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Preface

To be living as a contemporary of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is itself a unique chance, for His is the authentic voice of the Lord Himself; and He is easily accessible and eager to receive pious souls and persons afflicted with physical handicaps or spiritual confusion. His advent itself is to restore dharma in human relationships and instill courage in the hearts of spiritual aspirants and purity in the ranks of pious people (sadhus). He began this mission at the tender age of fourteen, when He announced Himself as the Saint of Shirdi, Sri Sai Baba come again, according to the promise the saint had made that He would reappear to complete His work eight years after He left His body (after His Mahasamadhi). Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba unostentatiously proclaims His divinity by a continuous manifestation of miracles beyond the reach of the laws of science. He counsels, consoles, confers boons, and, above all, encourages the faltering aspirants to march forward toward Him; for He is the Absolute, the Goal. Every word of His, spoken or written, is a great aphorism (a mahavakya); for He has the authority to make it so.

This book is the translation into English of His invaluable advice to all spiritual aspirants, which was first published in the "Sanathana Sarathi" as a series of articles in Telugu by Him. Baba's Telugu is sweet and simple and goes straight to the heart. To translate it into English is indeed to squeeze out much of its native nectarous taste. But for those unacquainted with Telugu, this is the best means of listening to His directions and so this book is presented to all such aspirants. May success come to all who read and follow the teachings of Baba and may they be led to His Holy Presence by His Grace.

1. The Power Of Meditation

Binding actions and liberating actions

People have to be doing some action (karma) or other from the moment of waking to the moment of sleeping - that is to say, from birth to death. They cannot sit quietly without doing action. No one can avoid this predicament! But each one has to understand clearly which kind of action to be engaged in. There are only two types: (1) sensory or binding actions (vishaya karmas) and (2) actions that liberate (sreyo karmas).

The acts that bind have increased beyond control; as a result, sorrow and confusion have increased. Through these, no happiness and peace of mind can be gained.

On the other hand, the actions that liberate yield progressive joy and auspiciousness with each single act.

They give bliss to the Self (Atma-ananda) and are not concerned with mere external joy! Though the acts may be external, the attraction is all toward the internal. This is the right path, the true path.

Actions that bind include all activity in relation to exterior objects. Such actions are usually resorted to with a desire for the result. This craving for the results leads one to the morass of "I" and "Mine" and the demon of lust and greed. If one follows this path, there will be sudden flares, as when clarified butter (ghee) is poured in the sacrificial fire! Assigning priority to sense objects (vishaya) is the same as assigning importance to poison (visha)!

But while engaged in those activities and in those sense objects, if one has no interest in the result or consequence, then not only can one be victorious over the feelings of "I" and "mine", greed and lust, one can also be far away from all such traits. One will never be troubled by such traits.

Liberating action is pure, faultless, unselfish, and unswerving. Its characteristic is the importance given to the idea of action without any desire of the fruits thereof (nishkama karma), which was elaborated in the Gita.

The practice of this discipline involves the development of truth, righteousness, peace, and love (sathya, dharma, santhi, and prema). While on this path, if one also takes up the discipline of remembering the name of the Lord, where else can one acquire more joy and bliss? It will give the fullest satisfaction.

If one treads this holy path, the Lord Himself will bestow all that is needed, all that is deserved, and all that will give peace of mind. Offer everything to the Lord without any desire for the result; that indeed yields full joy; that is indeed the easiest.

While it is very difficult to speak untruth and act against dharma, it is very easy to utter the truth and walk in the path of dharma. It is a very pleasant task to speak out the thing just as it is; one need not spend a moment of thought upon it. To speak of what is not, one has to create the non-existent! That plunges one into fear and fantasy, in an atmosphere of restlessness and worry.

So, instead of following sensory actions (vishaya karma), which offer all these troubles and complications, follow actions that liberate (sreyo karma), the path of Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda marga), which is true, eternal, and holy.

The best means for following liberating actions is meditation (dhyana). Today, people with newfangled ideas argue how meditation is to be done and even why it should be done. But they know neither its taste nor its purity. That is why there is so much criticism and cynical laughter. My present intention is to instruct such people.

Therefore, I am revealing this.

Taming the mind and the intelligence

See! Everyone in the world has the nature of behaving and acting in two different ways: one outside and another inside. This is known to all, though generally people do not show this publicly. Just as people lose even the little joy that they have worrying over the factions they may have in their family, so they lose their internal peace when faced with physical obstacles and troubles.

For example, consider a cart. It cannot move by itself, can it? It can move only when two bullocks are yoked to it. And the cart can move safely only when the bullocks are trained to pull carts and when they are used to the road on which they have to walk. Instead, if they are ignorant of the process of pulling carts, if they have not walked on the road, if they have never stepped out of their shed, or if they have always moved only round and round the post to which they have been tied, in their own mire, the journey cannot proceed! And the cart will itself face danger!

So also, the inner consciousness (anthah-karana) cannot move of itself; it must be attached to the externally related bullocks, the intelligence (buddhi) and mind (manas). Then only can it move forward, following the bullocks' tracks.

So, earlier than the journey, the bullocks - intelligence and mind - should be conversant with the road to the village that the inner senses are eager to reach. They must be trained to proceed in that direction. If this is done, the journey will be easy and safe.

Instead, if the draught animals have no knowledge of the pathways of truth, righteousness, peace, and love (sathya, dharma, santhi, and prema), and if they have never once trodden that path, the cart, the inner senses themselves, might come to grief! Even if they are prodded to proceed, they will only drag the cart to the familiar post and the accustomed mire of confusion, injustice, cruelty, indiscipline, and falsehood!

What then of the journey? When is the arrival to be?

Therefore, intelligence and mind have to be taught the art of pulling the cart and moving steadily along the road. This has to be done by repetition of the Lord's name (japa) and meditation (dhyana).

One-pointedness and concentration

People are suffering despair and defeat on account of the waywardness and unsteadiness of the inner senses.

This is the result of inability to control and guide the bullocks of intelligence and mind, unused as they are to meditation and repetition of the divine name to the extent of even stepping along that path! At such a time, the conflicting desires infecting the mind have to be quenched and controlled. The mind has to be focused in one direction. People must walk determinedly, using all their effort for the purpose of the aim and achievement they have set before themselves. If this is done, no force can pull them back; they can attain the position that is their due.

Plunge the wayward mind, which is fleeing in all directions, in contemplation of the name of the Lord; the effect will be like concentrating the rays of the sun through a piece of magnifying glass. The scattered rays develop the power of a flame to burn and consume. So too, when the waves of intellect and the feelings of mind get one-pointedness through the converging lens of the Atma, they manifest as the universal divine splendour that can scorch evil and illumine joy.

Everyone is able to gain success in their profession or occupation only through one-pointed attention. Even the pettiest of tasks needs the quality of concentration for its fulfilment. And even the toughest problem yields before unswerving endeavour.

The value of chanting the divine name and meditation

People are endowed with unlimited powers. Not a single person is without them! But the road is missed when one is unaware of this truth. To gain

awareness of this power, one must join the company of the holy, one must strive in spiritual practice (sadhana), and one must practise repetition of the divine name and meditation.

Of what avail is it, even though you have each item of provision in plenty, when you do not know how to cook them into palatable food? Similarly, people have in themselves all the provisions needed for their upkeep and progress, but they discard them lightly and leave them unused because they are ignorant of the process of benefiting by them. People must seek to see and understand the Universal Power (sakthi), the One without a second, which is the basis of all the multifarious manifestations of name and form in the world.

The mind flies at a tangent all the time. Meditation (dhyana) is the process by which it is trained to acquire concentration. As a result of meditation on the highest Atma (Paramatma), the mind will withdraw from sense objects and the sensory world. Just at that time, the intellect (buddhi) must assert its authority and command the mind (manas) not to entertain any feeling except the thought of the Fundamental Basis.

When its basic truth is known, the mind will not be deluded by the evanescent, the untrue, and the unblissful.

Instead, it will welcome the blossoming of joy, happiness, and truth, and it will not be affected by sorrow and grief. Nature (prakriti) and the life-force (prana) are indestructible, right? So, everything that is the product of the mingling of these two has a new value inherent in it.

One's life also assumes a new splendour when one visualises and realises bliss in the awareness of the Supreme Reality (satchidananda) through a mind and intellect (manas and buddhi) that is purified and transformed by means of meditation (dhyana). The taste of the fruit is evident when one sees the whole of it is eaten with no portion left behind. So too, when the taste of meditation is once discovered, one will discard all doubt and discussion thereon and engage oneself fully in it. Therefore, begin meditation, each one

of you, from today - even from this moment!

Meditation should be performed enthusiastically, with full faith and care, and strictly according to the disciplines laid down. If this is done, it will bestow not only all happiness and all victory but even the vision of the Lord. This is bound to the science of Supreme Spirituality (Vedanta) and also to the science of nature (prakriti).

These two are different in only one respect. The students of nature (prakriti) are immersed in the objects of life; the students of Vedanta are immersed in the basic truth of life. And people are bound to both of them! Nature is related to sense objects (vishaya); Vedanta is related to one's Self-reality (swa-rupa). If people desire to transform their lives, internal as well as external, into one of splendour, meditation is the best spiritual discipline (sadhana) they can adopt.

The method of meditation

The place for meditation should be a little elevated - an inch or two - from the ground. Place a mat of dharbha grass (a matty, long grass grown in India) on it, spread a deer skin on the mat, and lay a thin white cloth on the skin. Sit on it in the lotus posture (padmasana). The right foot must be above the left and the left foot above the right. The fingers of the hand must be in close touch with one another and the hands should be placed in front. The eyes must be either half open or fully closed.

Then, by means of mental massage, relax the neck, shoulders, hands, chest, teeth, stomach, fingers, back, thighs, knees, calves, and feet. After this, one has to meditate on one's own favourite name and form, with Om added. When this is being done, there should be no mental wanderings; one must be stable and quiet. No thought of past events, no trace of anger or hatred, and no memory of sorrow should be allowed to interfere. Even if they intrude, they should not be considered at all; to counteract them, entertain thoughts

that will feed one's enthusiasm for meditation. Of course, this may appear difficult at first.

The best time for meditation is the quiet hours before dawn, between 3 and 5 a.m. One can awake, say, at 4a.m. First of all, sleep has to be subdued. This is very necessary. In order to keep the hours unchanged, one may set the alarm clock for 4 a.m. and rise. Even then, if sleep continues to bother, its effect can be overcome by means of a bath in cold water. Not that it is essential to bathe; it is needed only when sleep gives much trouble.

If in this manner the path of meditation (dhyana) is rigorously followed, it is possible for one to win the grace of the Lord very quickly.

2. Chanting God's Name And Meditation

Spiritual aspirants (sadhakas) all over the world will naturally be engaged in repetition of the name (japa) and meditation, but first one has to be clear about the purpose of repeating the name and meditation. Without this knowledge, people believe them to be related to the objective world, capable of satisfying worldly desires, and hope to demonstrate their value by means of sensory gains! This is a grave error.

Repetition of God's name and meditation are for acquiring one-pointed attention on the Lord, for casting off sensory attachments, and for attaining the joy derived from the basis of all sensory objects. The mind should not be wandering in all directions, indiscriminately, like the fly. The fly dwells in the sweetmeat shop and runs after the rubbish carts; the fly that has such a mind has to be taught to understand the sweetness of the first place and the impurity of the second place, so that it may not desert the sweetmeat shop and pursue the rubbish cart. When such teaching is imparted to the mind, it is called meditation!

Look at the other type, the bee! It has contact only with sweetness; it approaches only flowers that possess nectar; it is not attracted to other places; it does not proceed there at all. Similarly, one has to give up all inclinations toward sensory attraction, toward the rubbish cart of the untrue and the impermanent. As far as possible, one has to direct the mind to all holy things, which yield sweetness and the joy associated with the Lord. To attain these, time is needed, of course. How long that time will be depends on the activities of thought, word, and deed as well as on the motives that impel those actions.

Gauge meditation by its inner impact

The main things to be considered are not at what expense one has prayed to the Lord, nor the number of years one has been engaged in it, nor the rules and regulations one has followed, nor even the number of times one has

prayed over. The main considerations are: with what mind one has prayed, with what degree of patience one has been awaiting the result, and with what single-mindedness one has craved Godly bliss, regardless of worldly happiness and delay, with no lassitude and with constant attention to oneself, one's meditation, and one's task.

If one examines deeply the success in getting rid of all idea of self, one can oneself gauge the progress made.

Instead, if one is engaged in counting the rules and adding up the time spent and the expense incurred, such meditation can belong only to the objective world; it can never come into the subjective and spiritual fields.

Repetition of God's name and meditation (japa and dhyana) should never be judged on mere external standards; they are to be judged by their inner effects. Their essence is their relationship to the Atma. The immortal Atmic experience should never be mixed up with low activities of the temporal world. Such activities deserve to be avoided. If room is given for them, and if one sways between impatience and sloth, and if one always worries oneself, feeling, "Why has it not come yet? Why is it still far away?" Then it all becomes simply repeating the name and meditation done with intent to gain, with an eye on the fruit thereof.

The single fruit of repetition of divine names and meditation is this: the conversion of the out-faced into the in-faced; the turning inward of one's eye, the inward eye seeing the reality of Atmic bliss. For this transformation, one has to be always active and hopeful, regardless of the time taken and the difficulties encountered. One should not count the cost, the time, or the trouble. One should await the descent of the Lord's grace. This patient waiting is itself part of the austerity (tapas) of meditation. Sticking unfalteringly to the vow is the austerity.

The three paths of meditation

There are three ways by which aspirants try to enter the path of meditation:

the path of truth (sathwikamarga), the path of passion and emotion (rajasika-marga) and the path of ignorance (thamasika-marga).

The pure, serene (sathwic) path. On this path, one considers repetition of the name and meditation as a duty and suffers any amount of trouble for its sake; one is fully convinced that all this is just an illusion, so one does only good under all conditions and at all times. One desires only the good of all and is always loving toward all; one spends time uninterruptedly in the remembrance and meditation of the Lord. One does not crave even the fruit of repeating the name and meditation; one leaves it all to the Lord.

The passionate, restless (rajasic) path. Here, one craves the fruit of one's act at every step. If the fruit is not available, then, gradually, laxity and disgust overpower the spiritual aspirant and repetition of the name and meditation slowly dry up.

The ignorant (thamasic) path. This path is even worse. The Lord will come into the memory only in times of danger or acute suffering or when one is the victim of loss or pain. At such times, such a person prays and vows to arrange this worship (puja), offer this particular food, or build this kind of temple to the Lord. One will be calculating the quantity of food placed before the Lord, the tribute offered at His feet, the number of prostrations performed, and the number of times the shrine was circled - and ask for proportionate awards! For those who adopt this attitude in meditation, the mind and intellect can never be pure.

Most people now follow only the passionate, restless (rajasic) and dull, ignorant (thamasic) paths in repeating the divine name and meditation. However, the very intention of repeating the divine name and meditation is to purify the mind and the intellect. In order to achieve this, the first path is best: pure, serene (sathwic) meditation.

When the mind and the intellect become pure, they will shine with the splendour of the understanding of the Atma.

He in whom this understanding shines fully is called a sage (rishi).

The knower of Atma becomes the Atma itself (Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavathi). The goal of life, that which makes life worthwhile, is the understanding of the Atma or, in other words, the basis of the individual soul (jiva).

The need for bodily and mental training

There is a close mutual relationship between the attitudes of the body and the attitudes of the mind. So, people's inner feelings will be evident from their physical bodies. The stance and the appearance of the body help us to discover these feelings. Take one example. With the loins girded, the sleeves of the shirt rolled, and the palms rounded into fists, it is not possible to exhibit love or devotion. With bent knees, the eyes half-closed, and the hands raised up over the head with the palms joined, is it possible to show one's anger or hatred or cruelty? That is why the ancient sages used to tell the spiritual aspirant that it is necessary during prayer and meditation to adopt the appropriate bodily pose. They saw that it is possible to control the waywardness of the mind by this means.

Of course, for the expert spiritual aspirant, meditation is easy in any pose; but for the novice, such physical means are essential. This bodily and mental training must be undergone only to be later discarded as but a means to attain the true and eternal Atma. Until this is realised, spiritual discipline has to be consistently practised.

Until the goal of meditation is achieved, the well-established discipline of sitting postures (asanas) has to be followed. The curriculum has to be adhered to till then. After attainment of the goal - that is, after the mind (manas) and the intellect (buddhi) have been conquered and brought under control - one can be immersed in meditation wherever one finds oneself: on the bed, in the chair, on a rock, or in a cart.

Once you learn to ride a motorcycle, you can ride on any road and under all

conditions. But when you are just learning to ride, for your own safety and for the safety of those around you, you have to select an open parade ground. And you have to follow certain principles of balance; this is essential. So too, those who engage in meditational practice (sadhana) have to follow a certain course of training. No change can be made in this. So, the passionate, restless (rajasic) and the dull, ignorant (thamasic) forms can never be considered meditation. If the spiritual practice becomes fully pure and serene (sathwic), that is best.

To describe anything in words is difficult; it might even cause boredom. But to demonstrate it by deed is easier and more pleasant! To make people understand by doing meditation is better than by talking about it! My writing on it and your reading it will not make it easy.

Through meditation, people reach the divine experience of realising the Atma within themselves. Through meditation, spiritual aspirants are able to cast off sheaths of ignorance, layer after layer. They withdraw their sense perceptions from contact with worldly objective experiences. The process that aims at this holy consummation deserves to be called meditation.

For this process, one must be equipped with good habits, discipline, and high ideals. One must be full of renunciation toward worldly things and their attractions. Whatever the situation, one should conduct oneself with enthusiasm and joy. Whatever is done must be dedicated not for the eking out of a livelihood but for earning Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda). One should train oneself to adopt a good sitting pose (asana), to avoid tension of the body, and to ease the mind from the weight and pressure of the body. This is what deserves to be called pure meditational practice (sathwika dhyana sadhana). Discipline is very necessary for this.

Everyone has the right to spiritual success

The troubles and tribulations that come in the wake of an attempt to destroy the undesirable activities of the mind will disappear through the strict course and rules described above. What remains is only putting them into actual

practice by the spiritual aspirant. Even the most powerful drug cannot effect a cure when it is brought to the bedside of the patient. The sufferer has to take it in, little by little, as per schedule, with all the attendant care, and try to assimilate it into the system. The healing principle of the drug must pervade the entire body; the body must be suffused with the drug. Similarly, the authoritative texts (siddhanthas) and the Vedanta have no power to destroy individual faults and 15 weaknesses.

If full results are wanted, then one must give up all false and low feelings and act according to the true teachings of the Vedanta and the siddhanthas. If one does, one will attain the fruit. The secret of success in meditation lies in the purity of the inner life of the spiritual aspirant. The success is proportionate to the importance the spiritual aspirant gives to right conduct (san-marga).

Everyone has the right to achieve this high degree of success. I do not say this in just a quiet tone; I declare this loud enough for all quarters to hear. Knowing this, meditate and advance! Do meditation and progress! Realise the Atma!

3. The Goal Of Meditation

Living is either pleasant or unpleasant, depending upon one's basic attitude toward life. See how the same object becomes pleasant once and unpleasant on another occasion! The thing welcomed with great fondness at one time becomes hateful at another time and there is not even the desire to see it. The condition of the mind at those times is the cause of this state. Therefore, it is necessary to train the mind to be always pleasant.

Control the temper of the mind

The waters of a river leap from mountains, fall into valleys, and rush through gorges; tributaries join at various stages, and the waters become turbid and unclean. So too, in the flood of human life, speed and power increase and decrease. These ups and downs might happen at any moment during life. No one can escape them. They may come at the beginning of life, at the end, or perhaps in the middle. So, one has to convince oneself firmly that life is necessarily full of ups and downs and that, far from being afraid and worried over them, one should welcome them as adding to one's experience. One should not only feel like this, but one should be happy and glad whatever happens! Then, all troubles, whatever their nature, will pass away lightly and quickly. For this, the temper of the mind is essential.

Concentration and one-pointedness are the keys

Every minute, from inside and outside, promptings and temptations arise and accumulate in people. One cannot attend to all of them at the same time, so one fixes attention on only the most important one. This is called concentration (avadhana). Concentration is needed to grasp any subject well. Purposefully directing attention on a subject and fixing it there is one-pointedness (ekagratha). This is also a condition of the mind. Concentration and one-pointedness help to focus effort on any selected task.

Concentration is essential for all. It is the foundation of all successful

endeavour. It is needed not only for meditation but even for worldly affairs and ordinary living. Whatever the task one is engaged in, doing it with concentration will develop both self-confidence and self-respect, for they are the result of the attitude of one's own mind. The mind may lean on either the bad or the good, and concentrated attention must be employed to keep the mind attached only to good prompting. Success or failure in the good task depends upon one-pointedness.

One-pointedness will increase power and skill. But it cannot be won without conquering the worldly cravings that distract the mind. This one-pointedness, this conquest of the mind, is acquired by the exercise of meditation.

Yearn for the right thing!

There are two types of people: one set on accusing themselves as sinners and the other flattering themselves as great. Both types are being worried by their own mental aberrations! What they both need is mental satisfaction, and this can be obtained by meditation. Through meditation, understanding will increase and wisdom will grow.

For this, a person should develop interest in and a taste for meditation - that is to say, a yearning that admits of no other step and that will not tolerate any obstacle. Of course, one may yearn to hear music and derive joy therefrom, or see the bodies of near relatives who have died and derive sorrow therefrom! Yearning may thus have pleasant or even unpleasant consequences! Yearning must have the strength to inspire endeavour. In fact, yearning is but dormant endeavour, and endeavour is yearning in action. When yearning is weak, endeavour declines; when one is strong, the other is also active.

Meditation gives concentration and success in all tasks. Through meditation alone, great personages and sages (rishis) have controlled their mental activities, directed them toward the pure (sathwic) path, established themselves at all times in contemplation of the Lord, and finally succeeded in achieving union with the Godhead.

First, yearning, then selection of the goal, then concentration, and, through the discipline, conquest of the mind - that is the object of meditation.

One must give up the craving for material comfort and the attachment to sense objects. One must direct the false fears, the absurd desires, the sorrow, the worries, and the artificial pleasures that now fill mind. That is to say, one must discriminate and train oneself to realise that everything is as illusory as the ghost in the well! Everyone needs this self-education. The pathetic condition of everyone is due to its absence. Meditation is the remedy for this state of mind.

Reaching the goal through meditation

Through meditation, it is possible to bring into memory the paradise that is one's empire, discarding the transitory creations of the mind as a dream and a delusion. By engaging oneself systematically and calmly in meditation. Meditation can be made effective and tranquil. Thus, the road toward the highest experience is laid.

A new understanding dawns, clear and unruffled. When the heights of meditation are reached, this understanding becomes so strong that one's lower nature is destroyed and burned to ashes! Then, only "You" remain! The entire creation is a delusion of your mind! One alone IS truth (sathya), the Lord, Being-Awareness-Bliss (satchidananda), the highest Atma; the ONE is the Self (Sivoham).

The truth (sathya) is so subtle and so soothing. Once it is reached, there is no meditation and no meditator; all merge into One. That is the fixed, illumined experience. Exulting within that one is pure knowledge, the wise one (jnani) will be aware only of Atmic bliss (Atma-anubhava). That is the goal, the fruit of immortality. Attaining this transcendent experience, the yogi finishes meditation and moves among people resplendent with divinity! In the yogi, the Vedas find fulfilment. The yogi is transformed into a pure being. Only meditation has the capacity to make one transcend the vicissitudes of time and space and make one ever the same equanimous individual, as if one is

another Creator himself.

Once the individual (jivi) is on the way toward the goal, the individual will derive full contentment from themselves and discover within themselves the source of bliss. The cravings and ambitions, delusions and falsehoods, and animal needs and antics that were worrying the individual till then all vanish. Since the Atma pervades all, equally and steadily, the individual also loses the "I-ness" and gets immersed in its inherent divine status. Such a person is the real great soul (mahatma), a liberated soul (jivan-muktha). Fullness is bliss (ananda); bliss is peace (santhi).

Those who do not give up the path of discrimination (vichara marga) receive the grace of the Lord, and they also realise the Atma. They will always be seeking the eternal truth that lies behind the dream-like illusions of this world.

Control the senses (jnanendriyas), which run helter-skelter; then, the origins of the disease will be destroyed.

Let the mind keep a watch over its gymnastics; dam up the mad flood of thoughts and plans and schemes; then there will be no room for worries and anxieties in the mind. To diminish the wanderings of your thoughts, repeat the name of the Lord; that will keep out your sorrows and troubles. Without the effacement of the mind, spiritual wisdom (jnana) cannot dawn. The full person is one who has succeeded in this.

Gain inward vision

The spiritual aspirant must first learn the secret of the "inward sight", the "vision directed inward", and take the attention away from the exterior. You have heard so far little about the inner world, but divine life is nothing but this method of "inward living". Just as the baby, after learning to watch and understands, tries to toddle here and there at home, so also the spiritual aspirant learns to toddle in the inner world and understands it. A healthy baby in the cradle waves its arms and legs in glee and lisps in joy, watching the lamp on the wall. Similarly, the spiritual aspirant, also healthy in body, mind,

and soul, lying in the cradle of life, watches the inner world and claps the hands ceaselessly in great glee at that inner joy. This has to be done.

Besides, every thought, every word, every deed has to proceed from the full consciousness of knowledge.

Direct your intelligence not to wander about but to dwell constantly in the inner world! This is the inward quest (antar vimarsha), and meditation (dhyana) is the most important instrument needed for this.

The spiritual aspirant can enter the inner quest through the gate of self-examination. That gate accords welcome into the highest and holiest status possible in life to every aspirant who is endowed with humility and devotion.

4. Promote The Welfare Of All Beings

The meditator (dhyani) considers the realisation of Atmic bliss as important, but the promotion of the welfare of the world is also an equally important aim. For carrying out that aim, one must bring certain physical, verbal, and mental tendencies under control. These are usually known as the tenfold sins: the three physical, the four verbal, and the three mental. The physical tendencies are: injury to life, adulterous desire, and theft. The verbal sins are: false alarms, cruel speech, jealous talk, and lies. The mental attitudes are: greed, envy, and denial of God.

Eschew the tenfold "sins"

The person intent on following the path of meditation must take every care that these ten enemies do not even approach. They have to be eschewed completely. The person needs tendencies that will help progress and not those that drag back. One must speak and act only good (subha), for good alone is auspicious (mangala) and the auspicious alone is Siva. This is what the scriptures (sastras) also say. The good is the auspicious. The auspicious is the spiritually helpful. The good is the instrument for merging in Siva.

Through the good, the meditator can achieve this world and the other; the meditator can promote their own welfare as well as the welfare of others. Welfare is the fruit of knowledge; illfare is the fruit of ignorance. Through welfare alone can peace, joy, and progress be attained. One's very basic duty is the welfare of all beings! Promoting it and contributing to it is the right task. Living out one's span of life in discharging this task is the ordained path.

Be unaffected by illusion

The intellect (buddhi) in us is the witness of all things in this objective world. These worldly things limit and colour the intellect; they affect it and mould it into consciousness (chaithanya). Illusion (maya) is only the intellect as affected by everything, as warped and twisted by the impressions of

everything. Therefore, the spiritual consciousness that is unaffected by illusion - i.e. upon which the world has failed to produce any impression - is the Lord (Iswara).

Therefore, the person who is striving to reach the stage of the Lord must be unaffected by illusion, unimpressed by the world! How can one remain so unaffected? Through analysis, ratiocination, fearless inquiry, and pure reason. To acquire this analytical reason (viveka), sharing in the task of promoting the welfare of every being in nature is essential.

First, good qualities; later, the absence of qualities

The passing show, this world (jagath), is based on illusions (maya). That is why it is branded "false". But do not conclude that mere recognition of the falsity of the world or an awareness that one has certain shortcomings will lead one on the higher path and take one to the highest truth. Without a good character full of sterling qualities, one can never achieve progress in the spiritual field. Progress depends on the worth and quality of the individual, just as the harvest depends on the fertility of the field. Upon such a worthy piece of land, sow the seeds of sterling qualities and irrigate with the waters of reason and analysis; the plentiful harvest will be ready in due time! On lands where the seedlings of good qualities are not planted and tended, useless weeds multiply; and where orderly gardens could have been formed, thorny bushes create a jungle of impenetrable confusion.

Even if a person, through perversity or blind conceit, has thus far not cultivated good qualities, the person can at least make a try or make efforts to secure them! If this is not done, the excellence of life cannot be tasted and life is a waste; its worth is nil. The mind, by sheer force of these opposing forces, gets lost in false values and is unable to develop along the right lines. Such a mind, turned away from good, might cause indescribable evil. All progress won by the spiritual aspirant might be destroyed by such a mind in an unguarded moment, like a spark falling on a keg of gun powder because of a moment's negligence!

Some try to be devoid of qualities, but they achieve only living death. Their pale faces reveal only lack of zest and interest. This is the result of unreasoned haste in spiritual discipline. Though becoming quality-less is ultimately needed, there should be no hurry to reach the goal. Even though a person may have the ardour, it very often leads to dilemmas, which many solve by means of suicide! First, one must accumulate wealth of character.

Many stalwart aspirants have lost their way and not regained it in spite of years of effort because they evinced no interest in earning this qualification! Others have slipped into the morass through which they were wading!

You can see that the path of "achieving the absence of qualities" is strewn with dangers. One cannot exist without activity, so one must of necessity act through "good" qualities. One must put down all desires and become free. The mind filled with good qualities will help in this process, for it will bear other's prosperity gladly. It will give up doing injury; it will seek opportunities to help, heal, and foster. It will not only suffer; it will also pardon.

It will not incline toward the false; it will be on the alert to speak the truth. It will remain unruffled by lust, greed, anger, and conceit; it will be free from delusion. It will always seek the welfare of the world. From such a mind will flow an uninterrupted stream of love.

The placid, calm, unruffled character wins out

When this mind matures and attains fruition, it easily becomes free of all qualities: placid, calm, and pure. It easily merges in the one Atma without a second.

Each person has the unique chance to taste the inner peace that such a mind can grant, but, unfortunately, most are strangers to the unshakable joy and equanimity that is their birthright. Meditation is the only island of refuge in the ocean of life for all beings tossed on the waves of desire, doubt, dread, and despair. This Vedantic truth must be present in the mind even while the world of objects (vishaya) is being attended to!

Consider the condition of this world hundreds of thousands of years ago. At that time, this globe was the scene of only two things. On one side was the fiery lava, which poured forth from the volcanoes and crevices that scarred the surface of the earth. The flood of destruction descended on all sides and spread fear and death in the regions around, as if the end of everything had come. On another side, the scarcely noticeable molecules of living matter, the microscopic amoeba, floated on the waters or clung to the crevices among the rocks, keeping the spark of life safe and well protected.

Upon which of these two - one boisterous and bright, the other quiet and secluded - would you have built your trust? At that time, surely no one would have believed that the future was with the amoeba or the animalcule!

Who could have foreseen that these minute specks of life could hold out against the gigantic onslaught of molten lava and earth-shaking upheaval? Nevertheless, that speck of life-consciousness (chaithanya) won through. Unheralded by fire and dust, by swooping gale or swallowing floods, the amoeba, in the process of time and by the sheer force of the life-principle it embodied, blossomed into goodness and strength of character, into art and music, into song and dance, into scholarship and spiritual discipline and martyrdom, into sainthood and even Avatars of Godhead! In all these, the history of the world is found summarised.

In the confusion of overpowering events, we see people sometimes placing faith in loud and noisy men who are enslaved by their own passions. But this is a passing phase; it will not last. When things are placid, calm, and unruffled, people can merge themselves in the atmosphere of delusionless consciousness, which is the highest they can reach. The peace (santhi) they taste there is subtler than the subtlest. They must ascend to it through effort guided by reason, through meditation. When the enjoyment is full and complete, it is no other than the divine status, the coveted goal of life. People do not generally strive for it, because they know nothing of its supreme attraction. Meditation gives them the first inkling of that bliss.

Meditation is the basis of spiritual experience

Therefore, everyone must now strengthen the mind and make it be aware of the happy moment of bliss.

Otherwise, there is a likelihood of the mind discarding all effort to reach what is now dismissed as "empty" and "useless". But once the mind is convinced that the moment of attunement with divine consciousness (chaithanya) is a moment of complete power, suffused with divine power (sakthi), then the effort will not be slackened; the spiritual aspirant can reach the Atmic realisation without further interruption.

With this as the ideal, carry on meditation and mental repetition of the divine name from now on. The step immediately after meditation (dhyana) is total absorption (samadhi). Meditation is the seventh of the eight-fold yoga. Do not give up this royal road that leads you on to that sacred goal. Meditation is the very basis of all spiritual practice (sadhana).

5. Cultivate The Blissful Atmic Experience

People are engaged in various forms of cultivation, but the most important of these is cultivation of spiritual experiences. All cultivation is based on spiritual cultivation. It is the king of cultures. The king makes laws, but he is above and beyond them. So too, all rules and laws, all distinctions of right and wrong, of sin and virtue, of joy and sorrow affect only the individual soul (jivi) that attaches importance to the inexperienced mind (manas) and intellect (buddhi) and not to the Atma. So, cultivation of the Atmic experience, which is pure, convincing, and self-transcending, is essential for all. It is also easy, for the Atma is as the mother of all, and hearkening to the Atma is like the child hearkening to the mother. Everyone is competent to have that experience; in fact, it is everyone's right to have it. That is why the Atmic discipline is being treated by me as so important.

The primary qualifications

The Atma is also known as Brahman, so learning the Atmic knowledge or Brahman knowledge (Atma vidya) is to be considered as the objective by every student.

Such students have to earn some primary qualifications. Then only do they deserve the status of studentship.

These qualifications are: discrimination (viveka), renunciation (vairagya), and the six qualities that constitute a good character. Aspirants who have these qualifications can hope to attain the Atma with confidence and without much difficulty.

Lead a dharmic life

The highest Atma (Paramatma) has six chief characteristics: complete wisdom (jnana), complete renunciation (vairagya), divine beauty, the fullest splendour of power (iswarya), undiminished fame, and inexhaustible fortune.

His nature is full existence (sat), full knowledge (chit), and full bliss (ananda). These are also related to people through the Atma in them. So all humanity has a right to realise and enjoy these characteristics and this nature. That is its ordained duty. The travail of the world today is due to people not performing this ordained duty.

In daily life, the common person acts quite contrary to the dictates of the dharma of the householder (grihastha). People do not follow the path laid down by the scriptures (sastras) and by the law texts of Manu (Manusmriti). They do not have an iota of truthfulness in them. Truth is the most holy virtue. So, leading a primitive type of life, people lose courage at the slightest upset and give up the adventure of life. People develop a kind of pseudo-renunciation. If only they would enter upon the householder's life with the attitude of performing their duty, they would not need to run away from it and seek caves and forests for escape. Each can realise the Lord in their assignment of duty, in their dharmic life.

The contemplation of the Lord must proceed in union with the dharmic life. This type of life has no need for status, scholarship, or vanity. The latter only lead people astray. It is only through this life that the mind and the intellect can be controlled, the knowledge (vidya) of Atma cultivated, and the will sublimated.

A good character is essential for the realisation of the Atma. In other words, all evil propensities have to be uprooted. Just as the army becomes dispirited and surrenders when the commander falls, so the army of evil qualities will surrender its arms as soon as egotism (ahamkara) is destroyed. The evil qualities are all natives of the realm of anger, so if that region is devastated, the soldiers can never again raise their heads. It is enough to accomplish this alone, for what can commander Egotism achieve without a single soldier to march under his orders?

So, all efforts must be directed to destroy the realm of anger so that no commander can venture to let loose the hounds of war. Let each spiritual aspirant preserve the region of his mind in peace, by putting a stop to the rise

of this commander and these soldiers. Let each spiritual aspirant bask forever under the smile of the ruler, the Atma.

The eight gates

The destruction of the modifications and agitations of the mind is the prerequisite for getting an audience with that ruler. His reception hall has eight gates through which one has to pass for the audience:

1. control of the inner senses: yama
2. control of the outer senses: niyama
3. sitting posture: asana
4. breath control: pranayama
5. mind control: prathyahara
6. concentration: dharana
7. meditation: dhyana
8. super-consciousness: samadhi

Of these eight gates, meditation is the seventh and super-consciousness is the eighth. Meditation is the royal road to super-consciousness.

After the mind has been brought under control by these eight disciplines, the will can easily be developed.

The will is the nature of the Lord; it is also referred to as the Lord's ordinance. The Lord, by mere willing, can do anything immediately and easily. But one cannot realise this will as soon as it is entertained. The power of the will is the deciding factor. The will is generally not so overpoweringly strong; when one achieves that power, one gets something equal to the power of the Lord. That is the meaning of merger (laya). Such merger is made possible through meditation (dhyana).

Wish versus will

Some people use "wish" and "will" as if there was no difference between the two. This is very wrong. The wish is related to the tendencies (vasanas) embedded in the mind (manas). The will is related to the fundamental character of Atma. Wish means the craving to get something; will is the determination to acquire it.

Both wish and will are based on the moral culture of the individual. Once the Atma is cultivated, they can be sublimated accordingly. But if they are cultivated without the Atmic point of view, the faults and failings of the mind will get mixed up with what is wished for and willed for.

Take it step by step

The lower step can be seen from the higher step, not the higher step from the lower. So, one should strive to go step by step, higher and higher - in other words, from the culture of the Atma to the culture of the will and thence to the culture of the moral conduct. Then, the enjoyment of the bliss of the Atma becomes quite easy and natural.

When the baby is unable to walk, the mother encourages it to toddle a few steps at a time at home before it is allowed to go on the road. Instead, if it is put on the high road first, how can it learn? Besides, what of the dangers of the road? So also, first the internal factors have to be strengthened, and then external factors, like moral conduct, become easy. Morals without the basis of internal uplift will not be deep-seated. So the cultivation of the attitude of the Atma is primary.

The aim of spiritual practice is to remove the motive, the wish, the attachment, the yearning for the fruit. Understanding this clearly, the spiritual aspirant must not give way to any dispiritedness, despondency, or feeling of failure or doubt. The aspirant must be patient and bear things with fortitude. Therefore, the aspirant must develop within themselves enthusiasm, faith, activity, and joy. Keeping the great big result of effort constantly in view, the aspirant must boldly discard all difficulties and temptations. Since

the latter are but short-lived and weak, with a little patience, they can be overcome with ease. If the aspirant is not vigilant and patient, all already-achieved success will melt away in an unguarded moment.

Spiritual aspirants, yogis, and renunciants (sanyasins) have to climb a ladder, the steps of which are: argumentation, no argumentation, analysis, non-analysis, agreement, etc. (sa-vitharka, nir-vitharka, sa-vichara, nirvichara, samatha, etc.) No past or future The knowledge of the world is not real knowledge. It is relative knowledge, the knowledge of the non-real.

The knowledge of the eternal Absolute is the real knowledge. It is acquired by meditation. The fire of meditation and yoga will reduce the sapless activities of the mind (manas) to ashes. Immediately thereafter, the knowledge (jnana) of the Real will flash; it will shine with undiminished effulgence; its light will never go out. For those established in this real knowledge, there is no past and future; all ages are in the present, in the actual moment of experience.

Clean and feed the mind

Just as soap is necessary to make this external body clean, repetition of the divine name, meditation, and remembrance (smarana) are needed to clean the interior mind. Just as food and drink are needed to keep the body strong, contemplation of the Lord and meditation on the Atma are needed to strengthen the mind. Without this food and drink, the mind will just totter this way and that. As long as the waves are agitating the top, the bottom cannot be seen. When the waves of desire agitate the waters of the mind, how can one see the base, the Atma? The tottering causes the waves and is caused by want of food and drink.

So, clean the mind with contemplation of the Lord. Feed it with meditation on the Atma. Only meditation and spiritual practice (sadhana) can clean the depths of the mind and give it strength. Without purity and strength, the Atma recedes into the distance and peace flees.

6. Meditation Reveals The Eternal And The Noneternal

The seen is transitory; this is seen through meditation. When people wander helter-skelter in a strange land, not knowing the road, and when someone comes to direct them along the right path, it is not right to laugh at and dishonour them - it brings about only ruin and confusion! But today, it has become the habit of people to curdle the love (prema), these embodiments of love, into poison through ignorance of the role of helpfulness that these guides have come to play.

Note this! Love and destruction arise from the same native spot. The same sea that yielded gems, the moon, nectar, and the goddess of wealth also brought forth the world-destroying halahala poison. Under these conditions, one must, like Sri Narayana, accept the good and the auspicious; otherwise, one cannot have nectar and Lakshmi. The heroic and the adventurous, like Siva, can have the poison as their need.

The Lord's grace is needed to cross the sea

This sea of life (samsara), turbulent with the waves of joy and misery, can be crossed only by those who have an unflinching desire for the essence of bliss; the rest will be submerged.

The capacity to overcome the qualities (gunas) of nature (prakriti) is not inherent in everyone; it comes to one with the grace of the Lord. And that grace is to be won by repetition of the divine name and meditation. This must first be clearly understood: it is impossible for everyone to control the tendencies of nature; the power is possessed only by those who have nature in their grip and whose commands nature obeys.

Nature (prakriti) is the basis of everything in the universe. It is the basis of creation and existence. All this is nature: men and women, beasts and birds, trees and plants. In fact, all that can be seen is inseparable from nature.

In this endless creation, the active element is the Lord (Purusha). This truth has to be experienced, so that it will not slip away from consciousness, and the discipline needed for this is also repetition of the divine name and meditation. This nature is like an ocean; even if it is agitated a little, millions of living beings will be destroyed.

When the sea becomes slightly ruffled, ships turn into hollow reeds. You can never cross this sea by your own effort, alone. The Lord's grace is essential. So pray for that raft, and when you secure it, you can reach the shore in a trice.

Why worry over short-lived attachments?

Everything in this world is ephemeral, transitory; it is here today but may not be here tomorrow. So, if you want to crave something with a full heart, seek the Lord, who has no decline. Instead, if you crave progeny, wealth, and all comforts, you will suffer untold misery when you are called upon to leave everything and depart.

At that moment, you would lament, "oh, did I love so deep that I may weep so loud?" In this transitory life, joy and pain are also perforce transitory. So, it is indeed humiliating to get immersed in the search for the evanescent and to forget the Supreme and the Everlasting. Ignoring God (Madhava), who is free from illusion (maya), and spending time in things immersed in illusion is fruitless; sorrow alone is the final gain. Nothing here is fit to be worshipped as eternal. Whomever you love, that love has to come to an end.

The self-same Lord gives and takes! He gives and takes as and when He wishes. Everything is His, so how foolish it is to lament when things belonging to Him are taken back by Him! Therefore, the wise person doesn't pine over anyone or feel undue attachment to anything. Let all the pining and all the attachment be for the Lord; He alone is eternal, the source of all joy. For the rest, love a thing as a thing, not more. Love a person as a person, not more. If you love them more, it is a sign that you have been deceived about their real nature. You can behave only for a short time as if the house you have rented

is your own! For as soon as the period is over, it passes on to another.

If you think on these lines, you will know that spouse, children, possessions, and relatives are not yours for long, but only for a short time. So why waste away, worrying over these impermanent things? A millionaire can eat only one bellyful, not more. You have to come to this world like the traveller taking refuge at nightfall in a caravanserai; he departs when dawn breaks! You go toward your goal, from caravanserai to caravanserai, stage by stage. It is good to take life in this light.

Animals with many legs creep along the ground. People have only two legs, so they can move freely about.

The larger the number of legs, the greater the bondage, the tighter the restriction. When one marries, one has four legs, one has become a quadruped. Later, when one gets sons, daughters, in-laws, and grandchildren, one is transformed into a regular centipede, capable of moving only by crawling along the ground! One cannot stand erect; one loses freedom of movement; one has to creep slowly along the mire of material objects; one has no time or inclination to secure the Lord's grace.

The attachments of the world are short-lived. People have been born many times before and have lived out their lives, loving and getting immersed in love and attaching themselves to others. But does anyone now have a trace of all that? Does anyone know where all that has gone? Does anyone worry about those they loved then?

Does anyone remember them at least now and then? No. The same type of love and attachment were there then also, but with the passage of time, it has been forgotten.

So too, when one departs from this world, the love one had for others and the joy, pain, and happiness one had through that love will be forgotten. Like the playgrounds of children, the senses of action of man will also change, from here to there and from there to somewhere else! Fixing their minds on the

insecure changing love, how tragic it is that people forget the cultivation of the disciplines that will give them the permanent bliss of the Lord!

Everywhere, people are plunged in worry, all twenty-four hours a day. Is it right to increase their burden?

Who can be so cruel as to torture instead of lessening the suffering of a dying person? Already, the sea is rough; dare we blow a typhoon over it? Therefore learn to spread a smile on the faces of the desperate. Keep smiling yourself and make others smile. Why make a sad world sadder by your desperate counsel, your lamentation, and your suffering? Adopt repetition of the name and meditation to assuage your own grief, to overcome your own sorrow, and to plunge in the cool waves of the sea of the grace of the Lord.

Why should travellers wrangle through the night over useless things, instead of getting ready to leave the caravanserai at dawn and starting out on the next stage of their pilgrimage? By wrangling, they lose sleep and deprive themselves of rest; they will not have the energy to continue the journey. So do not worry too much about things of the world. Worry ends in meaningless hurry and waste of time. That time is better used in meditating on God.

We are actors in the Lord's play

All living beings are actors on this stage. They take their exit when the curtain is rung down or when their part is over. On that stage, one may play the part of a thief, another may be cast as a king, a third may be a clown, and another a beggar. For all these characters in the play, there is ONE who gives the cue!

Here, some points have to be understood clearly. The prompter will not come upon the stage and give the cue, in full view of all. If He does so, the drama will lose interest. Therefore, standing behind a screen at the back of the stage, He gives the cue to all the actors, regardless of their role - be it dialogue, speech, or song - just when each is in most need of help. In the same way, the Lord is behind the screen on the stage of creation (prakriti), giving the cue to all the actors for their various parts.

So, each actor must be conscious of His presence behind the screen of illusion (maya); each must be anxious to catch the faintest suggestion He might give, keeping a corner of the eye always on Him and having the ear pitched to catch His voice. Instead of this, if a person forgets the plot and the story (that is to say, the work for which one has come and the duties that appertain thereto), neglects to watch the presence behind the screen, and simply stands dumb on the stage, the audience will laugh at their folly and charge the person with spoiling the show.

For these reasons, every actor who has to play the role of a person on the world stage must first learn the lines well and then, remembering the Lord behind the screen, await His orders. The attention must be on both: the lines one learned for the role and the stage manager's directions. Meditation alone gives one this concentration and this awareness.

7. Remember God And Meditate

Whatever the tangle in which people are caught, if they get immersed in the Lord's name, it will make them free. Moreover, by this means, they can realise without fail the name and form through which they constantly remember the Lord. There is no iota of doubt in this.

All religions remember the Lord's name

The spiritual disciplines of yoga, breath control (pranayama), and penance (tapas) are beset with pitfalls at every step, and they are also full of dangers. But in the spiritual practices of repetition of the name (japa), meditation (dhyana), and remembrance of the name (namasmarana) there is no likelihood of a fall or of any other danger. In the former type of spiritual disciplines, the practices differ according to the caste or religion. In the practice of the name (nama-sadhana), there is not even a trace of such distinction. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians may differ on many points, but they are all one in the glorification of the name of the Godhead. All of them take the name of the one Lord, though the language through which the name is expressed is different. Each one recites, repeats, and remembers the name as formed on his own tongue. Each one turns with his fingers the rosary appropriate to their religion. But for everyone there is nothing so fruitful, so universal, or so holy among spiritual disciplines as these: repetition of the divine name, meditation, and remembrance of the Lord's name.

Crave the Lord's name rather than the form

The Lord and His name are both one, but the sweetness of the name is seldom found in the form. When the name of the flower, rose, is remembered, its fragrance, tender petals, and deep colour spring to memory; its thorns and the trouble one has undergone to get the flower are all forgotten. Instead, if its origin and previous story are considered, and if the plant, leaves, and branches are taken into account, the flower - the most important, most beautiful, and most attractive part - is likely to be forgotten and only "the

plant" is discussed.

See this from another angle. As soon as the name mango is mentioned, one is reminded of an incomparable sweetness. Instead, if an actual mango is held in the hand, the doubt first arises in the mind whether it is sweet or sour; then one is engaged in distinguishing the skin, fibre, juice, nut, rind, seed, etc. When the name alone is repeated, these things do not come to mind. Only the sweetness is brought to memory.

Such is the difference between the Lord and the Lord's name! The pure essence of sweetness is in the name.

In the case of the form, there is the chance of dread mixed with respect - sometimes, even attributes causing fear show themselves.

Here is another reason why the name of the Lord is to be craved more than the form. Riches are needed to secure any article in the world. With riches, articles are acquired, so it follows that the riches are superior to the articles obtained by means of them, right? With riches, one can get any article, any time. So too, it is by means of the riches of the name that the article, "the form (rupa) of the Lord" is to be earned. If the riches called name (nama) are steadily accumulated, the Lord can be realised through the path of meditation, easily and without difficulty.

Another special thing about repetition of the name (nama-smarana) is this: It is possible to acquire various occult powers (siddhis) through yoga and penance (tapas). And there is every likelihood of the Lord being forgotten when these powers come. Blinded by this pride, a person might even let go the basic victory won by their spiritual practices. This is not the case with remembrance of the name, repetition of the name, and meditation; no such dangers beset these paths. These three paths make love (prema) grow in people more and more. Through love, peace (santhi) is achieved. Once peace of mind is achieved, all other conditions are automatically attained.

Through yoga and penance, extraordinary power; through remembrance of

the name, repetition of the name, and meditation, extraordinary love - this is the difference between the two.

Do not discuss the path with everyone

However, be careful not to discuss these paths with all and sundry, because each one's path appears the best.

If the people consulted are treading another path, they will decry your practice of repetition of the name and meditation and treat them with scant respect. They will look down upon them, as if they were very elementary and as if you were but a beginner in school. As a result, you will start doubting the efficacy of your chosen path! You will get concern where before you had joy, disgust where before you had love.

Therefore, reflect within yourself which among these is sweeter. Or, you can approach those who have tasted the nectar of that name and ask for details of their experiences. Do not argue about these things with everyone you meet. The time spent in these haphazard disputations is best used for the cultivation of joy through the repeated bringing of the name (nama) to memory and meditation on the form (rupa) of the Lord.

Mere weighing of the pros and cons, like which is greater among the two, will end only with the quick loss of all the success gained after great efforts through spiritual discipline. Until you become an expert, bring the name constantly to memory and repeat it firm and unruffled, either alone or in the company of devotees. Then, nothing can waver you.

Look at the fish! In early stages, it breeds its newly hatched young ones in a quiet shallow spot. Then, it pushes them into the wide open sea, rough and rude with its monstrous denizens! They can then survive there, courageously, and grow without fear. If the young ones were bred in the open sea from the earliest stage, they would certainly be swallowed up even by minor fishes! So, remembrance of the name (namasmarana), repetition of the name (japa), and meditation (dhyana) have to be practised with a great deal of care, according

to a planned routine, and without any discussion with others.

Repeating the name is safest and easiest

Nowadays, many aspirants are discarding the name and taking up yoga and breath control (pranayama).

These are fraught with many dangers. To follow them correctly is difficult. Even if correctly followed, preserving and protecting the fruits achieved is even more difficult.

If people grope in the water while spreading the net on the bank, can they find fish in the net? To give up repetition of the name and faith in that path and to sit in yoga and penance is as foolish as hoping to catch fish by this means. If the name is taken as the refuge and support, He can be realised tomorrow - if not today. If the name of a thing is known, the thing itself can be easily acquired. But if the name is not known, even if the thing is right in front, it cannot be recognised.

So repeat the name without intermission or faltering. By means of the name, love (prema) is developed; through love, meditation of the Lord can be practised. If love is deeply rooted in you, God, who is composed of love, becomes your own. However many the paths for the realisation of the Lord, none is as easy as this.

Note this. When a peculiar disease is prevalent in a country, the drug that can cure it is also found in that very country, more so than anywhere else. Though available after vigorous search in other lands, it will not be so good or plentiful. Similarly, this specific drug is available now, in the present age (the Kali-yuga)! In this age (yuga), the ghastly evils of injustice, immorality, and falsehood infect the world. That is why the scriptures (sastras) have been proclaiming again and again, with greater and greater emphasis, that in this Kali age there is no means of salvation other than the name! Of the four ages, the Kali-yuga is the best on account of this. Remembrance of the name, repetition of the name, and meditation strain out the evil in mankind. Human

nature is guarded and protected by these three. Hence, the fruits of meditation are greater than those secured with great difficulty through yoga, sacrifice (yajna), or breath control (pranayama).

8. One-pointed Attention Is Essential For

Meditation

It is not correct to say that the qualities and attainments needed for temporal progress and spiritual progress are different from each other. The spiritual is only the purification of the temporal. Success or failure in both depends on one-pointedness (ekagratha). For every item of work, one-pointedness is very important. This too is but spiritual discipline.

Avoid no-pointedness and many-pointedness

There are two paths along which this spiritual discipline may proceed: no-pointedness and many-pointedness.

No-pointedness is the stage of sleep; it is also called the quality of ignorance (thamoguna). Many-pointedness is the result of the restless quality (rajoguna), turning the vision of the opened eye on creation and its sights. Avoiding both of these, without falling into these two extremes, if the eye is neither closed as in sleep nor opened wide as in the fully awakened stage, but half-opened and directed to the point of the nose, the pure quality (sathwaguna) will become one's nature, and concentration of the mind can also be easily acquired.

Of course, this does not mean that mere fixing the sight on the tip of the nose is enough. Fix it there in the beginning and then turn the vision to the name and form you have in mind; that is meditation (dhyana).

When you are engaged in repetition of the name and meditation, other thoughts might enter you at first, but you shouldn't worry about this. There is no great danger on account of them. When you begin remembering the name of God (nama-smarana), sit down with enthusiasm. If you enter upon any task with firm determination, no impurity can affect you. Your only concern is to see that you are fully pure when you start the repetition of the name, etc. Do

not worry about formalities for this. Select the name that you like and the form of that name. That name is itself the mantra. That mantra is ever pure, ever active, everything.

Stick to one name and form

But do not change the name and form to suit the fancy and have one thing one day and another the next.

Whatever the name and form that first gave you contentment, hold fast to them without swerving. They will get implanted in the heart, without fail. Afterward, everything will happen through His grace. If workers are ordered to dig the earth, their work is simply to go on digging. The gardener alone knows how much of the earth is to be put under which plant and how the earth is to be so put. So too, the order is to "Constantly dwell on the Lord's name"! Provided you continue to do that work, He Himself will direct where and how that has to be utilised.

Stick to the task of taming the mind

The value of name and form consists in the training that they give to the mind (manas). What need is there to train a horse that has already been trained? It is the untrained horse that is "broken" through many devices.

Similarly, it is to tame the unruly mind that we have prayer, devotional singing, repetition of the name, and remembrance of the name. In the initial stages, the horse runs in many directions, but the trainer does not worry. He should hold fast to the reins. The mind, too, naturally runs in different directions when you begin remembrance and repetition of the name, but you must not yield to despair, anxiety, or indecision. Hold fast to the reins, the name (nama)! Within a short time, your speech and thoughts will come under your own grip. Only, do not allow anything to come near you that might make you forget the name of the Lord. You will realise the profit of that name in due course.

Do not crave the fruit the moment the sapling is planted! Do not pluck and chew the leaves and the twigs in the hope of inferring therefrom the taste of the fruit! Doing that does not help you enjoy the sweetness of the fruit; besides, the plant itself will not survive.

Similarly, your task is simply to cultivate the sapling called name of God (nama). While doing so, do not doubt and examine whether it has the glory ascribed to it. Without fail, that sapling will grow into a tree and give you the fruit you hope to eat. You can achieve it. The name is capable of yielding that fruit. So the purpose of onepointed attention (ekagratha) is to make you stick to the name, without altering it, and to keep its form always in sight. The net of "remembrance of the Lord's name (nama-smarana)" should have no torn holes; that is to say, it must take place always, with no intermission. If there is any gap, the fruit that falls into the net might escape through it! Perform meditation until your mind comes firmly under your control. That is the primary task.

Let the mind run wherever it likes; just be careful not to follow it, seeking to discover where it is going! It will then wander about for some time as the fancy takes it; soon, getting tired and exhausted, it will come back to you in the end! It is like a little child that knows nothing. Since the mother is following it and calling it back, it gets courage and confidence to run forward in any direction, but if the mother does not run behind the child and instead retraces her steps quietly, the child too, of its own accord, will run back to the mother!

Do not care for the vagaries of the mind. Carry on remembrance and meditation of the name and form that you like best, in the manner you are accustomed to. In this way, you will acquire one-pointedness (ekagratha); you will realise your heart's desire.

Everything is pure, everything is God

Do not entertain in your mind the idea of purity or impurity while doing this spiritual practice or meditation.

There is nothing impure in the world. When the Lord is immanent everywhere and in everything, how can anything be impure? Even if something appears to the ulterior eyes as impure, the moment it contacts the name of the Lord, it becomes purified.

Note this point! If someone discovers a treasure while answering the call of nature, will they hesitate to take it because he is impure at the time? Purity and impurity are the result of the mental reactions of the particular moment. When one is giving money to someone, one talks of the auspicious time and the purity of the hour. But when one gets a chance to take money, every moment is auspicious! The mind is the reason for both attitudes.

Similarly, no thought of purity or impurity will bother you if you have full faith in the love of the name of the Lord. On the other hand, if you feel some compulsion and some discontent, all kinds of possible and impossible obstacles will present themselves. Therefore, give up all such feelings and strengthen the faith in the unshakable holiness of the name and its appropriate form. Firmly believe that everything is made holy by His name.

Do not reject Him, cultivate love for Him

Cultivate love (prema) for the Lord. It has infinite potentiality. An iron chain can be broken with ease, but not the chain of love that binds you to the Lord. The cruelest of animals is also overpowered by love. This is the illusion (maya) of the Lord! If only the floodwaters of this love were directed not to the lakes and shoals on the sides of the river but to the ocean of the Lord's grace, what a holy task it would be! Then the individual (jivi) would realise the purpose of life. This is the highest liberation (moksha). To direct that love on to the name and the form of the Lord without interruption - that is real meditation.

Do not mistake this temporary abode as your eternal dwelling place. Do not lose heart at evanescent troubles and short-lived tragedies. Immerse yourselves in the effort to attain the eternal Lord. Everything in this world is subject to decay - if not today, at least tomorrow it is bound to disintegrate,

right?

It is not right to reject the Lord, who is eternally related to you, and to be misled by this world with which one is related for just two days! As already written, The relatives come up to the outer gate, or maybe up to the burial ground, but your real relative is the Lord, beware!

The Lord will never give you up. Considering the number of births you have had, you have had countless mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, sons, daughters, friends, and enemies. Do they subsist today? Do they remember the relationship? You are no one to them, and they are nobodies to you. But you and they have the Lord in common as the unchanging relative. He subsists throughout all the births; He is eternal. He watches over you from birth to birth. What greater tragedy can there be than forgetting such a Lord?

With the senses weakened and powerless and refusing to function, with the parents, wife, children, and relations all crowding on one side and the messengers of death compelling you to pack up for the journey without delay on the other - who knows when this call will come and how? Before that moment comes, be ready with the thought of God.

9. Spiritual Development

There are three stages of spiritual development: first, the hazy uncertain stage; then, the active stage of striving; and last, the highest stage. These are the stages of passivity (thamas), activity (rajas), and purity (sathwa).

When growing out of the first stage into the second, it is unnatural for a person not to improve step by step.

Three stages of growth

The period from childhood to adolescence need not be seriously taken into account. One need not worry much about it. With the dawn of adolescence, one enters upon the first hazy uncertain stage and engages in many fruitless activities. Later, one attains ripeness and strength. This is the stage between the uncertain and the certain.

It is when one has reached this intermediate stage that one must yearn for the fulfilment that is possible in the final stage.

In the rules for penance (tapas), this law is also observed. At first, ritual worship (puja) is associated with divine energy (sakthi), and the subsequent stage of worship is connected with Siva. That is to say, the period when one is under the care of the mother is over and the period of paternal care - the protection of the Renovator and Guardian of the universe, Siva - is reached. When the stage of paternal care is come, one should not soil the body and mind, as during the period of maternal care.

In the intermediate stage (that is to say at that particular age), one will have certain natural propensities and tendencies that are not desirable and have to be eschewed. These are: conceit, mischievousness, obstinacy, inquisitiveness, lust, greed, shame, fear, vengefulness, disgust, etc. As long as one has these, one cannot surrender oneself to Siva. These tendencies have to be uprooted completely, or at least there should be a systematic

endeavour to get rid of them. Such aspirants will have to be swimming against the current (Vyathireka pravaha gathi).

Proceeding against the current is the means to reach the Source; floating with the current means getting farther and farther from It and losing sight of the Goal.

Of course, swimming up the river is a bit hard, but every stroke takes you nearer to and not farther from the goal. To overcome the strain, one must have the raft called meditation. Through meditation, the weakness of the physical frame can be overcome, the wayward speed of the mind can be controlled, and progress toward the seat of grace is made easy; one can attain the primordial divine Force (adi-murthi). Instead, if one cares more for the ease of the journey and floats along the current, one would be travelling away from grace, turning their back on it.

The primordial divine Force will gradually become distant and disappear. People who float along with the current will get lost in increasing misery. And for what profit?

The evil tendencies mentioned above are the causes for this tragedy. If only they had been overcome, the divine Source could have been certainly reached. Without striving for that, all activities will end in failure. Moreover, the world loves only good people, people endowed with good qualities; it keeps bad people at a distance.

Exterior charm attracts the animal; internal charm, resulting from character, pleases the Lord. Do not be tempted by the low tastes of the world and the cheap regard that people bestow. Strive for the holy grace and love of the Lord. The affection that people shower is inconstant, for it depends on their likes and dislikes. But the love that the Lord bears to you depends on your good qualities alone. It can also give you permanent joy. Those who are enamoured of the external will tumble into disappointment and sorrow every now and then.

Beauty consists in character, not in anything else. There is nothing more charming than that.

Discuss the good in others, not the bad

The good should never even discuss the evil that others do, for that will contaminate them. The stories of Druva and Prahlada will, if listened to, grant merit and show the path, and the stories of Savithri and Anasuya will destroy the roots of evil and strengthen character. How does this happen? What is the explanation? They are all holy, and their careers are blameless; therefore, to discuss them and their lives is worthwhile and beneficial. That is the explanation.

Some critics of "good people" justify their own carplings by saying that they are trying to correct the good people still further and make them even better! No, they are really provoking the good people to evil and drawing that evil upon themselves. They are themselves becoming evil people.

Never think about the badness or evil of others. If you can manage it, always keep trying to turn them to good ways and giving them good advice. One should cultivate peace of mind, the charitableness and eagerness to promote the welfare of all that is necessary for the attitude. These can come only through repetition of the divine name and meditation. The wealth derived from repetition of the Lord's name and meditation is good qualities (saguna). Good qualities clean the exterior and also purify and ennoble the inner tendencies.

Waves originate in the upper layers of the sea. They are caused by the wind, so the wind can be said to have that power. So too, the mind of the intelligent person is full of thoughts and opinions. When the proper atmosphere is present, these spring up and roll in from all directions.

The Lord assumes the yearned-for form

In the same manner, the Lord is manifest in the picture or image that one

worships, but is this due to any special excellence of the picture or image? No. The picture, the photo, the image - these are and remain as picture, photo, and image. The fact is that on account of the intensity of the devotion of the devotee, the Lord cannot desist from manifesting Himself for them. For that reason, He assumes - in stone, wood, or paper - the form that the devotee contemplates and meditates upon and worships. He materialised from a pillar for Prahlada's sake!

For Vamana, He became visible in a stone! For Markandeya, He issued from a linga (egg-shaped stone)! In order to fulfil the yearning of the devotee, Hari, the Immanent Basic Being of the Universe, will come in any form, in anything, at any place.

Seek company of the good; avoid company of the bad

But you have to pray to the Lord with one-pointed concentration. This type of single-mindedness comes only out of the pure quality (sathwa-guna), and that again is the product of meditation. Therefore, you must cultivate good qualities, and in order to develop these, you should desire the company of the good (sath-sang). Your real companions, from whom you derive the maximum good, are those who talk and discourse about the Lord, about truth, about the service (seva) of others, and about love that considers all as equal. Association with such people is certainly association with virtuous people, for these are the real virtuous people.

Those who never speak of the Lord, or those who are not even aware of Him; who are busy multiplying and strengthening the bonds of worldly existence (samsara); who preach and practise falsehood, injustice, and oppression, and who advise you to stray from the path of dharma - treat those not as your friends but as people to be avoided at all cost. Theirs is the company of wicked people. Associating with such leads to committing wrongs against your will, uttering words that should not be uttered, doing deeds that should not be done, and, consequently, treading the downward road to ruin.

People who fear neither sin nor God are capable of venturing into any

wickedness; this is no cause for surprise.

So, seek the company of those possessed of these two fears; this is the true good company. The company of people who have not even an iota of these two is evil and should be dreaded. The aspirant must always yearn for good company (sath-sang). In that company, there is no chance for the growth of greed or for will power (icchasakthi) to attain anything. Whether easily available or not, seek and join only good company. Seek and realise permanent satisfaction and contentment. Do not distract yourself by pursuing temporary satisfaction.

It is profitless for a true aspirant to associate with men who spend their time in worldly affairs. If you don't secure friends of the type I mentioned, be solitary, without associates; you do not lose anything thereby. Never even think of the company of the wicked. Do not get entangled in their wiles. If possible, when you get the chance, advise them about the right, but do not yield to their words. In fact, do not even entertain the desire to be in the place where they are present. If you cultivate these characteristics, then both repetition of the divine name and meditation will become easy for you and will yield quick results.

10. Innocence, Purity, And Humility

The realised souls (jivan-mukthas) are like lighthouses that point out the way to ships caught in blinding darkness in mid-ocean. The spiritual lighthouses show the way to those who struggle helplessly in the thick night of ignorance.

All are born out of the womb of the one Lord. Just as many varieties of fish and crabs and aquatic creatures move about inside a big tank, multitudes of human beings move about in the sea called the Lord. This is indeed a very awesome scene. Some are undeveloped, some underdeveloped; they swim around, greedy and selfish. In the midst of this crowd of ignorant beings are a few highly developed souls, the wise (jnanis) and yogis. Since they are mixed up with the ignorant crowd, it becomes difficult to distinguish the wise from the others. A microscope is necessary to identify the red corpuscles in the blood; similarly, a special microscope is needed to find the wise.

That microscope is no other than meditation.

This creation, and the wonder with which it is filled, is really a source of amazement. But considering present conditions, there are very few who watch for light and are guided by light. So, instead of following this person and that, and taking devious roads and getting lost, it is best to place full faith in the Lord Himself and rely on Him as the only mother, father, guru, and guide. Then you will never lose the right path. He will never direct you to the wrong path. To have that firm faith and that experience, one must take to meditation; that is the one and only means. It is enough if the name and form of the Lord is meditated upon with love (prema) and faith, and you can choose the name and the form that you like most.

Be ever joyful and sweet

For this spiritual discipline, you must cultivate the quality of always being joyful, with a smile on your face; this will give you good distinction. People will also like you more. So, the Lord will also have joy upon seeing you. Therefore,

observe meditation with innocence, purity, and humility.

Then, without fail, you can attain whatever you strive for. Do not lose your temper in any situation; do not lose courage in any contingency. Respect everyone, whatever their status. Then the quality of universal love (prema) will develop in you. As a result, meditation will progress without disturbance.

For the cure of illness without resort to drugs, meditation is the only remedy. Even the capacity to discriminate and analyse will increase, and by means of that, illness, however serious, can be overcome.

In every word uttered, there are two kinds of senses: the obvious and the innate, the native and the qualitative.

The Upanishads take up the second kind and elaborate, clarify, and make the Brahman known. One important thing to be remembered is that it is possible and desirable to utilise the full power of words through softness and sweetness. If one is anxious to see God in every object, the sweetness of the word will be of immense help.

Sir, Master, Lord: in these words lie the secret of much affection and regard. Through these and such words, how happy you can make others, and how light your minds will become by the practice of softness of expression!

When meditation is carried on in that happy atmosphere, how quickly concentration can be attained!

Instead, if in conversation you use words that blame others and despise them, in turn you become the target of blame, and your mind gets agitated by the effect of both; then the object of meditation is not realised because the atmosphere turns impure. Therefore, if you really wish to be happy through meditation, as a preliminary to the process, you must be engaged either in joyful conversation or in happy thoughts or memories. Sweet and soft conversation helps meditation a great deal.

You must cultivate such a character, for character outlasts the body. Virtues are your strength and glory.

Character is power. So train the mind and use it to attain the visualisation of the Lord (sakshatkara); hold fast to that goal.

Have contentment and desire only the Lord

You must have contentment, whatever the gain or loss or state. This is essential. Contentment grants and increases happiness. For the contented mind, life is an endless festival, but the mind worried by desire will have no rest. With desire troubling you, concentration is impossible. Desire is the fire in your frame; it reduces you to ashes. Contentment is the effective drug to destroy it. Just as a bath in the cool waters of a stream refreshes a traveller who is exhausted and perspiring in the burning heat of day, the one suffering from the scorching fire of greed will be refreshed by the pellucid waters of contentment.

One should have desire only for the path of realisation. One should not dedicate one's life for the mean desires of the world. Dedicate all to the Lord; that is genuine contentment. That is the result of the acquisition of peace of mind (santhi), joy (santhosha), and discrimination (vicharana). Direct visualization of the Lord (sakshatkara) is also possible then.

To acquire these, remembrance of the Lord's name (smarana) and meditation (dhyana) are the only means.

Only they can give you that power. Nowhere else can you get them, nowhere else will you get them.

More than all, if you possess contentment (santhosha), the other two will be added to you. Nothing is more profitable than contentment. It is a treasure richer than the three worlds. The contented person can experience indescribable divine glory. Such a person is more joyful than the owner of the wish-bestowing cow, Kamadhenu, and the wish-bestowing tree, Kalpataru.

Such a person can immerse themselves within themselves and discover bliss therein. Do not strive for physical joy, discarding the more permanent joy of inner calm and contentment.

Do not get attached to this evanescent body; instead, utilise it as an implement. Consider yourself as separate from this destructible body, which was created out of the conjunction of the five elements. Know yourself as the indestructible Atma. Just as the house in which you dwell is separate from you, so the body, which surrounds you for a little time, is separate. The body is the root cause of all this grief, all this calamity, and all this slavery.

Understand this well: make the body obey your will, and never bow down to it and follow its whims. Be prepared to cast it away; resolve to control it and keep it under strict control. You have to deal carefully with the body; you have to train it with great attention.

Though all that was said above related to the Atma, some activities have to be undertaken by everyone. How should the body be used as an implement, as a boat for example, to cross the stream of life? Until the other bank is reached, or in other words, until the ultimate truth is attained, you must take care to see that it is not damaged or broken or leaky. Do not let the boat fall to pieces; be on the lookout for signs of this. That is to say: take moderate food of pure (sathwic) quality at the correct time, and continue disciplined physical activities for the body.

Such activity directed to the spiritual becomes the discipline needed for real spiritual practice. This is what is referred to as meditation, remembrance of the name, ritual worship (puja), and devotional singing. When the discipline is practised, as well as later, you must be joyful and not gloomy. This should not be forgotten; never get tired or timid. However, if you get tired, then you can eat a few ground nut kernels or almond seeds soaked well in water at the end of the day's meditation. These will cool the body and endow it with strength.

In summary, everyone must develop the virtue of contentment through the practice of meditation (dhyana sadhana). Contentment is a pure (sathwic)

quality; it will not transform you into an idler - no, not at all. Instead, it will permit the mind to travel toward the Lord, and it will grant peace. It will also hinder unessential activities that have profit for oneself as the aim. The contented person will be fully pure (sathwic) and will lead an inner life, in communion with the Atma. That person can do any work without rest and without complaint. The waves of the mind, which sway in many directions, get a single aim.

The sages (rishis), religious mendicants (bikshus), and yogis of the past realised the goal of life by means of the peace that came to them through contentment. Contentment gives all spiritual aspirants the enthusiasm and vigour necessary for treading the path that leads to realisation of God (sakshatkara). Contented, the aspirant can ignore the dangers and difficulties of the path. The aspirant treats all the impermanent things of this life as poison and discards them as trash. Discrimination, renunciation, and the spirit of inquiry develop through contentment.

The story of Meera is an example of this. Understand well the stories of Radha, Jayadeva, and Gauranga, for they will teach you the truth.

11. Liberation: The Goal Of Meditation

The beneficent and maleficent impulses

The fulfilment of life consists in the realisation of the Atma (Atma-sakshatkara). To get this realisation, one should be entirely free from impulses (vasanas). Liberation (moksha) is, in the true sense of the term, liberation from the bondage of these impulses. These tendencies are of two types: beneficent and maleficent. The beneficent tendencies are saturated with holiness; the maleficent ones feed the mind and make it more and more uncontrollable and unsteady; they spread and strengthen the desire for objective pleasure.

If the beneficent impulses (subha vasanas) are encouraged and cultivated, they will not go on multiplying and binding the mind indefinitely; they become fried seeds, which will not sprout. If you stick to the beneficent impulses, you can easily acquire knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana). These impulses are characterised by such activities as association with great souls (mahatmas), reverence for the great, conversation with them, following their advice, charity, fortitude, love, patience, truth, courage, continence, etc. These are the pure impulses.

The impure tendencies lead one to such vices as craving to see things that cater to the lower desires (like cinema pictures); eating dishes that are full of passion (rajas), like fish and flesh; drinking intoxicants that ruin one's personality by developing anger, delusion, greed, conceit, deceit, hatred, envy, etc.

Such impure tendencies are of three types: Worldly impulses, scholarly or intellectual impulses, and physical or bodily impulses. The physical impulses make men desire a beautiful physique, a strong sturdy build, a glossy skin that will never be disfigured by wrinkles, and round hard muscles. The scholarly impulses prompt one to crave being known as an unrivaled expert and to crave the defeat of every competitor in the field. And lastly, the

worldly impulses make one crave glory, power, personal authority, and pomp. All such desires can be grouped under this head. They are all impulses. They bind you to the wheel of birth and death (samsara) and tie you down to this Earth.

Destroy ignorance

The giant tree called mind has two seeds, impulse (vasana) and breath (prana). The seed becomes the tree, the tree yields the seed. The breath moves because of the impulses; the impulses operate because of the breath. If one of these is destroyed, so is the other. So, if the mind has to be free from their influence, ignorance (a-jnana) has to be transformed first.

Ignorance does not exist alone; it has an offspring: selfishness (ahamkara). That demon (asura) has two children, attachment or attraction (raga) and impulse (vasana); that is to say passion and craving. Passion and craving are closely interrelated. As the passion, so the desire. They are sisters.

Through attachment, one gets the feelings of my and mine, the feelings provoke desire, and desires breed worry. Therefore, to remove ego (ahamkara), attachment and impulse have to be annihilated. That means ignorance has to go, for by that means alone can ego be killed.

How to destroy ignorance and develop wisdom (sujnana)? That is the question! The answer is through meditation. The conquest of ignorance, ego, attachment, and impulse brings about liberation (moksha) for the individual (jivi).

Uproot the impulses that make up the mind, and the mind is no more

The one who is a slave to impulses and tendencies (vasanas) is devoid of wisdom (jnana). That one is, in truth, a weakling! But let me assure you that there is no cause for alarm. As soon as impulses are uprooted, that person can earn back the divine nature that was lost by neglect.

The impulses invade the realm of the heart; they cause endless trouble. They remind you of pleasures, agitating the memory of past experiences, and you start craving them again. The cravings make the senses and their leader, the mind (manas), engage in brisk activities; there is no escape for you from this. So you attempt to collect and enjoy the things that you crave. All this takes place in the twinkling of an eye, so to say.

The impulses operate so subtly and so powerfully. Just as the seed contains within itself the trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, and fruits, so too, all this lies dormant in the impulse. The impulses are the cause of all the objective unhappiness. If they are absent, the mind is pellucid and pure. If they are present, all purity is ruined; they are obstacles in the path of truth, of Atma, and of immortality. A mind free from impulse is transmuted and is no longer mind.

Nature (prakriti) is the world of impulses (vasanas). The mind is attracted toward nature and the external objects of the world by means of this tendency for attachment and starts contemplating on the objects and dwelling on their qualities because of these impulses. Without impulses, the mind will not be affected at all by the objective world. The mind is like a piece of cloth; it takes on any colour with which it is dyed. Pure (sathwic) impulses make it white, restless (rajasic) ones change it into red, while ignorant (thamasic) ones give it a black colour. The mind is shaped by the type of impulses with which it is filled. One has to undertake meditation and concentration (dharana) in order to destroy these impulses. The mind is but a bundle of impulses.

Success in meditation from uprooting impulses

Some aspirants say to themselves that in spite of many years of steady practice, they have yet to acquire success in meditation and concentration. The reason is easy to point out: they have not been able to uproot the impulses (vasanas)! Therefore, such practitioners must strive to conquer their innate tendencies. They must fortify themselves with greater faith, and act.

The aspirant who is disturbed now and then by impure impulses must overcome them by will power and spiritual exercises. The liberated soul (jivan-muktha) has burned out impulses, but the householder (grihastha) is cultivating them. There is no profit in simply controlling them; a cobra becomes harmless only when its fangs are plucked out; similarly, their roots must be burned. Then only can the aspirant attain the Brahman.

Of course, even pure desires are a bond. But they are not hindrances, however many they may be. A thorn is removed by another and both are thrown out afterward, right? So also, when impure impulses are overcome through the influence of pure impulses, one has to outgrow both. This means that even the purest of impulses, the craving for liberation (moksha), has to disappear in time. Only then can you become That. A shackle is a shackle, whether it be of iron or gold. One has to be free from both. That is to say, one should attain a stage when neither good nor bad will attract or repel.

Anyone aiming at the realisation of God should practise the diminishing of impulses, the curbing of the mind, and the understanding of the fundamental principle. One of these is not enough for liberation (moksha). In the liberated soul (jivanmuktha), impulses persist, but only as fried seeds. They will not cause further births.

The Atma is free of everything

See, the subtle body is the seat of ignorance (a-jnani). It is saturated with impulses and traditions and experiences.

The Atma is free from all these. It is ever pure. It belongs to neither sex and has no mind, no senses, no form. Not only that; It has no breath (prana), even! It cannot be said to be alive or dead. How can contemplation on such an Atma be anything other than pure? How can light and darkness coexist? How can purity and impurity coexist?

Of all the workshops in the world, the workshop of the body is the most wonderful, because it is the tabernacle of the Lord. In such a factory, the

impulses are sublimated into vows, the impurities are weeded out, beneficent desires are shaped, and good imaginings are brought about. The main aim is the uprooting of impulse, though this is a difficult task.

Mountains can be swept away sooner than these deep-rooted impulses (vasanas). But with will power and zest, supported by faith, they can be overcome in a short time. Just do not give up your determination and faith, whatever the loss, hardship, or obstacle. Remember, the impulses overpower you and keep you down as their slave. Opium and brandy enslave you and hold you in their full grip only for some time, but impulses grip you for a whole lifetime! The entire meaning and purpose of meditation is to attain freedom from these mighty and manifold impulses.

12. Do Not Be A Slave To Impulses

Those guided by impulses and instincts wander about the world like drunkards, devoid of discrimination between right and wrong, true and false. The overpowering influence of these animal impulses makes them forget the dire consequences of yielding to them. They have no shame or fear; instead, they simply revel in the search for worldly pleasures, in the accumulation of comforts, and in the sheer enjoyment of luxuries. For those plunged in these impulses, the intellect is a useless, functionless possession. By constant pursuit of sensory pleasures, the impulses become hardened, and they strike deeper and stronger roots.

That is why the advice has been given in the Gita to give up the fruit of one's actions. The impulses become stronger because the fruits are always kept in mind whenever actions are performed. This makes people proud and conceited, and they try to thrust their pride in the faces of others. The impulses enslave them, and under their influence they stoop even to the lowest type of wrongdoing in order to get rich and earn the money needed to satisfy them. They start worshipping mammon as their God. Of course, riches are essential, but surplus riches - riches that give worry, anxiety, and pain - are not desirable at all. One should not seek to acquire riches to that extent.

Besides, people strive to earn the praise of others and avoid being blamed by others. This too is to be classed as an impure impulse.

Seeking praise and blaming others are impulses

The world is a nest of crows; some caw in praise, some caw in derision. But you should be above the reach of praise and blame. Make light of praise; treat it as something spat out by others. Then only can you be free and enjoy real happiness. About blame: See how the world has not allowed even Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, Siva, and (Sai) Baba to escape from its tendency to blame! People talk ill even of the gods, imputing to those perfect beings evil motives and actions!

From foul-minded people such as these, can any consideration be expected toward mere "man"? Any excuse is enough for them. The white hates the black; the black hates the white. The Shaivite scandalises the Vaishnavite, and the Vaishnavite spreads stories about the Shaivite. Everyone loves their own religion, their own native place, and themselves; one loves one's own methods of worship and forms and ceremonies. This love takes the form of praise of one's own creed and blame of the other's faith. Though all this is related to one's relationship with God, such impulses are and must be classed under impure (malina) impulses.

Such mean attitudes, saturated with ignorance, have to be removed by repetition of the name and meditation that fill the heart with broad and universal Atmic wisdom. Then the limited impulses will be transformed and transmuted into holy impulses and will vanish.

It is indeed a wonder why people fail to put forth all effort to remove the impure impulses, for by following their path they get only pain, sorrow, and agony! The deluding effect of these instincts and impulses makes them believe and feel that they are on the correct path toward the goal of happiness. That is why they are reluctant to give them up, that explains why they hold on to them so fast. If they read some good books about the supreme Atma, the brain could be brightened. They could at least grasp the essence of the scriptures (sastras).

Mere reading without practice is impure

The number of scriptures are countless. Time is too short to study all of them, and the obstacles in the path of understanding them are also too many. Of what use is it to pore over silly books or jaw-breaking scriptures or to learn about modes of devotion that are not put into action? It is all wasteful effort. Spending all the time in study, apart from practice, also deserves to be condemned as an impure impulse (malina vasana).

Listen! Bharadwaja studied the Vedas for three successive lives. When born a fourth time, he started reading again! So Indra came to him and taught him

the supreme knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) and confided to him the secret of liberation. Then Bharadwaja put an end to his reading and study and entered upon hard, concentrated meditation. He realised the Atma.

Study is a purposeless exercise if the essence is not imbibed and practised. The greed to read about all kinds of subjects and topics is itself not a very healthy impulse.

Once upon a time, Durvasa, the saint, reached the presence of Siva with a cart load of religious books. Narada then compared him to the proverbial donkey, for too much attachment to books is itself an undesirable habit:

Though one carries the burden of a multitude of books concerning all branches of knowledge, and though one might have read all of them, the teaching contained in them cannot be grasped at all without actual practical experience. Mere pride in learning is itself an impure impulse, the impulse of greed.

When Durvasa heard such words of advice, he was enlightened; he immediately threw all the bundles into the sea and plunged into deep meditation. See how the sages feel that meditation is all-important for attaining full knowledge!

It is impossible to know the truth of the Atma through the study of manifold scriptures (sastras), by the acquisition of scholarship, by the sharpening of the intellect, or by the pursuit of dialectical discussions. It cannot be realised by these means. Swethakethu, the son of Uddalaka, was a great pundit. One day, the father asked the son, "Swethakethu, have you understood that scripture whose understanding allowed all scriptures to be understood?" The son replied that he didn't know of such a scripture and had not learned it. Then Uddalaka taught him the unequalled scripture of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya), which grants one the knowledge of the truth of the Atma.

Master the wayward mind through meditation

Hence, one should first grasp clearly the habits and mannerisms of one's mind and its tendencies and attitudes.

Then only can one control it, gain mastery over it, and purify and develop memory, will, and imagination.

Waywardness is the natural characteristic of the mind. It is like the wind. That is why Arjuna described it to Krishna thus:

Chanchalam hi manah Krishna
Pramathi balavath dhridham
Thasyaham nigraham manye
Vayoriva sudhushkaram.

Oh Krishna, the mind is very wayward.
It moves very fast.
It is very powerful.
It is very difficult to bring it under control.

Krishna replied, "Arjuna, no doubt what you said is correct. But by uninterrupted attention and discipline, and by the practice of renunciation, it is possible to control it. Hence, practise meditation as a first step."

Impulses and desires have to be suppressed in order to get mastery over the mind. Desires excite the mind and make it rush toward the senses, as a dog runs behind its master. The individual (jiva), poor thing, falls into the meshes of illusion (maya) produced by the illusion-creating senses and the pleasure-pursuing mind! To escape all this agony, one should have recourse to meditation, freed from the clutches of desires and slavery to the senses. Do repetition of the name and meditation. Then you can also cultivate and develop your will, memory, and imagination along proper lines. Without

meditation, it is not possible to control and master the mind. All other methods are as useless as the attempt to bind a wild elephant in rut by means of a thin and tiny thread! Meditation is essential to immerse the mind in the Atma.

Do not lose heart, but keep up the practice

Therefore, first free yourself from the bondage of desire. Some students and householders reserve a few wants and desires for their private satisfaction while giving up the rest. Even householders who are engaged in concentration (dharana) and the like find it difficult to give up certain desires. They retain them for their secret satisfaction. So, their energies get spent and they achieve little progress in the spiritual discipline in which they are engaged. These aspirants slide down the ladder they climbed so laboriously. To gain control over such unsteadiness, meditation is of great help. It is not enough if one sense is conquered; all should be mastered, from all sides. Of course, this is a very hard task; you might feel like giving up the entire struggle. But never lose heart. Be patient and persevering, and final success will be yours. Only, you should not, like some spiritual aspirants, stray from the path of discipline as soon as you feel you are not succeeding as much as you hoped. That is not the road to victory. Persevere, be patient, and earn victory in the end.

13. Developing One-pointedness

The wayward mind wanders hither and thither, but it is possible to fasten it on one fixed point by means of steady discipline and persistent training in spiritual discipline. This condition is called one-pointedness (ekagratha).

It is also referred to as single-mindedness (dharana). The uninterrupted flow of oil from one vessel to another is a fine symbol of the mental process called single-mindedness.

For novices in spiritual practice, concentration appears to be very difficult to attain because, after some progress is won, they do not usually keep up the practice. Instead, they give it up; even though they do not have peace of mind on days when they desist from spiritual practice.

Concentration endows one with divine joy, wisdom beyond measure, inner vision, insight into the deeper truths, clearer understanding, and unison with the Godhead. This science of spiritual discipline (sadhana) is more wonderful than the three worlds!

Monkey meditation: harmful to spiritual progress

The mind plans and executes innumerable deeds and roams over vast expanses, all in the twinkling of an eye! It operates with unimaginable speed. It conceives an object and dallies with it a little, but it soon discards it for another more attractive object toward which it flees and about which it begins to worry!

The spiritual aspirant has to be ever watchful of this tendency of the mind. When the mind flits from object to object, it must be brought back to the right path and the right object. That is the correct spiritual practice, the path of concentration and meditation. If, however, the aspirant does not struggle to achieve this one-pointedness but leaves the mind to itself, following its vagaries from this to that and that to this, the process deserves to be called

monkey-meditation (markata dhyana) - a type of meditation that is indeed very harmful to spiritual progress.

Force the mind to be one-pointed

In short, the chief purpose of concentration and meditation is to minimise the travels of the mind and force it to stay in one place. Holding it on that fixed stage, one should continue the spiritual practice for a long time. Then there is no limit to the peace and joy that one can have. For example, when you meditate on a table, your thoughts dwell on the wood, the size and measurements, the style, the mode of manufacture, etc. No other thought pertaining to anything else should be allowed. If the thought hovers round a cot, the idea of a table becomes hazy, and the cot is also imagined incompletely. Both get confused. The state of mind must be single-pointed. So too, when the Lord's form is meditated upon, the mind must dwell upon the form of each part and its beauty and splendour, and these ideas must be coordinated and combined into the complete picture.

That is the modus operandi of meditation. Persistent performance of this meditation will result in the emergence of a particular form. Contemplating on that form, looking at it and seeing it for days and days, finally a stage will be reached when the form will disappear and you will forget yourself. That is the super-conscious (samadhi) stage. In that stage, if one feeling or ideation alone persists, it is called the superconscious state with ideation (savikalpa-samadhi). If no feeling or thought persists, it becomes what Patanjali, in the text on raja-yoga (Rajayoga-sastra), designated as the end of ideation (bhava-nasana).

While doing meditation, the mind should not be allowed to wander away from the target. Whenever it flies off at a tangent, it must be led back to the form meditated upon. Finally, if you so desire, all things can be subsumed in that form itself. Nevertheless, only one form has to be meditated upon in the beginning. You should not change daily from one to another. Again, during the spiritual practice, you should not indulge in thoughts about things you do not like, that cause pain, or that shake your faith. If any such peep in, learn

gradually to welcome them as beneficial and seek to grasp the good in them, instead of the bad.

The inert mind reflects the intelligence

Of course, the mind is inert (jada). Just as when water, inert matter, begins to shine when it is placed in the sun, the inert mind borrows effulgence from the Atma and appears as if it has consciousness (chaithanya). The intellect (buddhi) gets reflected in the mind, so it looks as if the mind is also intelligent, that is all. Its real nature is ignorance. The mind is not self-effulgent, like the Atma. The mind's splendour is as the luminousness of insects in the rainy season. The Atma, however, is the sun of suns, the effulgence of effulgences, the Supreme Light (Paramjyothi), the self-effulgent (swayam-jyothi).

Control the senses as well as the mind

The senses can do nothing by themselves. They are not independent. If the mind is brought under control, the senses can also be controlled. Some people undergo mere asceticism of the senses in order to control the mind!

They are ignorant of the real discipline that is necessary. The real discipline is the destruction of desire.

However vigilant warders may be, a clever robber can still steal in a hundred amazing ways. So too, however skillfully you may try to control the senses, the mind will drag them to its side and execute its desires through them. Note how the sage Viswamitra, in spite of his austerities, fell before the wiles of the celestial nymphs (apsaras) sent by Indra to tempt him.

If only the outer door is closed and the inner door is left unbolted, calamity is certain. But if both the exterior and the interior doors are safely bolted, you can sleep peacefully, for no thief, however clever, will find it easy to enter and do harm. Therefore, the aspirant should establish mastery over the external senses. Then, the mind, immersed in the continuous succession of subject-

object (vishaya) relationship, has to be controlled by means of peace (santhi) and renunciation (vairagya). When that is done, one can experience real spiritual bliss (ananda) and visualise the Atma, in its real form. That is why Krishna once told Arjuna, "Those who aspire to have mastery over the senses must have full faith in Me." The senses are always extrovert in nature; they are greedy for external contacts. Therefore, they drag the ignorant perpetually toward external objects. So the spiritual aspirant, endowed with discrimination and renunciation, must place obstacles in their outward path and suppress their outbursts, just as the charioteer, wielding the whip and the reins, does to the raging steeds. Uncontrolled senses cause great harm. People in their grip cannot engage themselves in meditation, even for a single second.

Cultivate good habits before concentration

Form (rupa) is fundamental for concentration and meditation. Even in the absence of the form in front of you, you should have the capacity to visualise it. This is not so difficult for those whose concentration is correct. But some practise concentration without first cultivating good habits and right conduct. That is a sign of incomplete knowledge. Concentration must have the pure qualities (sathwa-gunas) as the basis. The mind has to be purified by proper treatment of the character through good habits. Concentration has to follow this purification process, not precede it. All effort for concentration without cleansing the mind is a sheer waste of time. Many great men have ruined their careers by aspiring early for concentration, without the discipline of good habits.

Make slow but steady progress

Again, in concentration you must be careful not to have as the object something your mind does not like, for however hard you try, your mind will not stay on it. Therefore, in the beginning, have some object that is a source of joy.

Sit in the lotus (padmasana) pose and fix your eyes on the tip of your nose. In

the beginning, for a minute; then for three minutes; some days later, for six; and after some time, for as long as nine minutes. Thus, the concentration has to be strengthened gradually, without undue hurry. In this way, it can be held for even half an hour, with the lapse of time. But do not force the pace. Slowly and steadily, the discipline must be developed.

With practice, the mind will get fixed and the power of concentration will increase. To attain concentration and acquire one-pointedness, you must undergo exertion to some extent. You must fasten your mind on the Lord and keep off all other thoughts from the mental plane. By constant exercise of this type, your vision will be firmly fixed on the Lord residing in your heart. That is, verily, the goal; the full fruition of meditation.

Concentration, according to yoga scriptures, is the fixing of the mind on one object, without any deviation.

Concentration alone can make meditation successful. Its very nature is one-pointedness; its power will negate hesitation. It is caused by spiritual bliss. The name is essential for meditation, for that alone can insure quick success.

Even if complete faith is not forthcoming quickly, the practice must not be given up or changed, for practice will certainly yield victory. Meditation is spiritual strength, the strength that will keep off the disease of worldliness (samsara).

14. Remove Defects In Character

But you should avoid the difficult obstacles in the path of meditation, viz. anger, pride, conceit, the tendency to discover the faults of others, mischief, etc. These operate even subconsciously, as the currents in the depths of the ocean.

Spiritual aspirants must be vigilant not to lose their temper on even small things, for that will block their progress. They must cultivate love toward all, and meekness. Then, undesirable habits will fall away from them, since anger is the parent of all wrong behaviour. Anger can turn any person into bad ways, any moment, and in any form. So it should be sublimated first by systematic effort.

Spiritual aspirants must welcome gladly the announcement of their defects by anyone; indeed, they must be grateful to those who point them out. Aspirants must never entertain hatred against them, for that is as bad as hating the "good". The "good" has to be loved and the "bad" discarded. Remember, the "bad" should not be hated. It has to be given up, avoided. Only people who can do this can achieve progress in meditation and spiritual wisdom.

Conceit, jealousy, the passionate (rajasic) exhibition of one's superiority, anger, the craving to inform oneself of the weakness of others and their failings, trickery - all these are obstacles in the path of meditation. Even if these are not patently exhibited, the inner impulses urging one along these wrong directions are latent in the mind.

Just as a room kept closed for a long time is found dust-ridden and foul-smelling, is opened, cleaned, and made habitable by elaborate sweeping and dusting, so the mind has to be cleaned by meditation. Spiritual aspirants must, by inward observation, examine the mind and its contents and condition. By proper disciplinary habits, the accumulated dirt should be removed little by little, systematically. Conceit, for example, is deep-rooted and unyielding. In the passionate (rajasic) mind, it puts forth many branches

in all directions and spreads everywhere.

It might appear to be dry and dead for some time, but it will sprout again, easily. As soon as a chance arises for its exhibition, it will raise its hood. So, spiritual aspirants have to be ever vigilant.

With regard to anger, spiritual aspirants have to be vigilant even about the most minor matters that might provoke them, because if they are careless, they cannot progress in the least. Such people must cultivate a humble, loving spirit. Then the bad traits will disappear. Some aspirants become very angry when someone discovers and announces to them the bad traits they possess. This makes matters worse!

Eliminate pride

Aspirants must always have the inward look; if they allow the mind to wander outward, they cannot identify their own faults. Pride prevents the inward look and confuses the examination of the mind. When aspirants want to achieve success, they must bow down to those who point out their faults. That is the way to progress quickly and fast in the path of meditation. And they must endeavour not to entertain the faults any longer.

It is hard to get rid of pride and self-love or ego (ahamkara), for everyone has been shaping this life from the beginningless period of time! Everyone has been allowing their mind to flow in the direction it likes for ages past, so it is very difficult now to turn it from its accustomed path and bend its steps in another direction.

Individuals full of I (aham) love to exercise authority over others. They will not agree with others that it is "bondage", for the arguments of others are not advanced by them! They see everything through glasses coloured by the smoke of selfishness and self-love. "My words are true." "My opinion is correct." "My deeds are right." Thus they feel and thus they spend their days. Such behaviour is very harmful for spiritual aspirants. They must look forward eagerly to any helpful criticism or suggestion or advice, from whatever

quarter.

Besides, aspirants must minimise all discussion and argumentation, for this breeds a spirit of rivalry and leads one on to angry reprisals and vengeful fighting. Do not struggle to earn the esteem of the world. Do not feel humiliated or angry when the world does not recognise you or your merits. Learn this first and foremost if you are an aspirant for spiritual success. Do not become happy when you are being praised; therein lies a deadly trap, which might even lead you astray and endanger your progress.

Thus, you must reform your mental traits and habits. Cultivate the habit of never causing pain to others. Try to understand others and sympathise with them and do things that will be helpful. Train yourself to take insult and criticism as "decorations" awarded to you. Struggle hard to be friendly with everyone, whatever their nature or conduct. A sense of joy is necessary for meditation and concentration to progress, but many things deprive you of the atmosphere of joy. So you must pray sincerely, in order to be free from such obstacles. The recital or repetition of mantras will be of great help.

Follow Krishna's advice and meditate

In the third age of humans (the Dwapara-yuga), Krishna said,

Mathchiththah sarva dhurgani math-prasadhath tharishyathi.

When you start fixing your thoughts on Me,
all thoughts that agitate you will be stilled through My grace.

This discipline of meditation must be rigorously followed. In fact, dhyana (meditation) means "discipline".

Discipline, regularity, steadiness - these are the essentials of meditation. A spiritual aspirant who keeps these things in view can achieve quick results. Meditation is a first-class cure for the illness of worldly existence (bhava-roga).

Along with it, another drug must also be taken; its name is contentment. If there is contentment in the mind, one enjoys an endless festival. Craving makes the mind waver; it is an all-consuming fire that will destroy people slowly and surely.

The royal road to meditation is contentment. Just as a traveller who has trudged along for miles in the scorching sun feels refreshed when taking a bath in the limpid waters of a cool and shady lake, so too the unfortunate individual struggling in the scorching heat of desires feels happy and relieved when bathing in the lake of contentment.

The three guards: peace, contentment, discrimination

At the gates of liberation (moksha) and Self-realisation (sakshatkara), three guards are posted to ask you for your credentials. They are peace or mental equilibrium, joy or contentment, and inquiry or discrimination (santhi, santhosha, and vichara). Even if one of the guards is made to become friendly, the others will facilitate your entry.

First in the series is peace. If you make peace yours, contentment (thrupthi) is yours, and contentment is the highest source of joy and the most valuable possession. It is as much as an empire.

Without contentment, desire (kama) and greed (lobha) attain dangerous proportions and will overwhelm the power of discrimination itself. Desire easily becomes greed, and greed degenerates into miserliness and lust, which make you flit from object to object in mad pursuit of the evanescent sensual joy. How can people with such qualities develop the faculty of concentration? And without the capacity to concentrate, how can they engage in meditation? And without meditation, no one can get Godhead (Daivam).

Advise the mind that flows so swiftly in so many directions: "Oh mind, do not drag me along the floods of objects, along the path of sensual desires, and spoil my career. Instead, take me to the Lord. Flow in that direction, please." Giving up all other desires and being ever content, dwell on His name and His form only, to the exclusion of everything else. Meditation on the name and form is real peace (santhi), genuine contentment (santhosha).

Contentment will not make anyone an idler, remember. It is an attribute of true pure (sathwic) character. It will make the mind turn always toward the Lord. It will save you from the tribulation to satisfy the unimportant wants and to cater to selfish needs. It will direct human talents toward efforts that elevate. The contented person will also be truthful and will therefore be in constant communion with the Atma. That is to say, the contented person can be immersed in meditation for long periods without rest or the feeling of tiredness. Meditation is the only method of counteracting the mental activities that surge forward in a thousand directions; there is no other method at all.

Be comfortable in all environments

The capacity to concentrate is a very useful qualification. You must watch the vagaries of your own mind - how it travels, what objects it runs after, etc. - and, slowly, by means of meditation, you should teach it to stay still and to behave beneficially.

Do not worry about the unsatisfactory environment you may have. Of course, the place may have some drawbacks and it may not be ideal. But it is no use trying to run away from all that. You can overcome the drawbacks by training your own mind. Stay in your environment and pray to the Lord! Pray that He may fill you with His thoughts and His vision, making you ignore the defects of the environment. Do not seek comfort, for comfort might not be conducive to meditation. Learn to be comfortable in any place; that is better. Live in joy wherever you are; that is the way. Revel in the realm of your mind; worship in the mind the Lord you have chosen as your goal and be free of all the defects of the natural or human environment! Then, no spot can be irksome to you,

nor will any place seem disgusting.

Concluding admonitions

Pride is an insidious vice, so at the slightest inkling of the disease, try your best to eradicate it by retiring into a lonely spot and engaging yourself in meditation. Delay is dangerous. "Even divine nectar (amritha) becomes a poison if the dose is delayed," says the proverb. Remember this and act swiftly. Meditation stills the agitated mind and makes it clear and full of joy.

Many in this world, even among the learned, do not spend their allotted span of life in the pursuit of certain selected ideals. Hence, their earthly careers are like the voyage of a storm-tossed ship that has lost both its anchor and its compass and is caught in mid-ocean. They are torn between opposing ideals and goals; they listen to diverse appeals; and their lives end in waste and failure, for they say one thing and do another in their ignorance and fear. Meditation gives them fixity of purpose, courage, and also wisdom.

The feelings that arise in the mind, which are classified as serene, restless, and ignorant (sathwic, rajasic, and thamasic), also have to be watched and cleansed. The restlessness and ignorance have to be uprooted. Meditation is the weapon for this task.

The path of meditation (dhyana-marga) will destroy ignorance (a-jnana), and it will grant the individual union with the Godhead (Brahmaikyatha).