

SPIRITUAL PRECEPTS

of

Swami Brahmananda (1862-1922)

Direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna

First President of the Ramakrishna Order

Compiled by Sri P Seshadri Iyer of Haripad (Kerala), who was the Curator of Libraries, Tranvancore and Cochln states He was a disclple of Swami Brahmananda. He was a linguist and played a major role In the translation of Ramaknshna-Vlvekananda literature into Malayalam and Its spread In Kerala This collection of spiritual precepts has been made available to The Vedanta Kesan (October 1999) by Prof N S Vasudev Rao of Mumbai.

True Faith

The first stage of spiritual life is faith in God or the intense desire to know one's real nature. The primary step in sadhana is to devote one's heart and soul to the task of finding out the basic principle underlying this universe. Whence came this universe? What is its cause? Human birth is for the purpose of solving this problem. Having got a human birth, he who does not strive for Self-knowledge, being immersed in transient pleasures, is born in vain. He alone has realized the purpose of human birth who knows his true nature, by conquering the animal tendencies. The majority of mankind remains immersed in the mad pursuit of sensual pleasures. Only a very few care to know about God. It would be enough if there be one such in a million. Many indeed make a display of religion by conducting elaborate worship and going round various places of pilgrimage. But there is hardly one among them who earnestly desires to know anything of true spirituality. Only that man who feels an inner urge to know the truths of religion and eagerly hankers after Self-knowledge has set his foot on the path of sadhana. The rest only talk of religion. The real desire for spirituality has not yet dawned on their minds. Their religious ob-

servances are a mere show, an outward façade.

It is very difficult to get true faith in God. How few are those who have such faith! We cannot have true faith in God by hearing from others or reading the scriptures. It is the pure heart that can have true faith in God. It is a matter of direct realization and cannot come about by mere intellectual reasoning or discussion. We must at least feel in our soul the existence of God; then only can real faith in God dawn. Faith and devotion are internal matters. No one can put faith into you, unless your mind and heart are pure. Unless you are born with good samskaras, you cannot get true faith and devotion.

What is the use of crying aloud, 'O Hari, O Hari, O God, O God' and making a fuss? You should feel God in your heart of hearts and then only will you get true faith in His existence. Ego, vanity, desire for sensual pleasures and such dirt and refuse are piled up in the mind. Then, how can it turn godward? You cannot realize God through hypocrisy. The observance of popular customs and manners is of no avail in the matter of the realization of God. Try your utmost so that your mind may incessantly think of God. The essential thing in sadhana is to be immersed in the love, thought and contemplation of God. Instead of doing so, if you merely confine yourself to the observance of certain meaningless customs, you can never realize God or advance in the path of spirituality.

Real faith and devotion will dawn only when man realizes that God alone is true. Get the actual vision of God, and then only will you have the conviction that He is. Unless you have the direct experience, faith and devotion will not be lasting and permanent. To believe in God because sages and saints have said so is one thing, and to believe in Him after direct perception as a result of your sadhana is quite another thing. So many are performing japa, sandhya etc. But are they really serious? They have not the least sincerity to realize God. Blind impulse or momentary emotion cannot make for self-restraint

or faith in God.

Early Stages

In the beginning, the mind will not remain steady in the contemplation of the Ishta Devata (Chosen Deity). Various idle thoughts will make the mind stray from that contemplation. You need not be worried about it. However unsteady the mind may be, do not give up your meditation. Try to fix the mind on the Ishta Devata, force it to return and stay in that contemplation. By such continuous and repeated struggles, you will find at last that the mind has become steady. You have to continue the practice for days and months. If you are sincere and up and doing in your practice it will not take long to make the mind steadfast in the contemplation of the Ishta Devata.

If in the early stages of japa, the mind is restless, open your eyes and do the japa looking at the Ishta Devata in front of you. Fix your eyes on that picture and pour forth your prayers and hymns. In this way, your mind will slowly become steady. Then, begin your japa. If you perform japa in this manner, you will find that the mind does not remain as unsteady as before. After that you can try to practise japa closing your eyes. Then, you will not find it so difficult. If you continue thus for five or six months, you will find that japa has more or less become natural.

Do not perform japa and dhyana in the company of any and every person. If you do so along with those whose minds are impure and unsteady, your sadhana will suffer, because the impure waves arising from their minds will stand in the way of your concentration. It is very difficult to get a real companion after your heart in the path of sadhana. If you do japa and dhyana with persons who have only vain and idle thoughts, your mind will not get the least concentration; also, various evil thoughts will force themselves on your mind. Hence, it is best to go to a secluded place and do your sadhana in solitude.

Japa and Meditation

You should daily devote some time in the morning and in the evening for your sadhana. Then only can you have any real progress. Regular practice will fructify in due time. If you get up two hours before daybreak and perform your japa, there will be little difficulty in concentrating the mind. A breeze of purity blows at that time. Devote two hours both in the morning and in the evening for japa. If you cannot do so in this period of your youth, when will you be able to do it? After the age of thirty, one's power to do sadhana will decline. Do everything you want to accomplish before that. Otherwise, you will have to return empty-handed.

At the time of japa, you have first to get a perfect mental picture of your Ishta Devata. It would not do to merely repeat the mantra. You should meditate on the meaning and also fix your mind on the Ishta Devata. In the beginning, the mind would not remain steady in the contemplation of the Ishta Devata; so some easy means should be taken up to steady the mind. For example, you may think that the Ishta Devata, all-luminous, is graciously looking at you and hearing your prayers. Think that the Ishta Devata is very close to you. Always think that the Ishta Devata is with you at all times and is listening to all that you say. If such a thought is strongly cultivated, you will not find it very difficult to make the mind steady and concentrated. Whenever you get any spare time, during the day, devote it to the thought of your Ishta Devata. It is essential to remember and think of the Ishta Devata constantly. That will help very much to steady the mind during japa and dhyana.

You must meditate on the Ishta Devata in your heart. Think that the all-luminous Ishta Devata is seated in the lotus of your heart. If it is difficult to think of the whole form, try at first to see the face. Those who find it difficult to do even this can think of some divine lila (play) of the Lord and in time, their minds will become steady. By thinking of the lila of one's Ishta Devata, the mind can be steadied at the time of japa. For instance, if Sri Krishna is the Ishta Devata, you can think of His slaying of Kamsa or His imparting the Gita to Arjuna. If you do

so, you will find that in a short time, the mind becomes steady and concentrated and quiet.

Be careful so that idle thoughts may not disturb the mind at any time and lead it away from the Ishta Devata. Whenever any such thought arises, think at once of the form of your Ishta Devata and remember Him. Thus drive out the bad thoughts then and there. By such regular practice, a good habit will be formed. Then even a little effort will make the mind concentrated on the Ishta Devata. If one has real yearning and earnestness, such a good samskara (tendency) can be formed in the course of four or five years. If this tendency is made a little deeper, you will get nishtha (steadfastness) in the Ishta Devata.

Yoga

If you wish to do regulated sadhana, you must take to Yoga. How few, however, are those who are really competent to perform Yoga! The body and the mind of the man who is competent for that will be of a different mould altogether. To get such a body and mind is the effect of the merits done in many lives. Can all and sundry stand the strain of meditating in the same posture for eight or ten hours continuously? That will put a tremendous strain on the nerves and the brain. Is it a joke to steady the mind perfectly? The person fit for Yoga practice should have no craving for sensual pleasures, must be able to bear heat and cold, must have his brain cool, clear and calm, should have a strong, wiry body, and must observe restraint in his food, sleep and talk. It is not proper for weaknerved, emotional and unbalanced people to practise Raja Yoga. It is very dangerous for weaklings to take to the practice of Raja Yoga. They will become mad or will fall victims to some fatal disease by which they may suffer a premature death. So, I do not ordinarily speak to anyone about the practice of Raja Yoga. Generally I teach the process of japa, prayer, and dhyana.

First, let the mind be steadied; then, you can do dhyana. Can the mind become steady by a few months' practice? Be up and doing for several years and then you will be able to control

the mind. There should be strict restraint in eating, sleeping and talking. Without cultivating discrimination and restraint, the mind will not become pure. Without getting purity of mind, how can one meditate? The evil tendencies of many births are stored up in the mind. So, the mind is unsteady and restless. By constant discrimination and patient reflection, the mind attains purity. If the whole day is spent in idle gossip and aimless roaming about, how can the mind become steady? At the time of meditation, the impressions of these idle thoughts will disturb the mind. The mind is restless to start with. If you waste your time in idle gossip, the mind will become all the more restless and unsteady. Unless you cultivate the practice of being in solitude, your meditation will be useless like pouring ghee into ashes.

Pranayama

It is not proper for any and everyone to practise pranayama. It can be practised only by one of strong body, controlled mind and very strong heart. Even if all these conditions be fulfilled, it is not good to practise pranayama by oneself. One should practise Raja Yoga after receiving initiation from a perfected Guru and under his guidance, following his injunctions strictly. It would be good to do pranayama in the presence of the Guru, since he can set it right if there be any mistake or defect. The meaning of pranayama is to bring the prana under one's control. Many come to grief by the practice of pranayama by themselves without proper instructions and guidance of the Guru. They are very dangerous practices. Only those who are very advanced can practise pranayama properly. Moreover, it should be practised in a place where the climate is very healthy. Also, one should take nutritious food like milk, butter, fruits etc. This is not practicable for many in this poverty-stricken country. To practise Raja Yoga living on rice and vegetables injures the lungs. One easily falls a prey to asthma and even phtysis. Do not practise in a stinking place. There is a spiritual atmosphere in Kashi, Hardwar, Puri, Bhuvaneshwar and other places. Also, there are many solitary spots there, fit for the practice of sadhana. If you practise in such spots, the

mind will become steady and you will feel greater joy in performing sadhana.

The object is to steady the mind in any manner whatsoever. It is not necessary for that to practise pranayama. If there be real yearning and the mind be pure, there is nothing else necessary to get to the state of meditation. Pranayama is not your goal; it is only one among the many means of sadhana. The only thing needed is to fix the mind in the contemplation of the Ishta Devata. If you have sincerity and inner purity, the mind will become concentrated.

In the beginning of sadhana, the mind will be restless. Why should you become disheartened on that account? What is there that cannot be accomplished by exertion? That mind which is now unsteady and restless will, by regular practice, become eager to meditate. Why should you be afraid on account of the mind being restless now? Have faith in yourself. Open your heart to the Lord and pray to Him. Collect all the powers of your mind and exert your very best. If there be real desire to realize God, all those obstructions will disappear. The Lord himself will certainly provide the means for one who earnestly calls on Him. If you have real yearning for the Lord, all such obstructions will leave you for good. Merely exert yourself to place your whole mind in God.

The Place of Sadhana

Take care that there be no idle talk in the place where you practise your sadhana. The atmosphere of that place where there is vain talk, idle criticism and abuse of others, becomes contaminated. All sorts of evil thoughts will float in that atmosphere. It is best to do sadhana in solitude. It would be very good to have a room set apart for sadhana. It is not proper to keep bedding, clothes, furniture etc., in that room. Keep only the asana, religious books, prayer books etc., there. Fill the room with fragrance by lighting incense both in the morning and the evening. Whenever you enter the room, meditate on the Ishta Devata, repeat uplifting hymns etc. Have no other thoughts. Do not allow anyone to enter that place. If you main-

tain the room like this for a year, the atmosphere of the place will be totally changed. Then, the thought of God will arise in your mind and you will have a natural tendency to meditate by merely entering that room. If worship, sacred recitations, meditation, singing of hymns etc., are continuously done in one and the same place for many years, holy thoughts will fill the place. Such a sacred atmosphere will be all the more tangible and permanent in a spot where saints have spent their lives. Why is it that we naturally feel spiritual exaltation in places of pilgrimage? Because many holy saints, sages and yogis have dwelt there. The power of their spiritual austerities pervades the place and keeps it pure.

Can anything be accomplished in a day? After practising for a few months, you want to know why you have not made any progress. Evil impressions are lying in your mind. If good thoughts prevail, the pull of the evil impressions will decrease gradually. You are now in despair because the mind is so restless. After a time, good thoughts would grow so much that the mind would not like to hold on to anything other than meditation. Be up and doing now. In time, you will find that everything becomes clear from the inside. If you exert yourself properly for four or five years, you will get God-realization. Everything depends on the intensity and sincerity of your spiritual feelings. The competent and worthy adhkari will get samadhi as soon as he is initiated by the Siddha Guru. This is no fancy. I speak from actual experience.

The Experience of the Divine

He who has really tasted the bliss of meditation will not hanker after name and fame. It is because they have not experienced the inner bliss that many sadhus run after money, name and fame. One who has tasted the bliss of God will not desire anything else. Would anyone who has experienced divine bliss, getting which nothing else remains to be sought, besides which all is vanity of vanities, find any pleasure in mere rubbish? If you once get to the state of meditation, you will not at all like to mix with all and sundry. Will the fish of the sea turn

its attention to the slimy pool abounding in weeds?

At the time of meditation all other thoughts except one will vanish from the mind. The thought that persists will be the thought of God, the thought of one's real nature. At the time of proper meditation, one would forget the external world. He will have no thought of himself. He will forget where his body is. Only the thought of God will prevail. Then there will be only the experience of infinite bliss. Even an infinitesimal part of that bliss cannot be found in this world. That state cannot be expressed in words. He alone can understand it who has reached that state. Others cannot understand it. If you attain to it, the habit of God-intoxication would grow in you. You would desire to abide in that state at all times.

By being immersed in that state, the mind will go beyond the realm of the senses. Then this mind will no longer remain as it is now. All its normal functions will stop. It will become wholly pure. Only one single thought will prevail therein, the thought of God, one's real nature. Then the internal realm will reveal itself. In this state, one gets the vision and when that becomes deep, God is seen face to face. The jiva merges in the Ishwara and samadhi is experienced. There is a state even higher than this. In that state, there is no being or knowing. There will then be no difference between the jiva and Brahman. The sadhaka realizes the One without a second. Nothing else exists. That is the real samadhi when the jiva becomes identical with Brahman. This is called the Realization of the Self.

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