

## Chapter IX. 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 pravaaha 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 (*sadguna*). 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 *dharmā* —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 (*ic-chasakthi*) 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.