



Birthdays Message
by Swami Jyotirmayananda

Be a Person of Integrity

Integrity is the fragrance of a highly cultured personality, and it is the basic foundation for good human relations. Normally, when we say that a person has integrity we mean that they do whatever they say they will do, that they give value to their words—and that there is a sustained and balanced attitude in their dealings with others.

In the Ramayana there is an episode in which Lord Rama confronted Ravana, a demoniac personality, the incarnation of all that is evil. At that time Ravana began to brag to Rama about his glory, his greatness and his power, threatening that he was going to destroy Rama and his monkey army and do many terrible things.

In response, Rama said that there are three types of people: One type goes on bragging and saying a great deal, but does nothing. Such a person is like the poinciana tree, showing lots of flowers but not a single fruit that you can taste with delight. And

then there is a second type of personality that says a lot and does a lot as well. Such a person is like the mango tree, decked with many flowers, and giving many fruits also. The third type doesn't say much, or may not say anything at all, but just does what it has to do. Such a person is like the jackfruit or pana tree, which silently and without show develops its fruits without your ever seeing a single flower.

Having integrity implies doing more in action and less in words, becoming profound rather than sentimental. A sentimental personality is like a shallow stream: a little rain and it overflows, breaking down the trees, and making a big noise. And when the rain stops and the dry season comes, it dries up completely.

A personality with integrity is like a deep running stream: it doesn't overflow quickly, nor does it dry up. That is the type of personality that one

should develop to advance in spiritual life as well as to be a highly cultured and successful human being in the world.

A person who is shallow will say so many good things early in the morning, but by evening the mood changes and all the good things are forgotten. In a shallow relationship one friend may say to another, “I will help you all the time; I will go to the ends of the earth for you.” But then, within hours, the sentiment changes. If one of the friends didn’t serve tea at the right time to the other, then that’s the end of the friendship!

This is just an exaggerated example of a relationship that is not based on integrity. When a relationship or an action is governed merely by sentimentality, it cannot be sustained. When you take up a project with sentimentality, there is lots of enthusiasm in the beginning, but as time passes you turn away from it. When there is only sentimentality, there cannot be integrity. You cannot have the patience to follow through with a project without interruption, overcoming the obstacles that come in your way.

Most people would like to be people of integrity, to have healthy personalities that are integrated psychologically, physically, and spiritually. But few know how to attain that state. The art has to be learned by *satsanga* or good association.

Let me relate to you a humorous parable. There were two disciples serving their Guru in an ashram. Whenever the Guru lay down to rest or sleep, one disciple was in charge of massaging his right foot, and another disciple was in charge of the left. One day it so happened that the disciple who was in charge of the left foot fell sick and the disciple in charge of the right foot continued with his duties. When the left foot came close to the disciple, wanting to be massaged, the disciple banged that foot. Because he was always jealous of the other disciple, he thought, “Why should I do the work that belongs to him?”—and he banged it!

Well, in a few days things changed. The disciple who was in charge of the right foot could not come to do his duty. When the one in charge of the

left came and saw the left foot slightly swollen, he asked his teacher, “Please tell me, why is your leg swollen?” And the teacher replied, “Well that disciple banged my left foot.” The disciple said, “Oh Guru, don’t worry. I am going to take care of it.” And thus saying, he banged the right foot.

Although the story is humorous, it does point out a form of misguided reasoning that can cause so much trouble and disharmony in life. In an ashram, for example, one disciple is given one type of work, and a second is given another type of work. Whenever there is a slight clash of the egos of these two disciples, it hurts the overall project of the ashram. Whether you are working in an ashram or anywhere else in the world, you should not be concerned just with your work and have disregard for the work of others. If you think, “If he puts his share of the work in front of me I’ll bang it,” then chances are the other person will get the same idea and bang yours.

People who behave in this manner lack integrity. They are led by shallow sentiments that hurt themselves and others. To be a person of integrity you must lift yourself beyond the level of sentiment. If you are overwhelmingly affectionate, kind, and sweet, and then suddenly you become bitter, angry, and restless, that means lack of integrity. You need to control the upsurge of sentimentality.

A Plan for Developing Integrity

Mental Balance through Meditation

Through the daily practice of meditation, you learn to calm your mind and capture a joy that exists within you, beyond the senses, beyond the ego. Once you capture that inner joy, you find it easy to be patient and to follow through with your objectives even in difficult situations. But when you do not have that internal vision of a boundless joy within yourself, every situation of happiness or misery is blown out of proportion in your mind, and you are overwhelmed by sentimentality.

Although nobody wants to be miserable, unwittingly one puts oneself in misery. By taking a negative situation too seriously, you may decide you are about to be destroyed by adversity. The fact is that no situation can destroy you. If you are internally rooted, you have balance of mind. If you have balance of mind, you have a better picture of every situation that comes before you while dealing with people and you can act with greater integrity. You are not guided by sentimentality; you are guided by reason. Therefore, you will say little and do more, and what you say will not be colored by bitter feelings.

Good Association

Another very important discipline for developing integrity is *satsanga* or good association. Learn to be in an association in which your mind does not become a storehouse of gossips and garbage. In bad association the mind becomes like a garbage can. Everyone dumps all that is negative into your mind and the mind cheerfully stores it. For what reason? For what reason should you store in your mind all the negative things about how others behave and what goes on in their houses? In what way will that benefit you? Therefore, constant good association is needed.

Selfless Service

Keep yourself involved in a disciplined project that is satisfying and rewarding to you. This is called Karma Yoga. Do not let yourself be lazy. Rather, continue to exercise every faculty that you have. Any faculty that is left unused becomes dull. And this applies even to mechanical things. If you do not keep your mechanical instruments operating, rust develops. If you do not go on using your intellect day by day in a proper way, a kind of rust develops in the intellect.

Using your faculties for the good of others through the practice of Karma Yoga enables you to discover that innately you are spirit, the Self,

not the physical body. The closer you come to understanding your essential nature, the greater is the sense of integrity in your personality.

Along with meditation, *satsanga*, and Karma Yoga, one should take up the study of scriptures, the study of philosophical literature under proper guidance. This type of study enables you to understand “Who am I? What is mine? What are the capacities of the mind? What is the power of thought? How am I to allow the thoughts to flow in a positive way? How can I change myself?” Such a process of reflection should become an engrossing habit. Everything that you gain by it is a real gain.

If you do not know how to handle your senses, your mind, or your sentiments, then, in spite of all external attainments, you will not have real happiness. You will lack the fragrance of integrity in all that you do. All achievements become like silk flowers. Imitation flowers may look wonderful, but they have no substantiality, no fragrance, no life.

Integrity must be developed with great patience. Integrity is the indication of higher culture, the secret for the most successful dealings with others, the basis for a harmonious and peaceful life, and the foundation of spiritual advancement.

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