

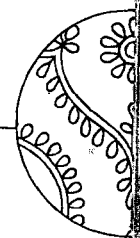
SADHANA

THE REALIZATION OF LIFE

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THE PROBLEM OF SELF



At one pole of my being I am one with sticks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of the comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things.

But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravity of all things. It is small in appearance but great in reality, for it holds its own against the forces that would rob it of its distinction and make it one with the dust.

This is the superstructure of the self, which rises from the indeterminate depth and darkness of its foundation into the

open, proud of its isolation, proud of having given shape to a single individual idea of the architect's that has no duplicate in the whole universe. If this individuality is demolished, then though no material is lost, not an atom destroyed, the creative joy that was crystalized therein is gone. We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this specialty, this individuality which is the only thing we can call our own and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world. It is most valuable because it is not universal. And therefore only through it can we gain the universe more truly than if we were lying within its breast unconscious of our distinctiveness. The universal is always seeking its consummation in the unique. And the desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us. It is our joy of the infinite in us that gives us our joy in ourselves.

That this separateness of self is considered by man as his most precious possession is proved by the sufferings he undergoes and the sins he commits for its sake. But the consciousness of separation has come from the eating of the fruit of knowledge. It has led man to shame and crime and death, yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of Mother Nature.

It is a constant striving and suffering for us to maintain the separateness of this self of ours. And in fact it is this suffering that measures its value. One side of the value is sacrifice, which represents how much the cost has been. The other side of it is the attainment, which represents how much has been gained. If

the self meant nothing to us but pain and sacrifice, it could have no value for us, and on no account would we willingly undergo such sacrifice. In such a case there could be no doubt at all that the highest object of humanity would be the annihilation of self.

But if there is a corresponding gain, if it does not end in a void but in a fullness, then it is clear that its negative qualities, its very sufferings and sacrifices, make it all the more precious. That it is so has been proved by those who have realized the positive significance of self and have accepted its responsibilities with eagerness and undergone sacrifices without flinching.

With the foregoing introduction it will be easy for me to answer the question once asked by one of my audience as to whether the annihilation of self has not been held by India as the supreme goal of humanity.

In the first place we must keep in mind the fact that man is never literal in the expression of his ideas, except in matters most trivial. Very often man's words are not a language at all, but merely a vocal gesture of the dumb. They may indicate, but do not express, his thoughts. The more vital his thoughts, the more have his words to be explained by the context of his life. Those who seek to know his meaning by the aid of the dictionary only technically reach the house, for they are stopped by the outside wall and find no entrance to the hall. This is the reason that the teachings of our greatest prophets give rise to endless disputations when we try to understand them by following their words and not by realizing them in our own lives. The men who are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the

unfortunate ones who are always busy with their nets and neglect the fishing.

It is not only in Buddhism and the Indian religions but in Christianity too that the ideal of selflessness is preached with all fervor. In the last the symbol of death has been used for expressing the idea of man's deliverance from the life that is not true. This is the same as Nirvana, the symbol of the extinction of the lamp.

In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from avidya, from ignorance. It is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but in destroying that which is negative, which obstructs our vision of truth. When this obstruction, which is ignorance, is removed, then only is the eyelid drawn up which is no loss to the eye.

It is our ignorance that makes us think that our self, as self, is real, that it has its complete meaning in itself. When we take that wrong view of self, then we try to live in such a manner as to make self the ultimate object of our life. Then are we doomed to disappointment, like the man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road. Our self has no means of holding us, for its own nature is to pass on, and by clinging to this thread of self which is passing through the loom of life, we cannot make it serve the purpose of the cloth into which it is being woven. When a man, with elaborate care, arranges for an enjoyment of the self, he lights a fire but has no dough to make his bread with; the fire flares up and consumes itself to extinction, like an unnatural beast that eats its own progeny and dies.

In an unknown language the words are tyrannically prominent. They stop us but say nothing. To be rescued from this fetter of words we must rid ourselves of the *avidya*, our ignorance, and then our mind will find its freedom in the inner idea. But it would be foolish to say that our ignorance of the language can be dispelled only by the destruction of the words. No, when the perfect knowledge comes, every word remains in its place, only they do not bind us to themselves but let us pass through them and lead us to the idea that is emancipation.

Thus it is only *avidya* that makes the self our fetter, by making us think that it is an end in itself and by preventing our seeing that it contains the idea that transcends its limits. That is why the wise man comes and says, "Set yourselves free from the avidya; know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you."

We gain our freedom when we attain our truest nature. The man who is an artist finds his artistic freedom when he finds his ideal of art. Then is he freed from laborious attempts at imitation, from the goadings of popular approbation. It is the function of religion not to destroy our nature but to fulfill it. D H ARMA

The Sanskrit word *dharmā*, which is usually translated into English as "religion," has a deeper meaning in our language. *Dharma* is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things. *Dharma* is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done, we say that *dharmā* is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.

But this *dharmā*, which is the truth in us, is not apparent, because it is inherent—so much so that it has been held that sinfulness is the nature of man, and only by the special grace of

God can a particular person be saved. This is like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree. But do we not know that the *appearance* of the seed contradicts its true nature? When you submit it to chemical analysis, you may find in it carbon and protein and a good many other things, but not the idea of a branching tree. Only when the tree begins to take shape do you come to see its *dharmā*, and then you can affirm without doubt that the seed which has been wasted and allowed to rot in the ground has been thwarted in its *dharmā*, in the fulfillment of its true nature. In the history of humanity we have known the living seed in us to sprout. We have seen the great purpose in us taking shape in the lives of our greatest men, and have felt certain that though there are numerous individual lives that seem ineffectual, still it is not their *dharmā* to remain barren, but it is for them to burst their cover and transform themselves into a vigorous spiritual shoot, growing up into the air and light and branching out in all directions.

The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its *dharmā*, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree; it is the nonaccomplishment that is its prison. The sacrifice by which a thing attains its fulfillment is not a sacrifice that ends in death; it is the casting-off of bonds that wins freedom.

When we know the highest ideal of freedom that a man has, we know his *dharmā*, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self. At first sight it seems that man counts as freedom that by which he gets unbounded opportunities for

self-gratification and self-aggrandizement. But surely this is not borne out by history. Our revelatory men have always been those who have lived the life of self-sacrifice. The higher nature in man always seeks for something that transcends itself and yet is its deepest truth, that claims all its sacrifice yet makes this sacrifice its own recompense. This is man's *dharmā*, man's religion, and man's self is the vessel that is to carry this sacrifice to the altar.

We can look at our self in its two different aspects: the self that displays itself, and the self that transcends itself and thereby reveals its own meaning. To display itself it tries to be big, to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations, and to retain everything to itself. To reveal itself it gives up everything it has, thus becoming perfect, like a flower that has blossomed out from the bud, pouring from its chalice of beauty all its sweetness.

The lamp contains its oil, which it holds securely in its close grasp and guards from the least loss. Thus is it separate from all other objects around it and is miserly. But when lighted it finds its meaning at once; its relation with all things far and near is established, and it freely sacrifices its fund of oil to feed the flame.

Such a lamp is our self. As long as it hoards its possessions, it keeps itself dark; its conduct contradicts its true purpose. When it finds illumination, it forgets itself in a moment, holds the light high, and serves it with everything it has, for therein is its revelation. This revelation is the freedom that Buddha preached. He asked the lamp to give up its oil. But purposeless

giving-up is a still darker poverty, which he never could have meant. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding. This is emancipation. The path Buddha pointed out was not merely the practice of self-abnegation but the widening of love. And therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching.

When we find that the state of Nirvana preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that Nirvana is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end unto itself. Everything else raises the question "Why?" in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, "I love," then there is no room for the "Why?"; it is the final answer in itself.

Doubtless even selfishness impels one to give away. But the selfish man does it on compulsion. That is like plucking fruit when it is unripe; you have to tear it from the tree and bruise the branch. But when a man loves, giving becomes a matter of joy to him, like the tree's surrender of the ripe fruit. All our belongings assume a weight by the ceaseless gravity of our selfish desires; we cannot easily cast them away from us. They seem to belong to our very nature, to stick to us as a second skin, and we bleed as we detach them. But when we are possessed by love, its force acts in the opposite direction. The things that closely adhered to us lose their adhesion and weight, and we find that they are not of us. Far from its being a loss to give them away, we find in that the fulfillment of our being.

Thus we find in perfect love the freedom of our self. Only that which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore working for love is freedom in action.

This is the meaning of the teaching of disinterested work in the Gita.

The Gita says action we must have, for only in action do we manifest our nature. But this manifestation is not perfect as long as our action is not free. In fact, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. The mother reveals herself in the service of her children, so our true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action, which can only be attained in the work of love.

God's manifestation is in his work of creation, and it is said in the Upanishad, *Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature;* they are not imposed upon him from outside. Therefore his work is his freedom, and in his creation he realizes himself. The same thing is said elsewhere in other words: *From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, toward joy does it progress, and into joy does it enter.*† It means that God's creation has its source not in any necessity, it comes from his fullness of joy, it is his love that creates, therefore in creation is his own revelation.

The artist who has a joy in the fullness of his artistic idea objectifies it and thus gains it more fully by holding it afar. It is joy that detaches itself from us, and then gives it form in creations of love in order to make it more perfectly our own. Hence there must be this separation, not a separation of repulsion but a separation of love. Repulsion has only the one element, the element of severance. But love has two, the element

* "Svabhaviki jnana bala kriyacha."

† Anandadhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante, anandena jatani avanti, anandamprayantyabhisamvicanti.

of severance, which is only an appearance, and the element of union, which is the ultimate truth—just as when the father tosses his child up from his arms it has the appearance of rejection, but its truth is quite the reverse.

So we must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others but in the ceaseless realization of yoga, of union, not on the side of the canvas where it is blank, but on the side where the picture is being painted.

This is the reason that the separateness of our self has been described by our philosophers as maya, an illusion, because it has no intrinsic reality of its own. It looks perilous; it raises its isolation to a giddy height and casts a black shadow upon the fair face of existence; from the outside it has the aspect of a sudden disruption, rebellious and destructive; it is proud, domineering, and wayward; it is ready to rob the world of all its wealth to gratify its craving of a moment, to pluck with a reckless, cruel hand all the plumes from the divine bird of beauty to deck its ugliness for a day. Indeed, man's legend has it that it bears the black mark of disobedience stamped on its forehead forever; but still all this is *maya*, envelopment of *avidya*; it is the mist, it is not the sun; it is the black smoke that presages the fire of love.

Imagine some savage who, in his ignorance, thinks that it is the paper of the banknote that has the magic by virtue of which its possessor gets all he wants. He piles up the papers, hides them, handles them in all sorts of absurd ways, and then at last, wearied by his efforts, comes to the sad conclusion that they

are absolutely worthless, only fit to be thrown into the fire. But the wise man knows that the paper of the banknote is all *maya*, and until it is given up to the bank, it is futile. It is only *avidya*, our ignorance, that makes us believe that the separateness of our self, like the paper of the banknote, is precious in itself, and by acting on this belief our self is rendered valueless. It is only when the *avidya* is removed that this very self comes to us with a wealth that is priceless. For *he manifests himself in forms that his joy assumes*.^{*} These forms are separate from him, and the value that these forms have is only what his joy has imparted to them. When we transfer back these forms into that original joy, which is love, then we cash them at the bank and we find their truth.

When pure necessity drives man to his work, it takes an accidental and contingent character, it becomes a mere make-shift arrangement; it is deserted and left in ruins when necessity changes its course. But when his work is the outcome of joy, the forms that it takes have the elements of immortality. The immortal in man imparts to it its own quality of permanence.

Our self, as a form of God's joy, is deathless, for his joy is *amritam*, eternal. This it is in us that makes us skeptical of death, even when the fact of death cannot be doubted. In reconciling this contradiction in us, we come to the truth that in the dualism of death and life there is a harmony. We know that the life of a soul, which is finite in its expression and infinite in its principle, must go through the portals of death in its journey to realize the infinite. It is death that is monistic; it has no life in it.

* Anandarupamamritam yadvibhati.