives of great men all remind us,  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time. (H. W. Longfellow)



# 3 Swādhyāya (Scriptural Study)

Sri Krishna advises an aspirant to practise *Swadhya*, study of the scriptures; it also means study of one's mind. Scriptures are the foundation of every religion. It is seen that religions without a scripture vanish quickly.

What are Scriptures? They are the spiritual realisations of saints and mystics, the records of their experiences of the Ultimate Reality, translated into local language and idiom. Truths about the existence of God, the after-life and the other-world cannot be known through the five senses; they can be known only through scriptures. Mystics through their experience assert these truths. Hence we can accept them only through faith until our own experience confirms them.

Since Reality is One, its experience must be the same for all. *"All jackals howl to the same note"*, said Sri Ramakrishna. The *Vedas* proclaim: "Truth is One. Sages call It by various names". The seeming differences are due to language only and interpretations.

Swami Vivekananda clarifies: *"Truth is of two kinds:*

1. *That which is cognisable by the five ordinary senses, and by reasonings based thereon;*
2. *That which is cognisable by the subtle, super-sensuous power of Yoga; and knowledge acquired by the second is called the Vedas.*

*The person in whom this super-sensuous power is manifested is called a Rishi, and the supersensuous truths which he realises by this power are called the Vedas.*

*This Rishihood, this power of super-sensuous perception of the Vedas is real religion. And so long as this does not develop in the life of an initiate, so long is religion a mere empty word to him.*

## Spiritual functions of Scriptures

a) It is from scriptures that we come to know of God, the goal of life, and the various paths which lead us to Him. We also come to know what should or should not be done, which qualities true devotees should acquire, which defects one should overcome etc. Since human beings are different in their nature and temperament

they require different paths. Scriptures provide different pathways suitable to different temperaments so that everyone can reach the one goal, God.

b) Scriptures give us the benefit of holy company. Sri Ramakrishna used to advise spiritual aspirants to cultivate holy company - association with holy men and sincere devotees of God. Their association is extremely effective in bringing home to us the reality of God and spiritual life. Devotees are the witnesses of God. Through them God Himself is manifested; through them we receive contact with God Himself. It is literally true that even a moment spent in the company of a true devotee produces everlasting results. Unfortunately real devotees are rare.

What should we do then? We may read the scriptures and the lives of saints - for they are also wonderfully effective. A scripture is not a mere book; it is another form of God. Sri Ramakrishna once had a vision where he found God, scripture and devotee as three manifestations of the same Reality. He used to say: "*Bhagavan* (the Lord), *Bhagavata* (His word or scripture) and *Bhakta* (devotee) are all one and the same."

c) Scriptures console and give us hope. Life is painful. The pain is felt all the more by the struggling aspirant (since the aspirant grows refined and soft). At times all hope vanishes and despair takes possession. Every aspirant, beginner and advanced alike, has to pass through these dry periods, the "dark nights of the soul". But a study of the lives of saints shows us clearly that everything must come out all right, at least, at the end.

d) Scriptures give us inspiration. 'Familiarity breeds contempt' - there is a lot of truth in this saying. Spiritual practices tend to become repetitive and mechanical after a time. At this period regular study of scriptures and the lives of holy men provides us with inspiration and slowly takes us towards our goal.

e) Scriptures provide us with right guidance. Men are weak, irrational, and are easily misled by passions. It is easy to forget the goal and go in the wrong direction. Yet most often people tend to justify their actions rather accept their mistakes and correct their behaviour. It is here that regular devout study of scriptures can help immensely.

f) Scriptures reinforce our faith. Faith is like a muscle. Muscles grow strong through regular exercise and become weak through

lack of it. Similarly faith also can be strengthened through regular study of scriptures and holy lives. Through a constant barrage of atheistic ideas with the help of powerful media whole nations can be brainwashed and made atheistic, materialistic or fanatical, resulting in wars and bloodshed - recent history proves this fact abundantly. A similar technique, however, can be turned to our spiritual advantage. Scriptures can help us to de-hypnotise ourselves by constantly reminding us of our divine nature, and our goal in life.

g) The power of Truth is irresistible. Since scriptures are nothing but varied expressions of Truth they cannot but lead us in the direction of God. When scriptures are studied regularly with devotion they seep into the very depths of our unconscious. They purify us, washing away age-old impressions, filling our minds with holy thoughts, and ideas, and slowly but steadily they lead us towards the Ultimate Reality.

However if we forget the true aim of scriptures, instead of liberating, they bind us.

*"The Grantha does not always mean a holy scripture, but often it comes to mean a 'Granthi' or a knot. If a man does not read it with an intense desire to know the Truth, it will be an encumbrance on his mind like so many knots. It is useless to pour over the Holy Scriptures if one's mind is not endowed with discernment and dispassion". (Sri Ramakrishna)*

‘Look for truth in the Bible; not eloquence. Every verse should be read in the spirit with which it was written. Read the devout and simple books as gladly as the learned and profound. People die, but God's Word will never pass away. If you want to make your Scripture reading worthwhile, read with humility, simplicity, and faith. Don't try to appear learned. Listen in silence to the words of the holy men, and take pleasure in the teachings of the elders. They spoke with good reason’ (The Imitation of Christ)

Someone asked Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj.

Q) How can one get the mind absorbed in God, Maharaj?

A) *"Practice meditation regularly. The early morning is a good time for meditation. Before you begin your meditation, read devotional scriptures. This will help you to concentrate the mind on God".*

Such is the power of Holy Scriptures. The study of scripture is to be undertaken with faith, devotion and with the sole idea of bettering oneself. That is why it is aptly named *Swa+adhyaya* i.e.,

study for one's own benefit. Scriptural study cannot be dispensed with until we realise God.

*Swadhyaya* also means study of one's mind. Mere study of scriptures without being aware of how one is benefiting is useless. Scriptures are like a compass or like maps. One needs to compare one's progress with the help of scriptures; along with scriptural study one should constantly observe one's thoughts, motives, actions, and try to make them accord with the teachings of scripture.



## 4 Sthirata (Steadfastness in the practice of Knowledge)

One of the most important spiritual qualities is steadfastness in the practice of knowledge.

What is knowledge?

Sri Ramakrishna says: *"Do you know what ignorance means? It is the feeling: 'This is my house; these are my relatives; I am the doer; and the household affairs go on smoothly because I manage them.' But to feel, I am the servant of God, His devotee, His son' - that is a good attitude.*

*"To know many things is ajnana, ignorance. To know only one thing is Jnana, Knowledge - the realization that God alone is real and that He dwells in all.*

*"Do not forget Him but remember that all men must one day walk down the same path. We stay in the world only a couple of days."*

Knowledge means that God alone is real and all else is temporary. Knowledge means that the goal of life is the realization of God. Knowledge means that this world is only a temporary place.

Knowledge is to remember God always and to keep the mind calm, balanced and rational, and to practice discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

One who is treading the path of knowledge strives to remember that he is a child or a servant or a devotee of God.

Whatever be the circumstances of life a devotee forges ahead with his practice. Through regular practice he achieves steadfastness.

Steadfastness of knowledge is a sure sign of spiritual progress.



## 5 Tapas (Austerity)

The Upanishads tell us that the creator performed austerities before creating the world. Millions of devotees regard Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation, yet he performed super-human austerities to realise God. Holy Mother had to go through the ordeal of five fires. We will not come across a single saint or mystic who has realized God without austerities.

At one time Swami Brahmananda practiced severe austerities at Brindavan. Seeing Maharaj thus absorbed in contemplation and neglecting food and sleep, Swami Subodhananda one day asked him: "You are the spiritual son of God Incarnate; he has already done everything for you. Through his grace you have attained samadhi. Where is the need for these austerities?"

"What you say is true." Maharaj answered. "The Master did everything for us. But I have to make these experiences my own."

Varuna was a knower of Brahman. His son Bhrigu, an ardent seeker, requested him to teach the knowledge of Brahman. The teacher gave a few hints and asked him to go and perform austerity: "Seek to know Brahman through austerity; for austerity is Brahman."

Any type of creative expression is the result of austerity. Thus we see that nothing great can be achieved without undergoing hardship.

We hear of people fasting for days, observing silence for years, standing on one foot for a long time, flagellating themselves severely etc., we even hear of Yogis lying on a bed of nails! We mistake these for austerities.

Once a disciple asked Swami Brahmananda:

Q: "Maharaj, is that what austerity means"?

Swami: *"Remember God constantly. Remember him when you eat, when you sit, when you lie down; remember him whatever you do. By such repeated practice you will find that, when you go to meditate, it will be easy to remember God and become absorbed in him. As your mind becomes absorbed in meditation, a fountain of joy will spring up within you. Give no time to idle cares or idle talk."*

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So what is austerity? Usually austerity is defined as an act of privation and hardship, but suffering caused by sickness, poverty or oppression etc., cannot properly be called austerity.

Any act undertaken for a noble purpose, especially, for spiritual progress, and done voluntarily, and which involves some sort of privation and hardship can be called austerity.

As mentioned earlier austerity is unavoidable if one wants to achieve greatness in any field. Austerity should not be felt to be a hardship. Austerity burns up evil tendencies and purifies the body and mind. It springs from freedom and helps one to be master of oneself.

The Bhagavad Gita mentions three types of austerity, pertaining to the body, speech and mind.

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम्।

ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते॥17.14॥

• Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the preceptors, and the wise; purity, straight-forwardness, continence, and non-injury are called the austerity of the body.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत्।

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते॥17.15॥

• Speech which causes no vexation, and which is true, as also agreeable and beneficial, and regular study of the Vedas - these are said to form the austerity of speech.

मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः।

भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते॥17.16॥

• Serenity of the mind, kindliness, silence, self-control, honesty of motive - this is called mental austerity.

The only purpose of austerity is to make the body and mind fit instruments capable of taking us to God. If we are undergoing hardships and privations but they are not making us pure and are not leading us to God then we must suspect that there is something wrong with our motive.

If our purpose is God-realisation, then we need not go to the top of a mountain or to deep forests infested with wild animals. Life affords us enough opportunity to practise more than our share of austerity.

To calmly put up with sickness, discomfort, inclement weather, traffic jams, is an austerity. To live with hope and optimism under adverse circumstances is an austerity. To live in harmony with others whether at the office or at home is a great austerity. Giving up unnecessary talk, harmful activities; fault-finding, entertaining negative thoughts, controlling food, are also austerities.

To love God, to practise *japa* regularly, meditation, and the study of holy books etc., are big austerities.

If we look around we can find many opportunities for the practice of austerity.

In later years, Swami Brahmananda used to say: *"It is easy to practise austerity by not allowing the mind to come into contact with sense-objects, but it is hard to get rid of the mental craving itself.*

*"The mind deludes us in many ways. We must control it and direct it along the right path. What is austerity? It is to direct the mind towards God in order to taste divine bliss. In this age it is not necessary to practise physical austerities, such as standing on your head. The path in this age is to create the desire to chant the Lord's name, to be compassionate towards all beings, and to serve holy men. Real austerity consists in the control of the passions.*

*"Real austerity is based upon these three principles: First, take refuge in the truth. Truth is the pillar to which you must always hold while performing any action. Second, conquer lust. Third, renounce all cravings. Observe these three principles. That is real austerity, and the greatest of these is to conquer lust." (Eternal Companion)*



## 6 Ārjavam (Straightforwardness)

Straightforwardness is one more quality Sri Krishna advises all spiritual aspirants to acquire. Straightforwardness is an indispensable virtue which must be practised by all aspirants desirous of realizing God.

Everyone loves babies for they are innocent, pure and guileless. Unlike us who practise hypocrisy (often in the name of etiquette and good manners!) a baby expresses his or her inner feelings so naturally. A baby laughs when happy or weeps when miserable. During the time of his sadhana Sri Ramakrishna used to keep the company of small children. By observing them he wanted to learn their purity, innocence and detachment.

Straightforwardness is the opposite of guile, deceit, crookedness, hypocrisy etc. It is akin to truthfulness. To be frank, to think, speak and act with one accord is straightforwardness. To make the mind, speech and action one is straightforwardness.

Straightforwardness also means uprightness. Only those who lead a righteous life can really become straightforward for they will, then, have nothing to hide or to be afraid of.

There are many aspirants who are sincere and pure. Unfortunately some of them are too outspoken, often hurting and creating problems both for themselves and others. The case of Golap Ma, a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna comes to mind. Many times Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, warned her to be careful and not to speak out harshly. She did not heed and had to suffer as a result.

There are few of us who can claim we are straightforward. Apparently we may feel sometimes we are being straightforward, but often it may turn out to be a case of pure rashness. A rash or impulsive way of speaking is not a sign of straightforwardness.

Straightforwardness invariably follows simplicity. Simplicity, as many misunderstand, is not having less number of things. If this were the case all poor people would be simple people.

Simplicity is a great virtue; it is the result of conquering desires and depending solely on God. Because a simple person depends for

everything on God he has nothing to hide or fear. Therefore he can afford to be straightforward. Such straightforwardness not only does not harm anyone, it often helps one go to God.

Straightforwardness leads the way to true faith. Sri Ramakrishna says: *"Unless one is guileless and broad-minded, one cannot have deep faith. A guileless man easily realises God. He who can resign himself to the will of the Almighty with simple faith and guileless love realises the Lord very quickly"*.

But it is not easy to be guileless. Unless one practises spiritual disciplines for a long time, it may be for many lives even, one cannot become guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *"One cannot be guileless and liberal-minded without much austerity, or unless it is one's last birth. When a man has performed many good actions in his previous births, in the final birth he becomes guileless. Unless a man is guileless, he cannot so easily have faith in God."*

Practice of spiritual disciplines makes one unworldly. Even a trace of worldliness does not allow one to be straightforward or guileless.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *"The worldly man is a hypocrite. He cannot be guileless. He professes to love God, but he is attracted by worldly objects. He doesn't give God even a very small part of the love he feels for 'lust' and 'gold'. But he says that he loves God. One cannot be guileless without a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births. Spiritual instruction produces quick results in a guileless heart. Unless a man is guileless, he doesn't receive the grace of God."*

Bayazid was a great Sufi master. He advises that a believer be straightforward and completely humble as a servant. According to him straightforwardness is the last step on a three-stepped stairway leading to nearness of God.

He says: *"The first step is consistency, where a traveler strives to embody Islam's theoretical and practical dimensions. Success in this continuous effort brings one's carnal self under control."*

The second step is settlement or tranquility, where an initiate purifies his or her inner self of the vices contaminating the spirit and heart (e.g., show, fame, and vanity, all of which cannot be reconciled with servant-hood), thereby purging the heart of all that is not God.

The third step is straightforwardness, where the doors of Divinity and creation are slightly opened to the traveler, and the Divine gifts are bestowed in the form of wonder-working and blessings, although he or she neither desires nor seeks them.

"Straightforwardness, the last station of the way, means living without deviation from loyalty to God and under His direct protection; it is an environment in which Divine gifts and favours are bestowed."

So long as people pursue straightforwardness on the path of belief in Divine Unity and fulfil their covenants with God and His Messenger by fulfilling the Divine ordinances, Divine gifts and bounties will flow abundantly."

Another Sufi master, declares: "So long as the heart of a servant is not sound and straight, his belief cannot be true and upright; so long as his tongue is not true, his heart cannot be sound and straight.

"Every morning, the parts of a man's body warn his tongue, saying: Ô Fear God concerning us. For if you are true, we will be true and straight; if you are crooked, we will also deviate.'

Straightforwardness takes one to God quickly.



## 7 Ahimsa (Non-injury)

Ahimsa means non-injury or non-killing. Non-injury is abstinence from causing any pain or harm whatsoever to any living creature, either by thought, word, or deed.

Swami Vivekananda says: *"Never producing pain by thought, word, and deed, in any living being, is what is called Ahimsa, non-injury. There is no virtue higher than non-injury"*. He further says, *"The test of Ahimsa is absence of jealousy."* This would come as a surprise to most of us. We think of Ahimsa as hurting others by word or deed. But jealousy is the subtlest and the most insidious form of causing injury. For what is jealousy but wishing none but me should have all the best for all time!

Measured by this definition there would be few who can be said to have the virtue of Ahimsa. Often we are not even aware of how much jealousy we cherish in the depths of our unconscious. Even advanced spiritual aspirants fall easy victims to this evil.

Ahimsa is not merely a negative virtue. It is a positive, universal love; it is a spiritual attitude in which evil qualities like jealousy, cruelty, and hatred are replaced by pure love and service. Ahimsa is not merely abstaining from doing injury but actively doing all we can for the welfare of others. Only those who consider the whole universe as their own Self can truly be said to be established in Ahimsa. The one constant thought of those saints who are established in Ahimsa would be:

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः  
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।  
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु  
मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*'May all beings be happy. May all be free from disease. May all realise what is good. May none be subject to misery.'*

The practice of Ahimsa needs tremendous strength and is not for weaklings. Neither is it for those who are intellectually weak and irrational. There are vegetarians who consider themselves superior and are apt to look down upon non-vegetarians. For these Swami Brahmananda gives a fitting response:

Q: "Should we avoid eating meat, since it entails killing?"

A: "Nonsense! The Buddhists say: "Harmlessness is the highest virtue." (अहिंसा परमो धर्मः) What does this mean? You can understand the significance of this only when you have attained Samadhi, when you have reached enlightenment and have seen God in all creatures. Until then mere talk is useless. When you can see the same God in the ant as in yourself, then you can practise this virtue. You may talk of not killing, but can you possibly avoid killing? What would you eat? Potatoes? Plant a potato underground, it shoots forth young sprouts. Has the potato no life? Would you eat rice? Plant the paddy grain in the earth, it grows into a rice plant. You want to drink water? Examine a drop of water under a microscope and see how many millions of tiny lives are there. You must breathe to live. Yet with every breath you kill millions of creatures. Do you see any harm in that? You think you lose your religion if you take a little fish. Such arguments are foolish. The ancient Hindus held no such ideas. These are later Buddhist and Vaishnavite interpolations."

In the practice of Ahimsa, motive is more important than mere action. If we think a bit deeper we will be faced with surprising questions: Would a soldier be committing a sin when he kills enemy troops who are invading his country? Would a teacher be cruel when he needs to discipline a student? Would a mother be heartless when she binds her child's hands so that it cannot scratch itself to the point of bleeding? What about a recluse who does not bathe for fear of killing invisible creatures but thereby may cause an epidemic? What about the brute who goes on breeding children year after year but lives only on boiled vegetables?

Can we consider a man evil who is ever ready to give up his life for the sake of others but lives on fish and meat? What about the goody-goody citizen who has knowledge of evil doers but does not inform the authorities either because of fear, or in the name of religion, or in the name of goodness?

Let us hear Swami Vivekananda:

*"This one idea that deserves special notice is Ahimsa, non-injury to others. This duty of noninjury is, so to speak, obligatory on us in relation to all beings. As with some, it does not simply mean the non-injuring of human beings and mercilessness towards the lower animals; nor, as with some others, does it mean the protecting of cats and dogs and feeding ants with sugar - with liberty to injure brother-man in every horrible way! A good practice carried to an extreme and worked in accordance with the letter of the law becomes a positive evil".*

*"The test of Ahimsa is absence of jealousy". Any man may do a good deed or make a good gift on the spur of the moment or under the pressure of some superstition or priest-craft; but the real lover of mankind is he who is jealous of none. The so-called great men of the world may all be seen to become jealous of each other for a small name, for a little fame, and for a few bits of gold. So long as this jealousy exists in a heart, it is far away from the perfection of Ahimsa.*

*"The cow does not eat meat, nor does the sheep. Are they great Yogis, great non-injurers? Any fool may abstain from eating this or that; surely that gives him no more distinction than to herbivorous animals. The man who will mercilessly cheat widows and orphans and do the vilest deed for money is worse than any brute even if he lives entirely on grass.*

*"The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the Bhakta, he is the Yogi, he is the Guru of all, even though he lives every day of his life on the flesh of swine." (Swami Vivekananda)*

Ahimsa is a positive spiritual quality which helps us perceive the Self everywhere.



## 8 Satyam (Truthfulness)

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: *"The virtue of truthfulness is most important. If a man always speaks the truth and holds to the truth tenaciously, he will realize God; for God is Truth"*.

God wants sincerity, truthfulness and love. Outward verbal effusions do not touch Him. Practice of truthfulness is one of the most fundamental qualities a spiritual aspirant has to cultivate.

Mahatma Gandhiji used to say: "I often describe religion, my religion, as Religion of Truth. Of late, instead of saying God is Truth, I have been saying Truth is God; in order more fully to define my Religion. ... nothing so completely describes my God as Truth. Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known."

The word 'Satya' has many meanings such as existence, goodness, purity, truth, righteousness, and holiness.

It is another name for God. Satya means that which never changes. Everything in the world is changing constantly. The only thing that does not change is *Brahman* or God.

Therefore truthfulness is that practice which makes us good, pure, holy and gradually leads us to the unchanging Reality, God. The practice of truthfulness is both the means and the goal.

For most of us truthfulness means the verbal expression of an incident as it occurred or of a fact as it is, and also that of adhering to a given word; to act as we say and to think as we speak. As Sri Ramakrishna says, to make thought, word and deed one, is truthfulness.

Practice of truthfulness in thought, word, and action makes the mind pure, holy and one-pointed. And it makes us truth-seekers; turns the mind away from the ephemeral to the Eternal; produces intense longing for God-realization. Spiritual practice, truly, starts at this stage only. To lead a spiritual life - this is the real meaning of truthfulness.

There is an idea that speaking of truth is dangerous and unfavourable for one's material and social advantage.

Nothing can be further from truth! Truthfulness is not merely admitting of one's failings; it is also to recognize one's virtues,

merits and moral and spiritual assets. Truth is not merely the recognizing of facts and realities of the outer world. It also extends to the vast inner world of man's higher nature, his unlimited potentialities. Truth is fundamental to man, to his survival, stability and progress.

Unless we understand things and persons in their true nature our plans and aspirations may fail.

As the saying goes 'Truth alone Triumphs.' Again, it is said truth hurts. No doubt, sometimes it does! But truth, in the long run, helps always even if it seems to hurt temporarily. Pain and suffering are the greatest teachers.

Truth is auspicious and beautiful (*Satyam-Shivam- Sundaram*), it is the source of all real beauty. Poets declare that 'Beauty is truth, truth is beauty'. The advice, 'Be true to yourself not only applies to our physical and psychological well-being, it applies even more to our spiritual nature. However, the practice of truthfulness needs caution.

As the saying goes:

सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् , न ब्रूयात् सत्यम् अप्रियम् ।

प्रियं च नानृतम् ब्रूयात् , एष धर्मः सनातनः ॥

'Speak the truth; but speak it sweetly and not harshly, and never speak of an unpleasant truth for the sake of pleasing'.

The test of truthfulness is not merely speaking out what is true but what proves to be beneficial to all concerned. If it harms any one in any way, whatever else it may be, it certainly is not truthfulness.

Truthfulness cannot be practised in isolation; it requires cultivation of other moral qualities such as fearlessness, simplicity, dispassion, poverty, non-violence, continence, and self-surrender to God. Without these the practice of truthfulness is impossible.

Also there is a close connection between righteousness and truth. The Upanishads emphatically declare that truth and righteousness are one and the same. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: "What is righteousness is indeed Truth. Truth is the Lord of the world, prosperity depends on Truth. Everything originates from Truth, there is nothing greater than Truth." One who is not righteous cannot be truthful.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* proclaims that,

सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम् सत्येन पंथा विततो देवयानः ।

"Truth alone triumphs, not untruth; the way to the divine is paved with Truth".

The same Upanishad explicitly declares again: "The Atman can be realized only through Truth and austerity". Indeed the practice of truthfulness is the greatest austerity.

Sri Ramakrishna is an embodiment of truthfulness. He says, *"The best name that we can give to God is Truth. Under no circumstance should one give up truth. Even those who are engaged in worldly activities such as office work or businesses should hold to truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in Kaliyuga."* He especially instructs householders: *"If a man leads a householder's life, he must have unflinching devotion to truth. God can be realized through truth alone."*

Very often Sri Ramakrishna used to show his displeasure to those who did not observe truth in their words and deeds.

Sri Ramakrishna did not preach anything that he did not practise in his own life. He could give up everything, but could not give up truth. He himself revealed this nature of this when he was talking to devotees: *"If by chance I say that I will go to the pine grove, I must go there even if there is no immediate need for it; otherwise I lose my hold on truth."*

*"After my vision of the Divine Mother, I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands: 'Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance, take them both and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness, take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil, take them both and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness and here is Thy unrighteousness, take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.'*

*I mentioned all these, but I could not say: 'Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood, take them both' I gave up everything at Her feet, but could not bring myself to a position of giving up truth."*

Such was the Master's love for truth. He was an incarnation of Eternal truth and he demonstrated how to practise truth in day-to-day life.

Hence it is that Swami Vivekananda says that, with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna the Satya Yuga, the age of Truth, has begun.



## 9 Dama (Sense-Control)

Dama is sense-control. One who aspires to Self-knowledge cannot be too careful about control of the senses. Unless the senses are controlled it is impossible to control the mind.

What does sense-control mean? Does it mean that we close our eyes, ears etc.? Obviously this cannot be the meaning, for besides being impossible to stop them functioning, it is unwise to do so.

Sense-control means:

1. Using all the senses to discharge one's duties with proper care and attention. This improves our concentration and will-power. Besides it gives a sense of fulfilment.
2. Using the senses in a way that does not agitate the mind but on the contrary promotes spiritual progress. For example, let the eyes enjoy divine forms, let the ears hear devotional music or let one talk and hear about spiritual things as far as possible.
3. Let all the senses be directed towards God. If we can remember God and try to do actions to please Him then the senses will gradually turn towards Him. Karma-Yoga is of great help here.

The control of the senses is a difficult task, but through constant practice and through the grace of God it is possible.

*"A man becomes a saint by conquering the senses. Is there anything impossible for a man who has subdued his passions? He can even realize God, through His grace." (Sri Ramakrishna)*

# 10 Akrodha (Controlling Anger)

A spiritual aspirant should have absolute control over anger.

Controlling and expressing anger in a right way is a divine quality. Though difficult, it is possible to control anger.

Some people consider our generation as a 'generation of anger', and this age as an 'age of rage'. There is road-rage, plane-rage, domestic-rage; and there is even an internet-rage!

Hardly do we come across a person who has not felt anger at sometime or other in life, not excepting saints. Then we find some people who are less prone to be angry than others. There are some who do not express any anger outside but go on simmering inside all the time. If a person does not appear to be angry but is grouchy all the time we can be pretty sure he is angry.

Anger is a normal emotion. It helps us to defend ourselves in dangerous situations and has its uses in life when controlled properly. But when it goes out of control it can lead to problems to oneself and others. If it is not dealt with properly it can lead to depression, high blood pressure, stroke, or to heart attack. Extreme anger can even cause death.

Is there also a thing called righteous anger? Most of us think there is and use it to justify some of our actions. But from the spiritual point of view there is no such thing. Here is what Swami Vivekananda has to say: *"Our religion teaches that anger is a great sin, even if it is 'righteous'. I could not for my soul distinguish ever the distinction between 'religious anger' and 'commonplace anger', 'religious killing' and 'commonplace killing,' 'religious slandering and irreligious', and so forth."*

Anger is a negative emotion, a concentrated outburst of energy in the form of annoyance, rage, dislike, coldness etc. According to some psychologists anger is 'a temporary state of madness, an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury, rage etc.' Swami Turiyananda regarded anger as concentrated desire. Anger is called a demon by Sri Ramakrishna, for like a demon it keeps us bound to this world.

Without doubt anger is one of the deadliest enemies in spiritual life. According to Vedanta it is one of the six inner passions that block progress in every field of life. If it is not controlled one courts ruin even in this world and can never progress in spiritual life.

Anger can manifest in myriad forms. Often it is difficult to recognize it; for it can hide its nature under different guises such as cynicism, pessimism, looking down with coldness and indifference upon others, constant grumbling, dissatisfaction with one's life etc. Whatever the expression the underlying cause is the same - anger.

### 10.1 Causes of anger

Anger, of course, is a symptom and not the disease itself. The root cause of anger is egotism. The ego, when ignorant of its true nature, identifies itself with body and mind.

This ignorance leads to passions like lust, anger, greed etc. The Bhagavad Gita gives a graphic description of the cause of desire:

ध्यायतो विषयान्मुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते |

सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते || 2.62||

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः |

स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति || 2.63||

"When a man dwells constantly on sense-objects, he feels an attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire (when thwarted) breeds anger. From anger comes delusion; from delusion, failure of memory; from the failure of memory, discrimination is lost; and from the loss of discrimination man perishes." (Gita 2.62 & 2.63) Now we can see that anger, in a way, is thwarted desire and expectation.

### 10.2 Expressions of anger

Anger can be expressed mainly in three ways - suppression, irrational outburst and sublimation. In some it bursts forth in the form of instantaneous and aggressive behaviour often leading to tragic consequences. Other people, especially those who are timid, try to suppress and internalise this emotion bringing harm to themselves. However it cannot be suppressed for long but will be out some time or other and with greater violence. These two ways of expressing anger are counterproductive and lead to great damage.

But spiritual aspirants have a better and productive way of expressing their anger. They control, sublimate and direct it towards a higher goal. Sometimes it may even be their duty to

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express righteous anger. Sri Ramakrishna used to say "It is sometimes very necessary to hiss but never to bite!"

Here is a quotation from Aristotle: "Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."

Perhaps only a saint can express anger in this way!

## 10.3 Ways to control anger

Those who wish to control anger must have a firm determination and a higher spiritual goal. Even a noble but worldly goal may not be enough. Since egotism is the root of all passions, we must realise that the only way to control anger is to uproot egotism. Naturally this involves controlling other passions too. It is a hard task but not an impossible one.

Here are some ways of controlling anger:

1. One way is to look upon all persons and objects as divine.
2. Another way is to consider that whatever happens in life is the result of our past Karma. This is easy for those who believe in the law of Karma and its corollary, rebirth.
3. Regular meditation, japa, prayer, study of scriptures, keeping company of holy people and places - all these spiritual disciplines are of great help. Marcus Aurelius writes in his Meditation: "When you are angry above measure, think within yourself, how momentary is man's life. Let us think how much more grievous are the consequences of our anger than the acts which arouse it. Let this truth be present to you in the excitement of anger, that to be moved by passion is not manly, but mildness and gentleness, as they are more human, so also are they more manly."
4. Passions by themselves are neutral. They become good or evil according to the way we use them. In any case they cannot be eradicated. Sri Ramakrishna advises: "*Since you cannot get rid of your passions - your lust, your anger, and so on - give them a new direction. Instead of desiring worldly pleasures, desire God. Have intercourse with Brahman. If you cannot get rid of anger, then change its direction. Assume the tamasic attitude of bhakti, and say: 'What? I have repeated the hallowed name of Durga, and shall I not be liberated? How can I be a sinner anymore? How can I be bound anymore?' If you cannot get rid of temptation, direct it towards God. Be infatuated with God's beauty. If you*

*cannot get rid of pride, then be proud to say that you are the servant of God, you are the child of God. Thus turn the six passions towards God."*

5. Having a definite goal and a daily routine helps immensely. Otherwise we are likely to brood over unhappy experiences and increase our anger.

6. Patanjali advocates the eradication of negative emotions by meditating on their opposite, positive qualities. The positive quality opposed to anger is love. Constantly thinking of love gradually erodes anger.

7. Ignorance makes us unrealistic. We expect everything to go according to plan - our plan. This world, unfortunately, does not come up to our expectations many times. So we must be prepared to expect the unexpected and graciously accept life as it comes.

8. Ours also is an age of impatience. We become annoyed if things do not go quickly and according to our plan. Deep breathing and relaxation can help us curb undue impatience to some extent.

9. A bit of humour is very helpful. As a wag said, "If one can learn to laugh at oneself one will never again lack entertainment." Humour helps us by making light of things which we take too seriously and makes us see the funny side of life.

10. Above all, prayer for the welfare of all, especially those who injure or annoy us, is of immense help.

Anger is a passion that every spiritual aspirant needs to address. We come across many exemplary incidents in the lives of holy men and women. They show us definite ways and means of controlling it giving us courage and inspiration.



# ॥ Shānti (Peace)

Peace is an important spiritual quality. It is impossible to make progress in any field of life, not to speak of spiritual life, without attaining some degree of peace. Peace and happiness are closely linked. Without peace one can never attain happiness. “Where is happiness for a peaceless man?” asks the Lord in the Gita (2.66).

...अशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥ 2.66॥

Consciously or unconsciously everyone longs for peace and happiness. To be healthy, happy and peaceful is the natural state of all beings. At the lower level if an organism is ensured of survival and security it lives a contented and peaceful life, and this is true of the majority of human beings too.

But man has higher needs, called values, and cannot be satisfied with biological needs only. He seeks higher values like (*Satyam—Shivam—Sundaram*) truth, goodness and beauty. He won't have peace or rest until these values are realised.

## ॥.१ What is peace?

Peace is not a negative state of mere calm; it is a state where the mind is not agitated with desires, is full of contentment and happiness; it is a state where man feels fulfilled because he has found meaning in life. It is only when man realises God that he finds true meaning in life. Peace is that state of mind in which the potential divinity in us becomes manifest.

Naturally very few experience real and abiding peace, the peace that passeth all understanding. It can be attained by everyone but it is a pearl of great price and few are prepared to pay the price.

There is a tradition in India of chanting thrice the word peace (*Shantih*) at the end of all sacred actions. There is a reason for this. Man is subject to various types of miseries.

These are usually divided into three according to their source.

They are *Adhyatmika* - those that are born of the ills and pains of the body and the mind; *Adhibhautika* - those that are caused by other creatures such as bugs, birds, bears, snakes, thieves, and also from floods, famines, droughts, earthquakes, etc.; and *Adhidaivika* - those miseries that arise from the heavens such as wind, rain, heat, cold, or due to the displeasure of gods, demi- gods, etc. It is for the

cessation of these three types of miseries that the threefold peace chant is usually done. Vedanta believes that these are the three areas in which we need to obtain peace.

*Adhyatmika, Adhibhautika, Adhidaivika* – these three words can also be translated in other ways such as mental, physical or spiritual; as individual, familial and social; or as gross, subtle and causal.

Whatever be the interpretation, one point is clear: no man is an island; we are individuals living in the world, in a family and in a society. Hence if we are to obtain happiness there must be peace in the individual, in the family and in the society.

Of these three areas, we have almost no control over the family or society. The only choice left is to deal with oneself. Happily there are shining examples of men and women who, in spite of adverse circumstances and almost insurmountable obstacles, rose above them and enjoyed abundant peace and happiness.

The secret is self-control and spiritual life.

## 11.2 How to attain peace?

Now let us discuss ways of attaining peace in the physical, mental and spiritual areas.

1. Physical: The body is said to be the first instrument of peace. Hence it is to be kept healthy and strong through proper diet and exercise.
2. Mental: The mind is said to be the cause of both bondage and liberation. It is true that we experience both happiness and unhappiness according to the state of our mind. When our mind is agitated with uncontrolled thoughts we feel restless; and desires are the root cause of this restlessness. Therefore we have to try to gradually bring this turbulent mind under our control by controlling desires. Though difficult, the mind can be brought under control through dispassion, discrimination and daily practice of prayer, meditation, scriptural reading and keeping holy company.
3. Spiritual: Each soul is potentially divine. Spiritual life is the way of manifesting this potential divinity within. It is impossible to attain perfect peace without Self-knowledge, without realising our true nature. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna says that the goal of life is to attain God.

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Says Sri Ramakrishna: *“You will get peace of mind only when you have seen God. You will enjoy bliss and gain strength only when you have talked to Him.*

*“Man attains his liberation, therefore, by piercing the veil of Maya and rediscovering his total identity with Brahman.*

*“Knowing himself to be one with the Universal Spirit, he realizes ineffable peace.*

*“The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace.*

*“Peace, peace, peace – Supreme peace! The nearer you come to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river.”*

Echoing the words of the Upanishads Swami Vivekananda says:

*“The nature of the soul is bliss and peace unchanging. We have not to get it; we have it; let us wash away the dross from our eyes and see it. In the midst of the manifold, he who sees that One; in the midst of this infinite death, he who sees that one life; in the midst of the manifold, he who sees that which never changes in his own soul – unto him belongs eternal peace. Unto none else, unto none else.”*

Only resting in the Divine Mother are we safe.

Sincere self-effort makes us realise that absolute surrender to the Divine is the only way. With this understanding comes peace and happiness.



# 12 Paisunam (Aversion to Fault Finding)

*“Don’t find fault with anyone, not even with an insect. As you pray to God for devotion, so also pray that you may not find fault with anyone.”* (Sri Ramakrishna)

One of the deadly sins Sri Krishna advises us to avoid is *Paisunam*. It is a Sanskrit word meaning slandering, fault-finding, spreading scandal, back-biting, calumniating, betraying, being harsh, cruel, low, vile, wicked, malicious, etc.

Even in a world context such a type of behaviour can be unprofitable, unwise and even can endanger one’s life. In a spiritual context it means talking shop, gossiping, etc. and is harmful in the extreme degree.

Unfortunately we live in an age of sensationalism. There is a saying: No news is good news. No news may be good news, but hardly anyone wants to hear or bear good news. If the media - TV, Radio, newspapers, etc., were to broadcast only good news I wonder how many of us would care to see, read or listen to them! The media bombard us with sensational news. Fed constantly on such unsavoury diet our bodies and minds become polluted and unfit for spiritual progress. (Sri Ramakrishna used to sprinkle holy Ganges water on the spot where a newspaper had been left! We may not go to such an extreme.)

Hence those who are intent on spiritual progress must take all care to avoid this undesirable quality.

Why should we avoid slandering, fault-finding, etc. First of all, it is a waste of time, and time is very precious. Many consider time as money, and those who are intent on profit, worldly or otherwise, cannot afford to waste time. Certainly it is not going to make those whom we are criticising or finding fault with any better; on the contrary they may become even worse. And according to the law of Karma we are sure to get back all that we gave with compound interest.

There is a saying: To err is human. If we look around can we find even a single human who is free from faults? Secondly, it is a

waste of energy. Every activity is an expenditure of energy and evil activities require even more expenditure of energy. Energy is limited, and is a precious commodity.

If it is spent in wrong ways it will not be available for a higher, creative purpose. As it is we need all the energy we can muster if we want to advance in spiritual life.

Thirdly, those who dwell on the faults of others will develop those very faults; for we become what we think of intensely and constantly. There is a well-known saying in India: Those who find fault do not know their own faults.

The Holy Mother used to say: *Man is bound to make mistakes. One should not notice them. If one does not follow this rule, it harms oneself alone. By constantly observing the faults of others, in the end one will become a mere fault-finder. To see the faults of others! One should never do it. I never do so.*

Forgiveness is *Tapasya* (austerity). Swami Vivekananda says: *Never talk about the faults of others, no matter how bad they may be. Nothing is ever gained by that. You never help one by talking about his fault; you do him an injury, and injure yourself as well.*

It is the experience of many of us that those of us who find fault with others often suffer from those very faults, perhaps in an even greater degree than others! It may, perhaps, be that we have an unconscious recognition of our defects but do not wish to acknowledge the fact because either they are too painful or we are too weak to overcome them. In addition, very often finding fault with others is a way of feeling that we are somehow better than others. Only those who are shallow and have no substance resort to this method.

Reject the thought that you are better than anyone else. If you think such haughty thoughts, God (who knows what is in you) will consider you worse than them.

Pride about our good deeds is pointless. God has his own ideas regarding what is good and he does not always agree with us. If there is anything good about you, believe better things of others. This will keep you humble. The humble are always at peace. It will be disastrous for you to consider yourself better than even one person. (Imitation of Christ)

In any case pride is a demonic quality and the sooner we get rid of it the better for everyone.

Fourthly, this habit of fault-finding prevents us from looking into our own hearts and finding our own defects and weaknesses. According to Vedanta we are already perfect but ignorance or Avidya prevents us from the knowledge of our true nature. Ignorance manifests in the form of defects and weaknesses. Spiritual practice is meant only to remove these faults and when they are removed ignorance vanishes and the Self manifests automatically.

Swami Vivekananda says: We do not look at our own faults; the eyes do not see themselves, they see the eyes of everybody else. We human beings are very slow to recognise our own weakness, our own faults, so long as we can lay the blame upon somebody else. Men in general lay all the blame of life upon their fellow-men, or, failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate.

Fifthly, Vedanta declares again and again that each soul is divine. So, spiritual aspirants are advised to look upon everyone and every object in this world as a manifestation of God. The goal is reached when we can perceive God in everything.

Holy Mother says: *But I tell you one thing - if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own.*

Hard and constant practice is necessary to make even a small advance in spiritual life. Needless to say an aspirant should struggle to uproot this evil habit of fault-finding and slandering.

Lastly, it is not only fault-finding but even gossip and meaningless chatter that should be avoided assiduously by those who wish to progress in spiritual life for small talk disturbs the mind, makes it restless, brews undesirable thoughts, and gradually turns the mind away from God. If we do not take care in the beginning it will turn into an evil habit and may be harder to eradicate later.

Avoid small talk as much as you can. Even shop talk can be a great hindrance. Our chattering is an escape from unwelcome thinking. Watch and pray, so that you won't waste your time. If you want to talk about something, discuss a worthwhile subject.

Failing to guard your mouth is a very bad habit. But reverent discussion of spiritual matters can help us all grow.

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We will have much peace if we refrain from minding the business of others.

Try to be patient with the defects and blemishes in others, because you also have many things about you that they must endure. If you can't make yourself what you want to be, how can you expect to remake somebody else? (Imitation of Christ).



# 13 Daya (Compassion)

Compassion, love of God and renunciation are the glories of true knowledge.

Sri Krishna tells us that compassion towards all beings is an important spiritual quality. As we progress in spiritual life the capacity to feel sympathy, mercy, tenderness, compassion etc. grows. This feeling is the outcome of true knowledge and not any moribund emotion.

Often Maya (attachment) and Daya (compassion) look alike, but they are diametrically opposed.

It is very natural to feel compassion for one's own family, relatives, friends, country, religion etc. More often than not this feeling is not compassion but attachment. True compassion transcends national, religious, cultural and gender barriers.

Sri Ramakrishna clarifies: Remember that daya, compassion, and Maya, attachment, are two different things.

Attachment means the feeling of my-ness toward one's relatives. It is the love one feels for one's parents, one's brother, one's sister, one's wife and children. Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality.

If you see anywhere an instance of compassion, as in Vidyasagar, know that it is due to the grace of God. Through compassion one serves all beings.

Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering. The important point to be noted is, if compassion does not lead to concrete action, it is worse than useless.

Even animals are known to be kind, compassionate and caring, not to speak of human beings. As the Chandi tells us The Divine Mother is present in every being in the form of daya or compassion. Because of this love and compassion animals too tend their young, sometimes at the cost of their own lives.

Without this care existence becomes precarious. It is God who has kept this tender emotion in the heart of all beings.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *The love that you see in parents is God's love: He has given it to them to preserve His creation. The compassion*

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*that you see in the kind-hearted is God's compassion: He has given it to them to protect the helpless. It is not for man to show compassion, but for God. One feels compassion as long as one has the ego of Knowledge. And it is God Himself who has become the ego of Knowledge.*

Qualities like compassion spring from Sattva guna. With the practice of spiritual disciplines one gradually develops sattva and sattva brings a great longing for God realisation. This longing in its turn brings spiritual qualities which take us near to God.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *What are the glories of that longing? They are discrimination, dispassion, compassion for living beings, serving holy men, loving their company, chanting the name and glories of God, telling the truth, and the like. When you see those signs of longing in an aspirant, you can rightly say that for him the vision of God is not far to seek.*

Therefore one who is merciless and devoid of compassion can never hope to be spiritual.

However, the practice of compassion needs deep understanding, rationality, and self-control. The quality of compassion is nearer to truth, love and knowledge than to a mere emotional outburst. Expressions of compassion like shedding tears, rushing into unthinking actions, etc. sometimes lead to undesirable results.

Though most of us do not like it, certain acts like punishing criminals, or disciplining children, can well be expressions of love and compassion. Spiritual teachers are frequently seen to be stern and harsh towards their students. It is because they would like to help their students get rid of their defects and progress in spiritual life.

Holy Mother goes so far as to say that misery is a gift of God. People complain about their griefs and sorrows and how they pray to God but find no relief from pain. But grief itself is a gift from God. It is the symbol of His compassion.

True compassion springs from the knowledge that we are all part of God. Compassion is not mere pity; it is to feel oneness with the other, with the whole universe, because all that exists is God. The man of realisation sees only God everywhere.

It is this which prompts him to feel compassion towards all beings. Hence some great souls retain their bodies even after samadhi and feel compassion for the suffering of others.

Compassion leads to service of God in man. One of the important tenets of Sri Vaishnavism is to show compassion to bound souls. Many misunderstand the deeper import of this tenet. The feeling of compassion often makes us take pity and look down upon others. It may produce a feeling of superiority in us thus causing our spiritual downfall. Sri Ramakrishna advises us not to show compassion but to serve man as God.

This was the basis of the Karma-Yoga preached by Swami Vivekananda. He says:

*As Jiva (individual soul) and Ishvara (God) are in essence the same, serving the Jivas and loving God must mean one and the same thing. For us, Advaitists (non-dualists), this notion of Jiva as distinct from God is the cause of bondage. Our principle, therefore, should be love, and not compassion. Ours is not the feeling of compassion but of love, and the feeling of 'Self' in all.*

*The application of the word compassion even to Jiva seems to me to be rash and vain. For us, it is not to pity but to serve. Doing good to others out of compassion is good, but the Seva (service) of all beings in the spirit of the Lord is better.*

The practice of compassion, however, has its own peculiar problems. Though we are prepared to sacrifice much if it is for our own nation, religion etc. we find it is hindered by our hatred for other nations, religions and cultures.

Added to this our emotional wounds, hurts, jealousy, feelings of ill-will towards others stop us from showing them compassion. The only remedy for this seems to be to spiritualise our life, to see God in all.

Finally we must not forget that the good Lord is within us also! We need to be compassionate towards ourselves too. Failure to understand this simple truth can bring much misery. Merciful towards others but stern towards oneself is a self-defeating attitude. To be compassionate towards oneself means to admit that we are also weak, vulnerable, and can make mistakes.

The practice of compassion makes life joyful and creative. Undoubtedly it brings us nearer to God.



# 14 Aloluptvam (Non-Covetousness)

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that lust, anger and greed are the three gateways to hell.

त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः |

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् || Gita 16.21||

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Maya is nothing but lust and greed. These two are the greatest obstructions in spiritual life. One who is caught in the net of Maya is called Jiva, i.e. a bound soul.

You have the traits of a Jiva, an embodied being. These are the traits: lust, egotism, greed for wealth, and a hankering after name and fame. All embodied beings have these traits.

Spiritual life is impossible without a sound moral basis. The underlying principle of all morality is unselfishness.

A man cannot be unselfish unless he is imbued with the spirit of renunciation. To renounce is not easy. The spirit of renunciation manifests in life as purity of character, as devoted service to fellow beings, and as a strong and steady aspiration for the Divine. The vision of God dawns in a heart in which the spirit of renunciation and the intensity of aspiration have reached their maturity.

Renunciation means the giving up of lust and greed. Of these greed is the most difficult to give up.

Greed is also called avarice or covetousness. What is greed? It is an inordinate desire for material possessions, wealth, name or fame. The Bible says: And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisted not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Greed is defined by Shankaracharya as the sense-organs running madly after objects of enjoyment. Intense agitation of the mind in the presence of sense-objects is also another form of greed.

Greed not only binds man but also makes him commit crimes. The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas said of greed: It is a sin directly against one's neighbour, since one man cannot overabound in external riches, without another man lacking them... it is a sin

against God, just as all mortal sins, inasmuch as man rejects things eternal for the sake of temporal things.

Greed would not be so bad if it could make the greedy person happy, for greedy persons are seldom happy. The tragedy of greed is that often the person spends more time and energy in accumulating than in enjoying! The pursuit of greed leaves little time for anything else.

Though we may not be aware, all of us are greedy, for all bound souls are greedy. If we were not we would have been free. We live in a society which promotes more and more accumulation in the name of happiness, freedom and security.

At no time in the history of mankind do we find so much of consumerism. In fact, modern economy cannot survive, without actively propagating greed and accumulation.

By our very nature we are all greedy. The Imitation of Christ says: Human nature is greedy and finds receiving more blessed than giving. It enjoys owning private property. But grace is generous to the poor and content with a little. It knows there is more happiness in giving than in receiving.

The Upanishads identify and condemn three types of greed: for sons, wealth and enjoyment of the sense-objects. To this can be added greed for name and fame, greed for power, and greed for learning. There are many who spend all their life trying to learn more and more, spending little time in actual practice of what they have learnt. Sri Ramakrishna's saying that lust and greed is Maya includes all these by implication.

Greed is self-perpetuating; for the more one starts accumulating, the more one's thirst increases. Greed makes people criminals. Greedy people try to obtain things by hook or by crook. Greed also increases jealousy, for greedy people cannot bear to see others having more or better things than themselves.

Unless this monster is destroyed, root and branch, one can neither enjoy life in the world nor make headway in spiritual life.

How can one overcome greed? Before we tackle the question we must try to understand the psychology behind it.

Why does the mind become so greedy? There are several reasons. One is the natural instinct for security. We mistakenly think that the more we have the more secure will be our life. Then we also feel that our prestige and power increases in proportion to our

possessions. Present-day society encourages this view. A third reason is the belief that the more material wealth one has, the more will be our happiness. In this view happiness is equated with abundance of things. The famous social physiologist, Eric Fromm, has conclusively proved in his book, *To Have or To Be*, that happiness depends upon what we are rather than what we have, and the pursuit of happiness through too many possessions may even prove to be counter-productive.

According to Vedanta the soul becomes greedy because it is infinite. Though the soul has forgotten, it has a vague memory of its real nature. Hence it longs to regain its infinite nature and won't be satisfied until it attains oneness with the Infinite.

### Overcoming Greed

How to overcome greed? According to Sri Ramakrishna prayer to God is one of the very best ways of getting over greed. He advises spiritual aspirants to weep and pray to God. He says: *When the impurities of the mind are thus washed away, one realizes God. The mind is like a needle covered with mud, and God is like a magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tears wash away the mud, which is nothing but lust, anger, greed, and other evil tendencies. As soon as the mud is washed away, the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, man realizes God. Only the pure in heart see God.*

Another way is to increase greed but direct it towards God. Sri Ramakrishna says: *Direct the six passions to God. The impulse of lust should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel angry at those who stand in your way to God. Feel greedy for Him. If you must have the feeling of I and Mine, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, My Rama, my Krishna.*

Along with sincere prayer there are four other habits which can help us overcome greed.

1. One way to overcome greed is to be generous. Generosity and greed are opposed to each other. Hence practice of generosity helps us overcome greed.

2. The second way is to remember that life is ephemeral and death can take us away at any time. When we die we cannot carry anything with us. Contemplation of death definitely helps.

3. However much wealth or material goods one has, one's enjoyment is limited by time, energy and capacity. One can sleep in one bed only, one can ride in one car only, one can eat only what one can digest. We often forget this and suffer. If we can remember this fact our greed is sure to become less.

4. Regular and daily practice of spiritual disciplines, keeping of holy company, study of uplifting books, and above all, practice of dispassion, can help us overcome the evil of greed.



# 15 Dāna (Charity)

Sri Krishna tells us that charity is one of the divine qualities; certainly it is a great and necessary virtue.

What is charity? It is not merely giving a gift, or helping or serving. It is an attitude, a way of looking at the world. Kindness, compassion, respect, sweet speaking, and prayer for the welfare of others are expressions of charity.

Charity is love of God and love of man.

Charity is living a simple life; it is a way of reducing selfishness and egotism; it helps us develop non-attachment towards the world. It is a way of sharing and caring, loving and serving. Charity is an inevitable expression of love. In a way it is a way of giving back to the world what we receive from it.

Real charity is to offer oneself to God and see the divine in all beings.

There are three types of charity - material, intellectual and spiritual. Of these spiritual charity, helping one to reach God, is the highest. No other charity can be compared to spiritual charity.

Charity should be practised with sincerity, humility, devotion, reverence and without expecting any return. Charity is done purely for pleasing the Lord.

Holy Mother used to say: *Those who have wealth must measure it out, and those who do not have should pray for the welfare of the needy.*

# 16 Mārdavam (Gentleness)

The Sanskrit word *mardavam* is a beautiful word. It means gentleness, softness and sweetness. A spiritual aspirant is expected to develop these qualities. Not to speak of humans, even animals appreciate and are attracted by love, gentleness, etc.

Gentleness, meekness and humility are all allied virtues. Often gentleness - especially these days, where aggressiveness is the hall-mark of a competitive person - is mistaken for weakness, and spinelessness.

There is a Sanskrit verse which says that the hearts of great men are as soft as a flower and as hard as a thunderbolt.

वज्रादपि कठोराणि मृदूनि कुसुमादपि ।

This goes to show that gentleness can belong only to the strongest. Swami Brahmanandaji used to say that one should become a gentleman before one becomes spiritual.

Many devotees think Sri Ramakrishna was always soft and gentle. Holy Mother remarked of him:

*I was married to a husband who never addressed me as 'thou.' Ah! how he treated me! Not even once did he tell me a harsh word or wound my feelings. He did not strike me even with a bunch of flowers!*

But Sri Ramakrishna could also be very hard when needed! When we study the events in the lives even of incarnations we often find them harsh and anything but gentle. (Holy Mother is an exception!) Yet their hardness is but a cover for their motherly heart and they act that way for the benefit of devotees.

Harshness, insensitivity, and lack of consideration are just the opposite of gentleness and are the signs of a selfish and worldly person.

Gentleness is a great spiritual quality. Only those who are spiritual, moral and rational can afford to be gentle in this world of cut-throat competition. One can acquire the quality of gentleness only through long austerity.

Sri Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita that gentleness of speech and mind is an austerity. Speech that is not offensive, truthful, pleasant, and beneficial is called the austerity of speech.

Gentleness begins with our thoughts. Invariably our actions follow our thoughts. Generally we all act impulsively, reacting

according to the situations we are in. Especially these days when we are accustomed to instant gratification we tend to become impatient at the slightest inconvenience. It takes time and practice to develop the quality of gentleness. So it is clear that control of the mind is an essential condition for acquiring gentleness.

Gentleness also requires us not to find fault with others. As the saying goes 'To err is human'.

Swami Brahmananda has this advice for us: *Keep yourself pure and go forward, following your own ideal. Learn to see the good in others. If a man has some goodness, exaggerate his goodness in your mind. Give honour to all, praise all. Do this and sympathy for others will grow. He himself is honoured who honours all beings. Never run down a fellowman or slight him. Everyone sees the faults in others. Give him your love, make him your own, and help him to overcome his weakness. A man is composed of both good and evil. It is easy to see the evil in others but a holy man is he who can overlook their evil qualities and help them to become pure and holy. Remember, my children, you are holy men. You must always be calm, gentle, modest, and kindly of speech. Goodness and purity must flow through every word you utter, every action you perform, through all your behaviour and movements.*

The quality of gentleness also requires humility. Humility is not mere show of outward respect but the ability to see divinity in every being. Holy Mother used to say that one should respect even an insect for God dwells therein also.

Swami Bhavyananda says: Gentleness is a powerful and mighty divine quality. A person who has strength can conquer another by force; but conquering oneself is a gentle process. One who conquers himself is a mighty person. One who conquers by physical strength may be conquered by another, who is stronger. But a gentle soul can never be overcome; he is triumphant even in defeat!

A gentle person is soft, tender, loving and humble. He is calm and peaceful, even under provoking conditions.

Arrogance, pride and harshness lead only to peacelessness.

Hardness, rudeness, cruelty and impatience are unspiritual qualities. They make for the downfall of man. There is great strength in humility and gentleness. Such a person treads softly and goes far; a gentle person makes everyone feel great.

Socrates was a gentle soul. Though he was put to death, he lives with us today. So does the risen Christ. When a person starts his

journey to meet his Creator, he walks the path of righteousness and humility. The power of darkness cannot hurt him. Such is the power of gentleness.

A spiritual aspirant will be gentle, good and noble. He strives to see the divine in everyone and everything.

With gentleness one can advance both in this life as well as in spiritual life.



# 17 Hri (Modesty)

Modesty (Hri) is one of the divine treasures and one of the most indispensable of spiritual qualities. Without its cultivation one cannot progress in spiritual life.

What is modesty? Modesty is freedom from vanity, boastfulness; it is regard for decency of behaviour, speech, dress; it is simplicity and moderation - in short it is a balanced behaviour.

Modesty may be described as that virtue which prompts us to be decorous, proper, and reserved, in the way we dress, stand, talk, walk, and sit - in general in the way we behave exteriorly.

Modesty is allied to the virtue of temperance, or the habit of self-restraint. A modest person is intelligent and well aware of both his capacities and limitations.

Jnanadeva, a great saint, defines modesty as a feeling of deep shame when a spiritual aspirant thinks or does something ignoble and unspiritual.

On the other hand, indiscriminate self-assertion, selfish display of one's gifts of body or soul, inordinate display of one's intelligence or talents or skills or abilities in any field of human achievement, overtly or covertly - are all examples of what modesty is not.

These days modesty is identified exclusively and excessively with dress, especially that of women. We may recall the admonition of Holy Mother here: *Mark you, my dear, modesty is the greatest ornament of a woman. A flower best serves its purpose when it is offered to a deity; else it may as well wither on the plant.*

True modesty is much deeper than mere dress, or even proper conduct - it includes the whole range of good qualities such as purity, humility, chastity and simplicity. The injunction of St. Theresa of Avila: Be modest in all your words and works, implies that modesty spans all external expressions of our internal possession of humility.

The practice of modesty is intimately related to chastity. Chastity means to be faithful to one's spouse (by implication to one ideal i.e. God). One cannot be chaste and immodest at the same time; for immodesty means drawing attention to oneself - 'Look at me,

how beautiful and desirable I am!’ Be it in dress or speech or conduct, in any form, immodesty is unattractive and injurious.

Modesty is a highly desirable spiritual quality.

It is a very endearing and attractive quality. All of us are helplessly drawn to modest persons.

On the contrary we are repelled by immodesty in any form even if we may not say anything for fear of being politically incorrect.

There is also a misconception that modest persons are too self-effacing, shy, and possibly suffer from an inferiority complex. Nothing can be further from the truth. When we look at Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha or Jesus Christ, we do not find them suffering from any complex. They knew their worth more than anyone else, yet all of them are models of modesty.

Pretence of false modesty also draws our attention.

There are people full of pride and arrogance almost bursting inwardly who pretend external humility and modesty. God help those who fail to notice their humility or modesty! We come across such a person in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Addressing the doctor (Dr. Sarkar), the Master said:

*Give up this false modesty. Why should you feel shy about singing the name of God? The proverb says very truly: ‘One cannot realise God if one is a victim of shame, hatred, or fear’.*

Absence of modesty is a sure indication that one is impure, proud, arrogant and full of oneself. It means one does not give credit to God for whatever capabilities or talents one has but appropriates all credit to oneself. Therefore every spiritual aspirant must cultivate the virtue of modesty. As Krishna declares in the Gita:

यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा |

तत्देवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोऽशसांभवम् || 10.41||

‘All extraordinary manifestations of power belong to God only.’  
(Gita 10.41)

St. Francis de Sales says: If you want to know whether a man is really wise, learned, generous or noble, see if his life is moulded by humility, modesty and submission. If so, his gifts are genuine; otherwise they are only surface and showy.

Simplicity, gentleness and modesty are to be desired in all societies; there are some people who are so full of affectation in whatever they do that everyone is annoyed by them.

There is a common quirk within us all; we want to be admired by others, we want people to think well of us, and our natural tendency is to put on our most attractive behaviour in the presence of others so as to obtain their attention and admiration. The best way of securing attention is to practise modesty.

These days we have become the worst idolaters - worshippers of the human body. At no time in history do we see the human body so much publicised, advertised and idolised as these days. Since we derive so much of our pleasures from the satisfaction of bodily desires, all efforts are made to encourage bodily satisfactions immediately. What we call fashion is nothing but vulgar display of, specially, the female body.

Under these circumstances who can dispute that the practice of modesty is indispensable?

In conclusion, modesty is an invaluable and indispensable spiritual quality. It is valuable because:

1. It is a sign that a person keeps things in perspective, in proper balance.
2. It prevents one from being too easily distracted from what is really important, i.e. spiritual progress, by an excessive concern for how one is esteemed or appreciated.
3. It makes one keenly aware of the grace of God and the ephemerality of life.
4. Since a modest person believes that all that he has is a gift from God, it keeps destructive emotions like pride, jealousy and envy in check.

Needless to say those who wish to realize God must cultivate modesty.



# 18 Achapalam (Absence of fickleness)

Steadfastness or absence of fickleness is one of the most important spiritual qualities. In most persons the mind has been allowed to run wild and follow its own sweet will and desires. The mind is like a spoiled child who is indulged by his parents or it is like a badly trained animal. Control of the mind is a thing unknown to most of us. It is said the average attention span of a modern mind is no more than twenty seconds.

## 18.1 Importance of mind and its control

No question has been asked or answered as frequently as how to control the mind. Our feeling of well-being depends on the state of our mind. The mind plays a most crucial role in human life.

The Gita tells us that a controlled mind is our best friend and becomes our worst enemy when we lose control over it.

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः |

अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्ते तात्मैव शत्रुवत् || Gita 6.6 ||

If we do not restrain and direct the mind towards a higher goal we will never feel the sense of fulfilment and joy in life. Inability to restrain the mind can lead to mental sickness.

What could be more revealing than the fact that one person in three is mentally sick in the developed nations! The mind uncontrolled and unguided is a dangerous instrument that may bring harm to ourselves and to others, whereas a controlled mind will save us from the dangers of life and will free us from all bondage. A controlled mind brings success in every field of life.

Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation, of happiness and unhappiness, of success and failure, of health and sickness, of good and evil.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. If you are in bad company, then you will talk and think like your companions. On the other hand, when you are in the company of devotees, you will think and talk only of God.*

There is a well-known saying that even after one obtains the grace of three (the grace of God, the Guru, and holy company) one

comes to grief for the lack of the grace of one (one's own mind!). There is no greater blessing than a mind that is filled with righteous, noble, positive and strength-giving thoughts, and no greater treasure than a mind filled with joy, peace and harmony. Such a mind is the key to success, health, wealth, power, prosperity, and, of course, to spiritual progress.

Realization of God or Self-knowledge is the only goal of life according to Vedanta. Only a pure and controlled mind can liberate us and lead us to God-realization.

No wonder so much of importance is given to the study and control of the mind. Patanjali, the author of Yoga Aphorisms defines Yoga as *the control of mind-stuff*.

Why is the mind so restless? The mind is restless because it is weak and impure. On the surface the mind seems to be so fickle and restless because it is filled with innumerable desires. So it is natural for us to conclude that when all the desires are fulfilled the mind will automatically become calm and tranquil. Nothing is further from truth. Giving in to desires is like adding fuel to fire.

However many times we may fulfil desires the mind will never become satiated; on the contrary desires will only become all the more stronger.

## 18.2 The real reason

The mind is restless because it knows, instinctively - though unconsciously - that we are all Divine, Infinite and Immortal souls. The mind will become tranquil only when it attains perfection, Self-knowledge or God-realization.

## 18.3 Conquest of Mind

Swami Vivekananda says: *How hard it is to control the mind! Well, it has been compared to the maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough someone made him drink freely of wine, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. To complete his misery a demon entered into him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey?*

It is difficult to control the mind, but there are definite guidelines that slowly but surely help us in bringing it under control.

1. Have a definite noble goal in life. A person without a goal is like a rudderless boat adrift in the sea of life. A fixed goal is a great help in restraining the restless mind.

2. The mind can be controlled by *Abhyasa* and *Vairagya* (practice and dispassion).

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् |

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते || Gita 6.35 ||

a. *Abhyasa* is constant effort to fix the mind on God or the Self.

b. *Vairagya* is dispassion or non-attachment to sense objects.

3. Sit alone and watch the thoughts of the mind as a witness. Do not identify yourself with the thoughts. Let us not think of the past or the future nor allow the mind to build images. Let us try to live in the present. Then the mind will gradually become calm and comes under our control.

4. Another way to control the mind is to do a thing which the mind does not want to do and deny a thing which the mind hankers after very much.

5. Regular practice of simple *Pranayama* or breath control helps make the mind steady and one-pointed.

6. In this age the easiest way for controlling the mind and attaining liberation is through *japa* and meditation. *Japa* is singing the Names and Glories of the Lord. *Japa* of the *Mantra* of our chosen deity and contemplation of the divine destroys the impurities of the mind, makes the mind inward and helps concentration, eventually leading to control of mind and attainment of God-realization.

7. Regular study of spiritual books, a bit of austerity, and, above all, cultivation of holy company goes a long way in the control of mind.

8. The quality and quantity of food we eat has a great influence over the mind. *Sattvic* food (milk, fruits, etc.) calms the mind. *Rajasic* food (hot, spicy, sweet foods etc.) excites the mind.

9. Retiring into solitude now and then can help greatly.

a. Swami Brahmananda has this advice: *The easiest way to purify and steady the mind is to retire into solitude, control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Just as a cow yields much milk when it is well fed, so when the mind is fed with spiritual food it*

*will yield greater tranquility. Spiritual food consists of meditation, prayer, contemplation, and japam.*

b. Another way to steady the mind is to let it wander, but to keep a steady watch over its wanderings. After a while the mind itself becomes tired and comes back to find peace in God. If you watch your mind, your mind will in turn watch over you.

10. Selfless service according to one's capacity is very helpful in purifying and controlling the mind.

11. Finally let us not forget that mind can be brought under control by the grace of God alone.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her Maya worldly people become entangled in woman and gold, and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation. She is called the Saviour, and the remover of the bondage that binds one to the world.*



# 19 Tejas (Spiritual Splendour)

Tejas is spiritual splendour. Those who live a life of purity consisting of continence, prayer, contemplation, truthfulness and righteousness acquire this splendour. Every spiritual seeker is advised to acquire this divine quality by Lord Krishna.

Often we see in the pictures of saints and holy people a halo surrounding their heads, symbolic of their spiritual attainment.

It is said that Kshudiram, father of Sri Ramakrishna, used to be revered like a Rishi (a Seer), and when he would go out the villagers would stand up with folded hands until he was out of sight.

Again it is said of Sri Ramakrishna that a divine light would come out of his body. The Master himself said: *Ah! There was such beauty then that people used to stare at me; the chest and the face used always to be red, as if a light emanated from the body. As people used to stare, I always kept the body covered with a thick wrapper and asked the Divine Mother importunately; 'Here is your external beauty, Mother, please take it back and give me internal beauty.' I used to pass my hand over the body, slapping it again and again, and say, 'Go in, go in'. As the result of this, the exterior became pale, as you see it now.*

It is said of Jesus Christ that he spoke like one with authority and not like the scribes. Of Swami Vivekananda the newspapers reported that he spoke with divine authority. We come across many such instances in the life of practically every saint.

Tejas may also be translated as spiritual power. Those who have had higher spiritual experiences exude a special power, albeit unconsciously. Whatever they speak has the great power of bringing about a real and lasting transformation in sincere devotees.

But spiritual power is not like political or economic, or military power, which are likely to cause more harm than good.

Sri Ramakrishna said: *In the Purana it is said that it was as if a hundred suns were shining when Rama entered the court. Why, then, weren't the courtiers burnt up? It was because the brilliance of Rama was not like that of a material object. As the lotus blooms when the sun*

*rises, so the lotus of the heart of the people assembled in the court burst into blossom.*

Spiritual splendour or Brahma Tejas soothes and confers blessings on all fortunate enough to come near it. It can only help and not harm.

We come across many a beautiful prayer in the Upanishads for endowing a sincere aspirant with this spiritual splendour.

As a result of sincere spiritual efforts, made for a long time, this divine effulgence radiates from devotees, and Yogis who have controlled their thoughts and whose thoughts constantly dwell on Brahman.

Such a person will have a beautiful, sweet and charming personality. A spiritual light will shine in his face due to the practice of continence. People will be drawn to such a personality. Physical beauty is nothing compared with spiritual beauty.

The most important function of this spiritual splendour is to protect aspirants from worldly snares. Wicked and selfish people, however much they may try, will not be able to take advantage of such spiritual seekers. Nor will they be able to harm them or create obstacles in the path of such spiritual seekers; for there is always a divine protection for such sincere aspirants.

That is why Sri Krishna advises all spiritual seekers to cultivate Tejas.



## 20 Kshama (Forgiveness)

Kshama, Shankaracharya says, is unaffectedness when harmed, beaten or reviled.

Forgiveness is freedom from antagonism towards others even when they cause injury to oneself, says Ramanujacharya.

Forgiveness is the ornament of a hero. He has the capacity and the opportunity to avenge the wrongs done to him. But he aims at self-effacement by forgiving the offender and forgetting the wrong. Only a strong person can forgive, never the weak.

Swami Vivekananda says: *Even forgiveness, if weak and passive, is not true, fight is better. Forgive when you could bring legions of angels to the victory.*

Then, Peter came to Jesus and asked: Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?

Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven. (Matthew 18.22)

Jesus is saying that one should not keep count of times. True forgiveness does not keep a record! The practice of forgiveness is also a great service to the world. Gandhiji used to say that if we practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, soon the whole world will be blind and toothless.

The well-known saying that, To err is human; to forgive is divine, is too true. None of us are free from faults. So we must try to cultivate the art of 'forgive and forget'; for to say I can forgive, but I cannot forget, is another way of saying, I will not forgive.

One who cannot forget has not really forgiven. The memory is still lurking and may manifest at the earliest opportunity.



## 21 Sahana (Forbearance)

Life is full of uncertainty, and one has to put up with so many unpleasant things in life. There is no guarantee that good and righteous people will not suffer, in fact good people seem to suffer more. There are evil and wicked people whose pleasure seems to lie in giving trouble to others. If one does not learn to forbear one has to suffer greatly.

Sri Ramakrishna was kicked by the family priest of Mathur Babu. Holy Mother had to put up with endless sufferings caused by her relatives and disciples, especially, Radhu. Swami Vivekananda had to face immense opposition in America. There was even an attempt to do away with him in U.S. Did we find any of them harbouring any grudge?

In the Bengali alphabet no three letters are alike in sound except the three sibilants (Śa, Śha and Sa); and they all mean for us, forbear, forbear, forbear (In Bengali Sa means forbear. It is derived from the Sanskrit root Sah.) This shows that even from our childhood we are made to learn forbearance through the very alphabet. The quality of forbearance is of the highest importance to every man. (Sri Ramakrishna)

Shankaracharya in his Vivekachudamani defines forbearance as:

सहनं सर्वदुःखानामप्रतीकारपूर्वकम् ।

चिन्ताविलापरहितं सा तितिक्षा निगद्यते ॥ 24 ॥

The bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them, being free (at the same time) from anxiety or lament on their score.

Forbearance helps us much in living happily in this world as well helping us make progress in spiritual life.



## 22 Kshānti (Patience)

Patience is defined as the ability to wait for an expected outcome without experiencing anxiety, tension, or frustration.

One of the most important qualities in spiritual life is patience. Patience is described as a great virtue in every religion.

There may be many factors affecting the outcome of all our actions. We can only do what best we can and accept with patience whatever be the outcome. This point is highlighted in the Bible in the story of Job.

Even God has to practise patience!! His patience knows no limit. Even though He knows all our doings He waits with infinite patience for us to turn and return to Him.

Needless to say patience is a quality all of us do well to cultivate.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *With implicit trust in the sayings of holy saints and sages, one must try to secure God in one's own heart with the bait of devotion, and the rod and hook of one's mind. With unceasing patience one must wait for the fullness of time. Then only can one catch the Divine fish.*

We live in an age of instantaneous gratification. That is why we become so agitated when things get delayed. We become deeply disappointed when our expectations do not come true. But success comes only to him who has infinite patience.

Swami Vivekananda says: *He who has infinite patience and infinite energy at his back, will alone succeed.*

Impatience is a sure cause of failure and can impair our physical as well as mental health greatly. Many times impatience is a sign that our actions are done as a matter of duty and not with a sense of joy.

So Sri Krishna advises all spiritual aspirants to cultivate the divine quality called *Kshama* consisting of forgiveness, forbearance and patience.



## 23 Dhriti (Steadfastness)

*Dhriti* is an important spiritual quality. The *Sandilya Upanishad* describes Dhriti as firmness of mind amidst a period of ups and downs. To remain calm, steady and self- possessed even when confronted with the greatest calamity, danger or sorrow, and not to deviate from the path of righteousness or duty under the influence of passions like lust, anger, fear or greed is called Dhriti or fortitude.

The great Shankaracharya defines Dhriti in his Gita-Bhashya as: That state of mind which removes the exhaustion of the body and senses when they droop down, and upheld by which the body and senses no longer get dejected.

It is said of the Buddha that he performed super-human austerities to obtain illumination but did not succeed. Then he made a firm determination that he would not get up from under the Bodhi tree till he attained illumination, even if he were to die in the process. He uttered these words: *Here on this seat my body may dry up. Let my flesh, skin and bones dissolve. Not getting Enlightenment, which is difficult to obtain even after many eons, not indeed from this seat will this body move.* (Lalitavistara)

With this firm resolve the Buddha sat down under the Bodhi tree and obtained illumination the same night.

Without steadfastness and strong determination one reaches nowhere. Sri Ramakrishna used to say of people who have no grit whatsoever: *There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk — soft and mushy. No inner strength! The mind is everything. Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is also of the mind. A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or in the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings'.*

Who can bind me? By repeating with grit and determination, I am not bound, I am free, one really becomes so - one really becomes free. One must have stern determination; then alone is spiritual practice possible. One must make a firm resolve.

One can be firm and steadfast under favourable circumstances, but none can escape the dualities of life. There will be trying times. It is under these difficult circumstances one needs strength, courage, patience and grit.

Swami Turiyananda often used to teach: *Clench your fists and say: I will conquer! Now or never – make that your motto, even in this life I must see God...*

That is the only way. Never postpone. What you know to be right, do that and do that at once, do not let any chance go by. The way to failure is paved with good intentions. That will not do.

Remember, this life is for the strong, and the persevering: the weak go to the wall. And always be on your guard. Never give in. It is natural to be dejected under unfavourable circumstances. Even great souls feel the burden.

Swami Turiyanandaji narrated an incident from his life: *When we were living at the old Math, now many years ago, it happened once that I was very sad. I could not make any progress for some time and everything looked dark to me. I was walking up and down on the flat roof of the Math. It was evening and the moon was hidden by clouds. Sleep was impossible for me, I was so unhappy. Then suddenly from behind the clouds the moon emerged and everything looked bright and beautiful. As soon as I saw that, I thought: ‘see, the moon was there all the time but I could not see her. So the Atman is also ever present, shining in its own glory, but I did not see it. The cloud of ignorance stood between the Atman and my intellect overshadowing my mind. And at once I felt strong again, my doubts all gone.*

Circumstances may or may not be favourable, but who cares? We must strain every nerve to accomplish the thing.

If you are determined to do it at any cost, you will find that great obstacles which you thought would overpower you, ultimately turn out to help you. But you must struggle sincerely. Does one find circumstances always propitious?

Consider what you have got to do as your duty and go on.

Swami Shivananda used to say: *With firm determination, one has to strive for God-realization. Make a start from this very day; for life is fleeing every moment.*

Nobody can say when one will have the call for departure; so don't waste a single day. Those who think that these things can be put off for the future never do anything. They will be tossed in this current of birth and death for infinite ages.

Dhriti is a word rich with many meanings. Dhriti means steadfastness, fortitude, patience, courage, strong will-power etc. Without these qualities no one is going to succeed in anything.

It is also very easy to misunderstand the word Dhriti and confuse it with stubbornness, which is quite the opposite in meaning. We find innumerable examples of wicked and cruel dictators persisting in their wrong views bringing immense harm to millions.

Indeed, Sri Krishna himself, in the Bhagavad Gita classifies Dhriti into three types: Tamasic, Rajasic and Satvic.

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः |  
योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी || 18.33 ||

यया तु धर्मकामार्थान् धृत्या धारयतेऽर्जुन |  
प्रसङ्गेन फलाकाङ्क्षी धृतिः सा पार्थ राजसी || 18.34 ||

यया स्वप्नं भयं शोकं विषादं मदमेव च |  
न विमुञ्चति दुर्मेधा धृतिः सा पार्थ तामसी || 18.35 ||

The resolve by which a person persists in wrong, irrational views and deeds is Tamasic. Tamasic resolve stubbornly holds on to a wrong notion or course of action.

We find many spiritual aspirants possess this Tamasic Dhriti. Some are not even aware that they are treading the wrong path. Even after becoming aware of this tendency, many refuse to change their ways, continue to suffer themselves, make others suffer, but still persist in their wrong ways. Such is the power of *Mahamaya*.

That resolve by which a person regulates his life for the enjoyments of this world is Rajasic.

Only that resolve by which one dedicates one's life for the realisation of the Self is Satvic Dhriti. One needs a lot of self-introspection in order to find out one's true motive.

To be steadfast one needs tremendous will-power. It is impossible to be steadfast if we do not have patience, fortitude, cheerfulness, positive thinking and infinite patience. An essential part of steadfastness is overcoming indecision of mind. Constant indecision is a disease of the mind. Steadfastness with flexibility is what is needed.

The spiritual path is a long and arduous process. No speedy result can be expected in this path. One has to go on persevering in the path, day after day, month after month, year after year, with the same determination, one has to make spiritual effort.

It may even take many lives before one can reach the goal. There will be lots of ups and downs, and challenges.

Therefore steadiness and perseverance are absolutely essential on the spiritual path. No one has become great without steadfast effort.

Perhaps many of our readers may remember the story of Robert the Bruce and the spider that fell several times yet finally succeeded.

*Try, try until you succeed* is the secret behind many great achievements.

If one is possessed of Satvic Dhriti and sincerely goes on striving with faith and patience one is sure to reach the goal. A Sadhaka with tremendous fortitude alone can reach the goal.



## 24 Śauca (Purity)

Sri Krishna describes *Sauca* or purity as one of the divine treasures. Purity is not merely a virtue but the culmination of all spiritual practices.

The sine qua non of spiritual life is purity of heart. The vision of God, a glimpse of the beyond, never comes until the soul is pure. It is to those who are true in heart, pure in deed, whose senses are controlled, that this Self manifests itself.

Swami Brahmananda says: *God is manifest in the hearts of His devotees, his children. Therefore we must be pure in heart. The pure mind receives a clear reflection of God. If the mirror is covered with dirt it does not reflect, so also the Lord's reflection does not fall upon an unclean mind.*

Purity is among the five observances which form one of the eight limbs of yoga. According to the commentator Vyasa, it includes both external and internal purity. While internal purity or the purity of mind is definitely more important, external purity is also recommended in all religious systems.

Purity is stressed in every religion. There cannot be any form of spiritual life without purity in some form or the other. It is the very heart of all spiritual endeavour.

The entire essence of all religions, has been put into that one sentence: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* The vision of God, which is the culmination of all spiritual practice, is reserved for the pure in spirit.

Swami Vivekananda said: *In that one sentence lies the gist of all religions...It alone could save the world were all other scriptures lost. A vision of God, a glimpse of the beyond, never comes until the soul is pure. All these forms and ceremonies, these prayers and pilgrimages, these books, bells, candles, and priests, are preparations; they take off the impurities of the soul; and when the soul becomes pure it naturally wants to get to the mine of purity, God Himself.*

These are not mere words. Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of purity. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there was nothing on earth or heaven which could pollute Narendra (Swami Vivekananda).

Once Swami Vivekananda was asked by his Western disciples whether he had exercised some yogic power while uttering the now famous words, Sisters and Brothers of America, at the inaugural session of the Parliament of Religions which had such a mesmerizing effect upon the audience.

In reply the Swami said that it was the power of purity. He had, in his life, never even once thought an impure thought.

What is purity? Purity is a state of knowing and being oneself, it is abiding in one's real nature. It is hard to describe what purity is, yet we can recognize it when we encounter it. When we see a baby we know what innocence, purity, simplicity is. Being pure in heart a baby does not see evil or impurity in others. Similarly a saint also, being pure in heart, sees God only everywhere and in everything.

The Gita tells us that only through austerity alone can we become pure in thought, word, and deed.

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् |  
ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते || 17.14||

The worship of gods, holy people, the guru, and the wise; purity, honesty, celibacy, and nonviolence; these are said to be the austerity of deed. (17.14)

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् |  
स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते || 17.15||

Speech that is not offensive, truthful, pleasant, beneficial, and is used for the regular reading of scriptures is called the austerity of word. (17.15)

मनः प्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः |  
भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते || 17.16||

Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-restraint, and the cultivation of pure motives; these are called the austerity of thought. (17.16)

Various techniques have been adopted in various spiritual paths for the purification of mind.

Karma yoga is, of course, the standard method advocated for purification of the mind. It involves performance of all actions without hankering for their fruits, or by surrendering the fruits and actions to God.

The Atman by nature is pure, immortal, and ever blissful.

The best way to attain purity is to assert one's eternally pure nature, and to be established in it is the goal of life.

Prayer, japa, meditation, holy company, selfless service, and diligent practice of spiritual disciplines as directed by one's teacher, now and then retiring into solitude; these are some of the means indicated in the scriptures for the attainment of purity.

Hindu scriptures also caution us about taking impure food. Pure food makes our heart pure.

Pure heart results in constant recollectedness of God. Constant recollectedness of God brings union with God.

Food does not mean merely what we eat, but what we gather through all our senses. How do we gather pure food through our senses? By seeing God everywhere. Wherever the senses go, let us be conscious of the presence of God.

Through diligent spiritual practice the mind gradually becomes pure and becomes blessed with the vision of God.



# 25 Adroha (Absence of Malice)

Adroha is complete absence of malice, hatred, ill will, or injury in thought, word and deed. It is a quality without which one cannot progress in spiritual life.

Ramanujacharya explains it as non-interference in others affairs when otherwise one may cause them harm or suffering.

According to Madhusudana, adroha is not the taking up of arms and weapons etc., with the idea of killing.

Non-injury, of course, does not convey the real meaning of the word adroha. The essence of adroha is complete absence of anger, malice, hatred, or jealousy; it is a spiritual concept. Total absence of self and selfishness is the test of adroha.

It is in this sense that adroha is equated with truth at its highest level, and is regarded as the highest principle in life.

Long ago the Jain prophet, Lord Mahavir, declared: The being whom you want to kill is none other than you; the being whom you wish to govern and enslave is none other than you. Killing a living being is equivalent to killing one's own self.

It is well-nigh impossible to live without injuring any creature. Physical violence in some form or other is a fact of life, and the sin that accrues from it does not come from the fact of violence itself, but from motives of desire, hate, and selfishness.

As it is said 'Life can be sustained only by life'. Bhagavan Buddha said: He who deserves punishment must be punished. Those who go to war in a righteous cause after exhausting all means of preserving peace are not blameworthy.

In our own times Dr. Radhakrishnan writes: We live in an imperfect world where all men are not saints, and force has to be used to keep the world going. If we say that the criminal's personality should not be violated, if we treat the gangster's life as sacred, we are acquiescing in evil. We cannot judge the use of violence as evil or as good by looking at it in isolation.

Any pain or injury inflicted during the course of living need not be an injurious act unless motivated by selfishness or hatred.

Again both good and evil, violence and non-violence are not ends in themselves, but only the means leading mankind to its goal of realising its divine nature. Conditions and circumstances in life influence and dictate whether violent means are necessary or not. Right conduct is always to be measured by the motive, since ethics and morality are all in the mind.

Though *adroha* or non-injury, is the highest ideal, it can truly be practised only by a rare few in any society at any given period of time. Such an ideal can only be for the few who have taken to the spiritual path seriously and are bent on Self-realisation. Only he who can look upon all creatures as one's own Self can truly be said to practise the virtue of *adroha* or non-injury.

*Adroha* means remaining true to one's faith or trust. In the light of this meaning there are five areas in which we should be careful not to break our trust: Duty, country, religion, Guru and Self.

**Duty:** One of the meanings of *Dharma* is sincere discharge of one's duties according to one's station in life. This not only purifies the heart but also pleases the Lord. One can advance in any field of life only through proper discharge of one's duties. This rule applies whether one works in an office or an institution. One who fails to discharge one's duties is called *Kartavya drohi*.

**Country:** A country shelters, nurtures, and protects its citizens. Hence it is the bounden duty of every citizen to love, respect and serve his country to the best of his ability. If one fails to do so, he will be doing great injury to himself or herself and also to the whole nation. One who fails to love and serve his country is called *Desa drohi*.

**Religion:** One of the most important teachings of Sri Ramakrishna is that all religions are valid paths leading a sincere aspirant to God. Though this is true one should love and follow one's chosen religion, at the same time taking care to show respect to all other religions and prophets. One who fails to do so is called *Dharma drohi*.

**Guru:** Hinduism accords the highest respect to the Guru; He is equated to God himself. Hence one should look upon one's Guru with highest respect. It does not mean merely saluting him or showing outward signs of reverence. Real respect to the Guru lies in strictly following the instructions he has given. Any deviation from

it is disrespect to the Guru and is bound to make one fall from the spiritual ideal. One who fails to do so is called *Guru drohi*.

Self: Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the goal of human life is to realise God or the Self. One who does not strive to realise the Self lives in vain and is called a Self-slayer.

The Isavasya Upanishad puts it so succinctly:

असुर्यं नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसावृताः ।

तांस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥ 3 ॥

*Verily, those worlds of the demons are enveloped in blinding darkness; and thereto they all repair after death, who are slayers of Atman. One who fails to follow and advance in the spiritual path is called Atma drohi.*

The only way to avoid harming or injuring others is to look upon all as one's own Self.

Needless to say this state can be achieved only through following a spiritual path and by realising God.

Before one reaches this state one should take care not to injure any creature by thought, word or deed.

And one should be faithful to one's duties, country, religion, Guru and Self. This is a sure way to acquire the spiritual quality called *adroha*.



## 26 Nāti-mānita (Absence of Pride)

*Nati-manita* is humility. Sri Krishna considers humility as one of the great spiritual qualities without which one cannot advance in spiritual life.

*Atimanita* is pride, vanity, conceit, overestimating oneself. *Natimanita* is the exact opposite of this. It really means humility.

Let us discuss pride.

Pride (or hubris or vanity) is considered as the most serious of the seven deadly sins. It is the ultimate source from which all other sins arise. Pride generates egotism and obscures truth. Regarding ourselves as exalted, superior or worthy of adoration and cherishing intense craving for fame, honour, prestige and respect and feeling happy on getting these (even if we do not hanker after them) - this is called pride. This is overestimating ourselves. It breeds excessive love of self and makes one look down upon all others.

Pride, said Dante, is 'love of self - perverted to hatred and contempt for one's neighbour'.

The natural tendency of most of us is to appear important in the eyes of others. This desire expresses itself as pride and vanity. A true enquiry into the Self compels man to relinquish pride as a disease of the mind.

Pride makes us feel that we are the centre of the world. We have high self-esteem, which is often a mask behind which our own self-esteem is hidden. Pride makes us feel we are all powerful, all knowing, and faultless. Pride makes us impatient and distrusting; it breeds contempt for those who do not subscribe to our philosophy, beliefs and way of life. If others do not agree with our views we become sarcastic and biting. Pride makes us look down at people who react negatively to our beliefs and views. Pride makes us deny the warning signs that there is something seriously wrong with us and thus we become easy prey for a downfall when a serious crisis or disaster strikes our lives - pride comes before a fall.

*Pride, vanity etc., are qualities derived from tamas. A characteristic of tamas is pride. Pride and delusion come from tamas. Pride of learning,*

*pride of money, and pride of social position. One cannot attain divine knowledge till one gets rid of pride. Water does not stay on the top of a mound; but into low land it flows in torrents from all sides. (Sri Ramakrishna)*

There are many forms of pride - pride of beauty, pride of strength, pride of wealth, pride of ancestry, pride of power and position, pride of talent, pride of intellect, name and fame, etc.

Many, especially parents, feel proud when their children attain wealth, fame, power etc. Many become vain even when there is nothing to be proud about. These unspiritual qualities like pride, secretiveness, and the like are so many bonds which keep man in ignorance. Man is free only when he is liberated from all these.

Of all forms of pride the worst and most harmful is spiritual pride.

*And, above all, if the pride of spirituality enters into you, woe unto you. It is the most awful bondage that ever existed. Neither can wealth nor any other bondage of the human heart bind the soul so much as this. 'I am purer than others', is the most awful idea that can enter into the human heart. In what sense are you pure? The God in you is the God in all. If you have not known this, you have known nothing. How can there be difference? It is all one. Every being is the temple of the Most High; if you can see that, good; if not, spirituality has yet to come to you. (Swami Vivekananda)*

But we need not think all pride is inimical and dangerous. There is a form of pride which is positive and highly helpful in spiritual life. This spiritual pride is the result of the grace of God.

Regarding this Sri Ramakrishna said to a devotee: *The ego of a devotee begets no pride; it does not create ignorance. On the contrary it helps one realize God. Haven't you heard Ramprasad's song? He used to say, Whom do I fear in the world, whose sovereign is the Divine Mother!*

*Keep such a pride always awake in the mind. If you must have pride, then feel like Vibhishana, who said, I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else. There are two signs of knowledge: first, absence of pride, and second, a peaceful nature. You have both. Therefore you must have received the grace of God.*

This kind of spiritual pride also helps us overcome frustration and depression. Swami Vivekananda says to a disciple who was feeling low: *Then think like this: Whose child am I? I associate with him*

*and shall I have such weak-mindedness and lowness of spirits? Stamping down such weakness of mind and heart, stand up, saying, I am possessed of heroism, I am possessed of a steady intellect, I am a knower of Brahman, a man of illumination. Be fully conscious of your dignity by remembering, I am the disciple of such and such who is the companion-in-life of Sri Ramakrishna, the conqueror of lust and wealth. This will produce a good effect. He who has not this pride has no awakening of Brahman within him.*

Do we suffer from pride and vanity? Many of us are blissfully unaware of our pride, egotism and vanity. A little self-enquiry is sure to confirm that we suffer excessively from pride, etc. If we are highly sensitive, if even an innocent remark or slight criticism puts us off and we take offence, if we are not open to truth; then, surely we are suffering from this disease!

As mentioned earlier, pride is a deadly poison. No one likes a proud and vain person. Pride makes others unhappy and resentful towards us; it also makes us miserable, hampers our happiness and creativity, and bars our progress in spiritual life. Until we recognize and take steps to eradicate this demon of pride there is no hope of progress in any field of life.

So how do we get rid of pride and vanity? The best antidote to pride and vanity is the practice of humility. The practice of humility opens all doors to peace, prosperity, and truth in this as well as the other world.



# 27 Namrata (The Practice of Humility)

Humility is the foundation of all virtues.

Sri Ramakrishna said: *Do you know my attitude? As for myself, I eat, drink, and live happily. The rest the Divine Mother knows. Indeed, there are three words that prick my flesh: 'guru', 'master' and 'father'. There is only one Guru, and that is Satchidananda. He alone is the Teacher. My attitude toward God is that of a child toward its mother. One can get human gurus by the million. All want to be teachers. But who cares to be a disciple?*

Girish Ghosh used to say that Sri Ramakrishna conquered the world by his humility. He was a personification of humility. In order to destroy the vanity born of noble descent and to acquire true humility thereby, he cleaned very carefully with his hands places which are absolutely shunned as unclean by others. All saints, by nature, are humble.

Humility is the greatest of all spiritual qualities. Without humility no one can advance in any field of life. The moment a man feels that he knows everything, that he has nothing to learn, then he is done for. Pride is an excessive belief in one's own abilities, a high regard for oneself and one's abilities. Pride begets vanity and leads to destruction.

Humility is the very opposite of pride, vanity and egotism; it is the only virtue which can destroy egotism, the root of all evil. And until one gets rid of pride and egotism there is no chance of peace and happiness. If we do not consciously try to get rid of egotism, life will do that for us in a painful way.

Humility is the greatest destroyer of egotism. Quoting Tulasidas, a great saint of India, Swami Brahmananda says: *Tulasidas is a liar, if God be not realized by truthfulness, obedience, and motherly attitude towards women.*

Commenting on the above saying the Swami says: *Do you know what obedience is? It is humility. When the right kind of humility comes, egoism is destroyed and God is realized.*

Speaking of humility Christ says: Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. (Matt. xi. 29)

Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man came to serve. (Matt.10:27)

In our arrogance we look down upon others. In our ignorance, we imagine that the whole world has been created for us, for our enjoyment. Very often our ego gets identified with the objects of worldly prosperity. Then we develop pride like, I am wealthy, I am a high-born person, I am a great scholar, great singer, speaker etc. But death can destroy all these in a trice. If only we are able to dwell on the evanescence of wealth, erudition and the like, and immerse our mind in the constant contemplation of God, then all this pride disappears.

When people praised him, Newton used to say: I have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than the ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

Following Newton, Sri 'M', the chronicler of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna also used to say the same thing.

Humility is a great aid in the building of character. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: Water accumulates on low ground; when the ground is high, it runs off. In a humble man sweetness of character and other good qualities develop effortlessly and naturally.

Sri Ramakrishna, again, used to say that one cannot realise God until the ego is destroyed. He used to illustrate this beautifully, citing the example of a bullock: *Egotism is so injurious to man that as long as it is not eradicated there is no salvation for him. Look at the young calf and the troubles that come upon it through egotism. As soon as it is born, it cries, 'Ham hai' - 'I am', 'I am'. The result of its egotism is that, when it grows up it is yoked to the plough, to drag heavily loaded carts. But still, in spite of all this punishment, the animal does not lose its egotism; for drums that are made of its hide produce the same sound of Ham, 'I'. The creature does not learn humility until the cotton-carder makes bow-strings out of its entrails: for it is then that the animal's intestines sing out 'Tu hai' - 'Thou art'. The 'I' must go and give place to the 'Thou', and this is not achieved until man becomes spiritually awakened.*

When a man becomes perfect he becomes truly humble and tender. As Sri Ramakrishna says:

*What is the state which a Siddha (perfect man) attains? As a potato or brinjal becomes soft and pulpy, when it gets Siddha (boiled), so a man, when he becomes a Siddha, is seen to be all humility and tenderness.*

Humility or humbleness is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and vanity. Rather than, Me first, humility allows us to say, No, you first, my friend! Humility is the quality that lets us go more than halfway to meet the needs and demands of others.

Humility as a virtue is praised and emphasised in all religions. Qualities such as humility, courtesy, patience, forbearance etc., have to be acquired patiently through diligent spiritual practice. Humility is needed to live in peace and harmony with all. Humility dissipates hatred, anger and heals all wounds. Humility allows us to see the innate dignity and worth of all people.

Being humble, however, does not mean feeling worthless or having a low opinion of oneself; it does not mean one should have an inferiority complex. It certainly does not mean one should compare oneself unfavourably with others. There is a beautiful saying: No pride is pride that expresses the glory of the soul. No humility is humility that humiliates the self.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *Many a man with a show of humility says: 'I am like an earth-worm grovelling in the dust.' In this way, thinking themselves always to be worms, in time they become like worms. Let not despondency ever enter into your heart. Despair is the greatest enemy in the path of progress. As a man thinks, so he becomes.*

Humility is a quality by which a man has a modest estimate of his own worth, and submits himself to God and others. A humble person respects himself and others because he recognises the innate divinity, the latent potentialities of all beings. A humble person recognises that God has given different qualities to different people. So he does not entertain a superiority complex. He respects all people, all creatures.

Humility is a quality achieved with great effort and spiritual practice. Prayer and the repetition of the holy name of God are of help in the acquisition of humility. According to Sri Chaitanya, japa or the repetition of the name of God is one of the best forms of

spiritual practice. Interestingly he says that God's name should be repeated with great humility. Commenting on this Swami Ashokananda, in his *Spiritual Practice*, says: "Mere outward humility and patience are not meant. Inner purification is essential. True humility comes only when we have risen high above worldly considerations, so that the standard of worldly judgement no longer affects us, and we feel in our inmost heart, every moment of our life, the presence of the Infinite, Omnipotent and Omniscient. Without at least a partial perception of spiritual immensity, real humility is impossible; it will be only mock humility.

We must also distinguish between humility and timidity. In most cases our humility is only another form of timidity and ineffectuality: we are cowed by the immensity of powers playing around us, and feel that we cannot play up to such greatness. But the aspirant of God must not be cowed by worldly powers. He must rise above them.

But is it easy to defy the world? We can then very well guess what a tremendous training the mind must pass through before the conditions as laid down by Shri Chaitanya can be properly fulfilled.

True prayer always makes one humble. Holy Mother used to say: *As you pray and meditate you will find the Master actually speaking to you, fulfilling all your desires immediately, and your mind will be filled with such deep peace ... You will realize that He who is in me, is in you too and in the humblest of men; only then will humility be born in your mind. In the fullness of one's spiritual realization, one will find that He who resides in one's heart, resides in the heart of others as well: the oppressed, the persecuted, the untouchable and the out-caste. This realization makes one truly humble.*

The practice of humility involves:

1. One should never have a base or inferior opinion of oneself. One should have a healthy selfrespect.
2. One should respect all creation as the manifestation of God. The Indian custom of greeting others with 'Namaste' i.e., 'Salutation to the Lord within you', is a great custom.
3. One should never criticise or find fault with anyone.
  - a. One should never try to exalt oneself above others or try to deprive others of their due.

b. Humility means putting God and others ahead of our own interests. Humility comes with the knowledge that God's creation transcends all our narrow interests.

4. One should never feel jealous of others. However humble may be our outward behaviour, entertaining jealousy indicates we are inwardly conceited.

5. One should be open-minded to receive truth from whatever source or from whomsoever it comes.

6. One should strive to unfold one's latent talents and use them in the service of the Lord. Not to do so is unspiritual.

7. Finally, one should never forget that humility means seeing God in everything.

Humility has great power; a humble man can never be destroyed. Before the power of humility, all people - kings, scholars, wealthy people - all bow down their heads in reverence; because humility is Godliness.



## 28 Shraddha (Faith)

*"Once a person has faith he has achieved everything." (Sri Ramakrishna)*

*"Is faith so cheap, my child? Faith is the last word. If one has faith, the goal is practically reached." (Holy Mother Sarada Devi)*

*"Faith is the anticipated reality of what we hope for - the beatific vision - and the demonstrative proof of what the mind does not see." (Swami Vivekananda)*

According to Luther faith is "a simple trust in the mercy of God".

Faith makes life joyous, rich, fulfilling and meaningful. Without it life is likely to become meaningless, fruitless, a drag. Faith lies at the back of every great endeavour and success. History is nothing but the story of a few people with immense faith in God, in themselves and in all. Faith brings out the innate potentialities of a man. It makes a man endure unbearable pain and suffering with hope and joy. It is faith again which makes a man undergo great sacrifices for the good of all.

In the Rig Veda faith is deified and offered a hymn called 'Shraddha suktam'. Therein a seer prays to the goddess that he may be endowed with Shraddha. The nearest but unsatisfactory translation of the word in English is 'faith'.

### 28.1 Belief and faith

The words 'belief' and 'faith' are often used synonymously. Belief is an intellectual assent to a dogma or a doctrine which often proves to be irrational; sometimes we have belief, at other times we lose it. Belief is controlled by our intellect and is influenced by circumstances. It rarely brings about a transformation in our conduct and character.

Faith is just the opposite. It is firmness of conviction of unseen truths - God, an afterlife and the other world. The true characteristics of faith are right understanding, strength, purity, truthfulness, rationality, sincerity, productivity, joy, fearlessness and nobility. Where these characteristics are absent we can be sure it is anything but faith.

Faith makes a man a sincere seeker of God and bestows the realisation of God on him. It always transforms and uplifts. Faith leads man to God and makes him a saint. Its movement is always upward and Godward. Faith is indirect knowledge of reality and dawns intuitively. Hence it unerringly leads one to God. It is a gift of God, the reflection of the Self in a purified mind. It, literally, takes possession of man. Once it comes there is no way but to move wherever it leads.

## 28.2 Faith, hope and charity

Faith, hope and charity are considered as the three theological virtues because they have God for their object and are infused into the soul as the grace of God; when God is pleased with one He manifests Himself in the form of these virtues. They are interdependent though faith is the basis and the foundation of the other two. Speaking of these three virtues, Caussade says they are 'but one virtue'.

Understanding, memory (or imagination), and will are the three faculties of the mind. These three faculties are one and interlinked so that if one faculty is united with God the other two also become united. Spiritual practice is an attempt to unite oneself with God 'through faith, according to the understanding, through hope according to memory, and through love (charity) according to will'. Integration of these three faculties of understanding, memory and will is called the integration of personality.

True faith fills the heart with hope - hope in the reality of the goal and hope in oneself that one is capable of attaining it. Faith lights up the spiritual path, fills the heart with undying hope and leads one forward even under the most hopeless situations. Truly a man who has lost all hope is a dead man. Hope, in its turn, inevitably translates itself into love (charity) and joy. Hence it is said 'faith separated from good deeds is a dead faith'. 'I may have utter faith', says St Paul, 'so that I can move mountains; yet if I lack charity, I count for nothing'. Charity, he tells us, is the crown of all virtues, and that which binds them together: 'that is the bond which makes us perfect'. Hence a person who has faith remains ever hopeful and discharges his duties with love, joy and reverence.

The great Sāyaṇācārya defines faith as a special affection embedded in man. He says it is a distinctive reverence for a person,

object or a principle. Vedantasāra defines it as 'faith in the words of the scriptures as taught by the Guru or teacher'.

Without absolute trust in the teacher and scriptures it is not possible to keep up one's ideal for long. Doubts are bound to creep in at some stage and they hinder progress. They are destroyed completely only after the realisation of God. But doubts should not be allowed to hamper one's spiritual progress.

*"Faith is the one thing needed, intense faith! Let not doubts get hold of your mind."*

*"But if doubts come, Maharaj?"*

*"Doubts will come until you have realized God; therefore you must hold fast to God and pray."*

*You may think: 'Let us have yearning, faith, and devotion first, then we shall begin our spiritual practices.' But is that possible? Can we see the day before the break of dawn? When the Lord comes, love, devotion, and faith follow him as his retinue."* (Swami Brahmananda)

Hence one should have strong faith in the teachings of the scriptures as interpreted by one's teacher. Here also what is advocated is not a dogmatic faith based on irrational authority. The teachings are to be heard with reverence and should be scrutinized through reason until they are grasped in the right way. Only then should they be accepted and acted upon. Ultimately even faith, as a working hypothesis, is only a help and should be verified through direct realisation of God. Until then, of course, we have no other means except to proceed through faith.

Faith slowly but surely leads man towards God. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: *'Suppose there is a thief in a room and he has come to know that a great treasure lies separated from him only by a thin partition. Can he rest content only to know about it? Will he not become restless to possess it?'*

Such is the nature of faith. Once a man has it, it will not allow him to rest until he realises God. That is why true faith is considered as the greatest gift of God to man. It is a rare gift and dawns only on the heart of a man who has become pure.

### 28.3 Faith and reason

There is a misconception that faith and reason are contradictory and opposed to each other.

The truth is faith and reason are complimentary, faith leading man to realms reason is incapable of reaching. We said that faith is indirect knowledge obtained through intuition. Intuition never contradicts reason but goes beyond it; for reason has its limitations and is incapable of functioning beyond the realm of the known. Intuition can come only to a person who lives according to the dictates of reason and objectivity. Objectivity is the faculty of seeing things or persons as they are. The inability to be objective leads one to insanity. When a person fails to be objective he develops a psychosis of some form. An insane person sees the outside world as symbols of his mind, as his own creation, because for him the reality is his own desires and fears.

#### 28.4 Faith and fanaticism

The reason why faith can never breed fanaticism is that it is based on reason. Reason is the faculty of thinking objectively, the ability to see things or persons as they are and not as coloured by our emotions. There are fanatics who believe all sorts of dogmas and doctrines and do not hesitate to commit heinous crimes in the name of religion. This fanaticism is based on irrational authority. On the surface these fanatics seem to be strong believers and are ready even to give up their lives cheerfully for their cause. The truth is otherwise. True faith is rational and objective, and always promotes peace, harmony and joy wherever it is present. As the saying goes 'a tree is known by its fruits'. The fruits of faith can only bring blessings on all. Wherever we find wars, conflicts and disharmony we can be sure that it is the result of selfishness and fanaticism, and not true faith.

Not to speak of progressing spiritually, without faith one can scarcely live a fulfilling life even in this world. As we mentioned earlier, faith is an infusion of God's grace into the heart of a striving soul. So how to acquire it?

All of us have to begin with the small amount of faith we possess, what Aldous Huxley calls 'a minimum working hypothesis'. If we can live in accordance with our faith it becomes stronger. The best way of doing this is to perform our duties with awareness, love, reverence and joy, with the sole motive of pleasing God. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

**88** Being Divine: Here and Now

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् |

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः || Gita 18.46||

'By Whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him by way of devotedly performing his duty, man attains perfection.'

True worship is the performance of one's duties.

If a man can do this in the right way and offer the result to the Lord, his heart will attain to purity, and faith gets reflected in it.

Swami Brahmananda said:

*"Always remember that through work you are serving the Lord. One can see him with the eye of devotion. If you work with the idea of pleasing men, you will be disappointed. You will find peace and happiness only if you can remember the Lord. If he is pleased, the world is pleased. In favourable or in adverse circumstances, feel that you have none but him and that you are serving him through the faithful discharge of your allotted duties.*

*"Another invaluable help is association with the holy. Sri Ramakrishna recommends this method highly. Sri Krishna tells us in the Bhagavatam that nothing pleases God more than association with the holy, for holy company is contagious and infuses people with faith, devotion, and dispassion. Keep association with the holy. Go to one who knows the path, learn about the path, and walk on the path. Then alone you will reach your destination someday. Then alone will arise faith and devotion."*

Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly prayed: 'Thou art my refuge, O Lord. I seek no physical pleasures. I do not want worldly happiness. Give me faith, and give me pure love for thy lotus feet. Destroy my sense of ego and make me thine.'

Prayer is one of the most powerful means of uniting with God. Consciously or unconsciously every creature prays, for every desire is an unvoiced prayer. And who is free from desires? Yet it is the special privilege of man to pray consciously with love and purpose. Many saints obtained God through sincere and constant prayer. St Paul advises all 'to pray unceasingly'.

Even if one has doubts about the existence of God, if one prays sincerely, prayer itself will infuse faith, and will lead man to God. Swami Vivekananda used to say that prayer unifies all the inner energies of man.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Pray to the Divine Mother, begging Her to give you unswerving love and adamant faith. Pray to God in

*any way you like. He is always sure to hear you. He can hear even the footfall of an ant. When mind and speech unite in earnestly asking for a thing, that prayer is answered.'*

Thus spiritual life begins with a small amount of faith. Then nurtured through proper performance of one's duties, holy company and prayer it takes possession of the heart and ultimately leads man to God.



## 29 Viveka (Discrimination)

Discrimination, awareness, control over body and mind and intense yearning - These are the four prerequisites before one even steps onto the path of a spiritual life. *Viveka* or discrimination is the very first and most important of these requirements.

Discrimination is the ability to correctly evaluate the lesser from the higher and choose the higher. Naturally it needs acute intelligence and a strong will. Discrimination is a very practical pursuit and not an armchair exercise. The test of true *Viveka* is the ability to give up what is tested and found to be of lower value. True discrimination is the beginning of wisdom; it brings on right understanding, strengthens the will and gradually leads man to higher states of life and in the end to Self-knowledge.

Naturally it is not easy to possess *Viveka*. Its acquisition needs long preparation and intense struggle. First one needs to acquire awareness. Then one needs to go through honest and objective self-analysis in order to know the workings of one's mind, especially, of one's unconscious mind. Then comes the Herculean task of integrating the conscious and the unconscious. Only then does a person become an individual and have the needed energy to step forward into the higher realms of spiritual life. Perhaps this is the reason why Swami Vivekananda used to exhort often: *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

So before one has *Viveka* one needs to practise self-awareness and self-analysis. Here are a few examples:

When told that the Oracle of Delphi had revealed to one of his friends that Socrates was the wisest man in Athens; first he wondered why; then he realised the Oracle might be right after all. He was the wisest man in Athens because he alone was prepared to admit his own ignorance rather than pretend to know something he did not.

One of the Upanishads declares, He who thinks he knows does not know, and he who thinks he does not know knows.

Arjuna refused to fight and laid his arms down. Subsequently he realised that he was wrong, all the while he was only rationalising his decisions. Then he admitted that he was wrong,

and earnestly begged for guidance. Only then did Krishna open his mouth and begin his teaching.

Even as a child Sri Ramakrishna was an acute observer. He used to observe minutely the ways of people around him. This gave him an insight into the nature of people and the world. This power of observation came in handy when he was practising spiritual disciplines. Before he undertook any spiritual practice he used to question his mind as to the purpose of a particular training, whether it was prepared to go ahead without a backward glance. Only when he got a categorical 'yes', would he undertake the discipline. This is why he succeeded in any practice in such a short time. Because of his purity and sincerity Sri Ramakrishna's own mind acted as his Guru. For instance, during his sadhana Sri Ramakrishna used to see a young monk exactly resembling himself with a sharp trident in his hand come out of his body and say, *If you do not fully give up all other thoughts and meditate whole-heartedly on your Chosen Ideal I'll pierce your heart with this trident.* Needless to say the young monk was none other than his own vigilant mind.

A few days before her passing away Holy Mother advised a despairing devotee: *My child, if you want peace do not find fault with any one. Rather find out your own faults.* Without doubt this is one of the most useful disciplines.

The few instances given above are for the purpose of illustrating the fact that one needs to cultivate a constant habit of self-observation and self-analysis. This gives us a clue into the secret of greatness and wisdom. One who wishes to become wise and great or improve in any field of life cannot afford to live a life of self-forgetfulness.

Here is an interesting Zen story. There was a disciple who was with his Master for forty years. The disciple thought he was now well qualified to be a Guru in his own right.

Humbly he asked the master his opinion. Now it was a custom for the disciples to leave their shoes outside the room before approaching the Master. The Master smiled and asked the man on which side of the entrance he left his shoes. The disciple could not remember! He hung his head in shame. The point is: how could one who does even such a simple thing so unconsciously ever hope to be a master?

Psychology has advanced a great deal since its inception and tells us that what we call our conscious mind is like the tip of an iceberg. Most of us lead our lives like sleep-walkers. Buried deep in our being the unconscious part of the mind controls most of our life. Motives, desires and fantasies, indeed, past impressions of innumerable lives, form conflicting complexes and control our thoughts, speech and actions, making puppets of us. Few of us dare claim that we live as free persons!

Again it seems in our age, quite a large percentage of people seem to be suffering from mental illness. The famous social psychologist Eric Fromm states that as many as one in three, in a smaller or greater degree, suffer from mental illness, especially in the developed countries. This in spite of living in abundance! This proves that material prosperity is no guarantor of a life of happiness and peace. Goodness, happiness, and creativity, the hall marks of progress, depend on the state of mind. After many years of intense study and observation Fromm concludes that what brings about human progress is a 'being mode of existence', and not a 'having mode of existence'.

Psychology wishes to make a thorough study of the mind in order to know its workings, and thereby help man achieve a healthier and higher state. Its aim is to make man a self-actualising or a mature personality. A person who is unified and harmonious not only enjoys peace and joy, he also contributes a great deal to the peace of the world. In fact only mature persons can bring about lasting peace.

It is difficult to define what exactly a mature personality is. There are many differing opinions about it. Whatever it be, it is something positive and creative, which makes life meaningful, and fruitful, and enriches it with peace, joy, and harmony. According to Maslow here are some of the traits which are consistently found in mature persons:

Mature persons accept themselves completely and unselfconsciously; so also they accept others on their own terms; thus, they can forgive others' shortcomings. They are in touch with reality, and willingly accept reality more than others do. They lead a simple and open life and easily see through deception and hypocrisy and avoid them.

They face problems head on and try to cope rather than avoid them. They are creative and spontaneous with their actions, ideas, feelings.

They have a definite purpose and goal in life. Hence they live in joyous expectation and hope. In other words life is not a bore and a drag. They are not afraid to be alone. They enjoy withdrawing sometimes into their privacy in order to be free to have their own thoughts and contemplation. They resent herd mentality and try to lead life according to their own set goals and ideals.

They live in harmony with themselves and with the world at large. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and try to be fair and resent unfairness and injustice meted out to others. They are content with the circumstances life puts them under but at the same time do not sit back but try to achieve higher ends. They are creative and try to do things differently.

From the above description it looks as though one is describing a saint. In a way it is true. One cannot become truly mature without becoming a saint. Sri Krishna describes the characteristics of a man of wisdom at the end of the second chapter in the Bhagavad Gita. Commenting on these verses the great Shankara says that what is natural to a man of self-knowledge should be assiduously acquired by others.

Not to speak of spiritual life, even to live in this world of duality with peace, joy and harmony one needs a great deal of maturity. The first steps in this are self-awareness and self-analysis.

### 29.1 Self-awareness (self-observation)

One of our swamis of Ramakrishna Order used to say that people are born sleeping, grow up sleeping, live sleeping and die sleeping. There is a lot of truth in it. Most of us go through life like automatons. We breathe, talk, eat, sleep, love, act and react - live most of our life - unconsciously. No wonder there is so little improvement!

Devotees are asked to remember God always. This constant remembrance is not mere mechanical repetition of the name of God. A mantra or a name is only a means of achieving the state of consciousness. The emphasis is on God who is of the nature of Pure Consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna advised Swami Adbhutananda to

meditate on the idea behind the name. What is this idea behind the name? God. Similarly a Jnani is advised to remember his Self or to keep enquiring on 'Who am I'? Both are pathways to reach the state of Pure Consciousness, Brahman or God.

Great people possess tremendous power of observation, of awareness; greatness is directly proportionate to the power of observation. This power of observation gives them accurate knowledge which leads them to form correct goals and methods. Spiritual life is a life of progression from the unconscious to the conscious, from the conscious to the superconscious. From Tamas to Rajas to Sattva. An awakened soul is one who lives perpetually in a state of pure consciousness. The measure of spiritual progress is increasingly living in a state of consciousness. When this conscious state becomes unbroken man becomes illumined.

### 29.1.1 Here are a few examples of awareness

Buddha had seen an old man, a sick man and a dead man. These are common sights we come across every day, and yet they bring no discernible change in us. But Buddha did not merely see them; he saw them with full awareness. This led him to conclude that the world is impermanent, and life is full of suffering. It made him seek a way out. The result was he renounced the world, found a way out of suffering to a life of Blessedness.

Holy Mother Sarada Devi used to get up early in the morning and meditate. Once she was sick and could not get up for a few days at the usual time. Later she became aware that even after she was well, the habit of getting up late continued. This awareness made her revert back to the habit of early rising.

It is said that Sri Ramakrishna was a master mimic even from his childhood. Mimicking requires a great deal of observation. He trained his mind to keep fully awake and observe everything thoroughly. As a result, like Buddha, he too came to the conclusion that worldly life is not worth the trouble. This turned his mind to God. He gave it such a thorough training in this respect that his very unconscious kept up the vigil and used to remain conscious! This training acted like a guardian and stopped him from taking a false step even unconsciously. Here is an instance: Sri Ramakrishna was a monk and monks are required at the time of taking monastic vows to renounce all worldly possessions and avoid accumulating

anything; for they are required to depend completely on God. Sri Ramakrishna was in the habit of chewing a few spices after taking his meals. One day Sri Sarada Devi tied a small quantity of spices into his wearing cloth. He started to go back to his room but his legs were pulling him towards the Ganges River. He was about to drown when his nephew came and pulled him away just in time. Consciously Sri Ramakrishna was not aware of doing anything wrong. He wondered why his legs were pulling him towards the river even though he wanted to go to his room. Then he remembered his monastic vows. Later he used to say: "If one relies on the Divine Mother completely, She will never allow anyone to take one false step". Who was this Divine Mother? We can safely presume that it was his own unconscious mind which was not allowing him to act contrary to his vows.

Girish Ghosh, a householder disciple, had given the power of attorney to Sri Ramakrishna. Sometime later he was heard saying, 'I will do this'. He was unaware that once he had given up his power to God he had no right to assume doership anymore. Sri Ramakrishna heard him and immediately corrected him: "Girish! What is this you are saying? You should rather say 'If He wills I will be able to do it.'" Even such an advanced soul could slip and do things all unaware! What a lesson to be learnt in the art of developing self-awareness!

This is why one should remain alert at all times. Inadvertence is death in any field of life, much more so in spiritual life. The great Shankara says in Vivekachudamani (327) :

अतः प्रमादान्न परोऽस्ति मृत्युः विवेकिनो ब्रह्मविदः समाधौ ।

समाहितः सिद्धिमुपैति सम्यक् समाहितात्मा भव सावधानः ॥327॥

"Hence to the discriminating knower of Brahman, there is no worse death than inadvertence with regard to concentration. But the man who is concentrated attains complete success. (Therefore) carefully concentrate thy mind (on Brahman)."

The famous Russian teacher Gurdjieff (re-)discovered this important fact that we go through most of our life with very little self-awareness. This is the cause of most of our suffering and the remedy is to live with awareness. Be it physical illness or mental illness self-awareness is the one remedy. So Gurdjieff devised various exercises with the sole purpose of developing

self-awareness. Selfawareness leads to self-improvement, better morals and ultimately leads one to God.

### 29.1.2 Practice of self-awareness

The very first step in the practice of self-awareness is a strong determination to do so. This determination or aspiration itself helps gather the scattered energies of the mind. It also helps us monitor progress on the way. Without a goal or purpose it is impossible to focus attention on anything. A well-defined goal alone can lead us to the right means.

Here we are concerned with the development of awareness, of paying attention to whatever we do. In this regard Vipassana, taught by Lord Buddha, can help us much. Vipassana means clear insight, right knowledge, or the ability to see things as they are. Whenever we experience any object we get two types of knowledge: knowledge of a thing as it is, and then this knowledge coloured by our likes and dislikes, our judgements. For instance if you come across a table your eyes present its shape, size, colour etc. This is knowledge of the table as it is. But then your mind will almost instantly colour it with thoughts such as 'This is a beautiful round table, or, this is a broken useless piece of junk, I must throw it out' etc. The purpose of developing awareness is to be aware of the first type of knowledge, i.e., to be aware of a table as it is without letting the mind colour it with judgements like good, bad, round, flat, beautiful, useless, etc. Once we develop this ability the mind develops the capacity for seeing things clearly which leads gradually to enlightenment.

Here are a few exercises:

1. Watching the breath: Sit down at ease, with spine erect. Relax for a few minutes. Now start watching the breath. Just watch it as though someone else is breathing. Observe whether it is short or long, deep or shallow, strong or weak, and which nostril is active etc. Do not try to control or force or alter it; just watch. Soon the mind will be filled with interesting thoughts: 'What am I doing? What good is it to watch my breath? I must be stupid! Oh! I am a shallow breather. Why am I wasting my time instead of thinking of God?' etc., etc. The purpose of this exercise is just to be aware of the process without being judgemental in the least.

2. Watching the various parts of the body: Now start paying attention to the various parts of the body - how the hands, feet, neck, spine etc., are placed, whether they are relaxed or tense etc. Even though you are asked just to watch without the least attempt to control the breathing or the various limbs of the body, you will soon see surprising benefits, though that is not the purpose of this exercise. The breath tends to become deep and rhythmic, and the body starts relaxing!

3. After the mind becomes capable of sustained attention for some time, start observing the various thoughts that are passing through your mind. Just witness all the thoughts. Done sincerely these exercises soon lead you to be aware of whatever you are doing at all times. In time this opens the doorway to the unconscious. Then the motives, thoughts, actions, emotions, phobias, fantasies etc., become progressively clearer. This greatly helps us detect our defects and helps us overcome them.

4. Recall any incident that disturbed you in the past. Go through the incident again as though it is happening now. But this time just watch it as a spectator without letting the mind form judgements, who is right or wrong etc.

5. If you are in the habit of meditating, part of the time can (should) be used to watch the mind. Also some time may be spent in finding one's own faults, defects etc. In fact, the practice of self-awareness can be done at any time - while reading, walking, talking, cooking etc. Practised with patience it becomes a habit which will pave the way to self-improvement.

Self-awareness or self-observation is the only way for any self-improvement. When once this is developed it acts like a faithful watchman and helper. This awareness is the very first step to self-improvement in any form. It gives us correct knowledge about our thoughts, motives, emotions, strengths as well as weaknesses. The practice of self-awareness is not easy. One might say that one who has developed it has already progressed much in spiritual life.

Self-awareness leads the way to self-analysis which in turn helps us move forward.

## 29.2 Self-analysis

We mentioned that self-awareness leads the way to self-analysis which in turn helps us move forward. Self-awareness itself gives us all the data we need in order to use it. A scientist at first gathers all the data and then starts analysing it in order to reach conclusions. So do spiritual aspirants. Self-analysis is the first step to self-improvement.

Self-analysis is an intellectual research into one's own mind. It is difficult and dangerous. It is difficult because of inner resistances and wrong attitudes. One of the strongest resistances is resignation to one's fate; it means one has practically given up any hope of improvement. Such an attitude breeds cynicism and pessimism. Yet a man would not admit he has given up. He would rather offer any number of rationalisations than face the truth. It also poses dangers because it is the mind itself working on itself. One such danger is wrong interpretation of one's actions due to wrong attitudes.

For example a person who is lazy misreads another's activity as restlessness; and a restless man looks down upon a sage as lazy. A miser interprets another person's frugality as miserliness. Or perhaps one who is reprimanded might react with anger and counter-accusations but will never admit the defect in himself; because, then, his inner safety is threatened. There is a saying in Telugu: "A man is apt to find those very faults in others from which he himself is suffering." We come across such instances aplenty every day. Needless to say one needs to be alert and objective if one wants to analyse oneself.

If we fail to do so we need to take the help of a psychologist. A Guru often acts as an expert psychologist pointing out the defects of an aspirant. Spiritual progress is possible only when one has faith in one's teacher and implicitly follows the directions given by him. That is the reason why so much emphasis is laid on faith in one's Guru (in accepting his directions) and obedience (in implementing his teachings). (In this connection the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna may recall the contrary advice given to Swamis Yogananda and Niranjanananda.)

Self-analysis is the very first step to success in any field. And success in any field involves mainly four elements: the Goal, the Path, the Instrument, and the Effort. Progress in spiritual life too

involves these four elements. Self-analysis helps us in the right understanding and utilisation of these four elements. Let us discuss them briefly.

**1. The Goal.** We often declare glibly that our goal is Self-realisation. No doubt it is true, but do we really want it now, in this life? What is the intensity of our desire? Tremendous faith is needed if we wish to realise God in this very life. If we open our eyes we find our life moving in the opposite direction! Often we are blissfully unaware of this. One reason for this is not paying sufficient attention. More importantly we may not wish to pay attention lest we are forced to face the fact that we do not want God. One of the famous psychologists used to say that most of the patients that come to him do not wish to get well, but wish to feel well! So we should take a serious look at our proclaimed goal. More important than this is to find out where we are and what our next step should be. This is where the advice of Holy Mother comes to our help i.e. to stop finding fault with others and start finding our own faults.

a. The first stage in spiritual life is purification. Purification means gradual reduction of one's defects and acquiring qualities conducive to spiritual progress. So our immediate goal should be purification of the mind. Karma Yoga is a great help in this respect.

b. Swami Yatiswarananda used to say that an aspirant should have a clear understanding of his goal and path. Self-analysis should help us in clarifying both our ultimate and proximate goals. Without being clear about our goals it is meaningless to talk of progress; for monitoring progress is possible only in connection with a defined goal.

**2. The Path.** We also need to be clear about our path. Though the goal is only one, the paths to it are many. Though all paths are equally valid and lead to the One goal it is important to know the right path suited to one's nature. Hence it is that a Guru is so essential. Generally the majority of people are emotional by nature. That is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for this age the path of devotion combined with selfless action is more suitable. Yet it is important to have reason and will also to balance fanaticism and blind superstition. There are some in whom intellect or reason

plays an important part. Such people need emotion in order to avoid aridity. So it is necessary to find a right path suitable to one's progress. Failure to do so is sure to impede progress. Here we may recollect the case of Vijaykrishna Goswami.

Vijaykrishna was then a prominent member of the Brahma Samaj. The members of the Brahma Samaj adore the formless aspect of God. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out to him that worship of God with form was more suitable to his temperament. Following the advice of Sri Ramakrishna Vijaykrishna made rapid progress toward God-realisation. Self-analysis directs us toward the right path.

**3. The Instrument.** Body and mind are our instruments. Most of the spiritual disciplines are meant to purify and strengthen our bodies and minds. Proper food and exercise bring about health and strength of the body. Even so the mind also should be given proper food and it should be exercised. To fill the mind with good and inspiring ideals and thoughts is achieved through holy company, study of scriptures, japa, and meditation etc. Reflection of what has been taken in, deep and clear thinking, and practical application of these ideas in our daily life is the constant exercise to be given to the mind.

Self-analysis gives us a good idea of ourselves, the working of our mind. It helps us see what is holding up our progress and what needs to be done in order to move forward.

**4. The Effort.** There is a saying that genius is ninety-nine percent perspiration and one percent inspiration. Sadhana is the word for spiritual practice. Most of us know about the essentials of spiritual practice like prayer, japa, meditation etc., but without first achieving a reasonably healthy personality it is impossible to make any progress in any field, much less in spiritual life.

Below are a few specifics which need to be thought over carefully in order to bring about required changes in our personality. A few questions are included to aid self-analysis.

**a. Attitude.** What is my attitude in life? Am I a hopeless pessimist or an unthinking optimist? How can I become a hopeful realist? Some people are too sensitive and some are highly emotional. Emotion is good; emotion spices up life. Yet too much emotion can wreck lives. People with too much emotion are constantly swinging between heaven and hell. To live with such a person must be a draining experience! Then there are people who

are too much attached or coldly indifferent. Here too a good balance is needed. So it is wise to ask of ourselves: Am I too sensitive? Am I always on the offensive? Do I react to events in a highly-strung manner? If so how can I behave in a more balanced way?

**b. Time.** Time is a most precious commodity. As a Swami put it so humorously: it cannot be bought, borrowed or stolen! Time lost is lost forever. One who wants to make something of himself cannot be too careless about time. However one need not be paranoid and get stressed out. Right use of time is one of the inevitable hallmarks of all great people. So one should question oneself: Am I conscious of the preciousness of time? Am I using it or killing it? How can I make better use of my time? An honest answer can help us greatly.

**c. Activities.** What we do in our day-to-day life has a lot of bearing on our goal. What we do should have at least some connection with our goal. This is achieved through judicious planning, and associating activities with God. Certain types of activities, by their very nature, hinder spiritual progress. More importantly our motives determine the results even more than what we do. We should be conscious of doing actions that would lead us gradually to God. Here is a help. Let us ask ourselves: Is this necessary? Is it good? Is it in accordance with truth? Right answers to these should clear a lot of junk from our brains.

**d. Our General nature.** Vedanta classifies human beings into three categories: Sattvic (well-balanced), Rajasic (restless) and Tamasic (lazy). Of course, this is not a cut and dried classification. One of these three qualities dominates our lives at different times, yet one particular quality may prevail most of the time. In a way all progress is from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattva* and from *sattva* to the beyond. It is good to find what one's nature is in general. Then one can slowly attempt to overcome the lower nature and rise to a higher nature.

**e. Truth and practicality.** It is said: "Know the Truth and the Truth will set you free." Sri Ramakrishna used to say that one who holds to truth will realise God. Truthfulness is a most precious quality in spiritual life. And yet few are able to balance truth with practical life. For most of us what is practical is truth, and if there is a conflict between practicality and truth, then, truth must go out of the window! When truth is disregarded in such a way, needless to

say, we get what we deserve. Real practicality is that which leads us to Truth, to God. So the question we should ask is: Am I holding on to truth? Is it leading me to God? The answer should give us enough guidance.

**f. The Six enemies.** Lust, anger, greed, infatuation, vanity and jealousy – these six are considered the greatest enemies of every spiritual aspirant; and all of them are inside our minds. One of the most important functions of self-analysis is to be aware of these – how strong they are, to what extent they influence our behaviour etc. Once we are aware of them, then the next step would be to control and direct them Godward. Once they are directed towards God then these very enemies become our greatest friends and helpers. As Sri Krishna says (Gita 6.6):

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः |

अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्ते तात्मैव शत्रुवत् || 6.6 ||

"The mind which is conquered is one's greatest friend."

Self-analysis is an indispensable step to progress in any field of life, much more so in spiritual life. One should practise it diligently, regularly, with a clear and strong mind. Self-analysis itself will shine further light which would lead us to self-integration.

### 29.3 Self-integration

We discussed self-analysis. Done honestly and objectively it should give us a fairly good idea of the inner workings of our minds. It is a step towards self-improvement. The next step is self-integration or integration of personality.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: *"There are two types of egos, one 'ripe' and the other 'unripe'. 'Nothing is mine, whatever I see or feel, or hear, nay, even this body itself, is not mine; I am always eternal, free and all-knowing,' – such ideas arise from the 'ripe' ego. This is my house, this is my child, this is my wife, this is my body," – thoughts of this kind are the manifestation of the 'unripe' ego.*"

The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to transform the unripe ego into a ripe ego. Though this statement is in the context of spiritual progress we have to say that without some amount of maturity, a person cannot function successfully even in worldly life. Self-integration, balance, maturity, selfactualization, and self-realization – all these words are used to convey a similar meaning. It is the goal of psychology to help people achieve maturity

of the mind. Instead of the word 'maturity' psychologists like Rogers and Maslow popularized the words 'self-actualization' or 'self-realization'.

Here the word 'realization' is not used in a spiritual sense but in a psychological sense. Self-realization, here, means growth and maturation of the mind, and of manifesting the inner potentialities of a person. Interestingly Karl Marx also used the word self-realization. By the concept self-realization he does not mean God-realization but an ideal society where every person has an opportunity of realizing his or her inner potentialities.

Only a mature person can become a self-realized person. Of course, self-realization is an ongoing process ending only with the realization of the Self. To the extent a man goes on striving to actualize his inner potentialities to that extent he becomes a mature person; but before he can manifest his potentialities he needs to achieve some amount of personality integration.

An integrated person is like a fine-tuned automobile. When the personality becomes integrated it becomes a fit instrument to attain a goal. It is also true that one does not service a car without a destination in mind. Similarly, without a definite goal one cannot achieve integration.

What is integration of personality? Psychologists declare that 'a man's personality is a collection of capacities, habits and attitudes which distinguish him from other men'. A person's conscious and unconscious mind together constitutes his personality. According to Vedanta man is a spiritual being entangled in a body and mind. His personality is made up of not only body and mind, but also of soul. Consciously or unconsciously he is struggling to discover his true nature.

The Maharaja of Khetri once asked Swami Vivekananda, 'What is life?' Swamiji answered: "Life is the unfoldment and fulfilment of a being under circumstances tending to press it down." Life is a constant struggle, an incessant adjustment within us and with the outside world. One needs tremendous strength and inner poise to remain calm and sane. The Bhagavad Gita calls this poise 'Samatvam' i.e., perfect balance. Most people succeed in just keeping their heads above water. Not only does a balanced person

keep his head above water but forges ahead manifesting his potentialities.

Such persons alone deserve to be called self-integrated or mature souls.

What are the characteristics of a mature personality?

1. He has a thorough knowledge of the workings of his mind; he knows his assets and liabilities.

2. He is rational.

3. He accepts himself; loves himself; and takes responsibility for himself.

4. He has an optimistic, cheerful but realistic attitude towards life and the world. He suffers neither from a superiority nor an inferiority complex.

5. He has a clearly defined philosophy and goal in life.

6. He has sufficient self-control to sacrifice weaknesses and defects so that he can attain his goal.

7. He constantly strives to improve himself without getting frustrated.

8. He always tries to see the best in himself and others. He forgives himself and others. Failures only make him more determined.

9. He accepts and integrates evil and suffering as part of life and as stepping stones to a better life.

10. He has a place, a definite routine, for everything in life.

11. He has a keen sense of humour without becoming a buffoon. (As a wag said: "If we can learn to laugh at ourselves we will never lack entertainment in life!")

Self-integration is often achieved through constant struggle in many lives. It is not possible to move forward without a certain amount of maturity or self-integration. When we attain some amount of maturity and integration a great reservoir of energy becomes available from the depths of our unconscious. Along with that our thoughts and higher ideals also will become clear.

## 29.4 Self-expansion

The next logical step in the practice of discrimination is self-expansion. An integrated personality has become a fit instrument; his body and mind are finely tuned and ready to move

towards his goal, and the goal is realization of the Self. From now on he has to move both upward and outward.

Through prayer, meditation, worship etc., he moves inward and upward. Through selfless service, harmony and right relationship with the world he moves outward. Here comes the need for self-expansion.

What is self-expansion? It is to discover the truth that the world we live in is in reality God. Everything in what we call the 'world' is connected and related. No man is an island; we live, move and have our being in a world of relationships; we are all strands of a huge web, part of one single living, conscious organism. This organism is God. Because of our ignorance we do not see God, we see Him as the world and the One as many. Swami Vivekananda used to say that this world is a reading of God through our minds. Self-expansion is to discover this truth and modify our conduct accordingly. In other words what we see in front of us is a reflection of our own Self, Brahman. This truth is expressed in the Upanishadic dictum, *sarvam khalvidam brahma*, i.e., All this that is seen is Brahman.

It is said that spiritual progress takes places in three stages. In the first stage called dualism everything is perceived as separate and totally unrelated. In the second stage of qualified non-dualism all things are perceived as parts of the whole which is God. In the final stage, the many and the One are perceived as the obverse and reverse of the same coin.

When we study the lives of mystics we get a glimpse of the way they see the world.

Sri Ramakrishna once said: *"I began to perceive God in all beings. Formal worship dropped away. You see that bel-tree. I used to go there to pluck its leaves. One day, as I plucked a leaf, a bit of the bark came off. I found the tree full of Consciousness. I felt grieved because I had hurt the tree. One day I tried to pluck some durva grass, but I found I couldn't do it very well. Then I forced myself to pluck it.*

*"I cannot cut a lemon. The other day I managed to cut one only with great difficulty; I chanted the name of Kali and cut the fruit as they slaughter an animal before the Goddess.*

*"One day I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had a vision of Virat; it appeared that*

*His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pluck them."*

We can observe the same experience in the life of St Francis. For him the whole of creation is alive with God; the sun, the moon, the stars, the birds, plants and animals - all are brothers and sisters.

Here is a poem by Swami Vivekananda:

*From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,  
And to the very minutest atom,  
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;  
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.  
These are His manifold forms before thee,  
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?  
Who loves all beings without distinction,  
He indeed is worshipping best his God.*

Why do we not perceive God in this world? Because of 'ignorance', says Vedanta. It is not enough to pray and meditate. We must also slowly be able to see the God we perceive in the depths of our heart in the outer world.

Part of the process of discrimination is to find this God peeping through this visible universe. How does one do that? How does one get rid of this ignorance?

This process takes place in three stages. The first stage is purification of our body and mind. The second stage is to perform duties appropriate to our station in life. A proper discharge of our duties (called Dharma in Vedanta) has the twofold result of conferring merit and purifying the heart of evil impressions. But merit only confers happiness in this world, it does not lead us to God. This is why aspiration to heaven is not commended in our scriptures.

The next stage is selfless service called Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga is serving the world looking upon it as a manifestation of God; it is to serve with love and reverence. In Karma Yoga every work is transformed into an act of worship. Needless to say only advanced spiritual aspirants can perform Karma Yoga. Swami Vivekananda says: "That man will have seen the real motive of doing good to others, because there is only one; it cannot be called egoistic, because that would be differentiation. It is the only selflessness. It is the perception of the universal, not of the individual. Every case of love and sympathy is an assertion of this universal. 'Not I, but

Thou.' Help another because you are in him and he is in you - is the philosophical way of putting it. The real Vedantist alone will give up his life for a man without any compunction, because he knows he will not die. As long as there is even an insect left in this world, he is living; as long as one mouth eats, he eats. So he goes on doing good to others, and is never hindered by the modern ideas of caring for the body."

There are two ways of performing Karma Yoga in a detached manner. The first method is described by Swami Vivekananda as work for work's sake. *"I am only the witness, unaffected, untouched. All work is done only for work's sake, not out of any other consideration or hope."*

The second method is suited to those with a devotional temperament. Here all actions are done for pleasing God. The results of all actions are offered to God. In fact the devotee feels that every work is God's work; that he is only an instrument of God carrying out His orders.

In his lectures on Karma Yoga, Swami Vivekananda says that both these methods help one in overcoming attachments and freeing oneself from the binding nature of karma.

He says: *"For whatever good work we may do, let us not claim any praise or benefit. It is the Lord's; give up the fruits unto Him. Let us stand aside and think that we are only servants obeying the Lord, our Master, and that every impulse for action comes from Him every moment. Whatever thou worshippest, whatever thou perceivest, whatever thou doest, give up all unto Him and be at rest."*

Swamiji then describes the wonderful sacrifice of the little self, "Atma-yajna". He says: *"Let us be at peace, perfect peace, with ourselves, and give up our whole body and mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice unto the Lord. Instead of the sacrifice of pouring oblations into the fire, perform this one great sacrifice day and night - the sacrifice of your little self. In search of wealth in this world, Thou art the only wealth I have found; I sacrifice myself unto Thee. Let us repeat this day and night, and say, 'Nothing for me; no matter whether the thing is good, bad, or indifferent; I do not care for it; I sacrifice all unto Thee.'*

*"The Truth! Be one with it! Let visions cease, Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams, which are Eternal Love and Service Free."*

This is self-expansion at its best. Performance of actions in the spirit of service will gradually bring the aspirant to the stage where he will be able to transcend the world of illusions to the world of Reality.

## 29.5 Self-Realisation

The practice of discrimination makes a man pure, unselfish, strong and content. Discrimination leads to dispassion, and gradually helps control the mind and the turbulent senses. Discrimination also makes the goal of spiritual life clear and produces an intense longing for the realisation of Reality.

An aspirant serves all men looking upon them as God. Such service makes the mind pure and one-pointed. In addition the aspirant also meditates on an aspect of God with devotion and concentration. Thus through unselfish actions his mind becomes pure, and through the practice of concentration, his mind develops the ability to detach itself from all objects at will and at the same time enables him to identify himself with the form of the deity he is meditating upon.

Yet he has a higher goal to strive for. Even though such an aspirant has advanced far in spiritual life he is yet to rise from the world of appearance to the world of Reality. In other words he is still ignorant about his real nature. Therefore his goal now is to strive for the realisation of his true nature, Atman. In Vedanta this goal is called Moksha or Liberation. One will not be free until he realises the Atman.

The goal of every spiritual aspirant is to realise his real nature. Man is neither the body nor the mind; nor even a combination of body and mind. Vedanta tells us that man is the Supreme Spirit, Atman or Brahman. Because of ignorance man does not know his real nature and comes to identify himself with his body and mind.

### 29.5.1 The Atman - the individual self

The Atman is beyond speech and mind; it is indescribable. Yet the Upanishads give us enough hints pointing us in the direction of the Atman.

The Self is not born and it does not die at any time. And it does not again come into existence by being born. It is birthless, constant, eternal and ancient; it is not slain when the body is slain.

Weapons do not cut it, fire does not burn it, water also does not moisten it and wind does not dry it. This Self is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable, and unchangeable.

In the beginning Brahman was all this. He was one and infinite; infinite in the east, infinite in the south, infinite in the west, infinite in the north, above and below and everywhere infinite.

The wise man, having realised the Self as great and all-pervading does not grieve.

Such descriptions as the above are found abundantly in the Upanishads. The goal of human life is to realise this Self or Atman within each one of us. Such is the goal of every sincere seeker whatever religion he or she follows.

## 29.5.2 The way

There are two paths for the realisation of the Atman or Brahman - the path of devotion (Iti, iti - this is, this is), and the path of knowledge (Neti, neti - not this, not this).

### 29.5.2.1 The path of devotion

For those who are endowed with (often excessive!) emotion the path of devotion is best suited.

Most of us, undoubtedly, fall into this category and are called devotees. The path of devotion is easy and natural.

Swami Vivekananda says: "*Bhakti (devotion) is not destructive; it teaches us that not one of the faculties we have has been given in vain, that through them is the natural way to come to liberation. Bhakti does not kill out our tendencies, it does not go against our nature but only gives it a higher and more powerful direction. How naturally we love the objects of the senses! And when the same kind of love that has before been given to sense-objects is given to God, it is called Bhakti.*"

Devotion is a total dedication wherein the devotee is thoroughly infilled with God. It is the acme of devotion, attaining which the devotee hankers for nothing else. In this path the aspirant has intense faith and devotion to a personal aspect of God (Saguna Brahman). He pours out his heart through prayer, japa, and meditation. He sings the glories of God, goes on pilgrimage, cultivates the company of other devotees, and tries to serve his Chosen Deity with utmost devotion. Slowly through spiritual practice he forges a definite relationship with **God**.

The devotional scriptures classify these relationships into five categories. These are:

1. *Sānta* (the serene attitude), 2. *Dāśya* (the attitude of a servant towards his master), 3. *Sakhya* (the attitude of a friend), 4. *Vātsalya* (the attitude of a parent towards a child), and 5. *Madhura* (the attitude of a lover towards her beloved). A devotee chooses one of these relationships according to his mood and ability. Perfection in any one of these moods gives the aspirant the vision of his Chosen Deity.

Finally the aspirant goes beyond the personal aspect of God and merges himself in the Non-dual Brahman.

Through the practice of devotion (1) the devotee feels that God alone is real and all else unreal, (2) he feels that he is similar in nature to God, and finally (3) that he is one with God. Thus the path of devotion takes the aspirant to the Non-dual Reality.

### 29.5.2.2 The path of knowledge

There are people who do not feel attracted to the personal aspect of God; they feel a strong pull towards the Impersonal Reality. Generally such people are rational, less emotional and a clear intellect dominates in them. For such people the path of Jnana or knowledge is best suited.

In this path the aspirant is advised to practice *Sravana* (hearing of the truth that the Individual Self is one with Brahman), *Manana* (reflection on this truth until all doubts disappear), and *Nididhyasana* (deep meditation until he realises that 'I am Brahman'.)

Whatever be the path, the goal is to realise one's real nature. When once the aspirant realises that he is the Spirit, the divine, the Atman, he becomes free (*Mukta*) of all bondage and goes beyond desire, fear and grief.

Adi Sankara describes the state of the aspirant after realization (*Nirvanashatkam*):

मनोबुद्धयहंकार चित्तानि नाहं  
न च श्रोत्रजिह्वे न च घ्राणनेत्रे ।  
न च व्योम भूमिर्न तेजो न वायुः  
चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहम् शिवोऽहम् ॥ 1 ॥

*Om. I am neither the mind,*

*intelligence, ego nor citta,  
Neither the ears nor the tongue,  
nor the senses of smell and sight;  
Neither the ether nor air  
nor fire nor water nor earth;  
I am Eternal Bliss and Awareness  
- I am Shiva! I am Shiva!*

Thus the practice of discrimination takes the aspirant to the realisation of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.



