

THE GRACE OF THE MIND

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I

A very significant saying of Sri Ramakrishna is, 'You may have the grace of the Lord, and the guru, but if you have not the grace of your mind then the other two will be of little avail for your spiritual uplift'. It seems really a paradox. How can the mind overrule the grace of God? Is it then such a potent factor as to set at naught the grace of the preceptor as well as of the Lord? These are the questions that will confront one's mind on hearing this utterance. Where shall we find the answer for these questions? By thinking deeply in and on our own minds.

First of all, we have to know that the mind is a mechanism which can divide itself, as it were, into two separate entities; one as the player, the actor and the other as the observer, the witness. Of course, we do not refer here to the Self or the Ātman, which is the witness, the illuminator, the operator of the body-mind machine, the prime mover of all our thoughts, volition, and action. We shall confine at this stage to the mind alone.

This phase of the mind, that is its capacity to bifurcate into two channels, as it were, will not be clear to the ordinary people who are moved by impulses in most of their actions. Take for instance a man in a fit of anger. What will he not do? He may commit any crime. He is carried away by the impulse and cannot use that part of his mind, which the Indian psychologists call *buddhi* (intellect). Similarly men under the impelling force of other passions fail to utilize this faculty. Their mind is completely lost in the impulse to act, or in the act, during those moments.

But it is not a fact that the generality of mankind does not possess or develop this faculty. That man regrets some of his actions for whatever reason, demonstrates that this faculty is not absent in him. Also, commerce, science, literature, music, art, and architecture have developed because of it. Yet the very same persons who have reached the pinnacle of glory in these spheres may be swayed by passions, may commit crimes. How could such a thing be possible if they were not swept off their feet in the current of their passions, thus losing hold of their intellect?

Again, it is a psychologically proved fact that a part of the mind

should always cooperate with the body for the performance of any action; there is no automation in it. Even when we allude to automation in man we imply that he does not do his deeds devoting his full mind to them, does not use his discriminative part of it.

All this will be obvious if we but begin to analyze every thought that we think, every word that we utter and every action that we perform. This self-analysis, if we may say so, is the laying of the foundation of man's character on a firm basis. All other codes of outward conduct, mores, traditions and so on are only aids to develop this intuitive self-analysis. These codes and mores cannot make you a new being unless you accept the disciplines involved in them whole-heartedly and not as drudgery. Perhaps, in the beginning even this drudgery should be accepted and may prove fruitful provided there is a real hankering after the spirit, after God. But if it remains as a burden, as a shackle which you think is impeding you every moment of your life then the outer disciplines will only weigh on your mind and create tension.

Well, what creates tension? Many of us might have seen the sport called the 'tug of war'. A rope is usually the medium by which the strength of the parties is tested. The two parties try to pull the other its own way. When the sides are balanced the pressure on the rope is such that it becomes taut. Likewise in the mind there are two tendencies, the good and the evil, each pulling its own way. When neither of these want to yield ground, tension is created. Let us take a concrete example. Suppose a man is impelled by his tendencies to wicked actions, at the same time his intellect functioning properly refuses to submit to the impulse. If the intellect is strong the man may wean away the mind, but if it is neither strong nor weak, is just able to counter the pull of his evil tendencies and no more, the mind then gets taut. Tension may also result when one is facing misery continually and for a long time. Then the resistance of the mind, however strong, wears off and a stage is reached when there arises an intense conflict, whether to go the easier way or fight and stay in the right path.

It is this period of tension that is critical in man's life. Either he succumbs to allurements and temptations or overpowers them and comes out victorious. History of religion is the history of these conquests of the lower self by the higher or, to be consistent with our subject, of lower desires of the mind by the higher values. That it is the mind which is responsible for what we are, is epigrammatically given in one of the Upanisads. 'The mind alone is the cause of man's bondage and liberation. That (mind) which is enraptured in worldly pleasures makes for bondage and that which has freed itself from such allurements helps towards liberation,'¹ says the *Brahmabindu Upanisad*.

¹ Brahmabindu Upanishad, 2.

II

After this preamble the subject, the grace of the mind, we believe, will be easier to grasp. We can now say that the willingness of the mind to take the yoke of God is what can be said to be its grace. Many of us have not noticed how wild horses behave when they are caught, to be tamed. But, it is said that this is a tough job which trained, strong and adventurous men alone can do. These horses are very turbulent, and would not like to lose their freedom. Some of them struggle to the last limit of their physical energy, before they give in. Even when they are caught, it is a task to tame them and ride or yoke them to the plough or the wagon. Man's mind is like the wild horse. Unrelenting should be the pressure that is made to bear on it. Not so much as to create tension but to watch and root out the thoughts that bring tension on. But this is most easily said than done. It is a lifetime's work to bring the mind into subservience and give it to God.

What then is the meaning of God's grace if it cannot detract us from our foibles, shortcomings and follies and attract us towards Him, if it cannot transform us? Sri Ramakrishna's simile of the mother engaged in her household chores and the child busy with the red toys is a very apt illustration to the point. As long as the child is happy with the toys the mother goes on with her household work, but a part of her mind remains always on the child. She hears it laugh and toss the toys, crawling or toddling about in great glee. So she allows it to play on but when the child has nothing more to do with the toys and cries for the mother, that moment she runs to it, discarding the work, whatever it may be, that she is engaged in. As long as we are busy and happy with our worldly life God allows us to be so. Otherwise like the children that are snatched away from their games we will be miserable. Do not the best dishes taste common and insipid when one has no hunger? Also, do not the ordinary dishes taste like nectar when one has toiled hard or had foregone food for many a day? That is the contrast. There should be hunger for God, thirst to taste His sweetness. Without this yearning even if God bestows his vision we would not welcome it. We may willy-nilly go on but a lingering back glance will always remain. But once this thirst develops then any yoke will be welcome and be cheerfully borne. When the mind can create such yearning for God then it can be said that its grace has dawned on that person.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the breeze of the Lord's grace is always blowing, only we have to unfurl the sails to catch it. Unfurling the sails is to make the mind receptive to thoughts about God. Ordinarily our mind is receptive to the impressions that the senses bring and though not averse, in some cases, to thoughts about God, the mind cannot be described as overflowingly avid towards them. Man, by his mistaken notion searches after everlasting bliss and peace in the external world but finds it nowhere. Like the astronauts that went round space and found

God nowhere, he becomes disappointed in the end if he searches for joy outside.

III

All investigations either in the sphere of science or religion is to find out that one Principle of Bliss which runs through every being and non-being and manifests in a variety of ways. But the veils, both in the internal and the external worlds, are too thick, very opaque, to allow penetration for our ordinary minds.

These clouds that veil our being from getting in contact with God are our passions which incessantly create a turmoil in the mind and never allow the image of God to reflect there. For as we have already noticed the swift stream of passions carries away man along with it, without giving him respite or any chance to deliberate over the actions which he is rushed in, intimidated, as it were, to do. That is what Arjuna complains to Sri Krishna, 'When this is so, urged by what does man do evil deeds though unwilling, as if compelled by force'.² Arjuna's question is when it is well-known that one has to reap the bitter fruits of one's evil actions, why does man persist in doing them. Sri Krishna's reply is, 'It is desire, it is anger (passion), that is born of *rajas* which is a voracious consumer, and a great evil (that makes man engage in evil deeds). Know this to be your enemy here.'³ Sri Krishna continues, 'Just as the fire is concealed by smoke, just as the mirror is covered by dust, just as the foetus is covered by the amnion even so this knowledge is hidden by passion'.⁴ The three examples here, imply three different stages of growth; smoke is natural to fire likewise passions are inherent in the mind in the form of impressions, and therefore give rise to the innumerable bodies which we pass through; the dust that covers the mirror is an external element, similarly, the attractions of the senses which come from outside have the tendency to make the desires stronger; the membrane that covers the foetus limits all its movements, even so man's freedom is curtailed by his enhanced passions, and he is bound by them even as a prisoner is by fetters.

The Bhagavata in an exquisite verse depicts how man gets entangled in this world. 'The mind creates these bodies, qualities, and deeds for this Self. That mind again creates ignorance (Māyā) from whence results all this transmigration.'⁵ We try to imagine things and by the sway of our imagination we bring them into being. So, as Swami Vivekananda says, 'Let visions cease. Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams, which are Eternal Love and Service free'.

Perhaps, we are apt to brush aside the above as a poetic sentiment. But before we pass on to the scientific explanation about it let us recall

² Bhagavad Gita, III.36.

³ Ibid., III.37.

⁴ Ibid., III.38.

⁵ Bhagavata, 12.5.6.

that one of the epithets of God, in the Hindu scriptures is Kavi,⁶ the intelligent one, one of insight, the poet. All poetry is not mere sentiment for some of the best thoughts in philosophy have been expressed in the form of poems. The Vedas, and some of the Upanisads are examples in point. The above statement of Swami Vivekananda is not merely poetry but is an expression born of profound spiritual insight.

IV

How imagination and hence the mind plays a great part can be easily explained. Let us take up the scientific and technological achievements of the present age. There was a time when even great thinkers and literateurs satirically wrote about man's attempt to fly in the air. But today it is an accomplished fact. All this has been made possible by imaginative thinking of the creative genius. In the present age no one can criticize as impracticable the wildest imagination of the scientist, of their being able to travel to the Moon or the Mars. The critic or the sceptic will then be considered as living in an antediluvian age, not aware of the advance science has made. As it is possible to lift ourselves by an imaginative process it is also possible to involve ourselves into difficulties by the same process. That is why Swamiji warned us to 'dream of truer dreams'. Thus we see that the mind has infinite power.

We can arrive at the same conclusion even from the physical point of view. Take up the science of biology. The biologists are of the opinion that germs of most of the diseases are present in our system but they bide their time, and become active only when the body gets weakened. We should not therefore allow our body to become weak. Swami Vivekananda says, 'There are hundreds of thousands of microbes surrounding us, but they cannot harm us unless we become weak, until the body is ready and predisposed to receive them. There may be a million microbes of misery, floating about us. Never mind! They dare not approach us, they have no power to get a hold on us, until the mind is weakened. This is the great fact; strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death'.

Thus from every point of view, we see, that the mind has a great part in the moulding of our lives. We should, therefore, be careful, to think thoughts, to visualize things, as would benefit us spiritually. And the grace of the mind, in a sense, is its capacity to think spiritual thoughts in a continuous and sustained manner.

Now, the English word grace can be translated into Sanskrit as *prasāda*. And this word *prasāda* in another sense means tranquillity also. If we equate these two words, viz., grace and tranquillity, with reference to the mind, we do not think we will be committing any error. On the

⁶ Bhagavad Gita, VIII.9 & Isa Up., 8.

other hand the grace of the mind is its very ceasing from going into modifications, attaining tranquillity, which, according to Patanjali, may be termed as Yoga.⁷ It is the end towards which all our efforts, knowingly or unknowingly, are directed. Even the feverish activity and interminable desire for pleasure, though misdirected efforts, are to attain this tranquillity. But the tranquillity born of attaining worldly goods or pleasures is short-lived.

How can eternal tranquillity be attained? Sri Krishna says, 'One who is free from attachment and aversion and moves about amidst the sense objects with the senses and the mind governed by a controlled self attains serenity'.⁸ Only then when one has acquired tranquillity of the mind, 'all miseries are destroyed; and the wisdom of a man of serenity soon becomes steady'.⁹

V

The main purport, which runs through all our scriptures, is that we should be able to cleanse our minds of all dross, of all other thoughts which make us hanker after things here, and point the mind towards God. The more we are able to hold on to the thoughts about God, the more, we should say, is the grace of the mind bestowed on us. For there are instances when everything has been favourable, yet due to the lack of an inner urge we fail to do our spiritual practices, do not feel any inclination to do them. The reason is that the mind ordinarily flows out towards external objects and that is why one can concentrate one's mind on things external, but it is very difficult to concentrate on the mind itself or on our inner being. Because there the instrument and the object are one. It is only for this reason that we have images and symbols. The outgoing mind is given an outward object which reminds us about God. Thus helped to think of the abstract through the concrete, the mind which has lost taste for worldly pleasure, will take up this idea. Only when the mind has taken up this idea seriously to the exclusion of all other thoughts, can it be said that the grace of the mind has dawned on that person. Swami Vivekananda informs us that, 'This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced'.

To sum up: the grace of the mind means its willingness to think of God, its eagerness to contemplate on Him, which in turn arises only when its hankering after pleasures has begun to abate, when it feels restless for God, when nothing disturbs its equanimity. It is a long process but one should not get disheartened. For nothing has been achieved by the weak; to the brave and the persisting alone have gone all the laurels in this world. And the laurels that will crown us in the field of spirituality are the only ones that give us peace that passeth understanding'.

⁷ Yoga Sutras, I.2.

⁸ Bhagavad Gita, II.64.

⁹ Ibid., II.65.