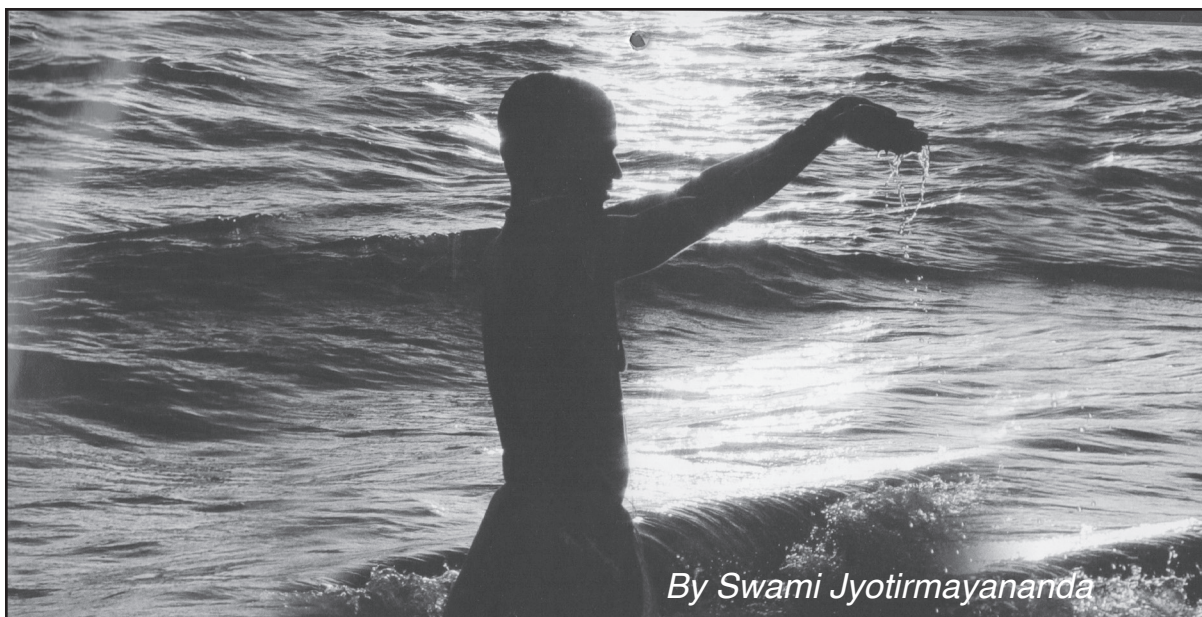




By Swami Jyotirmayananda

QUALIFICATIONS FOR LIBERATION

Once an eager disciple approached a spiritual preceptor and said, “I have attained great aspiration for God-realization, O Guru. Since you are the best spiritual instructor, please confer Liberation upon me.” The Guru replied, “Dear disciple, for your wish to be fulfilled, you must stay in the ashram for a while, perform your special duties here, and by and by you will listen and learn and then attain Enlightenment.”

“But Guru,” the aspirant objected, “This is the modern age — an age of technology. Spacecrafts land on the moon and travel to Mars. We can’t delay something that is so important. Why shouldn’t you give me Enlightenment right now?” The Guru thought for a moment and then said, “I am very pleased that you want to attain Enlightenment. But let’s get to know each other better. Invite me to your home for dinner.” The aspirant replied, “How blessed am I that you will accept food from me.”

So the time was set, and the disciple carefully prepared many sumptuous and delicious dishes to please his Guru. At the appointed time, the Guru arrived with a begging bowl, following the old tradition. He then sat down and held out the bowl, saying, “I am eager to eat. Put all the food you have cooked in this bowl right now.” The disciple looked

into the bowl and was shocked to find that it was tainted with mold and some strange smelly things. He said, “Oh Guru, let me wash your vessel first.” The Guru refused, saying, “I am too hungry. Forget about washing. Quick, put everything right in here.”

The disciple said, “But I have cooked everything with so much flavor. Great care has been given to all the details of this meal! How can you place my wonderful preparations into a moldy and dirty begging bowl? The taste will become polluted. It is not possible!”

The Guru said, “Well, if these wonderful dishes that you have spent so much time preparing cannot be served in a vessel that is not pure, how can I place Enlightenment — the Divine food of knowledge that has been cooked with great care by Sages for centuries — into your heart that has not been cleansed? Give me your heart and allow me to purify it, and then I will give you the food I have cooked.”

The message of this parable is clear. Many people want spiritual Enlightenment, but not everyone wants to work for it. Qualification is needed for spiritual wisdom. Wisdom is not acquired by mere academic study. If you want to study a shortened Upanishad, you can do so in half an hour. And yet that kind of study doesn’t mean anything. Even if you were to study the

scriptures for a long time, you won't be liberated by that study if your understanding has remained solely on the intellectual level. So what is needed for the attainment of Self-realization is developing the proper qualifications with great patience. According to the teachings of Jnana Yoga, there are four qualities that are the basis for developing the qualifications for Enlightenment.

THE FIRST QUALITY: VIVEKA (Discrimination Between the Self and Not-Self)

The first and foremost quality is *viveka* (discriminative knowledge), which is the result of purifying the intellect. When your intellect is not overpowered by ego, it resembles a wonderful lamp. It illuminates the distinction between the eternal and the non-eternal.

Within the deepest dimension of every person there is an awareness of the eternal "I Am." When someone knocks at your door and you ask who is there, the first and immediate answer is, "I am." That "I am" is the echo of the eternal awareness of the Self. That Self is constantly present, unruffled, unaffected, no matter what happens in the world. In the process of reincarnation, your bodies have come and gone, just as waves rise and fall in the ocean; yet, the ocean remains the same. That ocean-like Eternal Self is your true "I Am," your essential nature.

However, due to the lack of purity of intellect, the awareness of that "I Am" has been diminished and an illusory "I am" becomes the focus of an individual. The illusory "I am" is that which is constantly shaken by every experience. When you attain something positive, that "I am" becomes elated. During negative conditions, there is depression and pain.

The "I am" that relates to your transient personality is like a creeper entwining the eternal "I Am." You are encountering a blend of an eternal sense of awareness and a transient awareness of your identity. Each time you go to sleep, you rest in that eternal "I Am." The moment you wake up, the eternal "I Am" remains with you, however, your mind has transferred its attention from the eternal "I Am" to the perishable and transient "I am."

This habit of the mind is the source of all miseries. Mind is addicted to the egoistic "I am." But as your discrimination develops, as *viveka shakti* is activated, you begin to separate ego awareness from the eternal awareness of your deeper Self. You begin to see the difference between the Self within you, which is eternal, all pervasive, all encompassing and your psycho-physical complex.

You see the difference between spirit and matter, the Self and not-self. Otherwise, the two are confused in daily life. That subtle perception of what is real is called *viveka*. It is the greatest of all virtues. Once it is developed, intellect becomes intuitive and reveals the eternal "I Am" that encompasses all.

As a transient "I am," from the ego's point of view, you are just a wave in the midst of countless waves. Every individual has a life, a story with a past, present, and future. In the past, again, there were many embodiments. If ignorance is not destroyed, the future also holds the possibility of countless embodiments.

Viveka gives you the insight that underlying every wave or embodiment lies the ocean-like Self. It reveals that you have the ability to transcend your identity with the ego and realize the Self. From the normal awareness of "I am the body," you discover, "I am *Brahman*, the Absolute Self. *Aham Brahmasmi*."

THE SECOND QUALITY: VAIRAGYA (Dispassion Towards the Not-Self)

The next quality that supports and intensifies *viveka* is *vairagya*, (dispassion). As your intellect glimpses a higher reality, your mind begins to turn away from lesser values of life. This occurs even in daily life. You cling to pennies and copper coins as long as you do not have silver coins. You cling to silver as long as you don't have gold. You cling to gold as long as you don't have diamonds. Similarly, the moment your intellect begins to discover, "I am eternal, universal, all encompassing," then *vairagya* develops and you spontaneously become detached from things that are perishable, things that are not real.

Individuals perceive objects of the world according to their mental concepts. Others may not like certain things that you like. You may like something in the morning and not like it in the evening. When you are hungry, food is delightful. But if you have eaten enough and your dinner host insists that you continue eating, then the very same food becomes unappetizing and even painful.

By exercising your intellect, you finally begin to understand that genuine happiness is not found in the objects of the world. Your strength lies in not being a slave to these objects and not being dependent upon transient conditions of life. *Vairagya* is a quality that allows you to discover the innate power of your soul.

Vairagya itself is power, great strength. *Raga* (attachment or dependence) on the other hand, creates

weakness. You are depending on money, relatives, and success in the world to make you happy — and such happiness is shaky at best.

There are two ways to sit on a tree when its branches are shaking in the wind: the way of a human being or the way of a bird. If a person sits on shaking branches, he is constantly fearful that they may shake too much and throw him to the ground. On the other hand, a bird perches on those same branches with a sense of sport — because he is free to fly away at any moment since he does not depend on the branches for his security.

Reflect upon the bird's approach as symbolic of those who are spiritually adept. Make it your goal to live in the world, but like the bird, not dependent on the world, not affected by it — but free, ready to fly away at any moment. Be like a swan that lands on a lake, enjoys swimming with the fish, chatting with the frogs — but at any moment can shake off the water particles from its wings and soar into the heavens.

Although *vairagya* is a mental state, certain physical manipulations of your life can help promote it. If you do not have too many possessions, if you live a life of simplicity, *vairagya* develops faster. However, merely reducing the number of objects and living in utter simplicity doesn't mean you have attained *vairagya*. True detachment is a very special state of mind.

Detaching from the world and becoming attached to God is the project of spiritual aspirants, and it is a practical project. The more you are dependent upon the world, the more you are going to be frustrated and disillusioned. But if you are discovering within yourself the source of all happiness — the innermost Self or God within you — then you are gradually developing *vairagya*.

More technically, human mind, under the influence of ego, creates two currents: *raga* (attachment) and *dwesha* (aversion). When things please you, the mind develops the illusion, "I must have those things," and attachment develops. When things don't please you, the mind develops another current: "May I destroy them, push them away. May they vanish." Love and hate, like and dislike, are two currents that diminish your mental power. When you begin to reduce these impressions, *vairagya* begins to manifest.

With the flowering of *vairagya*, you become the master of your senses and mind, and you no longer depend upon circumstances. You become a valiant and heroic personality, facing challenges in life rather than being overpowered by them. *Viveka* and *vairagya*

are powerful, fundamental qualities to develop for enriching your life and for attaining Enlightenment.

THE THIRD QUALITY: SHAT SAMPAT (Six-fold Treasure)

The third set of qualities is *shat sampat* (six-fold treasure) consisting of six virtues. It is a unique treasure — one that is ever present. Normal treasures that people possess leave their hands at the time of death, but this six-fold treasure of Divine qualities is carried with you from one lifetime to the next. The profound impressions you have gathered, the deep insights you have gained, the positive experiences that you have developed travel with you from life to life. If you have developed the six-fold treasure to the highest degree, you attain Enlightenment.

SHAMA (SERENITY)

The first of the six-fold virtues is *shama*, (serenity of mind). It is important not to allow your mind to become agitated by situations around you that create *raga-dwesha*, (likes and dislikes). *Shama* allows you to remain unruffled and balanced.

Serenity of mind is a great achievement in the spiritual realm as well as in the practical plane. Imagine how much mental energy can be saved in daily life when you learn to enjoy serenity! If the mind is clear, you can accomplish activities promptly and with precision. Your life will be orderly and the positive qualities of your personality will blossom.

Most people do not value genuine serenity. Some feel that it is acceptable to be agitated and quarrelsome at home, but adopt a policy of superficial serenity in the business world so that they don't lose clients. Sometimes people are so overpowered by irritability and the moods of the mind that they don't even care about what they say or do in the practical world. They are sitting on a branch, and they cut off the very same branch that is supporting them. Someone tells them that the branch is going to fall and they're going to break their legs, but they don't care, because their lack of serenity has temporarily deprived them of their reason.

DAMA (CONTROL OF SENSES)

Each Divine quality is interlinked with the others and therefore one quality inspires the expansion of the

others. Thus the more serenity (*shama*) one possesses, the more their senses are under their control. That ability to control the senses is known as *dama*, the second quality. It implies that you are able to use the senses under the guidance of your reason.

Suppose that you are watching some entertaining programs on television and there is a lot of junk food sitting on the table before you. If you don't have control of your senses, you go on watching one program after another and eating the junk food until you feel uncomfortable. You become like a slave instead of the master. But when you enjoy *shama*, you are aware of not wanting to sacrifice serenity for superficial pleasures. Therefore, there is always an awareness that food or entertainment is needed, but not beyond the point of reason.

If you have *shama* and *dama*, you regulate your daily life in a rhythmical manner. Suppose you have resolved that you should go to sleep by 10:00 p.m. so that you can get up early each morning to meditate. If you do not have control of the senses, you go to sleep one night at 10:00 p.m., but the next night you stay up until midnight. Then, the following night you stay up until 2:00 a.m. because of some interesting television program. As a result, you sleep through the entire next morning due to drowsiness. In this way, lack of control can result in wild swings in your daily life and impede your spiritual progress.

Some changes inevitably will have to be made in your daily schedule so that you do not lose the balance and rhythm of your life. To the extent possible, sleeping, staying awake, eating, seeking company, and enjoying entertainment should be done in moderation so that your life is harmonized and enriched day by day. On the other hand, when you disturb your balance, headaches, nervousness, and other ills develop, and your quality of life diminishes. Your mind tends to view things in a negative way and the whole world appears dark and devoid of Divine Presence.

UPARATI (DETACHMENT FROM FRUITS OF ACTION)

Every action that one performs has a result in the world of time and space. For the majority of people, pursuing projects and succeeding in them according to their ego's concept of success is what gives meaning to daily existence. However, with spiritual maturity one develops the third aspect of

the six-fold qualities: *uparati*, the philosophical insight that fruits of actions are not your goal in life.

Why should you perform actions if their results are not significant in life? The answer lies in understanding that no one can thrive without action. If you don't do anything, you become a dull wit. No one can live without performing duties and attending to certain responsibilities. However, the primary objective of activity is to purify your heart. Learn to attend to your duties with detachment in order to promote internal relaxation. Every achievement in the world of time and space is secondary to these internal, spiritual objectives. Mind must be ever set on the goal of attaining Liberation.

TITIKSHA (ENDURANCE)

The fourth quality is *titiksha* (endurance). You live in a world where things will never be completely comfortable for you. You may clean your room perfectly, but you never know when one little insect will sneak into that room. That alone is sufficient to keep you restless for hours.

There are certain reasonable actions that people do to make themselves comfortable, but sometimes mind develops abnormal preoccupations with comfort. For example, suppose you are inspired and want to practice meditation. However, as soon as you sit down to do so, you see that a particular picture is not exactly level with the floor and you get up to adjust it. By the time you have adjusted the picture, you find that the wind is disturbing you, so you close the door and adjust your air-conditioner. Then suddenly you realize someone has started making noise outside your window, so you have to tell them that you are having a serious meditation session and they should be quiet. By the time you have done all this, you realize a lot of mental energy has been wasted.

Your time for meditation is more important than all the little things that have preoccupied your mind. Therefore, cultivate the idea, "Certain things are bothersome. Fine. That's the way the world has been created. Let me endure it." Make yourself comfortable to a reasonable extent, but don't become overly obsessed with the idea of making your environment perfect.

There are two ways you can experience discomfort: physically and mentally. Each requires its own type of endurance; however, mental endurance is the more

important of the two. Some people who are physically strong enough to lift amazing weights may immediately collapse mentally after the smallest insult. When you have *titiksha* or endurance, you have a greater possibility of looking at every situation in an objective way.

Always remember that if adversities present themselves from an outside source, there is a Divine test behind it. In one of his songs, Kabira sings, “If someone is criticizing you, don’t become angry. Rather, invite him into your home and listen to him everyday. He will surely purify your mind better than any soap and water.” If your negative qualities are really being exaggerated in the mind of the person criticizing you, then he serves as a magnifying glass. Thank him for clearly showing you what you should be working on in your personality.

SHRADDHA (FAITH IN GOD)

The fifth quality is *shraddha* (faith in God). There should be no need to feel anxiety about the developments in your life. Have trust that God, in His wisdom, is placing you in situations and circumstances that are best for you. Therefore, instead of becoming upset by a situation, handle it wisely. Do your utmost to remain relaxed. Behind all your effort lies a Divine hand. By developing *shraddha*, you gain immense power.

SAMADHAN (BALANCE OF MIND)

The last of the six-fold treasures is *samadhan*. *Samadhan* means establishing a mind that maintains harmony during varied circumstances, possessing a mind that does not look at things with a sense of contradiction. *Chhandogya Upanishad* teaches, “Be magnanimous-minded. That should be your vow. If it becomes too hot, do not condemn the heat. If it rains, do not condemn the weather. Do not condemn the seasons, people, animals, or birds. That should be your vow.”

Sometimes people have nothing to talk about so they develop the habit of complaining about the weather or constantly finding fault with little changes in the environment. But *Chhandogya Upanishad* says not to criticize the variations — appreciate them! Enjoy each situation as it appears, rather than being in opposition to it.

Live in the world with a sense of harmony with all creatures great and small. Do not harbor the idea that this

world belongs to human beings alone. This implies maintaining a vegetarian diet and caring for the environment.

Adapt and adjust in all circumstances. Bear insult and injury. Allow your mind to remain calm so that it can be directed to the highest purpose — Enlightenment. Otherwise, you are wasting a tremendous amount of energy on little things, and therefore, the purpose for which you have come to exist is ignored. Without *samadhan*, great is the loss. Therefore, ever strive to maintain the mind in a state of harmony, to possess a mind that accepts the small, inevitable variations in life without a sense of contradiction.

THE FOURTH QUALITY: MUMUKSHUTWA (Intense Aspiration for Self-realization)

As you continue to gradually and patiently develop *viveka* (discriminative intellect), *vairagya* (dispassion) and the six virtues of *shat sampat*, an intense eagerness develops within. Through spiritual disciplines, the mind has tasted the joy of the Divine Presence and now becomes like a bee that has tasted delicious honey. It becomes deeply engrossed in pursuing this unique bliss and experiencing it more frequently.

Ramkrishna gave the example of a thief living in a hotel. One day the thief realized that in the next room there was a safe filled with a multitude of jewels, and located between his door and the neighbor’s was a flimsy wall. He would only have to burrow a little to reach all that wealth. Imagine how eagerly he longs for the moment that he can begin digging through that wall to obtain the treasure!

Although that is a negative illustration, there are similar implications. Between you and the Divine Self there is only a small “veil” of ignorance. When you profoundly understand that fact, and know that you have the possibility to tear through that veil and realize the Self, you become extremely eager. You cannot stop your mind from thinking about reaching the ultimate treasure of Liberation. That’s *mumukshutwa*, intense aspiration for attaining God-realization.

If you are developing the four-fold qualities of an Aspirant, then you are truly progressing on the spiritual path. You are becoming increasingly qualified for attaining Enlightenment and you are enriching your life day by day. These Divine qualities illumine your soul and endow your personality with immense magnetism and spiritual power.