

Precepts for Spiritual Life



Swami Yatiswarananda



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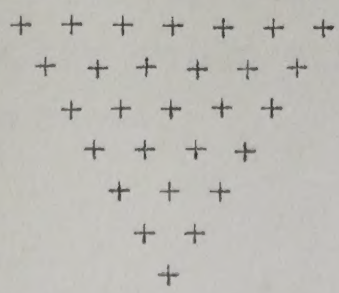
(A collection of notes on the class talks given by the Swami at Wiesbaden, Germany during the years 1933 to 1939 originally published in Vedanta Kesari, a monthly journal issued by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras)

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P R E F A C E

Some of the disciples of Srimat Swami Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj, of revered and beloved memory, happened to come across a series of articles by him published in the Vedanta Kesari between 1939 and 1945. These articles are notes of lessons given by him to a group of earnest spiritual aspirants in Germany between 1938³ to 1939. Having felt that these articles would form an excellent guide to seekers who are sincerely trying to tread the spiritual path, we have ventured to bring them out as a compilation for private circulation among the disciples and admirers of the Swamiji. It is hoped that they would treasure a copy of this volume as a constant reminder of the instructions on SADHANA imparted by the Revered Swamiji. Though every effort has been made to see that the compilation is free from errors, it is likely that some mistakes might have crept in for which the readers will kindly excuse us. May these words of Revered Swamiji inspire us all to persevere in our efforts to reach "THE GOAL SUPREME."



SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA, known as Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya in his pre-monastic life, was born on Wednesday, the 16th January, 1889 in his maternal uncle's house, in a village named Nandanpur in the District of Pabna, which is now in East Pakistan. His father, Ishan Chandra Bhattacharya, a teacher in a Government School, was a devout Brahmin and his mother Bidhumukhi Devi too was a pious lady and he was fortunate in being born in a religious family.

He had his early education in Jalpaiguri and Bogra and passed the Entrance examination from a school in Rangpur. He studied at Rajsahi and Cooch-behar colleges and afterwards at the Bangabasi College, Calcutta. Finally he got admitted into the Presidency College, Calcutta, from where he passed the B.A. examination, securing a gold medal for having stood first in Sanskrit in the Calcutta University. He continued his post-graduate studies in Chemistry up to the sixth year, but did not come out successful, obviously because of his indifference to his studies. At this time, he was being filled with the spirit of renunciation as a result of his contact with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at the Belur Math. His parents naturally wanted him to lead a householder's life, but he plainly told his mother some day towards the end of 1911 that he was going to join the Ramakrishna Order to attain God-realisation and that, if he failed in his mission, he would surely come back and accede to their wishes.

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With the little money that his parents gave him he came straight to the Belur Math and joined the Order in 1911 at the age of 22. He was an initiated disciple of Srimat Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and was invested with Sannyasa by him in 1917 at Madras.

In 1921 he became the Editor of Prabuddha Bharatha, in which capacity he continued for two years. Thereafter, he was made the President of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bombay for about a year. In 1926 he was appointed President of the Madras Math and he continued as such up to 1933. In 1928 he was made a Trustee of the Belur Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. At the invitation of a group of earnest souls, he was deputed to Weisbaden in the Rhineland (Germany) where he arrived in November, 1933. From the winter of 1935 to the end of 1938 he extended his activity to Switzerland, forming study circles at St. Moritz, and later at Geneva and other places, and also worked for several months at the Hague, in Holland, as also in Paris and London. In 1940, at the beginning of the Second World War, he left Germany and went to U.S.A. There, in December, 1942, he was able to start a Vedanta Centre at Philadelphia and was the head of that Centre up to 1949. He returned to India in 1950 from the U.S.A. via Europe. In 1951 he became the President of the Bangalore Ashrama, and in view of his sterling spiritual attainments, he was authorised by the Trustees of the Belur Math in 1952 to give initiation to spiritual aspirants. In 1962 he

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he was elected Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

The Swami was well versed in Eastern and Western Philosophies. He was an impressive speaker, a good writer, and was the author of Adventures in Religious Life, Universal Prayers, and Divine Life. His winning manners, feeling heart, catholic views, and spiritual attainments earned for him the admiration and devotion of a large number of friends and admirers, devotees and disciples in India and abroad whose lives were very much influenced by him. From about the middle of 1965, he had been suffering from various physical ailments. He was brought down to Belur Math from Bangalore in December 1965 for change of climate along with treatment as advised by the attending physicians there. Unfortunately, his health went on deteriorating and on the 24th of January, 1966 he had to be admitted to the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishtan, Calcutta, due to a sudden flare up in his diabetic and other complications. In spite of the best medical care, the end came at 1.15 a.m. on 27th January, due to shock from diabetic acidosis with acute cardio-respiratory failure.

For some time before the final end, he had been feeling that the end was approaching. He was often heard saying: "Sri Maharaj has taken away all power from me. There is no use of this body any longer. Better it is cast away."

Thus ended a dedicated life of renunciation and service.

Om Shantih ! Om Shantih ! Om Shantih !



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CHAPTER I

H O L Y W I S D O M I

"Only till the world seeks out Thy Feet for its fearless abode, it is assailed by sorrow, desire, disgrace and the all-grasping covetousness, and the wicked attachments as 'This is mine' and 'This is mine,' the root of all affliction in respect of wealth, house and friend, and relation." (BHAGAVATAM)

"O Lord, so long as man may continue to see this body and other things as different from Atman -- a notion which has its strength in Thy Maya appearing as Indriyas and their objects, -- this Samsara may not cease to be, though baseless, and it will continue to bring hosts of miseries, as consequences of motion."

"O God, even Rishis fall into Samsara who, here regardless of devotion to Thee, have by day their senses and organs wholly occupied and tossed about in seeking after wordly objects and who by night, immersed in sleep, are every moment disturbed by thoughts of their fancied objects, and whose labours to attain their objects are thwarted by Providence."

"On the other hand, O Lord, Thou dwellest in the lotus of Thy votaries' hearts purified by means of devotion; Thou are one whose way is perceived through the study of the Holy Scriptures; and in order to show Thy grace, to the righteous, O Lord, Thou manifest Thyself in whatever form they contemplate Thee."

Thou worshipped with great preparation and attention by the gods who cherish desires in their hearts, the Lord is not very much pleased with them; for He is one friend and the ruler from within, dwelling in all beings, who delights in His Bhaktas' showing compassion to them all - a quality which is never known to the wicked." (BHAGAVATAM)

The Bhakta's ego is connected with the Divine; our ego is separated from the Divine. We think we are free, but our freedom is more or less the freedom of the animal. Sri Ramakrishna feels free because of his unity with the Divine.

We must meditate in the space of infinite consciousness of which our own point of consciousness is only a point. In order to go to the terrace a narrow staircase is enough, but

the terrace itself is very vast.

Always our consciousness should be made to expand, and this consciously, to come in touch with the vaster consciousness in which we are included.

Retaining the purified individuality we become conscious of the Whole as well as of all others that have a place in the Whole. Now we have too much body-consciousness, impulse-driven, impulse-bound. Minimise your body-consciousness first of all. This can only be done through leading a perfectly clean life and through raising the centre of one's consciousness and making the energy flow through higher channels.

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H O L Y W I S D O M I

Although the world is a wilderness that is no reason why you should succumb to it, why we should lose our way completely. Manliness is needed whether we are men or women, real undauntedness and firm determination.

Sometimes much of our energy is lost through fear. We should not be too bold and think we are too secure, but the person who is always afraid of falling down is sure to fall, the person who is ever-confident is sure to slip. Follow the golden mean.

The general rule for meditation is one should never travel alone along with the path, unaided. Comparing notes with other people who are following the same path is very helpful.

The difficulty in spiritual life is that each case is to be dealt with separately. There may be some common points, but there are also uncommon points in everyone. Mass-production and any form of standardisation is not possible.

As we go up higher and higher there is always the danger that we slip our foot and die, but that is no reason for being continually afraid of slipping our foot and dying.

Never take the world-phantoms too seriously. Do not cling to all the shadowy dolls and puppets you happen to meet. Stay in

your own centre of consciousness.

Trust in God and faith in ourselves is necessary for every devotee. These are the two greatest props in spiritual life.

Knowledge and activity must go hand in hand. Otherwise work brings about restlessness.

We must be realistic and idealistic at the same time. Ours should be creative idealism.

Sri Ramakrishna's Bhakti does not mean that Bhakti is opposed to Jnana. Both are to be blended.

Human personality is a blending of good and bad impressions. You should make the good ones grow, but at the same time neutralise, counteract and eliminate the evil tendencies.

Simply washing off the daily sin is not enough. Some of the old dirt must be removed, too.

You should all try to devote some time to really intense spiritual practice every day. Without that the dirt cannot be removed from all the dark corners of your mind, and then nothing will be of any avail.

We want milk from the cow, not kicks, but then the same cow that gives milk, give kicks.

In a general way, God is every-where, but in the Incarnations you find His greatest manifestation, and we need to come in touch with His greatest manifestation.

In the course of our self-purification there comes a time when the mind disappears. Then the soul alone exists. Mindless. There comes a time when the soul reveals itself in all its glory. The pure mind becomes the pure soul.

That which makes the intellect and instrument this very moment, which makes the intellect work, is the soul, other than the intellect. The sense of existence is ultimately not a product of the mind.

H O L Y W I S D O M . III

Once upon a time there was a very clever scholar famous for his great scholarship. One day, his wife had to go out to do some shopping while the lentils were boiling on the hearth. So she asked her husband to look after the lentils until she returned. After a time the lentils began to boil over. Then the scholar went and prayed to God, "O Lord, stop the lentils boiling over, please. Help me, O Lord." Naturally, this did not help matters very much. When the wife returned and saw what had happened, she asked her husband what he had done. "My dear," he replied, "as soon as the lentils began to boil over, I prayed to the Lord for help." "Prayed?" answered the wife. "You fool. Why didn't you just pour a little cold water into the pot?" This very often happens in our case, too. Never blame others, and never blame the Lord for your own foolishness and lack of insight.

Depend on the Lord, but stand as erect as ~~errect~~ as possible. If He wants there will arise wonderful opportunities for you all, if you are sincere and really dedicate your life to Him alone. He creates different situations, forcing you into them even against your wish. When the Lord makes a plan, and you really become one of His agents, you feel that a certain thing is going to take place and that you are going to be an instrument. But then, we should work consciously, not only live on our instincts as we are doing as long as we are on the animal plane. There is no freedom on the animal plane. There is no freedom while we are content to remain in our half-conscious state.

If you just study your mind, you will find what an amount of sub-conscious thinking you are doing. You have not yet become fully conscious, wide-awake; you are half asleep, all of you. And this must be changed. Nothing but stereotyped, mechanical animal reactions. They will not lead you anywhere.

In most cases our personality is a chaotic mass of half-conscious or unconscious impulses. First of all, we must rid ourselves of all likes and dislikes brought about by unconscious impulse and prejudice. Only thus can we acquire an in-

dividuality that can be joined to the universal. First of all establish order in yourselves, be wide-awake, become master in your own house, rise above all your ludicrous likes and dislikes, irrational animal impulses, then only the question of spiritual life will arise. There is nothing grand in having strong irrational feelings, bubbling up from the unconscious. Passionateness is not the sign of manhood at all. Hatred and dislike are nothing but weakness and self-excuse.

Most of us are like awful poisonous whirlpools, full of complexes and venom. Break up these complexes, first of all, be one with the current, and your whole life would be full of blessing for yourselves and for others. The task is not an easy one. It requires real heroism and tremendous steadiness.

And the first stage is the most difficult one for all. At the first stage our whole task should be the purification of the mind that will lead to our becoming conscious beings, instead of floating helplessly on the sea of our half-conscious irrational impulses.

The fun is we live on impulses and say we are free. Where is all this wonderful freedom of the modern man or woman? A passion-ridden, passion-driven slave calling himself free! What fun!

"We have offered our salutations to Thee, the supreme Ruler, who art through eternity free from the illusion of difference by virtue of Thine own essential light, who art nothing but intelligence and whose sportful activities belong to Maya which is the cause of the origin, subsistence and destruction of the universe." (BHAGAVATAM)

Once the Holy Mother had a vision. She saw Sri Ramakrishna's form become the Ganges and Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) sprinkling its water over the whole world.

The Divine Spark is to be turned into an all-consuming conflagration.

Try to rid yourselves of all the petty forms of likes and dislikes and attachments that fill you and prevent you from being masters in your own house. It is a long and difficult task, but it will have to be achieved if you sincerely want progress and to attain to your own eternal freedom.

Habit lies in the body, mind and nerves, but habit is never an essential part of our nature. It has acted in a most dirty way. Now change the attitude, change the habit. Rise above all likes and dislikes bubbling up from the subconscious layers of your minds. The emotions must be completely purified and made healthy. There should be no sickly, romantic sentimentality and there should be no form of aversion.

Wherever there are likes and dislikes, a person has not yet become fully conscious. The conscious person never hates, never enslaves others, never grieves.

Hatred and lust are the two great obstacles on the way of the spiritual aspirant, and hatred, any form of aversion or dislike, is just as bad and just as impure as lust. So we need not feel proud of our hatred, our dislike, or "righteous" anger, etc., at all. If we cherish such feelings, the sexually immoral person is not in the least worse than we are ourselves. Do not go and try to cheat yourselves on this point.

Hatred prevents all possibility of a progress, just as incontinence does in the case of immoral people. So if we want to cling to our anger, our aversion, our dislikes, spiritual life is not for us. We had better occupy ourselves with something else.

Habit is ~~ex~~ formed through practice. Habit can be changed because habit never is an essential part of our being, but only our second nature. Habit has been created through our wrong thinking or through lack of consciousness, through our not being fully awake. Harmful habits can never be formed in the fully conscious man or woman. It may be difficult for us to change our habits, but it has to be done; and it can be if we are really sincere and do not shrink from sustained self-effort.

"Among the images, etc., one may worship Me just in that in which he may have faith at any particular time. For I am the self of all and dwell in everything as well as in one's own self." (SRI KRISHNA AND UDDHAVA, XXII, 48)

We have no place for intolerance or blind bigotry; for intolerance always shows that the person has no real faith and no experience. It is the attitude of the atheist clinging

desperately to same form because deep down he cannot conquer his own doubts, consciously. No man of true realisation will ever be intolerant, and only those who themselves have not yet reached the mountain-peak but are still on the way, can be intolerant. While they are on the way, they only see their own path; but not the others' paths leading to the very same peak which can only be seen and discovered once a person has reached the top. Never listen to the intolerant fool in religion who tries to force the Divine into the strait-jacket of his particular liking and blindness.



CHAPTER II

WHAT SPIRITUAL LIFE MEANS

Knowledge blasts our false personality with all its false relationships, shifts the centre of our consciousness from the body and the mind to the Self, from matter to the soul.

Our present personality is a combination of the body, senses, mind and ego. Spiritual life means breaking up this complex, shifting the centre of consciousness from this complex to the soul; nothing more than that. But this complex can only be broken through steady spiritual practice. This is very important. This breaking is nothing miraculous, nothing occult, but something very definite, clear-cut, precise - not at all mysterious. There should never be any mystery-mongering. Yoga is nothing occult, nothing mysterious at all. It is something very simple. We have erroneously identified ourselves with this curious combination. Spiritual life means being as simple as we really are, after breaking up the entire complex of the body, senses, mind and ego. In reality we are very simple, neither complex, nor combinations of anything. But this cannot be realised without prolonged and steady practice.

Ignorance binds all these things together. When ignorance vanishes, this combination continues for a little while, then it stops. Even if we stop rowing, the past momentum carries the boat to some distance. The test is whether we are ceasing to identify ourselves with the false combination, body, mind and all.

When the highest knowledge dawned on the Buddha, he exclaimed:

Many a house of Life has held me seeking ever Him who
wrought
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught;
Sore was my ceaseless strife!
But now, Thou Builder of this Tabernacle, Thou!
I know Thee! Never shalt Thou build again
These walls of pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits, nor lay
Fresh rafters on the clay;

Broken Thy house is; and the ridge-pole split;
Delusion fashioned it!
Safe pass I thence - deliverance to obtain."

(SIR EDWIN ARNOLD - LIGHT OF ASIA)

First of all we should try to separate the ore from all sorts of useless things, dust, dirt and sand, and then put it in the fire. This is the first separation. Then all the dross is burnt away, and what is left is gold. This is purification. To the extent we practice sense-control, perfect continence (Brahmacharya), discrimination, more and more, we get real knowledge. Knowledge cannot be got without that. To the extent to which we get knowledge, we become purer and purer. This is the fun.

Without having attempted for a long time to attain real knowledge, it cannot be had. This is where tremendous uninterrupted striving and practice come in. It takes a long time till a man attains the goal. Only the perfectly steady person has any chance to reach it at all.

There is a knot between Truth and falsehood. Knowledge burns away this knot and makes it easy for us to separate Truth from falsehood. The doubter ruins himself materially and spiritually.

Swami Saradananda has said, 'When what we hear from our teachers, when what we read in our Scriptures, when what we experience in our own lives, tally then alone all doubts pass away, but not until then.'

We do not see the Truth clearly because of our tremendous mental impurity. We must strive and remove the dirt of the mind. Others can give us only the necessary suggestions. But we have to change our conduct of life accordingly.

Gita V, 2, is not true in the absolute sense, but just now for Arjuna, because he is still a novice.

There are three kinds of renunciation:

1. False renunciation of a person who outwardly gives up the action, but inwardly possesses tremendous yearning for the objects of the world;
2. The sincere renunciation of the aspirant who maintains his renunciation with an effort of the will, but who has not yet been blessed with the vision of Truth;

3. The true renunciation of the man of knowledge in whom all conflicts have been set at rest for ever.

Mere discussion and nice feelings are not enough, and those who are not prepared to take up their practices in full earnest, had much better turn to something else. They will never make any progress in spiritual life, at least not in what we understand by spiritual life in India. People are so beggarly here that the moment they get a nice elevating feeling or thought, they think they have achieved something great or important. They have really no idea of what real spiritual life is, and where it really begins.

I think, for you all here three hours, or even four, daily, of Japa and intense meditation, prayer and intense studies should be the minimum if anything is to be achieved. You can never really advance simply by listening to these readings, even, I fear, you know too much already, - theoretically. That may not be good for you. Now the practices should be stressed more and more. The little practice we do, is done in a haphazard superficial way. Force your mind to do it even if it comes with very plausible arguments and adduces no end of reasons why you cannot do so on a particular day, etc. Never listen to your mind. It is always out to deceive you. Most people fight shy of the practices, but what do all these teachings mean, if we do not train our faculties in a way that enables us, too, to perceive these things, to realise these truths ourselves? Without spiritual practice this can never be done. I have to tell you this again and again. What does Christ's message, Buddha's message, Sri Krishna's message, Sri Ramakrishna's message mean? They show us the way to our own realisation; but if we do not experience the Truth, they are perfectly valueless for us. For lack of spiritual tradition Christ's message is no longer realised in the West and only the empty shell has remained. A Christian must attain to the Christ-consciousness, before he can understand Christ. A Buddhist must attain to the Buddha-consciousness before he can understand the Buddha etc. etc. This is very important point to note for all. We must attain their consciousness. This is the principal thing.

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CONDITIONS OF HIGHER LIFE

I

Sri Ramakrishna has shown us all the different steps of spiritual life. All work that can be done, can be done only through that which we ourselves have actually become, never through fine words and sermons. We must observe perfect Brahmacharya, for without perfect Brahmacharya no lasting work can be done. Work is never a question of eloquence, of high philosophy, of superfine thoughts and sermons, but of actual living. And if there is no perfect Brahmacharya at the back of our work and our words, nothing we do can ever produce any lasting effect.

The stronger the disease, the stronger must ^{be} the medicine. And in the West this terrible disease of "Woman and Gold" has become most virulent. So, very strong injections are needed to cure people and make them regain consciousness. In this age, small doses no longer suffice. In the beginning smaller doses may be given, just to prepare the system; but the strongest dose must be taken by all of us some day. And these high doses will have to be taken for a long time if the germ is really to be killed. Different crisis will come. In the case of every disease there is a curative crisis, and even this curative crisis is one of the necessary steps leading to the perfect cure. Through all our innumerable previous lives we have enjoyed these things; we have been fathers and mothers and friends and children, have undergone birth and death. Why not see this time, just as an experiment, what a real life of renunciation is like and compare the two kinds of lives? Let us see, out of sheer inquisitiveness, what the higher life of perfect purity is like.

Ramprasad sings, "O, my mind, why art thou lying fallow when thou canst raise crops of gold if thou wishest, out of thyself?"

Never use the violent method with your mind. Try to cajole it into reason. Try to persuade it with quiet, calm and reasonable words. Our whole evolution becomes easier if it becomes a conscious evolution. Your power of determinatio

must be made stronger day by day through different spiritual practices. Because we are not able to get the higher thing, why should we take the lower one instead? Fasting is always better than taking filth. 'Die for the higher ideal. Swamiji once said to his brother disciples, "If I wish to get a certain thing, and do not get it, does this mean that I should run after something else?"

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Real silence is the silence of the mind. It is stilling the mind and freeing it from all unwelcome thoughts. First attain the thought of the Divine, and then try to eliminate all other thoughts that cannot be directly connected with the Divine thought. "Mere external solitude will not make one forget the world, and that alone is real solitude in which one merges oneself in Brahman." We do not enter into solitude by merely getting into the forest or the monastery. When you sit for meditation, erase all ideas of the world in your mind and think of the Lord alone.

If we possess anything we must possess it as trustees, not as owners, administering it on behalf of the Lord alone. There must never be any sense of personal possession, however much we may happen to possess.

Faith in oneself is absolutely necessary in spiritual life. But in the case of the really spiritual man faith in himself means, at the same time, faith in God, because he has realised that his essence is the Divine and nothing but the Divine. "By thinking that we are the Atman we gain infinite strength. Then through the highest knowledge we attain to Immortality."

All great Ones stress Brahmacharya in all its aspects again and again. The Atman is ever pure and sexless. All our troubles arise through this clinging to a false personality. Spiritual life is blasting of this false personality, the pulverising of the ego, of all our littleness and limitedness. And the thought of the Atman shakes the very foundations of this false personality and of all our false relations with others.

Think deeply on this conception of the Atman before be-

ginning your meditation. Think that you are spiritual entities freed from the body, mind passions, desires and all the rest. If there be such a thing as sin at all, it is this clinging to creation and to the personality.

That alone is moral and spiritual which helps us in purifying our heart and our mind, and in attaining the goal. Everything else, whatever it be, is immoral. Purity alone is the condition of the Lord's grace.

Renunciation - mental and physical renunciation - is the central theme of all spiritual life and of all those who have really followed it. Renunciation of wealth and greed, renunciation of all forms and aspects of sex and lust, renunciation of the ego, when these three things are achieved, spiritual life becomes natural and unstrained, and then God-vision comes to a person as a matter of course.

This is the ideal of the threefold renunciation for this sense-bound ego-centric age of ours in which we are all running after the vanities and will-o' - the wisps of life. It is the redemption from the trammels of "Women and Gold" that is salvation. As Swamiji said in his "Song of the Sannyasin,":-

"Truth never comes where lust and
fame and greed of gain reside;
No man who thinks of woman as
his wife can ever perfect be;
Nor he who owns however little,
nor he,
Whom anger chains, can ever pass
through Maya's gates.

So give these up, Sannyasin bold,
say - Om Tat Sat Om ."

This is the great unchanging Truth proclaimed by all the Great Ones, and this Truth includes the threefold renunciation without which there can never be any spiritual life.

In every country we need just a few sincere individuals who strive for the highest ideal, for this ideal of perfect purity in thought, word and deed, who are prepared to give their all for this ideal, who are prepared to suffer anything for its realisation. We can influence other people to the extent to which we succeed in influencing ourselves for the better, we can never convert the masses. We can never make

the masses spiritual, but we can change the lives of a few sincere individuals whose time has come.

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In the streets you see such a lot of hideousness and perversity on the faces of people. Painted woman, nicely shaved men, all beautifully dressed, but on their faces there is nothing but greed and sex. As soon as you become a little more introspective and sensitive, you, too, will see, how hideous all this is. Rarely do you come across a face in the streets that has not got "beast" and "lust" clearly written over it. All this is a sign of degeneration. This makes the leading of a pure life so difficult for the beginner. So long as this beastliness is not dropped, and they are content to remain beasts all their life, degeneration cannot be stopped in anyway. Beware of being stained and polluted by the thoughts of these beasts poisoning the air all around you.

And if you cannot redeem this degenerate society, then redeem your selves, but realise how miserable all these brutes are. They themselves are miserable and they create misery for others, they soil others, poison others through their dirty vibrations. All their dirty thoughts can be read clearly on their faces. That is what makes it so very unpleasant to walk in the streets. You see that all the talks of these worldly people turn round and round the topics of money-making, politics and sex in all their most dirty aspects. What do you see in your theaters, cinemas, novels, songs, etc.? Sex, politics, money-making.

We are not yet sensitive enough. We do not yet clearly recognise our own motives. Sometimes our mind is allowed to find nice plausible explanations for our doings and thoughts, just to deceive us as is always the case in the untrained person. Tell you mind: "Let me see that you break down," if it complains against the great strain of the practices. If we try to lead the higher life, we should not mind our dying even if we die in attempt. And the mind will go on revolting and complaining for a long time. It says, "Look here, to-day you have had very little sleep. This may be bad for your nerves.

Take care that you do not get a nervous breakdown. Stop your practices for a day or two." Just give it some good kicks in such a case, whip it nicely, be very hard with this bad mind. Just as a horse gets whiped when it lies down with its rider, so you must give your mind a good thrashing if it revolts.

There must be a fixed daily routine. Repeat the name of God as many number of times as possible. You must have a minimum, and that minimum is to be done and finished under all circumstances. In the morning never touch food before having done this minimum of your spiritual practice. On no plea whatsoever should we stop doing it.

"Think of Me and fight, carry on your fight, and through My grace you will be able to vanquish the enemy and find peace" says Sri Krishna. And this fight takes subtler and subtler forms as we progress, and thereby becomes all the more difficult and relentless. It must be fought till the very end. The subtler the world, the subtler and greater the struggle. If a bad thought rises even in dream, you must find no excuse for yourselves.

I V

At the beginning, when we are given the seed, we cannot yet know its potentiality; but as we advance we find that the seed contains a mighty tree, but it must be properly watered and manured. Have some holy picture as the first thing and the last thing, directly after awakening and directly before falling asleep. Never think of other people or objects before having had this holy picture before you and filled your mind with it. This is very necessary for the beginner. Ramprasad sings, "O my mind, why do you not put up a fence round the three with the Mother's Name?" First we take it to be just a name and nothing more, but this name has its subtler aspect and takes us to the Divine. We cannot recognise its infinite potentiality in the beginning. When we do our practices regularly for some time, this mind of ours becomes tutored, trained; but even then, at times, just like a trained horse, it tries to bolt.

Regarding Asana (posture) you should have two different

ones, so that you can change it as soon as your body begins to hurt you. The central theme of Sadhana is meditation, and everything else is but a preparation for the mind to have the right mood. When the right mood comes, meditation becomes very easy. In India there is now a revival of practising the different Asanas. But it is not at all necessary for spiritual life. The ease of the Asana can only be realised after sufficient practice.

Five to six hours of sleep is enough for the spiritual aspirant. Eight hours is generally too much. Sleep, as such, is not so necessary as the conscious minimising of our nervous and mental tension at all times of the day. In order to be able to meditate, we must be able to relax, we should first learn how to decrease the tension of our nerves. Very nervous people can never meditate. After that we should control our sentiments and feelings, even if they be good and pure or elevated ones. By developing the spirit of self-surrender we should be able to make the mind passive, attuned to the Infinite, and thereby minimise all anxiety and our terrible nervous and mental tension. If we are able to do this, we feel a sort of peace, even long before being able really to meditate. We should make it a point to relax our nerves as much as possible before we attempt meditation.

Everything must be definite, clear. You must know how to sleep and what to do with your waking time, how to awake, how to fall asleep, what thoughts to have while awakening, and what thoughts to have just before falling asleep. The life of the spiritual aspirant must be conscious and regulated in all its phases and aspects. Before sleep, make your mind passive by filling it with some very holy and pure thoughts of the Divine or of a Great Spiritual Personality in a wholly dispassionate and unstrained way.

Everything depends on the purity and absolute chastity of thought; and unless this is brought about, our tension can never be reduced. Our sleep is undisturbed only if we know how to think and feel properly in the waking state. Let all those who lead the spiritual life not be bothered about the animal existence. Body-worship and sex-worship are the

most vicious and degenrating forms of idolatry that can ever exist and ever existed.

V

Our heart is to be made consciously a cremation-ground - the cremation-ground of all our attachments, of all our impurities, our whole personality. This eternal struggle is the worship of the Lord, the only true worship there is, and it should never unnerve us. Our trouble is that we worship only a God who gives us pleasure and sense-satisfaction and blessings. But is not also misery His? Everywhere we worship the God who is full of boons and the Giver of boons. And as soon as we think of a Thunderer we are afraid. Shiva as Giver of boons is all right. Shiva dancing the mad dance of destruction is horrible! Why? There is no rhyme and reason in our attitude. God is God only when there is creation, when there is preservation - but when there is destruction, God has no hand in it! No. God is God only when He is God in all aspects. When He is the God of creation, preservation and destruction, and above all the God who is none of all these. So the present day reaction against the religion of a merely good God is to be welcomed. When you give the modern mind a kind and good God, it will throw Him overboard; but when you give the modern mind the whole, it will, in most cases, accept Him.

God in His aspect of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer is Mother. Mother again in Her absolute aspect, beyond all these, is Shiva. Thus the relative aspect of God, as it were, is Mother; the absolute aspect of God, i.e. the same Mother in Her state beyond creation, preservation and destruction, is Shiva. Mother is dancing Her mad play of creation, preservation and destruction on Shiva who is lying under Her feet, motionless and unconcerned, appearing to be dead. What wonderful, infinitely deep symbols of Truth all these are!

Why be afraid of death? Death can be glorious. Where do we find the greatest play of Mother? Only in the cremation-ground, and the cremation-ground is as real and true as the nursery is. In life and in death the aspirant should cling to the Mother, and the Mother alone, giving up both.

It always so happens that he who has a great clinging for pleasant things gets misery. Physical distress is nothing compared with the mental distress; and suffering we all have to pass through in life. So we should always know that Truth is beyond happiness and misery, and can only be attained by transcending them both.

Ramprasad sings, "O my fickle mind, never stop taking the name of the Mother at all times, come what may. You pass through misery. You may have more. What does it matter?"

No physical suffering can ever be compared with the terrible tempests raging in the human mind, and all these tempests can never be transcended so long as we cling to life in its pleasant aspect and deny or try to deny its terrible aspect. We must be fully prepared to transcend both the good and the terrible aspects of God, if we really wish to reach Him and to attain to peace and blessedness.

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THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOUR

The ideal must be fixed and clear before beginning with one's Sadhana. That is what is needed. We must have very definite idea of the path and a definite idea of the goal to be attained i.e. the goal of life. So long as we allow ourselves to be vague and dreamy, hazy in all our feelings and doings; no progress is felt; and there is a continual conflict in us, which prevents most people from advancing even a single step towards the goal. There is too much shallow, superficial thinking, shallow feeling, shallow willing and acting, without any really deeper urge, without any definite clear-cut purpose, without any deeper awareness.

We should have the ideal fixed that neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures are our goal, that the only goal is self-realisation, neither this world, nor heaven, nor any other world. Heavenly enjoyment is no better than earthly enjoyment, and so long as there is hankering after heavenly enjoyment we can never attain the goal. Heaven is a very cheap reward after all.

We cannot lead the worldly life and the higher life at the same time. We cannot allow ourselves to run after worldly love and affections and have the higher divine love at the same time. God and worldly affections, God and worldly passion and pleasure, cannot live together. "Where Kama is, there Rama cannot be; Where Rama is, there Kama cannot be."

Before we actually begin our spiritual life in real earnest, we must decide if we are really fully prepared to pay the price. Generally there are two tendencies, a worldly tendency, and a spiritual tendency in us. If both are more or less equally strong at the beginning, one must be strengthened; otherwise there will be no progress, and the tug-of-war going on in ourselves can never be overcome. That is why it is absolutely necessary for us to fix once for all our ideal, our conduct in life, and then stick to it whatever happens. If you really wish to follow the difficult path beset with so many pit-falls and dangers, you must also be prepared to overcome all the difficulties. If we wish to transcend all the unrealities, there must always be a certain amount of the dare-devil in us, a certain amount of fearlessness and true heroism. The path of the aspirant is a very dangerous path; dangers and pitfalls are lurking everywhere, on all sides; and if once caught, there is no more chance for many people. Unless you sacrifice all your worldly desires and your sense of I-ness, you can never realise the higher ideal.

"Give us discrimination, give us renunciation, give us devotion and knowledge."

II

Religion is something different from and something more than book-knowledge. Nor is mere eclecticism religion. Now-a-days books are available everywhere, books on all religions, bringing the message of different religions in different forms. But through mere scholarship, through mere intellectual study, you can never learn the Truth. When we think too much and too highly of intellectual life, we can never realise the essential truths of religion. "He is one; sages call Him by different names."

"Let one study as well as he can, master the subjects, but after having become a great scholar, let him, like a child become simple." Unless we become simple, there can never be any spiritual life. One must be free from all guile, from all falsehood, from all secrecy and all lack of uprightness, from all the perversities of the mind, if one wants to make any progress. One must be upright, perfectly sincere, frank, and a man of meditation. Having known the essentials of spiritual life, having formed a clear conception of the Divine, you should try to practice the disciplines. Do not read too many empty words. That only creates disturbance and trouble. "The net of words is like a forest, and so one loses one's way in it, in this forest of mere words. Mere study of words and merely explaining these scriptures, all with bombastic words, is not for emancipation, but for enjoyment." (Sankaracharya)

Now this does not mean that we should not go in for studies, but we should make it a point to study with a view to realise the Truth. Study is always encouraged in Vedanta, but along with your studies there must be some real spiritual practice day by day. You must always train your intellect and have your fixed studies, think deeply on the problems, read books, and form a habit of clear thinking and deep studies so that you would feel uncomfortable the day that you have not studied any book deeply, pondering over it and over the truths it contains. This daily study is to be made an important item of your Sadhana.

III

Sri Ramakrishna's message is: Be spiritual and realise the Truth yourself. By living the spiritual life, we can make the Divine living in our own life. In the human being the passions, usually carnality and greed play the greatest part, and the Master shows us how we may overcome sex and greed - these our greatest obstacles on the path of spiritual progress. He wishes us to have a new outlook towards ourselves and others, men and women. Man as well as woman must have the Divine outlook and not think of themselves in terms of sex and body. They should never think of the body, but rise above all thoughts of sex in themselves and in others. This is the

most vital point to note for the spiritual aspirant. And the modern age needs this message more than anything else. The instruction the Master gives was first of all realised in his own life and in the life of the Holy Mother. Without purity there can be no spiritual life. Seeing the Divine in oneself and in all others, men and women, is the only solution for the world-problem of sex and the relation between the sexes. Seeing the Divine in all is the only practical solution, and the present age needs this more than any other age ever did. 'Lust and gold' is the sign of this age, because this age is pre-eminently one of sex and mammon-worship. So the Master had to go to the very extreme, had to deny sex and to deny gold and greed. The more one sees of Western life, the more one comes to understand the full significance of this message for all.

You can never rise above the sex idea by just hating woman or man, as many of the Christian mystics tried to do. Something more is needed. Even hatred is sex attraction, and nothing more. The Divine is in me, in all, in everything. I am not a man. I am not a woman, I am It. "It is by means of continence that, having found the Self, one meditates. That Self alone does not perish which one finds by means of perfect continence" (CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD). "It is by continence that one who knows reaches the world of Brahman. It is by means of continence that one, having worshipped the Lord, and having wished for the Self, reaches the Self. The Self which one finds by unbroken continence never perishes. By means of continence one obtains the Supreme Self" (SANKARACHARYA). "The Infinite is Bliss; there is no Bliss in what is finite. The Infinite alone is Bliss, and thou art That" (CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD). "Those who want to attain to the highest perfection through sacrifice and rites are like children crossing the ocean on rafts, an impossible task." This is an Upanishadic passage stressing the essentials of spiritual life. And the same has been stressed by Buddha also and by Christ and Krishna. Judaism has always been anti-monastic. Buddha, the Upanishads, Krishna, Christ, etc. have all been monastic in their essential teachings.

IV

It was the mission of Buddha's life to ask people not to think too much of rites and ceremonies, but to make religion living in their own lives by leading a life of purity, meditation, spiritual discipline and mental control. Without being moral and leading a pure life we can never expect to become spiritual or to make any progress. All this then remains nothing but a fond dream.

What did Buddha say of God? He did not speak anything of God. It is not essential to speak of God so much, but far more essential is to follow God's path, to live the spiritual life. What is the use of saying, "Lord, how beautiful Thou art! How beautiful are Thy skies, Thy stars, this whole creation!" The Creator is always greater than His creation and does not feel proud of such a small thing. Seen from our human standpoint we find it great, but to God it is a very small thing after all. So it is more important to follow God's path than to praise God eternally, without ever doing anything. This becomes mere lip-service. Once Buddha was asked, "Sir, is there a God?" "Did I say that there is a God?" Buddha wanted to stop all empty and hair-splitting speculations and make people do something. So he said, "When a house is on fire, do you just go and trace the origin of the fire or do you try to extinguish it?" But we in our foolishness very often try to trace the origin first, and before we have succeeded in the attempt, the whole house is burnt down, and nothing but a heap of ashes remains. We must always stress the essentials of spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna said, "The jackal has everywhere the same cry, no matter in what country." And on another occasion he said, "I just cook the food and put it before your mouth, but then you will not take the trouble of eating it."

We always want everything to be done for us by somebody else. There can be no vicarious salvation without any self-effort on the part of the aspirant. Most of the so-called religious people are mere parasites in the world of religion and spiritual life. It would be better for them to take up something else.

PREPARATION FOR SPIRITUAL REALISATION

I

In the beginning of our Sadhana we do not get any spiritual experience, because that is only the scavenging period when loads and loads of dirt and impurities have to be removed. Only when the mirror is clean does it begin to reflect. Evil thoughts arise even if the mind has already been made strong to a certain extent, but then they no longer harm it and can easily be conquered. If a boat has a good and experienced helmsman, it can face the storm without fear of perishing. Unless this phenomenal world has been effaced completely, desires and passions, attractions and aversion, can never be annihilated in their subtlest form. "When he realises the Atman as dwelling in his own Self, the sage ceases to hate." Until then the passions rise in the mind, but if we have strengthened our moral fibre through our Sadhana, we are able to withstand them and drive them away.

Love need not take always the calm, peaceful method. True love can often be as hard as steel, can use harsh words. The knife of the surgeon cuts, but then it cuts in order to heal. These Great Ones may appear cruel and heartless in some of their advices, but through the kindness of their 'cruelty' they heal and bring life.

Until we feel the coming of grace, we must strive. Self-effort has its place in spiritual life, and never can real self-surrender come unless we have really striven our utmost.

When the devotee has caught a glimpse of the Transcendental, he no longer troubles and bothers about the right breeze, whether it is a hot breeze or a cold breeze or no breeze at all. He need not unfurl his sails any longer.

The two tests of vision are: Bliss, certitude. Then the mind knows Truth is real. Then something in us knows it is true and it carries with it its own unmistakable light and conviction.

Let the teacher be merged into your own Ishtam, let

form-aspect get merged into the formless. By so doing, you will avoid all fanaticism and bigotry and always remain conscious of the One Principle standing at the back of all teachers and all teachings.

Once Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great dramatist of Bengal, said to Sri Ramakrishna, "The Lord has created you with His own hands. Us He has created with His machine."

Brahmacharya alone is real Tapasya, and there can be no Tapasya whatever without perfect Brahmacharya in thought, word and deed. This has to be stressed again and again.

II

Let us try to be as hard as possible against ourselves without any unnecessary or destructive self-condemnation.

I should always use my discrimination even with regard to non-violence. The scorpion, no doubt, follows its own law of being when it stings, but I, too, should follow my own law of being when it stings, but I should follow my own law and protect others from its sting if I can do so.

Buddha taught, "Hatred cannot be conquered by hatred. It is by love that hatred can be conquered." Christ taught, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them ~~who~~ despitefully use you and persecute you." Evil can never be conquered by evil. Violence can never be conquered by violence. The only weapon that conquers all is love and loving kindness to all creatures.

And what an amount of strength and undauntedness true non-violence requires! We should not be weak, we should not be cowards but we should at the same time be kind. The person who does not retaliate, however he is hurt, however he is offended by others, is a person of terrible strength, and he alone is a man. All others are miserable cowards hiding their fear and abject cowardice under a cloak of braggardism, physical and mental, and never rising to the stature of a man.

III

Struggle, struggle, struggle. There is no other way. not be afraid of struggles.

Success largely depends on the regularity and intensity of our daily practices. Very often we are so careless in this. Without steady practice nothing can be attained in spiritual life. Spiritual life must be a life of dedication to the highest, a life of consecration and sacrifice and one-pointedness. So we should be more wide-awake and more careful about our own thoughts for our own benefit and for the benefit of others to whom our thoughts may become a danger. Our thoughts, if they be thoughts of lust or greed or violence, are worse than poison gas, and the havoc created by them is far worse than the havoc created by poison gas. By our impure thoughts we affect people who do not even know impurity. By our pure thoughts we help others in their struggle after purity.

It is essential for us to create the right mood before sitting for meditation. There must be steady, regular practice. Let us rather die in the struggle with our body and our impure mind than give it up. What does it matter if I die or not? What matters is that I realise the Truth, that I attain my full stature, my true being. If we struggle our utmost, if we do our utmost, we have fulfilled our duty. Then the rest must be left to the Divine. Here true self-surrender and resignation to the Lord have their place.

I V

Turning the mind constantly and without any break to God, whatever you may be busy with, is the most efficient of all forms of spiritual practice. But you must be able to raise the plane of thought, see that you do not tie your boat to the bank by not fulfilling the preliminary conditions of Yama and Niyama. If you allow your boat to remain tied to the bank, no amount of rowing and exertion on your part will move it even an inch onward.

Try to make the individual ego subservient to the Cosmic Ego. The ego is very difficult to subdue. It is like a monster with hundreds and hundreds of heads.

Never try to face the enemy in the open at the beginning. Never give him a frontal attack. The enemy is still too strong for you. Let us first save ourselves even by flight. Later, we come back with greater strength, with the strength of the

Lord, because some day the enemy has to be openly faced and vanquished. Eternal flight won't do.

V

Once Ganesha was sitting on the lap of his mother Durga, when he happened to touch Her back and found there to his great astonishment a deep scar. "Mother," said he, "who did that?" "My boy," the Goddess replied, "you ill-treated a little cat, and so I got this mark, everything being My own body." When the question of Ganesha's marriage arose, he refused to be married, because the experience of the little cat he ill-treated and the scar of his Mother's back had taught him a great lesson and had made him realise that all women were but his own mother.

There is another story about Ganesha which is illustrative of a high lesson. Once Mother promised a beautiful necklace to one of Her boys who would be able to go round the universe and be back first. Kartikeya departed at once with all possible speed, but Ganesha just remained sitting on the lap of his mother, and after some time quietly got down, went round Her once, and got on to her lap again. So when Kartikeya came back he found to his great astonishment that Ganesha was already sitting on Durga's lap and had received the necklace. Ganesha had realised that, his Mother being all-pervading and omnipresent, it was sufficient to go round Her once without going round the whole universe as his brother had done.

All these symbolical stories and representations of truths are highly instructive if we but know how to read them aright. See Mother in every woman, then you, too, will say like Ganesha, "How is it possible for me to marry?" Through the infinite grace of Mother our whole attitude towards men and women can change, just as it had changed in the case of Ganesha.

The more we progress, the more we cease to love ourselves and to identify ourselves with our physical form. In the same way we cease loving others as bodies or feeling any attraction for them. In India, Ganesha is one of the symbols for perfect purity.

V I

Self-realisation is a very difficult process, and it takes a long time to attain it. But as soon as you come to feel the tide, you know that you are approaching the ocean. And then you should be glad that there is any tide at all. The ocean may still be distant, but if the tide makes itself felt, you know you have travelled a good way down the river. The old impressions must be attenuated, erased through rubbing and rubbing and rubbing, till they have completely disappeared.

Just as the thickness of a cloud in the sky differs; just as this cloud may be only a very thin veil or a dark black cloud which does not allow the sun's rays to penetrate, similarly in this world of Maya there is a thin coat or a thick coat covering Truth.

Some manifestations of Mother are to be saluted at a very safe distance so long as we ourselves are not yet fully immune from their influence. The Mother's play has two aspects, one which binds, and one which frees; but both are within Maya, not beyond Maya. Never think that the freeing aspect is beyond Maya. It too, is within the ambit of Maya.

V I I

"Whenever you come across a person who is of a different ideal of life, do not speak out your thoughts." (SRI CHAITANYA).

First there must be physical control, then mental control, and once mental control is attained, thought can never again come down or be dragged down to the sensual plane. This only happens if we have led a controlled life, physically and mentally, for many many years without any break. Then impure thoughts may now and then arise but they are no longer able to stain us.

There must be a completely new attitude towards ourselves, towards the world, towards all mental pictures and memories in our mind.

We should feel sorry when an unclean thought wells up in our mind, but this spur us all the more and make us more

dogged than ever. We should be thankful that we have come to know that such unclean things exist in our mind. If we did not know this, we could never fight them successfully. The greater the trouble, the more manly the fight; the greater our determination to remove them, the greater our relentless tenacity.

If really there is dirt and filth in our mind, let us know this fact, and know how bad it is. To know an evil as it is, is half the battle won. It is always good for us to know the possibilities of our mind to do us great mischief, so that we may be on our guard and become fully aware of its wily attempts at deception. What a terrible amount of misery man creates for himself and others by giving in to the impulses of lust, anger, greed, violence, etc. ! And all these impulses lie deeply hidden in our mind too, if we do not come to know them and annihilate them. Unless we turn our mind consciously to the higher life, it will always remain full of these.

+ + + + +

AIDS TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

I

We should always try to give the instructions we receive some practical expressions in life. Philosophy is all right as the back-ground, but the application to life must never be lost sight of.

'Through the purity of food comes the purity of senses, through the purity of senses comes steady memory of Truth, and when one gets this memory one becomes free from all bonds.' Then the mind thinks of Brahman in an unbroken stream. As I have said many a time, everything that comes in contact with the senses is 'food'. We must have pure food for the eye, the ear, the touch, the smell, etc. Taking pure physical food for the stomach without purifying all the food that is taken in the senses is no use. 'If by taking the purest of Sattvika a person does not turn the mind to the Divine, fie unto him. If he takes contaminated food, but is able to turn the

'mind to God, blessed is he' - this is what Sri Ramakrishna used to say.

I I

The Gunas are like ladders leading us to the terrace. The indolent person must become active, the active person must become pure. And Sattva is the topmost rung of the ladder leading to the Truth, but not Truth as it is.

Our purity must lead us to God-realisation. Attaining to the Divine means going beyond all the Gunas. All these Gunas are like robbers who do not dare to have access to the town. Our goal should be the Divine and Divine Realisation, i.e. to realise Him within ourselves, and then to realise Him in all others also. The ideal is the person who is not bound by any Gunas, who has known God, who remains always indifferent to all actions of the Gunas. When by getting rid of the evil tendencies with the help of purer thoughts one is able to get a glimpse of Truth, transcending even Sattva, he comes up to the highest rung of the ladder in a Sattvika state, but he can never again go below that highest rung.

I I I

Mere ethics does not make a man spiritual. Mere morals are no proof whatever for the spirituality of a person. This is the great mistake of what is generally called Protestantism. Morals are necessary, and there can be no spirituality without previously leading a perfectly moral life, but they can lay no claim to spirituality which far transcends the plane of morals.

'Having mastered all the scriptures and having given up all learning, be like a child. And then after attaining to your spiritual childhood live a life of meditation.'

We should all cultivate great simplicity and be free from all desires and passions which make us more and more complex and impure. We should minimise all personal feeling and all personal relationships with others by stressing the Divine more and more and becoming more conscious of the Divine than of others. Never commit the mistake of loving a person for her own sake. The feeling of love is all right, but the

very moment its true aim is hidden it turns into side-paths and brings us no end of misery and delusion, although many people, for a time, call this happiness.

I V

We should avoid all forms of austerity that are merely Tamasika. So Sankacharya says, 'Simply by making the body dirty, one does not become like a child.' No, certainly not. This spiritual childhood is characterised by perfect mental purity; sense-control, freedom from lust in all its forms, and freedom from passions and desires. One who goes beyond all Gunas is no longer bound to any particular mood.

V

The spiritual aspirant should feel he is an instrument in the hands of the Cosmic Power. The best attitude is that of an instrument knowing oneself not to be the doer, not to be the agent.

Let us take an example. There are different clocks all driven by the same electric energy. If every clock just thinks that it goes by its own strength, this is a serious error. We are all parts of a mighty energy that is working through us and with us. We should always try to be cosmocentric and become as impersonal in everything as possible. This body and the mind are instruments of a mighty Power. To what extent we are able to become cosmocentric and more and more impersonal, to that extent we succeed in giving up all ideas of agent-ship and we attain to peace. The more we run away from the Divine, the more miserable we become.

'Mother, Thou hast created this vast universe, and Thou alone as all being art coming in touch with the outside things. Thou art the only doer. Thou art the only enjoyer.'

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Mother, I am the machine, Thou art the mechanic. I am the house, Thou art the mistress of the house. I am the chariot, and Thou art the charioteer. I do as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak.'

V I

If at any time dejection comes, still go on with your disciplines. If obstruction comes, it must redouble your effort. Rather die than give up. The greater the trouble, the greater should be our determination and our will. We should not be weaklings.

'If, before we pass away, we are able to know the Truth, we attain to the goal of our life. If we fail to do this, everything is to no purpose. We miss the object of our life.'

'By realising the same Divine in all beings, the person of steady intellect attains to the state of immortality.'

'If there be God, what else is there that matters? If there be no God, what does life matter?' (Swami Vivekananda).

First of all, the ideal is to be fixed once for all. There must be no vacillating - no two ways. If we are side-tracked, at once let us fix again the ideal. There must be no 'I may do this or that.' No. 'I can do this only and nothing but this.' This alone is the attitude of the sincere aspirant.

'O Lord, I have made Thee the pole-star of my life. In this ocean of existence I shall not lose my way if I have my mind fixed on Thee.'

The compass, even the best and most modern one, may fail. The pole star never fails.

V I I

India does not believe in arms and ammunitions. She believes in knowledge and wisdom. With her, knowledge is power, and love is the one weapon which alone is necessary to conquer the whole world, to win over the hearts of the whole of humanity. India stands for cultural and not for political conquest. Learn to be men. Be men, true men, not animals wallowing in the mire of sensuality and greed but men of love and reverence, of wisdom, knowledge, purity, and non-attachment.

The sum and end of life is freedom and fearlessness, freedom from the ever recurrent bondage of births and deaths, freedom of the soul from the toils, and the ultimate and final

attainment of peace. The knowledge of the Self is the way to freedom and the discovery of Truth and at the very end of the journey the reward is peace, that peace which Christ taught that it passeth all understanding.

V I I I

If we find that all our life we remain in a certain stage, there is something seriously wrong. We should always see whether as a result of our Sadhana we are making spiritual progress or not.

We should not be like the muskdeer. It has the musk in its own navel, and in certain seasons it goes mad and runs and runs just to find the source of the sweet fragrance, and then it finally falls down dead. Similarly the God we seek dwells eternally in our hearts, but we want to find Him outside.

'Fire is the God of the twice-born; to the seer God dwells in his own heart; people of poor understanding take up idols as their gods, and one who is same-sighted finds God everywhere.' - UTTARA GITA.

We are always creating our own God or our own Gods. We try to create God Mahadeva, and it turns out to be an ugly monkey. We make an image, and then it proves to be the image of an ugly monkey. If we do not know the right idea and also how to apply it to life, everything becomes an ugly monkey. This is the danger.

'For one who attains to salvation worship of image is a hindrance and brings about rebirth. Therefore the man of renunciation should worship the God who dwells in his own heart. He should give up all external worship.' - MAITREYUPANISHAD, II, 26.

These higher forms of spiritual practice are only meant for advanced souls. It is all just like a staircase. We must proceed step by step. We must find out where we are, otherwise progress is not possible, never.

So Sankara says, 'Even for learning how to steal, a teacher is necessary.'

The voice of God, of which so many people speak, can only be heard by those who have a completely purified mind, never by others. There is very often great self-deception,

because there are impulses of the lower mind. Very often we take our impulses to be the voice of conscience, but really then the ego speaks, not God. When you want to hear the voice of God, stand aside as the witness, dissociate yourself from your body and your mind. If you do not, you cannot hear the voice.

Above all one must stress morals, purification, and sublimation. . 'The pure in heart shall see God.'

I X

'Let only those works be done by thee that are free from blemishes, and not others.'

Narada says, 'Shun by every means the company of the wicked for it will only breed in you desires and anger, delusion and forgetfulness, unreason and death. These grow in the company of the wicked as rapidly as the ripple swells into a tide. Who is the man that frees himself from the name of the world? The man who shuns the wicked and seeks the wise, and who is free from attachments. The man who loves solitude and snaps the bonds of the world. The man who goes beyond the Gunas and gives up to God all that he owns. The man who first abandons the fruits of his actions and then even the actions themselves, for the sake of God, and who passes beyond both good and evil. The man who leaves even the scriptures behind and loves God without a break, such a man saves himself, he saves others as well.'

Always keep impure people at a safe distance during the period of your training. Never become intimate with them. There are so many different kinds of lust, specially with regard to women; impure thoughts, glances, speaking of women, touching women. All these must be annihilated in their root-forms in you. Throw away all human dolls without mercy. Burn all your desires in your heart, but then see that you do not take up new dolls again. See only MOTHER and SISTER in every woman you meet, but so long as you are not yet fully established in dispassion and non-attachment, do even that at a distance. The same holds good in the case of women with reference to men.

QUESTION: Should they be stressed from the very beginning?

have observed that most people who just begin to be a little interested are scared away at once as soon as they are told to practise Brahmacharya. Must one raise this demand at once?

ANSWER:

Yes. At the very beginning. None is a child of Sri Ramakrishna who is not prepared to pay the price of Brahmacharya. Brahmacharya is one of the most important and essential points. It does not matter if such people are scared away. We do not count the number of people, but their quality. We only want those who are prepared to pay the full price unconditionally. Others cannot follow spiritual life or the seers of Vedanta or any other Great One. None is a Christian who is not prepared to fulfill all this. Everyone who revolts against sense-control and Brahmacharya should not take to any form of spiritual life. Above all, do not soil the holy name of Christ and Sri Ramakrishna with such people. And you in the West need Brahmacharya even much more than we do. You can never separate sex from brutality.

QUESTION:

And what about householders who feel interested in the message? You cannot expect Brahmacharya of a householder.

ANSWER:

The householder has to practise control just as all the others. Just look at Naga Mahasaya. His father forced him to marry even twice, but he never had any marital relations in all his life. Your idea of marriage is so coarse. Both the wives of Naga Mahasaya become his disciples, leading a life of the highest purity and devotion. So you see, outwardly, Naga Mahasaya was a householder all his life, but there has never been a monk who was purer and less attached than he.

QUESTION:

And if one party revolts?

ANSWER:

None is to be allowed to be prevented from following the spiritual path by his partner, even if the heart of that person breaks. About that we have already many talks as you know. A person who be-

comes an impediment to another with regard to spirituality, is so low, so sense-bound, so egoistic, so brutish, in all his emotions and feelings, that he can boldly be pushed aside, whatever may happen. God save me from all such emotional people. If you belong to them I should leave this place tomorrow morning. Certainly. Such people are not fit to become children of Christ or of Sri Ramakrishna, because both represent the ideal of the very highest purity and non-attachment.

Even in worldly life you need a very strong backbone, if you wish to achieve anything; but in spiritual life you need, as it were, a worldly backbone, a moral backbone, and a very strong spiritual backbone. You need infinitely more strength and manliness than you ever do in ordinary life.

It is very essential for the beginner to have an outward or a mental ideal on which to centre all his thoughts and emotions. If you do not have this, you are bound to cling to some other human being, making it your idol and getting entangled in its meshes. Then you believe that some other human personality can fill you, but this only leads you further away from the goal.

QUESTION: How to avoid old associations rising in the mind?

ANSWER: First of all learn to avoid all people that may tend to rouse them in you. You must mercilessly cut yourself away from them all for a long time to come. You should avoid as poison anything that may awaken impure memories in your mind. As I said, the moment anybody or any thing stands in the way of your spiritual progress, push them mercilessly aside. There is no other way if you desire to progress and go through the process of purification. Whose fault is it, if we have been careless in our life? Now we have to pay the price, and we shall not go free before having paid the very last farthing.

'In the darkness that surround us on all sides, do Thou

O Lord, just rise like the sun and dispel it all with Thy light Divine.'

'Shiva is my mother, Shiva is my father, Shiva is my Lord, Shiva is my friend, Shiva is my play-fellow, Shiva is my all in all. I know none else. No, not I.'

'O Lord, you have assumed many names and endowed them all with your full powers; there is also no particular time for remembering your names, such is your mercy. Yet such is my misfortune that I have no love for your names.'

'The glory of God is best sung by him who is humbler than a straw, more forbearing than a tree, and who does not honour himself but gives honour to others.'

* * * * *

THE DIVINE QUEST

I

RELIGION, whether you like it or not, is only for the chosen few. There can never be any mass religion, however beautiful this ideal may seem to you.

The Bhagavad Gita says that out of thousands of people we find one fortunate soul taking to the spiritual life. But success or no success, let us at least strive with all our heart. Let us all think we are these blessed few that are chosen, and strive on and on.

In the field of religion also there is a kind of aristocracy, but they are always willing to share their riches with others. Those who are strong, those who have the capacity, only succeed; not the others. There is no place for the weakling in spiritual life. The great aristocrats in the realm of the Spirit always place what they possess, before others. You can take a horse to the water; you cannot make it to drink if it does not want to. This is the meaning of throwing pearls before swine. We must use discrimination and bring the right thing to the right person. Others will not be able to understand it, and are not going to follow it, what-

ever you may say and do. There are people who have greater capacity and smaller capacity. If milk has been adulterated with water too much, how long shall one have to boil it?

We should look upon it as a great fortune that for some reason or other our mind possesses an attraction for the higher and eternal things, and should see that we steadily and gradually proceed along the higher path, never flagging till we reach the goal. Our spiritual fervour is to be maintained, but we very often run the risk of becoming slack. Thus spiritual striving stops in most people after they have taken to the spiritual life for a certain time. Their minds are too restless and too outgoing to keep this spiritual fervour and intensity up for a very long time and to go on steadily and doggedly with their practices and daily readings and studies. So we should be on our guard. Dogged tenacity is the one thing needed for spiritual life. All progress can only be had through great steadiness and tenacity, never allowing ourselves to flounder or to become lukewarm.

I I

"He is the only One that is stainless, sinless, changeless and unnameable, and that is pure and Divine. There is no second. Whoever knows Him, becomes He Himself." But how to know Him, that is the point. He cannot be known in a day, just after a few practices done in a haphazard slovenly way.

"Practise your disciplines and all that; it is quite right, but you must know how to die." (BENGALI PROVERB).

Let us not die the death of miserable slaves, being slaves to our impulses and senses till the very end of our life, never doing anything. Wordsworth says in his 'Intimations of Immortality':- "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting."

The one task of our life is to assert this potential divinity, to come face to face with the Reality that is. Man easily forgets that his power of comprehension is so very limited. And little knowledge is always most dangerous. 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' "The more I learn, the more I find I do not know." (Bengali Proverb).

One God hidden in all things pervades all things, and is the Inner Life of all things. He is the giver of the fruits of Karma. He lives in all things. He is the soul of all; there is nothing like Him, and He is without any Gunas, being secondless. He is the great wise One. He is the one doer among the many actionless objects.

I I I

Generally, it is not the Truth that we love, but we just love ourselves in something. We are in love with an idea, because it is our idea, not because it represents the Truth at all.

"God is known to him who really knows Him to be unknown.
And He is unknown to him who things He is known."
(KENA UPANISHAD)

To the true and steady devotee the Lord reveals His glory. And the devotee's task is to be in tune with the Divine, with the Infinite. And then the Lord manifests His glory to him. Just as man tries to approach God, God is ever ready to approach man.

If you go on trying to find out the root-cause of things, you find it to be an impossible task. A finer and subtler instrument is needed for that.

"He is without mind, ear, hands, feet and light. There the worlds are not worlds, the Devas, the Vedas no Vedas, sacrifice no sacrifice, mother no mother, father no father, daughter-in-law no daughter-in-law, monks no monks; so One, only Brahman, shines as different."

It is really very funny - all this manifestation, including the body, the thoughts and all. There is no sense, at least so it appears to us. What is the reason for the formless to assume form? It is all without rhyme or reason, nothing but madness. There is no explanation for this diversified and multiform play of Maya in the One, and none has ever been able to explain it in terms of the relative. On the relative plane there is absolutely no explanation, whether you call it God's will as the Christian does, or God's sport or play or Lila as the Hindu does. It can never be explained, but it can be transcended.

CHAPTER III

EVEN THE WORLDLY MAN CAN CHANGE

Our human personality is so full of complexes, and we waste so much time in turning round and round without ever moving forwards, which is the first thing in spiritual life. For years and years we go on turning round and round helplessly swayed by our complexes and yet we dare to speak of being free men and women! Where is this much-vaunted freedom, I wonder! As long as the slave believes himself to be the master, there can never be any real progress. Then his case is hopeless. What sense is there in talking about freedom if one does not even realise what freedom means? No man knows anything about freedom who is still swayed by his passions and desires, his likes and dislikes, his whims and fancies, who still feels aversion, who still reacts to the influence of others, who cannot even control his thoughts. It is surprising how glibly people talk about freedom without knowing what freedom is.

The human soul very often refuses to change, and unless we give up the idea of remaining where we are, no progress can be made. The energy that a whirlpool wastes in turning round and round in a single day, would take it round the earth. The same energy we waste in turning round and round, refusing to become free. Spiritual life means breaking up all these whirlpools in our soul. And of everything we see, we take readings according to our complexes, complex of lust, of fear, of jealousy, of hatred, of aversion, of attachment, etc. etc.

We always resent being corrected by others. There should always be the desire to move onwards. Complexes may be likened to mines that lie deep under water. They form a great menace. The more worldly we become, the more we give mental and physical expression to our desires and lusts, the more complexes we form, and the stronger does their hold grow on us.

Even the worldly man can change if he is ready to give up his worldiness and all the complexes he has formed. Otherwise never. It is not a question of mere lukewarm piety of devotion, but of actual intense daily practice and firm res

tion. Ordinary half-hearted devotion won't do. Something more is needed. What people generally do is they just anchor the boat and want it to move. In all our minds there are very deep rooted impressions - SAMSKARAS - and these SAMSKARAS must be completely effected. You must be ready to give up your false personality, false identifications. They give us a false and distorted outlook.

Theoretically all can be changed, but practically most people refuse to change. They cling to their pet desires and identify them with life. They gleefully hug their likes and dislikes, are proud of them, and make them their all in all. The current of the Divine is strong, but it cannot do anything so long as the whirlpool is still there. If you watch a river you can see this. There you have both, the current and the whirlpool, but the current, however strong it may be, cannot efface of the water. So the whirlpools of our complexes form these obstructions, and unless they be removed, the current cannot help us.

The worldly man who is willing to overhaul his whole mental structure and foundations, can be changed, can become spiritual in spite of his past. If we are fully prepared to lay a new foundation we can become spiritual, otherwise we grow worse as the years go on. At the end our complexes have become so strong, and we are so helplessly under their sway, that we can scarcely be considered normal.

It is terrible weakness to cling to one's own personality, even when wrong. The weaker the person, the greater the tendency to cling to his lower self. We are not able to change because of this self-love of our lower self. Unless we become merciless critics of ourselves we can never progress.

There is always an amount of self-justification in ourselves. And it is necessary for us to be open to Truth. Sometimes Truth will break our heart, but then will come a new awakening. The electric current that brings shocks, brings light also. If you want the light, be prepared for the shock also.

"O Perfect One, I am quite sick of gratifying the wicked
se, for by seeking to gratify them, O Lord, I have come to

be in binding darkness."

"At the end of many lives, I have by Thy grace obtained Thee as the keen power of vision which can lead one to the other shore of that impassable and blinding darkness.

"Thou art indeed the first and glorious Supreme Being, the ruler of all Purushas and, like the sun, Thou hast risen as the eye of the world which is blinded by darkness.

"Therefore, O Lord, be Thou pleased to dispel my delusion which consists in a strong attachment to this body and its belongings with notions like 'I, mine, and so on', and which has been instituted by Thy self." - (BHAGAVATAM - Devahuti's prayer).

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CONDUCT OF A SPIRITUAL NOVICE

I

Too much of human feelings sometimes stand in the way of our spiritual progress. It is not a question of heartlessness, but a question of really purified feelings, of becoming pure in heart.

IF YOU WANT TO WORSHIP THE DIVINE, FIRST BE DIVINE

In many cases it is good first to note down a definite set of ideas before we sit for meditation, otherwise the mind gets confused and everything becomes vague and hazy even when the beginning was good.

Spiritual life means developing a new sense of consciousness as distinct from the ~~gross~~^{gross} body, the subtle body and the causal body.

May this physical body become pure, may my mind become pure, may my soul become pure. I am the Spirit free from all taints and impurities.

The best way of attaining real purity is to think we are pure by nature, and never to think of sin, of impurity, of weakness, of imperfection. No. We are all perfect by nature, but we have forgotten our eternal perfection and thereby go on

committing endless mistakes. But as soon as we regain the memory of our true essence, impurity, sin and imperfection are nothing more than so many dreams.

This purity wells up from within, because it is ours and has been ours from time immemorial. It never comes from outside. It is not superadded, nor to be newly created. Spiritual life means this growth from within, though really speaking it is not a growth, but only an uncovering; for unless perfection and purity were inside and belonged to our own essence, we could never become pure and perfect; we could never be saved.

Bring about a transformation within, then this transformation automatically finds expression in the outside world. Our entire nature must be purified. See that you do not only whitewash it, but that you lay the ground-colour on in the proper way. Have daily intense spiritual practice. That will help you to rise above your false, impure personality. Through your false impure personality, your thoughts become impure and tainted; but if your real personality were impure, you could never be purified, and there could be no hope of salvation for any of you. Good thoughts, deeds and words are great aids; but they alone, without steady spiritual practice are not enough, and they could never transform you into something which you are not.

I I

The Mantram is, as it were, the body of God, and it brings us nearer to the Divine. Shoot the arrow and see that the arrow reaches the right target and becomes fixed in it. With a calm, steady mind hit the target; and then, just like the arrow, be one with it. Ordinarily we have no target, and then everything just becomes aimless bombardment. Unless you have succeeded in hitting the target, you should never be satisfied.

Never tell anybody about your spiritual practices and your Mantram. Never disclose to anybody what you are told to do.

Too much softness, too much goodness, too much kindness, these are very dangerous, especially if one wishes to lead

a perfectly clean, sexless, celibate life. Fatiguing the body has its use, but it does not go to the root of the matter. It does not go to the root of sex. One has to take special care if one finds these thoughts troublesome. During such periods take a little less food. All such rules must be followed carefully. It is always better to be a little stiff on the surface not to give expression to one's feelings, always to be reserved and dignified in his attitude towards the other sex. For then no person of the other sex will ever dare to show wrong feelings for him. The aspirant should be polite, but not chivalrous or romantic, but aloof and dignified. Every aspirant must be a gentleman or a gentlewoman; but there is no place for chivalry in spiritual life, for chivalry, in most cases, has sex as its basis and is an expression of sex. In such cases it is far better to let the other sex say, "Ah, this fellow is afraid of us. He is rude. He has no heart for us." Never pay attention to anybody saying such things, but first you must redeem yourself from sex, and then you can show others the way to do this and attain freedom. It is always better to salute the other sex at a safe distance, till a person has succeeded in redeeming himself from his sexual desires and impulses.

I I I

Always keep your centre of consciousness; always watch the trend of your thoughts; always prevent impure thoughts from taking form, through concentration and extra meditation. This will greatly help you in giving them all the right direction. Always be careful in the choice of your food too.

In the case of a householder, if there are passions, the passions are satisfied, but in the case of the Brahmacharin the struggle becomes tremendous in some cases and at certain periods of his Sadhana, and then the danger is very great. First the Brahmacharin has to control the sexual passions and then he has to sublimate them. So the Brahmacharin and the earnest spiritual aspirant can never be careful enough. If we do not attain the ideal of perfect celibacy, which includes mental celibacy, not only physical celibacy, if we lower it the least bit, we are just nowhere as spiritual aspirants.

Plenty of hard exercise is very good. Torturing the body as the Christian mystics used to do, helps a little; for it, too, diverts the superfluous not yet transmuted energies and inhibits certain sexual centres; but all these do not strike at the root of the matter. Thus the problem just remains in abeyance and is never really solved.

Sex-consciousness is inseparable from body consciousness, and to the extent we think we are not bodies and sexless, we attenuate the sex-instinct. Always shift the consciousness to the centre of your consciousness. See that you give the whole nervous current an upward direction.

I V

Some people become very aggressive at the time of their Sadhana. The reason is this: We try to control the sex-thought and some outside stimuli awaken it. So it finds its expression in aggressiveness. Be very careful about the company you allow yourself to be in. Avoid all people that are not leading a sexually pure and strictly moral life. All these people are extremely dangerous, if you really wish to struggle on.

Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed
Of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman
As his wife can ever perfect be;
Nor he who owns the least of things, nor he
Whom anger chains, can ever pass thro' Maya's gates.
So, give these up, Sannyasin bold!
Say, "Om Tat Sat, Om!"

(Swami Vivekananda - The Song of the Sannyasin)

People who give free licence to their desires and passions in the name of freedom or fearlessness always come to grief. Once the Holy Mother remarked in connection with the fall of an advanced aspirant, "My child, one who at first accepts all objects of enjoyments except woman, cannot by any means resist woman for a long time. He cannot but succumb to this aspect of Maya."

V

So long as unity has not been fully realised in practical

life, and one takes the relative plane to be intensely real, one should not fail to mark the differences in the manifestations and act wisely. In the One there is no difference, but in the phenomenal world there is always a difference, between a fool and an intelligent person between an unreflective and a reflective one, between a spiritual person and a worldling.

As Swamiji very nicely put it, though both are made of the same substance, the clay-elephant is not the same as the clay-mouse. There is no question of equality on the phenomenal plane. So Sri Ramakrishna always used to say, "Give honour where honour is due." Those who lose all sense of proportion in the phenomenal can never attain to the Absolute plane. All others are cowards who try to hide their inner weakness with a show of strength and independence. It is all self-deception.

In the West, all these sexually aggressive people one meets make it terribly difficult for you and intensify your struggle. Avoid all such danger-zones and all such free people who are proud of their so-called freedom which is nothing but abject slavery. If you cannot find clean people of your own sex, avoid all company and stay alone in the company of the Lord. This is the only way to salvation for the beginner. Avoid all talks about the other sex or sex topics. Avoid seeing any sexually attractive picture. Do not read any novels or any other book on such topics. Do not see any plays that have to do with sex. Avoid the outward sex-stimulus so long as the tug-of-war is going on inside you. All reading and any occupation that brings us in touch with any form of sex-stimulus must be carefully avoided during the period of our Sadhana. If we do not do this, we shall never attain the necessary purification for the higher forms of practices and we are bound to come to grief, sooner or later. Then there is no freedom and no fearlessness for us. Then we shall never rise to the full stature of a human being, but always remain animals with more or less developed minds.

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WHAT A SADHAKA OUGHT TO DO WITH HIMSELF

CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION:- Without previously having attained to a certain amount of sublimation and purification of our feelings and desires, concentration becomes very dangerous in the case of persons who have not prepared themselves properly for the higher life. It may lead to very bad effects. In a way, we all make the mind concentrated, but then we do not know how to manipulate it. This concentrated mind will run after sensual enjoyments and all kinds of worldly distractions and objects with a greater intensity for having become concentrated. So if we do not know how to handle it in the right way, it becomes a great danger. It is far better not to have concentration if one does not attain sublimation and purification at the same time. Therefore the necessity of purity, of non-injury, truthfulness, continence, etc. in thought, word and deed, has to be stressed very much. Without sublimation of all our desires and feelings we cannot progress in the spiritual path. It is after we have followed a strict code of ethics and morals that we should attempt concentration and meditation. The concentrated mind, if it is not purified becomes a veritable demon and creates untold troubles for the spiritual aspirant.

The concentration of worldly man on his gross material gain, profit and enjoyment; the concentration of the scientist on his experiments, for instance on the structure of the atom or the constitution of the plant; the concentration of the psychologist on the movements and laws of thought; the concentration of the Yogi on the analysis of the ego and the non-ego -- all these are but different forms of concentration, judged from the objective standpoint. But considered from the subjective point of view their contents differ very widely, and they lead to altogether different experiences and results.

The yogic seeker after Truth, having no faith in God as ordinarily understood, may begin with the concentration and meditation on gross elements associated with time and space, and then take the elements beyond the limitations of time and space. He may next take up the subtle elements as the objects of his concentration and meditation, at first within time and

space, and later on beyond their limits. Proceeding further, he may first make the mind the 'inner organ' and afterwards the ego, the object of this concentration and meditation. And knowing the true nature of these objects he ceases to identify himself with these limiting adjuncts, and having come nearer to his self he enjoys a wonderful state of bliss and illumination.

The Vedantic aspirant who believes in the existence of the Divine, may at the beginning meditate on the physical form of some great holy personality, image or picture or symbolic representation of the Divine, first associated with time and space and then without these limitations. Advancing further, he may meditate on the 'heart' of the holy personality or on the Divine Mind, and gradually imbibe the noble attributes associated with it. Later, he may pass on to Pure Consciousness, individual or cosmic, and thereby succeed in purifying and expanding his impure, limited consciousness, come in touch with the Infinite Being within his self, and even proceed to the highest Divine Realisation in which the meditator, like a salt-doll coming in contact with the ocean, gets merged into the Absolute Divine Principle. Thus beginning with different forms of concentration and meditation associated with individualised consciousness, he may reach the highest Super-consciousness -- the Absolute Reality, the One Undivided Principle -- in which all subject-object relationship, nay all relativity is completely transcended.

By themselves concentration and meditation may not have any spiritual value. As already said, they may even be dangerous if the person who practices them has not already attained a certain amount of mental purification and does not continue the process of sublimation at the same time. Concentration and meditation become spiritually effective to the extent to which the mind is purified of its dross, of all the dirt, the filth and bad impressions and tendencies it has been allowed to accumulate through successive evil thoughts and actions. With the attainment of great dispassion and purity alone can the aspirant take up successfully the higher forms of concentration and meditation, ultimately leading to the highest Divine experience and freedom.

THE GODWARD TURN:- Every average person has the capacity to practise concentration and meditation, although these are usually directed towards persons or objects of gain and enjoyment presented to us by the world. In order to follow the spiritual life, no new faculties need be created all of a sudden. To old capacities and tendencies are to be given a Godward turn without diminishing their intensity, and then the worldly man is transformed into a spiritual man. So the true devotee prays, 'Lord, may I think of Thee with that strong love which the ignorant cherish for the things of the world, and may that love never cease to abide in my heart.'

The ego asserts itself again and again. So says Sri Ramakrishna, make it the servant of the Lord. Desires and passions refuse to be controlled. Give a Godward turn to them, maintaining their intensity, so advises the spiritual teacher. Instead of yearning for the company of men and women, yearn for union with the Divine. See Him in all, but take care that you do not cheat yourself. He alone can satisfy the hunger of the soul. He alone can fill its void and give it permanent peace and joy.

Instead of being angry with those standing in the way of your sense-enjoyment, gross or subtle, be angry with all the obstacles lying in the path to the Divine. Learn to be angry with your lower desires, with your turbulent passions, with your very anger and avoid them all as your great and relentless enemies. Instead of wishing to possess another 'human doll' or fleeting worldly wealth, covet the Divine and His inexhaustible wealth which can never be lost and is alone able to give abiding peace. So says the BHAGAVATAM: "Lust, anger, fear, affections, fellowship, and friendship, when directed towards the Divine Being, lead to union with the Divine."

At the touch of the philosopher's stone all the base metals of desires and passions, of greed and anger, lose their evil nature and are transmuted into pure devotion bringing Bliss and Immortality to the soul. 'Even if the very wicked worships Me - the Divine - with devotion to none else, he should be regarded as good, for he has rightly resolved. Soon does he become righteous and obtain eternal peace.' Boldly canst thou

proclaim that my devotee never comes to grief, says the BHAGAVADGITA.

Time and again Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Give a Godward turn to all your tendencies.' Especially in the path of devotion all desires and passions should be consciously given a higher direction without allowing them to decrease in intensity.

THE PROCESS OF SELF-PURIFICATION:-Let us take the example, the question of anger. Why are we angry? Only because some one or something is standing in the way of what we think to be the object of our enjoyment. This is the only reason for all our anger. Always we find that anger is closely connected with the overstressed ego or a strong sense of personality, and without this strong sense of the ego and an inordinate desire for enjoyment, physical and mental, anger could never even rise in our hearts. So this ego, this desire for enjoyment, is the only cause of our becoming angry. If we do not desire any enjoyment, if we do not expect anything from anybody, but just give and act without ever expecting any return, there can never be any rise of anger. So we should get angry with our anger and not with others. We should get terribly angry with our desires for sense enjoyment and not with the objects as such. This is the only practical way to uproot anger and eventually eliminate it. And without eliminating anger and other associated evils to a great extent, we can never make any progress in spiritual life. Lust and anger are the two greatest enemies in the spiritual path. So they should be carefully avoided by all aspirants.

Thus, whenever there is anger there is some attachment or other, some inordinate desire or affection, for, truly speaking, without attachment to some person or thing there can never rise any form of anger. It is only our thwarted will to enjoyment that brings about anger. But this should be understood more in a subtle sense than in a gross one. It need not necessarily be any craving for the grosser forms of enjoyment that lies at the root-cause of anger.

It may happen that a person is fully convinced of the evil effects of desire, but still is not able to rid himself completely of them. What is such a person to do? How can he

rise above them? He should connect them all, directly or indirectly, with the Divine, give every desire, every sensual impulse, every passion a Godward turn consciously and knowingly, with an effort of the will. If he cannot rid himself of the inordinate desire for music, let him listen to devotional holy music, and all the time he is so doing, let him think of the Divine. If his artistic sense and his desire to enjoy art are very strong, he should take up some holy form of art and make that a stepping stone for rising to the plane of the Divine. If he is very fond of the sweet fragrance and beauty of flowers and wishes to enjoy them, let him pluck the flowers, offer them to the Divine and decorate the holy altar artistically with them. If he desires to love somebody, feel greatly attracted towards somebody, let him love the Divine in that person and be thereby directly drawn towards the Divine. If done consciously and knowingly, all this acts as great controlling factor, as a great regulating agency, helping us in sublimating our desires and in giving them a higher and higher turn and attaining a greater and greater purity. But even here the ultimate goal to be attained by the aspirant is perfect control and Divine Realisation. Everything else serves only as a stepping stone to that. Following the graduated steps we must be able to rise to the Highest sooner or later.

Unless all the filth and foulness which have gathered in the mind are removed from it, from all nooks and corners, our problem is not really solved. If some light just enters a room through a chink in the door and the rest of the room remains shrouded in darkness and continues to be dirty, nothing is achieved. There is no real spiritual illumination if just a tiny bit of light enters our mind and all the dirt and filth lying there is pushed away for the time being into some far-off dark corner. In such a case the man remains just what he was before he had this kind of 'glimpse.' Mere theories and philosophies do not help us in any way, however wonderful they may be. What is essential is the practical application, the sublimation, the removal of all the dirt lying hidden in the dark corners of the mind, not the so-called perfect control of all the mental-modifications (VRITTIS) as some people would have it, which only leads to self-induced sleep in the beginning, but not to any form of real illumination. People talk-

ing of the complete stopping of all the mental modifications (Vrittis) at the very beginning of their spiritual life do not know what they mean.

Very often there is in us only a certain amount of external control, but as distinct from this there should be real internal control. If we are outwardly controlled, but are not able to stop the activity in the sense-organ or in the mind, we can attain to higher forms of control. If the senses have been controlled, but are still eager to come in touch with the sense-objects, real control has not been achieved, but only its outward form. Even then a step has been taken in the right direction.

One form of control is to draw oneself away completely from the objects of the senses. Another form is to allow the senses to come in touch with things that are pure and not likely to harm the aspirant by rousing fresh desires in him. This is the better and easier method for most people.

'O my mind worship the Mother and repeat day and night the great MANTRAM (the mystic word) that you have received from your Guru. When you lie down, think you are making prostrations to the Mother. When you sleep, think you are meditating on Her. When you eat, think you are offering food to Her. With great joy Ramprasad proclaims, "Mother dwells in all bodies. When you walk in the city, think you are going round the Mother Divine."

The idea of this beautiful song is this: To connect consciously every thought and every single act of our life either directly or indirectly with the Divine, to practise the Presence of God at all times.

RECOGNITION OF THE ALL-PERVADING DIVINE PRINCIPLE: The Divine is everywhere and in everything, but we should learn to discriminate and act accordingly. We should learn to become more wide-awake and conscious. We should be more reflective and act less on the impulse of the senses and of our instinct, be they good or bad. We are so careless and easy-going in all this, that we follow the opposite course and bring no end of trouble on ourselves.

We should fully recognise this idea of Unity but in the right way. At present we recognise it so half-heartedly. And properly speaking, without acquiring true dispassion and detachment we cannot recognise it whole-heartedly and act up to it. If we were convinced that the One Undivided Principle exists in all, we could not have any strong hatred or any strong animal love for anybody, separating him from the rest, but would only turn our eyes towards the principle at the back of him. This does not mean that we are to behave like fools. No. We still should know the tiger to be a tiger, in spite of its being a manifestation of this One Undivided Principle. So we should not go and shake hands with it. We should know the Principles to be present both in man and woman, but this knowledge should not prevent us from discriminating and being careful so long as we are on this phenomenal plane. We should see the One Principle at the back of the worldly person leading an impure and immoral life, but we should not go and have intimate talks with him. This is very, very essential. And if we do not act up to this rule, our feet will slip one day, and we shall seriously come to grief. The aspirant can never be careful enough in this. To the extent that we recognise the One Undivided Principle in all, our hatred, our so-called human love, our attachment, would be diminished and lose all strength and influence. Wherever we find in an aspirant, the desire to mix indiscriminately with worldly-minded people and with members of the opposite sex, there is something seriously wrong. His desires for worldly things and enjoyments have not yet lost their tenacity and no purification has been attained. So spiritual progress and realisation are altogether out of question.

Ordinarily our attachment clouds our whole understanding. We must be able to stress the spirit more than the form, more than the personalities and sense-objects, but so long as our craving for sense-enjoyment, our clinging to this little personality of ours, continues to cloud our understanding, we can never really think of this One Undivided Principle, and thus we go on committing the same old mistakes over and over again. No dispassion should be cultivated as much as possible by all aspirants. Without it nothing positive can be achieved.

Christ says, 'He who loves father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.' And that is perfectly true. But not only that, but also he who allows another to love him more than the Divine is not worthy of God. He who allows another to be more attracted by him than by the Divine is not worthy of God and cannot attain Him. When we make another person love us in such a way by not being sufficiently reserved, we are not worthy of God. So, in this too, we should be very careful and wide-awake. We feel flattered, no doubt, we like being attractive to others, we like being loved by others as objects of enjoyment. But we are too impulsive and too unreflective to know that from the spiritual standpoint we create troubles both for ourselves and for others and prevent our progress. We should be dignified and well guarded. We should take such an attitude that others do not dare to approach us in a wrong way. In short, we should try to possess greater and greater discrimination.

Dispassion has both its negative and its positive aspect. We should try to disconnect ourselves from others as much as possible and then connect ourselves with the Divine, so that later on all connection with others can be done only through the Divine, but never again in a direct way. Human love connected with the Divine can be gradually transmuted, but if it is not so connected, it degenerates and always ends in disaster and misery, whatever we may think to the contrary. All our relationships, if they be direct relationships, are only born with the body and associated with others through connections of the body only. There is nothing lasting in them that could ever bring peace and real blessedness to any of us.

It is really very strange that people suffer so much and still they are not brought to their senses, but cling to all these false identifications. Very often we forget the goal and take the means to be the goal. The whole world is bound by the desire for wealth and by the desire for sex. But we should learn to develop a new attitude towards both. We make money the highest goal of our life, and then we come to grief. We make the love of a man or a woman the ultimate aim of our life, and end our life in misery. We should become introspective and know what is the real goal of life and then try to realise it.

Ordinarily there is in us such an awful identification with our body and our senses and passions that we just brush aside God. Wherever there is scepticism with reference to the Divine, there is some imordinate clinging to the self and to the senses and their objects, because of which God is pushed out. So long as the individual is full of sense-enjoyment, desire for possession, of egoism and vanity, God has no place in his life. The Divine is pushed away by our creature-consciousness. If the mind becomes perfectly free from desires and passions, one realises the Divine then and there. So if we do not realise God, if we do not even get a glimpse of the Truth, we need not ask why it is so. We should know that in the conscious and in the subconscious mind there are still strong desires in us, and we should first rid ourselves of these obstructions. So long as we allow them to remain, the question of realisation does not even arise.

We should break the sway of our impulses over us. The very moment the impulses rise in us, we should try to expand ourselves, for then these impulses at once disappear just as the waves disappear in the ocean. The man who knows how to expand his consciousness, how to attain a higher form of consciousness, is not affected by such impulses that rise in the mind. One of the most effective means to rise above one's impulses is to come in touch with the Divine Consciousness, with that Infinite Presence which is always in us. And without knowing how to rise above our instincts, without knowing how to control and curb our passions and cultivating true renunciation and dispassion, without having tried to attain to the purity of mind and of body, there can be no spiritual life for anyone. So we should become more reflective and more discriminating. We are not consistent enough in our thinking and in our actions. There should never be any haziness in the Vedantic aspirant. Vagueness and indefiniteness have no place in true spiritual life. Everything should be clear. We must have definite and right actions. Then alone can we proceed to the Divine Goal and realise it.

HOW TO PRACTISE YOGA ACTUALLY?

I

Many people want to begin from the topmost rung of the ladder; but that cannot be done. There are no long jumps in spiritual life; neither can anything be achieved without first finding out where one really stands. High philosophical flights and wonderful metaphysical dreams do not mean realisation, and by themselves they never lead to realisation, but only to abstract and superfine speculations that have no connection at all with real or practical life. They do not change the life of persons who indulge in them in any way. We should know where we stand and then proceed from there. We must begin as beginners and go on step by step. As an ideal Monism may be all right for us; but when we come down to the practical aspects, we are dualists and shall remain dualists for a long time to come. I am always amused when I hear everybody talking in high terms about the Absolute, the Principle, etc. because in our case all these are nothing but empty speculations and frothy words. They do not even mean that that particular person is fit for the Monistic path. Nobody who stands in Dualism, in whatever way this may be, is a Monist, whether Monism appeals to him or not. Very often the mind of the modern man revolts against the idea of any particular discipline. It says, "Why should we busy ourselves with that? Haven't we got enough drudgery in the world? So why should we follow practices which do not appeal to us? We want the Absolute, so what is the use of Japan, of attributes, of personal forms? Let us reach the Absolute. Let us worship the Divine 'in spirit and in truth!'" All this, no doubt, sounds very grand and highly spiritual; but as soon as we come down to realities we find out it does not mean anything at all. Mostly such people are convinced dualists as far as their own actions in daily life go. To worship God 'in spirit and in truth' is all right. This is the point. For most people it means just haziness, vagueness, - hazy feeling and hazy thinking and acting in a way that has no connection at all with the Divine.

Our mind is always out to deceive us and play tricks on us. Therefore we need strict daily discipline in everything we do.

How to begin? - That is the point. How to get the necessary mental training? - That is the problem before us. Different thoughts constantly keep cropping up in our minds. When we wish to make the mind calm, the mind becomes most disturbed. It revolts the very moment we try to concentrate. It suddenly takes the form of a mighty ocean in which we are in danger of being drowned. The whole surface of the mind is disturbed by mighty thought-waves, and the more we try to calm it, the mightier these become. So meditation makes us very tired in the beginning instead of soothing us and bringing us light as it should.

As in the case of a horse-trainer, who has to take great trouble to break the horse, similarly we shall have to follow a certain definite system of discipline, from which we should not deviate, to break the mind. In our spiritual discipline there must be great definiteness regarding everything. It won't do for us to put two legs in two different boats. We must learn to follow one course definitely without vacillating, to proceed step by step, if we wish to reach the goal one day.

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What are the conditions for meditation? For meditation and for all forms of spiritual practice the first point is a steady posture (asana), usually a sitting posture. Sri Patanjali says, "Any posture that is steady and pleasant." Squatting, no doubt, is very helpful, because the weight of the body is perfectly balanced in that posture, but it must be easy, otherwise it disturbs the mind of the person trying to attempt spiritual practices. For us, it is natural, but for many Western people it may take quite a lot of practice, and some may not even be able to do it at all. Anyway, for those who can, it is the best posture for spiritual practice.

The second most important point is continence. Without Brahmacharya (continence), there is no real spiritual life. When you allow the water to flow out through the rat-holes of the body by wasting it through sex and sensual desires, there will be no energy left for the higher forms of spiritual practice. No use rowing a boat while it is tightly anchored near

the shore. Sri Ramakrishna said, "What we want is communion with the Divine." If there is any obstruction in the form of sexual desire communion is not possible. It is just like the case of the broken telegraph wire. The electricity may be there, the operator may be there, but the communication will never reach its destination as long as the broken wire is not repaired, or as long as some obstructing non-conductor is not removed. "In heaven there is no marriage nor giving in marriage."

Our cravings of the flesh, our desires, usually stand in the way of real religion. The sham thing you ordinarily see in life, going to places of worship and hearing religious instruction and doing as one pleases is not true religion. This kind of thing may have proved highly profitable for the Church, but it is not Christ's teaching. The right mood is essential for all forms of spiritual practice, and without spiritual practice there never can be anything like spiritual life. The early Christians knew this perfectly well. So did many of the great mystics of the Middle Ages. But now the whole tradition seems to be lost in the West; and that is why the West is sinking to the level of the brute.

Without ethical culture we can never come in close touch with the Divine. If, after creating a perfect void, we are able to have the right thought, well and good. Then this kind of practice is very useful. But it is very dangerous for the beginner, because he does not succeed in having the right thought after creating the void, but just falls asleep or is dominated by his subconscious mind. In the case of the beginner there is always the great danger of his mind falling below the threshold of consciousness.

As has been mentioned above, the mind is very much like an unruly horse which has to be broken. The horse acts in two ways: When we want to drive it, it either becomes dreadfully restive or it simply lies down and refuses to move. It does not wish to be steady. So in order to break this unruly horse of our mind a certain amount of ethical culture is necessary. So long as the thought of sex and money is allowed to dominate it, it cannot be broken.

I I I

What are the virtues to be practised in spiritual life? First comes, as Manu says, Ahimsa or not harbouring any ill-feeling towards others whether they are good or bad. Remove these ill-feelings as they arise in the mind. With a disturbed mind it is not possible to have any form of concentration. It is not possible for us to have a concentrated mind and at the same time to cherish an evil thought against anybody. I am speaking of higher concentration.

Next comes Non-stealing. This must never be taken in the gross sense only. Anything that we wish to possess at the cost of anybody else, anything that we get by unfair means, is stealing.

Third - Purity. Physical as well as mental purity is absolutely necessary. Sometimes we commit the mistake of stressing only physical purity, because it is so much more difficult to achieve true mental purity. There are many who satisfy themselves by taking baths, but who do not trouble themselves to have a pure mind. It is, however, impossible to concentrate a dirty mind on higher things. So long as there is the impure thought of a woman in man or of a man in woman, real higher concentration is out of the question. There may not be any gross physical relations, but it is sex all the same, and so long as there is any form of sex, purity has not been achieved, and without purity having been achieved the higher spiritual life remains very far off.

Fourth - Sense-control. One who abandons himself to any form of sense-enjoyment cannot have any calmness or peace of mind. So he cannot do his practices well, however hard he may try. And there is this great point to note: Before the aspirant takes up the practice of asana (posture) he must already have gone through the whole of this ethical culture. So highly do the teachers of spiritual life value purity and non-attachment.

I V

Now let us sum up what we have to do and what we have to practise in spiritual life.

- 1) We must practise a steady posture (asana);
- 2) We must calm the mind;
- 3) We should make salutations to all the teachers of the world or to one particular teacher if this appeals to us more.

And what is necessary for really calming the mind has already been told. The mind can be calmed only by good and perfectly pure thoughts - only by holy thoughts, not connected with the body or the world.

The Upanishads say, "We must worship the Lord with a calm mind." So this calming of the mind is most important for all aspirants. In spiritual life especially we should follow the footsteps of the Great Ones.

We generally find it helpful to pray not only for our own spiritual welfare but also for that of others. Pray intensely for concentration, for calmness, for singleness of purpose, and for your own spiritual welfare as well as that of all other beings, so that they too may become pure and calm and concentrated and given to the higher life.

That is why Swamiji (Vivekananda) taught, "Immediately after sitting for meditation send thoughts of love South, East, North, West, to all creatures. You will find this immensely helpful."

As I said, during all our prayers we should also pray for the good of others. This sort of prayer, if done with a certain amount of concentration, brings to us in a general way a feeling of love for our fellow-beings who are struggling for the Higher Life and passing through great anguish and difficulties. The expansion of the soul is very essential for truly calming the mind and concentrating it on Divine things.

There are some people who find rhythmic breathing very helpful. Mind and breath are always interrelated and always act on each other. While doing Prana-yama the proportion should be 1:4:2, but mere breath is not enough. If it were so, t

football bladder would be the greatest of all Yogis of the world. Along with this breath we must have the intense thought of overwhelming purity. "Everything is purity. I myself am purity, I am purity." Give strong suggestions to your mind. Inhale purity, exhale purity, fill yourself with purity. Inhale calmness, exhale calmness, fill yourself wholly with calmness. Inhale peace, exhale peace, fill yourself wholly with peace. Inhale peace, exhale all mental disturbance. Inhale dispassion and renunciation, exhale all attachment, passion and desire. Inhale purity, exhale all that is impure in your body and your mind. Inhale strength, exhale all weakness and fear. Go on giving these intense suggestions to your mind again and again before coming to your real practices.

V

What next? After this the thought of the Divine must be taken up. Where to think of the Divine? Where to have the centre of one's consciousness? Either in the head or in the heart. These two centres are safe for everybody. Never should a centre below the heart should be taken. Here instructions can be imparted only to individuals, because they differ from one another, but both head and heart are always safe. If we do not consciously raise the nervous current at least up the level corresponding, more or less, to the place of the physical heart, no spiritual meditation becomes possible. This conscious raising of one's nervous currents leads one beyond all sensual temptations and establishes one firmly in morals and ethical culture. For very dry and over-intellectual people it is advisable to take the heart. For emotional people the heart-centre is very dangerous and should be avoided.

Think intensely of the particular centre and imagine it to be a centre of Divine Consciousness. Have the thought that the Divine Consciousness which is within you is also outside, part and parcel of a mighty Consciousness which is undivided and indivisible.

In the beginning you may think of it as light, but really speaking what is meant is the light of Intelligence,

i.e., the Divine Light; and this Divine Light, which is in me, pervades at the same time the whole universe and is one and eternally indivisible. This body of ours is like a temple of Brahman; remember, each body is like a temple of Brahman!

Having done all this, try to merge your consciousness in the Divine Consciousness as in the case of the salt-doll getting merged in the sea. You know the parable of Sri Ramakrishna. This body-consciousness stands in the way, and as soon as we try to merge it in Divine Consciousness we get the idea that the soul is not the body.

Meditations should not be focussed on the void. There should be no creating of a void in the beginner. This is very dangerous. Meditations must have some definite, positive, spiritual content. Those who find meditation on the formless too abstract should centre their feelings on some holy form. This is very effective in two ways: It leads them away from their too personal affections and aversions and, at the same time, intensifies their feelings in a good sense, makes them more definite and leads them on to the light of the spirit. If ever any picture of any person you used to love or to hate troubles you, set a very vivid picture of the holy form you have chosen as your Ishtam, against that picture and the feeling you have for your Ishtam against the feeling you have for that person, be it affection or aversion. Vivid pictures and memories must be counteracted by vivid pictures, strong feelings by stronger and purer feelings.

There is too little attempt at sublimation. We must learn to think in terms of the soul. Never stress the body aspect. Never think of yourself as a man or a woman. It is very necessary and very helpful to deny the body as much as possible. Sublimation is of the greatest importance. Think intensely, "I am not a man, I am not a woman. I am not even a human being."

Repeat all these grand passages from Sankara's works. He says:

"I am neither a human being, nor a God, nor a demi-God. I am neither a Brahmin, nor a Kshtriya, nor a Vaisya, nor a Sudra. I am neither a student nor a householder nor a forest-dweller nor a monk. I am the Self, the Infinite Consciousness.

"I am neither the mind nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the mindstuff. I am neither the senses of hearing, taste, smell, touch or sight, nor am I earth, fire or air. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. I am the Self, I am the Self."

"I am neither male nor female nor neuter. I am the Beneficent Being, the Light Supreme."

Just blast this rotten personality with these grand passages from Sankara by bombarding it with them at the time of meditation. It must be blasted, and if it does not go, nothing can be achieved.

Go on repeating sincerely "I am He, I am He."

"I am neither the body nor the senses, neither the mind, nor the ego, neither the vital energy nor the intellect. Husband, wife, child, wealth or prosperity are free from me. I am the Witness, the Eternal Indwelling Spirit, the Being Beneficent."

"I am the light of the Atman, the Light that is inside, the Light that is outside, the Light that is the inner Self. I am the Supreme Being, the Light of lights, the Light self-existent."

All these ideas are always associated with Mahadeva (Shiva) the Great White God/^{of} Renunciation, of Purity, of Dispassion, who has always been the Ultimate Ideal of spiritual men in India.

"I am the Being Resplendent, and none else. I am Brahman, not subject to misery. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute, eternally free by nature." (Sankara)

And there is the beautiful prayer in the Upanishads:

"May my mind become pure. May I be free from impurity and evil. May my soul become pure. May I be free from impurity and evil. May I realise myself as the Light Divine."

V I

Different forms of meditation without human form may also be practised:

- 1) The aspirant imagines he is a fish swimming in the

one undivided and eternally indivisible ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, without any obstruction whatsoever.

- 2) The aspirant imagines he is a bird flying in the infinite sky without anything to stand in its way anywhere.
- 3) The aspirant is like a full pot immersed in water. Water inside and outside.
- 4) The aspirant is like an empty pot floating in ether, ether inside and outside.
- 5) The aspirant imagines himself to be a point of self-conscious light immersed in the one indivisible Ocean of Light.

You identify yourself with the point of light, then you feel it to be part of an infinite sphere of light, and after that everything becomes just light everywhere. Nothing but light is left. Either make this point of light expand or merge it or let it move wherever it goes, because wherever it goes, there is the one infinite light. Try to expand during the time of meditation. Keep your body-consciousness hanging on a peg, as it were, at least for a time. Thus you raise counter-currents against all your false conceptions and feelings which lie at the root of all your troubles. All such ideas as "I am So-and-So, I am a husband, a wife, a child, a lover, etc." come from this mistaken identification with what is non-self. Really speaking, worldly love is nothing very grand. Association with others in bodies is nothing very fine. Learn to be realistic.

If one follows such a path, it is just like being a yeast-cell which goes on dividing and dividing itself, but never become big. The impulse of creation remains. It is the same impulse which leads to sex and physical creation on the animal plane that leads us to the highest on the spiritual plane. The man, forgetting the real background of his manhood, goes and associates with the bubble of a woman-form, feeling himself to be a man-bubble. So bubbles merrily associate with bubbles. Yeast-cells go on dividing themselves eternally and never become big.

All these relations based on the body are bosh and nonsense. "O, I have been longing for you all my life. You are the star of my life." All nonsense! Afterwards, when all is over, when your body is satiated with enjoyment, each goes

again in his own way. Inwardly we all remain strangers, however hard we may try to deceive ourselves on this point. Never can our void be filled by a man-bubble or a woman-bubble, nor by any bubble-star, by anyone who has always been "my life." All this sounds very grand and romantic, but there is no ultimate truth in it. To the child, the dolls are something very real. It loves them and caresses them and for a time feels very happy in the company of its dolls. Then, one day, it has lost all interest in them and sees them merely as absurd-looking, shabby dolls, hardly being able to understand how it could have cared for them so much. This happens to the grown-up man-child or woman-child also, sooner or later, after many lives, or in this life. But to all this awakening comes one day, and in the beginning this means terrible pain and misery.

THE GOAL AND METHODS OF THE TRUE YOGI

The mind should be stilled, no doubt, but then we should see that Divine Consciousness takes its place with new thoughts, otherwise the merely stilled mind is of no use. It becomes a state of dullness or lethargy, but never a state of illumination. Unless we are able to remain wide-awake, to keep our consciousness when the mind is calmed, there is every chance of the mind falling below the level of consciousness to the subliminal plane. What the Yogi really wants is the higher plane of consciousness, not a state of inertness like stones or stocks.

Yoga means restraining the mind-stuff, not allowing it to burst into waves.

Even in the state of deep sleep, there is no absolute unconsciousness. All the so-called unconscious processes go on, only very rhythmically, but for all practical purposes it is an unconscious state in which the soul even forgets self-consciousness. The self-conscious principle is shrouded in a kind of ignorance. We do not get wiser in any way because of deep sleep. We do not attain illumination. Only the brain

and the body feel a little invigorated by it.

In the lower states of Samadhi the breath and the heart-beats may continue, but in the higher state both stop.

Out of the Causal cones the subconscious aspect of mind, and out of this the conscious aspect. The mind is like an ocean, and in this the conscious mind is at the most like a small island. In the lower layers of the mind there is always movement, but in the really deeper layers there is no movement at all.

I I

Sankaracharya says, 'Being is everything, becoming is nothing.' And in Gaudapada's KARIKAS on the MANDUKYA UPANISHAD we find, 'As belief in the unreal attaches the mind to the unreal, knowledge of absolute non-evolution frees it from relativity and turns it away from the unreal.'

In Sat, 'being,' there can be no question of evolution or involution at all, and becoming is only true on the relative plane, and even then all becoming must have an end somewhere, and it must, one day, end in Being. Seen from the highest standpoint, evolution is a myth, but the idea of evolution serves its purpose for a time on the relative plane. Our great thinkers were very thorough-going in everything they taught. They were not afraid of Truth and what it implies.

The Vedantin of the Advaita Schools knows there is no evolution in reality. What is real cannot evolve. What is permanent and unchanging, cannot evolve. So being alone is real, and nothing that pertains to change or to evolution is real. There is never a break in the Soul's consciousness. It may be clouded by Avidya and by imagining all sorts of untruths.

I I I

The state of spiritual experience is not unconsciousness. It is something positive. It must have a positive content. It must never be negative, and it is the very opposite of inertness. Falling below the level of consciousness, to the subliminal plane, is not spiritual experience. In the West, very

often, this point is misunderstood and hopelessly distorted, especially by the missionaries who do not know what they are talking about.

In the state of spiritual experience the Soul becomes conscious of itself as it is. At other times it is identified with all the different modifications of the mind. And it is the task in Yoga to separate oneself from these modifications. The self is something that is utterly distinct from the body and the mind; and the Self, as such, knows neither evolution nor involution, nor any becoming or development. It is a wrong notion that the real can evolve; because evolution means change and anything that can undergo any development can never be real.

I V

What we have to attain is Brahman-consciousness as distinct from Jiva-consciousness. But in the path there are some dangers which we have to meet, and one of them is to identify ourselves with the causal state of our personality, the Ananda-maya-Kosha, the sheath of Bliss, as it is called, which is not the ultimate reality, but which makes us feel very happy and elated.

'Brahman is the self-conscious Principle that animates everything. It is the ear of the ear, the eye of the eye, the mind of the mind, the source of all vital energy. Knowing thus the wise give up all false identification of the Self with the senses and the mind etc. and become immortal.'

'It is never perceived by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the mind. We know it not; nor do we see It. How to teach one about it? It is different from all that are manifest and known, and is beyond even all that are unmanifest and unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancient seers who explained this to us.'

'What none can comprehend by the mind, but by which the mind can be comprehended, what none can see with eyes, but by which the functions of the eye can be seen, know that alone as Brahman and not that which people worship here.'

V

People who still have some attachments, who are not comparatively free from attachment, cannot really care for Vedanta, nor can they really care for the teaching of Christ. Such people do not like it, because all the Great Ones have preached renunciation as the only way. For people who do not lead a moral, pure, controlled, and non-attached life the teaching of Christ as well as of Vedanta is absolutely useless and cannot have any place in their lives and such people can never realize their goal. Without purity, non-attachment, non-violence and dispassion in thought, word, and deed, there can be no form of spiritual life; whatever other name you may choose to give it.

People who are not prepared to renounce their attachments, who permit themselves to be governed and influenced by lust, anger, and greed, cannot take to spiritual life and can never be Vedantins or followers of Christ. I do not say Christians, because most of the so-called Christians have nothing to do with Christ.

VI

While doing Japa you should give very strong suggestions to your mind so that at each repetition of the Holy Name or sound your mind becomes purer and purer, that your whole being becomes cleansed by the purity of the Holy Name of sound, that all the encrustations shrouding your reality brought about by your past passions and impurities are blasted, that all the superimpositions removed, and that your true being is thus liberated and brought to light.

And then, all the preliminary conditions of Yama and Niyama must be strictly fulfilled; and this not in a gross way only. Before that you cannot attain anything. How could this be possible? Nothing will change, nothing will come, if these have not been fulfilled by you. First their fulfilment means strain and effort. Later on it becomes natural and easy; but you will have to pass through this period of great struggle, or have to go away, sad at heart, like the youth who came to Christ to ask Him what he should do. That youth was not a

to renounce; so he could not do anything; could not follow Christ's words and had to go away in sadness.

V I I

In the spiritual realm Vedanta means allopathy and not homeopathy at all. Vedanta is out-and-out allopathy. Strong injections and large doses of medicine are required. There is no such thing as homeopathy in Vedanta. Homeopathic treatment won't do in the case of the Vedantin, because Vedanta must never be diluted if it is to be at all effective. You see what has become of Christ's teaching by endlessly diluting it.

Desires and the senses are our constant enemies, hence the absolute necessity of leading a disciplined and controlled life. There is no limit to the all-consuming power of desire, and so long as this is permitted to hold sway over us we shall not be able to follow any of the spiritual teachings given us by the Great Ones. There should be no conscious or unconconscious veiling of this fact.

No one who constantly stimulates those centres in the brain which act on the sexual nerve-centre in the body can even think of leading a spiritual life. It all becomes sham and hypocritical, a counterfeit of the real thing. In modern life very often things are being done to stimulate sexual desires - through the cinema, through literature, through dancing; through music, through conversation, through drugs and intoxicants etc.. and so long as a person does not realize this fact, does not become fully awake to it - he is not able to lead a spiritual life, neither is he able to be a follower of Christ.

This is really the Kali-Yuga. Everything has become body, animal brutish. You can clearly see why the great Ones like Buddha, Christ, and Sri Ramakrishna, why the great messengers of humanity like Mahatma Gandhi in our days, have to fight everything that in anyway pertains to sex. For sex brings destruction, and wherever there is sex, there you shall find the manifestations of brutality, because they are closely inter-connected. And modern civilization has raised sex to the posi-

tion of a God and constantly sings praises of sexual love in its literature, cinemas, theaters, and general conduct of life. It is just pandering to the lowest animal propensities in man.

For spiritual culture the most essential thing is a healthy mind, a pure mind, a mind that has not become perverted, that still has the capacity to strive after realization.

V I I I

It is not possible for us to take up each individual hankering and rid ourselves of it. No; a general pitiless massacre is necessary. When we turn to the Divine, allow Him to light the Divine Light in us, all darkness will vanish at once. Then He Himself appears on the battle-field and fights for us. The Lord does His work, but we must also do our part so long as we have our individuality, or are still conscious of being individuals. We have to give up our clinging to this world of manifestation. We have to give up all bodily and worldly desires. We have to renounce all attachments and all 'duties' pertaining to these attachments. That is the only way by which we can rid ourselves of the troubles and miseries of life and the darkness that is shrouding us from the Light. Allow Him to bring about our transformation, to give us the capacity to follow the higher life. Let us pay no more heed to the world than is absolutely necessary. We are always in the world, whether we live in the monastery or outside the monastery. We cannot run away from the world. But we must never allow the world to absorb our attention.

The energy at our disposal, physical as well as mental, is so very limited that we have to use it for spiritual purposes and not waste it in the world and for the world. This, no doubt, means tremendous struggle, but we have to pass through it. There is no other comfortable short-cut. Let us try to be in tune with the Cosmic Power and then this Cosmic Power works through us. This process is to be a conscious one, not an unconscious one as it usually is.

We have been caught in the net of Mahamaya and we must get out of it. Allow the Lord to be the Ferry-man that takes

you across the turbulent ocean of Maya to the shore of Immortality.

'O my Shiva, O my Ferryman, do Thou take me to the other shore beyond this ocean of Life and Death.'

IX

It is necessary for us to surrender ourselves whole-heartedly to this Ferryman. But self-surrender can only come after long and desperate struggle. Real self-surrender is not an easy thing.

When doubts arise in the mind, you must brush them aside with an effort of the will. Our word SHRADDHĀ means much more than mere faith. SHRADDHĀ always brings to the aspirant an amount of faith in himself. So Nachiketas in the KATHOPANISHAD says, 'I am not a worthless person.' Never think you are a worthless person. Be ever ready to face even death for the sake of spiritual life.

Having a faith that is not dynamic, that has no transforming power, a faith that does not make us intensely active in a higher sense, is no use. It must make us tremendously strong in the pursuit of spiritual life.

The man who constantly entertains in his heart destructive doubts comes to grief. He can never attain anything in spiritual life.

'One who is ignorant and at the same time does not possess SHRADDĀ, one who possesses an eternally doubting heart, comes to destruction,' says the Bhagavad Gita.

Unshakable faith comes only when faith merges into experience, not before.

X

Divine knowledge transforms life altogether. Attaining to this knowledge there are souls that transform other lives altogether, not only their own lives. If we do not see Him it is owing to the impurities of our mind. But this is no reason for our saying that God does not really exist. If God is, we

must be able to see Him some day, sooner or later. But first we must develop our own inner power of vision and purify our mind. To-day our mind is gross, and with a gross mind we can only see the external world, but never anything subtler than the grossest forms of manifestations.

We must get a mental telescope. This capacity lies dormant in everyone of us. It does not come from outside, nor can it ever be superadded to our true nature. But then it is something that we do not care to develop. When the mind becomes pure to some extent, we begin to feel the presence of something more permanent and vaster within us. Spiritual life means making this mind subtler and subtler. It does not mean making this mind more and more hair-splitting. We should always be on our guard against too abstract flights of thought which are not given any reality in the expressions of our own lives. It is better to be a Bhakta than a hair-splitting make-believe Jnani. And none can become a true Jnani without having almost completely purified his mind. So these sham Jnanis we meet should not be taken seriously. There is always a danger for certain minds to raise wonderful philosophic structures and revel in them which do not transform their lives, and for most people the safer and quicker path is the path of Bhakti tempered with a certain amount of Jnana. This is what Swami Vivekananda really wanted. There are some very clever and highly intellectual minds which even split hairs which nobody wanted them to split. I meet so many people talking in glowing terms of Advaita and of the Absolute that I am becoming afraid of them and their wonderful knowledge. They do not even know what they are talking about.

V I

The mental world is infinitely vaster than this gross world. When we catch a glimpse of the glory of this inner world of thoughts, the external world and all its attachments lose all charm for us. But first we must prepare ourselves thoroughly to get access to this inner world of ours.

'Dhyana (meditation) is an unbroken flow of homogeneous thought like the flow of oil which is being poured from on

vessel into another. And when this Dhyana is continued for a longer time it merges into Samadhi.

'Meditation is consciousness solidified, concentrated, a sense of existence solidified, intensified.

'If ever you have a glimpse of the peaceful state, call up the memory of that. It will always have a soothing influence on your mind. Dwell on that. Very often we dwell on all sorts of useless memories. Why not dwell on this kind of ~~memory~~

'Being steadfast in Yoga, O Dhananjaya, perform actions, abandoning attachments, remaining unconcerned as regards success and failure. This evenness of mind is known as Yoga.

'Sattva, Rajas and Tamas - these Gunas, O mighty-armed, born of Prakriti, bind fast in the body the indestructible embodied one.'

'Of these, Sattva, being stainless, luminous, and free from evil, binds, O sinless one, by attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge.'

'Know Rajas to be of the nature of passion, giving rise to thirst and attachment. It binds fast, O son of Kunti, the embodied one by attachment to action.'

'And know Tamas to be born of ignorance, stupefying all embodied beings; it binds fast, O descendant of Bharata by miscomprehension, indolence, and sleep'

(BHAGAVAD GITA - II:45, XIV:5-8)

Ordinarily we are the creatures of our moods. But if we sincerely wish to follow the Path, we must stop being creatures of our moods. We must gain perfect mastery over them.

Guna means 'rope' or that which binds the soul. The soul is caught in the meshes of these Gunas.

Spiritual life should not be abstract thought; neither should it be ego-centric, but cosmocentric. We should not be conscious of the point only, but of the whole circle.

The task of the spiritual aspirant should be to attain the balanced state and at the same time, to have his eyes on that which is beyond the balanced state.

'That which is like poison at first, but like nectar at the end; that happiness is declared to be Sattvika, born of the translucence of intellect due to Self-realisation (Ibid, XVIII: 37)'..

The secret lies in making ourselves cosmo-centric. All are part of the vast Consciousness. Hold on to the anchor. If you do not, you will be tossed again by the waves of delusion. If you do, then in the very depths of your mind there will always be this calmness and balance. The storms and battling waves will only touch the uppermost layers of your mind, but never again disturb it completely.

If we are not able to bring about a transformation in the whole organism, even Sattvika food is of no use to us. The body of Sri Ramakrishna was too Sattvika to be able to assimilate any impure or gross food. But mere physical food will never transform us. This is a very erroneous idea I find in some people. They cling to their impure minds, allow their senses to take in allsorts of filth, but their physical food their stomach must be pure. What nonsense. If the food I take through my eyes, my ears, my touch, etc., be not pure, the purity of material, physical food for my stomach is unessential. Spiritual life is not to be found in the kitchen-pot.

X I I

'The fourth is that which is capable of destroying all evils, ever changeless, of all beings the One without a second, effulgent, and all pervading' (GAUDAPADA).

This is the goal, and we should know it, but once having known it, we should busy ourselves with the path and not so much with speculation as to the wonderful nature of Truth. If it is to have any effect, Vedanta must be made practical. Theories, wonderful thought-structures, as such, have not value in life, and just from one more of the innumerable delusions we cherish so much.

GOD'S STANDARDS ARE DIFFERENT

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'It does not matter if one goes into the ocean of nectar oneself or is thrown into it.'

There are some people who are thrown into it by forces, as it were. They themselves would not have gone.

Man's necessity is God's opportunity; for He as the Soul of our soul is always anxious to reveal Himself. Time and again He stands as a beggar before our door, but we do not take any heed of Him. His love is infinitely great if only the devotee were equally prepared to follow Him.

Judged from a higher standpoint, all are distressed. The man yearning after all sorts of enjoyments, he also feels a sense of want, he also is distressed. The seeker of knowledge feels a void which he wants to fill.

Judged from the standpoint of higher psychology, it is all a sense of want. We all feel we are lacking something, we are yearning for something, no matter what this something be. The distressed person also feels in himself great pain, and this great pain is similar to the general feeling of want all have.

It is just this goad of misery of some sort or other that drives people towards God. It is the sense of want, of void, which cannot be satisfied by any human means, that gives God the opportunity to reveal Himself. First there must be tremendous discontent, then there is a chance of our awakening to Truth.

चतुर्विधां भजन्तो • मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।
आर्ते जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भक्तवर्त्तमान् ॥ (B. 10-
Chpt: 7. 16)

From one standpoint all the persons mentioned in this sloka are seekers, and all these are in misery:- seekers of succour, seekers of knowledge, seekers of enjoyment.

This misery is not due to any outside cause, but is born of what is called soul-hunger.

The love of the wise alone is something that is not tar-
ished by desires. All other loves are tainted by desire and

selfishness, by some form of self-seeking or other. But desire in itself is not bad if it takes us to God. Misery in itself is not bad if it takes us to God. Passion in itself is not bad if it takes us to God. Slavery in itself is not bad if it takes us to God. So God's standpoint is very very different from ours. How Christ treated the so-called sinners with the greatest sympathy! How the Buddha accepted the invitation of the public woman, the courtesan!

So those whom the hypocritical society brands as lost are sometimes saved not because of the grace of the Lord alone, but by some intrinsic worth of their own. Side by side with their lower nature, they have got their higher nature, which asserts itself.

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find how he treated Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great Bengali Dramatist, who was given up as lost by society.

You see, sometimes very, very passionate, glowing souls with tremendous will-power are changed all of a sudden, and it is really this kind of intensity that is needed by you all if you want to make real headway.

In the life of Sri Chaitanya we find how he used to choose the worst scoundrels who were transformed by him and led most wonderful lives.

In some cases this 'sinning' was only temporary, some temporary obstacle, and as soon as this was removed, the whole intensity and the glowing yearning of their soul turned to God. There are some souls who simply rush to God as soon as the obstacle is removed:

God judges such things by a different standard. We see only one link in the chain. He sees the whole chain. He looks within and sees the inner growth.

And those who for some reason or other turn to God alone have got every chance to attain to the Higher Life, not others. Half-heartedness and half-hearted attempts at Sadhana do not lead us anywhere. Intensity and unflinching one-pointedness are always needed. Uninterrupted daily spiritual practice. One who is half-hearted will be able to progress considerably.

When people turn to God and remain devoted to Him, they lose all their desires for enjoyment, and even obtain the vision of God.

There is no harm in our being passionate if we know how to turn our passionateness to God alone. The passional instinct, too, can be made use of if it is given an out-and-out Godward direction and entirely concentrated on God.

There are many people who love their misery. They would never give it up even if they were shown the way. There are also people who love to show their compassion for others. They want 'to do' something for others, 'to live' for them. Everyone must come to know the greatness of their heart and understanding. Again there are others who wish to be angry all their life, or who wish to hate all their life. There must always be something to hate, violently so, if they are to be happy. No one can make them abandon this attitude because they would be so terribly unhappy if ever they would get out of this state. I have had to deal with many such cases. And the more people I see and study, the more I see the whole fun of it. Human nature is so perverse! There are so many people who go on gathering filth and filth and filth, just like certain worms that can only live in dirt. And if these people cannot find enough filth outside, they go and create some more inside, in order to be better able to dig themselves in nicely. Once someone asked me, 'How is it possible that you are able to maintain such a quiet mind, 'when you see all this misery?' I replied, 'Just because I feel this misery and suffering more than you all, I have such a quiet mind.' Sentimentality is no solution, but positive help is. Not simply to show the other person some form of sentimental love, but to help him in his misery. If you cannot do that, do not go on wasting your energy with outward things, with outward compassion, but pray and meditate in deep silence and retire into solitude, for yourselves and others. This you can always do. But mostly you find only sentimental parasites everywhere; wallowing in sentimentality and never doing anything really helpful for others.

The stories of Tulsidas and Vilvamangal are good exam-

ples for the great importance of intensity in spiritual life. Once Tulsidas was shameless enough to run after his wife when she went on a visit to her father. So the wife said to him: "Are you not ashamed of yourself to run after me? If you had turned your mind to God with the same intensity, you would already have become a saint." Then the veil dropped from the eyes of Tulsidas and he renounced his wife and everything else and became a great saint.

Vilvamangal was terribly in love with his mistress, so terribly that he even wanted to see her on the night of the shradha-ceremony of his father, which is considered to be a great sin. As it was late he could not find any ferryman to take him across the river. So he jumped in and began to swim; but seeing something floating by he took hold of it and crossed the river with its help, thinking it was a piece of wood. But when he had reached the bank he found it was a corpse. Then he went to the house of his mistress and knocked and knocked, but nobody opened the door. Suddenly he saw a thick rope hanging from the roof and taking hold of this he climbed up and scaled the wall with its help. But when he had done so, he discovered that the apparent rope was a great serpent. When his mistress asked him which way he had come, he replied, 'I found something floating on the river. It was a human corpse. I saw a thick rope hanging down. It was a great serpent.' Then she said, 'Had you given this intense love to God, you would already be a saint now.' From that moment his whole life was changed, and both he and his mistress became great saints.

Here you see marvellous intensity and one-pointedness of feeling. If there is real intensity and sincerity - readiness to sacrifice everything for the goal and entirely turn towards the goal - there is a chance for you, otherwise not, never. Nothing can be achieved by half-measures and lukewarm practices.

Ordinarily we find sin leads to sin. In rare cases this sinning exhausts all the accumulated bad karma, and then a new day dawns for that person. God is mightily glad that all such souls have come to Him. Intensity of love turned in the right direction always bears fruit. Because His devotees love God

He feels a great obligation towards them, because God is the slave of the love of His devotees. This is the attitude of the Vaishnavas.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If you put your trust in a great man, will he not look after your welfare?' So God looks after our welfare if we put our trust solely in Him.

Just as the devotees become bound to God, so also does God become bound to them.

You do not know the infinite love of the Great Ones. We ourselves have seen some of the children of Sri Ramakrishna getting up in the early morning busy with our problems, how to help us, how to put us on the right way. There is no return for such love. It is marvellous. No one can ever repay them. It must ever remain unpaid. Only this is love, love that knows no bargaining, that asks nothing for itself, that only gives and gives, that never takes. In Sri Ramakrishna also this was the case. One day he asked the others to help Naren (Vivekananda) because he was in such difficulties and his family had nothing to eat. Then Naren became cross and said, 'Why do you talk about my personal affairs to others?' Then Sri Ramakrishna burst into tears and said, 'My boy, do you not see that I would go begging for you from door to door?' This is genuine love, and this we ourselves have seen many a time during our Sadhana in all the Master's children. Blessed in such love! There is an infinite difference between such love and sentimentalism or ordinary worldly relations given the name of love, but being only self-seeking in some form or other. Real love is quite different.

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CHAPTER IV

N O N - V I O L E N C E

I

If you practise Ahimsa (non-violence) out of cowardice it is no merit at all. Real non-violence means the greatest strength and power of endurance a human being can attain to. It means the greatest courage coupled with the greatest love. If there is the slightest trace of aversion or hatred it is not non-violence.

When you lead the higher life, do not stand in anybody's way; do not preach hatred or aversion against anybody, sinner or saint; do not trample under foot anybody, whoever he be. Do not elbow out others; do not sacrifice the interests of others for the sake of your interests or the interests of those who are dear to you. In the animal kingdom struggle (the so-called survival of the fittest) is necessary; but if we wish to be men, we must go beyond the laws prevailing in the animal kingdom and in nature. We must have the idea of love and non-injury in thought, word, and deed. We must not be swayed by our impulses; we must rise above attraction and aversion, and learn to be and remain as the witness of everything.

The ideal of the spiritual man should be, not how to stand in anybody's way; not how to enslave anybody; for his is not the ideal of animal existence. He has to rise above all the laws of the animal kingdom. If he does not do so, he will never become a man. He must always be prepared to help others, even at the greatest sacrifice. He must never allow himself to be used by others for their selfish interests.

Ahimsa is the highest goal. We must proceed step by step. Physically as well as mentally Ahimsa is to be practised. The mind must be cleansed of all impure impulses and thoughts. We can have real Ahimsa only if we really advance. The ideal of Ahimsa and the full realisation of Ahimsa in our own life are very widely apart. So we must consciously proceed in the right direction; and learn to analyse all our motives and impulses in whatever garb they come.

At a higher stage you develop such a soul-force that people dare not take advantage of you. Do not be soft or sentimental when the Principle is involved. Do not yield, whatever happens. We must learn to compromise less and less. The higher goal should never be lost sight of. We do not want to make a virtue of softness or bonelessness; but we have to fight all ideas of violence, in our nature. Ahimsa does not mean softness. The world is so impure and so bad that you cannot live in it if you do not go on hissing. But the limit of hissing should never be passed.

I I

Until your power of discrimination increases, never lose your balance. At least, do so only mentally, never give expression to it.

Whenever any tempting thought arises with reference to lust, anger, passion, etc. do not give it any physical expression and carefully avoid coming in touch with the object that makes it rise in your mind. Try to calm the mind, withdraw the mind steadily from all sense-objects. If you give such a thought or impulse a physical expression, it becomes very difficult for you to erase it again. Everything remains recorded in your mind, and so it creates no end of troubles for the aspirant who has to efface all such impressions before he can really progress in the spiritual path. You will be astonished to find how many bad impressions will rise during your practices, impressions you have never been even aware of before.

'Whatever desires and passions, anger and hatred, and other feelings trouble you, sit down quietly without paying any heed to them.'

If some wish arises in your mind which you know to be wrong as it stands in the way of your mental purification, annihilate it by giving your mind a different direction. Do not fulfil that wish. If you do, new impressions will be created which will make it all the more difficult to efface even the old ones. Freedom does not mean following one's

desires and impulses, but freedom means being the master in one's own house, physical and mental, and teaching all such desires a good lesson, so that they dare not come again and trouble one. None who follows his wishes and impulses and desires and gives in to them is free. But most people do not even realise the state of slavery they live in.

I I I

Do not have useless discussion. Do not have useless reading. Do not see useless things. Do not meet others uselessly. Discussions very rarely are of any use unless the people you are discussing with really want to change their ways of thinking. 'Only that kind of discussion that helps us to arrive at the Truth can be had recourse to, but not others.' -- this was Sri Ramakrishna's advice in this respect.

If you are careless in all this, one day you will find that you must pay a heavy price for your carelessness. But then it will be too late to escape paying it to the full. Spiritual life without mental control without curbing one's desires and wishes and passions, becomes an impossibility. Spiritual life without becoming free from the trammels of all such desires, of attraction and aversion, of violence and hatred, and of possessive personal love, just remains an empty dream. Nothing more.

PURITY IS STRENGTH

I

You can never divide the world into East and West as far as the essentials of life are concerned. All problems are cosmic problems. You cannot say, here the East begins; here the West begins. This is a very very erroneous and misleading idea and has been the cause of many fatal mistakes in the history of humanity. There is no eastern truth or western truth, but only Truth as such, which is neither eastern nor western, nor anything else but the one and only Truth. All problems of the human mind are the same problems. There is no such

thing as East or West in this respect. There is no eastern and western mind in so far as the essentials are concerned, but only the human mind. There are differences in customs, in the non-essentials of life; but the human mind always remains the same and its problems are always those of the human mind, not eastern or western problems.

I I

There is this first and a very essential point to be remembered in the course of one's spiritual striving. We should all have a short break after dinner i.e. , in the middle of the day, say at two o'clock or so. This is very useful, but very difficult for many people to practise. For many it is so difficult to have just a little break of consciousness, or just a little break in the hectic and feverish activities of one's mind, to fill it again with the holy name and the harmonising vibrations of the holy sound. We should also make it a point never to read anything worldly - no novels, no fiction, no stories - before going to bed or before falling asleep. At that time we ought to have some holy thought and some holy sound to dwell on. It may be that we are going to sleep in the lap of God, or some other such idea. It would fill our whole mind before falling asleep - the divine idea and the feeling of the Divine. If we permit ourselves to read something worldly, this goes on working in our subconscious mind during the hours of our sleep and has very bad effects. In the evening we should be very careful as to what we allow our minds to busy itself with, or as to how to get our mind absorbed. There should be concentrated and peaceful dwelling on the Divine - either the Divine form or the Divine name, or the Divine sound, or on all three combined, which is the most efficacious way. Only thus can ⁱⁿ time succeed in transforming the contents of our subconscious mind. It is very, very harmful to read worldly books before falling asleep; but we generally do not realise the extent of the harm we do to ourselves by being careless in this respect. The workings of the subconscious mind during the time of our sleep are very important and should not be lost sight of.

There is one more point which should be mentioned; if you awake at night, at once begin doing your Japam in a quiet peaceful way, without any unnecessary strain. But during the time of your practices Japam and sleep should never become connected. This is very bad. Before going to bed, do 100 to 1000 times Japam; fill your self with holy sound; and make it a point never to stop doing Japam before having reached the number you intended to do.

Habits are to be formed and strengthened. Then spiritual life becomes easier and loses much of its initial strain. Strictly preserve your fixed hours. Then meditation slowly becomes possible even when the mind is very restless. There should be perfect regularity in the hours of your spiritual practice, because only thus does the mind grow accustomed to them. And under all circumstances a certain minimum is to be kept up in one's daily practices. The time of the practices should be slowly and steadily increased in the case of the beginner. In the case of the advanced student, there will be an under-current of devotion in the mind which enables him to keep part of the mind busy with the devotional practices at all times, whatever one may happen to do outwardly. Before that state is reached the greatest regularity concerning the hours and the fixed round of spiritual exercises are to be observed by all aspirants most scrupulously.

I I I

Fellow-travellers can help each other. That is why holy company is of such great importance. There should be mutual help, mutual sympathy; because these help us in sustaining our energy and our striving. We should never try to be teachers; but only students amongst fellow-students, giving others a helping hand if we can, but never assuming the role of the teacher. This is always safe if we know how to remain within reasonable limits. Then we do not become dangerous to ourselves and to others. Then the teachers' mentality cannot sprout up in us and harm us and others.

"Thou art the mechanic, and I am the machine." This is the attitude we should adopt, and never that of superiority.

Before you lead others, learn to serve with dedication and self-surrender. Very often we want to lead without proper training. We want to have the fruits without paying the proper price.

The advantage of a small group of devotees is that in a small group all these direct instructions are applicable. It is easier to have a true spirit of sympathy and no backbiting in a small group, even if they be beginners. It is always better to have first intensive work and then, later on, extensive work.

I V

We should always act in such a way that we may equip ourselves fully to be able to meet death with a smile. Death should be our greatest happiness. It should be the gateway to Immortality, to be welcomed, never to be feared. This life is nothing but a passing shadow, a phase, a life in a world of unrealities and shadows. Our future depends on what we think in this life, on what we are, never on what we appear or pretend to be.

Whatever be the truth, follow it. An unpleasant truth is always infinitely better than a pleasant falsehood. Even if this truth breaks our hearts, even if it shatters once for all our fondest hopes and illusions, let us face it undauntedly. Vedanta is not for cowards or emotional weaklings. No use clinging to falsehood. No use covering the decaying carcass with beautiful fragrant flowers and doting over it! Let the light come under all circumstances, no matter whether the heart breaks or not. Do not care so much for breaking of hearts and shattering of hopes as for Truth and Light. Sometimes necessary operations are very painful; but if the surgeon should refuse to operate on the patient, the patient would die. Nothing is truer than the fact that some day the body will fall off. And we should so conduct ourselves that we have no occasion to repent for having wasted our precious time and our precious human birth.

Our great poet-saint Tulsidas sings: "When I was born, cried and others laughed. Act in such a way that when you

die, you laugh and others cry." This is the real task of our life. So we have a proverb in Bengali that says: "Do whatever spiritual practices you may be doing, but you must know how to die."

Death is always of the body, never of the Spirit or the Self. So why fear death? Death should neither be courted nor be feared, neither should life be so. The bier is always quite as real as the cradle, the burning-ghat as real as the nursery; but we rejoice at the one and recoil from the other. Why? Why this desperate clinging to physical enjoyment and physical relationships? I neither want life nor do I want death, because life is something infinitely greater than this shadow of life, the phenomenal life. We cling to our bodies and to those of others, to our own minds ^{and} to those of others and think we have got hold of life. We have not. We have got hold of the mirage, the reflection of the reflection of the reflection, and nothing more than that, and go on hugging it to our breast. What terrible fools we are! What an inordinate attachment to all that is not life! The true aspirant, he who has true spiritual yearning, neither clings to life, nor does he ever yearn for death, because to him, neither of them has any reality. We must learn to be wholly indifferent to our life and wholly indifferent to our death, but act in the right way to make spiritual progress, so that we may be able to make the very best use of the short span of life given to us. We need not be afraid of death, neither of our own nor of anybody else, if we just minimise the attachments of life and our personal relationships with the phantoms of others, with the men phantoms none of which has any ultimate reality. Relationships based on the mirage always prove to be nothing but a mirage in the end. You cannot have real relationship with what is unreal and which has no ultimate being.

The deaths of our Great Ones have taught us grand lessons. How wonderful was the passing away of Swami Ramakrishnanda, Premananda, Turiyananda, Brahmananda! The worldly minded and those who cling to their personal attachments alone should be afraid of death. The spiritual ones do not lose anything. It is just like passing from one room to another. One day, after the Master's death, Holy Mother wanted to put on the

widow's dress. But the Master appeared to her ^{and} said, "What are you doing? Am I dead? Death is just like passing from one room to another." So she gave up her intention. It is the body that dies, not the Self. We must be prepared to die for a righteous cause without any hesitation; and we must be fully prepared to see others die for it. So our motto is: "To work for our own salvation as well as for the salvation of others." This is what Swamiji wanted us to do, and this is the guiding motto of the Order.

So, Swami Vivekananda said, "This body that we nourish with food, let it be sacrificed for the good of humanity, God in man. This mind of ours that we nourish or develop through studies, let it be made use of also in the service of the God in man. The soul, too, let it be utilised for the service of the Lord in man." Thus alone our mortal death leads us to our spiritual birthday.

V

Follow the higher law. Care neither for optimism nor for pessimism. Develop this attitude of indifference to everything except to the ideal; learn to be perfectly indifferent to all other concerns, especially those of material life and all personal attachments and affections - to all things that bind us, that stand in the way of our spiritual progress. We must be able to maintain a perfect mental balance without allowing ourselves to be ruffled by anything. We must always hold our mind fixed on the one duty, our heart always set on the Lord, our hands ever busy in His service alone.

The glorious lives of many sages and saints are before us; they show us how to live and how to die. We have only to mould ourselves according to the pattern they have given us again and again. Even if we fall in this battle of life, through newer and newer lives we shall work with renewed vigour. Step by step we shall rise until we attain to our lives' only goal.

The conception of the Self is the peculiarity of the true Aryan. It is not to be found among Semitic religions. This is why Sri Krishna up-raises Arjuna for his "un-Aryan"

attitude. No Semitic religion has ever risen to the true Aryan conception of the Self and the higher life.

Generally we ourselves create all the obstacles that stand in the way of our spiritual progress or self-realisation. We think of ourselves in terms of the body and of the mind and do the same with reference to others. Then we go and take up direct relations with them as men or women, and then all the rest naturally follows in due course. On what does this whole life of the body and of the mind depend? On consciousness and not on man-form or woman-form or child-form. The moment the Self leaves the body, it becomes lifeless. All its charm vanishes. Nobody feels attracted by a dead form be it ever so beautiful; but what really attracts us in the man-form or in the woman-form is consciousness which we mistakenly identify with that particular body or mind. There is such a lot of blind infatuation in the world owing to this super-imposition on the Reality; and without undermining all these wrong notions and conceptions, all these body and mind-bound likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions, we shall never be able to make any progress. If I love the life of the body so greatly, why do I not look to that on which it depends? I should learn to love the life of the Self, because only owing to its presence is there any life in the body and in the mind at all. The cause is greater than the effect; and the cause of the life of my body and my mind and that of all others is the Self alone, not my man-form or woman-form or child-form. If I want life that is permanent and unchanging, I must look to the Self and never to any of the Upadhis (limiting adjuncts). But it takes people many, many lives to see this and realize their Himalayan mistake. Swami Brahmananda once told me, "My boy, if you give yourself to the world, your youth, beauty, health, everything will be gone. If you give yourself to the Lord, you will retain them all."

V I

Sri Ramakrishna always used to say to the women who came to him for instruction, "Beware of the snares of man; even if he is a very near relative." One cannot attain anything in

spiritual life without perfect chastity in thought, word and deed. The amount of real chastity attained determines the whole progress of the aspirant. Everyone should be on his guard with every person of the other sex, be he a man or a woman. Real chastity is infinitely more than the mere avoidance of sexual intercourse.

There is a nice story of Tan Sen, one of India's greatest musicians. One day when he was singing all alone in the forest the emperor Akbar happened to pass by and heard him. The emperor was enchanted, because he had never heard him singing in such a perfect way and in such a beautiful strain at his court. He felt a little displeased and said, "How is it that you never sing to me so beautifully?" Tan Sen answered, "Sir, how could I? Just now I was singing for some-one who is infinitely greater than you, and who is my Beloved. When I sing to you, I just sing to order and am paid for it. But I cannot open my heart. When I sing to Him who is the Author of the universe, I give my whole heart to my song." You see, good music plays a great part in the life of the aspirant and devotee.

Immortality does not mean impurity acquired by extra-marital relations only. Even if one is married, carnal relation with one's wife is really immoral. One can be as immoral with one's own wife as with any outsider. If one leads a sexually impure life with one's own wife, wherefrom is he to get the energy and intensity so absolutely necessary for all real spiritual striving? We should clearly and dispassionately recognise this fact. We need tremendous energy for leading a higher life; and this energy of ours, which is really one, cannot be wasted through sexual channels, if we want to progress and to really attain something. Spiritual life is not to be had as cheaply as the Protestants think. It is something more than mere morals and ordinary life, although morals are the very basis on which it must rest. No, whoever desires to lead the higher life must pay the price fully. There can be no bargaining in this.

Sri Ramakrishna was always able to tell the character of those brought into his presence. Once a young man was brought

to him while he was in ecstasy. He said, "If this young man touches a woman in a weak moment, he is done for this life, as far as his spirituality goes." Unfortunately, this very thing happened a short time afterwards. All beginners, no matter who they are, have to avoid the company of persons of the other sex (men or women) and always consciously to think thoughts which are opposed to the ideas of sex and their own and others' man or woman-form. Especially in the beginning the sex instinct grows in strength in many people. When water and manure the soil nicely, the weeds will grow nicely too, along with the plants you really wish to grow. So we have to uproot these weeds afterwards. And this we can do only if we are very very careful as to the company we allow ourselves to be in for the first few years of our striving. Never believe yourself to be too strong to be above listening to such advice. Avoid spending time in the company of persons of other sex, no matter how pure they may be, for before you have attained real sublimation, culminating in the transformation of your whole being, concentration influences your sexual imagination also and makes even such pictures more vivid and living as soon as you allow your sexual instinct to be stimulated in any way. This need not be in any gross way at all. Subtle attractions, subtle forms of stimulation, are even worse than grosser forms, because the latter are more easily recognised by the beginner than the subtler ones. Many many times I have found great carelessness in aspirants as to these points, and many have come to grief because of that.

When you feel any temptation, always say, "Mother, come up. Why stay in the lower centres?" Always try to persuade your mind. Never use violence. Speak to your mind in a cajoling way, "My mind, what fool you are to run after enjoyments and sex! Are't you ashamed to do it? You really should know better," etc. This is very efficacious and lessens the strain. Try to address your own mind as a witness, not identifying yourself with it in any way but always trying to stand apart and survey all its movements and desires.

There is a funny story which very aptly illustrates the effects of our carelessness regarding company etc. Once a camel just pushed its nose through the door of somebody's

house. The owner first objected to this, but it said, "I only put my nose in your room, just for a moment. Nothing more." But in fact, it slowly pushed its whole body through the door and then said when the owner objected to its presence in his room, "If you do not like my presence in your house you get out. I do not!" Lust sometimes comes in a very noble dress, in the form of 'duty' in the form of 'compassion,' in the form of 'self-abnegation,' as our mind is always out to deceive us as to its ^{true} motive. Without chastity in thought, word and deed nothing can be achieved in spiritual life. The mind, as I said, always wants to do harm to us, but it patiently waits for an opportunity to do so effectively. So you should give your mind a good scolding now and then and curb it nicely. After all it is you who is the master, not the mind. Do not allow the camel to come in. If you do you will have great difficulty in making it go again.

"O my mind, thou dost not know how to cultivate the land, and such a fine plot is lying fallow. Thou couldst raise crops of gold on it if thou wouldst but till it." Always say "Why remain down, Mother (Cosmic Energy) do come up." There should be a deliberate shifting of consciousness. The Cosmic Energy usually lies 'coiled up' at the lowest Chakra or Yogic centre near the sexual parts. So it should be made to move up higher. Sometimes it is very helpful if the aspirant just touches the higher centres of Consciousness, (head, heart, etc.) with his Rudraksha-beads while doing Japam. Feeling the centre physically makes it easier for him to fix his consciousness there.

If the thought of any woman comes, associate it at once with the form of the Holy Mother or with that of your own mother. Kill the sexual thought at once. Do not permit yourself to be in the company of women. In Tantra there is an instruction which says that all women-forms should be associated with Uma and all man-forms with Shiva. And this is of great value in spiritual life. But the beginner cannot do it effectively; so he should be careful about moving in the company of persons of the other sex and talking to them.

There is another effective means of counteracting the influence of some sexual thought. Just think of some woman

who never knew what sex-life was, or some of man who never knew what sex-life was." This is most important. Think of some Great One, man or woman, who from his or her very birth was a personification of sexual purity in all its aspects. Dwell on that thought daily, making it form a part of your spiritual practices.

V I I

Our object in life should be to transcend the male-principle as well as the female-principle and to go where there is absolutely no sex. On lower planes of life we see male and female, on higher planes, no sex and no form at all. So there is a verse which says, "Parvati is my mother. The Great Lord Shiva is my father. All devôtees are my friends and relations, the whole world is my native land."

Sankaracharya says, "O Shiva, Thou art my Atman. The Divine Mother is my mind. My pranas are Thy attendants, and this my body is Thy abode. All these sense-contacts are part of Thy worship. My sleep is like remaining in Samadhi in Thee."

And elsewhere he says; "Whereever I go, I am just going round Thee. All the words that I speak are like hymns to Thee. And all forms of activities I engage myself in, O Lord, are Thy worship."

Another instruction says, "Keep the eye distant when you see a woman." The same holds good in the case of a woman naturally when she sees a man.

Girish Babu once said, "Naren became so vast that he could not be caught in Maya's net, and Nag Mahashaya became so very small that he dropped through the meshes of Maya." So our task is somehow or other to get out of this, to transcend, to go beyond this Maya, this whole phenomenal world, and reach the Reality. And this can never be done without chastity in thought, word and deed. Unity, ultimate oneness, cannot be reached, so long as one remains physically and mentally tied to duality. There are some who say, "Lord I am Thine." Others again say, "Lord I am thyself." There is a difference in expression, but the ultimate goal is one and the same, when one

work. No revolution, but evolution is what we need. It must be work that leads your mind into higher, constructive, positive channels. Annihilate all morbid imagination about people and things. Annihilate all romantic brooding on others. Never care what others say or think of you. Do not pay any attention to them. You have to follow your path whether they like it or not, whether they approve of it or not, whether they find it good or bad, right or wrong. That is nothing to you. If the heart breaks, let it break. For many it is good if their heart breaks; for then there is a chance that one day they are forced to come to their senses and give up all personal romantic attachments and aversions. Never care for the opinion of others.

There is a funny story. There was a certain house where people living on the second floor were wont to use a sewing machine. Now when the needle went down, a person living on the first floor always lowered his head. His friend watched him for a time. Then he asked, 'But what are you doing?' 'Oh, but don't you see,' replied his friend, 'don't you see how the needle hurts my head?' This is an example of morbid imagination. We constantly busy ourselves with what others may think or say of us. All quite useless. The opinions of babies do not count. We have to follow the path. Let them think or say or do whatever they like. What do they know? It is no concern of ours. What does blame or praise of others mean? Almost all our anxieties, our fears, all our unpleasant feelings and uncertainties belong to the category of morbid imagination.

Always remember that the body must be conquered, the mind and the senses subdued, and that this holds good for all types of spiritual aspirants.

The central theme of all the Yogas is the purification of the heart for cutting off all the bonds of attachment.

In Karma-Yoga one great danger is that we may think too much of the fruits, but if we know, that the goal is perfect non-attachment and purity, we shall not bother about the fruits and this restlessness will not overpower us. It is a great privilege to work for ^{our} ~~my~~ purity without caring for the fruits.

The fruits of all your efforts do not regard you in the very least. As a Karma Yogin you have to work for your Path, but the fruits belong to the Lord alone.

RENUNCIATION - A FUNDAMENTAL NEED OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Jivahood or the consciousness of being a self separate from God always means pain, bondage and limitation. Without getting rid of Jivahood by attaining Brahman or realising the Divine, none can become free. Jivahood brings attachment and all the different forms of so-called human love and hatred, which only mean pain and misery. The Jiva has to undergo the endless cycle of births and deaths so long as he does not realize his true eternal nature. We want freedom and fearlessness. We want to break the limitations of the body and the mind and to be free. This we can never attain, so long as we cling to our different desires and passions and animal cravings. Self realization cannot be obtained without the renunciation of all our clinging to body and mind - to our own bodies and minds, as well as to those of others.

Our great sage Sankaracharya says, "A human birth, desire for emancipation and contact with a holy man - these three are very rare and are attained only through the grace of the Lord." But then even these three advantages do not suffice. We must be eager to profit by these three and be willing to sacrifice everything for the higher life. Without paying the full price we cannot become free or fearless; and without fearlessness and freedom there is no happiness for us neither in this life nor in any future life. All our petty human affections and aversions, all our desires for name and fame, all our clinging to the phenomenon, mean slavery and pain; and so long as we do not realise this clearly, we shall certainly remain the bond-slaves of our senses and passions. Think of Swami Vivekananda's wonderful spirit of renunciation! Try to follow him. Think of him and of all the struggles he had to undergo while his life was being moulded by his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. All this cannot be gained for nothing. You must be eager to realise some-

thing. You must be prepared to sacrifice all your petty feelings and personal desires for the Highest; then alone, one day, the Highest will be yours. Struggle, struggle, struggle. This is the only way. Remember, salvation can be had only in this human birth. In no other birth is it possible to attain salvation. So Sankara somewhere says, "It is not even desirable the state of the Deva, for even the Devas are slaves to for man to attain to their desires. Therefore, the human birth is the best of all births."

In the Katha-Upanishad there is a fine passage that says, "Know that the Self is the master of the chariot - he who sits in it. The body is the chariot. Consider the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins. The senses they say, are the horses. The roads are the sense objects. The wise call him the enjoyer when he is united with the body, senses and the mind." "He who is always of unrestrained mind and devoid of right understanding, his senses become uncontrollable like the wicked horses of the charioteer."

Without practising strict continence in thought, word and deed, - without trying to purify your whole mind, feelings thoughts and actions, nothing will be of any avail. Even the Christian mystics put this period of what they called 'purgatio' first. Purity in body and mind is the SINE QUA NON of all spiritual life, and whoever is not prepared to pay that price to the full, will fall away from the ideal, sooner or later. This is the relentless law, and it has always been so in all countries.

"He who is always of restrained mind and has right understanding, his senses are controllable like the good horses of the charioteer."

"And he who is devoid of proper understanding, thoughtless and always impure, never attains that goal, and gets into the round of births and deaths."

"But he who is intelligent, ever pure and with the mind controlled, reaches that goal whence none is born again."

"The man who has intelligence for his charioteer and the mind as the well-controlled rein - he attains the end of the journey, that Supreme Place of the Divine." (Katha Upd.)

I I

Renunciation and chastity are necessary. Without these, there is no spiritual life. And renunciation means not only outward renunciation, but mental renunciation too. We must renounce all our clinging to our own bodies and minds and to those of others, becoming truly dispassionate and non-attached in every way. It is not enough if we do this with reference to certain things and persons, while trying to cling to others all the more. Why is renunciation necessary? Why should we have so much renunciation and non-attachment? Spiritual practice can never be successfully performed without giving up all old associations which are not helpful to the aspirants with reference to things and to people. Only to the extent to which we are prepared to renounce our desires and passions and our clinging to others, either in affection or in aversion, can we practise true religion with profit and can any progress be made. Never allow your mind to delude you on this point. The mind always tries to bring forward some plausible reason or other, - why we cannot renounce this or that thing, why we should be in the company of such and such a person, why it is our duty to talk to him or her etc. Never believe your mind in such cases. It is always out to deceive you and to become the spokesman for your subconscious or half-conscious desires. So we need not only do Japa and prayer and meditation and other spiritual practices but also have renunciation; and only to the extent to which we succeed in having more and more true renunciation and non-attachment, can all these have any effect. When these two are combined, spiritual practices and renunciation, it becomes possible for us to control the mind and begin cleaning all its dirty nooks and crannies, where we have allowed all kinds of filth to accumulate for ages and ages, through countless births.

Things or persons whom we love, draw the mind, bring attachment, hatred and aversion - love and aversion are only the obverse and the reverse of the self-same coin. Never make any mistake as to this. So they come under the same category. Hatred or aversion is love or attachment turned upside down. It is not something essentially different. We must get rid of

all forms of attachment and of all forms of fear by becoming dispassionate, and free from personal likes and dislikes. We must be kind without ever becoming personal, and there should never be any personal claim on anybody or anybody's love; nor should we under any circumstances ever allow anybody to have any personal claim on us or on our affection. Christ says, "He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me," and there is nothing truer than that. But he who allows any other person to love him more than the Divine, is not worthy of the Divine either, and will never attain the Divine, no matter how hard he may try. We get only what we sow, and so long as we go on sowing all these likes and dislikes, fretting ourselves and others with the chains of so called love etc., we shall remain bondslaves, eternally bringing misery on ourselves and on others. Misery will always come. In some cases it comes soon, in others late; but all have to pay for their folly.

Learn to develop the spirit of true non-attachment. Free the mind from all old associations connected with purely human forms of love and aversion, connected with attachment and sex; for only then will spiritual practices become possible. Every thing before that is just an attempt at spiritual practice, and nothing more.

Hatred is as bad as attachment. Hatred is as bad as love or personal affection, in fact the same thing. Love and hatred are but the two sides of the same coin, as I said before. Never delude yourself into thinking that one is better than the other. Both are fetters and degrade the human being, preventing it from rising to its true stature.

And this is the secret which all who desire to lead a spiritual life should know. There is both love and hatred, and we cannot get rid of them all at once. So what to do? We may keep our love and we may keep our hatred, but we should consciously direct our love only to the Highest, to the Divine; never to any person or any thing; and our hatred should be directed towards everything that prevents us from realising our true nature and towards all obstacles, everything that stands in the way of our progress. And there may be an amount

of healthy and manly self-condemnation, but it should never become destructive or end in negative emotionalism: "O what a sinner, what a despicable sinner I am!" If I have done wrong in the past, it is over. Let me know that I have done wrong, but let me not brood over it. Let me turn over a new leaf and do better in future; let me be more wide-awake in future and learn to be a human being instead of an animal. That is the proper way. Whether we are young or old, we must all be reborn in the world of the spirit and begin our march towards Truth.

In the beginning spiritual practices produce both, good results and bad results. When you go and water the garden nicely you will get fine fragrant roses, but at the same time all the weeds will grow in great abundance. So you will have to do a lot of cleaning and cutting and uprooting.

Too much worldliness is like fire. It burns the human heart. It makes it callous and unable to appreciate spiritual life or even come to know what real spiritual life means. The faculty of intuition becomes so dulled in the worldly person that he is no longer sensitive to higher vibrations and higher truths, but just goes on wallowing in the mire of his desires and sex-bound and sex-conditioned affections.

I I I

All earnest aspirants should observe strict chastity in thought, word and deed. True chastity can never be observed if we are careless in our company or allow old associations to come up in our mind through lack of discretion regarding our talks and the people we meet. It takes a long time to eradicate impure impressions, even when there is a sincere attempt to do so; and it can never be done if they do not avoid each others' company for a very long time. There should be no self-deception as to this.

Christ says: "For there are some eunuchs, which were born so from their mothers' wombs; there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there ^{will} be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive, let him receive." This was the passage Sri

Ramakrishna told the two boys, Sasi and Sarat, (who were later known as Swami Saradananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda) when they first went to see him. He remarked that marriage is the root of all bondage. All the Great Ones have been unanimous as to this fact, but worldly people are always so anxious to do something for God's creation, as if God needed their help! All hypocrisy and cant. God does not need anybody's help; God does not need anybody to help Him in His creation; neither do these people really care. What they want is their enjoyment, not God's creation. People who are able fully to control the sex-impulse for many years and to observe strict continence in thought, word and deed, gain incredible creative strength on a higher plane. They alone really enjoy life, even physically, because they alone are masters over their body and over their moods, and can direct them as they like. A good horseman has great pleasure in riding his horse and in making it follow his wishes. Worldly people do not know the amount of enjoyment a perfectly chaste person gets even out of his body, not to speak of his mind.

To think of one's own ancestors is out-and-out materialism. We alone are our ancestors, not our parents or forefathers. They have given us the instrument, but what we are we owe to ourselves. It is very wrong and very low to conceive life in terms of biological heredity.

Really speaking, the task of spiritual life is to find the radius that leads one to the centre. And here the same coat cannot fit all, as Swami Vivekananda used to say. At the beginning there must be faith and strict obedience to the instructions given us by our teacher. But faith must never end in faith, but in actual living experience. And then, if you want signs, - signs there are many, if you only open your eyes and think.

I V

There should be faith - Shraddha - in the words of the Seers, faith in the words of the teachers and prophets, faith in one's own potential strength and purity. Without a working ideal spiritual life cannot begin. If we put this work-

ing ideal too high nothing can be achieved, but, at the same time, we should never lower the ideal as such, but rise to it step by step by taking higher and higher ideals.

Faith as such, is not enough. You must strive your utmost. Ethical culture means chastity; purity in food; purity in thought, word and deed; purity in one's company and associations; purity in what one listens to. And purity of a chaste life is more important than any other of the spiritual practices. Without these, as a matter of fact, spiritual practice is useless and becomes a mockery.

First comes physical purity. Then the mind must be tackled and controlled. Then comes the control of speech which is most essential. We should never listen to anything that is not perfectly pure and should behave in such a manner that others will not dare to discuss anything impure in our presence. This is the first step. After that a new attitude has to be developed with regard to all things or objects that tempt us in any way, till perfect indifference with reference to them all is reached. So we should keep strict watch over all the movements of our mind so as to become more and more conscious, more and more wide-awake and definite, in everything. There should not be any unconscious moment in our life.

You see, this is very, very, essential, because in the first period of spiritual life - and the first period may extend over many, many years - body-consciousness becomes stronger and the mind tends to wander more than it used to do before any practices were taken up. At the same time, affections and aversions become more prominent and more dangerous if we do not scrupulously avoid coming into touch with their objects, either mentally or physically, or both. All who are not careful in this will one day have a nasty fall.

For a time the body becomes in a special way the centre of consciousness in the beginner as soon as he begins to try to draw the mind away. So we should not allow ourselves to be hoodwinked by the subtle desires of our body and our mind that may crop up and try to drag us away to their particular objects which they wish to enjoy. The aspirant can never be too careful in his associations and the company he keeps dur-

ing the first years of his training for the higher life. Many do not realise this and then come to grief. So we should learn to be conscious, to be aware of our motives, and stop all forms of drifting and all expressions of a merely instinctive life.

TRUE RENUNCIATION IS REAL FULFILMENT

I

Your prayer should never be aimless like balls just thrown into the air without hitting any mark. You must have a definite goal and direct your prayer to that. If you shoot with blank cartridges and your whole shooting is, at the same time, aimless, nothing will come of it. We may pray or pretend to pray, but in most cases the Lord can ask us, "To whom have you prayed?" Certainly not to Me.

With a calm and steady mind just aim at the target and hit it.

I I

Sometimes we get in our heart a little fire of renunciation; but then we again pour the waters of the world on it, until this fire becomes extinguished. The love for the world and everything that the world holds dear extinguishes the little love for the Divine we have. This fire of renunciation and dispassion must be constantly increased as there is every chance of its being extinguished by bad physical and mental associations and all the outgoing tendencies of our impure mind. In the beginning, dispassion is a very tender plant which must be hedged round and protected from all strong gusts of wind and frost; otherwise it can never grow into a sturdy tree which no storm can shake. We must always be careful not to put wet wood on it instead of oil or clarified butter. To the extent we become freer from all personal relations and reactions and attachments we make a greater fire and thus become freer from

the world.

In spiritual life renunciation and dispassion are the two most important factors without which nothing can be achieved. Divine Love fulfils everything; so really speaking there is no giving up, but fulfilment. Real love for God finds its expression in love for man without loving anybody as such. If we develop this new outlook our life changes altogether, because this new outlook breaks down all the barriers and snaps all bonds. It is the tendency of work always to bind and fetter the soul in every way; but if we offer all the fruits of our work to the Lord alone, this very work breaks down all the barriers, destroys all bondage; because then we become only instruments in His hands and know ourselves not to be the agents. We must find room for the Divine in the monastery, in the world, and above all, in our heart.

I I I

Usually we find our mind is burdened with desires and passions, and to the extent we are able to rid ourselves of this load we feel more and more light-headed in the higher sense. We should try to shift our centre of consciousness from ourselves to God, and then we find we and everyone have a place in God.

I V

You must never permit yourselves to be indefinite or vague. Everything must be clear-cut. You must pass through all the different stages being fully conscious of everything.

Very often we choose the wrong path owing to our false conceptions of life, and ultimately come to grief.

V

Meat-eating, as such, is not so bad as its effects on others. We dehumanize a certain class of people because we wish to eat meat. The butchers are not at fault, but we. The deceivers are not at fault, but we who allow ourselves to be deceived by them. And we have to reap the consequences of dehumanizing others for our sake.

V I

There is an adage that says, 'Like Guru, like disciple.'

V I I

You should read the story of the pigeons in Sri Krishna and Uddhava. It is so very instructive. We should profit by the experience of others. It is not necessary for us to pass through the same experience. It is not necessary for us to put our hand in the fire to know that it burns. But we do it and then, as soon as the pain is over, we put the hand again in the fire.

V I I I

Swami Brahmananda used to teach us, 'At the time of meditation you must think that desires and passions have no existence, that they are unreal. Gradually this impression will sink into your mind.'

It is necessary for us to build up a new thought-life, a new world of thought and a new and better way of looking at things. This can be brought about only by conscious effort, by banishing all bad thoughts and bringing in new ones.

If you meditate on some form, you should do so thinking it to be bright and instinct with life. If you meditate intensely on some holy form, you become holier. If you meditate on some pure form, you become purer. Buddha says in one of his beautiful instructions, 'Look upon the world as a bubble. Whatever is subject to the law of origination, is subject to the law of dissolution.'

The sage seeks the Divine when he wants to have perfect security, when he wants to have something that knows no change. And in Him all this world-play takes place, but He ever remains the same eternally.

There is the sky, and there are clouds, but however much clouds may pass over the sky - the sky, as such, remains unchanged, ever the same, and never becomes identified with or diversified into the clouds.

I X

The only ultimate proof for everything is direct perception. If there be a God at all, He must be seen. He must be felt. Mere theorizing will never do. We have to believe in the words of those who have seen Him; we have to follow their footsteps and then verify their experience. Mere faith won't do, although faith is necessary in the beginning. And, as Swami Vivekananda used to say, if anybody tells you 'I have seen God, but you cannot do so,' never believe such a person. All can see Him, although it may take years and years till we get the vision of God.

X

'O Lord, when will Thy name cause streams of tears to flow from my eyes, and my voice to be choked with emotion and my hair to stand on end!'

X I

'One moment to me is like an age; my eyes are flooded with tears; the whole world is a void to me, -- all this because of the separation from Thee.'

X I I

'The Atman is one. It is absolutely motionless, yet swifter than the mind in its movements. It transcends all and hence the senses cannot reach It. It is perfectly steady and still. It outstrips all that run. In it does the vital energy sustain all the activity of living beings. It is ever moving and yet immutable. It is far and It is at the same time near. It dwells within all and yet It exists also outside everything. The wise one who perceives all objects as existing in the Atman his own Self, and the Atman in every being, does not hate anyone for this reason. When to the seer all things appear as nothing but the Atman, then what delusion, what sorrow can come to the sage who beholds that Oneness?'

X I I I

'The Self is all-pervading, self-resplendent, formless,

scatheless, muscleless, pure, unaffected by ignorance. He is the Great Knower, Omniscient, Transcendent and Uncreated.'

X I V

'It is He Who has allotted their respective functions to the powers that govern the universe.'

X V

'Under the cover of a golden brilliance the face of Truth lies hidden. Do Thou, O Protector, remove this cover so that I who am devoted to Truth may realize it.'

X V I

We must rouse a tremendous Divine discontent, the discontent which the mystics of all ages speak of. This is what Swami Brahmananda means. Unless we are able to rouse in the soul this Divine discontent that drives us towards God, spiritual life cannot begin. This discontent destroys all our attachments to worldly things and all our desires.

X V I I

Peace with the world is no real peace. There can never be any real peace with the world. There must never be a kind of slackness in our striving, nor any kind of satisfaction with things as they are. Such forms of satisfaction are very very dangerous for all spiritual aspirations. There must be tremendous discontent and tremendous restlessness for not having advanced sufficiently in our moral and spiritual life. We must consciously keep up the fire of restlessness and discontent for the Higher Life. We must never waste our energies for anything lower. We must never prefer the peace of lethargy to this higher restlessness.

There can be no security unless we have already proceeded very far towards the ultimate goal. Any devotee may come to grief or have a nasty fall at any moment, before he has attained to self-realization. So we should never risk too much relying on our own strength before having advanced considerably.

X V I I I

Spiritual practice and prayer are needed. Constant prayer day and night, constant meditation, constant thinking of higher thoughts, if we can do so. The mind of the beginner must be kept constantly busy with the Divine idea so as to create the habit. After having created the right habit, the path becomes smoother, and there is less strain in the life of the aspirant.

Never allow any break in your practices and daily routine. This is very bad and should be avoided by all. Try to develop great doggedness and unshakable determination. Then everything will become easy and pleasant in the end.

X I X

'O Thou, king of kings, pray bless me with a vision of Thee. I beg of Thee Thy grace. Do Thou cast Thy merciful glance on me. I am offering to Thee this soul of mine, scorched in the burning flames of the world. My heart is covered with dirt and stains. The spell of ignorance has made me almost dead. Do Thou O Lord, purify and revive me with the shower of Thy vivifying grace.'

V X

'O Thou, O Lord of the miserable, please pour the nectar of Thy Love into my soul. Then alone will my burning heart be soothed, and none can prevent this. At the touch of the waters of Thy love the dry plant again blossoms forth, and springs bubble up in the desert and in the sandy places. Having come to hear of Thee, the redeeming stream, of Thy Immortal Love, I crave for a drop of it for my heart scorched by sorrow. Being blessed with Thy Love, O Thou Greatest Friend, may I go out of the darkness of the world, rid myself of the miseries of life and thus find comfort for my troubled soul.'

X X I

Slowly, steadily, but with great perseverance and energy, train the body. Train the mind relentlessly. Make then both fit. This 'slowly and steadily' does not mean that we should be careless. We should do no violence to either body or mind, but we should never become slack.

As it is a new life, a new course, the rule for all is:- Strengthen your nerves. Spiritual life, in the beginning, always brings tremendous tension and tremendous reactions. So the nerves must be made strong to bear it and tension must be minimised. The mind must be calmed and, at times relaxed.

X X I I

Food is not the most important thing; I mean, physical food or nourishment. So Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Meat or no meat, fish or no fish, the mind should be kept pure.' The best instruction is to avoid all these who are not necessary for your spiritual life, and to do away with all things which are not needed for it. The food must be pure; the food of the eyes, the ears, of all the senses. Physical food alone is not enough. This is very important, as I have said many a time.

X X I I I

It is always necessary for the aspirant not to keep the nerves highly-strung.

There is a little piece of poetry by Edward Markham which is very nice. He says:-

"For all thy days prepare
And meet them ever alike;
If you're the anvil, bear,
If you're the hammer, strike."

This little piece Miss MacLeod used to like very much. So she sent it to me one day.

ASSOCIATION WITH THE WISE

Holy company you find stressed everywhere. And truly speaking it is very essential for the growth of the aspirant. It is one of the most essential factors in the life of the neophyte. But the aspirant must know how to make use of it.

Such grace has been showered on you, and that grace may be taken away any day and perhaps for ever. Some of you may

not be given a second chance.

If we cannot get the company of the good and the pure during the period of our sadhana i.e. the company of truly, deeply spiritual people, we need not seek fools, i.e., worldly-minded people, and be in their company. Their impure immoral vibrations affect us in our present state even if we do not feel it, if we are too callous to feel it and think nothing has happened. When some young boy-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna complained to Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) at the Barangore Math that they had not yet realised God and had better go away back to their families and family-life, to their life in the world, Swamiji replied: 'If I do not find a person, do I go to some other person for that reason? If I do not realise God, does that mean that I go back to the world? No, never!' This is the attitude everyone has to follow. But, ordinarily, people want somebody or somebody's company, either good or bad. They do not want to be alone. That is the whole trouble.

Fools are all worldly-minded people, though they may be very clever and intellectually developed; and the spiritual aspirant should see that he does not pass his time in the company of such fools. This is very very essential. I know why. I am telling some of you this again and again.

Many people talk glibly of sacrifice, but by taking up the higher life and dropping the lower, I do not sacrifice anything at all. This is no sacrifice, and the sacrifice really lies with the "fool" the worldly minded person, not with the spiritual aspirant. If I get something higher and lasting, dropping the lower does not mean any sacrifice at all. This is a very erroneous notion of worldly people.

'Association with fools brings sorrow for a long time, dwelling with fools brings sorrow like dwelling with an enemy. Life with a wise man is like living with relations. It brings happiness.'

The question of right association is a very important point closely related with right mindfulness, and cannot be left out of account either in Buddhism or in Vedanta. It is not a question of haughty aloofness, of insensitiveness, of

compassionlessness. On the contrary it can be an act of perfect compassion, though outwardly I may not mix with certain people and just stand aside. Buddhism is a religion of the purest compassion towards all life.

'Monk! Monk!. On him who is corrupt and reeks with the stench of carrion, the flies will surely settle and attack him, they cannot fail to do so.'

"Greed, Monks, is 'corrupt'. Malice is the 'stench of carrion'. Evil, unpracticable ways of thought are 'flies'. On him who is corrupt and reeks with the stench of carrion the flies will surely settle and attack him. They cannot fail to do so."

On him who guards no eye and ear, whose sense
Is uncontrolled, his thoughts, on passion centred,
Like flies will swarm. With stench of carrion reeking
The monk corrupt, who is a thing defiled,
Far from Nibbanna hath his lot in woe.
In village or in forest roams that monk,
Foolish, bewildered, getting him no mate
Like to himself, swarmed only round by passions' flies.
But they who, blessed with virtue and composed.
In wisdom's calm rejoice, live happily,
In them the flies of passion are destroyed.

--: ANGUTTARA NIKAYA

LET THE DIVINE BE THY CENTRE

The great point to note is to have one's own thought centred in the Divine at all times, and not to allow the mind to dwell on sense objects and sense-attractions in their gross and subtle forms. Without doing this, no purification is possible. Without purification no higher life is possible and no problem of life can ever be really solved by any body. No. -- without purification there can be no spiritual life for us. Without it we can never really help our fellow-beings without creating misery and greater darkness in spite of all our good intentions.

No single thought that rises in our mind, no single impulse, no single idea is to be considered lightly and super-

ficially as if it did not matter, as if it were of no consequence for our life and spiritual unfoldment. Thought is the one potent power in man that bring him either Godward or changes him into an animal. It either makes him stand on his own legs and rid himself of all superimpositions, a free being, so that he can grow, or it drags him into the darkest abyss to the animal-plane where he remains a slave life after life and makes others slaves. But people like doing this. They even go so far as to call it love or duty, etc. If you are not careful, you will not be able to make any considerable progress. You are often so thoughtless in everything. I know these things by experience. They are no more theories to me, you see.

There can be no spiritual progress so long as there is any form of hatred or aversion left in our hearts. And hatred and aversion are just as bad as lust. Do not deceive yourself on that point at all. So long as we go on hugging our hatred and aversion to our heart's content, spiritual life is not for us. We should not be hypocrites.

The mind is the cause. We can never do anything without being impelled to do it by our mind. Therefore great stress has to be laid by all of you on the purification of mind.

We must be able to bore a hole through this entire personality of ours from both ends, and then both the holes meet and the passage is clear.

We become all the more steady and balanced if we approach the Divine through our feelings, through our will and through our intellect at the same time. All the three must be coordinated in everybody, then there will come more and more balance, more and more steadiness, and strength and greater clarity of vision.

People who get a monastic training as you do must be very, very careful in every respect. Try to curb the restlessness of your mind and always use your discrimination before mixing with others.

In the very depths of our soul there is this union, this communion with the Divine, but it is unconscious. On the thought-plane we try to think in a definite way of that which is hidden in the very depths of our soul.

It is all a question of sincerity and intensity. If there is any real sincerity and real one-pointedness, real singleness of purpose, all defects will drop off. If a person really practises, if he makes any sincere effort at controlling his mind, if he really tries to feel the eternal Presence, then he is sure to advance. But real sincerity, real singleness of purpose, is something very rare. People mostly do not really follow the Path.

If a person really and persistently practises the Presence of the Divine, the world comes to appear to him more and more unreal, so that he does not attach any great value to things seen. Phenomena comes to have a secondary importance. Not that the phenomenon is not there, but it does not belong to primary reality; and solutions, if they are to be real solutions to the problems of Life can only be found when we take our stand on the basis of primary reality, never if we remain enmeshed in the phantasmagoria of secondary reality of Maya. The phenomenon, Maya, is like something seen in a dream, and must never be given the place of Reality. Everything then gets secondary reality and you yourself become the only permanent point in this phantasmagoria. After such an experience the things of the world will never again appear perfectly real to you, and you will never again attach any great importance to them.

The realisation of the Divine Presence in one's own consciousness must be practised under all circumstances. This is exactly the instructions of my own teacher, Swami Brahmananda, the instruction he used to give us youngsters again and again especially to myself when I found it so hard to combine my duties with my spiritual practices. After a time, this Presence of the Divine becomes a fully natural state as there is the union of our soul and IT in the very depths of our being. But in our case it is still all unconscious, covered up by all sorts of noxious weeds, of old impressions, and hidden through the outgoing movement and restlessness of our non-purified mind. Here you must learn how God is to be made the centre of the life of the devotee, of all his thoughts and feelings, and of his whole will. Mostly we do not train our mind properly, we do not think correctly, and if we do, we do

not feel correctly; and even if we succeed in doing both, will power is lacking to act rightly. And so there is no considerable progress. And all this can be changed by steadiness, by making the Divine our all-in-all, by thinking of it, by meditating on IT, by making IT alone the centre of our whole being and inspiration, consciously, intensely. But this requires a steady discipline, both physical and mental, and great sincerity of purpose.

'He is indeed the most beloved One, the Atman from whom there is no fear whatever - he who knows this is in truth the learned man; he who is such a learned man is the Preceptor, and he is Hari Himself.' - (SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM).

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CONCENTRATION HAS ITS DANGERS

The mind cannot but think, so it should think along constructive, definite lines. Everything should be precise and clear-cut. It should always be creative in a higher sense.

The novice should never be allowed to follow the path of exclusive meditation. We never allow this. So long as you are not yet a perfect master of your own thoughts, this is very, very dangerous for you, because when you sit quietly, alone, forbidden, impure thoughts begin to rise in your mind, create confusion in your brain and finally overpower you. The life of exclusive meditation may begin only after your purification. Before that meditation and activity must always be combined.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were not Karma-Yogins. This error is often committed. Neither the activity of Sri Ramakrishna nor that of Swami Vivekananda is the activity of exclusive karma-yoga. In both cases we find the activity of the perfect, not the activity of the aspirant or the Karma-Yogin on his way to the goal.

You see, all the Yoga-paths are still a struggle, an effort, no matter which path you follow. In the case of a Ramakrishna, a Vivekananda, there is no longer any such thing as a struggle. You must struggle. You must go in for a tremendous tug-of-war; you must still try to conform to the Great

Ones, to imitate them, but they, the Great Ones are always absorbed in the Highest, but, at the same time, tremendously active. But this is a state entirely different from that of the aspirant who tries to follow one of the paths of Yoga. You still have a body, that means, body-consciousness. But a Swamiji, a Ramakrishna no longer has a body in your sense. Their state is different. Their consciousness is the expanded consciousness of the Divine realisation.

We do not say that everyone must become a monk. This depends on the stage of evolution one has attained. It is better to become a householder than becoming a monk who breaks his great vows. Outward renunciation must always be followed by inner renunciation, otherwise it has no value. The monk must have both, but only outward renunciation won't do. So, for those who cannot renounce inwardly because of their weakness, who keep themselves busy with worldly ideas and hopes and thoughts, it is better to follow the householder's life and not be hypocrites. A man who really renounces both inwardly and outwardly, can also live in the world and yet fulfil the condition of absolute Brahmacharya, all the ethical conditions, lead a sexually perfect life, a life of non-violence and non-hatred and non-attachment without becoming a fetter to himself or to any other human being through personal relationship. But this is very, very difficult and quite impossible without the preliminary spiritual training and long years of spiritual practice. Only you must know that there is such a thing, though it is rare and for most people, quite impossible.

And there is a great point to note which Swamiji explains very well in one of his letters. He says, 'We put all our energies to concentrate and get attached to one thing - but the other part, though equally difficult, we seldom pay any attention to - the faculty of detaching ourselves at a moment's notice from anything.'

'Both attachment and detachment perfectly developed make a man great and happy.'

Concentration has its dangers if we have not sublimated our feelings, and we very easily get caught in the meshes of our concentrated, but impure mind. For many it is better to

make no attempts at concentration before they have attained purity. It may play the devil with them if they do.

THE PROBLEM OF SEX IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

In the Bhagavad-Gita Arjuna says very touchingly to Sri Krishna:

"You speak of Yoga which is characterised by evenness of mind, but I do not see the possibility of its being made steady owing to the restlessness of the mind. Verily the mind, O Krishna, is restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding. I regard it quite as hard to achieve its control as to achieve the control of the wind."

And then the Blessed Lord in His infinite kindness and love for all beings said reassuringly to Arjuna:

"Without doubt, the mind is restless and difficult to control, but through practice and renunciation it may be brought under restraint. Yoga is hard to be attained by one of uncontrolled self; such is My conviction; but the self-controlled man, striving by right means, obtains it."

Here Sri Krishna holds out His helping hand to everybody who is sincere, just as Christ does when He says: "I am the way, the Truth and the Life." But the mind can be controlled only if we follow the right means unconditionally. There is no religious life without previously attaining control of mind. Mental control, in the case of the beginner, is a regular warfare; and this we can carry on only if we observe strict continence and wisely follow all the laws of warfare. Making use of the wrong methods, we may strive eternally without any success. Religious life without mental control is not possible, except the popular religion of the unthinking crowd which, after all, amounts to nothing more than certain outward observances.

And there is a general rule to be observed by everybody. Never give the enemy a frontal attack, unless you have already become very strong and very well established in purity.

Do you know the story of the monk who was ruined by a rat? There was a monk who was continually disturbed in his meditation by a rat. So some kind people, meaning well, brought him a cat to catch the rat. Now, naturally, the poor monk had to feed the cat and needed milk, and as it was rather difficult for him to get it always, he decided on getting a cow. He did so, but another difficulty offered itself to him. The cow had to be fed, so people told him: "Why not buy a field?" Finding this advice very reasonable he bought a field, but after a short time he found out that the field had to be tilled. And this meant quite a lot of work which he could not do alone. So he married, and was gone. This presents allegorically what generally happens in human life. One desire just breeds another, till in the end they have become innumerable and can no longer be controlled.

If any temptation comes, raise just the opposite current of thought. But if you can, you should avoid temptations by being very careful in your company. And temptation is mental. It is not what you do, but what you think. So be aware of how people's vibrations affect you and develop more and more a very high sensibility. Do not say: "I have not done anything impure," but realise what you feel and what you think in the company of others, whether they attract you or not. The moment there is any attraction or aversion, be on your guard. Salute all such people from a safe distance. No attraction is harmless in a finer sense, neither is aversion so. Never deceive yourself on that point. You should not allow old impure associations to crop up in your mind by mixing with people who may awaken them through their form and old memories. When you follow this advice and raise strong opposite currents of thought, you will be able to efface the impure impressions in time, those impressions which you have allowed to sink into your mind by your life, and then your spiritual life will be made safe to a certain extent. By raising opposite thought-currents, temptation, in time, becomes weaker, and finally the new thought completely replaces old associations and memories, but only if you strictly follow the advice. There can never be a vacuum in your mind, so new thoughts must come in if you drive the old ones away.

Control of the mind comes step by step through practice and circumspection, but never hope to attain it if you are careless in your ways. If you allow the attraction of any other person to gain influence on you, you will never be able to attain control of mind, whatever you may be doing at other times. Then you are bound to have a nasty fall after some time. If you allow any woman to meet you as a man, if you allow any woman to attract you or see the man in you, control of mind is out of question. You should always behave in such a way that no woman will dare to speak to you as a man, and that every woman will feel that she cannot meet you on the plane of sex, that you do not see the woman in her and are not interested in the women. But for the beginner the only way is to avoid the company of the other sex as much as possible and never to have intimate talks with any person belonging to the other sex. We should be dignified and reserved, though polite, but never allow a person of the other sex to become friendly with us. If others want to stand in our way, we must just brush them aside, even if their hearts break. There must be a parting of the ways, however intimate we may have been before. A love that is dangerous has to be avoided at any cost. Do not grow sentimental. We have to pay the price for our folly and egoism, and why should we not? If I have made a mistake by loving the man or the woman, let me suffer for it, and let him or her suffer also. If someone wants to embrace me, I must just avoid him. If a person of the other sex offers me kind words, I must just leave him or her. Otherwise he or she kills me, i.e. kills the only thing that has any value in me. Even if such a person tells you that you make him or her miserable for life, there must be a parting of the ways. Once having committed the great mistake, you suffer and he or she suffers too. And very often sex hides under the cloak of duty. "It is my duty to be kind to him or her." Nothing but sex, coming in some nice garb and finding some nice excuses for my clinging to a certain person. Never allow yourself to be caught in the snares of your own mind. "Oh, my heart will break if you leave me." Are you responsible for the other person? Those who have committed the folly must pay the price. We should be sympathetic and pray for such people, but there must be a parting of the ways. We must have great patience because the mind always

wants to run away and deceive us, because we are not fully sincere in our spiritual struggle. We succeed only after a long time, but the struggle must be carried on unceasingly and doggedly. Medicine is so unpleasant, but it has to be taken if the patient wishes to be cured.

The new opposite thoughts must be allowed to break our hearts and that of the other person completely. Never be afraid of truth, even if truth means death. If truth breaks your heart, well and good. If truth breaks other people's hearts, well and good. Allow your heart to be broken. What is the use of clinging to your petty affections? At the beginning truth destroys everything we used to hold dear. First there comes a new foundation and on this new foundation the superstructure is to be built slowly and carefully, with great circumspection. The laying of a new foundation naturally always means destruction, but in the end, this alone brings peace and happiness and freedom to ourselves and to others. The poison-tree planted by our thoughtlessness and desire must be cut down ruthlessly. Having reared the poisonous tree we find it very hard to cut it down, but it must be cut down.

How to bring in the better thought? This is a great task to be performed by the beginner. The rest can be left to the Lord. But there must be a parting of the ways. It is very difficult, but without it, you will never be able to control your thoughts or your emotions. It is this: If you rear a poisonous tree with great love and care, you haven't the heart to cut it down after it has grown so nicely. You get caught in your own snares. Never listen to the voice of sex coming clothed in the garb of pity, either self-pity or pity for the other person, or both.

The whole thought-structure must be overhauled and reformed. We have been living on empty dreams, created by our desires, and when the whole edifice comes toppling down, we are left standing in the road without any support.

Filling the brain with all sorts of useless and impure thoughts, making the mind a chaos, instead of making it pure and systematic, we have lost all capacity to think in a dispassionate and consistent manner without considering our own

satisfaction. We have very many ideas, even good ideas, but we have not the capacity of thinking them in a definite order and in a detached and dispassionate way. Very often we go ^{on} thinking and thinking the same thought time and again, but all this is useless. If you want the mind to be pacified, you must go through a series of meditations. At the beginning, have fixed hours and lead a very retired life as far as you can do. Do not mix with other people if you can avoid it in any way. First rid yourself of the too many different thought-currents which are neutralising each other in your mind. Otherwise you can never maintain a balanced and dispassionate state of mind. Dispassion, true dispassion, is so very necessary for all spiritual progress : facing things as they are, not as we would have them to be.

Through meditation the mind becomes stronger and clearer. It slowly develops a kind of very strong non-attachment to everything. The will is also to be strengthened systematically. Intelligence is to be developed, the mind must be purified and our sentiments and feelings must be chastened. We must have a definite system, whereas most of us have no system at all. They just drift through life on their emotions and impulses. In spiritual life everything has to be systematised.

"Gurus may be had by hundreds of thousands, but it is very very hard to find a disciple." Nobody really cares to follow the Path. Nobody is really sincere. Nobody wishes to be on his guard and to avoid contact with others, which is harmful. We even find pleasure in such contact, instead of avoiding it. So for us, there is no real spiritual life. Out of thousands of people there may be one or two who really care to lead the higher life. The others are not sincere. It does not matter whether we attain to the goal in this life or not, the principle thing is to struggle, to fight, to become a man, to sacrifice everything for our goal.

Most of us are worse than animals and more impure than animals. Most of us lead an impulsive life which is far lower than that of any animal. Men just go on whetting their sensual appetites in the name of affection and love, a thing which an animal would never do. Men artificially create sensual appetites and even seek stimulents. We must work hard, but unfortu-

nately we have neither patience nor the will to rid ourselves of our impure impressions and old associations with people, nor do we care to follow the advice that we are given. We have neither the will nor the patience to wait. We must work hard, as I said; and have great dogged perseverance; but, in fact, we have neither patience for the one, nor the inclination to have the other. So our spiritual life just remains a vague and idle dream, while we merrily go on following our impulses and trying to cling to our connections with others, or even, what is worse, trying to form new ones. This is not spiritual life, whatever else it be.

+++++

PITFALLS IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

I

"We see the play of life everywhere, plants live, animals live and birds also live, just as men do; but he alone really lives, who lives a higher life, who lives for a higher ideal."

Sankaracharya says, "Both men and animals eat, drink, sleep procreate, follow the impulses of the senses; Dharma the path of the higher life, alone differentiates men from other beings; without Dharma man falls to the level of the animal or behaves worse than the animal."

II

Our ideal should be not so much external solitude, but the inward solitude that we are able to create in our mind wherever we are. This inward solitude is of great importance in spiritual life. Make the mind more and more indrawn, give it a glimpse of the real solitude and practise that at all times.

Prepare the mind through great purity of thought, word and deed, and then begin to lead an intense spiritual life. Solitude is not something negative, neither is dispassion or renunciation. We want to be left alone with God and not with

anybody else. We do not wish to be in the company of other beings, but in the company of the Divine, at all times. Merge yourself in God, and then there will only be one, wherever you be.

Narada says, "Realizing God, the devotee is full of bliss. He gets the taste of the highest immortality. He attains to the goal of his life. He himself is saved and he himself becomes a saviour to others."

In a way we make the mind concentrated, but then we do not know how to manipulate it. This concentrated mind will run after sensual enjoyment and all sorts of worldly distractions and objects with all the greater intensity for having become concentrated; so if we do not know how to manipulate it in the right way, it becomes a great danger: It is better not to have concentration if one does not attain sublimation and purification at the same time. Therefore, the aspect of purity, of non-attachment and absolute continence in thought, word and deed, has to be stressed so much. I am repeating this time and again, so that there may be no misunderstanding as to this fact. Without sublimation of all our desires and feelings we cannot progress in the spiritual path; and if we do not follow a strict code of ethics and morals we should never even attempt at concentration. The concentrated mind that is not purified becomes a veritable demon. The fulfilment of all these ethical and moral conditions is absolutely necessary, and without it all forms of spiritual practice become extremely dangerous and harmful and lead to insanity or a nervous collapse. If you do not follow this code strictly and go in for spiritual practice in spite of that, you will go mad. That is all. Never underrate the danger. If certain attachments and certain associations are not resolutely given up once for all with an effort of the will, no spiritual practice leads anywhere.

I I I

The general rule is this: If you have some worldly desire to fulfil, never pray for its fulfilment after you have begun your spiritual practices and meditation. First the desire must

be renounced or fulfilled. Then spiritual practice may be begun. It is very troublesome to have a concentrated mind and not to be able to make proper use of it. It is good to have a devil's strength and will power; but it is not good to use these as a devil. We must know how to manipulate the concentrated mind. I do not even like people to practise concentration before they have already attained to a certain degree of mental and physical purity. It is so very dangerous and very often people just play with fire. They turn deaf ears to what they are told and then suffer the consequences.

I V

Through leading a life which is sexually perfectly controlled we store up a tremendous amount of energy and if we do not allow this energy to find expression along physical lines, it finds its expression along other lines. Hence we get psychic powers etc. Never spend your capital. Increase it steadily, but never spend more than the interest. You must increase your fund of energy and avoid all unnecessary friction, so as to minimise the wastage of energy. There may be friction on the other side, in the other person, but it does not concern you. You cannot do anything without perfect Brahmacherya.

V

There is a very fine song by Rabindranath Tagore, our great poet:

"Lord, give me the strength to bear Thy standard to whom Thou hast been pleased to give it. Give me the devotion to bear the great pain that is unavoidable in Thy service. Thou mayest fill my heart with the great pain."

"I do not want even to get rid of this gift of suffering that Thou art giving me with Thine own hands. This misery will be my crest-jewel if with it Thou givest me also devotion to Thee. Give me work as much as Thou likest if Thou doest not allow me to forget Thee, nor my heart to get itself in the entanglements of the world."

"If Thou wishest, do Thou bind me as much as Thou likest, but keep my heart open to Thee. Do Thou not allow me to forget Thee on any account."

V I

All this terrible suffering is our training. The will is to be subjugated, to be controlled, to be burnt, as it were, in the furnace. If you want to do this, take to this life. If you do not, if there is the very least idea of bargaining in you, if you do not wish to give everything, do not go even near it, but do as you please and live as you please. There is no half-way house in spiritual life. For a time you will be between the anvil and the hammer. When the iron has become crooked, it needs hammering all the more. Only then can it take shape. The general rule is: Never to be a coward. Let us have troubles. Let us have untold misery. Let us have unspeakable suffering, but let us face all these and remain unaffected. Let us learn to be the witness in everything.

V I I

"O Lord, if the doors of this heart of mine be kept closed to Thee, do Thou break them open and come to me. Pray do not go away from me."

"If any day the strings of my soul do not vibrate with Thy sweet name, Pray, wait standing, but do not go away from me."

"If any day I place someone else on Thy seat in my heart, O Thou, my eternal King, do not go away from me."

"If any day my sleep does not break at Thy call, do Thou awake me with the blast and pain of the thunderbolt, but pray, do not go away from me."

V I I I

The devotees should always compare notes among themselves. This is very, very essential. But then we must be really eager to help one another. We must be really and truly sympathetic. Learn to judge yourselves mercilessly without any destructive self-condemnation. Just stand aside as the witness and look at things as the witness, not as the agent. There should be absolutely no sense of agentship left.

I X

Very often we find that those who are not able to control

their good feelings and impulses, are not able to control their bad feelings and impulses also. We should try to have perfect control in both cases. Even the good feelings, the good sentiments, the noble impulses have to be controlled and we should try to become fully conscious and definite.

If we are able to drive a good sentiment into our very being, it colours it. If we give it expression too soon, it is all gone in no time. The driving power of the engine comes from the tremendous steam-pressure. If the steam be let out too soon, there won't be any driving power left and the engine refuses to move. The steam has to be kept under pressure, otherwise there won't be any transforming power; and if life is not transformed, all these teachings and suggestions have no value whatever. We might much better busy ourselves with other things. But generally people just go on listening and creating some nice feelings for the time being. This, too, is nothing but a form of enjoyment, but not spirituality.

If you are not able to control the noble sentiment that suddenly rises in your mind, you will succumb to the bad or impure sentiment the very moment it rises in it. First create the capital with great doggedness. Then spend the interest. But first you must possess a large amount of accumulated capital, otherwise if you spend out of your capital, you will end in bankruptcy.

Have tremendous feeling, but be a master of your feeling. And if a feeling brings about a sort of nervousness you may be sure that there is something seriously wrong with that particular feeling or with its object. Swami Brahmananda had tremendous feeling, but the greater the pressure of the feeling, the more he controlled it, the calmer his mind used to become.

X

Tenacity is wanted. A balanced mind is wanted. Always. There should be tremendous intensity coupled with great calmness and steadiness. There should be tremendous will-power and determination coupled with great peace and self-assurance.

Those who are hasty or careless cannot go in for spiritual practice. Tremendous doggedness is needed. Even if He

should tear me to pieces, I am going to cling to Him and to Him alone. I do not care what happens, but I shall not give up clinging to Him. That is the proper attitude.

"Whether He embraces me and makes me His slave, or crushes me down or chooses to keep company with others, discarding me, - He is ever the Lord of my heart and none else."

"O Lord, I have no desire for wealth, for men, for beautiful women, for the flights of poetry. But I pray that from birth to birth my motiveless devotion to Thee may continue."

.X I

A partial awakening of the Kundalini is very dangerous, as it brings tremendous sexual reactions. Therefore first have ethical culture.

Swami Brahmananda says, "Swamiji used to say that a little awakening of the Kundalini is very dangerous. Until She rises up higher, lust, anger and other lower passions become very disturbing. The Vaishnavite Sadhana of Madhur Bhava or Sakhi Bhava is exceedingly dangerous. In trying to remember constantly the story of Sri Krishna's Divine play with Sri Radha, the Vaishnavities cannot control their lust and they do all sorts of lecherous acts. Hence the restriction for the beginner in reading Rasa-Lila and such works. Meditation is not an easy thing. Eat a bit more and your mind will not settle that day. When lust, anger, greed and the whole host of evil passions are kept under control, then and then alone does meditation become possible. If any one of these asserts itself, meditation will be impossible."

All thoughts and impulses that flow in a contrary direction are impediments to meditation. So they must be controlled and slowly minimised and annihilated. External penance is far easier than control and purity of the mind.

X I, I

There are a good many people who think they can leave religion for their old age after having enjoyed all the fruits of life. But for them the time never comes, because after hav-

ing wasted the greater part of their energy in physical enjoyment, they begin spiritual life much too late to be able to achieve anything. Their whole life had been in vain, and they all suffer for it.

Never say, "O, my mind is so restless. How is it possible for me to meditate?" Just because your mind is so restless you must meditate, all the more. A perfectly calm mind does not need so much meditation.

The really thirsty man always needs water, but those who are not thirsty can do without it for a long time. The really sincere aspirant will do all he is told, but we are so half-hearted and so little sincere, that we are in no great hurry to follow the advice we are given.

And then, we want the purest water, not adulterated water, or water that has become terribly dirty. We should rather feel really thirsty than go in for anything that is not good and pure.

Sri Chaitanya said, "Even if You trample me underfoot, even if You break my heart, I would know that You and You alone are my Beloved."

"Even if I am to pass through various lives and through the greatest of miseries, O Lord, let my mind be turned to Thee and Thee alone."

And then there is the beautiful prayer of Kunti:

"Lord, give me misery and yet greater misery, for when we are in the midst of misery, we are made to think of Thee more and more."

X I I I

Divine Love can never be judged by the standard of our worldly prosperity. Wherever the Lord Himself becomes the charicteer, success is assured. When the devotee allows himself to be guided by the Lord alone, then alone success is assured. This is the real meaning and significance of the Bhagavad-Gita. Nothing short of that will do, but it takes a long time to attain real self-surrender and renunciation.

There can be no security in our life unless we have

attained the ultimate goal i.e. self-realisation. Any devotee may tumble down at any moment before he has attained the ultimate goal. So we should all be very careful and strictly follow the advice we have been given. Do not have worldly or useless discussion either amongst yourselves or with others. "Only that kind of discussion that helps us in arriving at the Truth can be taken recourse to, not others." Sri Ramakrishna used to dislike allempy discussions very much and warned all his disciples of their danger.

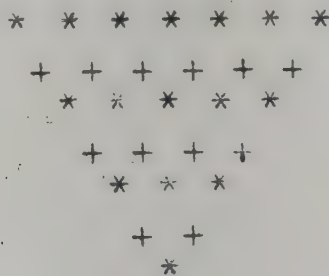
X I V

"Speed forth, O Soul! upon thy star-stream path;
Speed, blissful one! where thought is ever free,
Where time and space no longer mist the view,
Eternal peace and blessings be with thee!

Thy service true complete thy sacrifice,
Thy home the heart of love transcendent find;
Remembrance sweet, that kills all space and time,
Like altar-roses fill thy place behind!

Thy bonds are broke, thy quest in bliss is found,
And one with That which comes as Death and life;
Thou helpful one! unselfish e'er on earth,
Ahead! still help with love this world of strife!"

-: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.



REPETITION OF DIVINE NAME

I

Faith is most essential before taking up Japa or repetition of Divine Name. It does not matter even if it becomes mechanical to some extent. The beginner will find that his centre of consciousness is continually shifting, going up or coming down. This is a most difficult situation for all aspirants. You must never allow yourselves to get into a drowsy state during your attempts at meditation or during Japa. This is most dangerous. Sleep, drowsiness, and meditation should never be connected in any way. If you feel very drowsy while you are doing Japa, just get up and pace the room till this drowsiness leaves you.

In the beginner there are mostly two states of mind. In one the mind becomes awfully restless, in the other it falls down to the subliminal plane. Both are to be avoided if you want to make some real progress.

When the mind is awfully restless and out-going, you should doggedly persist in your Japa, even do it mechanically, without giving way to this restlessness. In that way part of your mind is always engaged in Japa. Thus the whole mind cannot become or remain restless.

The other state, that of drowsiness, is most dangerous, and should be avoided at all costs. There are people for whom sitting for meditation is an invitation to sleep. A restless, terribly out-going mind is even better. One is Rajas, the other Tamas; and Tamas is even lower than Rajas. Hence it can have no place in spiritual life or striving.

Imagine that along with each repetition of the name of your Ishtam or your Mantra your whole body, your whole mind, senses, etc., are purified. This faith must be made very firm because in a way, this is the idea underlying Japa. The name of the Ishtam soothes one's nerves, calms the mind, changes the body. When the mind is in a state of great tension or is depressed, begin at once humming the Name, and imagine that

this is bringing about a balanced state, a new sort of rhythm, in the body and in the mind. Actually you will feel how it soothes the whole nervous system, how it stops the outgoing tendency of the mind more and more. Rhythmic breathing brings about calmness and a certain rhythm in the nervous system, and this again facilitates spiritual practices. The Holy Thought brings about a certain rhythm in body and mind. Think with each repetition of the name of your Ishtam or of Your Mantra that you are becoming purer and purer. You cannot know, the effect all at once; but if you go on for some time steadily and doggedly you will feel it; and then after some years, you will be astonished to find what a great change has come over you. There is great scope for experiments. This body is to be polarised and made rhythmic, at least to some extent; and the nerves too are to be polarised and made rhythmic. Through practice, we must make the body, the senses, the mind and the breath rhythmic; then only we come to have the proper mood for spiritual practices and meditation, and we can begin them in right earnest. Everything else belongs to the preliminary steps.

II

While doing your breathing exercises, try to give the following suggestions to your mind:

I am breathing in purity, breathing out all impurity. I am breathing in strength, breathing out all weakness. I am breathing in calmness, breathing out all restlessness. I am breathing in freedom, breathing out all bondage. These suggestions may be given even while doing your Japa. They are very helpful in preparing the ground for the real practices.

Strict regularity and a fixed daily routine for all spiritual practices are very much wanted; deep thinking is very essential in the aspirant's life. Then in the fullness of time through habit, the right mood just comes and makes everything else easier. Once this habit is formed, you will make greater progress and feel the strain of all these practices much less.

Everything is difficult in this path. Visualisation is difficult, control of the mind is difficult, meditation is

difficult. Japa is difficult, but if done properly a little less so. So new strength must be gained. And for this the suggestions I mentioned are very helpful. Make use of the great power of sound and sound-symbols. Man is a psychological animal; we must know how to calm our mind and body. Just as this mind of ours is ever ready to deceive us, we must be ever ready to deceive the mind, taking the help of something higher.

You must try to feel that the Holy name, the 'Holy Mantra, purifies you. If you just try for some time, this feeling is sure to come. Make the experiment yourself. Verify everything that is being told you. If you do not realise these truths yourself, it would be ever so much better to burn all the books on religion, to throw all the holy scriptures overboard.

You cannot realise the great effect of Japa now. This rhythmic repetition of the name of the Ishtam has a great effect and is one of the most essential practices in the life of the beginner. OM is a very fine rhythmic syllable. So we should take its help.

I I I

Immediately after sitting down for meditation with folded hands, one says "Whether impure or pure, under all conditions, whoever remembers the Lord, becomes purified inwardly and outwardly."

The aspirant thinks that along the Sushumna-canal the Jiva (individualised soul) is taken to the centre in the head and is connected with the Universal Spirit. And then he thinks that the gross and the subtle bodies are burnt away, and he himself becomes one with the Absolute. I am He, I am He!

"Do Thou appear here, do Thou stay here, do Thou be steady, do Thou come near me and accept my worship."

Right prayer requires first great intensity, great concentration and one-pointedness. Without these, no prayer will be of any avail.

Do Thou save me, O Lord, Thou who hast taken this form of the Universe.

Saying this Mantra we remember the All-Pervading Being, the Being with these thousands of heads, thousands of eyes and thousands of feet, who envelopes and permeates this whole universe, nay, even exists beyond.

"Being subject to the limitations (workings) of the vital energy, intellect and the body, whatever sin has been committed by me in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep, in thought word and deed, by means of the different organs of senses - may all that be offered to Brahman. I surrender myself, with all whom I call my own at the feet of the Lord."

I.V

Transcend both good and evil; for wherever there is good, there you unavoidably get bad too. Happiness and misery always go together. The moment you accept happiness you must take misery too. All the pairs of opposites go together, so you can never have one without getting the other also. The only solution is to transcend them and reach a plane beyond all relative good and evil, all relative happiness and misery. There is no such thing as absolute good or absolute evil, absolute happiness or absolute misery, on this phenomenal plane.

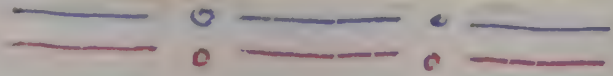
Cheerfulness is a sign of great progress, but many people do not understand this. Spiritual life eases all heart-burn, so it makes people cheerful.

"Let us meditate on the excellent glory of that Divine Being who illuminate everything. May He guide our understanding." - (Gayatri).

Always take the help of the sound-symbol, for sound and thought are inter-related. Thoughts manifest themselves in different sounds. Is there any eternal relation between the thought and the sound? Take for instance the word cow. We express this 'thing' 'cow' with the help of different sound symbols. For each language a different sound-symbol is used to express the thought 'cow'. The bovine idea finds its expression; and there is an inseparable connection between this idea and its sound-symbol.

Now we find that the Divine idea finds its expression in

different Holy Names, and there is an inseparable connection between the holy idea and the sound. That is why we make use of the sound in our spiritual life. It becomes easier for us to call up the thought with the help of the sound. We should see that we pass from the sound-symbol to the thought; otherwise the sound does not help us.



* *

SUCCESS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

I

Success in spiritual life depends on our firmly and steadily holding on to the Divine Ideal. Every one of us must have a central seat of consciousness, a central name to dwell on, and a Holy Form to visualise. In the midst of all the confusion and darkness of the relative plane we must find out a definite course of action, of thinking and of willing, without which no spiritual life is possible. And the person who has no ground to stand on, who has no central point of consciousness, can never have any real faith in himself, and never have any real strength. Always believe firmly: "I am a being that can achieve something in the world of the spirit."

Strength is what we want first of all. We are meant for something great, for something nobler and higher. What is needed is not negative humility, but positive humility, born of real inner strength. People think they are miserable sinners, and sinners they become. People think they are weak, and weak they become. Filth can never be cleaned with filth.

First of all the body must be strong and healthy. A certain amount of physical strength is necessary. There must be some regular physical exercise in the life of every aspirant. Do not take a negative attitude regarding your body. This body of ours is something noble, a temple of the Divine. It is able to achieve something great. Even such physical faith is needed.

This body of ours is like a raft, like a boat, with which one may cross the ocean of relative life. See that it does not spring a leak, otherwise you are drowned. Make it a point to have regular physical exercise to keep your body in a healthy condition. "May all my limbs, may all my senses, be strong and controlled." "With strong and controlled bodies, with strong and controlled minds, let us pray to the Gods." Mental faith is only possible when the mind is strong. Strengthen your mind, strengthen your will. Strength of the mind has to be increased. We need the firm faith that this body of ours is a temple of the Divine, that we are spiritual entities. The weakling has no place at all in spiritual life, neither physically, mentally, nor morally; he has no place in the world of the spirit. This Atman cannot be realised by the weak," says the Upanishad. If we have strength, then only can we get rid of fear. Drop all fear of others: What will others say of me? If I think this is right, what does it matter what others say or think of me and my doings? Never give in on the vital point. Never lose ground on the vital point. Let us devote every drop of our blood, every heart-beat of our lives, to this cause in some form or other. Live ideal and irreproachable lives as examples to others, not only for your own salvation.

I I

He in whose name we come is always judged according to the standard of our life. Hence we have tremendous responsibility, hence we have to conform to a certain standard. We cannot do what we like. We cannot allow ourselves every freedom. Our responsibility is very great; and we all should be fully conscious of this tremendous responsibility. Let us all pray for greater strength and greater purity, knowing that our responsibility is so great, and let us walk with steady steps,

having firm faith in ourselves. The conduct and attitude of all aspirants has to be one of reserve, of dignity, and dignified in everything. People must be made to feel once for all with whom they have to deal when they come in touch with you.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "So long as you have this false shame and hatred and fear of society, you cannot make any spiritual progress." And in the Upanishads we find "We want to attain to that which will make us fearless."

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad there is a passage that says, "Now, Janaka, you have attained to fearlessness." And that fearlessness which is characteristic of the true Sadhaka can come only when we realise the Divine, and the more we approach Him, the more we become fearless. So our whole attitude should be one of responsibility, of dignity, of fearlessness and faith in ourselves as spiritual entities. We are fully responsible for the impression we make on people with our words and actions. That is why we all have to act in such a way that none can reproach us with anything undignified or unworthy of an aspirant. Here the greatest discrimination and discretion must be used by you all.

There is a passage that says, "In enjoyment there is fear, in wealth there is the risk of losing it, in honour that of being dishonoured, in true renunciation alone there is fearlessness." And really speaking, without true renunciation and true dispassion for all things worldly and a worldly life, as such; no spiritual life is ever possible.

"One who has not desisted from evil, one who has not calmed his mind, one who is not concentrated, can never know the truth, even if he gets knowledge." This is the general rule of the Upanishads. Swami Vivekananda very rightly says, "Luther drove a nail into the coffin of Christianity. He took away religion and gave Christianity morality instead."

We should be pure, because He is pure. We should be clean, because He is clean. And if you really were impure by nature this would never be possible. What is the necessity of our being pure at all? We should be pure, because purity is of the very nature of our soul. This purity is not anything that is adventitious or superimposed on our nature. And unless we be-

come pure, it is not possible for us to see God. Purity must find its physical and its mental expression in and through our whole life. Morals without God have to stop half-way. They can never really go to the extreme, can never really reach the goal.

Purity is part of our nature, therefore we should be moral. What we usually call impurity is only something superimposed, something adventitious, never an integral part of us. Herein lies the whole secret of spiritual life and of salvation.

We want to make that, the centre of our consciousness, which is the eternal centre of all. Herein lies the explanation of purity and of being able to lead a perfectly pure and spotless life.

Give the lie to all the Churches, give the lie to the sinner-attitude! "Oh, I, such a miserable sinner, what can I do? I am a sinner!" Give the lie to that by living an ideal pure life, a life that is purer and more spotless than that of these sinners clinging to the pillar of their institutional religion, but never doing anything, except crying, "Oh, I am a sinner, I am so weak, what can I do?"

The utilitarian stressing morals for some purely utilitarian reason will never go to the point of leading a perfectly pure, irreproachable life. That is why we have to have morals; but also along with morals the foundation of morals, which is wholly lacking in all utilitarian schemes.

I I I

The ideals of non-attachment and purity are associated with the Spiritual Being, and thus man comes to realise Divine Consciousness, which is beyond all multiplicity, in fact, beyond any form of being and non-being, Sat and Asat. In all Scriptures we find the conception of freedom associated with the Divine, and freedom can never exist where there is no absolute purity and no absolute non-attachment. Freedom is beyond personal affection and beyond hatred, beyond attraction and beyond aversion. A person who has become free cannot be touched by any of the pairs of opposites, but always rests calmly in

his own true being. We all associate Divinity with the ideas of purity, freedom, knowledge, fearlessness etc. Man aspires to freedom, to fearlessness, to independence, to a state of security and stability. But first we must try to realise this ideal of purity, of sexlessness, of freedom, of fearlessness, in our own life. Only through our own realisation of the ideal can we rise to our true human stature. Only thus can the ideal ever become the real. The person who has no definite idea of the spiritual entity has no foundations for his morals, and if he at all possesses morals, they are, as it were, hanging in the air. There is no rhyme or reason for them in his life. How wonderfully free are the Great Ones! Free from passion, free from attachment, free from fear! We, too, must become free from lust, from sex-consciousness, from anger, greed, jealousy, and all forms of covetousness, subtle and gross. We must rise above the cravings of the flesh, above our man-form or woman-form, to the pure heights of Divine Consciousness. And spiritual life is not merely moral life. It is something more. The great mistake Protestantism in its different forms committed was to put moral life in the place of spiritual life and thus to kill all spirituality. A merely moral or ethical code is insufficient for giving fearlessness and peace to the soul, for lifting it up beyond all temptations and insecurities.

In the lives of the saints the ideals of morals and of spirituality are wonderfully blended, but Protestantism was not prepared to understand and recognise the example of such saintly lives, because it had lost the key to their meaning. A moral man is no spiritual man; but all spiritual men are always moral. This is a great point to note if one really wishes to understand spiritual life. We find in all true saints a wide sympathy that we miss in the utilitarian or the merely moral man.

I V

Buddha attained to Nirvana; but he wished to share Nirvana with all others. So his prayer was, "Let all misery come to me. Let all evil, let all troubles of the world come to me; but let others be free from them!" How he was prepared to save even poor animals with his life! How he saved the sheep which were to be sacrificed by offering his own body to the king!

Buddha's heart melted at the sight of the suffering of our dumb brothers. He was one from whom all worldly attachment had passed away, who no longer had any worldly love or any worldly desire, who had given up his wife and child for the sake of the world. This dynamic charity we find in all our saints. When Buddha went to the king to save the sheep, the king was astonished at his courage and love for all living beings, was at once converted and he stopped the sacrifice. Buddha's dynamic charity saved the life of all these poor animals. Even before becoming a Buddha, he was fully conscious of his great message. "I want to attain to Immortality and this Immortality I want to share with others."

Such people are never alone, in however great a solitude they may happen to live. One day somebody saw that Mohammed was quite alone. He went and asked him, "Are you alone?" "No, I am not," was the answer. "I am in the company of God."

Once a Bedouin attacked Mahommed while he was alone. "Who is going to save thee now, tell me?", he cried. "God," came quietly the reply. The Bedouin's sword fell down from his hand. Mahommed took it up and said, "And who is going to save thee now?" "None!" "Well, then learn the lesson of love and mercy from me."

In all these great souls we witness the expression of a love that is not personal and that we find missing in all others. And this ideal of love is closely connected with Divine Love.

Sri Chaitanya had a great disciple whom he used to call his brother. His name was Nityananda. He used to go about singing the name of the Lord to the people. Now, in the city of Nadia, where they were working at that time, there were two brothers, great ruffians, who had become dangerous to the householders. In fact, they were rogues of the worst type. They got angry at the singing of the holy name and said, "Why do these fellows come making all this unpleasant noise? We shall teach them a lesson, we shall!" And the ruffians began throwing stones at them. Very soon the blood came trickling down, but Nityananda cried, "Brother, O Brother, it does not matter whether you have hurt me or not. Just take the name of the Lord, do!" Seeing this deep love for all beings the ruffians

were fully converted and began to lead saintly lives.

You find this spirit of love and sacrifice in all the Great Ones. Sri Ramakrishna imparted some instructions even on his last day, when he was suffering agonizing pain. A young man had come from some distance to see him and to receive instruction from him, and when Sri Ramakrishna's attendants wanted to prevent him from seeing the Master, Sri Ramakrishna ordered them to let him come in and then gave him the desired instructions in spite of the tremendous suffering this meant to him.

In the Bhagavatam there is a story of a poisonous snake that lived in a pond and which Sri Krishna wanted to punish. He said to it, "Why art thou poisoning the water of this pond with thy venom?" The snake replied humbly, "Lord, what else can I do? It is Thou who has endowed me with venom, so I must secrete it. It is not my fault, but Thine."

V

The spiritual ideal is the surest support and the main-spring of all true morals, ethics, culture etc. But we should see that we become wide-awake and fully conscious of all our motives and the motive-forces that stand at the back of our thoughts and actions.

I do not know whether you have heard the story of a great Christian monk. It is very instructive. One day one of his brothers had been accused of having shaken hands with a woman, and he was brought before the chapter. He pleaded that she had been a person of good reputation and great purity and devotion. But this great monk who was presiding answered curtly "Rain, no doubt, is good, and earth is good, yet mingled they form mud, which is not good. Similarly, though the hands of men and women are both good, yet great evil^{may} arise in thought and affection if they are carelessly brought together." This story can teach the aspirant a great lesson. Always learn to go to the very root of a matter and never stop at the first superficial impression an action or a thought gives you. Learn to become fully conscious under all circumstances and in all situations of life, and learn to recognise your own motives mercilessly, but without too much-self-condemnation. You should sometimes

criticise yourself severely, but this criticism must always be constructive, and never merely destructive, if it is to help you in your spiritual striving and evolution. The negative 'I am a sinner' attitude makes you a sinner; and a greater sinner from day to day, and takes you away from all true spirituality.

V I .

Never say you cannot find time for your practices. It is never true. One of our monks is a great expert in gardening and spends much of his time in the garden to grow beautiful flowers to be offered in the Shrine at the time of our different Pujas. When he was one day scolded for not devoting enough time to his spiritual practices, he said that he could not do so as the garden needed so much care that most of his time was taken up with working in it. Then he was told to uproot all those plants which had become old or did not yield fruits; for then he would be able to find time for both - for his garden and his spiritual practices. No, the thing is this: our mind is so restless, is in such a tension, that we imagine we have no time. We set such a high value on outside cleaning, that we forget to clean the mind properly. Really we can do both.

We should be very careful not to forge new fetters for ourselves or others through passion. There are men and women who go on forging fetters for others and for themselves all their life; and they have to pay heavily in the end. There are men and women whose whole life is spent in making others free from all such fetters, and it is they who find love and bliss and peace and the fulfilment of life. "He who sees the same Atman in himself as well as in all others, he cannot hate anybody." But you may remain indifferent. It is not necessary for you to love everybody in the beginning. "Seeing the one Lord, equally present in all, he does not kill the Self by the self and attains to the highest goal." And seeing the one Lord in all means that there cannot be any attraction, nor can there be any aversion, because he who has reached such a state, no longer sees the person, but only the Principle. That is why he is able to remain unaffected and to love all without loving anybody. He has wholly transcended the domain of personal affec-

tion, of personal likes and dislikes, and rests in the Atman alone.

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LIVE ON THE TOPMOST FLAT

The higher form of happiness is always born of perfect control over the body and the senses; perfect control, physical as well as mental; happiness is never born of sense-enjoyments. Ordinary sense-enjoyment never brings us happiness, never the feeling of perfect bliss, of perfect poise and calmness that control always brings in its wake. The aspirant is happy because his body and his sense-impulses can no longer influence or dominate him and enslave him, because he cannot be caught in the meshes of lust, anger, greed, hatred, likes and dislikes, through contact with sense-objects. He is happy because he has something that eternally dwells in his soul and is entirely independent of anything else. Lust and anger have both to be taken in the very widest possible sense wherever they are mentioned. Lust is every kind of desire, anger every kind of aversion or dislike.

The aspirant is happy, as I said, because he is not troubled by his passions. Because he is ridding himself of the passions and attaining a state of perfect passionlessness. His happiness no longer lies in sense-contact in any form, but in something that is beyond sense. He stands on the bedrock of the Atman and as such cannot be shaken by anything.

Shraddha means far more than passive faith. It is the dynamic attitude of the inner self, born of deep inner conviction which makes us choose and act.

No one should even dream of attaining true spiritual knowledge and Self-realisation without YAJNA (Sacrifice) and TAPAS (Austerity). Without these he cannot approach the goal.

YAJNA and TAPAS help us in being in tune with the Cosmic and in realising our own eternal divinity, because they more and more purify our heart.

Bodily purity, simplicity of conduct, continence, non-injury, all of them in thought, word and deed, come under the head of TAPAS. Serenity, peace, control of speech, self-control, purity of thought, these are the TAPAS of mind. Formal Sannyasa without fulfilling this inner mental renunciation is of no value.

If illumination is possible, it must be possible now and must be realised now, not in some future life. If freedom is possible, it must be possible, before this body falls off, not in some future life.

The perfect man has no interest in sense-enjoyment, but he is nevertheless engaged in the good of all beings.

(Gita III, 3-4)

When these great souls lead a secluded life, a silent, quiet life, they purify the whole atmosphere, but people with gross minds are not able to appreciate the service they render to human society! It is much greater than any form of social service could ever be.

So long as we feel this body, let us feel the higher points instead of the lower points. When you have to live in a house, why not live on the topmost flat and breathe more of pure air?

"The seat of the mind is in the forehead, but the Jiva who sits there looks downward. That is the trouble.

The Jiva must look up. The seat, the centre of consciousness, is always there." - (SRI RAMAKRISHNA).

Never allow any extra-energy to flow to the lower centres; only allow as much as is absolutely necessary to keep them in a fit condition.

Try to practise rhythmic breathing until it becomes a habit. Irregular breath is a tremendous waste of energy, and, at the same time, it makes the mind restless. The senses must be subdued, the mind must be made rhythmic, the wheels of the whole machine must come under your control. And then you enjoy riding the machine; you enjoy living on the top-storey.

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HAVE RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS THROUGH THE DIVINE

All should think of themselves as parts of an infinite Cosmic Existence. If we find this too hard, we need not follow the path of the formless. We can also follow the path of the devotee, taking up some holy form. For many people the path of the formless is too difficult. Taking high flights in imagination does not mean anything. Mere soaring has no practical value, and the out-and-out Dualist who has realised something is far better than the intellectual Monist who just soars in his vague speculations, but never realises anything.

Ordinarily, in all our human relations, we commit the mistake that we wish to take up direct connections with others. We ourselves are shortlived as bubbles, and we try to come into touch with others just like us. Two bubbles drifting on the ocean just come close to each other through the action of the waves; but they think there be some direct connection between them and commit the mistake of their life. The same action that has brought them together will one day tear them apart, never to meet again. And this always means untold misery and will always happen again so long as we, human fools, try to come in touch with another bubble, instead of thinking of the ocean alone and being in more intimate touch with all through the ocean, without really being in touch with anyone. All bubbles burst sooner or later. So there can be no stability in any bubble-relation. We should do away with vague romance and childish dreams and see things as they are. We should cease to be emotional cowards covering the rotting carcass with fragrant flowers and going in for all sorts of absurd make-believe.

I I

In worldly life the Infinite has no place. We are so self-centred and so absurdly bent on our bubble-relations that we just push It aside and cling to falsehood with desperate doggedness. For all forms of spiritual practice the most important thing we need is a correct and dispassionate outlook about ourselves and others; for then alone is it possible for us to have a definite goal without constantly being tossed about on the

waves of our irrational and body-bound emotions and impulses.

Really speaking, as bodies we are nothing. And so long as we believe and feel ourselves to be bodies only, the question of spiritual life does not arise at all. Then drink and be merry. But this is not the truth. This world is not the only place for our existence. Therefore it becomes incumbent on us to revise this body-idea about ourselves and others. If it is found to be wrong, then our whole attitude towards life will have to be changed.

I I I

In all the different schools of Hindu philosophy, and especially in the Advaita School, we find the conception of the Atman as a spiritual entity that is not dependent on anything and that is not created and does not create. God, as Creator, is not the highest in any of our schools of thought. All schools hold that the mind is matter and that the soul is separate from, and independent of, the mind, although associated with it in some of its moods.

We must begin somewhere. There is the ladder, and each one of us must find out first where he actually stands, not where his thoughts soar when he happens to be in a good mood, for it is from there that he must proceed. His spiritual life can only be begun from that point, never from any higher point. We must know where we stand and where to begin, and then proceed.

Monism, no doubt, may serve as the background for all, but Monism cannot be reached without passing through the different intermediate stages. One in a million, perhaps, can take up the Monistic path from the very beginning. "Greater is their trouble whose minds are set on the unmanifest, for the goal of the unmanifest is very hard to reach for embodied beings," says the Bhagavad-Gita. A good Dualist is infinitely better than an intellectual Monist who, at the same time, is nothing but an out-and-out Dualist in daily life. Never deceive yourself on that point. And then the Gita goes on, "But those who worship Me, resigning all actions to Me, regarding Me as the Supreme Goal, meditating on Me with single-minded Yoga, for these whose mind is set on Me, verily I become ere long the saviour out of

the ocean of mortal existence."

In the West people try to detach creation from destruction, the God of creation from the God of destruction, and try to stress creation and preservation only. It is very wrong to make such an attempt at detaching these three aspects, which are eternally inseparable. If your God creates at all, it is He, too, who preserves, and He again who destroys. A synthetic view is very necessary for the devotee if he wishes to progress. The devotee who only wants the God of creation or preservation is a pleasure-seeker, but no devotee. What he really wants is worldly pleasure, infinitely prolonged and made safe against all misfortunes.

We with our inordinate clinging to life and its phenomena are mortally afraid of the destructive aspect of God. We must go beyond the creative aspect and beyond the aspect of preservation as well as that of destruction if we wish to find peace and attain to illumination.

I V

Once one Swami was asked by one of his students, "But, Swami, what do you mean by telling us to control the senses! When senses are fully controlled, then what is left of life?" The Swami had been talking of the necessity of sense-control. Yes, if you take that to be life, then what is left indeed!

"Brahman is that out of which all this comes into being, in which it lives and to which it goes back after dissolution."

Death is quite as real as life. Destruction is quite as real as creation. Why not face both? Why stress creation, why love creation if you do not care to have destruction also? Why cling to life if you do not welcome death also? Either have no attachment to the phenomenon or take both gladly.

"Do not court death; neither court life." This is the proper attitude for the real seeker after Truth. That is the real spiritual attitude. By merely ending life, we do not attain anything great. By clinging to life we remain the slaves of life. So both attitudes are wrong and should be got rid of.

Really if we die, and die we must, let us at least not die

as miserable slaves bound to "Woman and Gold." Let us die as free men. Let us die heroically, not as cowards constantly afraid of this phenomenon. Let us have attained fearlessness in every respect before we die. Let us become men before we die. Let us face death with a smiling countenance. Before we die we should have thrown overboard all these petty attachments of ours and realised our true being.

"Happiness and misery come by turns," say our Scriptures. Creation and destruction come by turns. If you take one side of a certain pair of opposites, you must take the other side also. There is no such thing as just getting one. One always comes after the other. Pain comes after pleasure. Destruction comes after creation. They will go round like a wheel without ever coming to any stop so long as we do not transcend this phenomenon and refuse to take either pleasure or pain.

All these relations of ours are like so many will-o'-the-wisps leading us away from the true path until we sink in the morass of our desires and lose our manhood. There is no such thing as a direct relation between one bubble and another.

V

Misery can only come by a false conception of ourselves, by clinging to our bodies and personalities, by trying to possess shadows. Sometimes we find the shadow to be a shadow, and then comes depression and misery. We can always trace all our miseries back to our false conceptions of ourselves and of others. So long as we think of ourselves as men and women, there cannot be any truth.

"Blessed is misery to those who come to have a higher ideal of life." - (Swami Vivekananda).

Forgetting our true nature, we very often dream false dreams, but false dreams can never bring truth, and very often when we find that the dream has been false, we become broken-hearted, because we even cling to our false conceptions. Then comes the dreadful lightening-flash of Truth and brings us untold misery.

You have had so many false dreams in your past life. You

have so often taken the mirage to be real. Do you not see how often you have been living in a fool's paradise, clinging to some other false personality, making emotional castles in the air, dreaming of a love which does not exist? Very often as an effect of disillusionment, life all of a sudden becomes a void. We have to remove this void.

The Western ideal of life is a false dream. Sooner or later disillusionment will come for the West, and then the awakening will be dreadful.

V I

It should be our goal in life to rid ourselves of this false dream-personality and to regain our soul. There is not a single human being that belongs to us. Father, mother, brother, sister, wife, child - none of them is ours, and they can never be ours. But generally we must get no end of kicks and blows in the course of our different lives to learn this lesson. And then one day we realise that God alone can be relied upon, and, what is more, that we are He.

The first step is to attain a right conception of ourselves. Then only the question of spiritual life arises.

We must only have relationship with others through the Divine, and only because we want to have direct relations with others, all this misery comes again and again.

It is our task to adjust all our relations in such a manner that no relations, except those through the Divine, are left in our life. Otherwise misery and misfortune will come again and again, and we shall not be able to grow, because we cannot grow so long as we do not let go our hold on falsehood. Never cling to any other human being. Neither make him your slave, nor ever become his. Gain your own eternal freedom and help him in gaining his. This is the only possible attitude in spiritual life. There is no other. You cannot have the cake and eat it too.

THE STAFF FOR THE BLIND

Maya's meshes are so strong that spiritual life can only be taken up by the very very few. That is why it is wrong to count on anybody at all. There may be control, but so long as there are the subtle desires and a wish for subtle enjoyments, spiritual life cannot be taken up in real earnest - not what we in India understand by spiritual life at least. Sooner or later such a person will slip and fall. From the plane of subtle enjoyments and subtle desires one is bound to fall one day and take up gross enjoyments and gross desires. There is no other way out.

If there is any license in the life of the married man, why does he look upon a person having love-affairs, but not being married? The moment the married man allows any form of sexual license in his married life, he is no better than the man having love-affairs without marriage.

All people are either gross sensualists or refined sensualists, but the sensualist, whether gross or refined, has no place at all in spiritual life. The desire for subtle enjoyment is just as bad as the desire for gross enjoyment. Who cares for God? Who is going to take up spiritual life in real earnest? We are so low. We cling to our subtle desires and subtle enjoyments and call ourselves spiritually-minded people! Very few do care for God after all. Very few ever realise what spiritual life really is.

There is nothing wonderful, nothing to make a song about, in the refined sensualist. The refined sensualist, priding himself on his refinement, but running after refined and subtle enjoyments and sense-pleasure must very soon come down to the plane of gross sensual enjoyment and gross sense-pleasure. There is no other way out for him, whatever he may think. But then, - people will not listen if I tell them the truth.

So long as there is lust, as there is any sexual impulse, even a very, very, very subtle form, so long as there is passion people only see the skin and go in for it. Really speaking, this body is an awfully nauseating thing, why take it to be so nice, why want to enjoy it? It is all worms and filth. Why

have no discrimination?

People are clinging to falsehood, to the unreal, to the transient, why should they not get nice kicks and troubles and miseries? Why not? Why expect happiness or a better state of things if your whole life becomes just one big lie and untruth?

We all want happiness while we go on clinging to falsehood and clinging to it merrily, clinging to the unreal, to Maya, in all her forms, with the greatest tenacity and a perfect lack of discrimination; so we really deserve kicks and kicks and kicks. Why should we not get kicks and troubles and pain and terrible suffering? For many, kicks are the only means to make them proceed. Why should we not suffer and suffer and suffer?

So long as I am clinging to the idea "I am so and so, I am a man a woman, a European, an Indian" etc., etc., there can never be any happiness at all. People are such miserable, petty beggars. They are so easily satisfied with the cheap things, with tinsel. When they get something small, a mere nothing, something utterly filmsy, they feel satisfied and pleased. Such beggars!

The moment you believe yourselves to be "So-and-So", a man, a woman, a European, an Easterner, etc., etc., the moment you thus desperately go on clinging to falsehood, you get nice knocks and kicks, because you are clinging to falsehood, to false ideas, to unreality, to Maya, to something that is not ultimately real. But then, there always comes a time when you find out the falsehood to be falsehood and nothing but falsehood, and then your heart breaks or is broken. But this day will come for all, sooner or later, in this life or after many lives. And misery and suffering and pain and frustration alone can bring us to our senses, stop our abnormal craving for enjoyment and sense-pleasures, be it on the gross or on the subtle planes.

Yes, there should be greater pain, greater suffering, greater misery, greater evil to bring people to their senses; and only when a person has been chastened to some extent, there can be a higher life. Not otherwise.

If suffering and pain and misery increase, a larger number of people will be drawn away from material things and towards the Divine. Naturally some will break down. Others will find

out that they cannot cling to human bodies and idols and dolls and to their own false personalities, to mental and material enjoyment, gross or subtle. And then only will they awaken to the reality of life.

We are just a filthy mass of dirt and blood and phlegm and bones. Remembering these bones to be bones, learn to live. There are some Buddhists who always carry some bones with and sleep with them. This is not necessary for all aspirants, but we should always remember that a filthy thing our bodies and other bodies are.

To us, in our unhealthy craving for enjoyment, what is filthy appears to be nice, what is horrible appears to be pleasant and attractive. So on our part sincere attempts should be made to minimise these unhealthy and untrue desires and have true desires.

Very often so-called moral men, leading so-called moral lives, are moral on the gross plane and immoral on the subtle plane.

So long as you do not develop any real dispassion for the world and the phenomena and, at the same time, true desire, spiritual life can never be maintained by you.

Moral life must always be based on true desires, otherwise you can never maintain it in the long run. Without the higher ideal and the higher longing it can never be maintained by anybody. Unless the outlook is changed, unless a serious attempt is made to minimise our desire for sense enjoyment, gross or subtle, one can never be really moral. The whole outlook has to be changed, and we should really make a sincere attempt to do this.

In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna denounces such spiritual people and types, controlling the senses outwardly and yet thinking of sense pleasures and subtle enjoyments. One should control the senses, and, at the same time, think of the Divine. Then only does one become established in the moral life and create a true basis for spiritual development. Otherwise one will fall and become a proper hypocrite.

SELF-ASSERTION IN A HIGHER SENSE

There is a great, even a physical, pleasure in perfect sense-control, in perfect chastity. The gross-minded man does not know what an immense pleasure it is, an intense and lasting form of enjoyment. This enjoyment is far greater than that attained by giving in to the sense-impulses. That is why a life of renunciation is also a life of the highest enjoyment and greatest joyfulness.

The essential point is mental dispassion. One may give up the things of the world outwardly and may yet have inordinate passions for the things of the world. Giving up all desires is the common point between a man leading the active life and one following the path of meditation. Without perfect mental control none can be a yogi of any type.

The meditative type does not work physically, but on the thought plane he is active in a most concentrated way, tremendously so. If people were able to have a peep into his mind while he is on his way to the goal, they would be scared away. They cannot even imagine such tremendous activity. Sri Ramakrishna has nothing to say to the thoughtless idiot, the person who is not willing to pay the full price for what he wants. Spirituality is dynamic. It is not passivity. Struggle is good and always to be welcomed if directed towards something higher. Most of us are not ourselves. We are somebody else. The first task of the spiritual aspirant is self-assertion in a higher sense, becoming an active, free agent, and not being a slave. First of all, learn to become yourselves.

Create we must. Unless we create something noble, we create something ignoble. Sri Krishna stresses the creative aspect.

We have some clay in our hand, and we are at liberty to make a God out of this clay or a monkey, but mostly we make a hideous monkey out of it.

Man receives shocks and blows, but he remains unruffled. All this is inevitable so long as there is the body and any form of body-consciousness, but the man of knowledge does not become disturbed thereby..

H O L Y T A L K S

Unless feeling transforms a man altogether and makes him live a better life, feeling has no spiritual value. Unless knowledge transforms a man altogether, knowledge has no spiritual value. Unless work transforms a man altogether and changes his life, work has no spiritual value at all.

Any form of Sadhana must bring about a complete transformation of the life of a person, a complete transformation of ourselves in all our aspects, must bring about a new attitude towards everything, all problems, all questions of life, must make us stop all unconscious thinking and acting and transform us into wide-awake, living, fully conscious individuals. Everything else only stands in the way of our spiritual evolution. And the real importance of Sadhana is this transforming power of the spiritual practices if they are performed regularly/^{doggedly, intensely} for a long period of time, day by day without any break.

If your subconscious is not dissolved, real progress is not possible. No end of bubbles continually rise from the depths of the subconscious and make us do things we should not do, think thoughts that should not be thought, keep us in a state of perfect slavery. We have not yet become responsible beings at all.

We live on impulses and think impulse-driven and impulse-rooted thoughts, and still believe that such a state is freedom, guided as we are by impulses and animal reactions!

Vedanta always puts great stress on consciousness, purified consciousness, consciousness that has really become conscious in ourselves.

There must be a thorough, merciless, dispassionate overhauling of all our conceptions of freedom. License has nothing to do with freedom. Sex-indulgence has nothing to do with freedom or true manhood. Hatred and anger have nothing to do with freedom. A person is a slave to his sense and thinks he is free, he is a man. That is the fun. When a helpless slave believes he is free and behaves in a slavish manner, there is no hope for him. Freedom is very different from all this.

Only through a life of great spiritual discipline and great control of all our impulses can we get a glimpse of the great eternal freedom that is within everyone of us. What we call freedom very often is the freedom of a cat or a dog. It is so absurd to hear all these slaves talk about freedom and manhood. Who is free? Certainly not they whatever they may think. No one is free who has not developed his higher faculties and become master of his subconscious. We cannot just act as if the subconscious did not exist.

The way to freedom lies not in becoming helpless and being guided by desires and passions, by all sorts of animal cravings, by likes and dislikes, but by controlling, consciously controlling, all desires and passions, all feelings of attraction and aversion, and remaining wide-awake at all times. If we do not do this, no amount of reading will be of any avail.

S P I R I T A L C O N S E L S

I

All the Great Teachers are still there on the mental plane. According to their tendencies the devotees get the vision of them. As you know Swami Vivekananda saw Buddha when he was yet a boy, and became terribly afraid. In later years he was sorry for that.

I I

On the birthdays of all the Great Ones we should devote more time to recollection and meditation and prayer and avoid all outer distractions all the more. They should not be days of outward festivities and social rejoicings, but of quiet withdrawal into our own innermost soul where we can find them always if we are able to reach their plane of consciousness. Do not think they are gone. No. They exist now as they existed in the past, as they existed in their life-time. So everybody who is sincere and learns how to raise his consciousness, withdrawing it from the physical, and how to fix it on them and their

ideal, can come in touch with them and be in their company!
Do not think Christ merely lived two thousand years ago.
Do not think Buddha is dead and gone.

I I I

Shankara has said, 'Let the Buddha in me awake!' Similarly we may pray, 'May the Christ in us awake. May we realise the ideal for which He stood, the ideal for which He laid down His life, the ideal of all the Great Ones. May there be illumination, peace, and good will on earth and among men.' May Christmas mean the birth of the Christ in us, not only a social function, and not only even the mere remembrance of His physical birth.

I V

Christmas has become a social function in Christian society. It is not Christ's birth that is actually being celebrated. It has become a social custom to-day - the ocean for worldly festivities.

V

Without caring for the greatest thing in life we continually busy ourselves with the ephemeral things of the world - instead of busying with Truth. Let us ponder deeply over the unfalsified teachings of Christ. Let us go to Him and not to His interpreters. Let us listen to His voice and pray to Him to grant us the capacity to understand His eternal teaching. Let His Birthday be our birthday, the birthday of our reality, doing away with all the encrustations and superimpositions which veil our true nature and prevent us from reaching the light which has been ours since time immemorial. May His grace and the grace of all the Great Ones descend upon us and illumine our understanding and heart. May this birthday of Christ awaken in us the true yearning for the higher life and give us the strength to follow Him and to reach Him.

V I

In the beginning of our spiritual life we may think God is separate from ourselves, and we are all separate from one another. As the result of our moral and ethical discipline, when we are really able to chasten ourselves, we find that we are part of Him, we all form the different parts of a mighty organism. When our mind is further purified, we come to feel that in our true spiritual nature freed from the limiting adjuncts we are eternally one with God, that our individuality and personality is a myth, and become merged in the One Undivided Principle, the One without a second, the THAT of the Upanishads, the 'I and my Father are one' of Christ. This is the ultimate consummation of all spiritual striving and Sadhana.

V I I

'God has so created the senses that they go outward, and man sees only the external world, and not the Self.'

It is only the wise person who turns his mind and senses inward. Unless we are prepared to rise above the temptations of the senses, it is not possible for us to lead a really spiritual life. The senses must not be given food, they have to be curbed. Unless we are able to rid ourselves of the temptations presented to our mind by the senses, unless we are able to achieve the control of this unruly mind, it is not possible truly to turn to the Divine and make Him the pivot of our life.

V I I I

Nachiketas went to Yama and asked him the most difficult question, namely, 'What is Truth?' Yama answered: "Choose sons and grandsons who shall live a hundred years, herds of cattle, elephants, horses, and gold; choose a vast territory on earth, and live thyself as many years as thou desirest. Ask for some other boon that thou thinkest equal to this, such as wealth and long life. O Nachiketas, be a king of the wide earth. I will make thee the enjoyer of all desires. Whatever objects of desires are difficult to get in this world of mortals, doest

thou ask for them all according to thy choice; - these fair damsels with their chariots and musical instruments - such indeed are not obtainable by man; be thou attended on by them whom I bestow upon thee. But ask not anything about Truth.'

And then came the beautiful answer of Nachiketas which proves him to have been a real devotee: 'All those are most transient, O Yama they wear out all sense-vigour of the mortal. Moreover all lives are short lived. So keep thy horses, dance, and song for thyself. Tell me, O Yama, of that Supreme Life of hereafter in which they have doubt. Nothing shall Nachiketas choose other than that goal which is so mysterious.'

And after having tested him thus, Yama proceeded to instruct him in the highest knowledge.

I X

We find temptation in the lives of all the Great Ones. By this they have shown us how to overcome temptation and how to follow the path. They themselves did not need any temptation, but without being shown practically the possibility of overcoming all temptation we should have said that this was impossible and that their case was different.

Especially during our meditation our desires become very vivid, take a terribly definite shape. So do our attachments. It is a severe test that comes to all of us without any exception. So our attitude should be that of Nachiketas. During the moment of our temptation we should say, 'O Lord, keep me away from all these temptations. I do not want them.' Physical temptations are nothing compared with mental temptations. The finer our world becomes, the more sensitive we grow, the greater the struggle. So the thoughts of the different Great Ones and of their attitude should give us greater and greater strength to fight the battle successfully. Hence when sitting for meditation always send salutations to them.

X

There are two different states, the state of the aspirant and the state of the perfect man. Of the first Sankara says, 'He avoids the company of people, looking upon them as poisonous

serpents. Even the most beautiful form he looks upon as a dead body, and objects of sense-enjoyment he avoids as poison.' This is in the beginning when the aspirant **wants** to lead a pure life without having overcome his passions and desires. But when he himself has realised Truth, all this sense of hatred and aversion passes away. So Sankara says, 'The whole world has become to him like a Divine pleasure garden. All trees appear to him to be the wish-yielding trees in heaven. All waters appear to him as the holy Ganges water. All acts become to him consecrated acts. All sounds, whether gross or refined, good or bad, become to him the Vedic sound. The whole world becomes to him the holy city of Banares. Such becomes the vision of him who has realised the Truth, who has known Brahman.' Then all fear of temptation has left him. At that stage he has gone beyond its sway.

But these two stages should be clearly separated. First we must make use of the staircase, and only afterwards, when we ourselves have reached the terrace can we look down upon the staircase as something very small compared with the terrace and its amenities.

X I

We must have dispassion for all enjoyments procurable in this life and in future lives. We must be able to discriminate between what is eternal and unchanging and what is transitory and fraught with pain and danger. We must come to possess the six ethical virtues: Tranquility of the mind, restraint of the senses, renunciation of desires, endurance, placidity of mind, and faith. And lastly we must possess a burning desire for liberation from the trammels of nature. This means we must have a tremendous yearning for the Truth.

X I I

Learn to see things as they are. Everywhere on the phenomenal plane you find filth and flowers side by side. They are eternally inseparable so long as we do not go beyond the plane of manifestation, which is the plane of the pairs of opposites. During the time of your early Sadhana create a disgust for the

world and its expression through these pairs of opposites.

X I I I

The first step towards realisation of God is to see in this body the greatest temple of the Divine. You must throw away all the filth you have stored up during innumerable years, and above all you must see that you do not allow your mind to accumulate any new filth.

'There are various holy things, holy waters, holy mountains, temples and the like, but the heart of the devotee is the greatest temple. It takes years for us to be purified by the holy waters etc., but the truly holy man purifies us in no time. And it is he who makes the holy places holier and makes our Scriptures embody his experiences and give inspiration for us.'

Only when the aspirant realises Him in the very depths of his own being, he realises Him in all. The human body is the greatest temple of God, for in it we have to realise Him.

'All dependence on externals is misery. Dependence on the Self alone is Bliss.'

Childhood has to be outgrown. And if we remain children all our life, we cannot be children in the higher sense. We should possess the purity of a child, but not a child's ignorance.

X I V

You must learn to touch the mind at the right point. You cannot get milk from the cow if you do not know how to milk it. You must become expert milkers if you want to get the greatest quantity of milk.

The Mind has many compartments. Some of them you must lock up carefully, and then set fire to them. Other compartments must be unlocked; but finally you must set fire to them also; for Truth is beyond both.

X V

Spiritual life does not mean passing over a bed of roses.

The soul's path is not a path strewn with beautiful fragrant flowers. We must never be afraid of tremendous struggle. Spiritual life means this, but then there is pleasure in weathering the storm, there is pleasure in struggling. You get greater strength, greater steadiness, and greater knowledge.

Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'Constant struggle is a form of worship to the Lord. Repeated defects should not unnerve thee. Let all thy hankerings, all thy desires be reduced to dust; make up thy heart a cremation-ground, and let the MOTHER dance there. God comes only when the heart is pure. Let the MOTHER dance there.'

Without morals spiritual life cannot be begun. And the higher forms of love must uproot our sense-bound affections for human dolls and create the right outlook which, in its turn, gives us great sympathy and insight and the true spirit of sacrifice. Once this new outlook has become alive in us, there is no more danger from human dolls and affections that are time-bound and create fetters and dungeons for ourselves as well as for others. The very moment Love comes into our heart, all counterfeits of Love vanish.

X V I

The morning is the best time for the spiritual practices, especially meditation - immediately after we get up from bed. Always the early morning is the best time; but then, we should, practise Japa and meditate at least for a few minutes in the evening too, when dusk is falling. If we have time enough, it is good to perform our practices at the time of the four junctions of the day, at dawn, midday, nightfall and midnight, because they mean a change in the current and in the vibrations. If we cannot do so much, we should at least stick to the early morning and night-fall practices.

How many times do we eat during the day? So if we can find time enough for our meals, what about our spiritual food? Is it less important? The early morning is the best time, because sleep, in a way, has cut us off from our memory.

X V I I

The general rule is: Practise rhythmic breathing, because breath acts on the mind, just as the mind acts on breath. The breath becomes very much attenuated during Japa. Whenever the mind is really concentrated, breath is minimised. This is a great sign by which to measure the stage of concentration we have attained.

X V I I I

We in our true nature are not products of Maya, but unchangeable spiritual entities. Man is a spiritual entity, not a body or a mind or a combination of both. Man is eternally beyond Maya, and only for this reason is there any hope of salvation.

X I X

Such is our inordinate and blind clinging to this body of ours that we are only busy with the pleasures of the body.

We undergo the miseries of life, repeat the bitter experiences again and again; but all this does not make us wiser in any way. We are continually running after the mirage to quench our thirst with its waters but this can never be done.

'As a lamp in a spot sheltered from the wind does not flicker, even such has been the simile used for a Yogi of subdued mind, practising concentration on thy Self.'

'When the mind, absolutely restrained by the practice of concentration, attained quietude, and when seeing the Self by the self, one is satisfied in his own Self: When he feels that infinite Bliss - which perceived by the purified intellect and which transcends the senses, and established wherein he never departs from his real state; and having obtained which, regards no other acquisition superior to that, and where established, he is not moved even by heavy sorrow; - let that be known as the state, called by the name of Yoga, - a state of severance from the contact of pain. This Yoga should be practised with perseverance, undisturbed by depression of heart.'

