



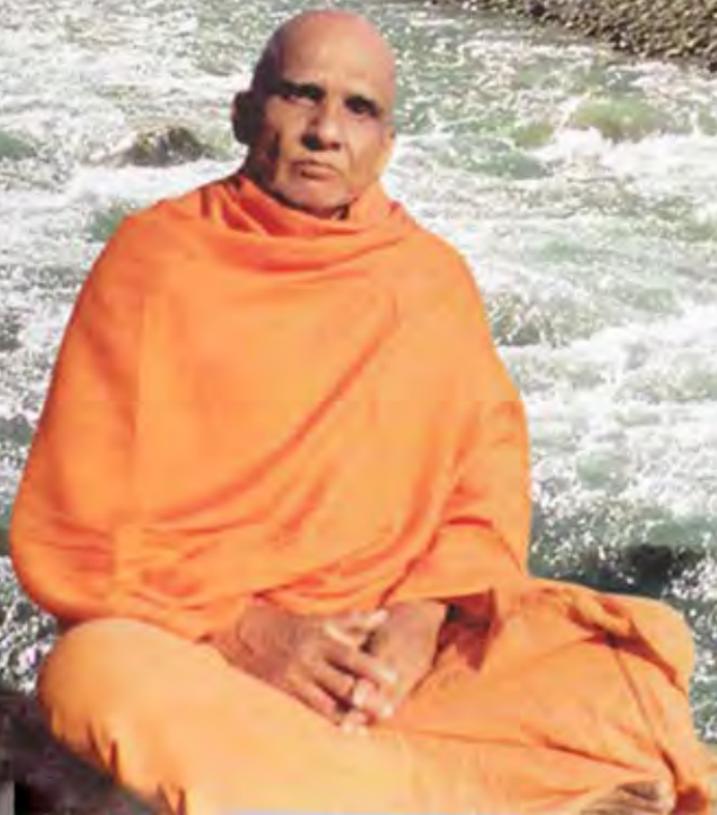
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2022

The Groundwork of Self-Knowledge

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



THE GROUNDWORK OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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 Janmasthanami, 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, '**The Groundwork of Self-Knowledge**', consists of an inspiring discourse of Sri Swamiji Krishnanandaji Maharaj on the preparatory disciplines for attaining Self-knowledge.

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

THE GROUNDWORK OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The equipment with which one has to arm oneself for entering into the field of meditation is no less important than the knowledge of the art of meditation itself. Many seekers with a fund of knowledge in them of the methods of meditation often fail to achieve tangible success in their efforts due to their not being properly prepared for the task they have taken on hand. There is many a question and a problem which subconsciously, though not consciously, disturbs and agitates the mind, almost throughout the day and night of an individual, irrespective of one's position in society and the riches of which one may be possessed abundantly. The subtle anti-sympathetic vibrations set into action by anxieties and limitations of various kinds keep in suspense, if not harass the mind constantly, in a state of cold war, as it were.

Here we have to bring into consideration one's external relationships in life, such as the political, social, economic, moral, aesthetic, biological, as well

as religious predilections and restrictions apart from one's own psychological make-up in general. A person politically enslaved to the core, whether by the mechanism of the State or by ill-administered systems causing nervous tension, as it would be patent in many places of the world even today, is denied the natural freedom honestly due to a human being as his birthright, and this dead-weight of the external mechanistic set-up is sure to intensely tell upon those beginners in the science of thinking. There is no doubt that a certain amount of freedom from the shackles of a rigid and overweening form of political governance is an indispensable necessity and all geniuses and culturally advanced personages of any country or nation have been those who had freedom of thinking, speaking and willing and had achieved liberation from a purely mechanised giant of State control, due to the nation's or the country's having risen above the law of the fish and the law of the jungle to the law of understanding and the law of a feeling of the significance and value and meaning of the individual in his own independent status, a status which he enjoys right from his birth, not because of the bounty or charity that he receives from others, individually or collectively, but because of what stuff he is made of in himself, an eternal spark

and a flame of a longing for larger and larger growth and expansion, a light which cannot be extinguished even by the strongest gale of time's vicissitudes. A specimen of such a free State of liberated individuals as its flowering citizens has been, to the people of India, the ideal of *Rama-Rajya*, an ideal which is said to have historically materialised itself in ancient times, an ideal which is the fond dream and hope of every political thinker in India, nay, of every statesman of any nation. Political freedom may not have a direct bearing on spiritual meditations, but what bearing it has on the life of an individual, who is spirit, mind and body in one, should be too obvious to call for any explanation or exegesis.

Too much eagerness to reform others in society and the world at large without self-purification and a readiness of oneself to the task is to be regarded as a major obstacle in one's efforts for spiritual perfection. Subjective urges and yearnings are to be considered well before attempting to bring order in the objective environment. First an integrated personality through manifesting a proportion in the functions of the physical, vital, mental, intellectual and spiritual levels of one's being, has to be built up for achieving good and beneficial results in any direction. To miss this point and lay stress only on

external social harmony would be a serious mistake. Without Self-knowledge in an appreciable degree and a total comprehension of life, attempts at social planning are bound to fail and lead to conflict and confusion instead of the longed-for social peace and harmony.

Apart from this, man has his own social restrictions, the do's and don'ts of the community in which he is brought up, which are supposed to help and support, but which often hinder and obstruct, the growth of the individual into the higher expanses of mind and spirit. The limitations imposed on the life of a person, whether politically or socially, are intended to check the excesses in his thoughts, speeches and actions, his vagaries, extravagances, whims and fancies, as well as prejudices of various kinds, which, when given a free lease and a long rope, are likely to deprive others of their rights and needs or, sometimes, even ruin them totally. While this is the positive and healing aspect of outward control, it has its negative and deleterious side when it loses sight of the individual's good by a deification of the demand for his obedience and his subjection to the autocracy of what should otherwise be a directing and guiding principle in life. In the social life of India, particularly, there is what is known

as the caste system, or the classification of people into social groups, necessitated by the need for cooperation among the specific endowments and capacities of people who have to lead a collective life for mutual good and improvement. But this very necessary provision for the ordering of groups in society can debar certain persons from the very chance of improvement and growth when the groups which form integral parts of the organisation of the society get segregated into classes of competition rather than cooperation, leading to its natural further consequences of mutual dislike, conflict and strife in various intensities. This is the travesty and distortion of the social rule for the purpose of personal advantage though leading in the end to personal ruin of which one is not, in one's ignorance, usually conscious. It is the habit of the selfish personality to take advantage of any situation in which it is placed and twist it to its own ends and convert into a vice even a universally accepted and praiseworthy virtue. Persons who are caught up in such circumstances in society need a guiding hand and an enlightening word, and the socially inflicted one, like the politically enslaved, will find that a higher advance in the field of the inner life will be almost beyond one's reach. The State and society

are largely responsible for the quality and number of individuals who can venture into and succeed in the endeavours for a spiritual advancement in meditation on higher realities.

It is also said that religion cannot be taught to hungry-stomachs, a great truth with much meaning. Reality manifests itself in degrees and even the physical plane is a degree of its expansion. It is not that one can jump to the skies of the spirit, from the body that is lumbering on the earth, without adequate preparations. Food, clothing and shelter, the creature comforts of the human being, are at least in their minimum proportions, a necessity, and while these are absolutely essential, one should have the opportunities to acquire them with a sense of freedom from attachment and anxiety. Too much of them cause attachment and too little anxiety. Hence beginners in the Yoga of meditation should strike a middle course of choosing a harmless and yet morally justifiable means of making their ends meet either by service of some kind or production in their own individual capacities, to the extent permissible and possible. Too high an idealism completely bereft of the realistic touch in it will be a stumbling block, leading to failure in the end, while, at the same time, too much concern for material comforts without

the soaring idealism of spirituality will lead to a fall from one's aim. The Madhyama Marga or the middle path usually spoken of as the one chosen by the Buddha is a good example of avoiding extremes in any course of action and tuning the string dexterously to produce from it the most beautiful music of the harmony of life. This dexterousness is called Kausala, and the harmony is called Samatva, in the language of the Bhagavadgita, two terms which have a wide connotation, applicable to all levels of life. The maintenance of the body in a perfectly healthy condition is a necessity, though the intention behind it is to transcend its demands and limitations, stage by stage, by self-restraint in a moderate manner, gradually practised.

Intimately connected with this aspect of the seeker's life is the moral aspect of his personal and social life. The economic needs of a person are generally linked up with the processes he employs in accepting material and intellectual provision from society. In the case of the ordinary man of the world, his need is likely to become a greed which can slowly grow into an obsession and passion, sunk into which he becomes an exploiter and a hoarder, the principle being of taking more than giving. But, the policy of the spiritual seeker, even

when he cannot rise above being an economic unit of human society, is not to take more than what he does give, because it is only in this way that he can avoid reactions from Nature, which are known as the nemesis of Karma. Nature always maintains a balance in all its levels and it cannot brook any interference with this law. Whoever meddles with Nature's law of balance, physically, mentally, morally or spiritually, will receive a rebuff from Nature, and this rebuff is man's suffering in life. It is maintained by moralists that the ideal rule of conduct is to treat others as ends-in-themselves instead of as means to ulterior ends, for no one would like to be treated as an instrument or a tool in bringing satisfaction to another. This is the character of one's being an end-in-itself and not a means, a character which discloses the truth that each one is an end and not a means and to treat everyone in this capacity is the essence of treating another as one's own Self, because one's own Self is an end-in-itself. This is also the reason behind the teaching: 'Do unto others as you would be done by', or, as the Mahabharata puts it: 'One should not mete out to others what is contrary to one's own Self.' This, then, is the great law of morality in the world, and this also is the way of extricating oneself from the clutches of the law

of Karma. This is also the law of what is known as Yajna or sacrifice, described in a most poetic and epic style in the Purusha Sukta of the Veda and the 3rd and 4th Chapters of the Bhagavadgita, sacrifice in its cosmic and individual significances. Sacrifice is life, for sacrifice is cooperation, cooperation is harmony and harmony is a reflection of True Being.

A very pertinent but much neglected aspect of the spiritual search is the observance of strict continence in the mind and the senses. This discipline has been called Brahmacharya, an extremely subtle device to ensure the strength and growth of one's personality as well as the full flowering of life into a conscious realisation of the Supreme Spirit in one's practical life. Modern man with his dissipated energies has not the education or the time to give attention to this moral, vital and vulnerable part of his life which, when not guarded with great understanding and care, may ultimately mean his ruin in body, mind and soul. The desultory and morbid cravings of the human heart, which characterise modern society in general, tend to disintegrate the vital spirits of the personality, a reason for their being no peace either in oneself or in the family and society. Nothing can be considered more salutary and necessary than self-control, which is the meaning of Brahmacharya,

to perpetuate human health and good-will, mutual participation in a common good cause and spiritual force and lustre in the entire human nature.

The law of sacrifice is at once the law of self-restraint whose canon is known as the Yamas in the ethics of Yoga. Yama or self-restraint is a process of self-subdual, a restraint of the passions in the form of lust, greed, hatred and anger and a non-acceptance of possessions more than one actually needs for the maintenance of one's psycho-physical individuality. This is the subject dealt in great detail by the scriptures on Yoga. And this is a pre-eminent rule in the life of a student who wishes to achieve any success in meditation. The law of treating others as ends-in-themselves is sufficient explanation of what Yama or self-restraint means in the life of a progressing aspirant on the spiritual path.

Heat and cold, hunger and thirst, and sleep are biological pressures and needs which cannot be easily overlooked, and 'the devil has to be paid its due'. Here again, excess or shortage is undesirable and the rule of moderation here to be followed is well stated in the 6th chapter of the Bhagavadgita. Neither luxury nor starvation is to be the principle to be adopted. The rule again is the maintenance

of a balance of attitude and attention to the degree of reality in which one finds oneself at any given moment of life. The hedonistic urges and aesthetic sense, which should be usually regarded as-normal to human nature, are often debarred by ascetic teachers of spirituality from having anything to do with spiritual life or even the good life. But, here again, the criterion is the finding out of the stage in which the mind of the seeker is, and it is this standard that can judge whether something is necessary or not. It is not always easy for oneself to judge one's needs, for one can easily go to excesses or do a wrong reading of oneself due to a clouded understanding or, very often, due to personal weaknesses or partiality in favour of oneself. Arts, such as sculpture, painting and music are not bad in themselves and they can very well become channels of sublimation and elevation of emotion when properly handled, at least in the earlier stages of the spiritual ascent. Too much of rigorism is bad, and this is a rule in anything, and, we should say, as bad as too much of slackness. It is easy to glut or starve one-self, but not so easy to eat moderately; easy to be talking always or not to talk at all, but not easy to speak moderate words. The urges of the aesthetic sense can also be expressed usefully through literary pursuits. Intensive reading

of spiritual poetry or philosophical prose, a perusal of sublime portions and instructive passages from Shakespeare or Milton, from Valmiki or Vyasa, is indeed paying even to seeker of truth.

Seekers are sometimes apathetic towards their body, the 'brother ass', as saint Francis of Assisi used to call it. Nevertheless, it is a good beast of burden, and if it is not to be there, who is to bear the burden of life? Living in extreme cold without proper clothing, eating carelessly and cutting down of sleep to the extreme may damage one's health, instead of helping to achieve the end of spiritual enlightenment for which these austerities are embarked upon as means. In all these adventures of the higher life, direct instruction from a Guru or teacher is necessary. No student can regard himself to be so advanced as not to need any instruction or guidance at all. Humility is the hall-mark of even those who are about to stumble into the ocean of Reality. There is no harm in effacing oneself. The danger is only in self-affirmation.

The religious atmosphere in which one is brought up from one's childhood gives a strong colour to one's feelings, naturally. The Hindu, Buddhist and Jain; the Christian, Muslim, and the like, all are obviously brought up under the influence of special and peculiar

religious notions which bear an impact upon their personal and social life. They have their own modes of rituals, fasts and observances, each one of which has an element of good in it and can be pursued with advantage when taken as an honest means of self-purification and self-evolution. But differences in religious ideologies should never interfere with the spiritual universality of human aspiration. This is a basic truth which most religionists are likely to forget. Religions which preach the oneness of God and the brotherhood of humanity are also not infrequently sponsors and protagonists of religious wars, and this is the extent to which fanaticism can go, a total mis-representation of that which is to lift man to the cosmic spiritual ideal. Religious rituals are a great help in Sadhana, and faiths in religious customs are good palliatives of human emotion. But these act also as double-edged swords, which can cut both the ways when brandished by untrained hands. Religious rituals have also an aesthetic value; they are an art in themselves, like sculpture or painting. But, what the seeker has to avoid vigilantly is bigotry or fanaticism in any of his pursuits or attitudes.

Study of spiritual texts is a great help as a preparation for the meditational attitude. The Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, the Sermon on the

Mount from the New Testament, the Dharmapada, and similar apt selections from the religious lore of the different religions may be taken as text-books for daily Svadhyaya or sacred study. Such a study is an aid in giving freedom to the mind within the delimited ambit of sublime thoughts recorded in these scriptures. In fact this is a kind of meditation in itself, generally speaking. Japa or repeated recitation of a Mantra or formula, a concept or an idea, is again a direct aid to meditation. Japa of a Mantra, regularly performed daily, stirs new unknown power in oneself. Those of the novices in the practice who cannot take exclusively to meditation should resort alternately, or in a circle, to Japa, study and meditation, so that the mind may not be tired of monotony in the practice. The study and the chanting may be loud, mellow or silent as the case may be, in accordance with the constitution and psychological needs of the student concerned. A particular method called Kirtana and Bhajana, which is mode of musical recitation and singing of divine Names as well as the glories of God in various ways, is exceedingly helpful as a method in purifying and sublimating emotion and lifting it to an ardent devotion to God. This is precisely the method of Bhakti Yoga or the Yoga of Divine Devotion.

The location or the habitat of the student of Yoga intending to practise meditation should be as far as possible isolated from the places of noise and hectic activity such as cities, factories, business centres, etc. This is something which is too clear a prerequisite to need any explanatory comment. The Svetasvatara Upanishad and the Bhagavadgita have said something very salient and to the point in respect of choosing the place and atmosphere for meditation. Peaks of mountains, sides of vast reservoirs of waters, mellifluous expanses of breezy scenery are all regarded as conducive to evoking a meditative mood in the aspirant. Holy places of pilgrimage sanctified by the presence of saints and sages, past and present, atmospheres of ancient temples and churches and places of religious adoration contribute to the rise of sublime feelings in a Sadhaka.

Prayer and worship act as suitable preliminaries to concentration of mind. These have various forms such as the Puja in Hinduism, the Mass in Christianity and the Namaz in Islam. Every religious faith has its own form of prayer and worship, which is an outward form of an inner feeling of dedication of oneself to the Divine Ideal. While prayer is a personal and private exposing of oneself wholly to the inflow of Divine Grace, a secret surrender of

the soul to the glory and greatness of the Almighty, worship is an external gesture in acts and symbols of this inner dedication of self. Karma or sanctified works and duties, Upasana or holy worship and contemplation and Jnana or wisdom of God are regarded as stages in the spiritual ascent to the Supreme Realisation.

A word of caution may be added here in regard to the proportion that is to be maintained in the pursuit of the aims of human existence, called the Purusharthas, Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, and the practice of the four Yogas, Karma, Bhakti, Yoga and Jnana. Spiritual aspirants are prone to lay emphasis excessively on Moksha or the Final Salvation, among the Purusharthas, to the exclusion and even detriment of the other three, viz., Dharma or the moral rule, Artha or economic value and Kama or emotional satisfaction. An over-emphasis here is deleterious to the integral growth of the individual towards perfection. What evolves spiritually is the whole person and not merely a side, an aspect or faculty of the individual. Too much stress on the Moksha aspect of spiritual life often makes one careless towards the values of the world, which not infrequently take a revenge upon the seeker when they detect a proper opportunity in his life.

A balanced moral sense, as long as one lives in the world, a sense which should apply not only to others but also to one's own personality, a due sense of values to one's real material needs, a careful participation in the joys of life and a proportionate deep yearning for union with God should be well blended, not as a composite fabric, but a homogeneous compound of a well-balanced life of divinised humanity. A similar care has to be taken in proportioning one's attitude in respect of the four Yogas which represent the disciplining of the conative, emotional, volitional, and rational aspects of human nature. Undue emphasis on one or a few alone among these will set up similar unpleasant reactions. As the growth of the plant of life through the Purusharthas has to be harmonious, so is the tending of it through the four Yogas into the vigorous tree of life to be balanced and proportioned, so that it may yield the precious fruit of God-vision and perfection in the Absolute.

The religious atmosphere in which one is brought up from one's childhood gives a strong colour to one's feelings, naturally. The Hindu, Buddhist and Jain; the Christian, Muslim, and the like, all are obviously brought up under the influence of special and peculiar religious notions which bear an impact upon their personal and social life. They have their own modes of rituals, fasts and observances, each one of which has an element of good in it and can be pursued with advantage when taken as an honest means of self-purification and self-evolution.

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