

# The Fourfold Path.

( *Sādhanā-Chatushtaya* )

~~~~~By Sri Krishna Prem.

**T**he *Brahmavidyā* is not, like ordinary subjects, something that can be understood by purely intellectual study. That "from which the mind turns back, together with the senses, unable to comprehend", can obviously never be understood by the intellect alone, however acute and learned it may be. Certain other disciplines, disciplines that find no mention in our modern universities, are absolutely essential if the study of the *Vedānta* is to be anything more than a matter of barren words, useful only to the scholar and the pandit.

A very old tradition has described the *Sādhanā* or discipline for him who would gain the *Brahmavidyā* and tread the Path that leads to immortality as fourfold:—*viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śat-saṃpatti* and *mumukṣutva*. Some there are, it is true, who reject this tradition saying that it is only the view of Śaṅkarāchārya; but that it is not so, is clearly shown by the fact that the same disciplines are mentioned by the great Vaiṣṇava Āchārya Rāmānuja in his *Sri Bhāṣya*.

The truth is that the list of the four *Sādhanās* is a very old one, far older than Śaṅkarāchārya, and, though it is not the only such formulation, it sets forth in admirably brief form what are to be found in every religion worthy of the name, the essential requisites for one who wishes to tread the Path. Those who desire to, may quarrel about names and substitute any others that they prefer, but he who disregards the things themselves does so at his peril; for, without them, no treading of the Path is possible and the unqualified aspirant will inevitably fall from the razor-edged Path and either smash himself on the rocks of sterile intellectual philosophy or become

engulfed in the seething bog of uncontrolled emotionalism.

The first essential is *viveka*, the power to discriminate between the real and the unreal, between the permanent and the transitory. It corresponds to the 'Right View' (*Samyag-dṛṣṭi*) that is the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path taught by the Buddha. Until the aspirant has learnt to distinguish between what is Eternal and what is transitory, he cannot be in a position to pursue the former. The first essential in any course of study is to separate out the special object of study from the other phenomena with which it is associated. The *Brahmavidyā* is the knowledge of the Eternal and therefore strenuous efforts must be made to separate out what is eternal from the ever-changing attributes with which it is associated in our experience.

It is not enough to say "Oh yes, God is eternal and the world is transient" or "the *Ātmā* is undying; all else is subject to death"; and then to pass on as if *viveka* had been achieved. Mere words are useless; it is *perception* that is required.

The Eternal is present everywhere and in everything. In all things, from the evanescent flame of a match to the age-old peaks of the Himalayas, from the day-long life of the butterfly to the hundred-year life of man, there are two aspects—an unseen Something that is eternal and the ever-changing accidents of form. He who seeks the Eternal must identify himself with It, and, to do this, he must first learn to see the Eternal in all things.

In the outer world he must learn to discriminate between the eternal laws of

nature and the passing forms they govern. In the inner world he must distinguish between the ever-changing flux of sensations and the constant 'awareness' which illumines them, between his feelings and he who has the feelings, between his thoughts and he who is the thinker of them.

Even when he has isolated the self, the thinker, he must go on to separate out the accidents of individuality, the factors that make the thinker this or that individual self, from That which is Eternal and is the same in all.

The ordinary man does just the reverse of all this. He loves to observe differences between things and to identify himself with the outer show of life. He is proud of belonging to such and such a race or caste or of having a highly trained intellect and he does not realize, what is really quite obvious, that all castes and races, all bodies and intellects, are temporary things which must sooner or later come to an end. Identifying himself with the transient, he makes himself transient and therefore treads the path of death. The Upaniṣads have termed such a man 'Atmahan', a slayer of the Self, because, seeing not the eternal *Atmā*, he identifies himself with the passing forms, and, though in truth immortal, he goes "from death to death".

The *viveka*, which is the opposite of this, must not be a matter of occasional practice during periods of meditation, of an occasional mood when one is 'feeling philosophical'. It must, by constant, unrelaxing day-long practice, be made habitual so that it becomes as natural when one is enduring the boredom of waiting for a train as when one is seated in peaceful meditation on the banks of the Ganges, as much present when one is suffering the irritating presence of tiresome people as when he is enjoying the pleasant company of friends or the inspiring conversation of Sādhus.

This leads us to the second qualification, *vairāgya*. It must not be supposed that any one of these four Sādhanās can be perfected by itself. All are necessary before any one of them can be brought to perfection. In fact, though there is a definite meaning in their sequence, these four Sādhanās are not so much four steps of a ladder as the four intertwined strands of a rope which must be grasped as a whole by him who would climb to the top.

*Vairāgya*, detachment, is a word which conjures up in our minds the picture of ascetics, naked and perhaps smeared with ashes, filled with disgust for the world, leaving wife and children to go and dwell in burning grounds or remote Himalayan caves. But this is to confuse *vairāgya* with one of its occasional manifestations. *Vairāgya* does not mean disgust for the world nor an abandonment of duties and responsibilities, but *detachment* from the world and a detached performance of duties, and it can be as highly developed in the busy householder as in the care-free wandering ascetic.

Having learnt to distinguish that which is eternal from that which is temporary, the aspirant must resolutely turn away from all that is subject to death and change. This does not mean that he must run away from his social duties. It is not so easy as that, for the most fickle and changeable of all things is his own mind and that will go with him wherever he may go. Neither does it mean that he should brood incessantly on all the disgusting and painful elements of life. The disgusting sides of life are not more real or lasting than the beautiful and inspiring aspects. The majestic ocean is as much a part of the world as the ugly and evil-smelling drain, and to meditate continually on the evil and disgusting, though it may occasionally be useful in special circumstances, is a thoroughly unsatisfactory attitude and one which is far removed from that balance which, as the *Gītā* says, is the very essence of *Yoga*—'समत्वं योग उच्यते'.

True *vairāgya* consists, not in the contemplation of decaying corpses and such like sights but in an inner detachment from all things that are temporary, from pleasant things no less than from painful ones. The ordinary man feels a violent attraction to pleasant experiences and an equally violent repulsion from painful ones. The *vairāgi* is one who sees that both pleasure and pain are feelings which serve certain purposes in evolution and who refuses to allow his inner self to be attracted or repelled by them. He identifies himself with the witnessing consciousness (सक्षि-चेतन), which is the same in pain as in pleasure, and he allows the varied experiences of life to unroll before him like the pictures of a cinematograph show, learning from all but attaching himself to none.

It is this inner detachment which is essential, and the aspirant can acquire it while fulfilling the ordinary duties of life better than by going off to dwell in caves and burning-grounds. When life brings pleasant experiences to him, he should check his natural tendency to rush out and embrace those pleasures and to cling to them desperately when, in the natural course of things, they depart from him. When, on the other hand, painful experiences are his lot, he must check the tendency to shrink away in fear. Practising constantly in this manner, every little experience of life will become a step in the ladder which leads to the Goal, and, with each success, however partial, he will find himself nearer to that utter detachment from pleasure and pain which constitutes the crown of *vairāgya* and is the habitual attitude of him who is established in the Eternal.

The next requirement is what is termed '*Sat-sampatti*', the 'six equipments'. It consists of six mental powers, *śama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titikṣā*, *śraddhā* and *samādhāna*. They are counted as one because they can be taken as a whole to signify the various aspects of mental control, that mental

discipline which is absolutely essential for the aspirant.

*Sama* signifies the calming of the mind and is the first on the list because, until the mind is calm and peaceful, it is quite impossible to establish any effective control over the senses. The mind is their king, and, if it is not controlled, all attempts at piecemeal control of the individual senses is doomed to failure like the attempt to control a swarm of bees without reference to their queen. If, however, the queen bee be induced to settle down quietly, the whole swarm will settle and come under control.

*Sama* is therefore followed by *dama*, which signifies the control of the senses themselves. It should be noted, however, that it is not the killing of the senses by fanatical austerities, but their rational control, that is required. For a man with a strong will it is easy to deaden the senses by severe treatment of them, but that is a mistaken way of proceeding and one which impoverishes instead of enriching the spiritual life.

The body and its senses must not be damaged and weakened, for they are the instruments through which alone the soul can act upon this plane of consciousness. They were evolved, as the *Sāṅkhya* truly teaches, to serve the purposes of the Soul or, as the *Bhakti* school would prefer to state it, their purpose is to be used for the service of God and not for the sake of mere enjoyment. They must, however, be brought into thorough subordination to the mind and never allowed to carry the aspirant away, despite his better judgment. Their natural tendency to run after such objects as give them pleasure must be restrained, and only such activities permitted as are approved of by the conscience-controlled mind.

The next requirement is *uparati*, which means a turning back from enjoyment (*rati*). When the mind and senses have been brought into control, a further step has to be taken. Even the pleasure-

seeker will be wise to practise some degree of self-control as, otherwise, many pleasures will be interfered with by the unruly nature of his senses. But much more is demanded of the aspirant to the *Brahmavidyā*. Having mastered the previous steps, he must resolutely turn his mind away from the desire for enjoyment *as such*.

Enjoyment, in one form or another, is the aim of life for most people and even many who fancy they are treading the Path have in reality only substituted the desire for more lasting and more intense enjoyments, either of a 'heavenly' or of a 'yogic' sort, for the commonplace enjoyments of ordinary men. Desolating as the idea may seem, the aspirant must turn his back on the very idea of enjoyment and no longer allow it to serve in any way as the motive for his acts and thoughts. In its place he must substitute the ideal of service, the desire to serve that Eternal Reality which is worshipped under so many names and forms, the undying Kṛṣṇa whose dwelling-place is in the hearts of all.

Let none quibble and say that this, too, is a form of enjoyment. Supreme bliss is indeed to be found in the service of Kṛṣṇa, but only for him who seeks to give himself in service and by no means for him who seeks the bliss for its own sake. "He who seeketh his life shall lose it but he who loseth his life for My sake shall find it."

*Titikṣā*, the endurance of the 'pairs of opposites', comes next upon the list.\* The aspirant who has turned back from all desire for his own enjoyment is faced, like all men, with the fact that there is much in the universe that is not pleasant.

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\* There are some who practise what is known as '*pañcagnitapas*', the practice of sitting between four fires with the blazing sun overhead as the fifth. The real five fires are, however, the fires of the five senses and the true ascetic is he who sits serenely in the nine-gated city of the body, unaffected by their burning flames.

Heat and cold, gain and loss, friendship and enmity, honour and dishonour,—these are the warp and woof of his and all men's experience. The ordinary man's reaction to them is to strive to do away with the unpleasant members of these pairs and to retain only the pleasant ones. But such striving is based on ignorance, ignorance of the nature of all cosmic manifestation. Wherever there is movement, wherever there is manifested life, there must be two opposed forces. Action and reaction must take place on all levels of manifested being, and to seek to have life without the pairs of opposites is the merest folly.

One of the things that every aspirant must learn is to cease beating his wings fruitlessly against the eternal laws of Nature. Instead of superstitiously wishing that the Laws which rule the Cosmos will be set aside for his special benefit, he must seek to understand them, and, having understood, to co-operate.

In this particular case he must learn to understand the fundamentally dual nature of all manifestation and movement. Instead of feebly wishing that unpleasant aspects of life should be taken from him, he must centre his being in that part of himself that is unchanging, unmoving, the '*sthānu*' which is beyond the pairs of opposites. From that vantage-point he must watch with calm detachment the ebb and flow of the cosmic tides manifesting in all things, from the pleasure and pain of his own ever-changing mental states to the movements of the nations and even of the worlds themselves as they circle round the Central Sun.

This, and not mere stoic indifference to heat and cold is the true *titikṣā*, and, though it is much harder to attain, yet, because it is based on knowledge instead of on mere will-power, its possessor will be able to stand firm amid the crash of worlds in ruin, while the mere stoic is carried away along the rushing waters of disaster.

*Sraddhā* (faith), the fifth 'equipment', is another requisite that is often misunderstood. All over the world the creed-mongers demand of their followers a blind belief in the doctrines set forth in their particular scripture and in the unique divinity of the particular teacher they profess to follow, in the particular God to whose cult they are devoted

Such beliefs, based as they are on ancestral habit, emotional preference or mere intellectual opinion, are superstitious; for it is the essence of superstition that a belief is held without reference to evidence and experience. Such beliefs can only be maintained by shutting the eyes to facts or by mutilating a part of one's being. Therefore it is that the blind believer can never rest in calm confidence in his belief but must always seek the strength that comes from numbers, and, if that support is not naturally forthcoming, he will seek to coerce others to his way of thinking, that thereby the doubts of his own heart may be silenced. Fanaticism is the twin brother of superstition, and if any man finds himself wishing to coerce another to his way of thought or to his particular type of belief in God, he may know for certain that his belief is not truly held and that the heresies he seeks to destroy in the minds of others are in reality the doubts which are lurking in his own inmost heart.

We have seen what *sṛaddhā* is not, and it is now time to state what it is. True *sṛaddhā* is the dim reflection in the mind and heart of the aspirant of that *knowledge* which is already present in his soul. All knowledge is present in the Soul. If it were not, there could be no teaching at all, for there can be no certain knowledge of anything which is different from oneself, nor can any knowledge be considered as final except the knowledge that is direct and immediate.

But, just as the power and bliss of the Soul are veiled through its association

with a physical body and a personality, so is its knowledge veiled by having to be expressed through the limitations of a physical brain. And yet, just as whatever bliss we have in our experience, whatever power we are able to manifest in our lives, are but minute fractions of the bliss and power of the Soul, so is it true that whatever knowledge we possess is the inherent knowledge of the Soul, though veiled and distorted by our material limitations.

This knowledge is reflected in our hearts in the form of intuitions of the Truth, intuitions which the aspirant must learn to purify and separate out from the mass of mere opinion and inherited or acquired prejudice, as the swan is fabled to separate out the milk from the water with which it has been mixed.

Certainly it is not always easy to distinguish the true intuition from the voice of instinctive prejudice and lurking desire. But when was it ever said that the Path, the razor-edged Path, is an easy one? It is only possible to distinguish with certainty when the whole personality has been disciplined and controlled by the constant practice of the previous *Sādhanās* and when the distracting voice of desire has been reduced to silence. Nevertheless, the Light of intuition in his heart is the only light that can guide the aspirant along the Path. If he cannot see It, he must go on purifying and disciplining his mind until he can; for, without it, no *Guru*, no scripture, no psychic experiences or visions can be of use, and he whose own lamp is not lit must remain in darkness even though all around him is blazing Light.

*Sraddhā*, then, has two stages. First there must be the effort to purify the heart, so that the Light of intuition may shine forth clearly. Secondly must come the effort to subordinate all else to that Light. Wherever it shines, all else must give way to it. The aspirant must cling

faithfully to his intuition, cling to it with all his being and allow neither religious tradition nor social custom, neither emotional preference nor intellectual opinion, to come between himself and its Light. One thing he may be sure of, and that is that each time he follows the dim Star within him, that Star will grow in brightness until it has become the resplendent Light of Knowledge, shining like ten thousand suns.

The next and last of the six equipments is *samādhāna*, or mental balance, a word which may be taken as equivalent to *samādhi*, as that word is used in the *Gītā* ( II. 54 ) and in the eightfold Path of the Buddha. It is the state of the *sthita-prajña*, the state in which the heart is turned away from its attachments and, "free from anxiety among pains, indifferent amid pleasures", is poised on the edge of the *Atmā*, gazing in devotion on that *Atmā*, thinking the world well lost so that the *Atmā* be gained.

The description of this state is so well-known from the clear account given in the *Gītā* that it would be unnecessary to say anything more, were it not for the common notion that *samādhi* means sitting in a trance, oblivious of one's surroundings, insensible even if a sharp instrument be thrust into the body. Such trance states certainly exist; but, in themselves, they are of no value. The true *samādhi* is something quite different. It is the condition in which the self is, as stated before, poised on the edge of the *Atmā*, with the mind ( and body ) held in perfect balance, ready to be used at any moment as a perfect instrument for the service of that *Atmā* which is One in the hearts of all.

Unlike the trance states with which it is popularly confused, and which are matters for mountain caves and jungles, this *samādhi* is one which can be, and must be, as much present in action as in meditation. A *samādhāna* which is dependent on external peace and quiet is an imper-

fect one, and it must be developed and strengthened till, amid the clashing strife of Kurukṣetra, the aspirant can maintain the same unruffled poise as in the calm peace of a forest hermitage. Only when this is possible has *samādhāna* been achieved.

Lastly, we come to the fourth of the main qualifications, *mumukṣutva* or desire for liberation. Primarily, this is not so much a further qualification to be acquired when the others have been perfected as an attitude which should pervade and motivate all the efforts which are set forth under the other heads. It refers to the motivation of the whole long struggle, the end for which all should be pursued. Many men submit themselves to arduous disciplines and pour forth their lives in strenuous effort all for the sake of some finite goal. But 'अत्रानु फले नेशम्'—'temporary are all such fruits'; temporary, for nothing is enduring save the Supreme Eternal, That which is "undivided among beings, though seeming to be divided."\* All other gains are of but brief duration and are lost again inevitably as the Cosmic Wheel turns through the unresting Cycles in never-ending change.

"Only, while turns this Wheel invisible,  
No pause, no peace, no staying-place can be;  
Who mounts may fall, who falls will mount;  
Go round unceasingly." the spokes

As long as man clings to his separate 'self', so long must he whirl and suffer in the restless tides of sorrow, so long must he be bound by the limitations of his personality, be he king or be he slave, be he saint or be he sinner. Only in the Eternal can man achieve immortality. Therefore the aspirant must seek to liberate himself from all attachment to personal gain, from all desire for separate personal existence. Passionately must he seek to strip himself of all selfhood,

\* 'अविभक्तं च भूतेषु विभक्तमिव च स्थितम् ।'

( *Gītā* )

not because his lot in life is an unhappy one, but because all separation, all selfhood is ultimately unreal and only in the stainless Light of the Eternal can the freedom and peace of Immortality be attained.

This, then, is the preliminary *mumukṣutva*, the constant effort to hold fast to the Eternal alone. But there is a further stage, and when, after many lives of struggle, the Wondrous Light shines forth, when the flickering candle of self is swallowed up in the blazing sunlight of the Self, there comes a sudden pause. The river of his separate life is about to vanish into the Shoreless Sea; nay, it has already vanished as far as any sense of separateness is concerned. Suddenly, as he takes one last look at the myriad forms of the world of sorrow that he is about to leave for ever, he is struck by a terrible and wondrous vision.

Within all those struggling forms, agonizing upon the cross of matter, bathed in the blood of many wounds, he sees his Self, the beloved, gazing piteously from behind pain-glazed eyes, feebly calling for a help that, drowned in the dark waters of ignorance, It scarcely can believe to exist.

Can he ignore that pitiful appeal? Shall he allow his candle to merge and be lost forever in the Sun, blazing beyond the Darkness, or shall he not rather turn back once more and make of his disciplined and enlightened individuality a focus through which may shine, not the small light of self, but the Great Splendour of the One Eternal, shining in the Darkness to lighten the weary Path of men?

Shall the lover rest while his Beloved is in bondage? Though the bonds be but those of illusion, yet are they none the less real to those who sleep and dream. Let him who has trodden thus far turn aside from the facile arguments, which would seek to persuade him that, since he is the ever-free *Atmā*, there is no more to be done. Let him make the final sacrifice of the self which seeks its own bliss to that Self which is one in all. Let him tread with firm courage the Path of the true *Mumukṣu*, of him who seeks the liberation of all, until the dawning of that mystic 'Day' when the last spark of Spirit is freed from the embraces of matter and, like the phantom figures of a dream, Matter and Spirit lose their separate being, transcended in the glorious Light of That which has no name.



## A Prayer.

Everywhere I see Thy beauteous face, O Lord of Love.  
 North, South, East and West, above, below, all around Thou art pervading.  
 Let me never be foolish and never think that there is some corner where I  
 can do something unholy.  
 Let me know Thou art everywhere and let me kneel down and touch Thy  
 sacred lotus feet.  
 O Lord, keep me from all harms,  
 Save me from dangers,  
 Protect me from the monsters of untruth, lust and fear.  
 Guard me from corruption.  
 Lord, all that I need is Thy loving care;  
 Vouchsafe that to me, Thy humble servant.

—V. A. Sundaram.

