

Factors contributory to Spiritual advancement.

By Hanumanprasad Poddar.

One should pursue the path of spiritual progress with great diligence and application, brushing aside obstacles and difficulties with firmness and courage. The sage Patañjali says in his "Aphorisms on Yoga":—

स तु दीर्घकालैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितोददभूमिः ।

(I. 14)

"Practice becomes deep-rooted only when it is continued ceaselessly and in right earnest for a long time." Three things have been inculcated herein, viz., (1) that practice should be continued for a considerable length of time; (2) that it should be carried on without interruption and (3) that it should be prosecuted in right earnest and with devotion.

Long Practice.

Truth cannot be attained with inadequate effort. It should be continued so long as the desired goal is not reached. It is not necessary to give up a particular *Sādhana* (spiritual exercise) even after the goal has been reached. A spiritual exercise is resorted to in the beginning as a means to an end, and

after the end has been realized the practice becomes a habit with the practisant. One is loth to give up a practice which has enabled him to attain the object of one's desire, out of gratitude also.

Those who aspire to achieve great results with inadequate effort and shirk labour are generally unable to attain the highest object of their life. It is essential for those who tread this path to have unabated zeal and an undying faith. Those who are slothful and get tired with a little amount of exertion cannot tread this path. An earnest seeker after truth however, would, proclaim like Buddha:—

इहासने शुष्यतु मे शरीरं

त्वगस्त्रिमासं प्रलयञ्च यातु ।

अप्राप्य बोधिं बहुकल्पदुर्लभं

नैवासनात्कायमतश्चलिष्यते ॥

"Let my body be shrivelled up on this seat, let my skin, bones and flesh wear away; this body of mine shall never stir from this seat until I have

attained wisdom which is difficult to attain even in a number of cycles."

Such a seeker after truth cares not for lapse of time. He is bent on attaining the object of his desire no matter how much time it takes.

Ceaseless Effort.

Long practice does not mean that one should continue a practice for years together without any system. Such a person would do a thing only when he has got sufficient time and inclination to do it and would otherwise defer it for some days. One who is truly and fully earnest about a thing can never do so. One whose throat is parched with thirst would not be satisfied with anything else than water. He would feel uneasy so long as he does not get water and would think of nothing else till then. Similarly, one who is athirst for God would not rest content even for a moment; he would remain absorbed in thoughts of God day and night. Everything else than spiritual discipline he is engaged in, will have secondary importance for him.

Faith and Reverence.

An aspirant who is thus engaged in constant practice does his work with great reverence and devotion. Those who carry on their *Sādhana* like one engaged in forced labour or do it in a desultory and half-hearted manner have no respect for that *Sādhana*. One cannot derive full benefit from a *Sādhana* unless one has got respect for it. Even he who practises a *Sādhana* simply for show or for the sake of diversion only, has no faith in his *Sādhana* as a matter of fact.

A devout aspirant takes to his *Sādhana* as his paramount duty in life. It is essential, therefore, that an aspirant should have, in the first place, full faith in the *Sādhana* he is engaged in; success cannot be achieved in any undertaking whatsoever without faith. The Lord has said in the *Gītā*:—

अभद्रया हुतं दत्तं तपस्तप्तं कृतं च यत् ।
असदित्थुच्यते पार्थ न च तत्प्रेत्य नो इह ॥

(XVII. 28)

"Whatsoever is wrought without faith, oblation, gift, austerity, or any other deed, null it is called, O Pārtha: it is

nought, here or hereafter." Faith is the sheet-anchor of an aspirant. One who is devoid of faith is eventually compelled to give up his *Sādhana*, unnerved by buffets of doubt and sophistical reasoning.

Living in Solitude.

For those who tread the path of knowledge the Lord has enjoined a solitary life and detachment from society (विविकल्पेऽपि विवर्जितं निर्विकल्पं सदि). For maturing one's *Sādhana* it is very essential to live in solitude. But so long as one has not fully developed a taste for *Sādhana* it is generally harmful for most of the aspirants to live in solitude, for a long time, abandoning all work and disowning all obligations. Hence a neophyte would do well to retire into solitude for an hour only to begin in every twenty-four hours for practising meditation and saying prayers to God. He should extend the period gradually if he finds that his mind is not perturbed in solitude by a tendency to indulge in frivolous pursuits, indolence and drowsiness. As far as possible one should set apart at least one day in every week, four or five days in a month, and a month in every year, which should be solely devoted to spiritual practices and conversation on topics concerning God. The wholesome food that the mind gets from such a programme is very helpful, in preserving one's mental health.

But he who takes to a solitary life, without practice exposes himself to the risk of falling a victim to frivolous pursuits, sloth, drowsiness, evil propensities and other vices of a Tamasic nature. Since he is not habituated to spiritual practices, time begins to hang heavy on his head, and, having no work to do, he falls an easy prey to frivolities and slothfulness. The tendency perceived in a large number of anchorites and recluses of the present day to smoke and take intoxicating drugs and indulge in idle gossip and worldly talk is mainly attributable to the fact that they have ample time at their disposal but no work. That is why, falling in bad company, they contract a number of vices. Sons of aristocrats and well-to-do persons are spoiled mostly because they have ample time but no work. They have to fall back upon vain pur-

suits in order to while away their time. Otherwise the precious life of a human being has not been vouchsafed to us for playing cards, dice and chess, indulging in idle gossip, talking of other's affairs, sleeping away the whole day, resorting to vain pursuits and reaping a rich harvest of sins. Hence it is essential for an aspirant that, while realizing the necessity of living in solitude and increasing its period for the sake of practising remembrance of God he should keep himself engaged in some responsible work, no matter whether it is of the nature of public service or one's own private work; every good work performed in a spirit of dedication to God and free from attachment being reckoned as His worship. The mind, when engaged in some useful work will hardly get any time to indulge in idle thoughts or frivolous pursuits. Of course, contemplation on God should not be given up even while doing one's work. On the contrary, one should perform his duties while thinking of God all the time. That is why the Lord said to Arjuna:—“गामनुस्मर युज्य मे” (Therefore at all times think upon Me alone and fight). One should never deliberately shirk one's legitimate duties and responsibilities, but he should discharge them with his mind fixed on the Lord all the time. Remembrance of God first and discharge of one's duties afterwards. In this way the Lord speedily redeems those who perform their duties for the sake of the Lord and with their minds fixed on the Lord as pointed above. The Lord Himself says:—

तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
मयामि नचिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥

(*Gītā XII. 7*)

“These I speedily rescue from the ocean of birth and death, O Partha,

their minds being fixed on Me.” Of course, real solitary life consists in the clinging of one's mind solely to God. External solitude is resorted to only with a view to securing this inner solitude.

Saintly Behaviour.

An aspirant should always have saintliness in his dealings. To endure sorts of sufferings and hardships calmly, to return forgiveness for anger, love for hatred, benedictions for imprecations and good for evil, to regard oneself as the humblest of all, not to arrogate any importance to one's own self, to find fault with none, to treat none with contempt, to look upon another's wife as one's own mother or an image of God, to have moderation in diet and recreation, to speak very little, to refrain from useless talk, to speak truthful and agreeable words, to keep oneself ready to serve all to the best of his ability without claiming to be a servant of the public, to reckon the service rendered by himself as a necessary part of his duties rather than an obligation to others, to detect one's own shortcomings in the services rendered by himself, to be alert to remedy them, to expect no return for services rendered, to bear himself humbly to behave politely with every one, to please one's parents, teachers and other elders by service, to renounce all covetousness for honour and distinction like poison, to keep away from a place where there is a possibility of one's receiving honour and distinctive treatment, to give no opportunity to any one to praise him in his very face, to feel compassion for the poor and to make himself ready for any sacrifice whatsoever in order to be able to serve them, to avoid as far as possible the work of arbitration, to keep himself aloof from societies and associa-

tions as far as possible, to abstain from literature which is not helpful in spiritual advancement, to shun as far as possible weddings and other functions and large gathering of men, never to speak ill of other faiths, to be guileless and straightforward in one's dealings with others and to be always on the alert to avoid hypocrisy, etc., are included in saintly behaviour. The more one develops these virtues the more he will advance on the path of spiritual progress.

An aspirant should always see what turn his life is taking. If he finds that it is moving in the direction of divine virtues, it should be understood that he is advancing, and if he finds that it is proceeding in the wrong direction, it should be taken to be an index of retrogression. This is a sure test. Devotion or wisdom is not a thing to be merely talked of. This should be taken as an axiomatic truth. Those who are advancing on the path of devotion or wisdom must needs manifest development of divine virtues.*

Caution against sins.

Finally, an aspirant should always beware of sins. Wherever a criminal propensity enters the mind it makes its appearance like a tiny wave, but, if allowed to stay, it assumes dimensions in no time and engulfs the victim. Hence the smallest sin should never be ignored, no matter whether it is bodily or mental. The presence of a snake or an armed dacoit in one's house is not so dangerous as that of the smallest sin in one's mind.

* For a detailed exposition of the divine and demonic properties vide Chapter XVI of the *Gita*. If possible, one should read this chapter and reflect on its contents every day and make full endeavours to develop divine qualities and get rid of demonic properties.

Some people observe that it is but natural for a human being to commit sins or that he is forced by his destiny to commit sins; but this is entirely wrong. It is neither in the nature of a human being to commit sins nor is he forced by destiny to do so. Such ingenious arguments are advanced by those habitual sinners who, though indulging in sins seek to exonerate themselves by laying the blame at the door of human nature or destiny. In fact, this is a mere figment invented by a weak heart. Human nature, on the contrary, when it exerts itself, enables man to guard against sins and develop those propensities which take him nearer the ultimate truth. Sins have their origin in attachment with worldly enjoyments and one cannot comprehend the truth without ridding himself of this attachment. Attachment to worldly enjoyments is the nature of brutes: man has through ignorance taken it to be human nature and kept himself away from spirituality. That is why we have to suffer pains and miseries again and again. Hence we should root out all evil tendencies from our minds. To entertain even the smallest sin is to pave the way for eternal tortures in hell. God has endowed man with a faculty by exercising which he can if he so chooses, make himself proof against all tinge of sins. It is therefore that the Lord has enjoined on man to remain on the alert and to kill his invincible enemy in the form of desire which is the germ of all sins:—

जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ।

(*Gita* III. 43)

Faith in God.

A capital means of preventing an aspirant from straying from the path of

spiritual progress is unflinching faith in God. An aspirant who obtained an insight into the secret of divine grace and mercy and His generosity benevolence and love and has faith in them can never be despondent. The fact that we fall from our *Sādhana* at every step is mainly attributable to our lack of faith in God. The Lord says:—"He who knows me to be the friend of all attains supreme peace." 'सुखं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमुच्छति' (*Gītā*). This is quite in the fitness of things. Having known God as his friend and knowing himself to be powerful with His strength and faith in His greatness one becomes able to get rid of his attachment with worldly

enjoyments and sins. That we do not recognise our eternal friend in God is our greatest misfortune. An aspirant should have a firm conviction that God is his true friend, his eternal comrade; that He always guards him against sins and that he should only take refuge in Him and remember Him and leave the rest to Him. An aspirant who does so with supreme faith surely surmounts all obstacles and attains God. The Lord has said:—"He who fixes his mind on Me, easily overcomes all obstacles by My grace."

मश्चित्तः सर्वदुर्गाणि न्यप्रसादात्तरिष्यति ।

(*Gītā XVIII. 58*)