

# PROBLEMS

and how to face them?

Swami Aksharatmananda

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**Explanation for the cover page:** In spite of the oppressive living conditions in the Sahara desert, these small flowering plants are fighting the battle of life by putting forth beautiful flowers. They amply demonstrate to us how we should face the problems of life and overcome them.

## ***Publisher's note***

There is not a man in this world who does not have a problem. All of us are occupied with some problem or the other, all the time. Therefore, the questions like 'what is a problem?' and 'how to face a problem?' become very important in our lives. This small book answers those questions.

In a seminar conducted by our Samithi on the topic 'Problems', Revered Swami Aksharatmanandaji Maharaj (President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Rajahmundry) delivered the key-note address. When we wanted to publish the said lecture Revered Maharaj added some more information and explanation to it. Our humble salutations to Revered Maharaj for kindly permitting us to publish the book.

First we published this book in Telugu (December, 2003) which received an overwhelming response from all quarters. Then our samithi felt the need to publish the said book in English as well. We are thankful to our members Dr. A. Srikantha Phani, Lecturer, Cambridge University, England and Dr. T. Sasi, Scientist, General Electric, Bangalore for proof-reading the manuscript.

We are sure that this small book-let would be of great help to people from all walks of life in solving the problems they face in both material and spiritual planes.

Krishnashtami  
August, 2006

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## *Foreword*

Swami Vivekananda while writing the introduction to Raja Yoga said, “A huge locomotive has rushed on over the line and a small worm that was creeping upon one of the rails saved its life by crawling out of the path of the locomotive. Yet this little worm, so insignificant that it can be crushed in a moment, is a living something, while this locomotive, so huge, so immense, is only an engine, a machine.” Now Swamiji asks us to consider which of the two is greater - the small worm or the big locomotive? Swamiji himself answers that the worm is greater than the locomotive because it has consciousness. It has the capability to think and to reason. The locomotive is powerful but inert. It has no consciousness and it can't think.

Man is far more evolved than the worm. God endowed man with intelligence. With that intelligence man should lead a purposeful life. But man

is not able to do that. To lead a purposeful life we need to understand what is life. We need to have an goal in our life.

To attain this goal we use mind as our tool. '*Mana eva manushyaanaam kaaranam bandha mokshayoh*' - 'Mind is entirely responsible for either throwing us into bondage or giving us freedom.' Therefore, what we do with mind and the results we we obtain from those thoughts determine our progress in life. If we use our mind properly, it will take us higher in our life or otherwise it will lead to our ruin.

How to give good thoughts to our minds and how to attain greatness are some of the questions which were discussed in this book by Swami Aksharatmananda. He detailed them with suitable examples. The ideas presented in this book would certainly prove to be a source of inspiration to everybody. I hope that this book would be read by one and all.



(Swami Swatmananda)

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## *Author's Preface to the Telugu Edition*

In English language there are several books which discuss the topics like proper conduct in life, how to face criticism etc. In India there are several religious books available on these topics but they do not give sufficient number of examples to explain the basic principle. Even when you find some examples they may be old and may not suit the modern times. Therefore I tried to bring all such ideas into one compilation with suitable examples to suit the modern times.

There is a sloka in Sanskrit regarding education.

*Anantha saastram bahu veditavyam  
alpascha kaalo bahavascha vighnaah  
yatsaara bhootam tadupaasitavyam  
hamso yathaa ksheeramivaambu misram*

The meaning of this sloka is:

“Whereas the books to be read are infinite, the time available is limited and the obstacles are many. Therefore, we should absorb the essence of the books much like the swan described in the Puranas which separates milk from water.”

This book is being published by Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samithi, Bapatla to bring the ideas of personality development to the doorstep of Telugu readers. I shall be happy if this book succeeds in giving some inspiration to the youth. I am thankful to Sri Amirapu Natarajan for translating this book into Telugu. I am much indebted to Revered Swami Swatmanandaji Maharaj for writing a foreword for this book. My special thanks are due to my friends and well-wishers who encouraged me to write this book.

I have collected a variety of flowers to make a garland. I do not claim that the flowers are all mine.

*Swami Aksharatmananda*  
(Swami Aksharatmananda)

President

Sri Ramakrishna Math  
Rajahmundry

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1

*The difference between  
man and man*

‘Do you want happiness?’ - Pose this question to anyone and the answer you get would be a definite ‘YES!’ But if you ask, ‘Are you happy?’ his face will turn pale! There is a vast difference between “*what we want*” and “*what we are*” and that matters a lot in our lives.

This difference is a measure of the satisfaction or dissatisfaction that is stored up in a person. One can use this satisfaction as a spur to go forward and achieve the goal he has set for himself. Alternately, one may get bogged down by the dissatisfaction and waste one’s life through constant worry.

## 2

### ***What is Happiness?***

Once a businessman, while walking along a beach, saw a fisherman lying down with his net next to him. He was very happy and relaxed and was humming a song. The businessman wondered how the fisherman could be so happy. He approached the fisherman and had a conversation with him.

Businessman: *Haven't you gone fishing today?*

Fisherman: *Oh, yes! I went fishing today, had a good catch and sold it too. After finishing all that, I am relaxing.*

Businessman: *Then why don't you catch some more fish?*

Fisherman: *Why should I fish more? What is the use?*

Businessman: *Well, you will get more money.*

Fisherman: *What would I do with that?*

Businessman: *You can buy a boat yourself and get more fish.*

Fisherman: *And then?*

Businessman: *You will get more money and you can have a big house of your own.*

Fisherman: *Then what?*

Businessman: *You can have a TV, a refrigerator, a car, etc., etc by expanding your business.*

Fisherman: *What after that?*

Businessman: *You can live happily!*

Fisherman: *Is it so? Then, what am I doing now? Am I not happy now? Do you mean to say that I will be happy after getting all those things? I feel quite happy now anyway.*

The businessman was stunned speechless.

Please try to think deeply about this story. What is the good in adding up things unnecessarily? Some people may require them, some may not. Happiness does not totally depend on external things. 'Happiness is a state of mind' says a popular adage.

The intention behind telling you this story is neither to advocate stagnation nor to discourage progress. Progress is good; expan-

sion is necessary. But to what extent? There must be careful thought if it will bring happiness to all those concerned.

### 3

#### ***Happiness - A Habit***

Once there were two students. Both were preparing for examinations. One day, one of them was relaxing after studying very hard for some time. Standing in the moon light and looking at the beauty of the full moon, he was enjoying the peaceful night. The other student asked, 'What are you doing, my friend?' The former answered, 'I am enjoying the moonlight. I will study a little later.'

The second student was shocked and felt that the other student was wasting precious time. As he was tense with "*examination fever*", he could not enjoy the soothing moonlight and was not able to find happiness in that peaceful night even for a moment. He neither knows how to study nor does he know how to live.

This is a lesson for all. It is possible to do all the work and yet remain relaxed. To be able to carry out your work in a responsible manner you need not get tense.

In a TV talk-show some people who claimed themselves happy were being interviewed. When they were asked how they were able to live happily, one old man replied, 'When I get up in the morning, I have two choices. Either to be happy or to be unhappy. I just choose to be happy and that is all.' Another happy man replied, 'I made it a habit to be happy.'

All this may look too simple and you may say, 'It is easier said than done!' But everything is possible by "***practice***." It requires right attitude of mind and perseverance to achieve.

Psychologists tell us that we can change our attitudes by changing our physical actions. For example, if you make yourself smile, you actually feel like smiling all the more. On the negative side, if you frown bitterly, you feel like frowning more and more. You feel superior

when you make yourself stand tall than when you slouch.

Here is a method given by Dr. David T Schwartz. It is a very simple technique, but it has tremendous power. Practice it! Every time someone asks you, 'How are you feeling today?' respond by saying 'Just wonderful!' or simply say 'Fine.'

Say that you feel wonderful at every possible opportunity and you will begin to feel wonderful and stronger too. It is not possible to be melancholic when you say that you are feeling fine. Get known as a person who is always happy and who always feels wonderful. It wins friends!

If you analyze yourself properly, you will find that there is always something to be happy about. Find out what it is. Bring that up into your mind now and then. It will refresh your mind and remove any despondency that might have crept in inadvertently.

Let us see what Swami Vivekananda said in this matter. *'You will find at last that the easiest way to make ourselves healthy is to see that others are healthy, and the easiest way to make ourselves happy is to see that others are happy.'*

Therefore, as soon as you get up in the morning, make a vow: 'I am going to make someone happy today (in a proper way).' Not just that, also try to put it into practice by doing some help to **someone** in need. Certainly it has some elevating effect on your mind and personality.

Now we can conclude that happiness in addition to being a state of mind, also depends on the attitude of the mind. So, right attitude is required in the search for happiness.

## 4

### ***Role of Attitude***

The attitude of a person towards life is a deciding factor in his life. How a man perceives

the events of his life and how he reacts to them is very important. It is very much known to us that two persons can view the same incident in different ways. But the important thing is how we learn a lesson from this paradox.

There is a story of a running race between American and Russian athletes. Although you may have heard many stories like this, this has something to do with our topic.

An American and a Russian participated in a race. The American came first and the Russian came second. The Russian press reported the news as follows: 'Our candidate is the runner-up. The American is the last but one.'

I am not trying to discuss whether the above report is factually correct or not. This is just an example of looking at things from a different perspective. You can look at an event from any angle you like.

Here is another story about two travellers and how different their perceptions were.

A weary traveller approached a wise man and inquired what kind of people dwelt in yonder town. “What kind of people were those from where you have come?” the sage asked. “Knaves and fools!” scowled the traveller. “You’ll find the people here very much the same,” the wise man said.

Another stranger approached with the same question. He was asked the same question by the wise man. “Good, true and wise” was the stranger’s reply. “You’ll find the people here the same,” the wise man said.

Do you think that the wise man was crazy? Why should he give different opinions about the same village? The truth is that he knows the psychology of human beings. He understood that the first man is a hyper-critic in his attitude towards others. He cannot see good in others. Whatever he sees, is evil only. So the wise man told him that the second village also will be as bad as the first one. But the second

traveller is of an agreeable temperament. He found that the first village is very good and friendly. So for him the second village will also be good.

The world is a mirror - We find that what we ourselves project is reflected back to us. As we look at it, it looks back at us! If we smile at it, it will smile back at us. If we frown at it, it will frown back at us. There is nothing absolutely good or absolutely bad. What is good for one may not be good for another. What is good in one occasion may not be good in another occasion. The idea is that value changes as per the situation and the person concerned. But this should not become a reason to make circumstances an excuse for the happiness or unhappiness of an individual. Circumstances should be understood properly.

## 5

**Circumstances**

It has become a habit for many people to blame the circumstances and external things for their failures in life. Many students say, 'My teacher didn't teach me well!' or 'My college is not good enough!' etc. Similar escaping excuses are given in career failures also. Blaming external things is easy.

Then how is it that others who are in the same circumstances are faring well? There must be something different in the individuals concerned.

James Allen says: *One cannot alter external things to suit his passing whims and wishes, but he can set aside his whims and wishes; He can so alter his attitude of mind towards externals that they will assume a different aspect.*

*He cannot mould the actions of others towards him, but he can rightly fashion his actions towards them.*

*He cannot break down the wall of circumstances by which he is surrounded, but he can wisely adopt himself to it, or find a way out into enlarged circumstances by extending his mental horizon.*

Things follow thoughts. Alter your thoughts, and things will receive a new adjustment. As with the conduct of others, so is it with the external things - surroundings and circumstances. They in themselves are neither good nor bad, it is our mental attitude and our state of mind that makes them so.

The real 'want' that hampers a man's progress is the 'want of right attitude of mind.'

When a man regards his circumstances as spurs to his resources, when he sees that his so called draw-backs are the very steps up which he is to mount successfully to his achievement, then necessity gives birth to intuition, and hindrances are transformed into aids.

*“It is not external things but our thoughts about them that bind us or set us free.”*

As we have seen in the previous section, the attitude is more important regarding circumstances and relationships with others. The same thing is applicable in the case of facing obstacles in life. The man with the right attitude will say, ‘Are there any obstacles? Alright. No problem. I am here to tackle them!’ Do you believe that it is possible to say like that? Yes, it is possible and all should be able to say like that. How is it possible? It can be done by converting an obstacle in to an opportunity.

## 6

### ***Obstacle or Opportunity?***

For some people, everything seems to be a problem or an obstacle. But the wise man is he who can change the obstacle into an opportunity and come up in life with the help of obstacles.

Once there was a football match between two teams. Many football fans and other interested people were watching the game. A simpleton from a village, who did not know anything about the game was there as well. After watching the game for sometime, he asked his friend, 'Why are these people fighting for a ball? Let them come to me, I shall give them one ball each!' If he gives them one ball each, there won't be any game!

For one person, the ball is an obstacle; whereas for the other the ball is an opportunity!

*'For a wise man every obstacle is an opportunity; but for a fool every opportunity is an obstacle.'*

If you want to go up the stairs, you have to use the steps. They help us to go up. But on seeing the steps, if you think that the steps are all so many obstacles, then you are lost.

Remember this: *'A kite rises against the wind, but not with the wind.'*

Suppose you undertake a project and find that people are opposing you and saying all sorts

of things against you. In the case of an average man the project will not take off at all. But the wise man - *the practical man* - will not be daunted by all the ill-speech. He will use these 'attacks' as 'helps' and go ahead with his work. Or in other words, 'abuses' become 'blessings' for this man.

Let us see what Bhatrhari, the author of Nitisatakam, says in this respect.

*Aarabhyate na khalu vighna bhayena neechaih  
Aarabhya vighna nibataa viramanti madhyaaha  
Vighnai punah punah parihanya maanaaha  
Praarabdha muttamajanaah na parityajanti*

“The lowest category of people never undertake any task for the fear of obstacles. Mediocres start and give up when they encounter problems. The best men will not give up the endeavour even though over-powered by problems again and again”

Napoleon, who was a hero of many battles said, “*Victory belongs to the most persevering.*”

Carlyle, a great thinker also said, “*Every noble work is at first impossible. Know thy work and do it and work at it like Hercules.*”

So, you see, *perseverance* is one of the qualities found in the lives of successful people. If you are creative and practical, then nothing can block your progress; instead, everything will turn into a building block for you. For a man who finds opportunities in every situation there are no problems at all! He knows the art of tackling problems with ease.

## 7

### **Problems**

What is a problem? It is a circumstance where you have to exercise your thinking power and find a solution to a tricky situation.

You can't do any work right away. It may be an unknown condition, an unknown job or an unknown person. Once you know how to tackle the problem, the problem itself ceases to exist. A problem is not an entity; nor a per-

manent phenomenon; it is only a phase that is ephemeral and passes away in time, tomorrow if not today.

Take for example, eating! It is so easy for us; but for a baby it is a difficult task. A mother has to feed the baby first, then the baby learns it by making a number of mistakes until it becomes natural for the baby. Similarly any task such as typing or driving or learning or anything else.

And then, what happens once a problem is overcome? You gain experience. You learn something from it. You become experienced or you become familiar with it so that you can tackle it the next time you face it. On the second occasion you won't have that much of fear or nervousness about it as you had on the first occasion. And more over if you have benefited from that problem then you can call it an opportunity!

You might have faced the situation unwillingly not knowing the benefit of the situation. But once it is over you may wonder how

you have actually been benefited by solving the problem or facing the situation boldly.

Now think of the benefit you would have derived if you had considered the situation as an opportunity from the beginning itself? You could have tackled the situation with willingness and enthusiasm and obtained more benefit than you have obtained by doing it unwillingly. Isn't it so?

Now we come to the point. A monk said, *'When you see difficulties in every opportunity, you are a sad, unproductive person. When you see an opportunity in every difficulty, then you are a successful and creative person.'*

It all depends on how you look at a problem. Your attitude is more important than the problem itself.

## 8

### ***Be grateful to your problems***

There are some successful people who said, 'I am grateful to my problems. Whenever I solve a problem, I become stronger and stronger than before. I grew on my problems.'

Rather, I thrive on them!’ Another man said, ‘I could have achieved nothing without problems; for they toughen my mind.’

When some one asked, *‘What is life?’* Swami Vivekananda answered, *‘Life is the unfolding and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down.’*

There is a story of a butterfly, which is very much relevant here. ‘One day a small opening appeared on a cocoon. A man who happened to be nearby watched it with curiosity for several hours as the butterfly struggled to force its body through that little hole.

Then it seemed to be making no more progress. It appeared as if it had tried as far as it could and it could go no further. So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and opened the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a withered body and shriveled wings. The man continued to watch it because he expected that at any moment the wings would open and the butterfly could fly.

Nothing happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a withered body and shriveled wings. It could never fly.

Nature created the tough cocoon in order to make the butterfly struggle hard and gain enough strength so that it will have a well built body and would be able to fly well. What the man, in his kindness and goodwill, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing the fluids from the body of the butterfly into its wings, so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If God allowed us to go through our life without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as we could have been.'

## 9

***What is our choice?***

Now you may ask, if problems are good and useful, then are we totally dependent on them? Or can we choose them? The answer is ‘yes and no.’ You can choose the battle ground but not the battle itself. You can’t avoid the battle. But you can choose what the problem can do for you.

‘What can the problem do for you?’ You may not be able to control every aspect of the problem. But you can choose your response to it. This choice is all up to you. In other words, ‘How are you going to react to it?’

When you control your reaction, you control the effect of the problem on you. Your reaction is the last word.

If you react positively and not negatively to any problem in life, you can turn your scars into stars.

Swami Atulananda, a foreign monk of the Ramakrishna Math, said, ‘Nothing has any

value. It is only our reaction that ascribes any value to something. If you don't react, and accept blame or criticism - then you won't carry that reaction with you. The object will have no value. It cannot touch you.'

## 10

### *Your attitude to problems*

We must understand that every problem holds positive possibilities. Every discovery that was made in this world was due to some problem. The solution to that problem led to new discoveries that changed the world greatly. If everybody had shrunk from those problems, humanity would have been at its starting point even today.

The discovery of penicillin is one example in this case. The scientist did not anticipate the growth of that new fungus in the experiment. Because of that fungus the experiments were being spoilt. The scientist without thinking that it is a nuisance, tried to bring some good out of it. That resulted in the discovery of a life-

saving drug for millions of people. If the scientist had simply ignored it and grumbled at the problem, mankind would have lost a valuable drug! This is what you call exploring the positive possibility of a problem!

## 11

### **'If' thinking and 'How' thinking**

What type of a thinker are you? The *If-thinker* broods over his setbacks and problems. 'Only if I had done like this or that....' and so on and wastes a lot of time.

The *How-thinker* wastes no energy in the post-mortem of past mistakes. He immediately starts thinking - 'How to solve the problem? There must be a solution.'

If you want to improve the situation do something positive. Grumbling about your surroundings or the people around you will not help.

If you look at life you can see nothing is fair to anybody. Big animals are swallowing the small ones. Strong men are ruling over the weak and

are oppressing them. Nature also is not fair to all. What about natural calamities? Millions and millions of innocents are affected. Can we blame nature for such setbacks?

By repeatedly saying, 'Life is not fair' and shrinking away from problems, 'you end up being not fair to yourself.'

William James, a great thinker, says, '*the greatest discovery of our times is to know that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.*'

So please stop 'IF' thinking and start 'HOW' thinking.

## 12

### ***Your approach to problems***

If you can approach the problem with enthusiasm then you face it with more energy and the encounter will be beneficial to you. I don't mean you will succeed every time. But surely, I can say that you will be benefited even if you are defeated. "*What is my attitude?*" This is the thing that must be the first and the foremost in your mind.

First of all you must understand that problems arise to make us but not to break us.

Norman Vincent Peal says, *'A nervous person attacks the problem not in the right spirit which is to forget self and go ahead and do the job in a natural manner. Instead, he works with tense effort - nervousness based largely on fear of personal failure than on a humble desire to serve God.'*

All our great people have one thing in common. They get absorbed in the work they are doing and forget themselves. They are so dedicated that they don't even go to take food. For them there is nothing problematic!

There is a story of a scientist, who invited his friend for lunch. He made all the arrangements and then got immersed in his research. The friend came and found the scientist in his lab. He didn't want to disturb him. He waited for some time and then he finished his food and because of hunger finished the share of his friend's food also. But the scientist was still busy in his work. The friend silently left the place.

After some time the scientist went to the dining table and found that the plates are empty. He thought, 'Oh, I have finished my food long ago!' and went back to his laboratory to continue his research!

Vincent Peal says further, *'Actually all shy people are egotistical, their thought being painfully self-centered. To be healed, the shy person must master self-forgetfulness.'*

Swami Vivekananda's ideal of Karma Yoga also says the same thing. The purpose of Nishkama Karma Yoga is to efface the ego.

Swami Vivekananda says, *It is the worker who is attached to results that grumbles about the nature of the duty which has fallen to his lot.*

It is not external things but our thoughts about them that bind us or set us free.

Now you may ask, "Is there a situation, where there is no problem at all, or a situation where all the problems are solved?" The same thing is contemplated in the Utopian and the so-called Welfare Societies. (Such a state can never

exist!) Schopenhauer said long ago, *‘When men achieve security and welfare, since they have solved all other problems, they become problems to themselves.’*

To give a more precise example, we can cite the rehabilitation projects undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission in many parts of India. In some projects the entire work was done by the mission and the beneficiaries were also given some employment so that they could stand on their own feet. What was the result? To the surprise of all, the beneficiaries, not able to know what do with the money they have earned, fell victim to bad habits like drinking, smoking etc.

Later this methodology was changed. They have been educated about the proper way of living and they were involved in the rehabilitation work also. The results were far better this time.

Now let's come back to our main topic. A trouble, after all, is a situation that we are not ready to tackle. When we make up our minds

to tackle the situation, it ceases to be a trouble. There is a proverb, *'Hammer shatters glass, but forges steel.'* What a trouble does to you depends on what stuff is inside you. Troubles come to make us and not to break us.

Swami Ranganathananda said, *'Running away from problems will not be a solution, for problems will come chasing you.'*

Swami Vivekananda gave a interesting illustration to this from his own life:

“Once when I was in Varanasi, I was passing through a place where there was a large tank of water on one side and a high wall on the other. It was in the grounds where there were many monkeys. The monkeys of Varanasi are huge brutes and are sometimes surly. They now took it into their heads not to allow me to pass through their street, so they howled and shrieked and clutched at my feet as I passed. As they pressed closer, I began to run, but the faster I ran, the faster came the monkeys and they began to bite at me. It seemed impossible to escape, but just then I met a stranger who

called out to me, ‘**Face the brutes!**’ I turned and faced the monkeys, and they fell back and finally fled. That is a lesson for all life—face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys, the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them.”

Another thinker said, *‘We do not lift our burden by ceasing to work, but by learning how to work.’*

The foregoing analysis leads to one conclusion, that the successful person always has one quality, i.e., he is full of enthusiasm to face the problematic situation. Yes! Enthusiasm works wonders. Let us see what it can do for you.

## 13

### *Enthusiasm*

Enthusiasm is an attitude of mind which helps one to do any work without getting bored and without any strain. Did you ever observe children when they are playing? How enthusiastic they are! You can see so much of effervescence in them, that any onlooker will also feel energetic like them.

*It is said that enthusiasm is infectious.*

In Gita enthusiasm is mentioned as one of the pre-requisites for a good worker.

*'Dhṛtyutsaha samanvitah...*

*karta satvika uchyathe'*

A good worker is one who is endowed with firmness and enthusiasm.

Do you know the etymological meaning of the word enthusiasm? It means 'En-theos', i.e., 'God-within.' Or in other words, it indicates the potential divinity of man that is inherent in him. Very close to Swami Vivekananda's theory, isn't it? According to Swami Vivekananda, the manifestation of the hidden divinity in man is the goal of life. It must be manifested in every act of our life.

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, cheerfulness is one of the preliminary requirements for practice of the higher disciplines. Cheerfulness is one of the signs of a good personality. Without it a person is a sick person.

Swami Vivekananda also advocates cheerfulness as one important requisite for spiritual life. He said: *The first sign that you are becoming religious is that you are becoming cheerful. When a man is gloomy, that may be dyspepsia, but it is not religion. A pleasurable feeling is the nature of the Sattva. Everything is pleasurable to the Sattvika man, and when this comes, know that you are progressing in Yoga. All pain is caused by Tamas, so you must get rid of that; moroseness is one of the results of Tamas. The strong, the well-knit, the young, the healthy, the daring alone are fit to be Yogis. To the Yogi everything is bliss, every human face that he sees brings cheerfulness to him. That is the sign of a virtuous man. Misery is caused by sin, and by no other cause. What business have you with clouded faces? It is terrible. If you have a clouded face, do not go out that day, shut yourself up in your room. What right have you to carry this disease out into the world? When your mind has become controlled, you have control over the whole body; instead of being a slave to this machine, the*

*machine becomes your slave. Instead of this machine being able to drag the soul down, it becomes its greatest helpmate.*

Mahatma Gandhi also said, *'You are not completely dressed, until your face wears a smile.'*

So, we have to cultivate the habit of being cheerful and enthusiastic.

## 14

### ***Advantages of Cheerfulness***

We must learn to be quiet and cheerful. It not only helps us, it helps others. Suppose a man loses his balance and if you come to him with a peaceful, quiet mind, you exert a quieting influence on that person and help him to regain his equilibrium. You can always set a standard. The way you do every thing can become an example. When you do things casually - thinking "Whatever!" "It's alright!" - it means that you are acting thoughtlessly and lack an order of spirit. The true art of performing action means doing things with poise and calmness. Our thought can make us careful or careless.

How to achieve this? We can achieve it by putting animation into our daily work. Seek inspiration in books, friends, art, music, travel etc. Interest is a measure of aliveness.

Doing a work mechanically like a paid coolie is always damaging for the development of a good personality. A person who can turn his boring work into a work of very interesting nature never comes to failure. He is wanted everywhere. This type of person never feels that he is suffering when doing some hard work or any thing like that. When you are undergoing a hardship, it is natural to feel that you are suffering. But how is it possible not to feel like that and to feel enthusiastic? This can be achieved through constant endeavour and practice.

## 15

### ***Don't Suffer, Struggle!***

There is an opinion that good people always suffer more and bad people avoid suffering by some bad methods. First of all, the question is who is good and who is bad? Generally we find

the people of religious temperament undergoing endless suffering. But those who are not religious have a nice time in life. Whatever the case may be, we must accept that bad people also suffer. There is no doubt about it. Who is suffering more and who is suffering less is a matter of individual opinion.

What is good and what is bad is also a question that needs to be answered. There is nothing absolutely good or absolutely bad in this world. What is good for one person is not good for another person. For example, Ice cream may be good for a man in good health, but it is harmful for another person with fever and cold. Similarly, what is good in one season is not good in the other season. This is known to all.

Similarly suffering also differs from person to person. What is suffering? It is an unpleasant experience. Since, likes and dislikes vary from person to person, suffering also varies from person to person. What is suffering to one person is not suffering to another person.

Sportsmen and gymnasts practice hours together enduring great physical strain. Others may feel it to be excruciating but those athletes do all that happily. Meditation or spiritual practice turns into a kind of suffering for an ordinary worldly person but not for a spiritual aspirant.

If you want to get something, you have to pay the price for it. Everything has a price. The price need not be in terms of money always. It can be hard work - physical or intellectual; or some effort or some struggle. To pass an examination, how much struggle does a student undergo? That is the price to be paid for the examination. But for a person who is not interested in achieving anything in life, all these *prices* will look like *unnecessary troubles* and he may feel that these people who are struggling to achieve something are suffering unnecessarily. After all, he is greatly enjoying his life, doing nothing!

For the struggle to be meaningful, the knowledge of how to do a certain thing is necessary.

Suppose a saint and a sinner are playing a game such as chess. Who will win? The person who knows how to play the game will win. If you argue that the saint must win and the sinner must lose, then it is not correct. If the saint does not know how to play then he has to lose the game. This has nothing to do with the saintliness of the person. It is same with other worldly affairs. If you don't know a thing, you have to suffer. Whether you are good or bad is different. Generally the so called good people lack many things required for a successful living. They happen to be impractical, and that is why bad things happen to them.

Take the lives of great people who have achieved many things in their lives. Their lives are full of ups and downs. But the ordinary men may not have so many ups and downs in their uneventful lives.

*Sampado mahataameva mahataameva cha aapadah  
Vardhate ksheeyate chandrabha natu taaraagana kvachit*

“Prosperity is for great people and set-backs are also for great people only. (Because) Only

the moon grows and decays but the stars do not.”

Great men encounter problems but they are not scared. Their self-confidence and boldness make them endure the ups and downs in life and hence they become great. Swami Vivekananda said that the world history is the history of a few men who believed in themselves!

But cowards and fools do not attain such greatness.

There is a sloka about these impractical people.  
*Sokasthaani sahasraani bhayasthaani sataani cha  
Divase divase moodham aavisanti na panditam*

‘A fool encounters thousands of occasions of unhappiness and hundreds of occasions of fear every day, but not a wise man.’

And then, no man is happy or unhappy all through the day. There are happy moments in a day and unhappy moments also. The memory of a happy event or a success in an issue is sufficient for a person to keep himself happy. Do you think I am talking of imaginary happi-

ness? Then what about your unhappiness or worries? They are also imaginations of your mind. Thinking that something bad will happen or had happened already, people are unhappy or worried. The antidote for this wrong imagination is just correct imagination!

*Yat dhyayati tat bhavati!*

*(Yat bhaavam tat bhavati)*

What you think that you become!

If you think of success you will succeed; if you think of failure, you will fail. If you think of happiness you will be happy and if you worry all day, you will become a person full of worries.

From this analysis we arrive at the conclusion that all sufferings or bad things come to us with a purpose. We should learn from them and improve ourselves. Therefore the question, 'Why do bad things happen to us?' must be changed to, 'Where can they lead us?'

Each experience comes to us to teach us the way towards perfection, i.e., towards God. That

is the goal. What happens to us is not important; what we do with what happens to us is more important. In other words, how do we benefit with what happens to us is more important. All great persons have experienced blows and failures in their lives. But they didn't keep quiet. They utilized the failure and came up in life again.

Thomas Alva Edison invented the Electric Bulb. He had to test a thousand filaments before making a successful bulb. Now, what would you call that? One thousand failures or one thousand attempts towards success?

In any work - secular or spiritual - unless you do it again and again and struggle while enduring all kinds of troubles, you will not be able to attain perfection.

You will find that misery and happiness are equal factors in the formation of character. Good and evil have an equal share in moulding character, and in some cases misery is a greater teacher than happiness.

Swami Vivekananda said: *“In studying the great characters the world has produced, I dare say, in the vast majority of cases, it would be found that it was misery that taught more than happiness, it was poverty that taught more than wealth, it was blows that brought out their inner fire more than praise.”*

Saints repeatedly said that the path to God is filled with difficulties. It is an obstacle race. We should not conclude that difficulties are obstacles. No! It is a way to God. Moreover, it is a way of God testing the devotee. Whether a devotee is truly devoted to God or not is known by these tests. Lives of saints are good examples for this. Bhakta Mira, Bhadrachala Ramadas etc. are well known examples. After a great struggle, they got the divine experience. And what happiness they had! It is like having a meal after being very hungry.

It all depends on how you look at it. It is your attitude that is important. First of all change the word *Suffer* into *Struggle*. Don't

say that you are suffering, instead, say that you are struggling. Then it becomes meaningful and the struggle will help you to progress.

When a man is struggling like that, he has to face lot of comments and remarks from others. It is natural for people to criticize like that. But the listeners are not ready for that! Here we have to know how to handle criticism.

## 16

### *Criticism*

What is criticism? An uncharitable remark about a person or a deed is taken to be criticism. There are many aspects of criticism. All of us expect some compliment when we do some work or achieve something. It is natural. But we don't always get compliments. Many a time, we get sarcastic comments from people, which throw us out of balance in a moment.

But it need not be so always. We have to analyse the intention of the person who makes the comment. Instead of taking the comment

as it is, try to be analytical. It will take the sting out of the remark. Read the following statement made by a wise man, "*A creative man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him.*"

James Allen says: *The injury that comes to you through others is the rebound of your own deed, the reflex of your mental attitude.*

*They are the instruments - You are the cause.*

*Destiny is ripened deeds. Man cannot abrogate the effects, but he can alter the causes.*

*The harm which a man sees in the action of another towards him is not in the act itself, but in his attitude of mind towards it. The injury and unhappiness are created by himself. The reality being that the deed can only injure the doer of it. But however, thinking that he himself injured, the man becomes agitated and unhappy.*

*The righteous man has proved this by the fact that the same act has ceased to rouse in him any disturbance. It (the act) belongs to a sphere which he has ceased to inhabit, to a region of consciousness with which he has no longer any affinity.*

*He does not receive the act to himself. The thought of injury to himself being absent.*

Other people can contribute to our depression only if we let them. Words and actions that we interpret as attacks, often are in reality not directed towards us at all. Even when they are, we need to remember that in making such an attack, people are revealing themselves.

Swami Pavitrananda, a renowned monk of Ramakrishna Math, puts the same idea in this way: *You feel that or this person has hurt you. Why? Because, you are sensitive. If you were inwardly strong, then you could ignore all these things. Just imagine! Permitting your happiness and peace of mind to depend on 'other man's behaviour or word'. Those are nothing more than words - weakness of another, ignorance of another. And a man of ignorance is an object of pity and not of anger.*

Release comes when we learn to bear what the other person's problems are, even when he expresses them by attacking us. Recognizing those

attacks as his problems frees us to deal with the actual situation and to help him.

There are several ways we can improve our ability to cope with criticisms. Indeed, you can make criticism work for you. Here's how you can respond to criticism without losing your cool and making yourself and others miserable.

## 17

### *How to cope with criticism*

1. When you are criticized, pause for some time. Take a deep breath. When you're under stress, you tend to breathe shallowly and rapidly. If you inhale and exhale deeply, you not only increase your sense of well-being, but you gain time before answering your critic.

2. Is the criticism really directed at you? On many occasions, the comment may not be towards us at all. But we project ourselves and expose our foolishness.

In school class-rooms it is very common. If the teacher scolds the students in an indirect

way without mentioning the name of anybody, the real culprit starts defending himself and is thus caught. It is childish to take the criticism on our head and worry. The next time criticism seems misplaced, ask yourself if you're the real cause of the other's wrath. Maybe your critic is really mad about his family problems or about the increased cost-of-living!

3. Evaluate your critic's competence. Your neighbour doesn't know the difference between sofa sets and cushion chairs. If he criticizes your taste in home furnishing, don't seethe, just shrug. If your boss criticizes your sales report, listen. If he tells you how to raise your children, his criticism may be worthless. Similarly missing a scheduled appointment can be justifiably criticized, but the colour of your walls cannot be, because, it is a matter of taste.

4. Do not counter attack. It fosters nothing but ill feelings. It's hard for some of us to resist, but it's worth the effort. There is a funny story to illustrate this point.

There was a young couple living in a village. Daily there were quarrels and arguments between them during the meals time. As it was the custom, husband takes food first and wife takes food afterwards. There was no way to find a solution for their quarrels. At last the wife sought the help of a neighbour, an elderly women. She understood the problem and gave her a solution. She gave the lady a small bottle with some medicine and asked her to take it for some days. The young lady asked the old women, 'How to take it and when to take it?' The elderly women told that 'This is a peculiar medicine. It should not be taken into the stomach. Just keep it in the mouth for 20 minutes and spit it after some time. The time is before meals. So it is better to take it just before serving your husband.'

If you can guess the trend of this story, congratulations to you. Otherwise continue reading.

The young lady followed the instructions carefully. The next time when her husband started

some argument during his meals, the wife wanted to give some counter attack. But she couldn't, because the medicine is in her mouth. So husband also could not carry on the argument further. Within a few days things improved. Both had some introspection and understood each other. Now the elderly women called the young lady and told her that she doesn't require the medicine any more.

Now, do you know what the medicine is? It is plain water! She understood that if the young lady can keep quiet for some time, the husband will change his attitude. Telling the young lady to keep quiet is of no use. So the elderly woman played this trick and it worked!

5. Consider your critic's motives. Some people think they can raise themselves by pulling others down. Some people boast of themselves, while others criticize others. Still some others do both. Actually *Atma Prasamsa* (Self Praise) and *Para Ninda* (Criticism) are obverse and reverse of the same coin. If you realize

that their criticism often reflects their own fears, it's easier to remain calm. These people require our sympathy. It will not help in anyway to indulge in exposing them.

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi says, "*Does any good ever happen to anyone if you enumerate his faults? It only injures you. Forgiveness is Tapasya (austerity)!*"

If you can't forgive, just forget.

It is said, '*We may not be saintly enough to forgive, but we can forget at least.*'

If this teaching is too difficult for you, here is one example. Your neighbour has a very good flower garden and your garden is not so beautiful. Will it add to the beauty of your garden, if you take a knife and damage your neighbour's garden? Not in the least. Similarly, verbal attack on somebody will not do any help to yourself.

6. Your critics could be right. All your critics won't be wrong all the time. If you hear a certain criticism repeatedly, it might be true. And, as Dr. Allan Fromme, a marriage counselor,

says, *'We are not adults if we cannot face a moment of truth with ourselves.'*

Under these circumstances, accept the truth and thank the critic. Try to improve yourselves. It is said, *A match stick has a head, but it does not have a brain.* Therefore, it flares up immediately with little friction. We have brains. So, we should not flare up!

Here is story on how to evaluate criticism. This is a story from the life of Abraham Lincoln. Once Lincoln issued orders transferring some army units. The war secretary Stanton knew that it is wrong. He not only refused to transfer them but commented, 'Lincoln is a fool!' When Lincoln heard this, he didn't flare up. He said, 'If Stanton says that I a fool, then it may be true. I have never seen Stanton go wrong. Let me talk to him.' He went to Stanton's office and talked to him, realized his mistake and took back his orders. Taking criticism in a positive spirit is one of the great characters of Mr. Lincoln.

Swami Yatiswarananda narrated this story: A man filed a suit against another man for defaming him. The judge asked him what the other man had done.

*'He called me a rhinoceros!'* answered the man.

*'When?'*

*'Two years ago!'*

*'Then, why are you complaining now?'*

*'Because, I saw the animal only this morning!'*

You see, the man didn't feel anything when abused, but only much later the effect took place. What I would like to tell you is, 'it all depends on how we take it.' If the man can keep quiet for two years, he can keep quiet later as well, even after knowing the meaning of the word. Do you accept it or reject it? That is important.

According to Buddha, if we don't accept a thing it remains with the giver. So also with criticism. If we don't react, indirectly speaking, don't accept it, it remains with the abuser!

Once again you may say, 'It is easier said than done'. Yes, usually people get depressed

when they hear criticisms against them. But a man of sound character will not get depressed like others. He knows how to take criticism by its horns. Even if he is depressed, it is only for a short period. He will come up soon. How is it possible?

## 18

### ***Depression? Bounce up!***

Have you ever seen a ball jumping? Yes, what is the specialty in it? It teaches us a lesson. There is a Sanskrit verse:

*Paatitopi karaaghaataih utpatatyeva kandukaha  
Praayenahi suvrutteenam asthaayinyoh vipattayah*

‘A rubber ball rises when it is hit against the ground. In the same way, for good people, dangers (set-backs) are not permanent.’

Swami Vivekananda also said, ‘*True greatness consists not in rising but in rising every time we fall.*’ In contrast, compare the fall of a clay ball. What happens? It never rises. Successful people are like rubber balls who can bounce back after setbacks.

*What happens to you is not important, but “what you do with what happened to you” is more important.*

When you see some people, you wonder what keeps them always so energetic and active. When these people work, it is a sight to see. They arrange their work in such a way that it all looks so easy. It all depends on how you arrange your work. Suppose there are some books on your table. If they are all heaped together, can you pick any of them at your will? No. It will be very difficult. But if you arrange them in some orderly fashion, you not only can find them easily but there will be room enough for some more articles. If such is the case with a few books, then, what to speak of multiple articles which you handle daily.

The same principle can be applied to *time-management* too. You have 24 hours in a day. It is the same for everyone. But some people have plenty of time to do many works, where as some find it always difficult to find time even to look after themselves. Where is the problem? It

all depends on how you organize your day. In other words you have to organize yourselves, that means, you have to organize your thoughts, first.

Swami Paramananda, a monk who was deputed by Swami Vivekananda to America to continue his work, says, *“Be at peace with yourself. So long as we are at war with ourselves, we cannot better ourselves. The only way to improve our steadiness and our devotion to our ideal is to so order and organize our feelings and thoughts that they can never overcome us.”*

Abraham Lincoln said, *‘It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself and claims kindred to the great God who made him’.*

But when we feel unworthy, it is difficult not to feel miserable.

## 19

### *Despair*

This despairing view of one’s own self often stems from childhood when we really were smaller, weaker and less skillful than those around us. Later, if we look closely, we may find

that we have not lived up to our own expectations or our parents' expectations of us. Or perhaps we have set our own standards too high. In either case, humility and laughter are the greatest antidotes. Feelings of unworthiness can actually be laughed away by anyone who is courageous enough to smile even a little at himself.

Now, with an understanding of the dynamics of depression, you should pray also for an insight into the emotion you may be burying or giving into. Pray for an awareness of being forgiven. Pray for a group or a friend to whom you can turn to express your deepest emotions.

And finally, remember that we are expected to think highly of ourselves. Proper self-esteem is a million miles away from conceit and selfishness. It is giving ourselves the same reverence and respect we feel for all of God's creation, and for the same reason: *'Because He made us and values us.'*

In many cases a failure can cause depression. We must understand that even great people 'tasted' failure many times in their lives!

If you can sit down and think very clearly about failure, if you realize that you *are* a person who always has choices, you will have mastered an invaluable lesson. Why do smart people fail? They can fail for many reasons. But failure is not the point - the best of people experience that. It is learning from that failure, that is special. *The distinguishing characteristic about really smart people? They learn.*

Bernard Shaw said, '*A life spent in making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.*'

If success is only one step away, will that be adjudged a failure? No. Is one undaunted by failure? Does one possess a will and courage that will never bend before difficulties? This is important.

There is a sloka to this effect. (In fact, there are slokas in sanskrit for every occasion in life.)

*Kadarthitasyaapi cha dhairya vritte  
Buddhervinaaso nahi shankaneeyaha  
Athah kritasyaapi tanoona paadaha  
Na athah sikhaayaati kadaachideva*

‘The flame of fire never goes downwards even if it is held upside down; Similarly the man of strong character and will-power will never be daunted nor even thwarted.’

We are fascinated to see and use the finished products of man’s achievements like Television, Car, Computer etc. without knowing the painful process by which these miracles came into being. We should know that virtually nothing comes out right at the first attempt itself.

## 20

### ***Don’t Worry! Be Merry!***

One more aspect of depression is the habit of worrying. This is brooding over the past, without trying positively to improve the situation. But if we analyze properly, most of our worries are self created, or in other words, they

are dependant on our imagination. It is told in one English poem:

*'All our joys are in our imagination  
All our sorrows are in our apprehension  
Though life does not tally with his fantasies  
Man always worries about his future'*

How true it is! By learning to think properly, this habit of worrying can be rectified. There are so many techniques to get rid of this habit. For example, try to recollect what you have worried about a few days back. In most cases, you won't even remember what you were worrying about! If you can remember, it is very nice. Now compare the present state of that condition which was worrying you. I can assure that, the problem might have been over for good. And you will be thinking about some other problems now. So, what is the use of worrying so much about a situation which is not worthy of remembrance?

There is a sloka in this connection, which compares worry with a funeral pyre!

*Chitaayascha chintaayaascha  
bindumaatra viseshataha  
Chitaa dahati nirjeevam  
chintaa dahati jeevataha*

The difference between worry (cinta) and funeral pyre (cita) in Sanskrit is one dot only i.e, the letter anusvara is the difference. Whereas funeral pyre kills a man when he is without life, worry kills a man even while he is alive!

You see, how true it is. Prolonged worry can cause ulcers, nervous tension, blood pressure and a host of many diseases. It is a well known fact that these diseases are all slow killers. This is the meaning implied by the above sloka.

Here is a quote I saw somewhere: *'Today is the tomorrow you were worried about yesterday.'*

It may not be true for certain types of worries, which take a longer time to settle. They have to be tackled systematically and analytically. But most of our so called worries are the creations of our own mental attitude and thinking. Change the way you think, the worry no longer exists!

In most cases we are too concerned with what people will think about us. The fact is that most people never observe us as closely and as critically as we believe.

The one characteristic of the people who beat this habit of depression and worry is that they have the sense of humour in them to the full extent. That helps them to overcome these obstacles. The greatest successes in life are to those fortunate few, who accept responsibility for their mistakes, as well as for their accomplishments.

John D Rockefeller Jr. recalled about his father, *'Never did I hear him utter a single word of regret. With him what has happened could not be helped. How to repair the damage, how to rebuild, how to turn the apparent defeat into victory - this was his immediate concern throughout his life.'*

One of the first things to realize is that accomplishment follows a natural course of trial and error. To admit one's own mistakes takes a sense of humour, and this wisdom too frequently does not come until late in life. The

earlier we accept and forget our mistakes, the better for us.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, *'Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. Begin it well and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense.'*

We shall now discuss this sense of humour, a quality much needed in a world of much tension and confusion.

## 21

### ***Sense of Humour***

'Take two joke-pills and call me in the morning!' That is the prescription of many physicians and psychologists who believe you can laugh your way to health. Today's healers offer succinct advice: 'Don't take your life too seriously; it is temporary.'

There are occasions, some situations, where you cannot decide what to tell or how to react

to the situation. Under these circumstances, taking things in a humorous way can save the situation.

There is, however, a warning! 'Beware: Humour may be dangerous to your illness!' The illness humour can immediately cure may be mental, but eventually it will heal most of your physical illnesses also. Because, now it is an established fact that mental health and physical health are inter-connected. In many cases, it is the mind that controls the body.

For every event there is a lighter side. We fail to look at it. But if we can look at the lighter side, many problems won't arise at all. Things will be eased out. On many occasions, a witty answer would be better than a serious explanatory answer.

All of us know Abraham Lincoln. He was taller than the average American. Once somebody wanted to tease him. He asked Lincoln, 'Sir! What should be the correct length of the leg of a man?' 'From waist to floor!' answered

Lincoln. This silenced the questioner. This is one example of a great sense of humour.

Swami Vivekananda also had to face similar situations in America. There were many misconceptions about India in that country due to the propaganda of Christian Missionaries there. He was asked by someone, 'Why do mothers throw babies to crocodiles in your country?' Swami Vivekananda answered, 'Because it is easier for them to chew!'

You see, there can be no use arguing under such circumstances. Looking at the humorous side of the situation is very useful on many such occasions.

Aristotle noted that, '*A society which cannot laugh at itself cannot be said to be in good health.*' Benjamin Franklin, in Poor Richard's Almanac, offered hilarious wisdom. An example: *Mary's mouth cost her nothing, for she never opens it but at the expense of others.* Throughout the ages, the savants have known that a smile costs nothing but gives much.

For all the qualities discussed so far, one unique power is required as a back ground, as a bed rock. That is *will-power*. It is the power which makes you achieve what you want in life and helps you to find a remedy for the tragedies you encounter in life. Without will-power the other qualities cannot be developed. It is like the backbone of a being.

## 22

### ***Will-Power***

For all the stories of successes and failures in peoples' lives, there are different reasons. But in every successful man's life one factor is inevitably common and that is will power. The amount of success a man achieves in his life can be gauged by the amount of will-power he cultivated.

Thus, the question "How to develop will-power?" becomes a very important question in everybody's life. Proper training to develop this will-power should be a part and parcel of our educational system right from the childhood. Otherwise our education remains largely

irrelevant. If, unfortunately, the idea of cultivating will-power has not been taught from our childhood, then we have to learn it now, whatever may be our age or condition. Because without exercising will-power it is impossible to develop our personality and individuality. On the other side, if we have will-power, then even if we lose everything else, it is perfectly possible to raise from a completely hopeless condition and achieve success in our individual and social lives. If a man has will-power then he will be able to make everything from scratch. If he lacks will-power then all his abilities will turn out to be useless.

By the above analysis we can conclude that the failure of our will-power is responsible for the tragedies which occur daily in our life. Many of us do not know what goodness, strength and greatness are innate in us and we do not understand how they are trying to manifest themselves. We only know about our weaknesses. So it is important to under-

stand how not to let our will-power fail. To ensure that, the only way is to cultivate it!

What is will-power? Swami Vivekananda teaches that the will is a combination of the mind and the atman. He says, *'This will is caused by character and character is manufactured by Karma or Work. As is the karma, so is the manifestation of will.'*

Every man has some amount of will-power. There is no doubt about it. But it varies from individual to individual.

We develop will-power by the way we work (i.e. do our karma). Karma requires discipline and discipline increases the will-power. Can an undisciplined person do any serious work? When we utter the word 'discipline', people frown as if it is something unwanted. Because generally discipline is imposed on someone by somebody else. It may be necessary when a person is too young to understand the world. But as he grows he must be able to discipline himself. It is known as *self-discipline*.

Take for example the case of a mighty river; it flows with full vigour, occasionally causing damage to the human habitations along its bank. If the power of the river is to be utilized for some useful purpose, then there must be a dam and machinery to convert the tamed power of the river into electricity etc. This may look like controlling the freedom of the river; but see the advantage of controlled use of the power of the river.

Similarly, the power of the youth must be utilised by channelizing it by proper means. This is known as discipline. Indisciplined youth-power both at individual and social levels is destructive, whereas the disciplined youth-power is useful in many ways.

Swami Vivekananda was mainly concerned about how young students can discipline their lives? He has addressed many a lecture to the youth of India. He told, *'Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders and know that you are the creators of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves.'*

Once you know the whole responsibility is on you, then you cannot behave irresponsibly, i.e. in an undisciplined way. A bus owner will not set fire to his own bus! But students do so because, they don't feel the responsibility. We see how people destroy the government property during strikes etc. People do not understand that those properties were created from the very taxes which they themselves paid. If they understand that, then they would not behave thus.

Now, where does this discipline start? It starts at home. Parents must discipline their children first. It continues in schools and then colleges. When a man completes his education, then who is there to discipline him? He has to discipline himself. It is known as self-discipline. In Ramayana, when Sita was kept in Ashoka Vana, who protected her?

*Rakshitaam svena seelena*

'She was protected by her own character.'

The well established good character of a man which is cultivated from self-discipline will protect him through his life.

Like any other quality, will-power also can be developed by proper methods and practice. By following simple exercises one can increase his will-power gradually. By loving what we ought to do we can develop will-power.

In our country, we can see women can endure more shocks and blows than men. I have seen many examples, where a family bereavement has thrown the father out of balance for many months, whereas the mother came round after a few days of wailing and lamenting!

What is the reason behind this phenomena?

Generally it is the women-folk who undertake religious fasting and observe vows meticulously. But men very rarely undergo these things. These practices are the reasons behind the strength of women. It requires some strength of mind to control the passions and emotions. Ladies develop this by practising *vratas* (austerities) regularly. However, these can be practised by everybody.

## 23

### *How to develop will-power*

First, start with simple exercises.

1. Weekly, one day, skip one meal. Instead, take some substitute in the beginning. Later on, this substitute also should be stopped.

2. Once in an week, practise silence for half a day. Spend the time in reading or meditating, if you are habituated to meditation. Avoid unnecessary thinking too. *Self-talk* amounts to talking. Don't sleep away the time. It is not silence!

I remember one incident. Once at a party, one multi-linguist who knew 14 languages, kept silent without making any comment or talking. All the others chit-chatted and gossiped to their heart's content. At the end one man complimented: '*Our friend practised silence in 14 languages!*' When it is so difficult for a man who knows only one language to keep quiet, imagine what a feat it is to keep silent knowing so many languages.

3. Once a week skip taking tea or coffee if you have the habit. But don't resort to another bad habit to keep up this practice. For example, if you go to a cinema in order to skip a meal or to practise silence, it is a very bad idea!

You can take the help of your friends who are interested in your welfare. Without their help it may be difficult to achieve the goal single-handedly. Beware! Not all are *friends*. They may disturb your vow!

Moreover, eagerly await the day of practice! Prepare the mind from the day before, so that you will find it easy to control the mind. And once you have kept the vow compliment yourself with some treat. I am not joking! It will work.

Our mind is like a child, we have to cajole it into obedience. The mind is like a white cloth. The white cloth can take whatever colour it is dipped in. Similarly mind also can take suggestions and ideas. By giving good and strong ideas we can nourish it well and make it stronger.

All these things indicate some extent of discipline - *self-discipline* - which will lead to self-confidence. This self-confidence is the watch word to success.

Swami Vivekananda taught this to us in a sloka. You must be able to recite it by heart,

*Kim naama rodishi sake tvayi sarva shaktihi*

*Aamanthra yasva bhagavan bhagadam svaroopam*

*Trilokyametadakhilam tava paada moole*

*Aatmaivahi prabhavati na jadah kadaachit*

“Oh, my friend! Why are you weeping? All the power is within you. Call forth your own nature, which is noble. The three worlds are lying at your feet. (Why?) It is the Atman alone which abides, never the inert thing called the body.”

All the setbacks belong to the physical plane only. They are temporary. In reality, in the plane of the *Spirit* it is the divinity which is ever manifesting its glory. It is like the sun obscured by clouds for a short while. After some time when the clouds move away, the

sun shines in its own glory. In our case also, these obstacles may block our progress temporarily but not for ever. Keeping this in mind one should strive his utmost for coming up in life.

Now you can try these exercises also. These are little advanced exercises. But certainly they will increase your will-power.

### **1. Attempt the impossible**

First of all there is nothing that is impossible. It may take a long time and tremendous effort to achieve. What seems to be impossible in one way of thinking and approach may be possible in another way of thinking and approach. For this one may think in different ways and must apply varieties of approaches. Or he has to take the help of some other people who can think differently. Usually, people are bound to think in a dogmatic way. But there are some who can think differently and they call the shots in life.

There is a story in the life of Jawaharlal Nehru. When Nehru was a small boy, he was playing a

game of ball with his friends. Suddenly the ball fell in to a deep hole in the ground. Every one tried to take the ball out by using sticks, ropes etc but failed. Suddenly Nehru got a brilliant idea. He brought a bucket full of water and poured it in the hole. The ball came out floating to the great joy of his friends!

## **2. Do without the indispensable**

There is nothing indispensable in this world. We are habituated to depend on something or on someone and think that the particular item or person is indispensable. Swami Vivekananda said, *'The world is not waiting for you and me.'*

Nature finds out its own replacement for everything and everyone. It is all our imagination that we feel we are indispensable. First shatter this cell of imagination and come out of it to see the reality. Not only that, trying to come out of the confused thinking may open new avenues to explore and which in turn may enrich our life.

### 3. Bear the unbearable,

#### Tolerate the intolerable

Responsibility is like a weight kept on our shoulder. We have to bear it.

Kalidasa said in *Sakuntalam*,

*Raajyam svabasta dbrita dandamiva Aatapatram*

‘The kingdom is like an umbrella kept in ones own hand.’

An umbrella protects us from rain and sun. That is the benefit we get from it. But we have to bear the weight to get the benefit. Similarly with responsibilities also. You will get the benefit only when you bear the responsibility. Those who want to be free from the burden cannot be responsible for anything. They are not wanted any where in the world.

We have to tolerate the behaviour of many people when we are working in a group. Leading a group is not trivial. Tolerance is the real test of leadership.

Swami Vivekananda says in one place, ‘*Can a leader be made, my brother? A leader is born.*’

*Do you understand? And it is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader. One must be a servant of servants, and must accommodate a thousand minds. There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader!’*

If you want to achieve anything substantially, working in a group and team work is necessary and it requires leaders. But what about followers? If there is no follower, whom to lead? It is necessary for a follower to be a true follower to accomplish the task. A follower who likes to follow his own course is no good in a group. The group may be a family or an office or a football team. It need not be a big organisation always.

#### **4. Keep on trying**

##### **when the time is trying**

Many people try for some time and then leave it with depressed mind or with lame excuses for their failures, or blame every one else and maintain that they are alright. But it is not cor-

rect. Have you tried your utmost? There is a story narrated by Swami Vireswarananda, the tenth president of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission.

Once there was a ship sailing in the high seas. A young boy accidentally fell into the sea from the deck. He knew swimming. So he was struggling to swim and kept himself afloat. But there was no help. Though he got exhausted, he was trying to swim and kept himself floating. At last when he was about to sink, a life-boat was lowered and the boy was saved. If the boy had not struggled, or given up his struggle, he would have drowned. So you see, it is necessary to keep on struggling even if there is no sign of success in sight.

One more thing necessary for developing will-power is the positive outlook in life. It goes hand in hand with the most often quoted '*Atmaviswasa*' or '*Self-confidence*' of Swami Vivekananda. The man who has faith in himself, has tremendous will-power already. All negative thoughts should be discarded daily

and the mind should be given newer and newer positive and encouraging ideas. Each disappointment is a filling station to renew your energy.

## **5. Now, here is a dose to try for the religious minded**

Sri J.P. Vasvani said, *‘Do the best you can and then surrender your problems to God; He is your senior partner!’*

There is a story about taking the help of God.

There was a little boy who was having difficulty lifting a heavy stone. His father came along just then and noting the boy’s failure, asked him, “Are you using all your strength?” “Yes, I am!” the boy exclaimed impatiently. “No, you are not,” the father answered; “I am right here waiting, and you haven’t asked me to help you!”

Sometimes when we are faced with a situation that seems unsolvable or a burden too heavy for us to carry, we might ask ourselves, are we using all our strength? God too, is waiting to help us.

It is our folly to depend too much on our own strength. We must be able to take the help of somebody who can really help. Who said that we must do everything ourselves and without the help of others? Are we not going to doctor for treatment? But of course, whom to ask is a question of wisdom.

Swami Vivekananda composed a sloka about the strength felt by the followers of Sri Ramakrishna.

*Kurvastaaraka charvanam  
tribhuvanam utpaatayaamo balaat  
Kimbho na vijaanaasi asmaan  
ramakrishna daasavayam*

We can make the stars into powder, and we are strong enough to uproot the three worlds! Don't you know who we are? We are the servants of Ramakrishna!

Even in Bible there are sayings to this effect: *'If God be for me, who shall be against me?' 'I shall do everything through God who strengthens me.'*

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## 24

### Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda said, *'The road to the Good is the roughest and steepest in the universe. It is a wonder that so many succeed, no wonder that so many fall. Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles.'*

By constantly striving to gain control over himself, a man gains a knowledge of the subtle intricacies of his mind; and it is this divine knowledge which enables him to become established in calmness. Without this knowledge there can be no abiding peace of mind, and those who are carried away by tempestuous passions, cannot approach the holy place where calmness reigns. The weak man is like one who, having mounted a fiery steed allows it to run away and carry him whither so ever it wills; the strong man is like one who, having mounted the steed, governs it with a masterly hand; and makes it

go in whatever direction and whatever speed he commands.

Calmness is the crowning beauty of a character that has become or becoming divine, and is restful and peace-giving to all who come in contact with it. Those who are still in weakness and doubt, find the presence of a calm mind restful to their troubled minds, inspiring to their faltering feet, and rich with healing and comfort in their hour of sorrow.

Therefore, take charge of yourselves: **YOU** can become the driver of yourself.































































