

Things My Mother Never Told Me

Part IV of Q&A with Brahmachari Uddhav Chaitanya

Is a sharp, smart mind required in spirituality?

No. The goal is to have a pure mind, not a sharp mind. What is needed is alertness, awareness, 24-7-365—at least every waking moment. The extent of awareness is such that Vedanta seeps into your dreams and you are awake even in deep sleep. One doesn't need a highly intelligent mind to realize the Truth. A genius was hired by a large and successful firm, and his mind worked at lightning speed. In his later years, he said, "I wish I could be as simple-minded in my faith as a village illiterate. I wish my mind would slow down so I could know and appreciate the simpler joys of life."

What is a pure mind?

A *sattvik* mind, where, even if there are thoughts, there is no identification with the thoughts. The quantity and quality of thoughts determine what a pure mind is. It is not just a mind without malice. It is a focused mind—one that is ready to be applied in any field, as and when required. It is creative and inspired, but throughout all thoughts and actions, there is still no ownership of the creativity and inspiration—everything just flows through a *sattvik* mind.

Initially we try to keep good thoughts and reject bad thoughts. This is fine, but it is more important for our practice to culminate into not being influenced by any thought in the mind. The reason scriptures give importance to values, ethics, and morals is that these refine the texture and quality of our thoughts. Dis-identifying with noble thoughts is much easier than dis-identifying with baser thoughts. Don't get caught up in labeling thoughts as good and bad. Always keep in mind the purpose of maintaining good thoughts. When I remain uninfluenced by a thought, it means I can make use of a good thought, but at the same time, I don't claim ownership of it. The thought expresses as action, but without a doer or enjoyer.

The realized master is above the *sattvik* mind. He is in the state of what the scriptures call as 'no mind,' wherein 'no mind' is *Brahman*.

What is total mind?

Gurudev explained it like this: A citizen in a democratic nation has a voting right and this is his individual right. Once all the citizens elect a president as their collective representative, the president represents the totality.

Everybody's thoughts put together is 'total mind.' Total mind can go in any direction. And the laws of karma apply both individually and collectively.

Collectively, times seem to be getting harder and *adharma* more rampant. Different people say different things about our present age. What part of what *yuga* are we in now?

Kali Yuga. We are about 5,130 years into it. Its total span is 432,000 years. Then there is *pralaya*, and then *Satya Yuga*. Don't worry, it's as simple as, "What goes around comes around."

Despite trying times, it is said, "Grace showers upon all." How should we understand 'grace'? Is it divine will? Is this divine will random? Or is grace attained through constant prayer and praise?

The term 'grace' is highly misinterpreted. Grace can be termed as 'divine will,' but a better term may be 'divine existence.' 'Will,' as it is used today, has a completely different connotation. Grace is not something that 'falls' on you when it feels like it.

In *Yoga Vasishtha*, grace is defined as self-effort. Grace is that power which is omnipresent, ever-present. When you put forth self-effort, when you raise yourself to higher levels through your *sadhana*, then grace, or divine law, or the law of being, reveals itself to you. Through the effort of your *sadhana*, you become qualified to have this grace flow through you. The one who raises himself up to it, for him, this grace is abundantly available. Raise yourself to *sattva* and grace starts flowing through you effortlessly. From then on, things just happen for you. You don't need to get agitated or

worried; you will just see cosmic energy flowing all around you—in your *sadhana* and in all aspects of daily life.

For many devotees today, their present understanding of grace creates a kind of expectation on the devotee's part. To put a purchase price on grace through prayer is to reduce grace to a form of negotiation, and prayer to a form of beggary; it is wrong. No, grace is not unconditional. Grace is an effortlessness that you earn and deserve after you have put forth all the effort required to reach a certain stage.

Grace is always there, freely flowing, like electricity in the wiring, but you need the right instrument to see and feel its flow. Raise yourself from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattva*. Grace flows in *sattva*. In *sattva*, you will come to see that there is no other power behind your will; you are the power. For now, you are not aware of this because you are in *rajas* or *tamas*. Abide in *sattva* and you will see your own power.

Shri Krishna teaches in *Bhagavad Gita* to be *nimitta-matra* (like an instrument).

Then why is so much importance given to chanting and the power of prayer?

Because *japa*, chanting, and prayer take you to the point of living life as a *nimitta*. Prayer is not an art of begging; it is about dedication, love, praise, adoration. We don't need to ask for a single thing in our lives. If you believe that the Lord has created you, you don't need to ask for help. He will provide all that you need, right time, right place.

Face life as it comes. To do it, you need more willpower—the ability to deal with everything that comes, to take care of it square and neat. Prayer helps you face life better, but it doesn't mean *namaskaar chamatkaar ho jaataa hai*.

It is often prescribed that chanting a mantra, or doing *japa*, should be done with a *japa mala*. What is the significance of using a *mala*?

In the practice of *japa* with a *japa mala*, we are told not to use the index finger because it represents the ego; the index finger is the accusing, pointing finger. Chanting with the attitude that I am not a limited ego reminds the practitioner that ultimately, he is not the one 'doing' *japa*.

To chant a mantra, does one have to be formally initiated into it (*mantra diksha*)? Should it be gotten from a guru, or can you choose and chant what you know?

I don't think you have to be formally initiated. There are many great masters who started chanting on their own and attained realization through it. So if you haven't been formally initiated, don't wait. Pick one and chant it—regularly, perseveringly, devotedly, with discipline.

When the scriptures talk of *mantra diksha* from a guru, the mantra is empowered with the spiritual energy of the master, which accelerates the disciple's growth. The point is that whatever the mantra is, gotten from wherever or whomever, the faith, regularity, discipline, dedication, and devotion to it are what will make the difference.

And how do you find your guru?

You don't. If you go to *satsanga* and end up trying to judge if this one's for you, you will fail. Don't go guru-shopping. Your *sadguru* will come into your life when he deems right, period. And when he does, you will find immense peace and clarity in your own living. In the presence of realized masters, it's always like this. And yes, you will know, without question.

Isn't it dangerous for beginners on the spiritual path to go to too many places, try too many things?

Yes, it can do harm if your spiritual understanding and foundation are not firm. You will keep coming back to square one. It is better just to pray intensely to be guided—He will take you where you need to go.

When the scriptures advise a seeker to gather dry twigs in his hand (to indicate dispassion and the readiness to undergo discipline) and then humbly approach a *shrotriya* and *brahma-nishtha* guru, it means that once such a spiritual teacher has entered your life, always implicitly obey all that he says.

What about spiritual masters who teach that a guru is not needed? Are they right?

For most of us, we need a physical guru. Masters who say we don't are talking from a whole other level. Rise to their level and yes, they are right. They invoke guidance and grace from within. This inner power is nothing other than the *guru-tattva*, the infinite Truth alone. People get confused by such statements because they make the mistake of limiting their understanding of a guru to mean a mere physical form. If this is the case, then they still have a long way to go.