

MOMENTS WITH ONESELF SERIES: 10

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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KEY TO TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION OF

SANSKRIT LETTERS

Sanskrit is a highly phonetic language and hence accuracy in articulation of the letters is important. For those unfamiliar with the *Devanāgarī* script, the international transliteration is a guide to the proper pronunciation of Sanskrit letters.

अ	a	(but)	ट	ṭa	(true)*3
आ	ā	(father)	ठ	ṭha	(anthill)*3
इ	i	(it)	ड	ḍa	(drum)*3
ई	ī	(beat)	ढ	ḍha	(godhead)*3
उ	u	(full)	ण	ṇa	(under)*3
ऊ	ū	(pool)	त	ta	(path)*4
ऋ	r̄	(rhythm)	थ	tha	(thunder)*4
ॠ	r̄̄	(marine)	द	da	(that)*4
ऌ	l̄	(revelry)	ध	dha	(breathe)*4
ॡ	e	(play)	न	na	(nut)*4
ऐ	ai	(aisle)	प	pa	(put) 5
औ	o	(go)	फ	pha	(loophole)*5
औ	au	(loud)	ब	ba	(bin) 5
क	ka	(seek) 1	भ	bha	(abhor)*5
ख	kha	(blockhead)*1	म	ma	(much) 5
ग	ga	(get) 1	य	ya	(loyal)
घ	gha	(log hut)*1	र	ra	(red)
ङ	ṅa	(sing) 1	ल	la	(luck)
च	ca	(chunk) 2	व	va	(vase)
छ	cha	(catch him)*2	श	śa	(sure)
ज	ja	(jump) 2	ष	ṣa	(shun)
झ	jha	(hedgehog)*2	स	sa	(so)
ञ	ña	(bunch) 2	ह	ha	(hum)

• m anusvāra (nasalisation of preceding vowel)

˚ ḥ visarga (aspiration of preceding vowel)

* No exact English equivalents for these letters

- | | | | |
|----|----------|---|--------------------------|
| 1. | Guttural | – | Pronounced from throat |
| 2. | Palatal | – | Pronounced from palate |
| 3. | Lingual | – | Pronounced from cerebrum |
| 4. | Dental | – | Pronounced from teeth |
| 5. | Labial | – | Pronounced from lips |

The 5th letter of each of the above class – called nasals – are also pronounced nasally.

SOURCES OF CRISES

Crisis Management implies either avoidance of crisis or facing a crisis objectively. Crises created by factors within one's control can be avoided, while crises created by factors beyond one's control have to be faced.

Very often a crisis is first created by an individual on account of habits in terms of patterns of thinking and behaviour. Such crises can be avoided by changing these habits. Where the crisis is created by factors beyond one's control, one has to manage it with the help of understanding the realities of life.

First, I shall discuss the aspect of how to avoid a crisis, because I am afraid that it is we who create a good number of crises in our personal life, as well as in our professional, social, national and even international life. Major crises can be avoided if we act upon a situation at the right time in a right way. There is an old saying, 'A stitch in time saves nine,' which is so true.

There are two tendencies, I find, which prevent us from acting at the right time. These are postponement of the unpleasant and non-recognition

of the problem. If we recognise these tendencies within ourselves and eliminate them, we can avoid many a crisis.

PROCRASTINATION CREATES CRISIS

The tendency to procrastinate is universal. It manifests whenever there is need for a painful decision, complexity of work, apprehension of failure and fear of losing.

As students, we are told, when we go for examination, to attempt the easy questions first. Such an advice is acceptable when we need to use time to our advantage. But if it becomes a trait of the child, I am afraid it is in for crisis after crisis. If one always looks for the easy and the pleasant, it becomes a trait.

Everyone has this trait in some degree or the other – the tendency to do what is easy, trouble-free, and pleasant, and leave issues that are difficult, troublesome, for the future. If we observe the behaviour of a typist in an office, we find he or she looks for the letters that are short, where the handwriting is clear, in the pile of work at hand, while the work that requires more attention is pushed below. Even an officer, who has to

attend to a variety of files, prefers to take care of those that do not involve a difficult decision or a big commitment. If deciding an issue requires consulting other files or other people, which involves certain effort, there is a tendency to postpone. Thus, the difficult issues keep piling up. They become irritants. We do not want to see them on our desk because they remind us of our inefficiency, our incapacity to face unpleasant issues. So, we tend to keep them away from sight and push them inside the drawers. However, even though the files are kept away, we carry them in our heart. The files remain with us when we go home because a work that we have not completed or done always remains with us. Many of our health problems result from carryinig such loads in the heart.

Let us take a domestic issue such as your wife wanting to talk to you. You know it is unpleasant. You find she is hurt and she wants to complain about your mother or sister or brother because she cannot solve the problem. You do not want to hear that, but you are the only person she can talk to. If you are ready to face the unpleasantness and listen to her, perhaps the matter will be settled because all she wants is to talk. But when you avoid it, it piles up and one day she blows up. It becomes a crisis.

DO THE UNPLEASANT FIRST

When a person is afraid of facing situations, of assuming responsibility, the situation turns into a problem and then into a crisis. We create a crisis by postponing, and I find it in students, in office staff, in executives, in the young and old. We want to postpone the unpleasant and do the pleasant first. If we postpone the unpleasant, we are stuck with the unpleasant. If we do away with unpleasant first, we are left with the pleasant.

An intelligent man is one who becomes aware of this tendency to postpone and accepts the problem. You cannot expect everything to be pleasant in life. Like two sides of a coin, the unpleasant always goes with the pleasant. A person is mature when he or she accepts facts and does not evade the disagreeable.

When you find a tendency in yourself to avoid the unpleasant, reverse the tendency; do the unpleasant first. You will find there is nothing unpleasant. I will tell you my own experience to illustrate this. I never liked bitter gourd. I never thought it was necessary to like it and always avoided it. One day, I decided that as a *sādhu* I was going to eat the bitter vegetable. The next time I was invited for dinner, bitter gourd

was served on my plate. I ate the entire helping first. The lady of the house thought I had liked it and served another helping. Since I had decided to eat bitter gourd, I ate the second helping also. Seeing the proportion of bitter gourd I had eaten in comparison with the other vegetables, the lady concluded that it was my favourite dish. Then the word quickly spread that I loved bitter gourd and wherever I was invited for dinner, I was served the bitter vegetable. The next one month, almost everyday, I ended up eating this vegetable because of my decision to do what I did not like first. And do you know what happened? I started liking bitter gourd! I had created a new habit in taste. What was bitter before had become pleasant. I was no longer averse of the vegetable.

The person who does not postpone, who has to make a decision, right or wrong, to fulfil the responsibility, he or she alone can become successful. At least, every successful person has this trait of facing the unpleasant situations. However, everyone who has this trait need not necessarily be successful in the conventional sense because success, like even financial success, requires other factors such as being at the right place at the right time and so on. But as a person, such an individual is mature. He or she does not suffer for

want of making a decision. Writing a letter, a simple letter, at the right time, congratulating at the right time, expressing thanks at the right time – all these things are important, because not doing them can give rise to a lot of misunderstanding. If you make a decision to decide the issue next month, well, that is a decision. You may think that the data available at present is not sufficient and you want to wait for a month; that is also a decision. It is all right because a deliberate planning is involved. But postponing something because it is unpleasant is wrong. It has the potential of creating a crisis and when it occurs, you will be frightened, frustrated, and feel inadequate to face it.

When you make up your mind to do the unpleasant first, you will find a change in yourself. You will find there is nothing unpleasant. There are only situations, comfortable situations and difficult situations. You are mature enough to accommodate the unpleasant, just as you accommodate the pleasant. The acceptance of the unpleasant will help you avoid crises that comes with postponement.

RECOGNISE THE PROBLEM AND ACT

Disowning a problem, in other words, wishful thinking, is another habit that causes a crisis. When there is a problem, we say, “There is no problem. Everything will be all right.” It will not be all right. You must remember Murphy’s Law. If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong. The possibility of a thing going wrong is much more than of it going right. You can act upon a problem, however small it is, only when you accept the problem first. Action presupposes a decision, a will, and the will can be only when there is recognition.

I recently came across this article in a magazine, about a doctor, a successful cardiac surgeon. He had pain in the chest. He was informed enough, qualified enough to know this could be a warning or it could be a simple heartburn. What it was could only be decided by a medical check-up. But he did not take it seriously. At one point, he even thought of having a check-up but was too busy to find the time. A fortnight went by, and in the end, he got a heart attack. Imagine, a cardiac surgeon getting a heart attack for want of a check-up! This is not a problem of postponement; it is the problem of non-recognition of a problem.

Whether you create the problem or others do, you create a crisis by not accepting it, by wishful thinking, “Everything will be all right if my *karma* is good.” *Karma* does not work that way. The theory of *karma* is not fatalism. It does not justify passing the buck; it pins down the responsibilities on you. You had performed an action and you must own up the responsibility. Do not blame God or the stars or anybody else.

You have the will along with *karma*. There are certain things that you cannot change. You cannot change your date of birth, your parentage and so on. Equally, there are things you can change. When something is not accomplished in spite of your effort, you may say there could be some *karma* on your part that may be playing a role there. You recognise them as ‘my *karma*’ and not someone else’s *karma* and thus assume the responsibility. You accept *karma* but always go by your will and do something about it. Even when an astrologer says you have a bad time, a period of Saturn, he always recommends what you should do to minimise the effect. So it is not fatalistic, it is positive. We fight against our own *karma*. That is a tremendous amount of self-responsibility.

Accept the problem as it occurs. If there is a resemblance of a problem, investigate whether there

is really a problem. It does not mean you should become suspicious or fearful. I am talking about the objectivity. However minor a situation is, try to see if there is a problem. If there is trouble, shoot it, do what needs to be done.

DEALING WITH THE CRISIS

When I cultivate the capacity to do the unpleasant, when I am willing to accept a problem as it occurs and I am ready to act upon it, I avoid crisis that could arise on account of factors within my control. Then, I can face problems even those that are not created by me.

Many external factors are involved in a situation and they often contribute to a crisis. For example, if you are an industrialist, there can be government policies that can interfere; materials may not be available, other people may interfere and so on. These are problems not created by you but you have to face them since you live in the society.

I do not think any society was free from such problems. Even in the days of Lord Rāma, there was a Rāvaṇa; in fact Lord Rāma came because Rāvaṇa was there. Such situations will always be there. There will be *asuras* in the society; there will be situations that

are not conducive. If there is such a thing as storm, storms will happen; if there is such a thing as famine, famine will happen. Unfavourable situations will keep arising and you have to face them; you have to deal with them.

There are no norms in dealing with a crisis because situations are different every time and with every person. Dealing with a crisis requires an inner strength and you should be able to do whatever you need to. It is like driving through traffic. When a driving school teaches a person to drive, it cannot create all possible traffic situations. It creates some typical situations, gives the person general guidelines, educates him or her about the rules of driving on the road and then the person has to deal with situations as they occur. The driver has to find his or her way through the trucks, buses, auto-rickshaws, pedestrians and the ubiquitous two wheelers.

In life too, you should be prepared to manoeuvre your way through different situations that can be difficult or tricky. And such a situation is called a crisis. You must be alert. Your values and capacities must be intact so that you can deal with the situations.

THE THREE POWERS

As a person, you are endowed with three powers – the power to know, the power to will and the power to do. You have the power to know, to think, to explore, to enquire, to remember. All this together makes up the power to know, *jñāna-śakti*. Then you have the power to desire, to will, and to create – this is called *icchā-śakti*. And when you have the power to desire, you should also have power and skill to fulfil the desire. This is called *kriyā-śakti*, power to do or act. Every human being has these powers that he or she employs in different disciplines of knowledge and action. These are the powers at the command of the human being to act in different situations.

Just as it is necessary to know that you are endowed with these powers, it is equally necessary to know that these powers are limited. For example, you have the power to know but there is a limit to what and how much you can know. You may know an object as a rose, but that is not all about it. There are a variety of disciplines of knowledge involved in a rose such as plant physiology, biology and so on. Even in those disciplines, much remains to be known. So, for

everything you know, there is a lot that you do not know. Thus, the power of knowledge is limited.

The power to desire is also limited. It is limited by what you know and what you do not know. For example, a hundred years ago, no one desired to possess a computer or to travel by a spaceship because such things were not known then. You cannot desire what you do not know. Similarly, your power to create, power to fulfil your desires is also limited. Fulfilment of a desire calls for skills, resources and so on, which are limited in every individual.

With such limitations of knowledge, skills and so on, how can you expect to always succeed?

EVERY EFFORT IS A CALCULATED RISK

Let us say that you have some money that you want to invest to make some profit. A friend advised you to buy a particular stock because its prices were rising every day and there was a potential of making a good profit. You buy the stocks; all your savings are invested in this particular stock and the next thing that happens is that the market crashes because there is a sudden change in the Union cabinet. Now, there is nothing wrong in desiring nor is there anything

wrong in desiring money. But you should know that when you buy a stock or even cross a road, there is no rule that you will succeed. You should know this. This knowledge changes the person, makes him or her effective.

Success does not come as a rule. When you begin to cross a road, there is a hope that you will safely reach the other side. In absence of that hope you would not even attempt to cross. You look in both the directions and see if no vehicle coming from either direction. Then you cross the road. Sometimes it happens that you fail to notice a vehicle approaching the spot where you are and end up in a hospital. Every time you expect a result for an effort, you base your expectation upon some data. For example, when you make a business projection for the following year, you take into account factors such as potential demand, availability of raw materials, possible changes in tax structure, labour strikes and so on. This is true not only for business projection but for a simple act such as crossing a road.

Your expectation is based upon your knowledge of facts but that knowledge is very often inadequate. You know that in spite of planning well, sometimes you do not get the expected results. Thus, there is a

speculation involved in every expectation. There is a basis for the speculation and so we call it a calculated risk. Crossing the road involves a calculated risk and eating a meal in a restaurant also involves a calculated risk. There is no way of knowing if a lizard has fallen in the food. Even breathing is a calculated risk these days with all the pollution and viruses.

BE READY FOR FAILURE

Since every intelligent effort involves a calculated risk, either of two results can be expected for every effort, success in different degrees and failure in different degrees. In fact the result is only one and in accordance with the action, but we look upon it as success or failure. These two results are possible for every effort. The question is, are you ready to accept this fact?

If you are ready to accept this fact, I tell you, you will be able to face a crisis better. Generally, we refuse to accept this fact. You get depressed when you meet with a result, you despise and say, “Swamiji, I failed.” Did you expect this or not? You should have expected it when your effort was a calculated risk. Why should you not expect the result, take it in your

stride and proceed further? Why should you allow yourself to become sad, depressed and lose whatever effectiveness, efficiency, and courage you have? In fact, a crisis requires more courage than a normal situation does, but here a crisis has made you less effective, less courageous. With adverse results, a person seems to become more and more depressed, gets more and more frightened and a time comes when one is not able to act at all. It is important that you are prepared for the outcome in your effort because success does not come as a rule since your powers are limited, because every effort is a calculated risk.

ACCEPT LIMITATIONS

To be ready for a failure, it is necessary to recognise our limitations. Our knowledge is limited and we cannot avoid many situations from happening. If our knowledge is not limited, we can avoid all accidents. Sometimes we have the knowledge, but our power is limited. We know that a cyclone is coming, but what can we do? Perhaps, the people can be shifted to a safe place but what about certain animals, the trees and the houses? Very often we find ourselves helpless. So, it is important to recognise

our limitations; only then can we enjoy our virtues. If we do not accept our limitations, we get frustrated, “How can this happen to me?” Instead, we should ask, “How can the other thing, success, happen to me?” So many good things have happened to us. Why not recognise and enjoy them?

You lose your ability to make use of your virtues, your powers by refusing to accept your limitations. You find yourself sad, depressed. Depression dictates your disposition. How can anyone be effective in dealing with a crisis when he or she is incapable of dictating his or her own disposition? If you permit yourself to get depressed for reasons you seem to have no control over, you become helpless, and the crisis, the outside factors, will make you more and more inefficient, ineffective.

Depression is a reaction. In action you have freedom; you exercise your will. When a situation is a crisis, it calls for an action from you, an immediate action. But here, the crisis makes you depressed, frustrated, and helpless. One crisis leads to another and finally you get a heart attack, which is one more crisis, not only for you but your family and many others. A crisis, be it financial or physical, requires

you be together as a person and that can be only when you are free from depression and frustration. You cannot get freedom from depression or sadness by will, because they do not seek your permission before coming. You have to get to the root of depression, and one of the important reasons for it is the refusal to accept your limitations.

There is also another factor that you should recognise to enable you to be positive.

RECOGNISE THE GRACE

Accepting limitations enables us to be prepared for failure. The fact is that every one of us is born to fail. Our knowledge is limited and therefore our projections can go wrong. In fact, all our expectations should go wrong. When we look at ourselves, we find that we have been successful—if we take into account every accomplishment beginning from breathing, eating, and so on—all the time. It is not that we have to make money to be called successful. We are successful because we are surviving against all odds. How many times have we crossed roads? How many times and how many varieties of food have we eaten in restaurants? Yet, we are surviving without knowing the whole process of cooking! I say that we are successful. It takes no time for an accident to happen and a person can end up in a wheelchair; this is happening every day to someone somewhere. It is not necessary that we should commit a mistake for meeting with an accident while driving. We can meet with an accident also due to someone else's mistake. Coming to think of it, we are always in the jaws of death, but we are still alive. Hence, we can say that we have been successful.

Is it not necessary then for an intelligent person to recognise something that makes the difference between success and failure? It is very important, psychologically important, to recognise this factor which seems to have been working all along in your life. This factor is what we call grace, *daiva*.

You cannot manage a crisis unless you are together as a person, mature as a person. That maturity calls for the recognition of this factor that you call luck or chance, although you do not leave anything to chance. We call it 'earned grace'. Recognition of this factor enables you to accept the situations with composure. With composure, you can act upon a situation with the powers you are endowed with. You can study the situation better, understand it better, plan better and act better. This is all you can do anyway.

If you recognise the existence of grace, you can also offer a prayer. You can make prayer a regular part of your effort. This is what makes Indian culture unique. When an Indian driver, whether the person is a Christian or Muslim, takes the car out in the morning, he or she first offers a prayer before getting into the car. When you build a house, you offer a *pūjā* before starting the construction and again offer a *pūjā* before entering

the house. Once you enter the house, you create an altar of the Lord first and then enter. This is because you understand that the difference between success and failure is on account of grace, *daiva* and you invoke that factor. It makes you psychologically secure. Our culture is non-separate from religion and non-separate from our understanding of realities too.

AN EFFECTIVE PERSON

When you recognise a power greater than yourself, you recognise your limitations. The more you recognise the limitations, the more effective you become and the more positive you become. You have been a success all the time, and there is no reason to be disappointed or to have a sense of failure. The very fact that you are alive shows that so much grace is flowing in your life.

There is no such thing as failure. Failure is a sense you impute upon a situation that you did not expect. You did what you could do and it is all that is expected of you. Since there is a risk involved in every venture, the result is not a failure. There is only wrong expectation which is to be expected because your knowledge is limited. You better accept that.

When you think of an accident or a failure, you always think of it as happening to someone else and not to you. That is not right. It can also happen to you. With this understanding you become alert, like a sportsperson ready to handle a situation as it occurs. You play the game and play it well. When you play, you play to win, but someone has to lose because both cannot win in a game. Your knowledge and powers being inadequate, failure is always there, up in the sleeves of future. If it comes, take it, become wiser and face the situation even if it is a crisis. Then, you will not create a further crisis.

What has happened has happened. You cannot do anything about it, although you can make amends or repairs if you like. Acceptance of facts is a precondition to an action; non-acceptance is an ideal condition for reaction. In fact, non-acceptance itself is a reaction. Non-acceptance does not alter the facts and one reaction creates a chain of reactions. So, accept the facts and keep acting. Then life becomes a learning experience. There are no failures; there is only further learning.

Graceful acceptance is more a recognition. It is not surrender. You accept a situation, pleasant or unpleasant, and act upon it. It is surrender when you

do not act upon a situation. On account of your limitations, you cannot call all the shots; you do not hold all the strings in your hands. If you understand this, you will accept the situation. If not, you cannot accept it. There is no defeat because defeat is only when you cannot accept facts. So accept facts and proceed. The growth is purely in terms of understanding, in terms of gaining an abiding mind and nothing else.

GAINING AN ABIDING MIND

Vedanta is a teaching about oneself in which one discovers that the meaning of the word 'I' as the self whose nature is absolute contentment and love, free from any sense of limitation. To appreciate yourself as such, you require an abiding mind, a mind that has, in relative measure, what it seeks to discover in absolute measure. Because the self is absolute contentment, your mind must be relatively content. Because the self is absolute love, you must also be relatively a loving person, who can happily accept people and things as they are. A cantankerous, non-loving person has to discover first, a relatively abiding mind.

AN ABIDING MIND SERVES YOU IN TWO WAYS

How then do you gain such a mind? Can an abiding mind be gained through the love you have for another person? We shall see that you must first have an abiding mind before you can discover an abiding love for someone. Thus, an abiding mind serves you in two ways – by helping you to be qualified for the teaching of Vedanta and by enabling you to discover an abiding love in your relationship with another person.

Love for another is something you discover within yourself when that person pleases you. You cannot ‘will’ to love another because love is not an action that is performed. If it were and someone asked you, “Please love me,” you could decide to love the person, not to love the person, or love the person the next day. With reference to action, there is this three-fold freedom — to do, not to do, or to do differently. With reference to love, however, this freedom is not there because love is not dependent on your will. Love is something you can only discover within yourself.

NO OBJECT OR PERSON HAS THE INNATE CAPACITY TO
INVOKE LOVE

Furthermore, an object of love, be it a person, animal, or an inanimate object, does not have an innate capacity to invoke in you the emotion called love. If it did, it would create love in everyone and in you all the time. But this is not what happens. To the same person with whom you fell head over heels in love, you eventually say, “I think we need some distance between us,” meaning your love is over. Love, in fact, has nothing to do with the object of your love but is within you, the subject. Your particular likes and dislikes determine ‘what’ and ‘who’ will be the object of your love, your hatred and your indifference.

However, the reason you love another is not for the other's sake but for your own sake because the other person pleases you. Therefore, when you say, "I love you," you really mean, "You please me now." It is as though you love your pleased self. Any object or person that invokes the pleased self in you becomes an object of your love.

To be pleased by someone requires that the person fulfil some of your particular likes and dislikes that are highly subjective and change from moment to moment. Somehow you do become pleased, but it all depends on chance. And more often than not, the person eventually is no longer pleasing to you or you to that person because no one can fulfil all of one's likes even part of the time. When the pleased self is gone, the object of love turns into an object of indifference or even hatred. Therefore, the mind does not become an abiding mind through the love we have for another person.

Whether the love you discover for another person will become an abiding love is anybody's guess. Marriage vows are taken because we are never sure that the love is going to last. We often break vows even as we make them because becoming pleased is not easy and to please another is equally difficult.

When you find yourself pleased by another and discover love for that person, you become reckless in your passion or fascination and ignore the other's limitations because they are unimportant to you for the time being. As long as they remain unimportant to you, the person seems to have something that pleases you and love is very natural. At the same time, however, you are a person with your own anger, resentment, hurt and guilt that do not disappear merely because you are in love with someone. That love is only with reference to one person. But with reference to your boss, relatives, government and economic system, you are the same angry person you were before you discovered love for the person. There are a number of things causing your anger, that anger is always there in your heart even though it may not always be expressed. When the freshness of the love you have discovered is gone, your anger will work its way into the relationship. This is when you begin to see the other's limitations with reference to your own expectations of the person.

If you are not a loving person with an abiding mind to begin with, you are unlikely to find an abiding love in any particular relationship with a given individual. It is like wanting only your nose to

be healthy when the entire system is unwell. The whole system must be dealt with. Adjustments made in your relationship with another person will not solve the problem unless you change yourself totally. Sooner or later, an angry person is going to be angry, the hateful person is going to be hateful. Any technique to improve the relationship merely alters the situation temporarily.

TO GAIN AN ABIDING MIND CERTAIN VALUES AND
ATTITUDES ARE IMPORTANT

To discover an abiding love in a relationship with a given person, you must first gain an abiding mind. To gain an abiding mind means developing certain values and attitudes and being clear about their importance. With such values in hand, you are granting the proper conditions of love. Accommodating others is one such value. In fact, your anger is due to lack of accommodation because you want the entire world to behave according to your expectations. To develop a value for accommodating others, one fact needs to be clearly understood, that the other person behaves in a given manner because he or she is incapable of behaving differently. "He could have done better," you say. If the person could, then he or she would have.

What right do you have to demand that another person act according to your expectations? Would not the person then also have the right to ask you to behave differently? If you change, then he or she need not change at all. If you have the right to ask the person to change, then the other person too has the right to ask you to let him or her live as he or she is.

Only by accommodating others, and allowing them to be what they are, do you gain a relative freedom in your day-to-day life. If you analyse this from a broad perspective everyone interferes in everyone else's life. Ordinarily, you look at things from a narrower perspective and find one person looming large before you, whose influence seems to be very strong. In fact, you are never free from anyone else's influence or from all the forces in the universe insofar as your physical body is concerned. Nor can you perform an action or even make a statement without affecting someone in some way. Therefore, no one is really free since we are all inter-related.

Even the Swami is not free. Once, when I went to the zoo, two people passed me and one said to the other, "Did you see the new one?" I try not to disturb people but I do so even by my robes! I wear these clothes because in my country they are the traditional

dress of a renunciate. When I travel outside India, I want to present myself in the same way. If I am disturbed by people's comments, it is only because I allow them to disturb me. Therefore, I gain only as much freedom as they grant me. However, if I reverse the process and give them the freedom to be what they are and to think what they think, then I am free. I see myself as free for I have given them the freedom to have their problems. Therefore, I do not argue with them. My freedom is only equal to the freedom I give the other person to have an opinion about me. When a person sees my clothes and asks, "What is all this?" I may just smile and say, "Halloween has come earlier this year." I need not change a person's opinion even though it may be incorrect. I give the person the freedom to be what he or she is. The only freedom I have is that his or her opinions do not disturb me.

You need to come to terms with yourself psychologically as a personality. You understand that certain problems are there, that they exist. Look back in your life and recall the situations, people and events that really disturb you. What you find are not mere memories but leftover reactions. A reaction is not what you do consciously. You cannot consciously get angry because anger is not an action; it is a reaction that

takes place when you have no say over the matter. These reactions create a great impact on you and become part of your psyche. They create a personality out of a person. They are false and are due to a lack of alertness on your part; they have no real roots in the mind.

Recall those people and moments that have caused disturbance in you or those people you have disturbed and about whom you carry some guilt. In the seat of meditation, recall them all and let them be as they are.

When you look at the blue sky, the stars, the birds, and the mountains, you have no complaints about them; you are pleased and happy with them. They did not do anything to please you, and yet you are happy because you do not want them to be different. You accept them as they are and therefore you are pleased. The river flows in its own way. You do not want the volume of water to be greater or the flow to go in a different direction. In fact, you seek out natural spots because they do not invoke the displeased, angry, hard-to-please person that you seem to be. You are one with the situation and accommodating, without the world doing anything to please you.

This is the opportunity to change. See yourself as a pleased person with reference to these few things and bring that pleased person to bear upon all the situations and people that have displeased you and whom you have displeased at one time or another. Accept others as you accept the stars, the birds, and the mountains. Pray for a change if you think the other person needs to change or do what you can to help him or her change. But first accommodate the person as he or she is. Only in this way can you really change as a total person. Vedanta becomes real when you are able to accommodate others totally. Accept others totally; then you are free. And you will discover an abiding mind, the love that is yourself.

I will conclude saying that you have to accept your limitations gracefully and thereby avoid depressions, frustrations and a sense of failure. Only then are you a person who is together, endowed with the three powers at your disposal. You do what you can and need to do. This makes you an effective person to face any crisis.

Oṃ Tat Sat

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