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XI. Renunciation and Morality

1. Avidyamaya, Sin, and Evil

Indian: “Knowledge is veiled in ignorance, and thereby mortals are deluded” (BG 5:15; cf. 3:38; 14:8; 18:32). “The entire world is deluded by the moods and mental state which are the expression of these three gunas [primal forces of nature]” (BG* 7:13, p. 90). “The evil doers turn not toward me. These are deluded, sunk low among mortals. Their judgment is lost in the maze of Maya” (BG* 7:15, p. 91).

New Testament: “All men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin” (Rom. 3:9; cf. 3:23; 6:17; 7:14; Job 28:20-21; Prov. 14:12-13). “Sin came into the world through one man [Adam] and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom. 5:12). “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions” (Rom. 6:12; cf. 7:25). “No one born of God commits sin” (1 Jn. 3:9; cf. 1:9; 5:18).

The blind leading the blind. Indian: “Deluded fools go round and round, the blind led by the blind” (Kat. Up.* 1:2.5, p. 24; cf. Mun. Up. 1:2.8). New Testament: “If a blind man lead a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Mt. 15:14; cf. Lk. 6:39).

The unawakened do not understand spiritual knowledge. Indian: “In the knowledge of the Atman, which is dark night to the ignorant: The ignorant are awake in their sense-life, which they think is daylight: To the seer it is darkness” (BG* 2:69, p. 50). New Testament: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (Jn. 1:5, KJ; cf. Is. 5:20). “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14; cf. 3:19; 13:9).

A person does what they do not what to do. Indian: “I know what is good but I

am not inclined to do it; I know what is bad, but I do not refrain from doing it” (MB).¹ “Under what compulsion does a man commit sin, O Varshneya, in spite of himself? ... It is desire, it is wrath, which springs from rajas [passion]” (BG 3:36). New Testament: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15-16). “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit ... for those are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would” (Gal. 5:17).

Concerning the maya of ignorance, Sri Ramakrishna revealed, “Maya keeps us in ignorance, and entangles us in the world.” “Rama, who is God Himself, was only two and a half cubits ahead of Lakshmana. But Lakshmana couldn’t see Him because Sita stood between them. Lakshmana may be compared to jiva [individual person] and Sita to maya. Man cannot see God on account of the barrier of maya. Just look: I am creating a barrier in front of my face with this towel. Now you can't see me, even though I am so near. Likewise God is the nearest of all, but we cannot see Him on account of this covering of maya.” “O Rama, please do not delude us with your world-bewitching maya.” “Mother do not delude me with Thy world-bewitching maya.” “Practice spiritual discipline laboriously, in order to avoid the clutches of maya.” “The bliss of God-consciousness always exists in you. It is only hidden by the veiling and projecting power of maya.” “If God is omnipresent, why do we not see Him? Observing from the bank of a pool thickly covered with scum and weeds, you will not see the water in it. If you desire to see the water, remove the scum from the surface of the pond. With eyes covered with the film of Maya, you complain that you cannot see God. If you wish to see Him, remove the film of Maya from your eyes.” By contrast “Knowledge, renunciation, devotion, and other spiritual qualities are the splendours of the maya of knowledge.”² Ideas about renunciation are easy to understand, but sometimes difficult to put into practice. World-bewitching maya for some of us is mind-bewitching maya.

Ramakrishna explained that, “People who have not realized God would become engaged in more and more sinful actions if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not made the sinner feel that he alone was responsible for his sin. Those who have realized God are aware that free will is a mere appearance”³

To quote Swami Shivananda (1854-1934), “Under the spell of Maya a person forgets God and remains attached to sense objects which are impermanent.... They become so mad after the fleeting happiness of this world that they entirely forget

the real aim of life. Such is the play of maya that deludes the whole world.”⁴ Deluded by the power of maya, people become entangled in the world and they suffer many sorrows. “Unless God is gracious, nobody can escape out of this illusion, be he ever so learned or wise. It is only when He removes a little of this covering of maya that a man can understand how great this grace is.” By self-surrendering the mind to Brahman-God, with the Lord’s grace the veil of maya will be removed.⁵

In his writings Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) mentioned, “Christian thought emphasizes the offense against Ishvara [Personal God], who is other than ourselves; while Hindu thought emphasizes the offence against our own true nature, which is the Atman.... The value of the Christian approach is that it heightens our sense of the significance and enormity of sin by relating it to a Being whom we have every reason to love and obey, our Creator and Father. The value of the Hindu approach is that it presents the consequences of sin in their ultimate aspect, which is simply alienation from the Reality within us.”⁶

Commenting on the aphorisms of Patanjali’s Yoga (YS 2:3-9) Prabhavananda noted that there are five fundamental afflictions (kleshas) that cause unhappiness. “They exist universally in all beings, though in different states and degrees in different people.” Universal ignorance (avidya) is the root cause of the other four kleshas. In some ways avidyamaya is equivalent to the “Original Sin” of the Christians. They differ in that avidya is not due to inheritance. Avidya like sin is responsible for an individual being unaware of the presence of God within or outside of themselves. “Ignorance has been defined as ‘taking the non-eternal, the impure, the painful, and the non-Self; for the eternal, the pure, the happy and the Atman or Self’” (YS 2:5). Avidya gives rise to egoism (asmita), which is the effect of the identification of the Atman, our true Self with the physical body and the thoughts and moods of the mind. “Through egoism there arises the desire for pleasurable experiences in the senses and there grows attachment to them.”⁷ Attachment (raga) may lead to a lack of mental tranquility and to aversion (dvesa), which is expressed in dissatisfaction, anger, and hatred. Attachment and aversion result in the fifth klesha, a clinging to surface life, and a corresponding fear of death (abhinvesha).⁸

Pandeya B. Vidyarthi head of the Department of Philosophy at Ranchi University discovered a number of similarities between the Christian concept of sin and the Hindu doctrine of avidya (ignorance). Both powers have existed since the beginning of creation. They are universal, given that most people are under the influence of

sin and avidya at least to some degree. Sin and avidya are characterized by an interaction between “wrong thinking” and “wrong living.” The sin of Adam and Eve and the erroneous cognition of avidya, both involve a cognitive “error of judgment” that leads to immoral and harmful behavior. Both sin and avidya function to alienate a person from themselves, other people, their own divinity, and from Brahman-God. Nevertheless, sin and avidya are opposed to the nature of the higher Self. Consequently, they can be overcome by living the right kind of life, thinking the right kind of thoughts, and feeling the right kind of emotions.⁹

Ramakrishna explains avidyamaya as that power or force that “deludes” a person, which keeps people from realizing their true Divine Self and seeing Brahman-God. Psychological Maya as delusion is a subjective state of mind and objective as the power that brings about this delusion. It is a false consciousness related to the psychological idea of the “irrational” determining human behavior, characterized by being unrealistic, illogical, self-defeating, socially defeating, and self-destructive. It is a delusion and is real. This differs considerably from Philosophical Maya that is an illusion and is unreal or an appearance, superimposition, etc. In addition maya is defined as the power of Brahman. Since these religious terms (e.g., maya) have more than one meaning, it is beneficial to attach a second term that tells us which definition is being used. Too confuse the different types of maya is a type of nominal fallacy that because different entities have the same name (in this case maya) they are identical.

The “world-bewitching maya” that Sri Ramakrishna talks about makes it difficult to predict future events. For example, the first and second world war, depression that began in 1929, the Cold War that started in 1945, and the Covid19 pandemic came unexpectedly for most people.

According to traditional Indian thought the six primary fetters (Arishadvarga or Shadripu) are pride (mada), envy-jealousy (matsarya), anger (krodha), greed-avarice (lobha), lust (kama), and delusion (moha). They bind the soul to the cycle of rebirth and death and keep it bound to this material world. By overcoming these limitations one gets more control over their life and can alter their fate.¹⁰ Ramakrishna refers to them as the six passions¹¹ and considers ego and egotism to be their root cause.¹² Evagrius of Ponticus (a Roman Providence now part of Turkey, c. 345-99) listed eight temptations that must be controlled: “gluttony [reduce one’s ascetic practices because of fear of health problems], fornication [sexual fantasies], avarice, grief, anger, listlessness, vainglory [self-love], and [self-

sufficient] pride [in relation to God].” During the act of prayer, these desires distract the soul and thereby disrupt the process of contemplation.¹⁶ Evagrius’ eight temptations were the precursors of the seven capital (cardinal or deadly) sins, later formulated by Gregory the Great (540-604). Pride is the source of the remaining six, which are “envy, anger, dejection, avarice, gluttony, and lust.”¹⁷ They are deadly because they can lead to committing other sins. Thus, the Catholics and Indians agree on five of these seven cardinal sins. The seven cardinal sins can be viewed in a hierarchical fashion following the logic of Patanjali’s aphorisms. First is pride (egotism) the inordinate love of oneself to the exclusion of other people, gives rise to lust the inordinate love of sense pleasure and to avarice (greed) the inordinate love of material possessions. When these desires are frustrated, the results are anger, envy, dejection, and in some cases gluttony (YS 2:3-9).¹⁸ According to the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis (1939) of modern psychology, when one is not able to attain a desired goal, they are apt to become frustrated and angry, and react with aggression and hostility.¹⁹

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) signified that the main three reasons for sin are an excessive self-love, desire for a temporal good, and ignorance. “Man is said to love both the good he desires for himself, and himself, to whom he desires it.”²⁰ Ignorance brings about sin because the will “is never moved to evil unless that which is not good appear good in some respects to the reason.”²¹ Venial sin can be overcome only through God’s grace, since people cannot permanently restrain all of their lower appetites. “Man incurs a triple loss by sinning. He incurs a stain, inasmuch as he forfeits the adornment of grace through the deformity of sin. Natural good [inclination to virtue] is corrupted, inasmuch as man’s nature is disordered because man’s will is not subject to God’s ... Lastly, there is the debt of punishment.”²²

The important point made by Paul Tillich (1886-1965) is that the apostle, “Paul often spoke of ‘Sin’ in the singular and without an article. He saw it as a quasi-personal power which ruled this world. But in the Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, sin has been used predominately in the plural, and ‘sins’ are deviations from the moral laws.”²⁴ “Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself.... Man as he exists is not what he essentially is and ought to be.... one belongs essentially to that from which one is estranged.... [Sin is] the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs.... It is not the disobedience to a law which makes an act sinful but the fact that it is an expression of man’s estrangement from God, from men, from himself.

Therefore, Paul calls everything sin which does not result from faith, from the unity with God.... In faith and love, sin is conquered because estrangement is overcome by reunion.”²⁵ Sin is a form of existential estrangement, a false consciousness brought about by a person being alienated from his or her own true nature. In this negative ontological state of existence, the individual does not know their true Self to which they essentially belong. Tillich makes a very important distinction between the universal and singular “Sin,” and individual and pluralistic “sins.” Sin is a universal cosmic force (like the Indian Avidya) characterized by ignorance, delusion, and irrationality that manifest in the individual soul. As a cosmic force Sin is indestructible, while the sins of an individual are removable by right understanding and proper action.

John Grimes defines Avidya as, “It is characterized by six marks: it is beginningless (anadi); it is removed by right knowledge (jnana-nivartya); it is a positive entity of the nature of an existent (bhava-rupa); it is indescribable (anirvacaniya); it has the two powers of concealment [avaraka shakti] and projection [adhoniyamaka shakti] which respectively represent the truth and suggest the false (avarana and viksepa); and its locus is either in the individual self (jiva) or in Brahman.”²⁶ Avidyamaya hides the truth and projects falsehoods.

Tillich makes the point that sin expresses itself in three ways. First, an individual denies their Divine center (unbelief), then “he makes himself the center of himself and of his world” (hubris-excessive pride), and finally he attempts to draw “the whole of his world into himself” (concupiscence, desire).

Unbelief “means the act or state in which man in the totality of his being turns away from God. In his existential self-realization he turns toward himself and his world and loses his essential unity with the ground of his being and his world.” “Hubris is the self-elevation of man into the sphere of the Divine.... It is sin in its total form, namely, the other side of unbelief or man’s turning away from the Divine center to which he belongs. It is turning toward one’s self as the center of one’s self and one’s world.... Man identifies his cultural creativity with Divine creativity. He attributes infinite significance to his finite cultural creations, making idols of them.”²⁷

A single negative cosmic force is viewed as Original Sin primarily from a behavioral standpoint by the Christians, as Original Ignorance (Avidyamaya) from an intellectual perspective by the Hindus, and as Original Suffering (Dukkha) from a feeling viewpoint by the Buddhist. Coming from the behavioral aspect, to overcome sin one might place more emphasis on good works, and coming from the

intellectual perspective one is more likely to stress proper thinking. A person living an unvirtuous life might not admit to sin or ignorance, but is apt to acknowledge their unhappiness and seek a remedy for it. Modern Existentialists stress negative emotive characteristics, such as feelings of anxiety, dread, despair, guilt, alienation, and the meaninglessness of life.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992), 374, 405, 418 humanity's original nature is good because it is a natural creation of God. But as a result of original sin, human nature has been weakened and wounded, subject to ignorance, suffering, and the inclination to sin.²⁸

Both Avidyamaya as delusion and a false consciousness, and Original Sin are nouns that cause people to act (verb) in the wrong way. They are the root cause of bad actions, misguided ideas, and unhappy feelings. Where they differ, avidyamaya unlike original sin did not arise from the transgression of Adam and Eve or anyone else. Also, avidyamaya is not due to hereditary transmission like original sin, since

people were subject to it before their human birth. One reason why people are born

While many Christians consider sin to be an offense against God (or His commandments), Vedantists view sin as a transgression against one's own higher Self (Atman), which is the essential or Divine nature of all people. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from both God and one's own inherent Divinity. Sin degrades us and prevents the Divine light from shining through. A wrongdoing like stealing is an act against both others and ourself. Immoral activity creates a barrier between a person and Brahman-God that prevents them from realizing their potential by distorting their hearts and obstructing their view of life. A sinful act is expressed through immoral, selfish, shameful, or harmful physical acts, speech, thoughts, and feelings. To sin is to appeal to a person's lower nature resulting in unhappiness.³⁰

The false consciousness, avidyamaya that prevents a person from realizing Brahman-God and their own innate divinity is a broader concept than sin. Avidyamaya involves seeing bad and thinking it is good, and seeing good and thinking it is bad. The maya that deludes and deceives a person comes in many forms, often not understood by the nondiscriminating mind. Though its specific forms vary from person to person, it relates to lust, greed, anger, fear, etc. The mind must be fed healthy ideas to keep it in good shape.

A big problem is that some people have been indoctrinated into a life of lust, greed, and violence, which they uncritically accept through persuasion not coercion. These negative values, attitudes, and roles are internalized through a process of socialization. Other people who are not interested in accumulating wealth or living a romantic life are made to feel they are missing out on the joys of life, and that they are abnormal and there is something wrong with them.

All negative powerful emotions that can overwhelm a person are reducible to samskaras, mental impressions that a yogi can overcome through mind control. Be optimistic and realize that solutions can and will be found. Problems are there to alert us to the errors in our thinking, and to makes us aware of alternate ways of doing things.

Fortunately according to Sri Ramakrishna's Doctrine of Two Mayas, there is also vidyamaya the maya of knowledge that leads to liberation. Ramakrishna explains, "This universe is created by the Mahamaya of God. Mahamaya contains both vidyamaya, the illusion of knowledge, and avidyamaya, the illusion of ignorance. Through the help of vidyamaya one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love, and renunciation. Avidyamaya

consists of the five elements and the objects of the five senses-- form, flavour, smell, touch, and sound. These make one forget God." "In order to attain vijnana one has to accept the help of vidyamaya. Vidyamaya includes discrimination—that is to say, God is real and the world illusory—and dispassion, and also chanting God's name and glories, meditation, the company of holy persons, prayer, and so forth. Vidyamaya may be likened to the last few steps before the roof. Next is the roof, the realization of God." "Even after attaining jnana, the jnani can live in the world, retaining vidyamaya, that is to say, bhakti, compassion, renunciation, and such virtues."³¹

Sin is due to not obeying the moral law, which is the law of ones higher nature. Among other things sins are caused by desires, greed, ignorance, weakness, and hostility. As activities they involve outward deeds and words, and inward thoughts (mental sin). They vary in type of sin, intensity, may be intentional or accidental, and might lead to other immoral acts. Wrongdoings are partially determined by the circumstances that surround the act.

We cannot see Brahman-God Who is right in front of us because through worldly desires we place obstacles between ourself and It.

In Section 4, Ramakrishna's doctrine explains the difference between the unripe and the ripe ego.

2. Renunciation of Worldly Desires

Indian: "Having realized the Self, brahmins give up the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, and the desire for the worlds" (Br. Up. 3:5.1; cf. 4:4.22). "The wise prefer the good to the pleasant; the foolish, driven by fleshy desires, prefer the pleasant to the good" (Kat. Up.* 1:2.2, p. 24). "Free from desires, with body and mind controlled, and surrendering all possessions, he incurs no sin" (BG 4:21; cf. 2:55; 13:8-9). "No one who has not renounced his desires can ever become a yogi" (BG 6:2; cf. 4, 24; 12:16-17; Br. Up. 4:4.7; Kat. Up. 2:3.14).

New Testament: "Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (Mt. 6:19; cf. 21; 10:9-10; 19:27-30; Mk. 6:8-10; 10:21, 28-31; Lk. 9:3; 10:4; 14:33; 18:29-30; Jn. 6:27). "Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on" (Mt. 6:25; cf. 26-33; Lk. 12:22-31). "What is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul" (Mt. 16:26, KJ). Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess

and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Mt. 19:21).

Desires cause sin which brings death. Indian: "Attachment gives rise to desire ... from the ruin of discrimination the man perishes" (BG 2:62-63; cf. 3:37). New Testament: "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death" (Jam. 1:14-15).

Detached from the flesh-senses. Indian: "He completely withdraws the senses from their objects, as a tortoise draws in its limbs" (BG 2:58; cf. 68; 3:34; Kat. Up. 1:3.5-6; Svet. Up. 2:9; LM 2:88). "He controls the senses and recollects the mind and fixes it on me" (BG* 2:61, p. 48; cf. 6:14). New Testament: "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God" (Rom. 8:7; cf. Mt. 5:28). "Make no provisions for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14).

Love of wealth. Indian: "They are ceaselessly busy, piling up dishonest gains to satisfy their cravings" (BG* 16:12, p. 153). New Testament: "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Tim. 6:9; cf. Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13; Jam. 5: 2, 5).

Mental renunciation. Indian: "A man who renounces certain physical actions but still lets his mind dwell on the objects of his sensual desire, is deceiving himself. He can only be called a hypocrite" (BG* 3:6, pp. 51-52). "No one who has not renounced his desires can ever become a yogi" (BG 6:2; cf. 4, 24; 12:16-17; Br. Up. 4:4.7; Kat. Up. 2:3.14). New Testament: "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2; cf. 2 Cor. 4:18). "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (1 Jn. 2:15; cf. Jn. 12:25; Jam. 4:4).

Non-attachment to one's family. Indian: "Non-attachment, non-identification of self with children, wife, home, and the rest" (BG 13:9; cf. Br. Up. 3:5.1; 4:4.22). New Testament: "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10:37; cf. Lk. 14:26; 18:29).

Sense pleasure. Indian: "The wise prefer the good to the pleasant; the foolish, driven by fleshy desires, prefer the pleasant to the good" (Kat. Up.* 1:2.2, p. 24). "They are addicts of sensual pleasure, made restless by their many desires. They fall into the filthy hell of their own evil minds" (BG* 16:16, p. 153; cf. 2:44). New Testament: "If you live according to the flesh you will die" (Rom. 8:13). "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against

the flesh; for these are opposed to each other” (Gal. 5:17; cf. 5:24; 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Jn. 2:16).

According to a parable of Sri Ramakrishna, “Money enables a man to get food and drink, build a house, worship the Deity, serve devotes and holy man and help the poor when he happens to meet them. These are good uses of money. Money is not meant for luxuries or creature comforts or for buying a position in society.” “If you direct the mind to the contemplation of God, you will be coloured by God Consciousness. Again if you direct the mind to worldly duties ... it will be coloured by worldliness.” “They alone make good use of their money who spend it for the worship of God or the service of holy men and devotees. Their money bears fruit.”³² “So long as these passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they behave like enemies. But when they are directed towards God, they become the best friends of man, for they lead him unto God. The lust for the things of the world must be changed into the hankering for God, the anger that man feels in relation to his fellow man should be turned towards God for not revealing Himself to him. One should deal with all the passions in the same manner.” “If the aspirant thirsting after self-improvement mixes indiscriminately with all sorts of worldly people, not only does he lose his ideal, but also his former faith, love and zeal; they die away imperceptibly.”³³ “If you seek the world and long for sense objects, the world will drag you down. But if you seek God and renounce everything for Him, God will lift you up and your consciousness will be filled with unending bliss.”³⁴ “God is in all men, but all men are not in God, that is why they suffer.”

Swami Shivananda signified, “The more you grow in discrimination and dispassion, the more power you will manifest. Even if you are not aware of it, others will feel it.”³⁵ “A mind that is untainted by worldliness will be soon enlightened.”³⁶ “As a result of association with the holy one reaches the state of being freed from all worldly attachments. All wants and desires are then destroyed root and branch, and one feels the nearness of God.”³⁷ “It is impossible to obtain peace that is abiding so long as one is subject to desires, and one cannot wholly uproot desires without Divine grace.”³⁸

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) told his followers, “If you can perform every action as worship of the Lord, then only will you like to work and feel no attachment to the fruits of your actions.” “Do your duties conscientiously, and without attachment. Always remember that you are an instrument in the hands of God and that God himself is the only doer.”³⁹ “Give your body and mind to worldly

enjoyments, and the world will destroy them both. Devote them to God and his service, and you will enjoy bodily health, peace of mind, and spiritual joy.”⁴⁰ “Only that man who is free from all cravings can find unending joy.” “We must pray; we must cry to God that he may awaken in us longing for him and that our cravings for enjoyment may be wiped out.” “Teach (your mind) to give up all cravings for fleshy enjoyments. When the mind is once freed from cravings it becomes your slave.”⁴¹ “Because the mind is gross it runs after gross things, but as it becomes pure and subtle it will run after God—the pure consciousness.” “When you are able to free yourself from these deep-seated desires, when the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed in real meditation.”⁴² “Outward renunciation will follow if you detach your mind from the transitory, unreal objects of the world and attach it to God.”⁴³ The Lord is near to the aspirant who has renounced selfish cravings and who regards Brahman-God as their very own. To renounce bodily cravings one must receive the Lord’s grace and practice intense spiritual disciplines. Give your body and mind to Brahman-God and not to worldly enjoyments, and then you will enjoy peace of mind and spiritual joy.⁴⁴

As expressed by Swami Saradananda (1865-1927), “Those who lead an unregulated life and think impure thoughts lose their powers and strength of mind. They are at the mercy of passing desires and the feverish cravings of the senses and are slaves.” Experiencing minor desires is okay, if you utilize your powers of discrimination. “Major desires have to be renounced and uprooted completely from the mind by realizing the danger and defects inherent in them. If they are given free reign, they will stifle the power of discrimination.”⁴⁵ “The mind is unsteady because it clings to objects of desire. Desire is like fire which always craves new sensation. If you ignore its demands, it will burn itself out and be extinguished.... If there is a strong attachment for God and a burning desire to realize Him, all other attractions will drop off.... One becomes dispassionate toward the world by seeing the emptiness of chasing mundane pleasures and clinging to transitory things. Until a man is ready and sees through the appearance of the world, no spiritual instruction will be of any avail.”⁴⁶

We learn from Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939), “Self-control means the control of the lower self, or the animal nature of man, by developing the higher powers that are latent in the individual soul.” “Simple desire for enjoyment takes the form of ruling passion, agitates the whole mind, and manifests in the form of anger and unrest. In that agitated state of the mind we lose the sense of right and wrong, memory grows dull, understanding gets confused, we lose foresight and act

like brutes.... Desire is the first stage, passion is the second stage, and the third stage is anger. Passion and anger, again, lead to hatred, jealousy, and many other wicked feelings which are expressed outwardly in the form of vicious acts.”⁴⁷ “A Yogi develops his willpower by daily practice; he rouses up the higher powers and continues to fight against his greatest enemies with firmness and determination until he accomplishes his end. Perfect self-control of a Yogi is that state of mind where no desires or passions of any kind disturb the peace and tranquility of his soul. Such a state can be acquired more easily by removing the bubbles of desires before they take the waveform of passions, that is, by attacking them while they are in their weak state.... We should also remember that the highest ideal of our life is not pleasure of the senses, nor slavery to desires and passions, but the attainment of mastery over the lower self, and the manifestation of the Supreme Self.”⁴⁸

Swami Prabhavananda indicated, “As we turn to the teachings of Christ we shall find that he was one of the greatest exponents of renunciation.” Purity of heart, which is the goal of a spiritual life, is brought on by being desireless. When we meditate on God, we realize that many of our desires are an obstruction to spiritual growth. Detachment does not mean being indifferent to and unconcerned about worldly duties. The more we renounce, the more the Lord will give us in return. “Out of this loving devotion to God there will come a normal and natural control of all the passions. For the more you advance toward God, the less will be the strength of your cravings and desires for the objects of the world. The lower passions lose their power in the presence of something that is higher and greater.”⁴⁹

Clement of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 150-215) stressed that the goal of spiritual life is to attain a poverty of desires, to have need only for that which is useful and essential for human existence. Developing self-restraint and the control of passions in the face of desires is the first step. “The Divine law, then, while keeping in mind all virtue, trains man especially to self-restraint, laying this as the foundation of the virtues.” Next is a state of self-sufficiency where the renunciate is not dependent on mundane things. “Rich he is in the highest degree in desiring nothing, as having few wants.” The final step taken by the gnostic is to cultivate the mental virtues like impassibility, freedom from agitation and the enslavement to pleasure or pain, tranquility and detachment.⁵⁰ The gnostic has no “fear, as he regards none of the things that occur in life as to be dreaded; nor can anything dislodge him from this—

the love he has towards God. Nor does he need cheerfulness of mind; for he does not fall into pain, being persuaded that all things happen well. Nor is he angry; for there is nothing to move him to anger, seeing he ever loves God, and is entirely turned towards Him alone, and therefore hates none of God's creatures. No more does he envy; for nothing is wanting to him, that is requisite to assimilation, in order that he may be excellent and good. Nor does he consequently love any one with this common affection, but loves the Creator in the creatures. Nor, consequently, does he fall into any desire and eagerness; nor does he want, as far as respects his soul, anything appertaining to others, now that he associates through love with the Beloved One."⁵¹

According to Evagrius of Ponticus (c. 345-99) (an admirer of Origen) who wrote on monastic asceticism, *praktike* is the first stage of practical piety, whereby the soul endeavors to become virtuous. This process involves an active struggle to overcome the temptations that bring about sinful activity. Eventually, the soul reaches a state of *apatheia*, characterized by impassibility, tranquility, and freedom from passions. *Apatheia* is a necessary prerequisite to reach the more advanced state of *agape*, love of God. Then the soul will dwell in a harmonious, natural, and healthy state allowing the mind to pray without distraction.⁵²

In the Middle Ages Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) found that the practice of mental detachment is absolutely necessary to reach God. A detached soul that is withdrawn from all created things is not thrown off its course by joy or sorrow, by honor or disgrace. "You must know that to be empty of all created things is to be full of God, and to be full of created things is to be empty of God." Strip yourself of everything that conceals the "core of the soul." True detachment raises the soul above all desires for any form of material reward. It yields a pure and unified mind and will, which is the habitat that attracts God. "As each man becomes uniform with God, to that measure he becomes susceptible to the Divine inflowing. And uniformity comes from man's subjecting himself to God; and the more a man subjects himself to created things, the less is he uniform with God. Now a heart that has pure detachment is free from all created things, and so it is wholly submitted to God, and so it achieves the highest uniformity with God, and is more susceptible to the Divine inflowing.... So detachment is the best of all, for it purifies the soul and cleanses the conscience and enkindles the heart and awakens the spirit and stimulates our longings and shows us where God is and separates us from created things and unites itself with God."⁵³ "I tell you that no one can experience

this birth (of God realized in the soul) without a mighty effort. No one can attain this birth unless he can withdraw his mind entirely from, things.”⁵⁴

In modern times Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) realized that indulgence is due to the Pleasure Principle, the instinct that seeks pleasure and avoids pain in order to satisfy the basic biological and psychological needs. When needs are not met, the result can be anxiety or tension. Buried deep in the unconscious mind is the Id that consists of our basic urges and desires. The Id is kept in check by the Ego that operates on the basis of the Reality Principle to show restraint and fulfill needs that are realistic and socially acceptable.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) the English writer apprehended that the three major forms of mental and material detachment are poverty, chastity, and obedience. “By Poverty the mystic means an utter self-stripping, the casting off of immaterial as well as material wealth, a complete detachment from finite things. By chastity he means an extreme and limpid purity of soul, cleansed from personal desire and virgin to all but God: by Obedience, that abnegation of selfhood, that mortification of the will, which results in a complete self-abandonment, a ‘holy indifference’ to the accidents of life. These three aspects of perfection are really one: linked together as irrevocably as the three aspects of the self.” “The true role of poverty consists in giving up those things which enchain the spirit, divide its interests, and deflect it on its road to God—whether these things be riches, habits, religious observances, friends, interests, distastes, or desires.”⁵⁵ In practicing detachment we become free from the objects of desire. Pursue the goal of living a simple life, since, “Desires, attachments become centres of conflicting interest in the mind. They assume a false air of importance, force themselves upon the attention, and complicate life.” Renounce all impediments that divide a seeker’s interest and sidetrack them on the path to God. It is harmful if the “senses have usurped a place beyond their station; become the focus of energy, steadily drained the vitality of the self.”⁵⁶

Because of Sri Ramakrishna’s influence, in the future we can expect a significant rise in asceticism and renunciation that will counter the present trend that is going in the opposite direction. Holy Mother’s disciples told her they pray for devotion and knowledge. She said that is good, but one should also pray to be desireless. Roman Catholic monastics take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

To some extent we must renounce the secular world to enter the sacred world. First is the renunciation of tamasic, then rajasic, and most difficult sattvic worldly desires. Moderate renunciation means eliminating harmful values, while the more extreme form means avoiding activities that most people consider as legitimate desires. The psychological advantages of renunciation are many. We avoid guilt, bad karma, frustration that leads to aggression, self-depreciation, and such maladies as alcoholism, drug addiction, and criminal activity. Renouncing the “bondage of the ego” helps one to avoid the suffering from criticism, disappointments, etc. The austerity of renunciation is for the greater good of the devotee.

Instant gratification is the desire to experience immediate pleasure or reward without delay or effort. Renunciation is undertaken to avoid the dangers of instant gratification. They include a weakening of willpower, overeating, over sleeping, over spending, procrastination, wasting time on unproductive activity, and substance abuse. On the other hand, delayed gratification is a habit of achievers who have the discipline, and perseverance to concentrate on reaching long-term goals that results in happiness and satisfaction. This characteristic tends to be found in people of higher intelligence.⁵⁷

“Transfer of learning” concerns the effect that knowledge or abilities acquired in past experience, effect learning and performance in a new situation. Negative transfer occurs when old behavior interferes with the performance of new behavior, knowledge and learning. Negative transfer often appears during the initial stages of learning and then gives way with further training to more positive results. There is a negative transfer of learning if the person previously learned material that is in opposition, antagonistic, and unsuitable for the new situation.⁵⁸ For example, it is more difficult to adapt to spiritual life, if one previously lived an excessive worldly life.

People are more willing to engage in changes in their behavior, attitudes, and beliefs if it: makes the individual feel better about themselves and increases their feeling of self-esteem; is congruent with their self-conception, appraisal, and identity, and with the roles they are involved in; reduces psychological stress; is an important part of their life that they are highly committed to; is accompanied by a feeling of self-responsibility for their behavior and the confidence that they possess the power to bring about self-improvement; is perceived as more beneficial than costly; is facilitated by a social support system; and occurs during a critical event in their life.⁵⁹

Asceticism involves practicing austerities, self-denial, and disciplined practices that remove obstacles and allow the spiritual aspirant to make progress. The major components of the various forms of asceticism include: 1) Chastity and in its more extreme form celibacy; 2) Avoiding worldly goods and being charitable; 3) Fasting which includes eating less and avoiding harmful foods; 4) Living in solitude with limited social interactions and avoiding people that will mislead you; 5) Undergoing physical hardships such as extreme heat or cold; 6) Maintaining religious practices such as reading sacred texts; and 7) Psychological austerities such as denial of the ego, humility; and practicing the virtues of truthfulness, honesty, self-control, forgiveness, being verbally kind to other people, and obedience to authorities.⁶¹

Westerners are held back if they are cultural bound in the wrong way. They are in bondage to the mental impressions (samskaras) and habits (vasanas) that they have been indoctrinated into throughout their lifetime.⁶² Some come to the Vedanta Society for a while but due to their cultural identity they eventually leave and return to their old lifestyle. Many people come to the Vedanta Society because of their psychological problems, but once they are healed they leave. The grace of renunciation is not easy to acquire. We are all tempted by so many things (some quite subtle) that move us off the mark. At times the will is too weak to resist the subtle attractions.

Identifying with and belonging to a particular culture is different from a social identity with a group. To identify with a culture does not require social interaction with a group of people. These cultural values and beliefs are internalized and create a self-concept having a marked affect on people's actions and thoughts.

Worldly enjoyment is like spending money causing one's financial resources to decline. They result only in short run happiness. Spiritual enjoyment is like investing money where one's capital increases. People are attracted to worldly desires because in their mind they associate them with happiness. If eating certain foods produces nausea then one loses the desire to eat them. So if one can associate displeasure with a worldly desire they will give it up.

Samskaras are combined into configurations (particular arrangement of ideas) that the mind takes when it thinks about something. There is a repetition compulsion to repeatedly think about the same thing in its various aspects. So whatever the mind is fed it will tend to dwell on those thoughts in the future. To renounce that line of thinking it is best to avoid feeding the mind those thoughts through mental renunciation.

Renunciation is also an important discipline for all people, since at the time of death one must be willing to leave behind their loved ones, worldly possession, the use of power, and various pleasures. If they cling to them this makes the dying process more difficult. One advantage of old age is with declining faculties a person relies less on themselves and can rely more on the Lord's assistance.

One must not only renounce unneeded physical objects, but also detach ourselves from nonessential beliefs and opinions, and from emotions so that we control them, they do not control us. Attachment causes dependence on the object of your attachment, which is a type of slavery. You love that which you are attached to and dependent on, based on personal likes and dislikes. Being detached means to be unaffected or undisturbed by negative things. You remain calm and experience unselfish love and compassion for others.⁶³

When people come to a religion they are apt too have many potential selves (compartmentalization). That is why it is necessary to be in the right environment where the more auspicious qualities of a person can manifest.

Another reason for renunciation is that though we may not be aware of it, in a mentally unhealthy environment bad thoughts and vibrations are absorbed by the unconscious mind that will eventually surface into the conscious mind.

3. Continence

Indian: "Carnal intercourse ... with unmarried maidens, with females of the lowest caste, with wives of a friend or of a son, they declare to be equal to the violation of a Guru's [wife's] bed [which is a mortal sin (mahapataka)]" (LM 11:59; cf. 55).

Old Testament "The lips of a loose woman drip with honey and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (Prov. 5:3-4). New Testament: "Let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous" (Heb. 13:4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:16, 18).

Sri Ramakrishna discerned, "To be able to realize God, one must practice absolute continence." "Without chastity one cannot assimilate these teachings." "M: "At last Devi Choudhurani met her husband. She showed him great devotion and said to him: 'You are my God. I wanted to learn the worship of another God but I did not succeed. You have taken the place of all gods.'" Ramakrishna: "This is the dharma of a woman totally devoted to her husband. This also is a path.... it is called

the dharma of chastity, the single-minded devotion of a wife to her husband. If God can be worshipped through an image, why shouldn't it be possible to worship Him through a living person?" "A good wife, has very little lust and anger.... She is full of affection, kindness, devotion, modesty, add other noble qualities."⁶⁴

In his *Yoga Sutra* commentary, Rammurti Mishra explains, "When firmly established in continence [self-restraint, temperance, moderation], one obtains physical, mental, and spiritual strength (YS 2:38).... [Through continence, sexual] energy is transformed into *apara ojas* and *para ojas*. *Apara ojas* maintains physical strength which protects the body from physical diseases. *Para ojas* maintains spiritual and mental strength that protects one from mental diseases and manifests mental and spiritual powers."⁶⁵ With this power the guru can take on the karma of their disciples.

Christianity sanction's virginity for the unmarried, continence for the widowed, and loyalty to the spouse for the married person (1 Cor. 7:1-9). Thomas Aquinas recognized that, "The more a person indulges in pleasures, the more does the desire for pleasure grow in him. Thus, concupiscent feelings are weakened by acts of abstinence and other corporeal practices suitable to those who have the vow of continence. Moreover, the enjoyment of corporeal delights distracts the mind from its peak activity and hinders it in the contemplation of spiritual things ... For enjoyment makes the appetite become fixed on the thing that is enjoyed. And so, for those people who devote their attention to the contemplation of Divine things and of every kind of truth, it is especially harmful to have been addicted to sexual pleasures."⁶⁶

The idea that semen should be kept in the body since it contains a vital force was held by the ancient Indians, Chinese, and Greeks.⁶⁷ Celibacy has been practiced worldwide by monastics, and priests of some orders, and some medicine men.

Not necessarily celibates but many philosophers were bachelors including: Greek: Heraclitus, Democritus, Plato, and Plotinus; British: Hobbes, Locke, I. Newton, Hume, A. Smith, Bentham, T. Macaulay, H. Spencer, F. H. Bradley, and Wittgenstein (also Austrian); French: Descartes, Pascal, Voltaire, and Sartre; German: Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche; Other Western European: Spinoza and Kierkegaard; and American: Thoreau and Lovejoy.⁶⁸

4. Avoid Egotism and Pride (Hubris)

Indian: “Full of hypocrisy, pride, and arrogance, they hold false views through delusion and act with impure resolve.... I am prosperous, mighty and happy; I am rich; I am of high birth. Who else is equal to me? I will offer sacrifice, I will give, I will rejoice.’ Thus, deluded by ignorance” (BG 16:10, 14-15; cf. Mait. Up. 3:2; BG 2:71; 15:5; 16:3; 18:58).

Old Testament: “To the humble he [the Lord] shows favor” (Prov. 3:34; cf. Is. 2:12, 17). “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.... but, humility goes before honor” (Prov. 16:18; 18:12; cf. Dt. 8:17; Is. 5:21; Jer. 10:23). New Testament: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt. 23:12; cf. Ps. 37:11; Mt. 5:5; 18:4; Lk. 14:11; 18:14; Phil. 2:3). “They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (Jn. 12:43; cf. 5:44; 2 Thes. 2:3-4; Jam. 4:16; 1 Pet. 5:5).

It was affirmed by Sri Ramakrishna that, “The true nature of the Jiva [Soul] is eternal Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. It is due to egotism that he is limited by so many Upadhis (limiting adjuncts), and has forgotten his real nature.... The individual soul and the Universal Being are separated because this ‘I’ comes in between them. If a stick is placed on the surface of water, the water will appear to be divided into two sections. The stick is the Amah—the ‘I.’ Take that away, and the water becomes again undivided.... The ripe ego which considers itself to be the servant or worshiper of God, causes none of those evil consequences characteristic of the unripe ego. On the other hand, it leads to God and signifies that one has progressed in Bhakti Yoga or the path of devotion.”⁶⁹ “A frog had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot, as if to kick the elephant, and said, ‘How dare you walk over my head?’ Such is the pride that money begets!... When the embodied soul says, ‘O God, I am not the doer; Thou art the Doer. I am the machine and Thou art its Operator,’ only then does its suffering of worldly life come to an end.... But a man cannot be egotistic if he has true knowledge. In other words, in samadhi man becomes one with God and gets rid of his egotism. True knowledge is impossible without samadhi. In samadhi man becomes one with God. Then he can have no egotism.”⁷⁰ “The feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ is ignorance. People say that Rani Rasmani built the Kali temple; but nobody says it was the work of God. They say that such and such a person established the Brahmo Samaj; but nobody says it was founded through the will of God. This feeling, ‘I am the doer,’ is ignorance. On the contrary, the idea, ‘O God, Thou art the Doer and I am only an instrument; Thou art

the Operator and I the machine', is Knowledge. After attaining Knowledge a man says: 'O God nothing belongs to me—neither this house of worship nor this Kali temple, nor this Brahma Samaj. These are all Thine."⁷¹ Swami Turiyananda indicated that Ramakrishna could not bear the sight of egotistical people.⁷²

Ramakrishna's disciple Swami Premananda (1861-1918) advised a monastic, "Always remember, the Lord is the 'doer.' If ever the idea that 'I am the doer' enters into your head, the Lord instantly flies away. All efforts then will be in vain. Therefore I say, be careful, holy man. Let not the 'unripe' ego ever enter your heart. Pray that you may only be the instrument in the hands of the Lord, through His grace. Then only will you become a real karma yogi. Then work will no longer bind you." "Sri Ramakrishna did not make us great; he made us 'nobodies.' You also have to become 'nobodies.' Wipe out all vanity and all sense of ego. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'When the ego dies, all troubles cease.' 'Not I, not I, but thou, O Lord.' Look at the life of Nag Mahasaya! There was not the least trace of ego in him. G. C. Ghosh used to say, 'Maya tried to bind Nag Mahasaya and Vivekananda in her net, but Nag Mahasaya became smaller than the smallest, so that maya's net could not hold him, and Vivekananda grew bigger and bigger; he became one with the infinite, and the net was too small to bind him.'"⁷³

Sri Ramakrishna criticizes only the immature unripe ego, not the mature ripe ego. Due to self-identity we consider ourself to be a particular person with a limited mind-body complex. It is our responsibility and duty to ourself to make that person as good as possible. If we succeed in doing so society will reward us for our accomplishments and we will receive good karma and samskaras. In a sense this is a ripe ego. The Avatara-Divine Incarnation like Sri Ramakrishna and Jesus Christ place the emphasis on the ripe ego seeking the highest goal, which is to be liberated-saved.

In *The Imitation of Christ*, the German-Dutch Thomas A' Kempis (1380-1471) wrote, "To take no account of oneself, but always to think well and highly of others is the highest wisdom and perfection.... It does you no harm when you esteem all others better than yourself, but it does you great harm when you esteem yourself above others. True peace dwells only in the heart of the humble: but the heart of the proud is ever full of pride and jealousy."⁷⁴ "Who is so wise that he knows all things? So do not place too much reliance on the rightness of your own views, but be ready to consider the views of others.... When God bestows spiritual comfort, receive it with a grateful heart; but remember that it comes of God's free gift, and not of your own merit. Do not be proud, nor over joyful, nor foolishly

presumptuous; rather, be the more humble for this gift, more cautious, and more prudent in all your doings.”⁷⁵ “His gift of grace cannot flow freely in us, because we are ungrateful to the Giver, and do not return them to their Fount and Source. God will always give grace to those who are grateful, but what He grants to the humble is withheld from the proud.... Seek no glory from one another, but the glory which comes from God alone.... God walks with the simple, reveals Himself to the humble, gives understanding to little ones, discloses His secrets to pure minds, and conceals His grace from the curious and conceited.”⁷⁶

For Augustus Strong (1836-1921) an American Baptist theologian sin “is a fundamental and positive choice or preference of self instead of God, as the object of affection and the supreme end of being. Instead of making God the centre of his life, surrendering himself unconditionally to God and possessing himself only in subordination to God’s will, the sinner makes self the centre of his life, sets himself directly against God, and constitutes his own interest the supreme motive and his own will the supreme rule.”⁷⁷

For Edward Koehler, “External sins are those of word and deed; internal sins are those of thought and heart. It is a sin of commission when we do what is forbidden; it is a sin of omission when we fail to do what is commanded. Known sins are those which we know to be against the Law; unknown sins are those of which we are not conscious, or of which we do not know that they are sins. Voluntary sins are sins we commit by deliberate volition, contrary to our conscience; involuntary sins are those which a man commits” due to uncontrollable passions.⁷⁸

There are the negative sociological effects of egotism on a collective level. In 1906 a sociologist at Yale University, William G. Sumner (1840-1910) coined the term “ethnocentrism” to mean that each culture and society considers its own practice, custom, and beliefs to be inherently superior to the others. Other cultures are rated lower depending on how dissimilar they are to ours. The idea of group superiority has been extended to nation, race, gender, income levels, religion, etc. with devastating effects. The first and second world wars were in part due to the collective ego of people. This mentality was accepted in the past though over the centuries it resulted in the deaths of hundreds of millions of people, but today with nuclear weapons that could destroy the entire human race this phenomenon must be avoided.⁷⁹ A result of ethnocentrism is a hostile or negative prejudice toward people who belong to another group, based solely on their membership within that group. Ethnocentrism relates to religiocentrism the view that only my religion is true and all other religions are false.

“In-groups are groups to which a person belongs, and out-groups are groups to which a person does not belong.” Belittling another group can be done for practical reasons if they are in competition with each other. In this case, the out-group is considered to be threatening to the members of the in-group if they are blocking or hindering their goals. Being overcritical of another group may be done for the purpose of enhancing social identity and the self-esteem of the in-group members. There is a tendency to stereotype members of an out-group as being homogenous with identical characteristics in a negative sense, while members of one's in-group as being diverse.⁸⁰

The detailed modern scientific study of the workings of the ego began with the Vienna psychiatrist Sigmund Freud who discovered ten ego defense mechanisms. An ego “defense mechanism is an unconscious psychological mechanism that reduces anxiety arising from unacceptable or potentially harmful stimuli.” These psychological strategies are used by the unconscious mind to manipulate, deny, or distort one’s conception of reality as a defense against feelings of anxiety and unacceptable impulses, and to maintain one's self-esteem and self-respect.

The workings of an “unripe ego” can be classified into three levels.

Level I: Pathological defenses include delusional projection and psychotic denial. They are commonly found in overt psychosis leading to maladaptive behaviour where the physical or mental health of the individual is adversely affected.

Level II: Immature defenses such as acting out, fantasy, passive aggression, and projection. They are employed to lessen distress and anxiety produced by threatening people or uncomfortable circumstances. These immature defenses can lead to serious problems in a person's ability to cope effectively.

Level III Neurotic defenses include displacement, dissociation, intellectualization, reaction formation, and repression. They are fairly common in adults. Their short-term benefits in coping, can lead to long-term problems in personal relationships, work, and in enjoying life. When a person is not happy with themselves they are apt to compensate through boasting or being hypercritical of others.

Corresponding to a “ripe ego” is Level IV: Mature defenses like sublimation and altruism. These virtuous behavioral patterns optimize success in human society and personal relationships, bringing about happiness and a feeling of control.⁸²

In section 2 of Chapter XII, it is explained how properly defined the following procedures can be usefully employed by the ripe ego for self-development: acting out, devaluation, displacement, emotional insulation, flight into reality, idealization, identification, incorporation, intellectualization, isolation, projection, reaction formation, regression, splitting, sublimation, substitution, superiority complex, suppression, transference, turn against self, undoing, and withdrawal. Some ego defense mechanism like avoidance of certain people can be mature or immature depending on the circumstances.

The Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937) of Vienna, Austria defined a Superiority Complex as a defense mechanism that a person develops in an attempt to overcome a feelings of inferiority. A person can develop a Superiority Complex if they failed to achieve their personal goals or to live up to their internal expectations. A better approach is not to strive for personal superiority by belittling others, but to achieve personal ambition and success through hard work. Contra Adler, modern psychological studies have found that some people exhibit a Superiority Complex having an overly high opinion of themselves that is not related to a feeling of inferiority. “Illusory superiority” involves overestimating ones positive qualities and abilities and underestimating ones negative qualities, relative to others. These people have an inflated opinion of their own abilities, characteristics, and behavior patterns. Egotism is often characterized by self-promotion, being arrogant and boastful with a grandiose sense of their own self-importance. They are apt to look upon other people as inferiors.⁸³

Persona (mask) is Carl Jung’s term for the outward impression a person conveys to impress other people. Being concerned with what people think of them, it can conceal the true nature of the person.

Persona is a defense mechanism if it is unconsciously used by the person so they will have a positive opinion of themselves and not realize their own personal shortcomings. The ideal persona a devotee should strive to create is a replica of their true authentic self.⁸⁴

A mind under the domination of the ego is interested in placating their self-esteem and not in truthfulness. An unripe ego is doubt a major cause of irrationality and harsh treatment of others. Some people do not realize how many of their ideas come from their ego and not from reason. One should avoid the tamasic maya of being hypercritical that often leads to personal misfortunes. Meditation can make a person overly aware of other people’s shortcomings causing

them to be hypercritical. To overcome hypercriticism it is best practice “melioem partem,” meaning to evaluate other people you know in the best possible light.

In the Kaliyuga (Iron Age) the ego is the basic cause of individual and group

People view a circumstance from the own personal or group standpoint rather than having empathy for the other persons or groups point of view. From the group-centric perspective they evaluate circumstances from the standpoint of their age, economic status, ethnicity, gender, occupation, political views, geographical region, religion, etc.

By egoism we do not mean the egotism of self-glorification, but the identification with a particular mind-body complex. Egoism is good if it makes a person want to improve themselves.

For more on this subject see: *Swami Vivekananda on Religious, Ethical, and Psychological Practices*, Ch. III. Karma Yoga, Good Works, and Moral Activity, Section 7. Avoid Egotism, Selfishness, and Pride (Hubris).

5. Truthfulness

Sri Ramakrishna told his followers, “Whoever holds to truth in word, thought, and action is blessed by the vision of God who is Truth itself.... One who observes truth for twelve years in thought, word, and deed reaches a state in which whatever he resolves comes true.” “Unless one always speaks the truth, one cannot find God Who is the soul of truth.” “It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga. If a man clings tenaciously to truth, he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses everything. If by chance I say that I will go to the pine-grove, I must go there even if there is no further need for it, lest I lose my attachment to truth.” “God can be realized through truth alone.”⁸⁶ Swami Saradananda wrote that, “The sages of the Upanishads say that the thoughts of illumined souls are true. In other words, any ideas that arise in their minds are found to be objectively factual and not otherwise. We could never have believed these words had we not seen through repeated tests how the exalted Master's wishes became reality.” “The Master used to say: ‘One who has steadfast love for truth attains the God of truth. The Divine Mother never allows the words of one who adheres to truth to become untrue.’”⁸⁷ Ramakrishna further affirmed, “Never does an untruth escape my lips,” indicating that his teachings are without blemish.⁸⁸

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) a monastic disciple of Ramakrishna’s emphasized, “No one can find peace if he hurts another. Never utter one word that would hurt another. Tell the truth, but never tell a harsh truth.”⁸⁹

As stated by Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938) a monastic disciple of Ramakrishna, “Just follow the maxim which you have read in the copy books-- namely, ‘Always follow the truth’.... Only the realization of Atman, the ultimate Truth behind all things, will give us everlasting peace.... Deviations from truth will surely hamper realization of God. God is truth and to realise Him you have to be completely truthful.... But know it to be the last word that to realize God you have to be wholly truthful in thought, word, and deed.... Truth must be strictly adhered to; that is the beginning and the end of religion. [In order to come nearer to God] you have to adhere to truth and have to be steadfast in this respect. The mind and the tongue must become one. And your action should be in harmony with your speech. And always speak the truth. God is Truth, and to realize Him you have to be completely truthful, in your words and deeds. Hold fast to the way of truth, do harm to no one, and God will draw you to His sheltering care. Truth must be adhered to very strictly. There should be complete harmony between preaching and practice. What comes out of your lips has to be acted upon.”⁹⁰

Swami Satprakashananda (1888-1979) of the Ramakrishna Order in St. Louis answered the question, “What does Jesus Christ mean by worshipping God ‘in truth?’ It apparently refers to the worshipper's inner attitude. Worshipping God in truth, not in falsehood, is worshipping with full faith or with as much faith and devotion as you can command. You should worship God sincerely, in spite all your limitations and drawbacks. The one test of sincerity is that you worship God for His sake alone. To worship God for some kind of personal gain, some transitory possession or pleasure, here or hereafter, is not worshipping God with sincerity. To pray to God for help in the time of distress, and then to forget Him when the calamity passes away is not sincere worship either. One should worship God because He is the one source of all love, all joy, all freedom, all wisdom, all beauty, all strength.... ‘Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’ can also be interpreted in a general sense. Truth means reality, and is not necessarily truth about the Incarnation of God. If we understand truth in a very general sense, it can mean the ultimate Reality, the Supreme Truth. When you know the Supreme Truth, you become free in every sense. There is no other way to complete freedom.”⁹¹

Equating moral action with truth, according too two editors of his book, “Recalling that any action which is morally right is a good action and that every good action ‘does the truth,’ Anselm [of Canterbury] (1033-1109) is able to maintain that when someone does a morally right action, he is thereby ‘telling the

truth.’ When he does a morally wrong action, he is thereby ‘telling a lie’.... we ordinarily say that an action ought to be done—or, by Anselmian reasoning, that it is true when it is morally upright. Thus, as a proposition is true by virtue of coinciding with what is the case, an action is true by virtue coinciding with what ought (morally) to be the case.”⁹²

Thomas Aquinas comprehended that, “The truth of the Divine intellect is immutable” and eternal. An individual is truthful to the degree that they conform to the truth of the Divine intellect. God “is the highest and first truth itself.... The truth of our intellect is according to its conformity with its source, that is to say, the thing from which it receives knowledge. The truth also of a thing is according to their conformity with their source, the Divine intellect.” “The Divine intellect is the measure of things, since each thing has truth in it, in so far as it is like the

Some people do not realize that to be an objective creative thinker, truthfulness is an extremely important virtue that has been stressed by people like Bertrand Russell (1872-1970). He emphasized one should go by the facts, not what you want to believe or what you think would be the most socially beneficial.⁹⁴ Without a well-developed sense of truthfulness, the thinker is bound at times to deceive themselves and make mistakes. If you are on the right side you should always go with the truth.

The “yoga of truthfulness” is vital because without it, entering into a subjective meditative world a person is apt to distort things. With an expansion of their imagination, they might develop delusions of grandeur, overrate their spiritual achievements; or develop paranoia thinking other people are out to persecute them.

We think of truthfulness as stating what you think is the case, though there is a possibility of being wrong. Ramakrishna refers to a higher state of truthfulness which he attained, that is whatever he stated was the truth, there was no error of miscalculation. If Ramakrishna said he was going to do something, to be truthful he would go out of his way to do it, even if circumstances had changes and it was an inconvenience.

Untruthfulness is a defense mechanism that protects the ego from criticism.

A truthful person is not a hypocrite who: a) claims to have moral standards or beliefs to which their own behavior does not conform. b) criticizes other people for faults that they themselves possess, or c) claims to be activated by a motive other than their real motive.

For more on this subject see: *Swami Vivekananda on Religious, Ethical, and Psychological Practices*, III. Karma Yoga, Good Works, and Moral Activity, Section 8. Truthfulness.

6. Overcoming Anger

Indian: “Rage and lust; the ravenous, the deadly: recognize these: they are your enemies” (BG* 3:37, p. 57; cf. 16:21; LM 6:92). “He who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger ... is a happy man (BG 5:23).

Old Testament: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty” (Prov. 16:32). New Testament “For the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God” (Jam. 1:20; cf. Mt. 5:22; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8).

On this subject Sri Ramakrishna stated, “Anger and lust cannot be destroyed. Turn them toward God.” “Repeat His name and sin will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on.” “It is not lust alone that one should be afraid of in the life of the world. There is also anger. Anger arises when obstacles are placed in the way of desire.” “The fire of knowledge at first destroys the enemies of spiritual life as passions, anger, and so forth.”⁹⁵ “Lust, anger, and the other passions cannot exist after the vision of God.” “You must reason when you are overcome by lust, anger, or grief.” “Another characteristic of *tamas* is anger. Through anger one loses one’s wits and cannot distinguish between right and wrong.”⁹⁶

Swami Abhedananda stressed, “Every reaction, in the form of hatred or evil, is so much loss to the mind. Every evil thought or deed of hatred, or any thought of reaction, if it is controlled, will be in our favour. Every time you have a destructive method or evil thought, you are using up so much of the energy. You should remember that your mental energy has a limit.... But if you waste a portion of that energy, so much of that energy is lost to you, and, therefore, you should learn to save it and conserve it. Every evil thought requires so much of energy. The stronger your hatred towards anybody, so much more energy you are spending. How much more beneficial it would be, if you can store that energy and utilize it towards good. Then you will not have wasted that much energy.... It is not that we lose by thus restraining ourselves. If, instead of sending revengeful reaction, we control, we are not losing anything by it, but we are gaining. We are gaining infinitely more than we suspect. Each time we suppress hatred or feeling of anger, or any other passion, it is so much good energy stored up in our, favour, and that energy will be converted into higher powers.”⁹⁷

Thomas Aquinas noted, “Anger is an effect of sorrow. For when sorrow is inflicted upon someone, there arises within him a desire of the sensitive appetite to repel this injury brought upon himself or others. Hence anger is a passion composed of sorrow and the desire for revenge. Now it was said that sorrow could be in Christ. As to the desire of revenge it is sometimes with sin—that is, when anyone seeks revenge beyond the order of reason; and in this way anger cannot be in Christ, for this kind of anger is called sinful anger. Sometimes however this desire is without sin—indeed it is praiseworthy—for example, when anyone seeks revenge according to the order justice, and this is called zealous anger.”⁹⁸

One of the best ways to overcome anger is to see the good in things, and avoid tamasic hypercriticism of other people, since that puts the mind in a negative, unhappy, hostile, and paranoiac state.

Vedanta and Judeo-Christianity agree that anger should be controlled, since it is often motivated by the desire to bring harm to another person. Anger is roused by the ego and can cause people to make all kind of irrational statements and engage in unreasonable acts.

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