

26. Disciplines of the spirit

WHATEVER one's scholarship, position or affluence, all of them will be of no use if one has not acquired the capacity to face the vicissitudes of life with fortitude and equanimity. The perennial message of the hoary culture of Bharat should be adapted to the needs of the present as part of the educational process. Students tend to go astray because they have not properly imbibed human values during their academic career. The significance of human values can be grasped only if the concepts of *Yama and Niyama* are properly understood.

Yama includes the following practices' *Ahimsa* (non-violence); *Sathya* (truth); *Astheyam* (non-stealing); *Brahmacharya* (continence and studentship) and *Aparigraha* (not receiving anything from others).

Ahimsa: This means avoiding causing harm to anyone by thought, word or deed. Out of selfishness and self-interest, men do not practise this estimable virtue. All evils arise from the sense of "I" and "mine." This trait can be eliminated only by developing purity in thought, word and deed.

Sathya: Truth relates not only to what is factually correct, but what is true for all time. Moreover, truthful speech must be both pleasing and beneficial to the person concerned. It should not excite passion or promote ill-will. You should not indulge in falsehood to please others.

Astheyam: In any circumstance and under any kind of compulsion one should not steal another's property.

Brahmacharya: In everyday life, this may not be easy to observe. *Brahmacharya* calls for the complete eschewing of all bad actions and living constantly in *Brahmam* (the contemplation of the Absolute). In practical life, this means dedicating all thoughts, all speech and all actions to the Divine. Doing everything as an offering to *Brahmam* is *Brahmacharya*. Study of *the Vedas, Upanishads* and other scriptures also constitutes *Brahmacharya*.

Brahmacharya is the foundation for the other stages in life: *Grihstha* (householder), *Vaanaprastha* (recluse) and *Sanyasa* (renunciant).

Aparigraha: *The Upanishads* have regarded *Parigraha* (acquiring things from others) as sinful. Whatever help we may render to others, we should' do it with no expectation of any return. The scriptures declare that it is natural for human beings to reap the fruits of their actions. One is entitled to receive benefits from one's father, mother, teacher and God, but not from others. As God is the creator, sustainer and protector, you can claim anything from God. From your parents you can receive what they are in a position to give according to their capacity. But you should not seek more than that from them. From the preceptor you must receive only knowledge. From the preceptor, who teaches you what promotes your well-being, you have to seek ways of satisfying him and not any other benefits. Students today lack these qualities. The result is they become indebted to others in various ways. No one can tell what sort of births they will have to take to discharge these debts in future lives. Limits should be observed even in accepting the hospitality of friends. It is wrong to overstay even in the houses of friends, who themselves might be dependent on their parents. Hence, the cultivation of restraint in accepting offerings from others is essential. You should be ready to offer a fruit, flower, water or other simple thing to a guest, but you should be wary in accepting anything from others.

Disciplines covered by *Niyama*

The second set of disciplines is covered by the term *Niyama*. It consists of five practices: *Soucham* (purity); *Tapas* (austerity); *Santhosham* (contentment); *Swaadhyaayam* (study of scriptures); *Easwara Pranidhaanam* (offering to the Lord).

Soucham: This is of two kinds--external and internal. External purity is achieved by the use of water and cleaning agents. But apart from bodily cleanliness, in daily life we have to ensure purity of the clothes we wear, the food we consume, the places where we live, the books we read, and the like. All organs of the body have to be kept completely pure. This is essential not only for maintaining perfect health, but also to enjoy a state of bliss. The environment around you should also be kept pure.

As regards internal purity, it should be noted that the mind is polluted by bad thoughts and bad desires, by attachments and aversions. You must strive to fill the mind with good and sacred thoughts. Qualities like love, kindness, compassion, forbearance and sympathy have to be developed to get rid of negative and bad thoughts.

Tapas: *Tapas* does not mean merely meditating in certain postures. Real penance consists in striving for the realisation of one's higher aims by maintaining purity in thought, word and deed and pursuing the aims with one-pointed concentration. "*Sathatham yoginah*" (Always be established in *Yoga*), it is said. You must yearn for the realisation of the Formless Absolute. That yearning turns into penance in due course. Merely going to a forest and living on roots and leaves does not constitute penance. To get rid of evil thoughts and passions and to fill the mind with sacred feelings is real penance.

Santhosham: Man can experience joy and happiness only when he has contentment. As desires grow, discontent grows and worries multiply. You must learn to be content with your condition. He who has got much satisfaction is the richest man.

Swaadhyaayam: This does not mean merely study of the *Vedas*. All the basic triple scriptures--the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*--should also be studied. One must be acquainted with all sacred literature. Thereby one gets rid of impurities in the mind.

Easwara Pranidhaanam: All actions that we do should be pleasing to the Lord. In whatever action we perform, the question must be asked, "Will this please the Lord or not?" God means in effect your conscience. You should not do anything which does not give you self-satisfaction. Whatever you do that pleases God will be holy. When *Yama and Niyama* are practised in this manner, you will be simultaneously pursuing the four *Purusharthas* (goals in life) *Dharma* (Righteousness), *Artha* (earning wealth, etc.) *Kama* (right desires) and *Moksha* (liberation) and observing the spiritual disciplines of *sama and dama*.

Sama means control of the senses, the mind and the intellect and ensuring that they do not go astray. It is only when the internal sense organs are controlled that the external organs like eyes, ears, etc., can be controlled with ease.

Dama refers to the control of the *jnanendriyas* (organs of perception) and the *karmendriyas* (organs of action). The spiritual transformation of man calls for the control of the sense organs.

Vighneswara is the deity presiding over the intelligence and he endows devotees with purity of intellect and the power of discrimination between right and wrong and between the permanent and the transient. Mundane pleasures are momentary and fleeting. Your aim must be to seek that

spiritual bliss which is enduring and unchanging and which transcends the pleasures of the earth and heaven. Keeping this ultimate aim in view, one should do one's duties in this world and lead a life of righteousness.

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