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Divine Wisdom

Question (asked by a devotee):

"Sir, what is Hathayoga like?"

Answer (Sri Ramakrishna):

"A man practising Hathayoga dwells a great deal on his body. He washes his intestines by means of a bamboo tube through his anus. He draws ghee and milk through his sexual organ. He learns how to manipulate his tongue by performing exercises. He sits in a fixed posture and now and then levitates. All these are actions of prana. A magician was performing his feats when his tongue turned up and clove to the roof of his mouth. Immediately his body became motionless. People thought he was dead. He was buried and remained many years in the grave. After a long time the grave somehow broke open. Suddenly the man regained consciousness of the world and cried out, 'Come delusion! Come confusion!' All these are actions of prana.

"The Vedantists do not accept Hathayoga. There is also Rajayoga. Rajayoga describes how to achieve union with God through the mind - by means of discrimination and bhakti. This Yoga is good. Hathayoga is not good.

"You must have noticed that when I see certain people I jump up with a start. Do you know why? A man feels that way when he sees his own people after a long time. I used to pray to the Mother, crying: 'Mother, if I do not find the devotees I'll surely die. Please bring them to me immediately.'

"In those days whatever desire arose in my mind would come to pass. I planted a tulsi-grove in the panchavati in order to practise japa and meditation. I wanted very much to fence it around with bamboo sticks. Soon afterwards a bundle of bamboo sticks and some string were carried by the flood-tide of the Ganges right in front of the panchavati. A temple servant noticed them and joyfully told me.

"I said further: 'Certainly I shall not have any children, Mother. But it is my desire that a boy with sincere love for God should always remain with me. Give me such a boy.' That is the reason Rakhal came here. Those whom I think of as my own are part and parcel of

me."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
December 9, 1883

Editorial Modesty

Modesty (Hri) is one of the divine treasures and one of the most indispensable of spiritual qualities. Without its cultivation one cannot progress in spiritual life. What is modesty? Modesty is freedom from vanity, boastfulness; it is regard for decency of behaviour, speech, dress; it is simplicity and moderation - in short it is a balanced behaviour.

Modesty may be described as that virtue which prompts us to be decorous, proper, and reserved, in the way we dress, stand, talk, walk, and sit - in general in the way we behave exteriorly. Modesty is allied to the virtue of temperance, or the habit of self-restraint.

A modest person is intelligent and well aware of both his capacities and limitations. Jnanadeva, a great saint, defines modesty as a feeling of deep shame when a spiritual aspirant thinks or does something ignoble and unspiritual.

On the other hand, indiscriminate self-assertion, selfish display of one's gifts of body or soul, inordinate display of one's intelligence or talents or skills or abilities in any field of human achievement, overtly or covertly - are all examples of what modesty is not.

These days modesty is identified exclusively and excessively with dress, especially that of women. We may recall the admonition of Holy Mother here:

"Mark you, my dear, modesty is the greatest ornament of a woman. A flower best serves its purpose when it is offered to a deity; else it may as well wither on the plant."

Though there is some truth in the above teaching, true modesty is much deeper than mere dress, or even proper conduct - it includes the whole range of good qualities such as purity, humility, chastity and simplicity. The injunction of St. Theresa of Avila: "Be modest in all your words and works," implies that modesty spans all external expressions of our internal possession of humility.

The practice of modesty is intimately related to chastity. Chastity means to be faithful to one's spouse (by implication to one ideal i.e. God). One cannot be chaste and immodest at the same time; for immodesty means drawing attention to oneself - look at me, how beautiful and desirable I am! Be it in dress or speech or conduct, in any form, immodesty is unattractive and injurious.

Modesty is a highly desirable spiritual quality.

It is a very endearing and attractive quality. All of us are helplessly drawn to modest persons.

On the contrary we are repelled by immodesty in any form even if we may not say

anything for fear of being politically incorrect.

There is also a misconception that modest persons are too self-effacing, shy, and possibly suffer from an inferiority complex. Nothing can be further from the truth. When we look at Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha or Jesus Christ, we do not find them suffering from any complex. They knew their worth more than anyone else, yet all of them are models of modesty.

Pretence of false modesty also draws our attention. There are people full of pride and arrogance almost bursting inwardly who pretend external humility and modesty. God help those who fail to notice their humility or modesty!

We come across such a person in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. "Addressing the doctor (Dr. Sarkar), the Master said: "Give up this false modesty. Why should you feel shy about singing the name of God? The proverb says very truly: 'One cannot realise God if one is a victim of shame, hatred, or fear.'

Absence of modesty is a sure indication that one is impure, proud, arrogant and full of oneself. It means one does not give credit to God for whatever capabilities or talents one has but appropriates all credit to oneself. Therefore every spiritual aspirant must cultivate the virtue of modesty. As Krishna declares in the Gita all extraordinary manifestations of power belong to God.

St. Francis de Sales says: "If you want to know whether a man is really wise, learned, generous or noble, see if his life is moulded by humility, modesty and submission. If so, his gifts are genuine; otherwise they are only surface and showy.

"Simplicity, gentleness and modesty are to be desired in all society; there are some people who are so full of affectation in whatever they do that everyone is annoyed by them."

There is a common quirk within us all; we want to be admired by others, we want people to think well of us, and our natural tendency is to put on our most attractive behaviour in the presence of others so as to obtain their attention and admiration. The best way of securing attention is to practise modesty.

These days we have become the worst idolaters - worshippers of the human body. At no time in history do we see the human body so much publicised, advertised and idolised as these days. Since we derive so much of our pleasures from the satisfaction of bodily desires, all efforts are made to encourage bodily satisfactions immediately. What we call fashion is nothing but vulgar display of, specially, the female body.

Under these circumstances who can dispute that the practice of modesty is indispensable?

In conclusion, modesty is an invaluable and indispensable spiritual quality. It is valuable because:

- (1) It is a sign that a person keeps things in perspective, in proper balance.
- (2) It prevents one from being too easily distracted from what is really important, i.e. spiritual progress, by an excessive concern for how one is esteemed or appreciated.
- (3) It makes one keenly aware of the grace of God and the ephemerality of life.
- (4) Since a modest person believes that all that he has is a gift from God, it keeps destructive emotions like pride, jealousy and envy in check.

Needless to say those who wish to realise God must cultivate modesty.

Swami Dayatmananda

The Art of Loving and Living in Relationship

Umesh Gulati

The word art in the title of this essay carries a great significance, for we are concerned with something that is sacred and sublime. While the world in which we live today is disorderly, mired in conflict and violence, the word art gives the sense of beauty and harmony. That love is art also signifies that it is not something that one falls into; rather like any other art form, it requires knowledge and effort to become perfect in the art of loving.

Our outer world of disorder and violence is an exact reflection of disorder and violence within our own minds. Therefore, to bring about love and peace in the outside world, we must cultivate love and peace within us. At present we put great emphasis on things that will make us greatly loved by having an attractive face, a well-built body and the capacity to make a lot of money, giving little thought to what will make us loving persons.

In economics, there is a famous law of supply and demand. According to this law, if the supply of any product increases, its price falls; the price will rise if the demand increases. It is no exaggeration to say that the phrase, "I love you," is oversold and, as expected, has lost its value. If we knew what love really is, and recognized its value, there would be no conflict between people based on religion, race, or nationality. Therefore the question, what love really means is of vital importance. But love or anything that is sacred and pertains to feelings cannot be captured in thought. Thought can only lead us to the knowledge that it cannot give us the ultimate answer. It is the mind that thinks thoughts, and the mind, being the product of time and space, is in turmoil; it cannot give us the truth. So we must go beyond time and space to know the truth intuitively or through direct experience. If I like the beauty of a sunset, can I explain it? Likewise love is not something to be talked about. Love is to love. Love is being and becoming, not proclaiming and talking.

There is an anecdote given by a Persian mystic. Once a young lover went to the house of his beloved and knocked at her door. A voice from inside asked: 'Who is there?' The man said: 'It's me, my dear.' The door didn't open. The man knocked a second time and the voice asked again: 'Who is there?' The man said: 'This is your lover, my beloved.' The door didn't open. The man knocked a third time, and when the voice asked the same question, the man replied: 'It's you.' And the door opened. Ergo, love is when you are not.

Therefore to understand the theory of love is extremely important. Swami Vivekananda talks of the triangle of love.(1) Just as a triangle has to have three angles to be called a triangle, so also true love must have three properties: love knows no trading; love knows no fear; and love knows no rival. If any of these properties were missing from our love, it would not be love.

The first property of true love is that it must be for love's sake, not in exchange for love received. Many of us nurture feelings of envy, anger, greed, possessiveness, and pride because our expectations about love are not fulfilled. But they violate the first rule that love is not a trade. All parents love their children. Suppose they want one of their sons to become a doctor or engineer who will enhance the family's prestige, but the son pursues a career in music or philosophy instead. Will the parents love and respect this son as much as they do their other children? What if one of their daughters marries out of their own caste, race, or religion? Probably, they will be estranged for the rest of their lives. Is it love? True love is unconditional.

The second property is that love knows no fear. Suppose a three-year old child slips into

a swimming pool while its mother is sitting outside and reading a book. What would she do? Without doubt, she will jump into the pool to rescue the child, forgetting that she doesn't know how to swim. That spontaneous action is love. On the other hand, if someone from a higher caste sees an injustice being done to a low caste person and doesn't protest for fear of being criticized by his peers, that sentiment is opposed to love. The test of true love is renunciation of 'I' and 'mine.' Fearlessness is the fruit of self-abandonment.

The third property is that love knows no rival. This suggests that love is our foremost ideal; everything else is secondary. In real life, there are other competing goals. Most people are ambitious, want to build their careers and get ahead in life to gain power and dominate others, or to achieve high status and become famous. In the process one or the other party loses its individuality or integrity. For love to be the primary ideal, one must not dominate one's object of love. Instead, one must cultivate the power that breaks through the walls separating one from the other, with each retaining one's own integrity. In love, according to the Persian anecdote cited above, the two beings become one and still remain two.(2)

Thus far we have discussed what love is not. Love is not where jealousy, fear or competition is. Love is not where anger, lust, greed, or pride is. When one negates all these, a loving person emerges spontaneously. This person is caring, responds to the physical and psychic needs of fellow human beings, and respects them as they are, and not how useful they are. The loving person also knows the difference between having full knowledge and understanding the object of one's love, and not just about it. This is possible only by transcending one's own interests and seeing the other person in his or her own terms.(3)

By these criteria, real love in this world is very rare. This is because few understand what it takes to really love. No wonder that humanity has lived in perpetual fear and sorrow. Can this sorrow end? Can we end terrorism and wars? Can any government, no matter how powerful, bring about peace in the world? Seldom do we realize that we are the world.(4) Conflict, violence, war etc. that we see outside are nothing but our own shadows, for reality, physical, gross reality outside and psychic, subtle reality inside, are one and the same; the former is only materialization of the latter, Suppose it's dark outside and there is a stump of a tree in an open field. A thief who is running from the police sees in the tree's stump a policeman, a lover sees in the same stump his beloved, and a little boy who had been reading about ghost stories will see a ghost in it.(5)

What then is the way out? First and foremost is to become conscious of this conflict, jealousy or fear within us. Suppose I see the face of a person and assume that he may be a member of a radical group engaged in terrorism. So I am afraid. Since I am no different from fear, the fear is me as an object, a mere body-mind complex. For that reason I react either instinctively or impulsively. All animals react instinctively or impulsively like unbridled horses. At the human level, however, everyone has the capacity to transcend these base emotions and act intentionally; I must discriminate between what is Real and not real and act in freedom.

The following incident from the life of Swami Vivekananda during his itinerant days in Northern India illustrates this point: One morning, after visiting the temple of Mother Durga (in Varanasi), the Swami was passing through a place where there was a large tank of water on one side and a high wall on the other. Here he was surrounded by a large troop of monkeys.... They howled and shrieked and clutched at his feet as he strode. As they pressed closer, he began to run; but the faster he ran, the faster came the monkeys, and they began to bite at him. When it seemed impossible, he heard an old sannyasi calling out to him: "Face the brutes." The words brought him to his senses. He turned and boldly faced the irate monkeys. As soon as he did that, they turned back and fled.(6)

You see, the evils that we find in us are like monkeys; once we recognize them, they take to their heels. In fact, some years later in a New York lecture he said: "If we are ever to gain freedom, it must be by conquering nature (both external and internal), never by running away. Cowards never win victories. We have to fight fear and troubles and ignorance if we expect them to flee before us." (7) How? I must choose consciously to deal with the fear, which is to reject it, and be aware of my real divine nature, the Self, always a subject, whom no weapon can cleave or fire burn; it is invincible, ever pure and immortal. This awareness makes inaction as total action. (8)

Sri Ramakrishna's parable of a cobra, to whom a Yogi had given a mantra and told him not to bite anyone, very well illustrates this last point. The Yogi checked after some time and found the cobra completely emaciated by hunger. When asked the reason, the cobra said that it was afraid to come out of its hole for fear of being beaten by the boys ever since they found out that it wouldn't bite them. The Yogi said that he had told it not to bite, but he did not say not even to hiss. Hissing is a cobra's real nature; not hissing made it fearful and weak. Once again, timidity is not the sign of love. A loving person is always fearless and doesn't try to make others fearful.

When sage Yajnavalkya of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad was about to renounce the world, he told his two wives, Maitreyi and Katyayani, that he wanted to distribute his wealth between them. Thereupon Maitreyi said: "Sir, if I had this whole earth full of wealth, would that give me immortality?" The sage said: "No, it will not. You will be rich, and that will be all; wealth cannot give immortality." Maitreyi then asked: "What shall I do to become immortal?" Then began one of the most profound lessons on the secret of realizing the Atman and immortality.

Yajnavalkya said: "It is not for the sake of the husband that the wife loves the husband, but for the sake of the Atman that she loves the husband. It is not for the sake of the wife that the husband loves the wife, but for the sake of the Atman that he loves the wife." Yajnavalkya goes on to talk of loving children, friends, and so on, and said that no one loves them for their sake, but for the sake of the Atman (God) in them, for all of these are nothing but the Atman.

In real life we forget that we are the Self, and instead identify ourselves with a body-mind complex: I am a man or woman, professor or doctor, Indian or American, Brahmin or Khshatriya, and so forth. In other words, I make an image of myself, and thus separate myself from the Self. It is this image then that "loves" a specific person, wife or husband for instance, or rather the image of that specific object. So two people interact as two images. But relationship means actual contact, of one real person, of one soul, with another. The mind makes these images, and since the thoughts that the mind thinks change, our perceptions about the images also change. I judge others from my own plane of perception, and others judge me from theirs. There then lies the cause of our living in sorrow. How can we end this sorrow? Buddha faced this question twenty-five hundred years ago, as did Sri Ramakrishna very recently. Both agreed that to rid humanity of its misery, we must change our own mindset and bring about a deep psychological revolution within ourselves.

How must we change our mindset in order to bring about the necessary revolution? It is to answer this question that the study of the art of living becomes relevant. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that to love one's own children is maya or attachment, while to love all children is daya or compassion. Translated into our everyday language, it means that to love one's own children, friends, parents, country or religion is politics, but to love one and all is wisdom. The latter occurs as a result of realization that "all this is verily Brahman." It is in the very nature of a politician to divide, and of a Brahmajñani to harmonize; one leads to violence and wars, the other to love and peace. One who has realized the Self sees the same Self in all. Then love of a man for a woman, and of a woman for a man is neither for man or woman as such but for the Atman, the real

person. That love becomes perfect and the loving person immortal.(9)

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, too, told her devotees to cultivate an attitude of loving everyone; loving selectively is attachment. Just a few days before her passing away, a disciple asked her: "Mother, how shall we have peace of mind?" The Mother said, " Don't find fault with others, but find your own faults. No one is a stranger; the whole world is your own."(10) Why did the Mother say "Find your own faults"? Because only by studying our own minds can we find peace and a fulfilled life, and also the answer. Being purity and perfection incarnate as she was, Mother saw everyone without fault. Besides, no one was a stranger to her. She was also a mother to everyone, bestowing her unconditional love without any regard to caste, creed, or nationality. Not only did she feed them, but also cleansed the dishes in which they had eaten. She fed and treated Amjad, an ordinary Muslim and often in and out of jail, in the same way as she did Swami Saradananda, a great Hindu saint. She said: "Amjad is as much my son as Sarat." During the early years of the last century, Indian nationalists had boycotted the British-made cloth, but she didn't join in the boycott, saying: "The British workers are my sons too."

Sri Ramakrishna advised many of his devotees that just as in breaking a jackfruit the juice won't stick to one's hands if one rubs them with oil first, in the same way one must realize God first, and then live in the world and enjoy it. To such a person, worldliness won't stick. Such a person would see God in everyone and everything. "Even if he lives in the body and works incessantly, he works only to do good; his presence is a blessing. Such a man will, by his very presence, change even the wicked persons into saints."(11) The secret of the art of living is to take our love beyond specific objects, relatives, wealth, property, religion and country, and give it to God (Self) in them. Giving or dedicating our love to God means giving it to all, and thus feeling relatedness to the whole world without any difference of caste, creed, race, or nationality. The opening verse of the Isa Upanishad, which according to Mahatma Gandhi contains the essence of Hinduism, says: "God the Ruler pervades all in this universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him, and then enjoy the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possession."(12)

In short, the art of living enjoins us not to get entangled in the world, make the satisfaction of our ever-increasing desires our goal, or get attached to our relatives and possessions. We must learn to renounce the pleasures of the senses. In fact we can even conquer death through renunciation, for after all, fear of death arises because of the expected loss of the known, not because of the unknown. But if we die to everything and everyday, will the fear of death remain?

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that one should live like a maidservant who calls her master's sons, "my Gopal," "my Hari," knowing full well that they are not her own sons. Like a maidservant, we should consider ourselves only the caretakers of our relatives, wealth, etc., never claiming to own them. He also exhorted devotees to take responsibility of their wives, husbands, and children, but with the attitude of detachment, seeing the Lord in them and serving them. The feeling of serving the Lord in them would make us work harder and better, and love for our relatives would be more, not less. The world then would no more be one of suffering but of joy.

Is there joy in detachment? Certainly, attachment with the sense objects is the cause of our suffering. But detaching ourselves from sense objects including our wealth, power, name, fame, and relatives does not mean that we will be living in limbo. Rather it implies attaching oneself with much more subtle and extremely powerful substance, which is nothing other than one's Self, the repository of love, peace and tranquillity. Suppose there is a cricket match between the Indian and Pakistani teams. Who will enjoy the match most, the Indians, Pakistanis or the cricket fans who love the game without being attached to either of the teams? Certainly the sports fans would enjoy the

most, because they love the Self (the cricket match itself), rather than being attached to either of the particular teams. It is this kind of psychological revolution in our thinking and practising detachment in our behaviour that will transform the world, from one of woe and misery to a mart of joy and harmony.

1 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), v.3, 86-90.

2 Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Perennial Classics, Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 19.

3 Ibid. 24 -27.

4 J. Krishnamurti, You are the World (New York: Perennial Library, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972), 29.

5 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati Memorial Edition, 1991), v.2, 87.

6 The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Eastern and Western Disciples, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, sixth edition, volume 1, 1989, 214.

7 Ibid.

8 You are the World, op. cit. 38.

9 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, op. cit., 418.

10 For an in depth understanding of Holy Mother's last message, refer to author's essay, "The Art of Living in Relationship," Vedanta (Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, U.K.), November-December 2004, 264-273.

11 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda v.2, p284.

12 M.K. Gandhi, My Religion (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1955), 135.

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The Mind In All Its Modes (continued)

Clement James Knott

Innate modes of the mind: origins

We are all born with a set of innate modes of the mind in seed form which are intended to preserve us and last us for a lifetime, but these modes do not always get the respect, affection and care that they merit from us, their inheritors.

By way of an instance; one of the innate modes that we all have is the mind's function to safeguard and protect the person in the prevailing circumstances whatever they may be. The mind is able to work out ways to survive in almost any amount of difficulty either in response to self-assessment and self-direction or even without such conscious promptings.

Where does the mind get its motivations or its promptings from? One answer to this question is: from other modes of the mind which may be of a positive or a negative nature depending on our current attitudes. For instance, the "protect me" mode may be clicked into action by a prior mode of fear, which may be a remnant of previous experiences, or it may be largely imaginary. In either case the reaction to the present-time circumstances would be similar. The "protect me" mode is ready and willing to come to our aid. Once it has been recognised, this innate mode is ready to be a faithful ally.

Modes of the mind in childhood

All children in early life react to images, feelings and perceptions before they learn language and the thought processes stemming from language. The child is trying to come to terms with the present time by responding spontaneously to changing events but as he learns more language with its innumerable tenses, adverbs, predicates, etc., his attention becomes less attached to actions in the present time and so his spontaneity declines. He tends to associate his responses more and more with his language through speaking, writing, reading and hearing which distract him from fully experiencing events in the present time.

The infant's personal feelings become associated with certain images or perceptions. If the recalled image of what he sees or senses is unwanted or is associated with unpleasant feelings such as fear, loss, or discomfort, then he is liable to get a "stuck picture" in his mind of that unwanted image and the unpleasant feelings associated with it. This is a negative mode of the mind which is liable to be re-activated subsequently by similar circumstances and can influence his patterns of response and conduct in later life.

In order to realize such persistent modes it is necessary also to realize the associated feeling. The person can become aware that there is no longer any actual connection between the image and the unwanted feeling. It is a figment of his sub-conscious. He will need to discern distant memories of past feelings from those feelings that are spontaneous responses to events or things in the present time.

Cultures which have been transmitted verbally or by means of pictographic languages are generally more spiritually based than other languages that are alphabetic, but without a spiritual basis. Hence the former are more susceptible to spontaneity and immediacy of expression since the sound or the pictograph is more closely related to the thing expressed.

Imposed modes of the mind and unrealities

A characteristic of imposed modes is that they are separate, each having been created within its own field of assumed reality. It may have been a false or partial reality but nevertheless each imposed mode seems very real in itself and it can persist in the mind separately from other modes. If this were not so, the mind would become very confused and would be unable to discern one supposed reality from another or one mode from another. Imposed modes persist because they have been created separately, each on the basis of a false reality. This has a divisive effect on the mind, resulting in a fragmentation of the sense of reality.

This characteristic formation of the modes of the mind - of each one overlapping others but being separate from them - allows the individual to observe his modes in action separately from one another and so to realize them. If it were otherwise, self-assessment of the imposed modes would be virtually impossible for the individual who is observing the movements of his own mind.

Our imposed modes have mostly been caused by other individuals or groups (either deliberately or by just being unaware of the effects of what they were doing) and insinuated by them on us but with our consent whether under duress or otherwise. The mind that has the ability to create a mode also has the capability to annul it, though it will have obscured its ability to do so by accepting the imposed mode in the first place. But how can we get past this fog of unrealities that we have created around us?

Why is it that some imposed modes can persist for so long even when they have become superfluous to the extent of being a hindrance rather than a help to our life efforts? This is because the imposed mode is a response mechanism to an assumed condition, resulting in the imposition of a false reality on the unsuspecting individual. Thus the imposed mode is brought about in the framework of an assumed (false) reality. In order

to annul such a mode one needs first to annul the false (material) reality. When each imposed mode was first self-created the individual mind had an impression of a field of reality in which to create the mode. This may have been a partial or apparent field of reality but it seemed most real at the time for the survival or advancement of the individual receiving the imprint of the mode.

In the assessment of one's imposed modes one needs to discern each self-created apparent reality that contains a redundant mode of the mind and to recognise it in order to allow the annulment of the unwanted mode. It is particularly important to recognise and realise those negative modes of the mind that have been allowed to mould our character and personality.

Modes can leave an impression in the subconscious for a long time, even for the lifetime of the individual. For instance, a feeling of physical tiredness may be associated with past modes of the mind long ago forgotten. This feeling may occur in the present time unexpectedly. It may arise due to the attention wandering or to distracting perceptions, leaving a "space" in the mind for the occluded feeling to recur. For self-observation it is necessary to focus attention on the present-time actions and attitudes without interruptions or distractions.

Self-assessment

The greatest gift that anyone can give us is to show us the way of self-knowledge: a way to higher awareness of what we are and what we can be. But the gift is exemplary; an example for us to lead and to follow; a matrix for the future development of the individual as a spiritual human being, pointing the way and guiding us on our lifetime quest. Thus we are able to enhance our own consciousness in order to re-direct our life efforts in the direction of our ideal by detaching ourselves from unwanted or redundant modes and so allowing the individual self (Jivatman) to re-generate the mind.

The self-reflective quality of the mind can allow us to examine directly its functioning by by-passing its presumed limitations. The ego-less mind can perceive itself as if in a mirror; but how can the aware mind experience the Self-intelligent divine energy from Source that governs our relative existence?

In the self-assessment of one's imposed modes one needs to discern each self-created assumed reality that contains a redundant mode of the mind and to discern its unreality in order to discharge the power of the unwanted mode. We can then invoke, in accordance with present time realities, a progressive mode of our choice that will supersede the unwanted modes. These are our own imposed modes of the mind regardless of their origin and we need to take responsibility for them in order to sort them out so as to move forward in the direction of our ideal. For this purpose we are not primarily concerned with the contents of the mind but rather with its functions in fact, and how much better it is capable of functioning. The ego has the problems but the spirit has no problems.

The main purpose of self-observation and self-assessment of our modes is to achieve the realisation of the individual mind. To attain this it is necessary to separate true knowledge of the mind (vidya) from ignorance of it (avidya). This can be made possible by detaching at will that part of the individual mind that is illuminated by the true spirit of the Self from the self-imposed thralldom of the ego-mind which keeps us mired into the traps and tricks of the material world around us. We need to release ourselves from our indolent bondage to our self-created egos so we can experience the true freedom of the spirit. The two aspects of the mind; the light of realisation, and the darkness of ignorance which seems to shut it out, can co-exist in the individual beingness but they cannot be manifested simultaneously. It is either one or the other at a time. So we always have a choice: whether to choose to work for the achievement of our own lifetime ideal or to work against it. One cannot be neutral in directing our own life

efforts.

The Yoga of the mind can progress hand-in-hand with the Yoga of the heart and the Yoga of the physical body, in accordance with the temperament of the adept.

Yoga and modes of the mind

There are four fundamental aspects of human nature and each is manifest in one of four Yogas:

Jnana: Expressing the mind through thinking, philosophy and knowledge.

Bhakti: Expressing inner feelings and emotions through devotion, loving and self-sacrifice.

Karma: Expressing the physical body by means of doing, willing and action.

Raja: Being the spirit through concentration, inaction and mysticism.

In each of these four limbs of Yoga, the being has the capability of creating his own field of reality, each having its own memory. Hence there are four fields of reality and four paths to realisation; each path leading us in the direction of our ideal. Yoga is a condition when the first three of these fields of reality are in abeyance and are not active; when the living being is subsumed into the Divine, beyond our other realities which he comes to see as having been largely delusory. The adept can shape his own path to Yoga to express the qualities of his ishta (his chosen form of the Divine) and in accordance with his own temperament.

However, for the purpose of self-observation and self-assessment of the nature and the functioning of the four vital bodies that constitute our beingness, they can be observed separately or in conjunction. The spiritual and mental bodies can combine to observe and assess the functioning of any aspect of the being by generating the self-reflective quality of the mind. The link between these two aspects of beingness is the feeling body. The integration of these four vital bodies and their co-ordination in the consciousness of the living being is an act of the will which in itself is the cause and effect of their integration.

The feeling body

The feeling body is a vital component of our consciousness and it is aware throughout our waking hours. Realising the feeling body involves integrating it with the mental body through perceptions of the senses. Whatever one is perceiving by directing attention, it is part of our awareness. The feeling body wants to feel and to be felt. If it has been suppressed or neglected, it may become intermittently dormant, but it is still there waiting to be released. Its memory is a continuous record of our feelings.

Every perception and each action that we do is accompanied by sensations or feelings. This may be expressed as words or emotions or it may be unexpressed and relegated to the subconscious. Even if it is suppressed, it is still there and may erupt at inappropriate moments. Our feelings may be appropriate or perhaps anomalous; true or false; but how can we tell the difference?

We need to get rid of any long-standing habits of suppressing our true feelings and instead we need to learn to express them freely and judiciously and so realise them. This helps to clear the way for self-observation and self-assessment of our various modes of the mind. We need to discern which of our feelings and reactions are appropriate from those that are negative or inappropriate and which are hindering us from achieving the goal of our life's effort.

The instrument of inner perception

The instrument of inner perception is that part of the conscious mind that has been illuminated by the spirit of the true Self, imparting the gifts of bestowing realities and the discernment of them. Thus one becomes aware of the mind, the individual self

(jivatman), and the subtle body, which together comprise the flows that constitute the consciousness of the individual. Thus, the realised self, being of pure consciousness of the same nature as the one true Spirit that pervades all, can create new modes in the mind according to its reality level and the mind can discern the positive modes from the negative and the resultant flows in and around the body.

For the instrument of inner perception to co-ordinate and integrate our perceptions, it is necessary to hold a stable viewpoint in the head despite any distractions. This is an act of will and facilitates the regeneration of the individual will-power. The internal instrument observes feelings in the mind from data produced by the senses and the mental faculties. The soul is the watcher within who, being detached from materiality, can watch perceptions and feelings directly without reacting in action or in thought. A feeling and the perception of it are virtually instantaneous and this generates the quality of spontaneity that is necessary for the continuity of experiencing the feelings. Our feelings seem to us to be real as long as they are spontaneous, then they pass into the memory or into the subconscious.

The location of the mind

The question, "Where is the mind located?" has more than one valid answer. The realised mind both guides and follows the consciousness of the being since it is a self-intelligent component part of it. It can locate its awareness wherever it wishes to be located: for mental processes it is in the head; for inner feelings and emotions in the heart; for perceptions in the various instruments of perception; for movement, willing and action in the physical body; for watching and witnessing passively it is subsumed into the one true Spirit that pervades all life and beingness.

Perception of consciousness and modes of the mind

The question as to how it is possible to perceive or define consciousness is an open question. How could one define that which is in essence formless, timeless, and unchanging? Almost every individual has some idea of what consciousness is even though he may not be able to explain his idea verbally. It has been derived from his inner feelings and emotions and his life experience. However, if his concept is dualistic in thought, even though it may be based on a monotheistic system of belief, it is susceptible to becoming associated with patterns of acceptable thought and action, which will come to represent to him certain aspects of his consciousness. He then transfers the associated qualities of consciousness and reality from himself to the chosen system of thought and action. Thus the possibility of the direct perception of his consciousness and the modes of his own mind becomes diminished and retarded. The individual has allowed part of his consciousness and part of his awareness of reality to be suborned.

Through the millennia many civilizations and empires have thrived by creating cultures based on a fundamental understanding of consciousness and the source of personal power. This enabled them to construct a comprehensive way of life which incorporated the means of continuing it on a traditional base and at the same time regenerating its creative aspects. Only too often the inheritors of these civilizations have used their powers, not to govern justly, but to generate more powers for the governors. Failing civilizations usually collapse due to their own internal decay, having generated more power than they can control. They are then liable to be overtaken by unforeseen cataclysms or by the onslaught of more aggressive neighbours.

The main exceptions to this pattern of the rise and fall of civilizations are to be found in the perennial philosophies of Asia; particularly in the Vedanta and the Tao. Why is it that the quality of consciousness in these systems of thought and belief has been sustained for so long and is able to regenerate itself? This is because the flows of pure

consciousness are self-intelligent and indestructible. The idea of consciousness (in mental form) and the reality of it (without form) are two different things. One is an impression of the other. The idea and the reality on which it is based can co-exist providing that the idea does not obscure the person's perception of the reality which is energising it.

Leaves of an Ashrama: 22

Egotism Followed Far Enough Demonstrates Egotism's Folly

Swami Vidyatmananda

Again Sri Chaitanya's (1) wonderful poem "Chant the Name of the Lord" has been running through my mind, and particularly the lines: "Be humbler than a blade of grass; be patient and forbearing like the tree." I have been thinking about humility and wondering what my progress has been in developing this virtue.

Grass does not compel attention; it permits everyone to take advantage of it. Yet grass remains friendly, performing a function which is indispensable. The tree stands quiet and detached. Oxen may scratch themselves against its bark, and cats sharpen their claws there. Men may nail signs to the trunk or carve graffiti on it. Good people - bad people - it doesn't matter - come and take shade under the branches. The tree accepts all.

How different from the way I've lived. I grew up believing that the way to fulfil myself was to press for my own ends, because my motives were particularly important and right. So ignorant! Yet I'm glad I started out in this way for, as the saying goes, egoism followed far enough demonstrates egoism's folly. There was no alternative but to become a devotee of God.

Yet it takes a long time to unlearn old habits. Progress in humility comes slowly. Fortunately, you get a push from the Lord. When you become a serious devotee He takes over your disciplining. Inexorably the reduction of your ego begins. For some time you may keep going through the old motions without realizing that you are being nullified. But you are. Asserting yourself now is like fighting a feather bolster; the blows are all absorbed. Things will go on as they will go on; the Lord arranges everything. You come to see this and accept it after a while.

Self-assertion is replaced with what I would call alert relaxation. You have stopped thinking that you are always right. You do what you must do but are ready to shift or suspend operations if it is indicated that you should. You don't identify much with your own enterprises or react severely to the activities of others. In other words, you have started to become humble.

I dare to hope that this process has begun in me. As a result I feel less strain in living; my human relations have improved; and I often discover that I am really happy.

We turn to religion because religion promises us a chance to gain peace of mind. Development in humility and forbearance is, I am convinced, the effective means of obtaining it. Once you get used to being small you would not like it any other way; the rewards are so much greater than those sought through self-assertion.

(1) Sri Chaitanya (1485-1527). Bengali religious reformer, considered a partial

incarnation of Krishna.

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Vedanta and The Courage to Be. Swami Vivekananda's message of strength Swami Bhajananda

One of the most striking aspects of the message of Swami Vivekananda is the great emphasis it lays on strength and fearlessness. Strength or courage is usually considered to be a virtue, that is, an ethical concept. Few people realize that for Swamiji strength or courage was primarily an ontological concept, that is, he regarded it as an essential attribute of Reality. When Swami Vivekananda spoke of strength or courage, his intention was not to give a sort of pep talk; his primary aim was to teach a metaphysical principle having immense practical application in day-to-day life.

Great men like Swami Vivekananda seldom make off-hand or ad hoc statements for some temporary benefit. Everything they say or write invariably springs from their experience of Reality in the depths of their being, and is therefore rooted in Reality. For Swami Vivekananda strength or fearlessness is a virtue only because it is a manifestation of an essential aspect of the ultimate Reality. Swamiji laid the foundation for an existentialist philosophy of courage. This is one of his enduring contributions to modern thought. Before Swami Vivekananda came on the scene, strength or courage had not been given a central place either in the scheme of moral values or in the metaphysical approaches to Reality. True, the Upanishads had defined the ultimate Reality as fearlessness - abhayam vai brahma (1) - but this concept was not incorporated into any of the philosophical systems that later on rose in India. Commenting on the above passage, Samkara merely remarks that it is a well-known fact. The approach to Reality adopted by most philosophers in medieval India was that of an 'essentialist'; they were chiefly concerned with the essential static nature of Reality as sat (Being), cit (Awareness) and ananda (Bliss). Swami Vivekananda's outlook was that of an existentialist; his chief concern was the dynamic aspect of Reality revealed in experience, encountered in human existence.

Even as a virtue, courage never figured prominently in the moral codes of Indian lawgivers. The chief virtues stressed by them were truth, Brahmacharya, non-violence, renunciation, and the like. With the rise of Bhakti schools, especially Vaisnava schools, self-surrender to God made courage a needless virtue. Nay, it was even regarded as a sign of hubris or egoism and as an obstacle to self-surrender. In its place weakness, feelings of helplessness, karpanya, was raised to the level of a virtue. Thus, Swami Vivekananda's stress on strength or fearlessness appears to be a major departure from the general ethical trends in India. The important point to note here is that for Swamiji strength or courage was not one of the several virtues; rather, it was the basic parent virtue without which the practice of other virtues would be impossible. He said: 'It is weakness, says Vedanta, which is the cause of all misery in this world. Weakness is the one cause of suffering. We become miserable because we are weak. We lie, steal, kill and commit other crimes, because we are weak. We die because we are weak. Where there is nothing to weaken us, there is no death nor sorrow.' (2)

Swami Vivekananda believed that his emphasis on strength as the parent of all virtues had the support of scriptural authority. He considered it the central point in the message of the Upanisads. He said: 'Strength, strength is what the Upanisads speak to me, from every page ... Ay, it is the only literature in the world where you find the word abhih, 'fearless', used again and again ... And the Upanisads are a mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world ...'(3)

'Strength is goodness, weakness is sin. If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanisads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word 'fearlessness'. And the only religion that ought to be taught is the religion of fearlessness.'(4)

The central message of the Gita also is strength, according to Swami Vivekananda. This is only as it should be, for the context of the Gita admits of none else. The scripture begins with Arjuna's complaint that he has been overwhelmed by karpanya, weakness, and Krsna's first exhortation is: 'Yield not to unmanliness; it does not become you'.(5) Referring to this verse, Swami Vivekananda said, 'If one reads this one sloka ... he gets all the merits of reading the entire Gita; for in this one sloka lies embedded the whole message of the Gita.'(6) Without the emphasis on strength the message of the Gita would lose all its contextual relevance, and yet none of the more than twenty major commentaries on it has given any importance to strength as a virtue or has made any attempt to find out its ontological basis.

The philosophy of courage

It should be mentioned here that although Swami Vivekananda stressed the importance of strength both as a virtue and as a metaphysical concept, he did not live long enough to work out in detail its ontological basis. Nor was it attempted by his followers. The most systematic and comprehensive attempt to develop a philosophy of strength and courage was made for the first time by the renowned Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. His brilliant work *The Courage To Be*, originally delivered as a series of lectures at Yale University in 1952, looks almost like an exposition of Swamiji's message. Tillich does not mention the name of Swami Vivekananda, but it is clear that he was familiar with Indian thought. There is little in Christian theology that supports the pre-suppositions of Tillich regarding courage. Swami Vivekananda's concept of strength and Tillich's concept of 'Courage to be' have more or less identical connotations.(7)

The English word 'fortitude', which means courage, is derived from fortitudo, the Latin word for strength. So, for all practical purposes, we may take 'strength' and 'courage' to be synonyms. The word 'courage' is derived from coeur, the French word for heart. Courage is an expression of will, and heart is the seat of will.

The Greeks had, even before Plato, recognized four virtues as the chief marks of an ideal character: prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice. The first three virtues represent the three faculties of reason, will and desire. Plato divided human society into four classes (almost akin to the four castes of Hinduism) each with one of the four virtues dominant in the character of its members. Christianity was in many ways a striking contrast to Greek culture. Christ in his sermons stressed purity, meekness, renunciation, non-violence and similar virtues. St. Paul spoke of faith, hope and charity as the three fundamental virtues of a Christian. When Christianity spread to Europe, it accepted the Greek tetrad of virtues as 'Cardinal Virtues', necessary for success in secular life, and the Pauline triad of virtues came to be known as 'Theological Virtues'. Tillich has made an attempt to unite these two sets of virtues to form a holistic perspective. According to him faith and hope are expressions of courage, while charity (i.e. love) covers all inter-human relationships. Surprisingly, this view comes very close to that of Swami Vivekananda. Almost all the exhortations of Swamiji are centred on two primary qualities: strength and love. He identified strength with faith in oneself.

Strength expressed through faith becomes courage.

This, however, is only one of the meanings of courage. There are several other popular conceptions of courage, and it is necessary to examine them before proceeding further.

Types of courage

Spectacular forms of courage are displayed in the circus by trapeze artists, the cyclist on the tight rope, and the animal trainer ordering lions and tigers about. The matador of a Spanish bull-fight is another such example. Burglary, acts of terrorism etc., also need a certain amount of courage. These are, however, more properly described as rashness, recklessness or desperation. So also disobedience to one's superiors, back-chat with one's boss, or to 'cock a snook' at the leader of one's group are to be regarded as insolence and arrogance rather than as courage. There are of course noble acts of courage such as a policeman's nabbing a hard-core criminal or a person's jumping into the river to save a drowning man or rescuing people trapped in a house on fire. These are, however, specific responses to certain extraordinary situations.

Apart from these, courage can take the form of a general response to all situations, an overall attitude towards life as a whole. A poor housewife managing her household, a businessman taking risks in investment, a salesman going about meeting customers, a monk leading a life of holiness and peace, a handicapped man trying to be self-reliant, a busdriver taking people through the crowded streets of a city, a scientist conducting research with undivided application - all are courageous people. In every country there are thousands of such people the life of each of whom is a saga of heroism. True courage does not need extraordinary feats, but it needs extra-ordinary courage to face the day-to-day problems of life, to love and live in harmony with people, to maintain the soul's purity, to practice intense meditation, to forge a bright future out of the encircling gloom. This kind of courage is known as existential courage, that is, courage expressed through one's living, one's very existence as a human being. It is the temper of a person's soul. As a blacksmith tempers steel by heating and beating it, so does a truly courageous man temper his soul on the anvil of life's experiences - suffering and sacrifice and failure and frustration.

Existential courage

What gives people existential courage? How do people develop this kind of inner grit?

There are three main sources of existential courage: faith in the power of virtue, dependence on Personal God, and knowledge of the true nature of the soul. Accordingly, existential courage may be divided into three types: moral courage, religious courage and the courage to be.

Since the vast majority of people claim to be virtuous, one would expect moral courage to be quite common. But actually, it is seldom met with. The majority are living, in Philip Wylie's telling phrase, by the law of conceit rather than by the laws of truth. How many people have the real faith that they can attain success in life by being perfectly virtuous? How many people have the real faith that they can face evil or even change the minds of wicked people simply by the power of virtue? Many people seem to believe that they would not be able to earn more money or succeed in life, should they become 'too good'. Though a large number of them talk about Dharma and Karma, they do not often hesitate to tell lies, to betray their friends or to be dishonest. There are self-righteous people who want to fight evil in society; however, they do it not by increasing their own virtue but by following a tit-for-tat policy or by resorting to various low-down tricks. In other words, what we most frequently meet with is not moral courage but moral cowardice.

It is not widely understood, especially by young people, that there is a kind of beauty which is quite different from that given by a pancake make-up or an after-shave lotion,

and which remains unaffected by old age and ill health. It is moral beauty. A person who leads a perfectly chaste and virtuous life radiates a rare type of beauty which inspires lasting love and admiration in other people. About this moral beauty Dr. Alexis Carrel who won the Nobel Prize for medicine and physiology in 1912 wrote:

'When we encounter the rare individual whose conduct is inspired by a moral ideal, we cannot help noticing this aspect - one never forgets it. This form of beauty is far more impressive than the beauty of nature. It gives to those who possess its divine gifts a strange, an inexplicable power. It increases the strength of the intellect. It establishes peace among men. Much more than science, art and religious rites, moral beauty is the basis of civilization.'⁽⁸⁾

Distinct from moral courage, though usually found coexisting with it, is religious courage produced by total dependence on the Deity, God conceived as a Person. Like moral courage, true religious courage is also rarely met with. Millions of people seem to believe in God but most of them derive their strength not from God but from their own instincts, desires, fancies and from their dependence on other people or wealth. If they depended wholly on God, they wouldn't be selfish, immoral, jealous and quarrelsome as many of them are, nor would they blame God for all their misfortunes as many of them do. Very often belief in God is seen to coexist with disbelief, and many people seem to have greater faith in stars, planets, ghosts and the Devil than in God. As Swami Vivekananda has said, eighty per cent of those who profess to be religious are hypocrites, fifteen per cent are insane and only five per cent are true.

Real religious courage comes not from mere belief in the existence of God or from reading books but from a pure heart illumined by the wisdom of God. It is the result of the practice of chastity and other virtues and the opening of the heart to divine Light and Power through intense prayer or unceasing worship. Through this opening the individual will unite itself with the divine Will; it is this union that is known as total dependence on God. Vaisnava scriptures mention six marks of a person who depends on God alone. 'He thinks of only what conduces to spiritual progress; he gives up all negative ideas, habits and actions; he has unshakable faith that God will save him under all circumstances; therefore in all actions he seeks the protection of God alone (not of other people); his ego is surrendered to God (and so he is free from pride); he is full of compassion for all people.'⁽⁹⁾ A person who practises true self-surrender acquires tremendous inner strength. This frees him from all fear and hatred. He will not act rashly but will wait - pray and wait - until the right way becomes clear.

In the two types of existential courage discussed above, courage is derived from a source outside the person. In the third type, known as 'the courage to be', the source of courage lies within the person, in his own self. It is the ability of the self to assert itself, its purity, joy, unity and peace, under all circumstances. Why should the self assert itself? How does it do it? To find out the answers it is necessary to enquire the central problem of human existence.

Being and non-being

There are two basic processes which give life all its dynamism and diversity. One of these is the struggle for existence. All living beings from amoeba to man are constantly struggling for their existence in this world. What causes this struggle? This question takes us to the second basic characteristic of life: impermanence. Everything in this world is impermanent, and there is nothing more impermanent than life. In philosophical language impermanence is known as 'non-being'. Every living 'being' is threatened with the prospect of non-being. The struggle for existence is not merely a struggle for food, caused by scarcity conditions, as Darwin believed it was. Even when there is abundance of food, every living being has to struggle against change - internal as well as external. Struggle for existence really means the struggle to avoid non-being

by asserting being. Every living being is struggling to assert itself, its existence, against change, impermanence, non-being.

In animals and plants this struggle is limited to the physical level. But even at that level their struggle is not with the external world alone but goes on in the internal world also as the struggle to maintain the equilibrium of physiological activities known as homeostasis. When this struggle for existence fails, the body is overcome by disease or death, that is, by non-being.

In civilized human beings the struggle for existence goes on chiefly at the ego level. Modern social organization and technology have to a great extent eliminated the need to struggle for bare physical survival. yet people incessantly compete, quarrel and struggle for the existence of the ego. When a person fails to get fame or recognition, or when somebody scolds him or speaks ill of him, he becomes upset because he feels his ego's existence is threatened, and not because his physical existence is threatened.

When the ego is threatened with non-being, there are three courses of action open to it. It can assert itself, its own being - this is 'courage to be'. (This will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections). Or the ego can take refuge in the Deity - this is religious courage already discussed. Instead of taking refuge in the Deity, the ego may seek refuge in a group or society - this is collectivization of the ego represented by Communism, Nazism, religious fundamentalism, etc. The ego which is unable either to assert itself or to seek refuge in a larger power may yield to non-being. Yielding to non-being can take various forms like yielding to depression, yielding to alcohol and sex, yielding to neuroses of all kinds, its extreme form is suicide.

Meaning of 'courage to be'

'Non-being' is a philosophical term which most people may find difficult to understand. But we can all understand one reaction of the ego to non-being: the reaction of anxiety. We saw above there are three courses of action open to the ego against the threat of non-being. But the ego does not generally follow any of these courses immediately. Instead, it reacts. The most common form of reaction is anxiety. If we feel, as indeed most members of the modern society do, a constant feeling of anxiety, we should know that our egos are facing the threat of non-being.

In this context Paul Tillich has introduced two important distinctions. One is the distinction between anxiety and fear. Fear is the organism's response to a particular situation; it has a definite object. We are usually aware of fear and make preparation to meet the threat. By contrast, anxiety has no definite object; it is a general feeling of insecurity which constantly nags us. We usually know neither the real cause of anxiety nor the way to get rid of it. Says Paul Tillich:

'Anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible non-being ... Fear, as opposed to anxiety, has a definite object which can be faced, analysed, attacked, endured ... But this is not so with anxiety, because anxiety has no object, or rather ... the only object is the threat itself, but not the source of the threat, because the source of the threat is 'nothingness'.

'One might ask whether this threatening 'nothing' is not the unknown, the indefinite possibility of an actual threat ... Anxiety then would be fear of the unknown. But this is an insufficient explanation. For there are innumerable realms of the unknown, different with each subject, and faced without any anxiety. It is the unknown of a special type which it is met with anxiety. It is the unknown which by its very nature cannot be known, because it is non-being.

'... Anxiety strives to become fear, because fear can be met by courage.'(10)

The second distinction that Tillich makes is that between pathological anxiety and existential anxiety. Pathological anxiety is a response to certain abnormal events like divorce, shameful action, etc. It is a form of neurosis which, as mentioned above, is a

way of yielding to non-being. It is usually nothing but repressed hatred or fear. It belongs to the field of abnormal psychology and may need psychiatric treatment. Existential anxiety, on the other hand, is a common experience in normal life and can be dealt with by the individual himself; it is what concerns us here.

According to Paul Tillich, modern man has to contend with three main types of existential anxiety. These are: the anxiety of fate and death; the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness; the anxiety of guilt and condemnation. Although these three types of anxiety may all occur together, more often it is found that each type of anxiety dominates a particular stage in the life of the individual. Thus the anxiety of guilt and condemnation is more intensely felt in early youth, the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness appears in a pronounced way during middle-age, and the anxiety of fate and death becomes the most serious problem in old age. Almost everyone has to deal with these anxieties in his life.

Guilt is the negation of the essential purity of the self, meaninglessness is the negation of the inherent perfection of self, death is the negation of the very existence of the self. Thus guilt, meaninglessness and death are all forms of non-being. The ability of the self to assert its being in the face of these forms of non-being is known as the 'courage to be'.

Vedanta and the courage to be

All the schools of Vedanta regard the Self, Atman, as self-luminous, eternally pure and blissful. It is totally different from and transcendent to the mind. Hence it cannot be tainted by impurities, which can affect only the mind. Everything that is created must have an end. The Self is not a created entity; it is self-existent and coterminous with God, and so it is deathless. Such a conception of the soul makes the exercise of 'the courage to be' easy. When confronted by guilt the soul can say, 'I am pure and blissful and so sin cannot touch me.' When confronted by emptiness and meaninglessness the soul can say, 'I am fullness of consciousness and every experience is meaningful to me.' When confronted by fate the soul can say, 'I am immortal and death is only an event in my unbroken existence.'

Thus the Vedantic conception of the Atman enables the soul to take on all forms of non-being simply by asserting its real divine nature. It does not need a saviour to save it from non-being; all that it needs is a guide who can teach the soul how to face non-being - guilt, meaninglessness, death. All the power that the soul needs is hidden within it, what it needs is a person who can awaken this power. That is why Swami Vivekananda 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.'(11)

Thus each soul has in it the power to exercise the courage to be and face the threats of non-being. Vedanta, however, goes a step further and denies non-being itself. It is in this denial that it radically differs from all western systems of thought. According to every school of Vedanta, there is no gulf separating the soul from God. It is not an 'I-Thou' relationship; God is not a 'wholly other' object. Both the soul and God belong to the same category of Self - the former is the individual Self (jivatman) whereas the latter is the Supreme Self (Paramatman). The relationship between them may be characterized as transcendent 'We'. Since God is the Soul of all souls and the divine Being pervades everything in the universe, where can non-being exist?

Of course, Advaita admits the existence of non-being in the form of Maya which separates the soul from God and the universe. But then, Maya itself is unreal, and so non-being is also unreal. In Vedanta the three existential anxieties of guilt, of meaninglessness and of death are regarded not as forms of non-being but as products of ignorance. Fear arises only when there is an object to be afraid of. As the Upanisads declare: 'Duality is the sole cause of fear.(12) Here duality means a subject-object

separation. But the divine Being, as the eternal subject, fills all space leaving no gap for objects. Hence the fear and anxiety we feel are not real but caused by ignorance. According to this view, the chief struggle in life should be to eliminate ignorance about the true nature of the Self; there is no need to fight against non-being as such. This is what the four mahavakyas, 'great Dicta' imply. 'I am Brahman', 'This Atman is Brahman', 'Brahman is consciousness', 'That thou art' - these four statements aim at eliminating the erroneous notion of non-being as a gap separating the soul from God. When the notion of non-being disappears, its products, anxiety and fear, will cease to haunt us. There is no need to fight with guilt, meaninglessness and fate all through one's life. It is possible to live completely free from these problems by realizing one's true nature as the luminous Self.

A liberated and illumined Self is our greatest wealth and greatest strength. Instead of trying to realize this sacred inner Light why should we run after external things? Material objects can never solve our existential problems; few people are unselfish and dependable; even the pure-hearted spiritual people cannot help us beyond a certain limit. There are situations in which we find ourselves alone and helpless. But everywhere at all times, even when there is nothing but darkness all around, there shines in our hearts the luminous Self. It never leaves us but always protects and guides us and fills our emptiness with its peace and power. To hold on always to this inner Light is the most courageous act on earth; it is what the 'courage to be' really means. The following Saiva Agama hymn may inspire us in making it an existential habit:

Where there is no mother, father, friend or brother,
where there is none to sympathise with us,
where exists neither day nor night,
there shines the lamp of Atman:
and I take refuge in it.

Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, May 1986

1 Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 4.4.25

2 The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976) Vol. 2, p. 198

3 Complete Works (1973) 3.237-238

4 ibid p. 160

5 Gita 2.3

6 Complete Works (1978) 4.110

7 Paul Tillich: The Courage To Be, published by Collins (Fontana Library paperback). London; 1970.

8 Alexis Carrel, Man the Unknown (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books - Pelican Edn. - 1951)

9 Ahirbudhnya Samhita 37.28

10 Courage to Be pp. 44-47

11 Complete Works (1964) 7.498

12 Brhadaranyak Upanisad 1.4.2

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Seeds (continued)
Swami Yatiswarananda

Idols of love

Always try to follow the moral path, the spiritual path. Stop brooding over the past, whatever it may have been like. Think of purity, think of what you are going to try to do in the future: "He who thinks he is pure becomes pure." If we dwell too much on the consciousness of sin and impurity we lose sight of the fact that with our spiritual striving we can achieve something. Think always, "Purity is my birthright, my true nature, I am eternally free."

The root-cause of all impurities must be removed, not merely their manifestations. Repressions and the formation of complexes are, as such, not bad. They are necessary as steps to complete sublimation which comes later. Why raise such a hue and cry about complexes? They are formed whatever we do. Sex-indulgence creates a complex in one form, repression in another. We have to seek that which will lead us onto something positive ... higher ... freer.

In our shifting centre of consciousness we can pinpoint three aspects: the physiological aspect, the nerve aspect and the thought aspect. All are important. We should know where we stand, and where we are aiming at. We must make it a point to avoid all dangerous stimuli in whatever form they may come to us; the tender plant has to be given some protection if it is to grow well. The centre of consciousness is like the pouch of the mother kangaroo. At the slightest danger the baby kangaroo runs to its mother and in a trice disappears inside her pouch. Likewise with ourselves. At the slightest notion of any dangerous stimuli coming to us from either outside or inside, we must seek cover in the "pouch" of our higher centre of consciousness. Have faith in yourselves! By far the best method of getting rid of all the incrustations of impurity is to think of that Eternal Purity which is our first nature. We are, seen from the spiritual standpoint, all our own ancestors, and only reap what we ourselves have sown. Yet the law of karma is never identical with fate. The law of karma is the law of self-effort - intelligent, conscious self-effort - it is never a teaching for fatalism and lethargy.

There will always be those whom we know that fall down by the wayside. What is to be done? Pass on! Without looking to the right or to the left, without caring for results or for fruits, keep your eyes on the Goal, and press on. So, no sticky sentimentalism! Everybody is at different stages of the journey. Your duty is to reach the Goal.

Out of so-called love, somebody may offer to "accompany" you on the journey. This could be dangerous. Such people only want to coil their "love" around you; rather like an octopus! Rather let their heart break before allowing them to do this. All such love is mere ego writ large in capital letters, and nothing but that. It is simply satisfaction of emotions and impulses. It is never love in the true sense of the term. True love never seeks to coil itself around anyone. False love drags us down, entangles us in its meshes and forever strives to possess us as its own property. So we must not be caught in the meshes of such sentimental, possessive love. "Ah! We are meant for each other..." All this is foolishness and sentimental nonsense.

Empty emotionalism and sentimentality are our worst enemies on the spiritual path. It is the pure heart that becomes the reflector of Truth, so too does the purified, thoughtful mind. But in the highest realization both are transcended, the heart and the mind cease to be. The purer the mind, the better the thinking, the greater the reflection. In matters spiritual, therefore, one should be one's own doctor.

So long as we cling to false puppets and idols of love and we cherish them in our hearts, it is not possible to have, at the same time, a sincere and deep yearning for God. But for everybody there will come a time when these false puppets, these dolls, will lose all their charm. Then only dawns a true and deep yearning for the spiritual life. All things worldly become "saltless."

Once a certain king, called Trisanku, was about to go to the highest heaven. But one of

the gods became awfully jealous and made him indulge in a certain kind of self-glorification. Because of this act, King Trisanku could no longer go to the highest heaven, for there self-glorification has no place. At the same time, the unfortunate king was unable to return to this world because he had no worldly desire. So he remained hanging in the air.

In a way, this is rather like ourselves, isn't it? But when the "transitional period" of our spiritual life comes to a close, we discover that the Lord is the essence of bliss and only by knowing Him can we become blissful. "That which is infinite alone can bring peace and happiness. There is no peace in that which is little or limited or finite."

Wrong identity

Is Brahman altogether out of touch with us? Is it a fact that we know nothing of It, get no glimpse of It? So long as there is false identification and this false sense of personality, Brahman cannot be realized. There is this false identification when we see we are shifting our centre of consciousness continually. Sometimes we identify ourselves with the body: "O, I am hurt, I feel such pain." Sometimes with the mind: "O, So-and-So was so rude to me. I feel so worried; I feel sorry; I feel interested;" etc. All this is wrong identification with people and things, and the common factor in this is, "I," "I," "I." Always this "I" that comes in different forms. And so long as this "I" lasts, we cannot get a glimpse of Brahman.

But there is one point to note: even at the time of this wrong identification, we have the consciousness of something that abides. At the back of this wrong "I" there is something that does not change. It is the task of the spiritual aspirant to find out what that really is.

Right identity

Existence/Knowledge/Bliss-Absolute: these are the very essence of our soul, our true nature. And when we analyse the outside world too, we find the same thing standing at the back of all phenomena. Every being, every thing has the capacity to force itself on our consciousness, has a sort of luminosity about it that illumines the sentient and the insentient. There is no difference in kind but of degree. So in the inside world and in the outside world we find this abiding sense of consciousness and thus a glimpse of the Reality.

The sense of consciousness is always there. Sense-objects draw our mind because of the idea that we are going to derive some enjoyment from them. It is because of this that we feel tempted, not because of the intrinsic value of that particular sense-object. Thus, not merely in ourselves, but also in all outside objects, sentient and insentient, we get a glimpse of what may be called Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Always there is a subconscious feeling with regard to its existence. It may be very vague, very indefinite, but still it is there.

The task of all spiritual striving is to make the indefinite consciousness definite, if we really want to come face to face with Truth. First we should begin with ourselves and find out that which exists in ourselves at the back of our ego. There must be merciless self-analysis. Try to find and regain your soul. Your soul is practically lost to you, and only after having found it again will the question of higher realization arise. Spiritual life begins with the recognition of the idea that we are neither men nor women, but spiritual entities. It is necessary to have this as the very basis of all our striving.

*(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West,
Nov-Dec, 1979/Jan-Feb, 1980)*

