

Spiritual steps toward peace

The mind should not be permitted to wander as it fancies. It must be controlled without the least tenderness or mercy. If possible, one should aim even at its destruction, that is to say, at making the mind keep away from contact with worldly objects. Why? It is only when that is done that one can grasp one's real identity. The realization of that reality is the state called liberation (*mukthi*). Then, all varieties of troubles and travails, doubts and dilemmas come to an end; one overcomes sorrow, delusion, and anxiety and is established in the holy calmness of peace.

First, give up all impure impulses and cultivate the pure ones. Then, try step by step to give up even these and render the mind objectless (*nir-vishaya*). Peace thus attained is effulgent, blissful, and associated with wisdom; it is indeed the experience of the Godhead, God Himself.

The aspirant who wants to attain this peace has constantly to practise a virtuous life, overcoming all initial obstacles. Peace is a mountain of rock. It can stand up against the continuous floods of temptations from evil. This supreme peace (*prasanthi*) need not be sought anywhere outside: it emanates in the inner consciousness (*anthah-karana*) itself. It is the very basis of the urge toward liberation; it is the root of deep-grounded meditation; it is the prerequisite for the state of superconsciousness (*nir-vikalpa-samadhi*). Established in peace, the reality can be known and experienced, and impulses and mental waves can be stilled. The bliss of realization of the Self (*Atma-ananda*) is proportional to the decline of I-ness and identification with the physical body.

Do not shape your conduct with an eye on the opinion of others. Instead, follow the sweet and pleasant promptings of your own awakened conscience, your own inner Self, bravely, gladly, and steadily. Associate yourself with those who are richly endowed with truth. Spend every second of your life usefully and well. If you possibly can, render service to others. Engage yourself in nursing the sick, but when engaged in service, do not worry about the result, the act of service, or the person to whom it is rendered. The service is made holy and pure if you ignore both the good and the bad and keep on silently repeating in your heart of hearts the *mantra* that appeals to you. Do not enter upon a task through momentary compulsion of some impulse; the impulse might appear very respectable, but you should not let yourself be dragged by it. You have to be always vigilant in this matter, always steadfast and strong.

A joyful outlook will help peace grow, so aspirants should cultivate such an outlook. Their nature should be free from pomp and show. They should understand the secret of character and strengthen their will for betterment. If they move in the world intelligently and with care, they can demonstrate the truth of the statement, "Humans are truly of the nature of peace." For example, valuable time should not be wasted in worthless talk. Conversation must be pleasant and to the point. Then, it can be kept polite and simple, and peace will become firm.

If everything is dedicated to the Lord, there will be no room for worry, sorrow, or even joy. If you rid yourself thus of attachment, peace can never be disturbed. I, my, mine, my own, your, yours —when these ideas take hold of the mind, peace suffers a setback. To get the attitude of sincerely offering all to Him, love is essential, love combined with faith in oneself. That is what is called devotion. Cultivate it steadily every day, and derive joy therefrom. Also, have a mind filled with a vision of equality (*samarasa*), the conviction that fundamentally all are the same. Spiritual life is not a matter of meaningless talk; it is really life lived in the *Atma*; it is the experience of pure bliss; it is just another name for the full life.

For a life of peace, you should keep your promises and never forget them; you should be courteous, well

mannered, and impartial in your dealings. You should be immersed in the ocean of devotion and as immovable as the Himalayas. Remove from the garden of your heart the thorny bushes of greed and anger, jealousy and selfishness, the evil breed of “I” and “mine”. Uproot them even when they emerge as seedlings. All this discipline is truly discipline for earning peace.

Be convinced that you are the universal, immortal *Atma*. That will make every subsequent spiritual discipline easy. Instead, if you fondle the illusion that you are the body, the senses, or only this individual self (*jivi*), any spiritual discipline you do is just tender rot-ridden fruit; it will never grow and become ripe, and the sweet fruit of peace cannot be won even at the end of many lives. To experience yourself as the embodiment of peace, you must proceed from the faith that you are such an embodiment. Give up the theory that you are the body and the senses. This will also lead to the receding of mental impressions (*vasanas*). When they recede, you acquire mastery and gain peace.

Peace can also be defined as true love toward the Lord, Truth itself, and true *dharma*. Hence, it makes realization of the Lord possible. Therefore, have the Lord as your sole aim, hold fast to the desire to realize Him in this very birth, and remain unaffected by lust or greed and by joy and pain, praise and abuse, or any such pair of opposites. Only such fortitude such leads to realization.

Resolve that the purpose of human birth is to reach the Lord through worship. All experience, all knowledge, all actions are toward that end. All that is eaten and all that is heard must be dedicated toward that goal. The Lord’s name is like a mountain of sugar. Approach that mountain, have faith in it, taste it everywhere, and experience bliss. The highest devotee is the one who ever revels in that bliss.

Others live beside the mountain, enjoying for some time the bliss of the constant remembrance of the Lord and at other times experiencing the objects of the world. Such devotees are of the middle class. Some among the rest devote a quarter of their time to the Lord and three quarters to the world. These are of the lower class of devotees. Others take shelter at the foot of the mountain (the Lord’s name) when calamity hits them but move far away from it when the crisis is over. Of these four grades, the highest type of devotee steadily clings to the path and enjoys bliss throughout life. To persist on that path, peace is the best comrade; with its help, you can render your life holy and fulfil its purpose.

But one point has to be carefully noted here. When the body suffers from fever or the mind is otherwise distracted, you don’t feel the taste of things you eat. So too, if the heart is tainted by ignorance and sloth (*thamoguna*) or the mind is otherwise distracted when the Lord’s name is uttered, you are not aware of the sweetness of the name.

As long as sugar is on the tongue, you feel the sweetness in the taste. Similarly, as long as the heart has devotion, peace, and love, you feel bliss.

Instead, if the bitter qualities of lust, anger, and envy germinate in the heart, then fear, anxiety, and sloth will be the fruits thereof. You must have noticed the crane walking silently or standing motionless in order to catch fish. If it plunges headlong or runs about helter skelter, can it catch fish? Similarly, the Lord, in the fish-forms of truth, righteousness, peace, and love, can never be won when the hullabaloo of lust, anger, greed, egotism, and envy is rampant in the heart.

The bliss that transcends all bliss can be achieved if a single discipline, the constant remembrance of the Lord’s name is practised and if, as a consequence, peace is attained. By this, the evil tendencies of the lower nature

can also be conquered. Know that the supreme *Atma (Paramatma)* is your goal, direct all attention to that goal, and control the mind that wanders away from it. That is the essence of the teaching of all the scriptures. Practise this one discipline, and you have practised all the scriptures.

Note this: the Kauravas enjoyed the benefits of the good deeds that they did in previous births, but while so engaged, they reveled in evil deeds. The Pandavas, on the other hand, while suffering from the evil deeds of their past births, engaged in good deeds. This is the difference between the wise and the unwise.

When hardships overwhelm you, know that they are the consequence of your own past deeds. Do not lay the blame on the Lord and develop a grouse against Him; do not pay heed to trouble or take it as such; but engage yourself in the service of others and in deeds of merit. Continue relying on the name of the Lord as support; that is the sign of the wise; that is acting Pandava-like. To strengthen this attitude, peace is a great source of help. Basking in the happiness born of good deeds, you should not be tempted to commit evil ones. You should strive to perform even more meritorious deeds. Then, you can make your lives holier and purer and reach the divine Presence. Such striving is the sign of the highest character. Establishing oneself in peace through this type of character and attaining liberation (*moksha*) —this is the secret of a successful life, the duty of every individual.