



In the monumental scripture, Yoga Vasistha, Sage Vasistha has given insight into the four gatekeepers at the Palace of Liberation: *shama* (serenity), *vichar* (enquiry), *santosh* (contentment) and *satsanga* (good-association). In this first of a series of articles, we explore the nature of *shama* or serenity.

The Great Healer

Shama or serenity is magical. Consider your inner being like a tree whose branches have been sheered off. If you allow a gentle shower to descend upon it, something magical happens. The tree will grow the limbs that were cut, its leaves will sprout and its flowers bloom again. The whole tree will come to life. Bring serenity to your heart and the tree of your personality will regain health and be decked with blossoms.

Serenity is like nectar. As you allow drops of nectar to trickle into your mind, all the suffering that has gone on through many lifetimes dissolves. This suffering is of two types: that which is more

mental (*adhi*) and that which is more physical (*vyadhi*). Both *adhi* and *vyadhi* invade the mind like disease-causing germs. Sometimes you have physical problems: there are no negative circumstances around, yet your physical body has aches and pains which prevent relaxation. Sometimes your agitation is not based on physical problems but on situations that produce aches in the ego. For example, someone insulted you when you expected admiration. They called you a “donkey” when you thought you had done something quite brilliant.

The greatest remedy to treat the twofold disease, *adhi* and *vyadhi*, is serenity. Let a gentle spray of serenity invade your mind. Gradually, all the hurt and fear created by past suffering disappear.

Making Problems Vanish

When you are serene, you have an objective view of your situations. In this state, your intellect brings you solutions to your problems. On the

other hand, when you become agitated and allow your reason to be clouded, naturally you do not know how to deal with situations. Although your problems could be easily resolved, because of lack of serenity, the problems linger.

One night a family was packing for a trip. The stern head of the family was constantly agitated; no one could say anything to him. He kept asking his family for a flashlight. It was getting late but no one dared tell him he was holding it in his own hand. This crude example shows how agitated conditions prevent you from solutions you have at your fingertips. The restless mind will not listen. Even though you have unlimited resources and people to assist you, they dare not. Lack of serenity breeds disharmony, discontent, agitation, fear and insecurity. Serenity, on the other hand, dissolves all these.

A Sense of Mastery

When you enjoy serenity, whatever you do is enjoyable. If you are walking, you enjoy the walk. If you are eating, you enjoy the food. If it rains, you enjoy the rain. If the sun shines, you enjoy the sunshine. You enjoy life, no matter which way it presents itself.

You remain balanced in pleasure and pain because your happiness is not dependent on external things. It flows from deep within your heart.

Serenity implies mastery over the senses. Your mind becomes so calm you do not need the excitement of the senses. The joy you experience is more subtle and far greater than that derived from sense enjoyments.

You remain detached from the world because you do not lean on it to enrich yourself. While serene, you enjoy the bliss of the Self that nothing in this world can replace. You are not dependent. Though performing various deeds, led by *prarabdha* karma, (fructifying karma), a serene person is like the sky, unaffected by the clouds. Indeed, he is *Brahman* Himself.

There is a sense of victory, a sense of mastery. You do not feel compelled to do things. However, if you lack serenity, you are always compelled, though there is no one to compel you. You are compelled by nature, by your whims, your own mind and ego. You have no freedom. You do not enjoy life.

To the extent that you have serenity, you feel a sense of sovereignty. The world does not enslave you; you are its ruler. If you have serenity, you rule the world. If you lack it, the world is your captor.

Benefactor of All

Serenity has profound effects on all around you. No one opposes serenity and everyone benefits. If you are serene, whoever comes near you receives a gentle vibration. When a tree spreads its cool shade, no one curses that shade; no one opposes it. Robbers passing by sit under the tree; saintly people sit there. Everyone, good or evil, can enjoy it. Much in the same manner, if you have serenity, you cast a cool shade, allowing people to feel better. Therefore, if you want to be liked, if you want to succeed in a world of so much tension and stress, develop a serene personality.

A serene mind brings forth a gentle shower of nectar that influences everyone. Consider the sunlight pouring through the clouds. As serenity develops within you, the nectarine radiation of the Self pours through your mind, benefiting all you contact.

Among learned scholars, doers of great deeds and heroic personalities, one who is endowed with serenity outshines them all. He whose mind is filled with serenity has become the very embodiment of the moon. Just as the moon brings enchantment through its nectarine rays, in the same way, rays of peace emanate from one who enjoys serenity. That was how Buddha deeply influenced the world of his time and continues to do so. As you

look at the face of Buddha, serenity is its most overpowering feature.

By having the *darshan* (vision) of a serene person, a subtle and secret joy enters your heart. You cannot experience that joy even by seeing your closest relatives. Even the dearest will not give you that joy you experience by having darshan of a saintly person endowed with serenity. That true serenity is beckoning your soul to Enlightenment. It is singing a melody of eternity that captivates your soul.

A serene person deals with all types of people in the most ideal manner. With children, he is a child. With grownups, he is grown up. With intellectuals, he is intellectual. He is able to blend with anyone. The speech of a serene person is ever sweet. Serenity and sweet speech are twins. Serenity is internal, while speaking gently is its external expression.



Further, even though a serene person knows other's defects, his mind remains unaffected and nonjudgemental. While living with all types, he moves on to the highest, deterred and obstructed by none. The serene mind is like the full moon calmly observing all. Thus, one who is serene is admired in every company, by all beings.

Serenity Is Vibrant and Dynamic

Although a serene person is calm even in the most difficult circumstances, he is never dull. Do not confuse serenity with passivity. Serenity is a vibrant virtue. A serene mind is dynamic, yet neither distracted nor restless. When clouds have moved away, the sky is serene, yet the sun continues to pour all its dynamic energy. In the same way, the Divine presence dynamically operates through your serene mind.

Similarly, do not confuse serenity with quietness. Serenity is a state of mind. You may be quiet, but without a serene mind, you are allowing the fumes of dejection and melancholy to proceed from your mind. With serenity, on the other hand, there is a radiation of bliss.

Stop Wasting Precious Energy

Imagine how much mental energy is wasted from morning to evening in just one day. How many times does the mind tremble out of insecurity and fear? The mind has created a habit of negativity. The mind irrationally wastes energy on situations that have no bearing on you.

If you put a person who has lived a life of daily agitation, excitement and fear into a situation in which he has nothing to be afraid of or agitated about, he will feel as uncomfortable as a fish out of water. Until he finds out how to create agitation, he will be miserable. He will start to blame the rug under his feet, the roof over his head and the window for the way it is

decorated. If you are determined to find things to be agitated by, you will find thousands. Human beings outwit their own intellect by justifying their rationalizations.

However, if you learn to develop serenity, you avoid all this. The mind's immense energy that is being wasted begins to flow towards God. If you learn to love serenity, your mind will find every reason to be serene, no matter what happens.

Serenity leads to serenity. Agitation leads to agitation. When you keep your mind agitated, you create more impressions of agitation. As you gather more and more serene impressions, your mind tends to become serene even in the worst conditions. However, if you have burdened your unconscious with impressions of agitation, then even in the most heavenly conditions, your mind will not be serene.

Watch Your Mind in All Situations

Your serenity is not dependent on the world and its conditions; it is dependent on how vigilantly you handle the mind day by day. What type of thoughts do you want to permit in the mind?

You have the power to keep your mind under control. You must constantly attend to that challenge—even under the most provocative conditions. It is no accomplishment to remain calm when conditions are favorable. If there is no provocation and you have gone to sleep, naturally you are serene.

Pleasure and pain are both agitating to the mind. Therefore, during conditions that are painful as well as during conditions of pleasure, watch your mind. Learn to remain calm like the blue sky unaffected by the swirling clouds.

It is important in this endeavor to pay more attention to your mind than to the world. However, this is not the norm for most people. They put more importance on the objects of the world than the mind.

For example, if a cat jumps up to your table and breaks your teacup, you might become agitated and angry. But why do so? The accident has already occurred. The cat cannot do anything about it. You cannot do anything about it. The cup is broken; why break your mind? Why lose mental peace, which is a thousand times more valuable than a cup?

Let not situations and circumstances trigger agitation in your mind. You allow the triggering process and then justify what you did. You say if certain things had not happened, you would not have been agitated.

Serenity is the greatest shield for your soul. Arrows cannot pierce a shield made of diamond. Even the sharpest arrows will become blunt when they contact the diamond. In the same way, if you are armoured by the shield of serenity, all the world's torments cannot affect you.

