

The path of spirituality does not consist of just “being” good and “doing” good. If it were that simple, there would be no need for scores of *śāstras*<sup>1</sup> and their multiple interpretations by so many different scholars. Every religion goes beyond the peripheral focus of just “being” good and “doing” good. The effort to be good has to grow beyond the limitations of the thought that we are trying to be good for the benefit of society and the world. It is our assumption that the world requires our presence, when, in fact, the world existed before our arrival, and will continue to exist even after our departure. In fact, our presence or absence does not make an iota of difference to the continued existence of the world.

Our efforts to be good should not be for the sake of the world, but for ourselves. We should not have the attitude that we are doing the world a favor by our attempts to be good. The practice of spirituality has to take us beyond the modifications of this world (*vikāra*) and their effect (*prabhāva*) on us. Until we can do that, we are still at ground zero, trying to lay the foundation for spirituality.

A tall structure needs to have a deep, strong foundation for stability. The taller and bigger the structure, the deeper and stronger must be the foundation. An individual who seeks the highest in life must prepare himself to reach that goal in accordance with the scriptural teachings. In order to go beyond the modifications of this world (*vikāra*) and their effect (*prabhāva*), the Lord gives us twenty pointers in the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gīta, which are the cornerstone of spirituality:

*amānitvam adambhitvam ahimsā kṣāntir ārjavam  
ācāryopāsanam śaucam sthairyam ātma-vinigrahaḥ<sup>2</sup>*

*indriyārtheṣu vairagyam anahankāra eva ca  
janma-mrtyu-jarā-vyādhi-duḥkṣa-doṣanudarśanam<sup>3</sup>*

*asaḅtīr anabhiṣvangaḥ putra-dāra-grhādiṣu  
nityam ca sama-cittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu<sup>4</sup>*

*mayi cānanya-yogena bhaktir avyabhicārini  
vivikṭa-desa-sevitvam aratir jana-samsadi<sup>5</sup>*

*adhyātma-jnāna-nityatvam tattva-jnānārtha-darśanam  
etaḥ jnānam iti prokṭam ajnānam yad ato 'nyatha<sup>6</sup>*

A clear understanding and application of these twenty pointers will result in a twenty/twenty vision of life, which will enable us to reach our full potential and achieve the purpose of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Scriptures

<sup>2</sup> Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service to the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control...

<sup>3</sup> Indifference to the objects of the senses, and also absence of egoism, perception of (or reflection upon) evils in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain...

<sup>4</sup> Non attachment; non-identification of Self with son, wife, home and the rest; constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable...

<sup>5</sup> Unswerving devotion unto Me by the *yoga* of non-separation, resorting to solitary places, distaste for the society of men...

<sup>6</sup> Constancy in self-knowledge, perception of the end of true knowledge – this is declared to be “Knowledge” and what is contrary to these is ignorance.

Each pointer is, in fact, a value that must be analyzed, understood and applied in our lives from three different standpoints:

1. What is meant by that quality?
2. Once the meaning is understood, then we need to analyze and see if and how much of that quality is reflected in our own hearts.
3. How can we achieve perfect mastery of that quality?

This whole process of analysis and application can be broken down into the following components:

1. Self-analysis
2. Acceptance in our actions and reactions
3. Commitment with sincerity
4. Need for a guide
5. Recognizing and changing internal axis
6. Recognizing and changing external axis
7. Result of change of axis
8. Effects of the result
9. First-hand experience born out of clarity and conviction
10. Pitfalls, loopholes and caution
11. Remedies and solutions for protection and growth

## 1. Self-analysis

The first step in this journey on the spiritual path is self-analysis. All these pointers are meant only for self-analysis, not to be used as a basis for passing judgment on the world. Spirituality starts when we stop commenting on the world and how it should be, and start thinking about where we are and what we should do to grow. As long as the focus is on the external world, we are nowhere close to spirituality. Is the world going to change in spite of strong heated discussions? The world does not change. It remains as it is. Don't be under the impression that you can make a difference!

The two main qualities that help in the process of self-analysis are *amānitvam*<sup>7</sup> and *adambhitvam*<sup>8</sup>. *Māna* means measurement in Sanskrit. In order to prove anything, we need the reference of some form of measurement in terms of time and space. *Māna* here refers to the image that we project about ourselves. Each individual carries in his heart an image of himself, which he loves to project into the world and seek acceptance from the world. This image has three aspects:

- What we know ourselves to be
- How we expect the world to see us
- How the world really sees us

We feel gratified and satisfied if the world accepts the image that we are trying to project. Supposing the world does not accept that image. This non-acceptance by the world results in dejection, "I am good for nothing." Why do we feel so low? Because we are constantly projecting an image to the world with the expectation of acceptance and respect. The moment we don't get that acceptance and respect, we feel disrespected. Why do we project something that is not real? Because we have a false sense of our own importance. Why then blame the world? "Nobody understands me". Actually we should realize that the world is inert, and it is our duty and responsibility to understand the world. The world does not, and need not understand us. When we recognize this, we should stop trying to glamorize our self-pity, and start trying to improve our selves.

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<sup>7</sup> Humility

<sup>8</sup> Unpretentiousness

On the other hand, if people start respecting our image, it fosters adamancy and arrogance. Having self-respect is fine, but when it leads to arrogance and adamancy, it is not acceptable. So the first step in laying the foundation stone towards spirituality is when the *sādhaka*<sup>9</sup> develops the quality of humility. Humility should be our very nature, reflected, without words, in the perfection of our actions. Sometimes we feel that if we are humble, we will be unable to compete in the world and people will take advantage of us. We forget that we prove ourselves to the world through our deeds, not our words. Even in this so-called competitive world we can exist with humility. People cannot abuse our humble nature if we do not allow them to do so. When we execute our duties and responsibilities with humility and perfection that in itself is proof that we are the master of our own world.

*Dambha* means to be pretentious; the one who pretends to be something other than what he is by wearing a mask. *Adambha* means to be non-pretentiousness; the one who does not hide himself, a person who possesses clarity, and hence expresses as being straightforward in nature. How do we function? We do not face ourselves, nor do we face the world. We desperately try to project ourselves as something that we are not. Who are we fooling? Certainly not the world. We just fool ourselves! The height of *dambha* is that we know that we are wearing a mask and that the world respects us because of the mask. We know that it is not us, but the mask that the world has accepted, yet we still feel satisfied in the knowledge that the world has accepted us.

How is *dambha* reflected in our daily lives? When people start talking about their own personal joys or sorrows, we start comparing them to our own lives. Then we try to project our own joys or sorrows to be bigger and better than the other person's. This can be observed in any discussion. We start glorifying ourselves at the slightest possible opportunity. These false projections lead to stress because we have to keep track of all the lies and falsehood so that we can be consistent with what we have projected earlier.

Once we start developing the quality of *adambha*, it protects us from the *vikāra* and its *prabhāva* of *sukham-dukham*<sup>10</sup>, *rāga-dveṣa*<sup>11</sup>. This quality is like a shield that protects you from your own self and the world. Whatever has happened thus far is fine, but in the future take precautionary measures so that you don't get hurt any more. Without this shield you will be ripped apart by our own weaknesses. When hasty seekers rush into spirituality with limited inspiration, they get ripped apart because they start seeing the naked truth about themselves. Unable to withstand this onslaught of their own weaknesses and the effects of the weaknesses, their inspiration seems to vanish into thin air.

The world also reacts strangely to a person who enters into the world of spirituality. The first reaction that any *sādhaka* experiences is a sense of rejection. History can bear witness to the fact that no spiritual seeker was accepted in the initial stages. Once they become history, we may recognize their greatness and start calling them masters! Was Mīrabai accepted in her own time? No. We can look at examples from different religions to prove the point. How did the world treat Jesus Christ? Do not start imagining that the world will accept you when you start on the path of spirituality. How will the world react? In a hurtful manner. Do not retaliate by reacting in a hurtful way.

How do these qualities of humility and unpretentiousness help us in our lives? By being humble, we are protecting ourselves from the *vikāra* of the world and its *prabhāva*. By not projecting ourselves out into the world, we protect ourselves from any sort of disappointment or rejection. This non-projection is not born out of a fear of rejection. Rather, it comes from an understanding that the moment I project myself out into the world, I start expecting that my projections should be accepted and respected. I understand that I do not need validation from the world for my existence. The perfection with which I fulfill my duties and responsibilities alone will give me the recognition which I do not need to seek. I accept myself as I am.

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<sup>9</sup> Spiritual seeker

<sup>10</sup> Joys-sorrows

<sup>11</sup> Likes-dislikes

## 2. Acceptance in our actions and reactions

After self-analysis and self-acceptance, the next step is acceptance of the world as it is. This involves the qualities of *ahimsā*<sup>12</sup> and *kṣanti*<sup>13</sup>. The world may hurt you, but you don't have any authority to react back in the same way. You may not do good to society, but at least do not do any harm. In the olden days doctors used to take the Hippocratic oath, "First, do no harm." *Ahimsā* is not just at the level of actions. Even if our thoughts have a trace of violence, it is considered hurtful to this existence. In fact, the most powerful *himsā*<sup>14</sup> begins at the thought level. The subtler we grow, the greater will be our understanding of the effect of the power of the thought. It is very powerful, especially if it is born out of negativity. Men of achievement can be categorized into two classes – those who have harnessed the power of positive thinking and those whose achievements are based on negative thinking. The results of their achievements are worlds apart. Both have inspiration, but they are of a different nature – one is constructive and the other is destructive. All our interaction with the world in thought, deed and word must be free from any negativity or feeling of *himsā*.

How should we present ourselves to this world? With *ahimsā*, with acceptance. And if the world rejects us or hurts us, how should we react? With the *bhāva*<sup>15</sup> of *kṣanti* or *kṣamā*<sup>16</sup>. This quality of *kṣamā* is highly misinterpreted and misunderstood. It is not a passive act of forgiveness. The popular notion is that even if the world hurts you, you should forgive them. The Bible is often quoted to support this idea, "If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." But forgiveness should not be misconstrued as allowing oneself to become a doormat for all and sundry to come up and wipe their dirty feet. Being spiritual does not mean that you lose the capacity to stand up for yourself. *Laachari ka naam spirituality nahin hai*<sup>17</sup>.

If a snake just lies passively without even hissing, the world will throw stones at him and try to injure him. If he does not stand up for himself, he cannot complain that he is being mistreated because he chose to "forgive". However, if he stands up for himself, no one will tease or bully him. The world gets scared and runs away even if he just hisses. That is how we should also protect ourselves. We should not just stand there when someone is trying to hit us. Hasn't the Lord provided you with intelligence to know when to run when you are being hurt? Even in karate, the first thing the student is taught is that martial arts are to be used for your own protection, not for injuring someone else. Don't allow the world to hit you. Protect yourself. If the world hurts you, then forgive it from the standpoint of compassion. This forgiveness is born out of understanding, clarity, and compassion, not out of *ashaktata*<sup>18</sup>. You can truly forgive this world only when you have inner strength and conviction.

But what do we do? In our negative act of forgiving, we continue to carry the burden of the hurtful feelings that the other person has given us for ages. People complain about their memory, but they certainly have no problem remembering what was said and done ages ago. Their blood boils even at the very thought, and yet they claim to have forgiven! That is NOT the act of forgiving somebody. Swami Vivekananda once said that if resentment is the result of forgiveness, then forget forgiveness. Do not carry the burden of hurtful feelings and resentment within yourself. It takes a great deal of maturity to truly forgive someone without carrying that burden and then lashing out in reaction at the first opportunity.

## 3. Commitment with sincerity

The qualities of *ahimsā* and *kṣanti* are expressed into the world as *ārjavam*<sup>19</sup> – sincere, straightforward commitment. *Ārjavam* is the quality of presenting the truth in the most straightforward way without being hurtful. Tell the truth when required. The second part is very important and must be remembered at all times, only *when required*. We do not need to jump into a situation saying, "I have to be truthful". That is being foolish. Sometimes

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<sup>12</sup> Non-injury

<sup>13</sup> Forgiveness

<sup>14</sup> Violence

<sup>15</sup> Feeling

<sup>16</sup> Forgiveness

<sup>17</sup> Being helpless is called not spirituality

<sup>18</sup> Powerlessness

<sup>19</sup> Uprightness

we even behave rudely under the guise of being straightforward. We claim not to keep any hard feelings in our heart and say whatever we feel like. That is not what is meant by being straightforward. The scriptural injunction in this regard is clear and succinct, *satyam brūyāt, priyam brūyāt; na brūyāt satyam apriyam*<sup>20</sup>. The truth must be spoken, but not at the expense of hurting someone in the name of truth. The person in front of you may not be really beautiful, but you need not approach them and ask them if they have seen themselves in the mirror! However, the sanctity of truth must be maintained at the same time. There are numerous ways in which the truth can be expressed without hurting the other person.

Gurudev was an expert at this particular art. Once a person had volunteered to do the brochure for a program. When Gurudev saw it, his first response was, "Thank you very much". If he had been "straightforward" as we understand it, he could have easily said, "What is this? Do you call this a brochure? Do you even know what a brochure looks like? ... etc. etc." But he did not choose to react in this manner. There was no consistency in the brochure because the person who designed it had used multiple fonts and colors. Gurudev recognized the good-hearted readiness of the volunteer to spend some time for a good cause. So instead of reacting to him, he acknowledged the time, effort, and energy spent on it. By first praising him Gurudev had already won over his heart, and then he slowly molded him, "If I were you, I would use only two colors; ... I would change this font here; ... modify this section ...". By the time Gurudev finished making his suggestions, the entire brochure was totally changed, but the person left feeling very happy, "Gurudev appreciated me!" Gurudev's appreciation of the man's effort caused him to accept the truth without reacting negatively. Sometimes we may have to present the harsh truth, but we have no right to hurt the other person through that harsh truth. Recognize and value the truth, but present it in the most palatable form.

Think of this in these terms, "If I had done something wrong, something really unpardonable, how would I expect the world to react?" Would you not expect the world to understand and pardon you? Similarly, you may be straightforward in presenting the truth to someone who has done something wrong, but it must be presented in a soft manner with lot of humility, love, and concern. With a lot of TLC (tender loving care). Such a person is always respected. If you present the truth with harshness, do not be surprised if you are disrespected and hated from the core. When you start understanding the other person's point of view, and give them an opportunity to explain, you will gain their respect, confidence and trust. This is the positive way to manage human relations. We find so much tension in human relations today because of a lack of mutual respect and acceptance.

#### 4. Need for a guide

When the seeker reaches the feet of the master with the few basic qualities discussed above - humility, modesty, non-injury, forgiveness and straightforwardness, he is sure to be blessed with the presence of a guide or mentor in his life. The master himself enters the life of one who has these six basic qualities. You do not need to go out to find a guru. The guru will automatically find you as a result of you fortifying yourself with these six qualities. When the master finally comes, just serve the master. *Ācārya upāsana*<sup>21</sup> should not be understood as mere physical service, like preparing his food or washing his clothes, etc. Our service to the master should not be born out of the attitude of possessing the master. Otherwise, that same service to the master starts becoming an obstruction to our own growth. We should understand that being with the master is a result of all the *punya*<sup>22</sup> that we have ever performed. He comes to us because of our necessity to be taught, not because of his necessity to teach.

Who is the master? One who is *śrotriya*<sup>23</sup> and *brahma-niṣṭha*<sup>24</sup>. He knows the Truth, has direct experience of the Truth and is well-equipped to explain it to the student at his own level, in a language that he can understand.

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<sup>20</sup> Speak what is true, speak what is pleasant; speak not what is true but unpleasant

<sup>21</sup> Service to the teacher

<sup>22</sup> Meritorious deeds

<sup>23</sup> Well-versed in the scriptures

<sup>24</sup> Established in the Truth

What is the need of a guide on this path? There are many pitfalls on this path of spirituality that the novice student can fall prey to without the guidance of master who has already traveled there. A *sādhaka* cannot be successful on this path if:

- He wants to walk on this path without a guide
- He is guided by a master without vision
- He does not possess the requisite qualifications
- He wants to be spoon-fed without applying his own intellect

This is a journey where both the guru and the student pray for protection and put forth effort together in order to acquire a clear understanding of the supreme Truth.

Then what is the highest service that one can perform for the master? When will a music teacher be happy with his student? When the student knows how to sing all the different, intricate *rāgas*<sup>25</sup> in the proper *sura*<sup>26</sup> and *tāla*<sup>27</sup>. When will the *śiṣya*<sup>28</sup> be recognized as being greater than the master? When he grows out of his own limitations and reaches the level where the master is established. Raising himself to that state where the master belongs is the greatest service the disciple can provide. For such a student, the master *shall* take care of everything. Physical service can be performed by anybody. If the master has been telling us that we are that Reality who is the nature of bliss, and we go back to the master with our cranky complaints, do you think we have done any service? By reaching the feet of the master, we have lost our right to cry and whine. We cry when we feel insecure. But if we have already been told that we will be taken care of, the moment we start crying, it indicates that we are valuing our limitations, which in turn puts a big question mark on our own surrender and *śraddhā*. The guru clearly indicates the path, and the procedure that we have to follow to get to our goal. Thus, when we reach him with all these six basic qualities, he moulds us to grow higher in spirituality.

## 5. Recognizing and changing internal axis

Devotion and service to the teacher leads us to a change in our internal axis by a cultivation of the qualities of *śaucam*<sup>29</sup>, *sthairyam*<sup>30</sup> and *ātmavinigraha*<sup>31</sup>. *Śaucam* is purity at all levels, not just cleanliness, but sanctity. Cleanliness and purity does not mean the bacteria-free and virus-free sterility of the hospital environment where everything is sterilized. It is not that type of cleanliness, but cleanliness with divinity. External purity is as important as internal purity. Pure at all levels. Purity of heart, head, and physical existence. As long as you exist in the world, it becomes your responsibility to take care of the external world also, and make sure it is as clean and pure as your mind. Gurudev used to say that not only should your heart and mind be pure, but even the way you walk and talk, how you dress and what you address should reflect a high level of purity and decency.

This purity is to be gained by recognizing our own negative tendencies, and not feeding them by giving value to them. We have to stop succumbing to our own negative patterns and tendencies. It is our own free will and choice whether we succumb or overcome. By overcoming our negativities we start changing our thoughts, attitude, behavior and actions. This change in our thought patterns and interaction with the world leads to the purification of the four components of our *antahkaraṇa*<sup>32</sup>- *manas*<sup>33</sup>, *buddhi*<sup>34</sup>, *citta*<sup>35</sup> and *ahamkāra*<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Melodies

<sup>26</sup> Pitch

<sup>27</sup> Rhythm

<sup>28</sup> Disciple

<sup>29</sup> Purity

<sup>30</sup> Steadfastness

<sup>31</sup> Self-control

<sup>32</sup> Inner equipment

<sup>33</sup> Mind

<sup>34</sup> Intellect

<sup>35</sup> Memory

<sup>36</sup> Ego

Purity at the physical level is achieved by the practice of selfless service as prescribed in *karma yoga*, at the mental level by the dedication to a higher altar as prescribed in *bhakti yoga* with the clarity of purpose developed through the practice of *jnāna yoga*. The result of this *sādhana*<sup>37</sup> is *dhyāna yoga* where the purified mind glides effortlessly into the state of meditation.

So when this process is taking place, how should the student be? He should have steadiness and stability, *sthairyam*. When we approach the master, we frequently do so with our preconditioned thoughts and expectations. We start editing all that which does not fall within the frame work of our thoughts. That is incorrect! Then there are the students who approach the master with total devotion and say that they even willing to die for the master! But as soon as the master starts his cleansing process, they react, "What does he think of himself? Is this a guru? He can't even control his anger! How dare he scold me in front of everyone?" The ego plays a big role in this process. In fact, the purpose of the ego is to remove and eradicate the sense of that ego. But when the master starts pounding on it, we do not have the steadiness of purpose to understand why we have reached the master. It is a slow process, so we must have that steadiness of the purpose, the vision of why we are there with the master. Many of us miss that point. The steadiness and firmness of purpose has to be maintained and rekindled in our hearts from time to time.

The more we grow in spirituality, the more sensitive we seem to become to problems! This is called *stambha prathistha jnāna*<sup>38</sup>. When you want to hoist the flag, first you dig a hole to erect the pole. Then you place the pole in the hole and fill it with dirt. When you think it is firmly implanted, you shake it to make sure. If it shakes then that indicates that it is not firm yet. So then you fill in more dirt and maybe pour some concrete so that the pole stands firm. Once it is firm, it will not move even in strong winds. Similarly, in the initial stages, a *sādhaka* faces a lot of turbulence and turmoil. Why? In order to stabilize him and provide him with a firm grounding so that he can grow higher. What are the three basic things that give the seeker the firmness, the *sthairyam* to withstand the turbulence of life? Values, morals and ethics. They are embedded within you whether you want them or not! The purer you grow, the more sensitive you become if you are firmly established in values, morals, ethics, and have clarity of purpose. If you lack this clarity, you will immediately get thrown off your course even by the smallest of turbulences. Guruji puts it very well, "If a person cannot stand firm for values, he falls for everything in life."

Once that purpose is steady in our hearts, we can start disciplining ourselves by the practice of *ātmavinigraha*<sup>39</sup>. The art of self-discipline is not the suppression of your desires and emotions. It is growing up to the level of being in balance at all times. Self-discipline is not running away from your responsibilities in the world. Let me give you a couple of examples. I once had to go to a government official in India to get some documents attested. While waiting for him, I was amazed to see how he functioned. He was talking on the phone while keying in some information in the computer. He asked an assistant to find some missing files and also get some tea for me. In between all of this, he was also dictating a letter to his secretary. He juggled so many tasks simultaneously with perfection, without getting distracted or stressed out about handling them. I asked this person how he could manage to do all this. He told me that his father had trained him by giving him the toughest mathematical problems to be solved in a stipulated time frame. That is not all! He had to accomplish this task at the busiest and most chaotic bus stand in the city while his father ran some errands. Another example is these palatial homes in Texas, where children enjoy their individual soundproof rooms, and there are no external disturbances. Children are then required to concentrate in order to get their work done.

Both types of situations require concentration. Which type of situation do you think requires concentration of a higher order? Obviously the former example requires a different type of concerted effort. Life does not approach you in a manner where you have the luxury of going into solitude, analyzing, thinking and then expressing into this world. You should be able to focus on a particular situation and attend to it as and when it approaches. Otherwise, if you get caught in the traffic of events, life will start to appear ridiculous. *Ātmavinigraha* is that capacity which enables you to be in this world, with all sorts of pressures and stresses, yet, remain just an inch away from the world, untouched by the world. This is called being in balance. For example, if the tires in your car have less air pressure, the car will start wobbling. If there is more air pressure, then you will feel even the slightest bump on the

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<sup>37</sup> Spiritual practice

<sup>38</sup> Knowledge of establishing a pole

<sup>39</sup> Self-control

road. When will you have a smooth ride? When your car has the optimal level of air pressure required. Nothing more, nothing less.

Similarly, when you interact with the world, you should know the extent to which you can and should involve yourself with the world. You should know how much to involve, and how much to withdraw; when to involve and when to withdraw. Most of us are scared to involve ourselves in something new, and once we are involved, withdrawal becomes problematic. Finally the world has to kick you out indicating that you are not needed, and you are then retired. Neither of these situations is good. We should be able to adapt quickly as and when life presents us with situations. And when our duties and responsibilities are done, recognize it and quit immediately. This principle should be applied to every walk of life. When it is time to eat and there is a heavy load of work, and you are under pressure, you might skip a meal. When you delay eating due to work, you might get acid reflux or some other problems. When you eat late, you develop indigestion or sometimes throw up. Maintain the discipline to eat at the right time. On the other hand, whenever we do start eating, we have a hard time stopping! Eat the right amount at the right time.

All our habits, whether they relate to eating, talking, sleeping, every minute way that we express into this world has to carry the stamp of this balance and clarity. This balance and clarity is born only when the student has complete *viveka*<sup>40</sup>. It indicates a clear understanding of the situation and its implications. Just because a situation exists, one need not get involved in it. For example, if you see a banana peel, you do not need to intentionally walk on it, slip and fall down. When you see such a miserable situation, walk away from it. Sometimes that may not be an option. In that case, prepare yourself mentally prior to entering the situation. But we just dive in, and then start wondering what to do. The time to think is before we get involved, make plans, analyze all options and then jump in. "Plan out your work and work out your plans," as Gurudev puts it. With this *viveka*, you will not get distracted, stressed, or burnt out.

## 6. Recognizing and changing external axis

The word *vairāgya*<sup>41</sup> is usually used very loosely. When people start attending *satsangs*, their friends might say that they have developed *vairāgya*, but that is nowhere near the true meaning. External acts are not an indication of *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* or dispassion is the result of *viveka*. When something is given up under pressure, it is not *vairāgya*. Neither can it be partial. Don't fool yourself with the notion that you can be dispassionate 50% of the time! Dispassion is all or none - either 100% or 0%.

Once there is *viveka*, and wisdom is born, there is a capacity to think and visualize before we get into something. Once we develop that clarity, what is the result? A change in our external axis – *indriyārtheṣu vairāgyam*<sup>42</sup>, a dispassion born not out of pretense, or false claims, but a crystal clear discrimination between the real and the unreal and the ability to accept the former and reject the latter.

When you are trying to reach a particular destination, you take a certain route that leads you to that destination. In doing so, you don't get distressed over the routes that you had to abandon. Taking the incorrect route would not lead you to the destination, so you have no attachment to those routes. There is no feeling of loss that you experience because you were unable to take an alternate route! Similarly, *vairāgya* towards this world is about balance in action. A person who has *vairāgya* is still involved in this world, but he is not touched by the world *in spite* of being involved in it. It is not external renunciation and internal cravings. In the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the Lord tells us that a hypocrite is one who seemingly abandons everything, but still broods over that which he has externally renounced:

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<sup>40</sup> Discrimination

<sup>41</sup> Dispassion

<sup>42</sup> Dispassion towards the objects of the senses

*karmendriyani samyamyā ya āste manasa smara  
indriyārthān vimudhātmā mithyācārah sa ucyate*<sup>43</sup>

What gives the courage to forgo our attachment to worldly objects? Clarity of vision and purpose. Once we have that, everything that stands in the way is mercilessly removed. Parents are always heard complaining that their children never study; they always seem to be chatting online or on the phone. Even these children, if they have a test the next day are able to temporarily detach from everything, whether it is food or television or even chatting with their friends. Where did that detachment arise from? We may call it pressure, but it was born of the clarity that tomorrow they have to face the music. The moment that clarity is born, *vairāgya* is the instant result.

## 7. Result of change of axis

*Anahankāra*<sup>44</sup> or egolessness is the result of this change in internal and external focus. Lack of ego. How can we relate to this state? The existence of this entity called the ego depends on the value it places on the world of objects, emotions, and thoughts. When that which it values does not exist any more, how does it perceive the world? It is no longer perceived through the layer of ego. Such a person celebrates his life. He does not need to wait for an occasion to celebrate. Every moment becomes a celebration. What is the formula followed by such a person? *Āgate svāgatam kuryāt*. They rush to welcome anything that enters their life. They welcome it even if it is a headache. Why? Because if they start reacting, it just increases the headache. Once you welcome whatever comes, you automatically get the stability to deal with it. These people realize that even if they react or reject the experiences that unfold in their lives, those experiences will not disappear. Instead, their reaction or rejection will just increase the stress of that experience. *Āgate svāgatam kuryāt*. No extra value is added to the situation by welcoming it. It is just taken at its face value. And more importantly, *nirgate na nivārayet*, when these good or bad experiences leave, do not weep. Instead, celebrate the loss also.

Gurudev exemplified this quality perfectly. Once he had come to Hyderabad to initiate work on a new school. The school was to be constructed on a hill that had indigenous rocks and boulders. He instructed the architect not to remove the rocks, but to design the building in such a way that the rocks would blend in with the structure. Standing on the hill with his walking stick, he seemed to be totally involved in the architectural blueprints, the flooring, the roofing, and other aspects of the design. All the architects were taking detailed notes. The moment he stepped into the car, it was as if he washed his hands off the project. It was a closed chapter now. Each person whom Gurudev had encountered felt that he had come there only for him or her, but for Gurudev, he was done with it. He did not continue to brood over his ideas. When he went to the next place, he started fresh. When he left something, he left it completely. Such a person is called non-egoistic.

We have heard the story of the two *brahmacārits* who were crossing a river. They heard a young lady crying for help. One of the *brahmacārits* jumped in and rescued her. He carried her across the river, and left her on the shore after making sure she was fine. The other *brahmacāri* continued to brood over the incident. It was against their *dharma* to touch a woman and he was upset about it. They had already crossed the river, dropped off the lady, and were walking towards their *āśrama*. Yet the nagging still continued incessantly. Finally the first *brahmacāri* could not take it anymore and said, "I only carried the lady across the river to the shore. You are still carrying her in your head." When something is gone, let it go, don't carry it with you as a burden. Keep your memory lean and free. Don't cling on to unnecessary things.

Such an egoless person does not brag about the past, exploit the present or brood over the future. He lives totally in the present moment. His inspiration is in-born, it is not motivation which depends on external factors. He stands firmly for his values. He is not a doormat who is used or abused by the world. Nor is he running away from the world because of fear and insecurity. He values his values and is valued by the world.

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<sup>43</sup> He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking in his mind of the sense-objects, he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite.

<sup>44</sup> Absence of egoism

## 8. Effects of the result

Once the *sādhaka* is firmly established in the values that have been enumerated thus far, he sees the world as a cartoon network. He can see the world and his own experiences with perfect clarity. He can see how he used to succumb to the situations in life and get limited by them. He can now laugh at the same limitations. He is able to become a detached observer of the pain and suffering of *janma*<sup>45</sup>, *mṛtyu*<sup>46</sup>, *jarā*<sup>47</sup> and *vyādhi*<sup>48</sup>. These are the different ways in which we perceive ourselves to be limited. No miseries can touch the one who can laugh at his own miseries, “Trouble itself they send away troubled who do not trouble themselves at the sight of it.”

As the mind grows subtler, it wants to withdraw, but external responsibilities still remain. For example, your responsibilities towards children, spouse, etc. have to be fulfilled. You cannot run away from all these duties. I can provide my own example. I left home and joined Chinmaya Mission thinking that I would not have to take care of a house. Now I have a huge house with a mortgage and 300 children to take care of. Earlier there was only one set of parents to provide guidance. Now there are multiple sets of parents who have their own book of instructions with do-s and don't-s. Not one book matches the other and all of them are given with love! Where ever you maybe, if you are destined to go through those experiences you cannot escape them. The moment you are done for, even if things are forced on you, they cannot influence you. Till then, it is the *prārabdha*<sup>49</sup> of the listener and the speaker! As long as the *prārabdha* exists, the *pravacans*<sup>50</sup> will continue! You cannot run away from your duties and responsibilities. So how do you live while fulfilling them?

With *asakti*<sup>51</sup>, with a lot of love and involvement without expecting anything in return. When we have expectations, we create our own limitations. Just because we are on the path of spirituality, our problems do not diminish, but our attitude in handling them changes for the better. As has been said before repeatedly, we cannot run away from our duties and responsibilities, but non-attachment eliminates our dependency on things that are external to us. As Gurudev puts it, “Don't put the key to your happiness in someone else's pocket.” We no longer identify with and are dependent on objects and relationships like *putra*<sup>52</sup>, *dāra*<sup>53</sup>, and *gṛha*<sup>54</sup>.

With these results, when we observe the world, we are protected from ourselves. How does such a person who has grown to such a level exist in this world in spite of the seeming burden of duties and responsibilities?

## 9. First-hand experience born out of clarity and conviction

The first hand experience of such a person is *nityam ca sama-cittatvam iṣṭāniṣtopapattiṣu*<sup>55</sup>. He stops branding this world in terms of pairs of opposites, of duality – likes-dislikes, good-bad, joy-sorrow etc. In fact, from an absolute standpoint, there is nothing in this world that is good or bad, auspicious or evil. A poison that can kill a human being can also save the life of another person when used in a different form and strength. So is it good or bad? Nothing is good or bad. Living in this equilibrium is an effortless glide. You all must have learned to ride a bicycle. The first few days you experience difficulties, but once you master the technique, do you have to make an effort to stay in balance? No. You need not to, it happens automatically.

So when we ask, how *nitya*<sup>56</sup> should I be in my efforts to be *sama-cittatvam*? Such a question is not even worth asking. A person who has mastered the art of *viveka* and sees the reality of this world as it is, and executes his

<sup>45</sup> Birth

<sup>46</sup> Death

<sup>47</sup> Old age

<sup>48</sup> Disease

<sup>49</sup> Destiny

<sup>50</sup> Discourses

<sup>51</sup> Non-attachment

<sup>52</sup> Son

<sup>53</sup> Wife

<sup>54</sup> Home

<sup>55</sup> Constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable

<sup>56</sup> Regular

responsibilities and duties flawlessly, such a person is always in balance. He is unshaken, and unperturbed. So does he not have emotions? No, he has emotions. Having emotions is not a bad thing, but it is not good to be carried away by emotions. When something happens to somebody, it is not that he is unfeeling like a rock. He jumps into action, helps that person, but does not take credit for it. He performs his duty, and then leaves without any expectations. *Nityam ca sama-cittatvam*. He is in balance all the time. It is just like hang-gliding. You prepare yourself, and then jump. Once you are in the air, the movements are fluid and smooth. Similar is that state, *nityam ca sama-cittatvam*. But then, even such a seeker has to protect himself from the world. So what are those measures of protection?

*Mayi ca ananya yogena bhaktiravyabhicāriṇī*<sup>57</sup>. Unshakable devotion, *ananya yogena*. Devotion to a higher altar in life is a must. It maybe to the Lord, the guru, a lofty cause – anything higher than yourself. Dedicating your life to that higher cause is a must. This is for our own protection. There should be at least one person in your life whom you value so highly that you can never refuse anything that is requested. If you are asked to do something, there cannot be a negative answer. No is not an option. You should have that kind of a dedicated altar. How will that help you?

The moment you dedicate yourself to something that is higher than your own limited existence, the dedication miraculously brings out the best in you. Whenever you are inspired by something higher, you forget all your tiredness, and are oblivious to everything around you. You are motivated and inspired by something higher. Just like the scientist who can spend days together in the lab without any other thoughts. When you can have that kind a dedication without any wavering thought in your mind, it will produce an inspired result. It brings out the best, nothing less than the best.

Secondly, such a person who is dedicated to the higher altar, even if he hits rock bottom due to various experiences, that altar can save him and bring him back into balance. As fast as the fall is, that fast is the recovery. When people come to torture Mīrabai, she goes to the temple of *Bānke Bihārī* and sings out loudly to Him. Then she comes out and challenges the people because she knows she will be taken care of. This is not just a feeling that you are trying to develop in yourself. It is an experience that you live.

Fortify this dedication so that it does not start wavering. Otherwise you lose the pace and the inspiration. Protect yourself. All that intellectualization saying that spirituality is just being good, doing good will not protect you. Don't say "Why do I need God or some higher altar?" Your mind cannot protect you. It is very tricky. Even if you reach the pinnacle of spirituality, you can be easily toppled. When you are at the heights, it is easier to fall. For example, if I ask you to walk on the edge of this stage, you will run fearlessly. If I ask you to walk the same width at a height of 20 feet, you will not even begin to attempt it. The mind is also the same way - it is easily toppled from a height. To protect yourself from the treacherous mind, you have to have this higher altar in your life. Creation of that altar is not optional, it is mandatory. That is where *upasana*<sup>58</sup> of the *Īṣṭa deva*<sup>59</sup> becomes non-negotiable. When challenges come in to your life, the only thing that can protect you is the altar that you have created in your own heart.

### 10. Pitfalls, loopholes and caution

Some words of caution... When we enter a new environment, sometimes it can be unimaginably suffocating. All those mothers who have gone through the pain of delivery know this for a fact. The first few moments after birth, the baby's environment is so different from what he has been used to in the last nine months. Unable to face this new atmosphere, babies experience suffocation. Similarly, as a seeker, when you first enter this field of spirituality, you feel suffocated in the beginning stages. You can no longer identify with the same things that used to amuse you and give you pleasure just a few days earlier! You start thinking that if I don't get involved, it is a problem. If I get involved, it is a distraction. In these initial formative stages, protect yourself by maintaining the regularity in being with yourself. *Vivikta deśh sevītvam*<sup>60</sup>. You may have to get involved because of your duties

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<sup>57</sup> Unswerving devotion unto Me by the *yoga* of non-separation

<sup>58</sup> Worship

<sup>59</sup> Chosen deity of the devotee

<sup>60</sup> Resorting to solitary places

and responsibilities. But then, maintain the regularity of your spiritual practice. Set aside a designated time, a certain period that is only for yourself and your higher altar. Nothing in the world should come between you and your spiritual practices at that moment.

Choose the right time – not when you are required in the midst of your children and other family members. If you make it a habit and set aside that time frame, the rest of the world will get used to that habit. Get used to the solitude of the time to be spent with yourself. It has to be done regularly, not sporadically. Take regular simple baby steps.

Do not succumb to or get influenced by the unnecessary chatter of the world. Develop distaste for the society of men<sup>61</sup>. If it is worth getting involved, then present your thoughts when asked. This is an art to be learnt. If I were speaking to a group of *sannyāsis*, I would have asked them to go away from the world and stay in a cave. You do not have that option. So what do you do at that moment? Fold your hands – and take the Lord's name in your mind. Keep your facial expressions with the "chatter" going on, but internally chant the Lord's name. Apply selective hearing in this world. You can be totally with yourself, completely switched off from the outside happenings.

### 11. Remedies and solutions for protection and growth

How long should I practice the various spiritual *sādhana*s? Lord Krishna tells us that *adhyātma jñāna*<sup>62</sup> has to be revised and practiced *nityatvam*<sup>63</sup>, again and again. Repetition of anything depends on the level of our interest and "mood". We repeat and practice what we like. Can this repetition be born out of our likes-dislikes and moods, or should it be dependent entirely on our inner frame of mind? *Nityatvam* indicates regularity at various levels. The first kind of regularity is when we are in the initial stages of spirituality. Becoming spiritual is not at the peripheral level where we just surf. That kind of surfing will not change anything. *Nityatvam* means to start something right away, right now. Don't postpone it for the next moment. Beginners should start with a stipulated time of 15-30 minutes everyday, and maintain that stipulated time. That is the first level of regularity.

The second level of regularity is wherein that stipulated time should be spent only for that purpose. You are totally with yourself, and even if someone comes, they should understand that you are not available. Allocate some time, preferably in the morning, that is stress-free and does not interfere with anyone else's schedule. This regularity must be maintained. Scheduling the time is in your hands. If change the time, shift it from morning to afternoon to evening, eventually it will become the most easily postponed activity.

So the next question that logically follows is, "Until when should I maintain this regularity?" The process of *sādhana* is not like a scientific experiment wherein you can predict the time duration within which you will start seeing results. Still Srī Rāmākrishna Paramahansa gives us a time frame. He recommended that you spend 72 consecutive hours in front of the Lord without thinking about food or anything else and He will reveal Himself to you. He had practiced this himself and had proven it, but we back out immediately saying that it is too difficult and not meant for us.

If that is not meant for us, *Bhagavad Gīta* gives us a more generic time frame. Continue your *sādhana* until *tattva jñānārtha darśanam*<sup>64</sup>. Lord Krishna keeps it really simple. Practice until you have your own direct experience of the Truth. The moment you reach there, you can stop the *sādhana*. In fact, you do not even need to stop the *sādhana*, it will drop by itself. For example, you drive until you reach your destination. Once you have reached, you do not continue to drive after that! Great masters like Gurudev have said that even the realized masters still continue their *sādhana* for the benefit of their followers. They are role models, whom people look up to as an example to be followed.

When these twenty pointers are understood and implemented in life, the person is said to follow the path of knowledge. Supposing we do not? Undoubtedly, such a man is following the path of ignorance. Other

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<sup>61</sup> *aratir jana-samsadi*

<sup>62</sup> Knowledge of the Self

<sup>63</sup> Constantly

<sup>64</sup> Perception of the end of true knowledge

responsibilities and duties will not and should not interfere in this path. In fact, spirituality is seen in the attitude with which you deal with your responsibilities, and how you fulfill your duties. The moment we separate spirituality from our day to day life, it creates confusion. In fact, that is why *pandits*<sup>65</sup> in India are so busy – everyday we find some sort of a holy day on the Hindu calendar. What does that imply? Each day has to involve an aspect of divinity along with our regular duties and responsibilities. But divinizing the day does not mean running to the temple every four hours, or ringing a bell every two hours! That may be considered as spirituality, but it is just one aspect of spirituality. That alone does not constitute spirituality. That goodness which you aim for in such a sacred place, when that continues in every part of your daily life, and expresses into action, then that is considered to be a spiritual life. Such a man alone is living a life of knowledge.

How would you recognize that you have realized the Truth? A master was once asked whether he was realized. This is a really tricky question because if you answer, “Yes, I am realized”, it defeats the very purpose of Realization. There should not be any *ahamkāra*<sup>66</sup> or “I-ness” involved. And similarly, if you are silent, people may think you are otherwise! But that *mahātmā* answered it differently, “I feel ashamed to call myself realized.” What shame is he referring to? The moment that he says that he is realized, he is that Source, that Supreme, till then what was he? He was not That.

Twenty beautiful pointers indicating how we can understand, how we can reach our own core within. Lord Krishna declares them to be “knowledge” and everything that is contradictory to them to be “ignorance” because knowledge of these qualities leads us to the final Realization of the Self, which is the ultimate goal of life.

ॐ Om tat sat ॐ

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<sup>65</sup> Priests

<sup>66</sup> Ego

## Pointers from the *Master*.....

- ॐ It is sure to be dark if you close your eyes.
- ॐ Introspect daily, detect diligently, negate ruthlessly.
- ॐ Patient self-application, with all enthusiasm, is the secret plan of all great men.
- ॐ Efficiency is the capacity to bring proficiency into action.
- ॐ Each action should be so perfect that it brings more and more peace and harmony into the environment.
- ॐ Alert and vigilant living is *sādhana* (spiritual practice) in the true sense.
- ॐ To forget oneself totally, one's mind should keep awake at every moment. A mind that has forgotten the past and the future, that is awake to the now, to the present, expresses the highest concentration of intelligence. It is alert, it is watchful, it is inspired. The actions of a man who has such a mind are exceptionally creative and perfect. Verily to forget oneself totally, is to be in perfection.
- ॐ Only in a mind freed of all its egocentric burden will calmness, poise and equanimity take root.
- ॐ The secret of success in meditation is in the secret of living successfully a way of pure life....The more one lives the right values, the more one shall succeed in meditation.
- ॐ Wisdom is the assimilated knowledge in us, gained from an intelligent estimation and close study of our own direct and indirect experience in the world.
- ॐ Sandalwood perfumes even the axe that hurls it down! The more we rub sandalwood against a stone, the more its fragrance spreads. Burn it, and it wafts its glory through the entire neighborhood. Such is the enchanting beauty of forgiveness in life.
- ॐ Everybody exists. It is only the few who live. To live, you should have an ideal.
- ॐ Then end of the ego is the *mystic death* of the meditator.
- ॐ Appreciating the mind as, *All Silence I am*, is meditation.

.....Swami Chinmayananda