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Swami Dayatmananda

### *Swadhyaya* or Scriptural Study

Sri Krishna advises an aspirant to practise *Swadhyaya*. *Swadhyaya* means study of the scriptures and also study of one's mind. Scriptures are the foundation of every religion. It is seen that religions without a scripture vanish quickly.

What are Scriptures? They are the spiritual realisations of saints and mystics, the records of their experiences of the Ultimate Reality, translated into local language and idiom. Truths about the existence of God, the after-life and the other-world cannot be known through the five senses; they can be known only through scriptures. Mystics through their experience assert these truths. Hence we can accept them only through faith until our own experience confirms them.

Since Reality is One, its experience must be the same for all. "*All jackals howl to the same note*", said Sri Ramakrishna. The Vedas proclaim: "*Truth is One. Sages call It by various names*". The seeming differences are due to language only and interpretations.

Swami Vivekananda clarifies: *"Truth is of two kinds: (1) that which is cognisable by the five ordinary senses of man, and by reasonings based thereon; (2) that which is cognisable by the subtle, supersensuous power of Yoga; and knowledge acquired by the second is called the Vedas.*

*The person in whom this supersensuous power is manifested is called a Rishi, and the supersensuous truths which he realises by this power are called the Vedas.*

*This Rishihood, this power of supersensuous perception of the Vedas, is real religion.*

*And so long as this does not develop in the life of an initiate, so long is religion a mere empty word to him."*

### **Spiritual functions of Scriptures**

a) It is from scriptures that we come to know of God, the goal of life, and the various paths which lead us to Him. We also come to know what should or should not be done, which qualities true devotees should acquire, which defects one should overcome etc. Since human beings are different in their nature and temperament they require different paths. Scriptures provide different pathways suitable to different temperaments so that everyone can reach the one goal, God.

b) Scriptures give us the benefit of holy company. Sri Ramakrishna used to advise spiritual aspirants to cultivate holy company - association with holy men and sincere devotees of God. Their association is extremely effective in bringing home to us the reality of God and spiritual life. Devotees are the witnesses of God. Through them God Himself is manifested; through them we receive contact with God Himself. It is literally true that even a moment spent in the company of a true devotee produces lifelong results. Unfortunately real devotees are rare. What should we do then? We may read

the scriptures and the lives of saints - for they are also wonderfully effective. A scripture is not a mere book; it is another form of God. Sri Ramakrishna once had a vision where he found God, scripture and devotee as three manifestations of the same Reality. He used to say: "*Bhagavan (the Lord), Bhagavata (His word or scripture) and Bhakta (devotee) are all one and the same.*"

c) Scriptures console and give us hope. Life is painful. The pain is felt all the more by the struggling aspirant (since the aspirant grows refined and soft). At times all hope vanishes and despair takes possession. Every aspirant, beginner and advanced alike, has to pass through these dry periods, the "dark nights of the soul". But a study of the lives of saints shows us clearly that everything must come out all right, at least, at the end.

d) Scriptures give us inspiration. 'Familiarity breeds contempt' - there is a lot of truth in this saying. Spiritual practices tend to become repetitive and mechanical after a time. At this period regular study of scriptures and the lives of holy men provides us with inspiration and slowly takes us towards our goal.

e) Scriptures provide us with right guidance. Men are weak, irrational, and are easily misled by passions. It is easy to forget the goal and go in the wrong direction. Yet most often people tend to justify their actions rather accept their mistakes and correct their behaviour. It is here that regular devout study of scriptures can help immensely.

f) Scriptures reinforce our faith. Faith is like a muscle. Muscles grow strong through regular exercise and become weak through lack of it. Similarly faith also can be strengthened through regular study of scriptures and holy lives. Through a constant barrage of atheistic ideas with the help of powerful media whole nations can be

brainwashed and made atheistic, materialistic or fanatical, resulting in wars and bloodshed - recent history proves this fact abundantly. A similar technique, however, can be turned to our spiritual advantage. Scriptures can help us to de-hypnotise ourselves by constantly reminding us of our divine nature, and our goal in life.

g) The power of Truth is irresistible. Since scriptures are nothing but varied expressions of Truth they cannot but lead us in the direction of God. When scriptures are studied regularly with devotion they seep into the very depths of our unconscious. They purify us, washing away age-old impressions, filling our minds with holy thoughts, and ideas, and slowly but steadily they lead us towards the Ultimate Reality.

However if we forget the true aim of scriptures, instead of liberating they bind us.

*"The Grantha does not always mean a holy scripture, but often it comes to mean a 'Granthi' or a knot. If a man does not read it with an intense desire to know the Truth it will be an encumbrance on his mind like so many knots. It is useless to pore over the holy scriptures if one's mind is not endowed with discernment and dispassion". (Sri Ramakrishna)*

*Look for truth in the Bible; not eloquence. Every verse should be read in the spirit with which it was written. Read the devout and simple books as gladly as the learned and profound. People die, but God's Word will never pass away. If you want to make your Scripture reading worthwhile, read with humility, simplicity, and faith. Don't try to appear learned. Listen in silence to the words of the holy men, and take pleasure in the teachings of the elders. They spoke with good reason. (Of The Imitation of Christ)*

Q) How can one get the mind absorbed in God, Maharaj?

A) *"Practice meditation regularly. The early morning is a good time for meditation.*

*Before you begin your meditation, read devotional scriptures. This will help you to concentrate the mind on God". (Swami Brahmananda)*

Such is the power of holy scriptures. The study of scripture is to be undertaken with faith, devotion and with the sole idea of bettering oneself. That is why it is aptly named *Swa+adhyaya* i.e., study for one's own benefit. Scriptural study cannot be dispensed with until we realise God.

*Swadhyaya* also means study of one's mind. Mere study of scriptures without being aware of how one is benefiting is useless. Scriptures are like a compass or like maps. One needs to compare one's progress with the help of scriptures; along with scriptural study one should constantly observe one's thoughts, motives, actions, and try to make them accord with the teachings of scripture.

- Swami Dayatmananda

**Joan Rayne**

**Boredom**

Boredom has accounted for more casualties among spiritual aspirants than most of the more obvious tribulations, setbacks and obstacles put together, and when prolonged the ordeal has caused many to abandon the spiritual life entirely. Most of us are prepared to take a heroic stand and at least try to do battle against what we consider the forces of evil when they assail us from within, but if boredom is the enemy we drop our swords and shrug our shoulders. It does not occur to us to offer any resistance to something we do not recognize as a menace. We fail to see that this unprofitable state

of mind is a threat, however camouflaged, to our spiritual progress and should therefore be included among the forces of evil and dealt with accordingly.

Boredom is generally experienced by aspirants quite early in the spiritual life. Few of us can escape it, and indeed it appears to be the almost inevitable reaction after the first glow of enthusiasm has died down. Once Vedanta ceases to be merely an intellectual pastime and becomes our guiding principle, we begin to put its teachings into practice and to lead the spiritual life. This involves us in a number of activities which are new and strange; meditation, self-analysis, and self-denial or renunciation, in the course of which, according to our fervour and circumstances, we may have given up anything ranging from candy to our homes. The sheer novelty of making these gestures is in itself stimulating and absorbing, and while it lasts we live in the clouds. Probably during these first few months we enjoy a greater measure of serenity than we have known hitherto; it comes to us almost gratuitously without our having made any apparent effort to acquire it - a grace, in short. But this newly found peace of mind, the indispensable mental condition for spiritual self-development, we seldom value at its true worth, and the idea of trying to preserve it at all costs never enters our heads. Quite possibly we regard our mood of unaccustomed tranquillity as a reward for trying to be better people and no more than our due, so we take it for granted. As time passes we get used to it and then gradually, ungrateful creatures that we are, we begin to find this uneventful contentment a little tedious. If, as it is to be hoped, we have arranged our activities according to a fixed daily routine, this begins to pall too; spiritual disciplines, study, and duties which we have been performing with zest are now merely gone through without interest. The final stage of disenchantment is reached when we find ourselves more bored than we have ever been before. We are not basically unhappy, only apathetic. Everything we do seems flat, everyone we speak to seems

dull, each day is faintly unpalatable.

Such then, is the state of boredom. As a form of suffering it is perhaps harder to endure than the most spectacular agonies of grief, despair, humiliation, anxiety, remorse, temptation - the catalogue is endless of the sympathy-deserving woes. We look back on our lost serenity with regret and view our present dreariness with a mixture of bewilderment and annoyance. Not that we expected our happiness to last indefinitely, for had we not been warned that the starry-eyed period would end sooner or later to be replaced by a span of suffering? So we were fully prepared to accept the onslaught of misfortune in whatever form it might come - some external calamity, perhaps, or a bout of intense mental anguish - since it would be a test demanding all our strength to survive it and from which we might hope to emerge with our spiritual stature appreciably enhanced. Suffering was inevitable and we were ready to welcome it; we waited almost eagerly for the karmic sword of Damocles to fall. But when it did, we were confronted by the anticlimax of boredom. The danger lies in our not taking it seriously. Not that anyone is so naive as to believe that in the spiritual life the only alternative to scaling the heights of rapture is to plumb the depths of despair, but one cannot help suspecting that perhaps a dose of real, honest-to-goodness misery might be a more fitting adversary to overcome. There is something a bit *infra dig* about boredom, and the chances are that one adopts a negative attitude towards it.

Naturally, we seek to escape it, and in our preliminary attempts to do so we are even inclined to revert to our recently discarded belief that the solution to our problems lies outside ourselves. This convenient fallacy will soon be shown up yet again for what it is, but in the meantime we are prepared to give it another try. Here we take the line that perhaps we have been overdoing the spiritual life and have gone stale on it, and

that therefore the best means of recovering our former zest might be by not exactly cutting down on our virtues but by balancing them with a few harmless worldly distractions. We are in for a shock, however. For when we seek refuge in our time-killing devices, we find that they have lost their tang! We can no longer be entertained by a visit to the movies, relaxed by a good meal in an attractive restaurant, absorbed in a book; we derive no comfort from a gossip with a friend, find no satisfaction in our work, and even a change of surroundings proves abortive since we must take ourselves with us wherever we go. Diversions which in the past could always be counted upon to effect at least a brief respite from our tedium can no longer do the trick. Somehow we have lost our capacity for responding to the artificially manufactured good time. Our so-called pleasures having failed us, our sense of weary futility increases because we feel that we have nothing to take their place. We feel cheated out of both worlds; we find neither enjoyment in distractions nor solace and bliss in the spiritual life. There is nothing to look forward to and nothing we wish to do, since we know in advance that each experience will prove a dull disappointment. Nothing is interesting, entertaining, or emotionally stimulating. Everything is flat. In desperation we may be tempted to make the experiment of drinking or drugging ourselves into a state whereby the mundane will at least appear exciting; by deliberately dulling our sense of discrimination we can inject the commonplace with a shot of glamour. But this hazy self-deception, while it may provide the temporary thrill we crave, can never be a satisfactory solution for long and if persisted in will always end in disaster.

There is no justification for despair in our jaded reaction, however, which should be regarded as a step forward since it indicates a genuine distaste for what the world has to offer. Had we, on the other hand, been able to find adequate consolation in some trivial pursuit there would indeed be cause for alarm, for it would be obvious that since embarking upon the spiritual life we had not developed at all. Surely it is ridiculous for



the grown, mature man to lament the fact that he can no longer be amused by his nursery toys!

Bored, then, and having drawn a blank in our attempts to recover our early peaceful happiness by taking recourse to external means, we feel cornered. This is all to the good, and it is to be hoped that this *impasse* will drive us to the obvious conclusion, belated though it may be, that we had better turn our thoughts inward and seek within ourselves the cause of our apathy and its cure.

We shall find that the peace of mind we possessed during the early stages of our spiritual life was earned by the initial efforts we made in practising spiritual disciplines. But we must realize that these initial efforts, through repetition, become stabilized and habitual, and reach a stage of development whereby we should make greater demands upon ourselves because we have become capable of greater strivings. If we ignore this fact, however, once we have advanced even a little, and merely continue repeating our mild, kindergarten exertions, we are living beneath our spiritual level and heading for stagnation. The onset of boredom is the first indication of this, and is a warning that our serenity is not simply to be had for the asking and can only be preserved by our making increasingly strenuous endeavours according to our capacity. Failure to heed this danger signal will cause us to weary of our easy-going routine, our tranquillity will leave us and degeneracy will set in, boredom having undermined our resolution to persevere even with those disciplines we have got used to. We must never make the mistake of resting on our laurels. Our ascent of the spiritual ladder is like climbing up a downward-moving escalator, and if on any step we pause for breath, lost in a self-congratulatory reverie, we cannot expect to be carried on up or even allowed to remain stationary.

God is our only refuge, and all obstacles that we encounter in spiritual life should serve

to remind us of this fact and make us turn to him with greater single-mindedness. Boredom is no exception, but the chances are that it will make us try everything under the sun first before turning to the Lord as a last resort. Pascal has said that men prefer to occupy their minds with almost anything rather than to think of God, and there is certainly no one more disinclined to meditate than the bored spiritual aspirant; but in the end we shall be driven to calling on the Lord, and in this lies our only hope. No matter how fed up we may be by now, and no matter how distasteful the idea of spiritual disciplines, once we have decided to turn our problem of boredom over to the Lord we should begin lengthening the periods of our meditation and *japam*. At the same time we might practise unobtrusively one or two extra forms of self-denial such as, for example, getting up in the morning half an hour earlier, eating a little less at mealtimes, and refraining from uttering the amusing, yet hurtful and unnecessary remark. These and similar disciplines should be quite enough to go on with, and the efforts involved in carrying them out should absorb us sufficiently to prevent an attack of soul-destroying boredom from taking root in our minds. Of all these fresh ventures in self-development, *japam* and meditation are the most important; they can be relied upon to solve most of our problems if we will only give them a try. Calling on the Lord may not alter unfavourable circumstances, but it will alter our reactions to them and restore and preserve our tranquillity, without which our spiritual progress will be negligible.

This is a hackneyed prescription, but then so are all time-proven remedies. The cure is guaranteed if we follow the directions with patience and sincerity. There is no other way.

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**Swami Budhananda**

## **The Inner Stability We Need**

We may have everything called 'enviable' - money, learning, dear ones, success, position, rare things designated 'covetable'. Yet we may not have that one thing which makes everything worthwhile and meaningful. Without that one thing, life becomes dreary in the extreme and impossible to carry on but for the costly help of the psychiatrist. The need for regularly visiting the psychiatrist is becoming compulsory for many people. We all need have that one essential thing without which everything goes awry: inner stability.

What exactly is inner stability? From Sri Krishna's teachings, by implication, this perfect definition of inner stability emerges:

Inner stability is that state of being in which, when established,

- (a) a man's mind is permanently free from anxiety;
- (b) he is satisfied in the Self, not requiring things external to make him happy;
- (c) he does not stray from awareness of reality; and
- (d) he is not shaken even by heavy sorrow.

This theoretical statement will be made more clear by an example.

Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, came to be known as a sthita-prajna, a man of steady wisdom. No calamity could ruffle his equanimity. One day he

was escorting Dr. Kanjilal, a surgeon, who was also a devotee, in a country boat over the Ganges from Calcutta to Belur Math. When they were in the middle of the swelling river, there arose a frightening hurricane, and the boat was about to be capsized. Swami Saradananda who was smoking from a hubble-bubble continued to do so, as if nothing was happening. This was too much of a strain on the patience of the surgeon. He angrily seized the top of the hubble-bubble and threw it into the water, saying, 'You are indeed the strangest of persons. The boat is sinking but you are sitting and smoking!' Unruffled at this affront of the surgeon, Swami Saradananda quietly said, 'I thought I had better keep smoking for it will be time for swimming only after the boat has actually sunk!'

This is inner stability!

Now, the question is: why should we at all try to achieve inner stability? What purpose does it serve?

It serves three fundamental requirements of life:

1. It saves us from being destroyed by the forces inimical to life, internal or external.
2. It helps make life meaningful, sane and creative.
3. It secures for us boundless joy, beyond the reach of our senses, grasped only by a pure mind.

Now, how do we achieve inner stability?

This we shall consider, not in the light of modern psychology, but according to the most ancient spiritual wisdom of man, with special emphasis on the teachings of the *Gita*.

Our efforts will be to indicate some simple teachings with the help of which every one of us can build up such inner stability as will enable him to withstand, in a creative manner, any foreseeable and unforeseeable shock that modern life may bring at any time.

The *Gita* is called the '*yoga-sastra*', meaning a scripture which teaches the methods of

attaining illumination, or union with God. It is also called '*Brahma-vidya*', a scripture which teaches the knowledge of Brahman, or ultimate Reality. But what does not appear to have been well noticed is that the *Gita* contains profound lessons on human psychology. What is more, in the *Gita* is also demonstrated a wonderful technique of psychotherapy from which professional psychiatrists may very well learn with profit.

As Arjuna saw arrayed in both armies grandfathers, maternal uncles, sons and grandsons, comrades, friends, in-laws, and teachers - all of whom he had intimately known - his heart sank and he lost his nerve. Shaken to his very roots, he exclaimed: 'O Krisna, at the sight of these kinsmen assembled here to give battle, my limbs fail, and my mouth is parched. My body is shaken and my hair stands on end. My bow slips from my hand and my skin is on fire. I cannot hold myself steady. I see premonitions of evil.'

So saying, he sank down in the chariot, overcome by grief. As Arjuna sat there dejected with swimming eyes he presented a perfect case of instability.

How did Krisna handle the situation at that critical moment? First, he gave Arjuna shock treatment. With words of biting reproach, he sought to rouse the drooping spirit of Arjuna. He said:

'In this crisis, O Arjuna, whence comes this dishonourable lowness of the spirit, unbecoming to an Aryan? Shake off this unmanliness. It does not befit you. Cast off this ignoble cowardice and arise.'

'If you win the battle, you will enjoy the earth. If you die fighting heroically, why, you will go to heaven for giving your life in a righteous cause. What could be more covetable for a Ksatriya, a soldier?'

It is to be noticed that in order to rouse Arjuna's drooping spirit Krsna did not give a

long pep talk, but a talk on *Dharma*, righteous duties, and Atman.

In rationalizing his own weakness, Arjuna had drawn heavily on *Dharma*. Perhaps he had thought that would justify his case and impress Krishna. But Krishna shamed Arjuna by expounding the true understanding of *Dharma*, clearly showing that harmlessness born of weakness and delusion and harmlessness born of strength and righteousness are poles apart.

Truth alone can invigorate, purify and strengthen. Therefore, Sri Krishna told Arjuna some simple truths which he had forgotten due to delusion.

Showing Arjuna his place against the background of reality, Krishna showed how, from the locus of his earthly existence and position, through fighting the battle of life in a righteous manner, Arjuna was to move to the fulfilment of his destiny, which was the realization of the identity of his soul with the Supreme Spirit.

This was why Sri Krishna drew Arjuna's pointed attention to his *svadharma*, the duties of his earthly existence in relation to his march toward cosmic existence. His *svadharma* or specific duty as a member of the warrior caste was to fight, and fight well, since war had come, and not behave in a pusillanimous manner, or talk garbled religion and confused philosophy.

Sri Krishna taught Arjuna that it was by worshipping the Lord through the performance of one's duties that one attained the highest perfection. All duties could not be pleasant, but they had to be performed in a detached manner. The dual throng of life, such as heat and cold, pain and pleasure, etc., had to be endured calmly without being

disturbed by them.

In a nutshell, Sri Krishna gave the secret of fighting life's battle: 'Fight free from [mental] fever.'

How could one succeed in doing that? It would appear to be an impossible task, to fight undisturbed in mind. But Krishna taught: no, it was possible. The secret, he said, was: 'Remember Me always and fight.' That was the way.

Let us now analyse the technique of this, one of the most ancient cases of psychotherapy - by one of the great teachers of men, and applied on a hero - and see what lessons we can draw from it for building up our own inner stability.

(a) First came the shock treatment. The principle of shock treatment is well-known in psychotherapy, but what is to be noted in Sri Krishna's treatment is that each blow was simultaneously a weakness-demolishing and strength-generating blow. This strength he did not inject from outside, but uncovered within his subject. He said to Arjuna: 'You are the Atman immortal. How can weakness befit you?'

Shock treatment can be harmful to the human psyche when it does not unlock the source of strength within the patient.

(b) Next, Krishna lifts Arjuna's mind from the concrete to the metaphysical, and this he does as a practical measure.

Though the crisis being faced is on the battle-field, instead of talking about arms, strategy, logistics, he raises ultimate issues, discusses metaphysics, sociology, religion and spiritual disciplines.

He places Arjuna's contingent situation against the background of the cosmic set-up,

and teaches him to view his time-situation in reference to the timeless.

(c) As Sri Krisna's method of teaching shows, one of the most important steps for removing inner instability is to give due weight to both the concrete and the metaphysical.

We must find our own ways to generalize truths, and finally come to the highest truth, the one Reality, and grasp it firmly. When we can do that, life with all its strife and turmoil will appear as a pilgrimage to a great God-seeing; the universe will appear as God's manifestation; all work, His actions; all principles that govern movements, His laws. Similarities and diversities will then form a pattern of perfect harmony, and we shall know our own place in that harmony. It is the knowledge of the one Reality, the dynamics of which controls all variety and harmony in the universe and our place in it, that is the indestructible foundation of inner stability. In the music of the spheres every atom, every insect, every living being, has a tune to play, however little audible it may be. When we know that tune, we discover the truth of our existence, in which is all strength.

It is through the possession of the One that inner stability is attained. When we aim at this oneness and progressively move toward its realization, we gradually grow in inner stability.

When we live our lives without any reference to the metaphysical or spiritual, the unlimited, the One and the Absolute, we become frozen personalities completely identified with matter. Any shock from outside can then break our rigid inside to pieces, but if we have known, even theoretically, that within this psycho-physical organization there is something which is immortal and indestructible, which, while permeating our physical existence, spiritually unites us with the ultimate reality, nothing from outside can then touch our inner sense of security. It is this knowledge which makes for inner stability.



(d) What really restored Arjuna's inner stability was awareness of being the Atman, and not any change of outward circumstances. Therefore, he exclaimed: 'O Krishna, my delusion is gone, I have regained my memory.'

These words are very significant because they record the patient's testimony as to how his recovery came. It was delusion that caused the loss of memory, and the result was inner instability.

Now he said that he had regained his memory. Memory of what? Memory of the true nature of the Atman. When the memory returned, delusion was destroyed, and inner stability was then immediately restored. Inner stability is achieved not by acquiring what did not exist, but by discovering that the core of our nature, is immutable and ever free.

This can be worked through the five-fold method derived from the teaching of Sri Krishna in the *Gita*:

*First:* the aspirant desiring to attain inner stability must have a clear theoretical understanding of the true nature of his essential being, his relation to God or Reality and the world; and this understanding must colour, regulate, and inspire his thoughts, emotions, and actions.

For this, meditation is needed. A man without meditation cannot have inner stability.

*Second:* he must accept certain inevitabilities, such as disease, suffering, old age, separation, death etc., as concomitants of life, and have an insight into the meaning of change.

*Third:* he must endure the opposites of life, such as heat and cold, praise and blame, happiness and unhappiness, etc., with equanimity and thus strengthen the fibre of his

moral life.

*Fourth:* with this he should have a clear grasp of the cause-effect relationships which regulate a man's actions and fortunes. He should perform his duties, preferably in a spirit of worship but at any rate with dexterity and detachment.

*Fifth:* the battle of life has to be faced. Inner stability belongs to him alone who constantly remembers God or the true nature of the Self and fights free from fever.

Should this fivefold method of achieving inner stability appear to be too difficult for anyone, let him do only this one thing: let him completely surrender himself to God in all possible ways. He will then have inner stability in full measure without having to bother in the least about the true nature of the Self or the fivefold method suggested.

In this fivefold method of developing inner stability we have chiefly stressed a theistic approach. But what about those who, for temperamental reasons, cannot very well accept the theistic method, and are yet anxious to attain inner stability? Through what methods can they build their inner stability?

For people such as these, the most suitable and effective will be another fivefold method derived from Buddha's teachings, especially the *Dhammapada*:

*First:* one must hold fast to the truth. Truth will never pass away. Truth is immortal. Truth destroys a man's sin. Truth is the saviour. One who holds fast to truth becomes indestructible, like truth itself.

*Second:* holding fast to truth means becoming a seeker of truth and not pleasure. Those who seek pleasures cannot be stable because pleasures themselves are not stable. So the Buddha says:

'He who lives looking for pleasure only, his senses uncontrolled, immoderate in his food,

idle, and weak, Mara the tempter will certainly overthrow him, as the wind throws down a weak tree.'

'He who lives without looking for pleasure, his senses well controlled, moderate in his food, faithful and strong, him Mara will certainly not overthrow, any more than the wind throws down a rocky mountain.'

*Third:* earnestness is required. Earnestness means preparedness to do energetically and dexterously here and now all things that need to be done and to shun promptly what is to be shunned, for realizing the truth. Earnestness also means careful husbandry of all our resources and opportunities for attaining illumination.

*Fourth:* a well-reflecting mind is required, which prevents disintegration from within and distractions from without.

No external enemy can do greater harm to a man than his own wrongly-directed mind. No external friend can do greater service to a man than his well-controlled mind. A well-reflecting mind helps the aspirant to cherish proper values and to see clearly the inevitables of life in their proper perspectives. He sees and knows that:

(a) 'all created things perish';

(b) 'in all created things grief and pain are inherent';

(c) 'all forms are unreal'.

This acceptance born of insight helps the practice of detachment. The practice of detachment leads to purity of mind. It is the man of purity who never trembles, and who becomes unshakeable.

*Fifth:* seeking inner stability, the well-reflecting aspirant who has controlled his body and mind must assiduously devote himself to the meditative life. A man without meditation cannot have inner stability.

So says the Buddha:

'Meditate, O Bhikshu and be not heedless! Do not direct your thought to what gives pleasure, that you may not for your heedlessness have to swallow the iron ball and that you may not cry out burning: "This is pain"'

'Without knowledge, there is no meditation. Without meditation there is no knowledge. He who has knowledge and meditation is near unto Nirvana.'

It is only the man of inner stability who can attain or come near to Nirvana. This, then, is the fivefold method of attaining inner stability for those who are averse to practising theistic disciplines:

1. Hold fast to the truth.
2. Instead of being a seeker of pleasure, be a seeker of truth.
3. Practise earnestness and endurance.
4. Develop a well-reflecting mind for self-mastery.

## 5. Practise meditation.

Undoubtedly we live in very difficult times. But what of that? It is only by grappling with difficulties in a heroic manner that man has grown from strength to strength. We must not weaken ourselves by soft-thinking when affairs in the world are tough going. To live through our tough times, we require tougher insides. By flying away from the battle-field, we shall not escape the demand of destiny that our mettle be proved. We stand challenged to own firmly our responsibilities in these complicated times of ours. It befits men and women of our age to be awake, virile, and fearless, and accept them heroically. We have the power to do this.

Whether or not we seek God at all in the world, every one of us surely seeks his personal well-being. The true personal well-being of individuals can be worked for only on the foundation of inner stability. One who earnestly applies himself to develop inner stability will not crumble when everything crumbles around him. When everyone around him gnashes his teeth, tears his hair and beats his breast, he will remain tranquil and look at the goings-on of the world like an unaffected witness. From his heart and soul will flow a power, peace and joy which will help salvage suffering men and women of the world.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata Dec.1971)

## Leaves of an Ashrama: 10

### To Make Old Age Worth While

Several years ago Mme. Simone de Beauvoir published a new book entitled *La Vieillesse*, called in English *The Coming of Age*. It is a long book, but what it says can be summed up in three sentences. For most people old age is a descent into meaninglessness and frustration. Certain nomads leave their aged behind to die alone. Although not quite so literally, most other societies do almost the same thing, through neglect of and the lack of interest in the old.

Old age is one of the Buddha's Three Sorrows - a distasteful passage waiting up ahead for every one of us. Is there no way to circumvent it, or at least its worst consequences? Is there no way to be, though old, content and wanted?

I remember reading long ago a poignant saying by Leon Bloy which I have never forgotten: "There is only one sadness: not to be a saint". As I approach the stage of being what in America is called a Senior Citizen, I see that this is true. To be a sage is the only way to solve the problem of old age, for the oldster as well as those around him.

If there was ever a pragmatic reason for taking one's spiritual practices seriously, this is it. Those who in their active years succeed in developing some inner life, who learn to take sanctuary in the Real, can in their later years be at peace with themselves, and perhaps even be a joy to others.

What makes old age most disagreeable is being faced with inconsequence when one

craves still to be important. But one who has been practising detachment consciously throughout the previous years will have prepared himself for this, and will feel no shock of betrayal when the days of unimportance arrive. One may even be glad to be left alone, finding solace within oneself. I recall that my guru once said, "We have fewer problems with the aged in India; you often find them sitting quietly in a corner, doing japam." It is amusing but true that the law of karma gives us a 'selfish reason' for being unselfish. In choosing Vedantic alternatives, it's really I who reap, eventually, the benefit. A case, in fact, of virtue truly being its own reward! The same principle applies in relation to the disadvantages of old age. To pursue contentment in one's younger years guarantees contentment in old age, and a character not burdensome to others.

Perhaps a selfish point of view - but a good argument to keep in mind when one grows lazy about keeping up one's spiritual practices!

**Swami Swahananda**

**Be the Witness**

When the spiritual view of life comes through experience or understanding, man becomes aware of some higher and deeper purpose of his existence. The spiritual view of life says that man's life is not finished with his day-to-day experiences. The goal of life is posited as something spiritual. According to Vedanta, the goal is the realization of one's own essential nature. The Vedantic system has pointed out that man works in his body and mind, that all his enjoyments and sufferings are in these two areas. But his

persistent nature is beyond both of these. To realize one's essential and persistent nature as the spirit, as the Atman, is the ultimate purpose of life.

Man has a mind; he has a body; and this psycho-physical being, man, can discover the essential reality behind the mind and the body, but he has to find the ways and means of gradually discovering this reality. Spiritual life, after the completion of a preliminary inquiry, consists mostly of living life with a certain attitude. The theoretical position has been arrived at on the basis of the experience of the saints and sages, and doctrines are formulated on the basis of their experience. From the experience comes the philosophy. From the philosophy come the various spiritual methods and disciplines which help us discover our real nature. There are several methods of achieving this goal, but the most direct method, from the Vedantic point of view, is to disidentify oneself, at least for some time each day, from the body and the mind, and to look upon oneself as the "witness self". There are various other disciplines and spiritual practices such as devotion, meditation, and so forth, but here the idea is to assert that the spiritual self is my real nature.

Whenever experiences come in our life, sometimes good, sometimes bad - especially when bad - we naturally try to take the help of a philosophy or an idea to help us face the particular problem. This idea of looking upon oneself as the "witness-self" is one attitude. Whenever any experience comes at any time of the day, the attitude is to just look on - not to identify oneself with the experience. The Indian philosophers have the idea that man is covered, as it were, with different encasements. The Atman is there - the basic essential Self, but around it is the mind and the intellect, which are referred to as the subtle body. Then around that is the gross body. According to the ancient system, man has three bodies: the causal body, which is the essential core: the subtle



body, which along with the causal body migrates from birth to birth; and the gross body which, when added to the other two, constitutes a full-fledged man. The philosophers tried to analyze these different bodies. Sometimes it is put in a different way - that there are five koshas, or coverings, five sheaths. First is the body sheath, then the vital breath sheath, then the mind sheath, then the intellect sheath, then the subtle sheath, called the bliss sheath. Then, beyond these or within these, is the Atman.

In what way is this idea to be applied in our day-to-day situation? After establishing this position rationally and philosophically, the next question is how to put it into practice. The idea is that all our enjoyments and all our sufferings arise because of our identification with the body and mind. If I have a shirt on my body, and it catches fire, I catch fire. But if I remove the shirt and put it on a hanger, if the shirt catches fire, I don't catch fire.

Indian preachers often tell an interesting story to illustrate the idea that all enjoyment and suffering come because of our idea of possession. A man was going to market to buy a cow. So he higgled-haggled, paid the money and bought the cow. He was going back home, but after fifteen minutes there was an accident and the cow died. Now, who will be sorry? The man who brought up the cow for two years, or the man who bought it fifteen minutes ago? Naturally, the man who bought it fifteen minutes ago, because it is his cow. Because of the idea of possession, the idea of ownership, he feels the pain. A sort of identification has come. If the cow had died sixteen minutes earlier, he would not have felt so bad. Our enjoyment and suffering are based on this idea of identification or the sense of possession - either I am identified with an object, or it belongs to me.

The philosophers argued that from the philosophical standpoint your real self is not the body, not the mind, but the spirit. Once in a while we will have to assert that idea, especially when life becomes too much for us, or our experiences are not so palatable. There are various ways of practising this, but one direct method is to disown the experiences. Really speaking, you are not the sufferer, because the things are happening in the body and the mind. From this angle, Acharya Shankara, the great Vedantic philosopher, faced a crucial problem. In the Gita it is said that as soon as the fire of knowledge is kindled, that is, as soon as knowledge comes, all the karmas are burnt away. Karmas means the accumulated results of actions in this life and previous lives, which give birth to this body. On the basis of these karmas I experience enjoyments and suffering, and also, I add new karmas. Now, the argument has been given that if the karmas are burnt away the man must fall dead immediately, because there are no karmas to sustain his body, since the body is the result of the karmas. Philosophers have faced this problem in three ways. Some said, "The body actually falls away after twenty-one days." Another group said, "Real liberation in life is impossible. It comes only at the fall of the body." But then Acharya Shankara and Swami Vivekananda, and a great succession of teachers, believed that liberation in life is possible. So what happens to the karma? Most of the Vedantic teachers that came after Shankara gave the analogy of a hunter with a quiver full of unused arrows, an arrow which has been put on the bow, and another arrow which has already been released. Suddenly the hunter changes his mind about releasing the arrow on the bow. "No! Killing is bad. I shall practise non-violence." The quiver full of arrows immediately becomes neutralized. The arrow that had been put on the bow also can be stopped. But the arrow that has gone out of his hand he cannot do anything about. So, they said, karma is of three types: one type which has been accumulated; one type which is about to start; and another type called prarabdha karma, which has already begun to bear

fruit. The first two types of karmas are burnt away, but prarabdha karma continues. But Shankara was a great logician. He said that even this is not necessary. He gave this idea. What is illumination according to the Advaitic Vedanta? Illumination or realization means to realize that you are not the limited, changing, body and mind, and all enjoyments and sufferings take place in the body and the mind. So really, you don't suffer. When the saint realizes that he is not the body, not the mind, but the spirit, he is realizing his real self. Even if there is some suffering in the body and the mind, he doesn't suffer. At least he shouldn't suffer. If he suffers, it means that a feeling of identification is still there. How to get rid of that identification? By repeated assertion. Even an ordinary spiritual aspirant can do this. Our feeling of identification is so strong that the identification has to be neutralized by daily assertion. Meditation according to this method is just to identify oneself with the real Self, and disidentify with the demands of the body and the mind.

This is a potent method which all of us can to some extent practise in our lives. If our conviction is strong, then it is easier. Otherwise we will be shrieking when every little pain comes to the mind or body. Somehow or other we shall have to learn the technique of disidentifying ourselves, at least temporarily. In normal life if physical pain comes, the doctor will probably put you to sleep with some medicines, give you rest, so that for the time being you are disconnected with the pain. But in this method, by sheer mental effort, by sheer will I disidentify myself. I know, at least theoretically, that though I am suffering it is really not my suffering. Take another grosser analogy, which is easier. I have got many things in a house. If anything happens to them, it happens to me. But still I know that I am slightly separate. As long as nothing happens to my body, really speaking, nothing happens. I may be impoverished, I may be wailing and weeping, but still really nothing happens, because there is a clear disjunction. The

idea of possession has to be lessened, that's all. Then the pain will be less. The same idea is to be applied in day-to-day life. It is a little tough, of course, to accept this idea and put it into practice - but what is the way out? There is no way out. You can pray to a kind God, a responsive God, but He may reply or He may not reply. If He replies, you say He is a good God, if he doesn't reply, you say, what is the use of believing in that God? But if you are left to yourself, if there is nobody else on whom you can put the blame, if from outside nobody else is coming to help you, you will have to help yourself. So for such people, this idea is much more potent, much more strong. The idea of non-attachment is a subsidiary idea that can be dovetailed into this basic metaphysical position.

In day-to-day activity, in our daily work, one method is to consider oneself as the witness, the onlooker. The second method is to practise a little detachment. Now an average man cannot work without definite gain. But the idea of physical gain gradually is replaced by other types of subtler gains, such as aesthetic enjoyment and intellectual pleasure. These are also gains, but of a subtler type. From this comes the idea of spiritual gain. You give up something physical but still a spiritual gain is there. Here the objective is spiritual gain. If you are a believer in God, you offer the fruits of action to the divine, or else, just remain detached. "I have done my part, the results should follow. If they don't follow, let them go to hell; I don't care." That is the idea. Anyhow, nothing else is there in our hands. I have done all the things that should be done. If the results don't follow, there may be other factors involved in that particular situation. I don't care any more. One of these attitudes will have to be learned if we are to live in the world with a certain measure of serenity and poise.

You will see that in normal life also, the less the idea of possession, the less the idea of

involvement is there, the more unaffected you are. The source of all enjoyment is involvement. But the source of all pain, also, is involvement. So there must be some period of life, or some period of each day when we practise detachment. You may have noticed sometimes, if you are in a place where you can observe people going by all day, that at the end of the day, only a few faces come before your eyes. In your mental eye you will see or remember the faces which you liked, people whom you know, or people whom you hate. These types will be remembered. Love and hate both are involvements. Love brings a pleasant sensation; hate brings an uncomfortable sensation. It is the uncomfortable that we want to avoid. But here the idea is that impressions in the mind are associated with things or faces with which I am involved, who have created a special impression on me because of some type of involvement, some type of relationship. As an onlooker, the other thousand faces did not make an impression on me. (to be continued)

**Swami Atmarupananda**

**St. Teresa, Bride of the Sun (continued)**

Though the years at St. Joseph's passed in tranquillity and forgetfulness of the world, Teresa wasn't completely deaf to mankind's cry of suffering. 'I would have laid down a thousand lives to save a single soul...' she wrote during this period. She told her daughters that each was to look on herself as a sacrifice for the world, especially for the ungodly, for those who couldn't pray or wouldn't. Her purpose for St. Joseph's was a

precise one: to conquer God's Kingdom and radiate its glory on earth among men.

Yet her main emphasis was on the refrain she had learned as a young woman while reading St. Jerome to her Uncle Pedro: 'All is nothing.' She prayed for the welfare of the world, yes, but she saw that world, 'as though in a dream'. Love, which gives the sense of value and reality to whatever it touches, had been withdrawn from the restless world of the senses and given wholly to God.

Then one day in the summer of 1566 a Franciscan friar came to St. Joseph's. He described with great pathos the terrible state of religion in the world, how people were perishing for want of spiritual food. His words lanced Teresa's heart, and the unbounded love for God which had been contained within its limits flowed out over the earth. This love, which had been purified of all sensuality by detachment, returned a wonderful new sense of reality and value to the world - the reality of God and the value of serving Him in it. Teresa had passed from 'all is nothing' to 'all is God'.

The miseries of the world outside the cloister began to weigh heavily on her. What could she do, a poor, enclosed nun? One evening the Lord appeared to her and in all tenderness said by way of consoling her, 'Wait a little, daughter, and you will see great things.'

In February 1567 the General of the Carmelite Order came from Rome to visit Castile, and by April he was in Avila. He was deeply moved when he visited St. Joseph's and met these thirteen dedicated nuns leading a life of strictest discipline, for he had come to Spain mainly to encourage a reform of the Carmelite Order. Here at St. Joseph's he found the Carmelite ideal being lived in all its purity, and in Teresa of Jesus he found a

woman of indomitable courage, contagious enthusiasm, and deep spirituality. He gave her authorisation to expand the Reform in Castile by founding more convents and two monasteries for Discalced friars. This was the answer to her prayer for the means of serving God which had ended her autobiography. This was the beginning of the 'great things' promised by God.

Teresa was once again overwhelmed. She was now fifty-two; and her health was bad as always. Moreover, she had no money, no support, and no houses for new foundations. How and where was she to begin?

At dawn on 13th August 1567, three carts jolted through the bumpy streets of Avila. Teresa, accompanied by two nuns from St. Joseph's and four from the Incarnation, was starting out for Medina del Campo. Also in her party were the chaplain Julian de Avila and servants, who rode behind the carts on muleback. Dawn, the holy hour which had witnessed Teresa's birth, her quest of martyrdom with Rodrigo, her flight to the convent with Antonio, and the foundation of St. Joseph's, now found her in her old age setting out as Mother Foundress of Carmel after four and a half years of quiet retirement.

All Avila thought her mad: what business had a nun to go gallivanting about at her age? They were right: she was indeed mad, mad with divine madness, but never was there a more down-to-earth woman: in her was harmonised the mad idealism of the knight errant with the practical common sense of the simple peasant woman.

Hesitation was foreign to her. Though the Bishop of Avila and others looked at her askance for starting out on new adventures, she had commissioned Antonio de Heredia -

prior of the Mitigated Carmelite friars in Medina del Campo - to search out a house for her second foundation. The chaplain, Julian de Avila - one of the most lovable characters in the life of Teresa, who accompanied her on most of her journeys - has left a colourful description of their arrival, after two days' travel, in the busy market town:

"The Medina del Campo foundation! What a business! We arrived at Medina at midnight... There were in the streets, friars and nuns, laden with the sacred vessels and vestments necessary for saying the first Mass and fitting up the chapel: we looked like gypsies who had been robbing churches; if we had run into a police patrol we should have spent the rest of the night in jail...

"We had to wake up the caretaker and summon him with all urgency to open the house and clear it for us. O Lord! We had scarcely got in when we thanked God with all our hearts: He saved us in the nick of time from six bulls for the next day's bullfight which were dashing madly across town to the arena.

"It was nearly dawn. You should just have seen the prioress, the sisters, all of us, some with brooms, others on ladders busy putting up hangings or fixing the bell in place. We had no nails and it wasn't the moment to go and buy any. Mother Teresa made good use of those she found in the walls; somehow or other the place was cleared and the porch began to look more or less presentable.

"As soon as it was daylight, we joyfully pealed the bell for Mass, one stroke after another. Those who heard the peal came in to find a convent sprung up during the night. They were left speechless with astonishment. Soon there were so many people that our little porch was filled to overflowing."



The house selected by the well-meaning but highly impractical Antonio de Heredia had looked depressingly dilapidated at midnight. Now, in the light of day, what was Teresa's horror to find that the house consisted of only a few half-crumbling walls! The place was not fit for human habitation, so they took up residence in the upper part of a Medina businessman's house for two months while the convent was thoroughly repaired.

During this time Teresa one day asked Antonio de Heredia's advice on the founding of a Discalced Reform for friars. She was surprised and amused that the fifty-seven-year-old friar offered himself as the first friar: 'I took it for a joke and told him so...' He insisted, but Teresa was still doubtful of his capacity, so she asked him to think it over for a year while following the Primitive Rule in private.

Another day, however, a young friar named Juan de San Matias came to see her. He also belonged to the Carmelite monastery in Medina. Teresa was much pleased at their very first meeting, for his sincerity and spirituality were evident. She begged him to join her Discalced Reform, and when the five-foot-tall friar agreed, she exclaimed in delight: 'Daughters, I have a friar and a half!' Though Antonio was tall and Juan very short, Juan in time proved himself to be the friar and Antonio the half. This Juan became the great St. John of the Cross, whose figure has dominated all subsequent Catholic mysticism. As Julian de Avila summed up: 'In this town of Medina del Campo, a sort of fair where you find everything, the Mother found the cornerstone of her monasteries of Discalced friars.'

Once the house in Medina was ready and the nuns had taken up their residence, Teresa was free to continue her work as Mother Foundress. In April 1568 she founded a Carmel

in the small town of Malagon; in August, at Valladolid. St. John of the Cross and Antonio de Heredia - now Antonio de Jesus - founded the first Discalced monastery in Duruelo on 28 November. In May 1569 Teresa opened a convent in the historic city of Toledo...

In August 1570 Teresa was back at St. Joseph's, Avila. It was always a joy for her to return to this her first Carmel, and cause for rejoicing among her daughters, because they felt strength in the presence of their brave Mother whose spirit no difficulties could dampen. She was happy to find the house as recollected as she had left it. And to add to her pleasure, she was presented with two novices.

One, a peasant girl named Ana Garcia, had lived on such intimate terms with God in her childhood that when her village playmates called her, she would apologise to Him, saying: 'I'm going to play, but I'll come back straightaway.' As she began to mature, she scared off her first suitor by appearing before him in bizarre attire. At the age of twenty she had a vivid dream in which she found herself in a small convent, poor and silent but permeated with the love of God. She asked for something to drink, and a nun dressed in coarse brown frieze gave her water: never had she tasted anything so cool and refreshing. When Ana told her priest about the dream, he recognised the convent as St. Joseph's in Avila. Going there, Ana Garcia found the house true to her dream in every detail. She became Ana de San BartolomŽ, the faithful and devoted little sister who was to be Teresa's constant companion in later years.

Ana de Lobera was as talented and cultured as the other was simple. So remarkable was she for her brilliance and beauty that her friends nicknamed her 'the queen of women'.

One day she gave alms to a beggar on the street and continued on her way. After proceeding a few steps, however, the look of sorrowful love she had seen on his face

moved her so much that she turned her head to catch a glimpse of him again. But he had disappeared. From that time on she detached herself from her former pleasures, and at the age of twenty-five entered St. Joseph's. There she found in a picture of Christ the exact face and expression of that beggar. Thus Ana de Lobera became Ana de Jesus.

Teresa always had a special love for novices, and such jewels as the two Anas made her praise God's goodness in sending them. Not all who sought entrance into her Carmels, however, were so perfect. Now that her Reform was well known in Castile, women who were of no use in the world also sought refuge in her houses. At the Convent of the Incarnation she had seen only too well what degradation takes place when a convent becomes a boarding house for women who can't find husbands. So, though compassionate, she was unyielding in the matter of selecting only the best for her Carmels. 'I won't have nuns who are ninnies,' she would exclaim. To one influential benefactress who insisted that Teresa accept two candidates she wrote: 'I can find subjects everywhere, but I haven't dared to take one... for I want them perfect... I shall not accept either of the two of whom you speak to me. I find in them neither sanctity, courage nor talents sufficient to be an advantage for the house.'

When anger was needed to protect the purity of her order, hers was short-lived but terrible in its clarity of perception, leaving no doubt as to what displeased her. This didn't indicate a lack of self-control: she used anger as an artisan uses a precision tool to accomplish a definite purpose. Once the desired effect had been produced, she was quick to forgive and forget; but the same will which had expressed itself through anger continued to work now through gentleness, until success was assured.

This adamant hardness manifested only when the welfare of the Order was in question. Otherwise, Teresa's mother-heart reached out and embraced all: 'Her tact and sweetness', said one of the daughters, 'always attracted me to her. Her wonderful life and the way she spoke would have moved the heart of a stone' If she hurt any of her daughters, Teresa would prostrate herself at the offended one's feet, begging pardon. When writing to the prioress whom she herself had formed, Teresa would sign: 'Your Reverence's unworthy servant'.

In October 1570 Teresa left Avila for the university city of Salamanca, where on November 1st she made her seventh foundation. Here Ana de Jesus was professed. Christian nuns are considered to be the brides of Christ, and in these Carmels a nun's profession was truly a bridal feast. Such festive occasions brought out all of Teresa's natural warmth and gaiety. When she saw Ana de Jesus carrying a beautiful statue of the Child Jesus, her joy poured out in spontaneous verse.

"How happy is this shepherdess  
For she has today given herself to a shepherd  
Who is royal and will continue to reign.  
As to myself Gil, I am afraid.  
I shall never dare to cast eyes on her again  
For she has taken a husband  
Who is royal and will continue to reign."

Then her spiritual fervour overflowed in dance. As a young lady she had been a stunning dancer, but that self-conscious mastery of technique couldn't compare with this ecstasy in movement. The Spirit flowed through her limbs, giving them an ethereal grace and

liquidity of movement as she turned round, clapping her hands in the way that Spanish girls dance even now. The nuns were carried away with her and all accompanied her 'in a perfect transport of spiritual joy'.

Many years afterwards when Ana de Jesus went to France to found Carmels there, the French nuns were astonished to see vulnerable Mother Ana 'more like a seraphim than a mortal creature, executing a sacred dance in the choir, singing and clapping her hands in the Spanish way, but with so much dignity, sweetness and grace that, filled with holy reverence, they felt themselves wholly moved by divine grace and their hearts moved to God.' The nuns of Carmel carry on this sacred tradition to this day.

In the spring of 1571 Teresa went back to Salamanca for a short stay, after having made another foundation at Alba. On Easter evening, after feeling sad all day, she asked a novice to sing for her at the after-dinner recreation time. In a pure voice, penetrating in its clarity, the young girl sang:

"May my eyes behold thee,  
Good and sweet Jesus,  
May my eyes behold thee,  
And then may I die.

"Let him who will, delight his gaze  
With jasmine and with roses;  
If I were to see thee,  
A thousand gardens would lie before my eyes."

The sublime words of the song, their rhythm in the original Spanish, the angelic novice,

and the beauty of the April evening could not but send a pure mind like Teresa's into deep ecstasy, and she fell into the arms of Maria de San Francisco. She was carried to her room where she remained for a long time without external consciousness. When her mind returned to earth, she was in pain, the bones of her hands were as if dislocated, and she felt in every bone of her body an intense burning sensation. She gave expression to this pain of spiritual longing in verse:

"I live without true life in me  
And, living thus expectantly,  
I die because I do not die."

Is it any wonder that when recreation time came and the nuns saw their Mother hurrying off to her room, they would hold her back and say, 'Isn't Your Reverence staying with us?' If she spoke, all were illumined by her words; if she laughed, the whole convent roared; and if she was in a more obviously spiritual mood, the whole atmosphere would be surcharged. For Teresa, joy was an expression of purity and spiritual freedom. She disliked 'gloomy saints', nor did she like people to pray until they exhausted themselves. Once when Teresa was leading the games and songs during recreation time at a convent, the prioress complained to her that the nuns would do better to spend their time in prayer. 'Go daughter,' retorted Teresa. 'Go and contemplate in your cell while your sisters and I make merry with the good Lord here!'

In October 1571 Teresa was unexpectedly chosen as prioress of the Convent of the Incarnation, her joining house which followed the Mitigated Rule and which she had been so happy to leave in order to start her Reform. Teresa was horrified, and so were the Incarnation nuns who had been denied their right to elect a prioress of their own

choosing: they had no desire to be 'reformed' like the Discalced. But a high Church official, impressed by Teresa's genius for leadership and organisation, felt that she alone could save a fast-deteriorating situation. Spain was now becoming a poor country, and people could no longer support the country's innumerable monasteries and convents. Huge houses like the Incarnation literally faced starvation. The novitiate at the Incarnation had been closed and many of the one hundred and thirty nuns were contemplating a return to the world to escape dire poverty.

When Teresa arrived for the induction ceremony, she was met by jeers and shouts of rejection. Suddenly, in the midst of the tumult, a single voice was heard: 'We want her and we love her!' More nuns gained courage and rallied round this new voice. Soon the two parties began abusing each other and came to blows. Finally, with the help of the police, Teresa was formally inducted. Throughout the commotion she had remained calm and unconcerned. Seeing this, the nuns began to whisper, 'Maybe she is a saint!'

When the first chapter-meeting was held, Teresa addressed the nuns:

"My ladies, mothers and sisters:... This election has greatly distressed me, both because it has laid upon me a task which I shall be unable to perform, and also because it has deprived you of the freedom of election which you used to enjoy and given you a prioress whom you have not chosen at your will and pleasure, and a prioress who would be accomplishing a great deal if she could succeed in learning from the least of you here all the good that is in her.

"I come solely to serve and please you in every possible way that I can and I hope that the Lord will greatly assist me to do this... See, then, my ladies, what I can do for each

of you; even if it be to give my life-blood, I shall do it with a right good will.

"I am a daughter of this house and a sister of you all..."

Could they resist any longer? She was so natural, so unaffected and humble! Hostility vanished when she installed an image of the Virgin Mary on the prioress's seat, gave Her the convent keys, prostrated and said, 'Ladies, here is your prioress, Our Lady of Mercy.' The statue remained there throughout Teresa's three-year term, and every evening Teresa surrendered to Her the keys. (to be continued)

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**V.C.**

### **Inspiring Stories**

Dhun Nun was an Egyptian Sufi saint. He was known for his unusual methods of teaching his followers. Once he began to behave in a very strange way, to the point that people thought him mad. At last some neighbours took him to the lunatic asylum and had him locked up and chained - for he looked really dangerous.

When his disciples heard this they said: "But our teacher is not mad. He must have a very good reason for deliberately acting thus. Our teacher is testing us to see if we are like all the other fools of the neighbourhood and, like them, think he is crazy. We know



him very well. He is trying to find out if we will be loyal now that the world calls him mad".

The disciples were convinced that they were not like the common people of the town, and since they thought they knew their teacher better than anyone else, they could see through his acting. So they decided to visit him in the madhouse to show him that they were not fooled by his pretended madness.

When Dhun Nun saw his disciples coming from a distance, he started to shout and leap, clanking his chains loudly. "Who do you think you are?" he screamed at them furiously. "Dear Master, we are your disciples," they replied. "Are you all right? The neighbours have made a blunder bringing you here, but we know of course you are not mad. So we came to enjoy your company and learn from you."

Dhun Nun scowled at them and shouted: "So you know me well, do you? Liars! You don't know me at all!" Then picking up some sticks and stones, he began to attack the visitors. "Take this for your teachings then!" he said.

The students fled in fear and amazement. "God help us! Our teacher has really gone mad! We have nothing else to learn from him."

Then Dhun Nun sat down and laughed. One of the guards came and said: "Now I see why you wanted all those stones and sticks; but tell me, why did you drive away your poor students."

"My friend," explained the saint, "those fools thought in their arrogance that they knew

me very well, so much so that they actually knew that I was playing the part of a madman. Yet when I showed them more of it, they definitely thought I was mad and left. It will take time, but a few of them will understand today's lesson. Those who learn to be humble and not judge by appearance alone, they are the ones who will return."

