

Chapter XII. 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:

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

*Chanchalam hi manah Krishna
Pramaathi balavath dhridham*

*Thasyaaham nigraham manye
Vaayoriva sudhushkaram.*

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.