

OUR DHARMA



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To
*Our Revered
Master*

Mahamandaleshvara
Shri 108 Svami Nrisimhagiriji Maharaja
Acharya of the Paramahansa Order (1933-57)

with
OUR DEEPEST LOVE AND SALUTATIONS

वेदान्तवाक्यपुष्पेभ्यो ज्ञानामृतमधूत्तमम्।
उज्जहारालिवद्यो नस्तस्मै सद्गुरवे नमः॥

Salutations unto the Supreme Teacher (*Sadguru*) who, like a bee gathering delicious honey from flowers, extracted for our sake from the Vedanta scriptures the knowledge that leads to deathlessness.

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OUR DHARMA

The Basic Concept

त्रयी सांख्यं योगः पशुपतिमतं वैष्णवमिति
प्रभिन्ने प्रस्थाने परमिदमदः पथ्यमिति च।
रुचीनां वैचित्र्याद् ऋजुकुटिलनानापथजुषां
नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयासामर्णव इव॥

—*Shivamahimnastotram*

In the above praise to God the poet Pushapadanta says, "Various are the paths laid out in the Vedas, the Sankhya of sage Kapila, Patanjali's Yoga and the Shaivite and Vaishnavite scriptures. Some are straight and some go up winding and people take to these different paths according to their various tastes saying, 'This is the best, the easiest.' But like the waters of different rivers streaming down to the same ocean, they all lead to you, the final attainment of all beings." Here we have a beautiful depiction of God as life's goal and *dharma* as means to it.

The drop of water that rises up from the ocean lured by the kiss of sun-beam must one day descend down to earth. Dashed amongst the rocks and driven into the ravines it painfully seeks to go back home, the ocean of rest. Life is like this singing surging stream. If we must suppose that creation is not a nightmare or the handiwork of a mad devil, then it has a purpose behind it. Each pulsation of life is resonant with that meaning and must lead to that harmonious end. But just as the waters should confine themselves to the course in between the banks and the notes conform to the rhythmic sequence of the song, life too must follow a rule

lest it stray and be lost in the desert of meaningless activity and noise. This rule is *dharma* and the fulfilment to which it leads is the attainment of God; for life emanates from God, the cause of all things, and must go back to God.

Thus we are forced to consider these two inevitable factors seriously. And of these two; here we are chiefly interested in *dharma*, which is the means immediate to us and concerned with our life. With such a vast thing as life for its field and an incomparably precious thing as God, the supreme good for its fruit, *dharma* necessarily becomes an immense and intricate subject deserving particular care and wide capacities. We are however venturing now on a brief bird's eye-view of it, pausing to study the prominent points here and there.

At the outset let us take the word '*dharma*'. Usually it is translated as 'religion' which in English conveys the idea of a particular system of faith and worship or mental attitude towards superhuman forces or the condition of monasticism. This will more aptly apply to what we call *mata* (मत). *Dharma* is entirely different. धियते अनेन इति धर्मः—"*Dharma* is that by which all this is supported". Thus the very word indicates that *dharma* is the basis of all and is not confined to any particular act of worship or charity or service. *Mahanarayanopanisad* explains how *dharma* is the most supreme—"*धर्मेण सर्वमिदं परिगृहीतं धर्मान्नातिदुष्करं तस्माद्धर्मे रमन्ते*"—All this is encompassed and held by *dharma*. There is nothing too difficult to attain by *dharma*. Hence the wise follow and revel in *dharma*.

This all pervading aspect of *dharma* has to be rightly grasped. Each object has its own *dharma* as its determining adjunct (अवच्छेदक), which means *that* by which a thing is what it is, and losing which it will cease to be what it is. Take for instance fire. Heat is its determining adjunct because

without heat fire will not be fire. Similarly, to flow towards lower level is the *dharma* of water. Thus all things exist as they are because of *dharma*. This being the truth one laughs to hear the word 'secular' in our government policies. Can even a nation aspire to be indifferent to *dharma* or do away with it? In that case fire in our country should not give heat and waters should not flow downward. So the idea of secularism (धर्मनिरपेक्षता) is absurd; it only testifies to the fact that '*dharma*' is used in a very narrow restricted sense and not in its real fundamental and all pervading aspect.

But then it may be asked that all these fundamental rules of the world are posited by science and hence science alone should be called *dharma*. True, science also explains to us certain laws of *dharma*. But it is a small section of *dharma* confining itself to laws cognised through the five senses of sight, smell, sound, touch and taste, whereas *dharma* pertains also to things beyond the sense perception, to love, pleasure, pain and the innumerable experiences of truth. If we hold to mere sense-perception and deny the truths beyond we dissect *dharma*, divide life itself and deprive it of its full fruits.

Hence the great commentator Acharya Shankara in his introduction to the Gita Bhashya states: द्विविधो हि वेदोक्तो धर्मः प्रवृत्तिलक्षणो निवृत्तिलक्षणश्च... प्राणिनां साक्षादभ्युदयनिःश्रेयसहेतुः—*Dharma* of the Vedas is of two kinds characterised by extroversion and introversion and is the direct means to both—worldly prosperity and supreme liberation of all people. Through extroversion (*pravritti*) and active observance of *dharma* in social life one attains worldly prosperity and through introversion (*nivritti*) and renunciation, the spiritual wealth of *Moksha*. This double aspect and consequent double product of *dharma* is an important factor. It is somewhat difficult for modern minds to understand that *dharma* can

show the path to one who is rich and ambitious, skilled and successful as well as to another, or the same person at a different stage of life, desiring to give up all worldly possessions and devote himself to spiritual practices for the attainment of peace through self-realisation. Again there are not many who hold that the worldly fruits alone are important and *moksha* is unnecessary. We shall see later how this hedonistic view of life is impossible and against *dharma*, the nature of man. None can restrain the soul of humanity whose thirst for knowledge of the Divine must be quenched at some spiritual spring. Science cannot do it. It only asks how but not the why of things. *Dharma* posits all the internal laws, violation of which answers the why of every experience and hence *dharma* can also show the means to higher experience ending in the perfection of self-realisation.

You are coming down a flight of stairs and take a false step. As a result you fall and are bruised. Why did you fall? Science readily answers, "Because you violated the law of gravitation". If further it is questioned, "Why did you get bruised now where as in many similar falls in the past you remained unhurt?" Science is silent. Here *dharma* steps in and says "You must have violated your *dharma* and hence had to suffer this pain". Now in flying an aircraft you overcome the law of gravitation by following the laws of flying which are offshoots of the same science. Here there is no violation. Similarly by lying, cheating, killing etc. you violate the internal *dharma* binding the universe and suffer and hence must overcome these tendencies by practising truthfulness, straight-forwardness, non-violence etc. in all your actions. But a stage comes when even these actions are given up. The laws of good and evil fruits of actions are transcended through the laws of renunciation. This process naturally must culminate in the finding of true and eternal happiness, complete destruction of all sorrows which we call *moksha*.

This is the significance of *pravritti dharma* merging into *nivritti dharma* and the latter leading beyond all *dharmas*, beyond truth and untruth to utter peace, to your own self. For the nearer you go towards the centre of a wheel, the lesser the movement. In the centre of the axle there is perfect stillness.

A THUMB-RULE FOR DHARMA

We have seen that the *dharma* of extroversion (*pravritti*) must first be actively practised. It is the beginning, the first exercise for almost all of us. But as soon as we enter this field of action, a thousand doubts and practical difficulties assail us. A devout muslim says it is holy to sacrifice a goat on a the Id festival and the saintly Jain protests that it is the most sinful deed one can imagine. Different sects prescribe different courses of action which very often are conflicting. One begins to doubt if there is any truth at all in these opposing ideas. But there is a clue, a simple formula which can save one from all this confusion and scepticism.

This is based on the fact that the world is an integral whole, *ayutasiddhavayava*. That is to say, nothing can exist in the world by itself completely independent and separated from others by a water-tight compartment. Take for instance such a simple thing as your food. You think you have paid for it with your hard-earned money and so you need not thank any one for it or feel bound to share it. But a little thinking will show that not one or two but the whole world has a share in it and deserves your thanks. The grocer, to start with, is your first dependence. He too cannot produce rice, wheat, etc. in the courtyard of his city-house. He depends on the food-stuffs that are transported from villages. Transport service will have nothing to transport if farmers do not work hard in their fields and raise up crops. Then again the train or bus service depends on a thousand factors,

the station master, signal officer and other staff, the workers who made the roads or forged the rails and laid them up firmly in line and to penetrate further into the enquiry the miners who brought out the ore from the bowels of the earth and smelted them in factories for the making of rails and other machine parts and soon the line of dependence stretches unendingly till it has bound the whole humanity into a single unit for this simple function—giving your daily meal.

What is the result of such a minute inquiry? It is invaluable. This leads us to the awareness that the world is, as we told in the beginning, an *ayatasiddhavayava*, a complete whole. And so long as we maintain this awareness we will not fall prey to strong likes and dislikes which impel one to violate *dharma*. Just as in the case of your body each limb has a distinct function but is all the same non different from your body. You cannot say feet are less desirable than ears and eyes more lovable than nose. If each limb should think of itself as separate from the body and foster likes and dislikes towards others the result will be disastrous. Hands and mouth will say, "We always labour to gather food and put it into the body; the stomach only knows how to gorge on it. Why should we be slaves? Let us strike work". Very soon along with the pinching hunger in the stomach, hands will grow weak and mouth crave for food. When particular cells in the tissues of the body begin to develop themselves out of pace with the surrounding growth you get that incurable disease called cancer. Similar is the birth of social evil, of *adharma* in the social body.

So the clue we were seeking is obviously this—whatever divides and disrupts *adharma*, whatever forges all the world into one unit is *dharma*. Hence jealousy, hatred, suspicion, violence, cheating etc. are *adharma*. Friendliness and love, trust and non violence, these are *dharma*. Any act that springs from these feelings we can safely count as

dharma. When the awareness of the world's unity is strong then *dharma* becomes easy and natural. The girl next door meant nothing to you few years ago. Had she been seriously ill and her poor father sought your aid, most probably you might have thought of some excuse. But now she is married to your only son, she is the queen of your household and you have no hesitation in handing over all the keys to her. Why? Because you know she is your own.

This feeling of oneness very often centres around a limited family circle. That is why *dharma* has a truncated growth. It may even give place to cruel hypocrisy and utter *adharma*. Nowadays we raise lusty slogans for equality and at the same time put bullets through innocent monkeys because they are a nuisance, enemies of our economy! The *samata* or equality that our *dharma* dictates is quite different. समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च says the Gita,—"Equal unto the foe and the friend". It is very significant why the foe is mentioned first. To treat your friends equally with as much love and regard as you show to yourself is quite easy, but in case of one whom you dislike or consider unfavourably disposed towards you, such a treatment becomes an impossibility. But until you are able to do this, the cancer of hatred and jealousy can never be cured. Perfect adherence to *dharma* will be a far cry. Hence equality with a foe is insisted upon as a primary treatment.

This can be achieved by discrimination. Whenever you feel some one acting adversely towards you and you are inclined to label him as your enemy, reason within yourself this way, "Why does he desire to harm me? Either something in my behaviour towards him has caused this or he must have misunderstood me. If the former is the case then I deserve the harm he is intending. If the latter is true then I must try to correct the mistake by approaching him

with understanding and open friendliness. Suppose neither of these is true, and he is by nature wicked, then he is violating *dharma* and causing harm to himself, not to me. Why should I get disturbed?" This will ensure your poise and, what is more, it will have a telling effect on the person concerned. Sooner or later he is bound to give up his adverse attitude. The forces of *adharma* are turbulent and transitory; *dharma* is infinite patience and knows how to wait.

The same course of action is to be taken in other instances that betray our lack of equipoise. One of the most important and frequent of these instances is that of honour and dishonour, hence the Gita goes on to add, "समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च तथा मानापमानयोः" that is 'like-wise same in honour and dishonour'. Man is very sensitive to these. If he is physically hurt or materially deprived in any way he may take it easy, but on the point of what he considers his honour he is upto anything, even murder or suicide. But what is honour or dishonour? What does it pertain to? Usually it is towards this physical body of your. Analyse its contents it is a structure of bones bound and plastered, painted over with nerves flesh, blood and tainted skin. Nothing in its stuff or its contents is pleasing or edifying in any way. So if any one insults it, why should one be cross? And if another chooses to honour it, that too is quite deserving, there is nothing in it to get excited about, for the body, all the same, is a fine instrument for the supreme attainment of life's goal, *Moksha*. In this way discrimination helps one to be equal to honour and dishonour, pain and pleasure and other such pairs of opposites and thus maintain the unity of all things, the spirit of *dharma*.

Here a doubt may arise legitimately. One may say "Truth holds us together and untruth divides, so truth is *dharma* and untruth is *adharma*; but the converse may also be true in many cases, whereby sticking to truth you seem

to displease others and even get separated from them. Does untruth then become the *dharma* to be followed?" Reason tells us that it cannot be so. Then there will be no definite form of *dharma*. It will be a changing, conflicting entity which, as we have seen in the beginning, it is not. It is fundamental law. So between *dharma* and our mental capacity to grasp things, the latter alone can be suspected to be incorrect and effort should be made to improve it. It is an obvious fact that our mental capacities are limited and undeveloped at present. We are not omniscient like God, nor do we possess the keen insight of the *rishis*. So what is apparently a division and a conflict to us may actually be a union and a harmony in the universal sense.

Administration of a bitter dose of medicine may displease the patient but is meant only for his good. At the same time all bitter things are not medicine and all medicines do not cure the same disease. Only a qualified doctor can justly recommend a bitter medicine. Similarly special knowledge is necessary before we can definitely say this act is harmful to and disharmonious with this man's *dharma*. Here comes the necessity of the scriptures. Therein is inlaid this knowledge: for any man, however clever he may be, to decide in certain exceptional cases what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*. Helping a misguided youth to commit suicide is no help at all, giving drinks to a habitual drunkard is no gift at all.

It may need more than your ordinary brains to determine how to express your kindness and charity which certainly are the general dictates of *dharma* (सामान्य धर्म). That takes us to a new subject, where we are required to enlarge our knowledge of the principles behind definite forms of *dharma* (विशेष धर्म).

THE TRIPLE DHARMA

The Upanishad says ब्रह्मैवेदममृतं पुरस्ताद् ब्रह्म पश्चाद् ब्रह्म दक्षिणतश्चोत्तरेण ब्रह्मैवेदं विश्वमिदं वरिष्ठम्! That is to say, the death-less Brahman is in all directions. It pervades everything and is everything. Here is a clear statement of absolute unity towards which *dharma* promises to take us. Man is glad to accept that all is Brahman but adds inwardly, 'except myself'! He can never leave off his individuality, consider himself one with the rest. To avoid this error, the Vedas proclaim specifically, "सर्वं तद्ब्रह्मै ब्रह्मा अयमात्मा ब्रह्म" all this is Brahman and this self is Brahman. This is the essence of Vedanta, the summit of all realisations. To reach it the Vedas prescribe special *dharma*. The Yajur Veda States; "तमेतं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा विविदिषन्ति यज्ञेन दानेन तपसाऽनाशकेन", the pious seek to know it through the study of the Vedas, *Yajna*, *Dana*, *Tapas* and utter renunciation. The Chandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda puts it in a different way, "यज्ञोध्ययनं दानमिति प्रथमः"—these are the foremost branches of *dharma*—*yajna*, *adhyayana* and *dana*. Equating the two statements we arrive at the truth that *dharma* as meant in the Vedas is the means for knowing the Truth. And we also find here this *dharma* crystallised into three definite shapes.

One may ask, "Is this all that *dharma* means?" We can safely answer, "Yes, all the innumerable acts of *dharma* come under these three when properly understood in their full context". *Yajna* is commonly understood as giving oblations in to fire. In the Sabara-Bhashya *yajna* is defined as देवतोद्देश्येन द्रव्यत्यागः—that is, sacrificing or giving away certain material goods for the sake of a *devata* or a god. Here 'sacrifice' includes all forms of worship and *devata*, all those who deserve worship—gods, holy men, teachers and our elders. *Dana* here implies *daya* which is also a giving away, yet not to elders but to those who are placed lower

to us and are in need. *Yajna* is an expression of reverence and gratitude, *daya* of compassion and charity. In this way, *Yajna* and *dana* both together form one's duty to others while the third, *adhyayana* is a duty towards oneself for one's own ultimate good. Now it will be clear how these three strands of *dharma* intertwine to weave the whole pattern of life, since apart from duty to elders, youngsters and to oneself there is no other activity to be recommended.

Special stress has to be laid on the last mentioned of the duties for two reasons. First, it is the foundation of all *dharma*, the means and the end. Next, because there is every possibility of it being lost sight of, hidden by a overstressed conception of selflessness and service to others. It is good that a physician, moved by sufferings of patients, should devote all his time and energy for them but if the zeal encroaches upon personal affairs his own needs that is not something applaudable. By injuring his own health, the doctor has done a greater harm than by taking two hours off to serve himself. So in this case, serving oneself is not selfishness. It is like sharpening the tools or keeping the machine fit, which is a part of the job.

A surprisingly large number of modern enthusiasts do not accept this simple precept. Recently, an old gentleman with a weather beaten appearance approached me at Delhi and informed that he had no means of support and would be glad if he was accommodated in our Ashrama atleast till the epochmaking book he was working at was finished. I asked him on what subject was he writing. "The easiest way to remove poverty from India within three years", came the impressive reply.

Call it absurdity or downright lunacy, this has become the fad of the age. People talk of removing poverty and themselves cannot earn a full meal. Leaders lecture on

establishing world peace while their own hearts are torn with peacelessness. First: in his house-hold and the office-room and then whether he works for world peace or not, he has done a definite service towards that end by decreasing the number of restless souls in the world atleast by one. To the contrary, if a man places the ideal of service to others first and thinks his own good will come of it slowly, then he is bound to be a failure in both.

"How can I help mankind" has become an obsession. We should not forget that even great incarnations like Rama, Krishna and Sankara could not do a permanent good to all mankind. Persons are not lacking even now who call them villains, voluptuaries and self-imposters. And yet these great leaders and teachers of men were not failures. In themselves they had developed their personalities to utmost perfection and, with that perfection and power in hand, could protect and preach *dharma* on a universal scale. If we aspire to follow in their footsteps and do at least an iota of the good they delivered to humanity, we must first apply ourselves to ourselves and not go about excitedly enquiring about others. The well does not make any noise or show to attract people but whoever goes to it can be cleansed and cooled and quenched with its sweet limpid waters. Whereas the sea with all its beautiful appearance and day and night non-stop singing and dancing cannot offer a handful of water for the thirsty pilgrims! Let the waters of sweetness and peace well up within you, the world will come to you by itself. All that goes to accomplish this obtaining of a sweet and amiable character is implied by *adhyayana*.

Proper service to elders and youngsters, that is *yajna* and *dana* respectively, demands of one to know who is elder and who younger, who is fit for worship and who is in need. Similarly service to oneself (*adhyayana*) involves a thorough grasp of self-knowledge. It will be a grievous error to

say "All this is for philosophers. If we lead a simple, contented life and do no harm to others, why should we bother about self-knowledge?" The art of living a simple harmless life is a part of perfection. Gita says "स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः"—by worshipping God through performing one's own duties man attains perfection. And to perform one's own duties one is bound with oneself and forced to understand and control its nature. So we come back to self-knowledge: It is the beginning and end, path and destination. We cannot evade it at any cost.

So whether you are allergic to philosophy or not, this has to be swallowed. And actually when we proceed with the inquiry of the self as an essential part of *dharma*, we will find that it is not after all such a bitter pill.

SELF-INTROSPECTION

To fix a straight line we need two definite points on it. And the shortest route is always a straight line. So to fix one's lifepath we must know where we are and what is life's destination. Every one of us as individuals are different from each other but all are parts of one cosmos, have one final end and so we are like the infinite radii of a circle streaming towards the centre. Each one of us must start from a common circumference which is the inquiry "Who am I?"

In his famous *Dakshinamurthy stotra*, the great philosopher Shankaracharya says : "Those who know 'I am the body, *prana*, senses, the restless mind', talk like weaklings or children, blind and of dull intellect." Various common beliefs about the nature of Self are posited here and all of them denied in the end as they do not stand the scrutiny of reason.

First take the body-theory. Almost all people believe and behave as if they were just the physical bodies that go

by their names. Rama says, "I went for a long walk, I am tired, I got sun-burnt, see how dark I look!" In all these statements Rama identifies himself with the body because it is the body that is black or red or yellow. As far as the experiences of waking state are concerned, this identification creates no hitch. But as soon Rama, tired from his long walk, stretches himself (that is, his body) on the cot and falls asleep, this identification is lost. Perhaps he dreams he is at Haridwar and enjoying a dip in the cool waters of Ganga. There he has the awareness, "I am dripping cool and refreshed, feeling so very fine!", which is shattered the moment some one shakes him up from sleep. He finds that he (that is the body that went to sleep) is in his room at Agra, feeling hot and sultry. Everything is contrary to his previous experience. But it was an experience all the same; he cannot deny he dreamt. Rama, as the dreamer, took part in the dream whereas the body laying on the cot in his room at Agra had nothing to do with it. So he is forced to conclude that he is not that body always. Just as he works through this body in the waking state, he works through another body in the dream. The common factor between the two is the experiencer, the 'I' and that must naturally be distinct from the changing factors, the bodies of dream and waking.

Here we come to the second belief which posits, "The mind is the common factor between dreaming and waking. So that must be the self we denote by 'I'." This would have been acceptable and the travails of self-introspection would have ended had God given us only the twin experiences of dream and waking. As it is, there is a third, deep-sleep, which the Vedas call *Sushupti*. It is the subtlest and most short-lived of the three states and yet it is the power-house of our existence. No man can deny or try to do away with it and still maintain normal life. Even the most pleasing sense-experience in dream or waking can not be indulged in

continuously for a long time. It tires you and if you persist it turns into a torture. All you need then is to be left alone to sleep. Even a few minutes of sound, dreamless sleep works upon you like a tonic. You get up refreshed and say "I slept blissfully like a log of wood and did not know anything". This clearly indicates that there was no mind in deep-sleep state. If it existed it would certainly have cognized objects as in dream. Atleast it would have been aware of itself! But in deep-sleep the sense of 'I' also ceases to be. Does then the self vanish in that state? No. The soul as the experiencer persists there also and that is why you are able to recollect, "I did not know anything, I slept soundly".

Suppose you decide to clean your room thoroughly and so empty it of every article in it, your mate from outside asks "Is there anything left?" and you reply "No, there is nothing here". Then your mate begins to lock the door from outside and you shout, "What are you doing! Let me get out first". Your mate asks in surprise "You just only told me there is nothing left inside then what is wrong if I lock it?" You would retort "My good man, if I am not inside myself how can I tell you there is nothing inside!" The same joke we play upon ourselves when we deny the self because in deep-sleep nothing is observed. The observer of the absence of things is certainly there. Hence the mind theory too does not hold good.

What then is the nature of the self? Who is the experiencer of the three states? The common-factor in them is consciousness, awareness or knowledge. All other factors body, mind, ignorance *etcetera* are all inconstant. So we are forced to conclude that knowledge itself is the form (*svarupa*) of the self denoted by 'I'. It is impossible that at any time "I" existed and knowledge was not. All through life, from childhood to senility this "I" has persisted and known each experience, that is why you are able to recall all of them

now. But try as much as you can, you will never be able to recall the time when you were not. Theoretically too it is an absurd situation. Because that person alone can remember a thing who has experienced it himself. And you can never have the experience "I am not". It is a self-contradiction, like saying, "I have no tongue".

Since there is no proof available to assert that the self is nonexistent or deprived of knowledge, we must accept what the Vedas say, namely, that the self is deathless and of the form of pure knowledge. It is by false identification with the body that the phenomenon of death is attributed to the self. The Lord says clearly, "Just as you cast off worn-out garments and wear new ones so does the embodied self shuffle off worn out bodies and accept new ones." The body is the seat of experiences and each time the self takes up a body, its choice is determined by the law of *karma*. A portion of the actions it has done previously begins to yield its fruits and that is the span of that particular life. When those determined fruits of life have been enjoyed through the experiences of pain and pleasure, that body becomes worn out, exhausted of the causal *karma* and so is given up and a new body fit to yield the fruits of the next portion of *karma* is taken up. This is why we find death coming at a very early age in many cases, even behind the heels of birth. So the word 'worn-out' in the above verse of the Gita does not mean long years of senility.

When we have travelled the distance we paid for, then we must quit the vehicle, which is distinct from the traveller. So is the self from this physical body and mind. It remains essentially unaffected in itself in spite of the continuous changes in the latter, their innumerable births and deaths. All the experiences of the world included in the three states of waking, dream and deep-sleep are but shifting shadows on the theatre screen. The light behind the rolling

film is constant. The light is the knowledge-form (ज्ञानस्वरूप) of the self.

One may ask "If knowledge alone is the eternal unchanging form of the self, then who is the enjoyer and the doer in each experience? Experience convinces us that enjoyment and action belong to the self. But these two change with every new experience and hence the self too must be changing." To test whether action and enjoyment form the nature of the self or not we must apply the rule that whatever is one's nature is attained without exertion. It is obvious that to be the actor or the enjoyer of sense objects one has to exert oneself in some way or other. That is why we get tired of action and enjoyment after we have indulged in them for considerable time. We need rest and we attain it without any exertion because it is just a giving up of assumed alien roles, a going back to oneself; just as heated water cools down by itself. Coolness is water's nature, peace and pure awareness is the nature of the soul. Only when the fire of desire is kindled does the soul begin to fret and fume and appear to be active and sensuous. It so happens that the causal ignorance or *maya* maintains this fire ablaze day and night except for the rare occasions when you relax completely or go into deep-sleep. So much so, you believe that activity and enjoyment are your very nature! But those rare occasions of stillness and awareness afford loopholes through which the true nature of the soul comes out. It is like determining the nature of substance under experimental conditions when no extraneous influence can affect it. And when you think of it, even at the time of action and sense-perception stillness and awareness persist in the witnessing soul who observes records and recalls the action and experience in the form of memory "I did such and such an act, I felt so and so". As the observer is separate from the

observed so the witnessing (साक्षी) soul must be without action and enjoyment.

This shows that stillness and pure awareness that is to say, absence of action and enjoyment reside in the soul at all times whereas action and enjoyment appear imposed on it sometimes and at the cost of exertion. Hence we can safely conclude that action and enjoyment belong to *maya* and its brood, body, mind etc. and not to the self. Heat in the water belongs to the fire underneath. All that we have to do is to eliminate *maya* and its effects and then we will have the vision of self, the shining sun of pure knowledge.

The Illusion

In the *Manasollasa*, a commentary on Dakshinamurti Stotra of Shri Shankaracharya, his illustrious disciple Sureshvaracharya describes *maya* as 'a harlot, sensuous and enticing, thriving on the lack of discrimination' (अविचारित सिद्धेयं माया वेश्या विलासिनी). Bereft of her make-up and dressing she is not worth glancing at. It is discrimination that shows her up through all the make-up. Perhaps that is why most people dare not practise discrimination. Even though they know appearances are deceptive yet appearances are so attractive, they mean so much to them. They have been clinging to the world of appearances from beginningless time and now they cannot let it go even if it means losing oneself, encountering spiritual death. This is the inexorable power of *maya*. It holds the gaze of all and prevents the vision of Truth.

One can be prevented in many ways from the right perception of a thing. The object may be too near like one's own eye-lash or the point where eye-brows meet. Or the object may be too far like the mountains in the moon. A third cause may be the nature of the object itself. It may be

microscopic like the germs that whirl in the air or subtle and formless like air itself. That is why we cannot see them. Then there may be a defect in the eye, a cataract or jaundice or colourblindness. Even if the object is of proper size and at visible distance and the instrument of seeing is perfect, still if the seer is absent-minded then also proper perception does not take place. Absorbed in some talk or deep thinking you pass through a crowded street safely avoiding the vehicles taking the proper turns and enter your room automatically, but then if you try to recall some face or sign-board or prominent building on the way, you fail. Certainly you set eyes on them but paid no attention so that the object did not imprint itself on you. Now, granted that the above five limitations are not there, still an object cannot be seen if there is a solid obstruction between the seer and the object.

To our consternation we find that all these defects apply squarely in the case of the vision of the self. The self is the nearest conceivable and at the same time the farthest, since it takes the longest time to reach to it and understand it. As the poet puts it, "One has to knock at every other door to come to his own", one has to travel far and wide to return and find the wealth in the secret of one's own heart. And then the self is the subtlest of all. Vedas say "अणोरणीयान्महतो महीयान् आत्मास्य जन्तोर्निहितो गुहायाम्"—this self is subtler than the subtlest and vaster than the vastest and it is hidden in the cave of man's heart. The other factor is, however brilliant the mind and clear sighted the eyes they cannot make the *atman* their object, for it is beyond the senses. And lastly there is the solid obstruction of *avidya*, ignorance in between the aspirant and his real self. It is a heavy painted curtain. Rather it is a thick painting on the canvas of the self.

This comparison brings out the two functions of ignorance. First the thick paint covers up the canvas and then the

colours and forms of the painting absorb your attention so that when you see the painting you do not have the knowledge of the canvas but of the landscape and figures painted therein. These two are referred to in the scriptures as the veiling power (आवरणशक्ति) and diverting power (विक्षेपशक्ति) of ignorance respectively. Ignorance itself cannot exist but for the canvas of the self and yet it covers up its very basis and puts up an entirely new thing, the whole phantasy of creation before us.

Again, consider the case of twin-trees. The trunks are so very close to each other that from a distance you mistake it to be a single tree. Here the vision of the two trees is veiled and that of a single tree is put up. The power that causes this phenomenon is *avidya*, ignorance. Here *avidya* takes advantage of the proximity of objects to create the illusion.

You are seated in a railway train inside the station yard. Another train is standing by on the next line. As your train begins to slowly pull out, you look through the window and see that the other train is moving. Not until you have passed the train and find the trees and buildings outside speeding past, do you realise that your own train is on the move. Here too the illusion of movement in the standing train, trees etc. is caused by proximity.

The same device is employed to delude man in case of the knowledge of the self. By proximity to the body, senses, mind etc., the self appears to possess their qualities, name, form, birth, death, pain, pleasure, action and all the other conceivable changes and experiences. Nearness and farness are attributed to the self which is all pervading. The self which is the subject is objectivised and the senses and mind vainly try to grasp it as you would try to handle your own reflection. In this way *maya* erects all the obstructions we have seen earlier on the way to the vision of the true self.

And bound by its illusion, the pure, blissful self undergoes the terrible sufferings of transmigration.

A stalwart man used to visit our Ashrama regularly and attend the prayers and lectures. Once after a long absence he presented himself looking pale and pulled down. Naturally we asked him what was the matter. He narrated an interesting story. It seems he developed chest-pain and when self-treatment proved futile he consulted a distinguished doctor who always had a crowd of patients to attend to. The stalwart was tested and a prescription was given after making him wait for a couple of hours. He had to go to the clinic the next day for treatment. When he showed the prescription the physicians were surprised that he should have delayed the case so much; and they urgently admitted him into the T.B. ward. It was a great shock for him to know that he was suspected of having a seriously infected lung. For about a week as the preliminaries were conducted, the stalwart suffered utmost anxiety and began to recollect all the symptoms he had overlooked. He felt death was near and already he had lost much of his weight. But since the examinations were not satisfactory the doctor, who gave the prescription, obliged to see him one day. He had a wonderful memory and could spot out the case at once. To his utter dismay he realised that the whole case was a mistake. Some similarity of names had brought the patient the wrong prescription. The real owner of it had expired that very evening handing over the ghost of his disease to the unfortunate stalwart. Of course the whole case was hushed up, some minor treatment for cold was given to the man and he was hastily discharged. As the devotee finished his history, he brightened up and said, "Anyway Svamiji, it was a valuable experience. It has shown me exactly how the embodied soul suffers endlessly just because of misconception regarding its real nature."

In the above case the fear and suffering were real but it needed no medicine to cure them. The discovery of the doctor was enough. So it is with the disease of worldliness. Awareness of the real self alone can cure it. If you see a piece of coiled rope lying on the wayside in twilight and mistake it to be a snake it will not do to beat it with a stick or wait for the serpent to clear away. The only intelligent and immediate means is to flash a torch and see that it is only a piece of rope.

So in spite of all this paraphernalia of *maya*, the obstructions to the vision of the self can be overcome by right effort. Any amount of gadget-making will not improve our life in this respect. Nor does a nonchalant, inactive view of it help us. As we have noted in the beginning, discrimination is the effort required, and, to be able to discriminate properly and perpetually, we have to prepare ourselves through a graduated course of *sadhana* in our daily duties (कर्म) and devotions (भक्ति) which are the steps leading to realisation (ज्ञान) of the self.

DETACHMENT

The *Kathopanishad* declares, "Some men of steadfastness and keen intellect desiring immortality look inwards and search for the immediate self." Even the search for self-knowledge is rare, not to speak of its attainment, because the very first requisite is to become inwardly. This means that the mind has to be prevented from flowing outward through the senses in order to perceive objects. Perception of objects is a great distraction in the vision of the self. It is impossible to have knowledge of two entirely different things at a time. All created things are effects of the three *gunas* or qualities *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* combined together in varying proportions. The physical objects of perception have a predomi-

nance of *tamas* and hence are the grossest. The self is uncreated, unqualified, beyond even the purest form of *sattva*. So, awareness of the self and of the world of duality are poles apart. In order to have one, the other must be given up. What we want is self-knowledge. But the question arises: how can we give up sense-objects entirely and live? Just as there are ways of possessing so also are there ways of giving up. We must learn the secret of freeing ourselves from the distraction of sense-objects and yet not have to do away with them. Though it sounds like having the cake and eating it too, this is possible. The *yoga* of detachment we shall presently see, promises to accomplish this.

In Sanskrit the word for sense-objects is 'विषयः'. By its very construction it means 'that which binds'. That an inert object should have the power to bind a thinking being does not stand to reason. Yet we see in practical life that instead of man possessing objects, objects possess man. Without the necessity of any exertion on their part sense-objects can order a man to do anything, lie, steal, murder, betray or, if you are too decent for these things, atleast go against your own wishes and comforts. The shop-window displays a suit of a very fine stuff cut to the latest fashion; it stabs you every time you pass that shop on your way to office. You kill yourself with extra work and save for months going without your evening tea, visits to restaurants and a dozen other luxuries, all for the sake of that suit in the shop-window. It was just lying there inert but it had the capacity to arouse in you the desire to possess it. Rather you allowed the desire to arise in you because you thought it was very beautiful and life would be miserable without it. So actually we bind ourselves with our desires, objects are just the occasions, catalysts in this huge chain-reaction of transmigration. In the *Mahabharata* the wise Bhishma extols, "Salutations unto the Lord who is of the form of delusion, which, for the sake

of keeping up this world-show, deludes all beings with the bonds of attachment".

Svami Vidyaranya in his *Panchadashi*, a well known work on Vedanta, cites an instance of a woman on the wayside. Her father, husband and son are accompanying her and amongst the crowd of passers-by there is a lustful young man, a monk and a street dog. Suppose you ask each one of them referring to that woman, "What is this?" The young man answers, "She is a beautiful woman" and his eyes are full of lust. The monk says with his averted gaze, "Just a bag of flesh and bones". The father readily claims her as "daughter", the husband as "wife" and the son as "mother" and each has a ring of affection in his voice so different from that of the others. Lastly, the street dog is bound to tell you, "It is delicious food for me". And the hunger in the dog's look is entirely different from that in the young man's. You must accept that all the time there has been no change in the person of the woman which the others were seeing and yet its reaction on them are so strikingly varied. This clearly shows that whatever may be the real nature of objects, the world you see around and have relations with is purely your own creation. It is a colourful, queer pattern seen through the kaleidoscope of your mind. Tilt it a little and the whole pattern changes.

From this we can safely conclude that the physical presence or actual handling of sense-objects is of no criterion and that by manipulating the mind we may change and control the reactions of objects on it in such a way that no distraction is created in our search for self-knowledge. To put it directly, we must learn to give up attachment to objects. Without this, even if you manage to give up the objects externally, yet they will bind you with the fetters of attachment which have not been broken and powdered to dust. King Bharata gave up his sovereign kingdom and

practised austerity in the jungle for years. In his last days he grew fond of a deer and died thinking of it and grieving to part from it. As a result he had to be born as a deer.

This does not mean that Bharata's renunciation and austerities were meaningless. But for them he could not have been born enlightened later as Jada Bharata when that single flaw of attachment to the deer was removed. Many people commit this mistake of going to the other extreme and denying the necessity of outer renunciation to every one at all times. And they usually take the name of Janaka to justify their case. But how many possess the knowledge and renunciation of Janaka?

It is told that King Janaka used to go to Sage Yajnavalkya's ashrama daily to attend his spiritual discourses. Encumbered with innumerable royal duties, Janaka would very often turn up late and the beloved teacher would wait for him. This irritated the assembled class of thousands of disciples. They began to whisper to each other that even Yajnavalkya was gripped with greed and desired to please his royal customer and get wealth from him. Yajnavalkya was shrewd enough to understand this and decided to remove their suspicion. One day Janaka had been exceptionally late and the class proceeded after his arrival as usual. When the discourse was at its peak of interest, a courtier came and hesitatingly approached Janaka to deliver a message. Hearing it, Janaka waved him away and continued to listen to Yajnavalkya. After some time the messenger returned and whispered again in Janaka's ear. Janaka showed some irritation and commanded, "Don't disturb me with such silly talks. Consult the ministers as to what is to be done and don't again come here before the teaching is finished". The poor courtier withdrew hastily. But soon the minister himself made his appearance and announced in a vexed voice, "O King, the whole city of Mithila is being consumed by

flames. All our attempts to put out the conflagration have been in vain. If you tarry here any more, even your dear and near ones will not be saved." Yajnavalkya asked the king anxiously "Janaka, don't you think you should go to save your city and people from the grave situation?" But the king looking perfectly unperturbed, answered in a firm voice, "Where is mineness for the seekers of knowledge who believe in inexplicable delusion of the world? If the whole of Mithila is burnt to ashes what do I lose?" Even as he was telling this, some one shouted, "Fire! The fire has approached the ashrama!" In a trice, the whole class was empty. All the disciples fled to save their water pots, loin clothes and deer-skins! Yajnavalkya sat smiling to himself as the disciples returned after a few minutes shame-facedly and prostrated before their guru, because when they went into their huts they found there was no fire, no smoke. It was all an illusion created by their great teacher to reveal to them the sterling worth of Janaka. They understood now why Yajnavalkya showed such love and consideration to him.

Under the cloak of royal splendour Janaka nurtured the most intense form of detachment. This is a Herculean task which should not be attempted by everyone. Because there is the danger of self-objects and getting attached to them, all the while thinking and professing that you are detached. So the precaution to be taken is to give up the objects of enjoyments entirely now and then, retire into solitude for some time and lead a life of simplicity foregoing the accustomed luxuries and conveniences. Then analyse and see if you do not crave for them or feel disturbed by their lack.

Any attachment to objects, when detected, should instantly be uprooted by laying the axe of reasoning at it. Charge the mind again and again with the undesirable consequences of that attachment. All things created must one day be destroyed. During the time of its existence too

a thing can be possessed for a short time only, and what is given to you will one day be taken away. If you put your heart into it then when the object departs, it is bound to wrench your heart and leave you suffering ever after. Further, when you analyse, it is found that even at the time of possession and enjoyment the object to which you are attached does not give you peace; all the while you are haunted by the fear of it being snatched away from you. How to invest your money safely, get your diseased wife or children cured, maintain the motor car, repair the radio set, white-wash the building and so on you worry and plan through: carry out the plans. Where is the leisure and mood for deriving comfort from the objects?

If you say, "I am not such a nervous type. I enjoy my comforts coolly, why should I see fault in the object?" Even then reasoning must show you: by the objects. It happens this way. Whenever the desire for any object arises within you the mind gets ruffled. Restlessness is a painful, undesirable state and this pain, you mistake to be the effect of not having the object. So you strive to possess it. When you succeed in this, then the initial desire dies, mind becomes calm once again and you have the experience of peace and joy. But this state is very short-lived. The very next moment another desire springs up. So the only purpose of material possession is to quieten the waves of desire, not directly create peace or joy. Those who are without desires enjoy this peace even though they may not possess a farthing. That is why in the Upanishads where different scales of joy (*Ananda*) ranging from the human upto the bliss of the creator Brahma are mentioned, to each stage the clause is added 'and this joy belongs also to the learned man who is unconquered by desire (श्रोत्रियस्य चाकामहतस्य)'. The same pleasure which you obtain by getting an object with much effort is available to another who has had no desire for it at all. Because that

pleasure of the former as we have seen is nothing but a negation of a self-created distraction which is already negated in the latter. So a life given to sensual pursuits is as meaningless as if one spent all his time in rolling in the dust and washing onself with elaborate care and then go on repeating the process of rolling and washing. If we wish to be clean and tidy, wisdom lies in avoiding dirt from a distance. That suit which tempts you from the shop-window is nothing to a woman and the diamond necklace in the same window haunts her while you scarcely pay any attention to it. Become alike unto a suit and a necklace, not by desiring both of them but by becoming equally indifferent to both. Objects should be accepted as they come to our lot and used with discretion and detachment so that life may be maintained as a spiritual search for the attainment of real joy. Hence the Gita says, "He who is temperate in his physical and mental food, action and recreation, sleep and waking, this *yoga* destroys sorrow".

This then is the *yoga*, the first spiritual exercise in self perfection, to discriminate and detach one's mind inwardly from all sense objects.

Then even while using them for the needs of life we will remain undisturbed and pure "like the water-drop on the lotus leaf". When this state is reached then we are ready to apply the detached mind to the object of our search—God, the *Atman*. We become fit to be *upasakas*, worshippers sitting at the alter of God.

DEVOTION

To work efficiently in any serious profession you need proper qualifications. If you wish to practise medicine or undertake construction of buildings and dams, first you must procure a degree in medicine or engineering from a recognised

institution. But strangely enough we in India have decided that politics and preaching of *dharma* need no such qualifications! Anybody can by mere declaration become a political leader or religious preacher. This is the worst danger of our age because the political machinery of the ruling government controls and shapes our material life while the religious institutions are responsible for the spiritual. When both are made gullible to corruption, fraud and misrepresentation then there is no escape from a living hell.

To heighten the effect of this atmosphere, modern psychologist declare, "We know all about *dharma* or religion. It is the cause of all neurotic diseases in the world." Politicians add to it in a chorus, "Religion is the opiate of the masses". The interesting fact is that none of these good men has studied a single standard work on *dharma* or practised an iota of it in his life. They only go on enumerating the prevalent malpractices in religion especially in the path of love or devotion (*Bhakti*) with which we are concerned now. So it is better we make this point clear at the outset. The principle of *dharma* is one thing, what people make out of it is quite another. *Dharma* as we have already explained, is a vast science, vaster than our modern science. And as such it is more liable to be misused than the latter. If you deride religion as being ridden with ugly superstitions then just consider how ugly a thing the atom bomb or hydrogen bomb is. Can you therefore say science is ugly? The ugliness lies in the scientists who use it to invent ugly things. Similarly we must differentiate between *dharma* as principle and *dharma* as practiced by some groups.

Nowhere in the *dharma shastras* are you advised to repress yourself and become a neurotic. Certainly you are asked to restrain the mind from being attached to transient things. But this is only the negative part of *sadhana*. To stop here will be like trying to jump half the width of a well or

an abyss. The positive aspect follows to instruct you how to put the detached mind in God, the eternal principle of goodness-knowledge-bliss. This involves the process of directing all emotions and activities towards that centre. Nothing is denied. Even anger is not objectionable. If you cannot give it up, then vent anger upon anger, be angry with your mind, with its downward tendencies. Similarly with all other attachments. Love by all means, but love not the world. Love the truth which is the basis of this world-appearance, love God.

The question immediately arises, "How can any one love God? The world we see and know clearly and come in close contact with. It is not so with God. Then how can any one give up the world and love the latter?". This is the speciality of *bhakti*. Here you must first love and then come to know the object of love! But it is not after all uncommon or in any way impossible.

Once an Indian visiting the United States was asked, "Is it true that in your country mostly a boy is married to a girl whom he was never known before?" And on receiving an answer in the affirmative the questioner expressed his amazement, "How can they ever love each other?" The Indian retorted, "Don't you love your children? You do, even though you did not know them before you got them. Why? Just because you know they are your own. Similarly an Indian considers the woman given to him in marriage as his own; whether good, bad or indifferent, he learns to love her. And actually in the eyes of love everything is intimate and beautiful". That put the American to his senses.

The reason applies more fully in the case of devotion to God. For more than wife or children or any other relation that lasts only till death, God is our own for all lives to come. From beginningless time our connection with Him has been

there and will last to eternity. With all our attachments to mundane things when we have battled with the billows of life for long and grown weary and famished, when we are bruised and broken and tossed back on the shores, like the prodigal son in the parable we have to return to our Father. We must seek peace and strength within, enter into the chamber of the heart and worship God there and strive to be established in the unperturbed, immortal state of the soul which is our own and cannot be taken away from us because it is our nature (स्वरूप). Hence, whether we realise it now or not, we can always practise devotion to it with the consciousness that it is our own.

That is why the wisdom of seers and saints urges one to this worship. The Lord Himself commands in the Gita, "Having attained this transient joyless world, worship me" and also "Put your mind in me, be devoted to me and bow down before me". The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* states in definite terms that without knowing God it is impossible to go beyond sorrow and this knowledge is revealed only to him who has supreme love to God and equal devotion to the *Guru* (Spiritual Master). In the *Brihadaranyakopanishad*, Yajnavalkya while instructing his wife Maitreyi proves most logically that the self is the only beloved in the world. "It is not for the sake of the husband, Maitreyi! that the husband is loved, but because of the desire of the self. It is not for the sake of wife, O Maitreyi! that the wife is loved, but because of the desire of the self. It is not for the sake of itself, O Maitreyi! that any thing is loved, but because of the desire of the self".

A father picks up his child with the desire of fondling it and kissing it on the face. But the child, unwilling to abandon its play, begins to cry. The father's stubble and moustache prick its tender cheeks and it struggles to free itself. But the father would not let it go because it gives him

pleasure to kiss the child. If he has love purely for the child he will not bear to cause it any pain. He loves himself and the child is 'beloved' only in the sense that it is a means to fulfilling his self-love. So the moment an object fails to be such an instrument it ceases to be 'beloved'. As the child grows up and becomes a man and turns out to be utterly selfish and reckless in his life and fails to obey his father or look after him in his old age and illness, then that very darling son becomes a sore, a heart-burn and a continuous source of misery leading to the grave.

Nor can we say that any person is loved for his good looks and good nature. The good looks and good nature of the man in the next street evoke no love in you because you have no connection with him, you derive no benefit, no pride nor pleasure from him. So in any case the ultimate end of all love, is the self. All other seeming affections are means to the pleasing of the self which is परम प्रेमास्पद the supreme and final basis of love.

One may raise the objection that very often we find many people hating themselves so much as to commit suicide. But when you analyse it, suicide is a strong proof of the love for the self. Why does one want to die? Because life is unbearably purposeless or joyless. It hurts to live and one wants to escape this hurt. This obviously means he loves himself and wants to spare himself the pain. And thinking that by destroying this body, this particular seat of experience, he will be able to escape the situation, he commits suicide. It is impossible in the nature of things that anything will seek to destroy itself. The self can never be hated because it is not only the beloved, but also of the very form of love.

Hence Yajnavalkya concludes his sermon with this command "Maitreyi, one should seek to know the *atman*

alone, hear of it, think of it and mediate on it." This is the way of loving the self. *Shravana* (hearing), *manana* (thinking) and *nididhyasana* (meditation) are the three steps.

"Of all the means to liberation," says Acharya Shankara in *Vivekachudamani*, "*Bhakti* is paramount", and then he defines *Bhakti* as dwelling on one's own true nature or the nature of Self. For this, one has to first hear of the self as posited in the scriptures. There is no other source for knowing the self. You cannot find it in your morning papers. Therefore it is called 'the Self of the Upanishads' (औपनिषद् पुरुष). And the scriptures too cannot by themselves show us the nature of self. You cannot study it like a novel and find out for yourself. You must go to an enlightened teacher and learn the secret science of the Upanishads. That is why the word 'hearing' is used, not 'reading'. The Gita too states, "Know it through prostrations and loving service to the enlightened seers of truth who, on your questioning them in the proper way, will teach you the supreme knowledge". This demands that you live with the teacher and have intimate contact with him in order to absorb what he can impart spontaneously. The idea of a pre-determined course of study where the students pay, and the teachers receive fees is abnoxious to the Vedic conception of acquiring knowledge. Even though in modern times living with the *Guru* may not be possible for all, yet one must devote sufficient time sitting at his feet and hearing from him. Again and again the scriptures insist on *Satsanga*, association with the enlightened. In his *Bhakti Sutras* Narada prescribes it as infallible (अमोघः). As much *Satsanga* you earnestly practice so much enlightenment you get then and there. But this effectiveness depends upon your readiness and capacity to digest what has been imparted to you. Hence we go to the second step, *manana* or thinking.

This means reflecting on what the teacher has taught, trying to make out the pros and cons of each statement and convincing one's own reasoning about the truth of the principles taught. Vedic religion never discourages healthy doubting and free reasoning. Only it should be done with a real desire to know and accept the truth whatever it may be. So much has been thought of and discussed about the nature of self in Vedanta that we may say no other philosophy in the world possesses such a rich and vast literature. Thoughtfully reading these works is also a form of the practice of *manana*. Mind becomes sharpened and the idea of the nature of self clear. Yet the third step, meditation, remains to be covered. The conviction and clarity got through hearing and thinking last for a while and fade away at other times. The knowledge has not become one's own. In order to absorb it and make it a second nature and be established in it, the practice of meditation is prescribed. In this all other thoughts and vicissitudes of the mind are deliberately given up with effort and like a flame in windless space, mind is held one-pointed in the awareness of the self. Hours of such practice remove the mental impurities that restrict the knowledge and result in a flow of soul-consciousness or *samadhi*, which is a perpetual enlightenment, never to be lost again.

So far we have dealt with the foremost form of devotion, that is, dwelling on the nature of the Self. But this is rather difficult for most aspirants. Hence the scriptures give an elaborately worked out scheme of worshipping the Supreme Spirit through the names and forms that belong to its special manifestations. Though everything that exists, from the great gods in heaven down to a blade of grass is only a manifestation of the Supreme, yet, to purify our minds and invoke in them the shining light of knowledge, we must offer our love and worship to those exalted states of Godhead which we denote by the names of Shiva, Vishnu,

Surya, Shakti, Ganesha etc. and their respective symbolic, divine forms.

Here too the starting point is *shravana*, constant hearing of the Lord's beauty and glories. It adapts the psychology of advertisement that is exploited so much in our times. You read nice things about a certain stuff, told repeatedly in a dozen places and you develop a 'love' for it, you feel you must buy it. Similarly hearing of the Lord develops devotion even though you have not seen or known him. The very name of Rama or Krishna coming down to us through thousands of years vibrates with worshipful emotion. Hence, while listing the well known nine classifications of *Bhakti*, the *Shrimad Bhagavata* mentions at the outset, *shravanam* and *kirtanam*, hearing and singing the Lord's name and glories. Then follows *smaranam*, memory of the Lord. The lover's mind is naturally drawn towards the beloved whatever activity he may be engaged in. In imitation of this state the aspirant of divine love maintains by effort the Lord's memory. Lord Krishna's chief message to Arjuna and, through him, to humanity is, "Think of me and do your duty". This current of recollection which in the beginning is very thin and flows at fits and starts, becomes in course of time a mighty flood breaking through all obstacles and submerging the horizons of life with the waters of divinity.

The mental and physical worlds are closely related to each other. If you try to maintain a particular mental attitude but do not allow any of your external actions to be in tune with it then that attitude will eventually dry up and vanish. If some one professes deep love to you but never shows any consideration, regard or affection in his behaviour then you will take him to be a hypocrite. Human love needs to be sustained by certain rituals and simple attentions. Same is the case with love for God. Maintaining a constant flow of divine memory will not be possible in the beginning without

external observances. Service to the feet of Lord (*padasevanam*), ritualistic worship (*archanam*) and prostrations (*vandanam*) are therefore prescribed as the next three items in the nine-fold path of *bhakti*.

The philosophy and practice of ritualistic worship is a subject by itself and it is not our intention here to go into its details. But one thing is to be noted: Those who decry image-worship must remember that as far as the devotee is concerned he does not worship an inert object, a piece of wood or stone or metal. If he has that awareness he ought to pray, "Oh stone, Oh piece of wood, protect me from evil and give me purity and love!" As it is, the devotee addresses the Almighty, the Supreme Good, and expresses his devotion by offering worship to Its symbol; just as you would keep a photograph of a dear departed one and derive satisfaction by looking at it or decking it with flowers. Even an advanced soul, who feels the divine presence within himself, will not object to image worship since the Divine that pulsates within his physical frame is the same that animates the whole world of creation including the image of God. Because the Divine is one, all-pervading and all-powerful, to suppose that it cannot manifest itself through an image is to suspect this nature of the divine.

As one practices worship regularly, faith and love blossom out and fill the worshipping heart with the odour of sweetness. It is then that divine love distills into a definite attitude or relationship with which the devotee binds himself to God. The most natural of these relations is that of a servant to master. Through this the aspirant enters into the seventh stage called servanthship, *dasyam*. Hanuman, the messenger of Rama is a shining example of this aspect of divine love. Though he attained the highest knowledge of God he still maintained the attitude of a servant towards Rama. But usually the servant's attitude fades away along

with the awe-inspiring awareness of His superiority, strength and splendour as the intimacy with the Beloved increases. Familiarity removes fear. Instead of crouching at his feet you go up and clasp His hand as you would your friend's. This is the stage of friendship, *sakhyam*. Arjuna approached the Lord in this way. That was why he could command Him as his charioteer and yet, when the hour of crisis came and he lost his balance, he could accept Him as his teacher and receive the wisdom of the Gita. The Lord too held him close to His heart as plainly expressed in the words: "You are my friend and very dear to me". Arjuna symbolises the typical soul in the battle of life. So here the Lord is professing His friendship with all souls. When all things forsake the soul, it is He who stands by it through births and deaths. This awareness creates a very intimate relationship which leads the aspirant to the last stage, self-consummation (*atmanivedanam*). Then not only the splendour and power but even the 'otherness' of God is given up. The soul in rapture no more clings to God but becomes His very Being. The dew-drop slips into the lake, flame merges into fire, the rivers mingle with ocean, all relations enter into oneness with Him. This is the spirit of the common prayer you say everyday :

त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव
 त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव॥
 त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव॥
 त्वमेव सर्वं मम देवदेव॥

This is the secret of the Upanishads embodied in the key-sentences like — 'तत्त्वमसि' that thou art' and 'अहं ब्रह्मास्मि' — 'I am verily Brahman'. The gopis of Vrindavan gave up their all for the sake of Krishna and oblivious to their very bodies, their minds absorbed in Him, they ascended to the mystic consciousness "I am Krishna". After this they had nothing

more to attain, not even the vision of the physical Krishna. That is why in the *Bhagavata* we find that after the parting from Vrindavan, the gopis and Krishna came together only once and that by chance. It is a casual meeting, not a tear nor a single smile. This is the full fruit of *Bhakti*. In its last stages it is non-distinguishable from *Jnana*. The Gita says, "Through *Bhakti* one comes to know of me intimately, what I am truly and having known My true nature, one enters into Me forthwith."

THE VISION

There lived a shepherd on the outskirts of a jungle. He used to take his flock into the jungle daily for grazing. One day he came across a lion's den and found a new-born cub piously squealing and sucking at the milkless dugs of the lioness that had died of starvation. Taking pity on the helpless little creature the shepherd carried it home and fed it with warm goat's milk. Like this many days and months passed away. The cub had become the shepherd's chum. It accompanied him into the jungle along with the sheep, nimbled at the grass as they do, learned to bleat and respond to the whistle of the shepherd. In due course it became a full-grown lion and yet completely identified itself with the sheep and lived as one of their flock.

On one occasion they had strayed very far into the jungle and heard a lion's roar. Instantly the sheep fled in terror and the young lion too followed suit. The jungle lion from its high point of perch witnessed this strange scene and filled with astonishment decided to find out whether the fleeing beast was really a lion. So it chased the frightened lion and overcame it at a distance. Trembling in every limb the poor creature bleated and prayed to the lion to spare its life. The wild lion assured the tame one, "Don't be afraid, I am not going to kill a man of my own family".

"You will not kill a man of your family. But I know you will surely kill and eat me up because I am a poor sheep of the village and you are a lion of the jungle feeding upon its poor creatures."

The wild lion saw that the tame one was under a strong delusion and, desiring to release it from that, it admonished the tame one: "You talk nonsense. Who told you that you are a sheep. Don't you see you are a lion like me?" But the tame one thought it was all a cruel joke and would not accept. So the wild lion resorted to reason: "Just think of it, how big and strong you are. Is any one of your sheep of that size and strength?"

"What of that. My master loves me much and feeds me with special delicacies. So I have grown stouter and stronger than my brothers. Does that mean I am not one of them?"

"Well, you might have over grown. But how did you come to possess fangs and such long mane unlike the other sheep?"

The tame one was thoughtful for sometime. But it was too preposterous for it to believe that it could by anything but a sheep and so it shook its head saying, "You are trying to fool me. There is nothing strange in long teeth and long hair. I am a sheep and now let me go back to my master, please."

"Don't be stupid. Should you be reluctant to face the truth or prove yourself?" challenged the wild one. "I ask you, have you ever noticed the feet of your brothers?"

"Yes. They have cleft-hooves."

"And what about yourself? You have a strong paw with five sharp claws that can tear the biggest sheep into shreds. Look, they are just like mine."

The tame one stood gazing in turn at its own claws and at the other lion's. It began to doubt itself. Realising this the

wild one took it to a nearby lake and asked to look into it. The images of both the lions were mirrored in the still waters. Seeing them the tame one could not but agree that they both seemed to belong to the same family. Still finding it to be weak in its conviction, the wild lion took its friend on a hunt and made an easy kill. It tore out a large piece of flesh and thrust it into the tame one's mouth. Hesitatingly it munched this strange food and started licking the dripping blood. A new fervour shot through its limbs, its eyes blazed, nerves tingled, and it let out a roar that shook the forest with its echos. It was the bugle of the wild lion's triumph. The tame lion that had been lost to itself was reclaimed.

This fable brings out in a fine way the whole process of self-knowledge when you work out the representations of the details in this way: The cub is the soul embodied feeding upon what the shepherd of past actions deals out to it. The sheep are the host of non-self (*anatman*), like body, *prana*, mind etc. whose long association deludes the soul into believing that it is one of them. The grazing of the lion signifies the soul's seeking pleasure amongst inert sense-objects. As grass is not food to the lion so are inert objects incompatible with the conscious self. Yet overcome by delusion the embodied self feeds upon them and strives to amass matter. When it suffers loss or is met with failures and sorrows then it bleats, "Woe unto me, What shall I do now? How shall I obtain my things and retain them?" I-ness and my-ness bind him to the flock of ignorant, suffering masses.

It is by good chance that the bound soul comes upon the wild lion, the enlightened *Guru* who knows himself and is established in majestic glory and fearlessness. The *Guru* finding the self cowering and bleating like a sheep, takes pity on it and tries to reveal to it its true nature. But the worldly man is suspicious of any religious preaching that tends to destroy his worldly nature. He even accuses the

preachers with selfish motives and exploitation of the innocent. But when reasons are put forth, the thinking being within man can not but yield. The first part of the revelation is the reasoning out of the differences between self and the nonself, the lion and the sheep. Then the *Guru* compares himself with the disciple and proves that God the Truth and embodied soul's real nature both are the same. Though logically it is appealing, yet to make the disciple be firmly convinced of it, the *Guru* takes the disciple to the lake of meditation. In the still waters of the purified, concentrated mind the aspirant comes face to face with its own image which is one with that of the enlightened, pure Self. Then he is given the experience of Supreme Bliss which, like flesh and blood to the carnivorous lion, is the real food of the self. The very taste of it relieves the self from all doubts and depressions. It roars and delights in assertion of its own nature, "I am verily the Brahman" (अहं ब्रह्मास्मि).

Here the story of self-introspection comes to an end. One point to be noted in this is the method employed for direct perception of the self. The eye cannot see itself, the mind cannot know itself, much less the self hidden within it. That is what we say in discussing the obstacles to vision of the self. Yet the eye can see itself by the simple device of a mirror. The mirror has the peculiarity of throwing back the sight like a boomerang towards the seer, so that when you see the image in the mirror you are actually setting eyes on the object. Similarly the mind can know itself and even penetrate deeper to the very core of the self. The mind-stuff, when perfectly pure and concentrated, acts as the mirror in which the immanent self gazes upon itself without the need of an instrument of seeing or the aid of any light; because the self, as we have seen in the state of deep-sleep, is self-effulgent.

Just as the mirror is not the seer of the object, so also the mind cannot be the seer of the self. Nor can the physical eye. So we are correct when we say that the *atman* is beyond the mind and the senses. All the same, as the Upanishad puts it, "The self is seen by the subtle, one-pointed intellect", just as one sees one's face by a polished mirror held steadily in front.

The condition of clarity and concentration is very important. Lacking these the vision of self is impossible. The mirror of mind gets covered with the grease and dust of sins that accrue as the result of violating *dharma*, deliberately indulging in *adharma*; and the restlessness of the mind is due to overlooking *dharma*, not practising restraint, devotion, and other spiritual practices. To avoid both these errors of violation and omission, the knowledge of *dharma*, is first required and then earnest, intelligent effort to leave off *adharma*, and actively practice *dharma*. Through this, when mind has been mastered, one attains to self-revelation and goes beyond all delusion and sorrow. Of such a one it is told "The scriptures with all their injunctions and prohibitions become slaves unto the man who has become the soul of all. Instead of his following them, they go behind his heels".

This is the supreme function and self-abnegation of *dharma*. A sect or a particular faith can never show the path that leads beyond its own boundaries. It zealously tries to hold back the developing souls lest its numbers decrease. Because, a man-made thing must depend upon number, name and form. *Dharma* is not the figment of man's imagination or ingenuity. It is a farce when some psychologists with a leaning towards religious principles declare, "God is necessary for mental health of man. So that, even if there be really no God, we shall create one". Such a

constructed God can be demolished by a more intelligent man. God is Truth uncreate, ever existing; and to lead to it the path should also be eternal and uncreate. That can only be *dharma*. It is like the celestial Ganga whose waters are constantly changing and losing themselves in the ocean and yet it is not afraid of becoming non-existent. *Dharma*, alone can say:

"Give up the works that ought to be done as well as those that ought not to be done. Give up that which stays and that which passes away. And having given up all these give up also that by which you gave up all these." That is to say, one must forego the ego-consciousness. "I am giving up all these, and be established in the impeccable glory of the self, which is neither the gainer nor giver, neither holy nor sinful; for all these terms imply duality that does not exist in pure consciousness.

Just as we apply soap to dirty clothes and then wash away both the lather and the dirt, so *dharma* has to be taken recourse to in order to remove impurity and imperfection. In the attainment of the final purity and perfection *dharma* drops away by itself. Not understanding this, we do away with *dharma* at the very outset and vainly try to overcome our own sorrows and limitations as well as improve the lot of mankind through elaborate plans for material production, social reformation and enforcement of constitutional rules. The obvious result is, there is not improvement any where except in the statistics, which someone with deep insight defined as the father of lies, white lies.

So, human welfare lies in working for the human destiny by understanding and adopting fundamental human *dharma*. The quintessence of that *dharma*, as we have seen briefly, urges each man to realise for himself what is the supreme good and then help others to attain that according

to their capacities. Whether one is an altruist or spiritualist, *dharma* must become his armour and self-realisation his guerdon. As the German mystic Eckhart put it:

"To get at the core of God at His greatest, one must first get into the core of himself at his least, for no one can know God who has not known himself. Go to the depths of the soul... to the root, to the heights; for all that God can do is focussed there."