

4. The Four Gates

FROM the earliest times, the ancient sages had been engaged in the quest for God. They performed severe penances and observed austerities of many kinds in remote forests to discover the nature of God. They had the faith that, by the grace of God, their earnest efforts would be successful. *Sraddhaavaan labhathe Jnanam*, says the *Gita*, ("The earnest seeker achieves the Supreme Truth"). By persistence even an ant can cover miles of ground. But without making the effort, even an eagle cannot move one inch. Through earnest and diligent effort, anything can be accomplished, however difficult it may be.

The great sages who realised the Divine by their penance have declared that they have been able to see the infinite effulgence of the *Purusha* (Supreme Person) beyond the darkness of ignorance. This declaration is the first message they give to the world in the *Vedas*. *Vedaaham etham Purusham Mahaantham Adityavarnam Tamasah Parasthaath*. ("We have known this Supreme Person, effulgent like a thousand suns, beyond all darkness"). The divine shrines in splendour beyond the darkness of ignorance.

"When man gets rid of his ignorance, he can experience this infinite Light, this spiritual flame", declared the Rishis. Where did they experience the Divine? Not in the external world. Exploring the five life-breaths and the five sheaths of the human body, they experienced the Light of the Spirit in the heart within. They realised that those who love God can find Him nearer to themselves than anything in the world. To those who have no yearning for God, He is farther than the farthest object. *Duuraath duure anthikecha* ("Farther than the farthest and nearest as well").

The four gates one has to pass through

The sages regarded the body as a shrine in which the Divine is the Indweller. The individual is a spark of the Divine. He is not a fragment of Nature or a combination of the five basic elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether). He is an "*amsa*" of the immortal Omni-Self.

To reach the Divine within, one has to qualify himself to pass through four gates' *Shama*, *Vicharana*, *Thriipthi* and *Satsangam* (self-control, enquiry, contentment and the company of the good).

"*Shama*" calls for steadfast faith in God and complete control of the senses and the mind. There are five sense organs and five organs of action, besides the mind, through which these ten function. Once *the jnanendriyas* (the sense organs) are controlled, it is easy to control the *karmendriyas* (organs of action). "*Shama*" (sense control) makes one a master of his mind and *indriyas* (sense and action organs), instead of being their slaves. Such a person transcends the animal nature and can go forward from the human to the Divine.

Foundations for a Godly life

Birds, beasts and other creatures are concerned with the enjoyment of external things. Man alone is gifted with the capacity to discriminate between the transient and the permanent and seek what is everlasting by controlling his senses and giving up attachment to the perishable body and the ephemeral objects of the phenomenal world. It is the consciousness in the physical body that enables man to enjoy the pleasures derived from the objects experienced through the senses. Once this truth is realised, the divine nature of consciousness will become clear. Then, every action can be regarded as an offering to the Divine. Work will then be transformed into worship.

When the identification of the Self with the body goes, action which may seem to be done for personal enjoyment can be converted into actions of dedication to the Divine. When actions are performed in this unselfish spirit, one can experience a sense of liberation and enjoy bliss that passeth understanding. Control over senses is thus the first stage in Self-realisation. This *Sadhana* must be taken up early in one's life. It is the foundation for a godly life. One should not wait till old age to embark on this vital exercise. When death knocks at the door and one is surrounded by one's wailing kith and kin, there may be no time to think of God. Begin the Godward journey from now on. We create the shackles that bind us to the wheel of birth and death. Free yourselves from them by giving up evil deeds. Divine grace is secured only by purity. Purity is achieved through Shama (Selfcontrol).

Everyone needs to cultivate discrimination

The second gate that you have to pass through is *Vicharana* (Enquiry)--the process of discriminating between right and wrong, good and evil, the transient and the eternal. In ordinary life, you have to separate the rice from the stones, the grain from the chaff. Everyone needs to cultivate discrimination by the process of enquiry. Even a monkey knows that it has to remove the rind to eat the fruit inside. Likewise, man has to distinguish between the Atma and the *Anatma* (the Spirit and the matter), the Real and the unreal, good and evil, right and wrong, and then follow the right path. *Buddhi graahyam atheendhriyam* ("The light of intelligence grasps what is beyond the senses"). We have to transcend the senses so that we may seek the Real and the Eternal and reject the ephemeral and the perishable. The things of the world are subject to birth, growth, decay and death. It is by learning to discriminate between the permanent and the passing, man crosses the second stage in Godward journey.

The third gate requires "*Tripti*" (contentment). At this stage man must learn to be content with what he has and what he gets and look upon whatever he receives as gift from God. When he is satisfied with what he has, he can be happy. When he desires for more, he gets discontented and miserable.

There is the story of a man who was bathing in the *Godhavari* when it was in spate. As he was bathing, he saw a stick with a golden handle floating towards him. He caught hold of it and left it on the bank to complete his bath. Meanwhile, the bank caved in and the stick was carried away by the river. After his bath, the man found the stick missing and wailed over his loss. There was no reason for his elation in getting the stick or his grief over its loss. It did not belong to, him. It was a chance acquisition and it left him in the manner it had come. The river brought it and the river carried it away. Why claim any right to it? The temporary attachment to the stick was a bondage which subsequently caused grief. If there had been no attachment there would have been no sorrow.

Cultivate contentment to realise the Divine

Today there are people who are never content with what they have and are ceaselessly seeking more wealth, position or power. They are perpetually harried by discontent. They claim rights of every kind, but have no awareness of their responsibilities. They are consumed by perpetual discontent and insatiable desires. The contented man is the most praiseworthy person. Who is the richest man in the world? Not the millionaire or the billionaire. It is the man who is fully satisfied with what he has. He who is filled with desires is the poorest man in the world. One who wishes to realise the Divine should cultivate contentment.

The great spiritual masters Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda, Tulsidas, Ramadas, Kabir and others--were men who led supremely contented lives. There were numerous occasions when they could not get even food to eat. They regarded such occasions as invitations by God to observe *upavasam* (fasting) as food for the Spirit. They enjoyed such fasts by contemplation of God. When they were entertained to a rich repast, they considered the feast as a gift from God to make up for the fast they had observed. Whether it was a fast or feast, they looked on both with the same sense of contented acceptance. They were not depressed by the former or elated by the latter. *Samathvam yogamuchyathe*, says the *Gita*, ("Equal-mindedness is yoga"). The ancient sages practised such equal-mindedness. And this should be taught to our young people and cultivated by them. It is the index of contentment. One who has achieved contentment can enjoy the bliss of Divine grace.

Students should eschew bad company

The fourth gate to be passed through is Satsangam (the company of good). Youth today are in great need of good company. By associating with people who use bad language, indulge in bad deeds, young men take to bad ways. Students should eschew totally bad company of every kind. You need a lamp to find a way through a dark jungle. Likewise, in the jungle of life, you need the light and guidance of good men to keep you company on the right path and to take you to the right goal. Even a bad person, by association with the good, gets reformed. But a good man, by falling into bad company, becomes bad. If you add one litre of milk to ten litres of water, the milk becomes so diluted that it is valueless. But one litre of water added to ten litres of milk acquires additional value. When you wish to cultivate friendship, ensure that you join a group of good students., who are good in their speech, behaviour and actions. Maintain only normal relations with others.

Once these four gates are passed-- sense-control, discrimination, contentment and *satsang*--the road to Divinity is clear. Our entire life gets transformed.

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Any system of education that does not help to discriminate between right and wrong, that does not instill the fear of sin and the love of God, train you in the codes of humility and reverence, widen the horizon of your wonder, encourage you to worshipfully serve your parents, and inspire you to dedicate your skills and attainments to the progress of your family, village community, country, language and nation, stands condemned. The corruption and cruelty that are rampant in this country can be traced to this grave defect.

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