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1. Stream Of Supreme Peace

Readers! May this stream of divine love (prema) put down the burning fires of disquiet, ignorance, injustice, and irreligion that is consuming you, and may it slake your thirst. May it shower peace, joy, and happiness on you.

The meaning of peace

Many people are not aware of even the meaning of the phrase supreme peace (prasanthi). It is the backbone of an individual and, for, the spiritual aspirant (sadhaka), the very breath. The word is taken by each to mean something different. Many feel they have peace when some worldly desire that was vexing them is satisfied!

But that is not real peace; it is only a temporary short-lived interval between one worry and another. The syllable pra in prasanthi means expanding, enlarging (vikasa), so prasanthi means that type of peace (santhi), that is to say, the absence of desire, anger, greed, and hatred.

Supreme peace means success in the elimination of the qualities grouped under desire (kama) and anger (krodha). This process of elimination, called "developing equanimity (sama)", is very essential for all. The spiritual aspirant must be constantly engaged in practising it. What does the aspirant strive for? Fulfilment, is it not? In other words, the aspirant strives for peace.

Now, this peace is the innate nature of humanity. It is the force that comes to the aid of those who try to develop discrimination (viveka), renunciation or detachment (vairagya), and keenness of intellect (vichakshana). It is but a phase of the Atma itself. Just like the Atma, it has no beginning or end; no blemish can mar it; it is equaled only by itself; it cannot be compared with any other.

Peace must be manifested in feeling, word, posture, and deed (manas, vak, kaya, karma) in the same uniform, equal, measure. Then, peace (santhi)

becomes the real peace (prasanthi). Bereft of such peace, one cannot hope to get either worldly, other worldly, or trans-worldly bliss. Peace is the nursery of all happiness and all joy.

Thyagaraja knew this, for he sang, "No peace, no happiness". All men need it, whoever they are, be they selfrestrained men or vedanthins, ascetics or scholars, pious men or philosophers.

But people are unable to stand still even for a moment! Absence of mere anger cannot be taken as peace. The winning of a desired object and the satisfaction one then gets should not be confused with peace. The peace that has pervaded the heart must not be shaken subsequently for any reason; only that type of peace (santhi) deserves to be called supreme peace (prasanthi). Supreme peace has no ups and downs; it cannot be partial in adversity and complete in prosperity. It cannot be one thing today and another tomorrow. Always maintaining the same even flow of bliss (ananda), that is supreme peace.

This "Stream of Supreme Peace" (Prasanthi Vahini) tells you what supreme peace is and makes you understand how to earn it, how it can be utilized, and what its attributes are. Every single aspirant has the legitimate right to earn this supreme peace but must learn the path by which it can be earned.

2. Peace, Love, And The Atma

The world today is suffering from selfish politics, nihilistic religion, and heartless competition. This is indeed a disgraceful state of affairs. People have completely forgotten their fundamental, divine nature. At such a crisis, what is most urgently needed is peace and divine love; they are the drugs that will cure this dreaded disease.

No other specific can ameliorate the illness. Love is the only means to get peace. The fuel of love yields the divine flame of peace. Love brings about unity of all mankind, and this unity, combined with spiritual knowledge, will bring about world peace.

The discipline of the self is the basic foundation for successful living. Through that alone can one attain real and lasting peace. And, without peace, there can be no happiness. Peace is the very nature of the Atma. It coexists only with a pure heart; it is never associated with a greedy heart full of desires. Peace is the distinguishing mark of yogis, sages (rishis), and wise men. It doesn't depend on external conditions. It will flee away from the selfish and the sensual. It hates the company of such persons. It is the characteristic of the inner Atma - wonderful, unshakeable, and permanent.

Peace is full of spiritual uplift and the wisdom that is the natural accompaniment of bliss. Genuine peace is won only by control of the senses. Then, it can be called supreme peace. The experience of that stage is the "Stream of Supreme Peace". Calming the mental agitation that surges like waves, leveling the swirls and whirls of likes, dislikes, love, hate, sorrow, joy, hope, and despair, peace is earned and maintained without disturbance.

Peace is of the nature of the Atma. The Atma is imperishable. It doesn't die, like the body and mind. It is universal, subtle; its very nature is knowledge. So, peace also partakes of these characteristics. Knowledge of the Atma destroys illusion, doubt, and sorrow. Hence, knowledge of the Atma confers the steadiest peace and, with it, holiness and happiness.

The Atma is not the object of knowledge; it is the very source and spring of knowledge. Spiritual wisdom (jnana) is that which shows the way to the ripening, the fruition, the freedom, the immortality, the eternal happiness, the eternal peace. Those who are carried away by the vagaries of the senses cannot attain the Atma. Brahman is the one Unchanging in this changing world. The Atma is untarnished by external transformations, changes, or modifications. The glory of the body is not the Atma; the Atma is, really speaking, indescribable and inexpressible.

It is neither this nor that. It can be said to be only It, the Atma, Brahman. Brahman itself has become truth (sathya), love, light, peace, wisdom, and highest bliss (Paramananda). You can attain Brahman through any of these paths. Have no doubt about that; it is the truth.

The Atma is not the five senses, the intellect (buddhi), the vital airs (pranas), or the life force. It can only be described by what it isn't, not by what it is. No one can say it is thus, etc. If anyone says it is this or that, we can take it that they don't know the least thing about it. Much can be said about something unknown; anything, any name can be ascribed to it. In short, the Atma cannot be communicated by words. It is impossible to describe, whoever may try.

3. Shaping The Mind

Bliss (ananda) is the innate nature of all. But the pity is that people are searching for it everywhere except where it is available. Bliss is not something lifeless and inactive. It is another name for purposeful living.

Peace is the authority under which the rule of bliss prevails. It lays down the limits and laws for all activities. It must be made so stable that it is unaffected by the ever-wandering mind or the outward-bound senses. It can be experienced, personally, only through the natural state of wisdom. It is the most precious treasure. The one who grasps that which is deathless, that which cannot be destroyed, that which is not modified - that one is the enjoyer of peace and has no death.

Peace is a shoreless ocean; it is the light that illumines the world. Having it is having all. It confers knowledge of both this world and that. It leads to the understanding of Brahman, the very fulfilment of human life, which Vedanta tries to teach.

Pure love can emanate only from a heart immersed in peace, for it is an atmosphere that pervades and purifies.

Peace is not a conviction arrived at by means of logic. It is the discipline of all disciplined lives. When one is born, the mind is like a blank sheet of white paper. As soon as thinking, feeling, and acting starts, the process of tarnishing the mind also starts. The body depends on the life breath (prana); it depends on the mind and the desires that agitate the mind. Right and truth are befogged by the needs of manners, fashion, convention, custom, etc., and the individual is thrown into a crowd. The solitude is invaded and taken away.

Therefore, the mind must first be calmed and quieted. Only then can the body be healthy and the intellect sharp. The mind is projected at one time only on a single object, not on many. But it is still a conglomeration of thoughts, desires, fancies, imaginings, and the rest. In fact, the mind has inside it, in a

nutshell, the entire history of creation. That is the delusion (maya) mould of humanity. The mind is the battle field (kurukshetra) where good and bad, right and wrong contest for supremacy. Iron has to be beaten flat by iron alone. So too, the inferior, low mind has to be shaped better by the superior mind. One has to make one's mind superior and stronger for the task of personal uplift.

That is the purpose of this "Stream of Supreme Peace" (Prasanthi Vahini). Drink deep from the waters of this Stream, the waters of discipline indicated therein. Immerse yourself in it and become cleansed; may its coolness refresh your sorrows and pains and quench the fires of sin.

4. Overcoming The Disease Of Words Devoid Of Experience

Another disease has now begun to spread in the world to weaken and lessen peace. There are plenty who, parrot-like, purvey wholesome advice on morals, religion, and discipline but who do not practise even a single bit of it themselves. The so-called elders know only how to speak, not how to act. How do those who teach how to act know enough to speak about it? Words devoid of experience - that is the illness that afflicts the world today.

This disease must first be treated and removed, for peace is warped thereby for mankind. To speak is easy for all. The real spiritual aspirant, however, acts and then speaks from experience. People who merely speak but do not act bring about disaster. Such dangerous aspirants and seekers have multiplied, and they have confused the true path. Innocent and simple-minded devotees who attach themselves to such are also being led astray and duped. Let the readers and the aspirants first watch the conduct and then choose. If there is no observance of the advice given, treat them with the respect due to a phonograph record; nothing more. The record is to be treated as a record only, not as Godhead, until you reach the stage when the truth of "Everything is God" becomes patent to you. It is a greater mistake and sin to say "All is God" in mere words only and, while doing so, to treat some as unholy in actual practice.

Many take sweet diction and elocution as important. Of course they are, to some extent, but the sweetness of the words must be there whenever the speech is recalled from memory. It should not turn bitter with the passage of time. Only then are those words nectar (amritha). Today, the sweetness does not persist; it soon turns bitter, because there is no coordination between the speaker, the subject, and conduct. Therefore, instead of nectar (amritha), the words now become false (anritha). The impression will be changeless and permanent when a good subject is clothed in a fitting style and presented with appropriate feeling on the basis of actual experience.

What spiritual aspirants have to do now is this. First, develop wisdom with discrimination (viveka) - that is to say, the capacity to distinguish the eternal from the transitory and to decide which is worthy. Second, make a sincere attempt to experience what is chosen as worthy and true. Third, don't give up the discipline, whatever comes in the way. These three can be called genuine spiritual austerity (tapas). From this austerity alone is born real peace and joy.

Now, everything from ant to almighty is undergoing some change or other, every minute. No object, no living thing is an exception to this law. Creation is ever changing. But this change is of two kinds: external and internal. The external change can be easily cognized; the internal is not so patent, not so easy to understand. That is why it is necessary first to train oneself to understand the external changes, which are clearer, and then gradually to approach the problem of controlling the changing interior. Of these two, whichever you are at, do it with a full heart, to the satisfaction of your own conscience. Don't do it to earn the esteem of others, to please them, or to get praised by them as a great devotee; such an attitude is treason to the Self (Atma-droha).

The Lord loves the inner, not the outer, but you should not neglect the outer. Even in outward behavior and act, you should manifest the inner feeling; that gives a chance for experiencing the feeling of quietude and peace in fuller measure, for the taste of that peace must be enjoyed through thought, word, gesture, and deed. It is only when peace is enjoyed in all these four that it becomes complete; then, in other words, the mind (manas) fades away and the stage designated as genuine peace or union (yoga) is reached.

Philosophy that cannot be understood, scriptures that are not practised - the present world is full of such.

It is a waste to talk of these. Real change must be made in daily conduct and behavior, for these are within the experience of all, they can be easily practised, and their purpose can be clearly grasped. It is only when these are transformed that the inner Atma, deeper, more mysterious, and more

essential, can be understood. In every little act, activity, and word, one should discriminate and adopt the best; that is the sign of the genuine spiritual aspirant.

5. Spiritual Exercise Wins His Grace

Neither peace nor the devotion that gives it, can be obtained through another; each one has to create and develop them for themselves. Still, one should also have the grace of the Lord, which is fundamental. As said in the Upanishads,

"He whom He chooses gets it (Yameva vrunuthe thena labhyah)".

But the spiritual aspirant may doubt, "What then is the need for spiritual exercises?" Those who think of the Lord with devotion can overcome any type of inherited or accumulated karma. With His grace, they can experience even unattainable bliss. Do not doubt the usefulness of spiritual discipline; it can never be fruitless, no, not for anyone. Hold firm to that conviction. Unshaken devotion will win the grace of the Lord. Gajendra is an example of this.

Each is born for some task, but all can exist only on the self-same food and drink: peace. For without peace, there is no bliss. Peace embellishes every act; it softens the hardest core of humanity; it takes you to the footstool of the Lord and wins for you the vision of God. It knows no distinction; it is a force that establishes equality. It is the honey of love in the enchanting flower of life. It is a prime need for yogis and spiritual aspirants. Having acquired it, they can realize the reality tomorrow, if not today. They should put up with all the obstacles in the way, and peace will give them the strength needed for it.

Through peace alone can devotion expand and spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) strike root. Wisdom born of peace is the one and only means of living a full life or a life that knows no death. The inquiry "Who am I?" clears the path for realization. So, one must wait patiently and quietly, placing faith on the grace and wisdom of the Lord. Such an inquirer will be ever earnest and penitent. The inquirer becomes fearless and therefore full of peace through another

conviction also: the Lord is everywhere, visibly present.

To earn peace, its inveterate enemy, anger, must be laid low. Anger is the harvest of the tantalizing mind; it enslaves you and fogs your understanding. Understanding becomes easy when you are full of devotion and your devotion is deep rooted. The form of devotion called peaceful devotion (*santha-bhakthi*) is the best path for attaining eternal, everlasting bliss. Become the messenger of the peace that has no beginning or end. Hold forth the light of peace for humanity. Live the ideal life, ever contented, ever joyous, ever happy.

The spiritual aspirants and devotees of old reached their goal only through peace. Peace gave Ramdas, Tukaram, Kabir, Thyagaraja, Nandanar, etc. the fortitude needed to bear all the calumny, torture, and travail that was their lot. An aspirant who bases efforts on these examples will be free of anger, despair, and doubt. The accounts of their struggles and successes, if contemplated upon, are more useful to the aspirant than contemplation of the powers and accomplishments of the Lord. They will help the aspirant to try out in their own experience the methods developed by these others. One can attain peace by recalling how they overcame handicaps, how they bore troubles, and what paths they trod to cross over to the other bank.

It will be found that peace was the main instrument that saved them from the coils of anger, pain, conceit, doubt, and despair. Therefore listen, oh aspirants! Acquire the instrument, peace, by the grace of the Lord. Direct all efforts to that end.

Whatever the trouble, however great the travail, persist and win by means of remembering the name (*namasmarana*).

Remember Bhishma! Though prostrate on a bed of arrows, he bore the pain patiently, awaiting the dawn of the auspicious moment. He never called out to God in his agony to ask Him to put an end to his suffering. "I shall bear everything, whatever the pain, however long the agony. I shall be silent until the moment comes. Take me when it dawns," he said. Bhishma was chief

among the tranquil devotees. He lay firm and unshakeable.

Peace is essential for everyone. Having it is having all, and not having it takes away the joy of everything.

Although peace is the very nature of every person, anger and greed succeed in suppressing it. When they are removed, peace shines in its own effulgence.

6. The Need For An Unruffled Mind

One must always have calm thoughts. Only then can one's mind have equanimity. It is just a question of the discipline of the mind - difficult in the beginning, but once mastered, capable of conquering all troubles and worries. An unruffled mind is very necessary for every aspirant who is marching forward; it is one of the beneficial qualities. Such a mind gives real strength and happiness. Strive to gain it. Though you may fail even in seven attempts, you are sure to succeed in the eighth if you refuse to be dispirited.

The story of Bruce, who drew inspiration from a spider and won the honours of victory at the eighth attempt, is worth remembering. What gave him victory? Peace, the unruffled mind. He did not yield to despair, cowardice, or helplessness; he was calm throughout, and he secured success. Even if calamity befalls, the aspirant should not lose heart. The mind must ever be pure, untarnished, and calm, full of courage. No weeping for the past, no faltering in the performance of the task at hand, that is the mark of an aspirant. Be prepared to face gladly any obstacle in the path. Only such can realize the goal.

Elation at profit, joy, and cheer; dejection at loss and misery - these are natural characteristics common to all mortals. What, then, is the excellence of aspirants? They should not forget the principle: Be vigilant and suffer the inevitable gladly. When difficulties and losses overwhelm you, do not lose heart and precipitate some action, but meditate calmly on how they came to be. Try to discover some simple means of overcoming or avoiding them, in an atmosphere of peace.

When the blow is directed to the head, see that the turban alone gets it - this is the mark of keen intelligence.

Peace is essential for this sharpness of intellect. Haste and worry confuse the intelligence. Peace develops all the beneficial characteristics. Even farsightedness grows through peace, and, through that, obstacles and

dangers can be anticipated and averted. Aspirants have to pay attention to some subtle points here. They have special problems, viz. their failings, mistakes, drawbacks, etc. The will power can be so purified and strengthened that these failings will never more be recollected. If thoughts run after the failings and begin to dwell on how they came about, when they came about, etc., the aspirants are prone to commit a few more.

Once they have been recognized as failings, why worry about their birth and ancestry? Instead, allow the mind to dwell on good things. Of what profit is it to spend time on things that are no longer necessary? Do not think of them any more. The aspirant will find this attitude useful.

If aspirants are unsuccessful in following one discipline, they have to seek and know the cause of their defeat.

This analysis is necessary. They must then see that, in the second stage, the trait is not repeated. They should try their best to guard themselves against it. In such matters, one must be quick and active, like the squirrel. Agility and vigilance must be combined with sharpness of intelligence, too. All this can be earned only through peace.

Steady and undeviating earnestness is very important for avoiding and overcoming conflicts in the mind.

One has to be calm and unruffled. Courage, wise counsel, and steadiness - these make the will power (icchasakthi) strong and sturdy. Lustre in the face, splendour in the eye, a determined look, a noble voice, large-hearted charity of feeling, unwavering goodness - these are the signposts of a developing and progressing will-force. A mind without agitations, a joyous and unblemished outlook - these are the marks of a person in whom peace has taken root.

7. Prayer

The devotee can well pray for and ask from the Lord the gift of such a peace, as well as the virtues (sat-gunas) necessary for their growth. Why, the aspirant has only this one thing as capital for earning any goal: prayer.

Some people may have some doubts related to this. Of what avail is prayer? Will the Lord gratify all that we ask for in our prayers? He gives us only what, according to Him, we need or deserve, is it not? Will the Lord like to give us all that we ask for in our prayers to Him? Under such circumstances, what is the use of prayer? Of course, all these doubts can be resolved.

If the devotee has dedicated everything - body, mind, and existence - to the Lord, He will Himself look after everything, for He will always be with the devotee. Under such conditions, there is no need for prayer. But have you so dedicated yourself and surrendered everything to the Lord? No. When losses occur, calamities come, or plans go awry, the devotee blames the Lord. Some, on the other hand, pray to Him to save them. If you avoid both of these, as well as reliance on others, if you place complete faith on the Lord at all times, why should He deny you His grace? Why should He desist from helping you? Men do not rely fully and unswervingly on the Lord.

Therefore, though you have to be the agent and the instrument doing everything, keep on praying with devotion and faith. Faith is the product of peace, not of haste and hurry. For the acquisition of the grace of the Lord and the resulting awareness of the reality, the quality of peace is the prime need.

Every aspirant is aware of how Droupadi, through her dharma and peace, deserved the grace of the Lord.

Though her husbands were mighty heroes and far-famed monarchs, she sought refuge in Lord Krishna, feeling that all others were of no use. But Prahlada did not seek refuge under similar circumstances. At birth, he had surrendered all to the Lord. He knew that the Lord was ever by his side and

that he was ever by the side of the Lord, so he had no need to call out to Him for protection. Prahlada was unaware of anything except the Lord; he could not distinguish between one function of the Lord and another. So, how could he pray for protection, when he did not know that He was being punished? For all such God-intoxicated and dedicated souls, prayer is unnecessary.

But until that stage is reached, prayer in an attitude of peace is essential for aspirants. Prayer with this attitude will promote equanimity in enjoyment (sama-rasa). The Lord can be prayed to by means of recital of the name of God, continual repetition of the name of the Lord, meditation, or devotional singing. In every one of these, the chief item is the divine name. That is why Krishna spoke in the Gita of recitation of the name.

When repetition of the name is done, it is better to recite aloud and make it devotional singing. This will inspire the gathering. If devotional songs are sung in a sweet voice, people will be drawn toward the Lord. Gradually, it will develop into love for God, and His grace will follow in due course. One should patiently wait for that grace.

Even for being blessed by the Lord's grace, one must have peace and await patiently. Only serenity succeeds in bringing about the result of spiritual practice. Add this lesson to the practices you are engaged in, night and day, and to the following mantra for peace:

Asatho ma sadgamaya
Thamaso ma jyothir gamaya
Mrityor ma amritham gamaya

From untruth, lead us to truth
From darkness, lead us to light
From death, to immortality

The meaning of this mantra is given variously by different people, some elaborately, some succinctly. Here is the real meaning of the mantra.

The first prayer is: "Oh Lord, when I am deriving happiness through the objects of this world, make me forget the unreal objects and show me the way to permanent happiness."

The second prayer is: "Oh Lord, when the objects of the world attract me, remove the darkness that hides the all-pervading Atma, which every such object really is."

The third prayer is: "Oh Lord, bless me through Your grace with the immortality (Paramananda) that results from the awareness of the effulgence of the Atma that is immanent in every object."

8. Dwelling In God

The true devotee will always be dwelling in God. The true devotee has no time to know or feel welfare or worries.

Attaining the Lord is the one and only idea in the mind. It is hard to understand this nature, except by examples. A small child runs about in fear shouting, "mommy, mommy!", searching for its missing mother. The mother takes the child in her arms and places it on her lap. The child stops crying and is free from all fear. But can the child calculate and find out the difference between its previous state and its present relief? No. Nor is it necessary to do so.

Also, the one who seeks always to serve the Lord will immerse themselves in God when the glorious chance comes. In that Presence, no anxiety or trouble can disturb a person. Anxiety and trouble pester only until the moment of attainment; then, all attention is diverted to the experience. The past struggle and travail are forgotten.

Therefore, aspirants and devotees must ignore and forget all the thousand troubles that have gone before and be engaged only in thoughts of the Lord. Immerse yourselves in them and derive joy therefrom. Devotion has no other reward. It is the cause, and it is also the effect; there are no two. Devotion is itself the realization. Through the path of wisdom also, when the veil of ignorance (a-jnana) is removed, the self-same realization occurs. In the path of devotion, one derives not one jot of joy from any source except the Lord. Every obstacle in this path can be overcome by the power of universal consciousness (chith-sakthi). This power is weakened by the feelings "I am the enjoyer and these are mine (ahamkara and mamakara)". As long as one has this consciousness, one has no real contentment. One will be driven to seek for things that will give even more joy.

Every devotee hopes ultimately to experience the joy of supreme bliss as a result of their spiritual discipline.

But that bliss is not something newly earned or acquired; it is not some new experience to be won by spiritual discipline. It is always with one, within one; but it can't be tasted because of the obstacle of the ego, which acts as a screen hiding it from view. One has to rend that veil asunder. Spiritual discipline is all the aspirant has to do.

Then, the ever-existing bliss can be cognized. It does not arise anew; it is always there. What does come and go is the screen of "I" and "mine", which covers the bliss.

While trying to remove the screen of "I am the enjoyer" and "these things are mine", the aspirant should not hasten frantically and worry too much if the expected bliss is not discovered. At such times, peace is an unfailing help. If peace is cultivated well at first, then one can succeed in any task, however difficult.

Everyone is entitled to acquire and benefit by peace such as this. All are children of peace. However many the progeny, peace is "mother" to each of them. For every one of them, old or young, great or small, she is "mother" in an equal measure; when they call her, each has to address her as "mother". Children brought up by peace avoid all pain and sorrow, bear all varieties of happiness, and, at last, lay their heads on the lap of the "mother" in perfect security.

9. The Path Of Devotion

Winning such perfect security requires following the path of full devotion, dedicating oneself to the Lord. It cannot be obtained by other means. The path of spiritual wisdom (jnana) is possible only for one in a million; it is beyond the reach of all. Is it possible to negate the body and the objective world, so patent to the senses, by repeating "Not this, not this (nethi, nethi)"? Unless this is possible, how can the "Not this, not this" argument be applied? Under present conditions, the path of wisdom is indeed very difficult. The path of selfless activity is also not quite so feasible. It is also full of difficulties. To work in the proper spirit, love and devotion are essential for success. The path of yoga or communion also bristles with obstacles. Thus, the path of devotion is the smoothest, the most conducive to success, and the most bliss-yielding.

Even this path of devotion cannot be defined and demarcated as such and such. Since it has many forms, roads, and types of experience, it is impossible for anyone to describe it accurately and fully. Each devotee gets bliss only through their individual experience - through the experience of other devotees, at best they can get only encouragement and guidance. The experience changes from one person to another, so it eludes comparison and even description. If anyone describes it by examples and limits, be sure that their experience is not real.

The limited soul is immersed in the limitless love of the Lord, and how can words describe that experience called by the Upanishads as the unbroken unflow of sweetness? One cannot express that state of unbounded devotion in human language. By outward signs that can be cognized by the senses, one can feel that the devotee is in a high state of bliss, but who can gauge the depth of that joy? It has no relation with the senses at all. Devotion has to be realized in your own experience, though great souls can illumine the path a little for you by their examples.

With their help, you can grasp something of the path, but always remember

that words fail when they approach the Beyond. They are useful only for purposes of the objective world. They are instruments of no value in regions of experience where comparisons are impossible.

Still, consider a few illustrations. Maitreyi, one of the foremost devotees among women, compared the mind of a devotee to a still lake, that is to say, all agitation is stopped, the mind becomes inactive, ineffective, so to say, worn out into nothing. Kapilamaharshi, speaking of the same devotion, compares it to a flowing stream. Streams and rivers like the Ganga and the Godavari flow uninterruptedly, without rest or any other thought, toward the sea; so too, from the very moment of birth, the devotee yearns to reach the sea of the grace of the Lord. Devotion is that unbroken relationship. Whatever the task on hand, whatever road is trod, the mind dwells on the goal alone, the goal of attaining the Lord. Again, in the Devi Bhagavatham, it is said that devotion is like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. This is more or less like the image of the river. Sankara characterizes devotion differently in the Sivanandalahari. Like the piece of iron that is drawn toward the magnet, the individual soul (jivi) is drawn toward and attaches itself firmly to the Lord. All modifications of the mind get merged in the feet of the Lord.

Also, Ramanuja explained that devotion as well as meditation done through love are essentially the same.

Though each interprets it differently, all interpretations are correct, for they are all based on actual experience, which cannot be negated. These statements do not exhaust the types; there are many more, for devotion has a thousand forms; it flows along a thousand streams to reach the ocean of the Lord's grace. The goal of all the forms is the merger of the individual soul with Brahman, an absorption in total bliss.

10. Faith In Oneself And In The Scriptures

Many people are disheartened by the fear that such merger is beyond their reach in this Kali age (the era we are now in), however much they may try. But this is a kind of weakness, and nothing more. It is not a question of the path of communion (yoga) adopted; whatever the path, if one has faith in oneself and faith in the scriptures, the goal is bound to be won. Some pretend to have faith in both, all the while doubting them in the heart of hearts. Each one can discover for themselves the measure of their faith by the results. If the experience of merger is absent, it is due to the absence of these two kinds of faith. They must be in one, as the very breath of existence. Only then can one succeed in spiritual practice and attain union (aikya).

Of course, those without faith are without anything. They cannot benefit by advice. The present state of affairs is due to men losing faith in themselves and in the scriptures. Even those who claim to have faith do not conduct themselves according to the scriptures and nourish them. Consequently, goodness and purity (sathwic quality) have gone out of the world, and wicked habits and degradation have gained the upper hand. If this atmosphere is to be transformed, and if the world is to enjoy security and peace, every pious God-fearing person (asthika) must cultivate faith in themselves and in the scriptures and practise in their own life the disciplines enjoined in the scriptures.

Naturally, some modifications may have to be made out of consideration for the place, the time, and the individual, but the fundamental outlook and significant meaning should not be changed. The means by which those ideals are to be reached may be changed, but not the ideals themselves.

Suppose a child refuses to swallow a pill when it is in bed suffering from fever and clamours for a banana instead. Do you know what to do? Don't omit the pill; instead, insert the pill inside the banana and offer it to the child to be swallowed. Its desire is satisfied, and also the fever comes down. The fundamental has not been discarded; it has remained unchanged. Only the

method of administering it has been modified.

So too, in the midst of the crazy habits and behaviors of today, there is no use presenting the scriptures in a language that is unfamiliar to most people. The scriptures can be explained in easy, understandable language, and the fundamentals will not be affected by this. Then, the scriptures can be practised, understood, experienced, and enjoyed. Consequently, faith in the scriptures will also be strengthened, and peace will also be stabilized upon faith. So, every believer (asthika) must practise the important directions of the scriptures and demonstrate in their life the sweetness of such a dedicated life, so that all others might appreciate the truth and value of the ideals and disciplines.

Big personages, claiming to be great, declaim about the Vedas, the scriptures, and the Atma. They freely quote the similes and metaphors contained in the books, but, by their conduct, they diminish their lustre. When the eyes are closed, of what use is it to fill the rest of the body with vital consciousness? Not even a single step can be taken forward. Similarly, with the eye of faith in the scriptures closed, what can one practise if asked to carry on?

Therefore, from today on, readers who are aspirants in the spiritual plane should try to grasp the basic meaning of the scriptures. They are a sacred guide along the road. If the scriptures are not believed, the reality will elude them. To understand the meaning, one must have peace and fortitude. Peace is of great assistance in this. If only the great personages would explain the scriptures in simple, easily understandable language to the ignorant, then discontent and disquiet would disappear and belief in God would increase. Harmony would grow between people. Nourishing the scriptures will promote the nourishment of the welfare of the world.

To nourish the scriptures, speak the truth (sathyam vada); to nourish the world, speak pleasantly (priyam vada). If these two maxims are kept in view and practised, no greater discipline is needed. It is only in an atmosphere of peace that such sacred maxims can be put into action.

To earn that calmness, steady effort and harmony are essential, in the same manner as for nourishing the scripture and the world. When peace is acquired, then all is equanimity (sama-rasa). Equanimity is the very nature of peace. Everyone should be endowed with that peace and that equanimity and should establish an age of belief devoid of non-scriptural behaviour, attitude, conduct, habits, and character.

For this purpose, an army of spiritual aspirants has to be trained in ashrams and centres of piety. This is the responsibility mainly of those who run the ashrams, for they must have faith in themselves in order to train the army along sound lines. Otherwise, things will get more confounded. The elders and the "great", the so-called big personages, are responsible by their practices for the evident loss of faith in scriptures and oneself and the consequent discord and disquiet. Hence, they must all gird up their loins to reestablish and restore peace.

Devotion is the very fountainhead of this peace, so if everyone plants it in their heart and nourishes it with care and constant attention, a harvest of goodness and harmony can be reaped. The path of devotion is the best, under present conditions.

That is why the Bhagavatha is saturated with devotion. Without devotion, the Lord cannot be understood.

Divine power (sakthi), however high and mighty, has to assume the human form itself if it intends to protect and foster the world. That form alone will be suitable for all to listen to, learn from, honour, and serve. Those without devotion will take that form as merely human, for they cannot grasp the absolute or Supreme reality principle (Para-thathwa). This is why it is said in the Gita:

Avajananthi mam muudha manusheemthanumasritham,
Param bhavam ajanantho mama bhuthamaheswaram.

The foolish disregard me when I assume human form,
not understanding my higher nature as the great Lord of beings.

Men are failing to keep steady faith in such invaluable declarations; this is the worst sacrilege.

11. The Spirituality Of India

Judged properly, India (Bharatha-desa) is the holiest of all countries. The meaningful Vedic sacrificial rites (yajna) and devotional practices (yoga) that originated in India, as well as the way of life followed by its people, are not found in any other country or in the history of any other people. Such intensive cultivation of the spirit, such supremely useful spiritual literature, arose out of the experiences of the people of this country! It holds the very first place in this field.

The four Vedas, the six principal systems of philosophical vision (darsanas), the eighteen epics (Puranas), and the commentaries (bhashyas) of the great adepts of theory and practice all arose in India. Also, the disciplines and methods of spiritual practice expounded by the great souls (mahatmas), who have answered questions like the following. What is meant by life? What is the meaning of God? What transformations in the individual soul (jivi) take place on death?

No other place is so congenial for sages (rishis) and great souls as this country. Here, people have tasted the entire gamut of spiritual bliss. This country played the chief role in spreading the doctrine of nonviolence (ahimsa) taught in Buddhism - the land that gave birth to Buddha is India. When the spiritual experience, the essence of the scriptures of the eternal religion (sanathana dharma) of this sacred land is being treasured by other countries, what about the fate of those who do not realize its worth but are engaged in squeezing the essence out and making it dry?

So arise, all ye who aspire to take up the spiritual discipline. Immerse yourselves in actual practice! Strengthen your faith! Cultivate it! Make peace your secure possession! Saturate your lives with bliss! Enjoy the vision of the supreme bliss of the Self (Atma-rama)! Arise and delay not!

12. 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 (anthahkarana) 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 (Atmananda) 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.

13. Detachment And Renunciation

What exactly is liberation? It is samadhi or peace attained through the spiritual discipline of the cleansing of the inner person - the spiritual discipline of negating the impressions that one gets through seeing, hearing, reading, learning, doing, and getting done. People suffering unbearable physical agony don't take any interest in entertainment, do they? Similarly, a sincere seeker and devotee can have no interest in the world's theatre of objective pleasure and petty passion. These inferior desires have first to be renounced and checked. They lie at the root of all misery. Passion is the product of delusion; it dwells in the mansion of activity (rajas). Renunciation or detachment (vairagya) is resident in the pure quality (sathwic guna). Passion is demonic (a-suric) in nature. Passion, ignorance, and egotism are all born of delusion. Passion brings about death, while detachment brings about liberation; it is wisdom.

Stabilizing oneself in detachment is itself the highest austerity (tapas), the most exacting vow. One has to be ever alert in that austerity and strive again and again. Like a child endeavoring to walk, you might toddle a few steps, falter, and fall, but like the child, you must lift yourself up with a smile and start again. Peace is essential for such persistence. Failures are not boulders that block your way, remember, they are stepping stones to victory.

Be bound to the Atma in you; take rest and refuge in That and meditate on That without interruption. Then, all bonds will loosen of themselves, for the bond with which you attach yourself to the Lord or the Atma has the power of unbinding all other bonds.

The "unattached" have real love toward all. Their love is not only pure, it is divine as well. It is the embodiment of peace. Without a doubt, one can attain the Lord if one becomes devoid of all passion or attachment (raga) and engages in the actions detailed above.

Renunciation or detachment (vairagya), of course, does not mean the giving

up of hearth and home, or of high estate and even kingdoms. It is the understanding of the divinity immanent in everything, the fading away of all the distinct names and forms, the bliss of experiencing in everything and every place the Divine, which is its reality. That is the true meaning of the maxim "detachment (raga-lessness)". As long as one cognizes the world of name and form, one is burdened with attachment. How can one be desireless when the mind is immersed in thoughts, feelings, and experience of the objective world? One might have given up all, and yet be full of these.

Such cannot be said to have detachment. Surely, even for the acquisition of this pure spirit of detachment, peace is very necessary.

14. Happiness Through Unity

The ocean is one and indivisible, but here it is called the North Sea and there the South Sea! So too, the Lord, the ocean of grace, is one, but He is assigned various names according to the age or era of time. The holy rivers seeking to reach the ocean flow from all directions; so too, people seek the Lord through various spiritual disciplines and finally merge themselves, all of them, in Krishna.

Mankind can win happiness only through unity, and not through diversity. If thoughts and feelings run along the routes of distinction and division, happiness is beyond reach and peace cannot be experienced. Without peace, you have no chance to be joyful. Consider the one indivisible ocean as the goal. What does the direction of flow matter? What does the name matter? The rivers merge in the self-same sea, don't they? Spiritual aspirants and devotees who adopt the path of yoga, the path of devotion, or the path of peace, dharma, truth, and love reach the ocean of grace at last, and name and form fade away; distinctions disappear. They are blessed with merger in the sea of peace.

So, unity must always be kept before the eye. Never nourish ideas of difference, of distinct names and forms of the Lord, of divergent paths. Such ideas are obstacles for the attainment of bliss. Avoid these obstacles; develop equal vision. Remember, peace is the royal road to strengthen that vision and reach the ocean of grace.

15. Peace Through Truth, Dharma, Love, Patience

To enjoy peace, mankind must be controlled and directed by ideals of dharma; this depends on mutual toleration in the family, which again is based on individual conduct that is pure (sathwic) and that aims at pleasing everyone. Such conduct has a charm all its own. Avoid in your behavior, actions, and speech all trace of the desire to pain others, to insult others, or to cause loss or misery to others. Find out the best means of reforming yourself thus, practise this type of living, desist from injury to yourself and your own good, and always walk in the path of truth. That is verily the path of beauty; that is conduct that is really charming.

For this, large heartedness is essential. People can acquire it only if they have (1) an inborn desire (samskara) for it and (2) devotion in every act. Through devotion to the Lord, one gets humility, fear of sin, and faith in scripture.

Through these qualities, littleness of mind is wiped out and people become large-hearted. Therefore, Oh ye seekers! First direct your efforts toward acquiring faith in God and fear of sin. These two will promote meekness; and, remember, meekness is peace.

Some people, the sort that have no experience and that do not put their words into practice, go about declaring that the way to peace is to keep the world at a distance. That is no peace; it is just the opposite. If the seed is taken far away from the tree, won't it grow into a tree again? If you do not want that, you have to boil the seed or fry it over a fire. So too, the impulses and desires that germinate have to be fried over the fire of discrimination (vichara); then, real peace can emerge.

Instead, if one escapes only from the responsibilities of life in society, peace cannot be enjoyed; it will never come. But, if desires (vasanas) are controlled and eliminated, there is no need at all to run away. Content with what one has, refusing to be worried by the absence of things that one hasn't, trying as

far as possible to reduce and eliminate desires and passions and hatreds, one should strive to cultivate truth, dharma, love, and patience (sahana). Cultivate them and, at the same time, practise them systematically.

This is the real duty of humanity, the real purpose of human birth. If the above-mentioned four qualities are cultivated and practised by each, there will be no envy between people; selfish grabbing will cease; the interests of others will be respected; and world peace can be stabilized. Instead, if you yourself have no peace, how can you ensure world peace? Those enthusiastic about world peace must first learn how to experience and enjoy peace themselves; later, they can spread that peace to the world outside themselves and help to promote it.

16. World Peace And Individual Peace

Everywhere now, one can hear the cry "world peace", "world peace", but the number of people who can tell how it can be attained is very small! No one can even picture correctly what exactly peace means. For, if one has acquired true peace and experienced it, the turmoils and confusions of the world will not be cognized at all. You cannot be aware of its absence if you have it. Peace (santhi) means, "the giving up of the activities of the senses". How can such peace be spread and "promoted" by anyone who has gained it? It can be experienced, but it is incapable of being exchanged from person to person. The best that can be done is to show the way to others, to inform others of its sweetness. How can another's hunger be appeased by your eating your food? The diner alone derives satisfaction from the dinner. Peace is also of such a nature. Each has to earn and experience it for themselves, so that all may have it. Love and fortitude are enough to confer peace. But don't concentrate on mere outward show; let these virtues saturate your thought, word, and deed. That is also the way to establish world peace.

Certain others declare that prayer can bring about world peace and ask people to pray. Of course, it is good to pray; but peace can never be gained by that alone. Prayer must be united with practice. You should not pray for one thing and practise another. Such prayer is only a means of deception. The words you utter, the deeds you do, the prayers you make must all be directed along the same path. While repeating prayers for world peace, if you cannot patiently put up with others, if you slander others and look down upon them, you yourself will have no peace, you will have turmoil instead! And, with the turmoil, you will have all the attendant sorrow and pain!

Through world peace, individual peace can be cultivated. When food is taken by the hand to the mouth, chewed, and swallowed, the essence spreads to every part of the body; so also, if the hands are engaged in acts promoting peace and the tongue is engaged in prayers for peace, by these two means, the essence of peace will spread into parts of the world, which is but the body of the Lord. The peace of the world is the basis for genuine peace.

Many do not know the meaning of the statement, "The body is the temple (dehodevalayam)". Why did the temple arise? For the Lord worshipped within. If there is no such Lord, it cannot be called a temple. But people's actions are now all against this plain fact. Now, all worship is being done to the temple, forgetting that the temple is not God. The temple is to be preserved, cleaned, and decorated for the sake of God therein; it should be made a good means of realizing Him. That is all.

Similarly, the body is the temple of the Lord, the form of the Atma (Atma-swarupa). Forgetting the need for faith in the Atma, for the bliss derived from the Atma, for the worship of the Atma, and for dedication to the Atma, people are now immersed in faith in the body, bliss of the body, decoration of the body, and dedication to the body.

In spite of everything, the body is evanescent; but through the temple, the Lord can be seen. Through the body, the Atma that is within can be realized. That is your main task. Conscious of this, try always to keep watch over the body and protect it. Do not neglect the Lord within; do not hold fast to the unreal, temporary, outer building. Of course, you should not ruin the temple, either; its maintenance is also essential. But never forget that what gives value and purpose to it is the Atma within.

Similarly, with world peace (loka-santhi) and individual peace (Atma-santhi). The temple is world peace; the Lord within is individual peace. World peace is a means to subserve the peace of the individual. The world is the Lord's mansion. Know it as such. He is moving about in that mansion, in its many rooms. God's worship can be done well only if the temple is clean and pure. So, engage yourselves in winning the two, peace for the world and peace for yourselves. Do not ignore the Lord, whose mansion is the world. Without Him, it is a tomb (savam), not a temple (sivam). If you always remember Him, that is joy and victory.

World peace is the life breath of all beings, so strive ever for that. The Lord can be won only when the sacred motherland is immersed in peace. When nature (prakriti) merges in God (Paramatma), it is called liberation (moksha).

So seekers of liberation must yearn for the peace and love of the world as much as they yearn for the love and grace of the highest Atma. Without the grace of both the world and the highest Atma, the strong and subtle evil of the senses cannot be conquered. That is, the destruction of the mind, the stilling of the agitations of the mind, cannot be done. Therefore, everyone's chief duty is to achieve peace.

Many argue that self-respect is peace. But they confuse self-respect with the respect given to the inferior vehicle, the body, or to one's status. That is respect for the person, not respect for the self (Atma). Respect given to the Lord within, the Atma, is real self-respect; nothing else is. Truth is Atma; pure love is Atma; the Lord is Atma; selfless service is Atma. Respect for these is self-respect. Of course, peace is of this type and not of the other types. Keeping the all-merciful Lord, the personification of truth, the Lord whose very nature is love, always in memory, that is real Self-respect. To earn this self-respect, one has to cast aside as worthless the respect that the world accords to wealth and status, to ignore praise and blame, derision and flattery, and to engage in spiritual practice with full faith in truth and the Lord. That is real peace, pure peace, eternal peace.

There is no status higher than that of the Lord; no embodiment of His higher than truth; no beauty of His higher than peace. No, not even in all the fourteen worlds (lokas) and in the entire Creation. Now, in the past, and for ever and ever. This is the truth, and I repeat it. Truth enveloped in the darkest illusion (maya) will still shine brilliantly; however strongly you may imprison it in darkness, its effulgence cannot be suppressed.

Truth can never die; untruth can never live. You must all get firmly established in this belief.

Of what can one say, "This is permanent"? How can one ever believe that anything is permanent? Truly, when one sees from birth all things changing, one's experience itself undergoing various transformations and the atmosphere in which one grows constantly being transformed, when one grows up in an environment that has no permanency, how can that belief

arise? Observing all this, it can be declared without any fear of contradiction that this is an unreal world. For if this is real, how can it change? All that suffers change is unreal; reality alone is changeless, stable, permanent. The changeless, stable, permanent entity is the Atma alone; that alone is real, that alone is permanent. The Atma is the form of the Lord; it is the power of the Lord.

17. Path Of Inquiry, Discrimination, Renunciation

Only Humanity has the capacity, the credentials for realizing the power of the Lord, for earning that power (sakthi). It is indeed tragic that, even after achieving human birth, people do not realize that eternal reality or even make an attempt to understand It. If this chance is missed, when can they attempt it?

Why, they do not concern themselves with the very purpose for which they have come! Did they come only for living like all other animals, birds, or insects, eating, wandering about, sleeping, and seeking pleasure? If the answer is "no", then for what else? Can we say that a person is just another animal, like the rest? People have three things that animals don't have: the power to reason, the power to renounce, and the power to decide on right and wrong. These are special powers; but of what use are they unless they are applied in actual practice? If they are used, the name "human" is apt, otherwise, the name "animal" has to be used.

The three powers mentioned above should be applied by people not only in worldly matters but even in the investigation of the ultimate truth. Really speaking, if inquiry, discrimination, and renunciation are carried out while passing through the joys and sorrows of life, the conviction is bound to dawn in a moment that all this is unreal, that all this has no basis in truth. When such knowledge dawns, one is certain to tread the path of religion and spiritual discipline and take up the inquiry that will lead to the truth. This is the task in which people must be engaged.

Well! If only everyone would ask the questions "Who are we? Whence did we come? Where have we come to? How long will we be here?", the truth could be easily grasped. That questioning is the sign of discrimination (viveka). When, by means of this discrimination, the idea that the world is impermanent gets deeply rooted in the mind, all attachments cease automatically. That is the stage of renunciation or detachment (vairagya).

One asks, is it worthwhile to be caught up in this unreal world? This is false and misleading, one tells oneself.

One then turns one's efforts to the realm of the Lord, the realm of truth. That is the wise decision.

It is through discrimination (viveka) and detachment or renunciation (vairagya) that one understands who one really is. Without them, it is impossible to know it. The Lord has blessed only humanity with these two. He has endowed people so that they might use them for that purpose. Hence, people are truly fortunate. But alas, people have forgotten the task for which they have come, ignored the question whence they came, closed their eyes to where they are, diverted their intelligence toward amusement and creature comfort, and wasted all their powers. What a tragedy! If in this most propitious human birth itself the Godhead is not sought, when else is a person to succeed?

If today is squandered so,
Will tomorrow help you?

If one's real nature is first understood, the rest can all be easily grasped. One will thereafter know who one is, whence one came, where one has come to, and how long one exists.

These four issues are dependent, one on the other. If one is solved, all the rest can be known; but not one of these can be ignored. For example, suppose you write a letter to somebody. Whatever the contents of the letter, if it is put into an envelope and posted, whom will it reach? No one. Well, will it come back at least to the person who wrote it? No. In the end, it will be neither here nor there. Instead, if on the cover the address of the person whom it should reach and the address of the person who wrote it are both written, one can even predict when the letter will reach its destination, is it

not? So too, what do you do with your letter, your life? To whom do you address it? Where do you write it? When can it reach? Whom should it reach? Ignoring all these, not caring even for the time, if you simply worry yourself, how can you ever hope to know the reality?

First, you must know your own full address. Who are you? The Atma. Whence did you come? From the Atma. Where are you going? To the Atma itself. How long can you be here? Until you merge with the Atma.

Where are you now? In the unreal, the ever-changing. What are you engaged in? In evanescent tasks. In what form? As non-Self (an-Atma). Therefore, what should you do? Give up these three and try the other three:

try to enter the eternal, to engage in never-changing tasks, and to enjoy the bliss of the Atma. This must be the chief effort of the individual soul (jivi), its perpetual aim, the greatest adventure in this world. All other tasks are humdrum and silly; they glitter a moment and vanish. You will realize this truth if only you turn your back on them and watch, wisely.

18. The Crest-jewel Of Fools

A short story will illustrate these points. A king had transferred all responsibility of ruling to his minister and was spending his time in ease. He never worried about anything, be it big or small. He had a personal companion, who was always by his side, more or less as a bodyguard. This fellow was very wise, for he never did anything without deep deliberation about the how, the why, and the wherefore. The king took all this deliberation to be just foolishness and nicknamed him "Crest-Jewel of Fools" (Avivekasikhamani). He actually engraved the title on a plate of gold and compelled the fellow to wear it on his forehead for all to see! Many people at court were misled by this and took the fellow to be an ignoramus; they did not heed his words.

The king fell ill and took to bed. The kingdom was combed for physicians who could heal the king. Messengers went to the eight corners of the country, seeking drugs and doctors. Hundreds were busy around the royal patient, but, all efforts failed; the illness worsened day by day. The king was at the door of death.

The king suspected that his end was near; so he hurriedly made some dispositions, spoke to those whom he wanted to meet, and was immersed in sorrow. He had no thought of God or any other auspicious power. He was in terrible fear of death and could not think of anything else.

One day, he called Crest-Jewel of Fools to his bedside and whispered feebly in his ear, "Well; I am going soon, my friend!" Then, the fool said without any compunction, "What? You are weak and cannot walk a few steps; I will order a palanquin. Please wait till it is ready." "No palanquin can take me there," said the king. "Then I will order a chariot," entreated the fool. "The chariot is also of no use," replied the king. "Of course, then the horse is the only means of journey," wailed his companion, who seemed eager to rescue his master and spare him the toils of travel. The king said that the horse also could not enter there.

The fool was at his wits end. Then suddenly an idea struck him, and he said, "Come on master! I will carry you there." The king became sad and said, "My dear friend, when one's time has come, one has to go alone to that place! No companion can be taken." The fool was thrown in great doubt. He asked the king, "It is curious, isn't it? You say that the palanquin won't reach there, that the chariot can't go there, or the horse; you say that no second person can join you! Well, can't you tell me at least where that place is?" The king replied, "I don't know." Immediately, the fool unwound the golden plate with the engraving "Crest-Jewel of Fools" and tied it round the brow of the king, saying, "King, you know so much about the place, even which things cannot go there, but you do not know where it is, and still you are going there soon. You deserve this title much more than I." The king was overcome with shame. "Alas," he said to himself. "I wasted my years in eating, sleeping, and pursuing pleasures, never caring to ask who I am, whence I came, what I am doing, whither I am going, and why I came. The precious time allotted to me has come very near its end. I have no more time for all that inquiry. Death is knocking at the door; children have started weeping; my subjects are in great anxiety. Can I, under such conditions, immerse myself in inquiry? Can a thought that I never entertained throughout my life suddenly arise now, during my last moments? It is impossible. Yes, I deserve the title "Crest-Jewel of Fools" more than anyone else, for I wasted my life in useless pursuits, without any thought of the reality." The king let it be proclaimed that inquiry is the best means of knowing the truth, that inquiry must be directed to separating the true from the untrue, the eternal from the temporary, that people should arrive at the conclusion "God is the only true and eternal entity," and that by their own independent investigation, his subjects must not only grasp the entity intellectually but must also attain the grace of God by their pure lives. Announcing this lesson to his subjects, the king breathed his last.

Note how the king, blinded by material power and pleasures, misdirected his energies toward the world, away from God, and ended his days in agony.

19. Inquire, Discriminate, Detach

Every aspirant must enter onto the path of inquiry. Only then can the conviction dawn and grow that nature and all learning connected with nature are unreal; only then will these be given a relative, not an absolute value.

They are, of course, to be learned and experienced as necessary for existence, as a kind of daily routine. However, they should not be mistaken to be the highest knowledge, the unchanging eternal truth. That mistake, if committed, leads to an agitated mind (a-santhi). Agitation produces worry and anxiety, which in turn destroy peace.

If you aspire to peace, equanimity, the basic thing is to have faith in the temporary nature of Nature and be engaged in the uninterrupted contemplation of the changeless Godhead.

Therefore, do not be bound by selfish attachments. Engage yourself in the discharge of your duties. Do not allow yourself to be gladdened by success or saddened by failure. Be ready to renounce all that is harmful. Then, through discrimination, you can beat the drum of victory! Great declarations like these reveal the highest truth and the glory of the Godhead.

If the two paths of spiritual wisdom (jnana) and devotion (bhakthi) are compared, it can be said that the Lord's grace is won more easily by devotion than by the other path. In the discipline of devotion, there is the need to grasp the reality and its inner meaning fully and clearly. For this, the objective world is itself the proof and argument, the effort and means. To know this, spiritual inquiry has to be pursued; such an inquiry will grant unshakeable peace. Only inquiry can reveal the truth behind all the objective world. It is your experience, isn't it, that when you do some task carefully for a long time, correcting your mistakes as and when you discover them and avoiding their repetition while continuing with the task, you invariably achieve even more success than you hoped to get? What is wanted is just the unflagging desire to achieve victory. That will lead you to discover the means thereof, to

develop earnestness and care in the pursuit of those means, and to get success. The wish must be strengthened by the will, and the will by the effort.

Well, take the example of people anxious to become stronger. If the wish is powerful, they will first learn the means of realizing this aim - the exercise, the diet, the disciplines, etc. Then, when they practise them, the will is changed to steadiness in effort. But one important thing must be noted. There are many who say that the absence of wish and will is best. This is not as good as having one wish above all others, or, rather, "one wish" and one alone, to the exclusion of all else. Even more superior is having steadiness of effort in realizing that one wish. For one can then promote not only one's own good but even the world's good. Let your wish and will and effort be directed to your own good; do not divert them to worldly pleasures, for that will cause harm and destroy peace.

20. Deep Into The Ocean Of Peace

People are bundles of impulses and intentions, and giving free rein to the impulses reduces their innate divinity and inner peace. The impulses are the fuel, the intentions are the fire. The fire can be put out only by placing the fuel aside. The dying down of the fire is the attainment of peace. Dive deep into the ocean of peace and earn the invaluable pearl, the bliss of the Atma (Atma-ananda). When that opportunity is seized, one becomes the personification of the effulgent, the holy state of peace. That is why the Vedas declare that people are the embodiment of peace. Therefore, don't delude yourself by imagining that you are the seat of disquiet and untruth. Know that you are the embodiment of peace, that love is the blood that flows in your veins, and that your very nature is joy; realize this by actual practice and experience.

Without peace, it is impossible to see the truth. Just as the rays of the sun are necessary for the blossoming flower and the ripening fruit, so the rays of peace are necessary for the full development of humanity. Only with peace can one ripen into the realization of the true, the eternal, the blissful Brahman.

Brahman is a shoreless, bottomless ocean. That ocean is the basis for the ever-shifting waves, the evidence and result of its power. The wave emerges from the sea, leaps forth from it, falls back into it, and dissolves itself into it. Though the power of the sea is thus manifested in ups and downs, rise and fall, the sea is steady and fixed.

But the world is concerned more with the temporary and the shifting and thinks that the waves are very important.

So also, the aspirant is more concerned with attainments that are evanescent and changing than with the unchanging experience of the principle behind, the Brahman. All the senses, all the impulses rise up in overpowering strength like waves from the sea, roar in fury, and subside in the waters; they do not

confer peace. The wise thing is to forget these waves and to direct attention toward the sea beneath, which is without change. Only then can you attain peace and swim about happily in the deep undisturbed waters.

Why are the denizens of the deep sea so happy? Because they have water all around them - above, below, on all sides. They cannot survive for even a second outside it. Even when they have perforce to come out of the water, they struggle frantically to reach it again, for the disaster will bring about death itself. So too, when one is immersed in peace, one will experience the joy and exhilaration of that state, in all ways. A person who has tasted that joy and exhilaration can never tolerate even for a second the state of peacelessness (a-santhi) and will never desert the peaceful stage. If it ever happens that one is forced into peacelessness, one will struggle furiously and desperately to return to the state of peace and might even die in the attempt.

But why should such a person ever be thrown on the shore of peacelessness and risk life in escaping back into peace? One can be ever in a state of bliss, immersed in the ocean of peace, can't one? One should not float on the upper waves of impulses and intentions. One must dive deeper and try to revel at the calmer levels. This is the most urgent task. Then, one will not endanger oneself by being thrown out and beyond, upon the dry shore.

Only this type of pure and holy peace will remove the walls that now divide people. It will transform all the absurd hatreds, misunderstandings, disgusts, and prejudices that warp human behavior. Peace is the manifestation of the greatness of love. It will endow all who come under its authority with tremendous power for good. It can place God within your grasp and you within God's grasp.

Spiritual discipline can confer no higher power. It is the very secret of the life principle in creation. It is the highest individualization of the glory of the Atma. It is the magic wand in the hands of the devotee, with which one can master the entire world. Besides, it confers the greatest degree of contentment.

21. The Need For Activity (karma)

But peace does not mean inactivity, the mere inert life of eating and squatting. You should not spend your time eating and sleeping, saying to yourself that the Lord will come to your help when the need arises. You must arise and work. God helps those who help themselves, and He will help no other. Learn from the life of Prahlada the lesson that the Lord alone is to be loved; learn also the technique of that process. Do the work that has fallen to your lot sincerely and efficiently. Give up everything that is outside the service of the Lord. Follow the footsteps of Prahlada. Through the grace of the Lord, you can win the joy of peace, the thrill of fullness, and the bliss of immortality.

Work has to be undertaken, so that time does not hang heavily on you and is not a burden. Work is your mission. Without it, you will get lost in the darkness of ignorance and be overwhelmed by dullness and sloth (thamas). Ignorance will multiply your doubts - and these have to be chopped off with the sword of wisdom.

On one occasion, when such mystic subjects were taught to Arjuna, he got puzzled and asked Krishna, "One time, You say that we should renounce all activities (karmas); another time, You say that the discipline of karma (karma-yoga) has to be adopted. Tell me, which of these two paths is better?" Krishna answered thus. "Renunciation (sanyasa) and the discipline of karma both lead to the same goal of liberation, Oh Arjuna! But know this. There is greater joy in doing work than in giving up work. Renunciation and work are not contradictory; they are interdependent, complementary. By giving up work, without the progress derived from activity and the training achieved through it, people will only decline. The real renunciant (sanyasin) is one who does not desire one thing or hate another." The word renunciation can well be applied to work done without regard to success or failure, profit or loss, honour or dishonour, to any activity performed as an offering to the Lord. Mere inactivity announced by the saffron cloth and the shaved head is no renunciation at all. To deserve the name, one must have avoided the duality

of joy and grief, of good and bad.

So, better than the giving up of activity is the giving up of its fruits; it also yields greater joy. That is the best path. However, whether renunciation or the discipline of activity is followed, the fruit of the other can also be won. There is bliss in activity, but there is also bliss in renunciation.

Renunciation devoid of the discipline of activity (karma-yoga) will lead to grief. How can anyone get away from activity? However much you may avoid action, isn't it necessary at least to engage yourself in the remembrance of the Lord, in meditation or repetition of the name? That too is action. If these are given up, there is no joy in life. Everyone has to do some activity, whatever the form. One who engages in the yoga of action, renouncing all fruits of action and following the discipline of silence, can realize Brahman within a short time. Action will not stick to such. Action for such a person is akin to breathing. Life is impossible without the activity of breathing; so too, for the aspirant, work is essential. Unrest (a-santhi) comes only when the fruit of action is desired.

If the fruit is disregarded and joy is derived from the very action itself, then one gets peace. No one thinks of the results and benefits of the action of breathing, do they? So too, when work is done, never worry about its result; that gives real peace.

22. Canalize The Thoughts, Reform The Character

Many, many ideas take shape in the human heart; they wander to the very ends of the eight directions. Some of these are mutually supporting; some are mutually destructive. But without leaving them free, they must all be canalized and disciplined to subserve some high purpose. Only then can you be established in peace. You must have the cleverness needed for this canalization. It is not merely cleverness in the use of external things; it lies more in the control and subjugation of the mental faculties; this is essential for the blossoming of the Atma.

For understanding the faculties of your own mind, you must move with elders experienced in that line or in the sublimation of the vagaries of the mind.

Until you intelligently fix upon a certain direction for all your thoughts and activities, you will only be building shadowy castles in the air and roaming about in them. Even your senses will be pursuing contradictory paths and distracting your attention to such an extent that you cannot easily come to a decision regarding the ideal. They make you feel that their paths are the best. But you should always strive to change the course of the senses and the imagination to subjects and desires that are conducive to the ideal, whatever the difficulty and however serious the crisis. That is the sign of real intelligence; that is the road to real peace.

Everyone has, by virtue of human nature itself, the discrimination needed to strive for the ideal. You should not allow the slightest idea of neglect to hinder you or stand in your way. Peace based on spiritual wisdom (jnana) can arise only out of actual experience; the end and the consequence of each and every act is and must be wisdom. The progress of the individual consists in activity done with discrimination.

Take one small example: Even a person who has all the means of comfortable travel through the grace of the Lord, namely, cars, planes, or other

conveniences, has perforce to walk, in spite of everything, for the sake of health! So too, whoever one is, whatever the spiritual discipline engaged in, one has perforce to experience activity and learn the consequence themselves for the sake of their mental health! Otherwise, mental weakness cannot be cured.

In order to achieve this, one must move with experienced people and people who are basic supports of good life. One must grasp the Reality with their help and experience the Reality oneself. Only then can peace be established in the personality.

In this created world, wisdom (jnana) is enveloped in ignorance (a-jnana). This is inevitable at all times. As long as the lamp is burning, there will be a shadow beneath it; so too, when the flame of illusion is burning, the shadow of ignorance is inevitable. If the ignorance surrounding the Atma is destroyed by wisdom, then everything will be illumined as at sunrise, and peace will be the result.

If the above result is to be obtained, some effort has to be made to provide the necessary conditions. The mind is conditioned into good or bad by the environment. Hence, people have to create the needed environment themselves. The reformers of today do not strive to transform people's qualities. They try to bring about equality in economic matters, in outer life. But these can be lasting only when the qualities of character are built on the basis of equality. If the quality of equality is not developed, even if everything is divided and shared equally, that state of equality cannot last. So, there is need to reform the character by means of the knowledge of the Atma. This reform alone will bear fruit, the fruit of peace.

Therefore, culture must be directed toward the reform of character. Along with that reform and to the extent it is gained, the outward standard of economic life can also be adjusted. First, one must be trained in the technique of peace and happiness (santhosha). These do not depend on the outer, the external, the visible objective world.

So there is no profit in worrying about or debating these matters. You must take refuge in the Atma and the contemplation of the nature of the Atma, that is to say, in the real I. All this objective world shines only through the glory of the Atma.

The body does not deserve to be identified with the immortal; it is inert matter, and nothing better. You are not the thing connoted by the word "I". You are the One, without a second. The body is subject to change, it is evanescent, liable to decline. How can it be the Atma? No, Atma is One and Only. It cannot coexist with another entity. It is only when every spiritual aspirant, everyone, is aware of this that equality, equanimity, and exhilaration can be established on earth.

Therefore, contemplate on the reality (Thathwa). Leaving aside the seen, concentrate on the seer. That will illumine the truth.

23. The Atma Is The Reality

The nature of light is to reveal objects, by illumining them. But real illumination is the property only of the Atma. The sun and fire can only "penetrate" darkness; they do not destroy it completely, because darkness and light are opposed to each other. But the effulgence of the Atma has no opposition at all; all objects, all natures are favourable to it. It illumines all. Hence the statement, "The gods acclaim It as the light of lights (Tham deva jyothisham jyothih)." Its form is spiritual wisdom (jnana) - not things, like the physical body. The body is ever-changing; it is not eternal. The Atma shines equally everywhere and illumines everything, without any distinction. It is of the nature of bliss and of consciousness (chaithanya). So, it automatically becomes Brahman! This conviction is the essence of wisdom.

One who sees a pot can know that it is a pot clearly, by oneself, right? But how is it that one identifies oneself with the body simply because attachment makes one feel that it is one's own body? This is ignorance (a-jnana); the my-ness, the I-consciousness. Spiritual wisdom (jnana), which is of the nature of the Atma, is indestructible; ignorance, of the nature of the body, is destructible.

The Atma is formless; hence, the threefold affliction of the qualities (gunas) [pure (sathwic), dull (thamasic), and passionate (rajasic)] does not afflict It. The six-fold mutation will not affect It, for It is always being (sat), always It and It alone. It is a guest, distinct from the body that It inhabits. The body is subject to illness, growth, and decay. The Atma is free from all mutations. The Atma has no desires, impulses, or intentions. It is above and beyond the pure, dull, and passionate qualities. "The world is the doer; God is as the lotus on the water, unaffected, unattached (prakritih kartha Purushasthu pushkara palasavannirlepah)." The Atma is misleadingly denoted by the word "I" (aham). How can the seen be the seer, the eternal? How can the body be the real I? When this mistake is made, there can be no peace and no joy. It is only when this truth is understood and experienced that one can have peace.

The Atma has to be realized as distinct from this seen (drisya) world, from all that is "seen". This is possible only when one has the discrimination (viveka) to be freed from bondage to the world (prakriti) and to release oneself from the ignorance that tells one that the "seen" is indeed the real. Such discrimination has to be acquired by the practice of the eightfold discipline, which cleanses the ignorance that darkens the intellect. Then, the intellect becomes pure and sharp and gets directed toward the Atma. Ignorant people, to whom the understanding of the Atma is beyond reach, delude themselves by the belief that they can derive joy from the objective world, which their senses can experience. If only one reflects a little, even the little joy thus derived will be found to be only the same Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda) and not something separate! For, everything, everywhere, is bliss, is nectar (amritha). All bliss is Atmic bliss.

But when one can rest in the endless coolness of the actual full moon sailing in the sky, who will be content with the painted moon and its painted light on a piece of canvas? Who will care even to cast a glance at it? As the saying goes, will a honey-sucking bee ever drink bitter juice? So too, the aspirant who has tasted the nectar of self knowledge, the knowledge of the Atma, can never relish the sensory objective world.

The person engrossed in a painted moon can never know the real moon. So too, people deluded by the attraction of the world grope about in their ignorance of the Atma and wallow in the unreal manifold world shaped by the three qualities (gunas).

On the other hand, the learned one who seeks the reality gives up glittering falsehood and revels in the Atma, deriving peace therefrom.

So, never mistake the "seen (drisya)" to be permanent or true! You cannot exult in anything else except the ocean of the bliss of the indivisible undivided Atma, or Brahman. You can get real and full contentment only in the significant, sweet, meaningful experience of the highest Brahman, Supreme Reality Itself; only that can give solace from this cycle of birth and death. These unreal things can never afford contentment; the present is

without existence and significance. Nothing other than the Atma can ever, at any time or in any manner, confer any benefit or bring about any peace. Nothing else can put an end to sorrow and shower bliss.

Everything other than the Atma is nonexistent (a-sat), like silver in the mother of pearl; a delusion, like water in the mirage; a mistake, with no real silver that one can take or real water to slake one's thirst. So too, when you base your life on the sensory objective world, which is non-Atma and produced by ignorance, you can never derive happiness or joy. Such pictorial products of fancy can't appease hunger, slake thirst, or satisfy desire. Only the Real can produce those results.

So too, the removal of the recurring sorrow of existence (samsara) can be effected only by the attainment of Brahman. Genuine peace cannot be earned by means of desires and intentions, study and scholarship, pomp and publicity. It can come only by experiencing the Atma, to however small an extent.

By mere force of intention, one can imagine in an instant a scene in America, but can it also be experienced in actuality at that very instant? No. There is no use imagining and framing in the fancy; it must be experienced, in mind, word, and body. Only then can one claim to have genuine peace. Therefore, merely knowing about Brahman, peace, truth, or self-realization leads nowhere; you may even know that there is bliss in these, but all that is of no use. You have to dedicate your life to win that bliss and experience it and enter upon the discipline needed to acquire it. Only then do you deserve the grace of the Lord and the attainment of Brahman; only then can you get the true bliss.

It is this subject that the Viveka Chudamani (Crest Jewel of Wisdom) also teaches in many ways. One who follows its teaching, without deviation, can taste the nectar of Atmic bliss, can attain the goal of life. Devoid of the sorrow that is inevitable in dealing with sensory objects, having no intentions and desires, one should be immersed in the bliss of one's own real reality. Humanity alone, of all creation, has the qualification to achieve this supreme

joy. What a sad tragedy that people should neglect their right and wander about, seeking petty pleasures and empty tinsel! Like children playing with dolls and sticks, calling them elephants and horses, people play; but that does not make them real elephants and horses. Ignorant people play in all seriousness, imagining the objects of the world to be real, and they laugh and weep in joy and sorrow, they blossom and droop while up and down. But that does not make the illusory world (maya jagath) less unreal!

When you are immersed in deep sleep, what happens to your joy and sorrow, your profits and losses? They have no reality then and no reality later. At both times, they are but the creations of your fancy. One who knows this secret will always exult in the joy of companionship with one's own self, the contemplation of their own inner reality. That is real permanent joy.

Therefore, listen, all aspirants! You, whose real nature is Atmic! Seek to discover your true Self, your genuine Reality; attain the knowledge that you are the Atma itself; exult in the Atma alone; taste the undiluted incomparable unlimited bliss of the awareness of the real self. Let time merge in Him whose form is time; that is the legitimate task of humanity, as taught in a philosophical composition of Sankaracharya.

Jnana raksham samadrthya Jnaneer sudrdhavan bhaveth,
Sa eva niratham svasmin svanandam anu-bhunjathe.

With the amulet of spiritual wisdom around the arm,
One can escape the evil influence of the vile stars called sensual attractions.

One should not, out of the boldness born of the consciousness of wisdom, give free vent to the senses. One should be always vigilant regarding the external world and immersed in the contemplation of one's own inner reality. That is the sign of the knower of the higher truth. When one is ever in that

stage, the self-illuminating truth will ever be before the mind's eye and the objective world will melt away.

If the seen or the objective world is superimposed on that undivided indivisible Brahman, it will be only as real as the turrets and bastions of a city among the clouds. Can anyone build castles on the air and live in them?

The ether (akasa), of course, is your basic form; but for that reason, you cannot erect a city thereon. The turrets and bastions you seem to see in the clouds are unreal, baseless creations of your own fancy. So too, in the etherlike, formless highest Brahman (Parabrahman), all this superimposed world is false, baseless. Everything is but the consciousness (chaithanya) of the non-dual unequaled bliss-pervaded highest Brahman.

24. The Practice Of Silence

Always enjoy the peace that is the result of the stoppage of all mental agitations. Do not allow the mind to run after this and that. Train it to keep quiet. Keep away and afar the mental reactions caused by contact with the external world. Then, you can become the very Being (sat). That is the state of the sage or the state beyond the realm of the senses, where their fiat does not run. That is the real self-realization that is the goal of life.

"Practice silence (mounam bhajasva)," it is said. But what is silence? Not simply keeping the mouth shut. It means getting beyond the influence of all the senses and getting established always in the consciousness of one's own reality. Perpetual bliss is also perpetual peace. When the mind withdraws from the external world, the tongue also becomes silent; all senses follow suit, that is genuine silence.

This stage cannot be described in words; it cannot be communicated to others as "such and such". It belongs to the realm of experience. Silence (mounam) means "the form of the absolute Supreme that is beyond all this".

The one who has reached it will be in the highest peace and the highest bliss. If the activities of the intelligence are stilled, and if the intelligence is harboured in Brahman, one will become suffused with Brahman. One has to observe all this world as from afar, with a disinterested attitude - the world can be overcome only by this means.

One will then escape the wiles of the intellect, which breeds doubts, delusions, and dualistic diversions, away from the Atmic reality.

The intellect (buddhi) is the prime instrument. It should be cleaned of the rust of the sensory world and made to shine in its own pristine effulgence. The intellect should not be wavering, agitated, or even activated, for when it is so, the world appears manifold and multi-formed. When the intellect is tranquil, peace envelops; one is immersed in splendour (tejas); one is in complete

continuous bliss. This stage is also called "without mental ideation", the agitationless-silence (nir-vikalpa-mounam).

Therefore, may all aspirants, by their disciplined lives and ceaseless effort, establish themselves in the knowledge of their own Reality. May they keep their minds away from the objective world, always contemplate on the highest Atma (Paramatma), acquire peace of mind, withdraw from all attachment to the sensory world, saturate themselves in bliss, and know themselves as the One without a second.

This is the stage of disinterestedness, the condition of the person who has grasped the truth. There will nevermore be another; everything, that is is himself. The holy Suka, Sanaka, Sananda, and others achieved the bliss of this incomparable peace. They had no affliction or doubt or distraction, because they had no need for further thought or inquiry. They were not bothered by any change or modification, for the Atma has no such! Once people have tasted this sweetness, they will nevermore give ear to any other word or disturbing argument; they will nevermore entertain distracting thoughts; they will nevermore be drawn toward any diversionary attachment. They will hold steadfastly to their convictions.

25. Action Rather Than Inaction

The special characteristic of humanity among all created beings is the power of wisdom with discrimination (viveka). One is therefore bound to act, always using the discriminating capacity. But two forces are putting obstacles in the way: (1) the ignorant, who prompt toward inaction, and (2) the teachers of Sankhya. The first set of people, though they may desist from activity through their senses, are unable to withdraw their minds and continue to commit acts in their minds. So, their inactivity is meaningless and unreal; it is relatively or apparently but not absolutely true (mithya).

The Sankhyans use a number of arguments against action. "Action causes both good and evil," so, it is said, "the wise must give up all action." In the Gita, Krishna met this argument and showed the way to get the good out of action and avoid the evil. The Sankhyans further say that action results in a mixture of pain and pleasure, of benefit and loss, and it leads the doer to heaven, to hell, or back again to the earth, that is to say, to bondage of some sort. So, they ask people to give up action and take to inaction.

The Gita has a reply for this also. Action will bring about bondage only when it is engaged in with a view to the fruit thereof. When done without any thought of the fruit, on the other hand, it leads to liberation (moksha) itself! Why, even liberated persons engage in action, although they do not derive any benefit therefrom, just to promote the welfare of the world! Or rather, whatever a liberated person does must automatically be conducive to the welfare of the world. Action has to be engaged in; that is the means of securing the peace already won.

26. Practice Of The Name Of The Lord

If there is anything sweeter than all things sweet, more auspicious than all things auspicious, holier than all holy objects, verily, it is the name of the Lord - or the Lord Himself. Give up the company of the worldly minded, the association with those infected by demonic qualities. Keep away from every type of wrong doing. Seek always the company of the wise, the good. Take refuge in the Lord Himself (Narayana); He, the pure One, is the perfect embodiment of peace, of happiness, and of wisdom. He, the Lord (Sri Hari), is seated within everyone. He stays constantly in the place where devotees sincerely and with single-mindedness honour His name. Therefore, first, you have to practice intense devotion toward the Lord. Then, you can certainly attain real and permanent happiness and wisdom.

Of what use is the pursuit of the fleeting pleasures of the senses? Worship the Lord (Hari) who lives in the cavity of your heart, nearer to you than your dearest friend, or your father, mother, or guru, the Lord who is all these and more to you. The physical body for whose sake you crave all this comfort and luxury is subject to damage and decay. One day, it will become food for dogs and jackals. The Lord, on the other hand, makes for joy and the thrill of holy love. Surrender your heart to Him; He desires nothing else from you. He can be won by no other means, by neither unlimited scholarship nor pompous vows and colorful ritual.

Of the span of human life, one half is wasted in sleep; the other is frittered away in satisfying stupid desires, in the helpless ignorance of childhood and boyhood, in misery, travail, and illness, in the inanity of old age. You can devote yourself to some worthwhile activity, but beware of misusing even these for the silly pursuit of sensual pleasure. Use at least these precious years for the contemplation of the glory of the Lord, for fixing your mind on His lotus feet ever more firmly, and thus for transporting yourself across the vast ocean of birth and death.

Therefore, practise at all times and under all conditions, with love and

devotion, remembrance of the name of the Lord. That name is a thunderbolt that will pulverize mountains of sin. It is the unfailing cure for the dread disease of sheer worldliness. Surely, that name will endow you with peace!

The name of God (Hari) is as the effulgence of the rising sun, which scatters the darkness of delusion; it is as luminous, as universal, as sacred. Do not misuse that sacred name even for a second. Do not let even a second pass without bringing that name to mind. Remember, the sweetness of that name when repeated by Prahlada overpowered the hearts of the demons who heard him; the children of the demons repeated the Name along with Prahlada, and, led by him, they began to sing and dance with joy, arming themselves with axes to defend their leader!

The name of the Lord, which can transform the demonic character and purify it into nectar, is verily the heaven of peace for all, for the world. To repeat that name without break, to love that form and that name with intensity, that is what deserves to be called devotion (bhakthi). Devotion means the highest, purest love directed toward the Lord. Anyone can attain this devotion. The door of the yoga of devotion is open to all. The only passport needed is the desire for liberation (moksha). That desire entitles everyone to their heritage.

27. Devotion And Wisdom

Of course, such love will dawn only after knowing the glory and splendour of the Lord as well as His innate characteristics of omniscience, omnipotence, and immanence in all creation. One who is endowed with love of this nature, one who lives always with the Lord - that one will certainly be liberated.

What does the expression "to know God" mean? It means "to love God". Knowledge without devotion produces hatred; such knowledge leads to misused power; it is not knowledge worth the name; it is ignorance, mistaken for its opposite. It is only through devotion that wisdom becomes established and deep rooted.

What is the sign of a wise person (jnani)? It is love, the possession of ever-widening love. When devotion, or in other words love toward the Lord, dawns, ignorance will vanish step by step. Devotion and hatred cannot coexist; they are contradictory. Devotion and love, however, are of the same nature.

The worldly person is infected with love only toward material objects, but the same love, when it assumes the form of devotion or love of God, leads one on to the realization of Godhead itself. The phrase sweet essence (rasa) indicates the attraction of worldly objects as well as the longing for the joy of God-realization.

The consequences of activity are diminished by undergoing them and then you are born again. But the fruits of devotion are never diminished. They last forever. Liberation lasts; it doesn't end. Truly, devotion is the real technique for human liberation. It is the spiritual discipline par excellence; every other technique is built on it.

Devotion and wisdom are like the pair of bullocks for the cart. Both have to pull in unison. Each must keep pace with the other and help the other to drag the weight quicker. Wisdom has to help the increase of devotion; devotion has to contribute to the growth of wisdom.

It is because of this mutual help, this collaboration, that the cowherd maids of Brindavan were able to attain liberation. Their devotion toward Lord Krishna also endowed them with the highest wisdom.

Now, the essence of devotion as well as wisdom is peace, the highest type of peace, the supreme peace.

Supreme peace (prasanthi) leads one on to the glory of spiritual effulgence (prakanthi), and thence to the super effulgence of the highest revelation (param-jyothi).

Wisdom is a concomitant of devotion, its component part. Love fixed on God is most beneficent. It produces the greatest good. It will not bind people to the earth. It will take them by the hand along the road to liberation.

It will automatically release them from all types of bonds and attachments; they have only to strive to avoid evil company. Constant association in good company will promote the feeling of detachment.

More than the adherent of the path of activity, wisdom, or yoga, the follower of the path of devotion is declared fortunate and superior. The spiritual aspirant who takes up the discipline of activity is better than the yogi, better than the one who has renounced everything (sanyasin), and better than the wise person (jnani).

This is why Krishna directed Arjuna in the Gita to become a great yogi. He also said, "Among yogis, one who steadfastly meditates on the Self as merged in Me is indeed with the highest devotion." Then, Arjuna asked Him, "Among those who worship Thee ever like that and those who worship Thee as Indestructible, Imperceptible, etc., who among these, Oh Lord, have triumphed in yoga more?" Krishna replied, "Whoever fixes the mind on Me and worships Me, whoever is steadfast and exulting in this, that one has achieved greater success." So, faith (sraddha) is ever essential in matters spiritual, related to God. Faith has no limitations, so its results also have no decline. The fruits of all acts done in the pursuit of God-realization depend

upon spiritual disciplines; wisdom, more on internal spiritual disciplines; and devotion, more on external spiritual disciplines.

When Brahman itself is the object, it becomes spiritual wisdom. Listening to discourses on the scriptures, calling to mind what has been heard, and ruminating on things thus recalled to memory - until devotion is fully developed, these have to be gone through without interruption. Instead, devotees often deal with God in a bargaining spirit or in the spirit of a tradesman! This attitude should be given up. Whoever one is, one should not ask from God anything other than devotion or love. If one does, one is not a true devotee. Real surrender is uninterrupted flow of love toward the feet of the Lord. Such surrender alone guarantees and ensures peace, genuine peace.

28. Indirect And Direct Knowledge

There are two kinds of teaching: indirect and direct. Teaching deduction and induction, reasoning and inference through the Vedas and concluding treatises (Vedanta) is indirect. When this understanding is experienced and realized, it becomes direct. The highest Brahman - which is truth, wisdom, and bliss - is self-evident, so its understanding can at best be only indirect. Looked at from one point of view, the Brahman knows neither indirect nor direct. It is unique, being beyond both. To obtain this direct knowledge of the Absolute, the first requisite is spiritual practice, and the first step in this practice is service done to a virtuous teacher with full faith and full submission.

The teacher too should be always instructing the aspirant in the nature of Brahman, and in simple ways.

When the disciple grasps this instruction, it becomes indirect knowledge. This indirect knowledge itself can be transformed into direct knowledge by constant reflection, turning over in the mind. Indirect knowledge is as shifting as letters drawn on water, while direct knowledge is indelible, like letters carved on rock.

When the sound "horse" is heard, the form of the horse presents itself before the mind; so too, at the word "Brahman", the nature of Brahman will come into the consciousness. This is called meditation (dhyana) by those versed in the four disciplines or the first principles of spiritual discipline. To be stabilized in meditation, the aspirant should cultivate control of the senses (sama) and passions (dama) and cultivate also the attitude of acting without any desire for the fruits of action. Whoever is an adept in the six qualifications - control of the senses, passions, etc. - can easily see with the mind's eye the form of Brahman as soon as the exposition of Its nature is heard. Renunciation of the desire for the enjoyment of the fruits of one's action is also essential. When this detachment is deeply rooted, the consciousness (chittha) becomes pure and withdrawal of the senses from the objective world is made possible.

29. The Eightfold Path Of Yoga

Yoga (devotional practice) is also of two varieties: royal yoga (raja-yoga) and the yoga of inner contemplation (jnana-yoga). The royal yoga has eight stages, which have to be well cultivated and realized. Of these, some are external and some internal. This is the Aryan path. In the yoga of contemplation, there is no "external" at all.

Both these yogas have as their goal the stilling of the agitations of all levels of consciousness. For those who have calmed all these agitations, everything is Brahman. Primary for this purpose is the yoga of contemplation more than the yoga of activity - at least that is the opinion of the knowers of Brahman. They say "that is the thing to be known, to be reached." But, according to the wisdom of the Upanishads, direct knowledge of the Brahman can be obtained by the eightfold yoga of

1. Control of the inner senses (yama)
2. Control of the outer senses (niyama)
3. Regulation of the sitting posture (asana)
4. Regulation of the breath (pranayama)
5. Control of the mind (prathyahara)
6. Concentration or single-mindedness (dharana)
7. Meditation on the Divine (dhyana)
8. Complete absorption into the reality (samadhi)

(1) Control of the inner senses (yama)

This includes nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-acceptance (ahimsa, sathya, a-stheya, brahma-charya, a-parigraha).

This is the usual meaning given to the control of the inner senses, but I would say instead that it means the giving up of attachment to the body and to the

senses. The Brahman entity is devoid of name, form, and qualities; is without end, joy, sorrow, and modification; is eternal and of the nature of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda).

Creation, on the other hand, is endowed with all qualities and modifications, viz. name, form, transformation, of rise and decline, joy and sorrow. Nevertheless, as a result of delusion, this Brahman entity appears as all this creation. This appearance has an end; it has various other limitations; it appears to be ever moving, so it is called ocean of life (samsara). Thus, this Brahman entity appears in both the individual form of a whole, viewed as made up of parts, and the collective form of the individual parts, viewed as an aggregate. It deludes even great scholars and pandits.

One single consciousness (chaithanya) becomes manifest in different ways as all this multiplicity. Therefore, we speak of the particular and of the collective, i.e. a collection of particulars. Of course, the particular is a superimposition on the Brahman, like seeing the snake in the rope, the lake in the mirage. For the knower of Brahman, each of the three bodies - the gross (sthula), subtle (sukshma), and causal (karana) - is itself a super-imposition.

To say that one of the bodies is real or unreal is not correct; it is neither real nor unreal, it is something between truth and untruth (mithya). The ignorant person, caught in the meshes of this delusion, believes that the objective world is everlasting and a source of happiness.

Falsely identifying themselves with the body, people suffer in the coils of attachment to their mother, father, spouse, children, relatives, and friends. They do not realize that they have neither body nor senses and that they are Brahman (the sustenance and support of the three-fold body and everything else). This can be realized through the constant contemplation of the Brahman having the characteristics of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda), through the never-ceasing discrimination between the changeless and the changing, through association with the good, service of the wise, and through acquisition of purity of intelligence. The establishment of one's intellect in this consciousness is the real renunciation of the body and the senses, which is

implied in the word yama as defined earlier. This is what is called control of the inner senses (yama) in the practice of inner contemplation (jnana-yoga).

Joy in times of good fortune and sorrow in times of bad, mistaking the pain of the body and the senses as one's own, such dual attitude and feeling must be overcome. Step by step, identification with the body and the senses has to be given up. This is the sign of acquiring the "limb" (anga) of self-control (yama). This limb is the very foundation of the practice of inner contemplation.

(2) Control of the outer senses (niyama)

Niyama means purity, being full of joy, engaged in spiritual exercises or repetition of the name of the Lord.

This is what is mentioned in the king of yogas (raja-yoga): purity, joy, asceticism, Self-study, and surrender to the Lord (soucha, santhosha, tapas, swadhyaya, Iswara-pranidhana). These are the components of control of the outer senses.

But I would explain it in the following manner. Control of the outer senses is the condition of steady love in the Godhead, at all times and under all conditions. "It is the highest form of love", it is said in the Narada Bhakthi Sutra. It is only when such steadfast love toward the Absolute is gained that the purity, the joy, the asceticism, the study, and the surrender to the Lord mentioned in the yoga of activity will also be obtained. When control of the inner senses is won, bliss and peace will become your possession through the source of all bliss and peace, the being-a-wareness-bliss (satchidananda) Universal Absolute Entity (Parabrahman).

These two (control of the inner and outer senses) are not derived from dry worldly material objects. "He is sweetness", "Brahman is bliss", say the Upanishads. It is in and through Brahman that the material world is endowed with even the tiniest modicum of joy. Without the basic Brahman, which is the most complete and the fullest sweetness and joy, this fleeting evanescent appearance thereon cannot be so sweet and joy-giving to the worldly minded!

Without that basic sweetness, the world would have been terribly bitter. For the little sweetness that material objects give, the Ocean of Nectar is the cause. Association with the knowers of Brahman, discussion with them of the nature of the absolute in a spirit of humility and earnestness, a thirst to realize the Reality, unwavering love toward the Lord - these are the characteristics of those established in control of the outer senses.

Stalwarts with these characteristics will not be affected by derision or praise, by wind or sun or rain, by honour or dishonour. They will tread the path of liberation free from all attachment to anything except the one single aim of realizing the bliss of unison with the basic Brahman.

People who have realized the stage of outer-sense control will be ready to sacrifice everything for the acquisition of wisdom. They will run to any distance to listen to discussion of Brahman; they will obey every instruction of the wise; they will attach themselves to those who teach the science of ultra-consciousness (chinmaya-thathwa), as if they alone are their most intimate friends; they will put up with any trouble in fulfilling their wishes. These are the signs of people who have achieved control of the outer senses (niyama).

(3) Regulation of the (sitting) posture (asana)

One should have a steady posture in sitting. That is to say, one should neither shake nor sway. But even sitting like a rock, motionless and with all joints locked, can never be called asana. That is not the sign of real asana. Asana means both steadiness of the physical frame and inner joy that blooms in the heart. So whatever the posture adopted by the aspirant of yoga, it must be both steady and comfortable. That is why Patanjali advised a steady and comfortable posture.

I am telling you the same thing, in another way, what the best and most success-yielding posture is. It is that posture in which one is most unaffected by the external world. It is the posture that comes from practice of a moral life, meritorious in the world and in accordance with the Vedic path. It is absolute lack of interest in matters unconnected with the highest Atma. When

people whose ways you do not appreciate come near you, there is no need to find fault with them; there is no need either to laugh at them or show them your contempt. It is enough to continue to do your work, unaffected by their arrival.

Let those whose behavior you do not appreciate follow their path; leave them alone. That is the attitude of unaffectedness. After the dawn of love for the Absolute, the aspirant gets this feeling toward all worldly things.

To be more exact, one should constantly be turning over in the mind the reality of Brahman and the unreality of the world - Brahman is truth; the world is unreal. One must avoid comradeship with the bad and even too much friendship with the good! Attachment of this nature will drag one away from the path of withdrawal from the objective world to the path of external activity. Give up attachment to the momentary, the things clothed with the trappings of name and form. Once you have achieved this attitude of unaffectedness, you will have unshakeable peace, self control, and purity of mind. You will have the steadiness and stability of posture (asana).

(4) Regulation of the breath (pranayama)

Pranayama usually means control and regulation of the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. In the yogasastras, this is explained as comprising the various stages of regulation of breathing - practices to gain control of the five vital airs, closing the right nostril and inhaling air through the left, closing the nostril with the right hand while breathing, etc.

But I would explain it this way: Control of the breath is possible only for those who consider this whole universe as "unreal". We see golden ornaments of various types and styles, all made of the same metal, gold; and yet, we like one more and another less - not all of them equally. We have given various names and forms to these articles according to needs and fashions, likes and desires; and yet, we are bound by a meaningless delusion that blinds us to the actuality. When the ornaments are thought of, are being manufactured, are in use, and are finally melted into a lump they are and remain "gold",

don't they?

Likewise, so many names and forms appear and reappear in this world, rise, grow, and get destroyed. And yet, that which is the basic substratum, the eternal, persists in and through all this change and remains eternal. Just as the multiple forms create illusion and arouse feelings of hatred and love, so too these forms and names delude and create attachment. They make us believe that they themselves are the source of joy. But don't the scriptures say that the universe is nothing but Brahman, the beginningless, the endless, the unblemished, the ever pure? They declare that the ornaments are passing phases, that gold alone is eternal and real and true. Therefore, you must take everything to be Brahman and Brahman alone. Convince yourselves that all appearances are the product of delusion (maya), practise always that type of discrimination, evince great interest in knowing the reality, and be ever alert to recognize the truth that everything is Brahman.

Of course, in the deluded stage, the world appears as real and Brahman as a meaningless concoction. In the stage of intelligent clarity, the world is grasped in its true sense as unreal. The fairy of delusion overpowers you by her charms and her arrows of falsehood and guilt. Only the person possessed of the vision of universal Brahman can soon escape her wiles. Such a person fully knows that names and forms arose a little time ago and disappear a little time after. In the Gita [II 28], too, it is said; "These, Oh descendent of Bharath (India), appear in the middle only." The world is subject to evolution and involution. To understand this, one need not wait till the end of the world; it is enough if the angle of vision is corrected. That is the gateway to real knowledge. That is real control of breath, the consciousness that the world is unreal (mithya).

The genuine master of breath control will picture the world like letters written in pencil many years ago:

indistinct, hazy, misty. Knowing that Brahman alone is all this, such a one will never be drawn toward their environment, however fascinating it may be. Earnings, wealth, property - everything is unreal, valueless, not worthwhile.

This conviction is the best sign of breath control (pranayama).

(5) Control of the mind (prathyahara)

The tongue tastes, the eye sees, the ear hears, the skin feels, the nose smells. Each sense acts thus throughout life, right? The senses have to be withdrawn from the external objective world and turned toward the internal mental consciousness or awareness (chittha). This process is called mind control by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras.

However, I shall define it in another manner.

The inward activity of the mental consciousness (chittha), that is to say, the perpetual insight of the mind, the fundamental directive force of all the senses, that is the real meaning of mind control. It is only when the consciousness realizes that this is all delusion-born and delusion-maintained that it will draw back its feelers from the sensory world and give up its worldly selfish attitude. The general nature of the mind is to waver and hesitate and flutter in its search for happiness and peace. When it knows that the things it ran after are transitory and meaningless, it suddenly grows ashamed and disillusioned. Then it begins to illumine and clarify the consciousness.

Aspirants who have attained this stage will be watching the outer world as a huge pantomime; the inward look will give them such joy and contentment that they will repent for all the time wasted in external activities and pursuit of sensory joy. So, the straight, sharp, single-pointed vision of the mind toward the Atma within is the real control of the mind (prathyahara).

(6) Concentration or single-mindedness (dharana)

Patanjali has explained that when the awareness (chittha) is fixed in one place, it is named concentration (dharana). I would say that it means more the undeviating attitude of the mind, its unwavering character. When the mind gives up attachment to external objects, when it is saturated with repentance for past foolishness, when it is filled with remorse, renunciation,

and understanding, when it directly fosters the development of progressive qualities of the head and heart, then it truly becomes fit to join the ideal. It contemplates only the ideal. Such fixed attention is what is meant by concentration.

To whichever place the mind may wander, instruct it to find only Brahman there. Whatever ideas and pictures it may form, instruct it to find only Brahman in those creations of the mind stuff.

Treat your consciousness (chittha) as a little boy. Bring up that boy, training it to become wiser and wiser.

Caress it into good ways. Make it aware that all objects that are "seen" are just products of one's own illusion.

Remove all its fears and foibles and focus its attention steadily on the goal only. Never deal forcibly with the mind; it will yield easily to tenderness and patient training. Correct its waywardness by means of the attitude of renunciation. Destroy its ignorance by means of instruction in the knowledge of the Atma. Strengthen the interest with which it is already endowed toward the realization of Brahman. Let it give up the attraction toward the evanescent and the false, the mirages created by fancy and fantasy. Turn its face inward, away from the external world. By these three methods, concentration can be firmly established.

During both the waking and the dream stages, as well as during all the process of mental spinning and weaving of colourful pictures by the imagination, the mind has to be watched and trained. It must be made to flow, single-pointedly and steadily like water from a sluice, toward Brahman and Brahman only. That is real concentration (dharana).

(7) Meditation on the Divine (dhyana)

Spiritual wisdom (jnana) that flows in a single direction is meditation (dhyana). I have already described its various characteristics in Dhyana

Vahini. Meditation, in short, is the uninterrupted dwelling of the consciousness in wisdom, the consciousness itself becoming thereby the embodiment of wisdom.

All this is Brahman. The ocean of divine nectar (amritha) is everywhere divine nectar. Whether in the well, in the tank, in the river, or in the ocean, water is water. So too, when all is Brahman, all is the same substance appearing under a multiplicity of names and forms. Space (akasa) is inside as well as outside the pot, and it is the same space, although it appears as two, interior space and exterior space! The Brahman, too, appearing as various bodies with their own individual characteristics, is One and One only. Like space inside as well as outside the pot, it is One. Experiencing that One and only Brahman, avoiding all feelings of difference and distinction, that is the sign of meditation on the Divine, the essence of the meditation on the Divine experience, however much individuals may vary.

(8) Complete absorption in the reality (samadhi)

When form is ignored and only meaning is felt, that is samadhi. This is the opinion of Patanjali. Samadhi can be explained in another manner also. When someone who is engaged in meditation on the Divine forgets both themselves and the fact that one is engaged in meditation, then it becomes samadhi. That is to say, when one is merged in the thing on which one meditates, one enters into the stage called samadhi. Meditation on the Divine fulfils itself, becomes complete, in samadhi. Meditation strives, proceeds through effort, but samadhi comes effortlessly.

It is the culmination of the eight-fold discipline.

When one knows that there is not one iota of distinction between the individual (jiva) and the Atma, that they are one and the same, then it is the highest samadhi. It is the fruit of ripest meditation, the dearest moment of yogis, the destroyer of ignorance, the signal of the grace of God. Incessant thirst to know the Atma as all is worthy to be encouraged and welcomed, for it is the path through which all doubts can be eliminated.

Samadhi is of two types, differentiated and undifferentiated. In differentiated samadhi, the threefold nature of knower, knowing, and knowee will still persist. When it is realized that the knower is Brahman, knowing is also Brahman, and the thing to be known is also Brahman, then there is no more agitation or activity; that is undifferentiated samadhi.

Samadhi is the ocean to which all spiritual discipline flows. The seven streams of inner-sense control, outersense control, posture, regulation of the breath, mind control, concentration, and meditation on the Divine all find their consummation in samadhi. Every trace of name and form disappear in that Ocean. The server and the one who is served, the meditator and the one who is meditated upon - all such duality is dispelled and destroyed.

One won't even experience the experience, that is to say, one won't be aware that one is experiencing! Oneself alone, nothing else - that is samadhi. If there is anything else, it cannot be samadhi. It is something like a dream, a fantasy, a passing vision at best. Samadhi can admit of nothing other than Brahman.