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THE DIFFICULTIES ON THE PATH TO PERFECTION

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthan, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, **'Difficulties on the Path to Perfection'**, comprises an illuminating discourse of Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj given during Sadhana Week in 1993.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

DIFFICULTIES ON THE PATH TO PERFECTION

Prolonged meditation carried on for several months may present certain difficulties which are usually known as the obstacles. The difficulties are varied in their nature. Any one of them can present itself at any time but usually what one feels after the lengthened period of concentration is some kind of discomfort in the body.

People who live in distant places like Uttarkashi, Gangotri or some remote corner of the world dissociated from human contact can feel a sort of distress, which they would like to suppress and ignore as if it is not there. The form which this distress will take at the outset may be a kind of physical illness. You will not feel quite fit after one year of meditation. Appetite will come down; you would not like to eat. Sometimes there will be sleeplessness, apart from pain in certain parts of the body. Principally, the trouble may come in the form of a stomach upset. You will not be able to digest any food; nothing will be attractive to your digestive

system. You have to take some carminative mixture to absorb even a little diet. Although you were quite all right one year back, now you need help to digest even a piece of bread or a cup of milk. What is the reason? Why does physical illness come in when you go for deep meditation? The body feels that it is in an insecure situation. Somebody is interfering with it.

There are two kinds of security in the world: security due to entire dependence on certain forces which are supposed to protect the person, and security born out of one's own intrinsic strength. Our health, our sense of security, and feeling of comfort in the world is mostly dependent on external factors, conditioned by so many things in the world. If any of these factors is interfered with or removed from the field of action, you feel that you have lost something, indeed. The sense of losing a value is a distress in the mind, which will have an impact upon the body in such a manner that it will feel physical discomfort and illness of some kind. Even the *pranas*, the vital forces, will not cooperate properly, because they were secure earlier by depending on external factors. Now you want that you should be secure intrinsically by not depending on any external media.

Everyone resists change. If you introduce some change in the programme of life, it is resisted immediately. Everybody is against any kind of reformation, change, or instruction for something different from what is taking place now. If you start instructing the personality that what you are now is not all right (you will have to be something different), it resists the instruction, and then it presents a condition which is a type of illness.

Soldiers can fall sick a day before war takes place. Malingering is one of the features that we may have to face. The *pranas* are associated with the physical body in one way. When you concentrate the mind in meditation, the pressure you exert on the mind tells upon the *prana* also. This pressure which the *prana* feels is communicated to the entire physiological system. Any kind of pressure is an interference of some sort. The digestive system, muscles and nerves, all feel the ache. Even if you go for a massage for your well being, you will feel pain one or two days after the commencement of this treatment, though the pain is supposed to go by the treatment. You will start feeling more pain when the massage starts. It is an introductory feeling which cannot be avoided.

Maintain Moderation

Therefore, to avoid this kind of difficulty of being sick physically, certain precautions have to be taken. You should not start abruptly any intense type of concentration without taking into consideration the consequences. For instance, in the sixth chapter of the Gita some warning is given to us: "Yoga is not for one who eats in excess; not also is Yoga for one who does not eat at all, who sleeps always or does not sleep at all. The Yoga, destroying sorrow, comes to him who is moderate in eating, recreation, activity, sleep and wakefulness."

Sometimes, in our enthusiasm for Yoga, we go to extremes. We start fasting, we observe *mauna*, we do not sleep, we stop the usual activities of life, and keep quiet somewhere, doing nothing. If a person who has been busy doing work in an office or an establishment for many years suddenly ceases from doing work totally and places himself somewhere far off in a temple or a forest or a retreat, the agitation that will follow from this kind of sudden and abrupt change of activity is something obvious.

Nothing should be cut off completely. Everything should be diminished slowly, gradually, stage by stage so that you will not know that any change is taking place at all. Even if an organisation wants

to introduce some managerial change, they should not make a proclamation that from the next day onwards a change will follow. All will rise up in protestation. That is an unwise way of handling situations.

Everything should be done in such a way that it should not appear that you are doing it at all. It is said that the best governmental system is that whose existence is not felt by the people. You do not even know that there is a government; it is so beautifully running that you do not feel its presence. When you start feeling the pressure of a governmental system, it means it is like a disharmonious system impinging on your life. You resist it and are conscious of it always, as if hounds are around you, barking and threatening. When you are perfectly healthy, you will not know that there is a body. So buoyant, so light, so happy will you feel when the body is healthy. Perfectly healthy people do not feel that they have a body. When you begin to feel that there is a body, you may be sure that there is something wrong with its functioning.

A little work, a little performance of duty, some occupation, is good as a healthy measure to maintain the health of the body. Work is not an undesirable thing as many people imagine. Total disconnection

from every kind of work is also a sort of unhealthy complaint. The Gita urges that without doing something, without some activity, one cannot exist even for a moment. If you do not do 'this' work, you will do 'another' kind of work. If God does not speak, the devil will start speaking. An idle brain is the devil's workshop. Do not imagine that when you are doing nothing, divinity is working through you. The other thing also may be at work, equally.

You cannot say by an enactment (as if from a Parliament) that 'these' are necessary things and 'others' are unnecessary things. There is no tabulation of these categories possible because at any moment of time something may look necessary and at another time it may look unnecessary. From moment to moment the necessities and non-necessities will present themselves in different proportions and intensities. Actually, Yoga practice is a moment-to-moment progressive move onward as a long journey that we undertake to a distant destination.

The complications of a physical nature like illness, etc., can be avoided by a proportionate conducting of oneself in activity, behaviour, diet, sleep, as well as social contact. Complete dissociation from society also will disturb the mind, because man is a social being. It is good to be independent of social contact

but it is also dangerous to be dissociated from it in a morbid way. Wise precautions may be taken by a careful student.

Another reason that may bring about illness of the body and cause disturbance of the mind is suppression of desires. We had an in-depth analysis of these desires already, what kind of desires there are, how we can handle them, why they arise, what their nature is, etc. One can substitute a desire with something better, or sublimate it by God-thought, *satsanga*, etc., as one would deem proper. Physical illness should be avoided. Nothing can be worse than falling sick, having a headache, fever and lying down on the bed all day. Though nobody can be one hundred percent cautious always, some mistake may be there inadvertently some time, yet, as far as possible, by a trial-and-error method, you may guard yourself well. Some element of hygiene, cleanliness and neatness in dress, diet, occupation, etc., are to be taken notice of.

The Negative Reactions and Whispers

There is another difficulty sometimes that will present itself. You may feel dull and lethargic. You were enthusiastic in the beginning: "In this life itself I shall realise God!" With such determination you

come and gird up your loins. For several months you go on doing meditation with great feeling in the mind. After one year's practice you may feel as if you are dozing, with tiredness, exhaustion, and the feeling of a need to postpone the programme for a future date.

In one of the sermons of Buddha, he says that there are many excuses for not doing anything: This is the rainy season, very damp, very sultry; we cannot go out when it is pouring. No proper place is there; everywhere it is wet. Let these rains stop. Then I shall sit and do meditation. And you are free from this boredom called meditation for another two months because it is the rainy season. Then afterwards, winter starts. It starts biting you: Oh, I thought winter is better; it does not matter. Winter is not so comfortable. When the cold winds are blowing I cannot take even a bath properly. This is not good. I made a mistake. When summer starts, I shall certainly sit and start renewed effort.

When summer dawns, it is again horrible. You cannot sit anywhere. It is all hot. Again you think you made a mistake and that when the rains commence again it will cool down and you can meditate then. This is what you are going on saying, like a debtor telling a creditor to come tomorrow, then tomorrow

tell him to come after two days, after two days you would like to have another three days. There is no end to all this.

Why does lethargy arise in the mind? It is a trick played by the mind itself. It knows how to put a stop to your activities. If one method does not succeed, it will employ another method. There are other methods also which we shall see now.

“Are you not tired? Don’t you want rest? How long will you go on sitting like this? Don’t fall sick. Get up!” You hear this voice and do not know what to do. The remedy for this is not to listen to the voice as it comes, but understand that it is an undesirable message that is coming to hinder the progress on the path.

If you are really sick, that is a different matter. You have to take care of yourself by proper means. But if it is only a negative attitude of *tamas* that is operating inside and causing false fatigue and fake exhaustion, one should be vigilant. When you are doing no work, what kind of fatigue can be there? People do not do anything for days together, and then say they shall take rest. What kind of rest are you taking when you have done nothing? It is a kind of technology adopted by the mind to see that you should not progress spiritually. When tired,

do not sit and meditate. Stand up for a while and move about in the verandah. Just stroll from this end to that end. When you are walking like that, the lethargy will pass away. Wash your face with a little cold water. Take a cup of tea if you like. Satisfy yourself, move about. When you are feeling better, sit and start meditation. You should never allow idleness to enter your mind.

Then a third technique can be employed by the mind. It may say, "The method that you are adopting for meditation is wrong. Do you know that it is an erroneous exercise that you are practising? Who initiated you?" "I took initiation from that Guru but he has not told me everything. I have some difficulties." Varieties of doubts can arise: "After all, is it possible for me to realise God in this birth? Who has seen God? Can you see one person in the world who can say that he has seen God or realised God? If that is the case, what is my fate? I am losing everything that I have in the world to pursue some will-o'-the-wisp, a phantasmagoria. I may have it or I may not have it; from the conditions prevailing in my mind, it looks like 'it is not for me'. It does not look that it is possible.

"All the joys of life I have cut off, and now nobody wants to talk to me; family members are

annoyed with me. They do not like me and nothing comes from them. I have lost my job. One scripture says one thing and another scripture says another thing. 'Read the Bible,' some may say. 'Read the Gita, Upanishads,' say others. Which scripture am I going to follow? Even in the Gita one *sloka* says something and another *sloka* says another thing. 'Love me, do hard work, fight the battle of life,' it says. What is it actually that I am supposed to do? There is confusion everywhere. One verse of the Gita is contradicting another verse. You do not know what the Gita is saying finally. Let anyone say, after having read seven hundred verses of the Gita, what is the quintessence? You cannot understand! It is too much, and everything is a big jumble of instructions."

Vigilance is the Watchword

With doubt in the mind, how will there be concentration? You oscillate here and there, go to different teachers and ask a hundred questions and finally no answer is satisfying. Then the previous difficulties will start once again. Physical illness may again creep in and dullness of spirit also will show its head. They will take possession of you because this is the proper moment to catch you—when you are unguarded and you are in a dubious situation.

What do you do at this time? Never make the mistake of changing your instructor or Guru. Do not have doubts. There are a hundred guides in this country and you need not go to each one separately to ask different questions because the concentration gets diluted by diverting it in different directions and listening to hundred types of advice. This must be avoided. Be clear in your mind.

“Everything is clear to me—inwardly, outwardly, socially, everywhere. Everything is perspicacious, like a mirror. All things are shining before me. I have no problems.” Until this clarity arises, it is no use taking further steps ahead. Else, you may retrace the steps already taken.

Then another difficulty arises: heedlessness, carelessness. “Tomorrow I shall do it.” If you take diet every day, the body will grow and become healthy. If you eat once in three days only, the body will resent the process of eating. Even if you eat a little every day, it must be continuous, like the intake of medicines, which have to be taken at the proper time and in the proper quantity. The meditational process should be carried on every day. If you miss it for one day, the thread may be broken. Now you are a very busy person and have no time: “I am a travelling train inspector; the whole night I am

moving in the carriage. How will I do meditation in the night?" You are not travelling all the twenty-four hours of the day. Some respite you have, of course. Even if you are working in the office, you have some time of rest. There is something you can slice off even in the midst of busy duties.

It is to be remembered that the value of meditation does not so much depend on the length of time that you take in sitting for it, but in the quality or the intensity of feeling operating at that moment. Quantity alone is not important enough. Though lengthened period has some effect, quality is more vital. If you have time enough, sit for a long time.

But if you are not provided with the facility of sitting for a long time, ardently feel it, like a *gopi* who was not allowed to move towards Sri Krishna because her husband locked the door of the house. The others were running, but that one who was closed inside and could not go out reached the Almighty even before the others reached Krishna in the forest. These others took perhaps an hour to reach Krishna somewhere away, but before that time, that seeker who was inside the house had attained the Lord already. Quality, and not quantity is what is to be taken care of always.

When you are drowning, dying—what do you do at that time? Will you keep a timepiece and count the number of days and hours? The entire soul then will rise up into a total action. Quality is that which you feel when you are sure you will perish this moment, and you have then to think only one thought, the only thought possible, the all-consuming total thought.

“Heedlessness is death,” said sage Sanatkumara to Dhritarashtra. You should not be careless about that which is your blessedness. Are you going to be callous about your own welfare? Who can afford that? So, be cautious, keeping this in mind always as a treasure trove that you are holding in your mind. None can afford to be heedless and careless about spiritual practice. Never feel lethargic, despondent or melancholy.

After some time of meditation, another difficulty will arise. These terrible things called sense organs who appeared as your friends will now begin to act as enemies. Neglected friends are worse than open foes. One should be cautious about motivated friends. As long as you are behaving with them in the manner required, they are perfectly all right, very good indeed; but ignore them, and see what happens then. They can be more dangerous than

those who paid you scant regard.

Are the sense organs your friends? “How beautiful!” says the eye. “How melodious!” says the ear. “How tasty!” says the tongue. “How soft!” says the touch. “How fragrant!” says the nose. You have been getting on with them as your lifelong friends. Now you say that you will not listen to them, you do not want to see, hear, touch, taste. If you behave like that, see what they do to you. They will rise up in a consensus and present illusions of satisfaction before your eyes. These impulsions can come in any form. Attraction is one form; repulsion is another.

Some of these presentations before the mind, created by the over-activity of the sense organs (positively on the one hand and negatively on the other hand), are briefly described in the sixth chapter of a poem called the ‘Light of Asia’ of Edwin Arnold, describing how Buddha had to face certain grand presentations—majestic, attractive, impossible to avoid seeing, deliciousness of every kind connected with every sense organ. When all the senses offer you what you want, jointly, in all abundance, what do you do?

Previously, one sense organ was acting at one time and you were caught by that particular sense only. Now, like the members in a divided family,

each one is fighting with the other. One Brahmani sultan would not like another sultan, but they were all joined together in attacking the Vijayanagara empire as they wanted to uproot it completely. This is a piece from the medieval history of India.

Yudhishtira says somewhere, "Between ourselves, they are a hundred and we are five. But against others, we are one hundred and five." The senses say that in normal times they will not do any harm to you. The eye will take care of you and tell you that beautiful things are there; the ear will stay away somewhere. But you have now abandoned befriending the senses and so they all will join and attack you concentratedly and every blessed thing will be there in front of you to pull you away. All the music, beauty, taste, delicacy, all the softness, all the aesthetic presentation will be in front of you. The whole world will dance with the music of celestials. Nobody on earth can resist all that. The meditation will go to dogs in a second when beauty of every sort begins to rain in torrents from all sides.

Such an intense form of presentation may not be the circumstance of a seeker who goes slowly; but if you are bent upon doing something and go with great earnestness, this kind of consequential reaction should be expected. The world of beauty will be in

front of you sometimes. But if you are strong enough to resist it, there is another kind of activity to which the sense organs can resort. Death. They will finish you today itself. "You are going to die," they will pronounce. "Do not be under the impression that you are safe. We will end you." When temptation fails, threat follows as thunder.

This kind of thing will be experienced after a long period of protracted meditation. You will not see all these things in the beginning or even for a few years, because mostly the meditation is mild, diluted, not strong enough. You cannot expect all these experiences at once. Intense meditation alone can evoke intensely strong presentations, milder attempts produce relatively subdued response.

There are other difficulties. You will begin to feel that you have the vision of God. But it may be mirage water (you are seeing something shining and you mistake it for water in a desert). Something agitating, disturbing, some colours, sounds, shapes, may be mistaken for a divinity seen in front. The shape can as well be the shape of your own desires and it may present itself as your most worthwhile aim in life. At that time you cannot make a choice. You are not going to be a judge at that time. Immediately you must then run to your master and

Speak out your experience. Was it God whom you saw, or was there a disturbance caused by sensory turmoil and mental anguish?

Your master who is competent enough to solve your problems will tell you what is actually happening to you because a Guru, a teacher, is supposed to know every detail of the mental operations of a disciple. Any unusual occurrence of a psychological nature will be known to him when it erupts in the mind of a student. You cannot solve the problem yourself. You cannot be your own doctor at that time. You must listen to sagely advice. When a vision is seen, you do not know what actually is there. The pressure exerted upon the *pranas*, sometimes, will present colours. You may even hear sounds due to the operation of the *pranic* forces inside. Go to the Guru at that time.

There are other difficulties of a similar nature like missing the point of concentration. You have been concentrating on some particular ideal, on some location; you miss it. However much you may go on striking at that point, you will not get at it. Often we find that we cannot pass a thread through the needle's eye; however much we try, it will slip outside. Finally, with great difficulty, you succeed, but not suddenly, abruptly. You cannot

even drive a nail on the wall without striking in different places.

You miss the point of concentration and struggle again and again. You will find that you cannot remember a familiar face. "What did I think yesterday? What was the point of concentration? What was I meditating upon?" You go on thinking it again and again and you find that you have missed the point completely. Another picture will present itself afterwards, not the one with which you started.

Then something more is there, yet: oscillation of the mind. Even if you get at the point, like a mercury ball it will not remain in one place. It will move like a pendulum, and will not fix itself at one focussed point. These are some of the mentioned kinds of problems that may arise in the process of meditation, all worth keeping in mind.

There is nothing equal to a guide. Do not be under the impression that you are intellectual and rationalistic enough to understand all the difficulties that may be ahead of you. No one can know all the future. Even after travelling one mile you will not know what is there ahead of you. Only a good guide will know where you are, how far you have proceeded and what is ahead.

Daily *svadhyaya* (sacred study), daily *japa sadhana* (recitation of the divine name), chanting the name of God, or the formula of the *mantra* which you have chosen, resorting daily to the Guru, attending *satsanga* (holy company) of saints and sages, being with them, listening to their discourses—all these will produce a cumulative effect of strength and security in your mind so that the problems mentioned will gradually diminish in their intensity and fade out completely later on. Sometimes everything may look dark in front of you. Two or three hours before sunrise, it is pitch-dark. It will be so dark at about half past three or four in the morning that it will look darker than it was at midnight. But the day is to break shortly.

Great sorrow sometimes befalls a person a few hours before illumination. “This is the last day of mine. All that I have done is a waste. I am croaking and perishing. I have achieved nothing, after all. This is all that I have gained after so much effort for years of sitting and brooding. I go with this grief in my heart!” Such was the feeling a little before the bursting of the light of illumination, even in the case of Buddha, as is the feeling of darkness a little before sunrise.

All great things happen like miracles. Very good things, and very bad things do not happen with previous notice. Suddenly you are on velvet, or suddenly you are inside a pit.

Today you are an emperor, tomorrow you are a beggar. Suddenly you are anointed with coronation, costumes, as a king of the land. Tomorrow you are thrown into the dust as an unwanted waste, for reasons history knows. Spiritual tragedy and spiritual blessedness also are such extremes.

God (in some way at least) is an extreme form of reality and, therefore, the presentation of God before the seeker also may take place in extremely unthought-of and unexpected ways. You will not know that it has come because you never expected that it should come in that way. God need not come necessarily in the way you expect Him to come. He may come in the way that is necessary for Him to present Himself for your welfare. The occasion decides the nature of the manifestation.

Yoga practice itself is a miracle. The affection that Yoga has for you, they say, is equal to hundred mothers' love. You love Yoga but Yoga also loves you. You may wonder what is the meaning of Yoga loving you: Yoga is a kind of practice; does practice love me?

Yoga does not mean only practice. It is something different also. It is the energy of the whole cosmos wanting to befriend you, come to you, take care of you, possess you, unite itself with you, inundate you and 'be' you. That is the Great Yoga. The world loves you more than you love it, and God loves you more than you love Him. You may move slowly towards the Goal, but it comes often with a great force. When the ocean rushes into the river, it will come with a greater energy and push than the force with which the river enters the ocean.

All these are interesting things, beautiful things to hear, like an epic story which will delight your heart, that you are on the right path. You are going to be blessed because you are honest and sincere and true to yourself. The great saying of a poet is: "To Thine own Self Be True." Then you will Be True to everything else, also.

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