

Some Guidelines to Inner Life

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*This book is dedicated
with profound reverence and deep humility*

to

His Holiness

Srimat Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj

Sixth President of
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Publisher's Note

In 1989 Swami Gokulanda delivered a set of lectures under the title 'Some Guidelines towards the Goal Supreme'. These were later cast into book-form under the same title and published by us in 1991. This is the third edition. But there is another book with the title 'Towards the goal Supreme' by Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order. To avoid a possible confusion because of the similarity between the two titles, we have altered the title of Swami Gokulananda's book to 'Some Guidelines to Inner Life'. Apart from the title nothing else has been changed in the text in this edition. May the book continue to inspire seekers of truth.

Sri Ramakrishna Math
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Foreword

These are days when we come across a plethora of literature that go to entertain but only a few to educate and much fewer to inspire. In this collection of eleven lectures by Swami Gokulananda, one will find a book that will both educate and inspire.

The education it gives is in Para-Vidya, the science of the Spirit. The author calls the subject matter as 'Some Guidelines to Inner Life'. That goal is the attainment of liberation from the hold of the body on our Consciousness, which is called Moksha in our devotional parlance. The 'Guidelines' are the various disciplines that an aspirant must undergo for this attainment.

Many might have treated this subject from a philosophical stance. But philosophy as such is a dry subject for most people. However, if it is expounded in an inspiring manner, it becomes a delicious intellectual and spiritual drink, a veritable sherbat for a spiritual aspirant.

This book comprising Swamiji Gokulananda's eleven lectures is a text that answers to these requirements. It educates and inspires. Most of these lectures are based on quotations from the 'Vivekachudamani' and the 'Bhagavad Gita', both of which exhort aspirants to rise above the body consciousness – the former through the path of Jnana (discriminative wisdom) and the latter through the path of Bhakti (devotion to God and His grace). A special feature of the book is the inclusion in it of the treatment of these subjects by several saints of the West also.

The discourses are also punctuated by quotations from the teachings of Swami Virajanandaji, the Spiritual Teacher of the author, to whom the book is dedicated. His Guru's grace

is what has endowed Swami Gokulananda with the power to impart this inspirational quality to his lectures, the benefit of which was derived till now only by his Delhi audiences, but is now extended to all readers of English everywhere through this book.

Swami Tapasyananda

Ramakrishna Math,
Madras, 20-7-90

Preface

In response to the desire expressed by many devotees and friends, I delivered a series of lectures on 'Some Guidelines Towards the Goal Supreme' during the year 1989. Many of the devotees took notes of these lectures, which were also taped. Subsequently, a number of devotees expressed the desire for these lectures to be brought out in the form of a book to serve not only for reference purposes, but also for the benefit of those who could not attend these lectures. The present book is the result. The style maintained is that of lectures. It has however been considerably modified to make it suit the requirements of a book. I shall feel amply rewarded if this book proves to be of any help to those who genuinely strive to reach the Goal Supreme.

My sincere gratitude goes to Revered Swami Tapasyanandaji Maharaj, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, for his blessings for this humble attempt of mine and also for his kind Foreword to this book, which greatly enhances its value. Also my gratitude to Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, for bringing out this publication.

Last but not least, my sincere gratitude to one and all who have helped me in various ways to bring out this book. It is my sincere prayer that the blessings of the Lord may be on all of them and also on all those who read this book.

Swami Gokulananda

Guru Purnima, July 1990
Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.

1. The Call From Within

There are quite a number of devotees who are initiated disciples of the Ramakrishna Math. They often say: 'We have received Mantra-Diksha, but we don't seem to have made any progress in the spiritual path. Why is it so?' In answer it has to be pointed out first of all that one has to become serious about the goal. For most of us that goal consists in the fulfilment of certain worldly ambitions. Most people desire to become doctors, engineers, administrative officers or business magnates. But the supreme aim, the goal, should be to attain perfection in this very life – to realise our true nature, which is absolute existence, absolute knowledge and absolute bliss. If this is the Goal Supreme of human life, then this goal becomes easy to attain, provided we are fortunate enough to learn the path from a Sad-Guru, a realised soul, who is the visible representative of our chosen ideal or Ishtam.

Now, who really aspires after the Goal Supreme? Only the one who hears the call from within. When Swami Vivekananda met his Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, he sang two songs and the Master was very much pleased. The first line of one of the songs is:

'O mind! go back to your own abode.'

This is not our real abode. Our real abode is elsewhere. That does not mean that our abode is high up in the heavens. It is within us. As Jesus said, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.' As Sri Krishna says to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra in verse 61, chapter 18 of the Bhagavad Gita.

Isvarah sarva-bhutanam
hrd-dese' arjuna tisthati |
bhramayan sarva bhutani
yantr'arudhani mayaya ||

Some Guidelines to Inner Life - Swami Gokulananda

The Lord abides in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them to spin round by His power, as if they were mounted on a machine.

It is within, but if we run after the so-called pleasures of the world, then our life goes in vain. As Jesus said, we have got this human life only to become perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect.

The other song sung by Swami Vivekananda when he met Sri Ramakrishna runs thus:

'Oh Lord! must all my days pass utterly in vain?'

It is only when we are tired of the so-called worldly pleasures, tired of the play-land of illusion, that we want to go back to our real abode, and turn our gaze within. Only then we shall want to withdraw ourselves from all kinds of worldly allurements and attractions. Therefore, only those who have this kind of longing will hunger and thirst for the Eternal and the Infinite. If the question is asked, 'Why should we withdraw our minds from the pleasures of this mundane world? Why not let us seek happiness outside in external objects?' — the answer is, 'Well, one can get some amount of happiness, some amount of pleasure, no doubt, from things which lie outside us; but we are not concerned with temporary happiness.' Abiding peace and lasting happiness are possible only when we realise the Infinite and realise that the Infinite is our real self. So, in self-realisation alone, or in the attainment of the Goal Supreme, lies the real fulfilment of human life. Why is it that we should strive after the Infinite or the Eternal? Who can attain the Goal Supreme? Only those who find in themselves a conflict. There are millions and millions of people throughout the world who do not bother about the higher values of life and are satisfied with the so-called pleasures of this world, who do not believe in the existence

of the other world, who do not believe in the existence of the soul or the Supreme Spirit. For such people there is no conflict obviously.

But if real awakening dawns on any one of us, we cannot but have some kind of inner conflict. If we have no inner conflict, then there is no need for a spiritual quest at all. Only when we try to withdraw our minds from the outside world and practise introspection or, to put it in another way, prefer to become introverts instead of extroverts, that we experience a conflict. For those who are extroverts, there is no conflict whatsoever. There may be some people who claim to be religious. They are, however, so in a superficial sense only. For example, there are those who visit temples and places of pilgrimage. They may also go to the Kumbha Fair and have a dip in the holy confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers. These, however, are just certain obligations which can be described as social religion. We have to make a subtle distinction between such an attitude and the aspiration to attain the Goal Supreme. So those who are after the highest goal cannot but have an inner conflict, while those who follow routine habits of a ritualistic type, may not suffer from any kind of conflict.

Those who are really seized with the problem of reaching the Goal Supreme in this very life do not belong to any ordinary category of men and women. They belong to the category of mystics or persons who want to open themselves to the inner drama. We feel drawn to the highest values of life, to the highest ideal, which is to reach perfection in this life. But at the same time we are subject to the demands of the body. This is the source of the conflict, the tug-of-war, so to say, between the inner call of the spirit and the allurements of the senses. We want to advance steadily towards the Goal Supreme but the allurements of the external world pull us in

the opposite direction. The body refuses to collaborate with the ideals we have in mind. We are torn between these two opposite tendencies. On the one hand we feel a genuine urge to realise God, but on the other hand, such are the temptations surrounding us that we feel there are forces which run counter to us. Therefore, we can safely say that all cannot reach the Goal Supreme and all are not qualified to make the pilgrimage towards the Goal Supreme. We should remember that true spiritual life is possible only for the chosen few. There cannot be any such thing as mass spirituality, for it is not possible for all to be spiritual. It is meant for the chosen few – to those who have the conviction that the goal of life lies in attaining our real nature which transcends the bodily life.

Even though there is a conflict between the spirit and the flesh, we must have also this conviction that, though genuine religious consciousness is meant for the few, we belong to this group – the chosen few. Well, it is meant for the chosen few, but why not think, 'I am also one of the chosen few?' We must have this faith in ourselves, this tremendous confidence; otherwise we lose all interest and become pessimists instead of optimists. We must become robust optimists and have this kind of conviction. We should also remember that very few people really care for the great treasures of spiritual life. There are people who like to waste their human life in sense pleasures only. So those who do not get the inner call are apparently satisfied with the sensual pleasures of the world. If we run after sensual pleasures, then we will be ruined ultimately. In one of the writings of Swami Vivekananda, he did make use of this expression: 'In sense pleasure lies the ruination of man. Not in sense indulgence, but in sense denial lies the key to eternal happiness.' So those fortunate few who listen to the call from within should also be

prepared to pay the price for it. Those who hear the call to make the pilgrimage to the Goal Supreme, must have this inner awakening and awareness, and at the same time, must be prepared to follow the path with dogged tenacity and a tremendous amount of perseverance.

Sankaracharya has pointed out in the 3rd verse of Vivekachudamani that three things are rare attainments in life:

Durlabham trayam ev'aitat
daivanugraha-hetukam |
manusyatvam mumuksutvam
maha-purusa-samsrayah ||

There are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God, namely a human birth, the longing for liberation and the protecting care of a perfect sage.

Human birth is a rare thing. The grace of a true Teacher is rare. So also is the desire to know God or to have the real longing for liberation. But one would like to add something more, which is very important – we must be very serious. Let us assume we have all these. We have got this rare human birth, we have got our Guru's grace, we have learnt the correct technique, and we have the holy company. Even then we may lack something – eagerness to profit by all these three.

We must be ready to undergo any kind of hardship on the way of our pilgrimage towards our Goal Supreme. Now what do we mean by seriousness? If we are really serious about reaching the Goal Supreme, there has to be a parting of the ways. Parting of the ways is inevitable in spiritual life. Sometimes we follow the beaten track – the so-called humdrum, monotonous mundane life, and we are slack in our spiritual efforts. We have the grace of the Guru, we have got the Mantra. We read the Kathamrita or the Gita or the Bible. But all

that is not sufficient. With most of us, spiritual striving stops mid-way. In the beginning, we have some interest and enthusiasm; but later, when we find we have no tangible proof of any spiritual bliss, we lose interest. Our spiritual practice then becomes mechanical. Therein lies a great danger. Our minds are very restless and always outgoing. Naturally, we find it hard to maintain the original fervour as years roll on. That should never happen.

William Wordsworth, in his famous poem *Intimations of Immortality* rightly says, 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.' Another of his poems has a very significant title, 'The world is too much with us.' If the world is too much with us, then it will be very difficult to reach the Goal Supreme in this life. If the world is too much with us, naturally, we become extroverts and we will end this precious human life in the so-called phantom pleasures of the world. So there is a difference between the ordinary people and the genuine spiritual seekers or aspirants. To us, ordinary mortals, this world which we see with naked eyes, the visible and empirical world, is the only world, the real world.

But to a knower of Brahman or to a realised soul or a saint, anything which is visible to the naked eye is unreal. Such great ones reject as unreal, anything which has a form or a name. They know that this is a world of appearances and that the self alone is the reality. To them the inner world, the spiritual world, which lies at the back of the appearances, is the real world. The majority, however, do not care to bother themselves with the inner world. Why is it so? Because we are so sense-bound that this world alone looks real. Therefore, those who want to reach to Goal Supreme in this life should be very, very careful.

Spiritual life is really a life of dedication to the highest. It is a life of consecration and of sacrifice. It is a life of one-

pointedness. For this, a certain amount of divine discontent is necessary. If we are very happy with all the pleasures of the world, then we cannot hope to reach the goal. Sometimes we do get some kicks and blows from the world, and then we are brought to our senses. Therefore, it is said that if we have a certain kind of discontent and an understanding that anything of this world cannot give us real, lasting happiness, we will be able to destroy our attachments to worldly matters.

Now, regarding the parting of the ways, there are two distinct ways – one is the path of Pravritti and the other is the path of Nivritti. The former is the path of the pleasant (Preya) and the latter the path of the good (Sreya-) – the path of enjoyment and the path of renunciation, the path of sense-indulgence and the path of sense-control. The Mundaka Upanishad symbolises the Jivatma and the Paramatma as two birds of similar plumage sitting on the self-same tree of the body. These may also be called the apparent self and the real self, or the lower self and the higher self. So we have to decide once for all which path we are going to choose. Swami Vivekananda, while giving a talk at New York, observed, 'Since death is inevitable, let it go in a noble conquest, and what conquest is nobler than the conquest of the lower man?' Now, unless we are prepared to pay the hard price to achieve mastery of the lower self, the higher self cannot be unfolded and revealed to us. It is hard struggle, but we must be prepared to pay the price for it.

In this connection it may be relevant to refer to the concept of Maya and its two-fold powers, Avarana and Vikshepa. Stangely enough, though Wordsworth was not born in India, in his poem, he has used two words, 'Sleep and forgetting' in the very same sense as this twofold power of Maya. By 'sleep', he means the sleep which makes us uncon-

scious of our divine self, and by 'forgetting' he means forgetfulness of our real, divine nature. Here in the concept of Maya, we find two words, Avarana and Vikshepa. Avarana means concealment of reality – a kind of veil which hides our real self. Vikshepa means distortion of reality as something else in our mind. We are supposed to believe what we are not. These two are the two functions of Avidya or Ajnana, of illusion-producing ignorance. It is because of this Maya that ignorant people are deluded and they see many objects here instead of Brahman, the one without a second. The truth is we are divine. 'Aham Brahma Asmi.' We behave like limited beings, finite beings, (as Jivas), but the truth is we are Brahman - '*Jivo Brahmaiva Naparah*'.

It is because of the Vikshepa Sakti, the projecting power of Maya, that we do not realise our true nature. How can we overcome this two-fold power of Maya known as Avarana and Vikshepa? It is a fact that due to ignorance, we first forget our true nature, which is one of pure consciousness. Secondly, we are supposed to believe and behave like Jivas or finite or limited beings, which we really are not. Is there any way out then? There is, provided we are prepared not to cling to any kind of false attachments. Hence spiritual life, i.e., genuine spiritual life, is meant for the chosen few. It is not meant for the masses.

Now let us come to some other guidelines. As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Let us be honest; let us not be traitors to our thoughts.' Do we really want to reach the Goal? Do we really want realisation? If we really want it, we will be able to reach it. He also said, 'As we think so we become.'

There are examples of this kind of spiritual transformation. Take the case of Valmiki. As a young man he took to highway robbery to support his family which consisted of his mother, his father and his wife. He used to rob even elderly

people of their wealth, just to maintain his family. One day, as he was going along a road, he met Narada, the great saint. The robber did not know about the spiritual excellence or greatness of Narada. He waylaid Narada. But Narada was very compassionate to the young robber and asked him, 'Why have you taken to this path?' Whereupon Valmiki replied, 'Well, Sir, I have no other alternative; I have to maintain my family.' Narada said, 'But by doing this you are incurring sin. You murder people. Now go and ask the members of your family, your father, mother and wife, if they are prepared to share the sins you are committing by such acts of robbery,' Valmiki replied, 'Oh yes, of course, I am sure that they will share the sins, because I am maintaining them.' Narada said, 'Go and ask them.' Now to make sure that Narada did not run away, Valmiki tied Narada Muni to a tree and went home. Then he asked each member of his family, 'Do you know how I maintain you? By acts of murder and robbery. I am committing these sins to maintain all of you. So you are supposed to share part of the sins accruing from these acts.' They replied, 'No, it is your duty to maintain us.' The wife said, 'You are my husband and it is your duty to maintain your wife.' The parents said 'You are our son; it is your duty to maintain your parents. So we are not prepared to take any share of your sins.' All these replies shocked the young robber. So he came back, untied the rope, released Narada and then requested him, imploringly, 'You have opened my eyes, Sir, and I take refuge at your holy feet. Show me the way to lead a virtuous life. I entreat you, please accept me as your disciple.' And Valmiki learnt from him the correct path of spiritual Sadhana. He did so much Tapas and meditation, that an ant-hill (Valmika) grew around him, and out of that he had a new birth, as it were, when he emerged from it. That was the great Valmiki. When he realised the futility of the so-called worldly affection and love, and found that they were shallow,

he was brought to his senses.

Then take the case of Gautama, the Buddha. Siddhartha was a prince and he lived in a great palace with acres of gardens and many servants. He had a beautiful wife named Yasodhara and a son, Rahul. One night Gautama was in the midst of the dancing girls of the palace in a banquet hall, but suddenly he was filled with a tremendous disgust. He left the hall and went to the palace garden where he sat under a tree and started meditating on what he had been doing in life. He thought, 'A little while ago, I was enjoying the company of dancing girls, but it gave me only a transitory joy. It seems that if I run after the sense-pleasures, I shall never gain lasting happiness.' He was seized by a tremendous force of Vairagya (dispassion) and became intensely dissatisfied.

It was now midnight and all was dark and silent in the garden. Suddenly, Siddhartha had the good fortune to hear divine voices. A chorus of celestial beings was singing the following proclamation which changed the life of the wealthy prince.

*'We mourn for rest. Alas! But rest we can never find.
We know not whence we come or where we float away.
Time and again we tread this round of smiles and
tears.*

*In vain we pine to know whither our path leads us and
why we play this empty play. Rise, dreamer from your
dream, slumber not again.'*

On hearing this divine message, Siddhartha's mind became clear and he felt the inner urge to take to a life of renunciation. He went back to his room in the palace for the last time to take a final look at his wife and son. He then resolved in his great zeal for knowing the truth, to bid goodbye to all the sense pleasures once and for all. He then set out on

his famous pilgrimage which culminated in his attaining supreme illumination under the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya. He was henceforth known as Gautama the Buddha, the Enlightened One. How beautifully Arnold has expressed, 'Time and again we tread this round of smiles and tears.' Swami Vivekananda has also said: 'Down we go, animal man once more, eating and drinking and dying, dying and drinking and eating, again and again.'

We should always remember the fact of death – the inevitable hour that awaits prince and pauper alike. We are all here today, and tomorrow we shall not be so. When the call from the other world will come, we are not sure. Any moment death may snatch us away. 'Naked and alone we come out from mother's womb, and naked and alone we depart from this world.' We cannot carry with us any worldly possessions, any of our relations, dear and near ones.

This is the hard truth, the hard reality. Is it not prudent on our part to be serious about spiritual life and to reach the Goal Supreme in this very life? This does not mean that all have to become monks and nuns. We must develop dispassion. We must always remember the real fact that everything of this world is temporary, short-lived. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say again and again, 'We have to discriminate between the real and the unreal. God alone is real, eternal; all else is unreal, non-eternal.' So in the midst of a thousand preoccupations of the world, if we have the right attitude of Vairagya or dispassion, then only can we reach the goal, as has been mentioned earlier.

'Rise dreamer, slumber not again.' As Swamiji said, 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.' So we are to arise. We are not to dream. Many a time we have had dreams – all false dreams. What is in this life? Once we realise our divine nature, then even if death comes, we shall be sure

that we are not the body, nor the mind, nor the senses – we are the Atman, eternally free. Before the call from the other world comes, let us be ready so that we can meet death smilingly. But how many of us can do that? Only those who are serious about their spiritual life.

In continuation of the reference made to the stories of Valmiki and the Buddha, it will be relevant to take the case of the western mystic St. Augustine to illustrate how tremendous earnestness is required to reach the Goal Supreme. A study of the book, Confessions of St. Augustine, will give us immense spiritual benefit. Augustine had to pass through a real struggle – struggle between the call of the inner spirit and the call of the external body. Every day he would say, 'Oh Lord, I know you are the truth, you are the reality. I must reach you, I must realise you. It is true that you are within me, as you say the Kingdom of Heaven is within us. But somehow I go down to the level of animal life, to a very low level of animal existence. Why? I find it hard to resist the temptations of the senses. I want to realise you as the spirit, but the senses pull me down, and everyday I say: Lord, let me enjoy a little of the delights of the senses today, a little sense pleasure. Please forgive me. From tomorrow I am not going to listen to their allurements. Tomorrow I will follow you, my beloved Lord. But let me enjoy today.'

Then he was seized with a tremendous mental struggle and he cried out in agony, 'O Lord, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow! Why not today and why not now? I am a poor mortal. I fail, I am conscious of my limitations, of my weaknesses, of my imperfections. Unless you come to my rescue, it will not be possible for me to respond to your call. Everyday I resolve that I will turn over a new leaf from tomorrow. But again I fail, I go down. So, Lord, be kind and gracious to me.' One day, he was so serious that he cried out. 'Oh Lord,

how long! How long! Tomorrow and tomorrow? No. Why not now, today itself?' Then, he heard the voice, the divine voice, just as Gautama Buddha had heard – the voice of celestial beings. St. Augustine has himself confessed that he committed all kinds of sins possible on this earth, yet even so he had the desire to know the truth; he had the desire to know God, to realise Him. And because he had that, he was saved. But he confessed that he was not a traitor to his thoughts. As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Don't be a traitor to yourself. Admit your weaknesses, admit your imperfections. God is within you. If you confess your faults, God will forgive you and you can realise the truth.' That happened in the case of Augustine too, and so when he said, 'O Lord why not come to my help today itself?' Then he heard the voice 'Wake up, read that page from the Holy Bible.' And he opened it at a particular page and got some inner guidance and resolved to have nothing to do with the temptations of the senses and he became a great saint. So let us not be traitors to our thoughts. We are all conscious of our limitations and imperfections. It is true that God is so kind and so compassionate that if we do take refuge in Him, He will forgive all our imperfections. But the thing that is necessary is sincerity and real tenacity on our part.

And then, as to reaching the Goal Supreme, we must give our whole mind to God – not merely a part of it. If we think that we give a part of our mind to our family relations, a part to our jobs, a part to this person and that person, to this work work and that work, and we want to reach the Goal Supreme also – then we are terribly mistaken. If we want to reach the Goal Supreme and that too in this very life, we must be prepared to give our mind in its entirety to God. We must be prepared to make all-round surrender to God. A question may be asked: 'How can I give my mind in its en-

tirety to God? If I give the whole mind to God, then what about my day-to-day relationship with my family and with all the work I am expected to do? I have to attend to so many people. Naturally, I have to give my mind to my job, to my duties and obligations.' The remedy is, the great ones say, 'Give your mind, but spiritualise your relationship.' Give your mind only to God and believe in your heart of hearts that God dwells in every man. He is here, there and everywhere. He is omnipresent and so He is in every person, in every job, in every duty. Therefore, while doing all works, discharging all duties, if one can give one's mind, the entire mind, to God in this way, one can overcome the struggle. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'The goal of human life is to manifest the divinity which is within us.' First, we must have the conviction, that we are divine and then we are to manifest the divinity in our day-to-day life. As Swamiji said, 'My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life. There is no distinction between the secular and the sacred, all work is worship, no work is secular.' Whether one is a doctor or an engineer or a housewife or a monk, one has to engage oneself in hundreds of activities, but we should always try to spiritualise our relationship with others in day-to-day life, nay, in every moment of our existence.

The present writer would like to recall an incident from the life of Swami Atulanandaji Maharaj, as this will help us all to spiritualise our day-to-day relations with others. I was then a novice, a probationer, a Brahmacharin, who had just joined the Order. I was confronted by a kind of conflict. As a Brahmacharin I was expected to do Japam and meditation at particular times. In those days, I was in the Belur Vidyamandir, which is a residential college. One day my Principal,

Swami Tejasanandaji, reminded me that Saraswati Puja was drawing near and that I would have to attend a rehearsal which he was organising every evening from 6 to 7 p.m. (which was the time fixed for my Japam and meditation in the evening). My Principal asked me, 'Can you come and help me? I have to arrange for the rehearsal of students who are going to enact a drama.' I was obviously in a mental conflict. I had just joined the Order, and it was a time earmarked for my spiritual practices. Shortly after, I had the good fortune of going to Barlowganj – at the foot of the Mussorie Hills where Swami Atulanandaji Maharaj was then living. Swami Shraddhanandaji, who is now the Head of our Vedanta Society of Sacramento, asked me to go to Atulanandaji, as he was a monk of spiritual attainment. So I went to him and one day when I got a chance, I just unloaded my mind. 'Maharaj, I am just a novice. I have just joined only; but sometimes when I am in our college, I have to do certain duties at a time when I am supposed to do meditation. Then what am I to do?' His reply to this was as follows: 'The question you have put to me is the same question I had put to Swami Turiyanandaji when we were in the Shanti Ashram in America.'

Incidentally, let me inform my readers that Atulanandaji was born in Holland, took Diksha from Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, and had the good fortune to come in contact with a number of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including Swami Vivekananda. I now refer to that period, when Atulanandaji was in the United States living at Shanti Ashrama at San Francisco with Turiyanandaji. Swami Turiyanandaji wanted to give special training to a number of sincere seekers after Truth, so that they could realise their own divine nature. With this end in view, he took with him a group of aspirants to Shanti Ashrama. Atulanandaji was fortunate enough to join the group and he also went with great

expectations that he would do Japam, meditation and study scriptures all the time. But to his great surprise, after they had gone there, the members of the group were given different kinds of duties, such as bringing firewood, water and so on, and naturally they did not get much time for Japam and meditation. Atulanandaji was mentally disturbed about this, and one day, being unable to control himself, he asked Revered Hari Maharaj (Turiyanandaji), 'Swami, you have given me so much work, but then where is the time for meditation?' At this, Revered Turiyanandaji of hallowed memory told Atulanandaji, 'My son, remember always that the life of a spiritual aspirant is one of continuous meditation. What more time do you require?' Atulanandaji told me when I met him at Barlowganj Ashram that this reply of Hari Maharaj opened his eyes and that till then he was under the impression that bringing firewood and water are all secular activities; but now he understood that this was a wrong attitude. The whole life is to be divine. The entire life is one of continuous meditation. Every work or act is an act of worship. The reply Atulanandaji got from Turiyanandaji was the same reply that he gave me when I approached him with the same question, and that solved the problem once for all.

So, if we develop this attitude, then only it is possible for us to spiritualise our day-to-day relationship with others. When it is said that the mind in its entirety is to be given to God, it implies that it is possible, provided we do not make a distinction between the secular and the spiritual. A question may be asked: 'For those who are in the worldly life, is it possible?' Yes. Try to spiritualise your day-to-day relationship. Remember always the truth that the life of a spiritual aspirant is one of continuous meditation. Let there be no break.

2. Obstacles to Spiritual Life

Even if we have heard the call from within to return to our real abode, such is the attraction of the outside world that this call to return within is drowned in the din and bustle of the market place. But those who persist in listening to the call, do get a momentary glimpse of the reality within, when the clamour of the outside world subsides for a while. When this happens, then at least for a short time, we do not allow the attractions of the outside world to assail our minds. At such times, one realises 'I am picking up just a few pennies in the market place whereas in my true home, in my real abode, there may be a treasure awaiting me.' But unfortunately, the tragedy that besets man is that he is so enamoured of the few pennies of the outside world, that he does not take pains to look within continuously. But those who are serious, cogitate. 'Enough of the attractions of this world; now I must be serious; I must elevate myself and get possession of the spiritual treasure which is within me.' Only by realising this does one become immortal and get abiding peace and happiness. So when one become serious, one tries to turn away from all the different attractions of the outside world and practises regular self-analysis and self-introspection.

Now, let us suppose that all of us are serious students. By now we have learnt that, with the help of discrimination, we shall be able to achieve a certain amount of understanding of our real Self: and as a result of discrimination, one comes to the understanding that the supreme truth is, 'Thou art That' or 'I am Brahman' or 'Atman alone abides.' What we see in this world of ours, is just an appearance or Maya, while the objective is to reach the Goal Supreme. How to reach it? We have to tear off the veil of Maya; we have to discover Brahman, the substratum of reality beneath the changing phe-

nomena of the world. Well, it is easy to say so, but it is very difficult to reach that Goal.

Now what are the obstacles? There are some major obstacles. One is our attachment to all that is non-Atman. In the Bhakta Sammelan or Spiritual Retreat at the Delhi Ramakrishna Math, there is a continuous devotional programme from morning till evening, including a brief guided meditation. In that guided meditation, we are advised to detach ourselves from everything that is non-Atman. Because we get ourselves attached to the non-Atman, we find it very difficult to realise reality at the back of this universe. Here is one example. Suppose one purchases a jewel box; the box is a container and inside the box there is a precious jewel. There may be some who are not bothered to know what is inside the box. One may be foolishly so attached to the container, to the box outside, that the awareness of the presence of the jewel within is lost. Let us take this body. This body is a container. We are so infatuated, wrongly, of course, through Avidya (ignorance), that we get ourselves attached to the container, this body-mind complex, and we do not want to discover what is really inside the container. If the body-mind complex is compared to the jewel box, then the gem inside the box is our real nature, the Atman or Pure Consciousness. Now, only when we realise the value of the gem, shall we want to get rid of this jewel box. The jewel box is valuable to one as long as he does not possess the gem inside. Once he gets possession, of the gem, he can do away with the jewel box. But foolishly, we are so enamoured of this body that we don't want to realise the Atman, which is within us. The Atman is completely relegated to the background, and this happens because of our inordinate and foolish attachment to the outside box of our body-mind complex.

We listen to spiritual discourses and read scriptural texts.

We gain something from all this, but the tragedy is that we lose it in the course of various kinds of distractions and temptations of the outside world. Our condition can be illustrated by the following analogy. Certain kinds of weeds grow in ponds. Beneath the weeds, which cover the surface of the water, there is crystal clear water. Now it is to get the pure water of knowledge of the Atman that we listen to religious discourse. But when we go back to our respective places and live our monotonous lives, we are surrounded by such temptations that very soon the weeds grow again and cover the surface of the water. These weeds cover up the opening of the mind.

What is the remedy? We must neutralise the effects of the outside world. That means, we have to spiritualise our day-to-day relation with one and all. The entire life of an aspirant after Truth should be one of continuous meditation, as Swami Turiyanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says. We have to practise this constant remembrance of God to neutralise the effect of the influence of the outside world. But even though we resolve to do this, often we fail in our attempts. Why do we fail? Listen to Swami Vivekananda. 'The greatest of all lies is to think that we are bodies. All worldly love proceeds from the body.' And we take this body to be absolutely real. That means, we give so much attention to the container that we do not care to know what is inside the container; we become worshippers of our instincts and our body. Sarada Devi, the Divine Consort of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, though devoid of any formal education, was Saraswati and Jnanadayinee – the bestower of wisdom and knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna used to speak of her in these terms. On one occasion she said: 'What is there in the body? It will be reduced to ashes and the worth of this perishable body is just one and a half seer of ash.' In the same strain Ra-

jani Kanta, a great mystic poet of Bengal, says. 'Even now I am so infatuated with this body and filled with the thought that I am this body.'

Every moment of our existence is filled with the thought of the body, body and body alone. Nothing other than that. But unless we get rid of this body consciousness, realisation of the Self is not possible. So it boils down to this. We are now concerned with some valuable guidelines towards the Goal Supreme. Our objective is to realise God or realise our divine nature, and for that we need some guidelines. One such guideline is that we should cease to identify ourselves with the non-self. Swami Vivekananda has said, 'The truth is to see the impersonal in the personal, but due to ignorance we see the personal in the impersonal.' To explain this saying: What is Truth? Truth is Impersonal – it is the Atman, Pure Consciousness, which is above the body-mind complex.

We have to detach ourselves, dissociate ourselves wholly from the non-self, from all that is non-Atman. Because we cannot do that, we come to endless suffering, birth after birth.

In this connection, it would be relevant to narrate an interesting story about a crocodile and a fox. The fox is a very clever and sly animal. It so happened that once a crocodile came in contact with a fox and they had a dialogue. The fox said to the crocodile: 'My friend, human beings are very great and powerful, because they cultivate land and they raise different kinds of crops. So let us do something. Shall we also cultivate land and raise, say a crop of paddy?' The crocodile welcomed the idea; 'Friend, I agree, let us raise the crop.' And the crop was raised. At the time of sharing the crop, the fox said to the crocodile, 'My friend, tell me which portion of the crop you want for yourself?' The crocodile was very ignorant; it was not clever like the fox. The crocodile said,

'Well, I would like to have the root of the crop and not the top of it.' Naturally the fox was very happy at this reply. He got all the grain, the crocodile got only the hay. As time passed, the fox again said, 'Friend, let us now raise a crop of sugarcane.' That was done. Again, the fox asked the crocodile, 'What portion of the crop do you want to take?' Now, the crocodile thought, 'Last time I demanded the root, now let me demand the top of the sugarcane.' Afterwards he found he was wrong in his selection this time also. He found that his friend, the fox, did not point out his mistake, but cheated him. Now the crocodile asked the fox, 'How is it that you took the correct decisions and that both the times I made the wrong choice?' Then the fox replied, 'It is because of my superior wisdom.' Mark the language 'superior wisdom'. Then the crocodile thought, 'Well, I am getting old, I am going to die one day. I have little children who should grow up properly and they must have superior wisdom.' So he decided to send his little children to the fox and they were sent to him. Time elapsed but the little children did not return. Naturally, the mother crocodile was very anxious as to what had happened to her little children. So she expressed her agony to her husband. But he said, 'Don't be worried. They are safe in the hands of our friend. He will not betray us.' But even long after, the children did not return home. Then Mrs. Crocodile insisted on her husband going to bring back the children. The story goes that when the father crocodile went for this purpose, he could not find the fox. He was in a pond swimming merrily and did not notice the coming of the father crocodile. There was no sign of the little children. 'Perhaps they might have been eaten up by the fox,' thought the father crocodile. Anyway, father crocodile asked, 'Where are my children?' No answer. At this the father crocodile became very angry and then said, 'I am not going to wait any more. Do you know that I am a crocodile, and you only a fox. I am

going to eat you up.' The crocodile caught hold of the fox by one of its legs. At this the fox said to the crocodile, 'Well you cannot touch me. You just caught hold of my leg: The father crocodile became all the more angry and then he touched his belly. 'Oh, you have caught hold of my belly only, you have not touched me; you cannot kill me.'

The moral of the story is: if we do not identify ourselves with the non-self, if we treat our parts as parts only, i.e., the non-self as non-self only, then we are not going to be deceived by the world of phenomena, i.e., the world of appearances, Basically, intrinsically, we are indestructible, immortal spirits, eternally free. Anything of the domain of non-Atman cannot affect us. So this is something very important. We should think in terms of Atman alone and in the language of Swami Vivekananda, 'It is the duty of every soul to treat, to think of, and behave with, other souls as such, i.e., as gods.'

Another way of overcoming the attractions of the outside world is to be above the ideas of male and female. So long as we confine ourselves to the domain of this body and mind, the question of sex arises. But the soul is sexless. Even though we hear about this truth, talk about it and meditate upon it, it is very difficult to realise this. So what is wanted is Vairagya, dispassion for all mundane things. We have to give up our false attachment to this body and mind. This is possible, provided there is a change in our attitude.

Those who are really serious about the Goal Supreme should remember one important truth, that when they take up the spiritual life, they are opening a new account, so to say. A great spiritual personality of our Order of monks, Swami Yatiswaranandaji, used to say that real spiritual life is like opening a new account with a bank. We have to close all old accounts. What does it mean? That means, if we want to lead a spiritual life, we should forget old habits, old desires

and old inclinations, and we should not yield to any kind of fresh craving. No doubt this is very difficult, because we have so many desires of the body as also many desires of the mind. But we are concerned with the attainment of a goal which can be attained only when we are prepared to transcend the limitation, only when we are prepared to transcend the limitation of the body-mind complex. If we are to reach our real divine nature, the Atman or Pure Consciousness, we should not get attached to the body-mind complex, allowing ourselves to be victims of so many desires. Is it possible? Then sometimes the thought may also come to our mind, 'We have had a bad past.' To such a person, the great ones will say, 'Do not brood over the past, but forget all about it.' It has been said, 'Every saint has had a past, and every sinner has a future.' What kind of past? It might be a very inglorious past. We must have the conviction that as every saint had a past, so every sinner can have a glorious future. If we take up this line of thinking, it will help us to overcome whatever impure impressions there are in our mind. This was the teaching – a very, very valuable legacy – bequeathed to posterity by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the highest of incarnations who ever came on this earth. He would not encourage devotees saying, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner.' And that is the reason why we find his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda saying in one of his lectures: 'It is a sin to call a man sinner.'

So, if we find our mind out-going, it is because the Lord has created us in such a way that we cannot but be prone to different kinds of attractions of the outside world. As it has been said in the Katha Upanishad:

paranci khani uyatrnat svayambhuh |
tasmāt paran pasyati n'antarātman ||

The self-existent Lord created the sense-organs, including the mind, with the defect of an outgoing dis-

position; therefore man perceives things outwardly, but not the inward self.

If we have a biological heritage, it is also a fact that we have something divine in us, highest in us – the divine heritage. Still the memory of our failings, of our imperfections, of the impurities of our biological heritage sometimes haunts us. If we indulge in such thinking, we will not be able to reach the Goal Supreme in this life, as we are born with such bad impressions. These are the moments, when we have to assert our higher nature. If what one is today is due to bad inherited tendencies, one has to remember that there is also something divine in him. Instead of making much of the biological heritage, why not assert our divine heritage and say, 'I am eternally perfect.' Such a thinking will help us. But who can do this? Who can have this type of discrimination that if he has a biological heritage, he has a divine heritage too? Here, the right use of the Buddhi (purified intelligence) will come to our help. It is a fact that man is heir to a set of two heritages, one biological and the other divine. It is only by virtue of our intelligence or Buddhi that we differ from animals, and only by virtue of our intelligence do we get a glimpse of our divine heritage. Now, what is this intelligence or Buddhi? We all know that in our life there are times when we are perplexed. We do not know what to do when we are at a cross roads in life. When such a situation occurs or happens in our life, we listen to the voice from within. Our inner voice tells us, 'Do this, don't do that.'

The present writer is here reminded of a conversation he had with a great personage of the Ramakrishna Order when he was a novice. He approached the venerable Swami Visuddhanandaji with a self-analysis chart, showing how many virtues he tried to cultivate in the course of the day and in how many he had failed. On being asked to give the

list of virtues he tried to practise, he read out the first three slokas of Ch.16 of the Bhagavad Gita, known as Daivi-Sampat. They are as follows:

Abhayam sattva-samisuddhir
jnana-yoga-vyavasthitih |
danam damas ca yajnas ca
svadhyayas tapa arjavam ||

– *Fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness in knowledge and concentration, charity, self-control and sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity and uprightness;*

Ahimsa satyam akrodhas-
tyagah santir apaisunam |
daya bhutesv' aloluptvam
mardavam hrir acapalam ||

– *Non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquillity, aversion to fault-finding, compassion to living beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty and steadiness, i.e., absence of fickleness;*

Tejah ksama dhrtih saucam
adroko n'atimanita |
bhavanti sampadam daivim
abhijatasya Bharata ||

– *Vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, freedom from malice and excessive pride, these O Pandava (Arjuna), are the endowments of him who is born with the divine nature.*

On hearing this, the Maharajji remarked, 'My son, practise one. Don't do anything which has not the sanction of the inner conscience. Always remember that the voice of con-

science is the voice of God. The inner conscience always tells us the right thing. But we don't care to listen to the voice of conscience. Because we don't care to listen to the voice of conscience, we come to endless grief.' While I was wondering why Bhagavan Sri Krishna had told Arjuna of twenty six virtues, whereas Maharajji was speaking of only one virtue, the thought dawned on my mind, that he must be saying something from the depth of his spiritual realisation and conviction.

Here is another pointer towards the Goal Supreme. It will be worthwhile to understand the subtle distinction between the superior 'I' and the inferior 'I'. The inferior 'I' tells us to do this and do that. Consequently, we have many desires and these desires are endless and always uncertain. But if we want to overcome all kinds of desires which take us away from our path of absolute spiritual perfection, then we have to subject ourselves entirely to the serious discipline by which the inferior 'I' could be conquered by the superior 'I'. The formula is there for us in the 5th verse of the Gita, Chap.6.

uddhared atman'atmanam
natmananm avasadayet |
atm'aiva hy atmano bandhur
atm'aiva ripur atmanah ||

This means, 'Man should himself bring about his own emancipation; he should not (at any time) discourage himself, because every man is said to be his own Bandhu, i.e., helper, or his own enemy.'

Let a man raise himself by himself. Let him not lower himself. We are our own friends and we are our own enemies. When we allow ourselves to be prompted by the inferior 'I', we lower ourselves. Then we allow ourselves to be defeated

by our own enemies. But when we can take pains to follow some spiritual discipline to overcome the prompting of the lower (inferior) self, so as to rise up to our superior self, then our mind is our own friend. The poet Samuel Daniel also expresses a similar line of thinking. How correctly he writes that 'Unless above himself he can erect himself, how poor a thing is man!' So we have to erect ourselves.

Unless we take pains to assert our divine heritage, how poor a thing is man! Man is poor if he only allows himself to be dictated to by the lower self, the animal self, the biological self. In fact, as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'He is a man, who is conscious of his own divine nature.'

Sri Ramakrishna gave his highest blessing on the Kalpataru day, i.e., on 1st January 1886, at the Cossipore Garden House near Calcutta by uttering these significant words: 'May you all be spiritually illumined!' On that day Sri Ramakrishna was specially compassionate to the devotees. In a divine mood he touched all the devotees present on the occasion. As a result of this divine touch, each one had an immediate inner transformation and was blessed with the vision of his individual Ishtham (Chosen Divine Form).

The language of Sri Ramakrishna's blessing is very significant, because only when we are spiritually illumined are we immediately conscious of our divine nature. Sri Ramakrishna, by blessing those devotees on that day, did not bring down from heaven any Gods or Goddesses before them, but he just made them conscious of the Sat-Chit-Ananda – the indwelling spirit which is behind everything.

Spiritual illumination was the great contribution of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna to mankind. It is absolutely necessary that those who are after spiritual realisation in this very life, should completely change their manner of acting and

thinking. We want the highest truth, but we are not prepared to pay the price. We have to pay the price. No doubt, it is a very long and painful process. But let us not allow ourselves to be defeated.

Once we have received the inner call, we should not let this precious human life go in vain. No doubt, there will be ups and downs in our spiritual journey, but let us not be downcast and dejected. Let us have an optimistic attitude and be up and doing and be prepared to pay any price to transcend the limitations of this material existence to achieve immortality. If desires of various kind pull us down, side-track us from the real path, remember that there is something in us, a steady compass, Buddhi, i.e., the voice of Conscience. If we listen to our Buddhi, then with the help of the compass which is at our disposal, we shall be able to steer clear of all dangers, difficulties and temptations that may come in the way, and reach the Goal Supreme. So, what have we to do? By repeated practice; bit by bit, we have to build up a nobler personality. We have to seek a method by which the inferior 'I' is to be counteracted by the superior 'I'.

But there may be many people who may not be competent enough for the path of discrimination. Then let them take to the path of devotion, which they can practise easily. Here, Ishtha Nishtha, i.e., devotion to one's Chosen Deity, can help them. Leela Chintana, (mental contemplation of the divine sport of an incarnation) will be of great help. Before one starts one's spiritual practice, one would do well to go, in imagination, to the different places associated with an incarnation. For example, those who are the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna can make it a habit to make a pilgrimage mentally to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, the birth places of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi respectively, and all the other important places there associated with their lives.

Then one can go to Dakshineswar Kali temple, the place of the Sadhana of Sri Ramakrishna and to the Cossipore Garden House where he left his mortal coil and bestowed freedom from fear on all devotees by revealing Himself. Such a habit enables one to get the mind collected from its wandering and habits and get focussed on the sanctuary of one's inner heart where one's Chosen Deity resides.

Further, if we have deep devotion to our Chosen Ideal and if we can make our beloved Deity our constant companion, then there is nothing to be afraid of. For, it is said that if He is with us, nothing harmful can befall us, but if He is absent, all that is harmful rushes to us. It is a fact that He is with us, in us, but the tragedy is that we are not in Him. The right attitude of the devotee should be to be always with Him in the same way as He is with us and in us.

We just referred to the help one can get by taking recourse to imagination. A criticism may well be levelled against this practice: Does not this amount to some kind of auto-suggestion? Does auto-suggestion help us? I reply, we can say, there are beneficial autosuggestions and harmful auto-suggestions. An autosuggestion which gives us a lift, which helps us to get possession of the higher dimension of our life, is to be always welcomed. Swami Siddheswarananda, a respected senior monk of our Order who did pioneering work for the cause of Vedanta in France, once pointed out to the present writer that the kind of auto-suggestion or imagination which helps spiritual unfoldment has a certain philosophy behind it. Therefore, the auto-suggestion which helps an aspirant to unfold his spiritual self should not be branded as useless. On the contrary, it has to be accepted as a valuable aid.

3. Aids to Spiritual Life

Let me now refer to what the great Swami Vivekananda said on one occasion on the role that is played by imagination in one's spiritual endeavour. 'Imagine yourself to be in a condition which approximates more and more to the perfect; you would thus approach perfection. You would again gain greater harmony and your spiritual radiance would grow. Your dynamism would increase.'

It may be that the goal has not been reached right now, but that does not debar us from imagining that we are already perfect. Here a criticism may well be made, 'Why do you speak of imagination or autosuggestion? How can one come nearer to the Goal Supreme through imagination or auto-suggestion?' What Swami Vivekananda said is, 'Imagine yourself to be in a condition which approximates more and more to perfection.' This imagination, this auto-suggestion, is based upon a solid philosophy. And this philosophy teaches that the ultimate Truth behind the universe is unity, oneness of existence. Everywhere we see multiplicity. Now with the help of auto-suggestion, we are asked to see unity behind the veil of multiplicity. So that kind of auto-suggestion, which has as its basis a solid philosophy to guide us, will be always beneficial and should be welcomed.

We have a journey to undertake. Slowly we are approaching the Goal Supreme. All will agree that it is a fact that whilst making our pilgrimage, sometime we find it a hard struggle. At this point, let us see what the Hindu psychologists have to say. Very rightly, our great, ancient Rishis, who were also psychologists of great excellence, pointed out that error intervenes when our Buddhi descends to a lower level. The psychic or the Antahkarana, therefore, needs absolute purification. The psychic or Antahkarana in most of us, is not

pure. It is surcharged with impurities of both Rajas and Tamas and we have to take pains to purify this Antahkarana. Here also, auto-suggestion helps. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that we have to take the help of one thorn to remove another thorn that has stuck in the foot. Now, when with the help of one thorn we are able to remove another thorn, then both the thorns can be got rid of. With the help of auto-suggestion we can generate in us thoughts sublime and elevating. With the help of such ennobling thoughts, we are to rise above the region of thoughts, and ultimately we shall have direct experience. It is said that today's imagination is tomorrow's realisation. As we think, so we become. So if we think noble thoughts, if we think we are already perfect, this will help us to proceed towards the Goal Supreme.

Now let us see what is the role that is played by meditation. We are supposed to meditate. Those of us who have already learnt the spiritual path from competent spiritual masters know that at the time of initiation, the Guru, out of his compassion and graciousness, gives us a Siddha Bija Mantra. Says he, 'This is your Ishtam. If you meditate on your Ishtam, in course of time you will reach perfection.' With the help of meditation, we can create in us new life. But when we are asked to meditate on our Chosen Ideal, we should also remember that we are never asked to meditate on the physical form of our Ishta Devata. If we are asked to meditate on Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Krishna, Sri Rama or any other Ishta Devata, we shall do well not to meditate just on the physical aspect. We are to meditate upon His radiant form. We should remember this and also must practise to remain at the feet of our Chosen Ideal, our Ishta Devata, in the course of the day. We ought to habituate our mind to remain settled at the feet of our beloved Ishtam. Sometimes, people make mistakes. Suppose they take one Ishtam and they accept one

Guru, and then they go on changing the Guru and the Ishta Devata. This is quite improper. We ought to concentrate our mind on the same Deity and must be unflinching in our adherence to our chosen Devata. We may try to meditate on our Ishta Devata, but we may fail. The mind, being restless, wanders in different directions. The mind plays tricks. This mind is wild and it is very difficult to control. Now this writer is reminded of what one of the most revered Swamis of our Order told a close attendant of his about the Sadhana he was himself practising. He said to the attendant: 'I practise Anasakti, non-attachment; I would meditate on a particular Bhashya on the Bhagavad Gita which emphasises non-attachment. I look upon Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, the Divine Consort of Sri Ramakrishna, as embodiments of Anasakti or non-attachment, which was preached on the battle field of Kurukshetra by Sri Krishna. Then I do Japa Sadhana. Further, I also spend some time on Leela Chintana. I spend a few minutes recalling the Leela at the holy spot of Kamarpukur, where Sri Ramakrishna was born, how he came to Dakshineswar and then to Cossipore. This was of great help in my spiritual unfoldment.'

Often when we do Japa and meditation, we find our mind wandering away from the object of our meditation. At such times one can try Leela Chintana or going on the wings of imagination to the places associated with the Divine Leela of an incarnation of God who forms the object of our meditation. That may be found very helpful. Meditation is really difficult and we should realise the distinction between quality and quantity in meditation. A devotee comes and sits in the temple for half an hour and says, 'Oh, I meditated for half an hour.' It is not possible to keep the mind fixed at a stretch for half an hour on one's Ishtam. If one can be successful in fixing the mind at the feet of one's Ishta Devata for one or two

minutes, even that is sufficient. So, meditation being difficult, Leela Chintana helps. And another thing. When we sit for meditation sometime we make some pious resolutions. But in the course of our activities we relapse into our normal scheme of life. We forget all about our pious resolutions. What is the remedy? When some of his disciples wanted to unburden their minds to him, Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'Under all circumstances the spiritual attitude of the mind is to be kept up.' If we sit for Japa and meditation for half an hour, and we get concentration for five minutes in the course of it, those five minutes are most precious. It is not the time but the intensity of concentration that is more important. We then feel that we are happy, elevated, as if we have some tangible experience of the living presence of the Lord within. If we are successful even for two or three minutes in the course of the day, we should try to remember it.

In the midst of multifarious activities of the day to day life, if we are not careful enough to continue meditation on our Ishta Devata, then we are likely to be drawn to the attractions of the empirical world. So those who are really serious in reaching the Goal Supreme in this life itself should try to withdraw their minds from all objects of form, smell, taste, touch and sound.

Sri Ramakrishna said: A person can achieve such single-mindedness in meditation, that he will see nothing or hear nothing, will not be conscious even of a touch. A snake may crawl over his body but he will not know it. Neither of them will be aware of the other. In deep meditation, the sense organs stop functioning. The mind does not look outward. It is like closing the gate of the outer court in a house. There are five objects of the senses; form, taste, smell, touch and sound. They are all left outside.'

If, fortunately, we can have that inward vision, then we

shall be able to penetrate beyond false appearances and reach Reality. As Swamiji said, 'See God in every man, woman and child, see by the Antarjyoti.' But is it possible? Yes, it is possible, if one has real Vairagya, real dispassion. Sometime devotees come, and they want to know where good Sadhus can be found. They go and visit monks or Sadhus and say that they are 'Vairagyavan Sadhus'. One would like to amend it as 'Vairagyavan Grihasti', i.e., a householder devotee with mental detachment and dispassion. For householders aspiring to reach the Goal Supreme while discharging all their worldly duties, it is essential that they develop real dispassion for things of this external world. For this, one has to practise fourfold Sadhanas, or what is called Sadhana Chatushtaya – Viveka, Vairagya, Shatsampatti, i.e., the aggregate of the six virtues namely Sama, Dama, Titiksha, Uparati, Sraddha and Samadhana. Finally comes Mumukshutvam. The foremost is Viveka. We have to discriminate between the real and the unreal. If we want to reach the Goal Supreme in this life, we must have this burning discrimination that anything of this world cannot give us lasting happiness. Once we develop Viveka or right discrimination, we develop dispassion, Vairagya. So automatically it follows that Vairagya comes from Viveka and then one has to plod on and on till the Goal is reached. How is one to do Sadhana? We have to practise Sama and Dama, tranquillity of the mind. Sometime, when we are agitated, we must try to practise mastery of the mind to remain unruffled. Dama, sense-control comes next. The senses are to be brought under control. Then there is Titiksha. In suffering, in hardships we have to remain unperurbed. And then Uparati. The mind has a tendency to drag us to the outside world; we have to bring it back again, withdrawing it repeatedly from the sense objects. Next, we must have Sraddha. We must have tremendous self-confidence. We must have faith in the guidance of the Guru and also in our

scriptures. Lastly, one-pointedness or Samadhana. Only when we have Viveka, Vairagya and the aggregate of six virtues, are we qualified to strive after realisation of the ultimate goal.

So it comes to this; Vairagya is the fulfilment of Viveka. Take the case of any businessman. If he wants to be successful in his profession and if he wants to amass huge wealth, he does not even care for food and health, he works very hard. Why? Because, he is sincere in this profession, in his business. If we possess that amount of sincerity, tenacity and perseverance in respect of spiritual life, we shall surely reach the goal in this life. Therefore, in our pilgrimage towards the Goal Supreme, renunciation is of primary importance. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a story. Some boatmen got heavily drunk and the whole night they plied the boat. The boat, however, remained at the same place, because they forgot to lift the anchor by which it was tied. Similarly, if there is any hole in a jar in the form of different Vasanas or attachments, all our Sadhana will leak out. Like the boat, if it is tied to an anchor, however much we may ply for the whole night, it would not move. So, if we want to move towards the ultimate reality, we must try to uproot all that pulls us down.

It is all very easy to say, but difficult to practise. We admit it is difficult, but we also say here boldly, it is not impossible. It is true that millions and millions of people are swimming with the current. But the few who want to reach the Goal Supreme, have to go against the current. Naturally, they are up against a struggle. There are, however, people, who live animal lives, live on the sensuous level. As they do not want to rise above the animal level of existence, they have no struggle. One who is aiming at the Goal Supreme should not only rise above the animal level, but must also manifest the divinity within. One must become a God or God-

ness in this very life. For this one has, no doubt, to face an uphill task. Why is it so? The answer is given in the Kathopanishad.

As we are all aware, God has created our senses in such a way that they try to possess the things of the outside world. That means, God has created the mind in such a way that it tends towards external things. Only 'Kaschid Dheerah' (those who are introverts), who want to withdraw their minds from the outside world, practise real Uparati. Such persons alone reach the Goal. Kathopanishad says:

Kascit dhirah pratyag-atmanam aiksat |
avrta-caksuh amrtatvam icchan ||

– A wise man here and there, desirous of immortality, turns his senses (including the mind) inward to realise the inner self.

So, if we are after the Goal Supreme, then what have we got to do? We have to practise introspection. We have to practise withdrawing the mind from the outside world. Who can do that? Only the few determined wise men. If we want to realise our real divine nature, then we have to withdraw the mind from the outside world. If we do not do that, we shall only see the external world and not the inner self, the Atman, and this human life goes in vain.

But it is true that the path to ultimate realisation is hard to tread. It is not meant for all, but only for a very few. Then one may ask, 'If supreme realisation is not for all, what is the use of the study of Vedantic texts and listening to discourses on this subject?' The reply is, if one in a million can reach the goal, why don't you have the thought that I am that one in the million? Have faith. Have that robust optimism.

The difficulty facing the spiritual aspirant will be clear

from the following quotation (verse 79) from Sri Sankaracharya's Vivekachudamani:

Apata-vairagyauato mumuksun
bhavabdhhi-param pratiyatam udyatan |
asa-graho majjayate'antarale
nigrhya kanthe vinivartya vegat ||

– *The shark of hankering catches by the throat, those seekers after liberation who have got only an apparent dispassion (Vairagya), and are yet trying to cross the ocean of Samsara (worldly life). Violently snatching them away, it drowns them half-way.*

Here, Sankaracharya warns us that false Vairagya cannot sustain us long. There may be temporary Vairagya, say due to a tragic bereavement, or a painful disease or a shocking disappointment. This Vairagya cannot endure long in the case of many. Vairagya or dispassion which has its roots in the solid foundation of real discrimination alone can sustain us. One may have no bereavement in the family, no serious illness, no failure or disappointment. One may be enjoying perfect health. But one must be conscious that at any moment the cruel hand of death may snatch one away. And when this would happen, we do not know. We must be prepared for it. 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave', the poet said. Only this kind of discrimination will sustain us.

Sankaracharya makes a distinction between apparent Vairagya and real Vairagya based on discrimination. If we want to reach the Goal Supreme with the help of apparent dispassion and if we claim that we are Mumukshus or aspirants for liberation, then we are terribly mistaken. So Sankaracharya says that those who want to cross this ocean of Samsara, but are not possessed of real Vairagya and have only superficial Vairagya, are caught at the throat by the shark of desire. Not

only are we drowned half-way across the ocean of Samsara, but desires violently take possession of us and drag us down midway. Only those who have real and genuine Vairagya can cross the ocean. Further Sankaracharya points out that if one wants to cross this Ocean of Samsara, but is terribly attached to the body, liberation is not possible. Tulsidas has said, "Where there is Kama (lust) there is no Rama.' In verse 85 of Vivekachudamani Sankaracharya tells us:

Moha eva maha-mrtyuh
mumukSOR vapur adisu |
moho vinirjito yena
sa mukti-padam arhati ||

- For a seeker after liberation, infatuation with the body is dire death. He alone who has thoroughly conquered this deserves the state of freedom. Only those who have overcome the false infatuation with the body and can resist temptations and allurements of different kinds, deserve the state of liberation.

Sankaracharya says that so long as we allow ourselves to become the victims of the allurements of the flesh and infatuation of the body, there is no question of liberation. Only when we can overcome all kinds of attractions of the body, is it possible. Only he, who has totally conquered this attachment can become liberated. Totally, mark the language, no half-way house. We are to conquer it completely. Therefore what is to be done? In verse 321 Sankaracharya gives another valuable guideline. It refers to eternal vigilance, carefulness:

Pramado brahma-nisthdya
no kartavyah kadaCana |
pramado mrtyur'ity aha
bhagavan brahmanah sutah ||

– One should never be careless in one's steadfastness

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to Brahman. Bhagavan Sanat-Kumara, who is Brahma's son, has called inadvertence death itself.

Do we really want or desire salvation? Do we want to reach the Goal Supreme in this very life? If so, every moment of our life we must be careful, alert and vigilant, and we must continuously attempt to hold on to what may be called 'Brahman Consciousness' or Brahma Nishtha. If we fail to do this, then it will not be possible for us to make substantial progress towards the Goal Supreme

4. Viveka, Vairagya, Shatsampatti and Mumukshutva

Constant effort should be made to hold on to what may be called 'Brahmic Consciousness' – that we are Brahman, we are Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. We should always be conscious of 'Consciousness'. We must be aware of our inherent divine nature. We must try to live continuously in tune with our real eternal Self. If we do not, then there is every possibility of our mind being assailed by various kinds of temptations and distractions of the outer world. Not to dwell on the plane of Atman means that we live in our inferior self.

We are not concerned with the vast majority of mankind who do not bother to know about their Real Self. We are concerned with the real seekers of Truth, genuine aspirants after liberation. Such aspirants should never be slack in their spiritual efforts. They must have what is called 'Brahma Nishtha'. If they do not have it, then again they are likely to be covered by Ignorance. Let us hear what the Vivekachudamani says on this point in verse 324:

yatha'apakrstam saivalam
ksana-matram na tisthati |
avrnoti tatha maya
prajnam v'api paran-mukham ||

– As sedge, even if removed, does not stay away for a moment but covers the water again, so Maya or nescience also covers even a wise man, if he is averse to meditation on the Self.

This is also a very very important point. As moss, even if removed from the face of water does not stand away even for a moment, but closes up to cover the placid surface of the water, so also, if we are careless, Maya or nescience will

cover up our mind. Even a wise man, it is pointed out, cannot escape the clutches of Mahamaya if he is not alert. The point that is emphasised here by Sankaracharya is that if we want to reach the supreme goal, we must be introverts and not extroverts. Many may have a conventional type of religion. But that is not genuine spirituality, which is not meant for one and all. There cannot be any kind of mass spirituality. It is for the chosen few. As it is said in the third verse of Chapter 7 of Bhagavad Gita:

Manusyanam sahasresu
kascid yatati siddhaye |
yatatam api siddhanam
kascin mam vetti tattvatah ||

– Among thousands of men scarcely one strives for perfection, and of those who strive and succeed, scarcely one knows Me in truth.

Only those who have some inherent good tendencies hear the call of the highest Self, and we are concerned here only with such people. Once we hear the call, we must be ever vigilant, ever-careful. As Sankaracharya says in Vivekachudamani verse 325:

Laksya cyutam syad yadi cittam isad
bahir-mukham sannipatet tatastatah |
pramadatah pracyuta keli kantukah
sopana-panktau patito yatha tatha ||

– If the mind ever so slightly strays away from the ideal and becomes outgoing, then it goes down and down, just as a playing-ball inadvertently dropped on a staircase bounces down from one step to another.

In the same way, if the mind strays away from the highest ideal even a little, it goes down and down. And once deflec-

ted, it is very very difficult to bring it back to the point from where it started. Then what is the remedy? Along with Vairagya (detachment), we must have Brahma Nishtha. To reach the goal supreme, we are asked to become introverts; that means we must withdraw the mind from everything that is non-Atman. But if it is to be withdrawn from everything that is non-Atman, there must be something positive before us, as the mind cannot remain in a vacuum without an object. Therefore, by mere detachment alone we won't be able to solve our problems. Along with detachment, we must have something positive to hold on to. So, it has been said in verse 374 of Vivekachudamani:

Vairagya-bodhau purusasya paksivat
paksau vijanihi vicaksana tvam |
vimukti-saudh'agra-tal'adhirohanam
tabhyam vina n'anyatarena siddhyati ||

— *Learned one! Know that Vairagya and Bodha (true understanding) are two means, like the two wings of a bird. The ascent to the upper storey of the palace of Vimukti (liberation) is not secured by either of them singly.*

A bird cannot soar in the sky with one wing alone, it needs two wings. Similarly, if we are after liberation, then we need two things — Vairagya and Bodha. Bodha here means Brahma Nishtha. Both are necessary, if we want to reach the highest goal, which is like a flight to the Infinite. For this we must be fully equipped, not only with Vairagya or dispassion for things mundane, but we must also cultivate Bodha or constant at-tunement to our real nature. Only then can we hope for success. Thus we can have a practical formula. What is that practical formula? No doubt, we need Vairagya. We have to be convinced of the utterly deceitful nature of this world. Anything of this world cannot make us really happy. Abiding

peace, lasting happiness, we can never hope to get from the pursuit of anything mundane. Therefore, we must practise introspection and try to withdraw the mind from the external world. We need Vairagya, but along with Vairagya, we need real Sadhana (practice).

We must be ever conscious that this life is transitory and of short duration, and that one day we are surely going to die. No one is going to accompany us, not even our nearest and dearest relatives. It is only when such thoughts come to our mind that we would become serious and seek guidance from the scriptures and a genuine teacher to provide us with a Sadhana – a way of spiritual practice for attaining our goal. So Vairagya plus spiritual practice would lead us to the Goal Supreme. Both are necessary. It is often found that after getting direction from a teacher, an aspirant at first begins spiritual practice with great enthusiasm and eagerness. But as days and months pass by, that initial urge for spiritual unfoldment evaporates and fizzles out, so to say. Only those who keep up the original fervour, can reach the goal. This fervour will be kept up only if we have strong aspiration for liberation, which is technically known as Mumukshutvam.

On this point here is another important guideline given by Sankaracharya in verse 29 of Viveka-chudamani:

Vairagyam ca mumusutvam
tivram yasya tu vidyate |
tasminn ev'arthavantah syuh
phalavantah samadayah ||

– Only in the case of him, whose renunciation and yearning for freedom are intense, do calmness and the other practices really become fruitful.

All things of the world are totally unreal. Unless we grow genuine dispassion for things of this world, we cannot

achieve Moksha. The first important prerequisite is real Vairagya, but that is not all. To illustrate the point, take a table. It has four legs. Consider one leg as Viveka (discrimination), another as Vairagya (dispassion), the third as Shatsampatti or the aggregate of six virtues (namely, Sama, Dama, Titiksha, Uparati, Shraddha and Samadhana), and the fourth as Mumukshutvam (desire for liberation).

Unless all the four legs of the table are in perfect position, the table may tilt. That fourth leg is Mumukshutvam. So it is said, only when one has the real desire for liberation, one's Sadhana becomes effective or fruitful. Hence, if we do not make progress in spiritual life, we can find the answer within: 'Am I serious about my spiritual life? Do I really hanker after liberation?' Swami Vivekananda in one of his lectures has said, 'Take care of the means, the end will take care of itself.' What is the end? The end is spiritual perfection, i.e., reaching the goal supreme. What are the means? They are Viveka, Vairagya, Shatsampatti and Mumukshurva. These are experimented truths and those who practise them will reach the goal. Therefore, we can say that our pilgrimage towards this goal will become fruitful provided we have real Vairagya and desire for liberation.

So spiritual unfoldment, spiritual progress, does take place in a heart, only if it is watered by Vairagya, then we are to plough it also. Suppose we are to water a field for cultivation; simple watering will not do. We have to avoid by all means any kind of double movement. Now, what does double movement mean? The Lord has created us in such a way that our senses have always a tendency to possess or enjoy the outside world. But there are some people, intelligent people, who discriminate, who are wide awake, who realise in their heart of hearts that if they allow themselves to be drawn by different kinds of allurements of this external world, they

will not then be able to reach the desired goal in this life; for, the senses have a tendency to drag us out from our inner world to the outer world. In our quest for the mundane, ephemeral so-called pleasures of the world, we forget that the world is a world of appearances and that it is not real. If we allow ourselves to be deceived by the allurements of the world and at the same time want to proceed along the spiritual path, we are guilty of what may be called double movement. If we are serious about our path towards the our final, lasting goal, then we have to make the choice once and for all. Our line of thinking should be in this manner: 'We have enjoyed the world in innumerable births. In those we knew what sense pleasures mean. Should we allow ourselves again to be cheated by this deceitful world?' If we do not want to be cheated again, then we must make a resolution to that effect and live according to that. If we do not do that and try to proceed on our pilgrimage towards the goal supreme, we are likely to yield to different kinds of temptations of this world. Then we will have what may be called grievous discord, which every aspirant should try to avoid.

The next question is why this double movement? Double movement is there because of innumerable desires of the body and of the mind acquired through our past Karma. Is there any remedy? Yes. The mind must be subjected to a conscious and voluntary discipline. Mark the language. It should be a self-imposed discipline. Those who take to this higher spiritual path, the inner path, will have to face a struggle. Millions and millions of people on this earth do not face such a struggle. Only those who take to spiritual life seriously, are in for that struggle, because of our biological heritage, which is but another name for our past Karma. From biological heritage, we must go onward to the domain of divine heritage. Naturally, there will be a struggle before this is achieved.

Listen to what Swami Prabhavananda, a disciple of the great Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, told the present writer: "When we were novitiates, we would tell Maharaj, (Swami Brahmanandaji) about our difficulties. Then he would say that every one has to pass through such a struggle; do not lose heart, do not give up the struggle.' Once you give up the struggle, then there is no further hope. But if you keep up the struggle, even if you fail, you can rise again. Progress is never in a straight line. Those who take to the spiritual path are in for a serious struggle. They will be up against different kinds of inner conflicts, and they should therefore be prepared to pay the price for it. Why? Ultimately, if we keep up the struggle, we shall be victorious. We shall realise our divine nature and consider ourselves blessed. So, ultimate victory is assured. But on the way, we may have to encounter a number of difficulties. If this is not done consciously, it may lead to some kind of psychological complexes. However, if these struggles are faced willingly, then there will be no complexes. Instead of suppressing and repressing our desires, we should try to sublimate them. Our desires are to be given a Godward direction. That is what is meant by voluntary spiritual discipline. Without doing that, if we only suppress and repress the many kinds of desires in us, we shall have to face many undesirable consequences. Some would say therefore: if you have a desire, fulfil it. But there is a great danger in this. We may get into the great whirlpool of worldly life and find it difficult to extricate ourselves from it for a long time, even for the whole of this life. It is better and safer to adopt another method. We should take a philosophical attitude. What does this mean? The external world, according to Vedanta, means five things – Nama (name), Rupa (form), Asti, Bhati, Priya (existence, knowledge, bliss). If we can continuously eliminate name and form, then we perceive the omnipresence of Brahman – Asti, Bhati, Priya or existence, know-

ledge, bliss absolute. We are so many in this room. Basically and intrinsically, we are all divine. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Each man is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest the divinity within.' We are all of the same stuff, absolutely of the same stuff – pure consciousness. The difference between us is just in name and form. This truth is what our ancient rishis discovered in their transcendental mystical realisation. Anything animate or inanimate in the universe consists of five things; it exists (Asti), it is revealed (Bhati), it is pleasing (Priya), and it has a name (Nama) and form (Rupa). Now, if we go on eliminating the name and form, we are all of the same stuff. So we have to practise this daily. A devotee meditates and then comes out of his meditation cell and has to mix with hundreds of people of this world. So many types of attractions and allurements are there. Through the grace of God, if Vichara (discrimination) can be kept up, then one can be established in one's real nature in unity, by denying name and form, i.e., multiplicity. So, if we can eliminate name and form as an external layer, then we can realise the substratum, i.e., Sat-Chit-Ananda. If we have that attitude, then the entire universe will be seen to be pervaded by the omnipresence of Brahman. Then we are safe. This will give a right direction to our Antahkarana. We shall be able to avoid all kinds of mistakes and pitfalls and shall no longer be deceived by the world. Only in the Infinite lies real bliss.

Once we are persuaded that the same ultimate reality is here, there and everywhere, then because of its omnipresence, whenever we are about to make any mistake, we are sure to remember that we can deceive the world but we cannot deceive that all-knowing God, our real Self. There is another advantage in this. If it is a fact that God is always with us, in us, outside us, everywhere, then even if I am going to make mistakes, even if I have hundreds of evil desires in me

which want to pull me down, even then I can unload my mind to the indwelling Lord, saying, 'Oh Lord, You have created me in such a way that I cannot but run after the pleasures of the world. There are such horrible Samskaras in me that I feel there is no hope for me. But as my indwelling Lord, You are conscious of all my failings and shortcomings. Unless You give me strength enough to overcome all my weaknesses and imperfections, there is no hope for me.' So, if we have faith in the guidance of the omnipresent Brahman, we are safe. If we are going to make any mistake, immediately this thought should come, 'Well, I can deceive the world, but not God. I am helpless, O Lord! I run after so many things of the world. I am going to commit the same mistakes; so come to my rescue. You alone know of what stuff I am made.' Then the Lord will certainly come to our help.

Also, different kinds of unwelcome thoughts come to our mind as if they are bubbling up to the conscious layers. If this happens, we should not lose heart. These are indications that we are continuing further in the process of purification. These are indications that perhaps in the subconscious layer of our mind, there are many neglected corners. No real transformation is possible, if we are just in superficial contact with Reality. We are to get into the innermost recesses of our beings. We have to direct our attention to the depths of our being. Just a tiny bit of light enters our mind when going into meditation and all the dirt and filth consisting of various kinds of evil impressions are pushed to the background into some corner of the mind for the time being. When we come out of meditation, again they come to the surface. So we are to take steps for the removal of all the dirt that lies in the nooks and comers of our mind.

Now, sometimes we try to achieve mastery over the mind and establish control over the senses. But this should not be

mistaken as inner transformation. Inner transformation, according to the Bhagavad Gita, will not be complete if we have only external control of the mind. What is needed is internal control. Let me refer to verse 59 of the chapter 2 of the Bhagavad Gita.

Visaya vinivartante
niraharasya dehinah |
rasa-varjam raso'py asya
param drstva nivartate ||

– *The objects of senses turn away from the embodied soul who abstains from feeding them, but the taste for them remains. Even the taste turns away when the Supreme is seen.*

Now, in this verse of the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna explains the difference between outer abstinence and inner control or inner renunciation. There may be some of us who can reject the sense objects, but there may still be lurking desires in our mind to possess those very objects. Outwardly, we may reject but inwardly there may be hankering. That means only outward control, and not inner control, has been achieved. If we want to reach the final goal, with outer or external control alone we are hopelessly mistaken. Until we have achieved inner control, sense objects recede for the time being. But the taste for them remains as lurking desire. However in the case of one who has reached the goal, of one who is established in the substratum behind the world of name and form – from his mind even the lurking desires go once for all. Even the taste (Rasa or the lurking desire or attachment to enjoy the sense objects) turns away when the Supreme Self is seen. So when we speak of external control and inner control, we should remember this important verse of the Gita.

Another verse, the next one (2.60) also contains a warning for those who are careful and vigilant enough, including wise persons who want to practise control of both kinds, the external and the internal. The senses, it is said, are so violent and turbulent that they may carry us away and cause a spiritual fall of even a striving aspirant:

Yatato hy api Kaunteya
purusasya vipascitah |
indriyani pramathini
haranti prasabham manah ||

– *The impetuous senses, O Arjuna, of even a learned man who strives, forcibly drive the mind astray.*

We are not only to control all the senses, but we are to remain steadfast and live an integrated life. We should be exclusively and deeply devoted to our real self and reject as poison all that is non-self. So here is a warning. The senses are so turbulent that they are always about to overpower and devour us. Even wise people who take to the spiritual path may fail. So, we must be very, very careful.

Again coming to the distinction between external and internal renunciation, in the case of external renunciation, one renounces the world and goes to a cave or to a forest, but if one does not renounce the world internally, then there will be attachment and craving for sense objects wherever one may go. The mind will be cheated and deceived by various sense objects. Therefore, external renunciation is not of any consequence if it is not followed by what is called inner renunciation. Whatever might be our station in life, if we want to follow the ideal of external and internal renunciation, we must be very vigilant and pay constant attention to our ideal. We must have a firm grip on our ideal. We must strictly adhere to the goal supreme. Otherwise, no one will be able to

save us. In this connection, it will be relevant to refer to a conversation that took place in the Dakshineswar Kali temple between Sri Ramakrishna and one householder disciple. The question that was put to Sri Ramakrishna was this, 'Sir, can we not realise God without complete renunciation?' (complete means both external and internal). Sri Ramakrishna, who was the embodiment of compassion and mercy, replied with words of assurance to that householder disciple. Though he addressed his words to a particular householder disciple, what he said is meant for all of us. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Of course, you can. Why should you renounce everything? You are all right, as you are following the middle path. I tell you the truth. There is nothing wrong in your being in the world. But you must direct your mind towards God. Otherwise you will not succeed. Do your duty with one hand and with the other hold on to God. After the duty is over, you must hold on to God with both hands.'

Note the emphasis on the word 'must'. We must direct our mind to God, otherwise we shall not succeed. 'Bondage is of the mind and freedom is also of the mind.' A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound whether I live in the world or in the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me?' By repeating with grit and determination, 'I am not bound, I am free,' one really becomes so – one really becomes free.

5. Japa Sadhana

In trying to understand what is external and internal control, it will be helpful to know what Swami Turiyanandaji once said. Swami Turiyananda was a direct disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and a living embodiment of Vedanta. At the request of Swamiji he went to the United States, and built up the Shanti Ashram in California. Swamiji told the American devotees, 'You saw me delivering lectures; now I am going to bring to you a Swami from India who is a living embodiment of Vedanta. All that I taught you, talked to you, you will find exemplified in that Swami, my brother monk.' That was Swami Turiyanandaji. When Swami Turiyanandaji was requested by Swami Vivekananda to go to the United States to help him, at first he declined. 'No, I would not like to go to the United States. I would like to remain in India.' But Swamiji's love won over Turiyanandaji when he said, 'Well, Hari Bhai, I have given my life for the cause of Sri Guru Maharaj (Ramakrishna); will you not come and stand by and help me?' Then Swami Turiyanandaji replied. 'I am not going to give lectures like you. I am not an orator.' Swamiji told him, 'No, they have had enough of lectures in the West. They want to see the life of a true Vedantin. Show by your life what I have taught as the Vedanta.' 'Yes, I can then go,' was the answer given by Swami Turiyanandaji. He did live an exemplary sannyasin's life. Now, while he was in the United States one American student referred to the problems of controlling the subconscious mind. And Swami Turiyanandaji said, 'Ordinarily, we know only the surface waves of our mind, but by Yoga practice, we learn to go deeper. By watching and studying our own mind, we dive below our surface consciousness and observe what is going on below. Many Samskaras, latent desires, are stored up there, waiting for an opportunity to express themselves. Through introspection we

can discover them before they rise to the surface. This is very important; for once a thought has come to the surface, it is extremely difficult to control it. But at an early stage, it is easy. A seed is easily destroyed. But when it has germinated and grown into a big strong tree, it requires great strength and effort to cut it down. So we must check our desires in their early undeveloped stages. Here is the clue to the control of the mind.' Turiyanandaji pointed out that we only know the surface of our mind. Through japa Sadhana and meditation we can dive below the surface of consciousness and know the desires which are likely to come to the surface of the mind. So it will be highly practical and beneficial to make sure that these desires do not germinate and grow into big trees. As Swami Turiyanandaji said, we should strive our best to cut down before desires grow into big trees. Once a thought has come to the surface and taken hold of the mind, it is extremely difficult to control it. By japa Sadhana every one of us can be conscious of the subconscious layer of the mind. In the subconscious layer of the mind, impressions of different Karmas of this life and the past innumerable lives are stored up. Now, before they come up and attack us, we have to cut them down at their rudimentary stage. If we can do that, then we can have mastery over the mind.

Sometimes when we sit for meditation, many kinds of impure thoughts bubble up. Is there any way out? Now we have different layers of the mind. The conscious layer, the subconscious layer, the unconscious layer and so on. It has been the experience of most of us, that undesirable thoughts arise from the subconscious layer of the mind. If such undesirable thoughts do assail us during the course of meditation, it is a sure indication that the process of purification has not been perfected and completed and we have to continue with dili-

gent efforts towards the progress of purification. How can that be done? We have to focus our attention on the very depths of our soul. Even if we do that, in spite of our repeated attempts, we may perhaps find that we cannot make any further headway. Perhaps, we are in front of a world which prevents us from going further. This has been the experience with almost all saints and genuine seekers after Truth.

Is there any method by which we can be successful in removing this wall of impediments? Is there any method by which an aspirant can surmount all the difficulties on the path towards the Goal Supreme? The answer is 'Yes', there is a proved technique. By means of this proved technique almost all the insurmountable obstacles can be overcome. Now, what is that proved technique? That technique is 'japa Sadhana'. In this connection, one would like to quote what the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi said to one of her intimate disciples. His name is Swami Shantanandaji. The present writer had the good fortune of being in his holy company. He was held in high esteem by one and all for his saintly life. He told us that once when he met the Holy Mother and asked, 'Mother, how can I realise God? How can I have unfoldment?' The Holy Mother suggested a simple method. She said, 'Japat Siddhi! Japat Siddhi! Japat Siddhi! Through performing Japa alone, one can attain realisation.' Now what is this japa Sadhana? It is just the methodical repetition of a sacred formula, a Name, a siddha Japa Mantra that we get from our Guru or spiritual master. We should remember that when we receive a Mantra, we receive it from a competent spiritual master. A Mantra has got an inherent power in it. If we read any book on Tantra Sadhana, we shall find reference to a number of Mantras. However, if we just take any Mantra, and start doing Japam, it will not produce any effect. These are

all in the books. What is necessary is that it should come through a Guru Parampara — a successive generation of teachers and disciples. We have to learn it from a Guru. Power is transmitted from a master through the Mantra to his disciple. This disciple again, when he becomes Siddha, transmits the Mantra along with the power to his disciples. So we must have faith in what is called transmission of spiritual power from Guru to disciple. Only when we receive a Mantra with such faith through a competent master, are we able to reach the goal, provided we follow the path prescribed by him.

To proceed towards the Goal Supreme, we must have our own Chosen Deity or Ishta Deva. Now how can we meditate on one's beloved Ishtam? We must learn the path from a competent spiritual master. The Guru, out of his infinite kindness, gives the Mantra to a disciple. The disciple should not take it as just a syllable or word. The Mantra has got a mystic power. If we have real faith in the words of our Guru and if we go on doing japa Sadhana, we will be able to realise our Ishtam. So what happens if we have a Chosen Deity, and along with it we get a real Siddha Bija Mantra? We then have a definite centre of spiritual consciousness to hold on to. Again and again we should come back to our Ishtam. This is something absolutely essential. Japa becomes efficacious when, along with the repetition of a great Name, we dwell on its meaning as instructed by the teacher. It is said in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, 'Tat japah Tat artha Bhavanam', which means that we are to be constantly conscious of the spiritual significance of the Mantra. It does not matter if, in the beginning, the repetition of the Mantra is mechanical. It may be that we don't find any taste in the holy Name, but still we should go on doing it. Ultimately, we shall find out how delicious is the Name of the Lord. So it does not matter if, in the

beginning, we start with blind faith.

Japa Sadhana lays emphasis on taking the help of sound symbols, because sound and thought are interrelated. A typist knows that, when he strikes on a letter on the keyboard he is propelling the key of that particular letter and immediately the impression is printed on the sheet of paper. In the same way, as soon as we touch on the sound symbols, such as the name of 'Rama', 'Krishna' or 'Hari', immediately the thought related to it comes before our mind, and it does help in our journey towards the goal supreme.

If we have faith in the mantra, then even if we go on repeating mechanically, ultimately it will have its effect, because there is great power in the divine name. It helps us in counteracting different kinds of thoughts. To attain spiritual realisation or to manifest the divinity within us, japa Sadhana is one of the best means according to all our spiritual masters.

We need inner purification. We need real transformation of our psycho-physical organism. No unfoldment is possible unless we take pains to practise purity in thought, word and deed. But how to attain absolute purity? Swami Brahmanandaji, the first President of our Order, once said, 'From my own experience, I can tell you that none can ever be absolutely pure, unless one does japa Sadhana.' The present writer was advised by one of the most respected Swamis of our Order, Swami Visuddhanandaji, that for attaining purity of mind one should do a fixed number of Japas every day. The number he recommended was the small figure of 10,000.

In the same vein the importance of taking the Lord's name was impressed on the present writer by another senior and respected elder of our Order, Swami Siddheswaranandaji. He wrote to me: 'Take your spiritual life seriously. In this Kali

Yuga, according to Sri Ramakrishna, repetition of the holy Name is the highest Sadhana. I am a f-a-n-a-t-i-c of japa Sadhana.'

But we want to realise God somehow doing japam mechanically, one hundred and eight times a day, and for that also we don't get time! The question is whether this is due to want of time or due to want of sincerity. Let us not be traitors to our thought. Let us be frank. We find time for everything, but we do not find time for practising japam and meditation! We should ask ourselves: 'Why is it so?'

We must have faith in the words of these great ones. Even if the mind is restless, outgoing, and so many evil thoughts come in, the remedy is to go on doing japa Sadhana with diligence and perseverance. This is very important, because through japa Sadhana or by the repetition of the holy name, our body and mind become pure. As a result of constant repetition of a holy name, we get what may be called some kind of spiritual vibration. The world in which we live is full of impure vibrations, non-spiritual and worldly vibrations. To counteract the impure vibrations of the unfavourable environment in which we live, we shall have to create pure vibrations. How can we do that? Through japa Sadhana. Through japa Sadhana we create around us a fencing of spiritual vibrations, so much so that even if we happen to be in the midst of an environment full of impure vibrations, they will not be able to penetrate and assail us, because already, by means of the japa Sadhana, we have been able to create a holy fortress of spiritual vibrations. All kinds of impure vibrations will be neutralised by constant practice of the holy name, and the Jivatma will thereby be able to establish his closeness with the Paramatma.

Japa Sadhana has two kinds of values. One is esoteric and the other exoteric. By the mere vibration of a given sound, a

sense of spiritual awakening takes place, a new field of awareness is opened to us. This is what is called in mystical language, the esoteric value of japa Sadhana; it generates a Sakti (power) which unifies all the diverse kinds of energies in us into a single bundle of energy. Our energies are always scattered in different directions. Japa Sadhana makes all these diverse energies one-pointed and makes them unified. By this an aspirant will be able to awaken the Kundalini power which lies dormant in us. In fact, there is a song in Bengali where the devotee prays to the Divine Mother: 'Oh Mother Kundalini, please wake up from the Muladhara.' We have in the spinal column the Sushumna, and on its left and right, we have 'Ida' and Pingala nerves. By constant repetition of the holy name, an aspirant can awaken the Kundalini Shakti lying dormant like a coiled snake in the Muladhara, which thereafter rises along the channel of the Sushumna nerve, and passing through different chakras, gets united with the Supreme Self.

With regard to the awakening of the Kundalini, when a question was put to Swami Brahmanandaji, he replied, 'There are some special exercises to awaken it, but I believe it can be best done through japam and meditation. The practice of japam is specially suited to the present age.' Therefore, we should be careful lest in our overzeal to awaken the Kundalini we should take recourse to some occult methods and come to grief. The safest course is to constantly repeat the divine name. Therein lies the real clue to awakening of the Kundalini.

Another important point to remember is what Swami Vivekananda always used to stress. He was against any kind of cheap ecstasy. In fact at the Cossipore Garden House he warned his brother disciples against too much group dances and songs; for, such things can raise the mind to a high level,

but then from that high level, the mind suddenly descends into lower centres when the stimulation stops.

So, to find the truth, it is essential to plunge into the very depths of our being. By japa Sadhana alone superior consciousness can easily be awakened.

Now is it practicable to pray ceaselessly? Apparently, it seems that it is rather not practicable to spend the whole time in prayer alone. A break in the continuity is inevitable. But if one is to attain spiritual illumination, one has to pray ceaselessly. One has to pray at all times, at all places. No doubt other thoughts will invade our mind and not allow us to pray ceaselessly. The remedy then is to exercise our will power, and reject all other thoughts. This we can do if we only will. If we compel ourselves to repeat the mantra always and if we persevere, we are sure to succeed, and then we shall find that our heart will also open up and continue to repeat the mantra by itself without any effort on our part. It means that repetition will become automatic. That is called ceaseless prayer. We have to attend to things such as the ordinary demands of the body, say, sleep, hunger and other things. We have to meet people, talk to different persons. We are to engage ourselves in so many duties and activities. Is it possible in the midst of all this to pray to God constantly?

In this connection, there is the story of a Russian pilgrim who grew so used to his prayer that when he stopped it for a single moment, he felt as though he had lost something, and that very moment he would start the prayer again. This went on easily and joyously. He was so used to this ceaseless prayer that when he was asleep he would sometimes dream that he was saying the prayer which he had learnt from his experienced teacher. So when one is used to it, then one can constantly repeat one's prayer and one feels there is nothing

more precious and sweet in this world than ceaseless prayer emanating from the heart.

Our Russian pilgrim said that there were occasions when he would walk as many as 40 or 60 miles a day. While walking he would constantly go on repeating the name of the Lord within and would not feel the strain of walking. He was aware of only one fact – namely, that he was saying the prayer internally. Sri Ramakrishna gave a number of illustrations to drive home the truth that one can pray ceaselessly. Thus he would give the example of village girls carrying so many pots of water on their heads while returning from the common village well. They would chat and gossip with the other women, but all the time their attention would be on the jars, lest they should fall off their heads. Similarly, in the midst of our day-to-day activities or in meeting people and attending to different kinds of business, we can take the name of the Lord internally, provided we take pains to do it. Swami Vivekananda once said that the daily necessary thoughts can all be through God. To quote Swamiji, 'Eat to Him, drink to Him, sleep to Him, see Him in all.' Swamiji continues to say: 'When the whole soul pours out in a continuous current to God and there is no time to seek money or name or fame, nothing mundane of this world, no time to think of anything but God, then comes into our heart that infinite wonderful love of God.'

Let us also refer to Brother Lawrence. In the midst of his hard work in the kitchen, when so many people would ask for so many things and when it was terribly noisy, Brother Lawrence would maintain absolute calmness – the calmness or silence one would get in a church while kneeling down praying to the Lord. Brother Lawrence would get the same calmness while attending to his various duties in the busy kitchen. How was it possible? It was possible because Brother

Lawrence did not do anything for himself. All the work that he was supposed to do, he did for the sake of the Lord. He used to say that if one is to be established in the constant practice of the presence of God, then 'one must have a hearty renunciation of everything which we see with our senses as obstruction in our way to God.'

Ceaseless prayer does not mean that we have to repeat the name of the Lord continuously, but what is meant is that we are to live in His presence. We should also take care to see that we do not do anything or say anything or think of anything which may displease God. The most important point to note while learning the art of ceaseless prayer is, that we can be successful in this, provided we love God; but the fact is that we do not love Him. We pray, say for an hour or so in the morning or in the evening. As a revered personage of our Order, Swami Yatiswaranandaji, used to say, we are religious people for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening, but this does not build up spiritual life. Spiritual life means constant awareness of the presence of God within and without. If we can do that, then ceaseless prayer becomes a practicable proposition. So constant remembrance of God does not mean that we are to recite the prayer or Mantra we get from our Guru at a fixed hour only, but what is meant is a continuous yearning for God. The whole of one's life must be permeated by prayer. The secret of this is deep love for the Lord. As a bride loving the bridegroom is not separated from him because of constant remembrance of him, so the soul united with God in deep love always remains in Him and converses with Him. This is the secret. We are to be constantly aware of the presence of the Lord. God is everywhere, and we are to see that our thoughts are always with God. But this we cannot do if we are attached to some person or to some object. We have to sever our heart from all that brings us

down. We are to guard our hearts with constant remembrance of the Lord. And we also should remember that there are certain fundamental enemies who do not allow us to practise prayer without cessation. Who are the enemies? Carelessness, negligence, forgetfulness of God, thinking only of our own pleasures. If we are careless, negligent, if we forget God, if we seek only mundane pleasures, then the whole of the spiritual realm is closed to us. If we do not want to fall into this abyss, we have to be aware of the foremost enemy – forgetfulness. So we have to work always towards praying to God. God is omnipresent. If one asks, 'Is God present?' – the reply is 'Yes.' He is not only present within us, he is in this hall, outside the hall, in the temple, in your house, everywhere. As a bird which flies everywhere encounters only space or air everywhere, similarly wherever we may go, we are in God, because God is omnipresent. This being so, what is required of us is to be always alert and do everything in the living presence of God.

6. How to Control Vasanas (Tendencies)

Sometime some impure thoughts and impure impressions arise from within the subconscious layer of our mind. If such unwelcome thoughts arise in our mind from the subconscious region, then we should say to our beloved Lord within, to our Ishtani: 'Oh Lord, I am helpless. These impure thoughts and impure impressions are not my thoughts, my impressions. They belong to you. You have given me all that I have. So I am helpless.' In this connection one is reminded of the story of Lord Krishna and the great poisonous serpent, Kaliya. It is stated that a terrible poisonous serpent called Kaliya created havoc, poisoning the waters of the Yamuna. Devotees of Lord Krishna implored Sri Krishna to kill the monster. Sri Krishna, as he is always compassionate, listened to the prayers of those sincere devotees and came to their rescue. He jumped into the river and danced on the hoods of the serpent continuously until in agonising pain it began to vomit blood – not ordinary blood, but poisonous blood. Now this Kaliya, in its previous birth, must have done some meritorious acts. Otherwise, how could it have got the touch of an Incarnation of God? Now, at the moment of terrible suffering, it was still in the presence of the Lord and it surrendered at His holy feet, saying, 'Oh Lord, I am not only surrendering myself at Your holy feet, I am giving You some thing else too. Devotees give You various things, but I have nothing other than this poisonous blood to give You; because it is You, the Creator of this Universe, who have given this poisonous blood. I am making an offering of it at Your lotus feet.' It regretted very much that it had nothing better to offer to the Lord. The spiritual significance of the story of Sri Krishna and Kaliya is that we have in us both good and bad tendencies. We must

be prepared to make an all-out surrender to the Lord. We have to give good, evil and everything else to Him with total surrender. With such an attitude of total surrender, we should approach God.

In a previous chapter, reference was made to the neutralising of worldly influences. The society in which we live and our environment are full of different kinds of unwholesome, worldly influences which we cannot escape. Unless we neutralise them, take pains and make special efforts to do away with the influences which hinder our progress, it will not be possible for us to realise the magnificent goal in this life. In order to neutralise worldly influences, we must spiritualise every moment of our working life. That means we have to look upon everything as Divine. This is a very helpful practice, though admittedly difficult. Vivekachudamani, gives us the way of doing this in the following verse (316):

Sarvatra sarvatah sarvam
brahma-matr'avalokanaih |
sad-bhava-vasana-dardhyat
tat trayam layam asnute ||

Sankaracharya here points out that the way to destroy worldly influences lies in looking on everything, under all circumstances, always, everywhere and in all ways, as Brahman and Brahman alone. Under all circumstances, 'Sarvada,' always. Sometimes we take recourse to discrimination and the next moment we forget to do so. That will not do. Those who have read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna must have noticed that the compiler of the Gospel, Master Mahasaya (Mahendra Nath Gupta), when he met Sri Ramakrishna for the second time at Dakshineswar Kali Temple, put to him four questions. These are all eternal questions. The first question was: 'How, Sir, can we fix our minds on God?' Sri Ramakrishna told many things in reply. The chief point he tried to impress on the

mind of Master Mahashay is, 'Always discriminate.' He laid emphasis on the word 'always.' Here also Sankaracharya, says, 'Sarvatah', – under all circumstances, always, and 'Sarvatra', everywhere. If we do that, then to a great extent we shall be successful in neutralising the effects of worldly influences.

Desires are serious obstacles on our journey towards the supreme goal. Now desire can also be augmented. If we constantly dwell on sense objects, if we hanker after worldly pleasure, then they will overpower us. If we constantly dwell on such things, they will create in us a desire to possess the sense objects, and we shall indulge in different kinds of sense gratifications leading to repeated cycles of birth and death. Now, desires or Vasanas are stimulated by two factors – internal thought and external action. First, there is a mental longing – I want to possess this, I want to enjoy this or that object. First the thought comes in the mind. What is at the thought level gradually comes later to the level of action. So, the longing is inside the mind, and action outside.

These again can be traced back to a root cause, which is called Ahamkara. Ahamkara' is so subtle that it affects the intellect through internal longing first and then through the external act. Here also, Sankaracharya rightly points out that unless we make special efforts to completely destroy all kinds of obstacles that bind us, such as identification with our body, with our psycho-physical organism, we shall continue to be in this cycle of birth and death. So, what is the remedy? Sankaracharya points out in verse 314 of Vivekachudamani:

Samsara-bandha-vicchityai
tad dvayam pradahed yatih |
vasana preryate hy antah
cintaya kriyaya bahih ||

– For the sake of breaking the chain of transmigration, the Sanyasin should burn to ashes these two – thinking of the sense objects within and doing selfish acts without. These two lead to an increase of desires.

Here is a formula. What is our goal? We want to reach the Ultimate Reality. We want to manifest the divinity which is within us. We want to realise God. Now, to realise God we must snap, somehow or other, the chain of transmigration that drags us down to this vicious cycle of birth and death. Then what have we to do? Sankaracharya points out that one should burn to ashes these two – continuous thinking of sense objects and acting upon them. For, if we just dwell on them in thought, they will manifest afterwards as physical action, and that leads to further increase of desires. Therefore, Sankaracharya rightly points out that if we want to destroy all kinds of shackles, then we are to destroy both these which are our enemies. We should not go on thinking about sense objects, and we should also avoid acting on the prompting of sense objects.

By these two – dwelling constantly on sense objects and acting upon them – what happens? We get more and more Vasanas. Now, sometimes it is seen that though we restrict for some reason or other, certain kinds of sense indulgences, we still continue to dwell on these very sense objects all the time. By so doing, our restraint becomes a mere pretence. It will, therefore, not solve our problem. Why? In the words of Sri Krishna (Gita Ch.3-6):

Karm'endriyani samyamya
ya aste manasa smaran |
indriy'arthan vimudhatma
mithy'acarah sa ucyate ||

– The deluded man who restrains his organs of action

but continues in his mind to brood over the objects of sense, is said to be a hypocrite.

Subjectively, we go on contemplating upon these sense objects; mentally we may desire to possess them, although outwardly we avoid them. Such people are called hypocrites. Therefore, a strong foundation of character has to be laid, which consists in right action, which can in turn be built upon the right type of thoughts. In a nutshell, therefore, subjective thoughts and objective actions are themselves effects of powerful Vasanas, and these powerful Vasanas create fresh crops of Vasanas which drag the individual into innumerable births and deaths. Furthermore, on account of ignorance or Avidya, we continue to live a life of sense gratification bringing an endless stream of sorrows and sufferings. If we want to avoid this or if we want to get away from these two kinds of subjective thoughts and objective actions, then what are we to do? We are to practise spiritualising our everyday life.

Sometimes it is also seen that after we have practised the spiritual technique that is given to us by our guru, there are moments when it seems that we have reached our heights. But we should not be so sure of it. It may be that we are labouring under a delusion. On this point it is worthwhile quoting the following passage from Swami Vivekananda's lecture on his Great Master at New York:

'For the moment it seemed that the doors of heavens were going to be opened; for the moment it seemed as if we were going to plunge into the Light Effulgent. But the animal man again shakes off all these angelic visions. Down we go, animal man once more, eating and drinking and dying, and dying and drinking and eating, again and again.'

Sometimes it may seem that we have experienced a modicum of bliss and we are puffed up with pride. No, we

should not do that because these may be only apparent heights, not real heights, and we may not be able to stay permanently there in perfect safety. We may slip again.

So, what should we do? We should become very careful, mindful and alert. In our journey towards the great goal, once we allow ourselves to become extroverts, then there is a tendency of going down because the ego at once intervenes and the sense objects again crowd around us for attention. Terrible Vasanas will be created once more and we fall again. Our Sadhana becomes a sheer waste of time and energy. Therefore, we have to be very careful. It is like a chain, thought followed by action. Sometimes we shall have lustful desire or thoughts. Thoughts assail our mind, invade us and we then encourage such thoughts. Then we cannot avoid giving these lustful thoughts an expression in action. When encouraged, thoughts produce actions. Sometimes various kinds of evil desires will come, but if we do not encourage them by the exertion of our will power, then we can avoid their expression as lustful action. Suppose a bad thought invades our mind, we should not encourage it. Rather, on the contrary, we should take up the attitude of a witness and sublimate this lustful thought to divine thought and chant ardently the holy name. This point can be best illustrated from two incidents, one from the life of Lord Buddha and another from the life of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, both incarnations of God. In the life of Lord Buddha, it so happened that once a woman of ill-fame, enamoured by the beauty of Bhagavan Buddha, went to the palace at midnight with evil intentions. She wanted to tempt Lord Buddha and at midnight knocked at the door of the palace where he was living. Buddha stepped out and asked why she had come. He could immediately understand the evil intention of that woman who said, 'I have come with some fruits and offerings.' Obviously she wanted

to tempt Buddha. He did come out, receive the lady with all warmth and affection, but also said, 'Mother, what can your son do for you?' So, the poor woman, who had come to tempt him and was burning with passion inside, was struck by these words of Buddha — 'Mother, what can your son do for you?' The lady was frozen to death, so to say. Another incident of the same kind occurred in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. When he had just finished his first four years of Sadhana at Dakshineswar. Somehow a doubt about his condition came in the minds of Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law Mathur Babu, as Sri Ramakrishna was not behaving in a normal way. They thought that he was dwelling on a very high plane and living an absolute life of continence which perhaps had led to his abnormal behaviour, and that he should be brought down to the normal plane by breaking his vow of continence. Mathur Babu hit upon a plan to tempt Sri Ramakrishna through Lakshmi Bai and other women of bad character in a house at Michuva Bazar in Calcutta. But as the Buddha said to that lady, 'Mother, what can your son do for you?' Sri Ramakrishna also immediately saw the Divine Mother in these women of ill-fame and cried, 'Mother, Mother,' and they all begged his pardon and saluted him again and again.

The more we proceed towards the east, the west recedes of itself. At present, we are living a life of identification with the unreal. Basically and intrinsically we are atman. We are Sat-Chit-Ananda, but we have forgotten our divine heritage. We are conscious of our biological heritage only and we live on the psycho-physical existence, on the plane of unreality. And we go on indulging in different kinds of Asat Vasanas (evil desires), which are predominant in our mind. These Asat Vasanas are to be removed by Sat Vasanas (holy desires). We have to ensure that we do not indulge in any kind of wrong and sensuous thoughts. We all have Vasanas. Some Vasanas

are in the form of seeds which, if allowed, will grow wild, will increase and multiply. The individual would feel helpless and confess, 'Oh, I have so many powerful Vasanas which drag me down to a very low plane. I just cannot escape out of it.' Now even when these Vasanas are in the seed form, we should take pains to curb and crush them and not allow them to come forth, as that will bring more of such Asat Vasanas. So Sankaracharya, who was a great psychologist besides being a philosopher, says in Verses 312 of Vivekachudamani:

Karya-pravardhanat bija-
pravrdhah paridrs yate |
karya-nasat bijanasah
tasmāt karyam nirodhayet ||

– It is seen that when the effect is developed, its seed also is developed. When the effect is destroyed, its source also is destroyed. Therefore, one should subdue the effect.

When the 'effects' flourish, the seeds are observed to increase and when the 'effects' are destroyed, the seeds also are destroyed. Therefore, the effects are to be destroyed and subdued. When the seed is allowed to germinate and grow into a big tree, we get a fresh crop of millions and millions of seeds from it. If the tree is destroyed, no fresh crop of seeds will be there. So, what are we to do? We are to stop the effect, then the cause ends. The cause-effect chain is never-ending. When this body becomes incapable of expressing the Vasanas, then we have to take the help of a new body. A new body means again fresh Vasanas and again another body, and so it goes on. To break the vicious circle, we cannot do much directly with the Vasanas. Even if we attempt to do so, we shall ultimately find that unless they are removed with their very roots, there are chances of their re-appearing. An illustration from our everyday life will make

the point clear. Say, gardeners are employed to uproot the weeds in a flower garden. They are going on plucking out and uprooting the weeds. But the next morning, the gardeners feel helpless. For, more sprouts, more weeds have come out. Then what is the remedy? We are to remove carefully the weeds along with their roots. Even after removing the weeds with their roots, we find that in some corner of the lawn we have some fresh weeds. Perhaps there were some seeds lying scattered, ungrown. So also even though we take pains to channelise our different kinds of Vasanas into useful thoughts, we may find that some undesirable Vasanas again somehow crop up, because there were some lurking Vasanas, lying dormant. On getting a chance to grow under favourable circumstance, they appear again.

Therefore, we should never, never relax. We should go on weeding out and at the same time we should also see to it that the legacies of the past with all our bad impressions are reduced. Therefore, along with the effort with which we remove the weeds, we should also cultivate some positive attitudes. When the lawn is freed from weeds, we should plant in their place some good flower and fruit-bearing vegetation. In the same way while all sensuous thoughts are eliminated, along with that positive virtues must also be cultivated.

7. How to Annihilate the Ego or Ahamkara

A Christian mystic is reported to have said that the Cross is a symbol of the annihilation of the ego. If we put a bar across 'I', it becomes the symbol of the Cross. In the Third Chapter of the Gita, Verse 27, Sri Krishna says:

Prakrteh kriyamanani
gunaih karmani sarvasah |
ahamkara-vimudhatma
kart'aham iti manyate ||

– *While all kinds of work are done by the modes of nature, he whose soul is bewildered by the self-sense thinks 'I am the doer'.*

Now Ahamkara, which is a modification of ignorance, is responsible for the cycle of birth and death. This is pointed out as follows in verse 298 of Vivekachudamani by Sankaracharya:

Santy anye pratibandhah
pumsah samsara-hetavo drstah |
tesam esam mulam
prathama-vikaro bhavaty'ahamkarah ||

– *There are other hindrances also to man which are the causes of Samsara. Of these. Ahamkara is the root and the first modification.*

All the great ones, who have realised God, point out again and again that one has to renounce the false ego. It is because of Ahamkara that our intellect gets deluded and imagines and projects the concept of 'I'. To put it in another way, all our troubles can be traced to this concept of 'ego' or 'Ahamkara.' In the language of logic, we can put it as follows: There is a concept called the falsity of the premise. Thus, suppose we say that all philosophers are mad. Emmanuel

Kant was a philosopher: and therefore, Emmanuel Kant was mad. This can of course be easily challenged. For here the major premise that all philosophers are mad is wrong. So our conclusion too is wrong. It is vitiated by what is called in logic, the 'falsity of the major premise'.

To apply this in the present case, we make so many distinctions such as 'I am so and so, son of so and so, born in a particular family. I belong to this religion and I speak this language; I am an engineer; I am a housewife; I am a student, I am a doctor' so on and so forth. All these are wrong conclusions, as they suffer from falsity of the premise. We forget our real divine self, our true self, and we lean upon our false ego and we suffer. Therefore, if we want to realise God, this ego-centric 'I' must be completely rooted out. Unless it is done, one cannot realise one's true nature.

Sankaracharya develops this problem of false ego in a subsequent verse (verse 299):

Yavat syat svasya sambandho
ahamkarena duratmana |
tavan na lesa matr'api
muktivarta vilaksana ||

– *So long as there is any connection of oneself with the wicked Ahamkara (ego-sense), there cannot be any talk, even in the least, of liberation which is unique.*

So long we have the relationship with the vile ego, not even the slightest talk of liberation is possible. Why? As long as we live on the plane of the ego, so long we have endless varieties of mental agitations about our name, family, wealth, learning, etc. Once this concept of 'ego' is overcome, the varieties pertaining to so many Upadhis, to which we are subjected because of the deluded intellect, disappear, and we realise the supreme self.

Ahamkara is here called Duratma – wicked. What is our usual attitude? Either I am the doer (Karta) or I am the experiencer (Bhokta). These are nothing other than the expressions of ego or Ahamkara. These attitudes have to be eliminated. Once we confine ourselves to this vile ego, what happens? We confine ourselves to the body, to the intellect, to the mind and to all sense organs. As a result, through ignorance we super-impose upon ourselves various sorrows and imperfections and suffer from all these. I think, 'I have got the body, I was born, I have this painful disease; mentally I am dejected and very unhappy. I am depressed.' But all these are from the standpoint of the vile ego. But when we transcend the limitations of this vile ego and reach somehow or other the higher dimensions of life, then these super-impositions drop off by themselves. Until then we shall remain deluded. Why do we think wrongly? Because of our incorrect identification with our body-mind complex. We think that we are going to die and that we have so many kinds of deficiencies and that we suffer endlessly. This makes life miserable. All these can be traced to the falsity of the premise. Thus we find in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter XIII, Verse 8, where Sri Krishna tells Arjuna:

Indriy'arthesu vairagyam
anahamkara eva ca |
janma-mrtyu-jara-vyadhi-
duhkha-dosanudarsanam ||

– *Indifference to the objects of sense, self-effacement and the perception of the evil of birth, death, old age, sickness and pain.*

Arjuna was advised to ponder over and meditate upon the evil effects of all these: Janma, Mrtyu, Jara, Vyadhi etc. But these Janma, Mrtyu, Jara, Vyadhi etc., pertain to our limited and finite self. We must continually ponder deeply over the

evil effects of this, and in doing so we should cultivate the attitude, 'I am neither the doer, not the experiencer. I have a higher dimension in my life.' So we must practise absolute self-effacement. Further, we have to be indifferent to the objects of the senses. So it comes to this: if we want to realise the goal supreme, we are to get rid of Ahamkara; and once we get rid of Ahamkara, what happens? Here is the consequence, as Vivekachudamani, verse 306 puts it:

Sad'aika-rupasya cidatmano vibhor
ananda-murter anavadya-kirtek |
n'aiv'anyatha kvapy'avikarinas te
vin'aham adhyasam amusya samsrtih ||

– *But for thy identification with that egoism, there can never be any transmigration for thee who art immutable and eternally the same, the knowledge absolute, omnipresent, the bliss absolute, and of untarnished glory.*

Once we overcome the limitations of this ego, then we realise in this very life our true nature as eternally pure, intelligent, unlimited and of the form of bliss. If we are after the final goal, we must take care of the means, many of which have already been discussed. We are now dealing with one such important means, that is, the absence of the ego.

To continue further this very important point, it is relevant to quote what Sankaracharya says in verse 307 of Vivekachudamani:

Tasmad ahamkaram imam sva-satrum
bhoktur gale kankavat pratitam |
vicchidya vijnana-mah'asina sphutam
bhunsv' atma-samrajya-sukham yathestam ||

– *Therefore destroy this egoism, thy enemy which ap-*

pears like a thorn sticking in the throat of a man taking his meal, with the great sword of realisation and enjoy directly and freely the bliss of thy empire, the majesty of the Atman.

Therefore, since it is agreed by all that absence of ego leads to the realisation of the goal, we should remember always that this Ahamkara is a formidable enemy. Unless we destroy Ahamkara which is to be considered as a thorn in our throat, we cannot attain the goal we want. Suppose we are eating and somehow a thorn sticks in our mouth: what happens then? We cannot eat or enjoy the food, however delicious the dish may be. Why? Because there is a thorn in our throat. What is the remedy? Somehow or other, the thorn has to be taken out. Sometimes, it so happens that it gives such a painful sensation that one has to go to an E.N.T. specialist, as the patient cannot eat or relish any food.

Similarly, we have to destroy the enemy – this sense of ego. Otherwise we cannot enjoy the bliss of the Self. As with the help of the forceps or knife the thorn is removed from the throat, so that we may enjoy our food, similarly with the help of the sword of Jnana, we have to remove the ego-sense to enjoy the felicity of the empire of the Atman.

While discussing the concept of ego, it will be appropriate to refer to a discussion that took place between Vijaya Krishna Goswami and Sri Ramakrishna. Vijaya asked, 'Sir, why is it that we are bound like this? Why is it that we do not realise God?' Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.' The ego has to be killed. All troubles will be over, once the ego dies. Then Sri Ramakrishna added, 'If, by the grace of God, a man can realise that he is not the doer, not the Karta nor the Bhokta, just an agent, then he at once becomes a Jeevanmukta; though living in the body, he is liberated.' These are words of assurance to all of us. Sri Ra-

makrishna here has not mentioned that only monks can become Jeevanmuktas. Anyone who, by the grace of God, can realise that he is not the doer, becomes a Jeevanmukta. While living in this body, one becomes liberated. That means one must give up one's false ego. Then this is possible. To substantiate his point, Sri Ramakrishna just gives one example. He said that Sri Rama was only two and a half cubits away ahead of Lakshmana but Lakshmana could not see him because between Sri Rama and Lakshmana, stood Sita. So Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Lakshmana can be compared to the Jiva and Sita to Maya.' Man cannot see God on account of the barrier of Maya. It is the ego that separates the Jiva from Brahman. Once the ego is removed, the Jiva realises that he is none other than Brahman. Then Sri Ramakrishna says that the Jiva is nothing but the embodiment of Satchidananda. But since Maya or ego has created many Upadhis, the Jiva cannot realise that he is Satchidananda.

Now, here is another important point. Suppose, through the grace of God or through spiritual practices, we are successful in rooting out this ego, the sense that 'I am the doer, I am so and so.' Even then this ego may again somehow revive. So Sankaracharya says in Vivekachudamani (Verse 309):

Samula_krtto'pi mahan aham punah
vyullekhitah syad yadi cetasa ksanam |
sanjivya viksepa-satam karoti
nabhassvata pravrsi varido yatha ||

– Even though completely rooted out, this terrible ego-sense, if revived in the mind even for a moment, returns to life and creates hundreds of mischiefs, like a cloud ushered in by the wind during the rainy season.

You might ask, 'How can this Ahamkara, which has been destroyed, again come to life?' It is like the dead being re-

vived by the sprinkling of Amrita. Thinking of the sense objects is the cause of it. Even though we somehow overcome and conquer the vile ego, we should not allow our minds to dwell on the sense objects. If we allow the mind to ruminate on the sense objects, all our evil impressions may again be revived. Suppose there is a citron tree which has dried up. If we go on watering it, the apparently dead tree may flower again. Likewise, the sense impressions may recede into the background after we have made some progress in spiritual life, but even then we must be cautious lest the sense of ego should pull us down.

Attachment for even a most innocuous, insignificant thing may pull us down and may lead us into endless bondage. To counteract this, one must be ever-alert and ever-vigilant. There was once a monk who renounced everything both externally and internally. His only possession was his loin cloth, but he was deeply attached to it. He even forgot the purpose for which he had gone to the forest. To save that loin cloth from being eaten up by rats, he thought that he should get a cat. So he bought a cat. But how to feed the cat? It has to be given milk. So he thought that he must now get a cow, and bought one. But then who will take care of the cow? Then he thought 'Oh, I must have a wife,' and so he married and had children. This is how ruminating over sense objects will cause the ruin of a spiritual aspirant.

Those who are sincere seekers after truth and want to realise their divine nature, must not encourage anything that takes the mind downwards. In the Gita Chapter 2 verses 62 and 63, Sri Krishna aptly analyses the fall of one from godhood:

Dhyayato visayan pumsah
sangas tes'upajayate |
sangat samjayate kamah

kamat krodho'bhijayate ||

Krodhad bhavati sammohah
sammohat smrti-vibhramah |
smrti-bhramsad buddhi-naso
buddhi-nasat pranasyati ||

– *When a man dwells mentally on the objects of senses, attachment to them is produced; from attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger.*

– *From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment, loss of memory, and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence, and from the destruction of intelligence, he perishes.*

When man goes on thinking of objects, what happens? He becomes attached to them. From attachment comes desire, and if one's desire is not fulfilled, then arises anger; from anger comes delusion; from delusion loss of memory which leads to cessation of the discriminative faculty, and finally one perishes. In one of the verses of Vivekachudamani we see that armed with the sword of discrimination alone we can cross this ocean of worldliness. So if we lose discrimination, there is no hope of salvation.

In another group of three verses of Vivekachudamani (326,328,329) Sankaracharya has very aptly described the downward trend of Citta. He narrates it thus:

Visayesh'avisaccetah
sankalpayati tad gunan |
samyak sankalpanat kamah
kamat pumsah pravartanam ||

Tatah svarupa-vibhramso
vibrastastu pataty'adhah |
patitasya vina nasam

punar n' aroha iksyate ||

Samkalpam varjayet tasmāt

sarv'anarthasya karanam |

apathyani hi vastuni

vyadhigrasto yath'otsrjet ||

– *The mind, attached to sense objects, thinks of their qualities; by such strong thinking about them, desire for them arises; desire leads to action in regard to them. Due to that, a man gets deflected from his real nature; thus deflected, he falls down. One who has fallen down comes to ruin and for him there is hardly a chance of going up. Therefore one should give up thinking of sense objects, which is the cause of one's undoing, even as a sick man should avoid a baneful diet.*

Here is a very important point. Sense objects will produce their impression on our minds. We have to move about in this world, we cannot keep our eyes closed and we cannot keep all the organs shut. Naturally, we are to live in this world and different kinds of sense impressions will come. But trouble arises when we entertain a longing for these sense objects. Swami Turiyanandaji, who was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote a number of valuable letters. In one such letter he advised a devotee, "Write on your mind's door, "No Admission." Different sense impressions will come. Let them come, "I will meet them as a master and not as their slave." The trouble begins when we allow ourselves to be victims of different kinds of sense objects with all their allurements and enchantments. Therefore, it is said, if the object comes to our mind, nothing bad is going to happen. But if the mind loves that object and also runs after it, then the trouble starts. Therefore, if sense impressions come to our mind, we should not allow ourselves to be overcome by them. One is

the master, the lord, of oneself. Yet, if one does not have what is called Ichcha Sakti or will power – or it may be that the Ichcha Sakti is weak – then one may fall a victim to the allurements of this outside world. If one allows oneself to be a victim of the outside world, what happens? He becomes a slave to the world of appearances. He forgets his real nature; he falls from the ideal. If this happens, there may scarcely be a chance to rise again. Therefore, we must be very careful. We must have the determination that we must reach our desired goal in this very life and be merged in the bliss of the Divine. We must discover our real Self; this outside world has cheated us in many previous births; we should make up our mind not to allow ourselves to be cheated or deceived by this outside world any more. We must take to the discipline of discrimination. If we do not do so, we may go down and down. As the Vivekachudamani verse 327 says:

Atah pramadan na paro'sti mrtyuh
vivekino brahmavidah samadhau |
samdhitah siddhim upaiti samyak
amdhit'atma bhava savadhanah ||

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

Then what is the remedy? In order not to fall, we should reject the tendency of the mind to contemplate on the objects of pleasure which is the root cause of all mischief. Suppose one is suffering from some disease and a doctor is sent for. He comes and says to the patient, 'I prohibit you from eating such and such food. If you follow my advice you will be cured of the disease'. Similarly, if we want to be cured of this disease of worldliness, we are to renounce the sense ob-

jects which are like the forbidden food. If we want to overcome worldliness, we must reject and rise above all kinds of sensuous thoughts. Who runs after sensuous thoughts? Who runs after sense pleasure? Why do they do so, knowing fully well that running after sense pleasures may cause their downfall? Why is it that we cannot control ourselves and why do we allow the mind to ruminate over the unreal things of the world? Sankaracharya has given the answer through another verse (311) of the Vivekachudamani:

Deh'atmana samsthita eva kami
vilaksanah kamayita katharh syat |
atho'rtha-sandhana-paratvam eva
bheda-prasaktya bhava-bandha-hetuh ||

– *One who is subject to the habit of identifying the Atman with the body is alone subjected to desire. How can one who is different be afflicted by desire? Hence, being concerned with the sense objects resulting from the idea of difference, is the cause of the bondage of Samsara.*

Here is a great formula. Let me refer again to the question, 'Why is it that we run after sense pleasures?' Here is the answer: 'Because of our identification with our body'. One who has identified himself with the body is naturally greedy for sense pleasures. But one who is devoid of such bodily identification will not run after sense pleasure. Therefore, being concerned with the sense objects is the cause of bondage. And this again is because of 'bheda-prasakti', the sense of distinction of duality. Perception of plurality implies constant contemplation of the world of objects. What is the truth? The truth is that the Atman alone abides. Brahman alone is true, and we are Brahman. Yet, we forget this and descend to a lower level, to our lower self, and identify ourselves with the body and mind. Then naturally desires

come. Further, our identification with the outside world and our taking the outside world to be real, is possible because we see plurality. But the truth is unity of existence. Brahman pervades the entire universe. If we are established in that unity of existence, Brahman, then the goal of human life is fulfilled. We will swim, so to say, in the ocean of perpetual bliss. All the great ones testify to this and we should not have any misgivings or any doubt about this.

Here is a subtle philosophical truth. Kama means desire. Who is a Kami? One with desires — a sensuous man who is permanently merged in the idea that he is the body. As long as one has this feeling 'I am the body', the body's demand for sense gratification will be there. And one becomes, let us be frank, shamelessly sensuous. Such a man thinks of the body only as a body and against this Swamiji said, 'Stop this wrong identification, the spirit now seen as body, must realise itself as spirit'. The moment one realises that, one is released. This gives great hope for us all. For the realisation of the supreme truth, we need not necessarily wait for hundreds of years or even for another birth. Some philosophers speak of what may be called 'postmortem realisation'. We are not interested in it. The question is whether it is possible in this very life and in this very body itself? Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and other great ones assure us, 'Yes, it is possible, provided we take care of the means. If we take care of the means, the end will take care of itself'.

8. Purification of Body and Mind

If we try to think of God this very instant, we find that thoughts about Him fill the mind just for a moment. Then many distractions assail the mind, and we go on thinking of everything else in the universe except God. This shows that the mind is impure and is not ready to receive the vision of God. The impurities consist of various impressions that we have gathered in birth after birth. According to one Yoga Aphorism of Patanjali, the five root causes of impressions in the mind are the following:

Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesa, Abhinivesa, Klesah.

The first root cause of all the impressions that have gathered in our minds and stand obstructing us from realising God is Avidya or ignorance — ignorance in the universal sense. We are not conscious of, and are generally ignorant of, our divine nature. God dwells in us and around us, but we are not aware of it. Secondly, from this ignorance springs Asmita, or the sense of ego. This sense of ego makes us think of ourselves as separate from all others.

We have two more formidable enemies: Raga and Dvesha, i.e., attachment and aversion. We develop these out of the sense of ego or Asmita. The last but not the least, is Abhinivesa, i.e., the thirst to live — the desire to cling to our surface life and surface consciousness. We do not want to realise our divine nature. We are satisfied with our mundane state of existence. We do not want to live on a spiritual plane. So, these are called Panchaklesa or the five root causes which hinder us from realising our divine nature. This is again further elaborated in another Yogasutra. It says that because of Ignorance we take what is Anitya (non-eternal) as Nitya (eternal), Asuci (Impure) as Suci (pure), Duhkha (painful) as Sukha (happy), and Anatman (non-Atman) as Atman

(soul). All this misunderstanding is due to Avidya or ignorance. While explaining this very important aphorism of Raja Yoga of Patanjali, Swami Vivekananda points out that all of us think, 'I am the body and not the self – the pure, the effulgent, the ever-blissful – and that is due to ignorance. We think of man and see man as body. That is the great delusion'.

We are all under this delusion, which arises due to ignorance and false identification. We are to remember that pure joy is possible only when we abide in the Atman, our real nature. Due to ignorance, we seek pleasure in things temporal, non-eternal and ephemeral, and this is indeed a great tragedy.

A further quotation from the Vivekachudamani will be relevant in this connection: Verse 337 says:

Deh'adi samsaktimato na muktih
muktasya dehady' abhimaty'abhavah |
suptasya no jagaranam na jagratah
svapans tayor bhinna-gun'asrayatvat ||

– There is no liberation for one who has attachment to the body, etc., and the liberated man has no identification with the body, etc. The sleeping man is not awake, nor is the waking man asleep; for these two states are contradictory in nature.

It is said here that there is no liberation for him who is attached to the body, etc., and Mukti is possible only when we overcome identification with this body. The liberated man has no identification with the body. Who is a Jeevanmukta? One who lives in this body, but is not attached to this body. Though he appears to be living in the body, he lives in the Atman, his own divine nature. 'Suptasya na jagaranam', i.e. the sleeping man is not awake nor is the waking man asleep; for

these two states are contradictory in nature.

To clarify this further: so long as we are attached to the body or body-mind complex, we cannot dwell on our real nature, the Atman. So, one who is attached to the flesh and thinks, 'I am the body', must cater for the different needs of the body and cannot attain liberation. Only for him, who has overcome attachment to the body, is liberation possible.

We want to realise our divine nature; we want to become Jeevanmuktas. We want to realise that we are the Atman. But at the same time, if we go on fulfilling the endless desires of the body and the mind, then liberation is not possible. As has been pointed out in the Vivekachudamani, the sleeping man is not awake. Who is this sleeping man? One who is attached to the body, one not conscious of his own divine nature. On the other hand, the one who is seeking the Truth, who is conscious of his divine nature, who has been able to root out the false identification with the body-mind complex – for him there is no bondage. He is a Jeevanmukta. So these two states are contradictory.

There are also many demands of the body. If we get attached to them clue to ignorance, we shall come to endless grief. But once we take pains to withdraw our minds from the gross body, liberation is possible. In this connection Vivekachudamani verse 334 says:

Bahy'abhisandhiih parivardhayet phalam
durvasanam eva tatas tato'dhikam |
jnatva vivekaih parihrtya bahyam
svatm' anusandhim vidadhita nityam ||

– *Attachment to external objects will only increase more and more their fruits in the form of evil tendencies. Therefore, the wise should avoid for the afore-said reasons whatever is external and should ever en-*

gaga in the contemplation of the Atman.

Here Sankaracharya points out that constant contemplation on outward objects will only enhance our evil propensities and these evil propensities will go from bad to worse. Then is there any remedy? Is there any way out? Of course, there is a way out. Through discrimination one has to leave the thoughts of external objects. However, this is something negative. Simply giving up thoughts of external objects is not enough. Sankaracharya adds something positive. He says we have to give up thoughts of external objects, but at the same time, since the mind cannot remain in a vacuum, we have to make efforts to constantly apply ourselves to meditation on the Self. If we can do this, then the evil propensities can be overcome. Otherwise, the more one turns outwards, the more one becomes an extrovert. Then what happens? Vasanas (desires) of various kinds multiply by leaps and bounds, and as a result we have even more mental agitation. With such mental agitation it is not possible to meditate on our real nature, the divine self. Why? Because the mind has a tendency to contact constantly the world of objects, the outside world. Then what are we to do? Through our discriminative powers, through Viveka – the sword of discrimination – and also through Vairagya (dispassion) we have to constantly distinguish between the real and the unreal, between the eternal and the non-eternal.

If we are after the realisation of the Goal Supreme in this very life, then with the aid of Viveka and Vairagya we must turn away our mind from the world of objects and we should make sincere efforts to try to live in tune with our real nature. If we can do this, then realisation is possible. It is very difficult to comprehend the infinite Brahman, because our mind is finite. Even then we should go on trying and should make repeated attempts. This attempt at compre-

hending the infinite Brahman with the finite mind itself will ultimately enable us to successfully turn the mind from the world of objects.

Sankaracharya says some valuable things in verse 335 of Vivekachudamani. Let me draw your attention to the verse:

Bahye niruddhe manasah prasannata
manah-prasade paramatma-darsanam |
tasmin sudrste bhavabandha— nasah
bahir-nirodhah padavi vimukteh | |

— When the external world is shut out, the mind is cheerful and the cheerfulness of the mind brings on the vision of the Paramatman. When it is perfectly realised, the chain of birth and death is broken. Hence the shutting out of the external world is the stepping stone to liberation.

In the above verse, we are told to withdraw the mind from the outside world. What happens if we are successful in shutting out the mind from the objective world? The mind become quiet and cheerful, and in the calm mind arises the vision of the Paramatman. But Sankaracharya adds something further. Simply having a glimpse of the Paramatman will not do. We must have true realisation, concrete realisation, perfect realisation. When one is perfectly established in the vision of the Paramatman, then the chain of birth and death is broken and one is able to cross the ocean of worldliness. Here the word 'Padavi' means, 'steps or ways'. What is the goal? The goal is liberation. And what are the means? Bahye niruddhe' – shutting out the external world. So, again the emphasis is on with-drawing the mind from anything that is non-Atman. If we take care of the means and successfully cut out the external world, then what happens? We are almost face to face with the Truth or realisation of the Truth. There-

fore, it is said that the shutting out of the external world is a very important factor towards liberation.

In the Yoga-Vasishtha there is an important verse that sheds much light on this question. It has been said that we cannot hope to be successful in our attempts to realise the supreme truth unless we practise purification. In Yoga-Vasishtha Sara, we find a section 'Suddhi-nirupana-prakarana' or the method of purification, and there we find an important verse, which reads as follows:

kva mamsa-rudhiradini
kvas tvam caitanya vigrahah |
vijanan api dehe'smin
atmadhiyam na jahasi kim ||

Now we are bound on all sides firmly by the idea that, 'I am the body' and nothing other than the body. We must try and cultivate the attitude against this bond. Our link with the body should be severed by the sword of knowledge. We have to think constantly, 'I am pure consciousness', 'I am Suddha Caitanya', 'I am Caitanya-vigraha'. Again and again we must try to cultivate this idea as opposed to the idea with which we are presently afflicted – the idea, 'I am the body and nothing other than the body'. If we are after liberation, we have to cut this bond by applying the sword of knowledge and cultivating this positive attitude, 'No, I am neither the body nor the mind, nor the sense organs; I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, I am pure consciousness'. If we can do this, and be established in this idea, there is no doubt we will become happy, full of joy and bliss.

We are told that we are Satchitananda-svarupa. We are intrinsically full of joy, Anandam. But why do we foolishly forget our divine nature, that we are full of bliss – Anandam? We are 'Caitanya-vigraha', but why do we degrade ourselves

and stoop so low as to think that we are this body or this mind? Think of the ingredients of the body. The body is composed of filthy materials, and we foolishly identify ourselves with these filthy materials. This perishable body will one day be burnt and reduced to ashes. But so far as our real nature is concerned, we are Caitanya-Vigraha. Yet we foolishly allow ourselves to be degraded to the animal level and think in term of flesh and bones.

What a difference – we, who are 'Caitanya Vighraha', to foolishly forget all about this and attach ourselves to something for which we should have no attachments! What a vast difference between this flesh and blood and our true self which is Pure Conciousness! So know this – that we are Pure Conciousness. We are not the body, not a lump of flesh. Is it not all a great tragedy? O mind, just think of this!

Another verse tells us what we are to do in order to realise that we are 'Caitanya vighraha'. We are to separate ourselves from the body and think that we are 'Caitanya Vighraha'. Constantly dwell on this truth. This idea has to be made a ceaseless practice during every moment of our existence. If somehow we can separate ourselves from the body and abide at ease in consciousness and think that we are 'Caitanya Vighraha' and not the body, then what happens? We realise that we are Brahman, we become 'Caitanya Vighraha'. We are that. Everything else, this body or body-mind complex, concern about the external world and all desires relating to the body will become as insignificant as straw.

While dealing again and again with the importance of rooting out identification with the body, a question may well be raised: 'Why this insistence on withdrawing the mind from the outside world? What is wrong with the world? Can we not enjoy the good things of the world and practise Sadhana? Why this negative advice to withdraw the mind from the

world?' The reason is, here we are concerned with those aspirants who are really serious in their spiritual quest, with those who want to realise God in this very life. We are not concerned with the millions and millions of worldly people who have no interest in spiritual matters. Real aspirants after Truth will easily understand that withdrawing the mind from the outside world is not a negative advice, although it may seem so from a worldly point of view. Simply withdrawing the mind from the visible objects of the outside world will not do; we are also to focus our attention on our divine nature, i.e., negatively withdrawing from the world of objects but positively meditating on our divine nature. Although we are asked to withdraw, at the same time we are also repeatedly asked to contemplate upon our real nature. By contemplation upon our real self, we get realisation of the Paramatman.

Another question can now be raised. Can the highest truth, the Paramatman, be attained by some kind of Sadhana? Any kind of Sadhana is a finite activity, but the Paramatman is infinite. How then can the infinite be realised through finite efforts, by limited mortals such as we? The answer is that the withdrawal is not the direct cause of liberation. It sets in motion a series of consequences which ultimately lead the seeker to liberation. Let us consider these stages one by one.

The mind is rushing forth to the world of objects, but it has to be held back. Once it is held back, it becomes calm and serene. To the extent that the mind can be brought back from the outside world, to that extent our mind will not run after sensuous objects. When the mind is completely withdrawn from the outside world, we will reach the Goal Supreme.

A further question may be raised. What is the difference

between an ordinary man and a man of enlightenment? Even a saint, a man of enlightenment and realisation, has to live in the world of objects. Can we actually withdraw the mind? Here, there, everywhere, we are in the world of objects, surrounded by it and living in it. The world of objects does not cease to exist for any living being. What then can be the meaning of withdrawing from the outside world? The difference is this: The Jnani or the man of enlightenment may live, move and have his being in the world of objects, but he has a different attitude. He has Atma-Drishthi, Brahma-Drishthi – the perception of the Atman in everything. Even while he is in the midst of different people or objects of this universe, he is always established in unity. He sees Brahman alone in everything. He may be in the world of objects which can produce various impressions on his mind, but with the help of the sword of discrimination, he can negate all that appeals to the senses. He goes to the bottom, the substratum and knows that all these are appearances, and that Brahman alone is true. This, therefore is the difference between an enlightened one and the ordinary man. In the case of the ignorant person, when the world of objects is presented to his mind, it produces sensuous hankerings and appetites, because the ordinary world of objects appears to him to be a tempting one. And naturally so. He being ignorant, an Ajnani, he gives importance to the stuff of the phenomenal world. On the contrary, a man of enlightenment does not give any real importance to the things of the world. They may appear before him, but he is neither concerned nor perturbed because he has that 'Brahma-drishthi'. In the midst of multiplicity, he is established in unity. He is always a master of the situation. The objects may tempt him, but because of his realisation he does not allow himself to be made a victim to the tempting objects produced by the external world. That is the difference between an Ajnani and a man of enlighten-

ment.

To pass on to another important point, namely, the need to practise absolute chastity in thought, word and deed. No spiritual progress or unfoldment is possible, unless we think of God ceaselessly in an unbroken stream. Who can do this? Let us try to think of God. We see, and most of us can testify from our experience, that when we go to our meditation chamber or the temple and sit for meditation, hundreds of undesirable thoughts invade our minds. We are supposed to meditate upon God, 'This is the time, O Lord, when I have come to hold communion with You'. When we think of Him, the thought of Him may come to our minds for a few seconds or minutes. But after that all kinds of unwelcome thoughts will come. These are signs of impurity. If the mind is pure, we will have constant remembrance of God. So purity is very, very essential. That is the reason why Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. Therefore, purity is a sine qua non for any kind of spiritual unfoldment. But we cannot achieve this purity because of various sensuous desires. If we want to have ceaseless communion with God, then, in the language of Sri Ramakrishna, as you find it recorded in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 'If the telegraph wire is broken, then communication will not reach the destination till the broken wire is repaired'. We may go on doing Japam and meditation, but if the mind is full of desires, then all our Sadhanas and bhajans will be in vain. Consider a pitcher filled with water. If we go on pouring water in it but there is a leakage in the pitcher, any amount of pouring will never fill the pitcher, as the water will simply leak out. In the same way, we may go on doing Japam and meditation, but through our Vasanas born of identification with the body-mind complex and various infatuations, the effect of all our Sadhanas and Bhajans will leak

out. Unless we take pains to repair the holes and plug them with our spirit of detachment (Vairagya), it is not possible to fill the pitcher. As Sri Ramakrishna said, if we go on rowing a boat like a drunkard the whole night while the boat is anchored to the shore all the time, any amount of rowing will not move it. Likewise any amount of Japam and Tapam will not enable us to make any progress, if we do not take pains to root out our attachments.

The Chandogya Upanishad says that when the knots of the heart are broken, one realises God. This realisation of God is possible when one can practise constant remembrance of God. It has a technical name – Dhruva smrtih. This is not possible unless we have pure food. Through purity of food comes purity of intention, through purity of intention comes constant remembrance of God and from constant remembrance of God our bondages are cut and we become free. As far as the word 'food' is concerned in this context, there are two interpretations. Ramanuja has given an orthodox interpretation. By 'food', he means, in the religious sense, food according to prescribed laws of Sattvika food. But Sankaracharya gives an ethical and psychological import to this word 'food'. Anything we take in through our five senses, i.e., Rupa, Rasa, Sabda, Gandha, Sparsa is 'food'. Every moment of our existence we are receiving so many impressions through our five sense organs and through our memory and imagination. Anything we receive through the senses should be pure. Food eaten alone is not sufficient.

As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, a man may take even pork, but if his mind is still on the Atman or God, he is blessed; and a man may take strict vegetarian food, but if his mind is on Kama, Kanchana, i.e., lust and lucre, then fie on him.

Let us now quote that passage of Chandogya Upanishad regarding 'food':

Ahara suddhau sattva-suddhih
Sattva-suddhau dhruva smrtih
smrti-lambhe sarva-granthinam vipra-moksah

– From purity of food comes purity of mind, from purity of mind comes constant remembrance of God, and from constant remembrance of God one becomes free from all bondage – one becomes liberated.

A clear mirror alone can reflect the face. So purity, Sat-tva-Suddhi, is stressed again and again by all the mystics and saints of the world.

We must take care of all the five sense organs. All the sense organs are to be properly directed. Through any sense organ, let us not receive any kind of impure impression. We have already many impure impressions and these should be neutralised and counter-acted by good impressions. All the time, we should take only good impressions from the outside world. A question may be asked, 'I have bad Samskaras, and my mind is such that I only receive bad impressions. However much I try, I cannot help receiving impure impressions'. The remedy is given by Swami Vivekananda. 'Would you wash dirt with dirt? Will sin kill sin, weakness cure weakness?'

If we have impure impressions, impure Samskaras, then we should not emphasise it. We should not make much of it. To do so is wrong psychology. If one says, 'I have a bad habit; from childhood till now I have formed such a bad habit'. It is true that habit is our second nature but there is a greater truth that counteracts it. If habit is our second nature, then we also have a first nature. What is that? We are divine by our basic nature. We are 'Caitanya Vighraha'. Why not give greater stress on this? Why attach ourselves to the bodily failings only. If, because of the desires of the body, we can receive only impure impressions, is it not a fact that we are

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'Caitanya-vigraha', i.e., is it not true that we are divine by nature and that divinity is our birth-right? So, we must cultivate this positive attitude, and if that is done, we can overcome all impure impressions.

9. Self-Control, the Key to Self-Realisation

Some people feel that they are not able to make any progress in spiritual life, because they are born with bad tendencies (Samskaras), and that their life is going to end in failure. This is a wrong way of thinking. We have to counteract this feeling with positive thoughts. That is, we should repeatedly emphasise the divinity that is within us. We should think that purity is our birth-right – that we are all pure consciousness. But even if we think that we are divine, we should always be on our guard, should always be watchful. Sometimes we make serious mistakes. Suppose there are some insignificant ripples in the mind, some tiny impulse produced by something from the external world. Sometimes we may brush it aside by thinking that such a tiny impulse cannot do us any harm. There we are making a fundamental mistake. Even if it is a tiny something or it seems apparently insignificant, if we are not conscious of it, then it may ultimately do us great harm. Attachment in any form may be enough to bring about the spiritual downfall of an aspirant. We must carefully avoid all kinds of harmful stimuli. We should take pains to keep our mind engaged in higher thoughts. We should not give any opportunity whatsoever for the lower propensities and impulses to rise and overpower us. Swami Virajanandaji, who was the sixth President of our great Order, has to his credit a very valuable book, which originally was meant for his initiated disciples, but later on was made public. It is called 'Towards Goal Supreme'. In this book, Swami Virajanandaji rightly cautions all aspirants thus: 'Be always alert. Never believe your mind for a single moment. In subtle ways evil may try to beguile you by assuming sometimes a form of virtue or a form of compassion or a form of friendship.' Sometime we may think, 'Oh, I would like to help somebody. This is my duty, my dharma. Or it is neces-

sary for the sake of friendship.' But that may cause our downfall. Even by this form of compassion or sense of duty or seva, one may get attached to a particular person. So, we must be very, very careful.

The following funny story illustrates the effects of carelessness in our choice of company. Once an Arab built a tent and a camel came and wanted to push its nose through the door. The Arab objected, 'No. I will not allow you, this is my tent; this is not meant for animals to live in.' But the camel said, 'No, no, please allow me. I would like to put only my nose inside.' But slowly it not only pushed its nose in, but the whole body, so much so that the Arab was very much irritated and angry and he wanted to drive out the camel from his tent. But initially allowing the camel to put its nose into his tent was the mistake that he made. The camel said, 'Well, if you do not like my presence, then you better get out, but I will not.' So, sometimes we allow the camel to enter into us. We must be very, very careful about this. Intense and unbridled desire for any object of enjoyment is such an enemy as will cause our downfall.

A genuine spiritual life requires a great amount of self-control and purity. All great ones, who realised God, emphasised again and again the need for absolute purity in the case of those who take to spiritual life very seriously and want to reach the supreme goal in this very life. They must pay the price, and there cannot be any bargaining. This is not only true for monastics, those who lead the life of absolute celibacy or continence, but even for householder devotees. If they want to reach the goal, i.e., realise God, if they want real self-unfoldment in this very life and reach the state of a 'Jeevanmukta' (being free while in this body), they must also exercise self-control. As Sri Ramakrishna advised householder devotees, after the birth of one or two children, the husband

and the wife must live like brother and sister. The idea is that unless our baser urges are sublimated and we really lead the life of absolute chastity, God-realisation is not possible.

Here is a quotation on this point from Brother Gills, the foremost disciple of St. Francis of Assisi. Says Brother Gills: 'Amongst all other virtues, I would set the virtue of chastity first, because sweet chastity contains all perfection in itself. There is no other virtue which can ever be perfect without chastity. It is impossible for any man to attain spiritual grace without perfect chastity.'

The present writer once read in an English daily the report of a talk on this subject, wherein the speaker stated, 'Those who say that absolute chastity is to be observed, are terribly mistaken.' Such statements are absurd. Any one who leads a really pure life can bear witness to this. Living at the animal level of life, makes one feel degraded. The source of all spiritual strength lies in purity, but Brother Gills adds an adjective 'sweet chastity'. Sometimes we may perhaps think that if we maintain chastity and purity in thought, word and deed, then we shall miss much of the enjoyments of the world. So, let us enjoy the world. Here we make a fundamental mistake. We live a life of self-restraint and not of self-indulgence. If chastity is not sweet, i.e.. agreeable to one's aspiration, then naturally it may create some complexes, and there may even be a nervous breakdown. Further, Brother Gills is right when he says that it is impossible for any man to attain spiritual grace without perfect chastity. To quote Brother Gills again, 'Thou shalt never be able to attain spiritual grace unless thou can master all the vices of the flesh. Therefore, fight valiantly against thy frail and sensual flesh, thine own worst enemy which wages war against thee day and night.' But there is an art in this fighting. It is clear that there are many desires of the flesh, and if we become victim

to them, we cannot realise our divine nature, which is eternally free. Therefore, we have to wage a war constantly against our worst enemy in the form of different kinds of worldly desires and temptations. But should it be a frontal attack? No, for the enemy will take 'an upper hand. That is not the way, as there will be violent reactions. It is a fact that the flesh is our worst enemy and if we make a frontal attack, some nervous tension or complexes may be created. Then, what is the way?

We must adopt some method or technique by which this enemy can be overcome. Brother Gills gives us an example. Suppose a large piece of stone or any heavy weight is to be removed. If we try to remove it by force, we may sustain an injury in our attempt. If we try to remove it with some ingenuity, some device, then it can be done easily. Brother Gills says that the temptations of the flesh producing in us the vice of impurity are to be conquered by the virtue of chastity, but this can be done, provided we develop a technique and we practise real humility.

There was a very holy Augustinian monk named Thomas Haemmerlin, the author of the famous book 'The Imitation of Christ'. Swami Vivekananda in his pilgrimage all over India carried two books with him. One was the Bhagavad Gita, and the other was this book 'The Imitation of Christ'.

In this book Thomas Haemmerlin writes, 'The life of man upon earth is a life of temptation. Everyone, therefore, ought to be careful about this temptation and watch in prayer lest the devil, who never sleeps, but goes about seeking whom he may devour, find opportunity to deceive him.'

We are to be vigilant at all times. The devil does not sleep. If he finds that a man or a woman is careless, he immediately tries to bring his or her downfall. We must be very

careful. But it is also said that temptations do us some good sometime. How? Because, sometimes we become vain-glorious. We are proud of our spiritual attainments. We think, 'Oh, I have no desire for sense objects. I do deep meditation. I listen to spiritual discourses,' and so on. It is through temptations that we are reminded of such shortcomings of ours and thereby humbled, instructed and purified. It is a fact that everyone of us has to pass through a period of temptation. St. John of the Cross said that everyone has to pass through what is called 'the dark night of the soul'. It seems, 'Oh, I am going to be drowned in the ocean of worldliness. There is absolutely no hope for any redemption or deliverance, and I am going to sink down and down.' This is the 'dark night of the soul', when different kinds of temptations assail us. However, if we fight valiantly, like true soldiers, then ultimately we shall emerge victorious.

Sometimes we may be overcome by temptations. Should we run away? But we cannot run away from the mind. By flight alone temptations can never be overcome. We have to face them and take them as a challenge. Suppose one runs away from a place which he considers to be full of temptations, and thus avoids that place. We may go to a secluded corner, but the same mind goes there with us. Wherever we might stay, we are likely to be surrounded by different kinds of temptations, but if we develop the technique of training and disciplining the mind and have the willpower to rise above circumstances and situations and practise patience and humility, then temptations can be overcome. We must, however, be very watchful, especially in the beginning.

Let us see how temptation does us harm. Firstly, it gives a suggestion to the mind, the thought of something evil. Then it manifests as a strong imagination. If we follow that picture which imagination paints, we get some satisfaction. The

temptation comes to one's mind in the form of the devil and suggests, 'Oh, follow me, imagine the amount of sense gratification you are going to get from it.' Then imagination follows – then the thought of some delight by following this temptation, then a little movement – and ultimately we yield and we give consent. Little by little the mind goes down. To counteract this, at the very beginning, when the devil gives us his suggestions, we should start discriminating, 'No, it is the devil, it is not for my good. He has deceived me, cheated me, brought my downfall many a time. If I become a victim of his temptations and run after the sensual pleasures, then I shall not be able to comprehend the glory of my divine nature, my real self.' So, we must take action in the very beginning.

Thomas Haemmerlin further says that we are to become pure. How can we be pure? To quote him: 'Entangle not thy heart to any creature. Thy beloved is of the nature that He will admit no rival. He would like to occupy the heart alone.' If we are devotees of, say Sri Krishna, Sri Ramachandra or Sri Ramakrishna, the heart must be cleared of all impurities and emptied of various attachments to persons. If we want the vision of our beloved Ishtam, then, as Thomas says, He must occupy the throne of our heart alone. He does not admit of any rival. Then naturally a question may be asked, 'We are surrounded by relatives, mother, husband, wife, children and so many kinds of acquaintances. What are we to do?' Yes, we can love them all but we should try to see our beloved Ishtam in all. Our whole love should be only for our Ishtam. We should see our Rama, our Krishna, our Ramakrishna in everybody and then we are saved. But if we get attached to the body-mind complex, which is not going to last, we shall be forgetting that we are the eternally free spirit. If we get attached to a particular person, i.e., a body, then we are

caught in ignorance, and there will be no liberation for us. That is the reason why it has been said, 'Entangle not your heart with any creature.'

We should have conviction that the love of God alone is abiding, that the love of all others is inconsistent and deceitful, and that we must always have our being in our Ishtam. Then we will be in sweet paradise. Thomas Haemmerlin goes on to point out, 'When Jesus is present, all is well, nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent everything is hard.' Those who are in the midst of multifarious activities must also make it convenient to retire to the sanctuary of their hearts and hold silent conversation with the beloved Lord. It gives spiritual strength to fight the attractions of the world and to neutralise all kinds of worldly influences. We have to hold on to the pillar of God. If we do get ourselves entangled in the so-called 'activities', then we miss the Goal. Therefore, it is imperative that even in the midst of multifarious activities, from time to time or at least for a few minutes, we dive into our inner nature and pray thus: 'O Lord, I do not have much time to do japa and meditation, but I have the conviction that You are my beloved. I know that You will not admit of any rival, You want to occupy my soul alone. I know that I should not be attached to any creature, but how can I have the necessary strength so that I can practise all that is said in the scriptures? Unless You are gracious unto us, how can we do that?' We have to learn to despise outward things and we have to learn the things of the inner world. We are so enamoured of the things of this outside world and captivated by this gross phenomenal outside world that we are just not aware of the beauty of the noumenal world – the real world that lies at the back of the world of appearances. After all, this world which we see with our physical eyes is an appearance of Brahman who is the substratum of the world of ap-

pearances, but we are so much enamoured of these appearances that the substratum, the reality, Brahman, is relegated, and we miss the goal. We must despise outward things and give ourselves up to things inward. To quote again from Thomas Haemmerlin, 'The inward man He often visiteth; and hath with him sweet discourses, pleasant solace, much peace, familiarity exceedingly wonderful.' On the day we reach perfection we shall be able to verify the truth of all that is said in this sentence.

We come across several persons, especially youngsters, who entertain doubts about the existence of God. But the fact is that God is the only Reality. The opposite view is the result of ignorance.

God is in us but we are not conscious of it. That is the greatest tragedy of mankind. The more one becomes pure, the more one feels the tangible and living presence of God within. Can any one verify this? 'Yes, the Lord visits the inward man.' Most of us are extroverts. We are so captivated by the outside world that we cease to be inward in our outlook. No extrovert can hope to get spiritual bliss. To get spiritual bliss one has to become an introvert. Of course, to do outside activities, we must give all our attention outwardly. We may have to become extroverts for our day to day dealings, but along with it, we must be introverts to reach perfection. If we can become introverts, then God will visit us and we can have sweet inward conversations with Him.

When one gentleman sought an interview with Brother Lawrence, he made a condition, not to make public all that he would say. The first few years he (Brother Lawrence) struggled hard. Then, by the grace of God, he got such an abundance of spiritual bliss that he found it hard to control his emotions. He could not but give expression to them. So all this is possible only if we reach a state in which we are

not attached to anybody. It has been said in the 'Imitation of Christ' by Thomas Haemmerlin:

'It is vanity to follow the desires of the flesh. It is vanity to set thy love on that which speedily passeth away, and not to hasten thither, where everlasting joy abideth.

'Endeavour, therefore, to withdraw thy heart from the love of visible things and to turn thyself to the invisible.

'For they that follow their sensuality, do stain their own conscience and lose the favour of God.'

So we are rightly advised to give our attention only to the invisible by withdrawing our minds from the love of visible things.

We have to remember that all that is seen and all that is visible is unreal. That which is invisible is the truth, the reality. So we should take pains to withdraw our minds from all that is visible and we should try to go inside and turn ourselves to the invisible. That means that we must practise going inwards. We must become introverts. If we do not do that but just follow the promptings of the senses, then what happens? We lose the fervour for God. If we want the grace of God and the bliss of His company – the sweet visitation by the Lord, familiar conversation with the Lord, communion with the Lord – then we must give up running after the desires of the world of senses. Otherwise our conscience gets stained, and we lose the grace of God. 'Where there is lust (Kama), there is no Rama: Where there is Rama, there is no Kama.' We cannot serve God and Mammon together. We have to make our choice.

Further, it is said in the same book just mentioned, 'There is no peace in the heart of a carnal man; nor in him that is addicted to outward things but in the spiritual, and the fer-

vent man.' These are verily mahamantras, great formulas of Truth.

Any inward man who has been able to overcome the desires pertaining to the senses must gain peace of mind. Running after desires may seem the correct thing to do in life, but in reality it simply makes you restless. 'There is no peace in the heart of a carnal man.' A carnal man means one who follows the desires of the body. 'Nor in him that is addicted to outward things.' The inner world is so sweet that there cannot be any comparison with anything of the outside world. If we take any object of this world and enjoy it for long, it is likely to produce a reaction after some time. But spiritual bliss is a joy of the inner world which never produces any reaction. On the other hand, the mind will always say, 'Oh, I am happy. I am in immense spiritual bliss! Oh, the joy of it! Oh the bliss of it! I am full of Anandam. My human life is blessed.' We will be in perpetual joy. But this we cannot hope to have unless we become inward men. If we always seek outward things and if we are not fervent and spiritual men, then we cannot obtain everlasting joy. We have to be sincere seekers after truth. We must have Viveka and Vairagya and be deeply attached to the God within. We should not have any kind of attachment to any creature. We must be deeply devoted to the Lord alone, or to put it in a single sentence, we must be inward men, and then we will have real peace.

Thomas has rightly observed, 'Nothing so defileth and entangleth the heart of a man as the impure love to the creatures.' If the question is asked, 'Should we not love other creatures? Should not a mother love her children?' Naturally the answer is that a mother should love her children, but the mother should see Gopala (Krishna as child) in them. In this way, divinisation and spiritualisation of day to day relationship is what is required. In everyone we must see the be-

loved, the face of the beloved; then there will be no problems.

Passing from Thomas Haemmerlin's 'Imitation of Christ' let us now refer to the 'Unseen Warfare' by Lorenzo Scupeli. Naturally, as a Roman Catholic priest he had to pass through 'the dark night of the soul'. All those who take to religious life seriously, do not want to give up their sincere attempt to reach the goal. That means they go on struggling. If one keeps up the struggle, one is finally rewarded. In what form? We have depressions and feel as if we are sinking down, but God is gracious to us ultimately. He looks to our intentions. When he sees that a sincere soul is struggling against the pull of the senses and against so many kinds of odd situations, then He rewards the sincere person. So ultimately, such a devotee, an inward and fervent man, is rewarded by illumination. So 'the dark night of the soul' is followed by spiritual illumination and spiritual realisation, provided one keeps up the struggle. This Roman Catholic priest had to pass through different periods of struggle and from his experience he wrote this book, giving his advice to sincere spiritual aspirants. He begins thus, 'I realise that you want to reach the height of perfection; I appreciate your readiness', and then he adds something which reminds us of a verse from Vivekachudamani having a striking affinity with it. He writes that somebody expressed to him a desire, saying, 'Father, I want to reach perfection in this life, as Jesus said "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". I am willing to undergo any kind of hardship.' Then the Roman Catholic priest said, 'Well I am glad to know about your noble intentions', and then he added, 'Blessed be your zeal.' Now Sankaracharya expresses a similar idea in Vivekachudamani – which is a book in the form of a dialogue between Guru and Sishya. A disciple comes, offers his salutations to the Guru and asks, 'What is bondage?

How did it arise? How is one freed from it? What is this non-self and who is the Supreme Self? How can one discriminate between the two? Pray, vouchsafe all this to me.' Then the beneficent Guru replies, 'Blessed art thou; thou hast achieved thy life's aim and hast sanctified thy family as thou wishest to be a knower of Brahman by removing the fetters of bondage'.

Swami Vivekananda in one context says, 'Believe and you are free this very moment.' We are told that when Swami Vivekananda was in the Bay area of San Francisco, his mind was on a very high plane. He would always be on the plane of Atman. Swamiji would say, 'The hour will come when great men shall arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make vivid and powerful, the true religion, the worship of the spirit by the spirit.' This is the miracle that is going to take place in the modern age. Now, the spirit is seeing itself as the body and therefore we are not conscious of the higher dimensions of life. This rare human life is given to us to realise our divine nature and it is possible, provided we take pains to stop the wrong identification with the body and deny the promptings of the lower self. Once this is done, the inner self will shine in all its glory and splendour.

10. The Path as Shown by Western Saints

In our journey towards the ultimate goal we are faced with a serious struggle. Unless we are prepared for a ceaseless struggle and to oppose all that is evil in this unseen warfare, we cannot hope to reach our goal. A tremendous conflict will take place within us, although people outside may not know about it. Lorenzo Scupoli, the Catholic clergyman referred to in the previous chapter, has thus very rightly named his book as 'Unseen Warfare'. But there are also words of hope and encouragement in the same book. It is pointed out there that victory is ultimately given to those who are real fighters. Who can fight till the end? Only one who is really serious about perfection, and it is said that of all the wars, this internal war to conquer all our evil propensities is the hardest. Why? Because we are fighting against ourselves.

Swami Brahmanandaji in his very valuable book 'The Eternal Companion' has said that those who seriously take to the path of spiritual unfoldment have to go against the current. Ninety-nine per cent of the people swim with the current. They follow the path of pravritti, sense gratification, but those who want to realise God or achieve perfection in this very life, belong to a different category. Since they follow the path of nivritti, the path of sense denial, the path of the good and not the path of the pleasant – the path of Sreya and not of Preya – naturally they have to face tremendous struggles. Sometimes it may happen that after having struggled for years, when we do not realise anything, we may be tempted to give up the fight. We feel it is better to give up, since we have struggled so long and gained no spiritual experience. We feel as if all these years have gone in vain. Then from the path of Sreya we take to the path of Preya. We give up the path of the good and follow the path of the pleasant. Such weaknesses and temptations do come

in our journey towards the great destination. Swami Brahmanandaji says that since ninety per cent of the people of the world before our eyes run after different kinds of worldly enjoyments, naturally the temptation to follow them may arise in our minds too. If we at this stage become victims of such a mood, we shall miss the goal. But, if we once have this firm resolution to keep up the struggle, ultimate victory is assured. How does one become ultimately victorious in that case? Here are some important points. If we really want to emerge victorious in our unseen war within, then we have to plant in our heart four important things. What are they?

Sometimes we wrongly estimate ourselves. We are very proud and think 'Oh, I am somebody very important.' We think very highly of ourselves. This is a spiritual disease and this is abhorrent to God. God does not like proud people. Those who are vainglorious, those who have a wrong estimate of themselves, can never hope to reach the goal. So, let us not have a wrong estimate of ourselves. Let us not think too much of ourselves. Let us practise humility.

Secondly, we must have perfect trust in God and God alone. We cannot do anything by ourselves unless God, who is so compassionate, comes to our rescue. We cannot hope to be successful by means of our own individual efforts. We need divine help.

Thirdly, we should go on fighting and struggling ceaselessly without any break.

Fourthly, we should try to remain constantly in prayer.

Of these four important elements, the first one is the root cause of all passions, downfall and wrong doings. None can hope to reach God or attain perfection unless he or she gets divine grace. And Divine grace does not descend on us if we proudly think too much of ourselves. Over-estimating

ourselves closes the door of divine grace. So, this is something very important. We are to remember that by ourselves we cannot do anything. We have to depend on divine help.

In addition to these four virtues which one must plant in one's heart to reach perfection, we need certain other qualifications also. First, we are to realise our 'nothingness'. There was a great Christian saint, Peter of Damascus. He writes, 'Nothing is better than to realise one's own weakness and ignorance.' Sometimes people come and put the question, 'Is there any necessity to have a Guru, a teacher, for a spiritual aspirant? What is the necessity of taking help from somebody? We do not believe in any external help. So, we don't find the need of a Guru.' One is quite right in thinking so, if one is a Jeevanmukta, if one has realised the Goal. However, even for learning any kind of Aparā Vidya (secular art and science), we need guidance. How much more is the need for help and guidance in the field of Parā Vidya or Brahma Vidya, which is the highest of all sciences? The foundation of every virtue is the realisation that 'I' alone cannot do anything unless God comes to my help. We have to realise our nothingness, and with all humility, we should constantly ask for God's help in all our undertakings.

Secondly, we must accustom ourselves to fear our innumerable enemies. Mahamaya, cosmic illusion, does not allow us to realise God easily. Maya has innumerable ways of deceiving us. Countless are the nets of Maya. Therefore, we must be very careful to remember the fact that on our path towards the goal supreme, Maya may beguile us, deceive us, and we may lose the Goal. We must, therefore, be very vigilant.

Thirdly, we may be struggling hard to make progress, but at times we fail in spite of our repeated attempts, and succumb to the desires of the body. Then what are we to do? If

we happen to commit some transgression, then quickly we should realise our own weakness. Perhaps we were proud. Perhaps we had been thinking, 'Now that we have been initiated and have got a spiritual teacher, holy company and facilities for visiting places of pilgrimage, we have nothing to be worried about.' In that case, we are terribly mistaken. If we fall into such a transgression and wishful thinking, then we should remember that it is God who makes us conscious of our failures and weaknesses. However, if this makes us realise that we are far off from the Goal, then it will do us good ultimately, as it will make us conscious of our failures and weaknesses. Should we fall in the estimation of others or should we begin to underestimate ourselves or, may be, should people entertain a poor opinion of us – then we have to realise that this has happened for our own good. This happens to make us humble and make us pray to the Almighty to give us strength again so that we redouble all our efforts. It is with this purpose and to this end that God allows us to be assailed by different kinds of temptations and weaknesses.

Here is an important point. Everyday we sleep for 6 to 7 hours. That means for 17 to 18 hours we are in the waking state of experience. Now, in the course of the day, we have innumerable thoughts, speak a lot and do certain duties or deeds. Let us take one particular day, say yesterday. What all did we think, say and do yesterday? If we analyse, if we look into ourselves and do a little of self-introspection. 'How many unnecessary words did I speak yesterday, how many sinful words, and sinful thoughts came to my mind?' Then we shall find that most of the words and thoughts were sinful, foolish and wrong. This is just self-analysis of one day. If we are careful enough to do so, we shall have the following attitude: 'Oh, one day of my valuable human life has gone in vain. I indulged in so much sinful thoughts and deeds. Therefore, we

have to seek the help of God.' As the Lord said, 'Without Me, ye can do nothing.' Everyday, every moment we must have complete trust in God.

Now arises in one's mind the question, 'We are asked not to give up the struggle. But what is to be done if we find that our souls are overburdened with sin, that our mind has been defiled by so many kinds of bad imagination, and that even though we have tried to the best of our abilities to avoid such thoughts and actions, we still find ourselves sinking down and down. In such a situation, what are we to do?' The advice given by all the great ones in the world is, 'Don't lose trust in God'. We may feel, 'O God, I pray to you; I seek holy company; I read holy scriptures. Still I remain basically the same man. So what is the use of pursuing the disciplines prescribed for a spiritual aspirant?' When such a mood comes, it is just the time for one to resolve not to abandon the spiritual struggle. We have to fight and fight, struggle and struggle. It has been said that in this journey towards the supreme goal, all those who do not struggle till the end will be the losers. So let us never cease to struggle. Once we give up this struggle, there will be no hope of salvation.

It is said that if we stifle the lower desires and incline towards the higher, then victory is ours. But if we disregard the higher and choose the lower, then we shall find ourselves vanquished; it is only those who give the greatest importance to the higher self, that will keep up the struggle. We are told repeatedly by the the great ones who have realised God, 'Never disregard the call of the higher self. Even if we go down, even if we fall, remember this truth that we fall to rise again.' Who can rise again? One who keeps up the struggle. And who can keep up this struggle? One who has complete trust in God and walks in the Spirit. Those who give it up, live with desires for sense enjoyments, and will fall.

Those who keep up the struggle, will try to live on the plane of the Atman. We have to remember this basic truth that we have in us these two – the higher self and the lower self. The lower self will prompt us to give up the struggle, but the higher self will encourage us to realise the Goal Supreme. If we hear the call of the latter, no desire can harm us.

An aspirant may find himself in a higher plane of thought when he is in a spiritually elevating environment, but when he goes back to his normal environment, he finds it very difficult to keep the mind on the same exalted level. He is again seduced by the enemy, the sensuous desire in the mind. He may think: 'What harm is there if I indulge in my desires just for an hour or so?' As a result, for that period, he abandons the godly way of life and succumbs to worldliness. He becomes a renegade from God. Then it is likely that he will have a tendency to extend this hour of ungodly life to a further hour, then to a day and more days, months, even years; and then one day he will drop down dead and find that this life has gone in vain. We should therefore always remember that human life is very, very uncertain. What will happen to us the very next moment, we cannot predict.

In the glorious life of Lord Buddha there is an episode that graphically illustrates this point. Buddha came across four things which brought about a great transformation in him. One day, he came across an old man. When he enquired of his companion Channa, 'Who is this man?', Channa replied, 'Oh, he is just an old man.' Buddha then realised that he would also become old one day, and so would his wife Yasodhara. Everybody has to pass through old age; for, this is the nature of the body. So Buddha lost all interest in life and went back to the palace. Then another day, when Buddha went out of his palace, he came across a sick man. He had never come across a sick man before. He learnt that anybody

who has a body will be subject to different kinds of illness and disease. Then another day he came across four persons carrying a dead body. When he asked his companion Channa about it, the latter replied, 'He was a living being like you, but life has gone out of him.' Then Buddha thought, 'Oh I am not going to have eternal youth. So I also shall one day meet with the same fate. I shall also grow old and die ultimately. There will be a painful separation from my beautiful wife Yashodhara and also from my son Rahul.' Another day, when he went out of his palace he encountered a monk with a serene countenance. 'Who is this?' he asked his companion. His companion said, 'Well, he has realised that the world is full of sufferings. Anybody born in this world cannot avoid the process of growth, development, decay and death. This man has taken to the path of the good and realised the goal. So you find that his face is serene and absolutely calm'. Buddha came back to the palace and the same day took a decision; for he heard a divine voice, 'O Gautama the compassionate, you are born in this world to save mankind. Now is the most opportune moment; do not lose time; go out, renounce and realise your nature and redeem mankind. You have been born as a saviour of mankind.' The example of Gautama Buddha teaches us to be constantly aware of the fact of death.

Sometime ago, when an eminent Swami spoke here, the lectures were preceded by devotional songs sung by a young lady about 33 years old. She is now no more. She was quite hale and hearty, had no disease, nothing of the kind. But she suddenly passed away due to sunstroke. Anything might happen any moment, even to a healthy person, and we must be prepared for that. We think, let us enjoy ourselves; and then one day we suddenly drop down dead. We may be intoxicated by sensuality but when the hour of death comes, its cruel hand can snatch us away at any time.

So, let us not be unmindful, lest the enemy should seduce us to the depths of degradation by making us think: 'Oh, let me just seek a little moral holiday.' But we should always remember that there cannot be any moral holiday. We must utilise every moment of our valuable life. In the book 'Paramartha Prasanga', Swami Virajanandaji says, 'Life is precious, so don't waste a single minute.' We should consider that day lost, in which we have not struggled to root out our evil propensities. And we should also remember that those who want to reach perfection, must also know how to make correct use of the five sense organs. These five sense organs – Roopa, Rasa, Sabda, Gandha, and touch, always direct us to seek enjoyment of the outside world. Remember that only in God can we experience the fountain-head of all joy. In our mad pursuit of sense enjoyment, we fall away from God and pursue our desire and thereby we go outside ourselves. The secret is that if we want to reach perfection, then instead of going out of ourselves, we should try to go inside. The order of things has to be inverted. Instead of comforts and pleasures outside, the heart should seek God. We are to constantly seek God inside and we should have the conviction that by reaching God we shall have everything, the fulfilment of human birth.

In Vivekachudamani verse 76 Sankaracharya has pointed out that different animals of the world have come to grief by each following only one sense organ; but God has given man five sense organs; so what will be the fate of man?

Sabdadibhiih pancabhir eva panca
pancatvam apuh sva-gunena baddhah |
kuranga-matanga-patanga-mina-
bhrngah narah pancabhir ancitah kim ||

– It is said here that: *the deer, the elephant, the moth, the fish and the black bee – all meet with*

death, each by one of these five senses that is keen in each of them. What then need be said of man in whom all the five senses are very keen and active?

To avoid the degrading pull of the senses, we should give the right direction to these sense organs. Unless we are able to do that, we shall not be able to reach the Goal. We are to transfer to God our thoughts from all that take us away from Him. And we are to say again and again, 'O God, if Thy creations are so full of beauty, delight and joy, how infinitely more beautiful and joyous wilt be Thou!' We seek pleasures in the senses and seek different kinds of sense gratification, but our objective is not to seek the so-called sense pleasures, but to seek eternal peace, bliss. We cannot hope to get ineffable bliss from anything of the outside world.

It will be relevant here to narrate an incident from the life of Swami Vivekananda. In 1899, on the 16th of August, Swami Vivekananda with one of his brother-disciples, Swami Turiyanandaji and with Sister Christine and another lady, sailed from Glasgow to New York. They had to spend ten days on the sea. Those were very memorable days and have been recorded in the biography of Swami Vivekananda. One moonlit night, Swamiji was pacing up and down the deck. Looking at the beauty that was evident in the reflection of the moonlight on the waves, he said to Sister Christine and all those who were with him, 'If all this Maya is so beautiful, think of the wondrous beauty of the Reality behind it.'

We should ponder deeply on this important sentence. Swamiji asks us not to be enamoured of external beauty. The beauty we see in the external world should serve as a pointer to the infinite beauty of the Creator of this world. Instead of trying to get ourselves entangled in creature comforts, let us fix our attention on the great Creator. But such is the delusion caused by Mahamaya, that we are all after appearances

and do not bother about the reality of God within.

An important discipline in spiritual life is prayer. Again and again, we have been told that we must pray to God in all humility and earnestness. Now what is real prayer? Real prayer is inner prayer. It is not to be performed by words alone but also with mind and heart. Now to get success in prayer, we are to note some important points.

We are to keep the body strictly disciplined with regard to food, sleep and rest. Here there is provision for rest. Sometimes we are over-zealous and in our over-zeal go to excesses, with the result that some even go mad, deranged, by their over-zeal. That is the reason why Swami Vivekananda gave warning in his book 'Raja Yoga' that we have to learn the path from a competent spiritual master. One should not practise Pranayama etc., without learning it from a competent Guru. We should follow only the middle path – neither mortification of the senses nor sense-indulgence. We must, therefore, follow the middle path at all times.

Recall the life of Gautama Buddha. He gave up food and water until by this kind of mortification, he became physically so weak that he was about to die. Then the thought dawned on him that he had followed the path of extreme austerity and mortification of the body. But is the goal of life mortification of the senses and useless austerity? No; austerity and sense control are not the end, they are the means. The end is spiritual perfection or realisation of God. So Buddha gave us a new path, the middle path. We should not go to any extreme. It has been said in the 6th Chapter of Bhagavad Gita, Sloka 16:

N'atyaśnatas tu yogo'sti
na c'aikāntam anasatah |
na c'atīsvapna-sīlasya

jagrato n'aiva c'arjuna ||

– *Verily, Yoga is not for him who eats too much or abstains too much from eating. It is not for him, O Arjuna, who sleeps too much or keeps awake too much.*

So we must keep the body strictly disciplined through moderation. We should have moderate hours of sleep and rest. But at the same time, we should not give the body all that it wants. If we go on pandering to the needs of the body, then sexual desires will get the upper hand.

Secondly, we cannot hope to be successful in prayer, unless we try to reduce our external contacts to the most necessary things. It is very difficult to avoid external contacts. Even a sannyasin cannot avoid it. That is the reason why we sometimes go into solitude. But such are the demands of our work that we hardly find time for solitude. If we want to unfold ourselves, then it is good for us to reduce external activities. Even those who are very busy should be left with some time when nobody should disturb them. They should be left to themselves, so that they can then retire into their own selves and have deep, rigorous self-introspection. As it is said that a candle cannot burn in rain and wind, so also the flame of prayer cannot be lit in a flood of impressions from outside. If we go on mixing with people of all kinds and allow different kinds of impressions to invade our mind, then we shall hardly have any time to go into ourselves.

Thirdly, regarding study of books, we should read only such books as deal with prayer, meditation, lives of saints, instructions on spiritual life like the 'Towards Goal Supreme' or the 'Eternal Companion', teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, etc. Though we may know this, our mind often gets deceived by the cheap literature which has flooded the market. If one reads trash books for the sake

of enjoyment, then it brings one down. Who can then overcome such kinds of temptation? Only he who has real seriousness in spiritual life. So the first thing that we have to decide is whether we are serious candidates for spiritual life or not. If we are, then we should keep with us a select number of good books and study them alone.

An excellent book that could be mentioned in this connection is 'Philokalia' of St. Gregory of Sinai, a Russian saint with remarkable spiritual insight and realisation. He points out that the very day one is baptised, one obtains the grace of God. But though we receive the grace of God, we also lose that grace. There are three important reasons for this.

1. First, we lose the grace of God through inattention. The teacher has asked us to follow certain rules and not to follow certain other ways of life. But we do not follow implicitly all the instructions given by the teacher when he initiated or baptised us.

2. Secondly, vanity — the attitude that 'Oh, I know everything.'

3. Thirdly, in spite of being favoured with divine grace on the day of our baptism or initiation, we fail to make progress due to inattention, due to our vanity, and our wrong ways of life. Wrong way of life means the way that is opposite to the life we are told to live by our spiritual master. By the wrong way the grace of God is stifled.

Is there any remedy? Yes, there is. If we realise that we are not making any progress, then we are to make a firm resolution: 'O God, O my beloved Ishtam, my Teacher, I did receive Your grace, but through my carelessness I have lost it. Now I am serious. Please come to my help.' And God will say, 'Well, my son, divine grace will be restored to you. You will again get back divine grace, provided you fulfil two condi-

tions.' What are they? (a) First, you are to follow the commands of the Guru. Simply listening to and not caring to put them into practice will not do. (b) Secondly, simply fulfilling the commandments will also not help you to get back divine grace. You must pray ceaselessly, 'O Lord, be kind to me, don't forsake me, I am very weak, full of imperfections, full of limitations. I don't have any strength of my own to realise my own divine nature, unless You come to my rescue.' Such prayers you must make. So it is said that prayer can become a weapon for victory in our unseen warfare, provided it becomes real and takes root in the heart.

There is a song in Bengali which tells us with what great care we must guard our heart. The Lord is a jealous Lord in a spiritual sense. He does not want anybody else to occupy the throne of our heart. He alone should be seated there. What does it mean? If we want to realise God, we must not be attached to any creature or anybody of this world. If we live in a family with wife, husband, children and relatives, then we should spiritualise our relationships with them. That is the way to make progress. But an important point to remember is that if we allow ourselves to be loved by somebody with more than our love of God, then we lose divine grace. Therefore, it is said that prayer becomes successful, if it takes root in the heart and if it is done continuously. What does it mean when it is said that prayer should take roots in the heart? Let us discuss it in detail.

The line in the Bengali Song I referred to earlier runs: 'Jatone hridaye rekho adorini Shyama ma ke' – Keep the dear Mother Shyama with great care and attention in your heart. The Mother cannot occupy our heart, if She sees that in this heart we have kept somebody else. If we guard our heart carefully so that this heart is not given away to any creature of this world and is reserved only for the beloved Lord and

Lord alone, then our enemy will be subdued and our 'unseen warfare', the battle within, will end, and we can be successful in our attempt to reach the Goal.

St. John Kolov has said as follows in his own admirable way: 'I am like a man sitting under a tree and I find a multitude of beasts and enemies coming to attack me. I know that if I do not climb the tree, I will be killed by the beasts and the serpents. So I just climb up the tree and sit safely. When I see that different kinds of evil desires and thoughts are about to assail me, I rush to my God inside and I am saved.' If we can do that, we can have constant inner communion with the Lord within. But this inward communion with the Lord is not possible because of our external activities. Then what are we to do? It is said, 'As long as you lean on something within or outside you that is not God, as long as you find flavour in something created and you enjoy it, so long you cannot have spiritual communion with the Lord. God wants that you no longer live, but God lives.' To put it very simply, we have to live in God with all our heart. As Sri Ramakrishna said in one context in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, none can realise God unless the mind in its entirety is given to God and to God alone.

To refer again to 'Philokalia', it is said that the guarding of the heart implies that we have different bad impressions in us and these bad impressions cannot be rooted out, if we do not practise ceaseless prayer. Why is it so? An example will answer the question. A man wishing to refine gold must not leave his furnace without fire. If he leaves it without fire, then the ore hardens again. So unless we keep up ceaseless prayer, our spiritual fervour dries up. To keep the spiritual fervour burning in us non-stop, we must have ceaseless prayer.

We get plenty of instruction on food from the great teach-

ers of our country. Most of us do not know that many saints of the West too have many lessons to teach us on this subject. For example Simeon the New Theologian writes: 'It is impossible to fill the body to satiety with food and at the same time have spiritual enjoyment'. None can have spiritual progress if he does not take food in moderation. If he just panders to his taste and belly, then he may have some physical satisfaction, but he cannot have the satisfaction of communion with the Lord.

And last but not least, let us refer to the teachings of Abba Agathan. A question was put to him, 'Sir, which is greater – physical labour or the guarding of the heart?' The Abba replied, 'Guarding of the heart.' Physical labour is like going to the Kumbha Mela, taking a bath, observing physical austerities etc. It is said that man is like a tree and physical labour is like its leaves. We go and take a bath in the holy Ganga and adopt so many means which are the externals of religion. All these come under physical labour. Unless there is inner transformation, all these external activities are of no use. Religion means realisation, but sometimes we are too much concerned or bothered with the non-essential aspects of religion. Unless we get inner transformation through them all, these are useless. So, it has been said that man is like a tree – physical work is the leaves and guarding of the heart is the fruit. Further it is said, 'Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruits is hewn and cast into fire.' So our best attention must be bestowed on the fruit, i.e., the guarding of the heart.

We should not be too much concerned with the non-essential parts of religion. The essential part of religion is 'guarding the heart'. The habit of being concerned with non-essential parts of religion may lead us to have externally correct behaviour, but that will not bring about any kind of inner

transformation. St. Simeon the New Theologian points out that the whole of active life is regarded by God as nothing but leaves on a tree which bear no fruit, unless it brings God-realisation. And for God-realisation we must cease to have what may be called endless circling outside.

From morning till night we forget that God is within us and that if we realise God, we get everything. We forget this basic truth that, even though God is in us, we are not in Him. Aimlessly we circle about outside. Instead of this endless circling, we must learn the technique of guarding the heart, so that we can withdraw the mind from the outside world and keep it at the lotus feet of our beloved Lord in the sanctuary of our hearts. Only if we do that, is spiritual unfoldment possible.

11. Living in Tune with the Infinite

Now, to recapitulate the important points dealt with in this book on 'Some Guidelines to Inner Life'.

What is the goal supreme? It is to realise God, one's real nature. The question arises as to who is drawn to this goal supreme. The answer is: first, he who hears a call from within. Secondly, he who feels a conflict within. Unless we have this inner conflict – a tug-of-war, so to say, between the two opposite tendencies, our inner urge for the higher life and the instincts which take us downwards – it is not possible to feel drawn towards the Inner Life.

In this world there are different kinds of people. There are those who believe in the grossly materialistic way of life. They do not bother about the Goal Supreme and so they do not have any conflict within also. There is no hope for them until they begin to feel this inner conflict. The spirit wants to comprehend the Absolute, the Infinite, but because of the way our body is constituted, we are often pulled down by the attractions of the objects that the senses contact. It has been rightly said, 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.'

Human birth is a rare opportunity. Though we may have such an opportunity, we must first of all have a genuine desire for liberation and then be fortunate enough to get a competent spiritual master to show us the way to God-realisation. Even after getting all these, we may not be eager to take real advantage of them, because we do not want to undergo any hardship. The fact is, only a few are ready to pay the price for self-unfoldment. To realise God, the entire mind is to be given to Him. The mind cannot be divided into different compartments. We cannot give some part of the mind to the enjoyment of worldly things and the rest to God. No, God wants to occupy the throne alone. He is in this sense a very

jealous God. Therefore, if we want to realise Him, we must give our whole mind to Him. We may be practising spiritual disciplines. Whatever we have been asked to do by our spiritual master, we may be doing. But we are not really serious as far as spiritual life is concerned. Half-heartedly and mechanically, we do a little japam in the morning and in the evening. We find time for all kinds of works, desirable or undesirable, but for God we cannot find time. Remembering God a few minutes in the morning or evening cannot be termed as spiritual life. Unless we constantly practise the presence of God, unless we bring God into every moment of our existence, spiritual unfoldment is not possible. Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter to Sister Nivedita, 'My ideal can indeed be put in a few words: to preach unto mankind its divinity and how to help it to manifest that divinity in every movement of life.'

Now, in order to assert our divinity, is it sufficient that we meditate on God, our beloved Ishtam, when we sit for meditation in the morning or in the evening, and forget Him during the rest of the time? No, since we are all divine, we should practise to see divinity in every moment of our life. We attend discourses on spiritual themes and read inspiring books on the subject. From this we gain some understanding, but soon we get unsettled. We gain something only to lose it again. Here is an example to illustrate this. There is a certain kind of weed which grows over a pond. We go to the pond to drink clean, cool water, but we find its surface covered by the weed. If we want to drink water from it, we must remove this weed by hand, and having done so, we may somehow manage to take some water and drink it. The weed, however, has a tendency to cover the surface of the water again. Similarly, we feel elevated for the time being when we listen to spiritual discourses or read scriptures, but such are the

temptations and allurements surrounding us that we again forget everything we have heard or read.

One of the most fundamental obstacles is what is called Moha or Pramada, i.e., carelessness. It means negligence in the matter of having steady attunement with one's real nature. This inadvertence is as good as death for a spiritual aspirant after Truth. Sometimes we have tremendous obsessions. We may be born with very bad Samskaras. When we sit for meditation, so many evil desires assail us. We feel this life is going to be a failure and there is absolutely no hope for us. Against such thinking, we should have positive thoughts. If one suffers from evil thoughts at the time of meditation, one must have done some bad deeds in the past. That is why they are coming to the conscious level at the time of meditation. Man is the architect of his own self. If a man is what he is today, be it with evil propensities, it is certain that he can mould his future by making the right use of the present. So let us not dwell on the past.

It sometime happens that after we meditate or do Japam for an hour or so and then return to our active life, we relapse into the so-called secular activities. No spiritual progress is possible unless there is spiritualisation of our everyday life. We must bring God 'from the altar to the market place' in our day-to-day activities. The emphasis laid is on this – that at the time of meditation and Japam, we should try to keep our minds at the lotus feet of our beloved Ishtam and that we should try to sustain that mood during the course of our day-to-day activities too. Otherwise, we expose ourselves to an endless spiritual crisis. When we are in the temple, we are in one mood. When we come out of it, we are in another. We become guilty of what is called double movement. Let us avoid all kinds of double movements.

This concept of double movement requires further explan-

ation. We meditate on our Ishtam (Chosen Deity). We keep the senses indrawn at that time and feel temporarily elevated. We are on a high plane of existence. We get some mental peace and bliss. Later, we also yield to the temptations of the outside world. Now one is on a high level, on the plane of Atman; but after sometime one is again on the plane of body-mind complex. We forget all about the pious resolutions that were made. This tendency to allow ourselves to be tempted by the snares of the senses is what is called double movement. To be saved from double movement, mere discussions of theories and philosophies will not do. We must be in deep and abiding contact with our innermost reality. More often than not, undesirable thoughts come out from our sub-conscious mind during meditation, and we find they prevent us from making further progress. Is there any remedy? Yes, there is a proved remedy. That is Japa Sadhana. By the repetition of the Divine Name (Mantra), one can overcome all evil propensities. What is important and what counts most is purification. By continuous repetition of the Name of the Lord, all our evil Samskaras or propensities are uprooted by the spiritual vibrations generated through the concentrated repetition of the Divine Name. By the continued practice of this we can overcome our evil tendencies.

We may be taking vegetarian food, but if our mind is polluted with unclean thoughts, vegetarianism alone can do us no good. So, let our sense impressions be pure. Sometimes when we have a certain kind of excess energy, we must take recourse to occasional fasting, vigil and special prayers, and we must give up all excessive speech and indulgence in regard to food. Inasmuch as a man panders to his taste, he is deprived of spiritual bliss. If we go on eating even beyond satiety, we may suffer spiritually. So we must practise moderation in eating.

We have to face constantly a tug-of-war or an 'unseen warfare' in ourselves. But let us not give up the struggle. If we give up the struggle, then there is no hope for us. We may fall, but we should remember the testimony of realised souls that we fall to rise again. If we fall and think there is no hope for us, then we are perhaps doomed. If we keep up the struggle, then it means that we are trying to proceed towards God. Once we give up the struggle, what happens? We fall away from God and from His grace, then we go outside of godly life and get steeped in bodily life. To save ourselves from this, we are to keep up the struggle and we must pray ceaselessly.

Most of us are extroverts, that is, outward-going persons. No extrovert can reach the Goal Supreme. We must take pains to stop the tendency of the mind to endlessly wander outside. Instead of allowing the mind to go out of the inner circle and move about in the pettiness of the ordinary outer nature, we should learn to live within. We should try to withdraw the mind from the outside world and keep it fixed at the feet of our beloved Lord.

In conclusion it is worthwhile pointing out once again that the goal of human life is to obtain everlasting peace and happiness. We can have peace and happiness, provided we can go to the source — the Atman. Swamiji once said, 'Why seeketh thou, the pleasures of the world? Seek God, who is the fountain-head of all bliss'. Again Swamiji also said, 'Life on the plane of the Atman is the only joyful state of existence.' If we really aspire for this joyful state of existence, then we must shut out the external world and step into the internal world. For that we are to meditate constantly and ponder over thus: 'O mind, why do you give so much importance foolishly to the body-mind complex — to the temptations of physical life? Are you just a lump of flesh? You are

wasting your valuable time by being enamoured of the body. It is all transient. This body is going to die and it will be taken to the cremation ground and burnt and reduced to ashes. Why foolishly be enamoured of it? In this life, if you are careful enough, you can find the fountain-head of bliss. You are not a mere lump of flesh and bones. You are Pure Consciousness. You are 'Caitanya Vighraha'. Instead of dwelling on your divine nature and on the fact that you are eternally free, Sat-chit-ananda-swarupa, you foolishly think of the so-called pleasures of the world and waste your human life. Why do you attach yourself foolishly to the non-self, to the complete neglect of the eternal in you, the Atrnan?'

In no scripture is it said that the goal of human life is to marry and beget children. In no scripture is it also said that the goal of human life is to become a monk. But it has been said again and again that the goal of human life is the realisation of God. 'Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' Realise yourself and be free.

Lastly, let us end with the following few words of Swami Virajanandaji, the Sixth President of our great Order, from his valuable book 'Paramartha Prasanga'. Swami Virajanandaji observes, 'Brothers, we came out of the mother's womb naked and alone'. Let us all think about this. We all come naked and alone and one day we are going to depart from this world naked and alone. When we depart from this world, none is going to accompany us. The members of the family are happy when we are born, and when we die, the members of the family are unhappy, and we also feel miserable. Virajanandaji says, quoting Tulsidas, that we should behave in such a way that when we die, unearthly bliss should well up from our countenance. Let others weep but let us depart from this world with a smile. Who can do that? One who has been able to realise that he is 'Caitanya Vighraha' and not this

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body. This body is perishable, it will die. But something in us is eternal, non-perishable, birthless, deathless. Only he or she who realises this supreme truth becomes free in this life.

If we aspire to reach the Goal Supreme, then, as Virajanandaji says, we must shake off attachment to all that is unreal, and we must take pains to attune ourselves to our divine nature. Our goal will be easier to attain, if we are helped by a Sat-guru, a true Teacher.

May we take up spiritual life seriously and may we realise the Inner Life in this very life! Let this be our prayer to our Holy Trinity – Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

END OF
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