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PEACE

Humanity's Major Need

All want peace, though many may not want to read an article on peace. Peace eludes the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate. The haves and the have-nots are troubled by their own worries and have not true peace. Vedanta holds that peace is our true nature. What causes sorrow is spiritual ignorance (*avidya*). Then, there are umpteen wrong notions, false evaluations and faulty attitudes which are born of that basic ignorance.

"He attains peace who moves amidst objects with senses under control, free from likes and dislikes," says the Geeta (2.64).

A mind, ignorant of the divine nature of oneself, harbours likes, dislikes, desire, anger etc. These deepen into a strong habit of thinking and acting and one is a victim of one's own prejudices. Wrong notions do not appear to be wrong to one who is under their strong influence. We say these desires are natural. There was once a cow that would eat only such grass or leaves that were very green. She had thus a 'like' for things green. She imagined wrongly that only green grass or leaves were good. The cowherd had a problem now. While all the other cows with him could eat anything, this one demanded only very green stuff always and it was difficult to get green grass every day when he took all the cows for grazing. The story ends happily when the intelligent cowherd gets a pair of green glasses for the cow!

We have our likes and dislikes and how we wish it was as simple as wearing some glasses to overcome them. However, it is possible to purify our mind by the alert exercise of our intelligence. This is what the scriptures ask us to do. See Geeta (3.34):

"The senses demand certain objects
And want to avoid certain others;
One should not come under the sway
Of these likes and dislikes
For these are verily one's enemies."

Habits die hard, of course. If you remove 'h' from the word habit, 'a bit' remains. If you remove 'a' also, 'bit' remains. If you remove 'b' also, 'it' remains. No wonder habit is most hard to get rid of. It is like trying to write with the right hand, having been a lefthander for years. But practice makes perfect. A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. We must strive on. Inspiration from holy company (*satsanga*) and diligent self-effort are both important.
Do we ever examine our desires? Do we question our miserable dependence on the fulfilment of desires for our happiness? Why do we seek attention, for example? Why is our image so important to us? It can be seen that most of us live under tremendous pressure of "what people think of us." The need to be understood and to be loved weighs heavily upon us.

Saint Francis of Assisi prays,
O divine master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand and
To be loved as to love.

How significant these words are! The constant urge to receive pleasure and attention from those around us is like a thorn in our flesh. This urge is the reason for peace to elude us. Remove this seeking; infinite peace is discovered right away.

Do we not become totally inactive if desire is removed from our bosom? Will it not lead to a vegetable existence? These are natural questions in this context. Someone once said that people would just sleep all the time if they gave up desire for pleasure and attention. It is desire that makes them active, on the move. This is not true, for one who would sleep all the time is not a desireless person. Rather, there is desire in him for the comfort of the bed in such way of life. The lazy and the unmotivated may appear desireless; but they are actually burdened by lower desires. Or it may be a case of the frustration of the non-fulfilment of some desire. Therefore it is wrong to consider desirelessness as leading to sloth. A desireless mind, in fact, may go to Samadhi (blissful absorption, quietude), but not to a lazy mode.

One needs to train one's senses and mind. Moderation in food, speech and sleep was advised by the sage of Arunachala, Sri RamanaMaharshi. Here one can understand the basis of religious vows like fasting, silence and *jaagaran* (remaining awake all night, singing glories of Goddess) etc. Peace is ours if the mind and senses are prevented from their foolish ways. One is in the cool shade of a tree, let us say, on a hot summer afternoon. Is it not foolish to rush into the sun and then say, "Oh, I am miserable"? The intelligent one would remain in the shade. Is there any wisdom in putting our hand into fire and then crying out, "Oh, it is burning"? A wise one would just keep away from fire. Similarly to flow into egoistic channels of thinking and acting is quite foolish for one's mind and senses. Shirdi Sai Baba said his guru had made him hang upside down in a forest well for a long time and thus he got enlightened. The inner meaning of these words of the great saint is that the disciple was asked to turn inward, look within.

Introspection helps. We need to be increasingly aware of the contradictions in our thinking, in our selfish desiring. If we want good health, it is sheer contradiction to overeat. If we seek goodness from others, it is a contradiction to deny goodness to others. If we want all to love us, it is a contradiction in us if we but love only some chosen few. If we want our happiness to be unconditional, how can we encourage a thought in us which says, "Look, that object can make you happier"?

The objects are by themselves harmless, most of the times, if not at all times. It is our conditioned mind that interprets the objects as good or bad. It is these conditionings that Lord Sri Krishna objects to (2.64). If I eat onion, every breath of mine will smell of onion. In the same way, if one has indulged, in thought, word and deed, in sense pleasures in the past, one's mind would pursue all issues from the perspective of pleasure prospect. The *vasanas* (latent

tendencies) are thus the interpreters within us. While the media advertises various commodities on one hand, these *vasanas* do much more on the other, right within us. Beware of advertisements, outside and inside you! One whose actions do not spring from old *vasanas,* but do from the higher understanding that one possesses now – stands to gain peace. By inquiry and self-examination, one gains insight into life. When one is true to this insight, one does not fall again. Peace (called *prasaada* in Geeta 2.64) then prevails in one's bosom. It is peace that is one's nature, now unhindered by the foolish noise that the ignorant mind was creating before. Thoughts are no problem, but the ego and its foolish personal likes and dislikes are.