



## The Fine Art of Serving Others

**G**oodness is the very essence of one's soul. By doing good to others, one discovers the essential glory of one's own Self. All religions of the world concur on this point: The test of true piety in life lies in doing good to others.

A life that does not flow through good deeds becomes stagnant and collects the moss of egoistic vanities, the stench of frustrated desires and the croaking frogs of restless cares. But a life that flows on through acts of goodness sparkles with the light of joy and is rocked by the breeze of Divine grace. Gone are the ugly frogs and frothing moss. Now the swans of heaven sport in a life that

flows on with the sparkling waters of goodness to the surging ocean of the Self.

Goodness is the song of the God-ward soul. The essence of goodness lies in promoting one's movement towards God-realization. That which leads to God is good, but that which turns one away from God is evil, demoniac, unhealthy and illusory.

An aspirant must develop a keen insight into the philosophy behind the need to serve others. He helps others in order to attain purification of the mind and move on to the heights of spiritual realization. The Self is the One, Non-dual, Ab-

solute Reality, and the human heart is constantly pressured by the urge to discover that oneness through acts of goodness, kindness, generosity, self-effacing love and magnanimity.

There is a unique joy in one's heart when they are able to render help to one who is afflicted, kindle a spark in the dark night of a wandering soul or extend their hand to a person drowning in the marshes of illusion. However, due to mental limitations caused by ignorance, one begins to nourish the creeper of vanity within their heart. Acts of goodness ought to bring about humility, self-effacement, and simplicity in one's personality. Instead, they often cause pride, arrogance and a sense of superiority over those towards whom goodness is directed.

When the mind is complexed and life is steeped in egoistic illusion, people do more harm than good in the name of helping others. Backed up by selfish illusions, the help rendered brings about a sense of degradation in those being helped. It promotes illusions within the doer of these "good" deeds and within the receiver of such deeds as well. It weakens both the one who gives and the one who receives.

There are thousands of parents who continue to do what they think is the utmost good for their children. But their goodness is strictly confined to their own concepts. They turn their children into weaklings, in both body and mind, and then go through endless sufferings due to the frustrating developments in the personalities of their beloved children. As a result of their "good deeds," they earn frustration, sorrow and bitterness.

**H**ow then can a person be good to others? It demands a subjective preparation and an objective adjustment to the needs of practical life. When you practice concentration and meditation, you gain a deeper insight into the nature of the Self. This is greatly aided by the spiritual teachings of Guru. In this way, you promote health in your body and mind in order to express goodness through your life.

At the objective level, you must see how you can be of best service to people around you. You

should expand the horizons of your capacities, unfold hidden talents and learn new techniques to be of practical help to others. You can help people as a friend, relative, doctor, lawyer, musician, scientist, artist, philosophical guide, writer, or in all other possible ways. Everyone is endowed with unique talents that can be of great service to others.

**T**he highest form of help that can be rendered to another is to inspire them to tread the path of Yoga and move towards the goal of Self-realization. The highest "good deed" is to awaken a person from the deep sleep of ignorance. The highest gift is that of wisdom, which enables a person to be free from all forms of dependence. However, this understanding of the highest should not restrict one's practical magnanimity in daily life.

When you encounter a thirsty person, you must give him water instead of spiritual discourses to quench the thirst of his soul. If a man needs physical assistance, you must be helpful to him in a physical manner. If your acts of goodness are often confined to the physical needs of people, you must consider these as God-given opportunities for the upliftment of your mind and soul. You must perform good deeds to others with a spirit of serving God in them. And no matter how limited your deeds may be, it is the spirit behind them that renders them "good."

There is a great difference between the soft cadence of April showers that infuse life and refresh the vegetable kingdom, and the incessant beating of torrential rains that cause devastation to tender crops and green trees. Truly good acts are like the gentle showers of spring, while mighty ostentatious deeds are like torrential rains that often destroy and devastate the very vegetation that they intend to nourish and save. Such is the difference between good deeds done with the spiritual attitude of serving God in humanity and those done without this ennobling understanding.

A truly good act is sharing oneself with others based on the mystic realization that all is one's Self. It is sustained by ego-effacing love. When you give

a flower to your friend, you are giving yourself to them through a symbolic token. When you perform a kind act, you give yourself to someone through that act of kindness. You are symbolically trying to say, “O friend, all that is mine is yours, and all that is yours is mine. In fact, there is no difference between you and me. Let us unite with each other in order to abide in the Nonduality of the Self.”

When your mind glimpses this sublime understanding, you will feel a sense of shyness in seeking any recognition as a doer of good deeds. Rather you will feel obliged to a person who gives you the privilege of serving the Self in him through your limited means. Instead of vanity, you will develop humility. Instead of making others obliged to you, you will feel spiritually obliged to them.

Suppose you invite a friend to your home and welcome him by saying, “This home is yours. All that is mine is yours. Feel free to move about and enjoy all the conveniences of this home.” This is the ideal understanding behind Divine Love. However, in this practical world, expressions of love in the form of giving and receiving become limited. By naming objects that are to be given as gifts to someone, the feeling of oneness decreases, for no longer is everything given. Furthermore, a person who receives the gifts is supposed to be obliged to the giver. Therefore, the joyous sense of harmony is soon dissipated by the illusory concepts of giving and receiving.

You should aspire to not allow the vision of harmony and oneness to be dissipated through the illusions of give and take, illusions sustained by the practical realities of life. You should give with utter humility and receive with a spirit of uplifting love proceeding from the Divine Self. Giving is an expression of your Divine love, and receiving is an acceptance of a Divine blessing.

Thus, whoever receives any gift from you, either in the form of an object or a kind act, will be truly delighted. And even when you do not give any material gift, your very presence in this state is an abundant gift to humanity.

Human love is measured by the illusions of give and take, but Divine love is ever full. It is not affected by giving or receiving. It gives beauty and vitality to the blooming flowers, and it receives fragrance from them. Such is the vision of Universal love that gives and receives like the rising and falling of waves in the fullness of the ocean.

Acts of goodness must be like an aroma emanating from a blooming flower. One should not be aware, even at an egoistic level, of one’s acts of goodness. This secret art of doing the utmost good to one and all is illustrated in an interesting story told about a Sage who, by the force of his austerities, deserved a heavenly boon. The angels insisted on giving him miraculous powers, but he pleaded that the boon be given to his shadow. And so, the shadow of the Sage worked wonders in the world, while he himself remained oblivious to all the good that proceeded from him.

Give abundantly. Give with love and humility. Be a dynamic servant of humanity. Share your very being with all. Do not be miserly. Do not keep your knowledge, your wisdom or your talents locked up in the confines of your own little self. Fling open the doors of your mind. Just as imprisoned air blends with the joyous breeze, so too, blend with the breeze of Cosmic love. Realize, “I am all that is,” and be free!

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