

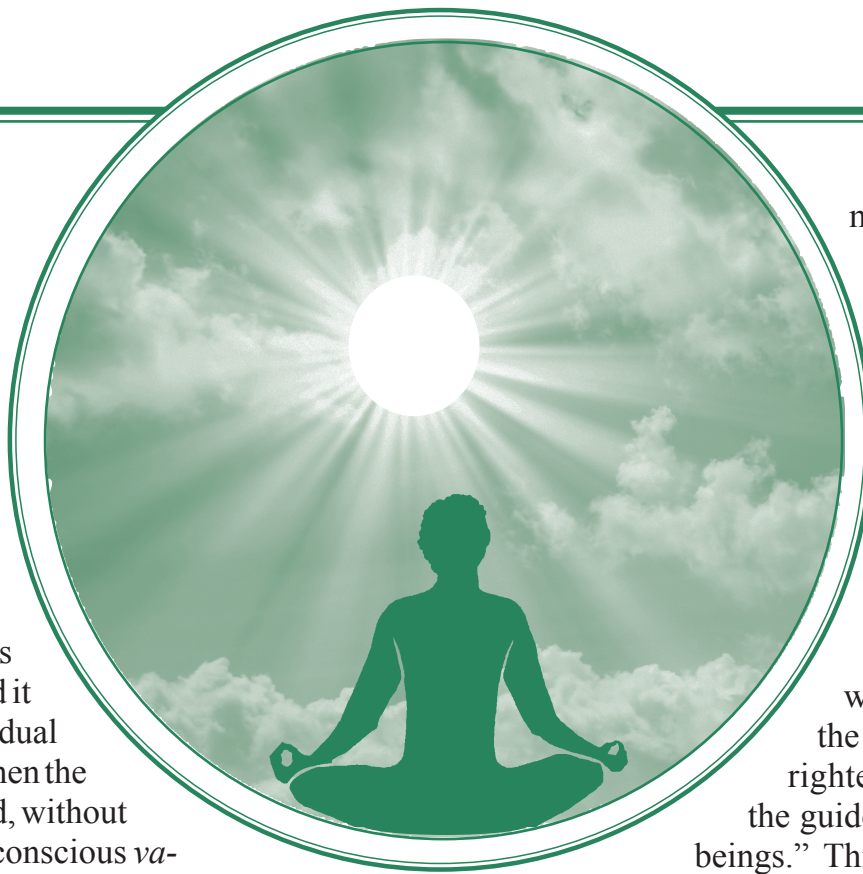
Insight into Humility

Humility is a divine virtue which is the positive counterpart of pride or *mada*. It is the expression of an evolving soul, a soul that is winging its way to the Divine Self. Humility implies effacement of ego, and it is attained by an individual in gradual degrees. When the mind is highly fulfilled, without the pressure of the unconscious *vasanas* (subtle desires), ego is transcended and one begins to experience one's unity with the Divine Self. In that state of perfection, there is an utter absence of ego, a spontaneous blossoming of supreme humility.

The Foot of Sage Bhṛigu

In the Puranas there is a story that gives insight into the quality of humility at its highest and most perfect form:

Once Gods were having a discussion about who among the Deities was the greatest: Brah-



ma—the Creator, Vishnu—the Sustainer, or Shiva—the Destroyer?

“Brahma is the greatest because he is the creator of the universe. He is the teacher of the Vedic wisdom. Being the embodiment of righteousness, He is the guide and guru of all beings.” This was the view upheld by some divine beings.

“Lord Shiva is the greatest because by His immense power He brings about the destruction of the world. If Shiva did not destroy the world, the cycle of creation and dissolution could not be maintained.” Thus some argued for establishing the greatness of Shiva.

“Lord Vishnu is the greatest,” asserted the devotees of Lord Vishnu. “He is the sustainer of the world. Creation and destruction are sustained by Him. It is He who incarnated as Rama and Krishna, and it is He who incarnates from time to time to promote harmony and order in the world.”

The Art of Positive Feeling Part Five



Overcoming Pride (Continued)



by Swami Jyotirmayananda

Unsatisfied, however, with these answers, Sage Bhrigu took upon himself the task of finding out who is the greatest among the three Deities. He reflected within himself, "I will consider Him the greatest who is endowed with the greatest degree of forbearance, who has the greatest control over his temper." With this idea in mind, he first proceeded to Brahma Loka, the heavenly region where Lord Brahma dwells.

Having entered Brahma Loka, he approached Brahma without offering adorations. Brahma could not tolerate this misconduct of the sage. Anger manifested in His face as the corners of His eyes grew red, and He began to look for His kamandalu (the vessel containing sacred water) with the intention of pronouncing a curse on Bhrigu. Goddess Saraswati, the Divine consort of Lord Brahma, restrained him, saying, "Lord, do not be angry with Bhrigu. He has always been courteous before. There must be some reason for his unusual behavior." Thus saying, Goddess Saraswati dissuaded Brahma from cursing the sage.

Scarcely believing that he had escaped, Sage Bhrigu hastened his steps to the dwelling place of Lord Shiva. Approaching the great Deity, he did not salute. In addition, he began to insult the Deity, saying, "Shiva, you ride on a bull, wear snakes for your garlands, and keep your body besmeared with ashes. You are the very personification of madness!" At this, Lord Shiva grew immensely angry and reached for his trident, ready to hurl it to destroy Bhrigu. But Goddess Parvati, Lord Shiva's Divine consort, stopped Him, pleading, "Lord, Bhrigu is a great sage and devotee of ours. Please have patience with him." Reluctantly Lord Shiva withdrew His trident saying, "This *brahmin* must be taught a lesson. However, I am not beheading him this time for your sake. But if he ever shows rudeness again, his head will fall!"

Fleeing from Lord Shiva, Bhrigu proceeded to Vaikuntha where Lord Vishnu dwells. Lord Vishnu, the indweller of every heart, knew what the sage was intending to do, and even before

Bhrigu arrived, He pretended to be deep in sleep. When Bhrigu arrived at Vaikuntha, he rushed towards the Divine abode. The gate-keepers tried to stop the sage from entering, but seeing his angry face, they let him go. Bhrigu rushed into the inner apartments of Lord Vishnu, and seeing him stretched out in sleep, the sage kicked the chest of Lord Vishnu with great vehemence, saying, "You who are the sustainer of the world, how dare you sleep, ignoring the well-being of the world!"

Lord Vishnu sat up and clasped the feet of the sage, saying, "Sage, your tender lotus foot has been injured by my rock-like chest. What a great sin I have committed! Please forgive me, great sage!"

Sage Bhrigu was amazed at the humility of Lord Vishnu. He said, "Lord, it is I who must be forgiven by You who are supremely compassionate. How can I ever be free of the sinful act of having kicked Your sacred chest with my foot? The world will always speak ill of me for having done so."

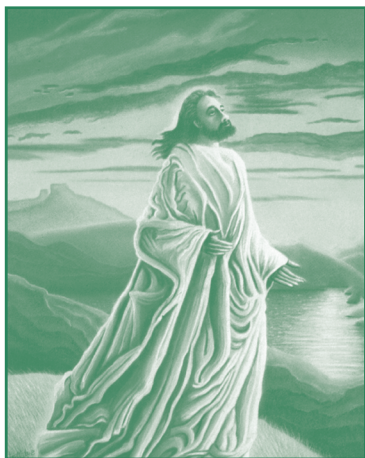
Lord Vishnu said, "Sage, on the contrary, the world will sing your praises. You have pleased Me by placing your foot on My chest. Just as a mother is pleased even when her infant kicks her, I am ever pleased with My devotees even when they are angry with Me. As a token of My satisfaction, I have installed your footprint on My chest. Not only this, every great incarnation of Mine will bear your footprint on His chest."

Sage Bhrigu was immersed in bliss. He had discovered the greatest among the Deities!

From a mystic point of view, this story is not meant to ascertain the superiority of one Deity over another, because, in fact, these three Deities are One appearing as three. What it intends to do is show the secret of real greatness. The greatness of a person does not lie in his power and prosperity, but in the magnanimity of his heart, the magnanimity with which he is ever ready to love instead of hate, to forgive instead of bearing a grudge, to be humble instead of proud and conceited.

The perfect and total humility of Lord Vishnu is Divine, beyond the human plane. As long as one

is in the human plane, his interactions are based on ego to one degree or another. But the ideal of egolessness personified in this story must be adored, and one must strive to realize that ideal gradually with patience.



Blessed are the Meek

“Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.” This third beatitude from Lord Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount extols the great virtue of humility and points to its majestic power. The “meekness” referred to here is profoundly different from the “meekness” of common parlance. It is not to be confused with the dullness of mind that leads a person to simply accept without questioning whatever the world presents before him. Nor is it at all like the degrading timidity that leaves many people feeling humiliated again and again in life. Certainly it is not the feigned humility that a crafty person adopts to help him get what he wants out of a situation. Such a person may act like a sheep, but he may well be a wolf in sheep’s clothing!

The blessed meekness praised by Lord Jesus is that Yogic state of advanced personality integration in which one is so profoundly in tune with Cosmic Will that he has no need to assert his ego. Ever guided by the Divine hand, he carries out the will of God with total surrender, with the innocent meekness of a sheep driven by the Great Shepherd—God, the Divine Self.

The highest state of meekness is reached when a devotee is able to totally cast his ego-

center into the ocean of the Divine Self through the intuitive realization of God. This is achieved through a mind which sees the very ego-center as merely a reflection of that Self, and not the absolute reality within.

In the lesser stages of spiritual development, the ego-center seems to be all that you have, and you are constantly trying to assert the ego. However, as you reflect deeply and enquire into “Who am I?” you gradually realize the illusoriness of the perception of ego, and the vanity involved in being a slave to egoistic consciousness. You eventually understand that the ego is not the all-important factor that it appeared to be and the tension due to egoistic illusions gradually begins to subside.

One who has developed such meekness of spirit enjoys a unique type of relaxation and experiences a joy that so far excels ordinary happiness that it is termed as Bliss. Their mind is no longer under the grip of selfishness, no longer tarnished by the impressions of frustrations and sorrow that accompany egoistic consciousness. The radiantly healthy mind of such a person becomes a basis for intense creative activity that can do immeasurable good for many, many people.

Mind is a form of Divine energy and it is necessary that an aspirant use that energy with respect. If you use your mental energy properly and see that your mind is kept relaxed and cheerful day by day, then Nature flows through that mind creating wonders. You begin to think powerful thoughts that you would never have imagined possible. You begin to enjoy highly sublime feelings and sentiments. Through that mind you begin to discover what is really meant by universal love and nonviolence. That mind becomes truly healthy and serves as a source of immense inspiration for yourself and others.

When you acquire a mind such as that, a mind permeated by the blessed meekness referred to by Lord Jesus, you “inherit the earth.” You become the master of all the circumstances, conditions, and developments within the material world around you. None of these can pressure

your mind any longer. Like a lotus, you bloom above all the conditions of the lake of the world, and remain untouched by them. Like a swan, you sport in the lake of the world, but at any moment you can shake your wings, throw off all the water particles, and fly away.

Thus, when true meekness arises, you attain dominion over the material world. The world of matter does not matter anymore. In Vedantic terminology, you triumph over *Maya*, or Cosmic Illusion, and are no longer tempted by worldly values.

The abundance of the earth is for the desireless, not for the man with desires. When a person approaches the objects of the world with desire, he becomes a slave to them. The objects begin to overpower the person and it becomes impossible for him to possess them in the true sense. Desires create slavery to the objects of the world and a slavish mentality degrades the soul.

But in the state of true meekness, the soul submits itself to God alone. It is not tied to the objects through the strings of desires. Therefore, it recovers its mastery over the earth. It rules matter, commands circumstances, and acquires a supreme victory that echoes with an immeasurable sense of inner triumph.

The Song of Saint Chaitanya

Speaking of the qualities of a saint, the great Indian Saint Chaitanya, sang

*“Trinaadapi, suneechena,
tarorapi sahishnuna, amaanina maanadena,
kirtaniyaa sadaaharih.”*—

“He who is humbler than a blade of grass,
and yet, more enduring than a tree;
he who gives respect to those who lack it—
he is ever immersed in singing the praises
of the Lord at all times.”

These words describe the characteristics of great men, men whose spiritual majesty endows them with utter humility and powerful endurance. Just as blades of grass bend willingly and without complaint beneath the feet of those who walk upon

them, a man of true meekness submits himself joyfully to the unfolding of the Divine Will. Just as a mango tree gives its sweet fruit to a child who throws stones at its branches, or a sandalwood tree gives its exquisite fragrance to the very axe with which it was struck, a man of true meekness radiates a spontaneous tolerance and endurance under all circumstances.

A man of true humility ever delights in making other people feel happy and content. Because of the spiritual strength that flows to him from within his own heart, he does not seek to draw from others any consolation or sustenance or praise for himself. Rather, he spontaneously showers others with honor, support and encouragement.

One who has reached great spiritual heights experiences such an overpowering sense of internal expansion that ego spontaneously loses all its importance. His mind then flows spontaneously to God at all times.

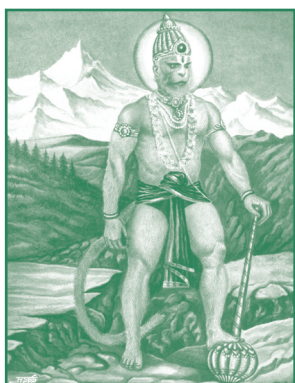
How Generously the Tree Bows Down

There is another saying in Sanskrit: “*Namanti phalino vrikshah*” — “A tree that is laden with fruit bows down.” The implication of this saying is that when prosperity comes to you, when you are endowed with the blessings of life, humility should develop. If prosperity makes one conceited, that prosperity is unhealthy prosperity, envenomed prosperity—like tasty food which has deadly poison in it.

One who is truly humble and prosperous becomes a flawless instrument in Divine Hands, without ever thinking to take the credit for the miraculous results achieved by the Cosmic Will working through him. “How great is this work that I have done!” is never asserted by one who has attained the blessed state of meekness or humility. In the overflowing sense of fulfillment that accompanies his mental expansion, he knows that it is not the ego, but the Divine Will that works through human beings, producing great wonders.

The Pride of the Pandavas Humbled

In the Mahabharata, the five Pandava brothers represent the forces of virtue, while their cousins, the Kauravas, represent the forces of evil. The following three stories from this great scripture highlight the manner in which three of the Pandava brothers received profound lessons in humility that helped them grow in wisdom and spiritual strength.



Bhima's Lesson in Humility

At one time during the twelve year period in which the Pandavas were living in the forest, Arjuna went away to the heavenly world to attain the celestial weapons necessary to guarantee victory in the future confrontation with the Kauravas. While Arjuna was away, Bhima and Draupadi visited great pilgrimage centers in the Himalayas. One day, at the great holy shrine of Badrikedar, a northeastern puff of wind brought a flower of exquisite beauty and it fell right near Draupadi. Captivated by the beauty and the fragrance of that flower, Draupadi asked Bhima to bring her more of them. Eager to fulfill Draupadi's request, Bhima set out in the direction from which the flower had been carried by the wind.

Endowed with superhuman strength and capacities for which he was exceedingly proud, Bhima was able to cross mountains and forests at breakneck speed and he quickly arrived in a plantain grove near the region presided over by Kubera, the god of wealth. There, in that grove, Bhima encountered a gigantic old monkey lying across his path and blocking his passage.

When Bhima asked that monkey to move aside, the monkey said that he was too old to move and that if Bhima was so interested in passing that way he should just move his tail and pass on. Annoyed with the old monkey, Bhima arrogantly tried to lift its tail, but he could not stir it. Summoning all his strength, he became full of perspiration and began to choke, and yet that tail did not budge an inch.

Bhima thought to himself that this could not be an ordinary creature, and suddenly filled with humility, he bowed down before that monkey, inquiring about his real nature.

The monkey then introduced himself as Hanuman, the leader of the monkey army in Rama's time, and proceeded to tell Bhima all about the events in Treta Yuga that led to the eventual defeat of Ravana. In the course of their conversation, Hanuman revealed to Bhima the majestic cosmic form he had assumed when he crossed the ocean. The intention of Hanuman that day in the forest was to meet Bhima, to test his strength and bestow upon him his blessings. The two, Bhima and Hanuman, were actually brothers. Hanuman was the son of the wind-god during Treta Yuga, when Rama was born, and Bhima was the son of the wind-god in Dwapara Yuga, when Krishna was born. Bhima was immensely delighted to have met Hanuman, and when Hanuman affectionately took Bhima in his arms, Bhima felt that a new energy emerged in his body and he became much stronger than ever before: Although Bhima had been renowned for his great strength and was quite proud of that strength, he learned from his encounter with Hanuman the majestic power of cosmic energy, of cosmic *prana*. Before that energy that sustains and empowers every individual, the power of his egoistic personality was but little.

Yudhishtira's Lesson in Humility

During the Mahabharata War, Dronacharya began to employ celestial weapons against the army of the Pandavas, although using such devastating

weapons against ordinary soldiers was considered highly unrighteous in those days. Seeing the terrible devastation brought about by these sinful methods, Lord Krishna resolved to bring the power of Dronacharya to an end by employing a form of Divine deception.

Dronacharya was endowed with such tremendous power that he was considered virtually unconquerable. However, he had a great attachment to his son, Ashwatthama, and that attachment made him vulnerable. Lord Krishna explained to the Pandavas that only if Dronacharya were to learn of the death of this dear son would he be overwhelmed with sufficient grief to lay down his arms and stop fighting.

With Krishna's words in mind, Bhima killed an elephant named Ashwatthama and then cried out, "Ashwatthama is dead." When Dronacharya heard this, he became deeply upset, but could not believe that it was his son who had been killed. He asserted that he would not believe this terrible news unless he heard it uttered directly by Yudhishtira, who was well-known for his unflinching devotion to truth.

At this point, Krishna persuaded Yudhishtira to come forward and confirm the death of Ashwatthama. With great reluctance, Yudhishtira brought his chariot within the hearing range of Dronacharya and shouted, "Ashwatthama has been killed." When Yudhishtira was about to softly add, "Not man, but elephant," the sounds of the battlefield drowned out those qualifying words before Dronacharya could hear them.

Thus convinced that it was his son who had indeed been killed, Dronacharya sadly laid down his arms and vowed to fast unto death. Seeing the guru they had once loved in this pathetic situation, the Pandavas would merely have taken him prisoner; but to the horror of all, Dhrishtadyumna rushed forward and quickly beheaded Dronacharya while he sat in meditation.

In this story about the deceiving of Dronacharya, the Mahabharata brings out a subtle point regarding virtue—that the principles of ethics are not as black and white as they would seem.

The words that Krishna persuaded Yudhishtira to speak to Dronacharya were apparently untrue, but at the same time they were necessary to bring about the ultimate victory of the forces of virtue.

Practicing a virtue such as truthfulness is not a matter of laying down some laws and following them literally, or mathematically. The practice of virtue requires a complex handling of the mind and deep philosophical insight. Although one may speak what seems true, if that "truth" does not serve the greater long-range purpose of the Divine plan, then it is actually falsehood. If that "truth" is in conflict with a higher truth, then it should not be uttered, or it should be watered down or refashioned with wisdom. For Yudhishtira to gain this understanding, his subtle spiritual pride about being the paragon of truthfulness had to be quelled.

Throughout his life, Yudhishtira had faithfully adhered to the concept of speaking the truth as he saw it, and he was well-known for his vow never to utter a lie. In Yudhishtira, as well as in any spiritual aspirant, such a vow to pursue the ethical injunction of *satyam*, or truthfulness, is indeed praiseworthy. However, in the earlier stages of spiritual evolution such a vow is generally tinged with egoistic pride and made with a shallow intellectual understanding that must give way to more profound wisdom as one advances. So it was with Yudhishtira.

To make Yudhishtira aware of these erroneous concepts hidden in his unconscious and help him eliminate them, Krishna brought out the weakness in front of thousands of great heroes. Thereby, he helped Yudhishtira purify himself more effectively and move on to higher levels of understanding.

Thus, through the intervention of Krishna, the personality of Yudhishtira became more integrated. At the same time, Dronacharya was destroyed and the eventual victory of the Pandavas was made more secure.

(To be continued)

