

CHAPTER IX SOME AIDS TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

Caste and external observances-Worship of images-Value of pilgrimages-Pious company-Repetition of Divine 'names'

Cast and External Observances

308. Honour both spirit and form, the sentiment within as well as the symbol without.

309. In a grain of paddy the germ is commonly considered to be the only thing necessary for germination and growth, while the husk is regarded as of no importance; but if the husked grain is sown, it will not sprout and grow up into a plant and yield rice. To get a crop one must needs sow the grain with its husk intact. If, however; one wants to get the pure grain itself for eating purposes, one must remove the husk from the seed. So rites and ceremonies are necessary for the growth and perpetuation of a religion. They are the receptacles that contain the germinating seeds of truth; and consequently every man must perform them till he reaches the central truth therein.

310. The oyster that contains the precious pearl is in itself of very little value, but it is essential for the growth of the pearl. The shell itself may prove to be of no use to the man who has secured the pearl. So ceremonies and rites may not be necessary for him who has attained the highest truth, namely, God.

311. Rituals are to be observed. But when one advances in spirituality, it is not necessary to observe them for long. Then the mind gets concentrated on God, resulting in communion with Him.

312. When a wound is perfectly healed, the scab falls off of itself; but if the scab be taken off earlier, it bleeds. In the same way, with the advent of Divine illumination all distinctions of caste vanish; but it is wrong for the ignorant to override such distinctions, lest they should lead to undesirable consequences.

313. A fruit that has ripened on the tree and fallen down of itself, tastes very sweet, but the one that has been picked and ripened artificially is not so sweet, and soon shrivels up. In like manner, the rules of caste fall away of themselves from him who has attained perfection and has realised the unity of all things; but those who have had no such exalted experience cannot escape the consciousness of superiority and inferiority in others, and have to observe caste distinctions. If in this state of ignorance a man feigns perfection by overriding all caste distinctions and by living a free life, he is surely like the green fruit artificially ripened.

314. Is it proper for one who has attained Divine wisdom to keep the Brahminical thread? When the knowledge of the Self is gained, all fetters drop off of themselves. Then there is no distinction between Brahmana and **Sudra**, between high caste and low caste. Thus the sacred thread, a sign of caste, falls off of itself. But so long as a man is conscious of any distinction and difference, he should not forcibly throw it away.

315. While a storm is blowing, we cannot distinguish between an Asvattha (fig tree) and a Vata (banyan tree). So when the storm of supreme Knowledge blows, there can be no distinction of caste.

316. A true devotee who has drunk deep of Divine love is like a veritable drunkard, and as such cannot always observe the rules of propriety.

317. Once **Krishna Kishore** asked me, "Why have you cast¹ off the sacred thread?" When this change came over me, everything was blown away, as if by the great cyclone of Ashvin². The old landmarks were swept away. There was no outward consciousness itself. What to speak, then, of taking care of either the holy thread or even of the piece of cloth I used to wear? Lost in intense God-consciousness, I could not even know that I was nude for the greater part of the day. Therefore when Krishnakishore took me to task for having parted with the sacred thread, I only observed, 'You will see it all clearly if you are once seized with madness for the Lord.'

318. Those who utter the 'name' of God are holy. Krishnakishore was a holy man of Ariadaha. Once he had been to **Brindavan** on a pilgrimage. There, one day, in the course of his walk he felt thirsty, and seeing a person standing near a well, he asked him to draw a little water for him. The man said that he was of a very low caste and so was fit to draw water for a Brahmana. Krishnakishore said, "Will you pronounce the name of God and thus make yourself pure?" The man did so and fetched some water for him; and he, an orthodox Brahmana, drank the water! How great was the power of his faith!

319. As a drunkard sometimes puts his coat on his head and at other times uses it as breeches, so the God-intoxicated man behaves as if he is not conscious of the external world.

320. People of this age care for the essence of everything. They will accept the essentials of religion and not its non-essentials (that is, the rituals, ceremonials, dogmas and creeds).

321. Those who take fish do not want the useless head and tail of the fish, but only the soft middle portion of it; so the ancient rules and commandments of our scriptures must be pruned of all their accretions to make them suit modern times.

Worship of images

322. While raising a building, the scaffolding is indispensable; but when the work is completed, no one feels the necessity of it. So also image-worship is necessary in the beginning but not afterwards.

323. As a man begins to learn writing by drawing, big scrawls before he tries to write a smaller hand, so a person must acquire the power of concentrating his thoughts by fixing the mind first upon forms, and then, after succeeding therein, by fixing it upon the formless.

324. A marksman learns to shoot by first having big objects to shoot at; and as he acquires more and more facility in shooting, he aims more and more easily at the smaller marks on the target. So when the mind has been trained to focus on images having form, it is easy for it to do so on things having no form.

325. As a toy fruit or a toy elephant reminds one of the real fruit and the living animal, so do the images that are worshipped remind one of God who is formless and eternal.

326. The **Master** once said to a disciple of his: You were talking of images made of clay. There arises a necessity for them too. These various forms used for worship have been provided to suit the needs of different men at different stages of spiritual evolution.

327. The mother so arranges the food for her children that each one gets what agrees with him. If she has five children and she gets a big fish to cook, she makes different dishes out of it, and gives each one what suits him exactly. One is given rich Polao with fish; another, of weak digestion, only a little soup; and so on, according to the digestive power of each. (The same is the case with the various symbols and disciplines prescribed for spiritual aspirants.)

328. A disciple: One may believe that God is 'with form'. But surely He is not the earthen image that is worshipped.

The **Master**: Why call it an earthen image? The Divine image is made of Spirit.

329. The **Master** once said to **Keshab Chandra Sen**, who was a great iconoclast in his days: "Why do these images rouse the idea of mud and clay, stone and straw, in your mind? Why can you not realize the presence of the eternal, blissful, all-conscious Mother even in these forms?"

330. If a worshipper is convinced that the images of the Deity in the shapes of various Gods and Goddesses are verily divine, he reaches God through their worship. But if he holds them to be nothing better than mud and straw and clay, to him the worship of such images does no good.

331. If there is anything wrong in image-worship, does He not know that all worship is meant for Him? He will surely be pleased to accept the worship, knowing that it is meant for Him alone. Love God; that is the duty nearest to you.

332. When one sees God, one realises that everything, images and all, is a manifestation of the Spirit. To him the image is not made of clay but of Spirit.

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Value of Pilgrimages

333. The Milk of the cow in reality pervades the whole body of the animal through its blood, but you cannot milk it by squeezing the ears or the horns; you can get the milk only from the teats. Similarly, God pervades the universe everywhere, but you cannot see Him everywhere. He manifests Himself more readily in sacred temples, which are full of the spirit of devotion diffused by the lives and spiritual practices of the devotees of former times.

334. Know that there must be the manifestation of God in places where countless people have for long practised austerity, **Japa**, meditation, prayer and worship with a view to realising Him. Through their devotion, spiritual ideas are present in these places in a solidified form, as it were. Hence there a man easily feels the awakening of spirituality and realises Him. From time immemorial, numberless Sadhus, devotees and men of realisation have come to these holy places to have a vision of God, and have prayed to Him in an outpouring of their hearts, setting aside all worldly desires. Therefore, God though equally present everywhere, manifests Himself specially in these places. Water can be had anywhere by digging into the

earth. When, however, there is a well or a tank or a lake, one has not to dig for water, but can get it whenever one likes to have it.

335. As cows, after eating their fill, lie down quietly at a place and chew the cud, so after visiting a sacred spot or a place of pilgrimage, you must take hold of the holy thoughts that arose in the mind while there, sit down in a solitary corner and think of them till you are immersed in them. You must not devote yourself to the pursuit of the senses, driving away the higher ideas from your mind immediately after you leave holy places.

336. Travel in all the four quarters of 'the earth, yet you will find nothing (no true religion) anywhere. Whatever there is, is only here (*i.e.* in one's own heart).

337. When the **Master** was alive, many of his disciples used to express to him their desire to visit holy places, and to them he used to reply: "Well, he who has got it (spirituality) here (*i.e.* in the company of the **Master** or within himself) has got it there (*i.e.* in holy places) also. Whereas he who has not got it here, has not got it there either", or, "He who has got the spirit of devotion already within his heart, will find it very much intensified in holy places. But of what profit will a holy place be to him who has no devotion at all? We often hear that the son of so-and-so has run away from home and has gone to Banaras or some such place. But later on we hear again that with great effort he has managed to secure a job there, and has sent money and news about himself to his family. People go to live in some sacred place, but many there are who open shops there and take to business. Going to the western provinces in the company of Mathuranath, I found the environment there just the same as here. The mango trees, the **tamarind** trees, and bamboo groves-they were exactly similar to those of these parts. Hence I told **Hriday**, 'Well, what have we come to see here? Things are just the same here as there, with this one point of difference, that the inhabitants of these places seem to have better digestion.'"

Benefits of Pious Company

338. Milk and water, when brought into contact, are sure to get mixed, and the milk can never be separated again. Similarly if the aspirant thirsting after self-improvement mixes indiscriminately with all sorts of worldly people, not only does he lose his ideal, but he also loses his former faith, love and zeal; they die away imperceptibly.

339. The companionship of the holy and the wise is one of the main elements of spiritual progress.

340. Many warm themselves in the fire kindled by someone else who has taken the trouble of collecting the firewood and other necessary things; similarly, many fix their minds on the Lord by associating with, and following the instructions of, holy men who have come to know the Lord after a good deal of hard penance.

341. If a man sees a pleader, he naturally thinks of lawsuits and courts. Similarly, on seeing a pious **devotee**, one is reminded of God and of the life hereafter.

342. How should one pass one's life? As the fire in the hearth is stirred from time to time with a poker to make it burn brightly and prevent it from going out, so the mind should be occasionally invigorated by the society of the pious.

343. As the blacksmith keeps alive the fire of his furnace by blowing the bellows, So the mind should be kept clean and glowing with the help of pious company.

344. The society of pious men is like the water in which rice is washed. This rice-water has the potency of dissipating alcoholic intoxication. So does the society of the pious relieve worldly men, drunk with the wine of vain desires, from their intoxication.

345. The agent of a rich Zamindar, when he goes into rural localities away from the seat of his **master**, tyrannises over the tenants in various ways. But when he comes back to the headquarters, and is under the eyes of his **master**, he changes his ways, becomes very pious, treats the tenants kindly, investigates into all their grievances fully, and tries to mete out justice impartially to all. The tyrannical agent becomes good through the fear of the **master** and also by reason of his society. Similarly does the society of the pious make even the wicked righteous, awakening awe and reverence in them.

346. Even moist wood placed upon fire soon becomes dry and finally begins to burn. Similarly, the society of the pious drives away the moisture of greed and lust from hearts of worldly persons, and then the fire of **Viveka** (discrimination) burns steadily in them.

347. In the Puranas, we are told that when **Uma**, the Mother of the universe, incarnated Herself as the daughter of the Himalayas, She blessed Her father with the vision of the various manifestations of the omnipotent Mother. But when Giriraj (the king of mountains) asked Her to show him the **Brahman** of the

Vedas, Uma said, "O father, if you wish to realise Brahman, you must live in the company of holy men who have entirely given up the world!"

348. If you wash an elephant well and leave it at large, it is sure to make itself dirty in no time; but if, after the wash, you tie it down in its stable, it will remain clean. So, if by the good influences of holy men you once become pure in spirit, and then allow yourself to mix freely with worldly men, you are sure to lose that purity soon; but if you keep your mind fixed on God, you will never more get soiled in spirit.

Repetition of Divine Names

349. The best thing for people whose minds are attracted by sense-objects is to cultivate the dualistic attitude and chant loudly the 'name' of the Lord as mentioned in Narada Pancharatra (a work on devotion).

350. The Master said to a devotee: "Through the path of devotion the subtle senses come readily and naturally under control. Carnal pleasures become more and more insipid as Divine love grows in your heart. Can the pleasures of the body attract a husband and wife on the day their child has died?"

Devotee: But I have not learnt to love Him.

The Master: Take His 'name' constantly. This will cleanse all sin, lust, and anger and all desire for the pleasure of the body will vanish.

Devotee: But I do not find delight in His 'name'.

The Master: Then pray with a yearning heart that He may teach you to relish His 'name'. Undoubtedly He will grant your prayer." I find no delight in Thy 'name'!"

If a delirious patient loses all taste for food, you must despair of his life. But if he relishes food even slightly, you may hope for his recovery. So I say, "Find joy in His 'name'." Durga, Krishna, Siva-any name will do. And if you daily feel a greater attraction for taking His 'name' and a greater joy in it, you need fear no more. The delirium must get cured, and His grace will surely descend on you.

351. Why is the 'name' insignificant? He and His 'name' are not different. Satyabhama failed to balance the Lord with gold and jewels. But Rukmini succeeded when she placed a Tulasi leaf and the 'name' of Krishna in the other pan of the balance.

352. If you wish to see God, have firm faith in the efficacy of repeating the 'name' of Hari and try to discriminate the real from the unreal.

353. Sri Chaitanya has said: "Very powerful indeed is the Lord's 'name'. It may not bring about immediate results, but it must one day bear fruit, just as we find that a seed left long ago on the cornice of a building at last reaches the ground, germinates, grows into a tree, and bears fruit, when perhaps the building cracks and is demolished."

354. Knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, in whatever state of mind a man utters God's 'name', he acquires the merit of such utterance. A man who voluntarily goes to a river and bathes therein gets the benefit of the bath; so does he also who has been pushed into the water by another, or who, when sleeping soundly, has water thrown upon him.

355. In whatever way one falls, whether consciously or unconsciously, into the lake of immortality, one becomes immortal by the mere immersion. Whoever utters the 'name' of God, and utters it whether voluntarily or involuntarily and pronounces it howsoever, attains immortality in the end.

356. To a religious teacher who said that His 'name' alone is sufficient for Divine realisation, the Master said: "Yes, no doubt the holy 'name' is very effective; but is it sufficient without Love? The soul must hunger for God. What will it avail if I repeat His 'name' while I allow my mind to be attached to 'woman and gold'? Mere muttering of magic incantations will not heal up a scorpion-sting. You must also apply the smoke of burning cow-dung¹. No doubt, man is purged of his sins by once uttering His name.' But the next moment he takes to various sinful ways of living. He has no strength of mind to take a vow that he will no more commit any sin. Ablutions in the Ganges take away all sins, but little do they avail. The story goes that the sins lie in ambush on the trees on the banks, and when the man returns after his bath, those old sins jump down on his shoulders. So, you see, before he has proceeded a few steps, they are on him again, they have possessed him once more. Therefore take the 'name' of the Lord always, but pray to him at the same time that you may gain love for Him, and that your attachment to money, fame and physical comforts-all transient things-may grow less and less."

357. Sing with Bhakti the hallowed 'name' of the Lord, and the mountain of your sins will vanish, just as a mountain of cotton will bum to ashes and disappear if but a spark of fire falls on it.

358. The devotional practices of the worldly-minded are all for the time being. They leave no lasting impression behind. But those who are devoted solely to God chant His 'name' with every breath. Some chant "Om Ram Om" constantly within themselves. The votaries of the path of Knowledge chant "So'ham". Of some, again, the tongue moves constantly (*i.e.*, utters prayers or some Mantra).

359. **Japa** means repeating the 'name' of the Lord silently, sitting in a quiet place. If one continues the repetition with concentration and devotion, one is sure to be blessed with Divine visions ultimately one is sure to have God-realisation. Suppose a big log of wood is immersed in the **Ganges** with one end attached to a chain, which is fixed on the bank. Following the chain, link by link, you can dive into the water and gradually trace your way to the.. log. In the same manner, if you become absorbed in the repetition of His holy name, you will eventually realise Him.

360. The **Master** would often say: "Chant the 'name' of **Hari** (God) morning and evening, clapping your hands all the' while; all your sins and afflictions will then leave you. If you clap your hands standing under a tree, the birds perching on it will flyaway. So if you chant the 'name' of **Hari** clapping your hands at the same time, the birds of evil thoughts will flyaway from the tree of your body."