

Surrender to God

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All religious teachers, savants, saints and seers have preached self-surrender as the highest step in the spiritual evolution of man. Our scriptures including Shrimad Bhagvad-Gita also advocate the doctrine of unconditional surrender to God as the final stage in spiritual growth. Shri Krishna says to the bewildered Arjuna, 'Abandon all paths and surrender to me I shall redeem you of all the sins. Grieve not ' Indeed, self- surrender, which implies the surrender of one's ego to the command of the divine will, with its stress on the 'Thou-Consciousness' rather than the 'I-Consciousness', is a stage higher than that of any kind of meditation or any kind of virtuous or noble deed. This progress from the Ego-Centre to the God-Centre is true liberation, and anything short of that is sheer bondage, or, in other words, Ego-Worship rather than God-Worship.

Mahayogi Aurobindo mentions self-surrender as the very first step in self-unfoldment. The word 'self-surrender' is very familiar to us and surrender seems to be quite easy, but the fact is that a lot of difficulties confront us when we try to practise this discipline in day-to-day life. True self-surrender has several implications.

What are the compelling reasons for which man has to surrender to God in order to achieve perfection, the goal of human life? No matter whether he is conscious of this goal or not, man seeks, and strives for, perfection from moment to moment in life in order to master and conquer it.

The natural man is, obviously, a self-propelled being, a self-willed individual with all the faculties to deal with any situation and there is apparently no need for him even to think whether there is any God, much less to surrender to him. But when man, in his evolution, rises above ordinary nature and aspires for a more broadened and expanded awareness, or, in other words, when he outgrows his animal-nature and propensities, he naturally wants to know the why and how of everything around him, and is not prepared to take anything for granted, or, believe in anything blindly. This stage in man's life is marked by intellectual awakening. When man matures in this stage of intellectual growth, and his intellect is greatly

sharpened, he is in course of time, fed up with mere intellectual gymnastics which leave him high and dry. He feels temporarily transported to the rarified domain of the subtle activity of the intellect, away from the hard and concrete sense- reality of the world around him. However, the limitations of this faculty of man make him revolve in a vicious circle from which there appears to be no release. There are ample chances that man may misuse this faculty by using as a tool to extol his ego. He may indulge in fruitless argumentation merely to emerge as the winner, and thus gratify his ego. Such persons cannot use their intellects impartially as they are able to invent reasons and arguments to justify their biased views. All the saints warn us against pride, vanity and egoism which the intellectual awakening may generate, as man is apt to think wrongly that he knows everything, and needs no teacher. Such intellectual pride is dangerous as it blocks all the ways for further progress and upliftment, especially in the spiritual field.

Realising the incompetence of the intellect to penetrate the mystery of life, and to find the answers to some basic questions about life and death, a sincere seeker, naturally and un-knowingly, enters into a spiritual quest, the quest for something that transcends intellectual limitations and the realisation of which will satisfy the deeper urges of man, and ensure his all-round development-emotional, moral, intellectual and, above all spiritual.

He seeks to ascend to a divine stage where his seeking and searching may end. How to realise this divinity in man and attain perfection is the question before us. How to attain a blissful, harmonious and elevating state of mind (Characterised by truth, knowledge and power) is another such question.

A man takes birth in a predetermined set-up in which he has no say. He falls a prey to the situations and circumstances around him which are beyond his control. The environment around him is mainly responsible for what he becomes in future. The situations and circumstances around him during his childhood are beyond his control, yet these have a far-reaching effect on his future. Man's ego is really at the mercy of nature. Another blow to his egoistic nature and vanity is the uncertainty about his life span, and the kind of death he has to meet. Thus he is blind to the past as well as the future of his life which is so dear to him and to sustain which he struggles so hard in life. He even does not know what awaits him the next moment, yet he feels confident about his future and plans for hundreds of years. He thinks that he inhales and exhales breath out of his own free will, yet even this simple act

is really beyond his control, for does not he die when he does not want to die, and is he not saved when he wants to die?

Thus the actual count of breaths that one has to take in one's life is not known to one but the Lord dwelling within one knows it. Even when man falls asleep, he draws his waking self into himself which consists of the ego, the intellect and the mind. The ego, intellect and the mind cease to function in the dreamless sleep but the inhaling and exhaling of breath continue. What is that intelligent power which sustains breathing without which life is impossible? Psychologists say it is either the unconscious or super-conscious part of the mind which is infinitely more intelligent and powerful than the conscious or the sub-conscious mind. Again what is that power, which creates milk in the mother's breasts when the child is about to be born?

Man is active on three planes, namely, the emotional plane (Characterized by the emotions like love, hate, anger, greed and lust), the intellectual plane (Characterized by discrimination, judgment and assessment), and the physical plane (Characterized by physical activity). A spiritual aspirant who practises a spiritual discipline uses the emotional self for devotion to God, the intellectual self for understanding science, philosophy and religion, and the physical self for translating devotion and knowledge into action. Thus he practises Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga respectively. But these yogas fail to reach their culmination so long as the ego remains in the aspirant. The director of all the activities, mundane or spiritual, is the ego and it is extremely difficult to get over it. All devotion, knowledge and meritorious actions fail to redeem a man or give him true enlightenment so long as the ego remains and interferes with his activities. The presence of the ego, together with its preferences and prejudices, makes any spiritual endeavour or, for that matter, any exalted activity like fasting and the practice of a discipline or penance impure from the spiritual stand point, and so unacceptable to the Lord. Man being naturally ego-found, the presence of the ego has some constructive role to play in the scheme of evolution, but that is so only upto a stage, after which it becomes an obstacle for further development. Man's ego bound nature is limited in vision and so his judgement is prone to error. All this parts a limitation on the individual effort for realisation and liberation. Even if you are knowledgeable and have true devotion to the Lord, your effort for attaining perfection may be misdirected. What you think is wrong for you may prove to be the right thing, the direction you consider promising for you may turn out to be a

ditch tomorrow. This is so because a devotee in his religious zeal is apt to fall a prey to misapprehension, wrong judgement, distortion, isolation and abstraction. The simple reason for this is that he fails to analyse and understand the deeper layers of his mind, the innate tendencies, prejudices and complexes that lay deeply embedded in his mind, and yet influence his thinking, judgement, behaviour and actions. Realising this fact, the saint-poet of Martand Kashmir, Parmananda, sings:

moklaawakh nath kyaah chhu myone paay
krim sind Dand tal hasi sund vopaay.

'Lord, without thy will and assistance, nothing can be achieved by man who is helpless like an elephant whose leg is in the grip of the jaws of a crocodile.

yore keyv zorav banino kehn
paan pushran ros nani no kehn

By mere individual effort, nothing can be achieved in the spiritual field. Instead, surrender to God can bring forth the final revelation.

So long as a man follows the dictates of his ego and is a puppet in the hands of his desires and individual plans which keep him preoccupied, he cannot hope to enter the divine sanctum, or gain enlightenment. Jesus Christ hints at this in the words "Blessed are those who are simple and true in heart for they shall see God." The saint poetess of Kashmir Lal Ded also says:

sooham padas aham golum
be no aasun chhuy kun updesh

In the "Thou-I" relation or the "God and I" - sense in man, the dissolution of the "I-sense" is the last word of wisdom and the final sermon. In other words, so long as man cherishes a separate individuality, feels his ego or for that matter inflates his ego-sense and refuses to dissolve or irradicate it, he cannot hope to make any headway on the spiritual path. The following words of Kabir are note worthy in this context:

jab mein thaa tab too naa hee
jab too thaa tab mein naa hee

So long as the I-consciousness persisted in me, god-consciousness was no longer there but as soon as God-consciousness dawned and took hold of me, the "I or me" - sense dissolved for ever.

Hints for tiding over the ego problem

How can an aspirant attain mastery over his ego and, at the same time, participate in day-to-day life where he is regarded as an individual, and has to act always in an individual capacity. The solution lies first, in understanding what this ego after all is. It is the sense of "me and mine" in man. He does not have the courage to question it. To keep this sense intact, he struggles a great deal. With this sense of ego man associates everything pertaining to himself: his dress, house, occupation, or, any good or bad quality in him. This is the error man commits from the spiritual point of view because there is the immortal and divine true self in him to which everything truly belongs and to which everything in the world should be attributed. Round this spaceless, timeless, causeless and all-witnessing consciousness, called the True-self, everything in the world revolves. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita 'To my prakriti or Nature (which is at my command) every action must be attributed, as it is the real doer of all actions; but the jiva, in his ignorance, ascribes actions to himself and hence has to reap their fruits'. Thus, in case a man does some action with the sense of ego and with the expectation of its fruits, the law of Karma, i. e. of action and reaction, operates and binds him, making him the recipient of the fruits of his actions, whether good or bad.

But in case he does an action considering himself to be only an instrument in the hands of God, the law of Karma no longer binds him, but, instead, becomes the cause of his liberation. Such a man says, "Lord, I am really incapable of doing any action without Thy grace, even the simple act of breathing; my body, mind, intellect, ego, family, profession, home and hearth and other possessions belong to you. My good and bad qualities also belong to you. What is desirable and what is undesirable in my nature is for you to see; for you to rectify all that is wrong in me. All my faculties are at your disposal. Your planning is my planning; my gain is Your gain; my success is Your success; and my failure, Your failure. Lord, grant me the equanimity, knowledge, power and bliss which is Thy essential nature. Lord, your guidance is fool-proof and your directions are harmonious with the world-setting. Your vision is clear and mine is hazy and distorted; Thy wisdom and knowledge are perfect and mine limited, because my highest knowledge and wisdom are just darkness before you. Lord, my judgement is partial and prejudiced but your's is not. Hence it will be judicious on my part to hand over the reigns of my life to you. How long shall I tread the path of ignorance, darkness and sin under the dictates of my cruel ego? Lord, since You are the original Designer, and true Director of this world drama, how is

the petty man responsible for his deeds? He may be immediately responsible for his actions but you are ultimately responsible for his actions but You are ultimately responsible for what he thinks and does; for does not ignorance (which breeds lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego) have its ultimate origin in you? But alas: man regards not You but himself as the doer of actions, and that, naturally, makes him the recipient of their fruits. Lord, yet the truth remains, that without Your wish even a blade of grass cannot move, not to speak of any major happening in this world.

If man would realise this, he would be relieved of his ego-bound nature, and cease to be caught in the chain of cause and effect. A man who cannot give life even to an ant or a blade of grass, thinks that he can, of his own volition, give birth and life to a human being. How funny! Truly, it is not man's power but the Lord's Shakti (power) in Him which performs this miracle. Lord, it is due to your creative will that the life-less dust of this planet is transformed into plant, animal and man. Why should I not bow my head in adoration to the powerful Magician of this Universe whom we call God?

This is the attitude of one who has surrendered to God. But a word of caution is necessary here. This surrender should not be prompted by one's incompetence to deal with life and its problems or by lethargy and any other kind of weakness. It should be motivated by experience, wisdom maturity and strength. It is an outcome of the mastery of life rather than defeat in it. Nobody should make surrender to God an excuse for running away from the problems of life. It is to be noted that this surrender is the result of individual growth and maturity of wisdom. Nobody can attain this state by simply uttering some formula about it. Indeed there is no short-cut to spiritual elevation because it is a matter of spiritual growth and maturity.

To understand better the true significance of self-surrender in the spiritual field, let us try to understand how the surrender of soldiers takes place in the battle-field. When the soldiers are fighting against the enemy troops, they follow the dictates of their Commanding officer, who directs them and controls their operations. The Commanding Officer is like an individual ego commanding and controlling the individual's actions. Now let us see what happens when the troops get suddenly surrounded by the enemy troops and are forced to surrender. The soldiers who surrender, raise their arms high in the air and abandon their individual command, wishes and desires, or their Commanding Officer's command, and follow the dictates of the authority to whom they have surrendered. This authority they follow from moment to

moment. For every requirement of theirs, they are dependent on that authority. In the spiritual field, the authority to

whom one has to surrender is God - the Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient Reality. First, the individual ego has to be consciously dependent on that Reality from moment to moment for guidance and instructions. Secondly, the individual ego has to abandon its individual planning and play a subordinate role so that it becomes a fit tool in the hands of the Divine. Thus the ego-drive or the individual drive, prompted by one's accumulated tendencies and desires, will no longer motivate one but the divine stir or the divine impulse alone will prompt one to action.

Shri Raman Maharishi explains the phenomenon of the ego and the condition of a man who carries its unnecessary burden in life when he can really feel light and relaxed without it, by surrendering it to God, and thus lead a life of bliss, beauty and equanimity. Is it not a fact that man even tells lies and tries to bluff others in order to keep up the false prestige of his ego? Regarding ego-problem and false attachment to what one associates with the ego, Shri Raman Maharishi says, "A villager, with a burden of his belongings on his head, once happened to board a train which, as is usual in India; was crowded. The villager entered a compartment and somehow managed a seat for himself. Taking his seat, he continued to keep his luggage on his head. A Co-passenger sitting by his side marking this, said "Brother, why don't you unload your head by putting the load down?" The poor villager replied, "This is my luggage and, keeping its safety in view, why should not I carry it on my head?" the fellow-passenger said, "I know this load belongs to you, but this is a very big train and has sufficient capacity to carry the bag and baggage of all of us. Why can't it carry your little load? "Relieve your head of this load and place it directly on the train which is big enough to carry everything in it". But the villager, who had an acute sense of possession, refused to keep the burden down.

The condition of the villager is the condition of the man in the world who insists on 'me' and 'mine' and who wilfully carries the burden of his ego along with its problems, and refuses to surrender the ego, together with its cares and worries, to the all-controlling power that rules the Universe.

This phenomenon can be reduced to a mathematical equation:

Man = God + Desire

or Man - Desire = God

i. e. Man - Ego = God

In this formula, Desire and Ego have been equated because Ego is the root cause of Desire.

In what has been said above, we have stressed the surrender of the ego and the fruits of actions to the Lord, and that this can be achieved by desirelessness. But does this mean that a man will do wrong things and surrender their fruits to God, Also, when a man has no desires, will he not be inactive, and so unable to progress in life or change the world for the better? Here, it needs to be emphasized that a desireless person is active but his actions are not dictated by desire, prejudice, bias, or any special attraction or repulsion; they are dictated by his destiny and the sense of duty and service to mankind. His mind is unprejudiced, simple and natural. He does what comes to him naturally. He accepts what comes to him un-sought for, and does what a situation demands of him or, what his intuition tells him to do. Thus, he does his duty for the sake of duty and puts extra care and concentration into his actions as they are to be offered to the Lord as worship. Such actions bring about his release from the law of Karma, i. e. action and reaction, and so bring about his liberation. In this way, such a blessed aspirant converts his actions into an act of worship because neither money nor fame or fear is the driving motive behind them but only the sense of service to mankind. He need not go to the temple for worship because his home, his office, nay the whole world is the temple for, him, and in his eyes every activity in this world ultimately converges on its Maker. He sees God's will behind every action and feels the world revolving, like an orbiting satellite round the central Reality, which is God.

There are two kinds of I:

- 1 "I" The false sense of ego or lower-ego.
2. I - The immortal divine self of man or Atman.

When the state of self-surrender matures, man escapes from his ego by his merger or identification with, and participation in, a Greater Being, and acquires immortality as his identity dissolves into the greater identity, the Universal Self.

Shri Rama Krishna Parmahansa's life demonstrates how a self-surrendered life can be lived. He sought guidance from the Divine, which he named Kali, from moment to moment. In fact, he worshipped his own transcendent Self in the image of Kali as the word Kali itself connotes that which transcends time.

This spaceless, causeless and timeless Reality, which he called Kali, really treated Rama Krishna as her obedient and trustworthy son because of the utter self-surrendered attitude of the latter. During his ecstatic state, Shri Rama Krishna sometimes put the flowers of worship on his own head rather than on the image of Kali because Kali lived in him, and was his own immortal self which he initially took to be outside himself. He referred every problem, whether minor or major, to Kali for clear-cut guidance. All this he did deliberately in order to dislodge the egoistic trend of thought which works on the principle of division and darkness. Thus he clearly laid the landmarks along which human evolution has to proceed. He lit the path which the future civilisation has to tread so that it embraces the divine and lives a life of harmony, truth, knowledge and divine obedience.