



## Discover Your Spiritual Strength

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

**S**piritual strength in Sanskrit is called *atma bal*—the strength of the soul, the power of the Self. There is a famous Upanishadic statement that says, “*Naayamaatma balaheenena labhyah*”—“This Self cannot be realized by a person who is weak, devoid of strength of the spirit.”

In order to better understand the meaning of spiritual strength, present before your mind the powers that have been revealed through great personalities like Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and all great Sages and Saints. Reflect on the balanced mind of Jesus when he bore the cross or of Socrates when he drank poison.

Spiritual strength, however, is not just meant for bearing crosses and drinking poison. It is because of spiritual strength that Mahatma Gandhi was able to influence millions of people in India and around the world. Although Gandhi spoke with a feeble voice due to his long fasts and weak body, the immense spiritual force behind his words awakened the masses of India and continues influencing people today.

It is difficult for most people to understand the profound significance of spiritual strength. In general, the masses equate spiritual power with glittering fame. However, great Sages like Ramana Maharshi and

Ramakrishna Paramahansa were born in simple circumstances and during their lifetimes did not achieve much popularity, and yet were endowed with immense spiritual power.

In order to understand the concept of spiritual strength more deeply, turn your mind toward Vedantic philosophy. According to the philosophy of Vedanta, the Self is all-powerful, the embodiment of infinite energy, the source of infinite strength. This supreme power of the Self manifests in three planes in every individual. The power that manifests through the intellect is known as *jnana shakti*, the power of knowledge. The same power manifests through the mind in the form of *iccha shakti*, the power of will. And its power also manifests through your body and senses in the form of action, known as *kriya shakti*.

In Hindu mysticism this feature of Divine energy manifesting in three forms has been described in the terms of three Goddesses or *Devis*. *Jnana shakti* is presided by Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of wisdom; *iccha shakti* is presided by Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity; and *kriya shakti* is presided by the dynamic aspect of Goddess Durga, the Goddess of the destruction of obstacles. During the nine nights of Mother Worship these three aspects of Goddess are worshipped to help aspirants on the spiritual path understand and unfold the dynamic energy needed for their spiritual evolution.

Aspirants first discover and generate the energy that promotes a congenial atmosphere—good health, a higher level of vitality and harmonious relationships with others. To accomplish this, a person develops that aspect of spiritual strength that breaks down obstacles—obstacles in the form of mental impurities such as anger, hatred, greed, and pride.

The next stage is integration of your personality. As you remove the obstacles, you begin to discover higher qualities such as goodness, compassion, generosity, and sincerity. Further, the subtle secrets of willpower are discovered. To be strong in will implies

being highly integrated. It is at this stage, when you begin to build the palace of your personality on the basis of higher qualities, that Goddess Lakshmi begins to operate through your personality.

The final state is the unfoldment of Goddess Saraswati, the dawning of wisdom. Your essential nature is revealed through a highly purified mind, and therefore there is the manifestation of the intuitive vision of the Self—the Source of all forms of energy in this world.

Therefore, the goal before you is to practice meditation and spiritual enquiry leading to intuitional Enlightenment. In the enlightened state, you realize your essential nature: “I am all that exists.” All great things in this world, all that is true, beautiful and good, proceed from this realization. The highest form of strength is achieved at this level because one realizes unity with God, Who is the essence of power.

### **Learn the Art of Positive Thinking**

One method of prime importance in discovering spiritual vitality is the development of positive thinking. Gain an insight into thoughts and how they influence your mind and the world around you. A human being’s perceptions are actually a product of his thought processes. Your world is nothing but an illusory manifestation created by the magic of thoughts. Your circumstances mirror your thought forces.

This being so, how can one constantly maintain a higher level of thought and eliminate the negative? How can one maintain strength in a world where there is insecurity, where there are so many things that can distract and imbalance the mind—pain and pleasure, gain and loss?

To better understand that art, let us look more deeply into the magic of thought and its laws. Every human mind is linked to the cosmic record of thought, attracting thought forces from the subtle *akashic* (etheric) plane. If your mind is operating on a low and negative level, you draw from the cosmos

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all the low and negative thoughts from that *akashic* plane. Therefore, if you have slipped into dejection because of something very minor, your own negative thoughts are reinforced by attunement to millions of others who are also dejected. As a result, you become exceedingly distressed.

Much in the same way, if you choose to perpetuate a positive level within your mind, you draw to yourself positive thoughts. Therefore, people who are successful and spiritually advanced are able to perform such wondrous and amazing deeds. You do not realize that this is brought about by the simple art of maintaining a loftier level of mind. Day by day you are drawing to yourself the thoughts of millions of minds in a positive level and therefore are inspired by a mountainous collection of elevated thoughts from the etheric plane.

Knowing this secret, be vigilant and truly interested in your Self. Call it Selfishness. Call it selflessness. Yoga is a process of being truly interested in one's own Self, and since your thoughts are your treasure, do not allow them to be wasted. Further, multiply and intensify the treasure of your thoughts. Maintain vigilance within your mind. Watch your actions and speech as well. What you do and what you say can color your mind and drag it down.

Never think, "Yoga is sitting in meditation early in the morning, but during the day I can do whatever I want. I have every right to stamp my feet, shout at the top of my voice, lose my temper and mental balance!" That certainly is not Yoga. Weakness should not be justified.

You may think that it is all right to give license to the negativity of your mind in small measure—by allowing it only a tiny negative movement. But be observant! At first the mind moves in a negative plane only an inch. But then it can suddenly find a slope and glide down with increasing momentum. Everything that falls gathers momentum. And therefore, it is important to see that even in the smallest situation or activity your mind should not slip into a negative direction.

### **Insights from Raja Yoga**

In *Raja Yoga Suktas* in Vibhuti Pad, a chapter that deals with psychic powers, Sage Patanjali Maharshi

reveals the secret of developing spiritual strength. First, one learns the art of *samyama*. *Samyama* is practice of concentration, meditation and *samadhi*. Concentration is the focusing of the mind on any one point, whether it is an object or an idea, an abstract quality or a concrete form. When you begin to focus your mind, that is called concentration. If you maintain that focused level, you enter into meditation. If you continue to maintain the state of meditation, you suddenly relax and the very ego that was involved in this practice is transcended by an awareness that dazzles your mind and radically changes its very fabric. That is called *samadhi*.

Further, Patanjali Maharshi says in the *Raja Yoga Suktas*, that if a person were to practice *samyama* on great qualities such as *maitri* (friendliness), he will gain immense strength. Friendliness in this context is not ordinary, superficial friendliness. Friendliness in Yoga means an awareness that you live in a world where all human beings are basically friends, linked to the same Self. And therefore, there is no direction to which you can turn where you will find an enemy.

Develop the awareness that you live in a world where everything is friendly: the sky is your friend, the ocean is your friend, the very breeze that blows is friendly. There is nothing inimical in this world. When your mind becomes free of any idea of animosity, you do not waste your energy unconsciously.

When you have any impression of annoyance or anger towards something or someone, there is always an internal will to damage that object or person that is causing you harm—to destroy it or remove it or do something inimical to it. But if you have the true spirit of friendliness, your energy is not depleted by a negative attitude. Rather your mind becomes constantly filled with the joy of expansion, the bliss of a healthy revelation of your own Self.

Therefore, meditate on the quality of friendliness. Present before your mind the image of men and women who radiated great joy. Reflect upon Sages and Saints who are blissful. *Choose* to feel joy and happiness, even though your mind may not accept your positive suggestion immediately. Present that idea before your mind again and again, day by day, and promote good association by good karmas.

## The Path to Spiritual Strength

For the development of spiritual strength, Yogic aspirants bring about harmony in their daily life and practice various important *sadhanas* (spiritual disciplines) everyday in a balanced manner. First is *satsanga*—good association. It is in the presence of Sages and Saints, and surrounding yourself with people who are devoted to understanding and sharing their teachings, that you will gather the inner fuel for kindling your own latent spiritual caliber. Second is the repetition of mantra. Even if you repeat the Divine Name unconsciously, you are generating inner spiritual strength. Third is the practice of meditation. Although you may not yet know the art of meditation, begin by maintaining a balanced plan of daily activity that includes regular practice of concentration and meditation. Mental focus is a most advanced method of discovering spiritual strength from within.

The fourth means of developing spiritual competence is prayer and surrender to God. This is the devotional method. When you have encountered real sufferings in life, you learn to pray wholeheartedly. Otherwise, there are only half-hearted prayers. When you realize that you cannot turn to anyone in the world for help, then God becomes your true support.

If you have faced intense miseries in your life with sensitivity—not with dullness—you learn the art of opening your heart to God within. This does not mean you must create misery in order to be sincere in prayers. What it implies is that you develop sensitivity deep within yourself by realizing that the world is full of limitation and you really cannot expect long-lasting help from any mortal human being. God is your help. That inner feeling of surrender to God is the most powerful method of developing intense spiritual will.

Weak will expresses in the form of indecisiveness, morbid sentiments and negative thoughts. If you have a strong will your mind functions in a very precise manner. If you decide you are going to do something, you will pursue it and accomplish it with great tenacity.

## The Glory of Spiritual Strength

Strength of will is linked to spiritual strength—the power of spirit manifests in the form of strength of will. It is by that spiritual strength that great personalities, Sages and Saints, follow a particular spiritual course of action or *sadhana*. For example, Lord Buddha sat under a tree and resolved, “I will not move from here, even if my body were to dry up, until I attain Enlightenment!” But he didn’t have to wait until his body dried up. The very same night he made that resolve, he attained Enlightenment. That powerful resolve arising out of immense spiritual will enables an aspirant to conquer all obstacles.

If you are endowed with spiritual strength even in the slightest measure, you do not have to be equipped with so many things in this world. Even if you are not a scholar who has studied so many scriptures, you will be able to communicate with thousands of people simply by your mere presence, with only a few words. There lies the glory of the strength of spirit.

If you are spiritually strong, you succeed in life from the real point of view. On the other hand, if you are internally weak, there is the need to over exert, to exhibit scholarship and to try to impress people with your talents, and yet ultimately not much is achieved. Spiritual fortitude accomplishes the greatest feat in life: transcending the world and, at the same time, providing the world with an eternal example of triumph—setting forth an example of spiritual power that provides endless inspiration for others.

All personal problems, as well as all worldly problems, are founded on lack of spiritual strength. Therefore, whoever cultivates this strength helps himself and humanity in the most effective manner possible. It is imperative, then, for you to gain an insight into the process of developing spiritual strength, and having been endowed with that blessing, use it to break down all the barriers that separate you from the Divine Self.

