

Positive Mental Attitude

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What we need is a positive mental attitude. Most of the suffering in our lives is not due to the outside world that seems to torture us, like tigers and lions. We suffer because of our own mental attitude. So it is very important, even for the devotees, to introspect about this fact. I shall try to explain this phenomenon by quoting from the Master, Swamiji, *Gītā*, etc.

There are three types of suffering in our lives. One type of suffering comes from natural calamities which do not happen every day. Sometimes suffering is caused by bad human beings or wild animals. But these also happen only occasionally. Mainly we suffer due to our own mind. The principal source of our suffering is the fire within. So we should train our *mind* properly. In the *Dhyāna Yoga*, Bhagavān is telling that if we can control our mind then we can enjoy ‘*Amrita*’ i.e. Eternal Bliss in this life. But to have it, we must know the secret.

Shankaracharya tells us in ‘*Vivekachudāmani*’ that there are three things which are very rare in this world: ‘*Durlabham trayamevaitat devānugraha-hetukam / Manushyatvam mumukshutvam mahāpurusha-sanshrayah* //’—‘Three things are indeed rare and are attainable only by the sheer grace of God: A human birth (*manushyatvam*), the intense longing for liberation (*mumukshutvam*), and the protective refuge of a realized sage (*mahāpurusha-sanshrayah*).’ Those of us who get them easily are not always conscious of this momentous achievement.

We have got human birth. We also have the desire to know the truth: How to go beyond this suffering and what is the goal of life? Billions of people are suffering but they do not pay any heed. They are constantly trying to enjoy, to derive pleasure from this materialistic world. They think that they will be happy if they can get a few objects. So, they immerse themselves in the fast life, but, as a result, there are frustration, depression, and the urge to commit suicide. But we are aware that the goal of human life is not the so-called enjoyment that people are constantly running after. If we are not deluded, then we are fortunate. But it is rare. Generally people do not care to know what the goal of human life should be, why I should do good work, why I should meditate, come to the shrine, and take God’s name in the morning and evening. They ask, ‘Where is God? I don’t see Him’.

Even though so many prophets and avatars have come, so many *shāstras*/scriptures have been written, so many lectures delivered, human behaviour has not changed much. Adi Shankaracharya’s hard-hitting words on the fleeting nature of time and human life tell us: ‘*Dinamapi rajani sāyam prātah / Shishira-vasantau punarāyātah // Kālah kridati gacchatyāyuh / Tadapi na munchatyāsha-vāyuh* //’—‘Day and night, dusk and dawn, winter and spring come around again and again. Time plays, life slips away, yet the powerful wind of desire never leaves the human being.’ Day ends for the night to begin. Again the day comes. This goes on and on and has been going on for

millenniums. We want to understand and evaluate the phenomenon in whatever way we can. But our suffering does not end. We are trying to know many things but not to know ourselves. So the second rare thing to attain after human birth is *the desire to know the truth, to know our real self*.

The third is '*Mahāpurusha-sanshrayah*' meaning communion with sages. We, the followers of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, believe in Rama, in Krishna, in Godhood. We know there is a Power behind all the creations around us. We have faith in that Power by whatever name you may call it, whatever form you may impose on it. You may even consider Him to be without any form.

Despite achieving these three difficult things, there is still no end of our suffering. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna reminds us, 'You have got the grace and blessings of God, your Guru and the devotees, who are always encouraging you to go ahead to realize your goal in this life.' When we were very junior brahmacharis, aged devotees would express their happiness on seeing our spiritual pursuit. If we try to achieve something good and do the right things at the right moments, there will always be people who would encourage and support us. They are happy to see our pursuit to realize the truth in this life. But still we are not happy.

What is the reason of this unhappiness? The holy sages have advised: '*Ātmānam viddhi*' (Know Thyself). If we are fortunate to know the core of all that needs to be known, our minds will become calm and we can be happy. But if our minds remain agitated and full of negativity, getting this precious human birth, best wishes of wonderful devotees, God's infinite grace and Guru's insightful guidance will not help. There will always be a kind of void, emptiness in our mind. Though we possess the three rare things, the negative mental attitude will not allow us to realize the truth

and our human life will remain futile and we shall die without achieving happiness.

This eternal advice 'Know Thyself' appearing in the scriptures has always been emphasized by Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Swamiji has uttered the wonderful words—all power is within you, you can do anything and everything, have faith in yourself, always think that you are Ātman, you are not simply this body-and-mind complex. He is constantly encouraging and inspiring us to achieve that state of mind so that we do not suffer from frustration and depression.

I remember an interview of Swami Ranganathanadaji Maharaj, the renowned international speaker, the 13th President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, by some journalists/devotees. When asked to indicate what were the things he was not happy about in his life, Maharaj immediately answered that from the day he left his home to join the Ramakrishna Order, he had never been unhappy or felt that he needed something else to make him happy. How many people can say that?

Why do we suffer? It is due to a feeling of emptiness, caused by the yearning for something we do not have. There is always some desire lurking in our mind. We do not know actually what to ask for. Even if we get what we desire, a new unhappiness creeps into our mind; a new kind of misery cripples us. So the secret is to train our mind to have faith in ourselves and not blame anybody else or even blame God. We find in this world many people asking why one must suffer in this world. Why did God not create everything as good and why bad things were created at all? The Master said in *The Gospel* that if there is no darkness you won't be able to understand the value of light. If bad people are not there, you will not be able to evaluate the goodness of the good people. You need to have a scope for comparison so that you can

try to be good and raise yourself. By touch we can distinguish between ice and fire. So it is God's plan that you should experience what is good and what is bad so that you can follow the path to goodness.

If our mind is trained to think always in a positive manner, then we shall find that it is really not correct to think about the world as a burning cauldron where everyone is suffering. In this world we can then find enlightened souls—'Jeevanmuktas' (liberated while living)—who have completely transcended ego, desires, and the illusion of *māyā*, realizing their absolute oneness with the Divine while remaining in physical body. They do not have any complaint whatsoever on any issue—be it politics or economics, physical or spiritual matter. They are truly 'swānanda', meaning, having themselves surrounded by their own bliss. They are having *ānanda* (joy) in their own selves, they are not asking for anything else. They have got the source of all joy within themselves, in their heart of hearts. This happens only when we have positive mental attitude.

The world being what it is, we cannot say sufferings are not there or bad people do not exist or wrong things are not happening. They are certainly there. But if we become influenced by them, we have to suffer. If you want to go beyond that situation, you have to think in a different manner. In life, you may find two people facing the same situation in two different ways. One person is unhappy while the other is happy.

I am going to share a wonderful story in this context. Sage Narada was on his way to meet Bhagavān Vishnu when he found two devotees meditating under two trees. Both requested Narada to offer their 'Pranams' to Bhagavān Vishnu and also to know from Him how much suffering they had yet to endure to get their final emancipation. Narada assured them he would certainly do so. During his

return he told them he had indeed offered their pranams and put their query to God. When Narada told the first man that he would have to meditate for another five lives to get that eternal bliss, the devotee's face immediately turned pale. He felt utterly miserable and started shedding tears at the bad news of having to take birth five more times. The second person in all humility asked what God had said about his fate. Narada told him that, according to God, in order to achieve eternal joy and bliss, he had to meditate for as many lives as there were leaves in the tamarind tree under which he was sitting. We all know that tamarind trees have numerous tiny leaves. While most people would be immensely unhappy to hear this, this man started jumping and dancing in ecstasy. He was so happy that God Himself in His grace had given word about his emancipation. He was happy that he was on the right track. Immediately there was a divine proclamation that the second man would be liberated at once. You can learn from this great story the value and importance of a positive mental attitude.

One may well say at some point of time that one has studied enough or worked enough for physical health. But the same cannot be said about spiritual enlightenment. No one can claim that he has done enough, for, it is up to God to give *darshan* and offer liberation. We must never think that we have already put in maximum possible effort to achieve enlightenment and feel depressed when liberation eludes us.

A devotee once asked Holy Mother, 'Can one realize God by *japam*?' Holy Mother said, 'No, my son.' Next he asked, 'Can we achieve that by meditation?' Holy Mother replied, 'No my son.' The anxious devotee then asked, 'Can God in that case ever be realised?' Holy Mother said, 'He can be realized only when God's grace is there.'

No one can say that he has done everything possible to realize God. We cannot say that we have already done sufficient *japam* or sufficient meditation (*dhyānam*) or sufficient good karmas. Can we say that we have given adequate number of donations or showed sufficient love and compassion to the sufferers? So the ball is in the court of God and we cannot do anything more. For spiritual liberation, there is no boundary by crossing which God's grace is assured. We simply cannot demand it.

In the *Gītā*, Bhagavān is telling Arjuna, '*Karmanyeva adbhikāraste, mā phaleshu kadāchana*'—'You have the right only to perform your prescribed duty, never to the fruits of your actions.' While exercising your right to do a work, follow the path of righteousness and perform your duty (*dharma*). There is a story which goes like this. One brahmachari was doing *tapasyā* (spiritual austerities) under a tree when a bird suddenly littered from the top. He was disturbed and just raised his eyes. Immediately the bird fell down dead. The brahmachari thought this to be an indication that he was not an ordinary spiritual seeker as one look of his could kill a bird. His ego led him to believe that he was now a very powerful man.

The brahmachari came out of the jungle and went to a nearby village seeking *bhikshā*. After he asked for alms from outside a house, an old lady from inside asked him to wait a little. While waiting, he thought that this householder lady had the temerity to make him wait, while he was a brahmachari with special spiritual power. Though he did not say anything, the old lady said from the inside of her house that she was feeding her sick, bed-ridden husband and requested him to wait till she was free to offer alms. The brahmachari wondered how the lady could have known his inner thoughts. He started feeling that even without doing meditations she was more

powerful than him who performed rigorous meditations. After a while the lady came out, regretted for making him wait and then gave him alms. The brahmachari pleaded with her to tell him how she could understand what he was thinking without even seeing or hearing him. The old lady replied that she was a devotee of God and regularly prayed and took His name, she had not done any special *tapasyā*, but was just doing her duty as a householder towards her in-laws and husband. She further said that if he was eager to know more on the subject, the brahmachari might seek the guidance of Dharma-vyādh.

A 'vyādh' is a hunter who hunts birds and other creatures and then sells the meat to earn his livelihood. The brahmachari wondered how a hunter who indulged in killing living creatures and selling the meat could be elevated spiritually. The brahmachari reached the market where the Dharma-vyādh was selling meat and, even before he could introduce himself or inform the reason for his visit, the Dharma-vyādh asked him to kindly sit down for a short while and then he would speak with the brahmachari. The brahmachari was astonished that a man who was regularly indulging in violence, killing and commercial transactions could be so elevated spiritually. After a while when the Dharma-vyādh was free, the brahmachari requested him to share the secret behind this extraordinary achievement. The hunter said that he was only following the family profession, performing his duties in an honest manner without cheating, that he never lied or did no harm to anybody. So saying, he prepared to go home, to take care of his old parents. Thus, performing one's duties and discharging the responsibilities is what is *dharma*. Doing the allotted work honestly and taking shelter in God is the real secret behind attaining spiritual bliss.

In the *Gītā*, Bhagavān asked Arjuna to perform his duty as a Kshatriya i.e. to fight

against injustice without a shadow of doubt or fear. If Arjuna is not able to do that, he would be performing *adharma*. One has to understand that whatever is not *dharma* is necessarily *adharma*. One cannot say that one is on both sides at once. You have to choose either to perform duties in a righteous manner (*dharma*) or not perform the same (*adharma*). Spiritual life is very clear—either it is true or it is false but nothing in between. The religious way of life is not about going mechanically to temple or church or mosque and following rituals blindly.

Swamiji once said that even by preparing a very good dish one can attain *Brahmajñāna* (the knowledge of Brahman). One can attain *mukti* by singing song before God with full devotion. Actually, for spiritual liberation the critical requirement is positive attitude. The status and position of the seeker of liberation—whether he is a sadhu or an ordinary devotee and what is his standing in the society, etc.—do not really matter.

Let me share a small anecdote in this regard. When I was a student of the prestigious Ramakrishna Mission College, Narendrapur, a sadhu fell ill and arrangements had to be made to take him to Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, a hospital run by Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata about 16 kilometres away. Someone enquired who the sadhu was so that the appropriate arrangements, befitting his stature, could be made. So everywhere there is an undercurrent of a craze for status. Many a time we are requested by the devotees to provide a copy of our CV so that the importance of the programme can be enhanced. Humans labour under the illusion that glamour and gimmicks are the most important things in life.

The crux of the matter is that, regardless of the post, status or religion, unless we have the right attitude we won't

succeed in our pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. If we do all our activities and spend our time with the right positive optimistic idea in mind, one day we will surely attain our objective.

As the Holy Mother has said, salvation is attainable only through *kripā* (God's grace). We can neither demand it nor question why it is not being conferred on us. We have to mentally accept this fact, maintain positive attitude and continue doing good work so that we may accept God's grace whenever it is bestowed on us. Bhagavān is telling in the *Gītā* that you have the right to do the work which is your *dharma* but cannot demand the fruit thereof which is not in your jurisdiction.

For training ourselves for the positive mental attitude, the first and foremost requirement is wholehearted prayer to God. We need to express gratitude for the human birth, for having the desire to rise above the earthly attractions and getting my Guru. Then, we shall seek God's blessings so that this human birth does not go to waste. The Almighty God is in the true sense our father, mother, and everything, and, as such, gives us His blessings. There is a wonderful prayer: '*tvameva matā cha pitā tvameva / tvameva bandhuscha sakhā tvameva / tvameva vidyā dravinam tvameva / tvameva sarvam mama deva deva //*'—'You alone are my mother, and you alone are my father. You alone are my sibling, and you alone are my friend. You alone are my knowledge, and you alone are my wealth. You alone are everything to me, O God of Gods.' Instead of demanding His grace or living in doubt, we should fervently pray to Him with full sincerity. The loving God is always keeping an eye on His children and we do not have to submit our updated CV. We should give our best and leave the rest to His will.

After prayer, we need to surrender, in letter and spirit, to God. Here is a beautiful

shloka from the *Rāmcharitmānas* (Uttar Kānda, *Sharanāgati*) which beautifully portrays the devotion and faith of Hanumanji: ‘*nānyā sprihā raghupate hridaye’smadeeye / satyam vadāmi cha bhavānakhilāntarātmā / bhaktim prayachchha raghupungava nirbharām me / kāmādi dosharahitam kuru mānasam cha //*’—‘O Lord of the Raghus (Sri Rama)! I speak the absolute truth, and You already know it because You are the inner soul residing within everyone—there is no other worldly desire left in my heart. O the best among the Raghus, please bless me with unshakeable, absolute devotion toward You, and make my mind completely free from vices like lust, anger, and desire.’ The profoundly wise Hanumanji is praying with supreme devotion so that nothing in this world may distract him from his sole desire to get the blessings of Sri Ramachandra.

In the *Gītā* we find Bhagavān trying to explain to Duryodhana that he should not indulge in the immoral war with Pandavas. But Duryodhana is adamant. When Lord Krishna asks Arjuna, on the other hand, why he is so depressed, Arjuna utters in a spirit of total surrender to the Bhagavān, ‘*Kārpnyadoshopahatasvabhāvah / Prichchhāmi tvām dharmasammudha-chetāh // Yachchhreyah syānnishchitam bruhi tanme / Shishyaste’ham shādhi mām tvām prapannam //*’—‘My natural disposition is overcome by a sense of helpless pity, and my mind is completely confused about my duty (*dharmā*). I ask You to tell me decisively what is best for me. I am Your disciple; please instruct me, as I have taken refuge in You.’

If we want to receive eternal bliss, then we need to help others to have a blissful life. If one desires to live a joyful life, then one should make others’ lives joyful. If you

want to smile yourself, then bring smiles to the faces of others who are around you, for all people are verily the embodiments of the deity whom you are worshipping. There is a beautiful *shloka* in the *Gītā* ‘*Sarva bhutastham ātmānam sarva bhutāni chātmani / Ikshate yoga-yuktātmā sarvatra samadarshanah //*’—‘A true yogi, whose mind is harmonized by spiritual practice, sees the Self residing in all beings and all beings in the Self. Such a person looks upon everything, everywhere, with an equal vision.’ That is the essence of fruitful action—to see yourself in others and see others in yourself.

We must not forget that, as human beings, we are God’s best creation. Nothing can be compared with this wonderful human form. As children of immortal bliss, one must have faith in oneself so that one can become enlightened—‘*Jeevanmukta*’—and go beyond this painful ocean of life and death. The colour of skin, religion, country are immaterial. We need to ensure that this wonderful human life is not misused, or kept unused. Sri Ramakrishna gave the metaphor of a small orphan boy put under the care of an adult. We should similarly consider God as our Trustee so that He may always guide us to take steps most beneficial for us.

Soon we are going to celebrate Durga Puja. If we do not restrict ourselves only to the formal worship of the goddess but believe that Mother is everything to us and utter Her name even in our deathbed, She would liberate us despite many errors we may have committed.

We now refer to one of the most empowering verses in the entire *Gītā*: ‘*Uddhared ātmanātmānam nātmānam avasādayet / Ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanah //*’—‘Let a man elevate himself by his own mind (or self), and let him not degrade himself. For the

mind alone is the friend of the self, and the mind alone is the enemy of the self.’ The *shloka* makes the ultimate declaration concerning personal responsibility, self-reliance, and mental grit. Krishna delivers a powerful psychological truth here that cuts through any victim mentality: 1) You are your own saviour. 2) The mind is a double-edged sword and 3) Do not degrade yourself. Krishna is telling Arjuna that he has to raise himself by utilizing the positive forces available within himself. If he does not do that, he actually becomes his own foe.

God has already granted positive energy as our potential which is latent in everyone.

We have to use this properly to reach our destination. He has empowered all of us but all of us have to do our own karma to attain liberation. We know how Sage Vashishtha taught young Ramachandra the intricate expertise of using special weapons to fight with the Asuras, Rakshasas and all other evil forces. After being empowered by his Guru, Ramachandra had to perform his duty to eliminate negative forces. Each of us has to fulfil his duty as per *dharma*.

So if one can control one’s mind and the senses and follow the path of righteousness, it will make him a God. It will be a journey from the ‘brute-man’ to a ‘Buddha-man’ as Swamiji has said. ■

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6) Finally, it can be said that Vallabha’s theory holds that the phenomenal world in its essential nature is Brahman. Being eternal it undergoes manifestation (*ābirbhāva*) and disappearance (*tirobhāva*) and is never dissolved like the transmigratory existence; it is identical with Brahman. Following the view of his predecessors, he considers Brahman as the efficient cause (*nimitta kāraṇa*), as well as the material cause (*upādāna kāraṇa*) of the world.

In consonance with the *Bhāgavata* tradition, Vallabha considers Krishna as Bhagavān Himself. He attaches the appellation of Krishna to the Supreme Lord or the Highest Brahman whose essential nature is Being (*sat*), Consciousness (*cit*) and Bliss (*ānanda*).

According to Vallabha, Krishna is the embodiment of Bliss, a deity whose limbs are elements of Bliss. Unlike his predecessors, Vallabha puts emphasis on the ‘*Rasa*’ aspect of Brahman, and after the teachings of the *Bhāgavata*, conceives Brahman as identical with all ‘*Rasas*’ or relishable aesthetic sentiments.

Vallabha has not blindly followed the paths of other Vaishnava teachers viz. Rāmānuja, Madhva and Nimbārka. He has derived his inspiration from the Upanishads, the *Bhāgavata*, and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. He has presented a doctrine with new speculations unknown to the preceding systems. His emphasis on the ‘*Rasa*’ aspect of the loving nature of the Lord contributes to a great extent to the evolution of the Vaishnava cult. ■

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