

Spiritual Living **- *Jivana-Yajna***

by

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Publisher's Note

During Guru Poornima Mahotsava 2017, which was celebrated at Bengaluru, Samvit Sadhanayana had released the book "Sanatana Dharma" written by Poojya Shree, which included his writings published earlier in 1959.

As a follow-up to the above writings, Poojya Swamiji had penned a book in 1960. Samvit Sadhanayana takes immense pleasure in publishing this invaluable work by Poojya Shree - "Spiritual Living - *Jivana-Yajna*" and making it available to all the Sadhakas.

We are grateful to Lt Col TP Rajkumar (Retd) from Silukkuvarpatti, Dindugul, Tamil Nadu, for sponsoring this publication. Shri Rajkumarji is *Kripa-patra* of Poojya Swamiji since 1975. We are grateful to Shri Ashwini Vyas of Jodhpur for the book-cover artwork.

Samvit Sadhanayana is infinitely grateful to Poojya Swamiji for this ambrosial ocean of wisdom.

With prostrations at his lotus feet,

Guru Poornima, 2022
Ishwarashraya Ashram

Sudhir Shroff
Samvit Sadhanayana

ॐ

निधये सर्वविद्यानां भिषजे भवरोगिणाम् ।
गुरवे सर्वलोकानां दक्षिणामूर्तये नमः ॥

To Him who is the source of all knowledge, who frees all from the deadly disease of transmigration, who is the supreme spiritual Master to all the worlds – unto that Dakshinamurti, the benign Lord, we offer our salutations.

Preface

There has been no age in human history which has not had its own problems, its crises to face, problems to solve. In fact any phase of history can be truly judged not by a statistics of its material output but by studying the problems peculiar and fundamental to it and the way it sought to solve them. If it succeeded in working out a solution then you call it a golden age. If it did not strive at all for a solution then it is a dead age. Struggle is necessary in order to maintain life.

It then becomes the duty of every serious inhabitant of this earth to make this attempt and welcome the contribution of others however small it may be. In our own times too this study and search has been going on, perhaps more intensely and widely than ever. Because the boundaries of nations and continents, instead of being barriers, have become conduits making this planet one small, closely connected integral unit. Whatever happens in the

West is no more a matter of the West, the East must share in its gains and losses and vice versa. This condition which has caused the disaster of our times, at the same time holds in its hand the promise of a solution.

The peculiar drift of the time has been such that the rising tide of scientific and technological advancement of the West has invaded the East and the ebb-tide has brought to the West nothing but the spiritual degeneration of the latter. This has upset the world-balance. This is the catastrophe. And no one seems to know how to re-establish it, how to be truly human yet modern and this constitutes the crisis. Not that such and such country possesses such and such atomic arms, not even that man has lost his supreme ideal. Man still knows what he has to gain in life, what he very badly needs. But man has forgotten how to live without hurting himself and his neighbours.

It is in this situation that Hinduism, the religion of the Vedas, steps in and assumes an importance. It is by its very nature universal, in as much as it is meant for man irrespective of country or race and it aims at the welfare of all according to their varying ideals and capacities. But the method prescribed by Hinduism is fundamentally individual. To cure the group it tackles each member of it separately. This characteristic endows Hinduism with a special advantage in averting the crisis we have spoken of. Because it proposes to the solitary man, the man in the street as

well as the man of high status, a simple discipline through a particular way of life. It does not burden him with the responsibilities of reforming his neighbour or working out elaborate schemes which involve factors external to him. In the Vedic discipline all the material is in one's hands. In fact here oneself is the material. The Vedic clarion call sounded through the Bhagavad Gita exclaims, "उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् - *Lift yourself through the self, do not let it fall to the depths*" (B.Gita 6.5). So if we want to study the Vedic solution to the crisis of our age we must study the Vedic way of life, the particular discipline it dictates for each man individually.

Hinduism has been hailed as a picturesque religion. Some have dubbed it as pantheistic. That only betrays a lack of acquaintance with highly developed symbolism. Symbolism is in the very blood of the Vedic. His actions, arts, images and temples are symbolic to the core. That is why Sanskrit, the original medium of expression of Vedic culture, too became so rich and pliable to picturisation, mystic-formula-making and poetry in general. The religious literature of Hinduism – the Vedas, the entire Mahabharata, the Puranas etc., – is replete with symbolisation which is clearly indicated in certain places. It is not left to the imagination of critics. Similarly later *Smritikaras* and *acharyas* have pointed out the significance behind each ritual and injunction of the scriptures.

Naturally this highly developed technique of symbolism employed by Hinduism comes into full play in the vital issue of presenting a picture of ideal life. It is conceived of variously as a battle, a dream, the field for sowing and harvesting, a play of dice or a drama enacted on the world-stage in between Time's shifting screens. Of all these the most effective and significant is the symbol of the *Yajna*, ritual sacrifice. Its very name justifies its claim to represent life in all its totality. Swami Shankarananda in his commentary on the Gita (8.4) states, "इज्यते क्रियते इति यज्ञः – i.e., *whatever that is done is yajna*", and he modifies it as, "श्रौत-स्मार्तक्रियात्मकः – *of the form of actions prescribed by the Vedas and Smritis*". That is to say, *yajna* directly points out to a well-ordered high mode of living according to the ideals put forth in the scriptures.

Now, the Vedas go one step further and bestow not only the name but the external form of the *yajna* to such an ideal living. In more than one place in the Upanishads we find the comparison of life to a *yajna*. The *Garbhopanishad* states : "आत्मा यजमानोमनो ब्रह्मा लोभादयः पशवो धृतिर्दीक्षा संतोषश्च – *the embodied self is the master, initiator of the sacrifice, mind is the chief priest, greed and other such passions are the objects of sacrifice, steadfastness and contentment are the vow...*" The *Narayanopanishad* and *Pranagnihotropanishad* contain a more elaborately worked out scheme. The present work however, is based on a passage from *Chandogyopanishad* of

the *Saama Veda*. Apart from the fact of its being one of the chief Upanishads, the choice of the *Chandogya* becomes doubly significant, because this particular passage refers to the teachings given by Ghora Angiras to Shri Krishna. We can, therefore, justly call this the seed of Bhagavad Gita, its foundation. Sri Krishna only puts in his own inimitable way what he received from his *acharya*. Hence by studying this passage we are ensured of the essential light that can be gleaned from the Gita.

The main feature, however, of this book is its special treatment of the *Samanya dharma* like *ahimsa* and *satya*. These precious concepts have suffered either from the familiarity that leads to neglect, if not contempt, or from the danger of idealisation and isolation. Many modern psychologists with all their sincerity are afraid to accept these concepts since they find them inapplicable to the ordinary man's life. This is true of the fully-developed stage of each *dharma* – not of its beginnings. The beauty of these *dharmas* is that any one of them when taken as a single concept and worked up to its farthest extent and deepest significance finally turns out to be the last word in perfection, the very attainment of the goal. That is why when Aruni Suparneya approaches his father Prajapati and asks, "Which is the supreme (path)?" Prajapati first mentions '*satya*' with reasons why it is the supreme. Then he goes on naming *tapas*, *dama*, *shama*, *daana*, *dharma*, *prajanana*, *yajna* and *manas* one after the other giving equal reasons as to why each of them is the supreme. One may

think that it is absurd to prescribe all of them when one alone is enough for one's purpose. But this is not so. Because the supremacy of each virtue consists in the complete mastery of it which is very difficult. So one is expected to develop oneself harmoniously and gradually through all the phases of virtues till, according to one's capacity and need, one is pulled with great momentum through the channel of a particular virtue towards the final state of illumination. Hence this advocating of the harmonious development of all the virtues indicates gradations in them and involves the practising of all of them according to each man's capacity without worrying as to how far it falls short of the ideal state, the definition, as they are given here. In order to enhance this viewpoint and avoid being merely theoretical, some hints as to the practice of these virtues have also been given in the foregoing pages.

Before taking the reader to the main work it will not be irrelevant to offer a hint here. It is very necessary to understand the symbol and take it seriously. Otherwise this book will be reduced to a mere sermon on morals. The firing of guns in honour of a dignitary's arrival, the hoisting or lowering of the national flag, the riding in state of the head of the Government on special occasions, all such innumerable items of national and individual life are nothing but so many symbols which produce the desired profound effect only when demonstrated in public regularly and with devotion. This is much more essential in the case of a

personal ideal of life. The strictly orthodox Vedic man initiated into the Vedas is supposed to offer the twin oblations of his daily *agnihotra* at dawn and dusk. Similarly the aspirant of the *jivana-yajna* must meditate, each morning as soon as he wakes up from bed, on the form of the life he is taking up, the details of the 'sacrifice', the precautions and preparations needed, and thus with clarity and firmness begin the day. Even so, before retiring for the night let him observe the little ceremony of silent recollection of the day's performance and renewal of the vow to maintain the effort. And throughout the day's activities also one should pause to visualise oneself as the sacrificer in the sacrificial hall of the world. Then each one of his deeds, even his thoughts, will become guarded and everything takes upon the air of sanctity. In such an atmosphere alone can the ideal life, capable of yielding perfection and bliss be practised.

In the Appendix is included a set of thought patterns which may be called prayers. The aspirant may select any one of these according to his inclination and weave that particular pattern into his life by going over it all through the day as often as it is possible. With such aids, we sincerely hope, one must be able to perform the great *Jivana-yajna* and make one's life an eternal prayer and a blessing to the world.

Ishwararanda Giri

Song Of The Sea

*“What is the course of the life
Of mortal men on the earth?
Most men eddy about
Here and there – eat and drink,
Chatter and love and hate,
Gather and squander, are raised
Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing; and, then they die –
Perish; and no one asks
Who or what they have been,
More than he asks what waves,
In the moonlit solitudes mild
Of the midmost ocean, have swelled,
Foamed for a moment, and gone.”*

– from ‘Rugby Chapel’ by Matthew Arnold

Significance Of Yajna

Life is an ocean. Like the fish, the countless souls in it do not care to measure its depths. To them it is limitlessly vast and deep and contains infinite number of things. So long as they get their food they do not care to explore. But even in such a day-to-day mundane existence of an ordinary man the question does rise, as the poet has raised, at some rare moment of life, in the wake of a disillusionment that comes “...bursting all these bubbles, fashions, wealths, these eager business aims – books, politics, art, amours – to utter nothingness”. Only instead of allowing time to force this question with a dose of bitterness in it, the intelligent man ponders over the problem even as he begins to bear the burdens of life on his mature shoulders, even as he begins to face the buffets of coast-rollers. He pauses to hear the uproar of the waves and observes with care their wild tossing. He would gladly discover in the wild uproar a music that resonates with his heart-beats, and in the wild tossing a rhythmic grace that keeps time with his

footsteps. In this discovery lies the success of living.

On deep analysis we find that man has in him three fundamental desires – to be unrestricted, to enjoy and to know. Almost all his activities can be traced to either of these motivating desires. But man finds himself in a world where the fulfilment of these desires is not easy; there are obstacles at every step restricting his freedom, there are pleasures he cannot get, things he cannot know. So man must go on striving to remove these obstacles and get what he wants for himself. This constant striving to get at his desired goal is what is generally called life.

Philosophy which literally means ‘love of knowledge’ thus touches one of the three main concerns of life viz., freedom, happiness and knowledge. It also indirectly covers the field of the other two factors and tries to offer solutions to problems concerning their attainment. But a philosophy to be of living and universal interest must make life itself its object, life in its universal aspect, probe into its secrets and situations and suggest how best life can be lived, that is to say how best can one overcome the obstacles to the attainment of absolute freedom and happiness.

Out of such an attempt emerges the form of practical religion with its essentially individual character and group of internal values. This is inevitable. For, an external search into things resulting in a thorough knowledge of them is not going to change the creation, remove the obstacles to man's achievement. We can only come to know of the fundamental laws that govern the

physical world and put them to material use. But we cannot reverse them as we wish. Whereas the internal nature can be controlled and transformed so that the external factors which were impassable obstacles are no more obstacles. This is the significance and speciality of religious living. That it is rooted in the individual's moral values does not mean that this sort of life would be confined to the monk's cell or limited to few hours of a man's private life apart from his activities in society. This would not at all be a wholesome prescription, it would be tearing life into shreds and creating conflicts and tensions. Hence the wisdom of the most ancient of philosophies, Hinduism, has not divided religion and normal social life into watertight compartments. Here religion penetrates every pore of life. It demands of you to sit at the shop-counter and transact business as 'religiously' as you would sit in the shrine-room and worship God.

This sounds incredible at the outset – almost blasphemous. That is because we are not ready to sacrifice certain pet ideas and fanciful items of life we are accustomed to, we are not able to reconcile ourselves to the seeming contradiction of seeking freedom and happiness through accepting a restriction for life-time, a strict self-imposed discipline. We need to be initiated into the doctrine of *Karma-Yoga*.

An illiterate farmer went to a doctor for treating his foot. A thorn had gone deep into the sole and formed a festering sore. When the doctor approached the wound, knife in hand, the

farmer shrieked, "What are you doing! A small thorn, one-tenth of an inch, has entered my foot and is creating so much trouble. Instead of doing something to relieve me you are going to thrust this six inch long knife. Are you mad?" The doctor replied, "I am not mad. That thorn got into you through your own foolishness and carelessness; hence it gives you trouble. I am now going to insert this knife with full knowledge and precaution so that it will not get stuck there but extract your thorn and also be free to come out the moment I pull it. And then your wound will heal in no time. You will be up and doing as before." That quietened the farmer.

The principle of *Karma-yoga* is somewhat similar. Action or, we may say, life itself, because as we have seen it is but a name for a series of actions, when based on ignorance is an eternal source of pain. The same when enlightened with knowledge becomes a heal, a doorway to perfection. By knowledge here we mean a close understanding of the principle of action, its fruits and the Giver of the fruits. It is this knowledge which the Vedas call variously as विद्या, उपासना, ज्ञान, भावना, etc., and prescribe its synchronisation with external action. For instance the *Ishavasyopanishad* declares :

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासते ।

ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायां रताः ॥९॥

विद्यां चाविद्यां च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।

अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययामृतमश्नुते ॥११॥

“Those who practise mere avidya (action) enter into blinding darkness. Into greater darkness do they fall who practise mere vidya (knowledge)...He who practises both vidya and avidya together overcomes death through avidya and attains to eternity by the help of vidya.” For a clear understanding of the Vedic theory of Life, this mantra with its typically Upanishadic language must be studied a little more deeply.

All actions give some fruit or other either immediately or at some distant time, either perceived directly or otherwise inferred. The effects of some actions linger for a while only whereas that of others last for a long time. All the same every effect must end at some point of time. Life cannot yield an everlasting result since life itself is a thing endowed with beginning and end. But there is a particular method through which action achieves the potency to give man an infinite result, a deathless perfection which we call *moksha*. This is the method of *Karma-yoga* with its twin functions: it inspires every action with desirelessness (*nishkaamana*) and turns it into an offering to the Creator. In this way *Karma-yoga* works like a double-edged sword.

Each action creates two kinds of results. One is the evident result that accrues to the doer in the form of pain or pleasure. The other is a subtle impression, *vaasana* left in the doer's mind. This latter is the real bondage of action. Because it deepens the lack or instinct which initiated the act and creates a propensity to repeat

the action again and in order to fulfil it more and more activity leads to more and more *vaasanas* which in turn accelerate the activity and thus the blind struggle goes on endlessly in a vicious circle. This is what the *Ishavasya* says as 'entering the blinding darkness'. Such useless activity is termed *avidya* because here the actor is completely ignorant of the principle of action, its fruits and the giver of it, the Creator, the God of perfection.

The *Atharva Veda* says, "The aspirant after perfection (Brahman) must investigate, analyse and test this world of material achievement and through the observation that the uncreate, infinite (perfection) is not got through the created finite (action), he must attain to dispassion". That is to say, he then ceases to be motivated by lust and greed for the evanescent fruits of action, nor is he carried away by the act itself. He just floats on the surface of life's flood of activity. Hence *vaasanas* fail to anchor him or draw him deeper into the vortex. This is the first function of *Karma-yoga*.

At this stage the aspirant instead of being subject to haphazard and capricious acting, is led by the commands of the scriptures. For knowing that by this the Creator will be pleased and that is what is important, he desires nothing else, nothing for himself. He is filled with the realisation that this world, this entire creation, belongs to the Creator and whatever personal gain a man has, is all a gift from Him. Man in his short-sightedness sees only his own actions and mistakes it to be the cause of his gains,

just as a brilliant reflecting surface held against the sun should be mistaken as self-radiant. The creator is the centre of Life, the only source of its light. He is the boundless ocean of all its wealth. Everything arises from Him and flows back to Him. This knowledge is called *vidya*.

But a mere theoretical conception of this without the aforementioned intense analysis and dispassion will only result in licentiousness and indulgences even in prohibited practices. Hence mere *vidya* is said to lead to greater blinding darkness where the possibility of realising the error and striving for purification and progress is completely lost. It is not enough to know that God pervades all and possesses all, one must enter into a definite relation with Him and be established in His oneness and universality. With all the limitations of life, *jiva* the aspiring being can achieve this only by adopting a particular set of actions, a prescribed code of life which he can offer to God every moment of his life. By restricting himself to the acts of *dharma*, the dictates of the scriptures, he escapes the errors of the evil path, *adharma*. And by offering the acts along with their fruits to God he avoids the transitory results of even the good acts. Because all his acts then are transmuted into the highest worship and take him to the very altar of the Creator, ushers him into the King's orchards and affords him intimations of that Infinity which is his fulfilment. Hence this combination of action and worship, of *vidya* and *avidya* is said to save man from the death of mortal

existence (मृत्युं तीर्त्वा) and enable him to partake of Eternity (अमृतमश्नुते).

Without this balancing of forces of activity and knowledge, life will fly at a tangent, as is the case with our present day civilisation. Man develops a lopsided growth. "As the fowls of the sky can fly only on both the wings, even so, the wise hold, *jnana* and *karma* (knowledge and action) are for the progress of man" (*Yogavashishta*). Lacking either one of them man is bound to falter and fall. The Bhagavad Gita warns that all actions are meant for worship; otherwise the world will be fettered by activity –

यज्ञार्थात् कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः । (B. Gita 3.9)

Here the use of the word ‘*yajna*’ (यज्ञ) is very significant. It points out to the very core of Vedic conception of life. The *Yajna*, the Hindu ritual of making offerings to God through fire, is an outstanding feature enshrined in the Vedas. It is a perfect example of karma-yoga's synchronisation of external act and worship of the Divine. Hence, accepting this as a model for all actions, the Gita gives the message that the entire life should become a *yajna*, a sacrifice.

Thus out of our brief study emerges this lofty conception of life. The Vedic *rishis* chose to represent it by the magnificent symbol of *yajna* and to grasp this conception and make it our own it becomes necessary first to get acquainted with the symbol and know its full significance.

Yajna And Its Form

Panini's *Dhatu-patha* gives out the root-meaning of the word *yajna* thus: “यज् देवपूजा संज्ञितिकरणदानेषु.” Here we get three distinct meanings: worship of God, collection of ingredients and *daana* or charity. The first is called *puja*, ritualistic worship and the second meaning is what is commonly understood by *yajna*. With respect to it the *Matsya Purana* says,

देवानां द्रव्यहविषां ऋक्सामयजुषां तथा ।
ऋत्विजां दक्षिणां च संयोगो यज्ञ उच्यते ॥

“*Gods, material for oblation (like rice, barley, ghee as prescribed for each yajna), the vedic mantras, officiating priests and their fees (dakshina) – the coming together of all these is what is called yajna.*”

In this way *yajna* takes the form of engaging well-versed priests for invoking certain aspect of God with suitable Vedic

mantras and offering Him oblations which are poured into a specially kindled fire. Pleased with this worship God grants the fulfilment of whatever desire that prompted the offering. Since the fruits of an act must go to the actual doer, the merits of the sacrificial offering rightly goes to the priests. The *yajamana* or institutor of the *yajna* who has engaged the priests pays them *dakshina* and buys from them the merit so gained and thus has his own desire fulfilled. The *karma kaanda* section of the Vedas prescribe numerous *yajnas* for different fruits like life, progeny, cattle, rains, kingdom, heaven, health, wealth, overcoming an enemy and so forth. From this it should not be concluded that *yajna* is done only for personal gain. The object of *yajna* covers all possible aims of social life extending upto *vishwa-shanti*, the peace and well-being of the whole world. Actually *yajnas* which give universal good are placed higher than those with personal gain as their end. We have it in the Angira Sutra, “यज्ञमहायज्ञौ व्यष्टिसमष्टि संबन्धात्” and Bharadwaja too says, “समष्टि संबन्धान् महायज्ञः – *yajna with universal connections is called mahayajna*”. Manu the great lawmaker asserts, “महायज्ञैश्च यज्ञैश्चब्राह्मीयं क्रियते तनुः – *one's physical and mental structure becomes spiritualised through the yajna and mahayajna*”.

In the famous *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* passage, “तमेतं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा विविदिषन्ति यज्ञेन दानेन तपसाऽनाशकेन”, the *yajna* is prescribed as a means leading to the inquiry of the Eternal, the truth, the Brahman. In fact it is a rule that even the Vedic rites

meant for the worldly purposes, when performed without any desire except that of worshipping the *Veda Purusha*, constitute a divine purification of the being instead of yielding worldly fruit. So one is free to wield the weapon of *yajna* as potentially as one is capable of.

And then again there are *yajnas* which are not the choice of the doer but must necessarily be accomplished according to one's order of life. Such are the *nitya yajnas* like *agnihotra*, the daily fire-worship prescribed for the *brahmana*, *kshatriya* and *vaishya*. Apart from these daily rites there are *yajnas* whose duration is longer than a year. They are called *satra* (सत्र). Some *yajnas* take as long as twelve years for completion. Bodhayana in his *Grihyaparibhasha sutra* (i. i. 20) makes a fourfold classification of *yajnas* : "That (*yajna*) is known to be of four kinds and practised as such viz. *yajna* of Vedic study, *yajna* of repeating sacred formulae, ritualistic *yajna* and mental *yajna*. Each is ten times more potent than the preceding one and all the four apply with special reference respectively to the four stations of life, studentship, householdership, hermithood and monkhood."

This implies that some sort of *yajna* is to be maintained throughout life, even in the stage of *sannyasa* where all duties are given up for the sake of complete absorption in God. *Yajna* cannot be given up. Because it is the sustaining force behind life. "यज्ञाः पृथ्वीं धारयन्ति – *Yajnas uphold the earth*". "It is *yajna*

alone which is the axis of the universe.” This world is run by it. All this shows that the concept of *yajna* is not merely a particular physical act but a cosmic force, a conscious entity. The *Chandogya Upanishad* declares, ‘*Verily man is yajna*’. Because his whole life, as we shall presently see in detail, is a perpetual *yajna*. Through this man succeeds in lifting himself from the human to the divine plane.

Thus *yajna* is a powerful instrument for achieving human and divine goods and, as is revealed from the following robust statement, even immortality is possible through *yajna*:

ये ते सहस्रमयुतं पाशा मृत्यो मर्त्याय हन्तवे ।
तान् यज्ञस्य मायया सर्वानवयजामहे ॥

“O Death, those thousand and ten thousand snares which thou hast laid for slaying man, all of them we remove by the power of yajna.”

Life or creation along with death or dissolution forms a pair that has been one of the most intriguing subjects of philosophy. There are many creation theories and various analogies are freely drawn upon to explain the process of creation. But it is very significant that the Vedas chose the *yajna*. In the Rig Veda there is a rich poetic description of how *purusha*, the primeval being sacrificed himself and brought forth the whole universe. Here we find the concept of *yajna* reaching stupendous heights. As the manifestation so is the merging back into original form. If man

came into being, into the world of limitations, through *yajna*, then it is through *yajna* that he can reverse the order, break through the limitations and reach his home, the perfection and bliss he aspires after.

With all these details, scopes and intrinsic values under our consideration we can proceed to find out how life can be lived on the model of *yajna*.

Symbol And Symbolised

“Man hungers, thirsts, is afflicted with joylessness – this is his *diksha*, his initiation (into the sacrifice of life). Man eats, drinks, feels pleased – this is his *upasada*, sacrificial repast. He makes merry, feeds on delicacies, mates with his life-partner – these are the psalms and praises, *stutahshastra*. Whatever austerity, charity, uprightness, non-violence, truthfulness etc. he observes is the fees of the priests, *dakshina*. And when he brings forth an offspring they say 'It has been accomplished, extracted' as they would at the extracting of the *soma* juice. Verily death is his last bath, *avabhrita*. Thus did Ghora Angirasa instruct Krishna, the son of Devaki, who then became satiated of the thirst of knowledge.”

The above passage from the seventeenth section of the third chapter of *Chandogya Upanishad* contains the major feature of

jivana-yajna. In working out the details of each item and observing the idea behind each comparison we get a complete and comprehensive picture of it.

In any serious enterprise the foremost requirement is to resolve firmly that one will persist in the fruitful completion of the work to be undertaken. This is done ceremoniously in the *yajna* through the rite of initiation, *diksha* (दीक्षा). All through the period of the *yajna*, the *yajamana* is bound by many strict disciplines and he has to promise “अनृतात् सत्यमुपैमि मानुषाद्देवमुपैमि दैवीं वाचं यच्छामि – *From falsity I rise to truth, from human conduct to the divine. I restrict my speech to the divine*”. The 'conduct' may include austerities like continence, fasting, sleeping on the bare ground etc., as prescribed for each *yajna*. And the *yajamana* must take the vow that he will put up with all difficulties and complete the *yajna* in the proper way.

The man of wisdom who would make his life itself a *yajna* must firmly resolve within himself, “I shall not swerve from the path of *dharmā*, nor give up for any worldly comfort or gain the attempt of divinising my nature, never stop till perfection is reached. I shall offer everything into the fire of the Divine and patiently bear whatever sorrows that meet me on the way.” It is one thing to resolve and something much more difficult to stick to it. But temptations and tribulations do not beset only the few righteous souls who are set on a high ideal. Suffering is common to all. Hunger, thirst, frustrations, disappointments, disease, these

are inevitable features of life and bearing with them with equanimity is the austerity involved in taking the vow of life-sacrifice. Hence it is told: “स यदशिशिषति यत्पिपासति यन्नरमते ता अस्य दीक्षा: – His hungering, his thirsting, his sorrow (of not attaining the desired object) and such like – this is his diksha.”

When a child is born the first sign of life that manifests in it is the voice of hunger – it cries and has to be suckled. Suffering is the initiation into life. But when it is consciously accepted with a firm resolve and if sincerity is not lacking then slowly through the struggle the soul-fibres get toughened and become capable of safely enduring the unavoidable handicaps, irritations and tensions of life. Hence this preparedness and resolve are very essential if life is to be made a holy worship and not a nervous wreck. Once the initiation into *yajna* is finished then the priests start the regular activities of the *yajna*. Usually in a full-fledged *yajna* sixteen persons officiate as priests, each with a distinguishing name and work allotted to him. For example, the chief of the priests is called *Brahma* and he is in charge of the whole proceedings and instructs the *udgata*, *hota*, *prastota*, *upagata*, *adhvaryu* and other priests in their respective works of singing hymns, offering oblations, etc. In the *jivana-yajna* too we find on analysis the full chorus of sixteen priests, sixteen factors that are responsible for all the functions of life.

All the sense-experiences of man can be said to be contained of sight, hearing, smell, touch or taste. These five are experienced respectively through the eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue. These are the five senses of knowledge. Similarly there are five senses of action which are the means to the five forms of all possible human actions viz. handling, walking, speaking, excreting, and reproducing. These five senses of action are the hands, feet, mouth and the two organs of excretion and generation. Thus altogether we have ten senses which are the basis of our external life. Apart from these there is the internal sense of perception, mind. This rules over the ten external senses goading them on to their respective action or perception. That is why in the state of absent mindedness one does not see with eyes wide open, nor do the other senses respond in any way even though the objects of their perception are present. Besides this, mind has the distinct function of cognising pain and pleasure and other such feelings and emotions and also possesses the capacity of preserving and recalling memories.

Then we come to the next criterion in the human body which is responsible for the life-functions. It is *prana*. This is a collective name given to the groups of energies that feed the life-fire burning in the body at all times. As *Kriya-shakti* the active energy, *prana* directly impels the five senses of action. And coupled with the mind it indirectly sustains the senses of perception too. That mind and *prana* are interconnected is evident in the ordinary

experiences of life. When mind is agitated with passions the breathing too is affected. When *prana* grows weak through starvation of the body the mental faculties too begin to diminish. So by proper control of mind *prana* can be regulated and vice versa. This has given rise in Hinduism to *pranayama* and other yogic practices that form a regular science of body-mind culture.

Prana functions in five major channels. As individual *prana* it causes the breathing through the nostrils. As *apana* it ejects things out of the body. *Udana* withdraws the senses during sleep and at time of death helps individual self to transmigrate into other bodies according to the law of *karma*. The *prana* that keeps the digestive fires alive and consumes the food taken in is called *samana*. The essence of the food consumed is distributed all over the body by *vyana*. These five *pranas* and the ten external senses along with the mind as their leader form the sixteen priests who carry out the functions of *jivana-yajna*. Mind being the hub of activity, and controller of the rest, naturally occupies the place of *Brahma*, the chief priest.

Now, for any *yajna* to be successful throughout, the priests should be well-qualified, highly exercised, purified and pleased. All these requirements apply to the senses, mind and *prana*. In this intensively active and positive view of life there is no starving of the faculties, instead the greatest pains are taken to make them as strong and subtle as possible. The Vedic prayer goes: "Let us hear with our ears what is good, let us see with our eyes what is

good. May we remain possessed of firm limbs and sound parts and all through life seek the divine welfare".

Priests partake of food only once a day and after the day's *yajna* is finished. However when the *yajna* is going on they are allowed to break the fast with a little quantity of milk. This is technically called *upasada*. Referring to this item in the *jivana-yajna*, *Chandogya Upanishad* says, “यदश्नाति यत्पिबति यद्रमते तदुपसदैरेति – What he eats, what he drinks, what he exults in, that is *upasada*.” These are the simple pleasures of life that are given to all creatures. Just as in *diksha* we saw that life abounds with inevitable suffering which therefore must be borne with calmness even so these pleasures that are natural fruits of life must be accepted with dignity and contentment. They should refresh and keep us ready to push on further in our duties, not awaken greed and lust and drag us down. Hence they are the *upasada* in the *jivana-yajna*.

Apart from the above mentioned experience of pleasures which are, so to say, satiations common to all living, there are special occasions when man experiences deep joy. A pleasant social gathering, meeting with dear friends, interesting sports and other entertainments, feasting, sight-seeing etc., afford him an exhilaration that makes life worth living. He then bursts into laughter or music. Then again there are moments when the joy is too deep for expression and man is just thrilled. It may be in the ecstatic embrace of the beloved, or a sudden stumbling upon the

profound beauty of a Himalayan scene. All such rare and special occasions of joy are the songs of life that break the monotony of a commonplace daily routine. So they are likened to the *statahshastra*, Vedic hymns in praise of gods sung at certain intervals of the *yajna*. The lilting resonant notes of these *Saama* Veda hymns shed a peculiar charm and brighten the ritualistic routine of the *yajna*.

Angiras asks Krishna to sing the songs of life as lustily and yet as sacredly as the Vedic songs of praise. There is no place for wild abandon in a purposive life. The greatest pleasures should not come by surprise and sweep us off our feet. Through definite and demarcated channels they should be sought, analysed, known, accepted and exulted in. Then they will form a part of worship. There is no stooping down to crumbles of chance, no stealthy drinking of prohibited pegs. We receive our joys from God as we would the monsoon showers, the glorious sunshine. There is a complete lack of confusion and nervous tension. Instead, a full awareness and acceptance lead to healthy morality and thankful remembrance of God and a persistent effort to attain more and more fullness and subtlety which can be got only by approaching God, the primal cause.

We may consider the conceptions of *jivana-yajna's upasada* and *stutakshastra* as examples of the brilliant Vedic genius which couples intense humaneness with high spirituality, endowing life with robust optimism and fullness instead of

escapism and religious melancholy. In short, these are keys to that oft-quoted and least practised principle of simple living and high thinking. They open the doors to varied avenues of noble ideas like *santosh*, *shama*, etc. which we shall deal later in detail.

The next item of the *yajna* is the *dakshina*. As mentioned earlier it is through proper *dakshina* that the whole merit of the *yajna* accrues to the sacrificer and hence *dakshina* is very important. The Bhagavad Gita (17.13) includes lack of proper *dakshina* as one of the five factors that make a *yajna tamasic* and hence least meritorious. In ordinary *yajnas* *dakshina* may be given in the form of gold, silver, corn, cattle, or any such valuable and useful commodity. In the *jivana-yajna* however we pay the 'priests' in a different way: "अथ यत्तपो दानमार्जवमहिंसा सत्यवचनमिति ता अस्य दक्षिणाः – (*Practice of*) *austerity, giving away in charity, straightforwardness, abstaining from violence and speaking the truth – these are his dakshina.*"

The vein of similarity that carries the comparison is the aspect of giving up. By giving up sensual comfort through austerity, wealth through charity, crookedness through uprightness, violence through non-violence and untruth through truthfulness, we buy the real profits of life. The following pages will be devoted to a special study of how this is accomplished.

Presently we come to the leitmotiv of this *yajna*, the offering of oblations. Instead of the offerings of rice, barley and sesame

mixed in clarified butter as is usual in a fire-sacrifice, the sacrifice of life requires us to offer six things: lust (काम), anger (क्रोध), greed (लोभ), delusion (मोह), pride (मद) and jealousy (मात्सर्य) – in short, all our evil passions and deluded attachments. These are the ‘gateways to hell’ as Sri Krishna puts it in the Gita. They are the most dangerous and formidable foes in the pilgrimage of life and plunder away our peace and purity, our wisdom and honour and cast us in the most brutal enslavement. Hence these are to be consumed to ashes in the fire of a disciplined life.

But their consummation will be temporary so long as the root of these passions and delusions remains untouched. According to Vedanta philosophy ignorance of the Truth, the true nature of the self and the world of manifestation, is the root. Hence this causal ignorance also is to be made a holocaust. And this is the final oblation, *puṇahuti* (पूर्णाहुति) with which the sacrificial fire is put off. *Jivana-yajna* virtually comes to an end here. Only the last ceremonial bath called *avabhrita snana* remains. This corresponds to the state of *jivan-mukti*, the highest goal of life in which, having cut the 'knots of the heart' asunder, having dispelled the dark hordes of ignorance with spiritual illumination, untouched by sin or sorrow, unrestricted by time or space or any duality whatsoever, the soul exults in the state of pure existence-knowledge-bliss that is eternally its own.

Just as on the completion of the *yajna*, the consecrated waters of the *avabhrita snana* are sprinkled over all those

assembled on the spot, even so a person who has successfully concluded his life-sacrifice and attained the goal of *jivan-mukti* immerses himself in that supreme bliss ब्रह्मानन्द and sprinkles the same on whomsoever he contacts. So long as his body exists he is a source of unfailing inspiration and through every one of his actions, even the most insignificant, he helps to relieve the sufferings of mankind. As it is said, he has no other business but to go about doing good. And this he does as naturally and tangibly as the sweet winds that blow or the warm sunlight that shines on all, awakening, refreshing and invigorating.

Ahimsa – The First Dharma

Having got a complete picture of the *jivana-yajna*, the practical question arises now as to how to materialise it in one's own life. It is clear that giving up of lust, anger, greed, and other passions along with their ultimate cause, ignorance, is the main feature; all other things being accessories to it. But how is this to be accomplished? Passions are not material substance that can be grasped and cut to pieces or thrown into a fire capable of consuming it. Most of the time we are not aware of the rising of passions, or even of their taking possession of us. Usually it is only a sort of later reflection when the storm has passed away and damage is complete. In case we do detect the passions, still we are unable to put them down. So we need a system of life which will be a constant vigil and exercise at every step, a system in which the sacrifice of these passions will be the natural and inevitable result of each action.

The dictates of *dharma* have been laid out in the scriptures for this very same purpose of providing such a system. *Dharma* is a code of life and one who follows this code alone will be fit to attempt at *jivana-yajna*; just as in an army only those who have accepted and passed through a particular course of military discipline and training can work efficiently. We cannot help introducing such disciplines and modes of training in civil and military life of society. Man has evolved them out of countless ages of experience and knowledge. Similarly the *rishis* and prophets of ancient times dived deep into the cosmic mind and found revealed there the fundamental threads of life. Out of this knowledge they formulated a set of rules guided by which man will be able to tune himself in harmony with the cosmic purpose and thus reap life's highest good. This set of rules, which we call *dharma*, are more important and valuable to us than the man-made laws and regulations of social life. Because unlike the latter, *dharma* does not change in its fundamental forms which have stood the test of countless aeons of human life – rather, countless cycles of creation and dissolution. The universality of these forms of *dharma* too is unquestioned, because in widely varying or even opposite situations of time and space, every one of the great personalities who have come up to brighten the horizons of humanity have shed the same light, spoken the same spirit, prescribed the same form of *dharma*. The only effect that the individual characteristic of any particular age or person has upon

this, lies in the change of stress, the choice of certain forms of *dharma* to which chief attention is paid. So it is not desirable or possible for us to do away with these fundamental forms of *dharma*, or try to change them in their essence. Since the choice or change of stress regarding any one of these forms is determined automatically by the need of the age, we have only to study these forms in their basic and full contexts in order that we may lay these strands in our personal life-pattern. *Dharma* has two broad divisions, general (सामान्य) and special (विशेष). The first is for all human beings under all states of life whereas the latter applies to special classes of people under certain conditions. *Jivan-yajna* is prescribed for all under all conditions of life. Hence we are here chiefly concerned with the general *dharma*.

Under general *dharma* different *rishis* and *smriti* writers have given different lists of disciplines. Taking most of the main items into consideration Yajnavalkya says:

अहिंसा सत्यमस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।

दानं दमोदया क्षान्तिः सर्वेषां धर्मसाधनम् ॥

“*Ahimsa, satya, asteya, shaucha, indriya-nigraha, daana, dama, daya, kshaanti, these are means of dharma for all.*”

We find that *ahimsa* tops the list of these golden laws of humanity. Patanjali too while describing the *yama* disciplines in his *yogasutras* names *ahimsa* first, and Vyasa commenting on it says

that he who takes hold of this gets everything, meaning thereby that it is the root of all virtues. Elsewhere it is told explicitly: “अहिंसा परमो धर्मः – *Ahimsa is the greatest of dharmas*”. The Jains and, to some extent, the Buddhists made this the pivot of their religion. And even now there is much preaching all over the globe of this single virtue, so much so, very few men seem to have scarcely ever understood its real worth and extent. The exaltedness of *ahimsa* will be clear only when we realise the depths of degradation that is *himsa* (violence), the opposite of *ahimsa* (non-violence).

It is surprising how varied are the conceptions of violence, some of them too startlingly gross for this so called age of inquiry and intellectual refinement. Most people believe that killing a living creature is violence. Among these too the majority hold the more restricted view that killing a human alone is violence. Religions like Christianity posit that all other creatures, plants etc., were created by God for the sake of man. So in the West preachers of non-violence and other pious virtues do not at all feel there is anything wrong in the immense slaughter of animals and birds that goes on every day in their countries to fill their dinner tables sitting over which they fervently talk their heads off in defending or condemning euthanasia, the mercy killing practised by certain physicians. This points out to the homo-centric philosophy that man alone is concerned with pain and pleasure, loss and gain, man alone is everything in the world. There are certain groups of

people who take the word 'man' in the above statement to apply literally because they deny to the fair sex even the right to have a soul. According to them the murder of a woman should not by reason be considered *himsa* at all.

Again in this homo-centric view an interesting process of modification is introduced, yielding the theory that one man killing another or others out of personal motive is violence and is fit to be punished, whereas if one group of men slaughters another group in its own interest then it is not prohibitive violence. That is to say, one nation can rise against another in cold blooded war and massacre as many people as it can while they are unaware or even asleep in their beds at night; that is perfectly justifiable. Almost all countries in modern times act upon this philosophy, even though some of them may not openly accept the theory of it.

All this confusion and corruption, this rage of war on universal scale and every-day acts of aggression in individual life, arise from the negligence of the fact that *ahimsa* is one of the greatest 'vows' of humanity embracing the whole world of creation. “जातिदेशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमा महाव्रतम्” as Patanjali puts it. The question of restricting the meaning or providing exceptions to the rule of *ahimsa* is altogether untenable. Scriptures do state at some places that if a wicked man (आततायिन्) comes to molest and try to take one's life or possessions, then he is to be killed without thinking twice about it. But there is no place for such exceptions as applied to *jivana-*

yajna. Because here *ahimsa* must reach its fullest heights, its uttermost perfection, then only it will be possible to include in its fold the life of a saint, a *sannyasin* monk, who gives the boon of fearlessness to the meanest of creatures, to whom even plucking a wayside leaf capriciously and tearing it to pieces is an unbearable offense, a violation of the vow of non-violence.

So the ideal to be placed before everyone is the *ahimsa* which is not merely a prohibition against killing but a rule that avoids giving any kind of hurt to anything on face of earth. A man who very scrupulously and with painstaking care avoids stepping on ants and worms while walking on the street and who on arriving home or his office readily uses the harshest words in dealing with others is not practising non-violence. If he is provoked and yet out of fear or shame restrains himself and keeps silent, all the while burning inwardly with suppressed indignation and curses unuttered, even then it is not true non-violence. For mentally he has committed violence against the people concerned and so long as he nurtures the seed of ill-feeling within it is bound to sprout up some moment.

Very often it is told, "A snake should not sting others to death. But if it stops even hissing then its very life will be in danger". By this the poor worldly man is allowed to nurture the seeds of violence and turn a veritable serpent. In religion too there is the conception of righteous indignation. It is very dangerous to preach such things. For they are found in certain highly perfected

souls on some stray occasions and do not deserve to be used as a model for regular practice of ordinary men. As a rule indignation is never righteous. And the dividing line between potential anger and pretended anger is too dangerously thin. A man who has in him the fangs of poison intact and indulges in 'hissing' all day, even for just self-protection, is bound to strike and kill. So all activities and propensities which have the possibility of leading to violence must be rooted out clean, without any fear of being dominated and oppressed by others. Violence is a deceptive shield. It invites and increases rather than wards off trouble. Non-violence to the contrary is real strength.

An interesting episode in the purana effectively illustrates this. Once Krishna along with Arjuna and Satyaki happened to lose their way in a jungle and were forced to spend the night on a tree. To guard against nocturnal wild animals they agreed to keep vigil by turns. Being the youngest of them Satyaki was given the first watch at the end of which he woke up Arjuna in a rather undignified haste. Finding him agitated Arjuna asked, "Any beasts?" "Worse", answered Satyaki in a half-whisper, "Ghost!" "Ghost?" echoed Arjuna, "don't be childish". "I have always been a child to you sir," replied Satyaki, "But believe me, I am not joking. I tried my best to scare away the ghost but, well, it is upto you now", and Satyaki laid himself to sleep. Arjuna contemptuously swung up his bow and assumed the post of watchman. He did not have to wait long before a hideous

dwarfish figure appeared at the foot of the tree and signed to Arjuna to get down. Arjuna leaned forward and growled, "Who are you and what do you want ?" "I am a ghost and live in this tree. You have no right to be here. Get out quickly or else come down and wrestle with me", came the answer. Arjuna dashed out his angry fist at the dwarf and laid him flat on the ground. He thought he was dead but to his surprise he found that the ghost had risen and seemed to have grown in size. Laughing, it came towards Arjuna and challenged him. Arjuna jumped down from the tree and a regular encounter started. Each time Arjuna defeated his enemy, the ghost came up again and again with increased stature and strength till he towered higher than the tree and threatened to swallow Arjuna bow and all. Desperately Arjuna made a last effort and threw him down and looked at the stars. The second watch of the night was expiring and he quickly climbed the tree and woke up Krishna. For shame he did not say what had happened but promptly went to sleep. When it was dawn Satyaki and Arjuna were awakened by Krishna. They asked him anxiously, "Has it been well with you in your night-watch?" "Perfect", answered Krishna and added, "Why, did you have any trouble?" The two warriors exchanged meaningful glances and to save their faces warded off the issue by saying, "Oh, nothing in particular." But curiosity is a terrible itch and it would not allow them to proceed peacefully on the way and so at last Arjuna narrated the night's affair to Krishna and asked him if

that terrible ghost had visited him too. Krishna said, "I do not know to what ghost you are referring, but a dwarfish figure did come to disturb the peace of the night." "Did it not challenge you to fight?" "It did. But I just laughed and kept silent; for I knew who it was and what to do with it. Enraged at my indifference and unable to stand the pressure of my pity, it swore and shrieked and tried to taunt me while all the time it grew paler and thinner till within a few minutes it shrank to the size of my thumb. In order to relieve it from this plight I took it and tied it in the end of my cloth." At these words a mocking disbelief entered into Arjuna and he shrugged his shoulders saying, "You have not left off that boyhood instinct for lies, Krishna." To convince them Krishna picked up the end of his upper garment and undoing a knot there produced that tiny little creature whom the other two recognised. Completely baffled Arjuna asked, "You always surpass our understanding. Tell me, Krishna, who is this?" And smilingly Krishna told, "Violence is its name, O Arjuna, and it challenges the most valiant of heroes and conquers them. The more you oppose it the greater it grows in strength, for violence feeds on violence. The only way to defeat it is by non-violence."

Here we get a valuable hint as to the method of conquering violence by practising non-violence. Non-violence is not just a negative attitude, it is a state of perfection born of the practice of a number of positive virtues. The principal of them are friendliness (मैत्री), pity (करुणा), gladness (मुदिता) and indifference (उपेक्षा).

These are different, so to say, states of mind to be consciously and carefully developed and exercised at the proper time. For violence makes its assault from many avenues and in various ways. So one must have beforehand a knowledge of all the possibilities and be thoroughly prepared to face each of them.

The field of violence for the most part is the society in which we have our daily dealings. This society is formed of people who are by nature either good and pious or wicked and corrupt, and, by circumstances of life, either happy and prosperous or afflicted with sorrow. It is these natures and circumstances that afford a hold for violence to be directed on them.

You see a man better off than you and enjoying life immensely. Immediately you are smitten with envy and greed. You must somehow get ahead of him or pull him down if you can, until then there is no rest for you. That means you take recourse to violence against him or someone else who is in your way of rising higher. As to the countless numbers who are much below your standard, who are in suffering and poverty, your eyes are veiled by callousness and you cannot see them or try to do anything for them. Here again you have done violence. So in these two cases greed and callousness are to be won over respectively by gladness and pity (मुदिता, करुणा), celebration and compassion.

Learn to rejoice in the rejoicings of your neighbour and celebrate with him the festival of life. If you lack this learning then

you must go to the children and acquire their simplicity. How easily a child is cheered by the pranks and laughter of others, how unhesitatingly it accepts anything offered to it by an utter stranger! If you tell the child, "He is your uncle and will take you to show his picture-album", it is ready to go with him wherever he may take it. Such faith and simplicity with which man begins life unfortunately gets faint and almost traceless, amazed at which the poet asks, "Is it beyond thee to be glad with the gladness of this rhythm ?..." For, the poet is ever a child of Nature, who ever beholds the vision of one integral vast sea of life and is eager to lose himself in the rhythm of its majestic waves rather than preserve his individual life-stream sounding discordant and harsh notes on the rugged rocks of ambitious pursuits.

When such oneness with all forms of life is developed then one's heart, just as it expands in the joy of others, will also melt to their sufferings. That does not mean one will become sentimental. Mere sentimentalism is a weakness whereas love and compassion are great powers which lift up both the subject and object above the earthly situation and render a tangible relief at once. It may not be always through a physical act of sharing. Very often even words are not necessary to console or to congratulate. Just the presence of a compassionate and understanding soul heightens your joy and heals your sores. For heart can touch heart and commune with it.

Now with regard to the other two groups of people, who by their natures appear to you to be good or bad, the mental qualities to be developed are friendliness (मैत्री) and indifference (उपेक्षा). These are coordinate to each other and not contradictory. For friendship with the virtuous and indifference towards the non-virtuous sustain each other and both combined form a strong blockade to violence. Violence comes as a result of reversing the above order, that is, by having indifference to the virtuous and friendship with the opposite. A man may have a gentle nature and a noble instinct or might have learnt to value love and compassion better than hatred and aggression. But by constant contact with men of low morals and complete lack of scruples he is bound to lose that gentleness, that instinct or that value. In a tribe of wild people where slaying, strangling, scolding and other such violences are commonly practised, or even in a modern society, where the slogan of ‘might is right’ is raised day and night, it is useless to expect the preservation or production of a non-violent personality. The constant observation of the scenes of violence, the perpetual praise and popularisation of the philosophy of violence, all this leaves deep impressions on the subconscious mind and this is bound to erupt into action when favourable circumstances offer themselves. And once the blood of violence is tasted then the thirst for it increases till it becomes an incurable instinct. Hence from the beginning it is wise to keep off from all violent associations.

Just as foul atmosphere pollutes so also does a clean one purify you. Virtue is a holy contagion and hence one must by effort seek the association of those who value and practise non-violence.

One may ask, "Is it not a better thing to practise indifference both to virtue and vice?" The answer is a definite 'no'. Because the question is about practice; and a practisant must apply himself zealously to the acquiring of virtues and elimination of vice, for which purpose he must first observe and recognise these in others. If he is indifferent to detect and delight in the virtues of the virtuous he will never succeed in or feel inclined to attempt at the mastering of those virtues. When this success is complete and there is no danger of either losing virtue or gaining vice, then in that state of perfection one naturally transcends both the values. This cannot be achieved by working for it. In fact it is positively dangerous for the ordinary man to slacken his seeking of virtue while, as a rule, vice abounds all around him; nor should he through a misguided sense of sympathy try to be friendly with those given to violence, taking them to be 'angels with dirty faces'.

At the same time it should be emphasised that one should not wilfully dwell on the vice of others. There is a natural tendency in man to gloat over other's shortcomings. Scandal is a sweet intoxicant. And the worst of it is that the more you dwell on the

vice of the other man the deeper do you colour your own mind with it. Many reformers and well-meaning enthusiastic workers fall a victim to this. So from the beginning this tendency of finding fault with others must be scrupulously put down. Even if one cannot help observing a glaring lapse in another, one should try to quietly forget it. Instead of bothering about other's affairs if one exerts the same energies in self-introspection and weeding out of vice within, this will save one from much mischief and serve as a great spiritual benefit.

Patanjali claims: “अहिंसाप्रतिष्ठायां तत्सन्निधौ वैरत्यागः – *in the presence of one perfected in ahimsa, all beings lose the feeling of enmity.*” Descriptions of forest-retreats (*ashramas*) in ancient times picture to us the scenes of lions and lambs, tigers and cows, snakes and kites playing fondly with each other. Whether we desire to have such *ashramas* or not, certainly we will have to develop that air of concord amidst human societies and nations and not degenerate to levels worse than bestial as history has again and again recorded in notorious world-wars, revolutions and civil conflicts.

Man has the terrible responsibility of choosing between vowing himself to practise ahimsa to the fullest extent and adding his own bit to universal suicide.

Practice Of Truth

Like *ahimsa* truth-speaking is also a सार्वभौमा महाव्रत. The Atharva-veda says, “सत्यं बृहत् व्रतम्”. It is incumbent on everyone. In its simplest form it can be defined as “यथार्थे वाङ्मनसे – *maintenance in one's speech of strict and exact correspondence with one's knowledge of the thing spoken*”. This involves full earnestness to express that knowledge, as clearly as possible without any desire for confounding or withholding. Every shade of lying is prohibited.

A decent and cultured man instinctively resents being called a liar. But it is very difficult to say how many of them really have the conviction that lying is bad. "What is the harm in lying if I am clever enough to get away with it? and what is the good of speaking the truth when it does not pay?" These are questions daily posed within every heart but in very rare cases fully considered and answered. So the first thing necessary is to make it clear in the mind that lie never works. Untruth by itself can

never give you any benefit. It must come masked as truth in order to get things worked for you. You tell a lie always with the hope that it will pass off for truth. If it does not and the other man knows you are lying then the lying does not work, instead you go down in the eyes of the man. Does not the cheat then owe his success to truth, to trustfulness?

If there was nothing like truth in the world then life cannot go on for one full day. Supposing every one vows to tell only lies, then if you are hungry and you are offered food you will say, "No, thanks, I am full". Or when you ask for food the housewife will say, "There is no food". You cannot eat, go out, get on with people, or do anything fruitful for that matter. That is why it is impossible to see anyone who has never told a truth, whereas history records the lives of many who never spoke an untruth and preferred great sufferings and even total self-sacrifice to a slight compromise with it. So it is gross mistake to believe, as it is popularly believed, that a lie works or that truth does not pay.

During the Mahabharata war when Drona, the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army proved invincible and in devastating form, the Pandavas, in their helplessness, sought to win him through a strategem. Drona was very much attached to his son Aswatthama. The Pandavas thought that if they gave the false declaration that Aswatthama was killed then in extreme anguish Drona might cease to fight or at any rate grow weak and be easily overwhelmed. But the problem was how to make Drona swallow

the yarn. He as well as many others knew that Aswatthama was blessed with immortality. Yet through certain manipulations King Yudhishtira was persuaded to make the declaration. And hearing it Drona could not but believe it, how ever incredible it seemed. Because Yudhishtira was sworn to Truth and that he should utter a falsehood was even more incredible. As if struck by a thunderbolt Drona laid down his arms and was instantaneously killed.

When you analyse this much-discussed episode of the Mahabharata it will be found that the triumph is not of the seeming lie but of the truth-speaking to which Yudhishtira was sworn. But for it Drona could have never believed the news and surrendered himself. The same is the case with the so-called success of untruth in our day to day life. People have the innate faith that man will ordinarily speak only the truth.

It may be asked, "If for the sake of success untruth has to masquerade in the garb of truth let it be so. We will allow truth that much commission. But the success all the same belongs to untruth. Then so long as it works why not resort to it?" It is just that this view when taken up by each person makes short work of the whole scheme. Just as you desire to tell lies and gain by the trust of others, even so does the other man want to cheat you of the goods promised by the lie. When there is no truth anywhere and everyone knows definitely that the other is a liar then lies do not work. The veil falls away and naked untruth shows itself like a

blister or a sore on the social body. “Do not do unto others what you would not have others do to you” – “आत्मनः प्रतिकूलानि परेषां न समाचरेत्”, is a simple rule whose violation means social disorder, fall of efficiency and ultimate material bankruptcy. Hence Patanjali says, “When truth is established actions become fruitful – सत्यप्रतिष्ठायां क्रियाफलाश्रयत्वम्”. On a single word from a truthful man huge amounts are transacted while a confirmed liar cannot find anyone who will lend him a pie. When great decisions are to be made in national or family life, it is the man of truthfulness and sterling character that is sought after.

It is a tragedy that in our present day constitution, our legal procedure is such that lying becomes legitimate and practised by the very institutions which are meant to deliver justice. Any accused produced in our law-courts is entitled to engage a lawyer to plead for him, on the supposition that he may be innocent and deserve to prove himself. The supposition that only wrong persons are always produced as accused makes our police and institutions of law meaningless. Apart from that, the lawyer is exposed to the necessity of pleading for the criminal in an obvious effort to prove him innocent. And if he argues cleverly and confounds the other party then the Judge too must bow down to that brilliancy and on the point of law acquit the criminal, even though his personal conviction may be otherwise. This just means that we have made lying a dignified profession and created a tradition to stick to laws in letters and lies in living. Whereas the

scriptural tradition is never to lose the spirit of truth even in a seeming lie. Reversing this rule is nothing but giving rise to a wholesome untruth. Strict concurrence of thought, word and reality is the essence of truth-speaking.

Most people say, "The days are bad, one is forced a lie, how can we help it?" But by this very statement they are betraying themselves to a lie. Because such instances are indeed very rare in which you are helplessly driven to take refuge in untruth. Ninety percent of your burden of lies are silly, unwarranted and voluntarily taken upon.

You are sitting at your reading desk and nodding in a drowse. Your friend drops in and pulls you up. You immediately remonstrate, "No, I was not sleeping" as if sleeping in your room is such a shameful thing.

You see a brick falling from a house on the street downtown and you go home to report to your friends, "A house collapsed on the way and I escaped by hair's breadth".

Like this there are any number of instances analysing which you must agree that if we give up this habit of exaggerating and resorting to cheap means of winning other's admiration or appearing to be interesting, then the path of truth-speaking will be infinitely much smoother.

As to those few occasions when there is a real moral conflict and a compromise with truth is demanded of you, there are many

ways of handling the situation. It is not enough to be earnest and obstinate in order to stick to truth. A certain amount of cleverness and understanding is required. The *Devi-Bhagavata* provides an interesting illustration in the form of the well-known story where a butcher chasing his victim-cow comes across sage Satyavrata (meaning one who is vowed to speaking the truth). The sage has obviously seen the fleeing animal entering a nearby copse and when the butcher asks him whether he saw a cow passing that way, the sage is caught in a fix between violation of *satya* on one side and *ahimsa* on the other. For, as we have already seen under *ahimsa*, one who abets by or in any way assists in an act of violence, also shares the sin of that act. Satyavrata ponders for a minute and declares, "That which sees can never speak and that which speaks can never see. O hunter, what are you asking?" The butcher must have been confounded by this philosophy of seer and speaker; not being so intelligent as to see through this subtle answer he must have hurried on leaving Satyavrata and his vow intact.

If one does not possess this presence of mind one must have the boldness to refuse any disclosure and receive the consequences of it. Or, like the prophet of Nazareth before the judges, one may maintain perfect silence. It is a wrong notion to consider not telling the truth as a moral lapse. To the contrary there is the specific injunction that the fact known to you as truth should not be disclosed if it means suffering or loss to others who do not deserve it.

Many people complain with a tinge of self-pride, "You see, these folks do not like me, because I am a plain-spoken man; I am not afraid of telling them to their faces facts which are unpalatable to them". Such complainants should bear in mind that *dharma* can never lead to *adharma*, truth which is *dharma* can never create sufferings which are the fruits of *adharma*. Actually a harsh truth is only truth in appearance and "by uttering it you get sin instead of merit – तेन पुण्याभासेन कष्टमं प्राप्नुयात्", says Vyasa while commenting on the *Yoga-sutras*.

Hence improvising on the simplest definition of truth with which we started, Yajnavalkya adds, "Truth is that which is beneficial to all beings, not mere concurrence of statement and fact – सत्यं भूतहितं प्रोक्तं न यथार्थाभिभाषणम्". At the same time we have to bear in mind that this is no encouragement to make our talk pleasing by giving a sweet coating of falsehood. It then becomes flattery. And flattery is nothing but flowery lies, covering the rotten corpse of desires. If you have some material profit to be gained from a man you seek to placate him with fawning words, bathe him in a shower of brilliant attributes, while at heart you know he is not worth a straw. You deny the merits you possess and decry yourself in order to bloat him.

It is possible that by all this you may succeed in pleasing an uncultured mind, but all the same he will know that you are a liar. You fall in his esteem and deserve only the meagre alms that are thrown to cheap entertainers. Very often such tactics reward you

with nothing but humiliation. Lasting merits come irresistably to the man of honesty, self-honour and hard work.

There is another peculiar form of falsehood into which a man is led in his attempt to speak pleasing words. That consists of uttering blessings without the capacity to effect them. This is rather a difficult thing to understand at the outset. There is such a thing as the power to bless or to curse. Scriptures attribute it to austerity (तपस्). The great *rishis* and *brahmanas* of spiritual merit possess it. The *puranas* record many instances of virtuous women having used this power. The yoga system recognised that when a person has strictly adhered to truth all his life then he attains to *vaak-shakti*, that is, whatever he says is bound to happen. Naturally with his strict adherence to truth which means a great restraint on speech, he will not indulge in a habitual or professional prophesying. An *amoghavaak* or man of *vaak-shakti* only indicates that even if by chance a word slips out of his mouth it will not go in vain. Such people when their hearts are moved to pity by another soul's sufferings or are gladdened by the good services and humbleness of others, then they may consciously will that the sufferings be removed or the goodness be rewarded. This is what we mean by "blessing". And from endless time humanity has been the recipient of such blessings from saintly souls. It is not just a psychological effect but a spiritual law. Just as physical energy can be handed over by one body to another by charging, even so spiritual energy stored in a

person through austerity can be conveyed to another person in order to yield material or spiritual good. But those who have no such store of energy cannot by merely uttering lofty words induce any such effect. The utterance in that case will be clearly a case of deception either of oneself or of the object of blessing. It is like sending a cheque to the bank where you have no balance to your credit. Many souls, otherwise sincere and advanced in spiritual life, fall to this deception. And as to the regular cheats in sack cloth and ashes who parade as saintly men bent on curing the diseased, granting boons of success in love affairs, civil-suits, university examinations, gaining of progeny and such endless mundane items, they blacken the fair face of religious faith on which they thrive. What is the amount of their own spiritual ruin need not be told. The basis of all this is the particular practice of untruth in the form of giving empty blessings.

This does not exclude a real loving heart from having good feelings towards and great expectations about another. Entertaining best wishes or even praying for others is an entirely different thing from blessing in the way we have explained, for in this the burden and ego of sanction does not lie on the praying soul. It does not even know if the prayer or wish will come true. So it is just a use of sweet words and has no reference to truth.

Hence in the definition of truth, to avoid these extremes and dangers caused by the insistence on sweetness, another modification follows: “*Speak sweet things but not the untruth*”

– प्रियं नानृतं ब्रूयात्’. All these factors go to make *satya* a great *tapas*, a restraint on speech and a constant mental vigilance purging the mind of subtle desires.

One may ask, "Why all this botheration? No one can help hurting by speech, or even avoid stating oneself in dubious terms sometimes. Let each man sincerely strive to follow the voice of conscience, speak to his best ability of correctness. Then the observance of truth will become simple and natural." It is true. Truth as we have told is very difficult to observe and we wish it could be simpler. But this is not achieved by introducing conscience. The concept of conscience, though familiar to many nowadays, is purely a Western production and is not found in our philosophy. Actually ‘conscience’ is an inward sense, a voice of the mind. Now, mind has many voices according to the many *samskaras* or impressions it has received. It will be difficult to pitch upon any one of these voices as the voice of God or conscience. Actually it will be wrong. Mind cannot be led by mind. If by conscience you mean the *buddhi*, the deciding factor or will, this too is liable to corruption and first needs rigorous training before becoming the director of the mind. *Satya* itself is an item in this training of the intellect and as such we cannot put the cart before the horse and use the blunt edge of the untrained *buddhi* in the name of conscience to test truth which is meant to sharpen that very *buddhi*.

So we are left with the necessity of accepting these definitions and instructions provided by the scriptures. Like a tent which is well-pitched when firmly held by ropes on all sides, truth becomes established when subjected to these various considerations. Another reason is, Truth in truth is not a thing that can be explained in words or in any human endeavour (व्यवहार). The great philosopher Shankara states : “*That whose nature never undergoes any change from what has been tested and decided upon, that is truth – येन रूपेण यन्निश्चितं तन्नव्यभिचरतीति सत्यम्*”. This can apply only to the Brahman of the Upanishads, the beginningless, deathless, absolute, self-luminous principle of existence-knowledge-bliss, which is untouched by any modification. So no words can objectivise it. Yet what we call truth in our daily life, the subject of our present discussion and one of the foremost moral disciplines stated by Yajnavalkya and other seers, is so called because it helps one to realise the Truth; just as in the Gita the group of virtues beginning with humbleness (अमानित्वम्) and running up to direct perception mentioned in Chapter XIII are called knowledge (ज्ञानम्) because they are means to the Knowledge. Of all the disciplines that lead to the attainment of Truth or Perfection, this discipline of speech, whose roots cover both the physical and mental fields, is the central shaft. When this is shaken the whole structure collapses. “*The effulgent atman, immanent in the body, is realised through satya – “सत्येन लभ्यस्तपसा ह्येष आत्मा” (Mundakopanishad).*

Asteya – Non-thieving

Whatever may be the views of people on non-violence and truth, there can be no two opinions about stealing. There may be groups which are for amassing huge armies for self-protection, and readily compromise with truth in order to gain national aims. But even they will not advocate stealing. Those socialists who dream of an Utopia where not only army, but police and law-courts will be done away with, they too do not speak for stealing but the elimination of it through proper education, distribution of wealth etc. In short nowhere except in savage communities and gangs of bandits, is it felt that stealing is in any way a virtue. In such a case, it seems absurd to decent human society that non-stealing should be preached and that the scriptures should give it a prominence next to the foremost couple, *ahimsa* and *satya*. Moreover, thieves are a social evil and are to be dealt by laws and conventions suited to that particular society. It is something

like the ‘keep-to-the-left’ rule of the road we have adopted in order to secure safety and speed in traffic. There is no fundamental universality about it. We can as well choose the right hand side as people in the United States do. So there is no meaning in *dharma*, which deals with fundamental laws of human nature and welfare, attempting to preach and provide for the prohibition of stealing.

All this is quite true and we will be glad to abdicate our necessity of dealing with *asteya* here, but for two reasons.

Accepting the gross and apparent meaning of ‘stealing’ on which the above argument is based, *asteya* still deserves the place it has been given. Otherwise the mentality which instinctively abhors stealing will become weakened gradually and finally be wiped out. It is astonishing how quickly aesthetic and moral standards of an established culture may degenerate. Like an expensive and elaborate mural painting, a developed culture has to be maintained by constant retouching and other precautionary measures.

Some time back while visiting one of the foremost cities in north India with a university of its own, we were told that the college students had objected to classes in moral training on the grounds, "We are neither babies nor blackguards." There were strikes and many unpleasant incidents on this score and eventually the classes had to be stopped. At the same time it was found that a large number of students who live in college hostels are in the

habit of wandering into crowded shops without buying anything and return to their rooms with their pockets stuffed with spoons, packets of razor-blades, soap cakes etc. It is one of their favourite pastimes.

Modern movies and crime-fiction have made juvenile delinquency an insoluble problem for many a country with all its restricting laws and reformatory institutions. The failure to stress on "Thou shalt not steal" is the error constituted here. It is therefore absolutely necessary to avoid confining the concept of non-stealing to the limits of a social arrangement. It has to be elevated to the level of a philosophic concept of life. Hence by introducing it as an essential part of *jivana yajna* life becomes a sufficiently serious affair and automatically eschews all light-hearted indulgences that ultimately lead to a criminal instinct.

Secondly, when the scriptures talk of *asteya* they mean much more than the gross act of it. To grasp their true import we must refer to a significant verse in *Srimad Bhagavata*:

यावद्भ्रियेत जठरं तावत्सत्त्वं हि देहीनाम् ।
अधिकं योभिमन्येत स स्तेनो दण्डमर्हति ॥

“The embodied soul has rightful ownership only on that much which fills his belly. He who claims more is a thief and deserves punishment”. It sounds rather too severe. But the illustrious writer of this great work has weighed each word in this couplet and used it with deep significance. At the very outset he

prefers to call man 'dehi', one endowed with physical body. This helps us to understand what he means by 'filling the belly'. Just as mind is the seat of experience so is body the centre of one's material world. One's relations with all other beings and things refer only to this body. 'Mother', 'child', and so on are essentially terms of blood-relationship. All the activities that go under the name of earning a livelihood concentrate on the single function of clothing, feeding and keeping this body in proper condition. So the real property that a man can reasonably claim is that which he needs to maintain his body and those bodies immediately connected with his, that is to say, family members who depend on him. This much is to be understood by the 'filling of belly' in the above verse. For, the literal meaning will be absurd and reduce life of non-stealing to an impossibility. Even the fowls of the air, ants and insects have to save and hoard for their family and future use. In short, the *Bhagavata* prescribes a reasonable form of simple living with no more possessions than the necessities of a communal life.

But still there seems to be a vagueness about the limit. Who can decide what are the bare necessities of another man? Each man has his own standard. For a hard-working clerk in an office the increase of ten chips in his monthly pay becomes a luxury. Whereas a prince whose kingdom has been taken over by the Republic feels miserable in managing with one lakh of rupees a month. Naturally we cannot call the prince a thief because of his

throne, his fine palaces and gorgeous robes and other royal paraphernalia. *Asteya* does not attempt at creating a barren uniformity as that of a military barracks or the lifeless routine and security of a welfare-state that distributes equal share of the same stuff to clothe and feed all its members. *Asteya* trains each man to regulate his desires by confining himself to the standard of the state he is in. The least possession that is unnecessary to maintain that state should be regarded as illegal. This can be easily determined by each person in practical life by trying to do away with things and not by trying to gather them. The more you gather and enjoy, the more sensitive do you become to comforts and facilities. And then you begin to rationalise. This is a danger common to all the different avenues of spiritual life. One should learn to detect and avoid this.

There is a slight difficulty still lingering in whole-heartedly accepting the *Bhagavata* theory of possession. In the struggle for human existence many unnecessary things accumulate. One cannot help it. To go on eliminating them will be an endlessly futile and tiresome effort like removing the foam from the surface of a rushing stream. *Bhagavata* solves this question by the use of the ‘*abhimanyeta*’ – he who nurtures *abhimana* (the egoistic identification of 'this is mine') with regard to excess things, he alone is fit to be punished. Mere physical possession or proximity (संग्रह) is not meant here. It is the inward grasping, the greed that commits the crime. Let the inevitable excess things lie with you,

why should you bother. There are ever so many things lying with others in the world. They do not affect you. Just because you have received them as a result of your labour it does not mean you should be bound by them. You may even have to work further in order to preserve them and pass them on to posterity; still it deserves no attachment. The cashier in a bank transacts a large amount of money in a day and yet he does not covet them or try to pocket them. He cannot. The police will be ready to catch him even for a single pie. But he is free to put his *abhimana* in what he gets as his monthly pay. None can object to it since it is his legal earning. Similarly the soul in its sojourn in life must deal with things as if they did not belong to it.

And after all that is the truth. This world is the Bank of God and all things in it are like bank-notes, constantly shifting, loaned out, changing hands and never possessed. This currency which you carefully pocket in the interior of the coat, how many fears, fights and cares it has evoked in every one of the countless souls who attached themselves to it with the idea, "It is mine"! Matter is in a state of constant flux, continuous flowing out and appearing in different names and forms, this body, these dear ones, these buildings, vehicles, wealth and treasures. It is the height of absurdity if anyone claims, "This is mine". Hence the opening *mantra* of *Ishavasyopanishad* posits: "Covet not. Think of it, whose is this wealth?" If it really belonged to you then you will not have to go weeping and bare handed when death calls at your

door. As it is, you cannot carry a worn-out coin with you, even this body is to be left here stiff and cold and fit only to be hidden away or destroyed hastily. Greed is the most absurd of man's passions. When it shows up, when one is convinced of its absurdity then only can true *asteya* be practised.

Yet greed seems to have become the pulse of our present day civilisation. It has become confused with healthy ambition and divine discontent. Labourer is encouraged to 'steal' by doing least and demanding most while the capitalist has the temptation of spending least and extracting the most. So between thief and thief there is always strife. If not, they say there is no progress.

Even now there are some people of the merchant class who amass great wealth and still if his *dhoti* is torn they will prefer to put few stitches and wear it instead of throwing it away. Modern society may contemptuously call them misers and old-fashioned but it scarcely has leisure enough to inquire and find out how many crores of rupees every year are spent by these 'misers' in giving away to orphanages, feeding-houses and choultries in pilgrimage centres, and other such charities. They do it silently and naturally as a matter of duty and for their own spiritual good. Timeless family tradition has imbued them with the pious conviction that all this wealth is given by the Lord and belongs to Him. There is neither show nor sense-gratification in this. A wealth that is thus used can justly earn for the owner the merits of following *asteya*. And the label of 'miser' must in truth be applied

to every one of us who entertains the ideal of 'raised standard of living', that is to say, earn and enjoy more and more, and all for yourself; no matter if old parents have to be turned out of the house or the husband forsaken, no matter if public funds are misused or senior officers cheated. As a result of such a philosophy of progress we have indeed covered much ground only to move very far away from that ancient state in which an Upanishadic king could boast, "There is no thief, no adulterer in my country". Now house to house, and in every department of offices, all places are filled with 'thieves', decent educated and modern 'thieves'. Government has to work up an elaborate form of police vigil, anti corruption drives, confidential records etc., and place a CID man behind each official. But the problem becomes unbearable when that CID man himself proves à be a 'thief' and needs a check.

This crisis of our age calls out for an entire revision of the social philosophy and sincere attempt to base all social activities on the principles of *asteya*, which prohibit even mentally coveting the property of others. On the one hand through our advertisements, filmfare, crime-fiction and political policies we teach the people mental and outright thieving and on the other hand we waste our energies in trying to reform society. True reform can be achieved only by honouring the ideal of *asteya* and encouraging its practice in individual life of simplicity bereft of an enormous greed to secure possessions and an intense attachment

to things possessed.

The Zen-buddhists have a remarkable story to narrate in this connection. A Zen monk lived in a lonely cell in the outskirts of a city. One night a thief decided to break into the cell and waited for the monk to finish his prayers, put out the light and retire. But the hours went by and midnight was long past and still the monk was at his prayer-book. Tired and disgusted, the thief took courage and grasping his iron rod firmly he rattled at the door. The monk asked: "Who is that?" and the robber shouted, "Open the door immediately or I will break open your skull". The monk replied in his normal voice, "Turn the latch to your left and come in". The thief entered cautiously flourishing his weapon and declared, "Don't move an inch from your place till I take what I want and quit; and don't you try to follow me". The monk replied, "You are foolish. I would not for anything in the world abandon my prayers in the middle. Meanwhile don't disturb me. Here is the key. Open that small tin-box in the corner and you will find few coins in that and that is all there is. See that you don't make much noise." The robber took the key and gathered the coins as well as other few belongings of the monk and was preparing to leave when the monk paused in his recitations and called to him, "Brother, you should learn a little decency. You must thank me for the things before you leave." The robber unaccustomed to such treatment simply said, "Thank you" and left the monk to resume his prayers.

Few days after the incident the thief was caught by the police in connection with some other crimes he had committed in the city and in their investigations they came upon the monk's stolen goods. The thief confessed and the monk was called to identify the man and the goods. When the police asked the monk, "Do you know this fellow who stole your things?" the monk replied, "Oh, I do recognise this man, but he did not steal my things. I gave it away to him few days back and he even thanked me for it. Did you not, Brother?" The thief's face had suddenly changed and there was a lump in his throat that would not allow him to speak. The monk's case was dismissed but due to other crimes the thief was sentenced to imprisonment. After finishing his term in the prison he directly went to the monk and fell at his feet weeping like a child, "Master, I will never do it again. In my turn I give myself to you, please accept me"; and he was forthwith made a Brother.

When you implant your ownership over a thing without the permission of its rightful owner then it is a theft whereas if it is done with the permission of the owner it becomes charity (दान), which we will deal with later. *Asteya* in its general form consists in abstaining from the former mentally and physically. And when *asteya* practised in day-to-day worldly life reaches its perfection, it leads to complete non-possession (असंग्रह) of the *sannyasin*, the all-renouncer, who belongs to the last stage of progress in the *varnashrama* scheme of life.

Purity

Man has been provided with a pair of eyes that he may directly perceive the things around him. The defectless eye sees everything, but not itself. By no means can the eyes see itself directly. You may gaze into a mirror or placid water and say, "Look at my face, my eyes are blue" but you are only looking at the image. Yet through the image you get an accurate and useful knowledge about the details of your face. Similarly Vedanta holds that *atman*, the principle of existence, the only Truth whose realisation is the last perfection in life, cannot be perceived though it is the essence of the light of knowledge and all-pervading. Sri Krishna too declares in Bhagavad Gita, "I am not revealed everywhere, being wrapped up in *yoga-maya*". It is the case of the self-effulgent sun hidden by thick clouds. To get a vision of it you need clear eye-sight and a clear sky or a clear reflecting surface. So, for the realisation of *atman* which takes place in the 'mental sky' (हृदयाकाश) immanent in the body, the eye of

knowledge should open and the field consisting of the gross and subtle frames, mind and body, should be purged of all impurities. Purity is the portal to perfection, an essential condition for supreme enlightenment.

Thus we have two cotyledones of purity – that of gross body and that of the subtle mind. Though both of them are equally important and developed simultaneously, yet it is easier always to go from the gross to the subtle. For many in the ordinary ranks cleansing the mind becomes too much a strain and they may even abandon the entire effort out of fear. This accounts for the comparatively elaborate dealing of physical purity, enormous number of rules and restrictions in daily acts found in the *Smritis* and *Puranas*. Very often a superfluous observer launches the accusation that Hinduism stinks of mere show and shallow rituals whereas real purity in thought is not practised at all. Such people find encouragement in the great personalities who, from the times of the Buddha to Vivekananda and the modern age, have stressed on internal values alone and openly decried external observances. It is true that according to the times some change of stress may be found necessary. But before we raise slogans against a 'kitchen-pot religion' and 'superstitious ringing of bells and waving of lights', cooked up by cunning priestcraft, let us pause and think how much of the fencing should be pulled down around the young plant, how much of the shell should we scrape out to expose the kernel.

Once condemning becomes a pet theory and a fashion, then there is no discrimination of whom you are addressing and to what length you should go. Invariably you swing to the other extreme which is a thousand times more horrible – you have a society where there are neither external restraints nor internal worth, everyone can profess and believe with impunity that he is pure at heart while actually he is rotten at the core. This is not only a possibility but an inevitable result. For, here we are not speculating but studying the nature of man. Man's mind is very subtle, complicated and an easy victim to self-delusion. It abhors restraint in general and to avoid going through the disciplinary process of purification it will easily build up a defence fortification in the form of the conviction, "I am pure and good, what need is there of purity?" If impurity shows itself strongly through gross misbehaviour, moral lapse etc., then the mind in revolt flings the next defence – viz., justification – "What is there in sweet external behaviour? It is a pretense, a pitiful anxiety to show oneself as good. My lusts and ambitions are healthy and natural, there is no sin in trying to express them. Superstition believes them to be sin; to try to eliminate them is sheer waste of life", and so on. With this all possible ways of detection of fault are blocked, and the festering goes on inside. Progress in purity of any kind becomes a far cry. Instead, all sorts of abnormal, indecent indulgences come into play; and the innate human sense of decorum and dignity creates cross-currents cutting at the very roots of life. Man in his

eagerness to avoid the trouble of external observances falls into the abyss of a fundamental bitterness in life, in his very attempt to prevent the surface ruffle he plunges into a vortex of complete chaos. This has been unfailingly witnessed in history whenever over-enthusiasm of reformatory schools broke down external forms of religion, as for instance in the case of mediaeval Buddhism.

Hence we should zealously stick to the general rule that the internal state must have a suitable external observance for its validity. If one comes across a character which bears definite proofs of a radiant purity under a very repelling exterior, then it should be considered an exception and respected, but not acclaimed before all as an ideal to be followed. Some ruins do contain treasures. That does not mean we will go about poking at heaps of trash or pull down our houses and start digging for treasures. As to the oft criticised class of people who have meticulous external observance of purity but internally harbour much dirt, these are neither to be condemned nor copied but encouraged to strive towards internal development also. For, they have atleast started on something and possess the potentiality to proceed further.

With all these ideas in the background we must approach the topic of external purity in order to break the resistance that has been developed in most minds by modern trends of thought, a prejudice that cuts at the very roots of scriptural faith and

deprives one of the untold good derived from following its injunctions.

Physical purity again falls into two categories, internal to the body and external to it. Purity internal to the body is attained by certain yogic exercises like *neti*, *dhouti* etc., which thoroughly cleanse the internal system, as well as by taking pure food. There are many ways in which food can be polluted, but we shall deal with this later.

Purity external to the body rests on the common ways of cleanliness, bathing in sumptuous waters, wearing washed clothes and maintaining the surroundings free from dirt. Though we have noted them as common acts, a lot of corruption and confusion seems prevalent in them also. One of the things that are chiefly responsible for this is the importance given to attractive appearance. Most moderners in India, evidently in imitation of the West, do not take bath in the mornings but just change clothes, wash and powder the face and go out to their work. They look as decent and neat without a bath and that is all they want. Similarly about the clothes. The same set is worn day after day, the crease being carefully preserved by folding the clothes at the end of every day and putting under the pillow. The crease is the criterion and no one notices the layer of dirt on the inside of neck-collar and hand-cuffs that goes on thickening. There is also the habit of spitting on the shoes while brushing them. It is supposed to make them shine better. All these are against the spirit of *shaucha*.

The *smritis* insist, to the contrary, that as soon as a man leaves his bed, he should ease his bowels, clean his mouth and throat, take bath and wear washed clothes even though they may not be creased or even if they be torn. The body becomes polluted through sleeping and no work can be done in the proper spirit of sanctity without having a bath. And in taking bath too there many rules for observation and verses to be recited containing such beautiful ideas as, "The waters are the form of God, the Purifier. I enter into God in order to purify my body and by meditating on Him through this verse, I allow God to enter into me and purify my mind. May all beings be pleased with this bath of mine." Such observations elevate the mind, transform the simple act of bathing into a worship and prepare you for a day of peace, good-will and noble strivings. But we seem to have scarcely any time or respect for these few little things; we can only wet our bodies for a minute in the dirtiness of a bathtub or under the tap and rush to be in time for the morning papers.

Manu strongly condemns taking food before bath and prayers. To any cultured mind the idea of gulping down bed-coffee or tea with dirt inside and outside of body is nauseating. Of all the natural activities of man, eating is particularly a special ceremony. It is not just stuffing the belly or placating the palate. It is a vital function of charging life with fuel, on the quality of manner of which will depend the functioning of the entire psycho-physical mechanism of man. For, food affects not only the

physical purity internal to the body as has been already pointed out, but also mental purity. The *Chandogya Upanishad* states: "From purity of food arises purity of mind, purity of mind leads to divine dwelling, and out of such dwelling is effected the breaking of all bonds, supreme liberation". It is clearly stated in another place that mind is built by the food consumed. Fast for twelve days at a stretch and then try your mental powers in any work. Your mind fails. And on slow dieting the mind regains its vigour. If on some day you are treated to a heavy dinner the effect is immediately felt in the mental field – you feel drowsy and dull. Similarly certain food-stuffs excite the mind, irresistibly impel it towards futile and frivolous activity. Then again there are things which when eaten soothen the system and keep the mind tranquil, firm and keen in the right perception of things. These three are respectively the *tamasic*, *rajasic* and *sattvic* food, a list of which is given in the *Bhagavad Gita* (17. 8-10). For a life of purity *sattvic* food alone is helpful and the other two must always be avoided however delicious they may be, because they are polluted by their very nature. This is called fault innate in the food (स्वरूप दोष).

Then there are other kinds of faults in food. By nature it may be *sattvic* and agreeable but if it is kept in a dirty vessel or container then also it becomes polluted and causes undesirable effects in the eater. This is the आश्रय दोष, the fault of the container. Modern craze for frequenting all sorts of hotels and eating from

street-vendors involves this risk to a great extent. It is understandable how people with scientific outlook and who also witness the way dishes are cleaned and handled in eating houses still do not desist from eating there. Food into which dust, hair or any such dirt has fallen also becomes unfit for use. This is due to निमित्त दोष, fault of an external factor. Then there is that theory of दृष्टि दोष, fault of sight. Food seen by a hungry person or animal or by a stranger who has no love to you and therefore may harbour ill-feelings towards you, is also supposed to cause harm to the eater. This may appear fantastic to many. But some modern researches relating to the effects of mind on external objects, especially those conducted in the Rice institute of United States of America, seem to support this theory. And we may hope to get more light from future scientific researches. Anyhow, the gist of it is, eating in all sorts of indiscriminate gathering is not approved of. It ought to be as private as possible. It is also said that food, a part of which has been offered to God, to the departed forefathers, to hungry wayfarers and to household animals and birds that take refuge in you, is very pure. "He who eats such sacramental food attains to Brahman, whereas he who cooks all for himself verily eats sin" (*Gita*). Here is an instance of the scriptural technique employed to connect internal values with external observances. The entire mode and meaning of external observances consist in the development of such values as devotion, mercy, gratefulness etc., which is what is meant by

mental purity. Commenting on the word '*shaucha*' occurring in the seventh verse of the thirteenth chapter of the *Gita*, Acharya Sri Shankara states, "*Shaucha* is washing the dirt of the body with water and clay, and removing the internal pollutions of the mind like lust etc. through development of opposite attitudes (प्रतिपक्ष भावना)". We saw in the case of *ahimsa* how *maitri*, *mudita*, *karuna* etc., oppose and overcome the feelings of hatred, jealousy and cruelty. Similarly with every other passion of the mind, a wave rising is met by an opposing wave and as a result the surface becomes quiet. This is the process of internal purification to which external purity naturally leads.

Patanjali clearly states: the purpose of *shaucha* (external purity) is to destroy attachment to one's own body as well as to that of others (स्वाङ्ग जुगुप्सा परैरसंसर्गः). This is a completely different outlook for those accustomed to consider cleanliness as a means only to physical health. If you are a person with a developed sense of cleanliness then you will find yourself restricted in your contact with others. You hesitate to shake hands with a friend who has just now unlaced his shoes full of dust and dirt of the street and has not washed his hands. You fold your hands in the Indian way of greeting which is perfectly polite and safe. Then afraid that your friend will defile whatever object he lays his hands upon, you perhaps offer him water to wash. In this way many other such observances of cleanliness are imposed upon all your friends. This is not possible always in public and

hence you naturally do not come in close physical touch with strangers. Where there is obvious physical cleanliness and even charm, yet lack of mental purity will prevent you from contacting that person. Many times it happens that you come across a sweet looking face and for a long time wish and even strive to establish a relation with him or her and when at last you succeed then you are disappointed to discover some very serious mental flaw in that person. She is uncultured, garrulous and vain, or he may be a drunkard, a thief, a selfish, cruel man. Then you are repelled and retreat from that contact and a score of awful entanglements and bitter experiences.

Thus your standards of purity save you from tremendous amount of both physical and mental pollution by restricting your contacts. For, each person through his bodily contact passes on to you something of his 'aura', his qualities good and bad, just as he leaves his 'scent' on his clothes and other belongings which sensitive dogs are able to sniff and trace out. This is particularly to be borne in mind in these days of club-life with its full indulgence in indiscreet mixing with all sorts of people.

This *asamsarga* or absence of contact is not the fruit of a fear-complex or in any way a suspicious and fastidious nature always doubting the cleanliness of the neighbour. It is born of a realisation of the fundamental and innate impurity of the human body and thus it creates in you **जुगुप्सा**, sort of disgust for one's own body. Many times in a day it is washed clean and yet in no

time it is dirty and again begins to stink. Similarly, with the clothes you wear, the apartments you live in. At last, weary of a lifetime's endeavour, the truth dawns on the mind that all things created are born of dirt and must co-exist with dirt. The self, the seer alone is untouched, uncreate and hence pure. It is distinct from all other things and can have no real connection with them. "One who has received this conviction", the *Muktika Upanishad* exclaims, "where is the need of *shaucha* for him!" Not that such a person will cease to observe cleanliness and wallow blissfully in dirt. The statement only emphasises this realisation of *atman's* purity as the last and paramount and most precious fruit of *shaucha*. The other fruits are nothing compared to it.

Rishi Haarita however gives us more or less a complete and attractive list of the fruits of *shaucha* :

“शौचं नाम धर्मादि पथो ब्रह्मायतनं श्रियोधिवासः मनसः प्रसादनं देवानां प्रियं शरीरे क्षेत्रदर्शनं बुद्धिः प्रबोधनम् – *What goes by the name of shaucha is the first step in correct living (dharma) and the basis of god-realisation (Brahman)*”. Because, as we stated at the start, only a pure mind can 'see' Truth, form the basis for its 'reflection'. Granting that a person is not bothered so much about this realisation, the Rishi concedes, (श्रियोधिवासः), the abode of worldly prosperity should at least be tempting enough. But, it may be asked, some of the filthiest and most corrupt of men are found to hoard much wealth. So the Rishi clarifies his concept of wealth with the adjunct “मनसः प्रसादनम् – *soothing and sweet to the*

mind". A miser may fill the dark hole of his treasury just as the legendary serpents in the bowels of earth, but he is never satiate, never free of mind. Like the beggars in certain famous pilgrimage centres who gather astoundingly large sums of money but still go on persisting in that shameful 'profession' most wretchedly, these people too, bereft of internal and external purity, never enjoy life through their wealth. Hence they cannot be called prosperous. The more minute the operations the finer should be the instruments. Similarly finer enjoyments demand more and more refinement of body and mind. That is why the gods are supposed to have infinitely better enjoyments since only those of pure actions and intellects attain to the state of *devas*. The very word *deva* means 'endowed with light', which indicates transparency or purity. The same rule holds good in human enjoyments too. A pig may seem to glut on filth with great gusto but it is impossible for it to enjoy the extremely subtle and intense joys of an aesthetic experience which is given only to a developed, pure mind. This condition of refinement becomes much more pronounced in case of religious experiences. When an aspirant endowed with purity experiences the spontaneous joy of the spirit, then it manifests obviously in a cheerful mood of the mind, a brilliant face.

The head of a certain monastery was very fond of telling his monks the funny story of a Christian priest who as the principal of the college of bishops gave the following tip to his departing students: "When you preach from the pulpit and speak of heaven,

then you must smile and make all efforts to put on as bright and blooming a sage possible; and when you describe the scenes of hell, well, your natural face will do."

It is true that most aspirants in religious life wear long faces. But that is because the continuous introspection and restraining of the senses churn the mind and throw up hidden impurities, past impressions and secret desires. This scum on the surface obstructs the occasional joys of religious experiences expressing themselves obviously. Anyone who understands this will not condemn the long-faces of the church but take it to be a sign of internal struggle, and if possible try to help the seeker remove the impurities.

For this same reason in the yoga scriptures it is told that the place of meditation should be pure, free from dirt, dust, insects etc., and also endowed with a surrounding that is pleasing to the mind and not hurtful to the eyes (मनोनुकूले न तु चक्षुपीडने). External state of purity and placidity of mind are interdependent and afford mutual encouragement.

The next feature of *shaucha* that Haarita presents is, 'beloved of the gods' (देवानांप्रियम्). As already mentioned gods are gods because of their godliness and hence are attracted by holiness. A man's life is governed by innumerable factors external to himself and many of them are superhuman. An aspirant after perfection with all his sincerity and strenuous effort may fail to

reach the goal because of insurmountable obstructions created by these factors. The pleasing of gods is very necessary to avoid this danger, *shaucha* promises to accomplish this.

Or '*devas*' here may mean the senses too, the five senses of knowledge and five of action. The senses depend on mind, the internal sense of perception, for their functioning. Where mind is pleased and at rest there the activity of senses ceases or becomes orderly and in tune with the mind's mood. That is why when you are listening to sweet music or gazing at a beautiful scene or engrossed in inspiring thought, you do not entertain any other sound or sight or distraction and if it is forced on you, you resent it. About this quietness of the senses we will speak in detail in the next chapter. Here our purpose is only to remark that *shaucha* contributes also to this essential condition of concentration.

“*When mind and the senses are at rest*”, says the *Katha Upanishad*, “*and the intellect is one-pointed, that is called the supreme state*”, or you may call it the stepping stone to the supreme state. That means we are in the transition from the courts of outer purity to the rich treasures of the internal; and so we pass on to Haarita's next criterion, “*शरीरे क्षेत्रदर्शनम् – seeing the vision of the 'field' in this body*”. That is to say seeing the body as the abode, clay house, a dull, inert, mortal shell in which the immortal, resplendent spirit (क्षेत्रज्ञ) dwells. To put it plainly, this means the arising of dispassion and discrimination which we have already

discussed. This is quickly succeeded by awakening or enlightenment of the mind (बुद्धिः प्रबोधनम्) which is the last step.

Thus Haarita's seems to be a restatement and explanation of the *Chandogya* saying quoted earlier, where food (*aahaara*) should be interpreted to mean all that is taken in through the senses. Observance of purity in external and internal dealings covers the entire gamut of spiritual striving ending in perfection and liberation.

The First Attack – Sense-control

The necessity of war has risen. We are about to launch our first offensive in our winning of the 'kingdom of god'. But before we get into vital action let us consider what is action, what is its general form. Action can roughly and conveniently be defined as a process of change from one state to another. 'Eating' means a change from state of hunger to that of satiation. 'Going' takes you from 'at home' state to 'in office' state. When a sour mango transforms into a sweet one then 'ripening' has taken place. To change cotton from the strands to cloth we must resort to 'weaving'. Similarly with all actions. It will also be noted that each act is composed of three items, the object (कर्म), actor (कर्ता), and the means (करण). In the case of 'eating' these respectively will be food, eater, mouth; and in the case of 'going' they will be office, walker, legs; and so on in the other instances too.

Now, apply these ideas to the act of knowing – an activity that is indispensable to life, common to the blind, the lame, to

every living creature. This activity is a change from a state of ignorance to that of knowledge. When you say or feel, "I know this flower" it means you are changing from a man ignorant of that flower to one endowed with a knowledge of it. And in this action the flower is the object, you are the actor and the eye is the instrument. Similarly all knowledge is experienced through the instruments of the five senses (ears, eyes, nose, taste, and touch) and the mind. If the instrument is faulty then the whole act becomes foul. When senses are not in perfect order the whole process of knowing becomes clouded and turns life into misery. According to Sureshwaracharya, "*this perception of atman as a bound and worldly entity is our sole blunder and seed of sorrow – अयमेवहि नोनर्थोयत्संसार्यात्म दर्शनम्*". To escape from this we must attain correct perception; and this naturally means rectifying the instruments of perception.

It is true that in the supreme spiritual experience of God-realisation the senses and mind have absolutely no place. But that is the final stage and to reach at it all along the way we must depend upon these instruments of knowledge and with their help proceed from grosser to subtler experiences of truth. So we will be committing a grave mistake by overlooking the senses in the struggle for God-knowledge. We have to preserve them and sharpen them constantly. Hence in the popular peace chantings (*shanti mantras*) of the Vedas we have the prayer recurring again and again, "Let us be strong of limbs and senses and

through them perceive the good, accomplish the right". Nowhere is it told, 'Annihilate the senses.' It is control and culture of the senses, not destruction or deadening that is required.

This culture at the very outset involves two broad steps – one is (निषिद्ध भोगत्यागः), renouncement of enjoyments forbidden by scriptures, and the other is (भोगसंकोच), restriction in all enjoyments. To modern ears accustomed to the slogans of 'more and more enjoyments', 'let us be natural like cats and dogs', 'eat, drink and be merry', these ideas will naturally be startling. This is nothing strange. Charvakas of old seem to have possessed a more vigorous hedonistic and epicurean philosophy of life which they voiced in their favourite couplet:

यावज्जीवेत् सुखं जीवेद् ऋणं कृत्वा घृतं पिबेत् ।
भस्मीभूतस्य देहस्य पुनरागमनं कुतः ॥

"Till there is life, live happily. Borrow and feast. Once the body is burnt to ashes after death where is the coming back?"

Hence even in olden days Nachiketa was a strange figure who startled the world with his harsh denouncement of worldly pleasures. Yama, the lord of death, offered him fabulous wealth and heavenly enjoyments but Nachiketa firmly replied:

श्वोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत्सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः ।
अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥

"All these pleasures are transient and last for a day and during that short time of enjoyment they deaden and loosen the power of all the senses. Even if one lives to all ages, these pleasures will ever remain meagre. Hence you keep your dancing and music to yourself." Putting aside all such temptations Nachiketa sought to know the Truth beyond death.

Referring to this episode in the *Katha Upanishad* one learned brahmin pundit of Kashi used to exclaim, "Nachiketa was a fool. He could have accepted and enjoyed all these riches and pleasures and then sought to know the Truth too. After all Brahman is eternal, we can seek and know it at any time, what is the hurry now". Such a cool and calculating brain can never know the Brahman. If you employ a fine sharp-edged razor for mending pencils or dressing vegetables for a considerable time and then one day attempt to shave your face with it or do some delicate operation of a wound, you will be considered mad. The accurate balance of the chemist is meant to register very fine difference of weights of minute quantities of substances and it is certain to lose its accuracy if used as a grocer's balance for weighing provisions etc. Similarly the group of senses as well as the mind is a delicate balance, a fine razor. It will get blunted by gross use and that was why the intelligent Nachiketa laid bare this secret in that fundamental statement : "सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः". Once applied to the gross objects of the world the senses become unfit for dwelling upon Truth, the *atman*, which is spoken of as 'सूक्ष्मात्

सुसूक्ष्मम्' (*subtler than the subtle*) and 'एषोणुरात्मा' (*this atman is very subtle*).

Leave alone the *atman*. Even subtler forms of physical enjoyments become impossible for those who revel in mediocre and cheap excitements and gross pleasures of eating, drinking and sleeping. In certain serious and long ailments one is forced to give up salt or pepper or any such spice for two or three months. When after full recovery the patient resorts to normal diet then even a pinch of salt or pepper becomes almost intolerable. After slow and constant use the tongue loses this keenness and becomes capable of swallowing quantities of these spices without the least difficulty. This is true of all senses. They lose keenness by constant use. And for the perception of the *atman* untouched by the least taint of *avidya* and its effects in the form of birth, death and other transformations, the utmost keenness in perception is called forth and this necessitates complete renunciation of the grosser use of the senses.

With this end in view the scriptures have prescribed many 'don'ts' regarding the natural indulgences of an ordinary life. Discrimination is thus made in what you eat, wear, hear, smell, see and touch and depending on the strata to which you belong different rules with degrees of freedom are suggested. The aim of *dharma* is to help even the most degenerate to elevate himself. Hence we find on the one hand even meat and intoxicants allowed for certain people whereas on the other hand some are

charged with the price of five great sins (*Mahapathaka*) for the use of such stuff. Among meat-eaters also some are restricted to use only certain kinds of meat and on certain occasions. To one class of people the use of stitched clothes is prohibited; and then a concession is made in case of silk and wool. Failing to understand the underlying aim of all these one very often is overwhelmed by the external and accuses *dharma* of a ritual-ridden gorgeous cloak of hypocrisy. This is a grave error. Because the end is so far away, we fail to see how the road leads to it. But one must always bear in mind that every observance in as much as it restricts the gross use of the senses is a form of renunciation which is a preparation to the final purity and perfection and so each one must accept these impositions of external observance according to one's capacity and order in life, and firmly keep away from the forbidden enjoyments.

After having gained certain strength from this first step one must go further to भोगसंकोच because it is possible that the aspirant gets enmeshed in permitted pleasures. One may scrupulously avoid eating flesh and other adverse food but glut on milk and honey. Such people have to be advised to fast on *ekadashi* and other such occasions and reduce their addiction to food. Similarly with the other senses of hearing etc. One may give up cinema-going and sensuous songs but spend all his time in dancing and devotional singing at the cost of meditations and studies. Senses are readily deluded and drawn away from their

course even at a very advanced stage of *sadhana* and deprive the sadhaka of the wealth of *atmajnana*. Hence constant vigil and discrimination is necessary.

There is one simple rule to be borne in mind for general guidance in this matter. Whenever a sense-object exercises its sway over you, then do not indulge directly. Postpone and meanwhile consider how much you gain and how much you lose by this indulgence. If you think you do not lose much then see if you can do away with the gain of that certain pleasure. Always prefer to renounce if possible. Suppose you find your losses are great and yet you cannot restrain, then go and indulge but with a clear mind frankly admitting, "I know it is bad". This attitude will prevent your desiring to repeat it. For one possessed with an amount of dispassion, all these deliberations are not necessary. It is advisable for him to decide right away on a "no" and cling firmly to the declaration voiced in the Gita:

ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।
आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥

– *B. Gita (5.22)*

“All these enjoyments born of sense-contact are verily seeds of sorrow. They begin at a point of time and must cease to be at some time or other. Hence the wise do not revel in them”. This deep conviction must be the sheet-anchor in all the unavoidable storms of life. Senses have to be constantly used, sense-objects cognised at every step. Even in all these ordinary

experiences if the mind is steeped in the idea, "All this is ephemeral and we have to bear with them as a part of the pilgrimage of life", then one achieves the perfection of *indriyanigraha*.

This obviously involves *vichara*, mental training and leads one to the next step in the assault, viz. tackling the mind. In the start itself this was mentioned along with the control of the senses. In the scriptures they are spoken of as *shama* (शम) and *dama* (दम) respectively and invariably grouped together. Because they are interdependent and mutually fulfil each other. So much so, where only one is mentioned the other too is usually taken for granted. For instance in the *sloka* of Yajnavalkya, which we are studying, *indriya nigraha* and *dama* are mentioned and this in the ordinary course would mean a repetition. But since *shama* and *dama* are interchangeable and *dama* has not been separately mentioned here, we attribute to *dama* the meaning of control of the mind.

Mind is the king of the senses and the sole instrument of internal perception. Hence it is called *antah karana*. It plays such a vital part in a person's life that one can easily say that the entire scriptures with all their rituals, dogmas and theories are only devoted to the study and restraint of the mind. Patanjali defines yoga as "चित्तवृत्ति निरोधः – *restraint of mental functions*". "*Mind alone is the cause of bondage as well as that of liberation*", says the Upanishads. Even the senses do not bind us

if the mind is not a partner to them in worldliness. If the mind does not spin its strong threads of attachment to the objects then sense-experience may come and go and yet create no ripples in our inward life. But mind can never be quiet and cease from this spinning. From beginningless time it has been flowing out through the senses towards the external world, registering, conjuring and building up a world of its own, weaving an intricate pattern of passions. It is impossible now to snatch the spindle and still the mind. Only the mind has to be taught to weave a new pattern or go back on its work and un-weave the pattern of human bondage. The mind which has so far flown outward must be slowly trained to turn within and then, like a lens whose convexity has been changed to concavity, the same mind will present us with a different picture; instead of the universe it will reveal the *atman*. This is the process and purport of *shama* (शम).

Acharya Shri Shankara defines :

विरज्य विषयव्राताद्दोषदृष्ट्या मुहुर्मुहुः ।
स्वलक्ष्ये नियतावस्था मनसः शम उच्यते ॥

“Averting the mind from the swarm of sense objects by seeing the faults therein, repeatedly trying to establish mind steadily in the target of Self – this is called shama, the control of mind”.

Here we have both the positive and negative aspects of *shama* with a valuable hint as to the means of the withdrawal and the method of settling within. To maintain दोषदृष्टिः, detection of the

defects with respect to all effects of transmigration through constant discrimination, is the soul of mind-control. We have already referred to a major defect in things, viz. their transience. Shri Krishna tells in the Gita that it is a form of wisdom to perceive how life is filled with the inevitable drawbacks and sufferings of birth, death, old-age, illness and other afflictions (जन्ममृत्युजराव्याधिदुःखदोषानुदर्शनम्). The common man has all his eyes greedily fixed on the seeming sunny side of life, its boyhood pleasures, fleeting youth and manhood's meagre achievements and glories. In some uncanny way the other side is completely hidden from him, its triviality and restrictions, the consuming fire of frustrated emotions, relentless goad of ambitions that are never realised, the endless cares of governing, maintaining, serving and keeping up to social standards etc. In short he fails to see, as the Upanishads put it, that all these are but 'forms of death' (मृत्यो रूपाणि). Indeed he does not even want to admit this when it is pointed out to him.

King Yudhishtira was once asked what he considered to be the greatest wonder in the world. Forthwith came the profound reply:

अहन्यहनि भूतानि गच्छन्तीह यमालयम् ।

शेषाः स्थावरमिच्छन्ति किमाश्चर्यमतः परम् ॥

“Day and night people are hastening into the temple of Death and yet those who are watching them still wishfully hope to live for ever” (Mahabharata, Vana. 313, 116).

This is the inscrutable power called *Maya*. It overwhelms even great intellectual giants who can scan the stars or reach to the bowels of earth, but failing to gaze at the mind, and control its passionate course, every one of their cognitions becomes contorted and one-sided. They become incapable of *vichar* and bereft of the sturdiness to accept the tragic truth of the phenomenal world. They are fond of the soap-bubbles and are afraid they would burst at the least touch of *vichara*. Hence it becomes necessary to prescribe the practice of *vichara* – constant discrimination. The call to the aspirant of stable knowledge and bliss to see the transience and tribulations of the world of senses, is only in order to induce him to go beyond the senses to find the world of *atman*, the real source of bliss. *Vairagya*, dispassion born of discrimination, leads to and sustains *abhyasa*, practice of the stilled mind settling on to meditation on the *atman*. That is why Patanjali states: "अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः – *its (mind's) restraint is accomplished through abhyasa (practice) and vairagya (dispassion)*". Vasishtha too in his teaching to Sri Rama prescribes these two in slightly different terms: "द्वौ क्रमौ चित्तनाशस्य ज्ञानं योगं च राघव – *These, O Raghava, are the two steps of annihilation of the mind, jnana and yoga.*" Here *jnana* is the discrimination between and conviction of the real nature of the creator and the created; and this is the restraining dam, whereas *yoga* is the channel which carries the restrained waters to the proper fields. The steps of yoga like

pranayama (प्राणायाम), *pratyahara* (प्रत्याहार), *dharana* (धारणा), *dhyana* (ध्यान), etc. are like so many outlets or shutters in the dam. One must know well how to operate these shutters lest the dam should burst with the pressure of accumulated waters behind it.

Pranayama is the control of breath based on the psychophysical connection between *prana* and mind. We have already referred to this once while describing the priests of *jivana-yajna*. It is in the ordinary experience of every man that when mind is agitated with anger one feels suffocated, breathing becomes fast and short. When mind is completely at rest as in deep sleep, the breathing becomes soft and harmonious. Conversely, we may conclude, when breath is troubled or made uneven the mind must become ruffled and when controlled then mind too must become quiet. This can be verified also. That is to say, breath is an index of mind; like the bubble of air in the spirit-level it indicates the state or gradient of your mind. So to obtain a perfect level all that you have to do is to adjust the bubble to be even and in the middle of the graduated scale. This is what is done in *pranayama*. The inward and outward breaths are regulated and restricted in a particular measure until the natural breathing becomes harmonious and the mind is automatically softened and ready for concentration. *Pranayama* is a science by itself and has to be carefully studied and practised under personal guidance of a competent teacher. It is well to bear in mind that

one should not try to use *pranayama* as a whip to punish and force the unruly mind to subjugation and stillness. The effects of such a step on the psychophysical frame may be disastrous; just as if you jam the front brakes of a fast speeding bicycle suddenly without applying the back-brakes you are liable to be overturned along with the cycle. Mind is the back-wheel which is connected to the pedal whereas *prana* is the front wheel. A certain amount of slowing down is necessary in both of them before brakes can be applied forcibly on them. Just because mind is in a very ruffled state one should not right away sit for a severe and sustained *pranayama*. It has first to be calmed down by practice of *japa*, loud recitation of scriptures or singing the Lord's glories. Hearing to holy discourses, doing ritualistic worship and all such acts mentioned as the first steps to Bhakti yoga are means to engage the mind in God. When mind's attention is once drawn inward then practice of *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) etc. becomes easy. These are various stages of fixing the mind in the single idea or object chosen for practice and like *pranayama* they charge one's personality with tremendous powers. This again is a profound scientific study which needs to be separately dealt with. Since *jivan-yajna* is for all, including the common man, we do not go into the technical details of *dhyana yoga* and of many other yogas like the *mantra*, *hatha*, *laya* and *kundalini* yogas, which are specially and effectively used according to the aspirant's capacity and need for restraining the mind and raising it

into higher states of spiritual consciousness.

It should however be stated that each person must set apart certain hours every day at dawn and dusk or any other convenient time to sit quietly by himself, and strive as directed by the spiritual master, to withdraw the mind from all worldly matters and gradually fix it in God. There is no greater purifier than these waters of meditation. Purified and plunged into these tranquil depths one contacts the spring of divine love, divine illumination and bliss. Jagaddhara, the great poet and devotee of Shiva extols: "Seated somewhere on the banks of the holy Ganga under a wild tree, seeking shelter only in the thought of the Lord of Uma, exulting inwardly in the self alone, those who taste the nectarine joy of the state of the subdued mind (*shama-sukha*), they alone are the blessed". This echoes the biblical question "What profits a man if he gaineth the whole world and loses his soul?" Real profit accrues when you lose the world, at least for the time being, forget all its travails and turmoils, and gain your own real self, that is to say, be aware of the only reality embodied in you. It is of this gain, this yoga that the Gita says: "यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते" (6.22). Only so long as one has not tasted this bliss of world-forgetting and self-gaining, do the other sensual and intellectual enjoyments tempt a man. Afterwards they become insipid and mind by itself turns away from them and hungers for the *shama-sukham*, the spiritual manna.

Actually the joy of sense-objects experienced through the mind and senses is not real joy but a faint reflection of the self which is of the form of pure and absolute bliss. The sufi mystic, Rumi, puts it beautifully :

*Kings lick the earth whereof the fair are made,
For God hath mingled in the dusty earth
A draught of Beauty from His choicest cup.
'Tis that, fond lover – not these lips of clay –
Thou art kissing with a hundred ecstasies,
Think, then, what must it be when undefiled!*

– (mathnawi V, 372)

Thus the momentum of retreat from the gross world increases in correspondence with that of entry into the inner world of peace. When thus the mind is perfectly cleansed and coloured with the divine tinge, then it becomes in the real sense the abode of the Lord, one begins to have a permanent experience of inward poise and unearthly peace.

Based on this analogy Acharya Shri Shankara works up a beautiful picture in his *Shivanandalahari* :

धृतिस्तंभाधारां दृढगुणनिबद्धां सगमनां
विचित्रां पद्माद्यां प्रतिदिवससन्मार्गघटिताम् ।
स्मरारे मच्चेतः स्फुटपटकुटीं प्राप्य विशदां
जय स्वामिन् शक्त्या सह शिवगणैः सेवित विभो ॥

“My mind is a tent (पटकुटी) and it is meant for you. That is why I have made it sparkingly clean (स्फुट). Do not hesitate to enter it, thinking it is an impermanent abode. I have made steadfastness itself the central post (धृतिस्तंभाधाराम्). My poles are deep and strong. Amidst all difficulties and through endless ages this mind will persist in the path to perfection. And I have held the ends of the tent tightly by the ropes of firm sterling qualities (गुण, meaning both rope and quality) like ahimsa, satya etc. The storm of sense-attractions cannot blow it away. And though this is so well and firmly built yet it is a mobile residence. The tent goes with me always, for I am a pilgrim in life; and every day I pitch it on a fresh spot by the road of righteousness (प्रतिदिवस सन्मार्ग घटिताम्). It is decorated with gay colours and painted lotuses in full bloom (विचित्रां पद्माद्याम्).*

Into this house of holiness, O Lord, come along with your Shakti (ब्रह्मविद्या, the divine knowledge) and other retinue (शिवगण – the glorious manifestations that herald the divine presence) and be worshipped for ever”.

In this we have a complete picture of the control of senses and mind, its accessories and advantages and the exalted purpose which it fulfils.

*This refers to the opening of the six yogic lotuses or spiritual centres within the subtle body. Or the word ‘पद्माद्याम्’ may mean ‘of the shape of lotus’, as the heart is stated to be.

The Divine Passions

The story is told of one poor Brahmin who suffered more by seeing the prosperity of his neighbours than by his own penury. His wife used to reprimand him daily, "What is the use of burning with jealousy day and night. Exert yourself in some way or other and earn wealth. That will be becoming of a man and you can live in comfort like the others". At last one day the Brahmin decided to do something about it and, having no other means and talent, retired into the jungle and performed severe *tapas* (austerity) in order to please the Sun-god Bhagavan Surya. After many long years the resplendent Lord took pity on the Brahmin and appeared before him and asked what he wanted. Overwhelmed the Brahmin offered fit worship and humbly told, "If it pleases you, O Lord, grant that all my desires be fulfilled the moment they arise within me." Surya smiled to himself for he knew the nature of the Brahmin and the irrevocable poverty to which he was

fated. But he had to grant him the boon due to his austerities and so declared carefully, "Pious Brahmin, pleased with your steadfast devotion to me I grant that all desires in your mind become fulfilled, but under a certain condition. Every time you get something through this boon, because of the glory of your proximity, your neighbour will get twice as much." So saying the Sun-god vanished suddenly from the site. Bewildered, the Brahmin returned home with a strange emotion within himself. He left off eating and sleeping and was obsessed with some terrible thought. To all eager inquiries at home he replied evasively, "No, there is nothing wrong with me. Yes, the Lord gave something like a boon." Seeing his condition deteriorate day by day, his wife insisted on knowing the truth of what exactly had befallen him in the jungle. The man at last yielded and told her the secret and the innocent wife blurted out, "Then why don't you ask for wealth and be rid of this gnawing poverty? If you cannot decide what to ask then you should have consulted me. Ask right now and test the Lord's boon". "You are a blockheaded silly woman", retorted the man, "How do you expect me to ask for wealth or anything when I know that my neighbour is going to get double my gain. If I have a thousand and others have two thousand then what is the use of my having the thousand. I will still be considered poor. If I have a four-storied building all the same it will appear a miserable tiny hole by the side of a towering eight-storied structure. How do you expect me to live in such misery at the cost of another's

increased prosperity? Actually the boon makes me a slave to others, an unpaid, awful slave. I wish I could forget that I ever got the boon." The woman was speechless at the jealousy of the man and not daring to inflame the peculiar state of his mind she silently cursed her fate and her husband's which would not allow them to enjoy inspite of acquiring.

One fine morning the Brahmin came out of his dark musings crying with a fiendish glee, "I have found it – I have found out the way!" "What has happened now?" asked the wife. "I know now how to use the terrible boon." "That is very good. Better late than never. Desire and quickly ask something." Slowly, controlling his shaking emotions, he uttered, "Oh, Lord of Light, let that worthless second son of mine fall sick and die." The woman was aghast and then realising his intention she railed at him, "You fiend, you want to harm your neighbour by murdering my child? But with all her wailing the boon came into force and by the evening three biers were ready in the street, one in front of the Brahmin's house and two next door and the loud lamentation; in the latter drowned the lonely voice of the Brahmin woman. The husband having tasted the blood of jealousy's victim, became intoxicated and unable to control himself. He began to plan out new venues of venting his power on his neighbour. He chose to lose one of his eyes and made his neighbour completely blind. He caused the earth to split into an abysmal pit half way across his door so that the entire entrance to his neighbour might become dangerous. He

prayed for a part of his house to collapse and ruined the whole of the next building. So it went on till, as the story goes, the one-eyed Brahmin stepped out of his house absent-mindedly one evening and fell into the pit created by himself and died.

The fact to be observed here is the existence of such abnormal specimens in human society. We cannot really class them with the human nor for that matter with any group. Bharatrihari lists three categories of human beings: (i) the divine (सत्पुरुषाः), who do good to others by sacrificing their own interests, (ii) the ordinary (सामान्याः), who will readily serve other's interest if their own are not impaired thereby, (iii) the fiendish (राक्षसाः) who do not hesitate to cut an other's throat for their own personal profit. "And then" adds Bharatrihari, "there is a fourth category. It is formed of those who purposelessly seek to hurt and harm others even at the cost of great personal loss. I have searched all the dictionaries and literature and found no name for this group." Bharatrihari must have had in his mind some such personality as the hero of the above story.

On the other hand we have such examples as the famous South-Indian ruler Paari, who was driving out one day and observed a way-side creeper trembling and tossed about helplessly in the wind as if it was seeking for some support. Overcome with compassion Paari ordered his chariot to be stationed near the creeper and settling the creeper carefully on it he himself walked all the way to the palace. This, in the opposite

extreme, again passes the understanding of common man who may argue: "Is this not a lack of common-sense and understanding of value of things? The king instead of using a golden chariot as a tree stump, could have asked his charioteer to break some nearby branch or sent him fast on the chariot to fetch a suitable support for the creeper". To calculate in this worldly way is to make oneself unfit for the study and understanding of the finer qualities and pure emotions that sway a noble heart. Qualities like charity (दान), compassion (दया), and forgiveness (क्षमा) are the flowers of the highly developed stages of man in his slow evolution from the fourth degraded state which Bharatrihari calls 'unnamable' to the first mentioned 'divine' state. That is why we find these qualities prescribed in the end of the list of *sadharana dharma*. As such they need to be approached with an amount of delicate imagination and reverent understanding. Then one will also be able to differentiate between charity, compassion and forgiveness which are so intimately grouped together that very often they are confused with each other or with other qualities like non-violence (*ahimsa*). Charity here means something quite different from the Christian concept of it. It is *daana* which technically implies giving away certain prescribed things to suitable persons with due regard to time and place. Then that *daana* or act of giving produces *punya*, a spiritual merit which yields joy in some form or other and also purifies the heart. Particularly it frees one from the mire of greed and

possessiveness. In this light it is significant to note that *daana* is prescribed as the chief *sadhana* in Kaliyuga.

ज्ञानं परं कृतयुगे त्रेतायां तप उच्यते ।
द्वापरे यज्ञमेवाहुर्दानमेकं कलौ युगे ॥

“In the Krita age knowledge (jnana through discrimination) is said to be the supreme means (to perfection), in the Treta it is tapas (austerity) and in Dwapara the yajna (sacrificial worship); while in Kali age daana alone is the chief means”.

We will miss the true significance of the above statement if we confine the meaning of *yuga* (age) to mean that phase of creation in so many lakhs of years as mentioned in the scriptures. That is the cosmic (*samashiti*) view. In man's individual life too there are *yugas*. Rig Veda itself gives the clue: "Sleeping – it is *Kaliyuga*, sitting – it is *Dwapara*, standing – it is *Treta*, and walking – it is *Krita Yuga*". That is to say when one is immersed in the darkness (*tamas*) of ignorance and is 'asleep' to truth, then verily he lives in the age of *Kali*. When he wakes up and 'sits' and sees, feels there is an entity called '*atman*' beyond the body and senses, and '*Iswara*' the cause of all creation and realises there are ways of transcending sorrows and bondages, then he is said to be in *Dwapara* age. After this when man becomes real aspirant after a liberation (मोक्ष) and, with firm conviction in the goal and the way, decides to walk it, then he gets up and 'stands'.

That is the age of *Treta*. When he actually 'walks' the path to perfection the golden age of *Krita* descends, the supreme goal is at hand, for, one who has started and persists will surely reach the end.

From this view-point, whenever man is overwhelmed with *tamas*, characterised by procrastination, possessiveness, anger, violence and such like, then *daana* is to be freely resorted to. Apart from this criterion of the internal state of man, his *ashrama* or position in external society too decides the selection of the *sadhana*. The *Yama Samhita* says: "For the renouncing *sannyasin* complete control of mind and senses is the *dharma*, for the recluses who retire into the jungle (*vanaprasthi*) fasting is the *dharma* and for the *brahmacharin* students living with the teacher, service to him and devotion to studies. The best *dharma* for the householder (*grhastha*) is *daana* alone." And this is quite reasonable. For *daana* is possible only if you possess things to be given away to others. The householder alone can do it, not easily the other three ashramites.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita differentiates *daana* according to the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The *sattvic daana* helps as an effective means to liberation, *moksha*, by purifying the mind, whereas the *rajasic daana* only bears earthly or heavenly fruits that are enjoyed for the time being only and the *tamasic daana* may even do harm and strengthen the degrading tendencies of the mind instead of eliminating them. Hence the

sattvic daana alone is recommended.

What is a *sattvic daana* is told in the sloka :

दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे ।
देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् ॥

– (B. Gita 17.20)

First of all the motive behind the act of charity should be nothing but an unselfish, detached sense of duty : "I ought to give this and so I give, not just to please myself or to show off". The least tendency to entertain future expectations is removed by the condition 'अनुपकारिणे' which means that the charity should be given to one who has practically no possibility of doing any return to you. Perhaps he is a stranger on the way, someone whom you have met for few minutes and will part with forever. Or he is a beggar who can do absolutely nothing for you even if he wants. This condition is very necessary if charity has to preserve its high worth.

Once a devotee known to us was visiting a friend of his, who was a popular tradesman. It was the time of elections in the city and the representatives of one of the contesting parties came to interview the tradesman and collect donations for the election campaign. The friend sent them away with a cheque for a thousand rupees. After half an hour another contesting party arrived and made a handsome speech enumerating the advantages it will offer to tradesmen if it won the elections. In the

end the party left pocketing a similar cheque. This happened twice again and the devotee could not help asking his friend, "You seem to be too lavish in your charities. But what is the idea in giving to all the parties? Only one of them will come out successful." "Which one?" retorted the friend merrily, "who knows who wins, so I give something to all. Whoever wins is bound to favour me." This sort of donation is a part of the trade, it is an investment and not *daana*. Similarly many people build huge hospitals etc. and insist on their being named after them or on special privileges afforded to them in the running and use of the institutions. All these are good as social contributions but one should not expect of them the high merits of *sattvic daana*.

So far as this factor pertaining to the attitude of the giver is concerned it lies within the power of each to strive to make oneself fit for *sattvic daana*. But as regards the other three factors mentioned in the Gita sloka one becomes dependent on circumstances. Only a knowledge of them enables one to recognise and utilise them whenever opportunity offers them. The merits of a *daana* vary according to the place, time and receiver (पात्र). It is told in *Daanamayukha*:

गृहे दशगुणं दानं गोष्ठे चैव शताधिकम् ।
पुण्यतीर्थेषु साहस्रं अनन्तं शिवसन्निधौ ॥

Charity at home bears tenfold more fruit than that given on the way. When made in the place meant for tying cows it is a

hundredfold, in holy places of pilgrimage it is a thousandfold and right in the precincts of the Lord's temple it is endless. Again, out of the holy places some like, Kashi, Kurukshetra, Prayag, the seashore etc. are said to yield special results. Anyway, this gives a rough idea of the comparative merits so that the more meritorious place be preferred when available.

As regards time, nights are generally prohibited. Special days like the first day of the solar month and of the lunar fortnight, solar and lunar eclipses etc. are considered very auspicious and it is desirable at such times to do *daana* without regard to personal convenience or other factors. In the case of the availability of a meritorious and suitable receiver (पात्र) of the charity, this being the weightier criterion, the consideration of time and place become secondary. Merits of a receiver are fixed by the scriptures in their own way, which sometimes may appear the opposite of what is considered in modern sense of charity. *Suta samhita* states the grades of receivers thus : "As compared to animals, birds etc. men are better, of men the Brahmanas, of Brahmanas those learned in the Vedas, of the learned those who are convinced of the truth of principles contained therein, of the convinced those who act according to those principles, of the men of actions those who aspire for the attainment of Brahman, of the aspirants the knower of Brahman. There is none greater than the best of the knowers of Brahman." Of course it is extremely rare to come across a knower of Brahman and much more so to make him

accept gifts of offering. In the absence of any meritorious receiver even a crawling worm becomes a source of grace in as much as we can bestow something on it and be blessed. It is told that saint Namadeva walked all the way from the Himalayas carrying the precious waters of Gangotri (the source of Ganga) to be used in the worship of Lord Rameshwara at the southernmost corner of the country. While passing through a semi desert one hot summer day, he found a donkey dying of thirst and unhesitatingly Namadeva emptied the sacred pot into the poor creature's gasping mouth saying, "O Lord, you have yourself come to meet me half the way!" Then and there he is said to have obtained the vision of Lord Rameshwara. It may however be noted that this argues finely for the development of a very high spiritual attitude in the giver, not that one should not discriminate between the ordinary creatures and the more meritorious.

In the definition of *sattvic daana* given in the Gita it was mentioned 'दीयते यद्दानम्', 'that which is given'. There seems to be a stress on the pronoun indicating a speciality of the object of charity. We have to be careful also of what thing is to be given. If you freely distribute intoxicants and other prohibited stuff to habituated drunkards hungering for them you are certainly pleasing a number of persons in dire need but you are not going to incur any merit thereby, not even if the best of *Brahmajnanis* comes forward to receive it. We must, on the basis of the scriptures, select the object of charity according to its availability,

degree of merit, our capacity to give, etc.

The most superior *daana* is *abhaya daana*, the bestowing of fearlessness. Life is characterised by fear from beginning to end at all. In every state of life fear pervades in manifold forms. The best of your unadulterated pleasures, of your feeling of unrestricted freedom and unrivalled possession, the best moments of your life are punctured with dark fear, the fear of losing them, fear of dangers unheard, of thieves, rulers, fire, disease and death. This last one is the fundamental and most formidable. None can dare to pretend at protecting you from that, not the police, nor your safety-vaults and insurance policies, nor your stalwart servants and dear relatives, nor even the propitiated gods. For all of them are themselves victims of the fear of death. Only he who has gone beyond the clutches of death can save another from it. The Upanishads declare emphatically: "य एवं विद्वानमृत इह भवति नान्यः पन्था – He who knows (the Brahman) thus, becomes deathless even here, there is no other way". So in order to be able to do the *abhaya daana* one must first attain fearlessness through the knowledge of Brahman which is itself the goal of *Jivana-yajna*. This sounds like putting the cart before the horse, insisting on the obtaining of the goal as a condition for the fulfilment of the means. But it will be easily noticed that this supreme *daana* of absolute fearlessness is the last rung, the last step which is the roof itself. A realised soul bestows his grace on people out of his most compassionate nature and without striving,

since for him all striving has come to an end; yet this is put as the ideal so that all other forms of removing the fear of creatures may be approaches to it.

Next to fearlessness, the knowledge of the Vedas is considered the best object of *daana*. The Vedas is the abode of *dharma*, the store-house of all the four desirable ends of life. Hence to initiate a man into the mysteries of the Vedic knowledge is to hand over the keys to the treasury of heaven and earth. In *sanatana dharma* an entire race or class of people have been set apart for this potent and prodigious task of imparting the Vedas. The unbroken line of highly specialised Brahmin scholars and reciters of Vedas (*Vedapaathis*) have from the time of creation to the present day laboured hard, sacrificing all earthly profits and preserved the Vedas. Their number has naturally thinned down very much and due to tremendous changes in society very few are ready to stick to the ordeal. But even now such authorities exist who can check if a single syllable of the Vedas is intoned or interpreted wrongly. To them the world owes a great deal, heaven itself is indebted to and eager to receive such who bestow the Vedic knowledge in the correct way to the proper students and thus maintain the lineage.

But this offering of *Vedavidya* is again a difficult and uncommon thing. The third best *daana* is the more universal *annadaana*, food-offering, and this is most suited for the times. Food is commonly possessed by most and needed by all. The

giving of it is easy and there is no dearth of candidates to receive it. All the same the fruits of a food-offering are not meagre. By giving proper *sattvic* food to a righteous person one earns incalculable merits. Because, food being the capital investment for all endeavour, the man who feeds gets a share in every good act of the one fed. It is told: "By food man gets energy (प्राण) and grows strong (बल) enough to do austerities (तपस्). Through constant study, which is the mental austerity, one gets spiritual faith (श्रद्धा) and develops the retentive power (मेधा) and is led to discrimination (मनीषा).

As an effect of this the purified mind (मनः) attains to tranquillity (शान्ति) in which state one dwells on holy recollections (चित्तम्). Then the idea or concept of Truth (स्मृतिः, ब्रह्माकारावृत्तिः) shines clearly and gets established into steady thought (स्मारम्) which ultimately ripens into an intense personal experience (विज्ञानम्). Thus one attains to the vision of self (आत्मानं वेदयति). Therefore he who gives food gives all these (यो अन्नं ददन् सर्वाण्येतानि ददाति)."

Apart from food, one can give clothing, foot-wear, medicines, fire-wood and other such necessities of life in *sattvic daana*. Only one must know certainly that the life so sustained is a righteous one. Where such certainty cannot be had and you feel impelled to give, then the field shifts from *daana* to *daya* (दया). In *daya* there is no consideration of the receiver's qualities and fitness. Only you are aware of his need, his misery and, desiring

his well-being, you give whatever you can as the situation demands.

Compassion should not be mistaken for a gushing emotion that is the nature of certain people. *Daya* is ordained and hence it is a cultured compassion, a developed state of mind. The seed of this culture is the truth of the all-pervasiveness of the Self, which alone shines in all beings. You cannot ask, "Why should I show compassion to others? How is it my duty to try to help a stranger?" Such asking will spell your spiritual doom; even as, if the hand decides, "I need not stretch to remove the thorn from the foot. What do I gain by it?" then your physical well-being is doomed. Hand instinctively goes to the affected part, eyelids close and bar the entry of any extraneous matter. Similarly the mind feels or must be trained to feel for a fellow-being. Constantly the mind should be charged with the idea of the Self (आत्मभावना), "So-and-so is not just this body, of such colour and proportions, not just a mental mechanism of such capacities and complexes. All these are outer casings, which wither and die when the indwelling power of the ever-conscious self is withdrawn. So-and-so is therefore in truth the radiant self garbed in this particular body and mind." Through such mental apprehension one begins to have *atma drishti* and perceive the Self everywhere. This is a necessary preparation to the development of *daya*. To manifest *daya* one must be a first rate yogi, whom Sri Krishna describes as, "आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति

– he who sees equally through the sameness of the atman residing everywhere" (B.Gita 6.32). Using identical terms the *Bhaagavata* too states, "आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र दयां कुर्वन्ति साधवः – the saintly show compassion to all because they see the same atman everywhere." Here the secret of *daya* is laid bare.

You are walking in the street and suddenly from the upper storey of a building a mud-cup crashes on your head. Burning with indignation you look up to behold a distressed woman spanking her child in her arms shouting, "You imp, why did you drop it?" Seeing the writhing, weeping child all your anger cools down and instead of the hot words that were about to spill out of your mouth you hear yourself pleading, "Ah, leave it, let the child go. It was nothing after all". Compassion puts out the most dangerous conflagrations of wrath.

Having sowed *daya's* seed, it should be manured, watered and carefully tended through constant self-denial and loving service to others in the countless instances of everyday life. It need not wait for special critical moments or uncommon catastrophes. One should learn to give oneself freely to others in any case of need, however trifling it be, taking care at the same time to avoid being fussy and an uncalled-for intrusion. Compassion should open out slowly, naturally, delicately, like a blossom whose fragrance irresistibly enters into the very being of every one present. Open out the heart and wait silently and whoever comes in contact with you will derive solace and

strength from that. This opening out involves untying the gordian knot of self-pride, of that deep-seated conviction of one's own superiority over others. This is what prevents one's giving oneself to fellow-beings; and even if it allows such a giving yet it is certain to make it artificial and hence ineffective. One must go down or reach up to the state of the sufferer, feel his difficulty and talk his language.

A Jewish Rabbi says, "To live in the life of others, this alone is righteousness, to live with understanding of others is justice, to live in others as in oneself is love." Compassion is a righteous and just way of loving. It is no giving, but a sharing. And the more infinite you make yourself the greater are your capacities for this. By holding oneself as distinct and higher than the majority of the rest, one creates boundaries and restrictions. Compassion then becomes a confined interest. In the lives of great saints we find the interesting fact that in spite of their really being distinct personalities held aloft and above the sea of humanity, yet they were filled with humility and attributed no speciality to themselves. That is why they could touch and penetrate every one of the thousands who came to them. Even where no talking, no introduction, no external intercourse has taken place, merely sitting in their presence the strangers are aware of the saints' compassion. This proves that even compassion in its end and essence does not depend on actions. It manifests through actionlessness or actions which superficially seem to be harsh and

contrary to a loving nature. One who is so long trained in the acts of kindness that he has developed an instinct for *daya*, does good alone even if he acts harshly. This is a strength and a freedom which distinguishes compassion from mere sentimentality. And this is beautifully symbolised in the image of Goddess Durga in her martial dress, mounted on the roaring lion and thrusting the deadly spear into the *asura's* chest, while at the same time a benign smile is playing on her lips and her eyes are full of tenderness.

The flood of compassion can be so mighty and irresistible as to sweep away that very compassionate heart and drown it in the vortex of self-sacrifice. One refuses to consider not only the fitness of the object for compassion but also one's own fitness to help that object. If a man hears the plaintive calls of a drowning man he immediately jumps into the waters without giving a single thought, "Should I remove my new coat and shoes too? Will I be able to make the distance? Let me first see how strong the current is." A man who starts cogitating like this will never save the drowning person. Rather he will not take the plunge at all. Compassion cannot reach its full growth in such a matter-of-fact self-conscious nature. If any one says, "I feel very much but what to do, I am helpless" and then keeps quiet, then it is to be taken as courteous manners if not hypocrisy. It has nothing to do with compassion.

Compassion is a strong, positive, divine force acting through the human mind. It is impossible that even the faintest trace of it should appear somewhere and no good result out of it. When it takes full possession of the human heart, it ceases to be human. In that state one gives like God, who needs nothing or rather whose needs none can ever fulfill. King Rantideva gave away all his kingdom and personal possessions, ornaments, silk robes and even his daily meal and was aflame with divine passion to do whatever he could for his fellow beings. And even in that state when the gods came to give boons to him he found he had nothing to beg from them, except that the world's miseries be allotted to himself and all beings be relieved.

Daya is the full-blown lotus of humanity. Indeed it is considered to be the very form of God; for He is *dayaasindhu*, the ocean of compassion.

Closely linked with *daya* and, so to say, simultaneously occurring with it is *kshama* (क्षमा) forgiveness. It is different from *daya* in the sense that *daya* is shown to one and all, even though they be unconnected with you; whereas forgiveness is practised towards only those who have wronged you or bear ill-will towards you. And yet forgiveness is *daya's* twin-sister. Because they are both born of *atma-drishti*, the perception of the self in all. As long as there is difference between you and others it is bound to appear at one time or other in the form of offender-offended. If there is no difference at all, then this possibility will

not be there. Who will offend whom? You cannot wrong yourself; and since all beings are various forms of your own self they cannot offend you nor can you offend them. This non-acceptance of offence is what forgiveness means. It is not just a let-it-go attitude. This is but a tacit way of admitting that an offence has been done and so it silently punishes the offender. Nor is forgiveness a restraint or denial of anger. That will be *akrodha* which Sri Krishna mentions in the Gita as separate from *kshama*. *Akrodha* presupposes the rising of anger while in *kshama* there is no anger at all, one does not even recognise the harm done by the other. Here one uses *akrodha* as an initial step and passes over it to a higher state of spiritual concord where error is meaningless and to forgive is natural.

Thus one who strives to be established in forgiveness develops along with the awareness of the essential oneness of things the giving up of the habit of dwelling upon the faults of others; since this alone is the bitter seed of ill-will. Whenever there is a temptation to judge anyone as a culprit, that tendency is to be weeded out as an evil at the very sprout, by reasoning in the following way: "In holding him as responsible for the offence I may be right or wrong. Even if I am correct this view is not going to help him or me. To the contrary it will come as a coloured screen between me and the other good qualities which he possesses. The idea of evil or wrong is bound to raise hatred which is a veritable fire, it will not allow me a peaceful carriage of

myself with respect to him and one time or other it will explode. Retaliation instead of healing the wound aggravates it, it will harden him and excite him to definite acts of offense against me and all others for that matter. Or if he suppresses it then these passions will cause a mental cancer. To the contrary if I keep cool and dismiss the whole thing not only am I safe but most probably my friend may also change his feelings towards me and be benefitted".

Thus in the practice of *kshama*, there is no place for finding fault, no hitting back, no report to police, not even the pious belief that God will punish him. The account is closed immediately without noting down in some corner of the mind for future reference.

There is one more step further to be taken. When you come to think of it, if your brother errs, you too are guilty of it and so you must also hang your head in shame for not having guided him, helped him towards better things. You must therefore go and seek his pardon and fulfil your duty. The real significance of forgiveness lies in this strongly positive attitude of doing good to those that 'seem' to have harmed you – not just showing the left cheek if the right is slapped; that would only encourage the other man in his old ways, not improve him. Dostoevsky raises the question that even the loving form of forgiveness as contrasted with due and timely punishment will also encourage the erring instead of checking and improving him. But this possibility, says the Russian

writer, is not valid. There is no better course of action, no other remedy but to go and give the erring the kiss of forgiveness as many times as he errs. "If after your kiss, he goes away untouched, mocking at you, do not let that be a stumbling-block to you. It shows his time has not yet come, but will come in due course. And if it comes not, no matter; if not he, then another in his place will understand and suffer, and judge and condemn himself, and the truth will be fulfilled. Believe that, believe it without doubt; for in that lies all the hope and faith of the saints."

Just as compassion consoles and strengthens so does forgiveness correct and elevate the recipient. Its force is infallible. *Kshama* always co-exists with power and strength. This again is illustrated by Goddess Durga. She is extolled as "*The one who dwells in all beings as Kshama* – या देवी सर्वभूतेषु क्षमारूपेण संस्थिता" and she is also the terrible and mighty. Her nature is, "*forgiveness at heart and ruthlessness in the battlefield* – चित्तेक्षमा समरनिष्ठता." One who has the ability to punish, he alone can be expected to manifest forgiveness; just as he who has wealth can do charity and he with senses keen and healthy can practise restraint of them. Otherwise forgiveness becomes camouflage for a cowardice.

It may sound strange, but sometimes forgiveness itself may come clothed in seeming aggression. Two monks went for begging their food and at one place the man of the house irritated with such 'fattened parasites' treated one of them to a good

thrashing. The monk silently turned to go when his brother stopped him. "Don't you see what harm he has done?" "No, he has done no harm to me." "Not to you, but certainly to himself. He will suffer terribly for this sin and you will go away without doing anything to save him from this?" "Brother, what do you want me to do to him?" "Go and give him some scoldings and finish it there; then he will not have to account for it in hell." And the monk, welling up with sincere compassion for the poor wretch, went up to the door accordingly, scolded him strongly and ran away before the sin could be repeated.

Here *daya* and *kshama* mingle to manifest in a peculiar form. For, whatever be the form, essentially forgiveness is nothing but a deep desire to do good, save a fellow being from evil.

Now, just as giving of forgiveness, the asking for it is also an aspect of *kshama*. One needs learning to seek forgiveness from others. Man can never be so perfect as not to suffer a single wrong to be caused through him. If not in words and deeds, we are constantly judging and condemning our brothers in our thought, consciously or unconsciously we are hurting the innocent creatures. And for all this we need to go down on our knees and with humility pray for forgiveness. Supposing that it is possible for one to conduct himself in an ideal way without in the least harming the creature-world yet it will remain impossible with respect to the Creator. At every step we wrong Him, cheat Him. At every instance of life we use the things which are His, this vast world

with its waters, corn and wealth, the pure air and limitless space; and we have nothing with which to repay Him in any way. Not only this, most of us do grievously wrong Him by using His gifts against Himself in the practice of *adharma*. The dictates of *dharma* are the dictates of God and by violating them we insult and hurt God, so to say. And yet He continues to bestow His bounties on all and is ready to forgive all our faults. It is but reasonable that we go to Him in all our meekness and ask forgiveness. Forgiveness being His nature, God does not need to be prayed to and placated. Yet divine grace too needs channels to flow through. Like the sunshine God's forgiveness falls on all; only by turning towards Him and opening the portals of our hearts wide are we able to receive it and be enriched thereby. Those who are not meek enough to open their hearts in prayer for forgiveness are withheld from this spiritual benefit. Hence has it been told that the meek shall rule in heaven. This is not a promise to compensate for their being oppressed and pushed out in this world. Even here it is the meek that win in the end. If we see anyone developing a weak and diffident personanality by always turning towards a higher power to save him from the undesirable fruits of his drawbacks it can be found on close observation that this is a distorted example of the ideals we have dealt with. Humility and forgiveness are potent instruments; only the well-trained can handle them properly. Like the ancient ayurvedic medicines they demand a certain amount of robustness of

constitution and the capacity to wait through the long period taken to effect a complete cure. Nowadays we are accustomed to immediate results, we have forgotten to learn to wait. Hence we have become unfit to wield subtle spiritual weapons.

Sage Vasishtha through his power of forgiveness converted Viswamitra from becoming a base murderer to a *Brahma-rishi*. Viswamitra stung with jealousy and enraged at Vasishtha not accepting him as a *Brahma-rishi*, tried to harm the sage in many ways. He caused the death of Vasishtha's hundred sons; and yet Vasishtha was not intimidated. In utter despair Viswamitra decided to kill him also and himself came to the cottage of the sage one night sword in hand. Lurking in the shadows he heard the wife Arundhati remarking, "How peerless and beautiful the moon-light is!" and Vasishtha replied, "Not so fair as the sincerity and *tapasya* of Viswamitra, my dear." That finished the haughty Viswamitra; he would have killed himself with that sword, but his old self was already gone and without any pride or hesitation he rushed out of the shadows and asked Vasishtha's pardon and blessings. Later he devoted himself to greater *tapasya* and attained to the state of *Brahma-rishi*.

The Last Offering

We have seen in detail the technique of making oblations in the *Jivana-yajna*, the sacrifice of life. This forms the main body of the *yajna* and the *purnahuti* or 'full-oblation' is the heart of it. This comes in the end and is very important since this alone is responsible for creating that unseen divine merit (*apurva*) by which the fruit of a *yajna* is got here or here after. All the preceding oblations are only supplementary parts (*anga*) of the *purnahuti* and go to fulfil it. This idea in the *jivana-yajna* endows life with a very serious and deep significance. For the final oblation as we have seen earlier, is the offering of the fundamental ignorance through realising the Truth of the Self. So the giving up of passions through all the observances of *dharma* so far elaborated upon have meaning only with respect to this attainment of Knowledge. This is justified by the Upanishadic saying “तमेतं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा विविदिषन्ति यज्ञेन दानेन तपसा

अनाशक्तेन – *the seekers of Truth strive to know It through the study of the Vedas, yajna, daana, tapas, renunciation etc.*" (*Brahadaranyaka 4.4.22*). This also asserts that life's goal, the winning of perfect freedom, perfect bliss and perfect wisdom consists in this supreme Knowledge.

In order to appreciate the immense potentiality of the *jivana-yajna* this concept of knowledge as means to moksha or liberation has to be properly understood; because this is the fundamental feature of Vedanta. The Vedas are very clear about it: "ज्ञात्वा देवं मुच्यते सर्वपाशैः" "तमेव विदित्वा अतिमृत्युमेति नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेयनाय", "Knowing that effulgent (conscious) entity, one becomes free from all bonds" "Knowing It alone one goes beyond death; there is no other way for liberation". There are any number of such decisive statements. And they are supported by reasoning also. For when we minutely analyse the fundamentals of life and death, the various factors that go to make the picture of this external world and the 'feeling being' called man to whom this picture is being presented, then we are forced to the conclusion that the experiencing entity is all that matters. The rest is purely relative, constantly appearing and disappearing and having no substance of its own, like a dream.

Everyone knows and accepts that the dream-world is false and ephemeral and is an illusion of the mind. Hence one does not base his plans of future life on the facts of dream-happenings; he does not rely on the money amassed in dream for building a home

here; he does not seek the help of dream-friends in necessities of the waking state. For he knows they do not exist at all and even during dream he actually did not amass the wealth or meet any such friends, it was just imagination. But when you come to think of it, dream in itself is as valid and real as the waking world is to us. There is of course a certain amount of relative lack of coherence in the happenings and clarity of understanding in dream; but this is caused by the 'cloudiness' of sleep, its incapacity to perfectly adjust and arrange the impressions of the mind that create and present the dream-world. In waking this arrangement is perfect. This difference, however, is not the reason why the perceptions of dream are false and those of waking are true. Because even with this difference the waking too is capable of yielding false perceptions as when you mistake a distant object to be something else, the burning sands of the mirage to be water, the formless space of the sky to be like a overturned huge bowl, and so on. So there seems to be no solid reason for holding that the waking world is essentially different from dream as truth is from falsity. And if dreams were to come in continuous sequence, as experienced by the hero of H. G. Wells' '*Armageddon*', then one will be completely at a loss to know which is the dream and which the waking, which is his true life and which one the imagination. Actually apart from the absence of proofs as to the distinct difference of waking from dream we find to the contrary that the former has in it all the criteria that go to make a perception false.

Suppose you see a friend of yours driving past you in the street and due to some reason or other he does not respond to your greetings. Without minding this you enter the shop in front in order to do some purchases and to your surprise find that very same friend sitting there. If you go up to him and say "Hello, you are here! Just a minute back I saw you driving down the street" your friend will probably answer, "You must have seen my ghost." You too laugh and take it for granted that you have made a mistake and that the unmistakable perception of your friend driving in the car was after all an illusion. Why? Mainly because the same man cannot be simultaneously driving outside and sitting in the shop. Either of the one must be taken as false. The present perception which has contradicted the first is naturally taken as valid and also you justify it with such reasons as, "Had he been my friend he would have responded to me" and so on.

Now, in this example we find three outstanding characteristics. One is that it essentially involves a change perceived by the senses, a change attributed to the object regarding its situation in time and space. The man driving in a car is changed to one sitting in a shop. Perhaps his dress also is different. Unless there is a proof to the contrary, these two are different entities; any connection between them is illusory like the solidness of a particle that is nothing but atoms in intense motion. Secondly, there is an unaccountability about it – how he managed so quickly to park the car somewhere, change clothes and be

seated in the shop. If a magician or trick-maker causes a rain of currency notes from nowhere, you conclude it is false, because currency notes do not fall from skies. Thirdly, there is the awareness of the second perception contradicting the first and resulting in the conviction, "He whom I saw in the car is not the man I took him to be". The three factors noted above are referred to in the philosophic language as अनित्यत्व of the दृश्य, कारणाभाव and बाध.

All these three factors are easily found to be common to the perceptions of waking. They are perceived through the senses and every object so perceived is constantly undergoing changes. Science says that the cloth you have worn yesterday is not the same today, it is lost once for all. The flower you have smelt an hour ago has completely changed by now. The cells of your very body are getting transformed every moment. The immense mountain ranges are slowly being ground to dust and the dust deep in the earth is being hardened and ready to be thrown up in an upheaval as the mountain-rocks. We falsely take them to be the same and stable; and for all practical purposes it 'works', until of course the cloth is torn, the blossom withers and the body falls into the cold clutches of death. Thus change being the very nature of the objects of waking, they afford a fertile field for false perception.

Secondly there is also the unaccountability of their appearance. Sri Harsha in his masterpiece of Vedantic thought,

'*Khandana-khanda-khadya*' shows how any form of real cause-effect relationship is impossible with respect to anything cognised through the senses. That a pot has come out of a ball of clay, or this tree grown out of a tiny seed is itself untenable. And then that the fantastic pot is being seen by me is another unaccountable phenomenon, since I the conscious entity cannot have any connection with the pot which is inert. In fact the rising of the entire world of waking has no real accountable origin, either conscious or inert, unless we attribute it to an illusion, like the creations of dream or mirage.

Thirdly, just as the dream-experience is contradicted in waking, so also in the supreme state of consciousness called *samadhi* in which the mystics and yogis establish themselves, this world too is contradicted, they see its unsubstantiality as clearly as we see that of dreams. Even for an ordinary man in sound sleep this waking world is negated. Where it goes and how it again dawns on the consciousness is a mystery. All the same, man takes it at its face value in a blind supposition; and that makes him go on working, gathering, enjoying the bitter and sweet fruits of life. The falsity of it all never comes to his mind. He has no time to see that these things of the world have not 'responded' to him. If they were really his then they would have remained with him always. But every day they are cheating and deserting him, running out of his hands inspite of his frantic efforts to retain them. Neither do they stay permanently nor leave him in permanent

peace. It is only in the fond hope of "This time I will hit it" man goes on clinging to them.

Whereas a little thoughtfulness will show that the only feature which has escaped all the above-said drawbacks in the world set-up, the only thing which is unperceived by the senses, unchanging, single, self-evident and beyond the necessity of being accountable, uncreate and uncontradicted is the conscious entity, the self, the *atman*, the 'I' that experiences the dream and waking. This 'I' must learn to break the blind supposition and see the waking as objectively as it sees the dream. Due to thick identification this waking world now is subjectively mixed with 'I' and 'mine'. Knowledge alone can break this identification and remove the supposition, no other operation is needed. The prison walls in dream do not need to be pulled down in order to release you, your experienced family doctor cannot cure you of the disease contracted in dream. You have just to wake up, come to your senses and know it as dream. Similarly to be unlimited by the bondages of the waking world you must wake up into higher realms, into a deeper knowledge that is beyond the senses. Instead, if you exert yourself in changing the world or dwelling on it for some solution then the stronger does the illusion take hold of you. All the philosophic trends, both at home and foreign, modern and ancient, which tried and even now try to prove material and mental well-being as the immediate means to peace and perfection have committed this fault and hence fail to fulfil the

purpose. All that is achieved in dream, however wonderful and precious, however carefully worked out is after all a figment of imagination. Out of falsity and impermanence the real abiding cannot be got. Hence all perceived things being unstable, we must divert our attention to the perceiver, the *atman* for this fulfilment of the abiding. “परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायात् नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् – *Having analysed the worlds of appearance, the created, the seeker of Truth must cease going after them, knowing well that the finite created cannot yield the Infinite uncreate, and then seek to know of that from the Master*” (*Mundaka Upanishad*).

And in this new quest we need not have to go far. As the *Chandogya* beautifully puts it, the field of investigation is this very human life and the treasure that will remove our spiritual penury is hidden here within this person – “यथा हिरण्यनिधिं निहितमक्षेत्रज्ञा उपर्युपरि संचरन्तो न विन्देयुरेवमेवेमाः सर्वाः प्रजा अहरहर्गच्छन्त्य एतं ब्रह्मलोकं न विन्दन्त्यनृतेन हि प्रत्यूढाः – *Just when as treasure of gold is buried in a field, people secret ignorant of the fact walk over it on the surface, sit there and lament their poverty and yet do not benefit by the wealth, even so all these beings everyday and for ever exist and move in this world of Brahman and yet It being covered by untruth, they do not realise and enjoy It*” (8.3.2.). Just as the layer of soil and rock separates the wealth from us so the covering of *maya*, ignorance or false knowledge prevents us from the wealth of perfection. Hence that *maya* has

to be removed and thrown away. In other words the innermost self is to be realised.

It will not do to say that everyone knows oneself. Most people by self mean the body. But this cannot be the innermost. If a thorn pricks you it takes time to locate the place. It shows that the body is apart and distant from the experiencing self. The pain which is immediately cognised may be supposed to exist in the experiencer. But this is not so, since the mind alone is the seat of pains and pleasures. It is more immediate than the body and very near, almost intertwined with the perceiver; yet it is perceived objectively, analysed and known. For this to be possible there must exist an essential distance between the knower and the known. The distance in miles of a city from different places on the respective routes leading to the city are measured from a particular fixed and central spot in the city, say a tower or railway station or any such prominent or important structure. At the portals of that structure the milestone will register zero; but that does not mean that the building or structure is without dimensions. It encloses a distance of its own, perhaps it takes full five minutes to go from one end of it to the other. Similarly the mind, though being the seat of experiences and self consciousness, is still an object and as such is not the innermost. Beyond it the knower, the self-conscious principle is the innermost *atman*, which is verily you. This is the centre, the secret treasure, to be approached and tackled; and this, because of its very innermostness, is not

generally known in its fullness and reality.

The Upanishads use the word '*aparoksha*', which means 'most immediate', for the Brahman or the Self alone. But it is ordinarily used to refer to objects when they are directly cognised through the senses or mind. I see a flower in front of me or a fruit placed on my palm. I see it instantaneously and clearly. I possess a direct, intimate and correct knowledge of it. Similarly with every feeling of pain and pleasure. Then is it not proper to consider these objects also as immediate in experience? Why should we conclude that self alone is immediate? Here too analysis reveals at what a distance these objects are placed from the point of experience. At the very outset it will be clear that the immediacy of objects is not in their very nature in which case it will exist with them always; to the contrary the immediacy depends on certain conditions. In utter darkness for instance the object ceases to be immediate. And even when perceived the first contact of knowledge is with the light that covers the object. In fact it is impossible to see a naked object 'as it is', bereft of this veil of light. Then is the light itself immediate? Light too must pass through the portals of the eye before it is perceived. If eyelids close then light is cut off from the field of experience. The eye too in its turn is not immediate, since it needs to be connected with the mind in order to convey the experience. Absent-mindedly eyes may stare into space, no light, no object is cognised. When mind steps in and functions then it colours and changes the perception

according to its nature. The same eyes view the same object differently in different attitudes or moods of the mind. If the mind is impure it sees the object as faulty, if attached then as pleasing, if spiteful then as an enemy, if lustful then as desirable, and so on. This mind too with all its influence over the perceptions is yet not immediate always. In deep sleep it dissolves and is not felt at all. There is no function, no perception in that state except the awareness of the self in a profound rest. There is no other common human experience which takes us deeper and more inward than this. Hence the self alone is the innermost, unfailingly cognized in all states and yet not clearly understood.

Now the question arises, how to possess the knowledge of this self, who is the undivided, immediate and so far unknown stray entity called the knower? For this we have no other go but to resort to the Vedas. This entity is named “*औपनिषदं पुरुषम् – the self of the Upanishads.*” That is to say, it can be known only through the Upanishads. At another place the Vedas say, “*नावेदवित् मनुते तं बृहन्तम् – that all pervading great self is not grasped by one who is ignorant of the Vedas*”. So the knowledge of the nature of this Self can come only from the scriptures. And in the vast extent of the Vedas this knowledge is contained in the chief or key sentences (*Mahavakyas*) which are therefore the particular subject of Vedantic study. These are to be heard, their meaning reasoned out and, by meditation, made one's own in order to yield the absolute fruit of knowledge.

In all the *mahavakyas* like “तत्त्वमसि – thou art that, अयमात्मा ब्रह्म – this immediately experienced self is the Brahman, प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म – this conscious self is Brahman, यश्चायं पुरुषे यश्चासावादित्ये स एकः – the living power pulsating in the far away Sun is one and the same that pervades this soul”, in all these we have two things which we are asked to identify as one – the self (*atman*) and God (Brahman). In all the world's religions it is the lonely voice of Vedanta that declares this singular statement. To others it may appear as the height of blasphemy. But Vedanta insists that it is not enough to know God, or just know the self, one must realise the essence that is in both. Until then true liberation cannot be achieved; for, “यदुदरमन्तरं कुरुते अथतस्य भयं भवति – he who makes even a minute and minor difference in this shall thereby be siezed with fear”. Such open condemnation of the least duality is not found anywhere else. Rather the few exceptions like Meister Eckhart who supported such ideas were themselves condemned by their society. This is natural when we refuse to open all the doors of relevant reasoning at the higher levels of spiritual investigation. Vedanta, through its insistence upon *manana*, relevant reasoning, is able to rise to hoary heights and achieve this oneness which is the distinguishing feature and which therefore deserves to be closely studied.

In order to comprehend the oneness of *atman* and Brahman it is first necessary to understand what principles they stand for, what actually we mean by them. As is customary with Sanskrit

studies, let us first take the word itself. 'Atman' indicates in its structure an entity with four characteristics :

यच्चाप्नोति यदादत्ते यच्चान्ति विषयानिह ।

यच्चास्य सन्ततो भावस्तस्मादात्मेति निगद्यते ॥

"One who attains, who gathers, who eats, whose nature is eternally unchanging – this is called the atman." Of these four functions let us for convenience take up the third 'eats', because a clue is afforded in the explanatory phrase 'who eats the objects here'. 'Here' refers to the state of waking in which this familiar visible world is cognized. The five senses of knowledge and five senses of actions are awake and function vigorously. Man experiences the sense-objects and drawn or repelled according to his inborn nature he throws himself into action, achieving and avoiding, making and unmaking. In this way the self 'eats' or enjoys pains and pleasures and is filled with the world of senses. The self in this state is completely identified with body and *prana*; bodily comforts and appeasing *prana* with food and drink become the major items of life. Technically speaking, the *annamaya kosha* and *pranamaya kosha* are predominant. It becomes very difficult to recognise the self as of pure consciousness and bliss under the gross and heavy makeup of these two physical coverings. Yet the 'isness' (सत्) or existence of some experiencing entity is felt. None can deny or be deprived of the experience "I am". Only it seems to be fettered with the attributes of birth and death, hunger and thirst, activity and fatigue.

When body and senses get tired and wish to rest then the soul shifts its centre of activity to the mind and one falls asleep and starts dreaming. The mind deprived of its entrance into the external world through the senses, 'gathers' the impressions (*vaasana*) of the world-experiences and, with them as the material, creates within itself a world of its own, the world of dream. This is the second functioning of the self denoted as the 'gathering'. In this subtle region of *vaasanas* the self appears less hidden and its self-effulgent nature shows itself. It is evident that the Sun, moon or any earthly light is not there to help one see the dream-objects, one perceives them by one's own light. In a poetic way the *Brahadaranyaka* explains: *“In that state where he is said to be dreaming, he gathers a part of the impressions of this world of waking and himself creating the dream-body, casts himself in it as its enlightener and propeller. The light of the objects there is the light of the thought-forms and he sees them with the light of the self's undiminishing eternal light of perception. There is no sun nor eyes. Verily in dream the experiencer is self-luminous. There are no chariots, no horses to draw them, nor are there any roads; he creates the chariots, horses and roads as well. There is really no joy there, no pleasures born of contact with objects like wife and children, no ecstasy either, yet he himself becomes the joys, pleasures and ecstasies. There are no foliage, no lakes and flowing rivers except what he himself has created; he is the lone creator, the actor without instruments.”*

Here the Upanishad tries to bring out two characteristics of the *atman*. One is the self-luminous nature (स्वयंज्योतिस्वरूप) of consciousness (चित्). In waking, where other illuminators, objects and instruments of perceptions are available, this essential light of the self is not clearly seen. Here we find that when all lights are put out yet the self can perceive all things. This is possible only if we attribute to it the form of an eternal and unconditioned perception (अलुप्तदृष्टि). Secondly it is capable of manifesting itself as the entire world of differences consisting of perceived, perceiver and means of perception – actor, action and the fruits of it. That is to say the *atman* is *advaita*, the undivided single principle, the real behind all duality of the dream; and this can be extended easily to the world of waking which also is a manifestation of the mind.

Next we come to the third function of the *atman* viz. 'attains' (आप्नोति). Attains what? Naturally that which has been missed in the first two functions of waking and dream. All the experiences of these two states can be classed under one single category – objectivisation; with restlessness, activity or disturbance (विक्षेपः) as its inevitable feature. Now, worn out and weary of both waking and dreaming, when senses drop off and mind too fails, then the self plunges into the dark depths of sleep, like a bird ousted from its nest taking to the skies. Stretched in that limitlessness, lying unsupported in the lap of an objectiveless void, the self 'attains' to a profound rest, a pure joy. Rather, as the

Kaivalya Upanishad puts it, "At the time of deep-sleep in which all things get dissolved, the purusha overpowered by darkness attains the form of joy – सुषुप्तिकाले सकले विलीने तमोभिभूतः सुखरूपमेति." Here we have a brief and complete picture of *sushupti* (deep sleep) consisting of three things: dissolution of mind along with all other objects and impressions, the presence of ignorance and lastly the manifestation of self's *ananda* (bliss) aspect. The first explains why the experience of deep sleep is not registered immediately in the present tense as, "I am joyful and know nothing". Instead it is always a recollection, "I slept soundly and knew nothing". In *sushupti* there is no instrument with which to register its experience. The self alone is and feels itself and the darkness of causal ignorance covering it. Hence on waking it can only recollect itself as having been pure, alone and blissful in sleep and not knowing anything. This existence of the causal ignorance in *sushupti* is the only appendage, only limitation that vitiates the state and deprives it of the preciousness of being the final state of perfection to be achieved. For, this seed of ignorance of *sushupti* sprouts into its various forms of identification with body, mind and senses when these come into the field of experience in waking and dream. Hence the complete destruction of this ignorance is necessary. It is not enough to feel the pure blissful aspect of the *atman* so long as it is accompanied by "I knew nothing". To the contrary one must attain to the consciousness of "I am the all, I am verily Brahman, the infinite, the omniscient" and retain this firm

knowledge in all states of being. Since such a knowledge is not acquired by going to sleep, there is the necessity of training the self to abide in the fourth state called *turiya*, in which the fourth function of *atman* comes into play, and we see the *atman* as 'the eternally unchanging'.

This state though achieved here in this human body is yet a supersensual unworldly experience defying all description. By deep meditation on the self's pure nature one transcends all objectivisation and limitations, 'the current jumps across the gap', the circuit is completed and the intense light of the spark so created burns for ever the causal ignorance with its entire horde of mental impressions. In this great enlightenment all the fundamental aspects of the *atman*, which we discovered by analysing the three fore-going states and functions of the *atman*, are cognised in a flash as crystallising into one single integral, absolute entity, the *sat-chit-ananda-ananta* (existence-consciousness-bliss-infinite). And this principle is clearly seen as unchanging and ever present as the underlying basis of all the different states of being. It is like the ocean-bed which holds the entire mass of waters with its currents, tides, waves, foams and bubbles. Itself unmoving and unchanging it makes possible the observation of all movements and change. If self too were to change then this very observation of change will not be possible. This is a very simple but strong point to prove the changelessness of the experiencing entity.

Suppose you are watching the Republic Day procession at Delhi. All the various armed forces are coming batch after batch, the elephants, horses and camels follow the train, and then the tableaux representing each State. The whole thing seen in a stream of succession gives an idea not only of the beauty of the celebration but also of the richness, vastness, solidarity and potentialities of the country. Now, instead of one man seeing the whole thing suppose a number of persons come in turns one after the other, each one seeing only one item of the procession, it is possible to assert that the whole procession has been seen but impossible to convey that beauty and that direct experience of the vastness of the country to any one of the men who have seen. For he has seen only a part. The one who saw the guns would not have the idea of the elephants and the one who watched the elephants will be deprived of the presentations of the tableaux. In order to have a comparative and thorough grasp of the entire sequence, one single unchanging person must be the observer.

Apply this to our present subject. Human life is an endless procession of events and experiences – child-hood, youth, maturity and old-age, all these come one after the other, each offering a rich variety of experiences. At any point of life, man is generally able to recollect the totality of the experiences of the past. He knows "I as a child did such and such things, felt so and so in youth and now I am thus. What changes has my life undergone!" Such an awareness is not possible if the one who

acted in childhood were to change in youth and he who felt in youth were to be different from the one who is musing now. The experiencer must be same through all the changing items of experience. Otherwise each item will be an individual experience unconnected with any other. The connecting factor is the sameness or unchanging nature of the experiencer. The *Kaivalya* says: “*That very same embodied self which goes to sleep, dreams and wakes up and thus plays in these three states, out of this has come all this diversity*”. The experience, "I went to sleep, I dreamt of wonderful things and now I find that it was all imagination" contains in it the strong proof of the changelessness of the experiencer. This recollection is called *pratyabhijna* in Vedanta terminology.

This proof will also support the ‘infiniteness’ of the self which is its fourth aspect. That fundamental principle on which all perceptions of limitations depend must by its very nature be limitless. It is the vast space which gives rise to the appearance of a limited space, as that within a pot, a house, or an entire galaxy. Now, if that vast background of space is itself limited then what is it that limits it? If you hold that something envelopes and limits the perceiver or background then is this envelope itself a limited or unlimited thing? If it is limited then the question again arises as to what is it that limits this. And the search becomes endless and futile until we are forced to accept one fundamental limitless entity.

If there is no silence behind each uttered sound you cannot hear it. Silence is an eternal background, waves of sound arise and die on it. You may ask, "What is the use of knowing silence? We need sound for our affairs not silence." But all the same, sound is a distraction, as all human affairs are. At its best it yields sensual pleasure. Only when it merges meaningfully into silence does it become spiritually awakening and a lasting joy. Similarly to those people who are so much addicted to objectivisation and the life of duality that the concept of an eternally unchanging, attributeless, purely conscious and absolutely alone self appears to be dry and unusable, we have to say that the self's futility is the greatest utility of man, because it fulfils the only purpose of human birth. Being an object ever to be used and enjoyed by another is the greatest bondage and humility. That alone can be the abode of peace and perfection where there is no give and take. It is essential to stress upon this pure and 'fourth' aspect of the *atman* for another practical reason, because this alone affords a meeting point between the study of the self and God (Brahman) as we shall presently see.

In the *Brahma Sutra* of the Sage Badarayana, Brahman is defined as "जन्माद्यस्य यतः" , who is the cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. Just as *atman* the knower and the experiencer is held by various people to be various things like body, *prana*, senses, mind etc., even so there are differences of opinion as to what is this primeval cause of the

universe. The *Naiyayikas* of the logical school posit that the atoms are the cause, they are eternal and indestructible and when they combine with each other creation starts. The *Samkhya* school has the theory that *prakriti*, the causal matter as distinct from *purusha* (the conscious soul) is the creatrix. Followers of *Mimamsa* assert that creation is eternal, without beginning and end and that the *jiva* takes different bodies in different lives according to the force of his actions (*karmas*) in previous lives and enjoys their fruits in the form of joys and sorrows. Modern science too has many creation theories. Some hold that the electrocule which is neither pure energy nor matter, was the primeaval thing and when an electron got separated from it the whole process of creation was switched on into action, the different combinations of electrons and protons producing matter and slowly the universe we see came into being. What made the initial electron to shoot out is not answered by science, and if answered, the reply consists of vague suggestions of an indefinable 'chance'. It becomes a still more complicated and inconvenient question when we ask if the primeaval cause is a conscious entity or not. If it is not, then it is against reason that an inert object should initiate the living process. If it is, then the relation between that entity and consciousness should be explained.

It is not our intention here to go into the details of the arguments for and against these theories. It will suffice our present

purpose to note that none of these is justified by the Vedas. The prayer in the *Swetaswatara* reading of 'Krishna Yajur Veda' says, "He who gave birth to Brahma, the creator, in ancient time and bestowed him with the Vedas, to that Lord who is the light of the mind and self, I go for refuge." This clearly shows that the primeval cause is of the nature of consciousness which enlightens all beings and is omniscient so as to emanate the Vedas. It is the creator and the prime mover of even the causal matter. It must therefore be omnipotent and free to exercise its powers in creation, sustenance and dissolution.

We observe fundamental laws existing in the physical and mental worlds. There is a definite order in creation. The power that is responsible for this is the power of Brahman. The suns, moons, stars and constellations rise and set, the seasons change and depart in such a strict routine that we are able to set our time and regulate our life through a scale based on them. The raising of corn and blossoming of flowers, the fall of rains and the rainbow, the kindling of life in the mother's womb, every one of these and other happenings in nature involve a definite process, Each thing in creation has its nature and sticks unflinchingly to it; the fire to its warmth, earth to its solidity, water to its fluidness. They cannot stray a hair's breadth from this. They seem to be afraid to do so, lest they be punished. Hence the *Katha Upanishad* declares :

भयादस्याग्निस्तपति भयात्तपति सूर्यः ।

भयादिन्द्रश्च वायुश्च मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः ॥

“Out of fear of it burns the fire, as also the sun, out of fear of it Indra and Vayu maintain their posts and Death the fifth officer runs to his errands.”

One is led to believe that like a chieftain supervising the workers whip in hand, God governs the universe. But the same Upanishad a line ahead states: "Knowing this great, terrible one like the thunder held aloft, one becomes deathless". This is to remind us that with all these stupendous dimensions Brahman is very closely connected with us, it is very essential and possible to approach and know It.

This leads us to the fourth aspect of the Brahman where deprived of all the adjuncts and functions of the Almighty God, He is the “सत्यंज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म” of the Taittareya Rishi, the Brahman who is absolute existence-knowledge-infinite-bliss. But for this it is impossible to reconcile the self to God. The first three aspects of the self in which we saw it as the experiencer of waking, dream and sleep are paralleled to the above three aspects of God. They can never meet and both must co-exist on the worldly (व्यावहारिक) plane of becoming and duality. The self is a puny creature with limited powers, knowledge and joys, whereas God is the supreme being omniscient, omnipotent, free from mortal limitations of death and disease, lifted up high above all things, even the force of *maya*. The self is a toy in the hands of *maya*, God is its Lord (मायाधीश्वर). But when the worldly plane is transcended, when we go beyond the cosmic functions of

creation and dissolution, the question arises, "What is the basis on which these plays are enacted, the medium through which the powers are manifested?" For, after all a thing does not exhaust itself in mere function. It is much more than that. Just as in the case of the self we saw that all its actions and changing experiences point out to an actionless, stable, and ever conscious entity so also when we search into Brahman of whom it is said figuratively "त्रिपादस्यामृतं दिवि – three-fourths of it is in the deathless, shining regions, only one-fourth is manifested here", the true form of Brahman emerges to be the same as that of the self. "Where all worlds are put out it is the great peace, the great good, nondual – "प्रपञ्चोपशमं शान्तं शिवमद्वैतं" (*Mandukya*). In their essence and absoluteness, existence-knowledge-bliss are one and undivided. Due to difference in adjuncts they may appear to be different in different entities; just as by change in filaments or the colour of bulbs the electricity may appear varied but it is the same. Self and Brahman in their essence are one. Two limitless entities would involve a self-contradiction. Because limitlessness of one would restrict the other or swallow it. So we have to accept that the essence of existence-knowledge-bliss which impels the cosmos is the same that impersonates through the individual creature (*jiva*). The *atma* is common to *paramatma* and *jivatma* and this common basis is the truth, the reality to be grasped. This is what the great utterances of Upanishads proclaim – "यश्चायं पुरुषे यश्चासावादित्ये स एकः".

All the innumerable works on Vedanta have been produced in order to put forth the meaning of these utterances fully and clearly through various reasoned out and technically perfect methods of approach (प्रक्रिया). They are of great help to an aspirant in clearing the doubts that rise in his mind and answering objections raised by other schools of thought.

But a mere intellectual understanding is not enough. One must go to realisation, which is a totally different thing. When you come across an unfamiliar word, say 'hippopotamus' and wish to know its meaning you refer to the dictionary and find it explained as, 'a large African animal of aquatic habits with very thick skin and short legs' or some such explanation. Your curiosity is satisfied. But certainly you cannot be said to have known the hippo. That will happen only when you come across the animal in a zoo or an African jungle and see it with your own eyes. Dictionary only substitutes familiar words for unfamiliar ones, or at the most it can present a picture. However reliable, it is after all information, not experience. Real knowledge comes of the latter. Similarly the great utterances of the Upanishads should be "seen" with the mind's eye as clearly as you would see an apple held in the palm of your hand in broad day-light. The self represented by त्वं, अहं, प्रज्ञानं, आत्मा and other such words as also the Brahman, the Parameshwara, the 'that' (तत्) should both be experienced in the secret chamber of one's own heart.

This means one has to undergo spiritual disciplines. Through intense discrimination and dispassion the *jiva-chaitanya* is crystallised. One sees the self indwelling within this body as the pure consciousness witnessing all the experiences of life. “*In seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping, dreaming, talking, giving, taking, closing and opening the eyes it is the senses that contact the objects, I am not the the ‘doer’ thus firmly convinced, the yogi knows the Truth*” (Gita 5.8, 9). Such a realised aspirant never mistakes himself to be the gross body or the mind or any such adjunct and even in other persons he sees the *jiva* as such. This is the realisation of the *jiva* principle denoted by 'I' or 'you' (त्वंपदार्थ).

Similarly the various practices of *upasana* mentioned in the scriptures when followed with deep faith and devotion yield the unbroken vision of the Lord, the Parameshwara, denoted by 'Brahman' and as 'that' (तत्पदार्थ). Then one begins to see the whole world permeated with that principle and pulsating with His divine conscious presence. A person who has acquired these twin realisations and developed himself through the principles we have detailed in the foregoing pages, alone has the full fitness to meditate on the *mahavakyas* and aspire after oneness with Brahman. Shiva, the Absolute, the supreme God, has already been referred to as "प्रपंचोपशमं शान्तम् – *the hushing up of all worlds, absolute peace*" and yet people filled with the world seething within and experiencing peacelessness at every step dare

to say "*Shivoham* – I am Shiva". Such parrot-like repetition, if not harmful, is certainly a futile mockery. So it is to be carefully borne in mind that the required fitness is to be first attained before venturing to meditate on the oneness of the self and Brahman and attain to supreme knowledge. Then alone the hidden treasure will open out and be within reach of the aspirant.

Taking up this Vedic analogy of the treasure referred to previously, Acharya Shri Shankara in his '*Viveka Chudamani*' has briefly and beautifully worked out all the necessary steps involved in the destruction of ignorance and attainment of knowledge :

आप्तोक्तिं खननं तथोपरिशिलाद्युत्कर्षणं स्वीकृतिं
निक्षेपः समपेक्षते न हि बहिःशब्दैस्तु निर्गच्छति ।
तद्वद् ब्रह्मविदोपदेशमननध्यानादिभिर्लभ्यते
मायाकार्यतिरोहितं स्वममलं तत्त्वं न दुर्युक्तिभिः ॥

– *"In order to get at the hidden treasure it is necessary to hear of it from a reliable person and spotting out the place start digging. Below the surface-soil and debris you come across rocks and blocks of stone which have to be dislodged. The treasure then comes into view. Simply gazing at it will not do. It has to be hauled up and made one's own. All this has to be done; of what avail is it to use merely high-sounding words?"*

Similarly the Tattva, the Essence of the pure Self, hidden by maya and its brood is attained not by arguments and word-combats but by receiving the teachings of a knower of Brahman, mentally reasoning it out, becoming convinced of it and realising it through practice of meditation enhanced by restraint of senses, forbearance, renunciation etc.”

Of such a winner of this wealth of Brahman-knowledge, the Vedas and scriptures find no words to speak. He verily becomes the Brahman. Having made a holocaust of the causal ignorance, all his bondages burnt, nothing can touch him in his impeccable glory and unshakable stand in the consciousness of the Spirit. The Vedas with an awed voice exclaim, “**किमिच्छन् कस्य कामाय शरीरमनुसंज्वरेत्** – *Desiring what, moved by what lack should he yoke his body to exertion ?*” He is fulfilled paramountly and has no lack, no duty, no affliction. And yet the physical and mental frame, which the others still continue to attribute to the knower of Truth, have become so pure and brimming with *sattvic* qualities that they in their natural movements scatter the wealth contained in them; they seek the good of the whole creation. The mere presence of the fullmoon is enough to relieve the sun-scorched tropical land of all its travail. The effect is effortless and inevitable. It is not possible that the moon should rise and yet withhold its cool, nectarine rays. Similarly when the knower of Brahman steeped in the bliss of It opens his mouth to speak, only words of life-saving wisdom gush out and the flood submerges the hearts of

all the others around him consumed day and night by the evermounting flames of fear and sorrow, death and delusion.

This is the sprinkling of the sanctified waters of the last bath, *avabhrita-snana*. And with this the story of *jivana-yajna* comes to a close. Considering its entirety it may appear to be a prodigious picture, a tall task for the common man. But we must remember it is the picture of the ideal and an ideal; if it is to be precious and high, will naturally need much effort, much footing and scaling and even taking frightful leaps. All the same it is an ideal to live for and die for. Actually it is such a tremendous ideal that dying for it is not possible. In its universal sweep death is a minor turn. The ageless life of man has come like a mighty river meandering through so many births and deaths, and none can say how many more such valleys have to be crossed over. This much is certain that till the goal, the fruit of this *jivana-yajna* is not attained this life-stream will not cease to wander. Hence laying aside the fear of death or any other obstacle and without asking "When will this be finished, how can we accomplish it ?" one must right away start shaping life on the model of this great sacrifice. Perfection may come here and now or one may master only a part of it, just finish offering a few of the oblations, *yajna ahuti* of the life sacrifice. Then death intervenes and shifts the field of sacrifice. But when the situation changes and strength is renewed, one can always proceed on. A lull does not mean a loss. Sri Krishna gives the assurance in the Gita, “ न हि कल्याणकृत्

कश्चिद्दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति – *The doer of the auspicious act, my dear, never comes to any evil end*" (B.Gita 6.40) and also, "स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् – *even a little of this dharma when practised saves one from great fear*" (B.Gita 2.40).

Once you take this view of life, launch yourself on this course of *sadhana*, then, as already noted, no situation is too small or too great for it. Our very infirmities and obstructions become the material to be handled and hurled into the fire of life, and the more you offer yourself thus the taller grows the *yajna-flame* till it becomes a bonfire to consume the greatest of our drawbacks and limitations and transform the self to its native, rich and golden purity.

When Song Becomes Silence

Having come to the end of the *yajna* one may be tempted to ask, "Is this all?"; and we have no hesitation in assuring back that this *is* the all. There is a wholesomeness both in the means and the end which may not be easily seen in the case of *jivana-yajna*. Just as one is not prepared to accept knowledge of oneself as the end of human aspirations, even so one is not satisfied with the fact that *dharma* is enough to take one to that goal.

Ninety percent of men view *dharma* to be a useless ideology or even a blockade to all creativeness and prosperity. Out of the remaining ten percent who are serious about religion, most of them are led away by some excitingly curious and uncommon practices through which they seek to achieve dramatic, out of the way, unaccountable and mysterious experiences. Usually such people pass over the dictates of

dharma as being too elementary and unimportant. For those who take to religion as a fashion, *dharma* becomes an outdated style lingering amidst the 'unsophisticated middle-class'. Very frequently it has been our experience to address a group of aristocrats and at the end of the talk someone or other comes up with the genuine suggestion, "Why talk of *dharma* and religious practices in this twentieth century? Is it not better to make each one realise himself and be done away with it? That ought to be easy, I suppose."

To avoid such widespread misconception two points have to be made clear: firstly, that *dharma* is the alpha and omega of spiritual life and subjection to it is the only way to perfection; secondly, that the specific *dharmas* which lead to perfection are neither opposed to nor active promoters of worldly prosperity.

We must remember that there are two clear divisions of *dharma*, one is the worldly which yields material prosperity and welfare (अभ्युदय) and the other is the godly leading to liberation or perfection (निःश्रेयस). In the worldly *dharma* are included the special means to prosperity spoken of in scriptures as also the physical and mental laws within the scope of man's research, discovery and handling. This latter is what is called science in modern terms. Hence we may say that the worldly *dharmas* depend to a large extent on our intelligence and capacity. If we use them properly they will empower us to increase our wealth and sensual enjoyments; if improperly handled this very power will become a threat to universal welfare, as it is in the present

world set-up. On the other hand the godly *dharmas* are confined only to the function of leading man to his highest good, to transform and elevate him above worldly comforts and calamities; and they are entirely beyond the capacity of human discovery and intervention; they are to be known only through the scriptures and the inspired guidance of great spiritual masters. It is of these *dharmas* that we have spoken in the foregoing pages; because it is these *dharmas* that we want more than anything else today.

Let those so-called backward nations who lack in material wealth and physical amenities strive to specialise in science. But as a whole, this poor earth, this habitation of intelligent, aspiring and erring human beings has had enough of it. Drunken with our progress in worldly prosperity we are heading on towards an irretrievable blunder. In fact as the eminent sociologist Dr. Pitirim Sorokin of Harvard has pointed out, whenever there was increase in worldly prosperity in human history there has been a corresponding intensity of hatred and strife between man and man and nation and nation, leading to large-scale destruction and untold sufferings. We may say this is not due to any inherent fault of prosperity. It is just that while in possession of it or while engaged heart and soul in acquiring it through worldly *dharmas* or scientific development, man easily overlooks and even forsakes and condemns the godly *dharmas*. Whenever this has happened, whether in prosperity or impoverishment, in a state of scientific progress or backwardness, there have been wars and

conflicts and disturbance of world-peace.

Hinduism goes deeper into the analysis and lays down that the world is of such a nature it can never yield lasting peace or perfect happiness by any means. Whether communism or altruism, we have to realise that it is an 'ism' and can provide only momentary solutions; when times change, fresh problems come and life shows itself again in its pitiful rags. In its natural state water is cold. It may get heated by effort or some accidental means, but is bound to cool down when left to itself. Similarly the nature of world is असुखं दुःखालयम्, joyless, the temple of sorrow, as the Gita says, and it is bound to assert itself in spite of all our efforts. There is no real use trying to fight against or avoid this fact just because we do not like it. All conceptions of an Utopia which promises permanent welfare, security and goodness are magnificent dreams and go to make fine literature, nothing more. Hinduism tried to impress this point deeply through its own version of the Utopia, the lives of its great incarnations of Godhood.

When we study the life of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna as found in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata* and other *puranas*, we get the true picture of the life-glorious, the ideal according to the scriptures. Yet this picture is painted with a liberal colouring of human sorrow, loss and disappointment. Rama in early boyhood developed dispassion towards the world and could not enjoy the princely life. Vasishta through his teachings

imparted peace to him and sent him to the forests to protect the *yajna* of Viswamitra from the attacks of powerful *asuras*. On his way back in that early age he got married. When he was a full grown youth and about to be crowned as King he was deprived of all that one considers dear in life and forced to retire to the forests. At the end of his fourteen years of hermit life his wife Sita was kidnapped by Ravana. Writhing in the agony of her separation Rama had to search all the forests for her, make the friendship of beasts, use political devices to gain support, execute the colossal task of building a bridge across the sea, march over to Lanka and in a bloody battle kill Ravana and regain Sita. After his return to Ayodhya and his enthronement he had a brief period of joy only to be rudely disrupted by the necessity of acquiescing to public accusations against Sita and sending her again to the forest, this time alone and in shameful banishment. The rest of the years are one stretch of solitary, cheerless sustaining of royal duties, culminating in the sentencing of his dear brother Lakshmana to death and himself entering the waters of Sarayu in order to shake off the mortal coil.

Let us turn to the life of Sri Krishna. It is more strikingly complete in its representation of human life. At the very outset he is born within the walls of a prison, in the very jaws of death, from which he is hurriedly transported in the dead of night to a safer place. Born a prince he is brought up as a cowherd in the coarse conditions of a peasant village. His boyhood is replete with

attacks by *asuric* agencies of the evil Kamsa bent on killing the child who has been prophesied as his death. At the tender age of eleven Krishna with his elder brother sets out of his foster-home and presents himself in Kamsa's court, successfully overcomes the traps laid out for him and finally in a gruesome combat kills Kamsa, his own uncle. Krishna's parents are released from prison and the father of Kamsa installed on the throne. The ensuing years are spent in constant strife trying to quell the revolts and conspiracies of Kamsa's friends. At last, disturbed and overwhelmed by Jarasandha's repeated attacks, Krishna flees to Dwarka and builds a city in the seas. His life as a married man is a stern account of disciplines and duties and very many bereavements and unpleasant issues, in one of which Krishna labours hard to vindicate himself against the charge of stealing a very precious divine jewel lost by a courtier. Meanwhile the Kaurava-Pandava spite blazes into a vital conflict and Krishna is called on countless occasions for helping the Pandavas during their exile. In the end Krishna goes to Duryodhana as their ambassador and is ill-treated by him. War becomes inevitable. Like the true lover and magnanimous man he is, Krishna agrees to be Arjuna's charioteer and face the wrath of the enemy without himself lifting any arms. But he is forced to break this promise too at a critical stage of the battle when Arjuna's life is at stake. Out of the bloody war emerges victory to the Pandavas as also an aftermath of gloom and depression. Krishna, in his declining

years, is rewarded with the privilege to witness the Yadavas fight amongst each other in a drunken bout and perish. In order to protect his brother he is forced to take up arms and perfect the total extinguishment of his own clan. As a fitting climax to this he wanders alone into the jungle and is shot by a mistaken hunter.

Even a glance at the above report is sufficient to reveal the obvious fact that Hinduism does not consider the elimination of strife and sorrows in life as the ideal state; for the simple reason that it is unnatural and impossible. The divinity of Rama or Krishna, or for that matter any individual, is not guaranteed by the power and prosperity he amassed, the comforts he could get out of life; to the contrary it consists in how he faced and bore the inequities of life, how he passed dignified, accomplished, undisturbed and unscathed through all that is common with us, completely transcending them. He is divine in the standards of godly *dharma* he set up, divine in the supreme realisations of the Truth he expressed in his lofty teachings. For, what is divinity but the apex of human culture and achievement. It is not the singularity of someone sitting in the seventh heaven. If that were so then human life would have become a supreme tragedy and all those who will not allow any fond illusions about life but wish to see it as it is, will be forced to become cynics. For, as we have seen, sorrow in truth is an inseparable part of life. It is the nature of material world and hence it can be transcended only in the spiritual. All efforts of man towards prosperity, all development of

his culture has its meaning and end in this. If science or material prosperity helps one to remove the obstacles to this development then it is a blessing, instead if it tries to oppose, push back or usurp the place of spiritual culture then it is the most terrible fetter and a curse. It does not mean we are against all efforts to improve the material lot of man. The efforts will be there whether we preach for or against it. Our sheer necessities will goad us towards research and exploitation of natural resources, and even as an enterprise the conquest of external nature and utilisation of its energies to our convenience is a grand thing; only we should remember that it is not the end, the all, the final cure for sorrows. Medical advancement with its brilliant discoveries can and does free us from old diseases and lengthen the span of our life but these very new medicines create fresh troubles, and the extra span of life is frittered away in seeking new escapes, in suffering stranger conflicts and unheard of catastrophes. Hence through the vicissitudes of man's fortune whether prosperity comes or goes, the spiritual effort is always to be maintained, because that alone is the harbour, the source of our strength to bear the inevitable handicaps of life. In fact it is the alchemy to transform these very handicaps and failures into burnishers that bring out the sterling worth in man. As some wise man told of one who was in suffering yet giving himself up to do good, "He has been given the rare privilege of receiving the mark of pain". This can be told only of such noble persons, not of all those hundreds who bear their

pains in humiliation, hunger and silent revolt. Pain or suffering by itself is degrading and undesirable; it is the cultured man who converts this into a golden armour. This needs individual striving through the godly *dharmas*.

Dr. Pitirim A. Sorokin in his '*Reconstruction of Humanity*' chooses the individual as the starting point of the transformation of society. He says: "Without hypocrisy or self-deceit every individual as such can begin to work upon himself, developing his creativeness and altruism, increasing the control of his superconscious over the conscious and unconscious regions of his personality." Bertrand Russell speaking on the possibility of averting a world catastrophe and destruction of our culture through atomic war has also voiced the same opinion in these words: "We can, if we choose, destroy the human race. We can, on the other hand, create a happy prosperous, civilised and peaceful human family, embracing all nations, all colours and all creeds. Which we shall do depends upon collective passions and collective passions are the sum of individual passions. Each one of us, if he allows himself to be dominated by hatred, envy, pride of superiority or the pursuit of safety by means of large-scale murder, is contributing his quota towards universal disaster. Each one of us, if he is inspired to action by hope and tolerance and the realisation that strife is as foolish as it is wicked, is doing what lies within his power to bring about an earthly paradise." This inspiration to the individual, we claim, can obviously come only

from an accepted ideal of self-transcending godly living. For it is clear that the qualifications required of the reformed and reformist individual according to the modern thinkers quoted above are the sheer values of the *dharmā* we have been talking about. Whatever may be the modern approach and taste, in whatsoever ‘ism’ we may clothe our ideas, the system under which we want every individual to work and train himself and others must contain in itself these values of *dharmā*. Nothing more, no organisation, no regulations, no platform-preaching, pamphleteering, political tactics or technological manoeuvring is necessary. If *dharmā* is achieved it is capable of yielding, independent of any other factor, the highest good of the individual as well as of the universe. For, *dharmā* in truth is *the Truth*, the God, the absolute Good. This is the secret behind God’s government.

In our recitations of *sahasranamas* (thousand names of God) we take *dharmā* too as one of His names. Rama and Krishna are spoken of as धर्मविग्रहः, the embodiment of *dharmā*. In the *Mahabharata* we find Bhishma praying:

यं पृथग्धर्मचरणाः पृथग्धर्मफलैषिणः ।

पृथग्धर्मैः समर्चन्ति तस्मै धर्मात्मने नमः ॥

“People who are desirous of the varied fruits of *dharmas* worship Him through the varied *dharmas* by following them with faith and devotion. That Lord who is of the form of *dharmā*, to him my salutations.” Here we find God spoken of as nondifferent

from *dharma*. He did not create or lay down the rules of *dharma* as a king or council lays down the rules. Where the ruler is different from the rules he can in emergency or according to his fancy overrule them. But since God himself has become the *dharma* he can never violate Himself. So when He is supposed to sanction the fruits of actions to creatures, He is not doing it as a manager distributing wages to labourers, but God gives out of Himself. Thus grace of God and effort of the individual become one, God's restricting Himself to *dharma* is reconciled with His absolute independence. The same holds good for man too if he has to rise to Godhood and establish God's kingdom here. Man has to be स्वतन्त्र, not स्वच्छन्द. 'स्वतन्त्र' (*swatantra*) means self-rule, restraining oneself by oneself, and the word is used loosely for independence or liberty as we understand today. 'स्वच्छन्द' (*swacchanda*) stands for self-desire, the ability to do as one desires. The former is the godly attribute while the latter represents the ungodly, slavish human aspect. Because desire always denotes a lack, something unachieved. If we aspire always to be led by our desires then we must be eternally wedded to unfulfilment, be ever slaves to the dictates of the mind. It is by overcoming desires and subjecting ourselves to *dharma*, our true inner nature, that we become *swatantra*, the rulers, the independent. We become like unto God. The way itself is the goal when the last step has been taken; the song itself is the silence when the last note has been sung. And when we ourselves

become the *dharma*, then the practice ceases, effort falls, perfection becomes ours once for all.

Therefore if it appears odd to anyone that ‘a concept of life’ should exhaust itself in these items of *Jivana-yajna* and if after reading it anyone should look expectantly for more, we can only answer after the fashion of Angelus Silesus :

*“Friend, let this be enough. If thou wouldst go on reading,
Go and thyself become the writing and the meaning.”*



APPENDIX

Thought Patterns

[Aids to orienting the internal perspective so as to be favourable to and prepared for *Jivana-Yajna*. Pick out one or more of these patterns and apply it to the mind in beginning and close of day and at constant intervals. The group of patterns presented here is just an indication; similar examples may be gathered from other sources. But it is necessary to stick to one thought for considerable period in order to take it deep into the consciousness.]

Dawn

I worship the beautiful dawn, because it is the beginning of day and brings to my mind the Beginning of all things.

All things under experience have an origin. This entire creation, like some mighty tree, has sprouted out of a single seed; and my life is but a fruit of this mighty tree. Each dawn implants its kiss of light on me, and I grow brighter. Each moment I suck the sap of life sprung from the Originator, and I grow richer, sweeter.

Beautiful dawn! Who paints the heavens with tints of delicate hues, even so may you fill my life with wisdom and virtue; for, I am the fruit of life and will be the pride of my Originator, the most acceptable offering to him.

The River Of Life (i)

Life, you are my companion, for good or bad. I cannot do without you, I have none else. I have stood on your banks through all eternity and worshipped you alone. I know not what God is. I am too poor to go in search of him. But I know he has sent you to me and you are to be my all.

I dare not hope to touch the eternal snows of Himalayas; but I find the same impeccable white has melted and is flowing down in a thousand streams to meet me!

The substance is the same, only the form is changing. God, the unmoving source, is ever manifesting, ever giving himself away as constant motion, which is life.

In receiving you with reverence and keeping you well, I entertain God himself.

The River Of Life (ii)

So, dear Life, who art ever cutting down the banks of time and bringing to us the treasures we need, may it be so willed :

That I harm not anyone, not even the crawling ant or wayside flower; for you are worshipped in that too –

That I learn to be pleased with whatever you have brought, and not aspire to extract more through ways that are untrue, tiresome and unbecoming –

That I strive to make fit channels for you to flow into fields far and below, awakening the latent wealth of golden harvests, for, I alone am enriched and fulfilled in the richness and talents of my fellow-men –

That I may not, even in humility, prize myself higher than the others – since you are not accessible to such unnatural heights –

And, lastly, that I may not so distract myself as to forget to listen to you, to the swelling song of your ceaseless flow, singing day and night of the silence that rules the heart of the Snow-Peaks.

Cocoon

Like the worm in the cocoon you are busy weaving your own world around – your earnings, collections, contacts, passions and procreations – a hundred silken threads.

This world of yours is warm and cosy; and will protect you until you wake up to your supreme destiny, grow a pair of delicate wings and flutter into the limitless sky.

If you fail in this, if you are lured by the shining, silken nest, and refuse to cut through and come out, then you will be held in eternal captivity and die there, an insignificant worm.

Take care, therefore, O man! Each time you spin a thread round yourself, know it clearly that one day you shall break through it; and when the cocoon is complete, say to yourself, “This is meant for release, not to hold. Here I shall grow my wings, culture my spirit and understanding”; and when the time is come, when the Infinite calls you be ready to go forthwith into the radiance, into the vaster cocoon of the Everlasting Sky.

Death

Life feeds on death and death on life – as day issues the night and night the day. In the stream of existence that is the greater Life, these two are the recurring ports of call; when you are at one, refresh and equip yourself sufficiently to reach the latter.

All things are the forms of death – for they must by their nature change and die. When you see a flower, a sweet face smiling in beauty, know it is but preparing to fade, to be stained with sorrows' tears and finally fall off, be forgotten. When you greet the fresh and fragrant dawn, know it is a footstep of time wending its way to the corridor of death.

In bold letters write “I Must Quit” and nail it to the doors of your mind; you will not then be enamoured or led into error in life.

Keep death always in front, it is your shield against temptation.

Triple Carriage

Thought, word and deed – are the carriages that take us to meet the world. Deeds are confined to the small group around, words reach up to a wider circle, while through thoughts we envelop the entire creation.

Let us be, then, very particular of thought, and give not to ourselves the liberty to think what we list, but only what we must. Thought forms into words and flowers into deeds. If thought be always pure and helpful then by speaking and acting also we may not lose ourselves, or afflict others.

Let us hold ourselves back inwardly whenever we wish to speak or act, and then pick up and peer at the thought prompting from behind. Let us have the sincerity to judge the thought correctly, and the strength to deny it expression if found unfit.

Wary in thoughts, sparing in words and pure in deeds - thus may we carry ourselves in dignity and peace, when we go to meet the world of fellow-beings.

Tasting The Divine Essence

Teach me the secret of joy – thirsting for which all beings are fired to action; they proceed towards it, dizzy about and fall missing the aim. Tell me the secret place where joy lies hidden from all.

‘Joy is that which pulsates in the Creator, impelling Him to create. Joy is that through which God has poured Himself into all that He created. The sky, the waters, the landscape, the flowers and foliage, birds and beasts – from the cricket chirping lustily in the thicket to the saint merged in his mystic vision – all have inherited and enclose that divine essence of joy at heart.’

Teach me then the wisdom which wanders not hither and thither, picking up fallen crumbs and looking to others’ faces, like beggars in the street. Tell me how to taste this essence hidden in the heart of things.

‘The world is a mirror flaunting the image of joy’s flower. Like bees buzzing uselessly round the reflection, do not strive to find the essence in the world – no, not even in the mind. Dive deep into your own being – and to the depths where none else watches or is watched; for the joy of each is one’s own being, not in an other, nor another.

May all your going out end in this return to yourself – and may that return have its reward in contacting the perennial stream within’.

Dedication

I dedicate myself to Thee, my Lord, who art the lone object of love – all else are but shadows of a fitful lightning.

I dedicate myself to Thee a hundred times a day. In all my strivings shall I seek to pay my tribute to Thee and Thee alone. Who else is there, what else to gain from them? Joys and sorrows are alike in that they bring Thee to me.

I dedicate myself entirely, my Lord, as a full blown flower unto the fast receding day. What have I even to strive for? Just be, and every minute of existence my fragrance will rise by itself like a prayer and enclose Thee.

A Boon To Ask (i)

I know thou art the monarch of all the worlds, the store of infinite knowledge and power; but when I come to beg of thee I do not know what to ask for.

Eternal youth, endless wealth – I want not either. Give that which will never die nor diminish. Give me the knowledge of thine own Being.

Dazzling visions of thy divine glory – I will not know how to receive them, what to do with them. Pray, give me the vision of thyself in all things I perceive, high and low, sentient and insentient.

Fain would I become the diadem on thy crown, a pole-star shining above the worlds, a great power governing the four quarters. I only wish thou wouldst make me a pen in between thy fingers ; so that the world may read in my most insignificant works nothing but the terms of thy divine will.

A Boon To Ask (ii)

*Thou art the Light of lights, lighting heaven and earth,
mind and matter. Do thou enlighten my heart.*

*Thou art the strength of the strongest, give me the
strength always to stand by thee.*

*Thou art the pure of the purest, give me purity in all
emotions.*

*Thou art the joy of the joyous, teach me the gladness of
self-contented children.*

Thou art the holy of holies, fill me with holiness.

*Thou art the peace of the perfected seers and saints,
give me the peace of self-effacement.*

Worship

I worship my God, the Truth, enshrined in the secret chamber of my heart.

With the waters of faith I daily wash him and weave garlands of pure thoughts for his decoration. All the fruits of my actions I offer unto him –

And this is how I worship the Lord of all worlds; I know no ritual nor sacred formula. Like a bee to the honeyed lotus, I centre around and sing to the essence of life that lies in the depths of my being.

Sacrifice (i)

There is fire in the heart of wood. It bursts out in long, licking flames, eager to consume its own origin.

The churner is the priest, fuel the oblation; blinding is the smoke and radiance the offspring of sacrifice.

There is fire in the heart of heavens. It strikes forth in the lashing of lightning.

Sky is the priest, darkness the oblation; cloud is the smoke and rain the offspring of sacrifice.

There is fire in the heart of being. It manifests in acts of self-effacing love.

Self is the priest, life the oblation; pain is the smoke and perfection the offspring of sacrifice.

Sacrifice (ii)

If you must speak, speak without hurting, speak what is becoming of you. Sacrifice all excess words in the fire of silence.

If you must be silent, let your silence register your discourse with yourself or let it gently cover the wounds of other's insults. Sacrifice all excessive silent broodings in the fire of cheerful words.

If you must act, act to benefit yourself and others, without breathless haste, without over-zealousness. Sacrifice all aimless activity in the fire of imposed quietness.

If you must be quiet, let that be a tether binding you away from hurting others or let it relax your body for a while. Sacrifice all excess inertia in the fire of loving service.

If you must possess and enjoy, possess that which is useful and enjoy that which elevates. Sacrifice all excessive hoardings in the fire of giving-away.

If you must give, let that giving be bereft of self-glory and show; let it go out naturally, relieving you as well as the one who receives. Sacrifice all excessive expenditure in the fire of non-possession.

I Am

You are the most inviolable Truth whom the religions worship as God. You are the Truth, because you are the only unchanging, deathless.

From this very body of mine to the farthest star, all things change, disintegrate and die – pass into oblivion. But there is the something which observes all this, something which gives a basis, a reality to this very change. That is existence and that's you.

You are the beginningless, endless, one continuous principle of existence.

Like waves on the ocean, beings appear and merge upon your surface. You are behind each one of them, in them, and encompassing them. I too exist and hence hold you within me – for ever. Because nothing can extinguish me, separate me, from you, my existence. I am. I is you.

You are the eternal rock of existence. Here I take my stand upon you and behold the currents of life come, eddy about and pass – leaving me untouched.

Meditations

I meditate on the supreme as the being of space.

All things are held in space. Billions upon billions of galaxies emerge out and expand and are losing themselves into limitless space. That very space is within the secret chamber of my heart wherein are contained greater universes of thought, more powerful and subtle.

Space encloses me from without and within, it permeates me to the core; every moment of my life I am aware of its intimate embrace; and I become one with its nature which remains untouched, undefiled and unlimited as ever –

That is why I worship as the Supreme, the infinite, the pure.

* * *

I meditate on the Supreme as the Light of lights.

Light is all-pervading, nothing is bereft of it, not even the uttermost darkness, for then we would not see it.

As life-fire it pervades all bodies, even those in the fathomless seas and bowels of earth. The dust of light spreads and settles upon the most distant planet or star. It comes back reflected as a ray and enters the pupils of the perceiving eyes.

Light is within. As there are suns and stars in heaven so are there illuminators in the heart of each being, that reveal each thought, the faintest of memories. And when there is no vision, no thought, no memory, no movement at all, in the depths of being there arises a terrible light which swallows all other illuminations and the very limitations of becoming, a light that flashes once and remains for ever unquenched.

Light immerses me from within and without, purifies me with its radiance –

That is why I worship light as the Supreme, the deathless, the all-revealing.

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I meditate on the Supreme as the Spirit of silence.

Silence was there in the womb of creation and silence sits on the waters of dissolution. When the worlds of creation come tumbling down in a stream of multiplicity, there is amongst their mad whirling an unheard note of silence that keeps each planet apart, fixed to its chartered course.

Out of silence all things come out, in silence they are held and unto silence they all go back.

Sweet is the silence that precedes the hour of dawn. When birds sing, and winds send ripples of laughter through the lakes, it is but a tribute to that virgin silence. When men awaken and hurry to their respective functions, it is but a preparation to worship silence in the lull of noontide.

Profound is the silence that pervades the time of dusk. It is eloquent in the wings of cranes flying back to their nests, in the clouds of dust raised by cattle returning from the graze, in the low voices of women hushing the dreams of children asleep.

And when the hour of mid-night comes, unseen, unannounced, it stands dumbfounded in the court where silence reigns supreme, in its naked purity, blinding all souls with its unsullied radiance.

There is silence in the universe, silence in the individual. Silence in life, and silence in death. Silence remains for ever and everywhere. In the busiest hour of my day I can approach it by just the closing of the eyelids, a slight turning in of the mind. And there am I enriched with the deathless treasures of my pure being –

That is why I worship silence as the Supreme, the alpha and omega, the ever-present and accessible, the refuge, the temple of sweetness, OM – ॐ



