

Are You Succeeding in Sadhana?

SADHANA—the striving process of spiritual movement—is like a stream that must flow on to the ocean of perfection, or *siddhi*. Although *sadhana* is ordinarily translated as spiritual discipline, from a broad point of view, one's whole life is a perpetual *sadhana*. Every soul is striving to be better, to come ever closer to God, Who is the essence of the soul. The urge to overcome limitations and imperfections is the guiding force in every person. And directing that urge in the right way is called *sadhana*.

Life becomes glorious if you live your life with the spirit of *sadhana*. But if you do not, then you are like a river that dries up and stops flowing in the desert. When you immerse yourself in the spirit of *sadhana* you are like a rushing river; your life sparkles with energy. When *sadhana* is the cornerstone of your life, you live to discover your inner strength, to explore the spiritual dimensions of your personality, to ascend the heights of wisdom, and to enjoy the infinite Bliss that abides within the heart. In all ways, life becomes truly glorious.

All people must adopt this spirit of *sadhana* in their daily lives as much

as possible. Spiritual aspirants, in particular, however, must be fully aware that their purpose in life is to discover the innate potentiality of communing with God and to unfold that potentiality.

Many persons, however, do not have a clear idea about what success in *sadhana* means. Many people erroneously consider spirituality to be something separate from practical life. Thus, when they start practicing so-called spirituality they expect a lot of miracles and psychic phenomena. And in many circles, most of the talk is centered on extrasensory experiences. Practitioners are fond of describing the lights that they “see” during meditation, or the unique experiences that occur during their practice. They become particularly excited when they think that they have acquired some psychic power. Perhaps an idea has come to them during meditation, as if by intuition, and later on it comes to pass. They feel that this is unmistakable proof that they are advancing on the spiritual path. There is, however, great error in this kind of thinking.

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

SPIRITUAL advancement has many expressions of success, but the least of these is having a psychic experience. Success in *sadhana* is not measured by miraculous visions or other psychic phenomena that one might enjoy during meditation; it is how you handle yourself in daily life that measures your success. When you notice that you can confront adverse situations with a balanced mind, when you develop a resilience in your personality that allows your mind to come back to normal faster whenever it is jarred, then you know you are advancing on the path of *sadhana*.

But if you tended to hold a grudge for a long time as a child, and you continue to do so as an adult, then your spiritual movement is dull. If, on the other hand, you do not hold grudges against people, but instead develop increasing faith in God and become more directed towards your spiritual goal, then your spiritual movement becomes keen.

THE WORLD should not distract you from your goal, but rather should help you reach it. But to see the world as helpful, rather than as a hindrance, you must change your angle of vision. If you do not have that changed angle of vision, then the world goes on creating *raga* and *dwesha*—attachment and hatred. When things are congenial you think, “How wonderful! May these circumstances last forever.” During such times, your mind is filled with impressions of attachment, a state that is called *raga*. And when negative situations arise in life, the mind builds up hatred and dislike. You

brood over what caused the unpleasantness or who deprived you of your happiness. Then your mind turns to revenge: “How can I get back at that person who made me unhappy?” In both ways—through *raga* and *dwesha*—you are missing the point.

If you develop *raga* you are like a traveler who, on the way back to his distant homeland, passes through a beautiful land of lush gardens and green fields—one inhabited by friendly, hospitable people. He is so entranced by the scenery and the warmth of the people that he decides not to return to his own country. When you feel this form of attachment to objects in your own life, you are delaying your process of returning “home” and are getting entangled in the world of illusion.

And then imagine the situation in reverse. Suppose, as a traveler, instead of discovering good-natured people, you discover rude, gross-minded ones. As a result, you build up feelings of hatred for

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them, and spend all your time and energy chasing them around to get revenge—forgetting about reaching your destination. This also is a deviation from your goal.

You see then that attachment and hatred are both deviations. One's mind must be sensitive to its spiritual need and not chase the mirage of likes and dislikes. When you reflect deeply you realize that pleasant conditions in life do not come about as a result of your ego; they have come to you through the Law of Karma, which is presided over by the Divine Will, according to the Divine Plan.

EVEN IF YOU dedicated your whole life to securing pleasant situations you could not do so, because it is God alone who secures them. Turn to God, therefore, instead of objects. When happiness comes, let that happiness help you to turn to God. When unpleasant situations develop, they, too, should allow your mind to turn to God by making you realize that it is not the people around you who have caused your discomfort, but you, through the karmic process, who have drawn those situations to yourself. God in His infinite mercy and kindness has created those seemingly negative situations in your life for a purpose.

You should, therefore, not develop a sense of contradiction towards the world. Do not be misled by the notion that the world has to be a better place so that you can enjoy yourself more. Rather, understand that no matter which way the world is, it has been designed in the best possible way for your spiritual evolution. Once your target is Self-realization you

welcome every situation—intellectually, that is. Externally, your personality will naturally react to different situations. If you encounter pleasant situations you will feel joyous. If, for example, you are given a velvety-soft bed under a beautiful shade tree, with a wonderful, sparkling stream nearby, of course you are going to feel happy. But suppose that a storm suddenly comes up and you are driven away, with sand beating down upon your face. Naturally you will cry, jump and maybe even curse a little!

In life, then, both pleasant and painful situations will come to you, and you will react to them. If you did not do so, you would be a stone. However, while reacting to them you must be deeply aware that in both situations you are being led to Self-realization. Your goal is not to build attachment or hatred, but to realize your essential nature as the Self, beyond all the apparent duality and multiplicity of the world.

TO UNDERSTAND this better, imagine that you are making a pilgrimage in the Himalayas and, although you are yet far away, you can look into the distance and see the radiant mountain top that is your ultimate destination. As you travel along the pilgrimage route, you may encounter many ups and downs. Some situations along the journey may be dangerous and unpleasant; some may be delightful. Yet, seeing that radiant mountain top always in your view keeps you moving right along despite everything. Similarly, on the pilgrimage of this life, you must keep the lofty goal of Self-realization always in view, and that vision will make you successful.

THE MOST important manifestation of success in *sadhana* is your ability to transcend the world. This practice of transcending the world should continue day by day. Look into your mind each evening and ask yourself, “Am I breaking the fetters that enchain my personality? Am I lessening my dependence on objects? Am I simplifying myself? Am I able to rest peacefully, with a mind free of all problems of the world and enjoy inner contentment?” In positive answers to these questions lies your success.

Naturally, if you pursue this process you will develop the qualities that the Gita talks of: fearlessness, cheerfulness, a sense of inner expansion, increasing faith in God, and a profound faith in your future. You will become supremely optimistic—but not sentimentally so. The spiritual process is one of supreme optimism, meaning that nothing can go wrong, that yours will be the victory, that the Self must triumph, and that you are that Self.

The secret to spiritual success is harmonized movement. Spiritual *sadhana* should not be sporadic. You should not start practicing meditation for a great many hours, then abandon it and finally resume your practice a few months later. Instead, you must convert your daily life into a flowing stream of *sadhana*, with the disciplines you practise blended in a harmonious way every day. Plan your day to include a little meditation and prayer, some Yoga exercises, or any other kind of exercises, and study of scriptures in *satsanga*. Attend to the various things that your personality needs in a balanced way,

and move on in this manner day by day, even though circumstances may jar you a little from time to time.

Adaptability is crucial for an aspirant’s success in *sadhana*. A sincere aspirant must be flexible and tenacious, bear insult and injury peacefully, and persevere in trying circumstances. If you are fostering these qualities, then you have imbibed the spirit of *sadhana*.

With the goal of Self-realization before you, your life flows on in spite of variations and adversity. An inward sense of adventure and achievement grows more and more. You do not have to wait until Self-realization comes to know that you have attained it; rather, day by day you discover more of the strength, peace, and inner joy that was waiting—within you—to be revealed. That is what we mean by success in *sadhana*—and the ultimate, supreme success lies in the attainment of Liberation.

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