

SATSANG

Vol. 1 No. 6

August 2, 1973

Biweekly

It is the practice to devote some time for questions and answers at weekly Satsang meetings held in Washington, D.C. We reproduce some of them below.

Q: The spiritual aspirant says the world is full of misery and thus has a pessimistic outlook on life while science brings forth new inventions which make people optimistic and happy. Is this correct?

A: The physical sciences aimed at banishing misery, but all they have done is banish drudgery. The misery persists although we find the country saturated with all that the material civilization has to offer. Despite intense effort and strong will that have changed the whole land into a beehive of activity, we experience the poverty of the anguished mind. Do you think we are happier than our forefathers who did not have the benefit of gadgetry? Certainly not. People thought technology would make man free from drudgery, and this would afford him more leisure to pursue higher objectives. Where then did we miss the target? Technology can give each one of us freedom from drudgery and enough leisure, but it cannot grant us equal capacity to utilize that leisure. This is where things went wrong. If a person spends his leisure time in exploring more avenues of sense enjoyment, he is creating a heavy karmic burden for himself. The more one indulges in sense gratification the more attached he becomes. His mind becomes burdened by the wrapping of desires. This leads to further misery, and happiness remains only a cherished dream. Again, science is amoral, but the use to which we put it determines the quality of life which a society is going to have. Thus, we can see that new inventions might make people optimistic, but they have not made them happy.

Applied science can be a contributing factor to human happiness only if we do not miss the spiritual dimension. The dimension is: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all other things shall be added unto you."

Now, let us have a look at the first part of your question. The spiritual aspirant observes that the world is full of misery and shouts loudly about it. The spiritual aspirant is in search of happiness that is not followed by unhappiness, and therefore he notes that misery is only the manifestation of the disease which is bondage. Therefore he tries to reduce the bondage or eliminate it altogether. Recognition of stark truth, however unpalatable, leads to proper

efforts. This recognition is inaptly termed pessimism. Others who do not go in search of truth can never come out of this misery. Thus, you can see that the spiritual aspirant is not a pessimist, but he has the highest optimism to rid himself of worldly misery.

Science is concerned with the phenomenal world, the manifested universe, the grosser part. The results are easily observable. The spiritual aspirant enters the subtler realms, and his progress is not easily observed by others unless they become subtle. Hence, the spiritual aspirant is dubbed a pessimist by others who know not.

Q: Is it true that the spiritual seeker becomes incapacitated or unable to carry on his worldly duties?

A: The spiritual aspirant spends more time in self introspection, solitude and silence. He is not overtly assertive. Thus, he invites the charge of neglect of worldly duties. A scientist in a laboratory, a business executive and an industrialist who are responsible for making decisions have to spend sufficient time in concentrating on matters at hand. How much more the spiritual aspirant needs to concentrate when his pursuit is the highest prize of human existence! But he alone is singled out for the charge. Any true seeker of knowledge has to spend time in solitude, silence and introspection. Much more so for a seeker of true knowledge, higher knowledge, Self knowledge. The aspirant sometimes goes into states of ecstasy. This appears strange to others, and he is labeled as unfit to carry out worldly duties. People think that the search for higher knowledge is something out of the way, something strange. Self knowledge does not banish the world; it banishes attachment to the world.

The spiritual aspirant acquires one-pointedness and is no more a victim of schizophrenia, split personality. Concentration of mind leads to efficiency in carrying out worldly duties. He is not perturbed by the vicissitudes of fortune, nor is he deterred by circumstances which appear to be unfavorable. He is thus a fitter vehicle to carry out worldly duties. He is steadfast and recollected under all circumstances. He carries the tranquility with him while engaged in worldly duties. Tranquility of mind means more efficiency in work, better output per man hour. All the biofeedback techniques that are prevalent today have this aim in view. "Efficiency in action is yoga."

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During meditation, if you close your eyes you doze off. If you keep them wide open it is distraction. Hence meditate with half-closed eyes.

TEN COMMANDMENTS
of
PARAMASADGURU SHRI GAJANAN MAHARAJ

COMMANDMENT FOUR: May my mind always affirm the holy.

तन्मे मनः शिवसंकल्पमस्तु

Tan me manah shiva sankalpamastu (Shukla Yajurveda, Vajasaneya Samhita 34-I)

A gardner sows useful seeds and weeds out all other growth. If neglected, the plot of land will bear useless weeds. Even so is the mind. When we observe the operation of free will that liberates us from the cycle of Karmic attachments we know the gateway to the Kingdom of Heaven. Our total identification with body consciousness is loosened, and we transcend the bodily tabernacle to enter the subtler regions that lead us to the Spirit that resides within. Our consciousness is enlarged and deepened. The mind conditioning is redeemed. Latent faculties become patent, and the homeward journey is made smooth. For this process to operate it is necessary to cultivate the mind with seeds of virtuous thoughts and throw away the weeds that tilt us sensewards. The final illumination that dawns is not a process of accretion but of instantaneous illumination. The process relates only to the removal of dross that is wrapped around us in the form of coiled up desires. The light then becomes manifest, and we are ushered into a state of happiness that is not followed by unhappiness.

Although fettered by the strings of destiny, man is blessed with the power of discrimination which functions through the intellect. The power of discrimination is the capacity to discern right from wrong. "Thou art made in the image of thy Father." Only in the human species is this power manifest, while in the animal kingdom instinct along rules. Judicious use of this faculty delivers us from the bondage of Karma. It is essential, therefore, that mind entertain thoughts that uplift. Once this innate creative power is cognized, one can command the weeds to wither, and seeds blossom forth. Constant affirmation to do so is necessary to maintain awareness of the Spirit that resides within.

When the creative power is tapped circumstances tend to shape towards fulfillment. Sublimation of the outgoing tendencies of the mind correspondingly alters our reactions to circumstances. We attract what we vibrate, and the first impact is a change in circumstances. Thoughts impinge on the atmosphere. Similarly, when we have holy thoughts, the process of upliftment is accentuated. Thus, we are the makers of our destiny. Thought can buffet circumstances or it can liberate us from the bondage of circumstances. Hence the commandment: "May my mind always affirm the holy."

Circumstances improve when we set in motion the factors that lead to inner purification. Constant affirmation of holy thoughts alters the material conditions around us. We become better receptacles for the manifestation of Divine Grace. We get into the habit of always performing the right action. This is character building. The habit dissolves the dross of desires that cloud the intellect. This is

purification. This purification is functional, i.e., it enables us to reach higher states of evolution. The aim of all our endeavor is Self realization which results by surrender in an egoless state. One can not improve conditions unless inner improvement takes place.

Right thought eliminates suffering. Affirmation of the holy consolidates the habit of acting according to the judgement pronounced by the faculty of discrimination. We can choose our thoughts despite circumstances. This is the thin end of a wedge which enables us to overcome the pangs of destiny.

The word MAN in English or MANAV in Sanskrit comes from the Sanskrit root MAN meaning to know, to think. Man alone can make man the subject matter of thought. Man can discern the Infinite among the finite, the Changeless among the changing, One among the many. Human intellect is not able to grasp the ONE that pervades all manifestation. When, after purification, the intellect is transmuted into a higher state known as PRAJNYA we perceive Reality. Affirmation of the holy creates the proper groovings in the mind to intensify the process of purgation.

It is a good practice to spend some time daily over self introspection. We come to know that we are full to the brim with selfish desires that await gratification and evil thoughts that prey on others. When we become aware of these things we become less prone to find fault with others. The egotistical attitude wanes. The gates to the Kingdom of Heaven within us are unbolted. Holy affirmations on our part during the period of introspection help us consolidate the habit of right thinking. Then we think along right lines not only during the introspection but all the time. Evil thoughts are then unable to make their way towards us as the mind becomes too subtle to entertain grosser thoughts. This is penance of the mind.

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"
(II Cor. 13-5)

Lead me from illusion to Truth
Lead me from darkness to Light
Lead me from death to Immortality (Vedic Prayer)

"And God doth advance in guidance those who seek guidance."
(Holy Koran 19.76)

SAPTA SHLOKI (Seven Verses)

Commentary on Verse one (Continued 5)

यदा सृष्टं जगत्सर्वं तदा लोकापितामहः ।
चतुर्विंशत्यायुक्तं शाश्वतं धर्ममादिशत् ॥१॥

Yadā sr̥ṣṭam jagat sarvām

Tada lokapitamahah

Chaturveda samayuktam

Shashvatam Dharma madishat.....(I)

The process of purification of mind through the agency of fire is a material aid given through the Vedas to the spiritual aspirant. As days went by this came to be known as fire worship or fire sacrifice. The process of fumigation, atmospheric purification, Pranik purification and therefore mind purification was turned into a mere ritual in later periods of history. The essential principle behind the concept was forgotten and it further deteriorated into ugly ritualism with the introduction of flesh and blood as offerings to fire. The pattern of deterioration was similar in various parts of the world. In India and around Jerusalem it developed into a cult that took a dastardly toll of the environment. This had exactly the opposite effect of what was stated in the Vedas. In our last issue we saw how various messengers of God manifested in various parts of the world at various intervals of history to undo the evil.

Avatar of Buddha graced our planet around 553 B.C. to cry halt to these evil practices. The allotted task was:

1. To stop the practice of evil Yajnyas (Fire sacrifice) which involved flesh and blood offerings to fire.
2. To reiterate the doctrine of Karma which is the doctrine of "Reap as you sow" among people who indulged in puerile rituals, forgetting the spirit behind them.
3. To weaken the hold upon the masses of people that a corrupted priesthood had managed to acquire.
4. To provoke the people to think for themselves about the path of liberation (Nirvana). To lay stress on doing good actions only by remaining unattached to the fruit thereof.
5. To combat the intellectuals of the times who indulged in altruistic syllogisms about Almighty while leading a life of crass sensuality.
6. To answer the Hatha yogis who acquired miraculous thaumaturgical powers (siddhis) by yoga practice but were egotistic and divorced from the spirit of surrender.
7. To resuscitate the pristine form of Yajnyas (fire purification) given through the Vedas which purified the atmospheric content and removed the load of anxiety and tension from the minds of the populace.

Out of the allotted task above the last item remained unfulfilled. The unfulfilled task will now be fulfilled, as present conditions require these measures.

Mahavir Prabhu was the senior contemporary of Buddha. He made

non-violence (love)-the central theme of his teachings. Buddha continued the work by adopting the Middle Way, equidistant from extreme asceticism and sensuality. The Lotus and the Cross are symbols of the same Divine message of love with detachment.

Flesh and blood offerings to fire were rampant prior to Buddha's appearance on the scene. The priestly class held a firm sway over the masses, although they were devoid of learning. Ritualism had taken a heavy toll of religion and consequent impurities in the atmosphere worked out their inevitable effect. Ascetism and self mortification on one side and life given to worldly pleasures, irrespective of misery and grief caused to others, on the other side, was the deplorable picture that society presented. Buddha found the Golden Mean.

Sorrow and suffering among the poor and wretched as well as those wallowing in luxury was a material fact of existence. Priestly hypocrisy, casteism, sorcery, lack of cogent thinking, fatalism, overlordship, lapse of moral code, refuge behind high sounding doctrines as a cover for ignorance and craftiness was the order of the day. Reason was scoffed at and dogma ruled the roost. Externals of religion seemed more important than essentials. The Yajnyas did not seem to produce beneficial results as there were interpolations and unholy offerings of flesh. Yajnya rituals held people in such a strong grip that some believed in the mechanical performance of Yajnya rituals and its results without the intermediary of the aspect of Godhead. An antithesis was necessary to bring about synthesis.

Gautam, the Buddha, at this juncture brought the message of reason, right conduct, absence of lust, freedom from passion and inward peace. In 523 B.C. Shakyamuni Gautam entered the life of a monk at the age of twenty-nine. He never claimed to be more than human; never offered to expiate the sins of others. Only self help would lead to Nirvana. He was a righteous prince who had full faith in man's capacity to understand truth. Reason enables man to construct knowledge. Faith renders the determination to pursue the path of knowledge. Added faith leads to reconstruction of knowledge and this leads to strengthening of faith. He gave utmost freedom of thought to his disciples. He asked people not to aspire to Heaven but to seek haven in ethical conduct and self conquest. He insisted on strong mental activity for attaining Nirvana. He forbade exhibition of miracles and signs as they might produce a dent in the reasoning process and lead to blind following. Final attainment comes through the contemplation of Four Great Truths.

Worship consists in fulfilling the design of the person honored, not in offerings of perfume, flowers and the like. Buddha advocated MAITRI, the perfection in loving kindness. Instead of an independent supernatural he insisted on a recognizable reality of attitudes and ideals. One peculiarity about this Avatar is that he was never given to speculations. He never discussed with anybody profundity of knowledge if he felt that it was of no practical use to the enquirer.

His mission was to deal a blow to flesh offerings in Yajnya, to resuscitate Yajnyas performed in the prescribed manner eschewing

violence or offerings of flesh and blood, to arouse people to their innate capacity to reason and sublimate intellect to right action, to pierce the shield of hypocrisy of the priestly class, to throw doubts in the armor of faith because it was on the wrong shoulders. This was the antithesis presented by Him which would ultimately lead to synthesis. He declared that Yajnyas like--ASHWAMEDHA and PURU-SHAMEDHA, if they required animal flesh and blood, would not lead to the desired results. He had stated more than once in the canonical works that sacrificial offerings to fire which involve killing of a goat, sheep or a cow are of no great reward and should not be performed by the wise.

"Ashwamedha, Purushmedha, Samyakpash, Vajpeya and Nirargal Yajnyas involve huge expenditure but bear no corresponding fruit. The righteous never attend the Yajnyas wherein the goat, sheep, cow and other animals are slaughtered as offerings to fire. The righteous attend Yajnyas which are approved by the people wherein no goat, sheep, cow or any other animal is slaughtered for offerings to fire. The wise should perform such Yajnyas as it is highly rewarding; it blesses the Yajaman and brings no evil to him. Such a Yajnya adds to prosperity and the Devatas are pleased." (Samyutta Nikay I-76)

Yajnya, the big boon given by the Almighty, had become a liability due to the introduction of flesh and blood offerings and consequent vitiation of atmosphere. A strong condemnation from the highest pedestal was necessary to wean the people away from evil. This Buddha did in no uncertain terms. But this was only a part of the message of the Blessed One. He strongly urged people to take to Yajnyas performed in the prescribed manner which involved no flesh and blood offerings. For unfoldment of the latter part of the message it was necessary to strike hard at the prevailing practice. Buddha appealed to people to contemplate and reach conclusions enunciated by him. He stressed the importance of performing Yajnyas which would yield prosperity for all; for the righteous always approved of such Yajnyas.

After attaining Bodhi (Knowledge), Buddha, in one of his detours, once paid a visit to a nearby kingdom where Soma fire sacrifice was about to commence. Soma fire sacrifice in those days meant slaughtering hundreds of sheep and goats before the sacrificial altar. The king, delighted to welcome the most revered guest, stated that due to performance of that sacrifice he would secure his place in paradise. Buddha exclaimed that if slaughter of quadrupeds would achieve that object it should be much more elevating if a Sanyasi like himself offered to die on the altar. The king was aghast and seeing things in proper perspective, surrendered himself before the Blessed One. It was TRIRATNA surrender:

BUDDHAM SHARANAM GACHHAMI
DHAMMAM SHARANAM GACHHAMI
SANGHAM SHARANAM GACHHAMI.

Maha Nirvana of Gautama, the Buddha, synchronized with the disappearance of flair for Yajnyas involving animal slaughter, but they were not totally wiped out of existence. The general approbation for such Yajnyas, which was its mainstay, had disappeared but the age-old habit was still noticed off and on.

A short summary of the Fivefold Path is given below by Sally Hobart:

THE FIVEFOLD PATH

The first two pathways, briefly described below, are largely concerned with material effects and benefits.

(1) AGNIHOTRA is an antipollutionary measure. It purifies the atmosphere and consequently purifies the mind, bringing mental peace and material fulfillment. The effectiveness of agnihotra is due to its three inputs: (a) Timing (it is done at sunrise and sunset to coincide with the bombardment of cosmic rays at these times), (b) the substances used, and (c) a short mantra which is chanted to cause a specific vibrational effect. As a result of agnihotra the outgoing tendencies of the mind are reduced, thus lessening the pull of desires which disturbs tranquility. Thus, it is an aid to the spiritual aspirant.

(2) DAAN means "dividing assets." It is a heartfelt offering made to another person. It benefits you by helping you to cultivate an attitude of detachment from possessions and also guarantees many-fold material return for the giver. Daan involves giving a needed article such as money, food, clothing, etc., in a spirit of humility.

The next three pathways deal less with material consideration and more with one's own inner spiritual work.

(3) TAPA means penance. Tapa gives you access to the "Kingdom of Heaven within." A Sanskrit word meaning "to heat," tapa is the control of the mind and senses, the practice of which creates friction. Each person knows and decides for himself in what areas he needs the greatest self-control. If his life is one of comfort, he must learn to do with less until slowly he reduces to necessities. He must go at his own pace, however, so that his progress will be steady and permanent. The practice of tapa leads to inner detachment and lessens dependence on external conditions. It results in an influx of energy and increased awareness of the latent powers within us. When dependence on outside conditions is reduced, true happiness dawns. Performance of agnihotra and daan make the practice of tapa much easier by creating an atmosphere of tranquility for the mind.

(4) KARMA means action. According to the law of karma, you "reap what you sow." There is no action, good or bad, that does not have its consequences. The ideal is to employ our power of discrimination so that right action is always taken. Further, we must not seek the fruit of our actions or have expectations. Our duty is to perform right action regardless of what others do. With the practice of the first three pathways, our duty becomes clear, and we have the strength of will to carry it out. As the chains of karma are loosened, real knowledge dawns, and we are ushered into a state of peace and happiness.

(5) SWADHYAYA means Self study. As we practice the previous four pathways, we become aware of the true nature of Self. We strive to realize our "Self." The study of higher knowledge given by the Messengers of Almighty (Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Muhammad, etc.) sheds light on the Path. It consolidates our faith and yearning to unfold the Divine within. Swadhyaya is the awareness of the necessity of following the Fivefold Path to peace and bliss.

SATSANG is published on the first and third Thursdays of every month.
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NOTE: For further information about SATSANG or the FIVEFOLD PATH

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