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III. Karma Yoga, Good Works, and Moral Activity

1. Karma Yoga

Indian: “He who works without attachment, resigning his actions to Brahman, is untainted by sin” (BG 5:10; cf. 3:30; 9:27; 18:57). “Devote yourself to works which will please me. For, my working for my sake only, you will achieve perfection” (BG* 12:10, p. 129; cf. 11:55, p. 127). “A man will reach perfection if he does his duty as an act of worship to the Lord” (BG* 18:46, p. 169; cf. 2:48; 3:9).

Old and New Testament: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt. 12:50; Mk. 3:35; Lk. 8:21). “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40). “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17; 15:10). “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men” (Col. 3:23; cf. Prov. 16:3; Rom. 12:11). “He who does the will of God abides for ever” (1 Jn. 2:17; cf. Dt. 5:32; Ps. 127:1).

It was recognized by Jiva Goswami (c. 1511-96) that if one’s daily undertakings are offered to the Lord, they are transformed into acts of devotion. “All works offered to God, and all desireless specific works are prompted by sattva. All works prompted by the desire for their fruits are actuated by rajas. All acts of cruelty are prompted by tamas” “A devotee should offer all bodily, vocal and mental actions, and actions done through the sense-organs, mind, and intellect to God.... A person should offer whatever he does, whatever he eats, whatever he gives in charity, whatever sacrifice he performs, and whatever penances he undergoes, to

God.... The fruits of desireless works are never destroyed; they never entail any sins of omission. Desireless works save the agent from the fear of birth and death even if they are performed a little.”¹ “The offering of works to God is an aid to devotion, and consequently, such works are said to generate devotion,” and purify the mind.²

Swami Vivekananda’s “Practical Vedanta” emphasizes the spiritual efficacy of work and action that is necessary for the progress of both the individual and the society. Serving one’s neighbor is a way of worshipping Brahman-God. On the subject of karma yoga he observed, “In helping the world we help ourselves. The main effect of work done for others is to purify ourselves. By means of the constant effort to do good to others we are trying to forget ourselves; this forgetfulness of self is the one great lesson we have to learn in life.... The more intently you think of the well-being of others, the more oblivious of self you become.... Thus it is that doing good to others constitutes a way, a means of revealing one’s own Self or Atman. Know this also to be one of the spiritual practices, a discipline for God-realization. Its aim also is Self-realization. Exactly as that aim is attained by Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and so on, also by work for the sake of others.”³

In August 1896, Swami Vivekananda wrote to Alasinga the new editor of the *Brahmavadin* journal telling him, “Entire devotion to the cause, knowing that your SALVATION depends upon making the *Brahmavadin* a success. Let this paper be your Ishtadevata then you will see how success comes.”⁴ This teaching is totally unique, that the *Brahmavadin* and not a Personal God like Rama or Krishna or the Divine Mother should be his Ishtadevata [Chosen Ideal or Deity]. This is the ultimate form of karma yoga. Also implied is that Alasinga should meditate on (raja yoga), feel devotion for (bhakti yoga), and have knowledge of (jnana yoga) the activities concerning the *Brahmavadin*. If we think of an event as composed of action (karma), thought (jnana), feeling (bhakti), and will (raja), then each yoga involves all four with an emphasis on one of them. For example, jnana yoga focuses on thought, but at the same time it deals with action, feeling, and will.

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna realized that one cannot devote their time entirely to meditation, so they must work. Whatever activity you are engaged in, keep your mind on the Lord. “Learn to work for the Lord instead of working for yourself. Know that you are worshiping the Lord through your work. If you can work with this attitude, work will not bind you; on the

contrary, it will improve you in every way, physically, mentally, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Offer yourself, body and soul, to the Lord. Give yourself entirely to him. Say to him: 'I give myself, body and soul, to you, O Lord. Do with me what you will. I am your servant, ready to serve you to the best of my ability.' If you can really do this, the responsibility for your spiritual well-being rests with him." "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."⁵ Salute or bow down to the Lord when you begin and end each task. Work with faith [shraddha], dependent on Brahman (God), detached and in a spirit of renunciation. You will feel no attachment to the fruits of your work, if you perform every action as a worship of Brahman. However, it must be realized that "it is hard to do work as worship" unless the devotee meditates regularly.⁶

The conclusion reached by his brother monastic Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) is, "The works of our daily lives will be transformed into acts of worship when we have learnt to offer their results to the supreme Lord of the universe and this can be accomplished by any man or woman engaged in any kind of profession or business."⁷ "If we are mentally offering the results of our works that we have performed, we would not accept any of the credit, because we would think that all the credit goes to the Lord. Christ never received any credit for himself, but when anybody praised him, he said: 'Praise the Father.' That is the ideal. Christ set the example.... Let us give all credit to the source of all power and all intelligence and all knowledge God, for the good works we have done.... Give praise to the Lord, and do not try to take credit for all the praise that is poured upon you, if you are living a good life, but let all praise go to the Lord, and you will become humble, meek and gentle, and you will be the salt of the earth." God "is the source of everything in the universe, then all the activities that are manifested by our minds and bodies, are the activities or expressions of the forces that are coming from God Himself."⁸ Each night before retiring, offer the results of your deeds to the Lord to be free of their karmic effects. Then your daily activities will be sublimated into acts of worship. Even the most menial forms of work should be viewed as acts of worship. Expecting rewards for your labors often brings disappointment and frustration. True worship means emulating the righteous path of the great souls. Desire to help the downtrodden by serving the Lord in them.⁹ "In all the scriptures of the world, charity is considered to be one of the greatest virtues. In trying to help others, we

not only help others, but we help ourselves. We rise above the plane of selfishness.”¹⁰

As the German born Catholic Ursula King, Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol, England sees it, Vivekananda widened the traditional idea of karma yoga to include not only ritual and dharmic deeds, but all aspects of human activity. Emphasis is on all forms of work and social service. It provides a religiously motivated work ethic, a “Practical Vedanta” that stresses the necessity and spiritual usefulness of work.¹¹

Concerning the *Bhagavad Gita*, Swami Tapasyananda of the Ramakrishna Order tells us, “If an action has to conform to the *Gita* standard, it has to be desireless, dispassionate, and dedicated to the Divine. Desirelessness here means that the action is not motivated by selfish gain. An action can be dispassionate only if it is not preceded or succeeded by disturbances of passions like greed, hatred, jealousy, and the rest. Complete self-mastery is necessary for this.” Swami Vireswarananda (1892-1985) President of the Ramakrishna Order adds, “Worshipping Him [God] through one’s own duties, by performing work for the Lord and by dedicating it to Him, one attains liberation. From Him proceeds the activity of all beings. He is the ultimate source of all power and as such He is the agent; we are but tools in His hand, mere machines. As he directs us, so we do. He is the inner Ruler directing all; failing to see this, we think that we are doing all actions and get ourselves bound. Through devotion man ultimately realizes this fact, surrenders himself to the Lord, works out His will and thus becomes absolutely unattached. There is no more compulsion to perform duties; nay, there is no idea even of duty, and the devotee does what is expected of him spontaneously, out of love for God” (BG 2: 47; 3:19-20, 25; 5:10; 6:1; 12:10, 18:46).¹²

In traditional karma yoga, the focus of concentration is on being detached from the fruits of one’s actions. This approach relates to some extent to the ethical system worked out in Athens, Greece by Zeno the Stoic (c. 340-265 B.C.), according to tradition a fourth generation member of the Socratic School of Philosophy (The guru line from Socrates to Antisthenes to Diogenes to Crates to Zeno). He developed a system of ethics whereby the actor should be free of passions, psychologically unmoved by joy or grief. For the Stoic, happiness does not come from the various enjoyments of the external world, which he has overcome by mastering himself, his passions, and emotions. Vivekananda’s emphasis is

somewhat different and more positive, whereby the goal of karma yoga is to compassionately work for the benefit of other people without any selfish motives and intensions.

A 17th Century Church official who recognized in Lawrence “the beauty of holiness” wrote, “Brother Lawrence (c. 1611-91) had always been guided by love, without any other self-interest, and he did not worry about whether he would be damned or saved. The goal of all his actions was to do them for the love of God. He found great satisfaction in doing this. He was even content to pick up one straw from the ground for the love of God. He looked for God alone and nothing else, not even his gifts.... He always spoke to God whenever an occasion arose to do virtuous acts, saying to Him, ‘My God, I would not know how to do that if You did not enable me do it.’ Immediately he was given strength and beyond.”¹³ Lawrence emphasized we should feel the presence of God while undertaking all of our duties and converse humbly with Him. Make the love of God the end of all of your activities. “We must apply ourselves continually to the end that all our actions may be little spontaneous conversations with God, coming from purity and simplicity of heart.... As we carry out our duties, we must work gently, tranquilly and lovingly with God, asking Him to accept our labor.... Since you are not unmindful of the fact that God is present before you as you carry out your duties, and you know that He is at the depth and center of your soul, why not stop from time to time, whatever you are doing—even if you are praying aloud—to adore Him inwardly, to praise Him, to beseech Him, to offer heart to Him, and to thank Him?” Brother Lawrence was a remarkable karma yogin since for many decades he continually felt the presence of God while performing the most ordinary of tasks of cooking and cleaning and later of repairing sandals. He did not have to be motivated by engaging in import work to reach this state.¹⁴

The American Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) developed a systematic “Social Gospel” theology, centered around the idea of the bringing about of the Kingdom of God on earth. He had this to say, “The purpose of all that Jesus said and did and hoped to do was always the social redemption of the entire life of the human race on earth.... Christianity set out with a great social ideal. The life substance of the Christian religion was the hope of seeing a divine social order established on earth.” “A theological God who has no interest in the conquest of justice and fraternity is not a Christian. It is not enough for theology to eliminate this or that autocratic trait. Its God must join the

social movement.... The development of a Christian social order would be the highest proof of God's saving power. The failure of the social movement would impugn his existence.”¹⁵ Over time the Kingdom of God, which is the earthly manifestation of the heavenly society, is progressively manifesting as the dominant force in history. We must Christianize the social order by bringing society in conformity with the precepts of Jesus. Realization of the Kingdom of God through a moral reconstruction requires a new view of the church's relation to the social structure and the historical process. In the future, the church will take a leading role in overcoming evil and bringing about a redemption of humanity, by creating the proper social and political environment.¹⁶

One of the pioneers of Western psychology Alfred Adler (1870-1937) of Austria taught there is the need for an individual to expand beyond their limited self and to identify with the larger community, where they can attain a sense of belonging. The development of their unique character and emotions depends on the relationship they have with the community. Striving for accomplishment empowers a person to overcome obstacles, gain strength and status, and conquer self-doubts. Mentally healthy people strive towards realistic goals that are of useful social significance.¹⁷ “All failures—neurotics, psychotics, criminals, drunkards, problem children, suicides, perverts, and prostitutes are failures because they are lacking in social interest.... The meaning they give to life is a private meaning. No one else is benefited by the achievement of their aims, and their interest stops short at their own persons. Their goal of success is a goal of personal superiority, and their triumphs have meaning only to themselves.... [On the other hand] life presents only such problems as require ability to cooperate for their solution. To hear, see, or speak ‘correctly,’ means to lose one's self completely in another or in a situation, to become identified with him or with it. The capacity for identification, which alone makes us capable of friendship, love of mankind, sympathy, occupation, and love, is the basis of social interest and can be practiced and exercised only in conjunction with others. In this intended assimilation to another person or to a situation lies the whole meaning of comprehension.... Social interest remains throughout life. It becomes differentiated, limited, or expanded and, in favorable cases, extends not only to family members but to the larger group, to the nation, to all of mankind. It can even go further, extending itself to animals, plants, and inanimate objects and finally even to the cosmos.... When social interest has been from the first instilled into the upward strivings of the psyche, it acts with automatic certainty, coloring every thought and

action. Where this automatized social feeling is deficient, the individual's interest is too self-centered, and he feels that he is impotent or a nobody. All his other feelings are [then] more or less directly connected with this [social] feeling.... It is almost impossible to exaggerate the value of an increase in social feeling. The mind improves, for intelligence is a communal function. The feeling of worth and value is heightened, giving courage and an optimistic view, and there is a sense of acquiescence in the common advantages and drawbacks of our lot. The individual feels at home in life and feels his existence to be worthwhile just so far as he is useful to others and is overcoming common, instead of private, feelings of inferiority.”¹⁸ Alfred Adler established a number of counseling centers in Austria. He inspired Albert Ellis who developed the earliest cognitive-based psychotherapy, known today as rational emotive behavior therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy’s purpose is to change people’s cognitive distortions dealing with thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes and their behavior patterns.¹⁹

In his religious textbook Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) a President of the Calvin Theological Seminary summarized, “The following are the characteristics of works that are spiritually good: (1) They are the fruits of a regenerate heart, since without this no one can have the disposition (to obey God) and the motive (to glorify God) that is required. (2) They are not only in external conformity with the law of God, but are also done in conscious obedience to the revealed will of God, that is, because they are required by God. They spring from the principle of love to God and from the desire to do His will. (3) Whatever their proximate aim may be, their final aim is not the welfare of man, but the glory of God, which is the highest conceivable aim of man’s life.” Virtuous actions are possible as a consequence of the strength of God that is imparted to the doer.²⁰

Edward Koehler (1875-1951) an American Lutheran theologian wrote, “It is the attitude of the heart that determines the ethical value of a work. The only motive recognized by God is selfless love, love of God. Such love is the fruit of faith, and is, therefore, found in believers only. They that believe in Christ are careful to maintain good works. The regenerate are inwardly qualified to do good works, and they will do them; their light of faith will shine forth in many good works. ‘As long as a man is not regenerate, and conducts himself according to the Law and does the works because they are commanded thus, from fear of punishment or desire for reward, he is still under the Law, and his works are called by Paul properly the works of the Law.... But when a man is born anew by the Spirit of God, and liberated from the Law, that is, free from the driver, and

led by the Spirit of Christ, he lives according to the immutable will of God.”²¹

The Peruvian Christian Liberation theologians and field worker Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928) also considered humanitarian work to be a religious experience. “For many Christians a commitment to liberation [of the oppressed] does come down to being an authentic spiritual experience in the original and biblical sense of the term. It means living in and by the Spirit ... Only through concrete acts of love and solidarity can we effectively realize our encounter with the poor and the exploited and, through them, with Jesus Christ.”²²

Karma yoga involves secular work that is aimed to reach the sacred goal of liberation-salvation. It begins as rajas and properly performed lead to sattva. Actions are judged by three things: (1) the person's intent, (2) the circumstances of the act, and (3) the nature of the act. The virtues of a Karma Yogin include:

Active: motivated, energetic, persistent, enthusiastic, courageous, integrity.

Mental: innovative, prudent, open-minded, desire to learn, curious.

Social: friendly, appreciate others, kind, humble, self-control, compassionate, humor.

Organizational: group oriented, leadership, fairness.²³

Karma Yoga is also determined by the nature of the work performed. If one is doing the Lord's work as Alasinga was doing, then this selfless action is a form of worship of Brahman (God). Vivekananda said, “He can raise His workers from the dust by hundreds and thousands. It is a glory and a privilege that we are allowed to work at all under Him.”²⁴

Ethics and morality are an important aspect of the Vedanta Philosophy and it is through karma yoga that they can be expressed. According to the “Attribution Theory” (Behavioral Observation Accounts) of Daryl Bem of Cornell University, we come to understand our own attributes, feelings, and other internal states, partially by inferring them from our own overt behavior. For example, if we attend religious services regularly, meditate, and/or partake in religious ritual and enjoy it, then we think of ourselves as being a religious person. Self-identity as to our basic nature and characteristics is largely a function of the activities we participate in.²⁵ Our judgment of what and who we are is related to what we do. It is a great boon to do the Lord's work. Great benefit comes if it is performed with the correct attitude.

No matter what form of yoga they prefer, the Swamis of the Order are involved in some type of karma yoga. People differentiate between karma yoga (work) and bhakti yoga (devotion). But many people express their devotion through work as well as emotion and a feeling of love. A devotee feels love for his guru or a religious organization, or a husband for his wife and this can be expressed by working for them. For a functionary of the religion, karma yoga is very important since they devote so much of their time working for the organization.

Most people perform their duties as “works of the law.” They are motivated by following the prescriptive normative moral law that when applied to our actions act as causes producing certain effects. These effects are determined by the descriptive empirical law of karma. Working through the laws of nature, performance of moral acts by believers (in Brahman-God) and by nonbelievers alike often produce good results, and are beneficial for their character development. Good acts are undertaken to gain desirable rewards, or out of a sense of duty to friends, family, country, etc. On a higher level, the Christian “Works of Faith” (James 2:14-26) carried out in a spirit of humility, and faith and love of God, correspond to the Indian idea of karma yoga, of working as service to the Lord. We prove our faith through our actions. Properly performed these acts yield the grace of Brahman-God that transcends the laws of nature.²⁶

When doing any work for the Vedanta Society it is best to be motivated by a sense of duty (Deontology Ethics). For example, the disciples of an Avatara are motivated by the feeling that it is their duty to maximize their spiritual potential and to help other people. *Ceteris paribus* (all other things being equal), the more a person feels a sense of duty the more useful they are to the Ramakrishna Order. We think and feel this way because we believe our actions are good and will benefit other people. This approach is good-in-itself when it produces good consequences for others and happiness for ourself. In helping others we are benefiting ourself. It is important that our motives be rationally determined and based on love, not on selfishness.

We should not only consider the religious work we are doing, but also the positive effect it is having on us. Morality is pursued because we feel it is something we ought to do, that it is based on a good will, and it will lead to a desirable end such as the betterment of society, increased human sympathy, etc.

The Lord works through different kinds of people. They might not impress others with charisma or have strong social skills or a charming

persona, but the important things they are willing to do devote many years doing the work assigned to them. They work for the Lord and not for self-glorification. Karma yogins do what they think is the best thing to do in spite of criticisms from other people. They are willing to take risks, in spite of the possibility of failing.

Make Brahman-God both the goal of existence, and the vehicle by which it is attained, so they become identical. As the action concentrates on Brahman-God, so does the mind. Karma yoga involves doing as a means of acquiring knowledge of Brahman-God. Action is more than an externally mechanical process. It also depends upon the inner desire, the intention for which the action is on normally could be expected from such action. This way the person remains detached from their activities that aids in the liberation process. Following the path of Karma Yoga actions are performed with the spirit of selfless service as a servant of Brahman-God, surrendering oneself to and offering the fruit of such actions to Him/Her. As a devotee of Brahman-God, the karma yogin surrenders their will, ego, desires, and attachments, with the firm belief that the Lord is the doer in all actions and we are the instruments. The devotee strives to have complete trust in the Lord.²⁷

2. Good Works

Indian: “It [the soul] becomes virtuous through virtuous action, and evil through evil action” (Br. Up. 4:4.5). “A man who does his work without attachment attains the Supreme” (BG 3:19; cf. 20). “The act of sacred duty, done without attachment ... by him who has no care for the fruit of his action: That act is of sattva” (BG* 18:23, p. 163). “Man attains high perfection by devotion to his own duty” (BG 18:45; cf. 2:33; 12:4).

New Testament: “That they may see your good works” (Mt. 5:16; cf. Lk. 17:10; 2 Cor. 9:8; Tit. 2:14). “For God is not so unjust to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints” (Heb. 6:10). “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.... faith apart from works is dead” (Jam. 2:24, 26).

Give to others. Indian: “Whatever you give to others, give with love and reverence. Gifts must be given in abundance with joy, humility, and compassion” (Tait. Up.* 1:11.3, p. 82; cf. Br. Up. 5:2.3). “A gift may be regarded as proceeding from sattva [goodness] when it is given to a deserving person, at a suitable time, and in a fit place” (BG* 17:20, pp.

157-58). “Practice according to his ability, with a cheerful heart, the duty of liberality, both by sacrifice and by charitable works ... let him always give something, be it ever so little, without grudging” (LM 4:227-28; cf. 4:31-32, 229-35; 7:82-86; 11:1-6). New Testament: “The measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Mt. 7:2; cf. Mk. 4:24; Lk. 6:38). “But when you give alms ... so that your alms may be in secret” (Mt. 6:3-4). “By so toiling one must help the weak ... It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35; cf. Mt. 10:42; Mk. 9:41; 2 Cor. 9:7, 11).

Traditional Indian epic literature like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* describe historical personalities, men and women who possessed extraordinary moral character, and have served as role models for the Indian people for thousands of years. “Hindu ethics would not have had such an abiding hold on such a vast country, if Brahmanical literature had not immortalized certain ideal types of character in its heroes and heroines.” Particular moral virtues like generosity, compassion, truthfulness, heroism, chastity, self-sacrifice, forbearance and brotherly affection embodied in these historical figures, have had an ennobling effect on the people of India for centuries.²⁸ Ordinary people are influenced more by the living examples of noble people, than by abstract metaphysical principles. As stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Whatever a great man does, ordinary people will imitate; they follow his example” (BG* 3:21, p. 55).

“In the Nyaya, and in later Vaishesika thought [450-900], God is invested with absolute moral perfection and is the supreme executive authority of the moral law ... the Divine Will, insofar as it is the spontaneous manifestation of the objective law of reason, acts as the impersonal moral law (dharma) whereby the merits and demerits of the human selves are directed to produce their appropriate results. It is therefore in His capacity as the moral law that God is conceived as the supreme judge of the moral quality of action, and, consequently, as the apportioner of happiness or misery in keeping with the individual nature. It is this law of perfect rationality, when viewed in relation to human selves, that comes to be looked upon as the moral imperative (niyoga), and God in his perfection as its eternal source, its supreme authority and custodian.”²⁹

Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) concluded that moral behavior and good works are valuable aids in attaining the self-realization of Brahman,

which is the absolute good. “If you really desire liberation, hold the objects of sense-enjoyment at a distance, like poison; and keep drinking in with delight such virtues as contentment, compassion, forgiveness, straightforwardness, tranquility and self-control, as if they were nectar.”³⁰

Morality is the law of our higher self (Atma-dharma), which is necessary for attaining the supreme good. Moral actions aid an aspirant in realizing God, and bad actions retard their progress toward this goal. Good deeds help an individual to free themselves from the bondage of past sins.

“Sattva is purity ... when mixed with the other gunas, has these characteristics: absence of pride, purity, contentment, austerity, a desire to study the scriptures, self-surrender to God, harmlessness, truthfulness, continence, freedom from greed, faith, devotion, longing for liberation, aversion to the things of this world, and the other virtues that lead toward God.”³¹ “The religion of work [karma yoga] ... when practiced in a spirit of complete devotion to the Lord without regard to the (immediate) results, it conduces to the purity of the mind. The man whose mind is pure is competent to tread the path of knowledge, and to him comes knowledge; and thus (indirectly) the religion of works forms also a means to the Supreme Bliss.”³²

The idea expressed by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) is that work properly performed (Karma Yoga), is a form of worship and a high religious ideal. “The Karma-Yogi's renunciation is in the shape of giving up all the fruits of his action; he is not attached to the results of his labour; he does not care for any reward here or hereafter.”³³ Cultivate the attitude of serving the Lord, working in a spirit of humility and selfless devotion while being detached from the ego. Work unselfishly with the purpose of doing good to others and this will make you happy. Perform your duties immersed in mental concentration, free from any personal motive. “Yet we must do good; the desire to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others.... be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect.” “Work for work’s sake. There are some who are really the salt of the earth in every country and who work for work’s sake, who do not care for name, or fame, or even to go to heaven. They work just because good will comes of it. There are others who do good to the poor and help mankind from still higher motives, because they believe in doing good and love good.”³⁴

The goal to strive for is the spiritual state of complete self-abnegation. Working for others will arouse innate power and strength in us. So that we can help ourself, the Lord allows us to perform beneficial duties.³⁵ He added, “the immoral remain weak” and can never “raise themselves intellectually, much less spiritually.”³⁶

It was discerned by Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) that because God is the first and highest cause and the sovereign good, all of our acts should be ordered to that spiritual end. Religious virtues are the most important moral precepts, since they are an aid in attaining salvation (liberation), which is the final goal of life. “God is good, and thus the creature becomes like Him by being good.” The more the supreme good is attained, the more it is loved and the happier a person becomes.³⁷ “Moral virtues belong to the contemplative life as a predisposition. For the act of contemplation, in which the contemplative life essentially consists is hindered both by the impetuosity of the passions which withdraw the soul’s intension from intelligible to sensible things, and by outward disturbances. Now the moral virtues curb” these.³⁸ “The ultimate felicity of man does not consist in moral actions. In fact, human felicity is incapable of being ordered to a further end, if it is ultimate. But all moral operations can be ordered to something else.... [For example] the operations of justice are ordered to the preservation of peace among men.”³⁹ Aquinas mentioned that non-rational creatures exist for the sake of the perfect ordering of the universe as a whole, and also for the sake of human beings who are entrusted with the care, cultivation, and proper use of the natural world.

Augustus Strong (1836-1921) expounded, “According to the Scriptures, the ground of moral obligation is the holiness of God, or the moral perfection of the Divine nature, conformity to which is the law of our moral being.” God “is subject to no law but the law of His own nature.” “The moral perfection of the Divine nature includes truth and love, but since it is holiness that conditions the exercise of every other attribute, we must conclude that holiness is the ground of moral obligation.” To make a good act bad, or a bad act good, God would have to alter His own internal nature. Since God is supreme, the foundation of morality cannot be independent of or above Him. Human righteousness and the performance of good works are acts that conform to the nature of God.⁴⁰

The German theologian Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) of the University of Marburg stressed, “In prophetic religion the moral will and

deed are not provisional, not a mere preparation for union with God, but ‘a doing of God’s will,’ as Jesus repeatedly asserts. Morality is not cut off from religion, nor is religion dissolved away in morality ... God is not ‘the more than good’; He is the substance and source of all moral goods, the holy Will, the sovereign Legislator and Judge who demands and commands, avenges and condemns. The fulfillment of His moral requirements in the individual and social life, in purity of heart and self-discipline, in brotherly love and self-sacrifice, is just as much the service of God and intercourse with Him as faith and love and prayer. ‘Right’ and ‘righteousness’ in the *Old Testament* constitute the essence of practical religion. Paul places active love above miraculous gifts, nay, even above faith and hope.... in prophetic religion morality has a positive value. It seeks to realize God-ordained ideals which have an intrinsic value, not merely a value in view of a religious ideal.”⁴¹

The Vedanta Society places emphasis on morality that involves right action and reasoning, and the correct attitudes and intentions in our actions. It is what I ought to do based on a good will that functions to achieve a desired goal such as human welfare, etc. These actions can be properly motivated and directed toward the right ends. The role of the will is to follow the correct action that reason commands. We should be motivated by our concern for others and their welfare. Our moral acts involve participating in Brahman-God, who is both the ultimate source of goodness and the supreme standard by reference to which our acts are to be assessed.⁴² Practical application is gained by performing good acts, while theoretical learning involves reasoning and study to gain understanding.

We perform good works because they: express our love and gratitude for Brahman-God and the guru, bolster our faith in the ideals of the religion, are a way of worshipping our Chosen Ideal, encourage other devotees to work for the good of the religion, and people who do not belong to the church can see the good in it.

Religious practices such as meditation, prayer, image worship, karma yoga, renunciation, moral practices, good works involve “Learning by Doing,” a theory of education first developed by John Dewey (1859-1952). This process involves four phases: intention, active involvement, reflection, and the results. What is vital in this process is first the devotee’s self-initiative and intention to learn, to become actively involved in the experience. Second, the educative process is a growth of

experience and developing, where practice is to be understood more in active terms, as involving doing things that change one's mental outlook and objective environment. Experiential learning is an empirical activity that is concerned with acquiring knowledge and skills through observation and interaction with the environment. Third, in order to gain useful understanding from an experience, the devotee must reflect on it. Analytical skills are utilized to conceptualize the religious practices, in order that one gains a better understanding of the acquired knowledge and retains the information for a longer period of time. The reflective learning and observation phase might involve feedback from others. This process of learning can result in changes in judgment, feeling, or skills in order to make judgments as a guide to proper choice and action. The learner has an opportunity to determine what method is working or failing, and to think about ways to improve on the next attempt made at the task. Every new attempt receives benefit from the cyclical pattern of previous experience, thought, and reflection. Lastly, the goal is to put all of this into practice and obtain the desired results.⁴³

A higher ideal is a principle or value that one actively pursues as a goal. The value of one's behavior can be empirically determined by comparing it to the ideal. The closer the behavior matches up to the properties of the ideal the better it is.

Virtue ethical theories place the emphasis on character, intentions, motives, etc. To feel and act virtuously is to desire, favor, and hope to attain what is truly good for the person (or persons) who one is interacting with. Motivated by goodwill we are concerned with their well-being.⁴⁴

Following a version of the progressive "Principle of Circular Cumulation" if a devotee lives a moral life this will enhance their spiritual progress. In turn as they develop spiritually they will become more moral. Conversely, if they get away from religious disciplines their level of spirituality will regress, which will make it even more difficult to fulfill their religious duties. Personality characteristics are so interrelated that if we develop in one area that stimulates growth in other personal qualities.

Some people are misled by the Happiness (or Pleasure) Principle and make the mistake of thinking "the good" is whatever makes them happy. Good works include both morality and living a productive life. They produce good karma. If these acts are performed selfishly, the rewards of good works do not bring lasting happiness. If they are undertaken for the purpose of helping other people, the fruits of the meritorious actions will

bring joy. To attain liberation-salvation these noble acts should be performed humbly as service to the Lord. It is important to realize that good works performed with the right attitude produce auspicious mental impressions (samskaras) and habits (vasanas) that help to purify the mind and open the person up to receiving the Divine light of grace.

3. Follow Your Duty (Dharma) as Karma Yoga

Indian: “All mankind is born for perfection and each shall attain it, will he but follow his nature’s duty. Now you shall hear how a man may become perfect, if he devotes himself to the work which is natural to him. A man will reach perfection, if he does his duty as an act of worship to the Lord, who is the source of the universe” (BG* 18:45-46, p. 169; cf. 3:33). “It is better to do your own duty, however imperfectly, than to assume the duties of another person, however successfully” (BG* 3:35, p. 57; cf. 18:45, 47-48; LM 10:97).

New Testament: “Let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him.... Every one should remain in the state in which he was called” (1 Cor. 7:17, 20). “Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1).

After the early *Upanishads* were orally communicated, the Vedic concept of *rta* was greatly expanded upon and called *dharma* (duty). It consists of eternal, immutable, and impersonal laws that regulate, maintain, and uphold the universe in the cosmic and physical realms. Human dharmas pertain to societal laws, moral obligations, religious practices, social duties, and customs. Dharmas include moral obligations and duties: to be performed by all people based on values and norms like kindness, truthfulness, and so on (*sadharana-dharma*); fulfilling one’s vocational or caste duties (*varna-dharma*); uniquely individual duties (*sva-dharma*) based on the person’s essential nature (*sva-bhava*); stages of life duties (*ashrama-dharma*); and spiritual development (*Atma-dharma*). Duties are also performed toward one’s family, friends, political unit (city, nation), and groups a person belongs to.⁴⁵ *Dharma* not only deals with one’s actions but also their systems of beliefs and values. In the West *sadharana-dharma* is referred to as a Cultural Absolute that is universally applicable and correct for all people at all times.⁴⁶

The traditional Indian Ashrama-dharma system described in *The Laws of Manu* (c. 1500 B.C.) was created for males of the three highest castes. The life-cycle was divided into four stages each with corresponding ethical guidelines, duties, and responsibilities for the individual and for the society. First was Brahmacharya (student life) where young male bachelors left their families and lived for several years in the house of their guru (Gurukul). From the guru they acquired knowledge of the holy religious scriptures, science, philosophy, logic, and vocational training. The students were required to lead a very austere and disciplined life, which included the practice of celibacy, humility, non-violence, and the avoidance of anger and greed. Next was Grihastha (household life) where after leaving the guru the individual would hold a job, marry, raise a family, and be a functional part of the society. Of the four phases this was the one that most resembled modern life. He should follow the code of conduct prescribed by the Hindu law books of being honest, virtuous, modest, and mild mannered. Third came the Vanaprastha (retired life) stage where household responsibilities were handed over to the next generation. During the transition period the householder life was replaced by the forest dweller who lived in a monastic community (Ashram). Emphasis was on a life of detachment, austerity to attain moksha (spiritual liberation-salvation). It is not certain how many people advanced to this stage. Finally, came Sannyasa (renounced life) involving the renunciation of material desires by living the life of a wandering ascetic also for the purpose of obtaining moksha. Religious austerities were increased to become completely detached from worldly activities and possession. Deep meditation was practiced to awaken the inner Divine nature and to prepare the person for the higher life.⁴⁷ The book mentions virtuous and righteous people living to a hundred years of age (Manu, III:40, IV:148).

Though there is disagreement on this topic often the modern human life-cycle is divided into: Infancy (age 0-3), Childhood (age 3-12), Adolescence (age 12-18), Adulthood (age 18-65), and the Elderly (65+). More refined studies break down adolescence and adulthood into sub-categories. Erik Erikson (1902-94) (who authored an admirable biography of Mahatma Gandhi) presented eight stages of life and psychosocial development: trust in the world (age 0-18 months), autonomy and a little independence (age 18-months-age 3), initiative (age 3-5), competence and industry (age 5-12), self-identity (age 12-18), intimate relations with others (age 18-40), feelings of usefulness and accomplishment (age 40-

65), and reflection on our life (age 65-death). The goal of the final stage is a sense of contentment, and ego integrity, derived from the feeling and belief that our life was a productive success.⁴⁸ Interestingly the main purpose of retirement according to the Indian system was not to evaluate one's life, but to prepare for post-mortem existence. From a reincarnation standpoint Erikson's last stage is preparing a person to do an even better job in their next life.

Dharma is a manifestation of Brahman's (God's) will and commands based on the objective law of goodness. Goodness is unqualifiedly good based on its definition while other virtues such as knowledge may be used for bad purposes. Human dharma is a partial expression of the cosmic dharma, which if properly performed, leads to the identity of an individual with the higher reality. Dharma in its higher and most sublime form brings liberation (moksha) and harmony with the Divine reality, while the secular dharma is necessary for the well-being of society and the harmony of human events. From dharma, which is an unconditional command and moral imperative, a seeker can discover their essential Divinity. "Moksha-dharma, as the higher dharma, represents harmony with the higher reality, which is not only the source but also the inner being of the individual. The lower dharmas represent a harmony of the various aspects of manifested reality (especially social aspects) with each other. But since all beings have their source and inner being in a higher reality, there is no conflict between the social dharmas of varna and ashrama and the extra—social dharma of moksha."⁴⁹ In addition, there is Atma-dharma, which is one's duty to their Divine nature. Also there is yuga-dharma meaning that there is some variation in duty for each historical period. For example, with the advent of nuclear weapons, involvement in war takes on a different meaning than it did in the past. At this time in history, global consciousness has taken on a new meaning. In the *Mahabharata*, Karna who was brought up by a chariot driver became the king of Agra and a distinguished warrior, and Vidura the son of a maid became the minister in the kingdom of Hastinapur. Their Varna (Caste)-dharma pertained to properly fulfilling their vocational duties and position in society, and not to the status of their parents. In addition to the above mentioned, there are also family, gender, national, ethnic, religious, and other dharmas (duties) to be fulfilled.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna tells his disciple Arjuna that it is his duty as a member of the warrior caste (kshatriya) to fight in a righteous war. Born into that particular station in society, he is obliged to perform

his appropriate duties and social responsibilities. By fulfilling his vocational caste duty he will receive honor, and after death will go to heaven. If Arjuna forsakes his duty to society and refuses to fight, he will be disgraced and despised, by both those people who presently admire him and by his enemies (BG 2:31-38). The commentator John Koller explains, “Every person has his own dharma (sva-dharma) which is the innermost law of his being, which serves to regulate his conduct, his righteousness, and his very sense of right and wrong. In the *Gita* one’s sva-dharma, as his essential principle of being and function is inseparably linked up with his position in society. Thus when Arjuna, not knowing whether to fight or run, says to Krishna, ‘I am confused about dharma [duty], I beseech you, tell me the better thing to do,’ he is advised to do whatever is in accord with his nature. Krishna answers Arjuna by saying, ‘considering your own [occupational] dharma, you should not flee. For a kshatriya (warrior) nothing is better than a just war.... But if you renounce your own dharma and refuse to fight this righteous war then certainly you will incur sin’ [BG 2:33]. He must do his duty and fight. It is his dharma because he is a kshatriya, and he is a kshatriya because of his [inner] nature. In fact, acting according to one’s own nature, and thereby contributing to the order and maintenance of society, is regarded as a form of worship of God [BG 18:46].”⁵⁰ An essential aspect of sva-dharma is one’s duty to become the best person you can. A person should avoid any action that debases them and leads to their downfall.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) was formed in 2003 to serve the Hindu community defined Hindu Dharma as: Truthfulness (Satya), not injuring others (Ahimsa), being wise (Viveka), innovative (Nutana), collaborative (Sadbhavana), selflessness (Kutumbakam), and being passionate about the work they are involved in (Utsaah).⁵¹

The Prabhakara (fl. 700) Mimamsa school of philosophy taught (according Balbir Gauchhwal), “The status and authority of the *Vedas* being *sui generis* [of its own kind] they alone are regarded as competent to reveal to man the knowledge of a particular kind which to him is otherwise unattainable. Since over and above his Essential Self he also possesses a sensuous self, the law of the former as embodied in the Vedic commands presents itself to his moral consciousness as the law of duty (niyoga).... Thus, a Vedic command becomes my duty only when it is appropriated—albeit partially—as the law of my Essential Selfhood and manifested in the determination of my will.... an action to be characterized as genuinely moral must be so willed that the content and

authority of its choice are derived from no other source than from the law of duty itself.”⁵²

Swami Vivekananda brought out the point, “According to our mental constitution or the different planes of existence in which we are, duty and morality may vary. The important thing is to know that there are gradations of duty and of morality—that the duty of one state of life, in one set of circumstances will not and cannot be that of another.... What is duty for one is not duty for another.... Each duty has its own place, and according to the circumstances in which we are placed, we must perform our duties.... If a man retires from the world to worship God, he must not think that those who live in the world and work for the good of the world are not worshipping God: neither must those who live in the world, for wife and children, think that those who give up the world are low vagabonds.... Each is great in his own place, but the duty of the one is not the duty of the other.”⁵³ “It is therefore our duty to do that work which will exalt and ennoble us in accordance with the ideals and activities of the society in which we are born.”⁵⁴

D. S. Sarma (1883-1970) the Principle of Vivekananda College in Madras affirmed, “Every man has, first of all, to be true to himself, to the law of his own being. He has to achieve the best he is capable of by perfecting his own natural endowments and by making the most of the circumstances in which he is placed. It is only then that he will become an efficient servant of God and an efficient member of society.”⁵⁵ The innermost aspect of a person’s own being is called Sva-bhava (one’s essential nature). It is the inborn innate propensities and abilities of an individual determined by their karmas and mental impressions (samskaras) and habits (vasanas), which were acquired in this and prior lives. Sva-bhava determines one’s sva-dharma (personal duties), which are the specific functions that are compatible with their nature.⁵⁶

In his commentary Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) describes the ideas of John Calvin (1509-64) the French-Swiss leader of the Protestant Reformation, “Christian perfection must be realized not above and outside of, but within the sphere of the calling assigned us by God here on earth. Perfection consists neither in compliance with arbitrary human or ecclesiastical commandments, nor in the performance of all sorts of extraordinary activities. It consists in the faithful discharge of those ordinary daily duties which have been laid by God upon every man in the conduct of life. Calvin emphasizes the idea that life itself in its whole

length and breadth and depth must be a service of God.... this life and the vocation in it given us by God are a part which we have no right to abandon, but which without murmuring and impatience we must faithfully guard, so long as God Himself does not relieve us. So to view life, as a *vocatio Dei*-this is the first principle, the foundation of all moral action.... there is with God no acceptance of persons; all men are equal before Him; even the humblest and meanest workman, if he be a believer, fills a place in the Kingdom of God and stands as a colaborer with God in His presence.”⁵⁷

The famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) formulated the principle that, “The moral laws lead through the conception of the summum bonum as the object and final end of pure practical reason to religion, that is, to the recognition of all duties as Divine commands ... as essential laws of every free will in itself, which, nevertheless, must be regarded as commands of the Supreme Being, because it is only from a morally perfect (holy and good) and at the same time all-powerful will, and consequently only through harmony with this will, that we can hope to attain the summum bonum.... The moral law commands me to make the highest possible good in a world the ultimate object of all my conduct. But I cannot hope to effect this otherwise than by the harmony of my will with that of a holy and good Author of the world.... morality is not properly the doctrine how we should make ourselves happy, but how we should become worthy of happiness.”⁵⁸ Moreover, “Nothing glorifies God more than that which is the most estimable thing in the world, respect for His command, the observance of the holy duty that His law imposes on us.” “To love God means, in this sense, to like to do his commandments; to love one’s neighbour means to like to practice all duties toward him ... the moral precepts of the Gospel, exhibits the moral disposition in all its perfection, in which, viewed as an Ideal of holiness, it is not attainable by any creature, but yet is the pattern which we should strive to approach.”⁵⁹ Evil propensities are overcome by living a moral life. By means of their own efforts, a believer must make themselves worthy of receiving supernatural assistance. “It is our universal duty as men to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection”⁶⁰ Kant also advocated a “league of nations” (1795) to insure peace between nations and to uphold human rights not only for their citizens but also for foreigners.⁶¹

Based on his study of the “Protestant Ethic” of the Reformers,

particularly Calvinism of the 17th century, Max Weber (1864-1920) the brilliant German sociologist concluded, “Inner-worldly asceticism” involves an emphasis on worldly activities, meeting ones obligations to the world, as a path to salvation. God’s blessings are attained by active conduct in the secular world, and by rationally fulfilling one’s duties according to the Divine Will. The world is the creation of God, which is a medium by which an individual proves their moral worth as an instrument of the Lord.⁶² “The order of the world in which the ascetic is situated becomes for him a vocation which he must fulfill rationally. As a consequence, and although the enjoyment of wealth is forbidden to the ascetic, it becomes his vocation to engage in economic activity which is faithful to rationalized ethical requirements and which conforms to strict legality. If success supervenes upon such acquisitive activity, it is regarded as the manifestation of God’s blessing upon the labor of the pious man and of God’s pleasure with his economic pattern of life.... This type of inner-worldly asceticism included, above all, ascetic Protestantism, which taught the principle of loyal fulfillment of obligations within the framework of the world as the sole method of proving religious merit.”⁶³ An inner-worldly ascetic “has succeeded in becoming a tool of God, through rationalized ethical action completely oriented to God.... Through his rational actions in this world he is personally executing the will of God.... An unbroken unity integrating in systematic fashion an ethic of vocation in the world with assurance of religious salvation was the unique creation of ascetic Protestantism alone. Furthermore, only in the Protestant ethic of vocation does the world, despite all its creaturely imperfections, possess unique and religious significance as the object through which one fulfills his duties by rational behavior according to the will of an absolutely transcendental God.”⁶⁴ This ethic has the virtue of combining the sacred and the secular into a single coherent system.

As a broad generalization, the traits of what Weber referred to as the “Protestant Ethic” are also found in the Chinese and Japanese people. Consequently, China has shown remarkable economic prosperity particularly in the 21st century. Emphasis is on worldly activities in a secular environment, an ascetic lifestyle, hard work, and rationally fulfilling one’s duties, in an ethical manner.

Max Weber’s discussion of the “Protestant Ethic” merges sacred and secular activity. It shows many similarities with the Indian idea of Karma Yoga with its emphasis on: “self-control and obedience to the will of God.... a person’s worldly occupation was regarded as the sphere in which

he was to serve God through his dedication to his work. The man of property was to act as a steward of worldly goods, that is, to use them for some betterment rather than for luxurious enjoyment. This unlimited demand for self-discipline, self-examination, hard work, dedication to duty and one's calling ... These values promoted ascetic dedication."⁶⁵ It might be added that a person of any religion can follow the system of ethics that Weber referred to as the "Protestant Ethic." There is no doubt that inner-worldly asceticism is a valuable asset in maintaining a highly productive society. A criticism of the Protestant Ethic is that it is questionable that it is being followed today by many members of the religion.

In response to Kant, when concerned with individual and concrete forms of knowledge, power, good, and truth are we unconsciously seeking their abstract, essential, ideal, and universal counterpart? Ethically do people act for the sake of abstract universal ideals like law, duty, moral law, or the moral imperative? Or are moral actions performed to individuals and groups, within the context of personal concrete obligations and life experiences?

In sum, one should follow their calling by working hard to rationally fulfill their duties and social responsibilities because it: is a special command of Brahman-God that the Divine Will has imposed upon us (Calvin, Weber); is an act of worshiping and serving the Lord, and a path to liberation-salvation, when performed in the right manner with the correct attitude (*Bhagavad Gita*, Calvin, Weber); is beneficial to society (Calvin); exalts and ennobles us sending us Brahmanward-Godward (Vivekananda); is the way in which an individual proves their moral worth (Calvin, Weber); develops and self-actualizes one's inborn innate propensities and abilities (*Bhagavad Gita*); gives life meaning and a purpose (Calvin); and brings respect from others to people who properly fulfill their duties (*Bhagavad Gita*).

A karma yogin should think of themselves as a "servant of Brahman (God)." This requires selfless self-sacrifice of time and energy. The desired goal is to please the Lord.

To achieve success in religious life like in other things requires dedication, meaning being fully committed to some endeavor. The primary components of dedication are self-discipline, self-sacrifice, hard work, and perseverance particularly when one goes through a dry spell. You have to understand what your life goals and objectives are and to deviate from them as little as possible.

Western psychologists assume we have an enduring self that unifies our actions, thoughts, and sense perceptions. They are interested in its form or nature for each particular person. The self creates or builds a sense of Identity for itself out of its actions, sense perceptions, emotions, thoughts and memories. Hence in Sanskrit ego is called Ahamkara or "I-maker."

A social identity defines a person role and nature in terms of the meaning and expectations associated with a socially constructed group and locates where the person fits within that configuration. It determines how a person is likely to think, feel, and act. The world is like a play and each person fulfills a certain position that they and other people determine. Our role in society is determined by our life events, the way other people react to us, and our evaluation of these two factors. This includes our occupation and class position (varna-dharma) in society.

Social identity theory was developed by two social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). To gain a better understanding of the human world and to identify other people we categorize individuals by placing them in different groups. Next, we identify with groups we join or belong to that include: occupation, income level, ethnicity, nationality, religion, educational level, gender, marital status, political affiliation, etc. Group membership gives people a sense of social identity, of whom they are in relation to the social world. This may be more important than their identity as a unique individual person separate from other people. This way they have a better understanding of themselves by knowing what groups they belong to. They gain understanding of how to behave by reference to the norms of the groups they are members of. Also, important is a person's role and status within each group, which are subject to change. Their identification with a group could be short-lived or last a lifetime. Since people belong to a number of different groups they must make some changes in their thinking and behavior patterns when moving from one group to another. Some people have a preference for the groups they identify with showing in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination.⁶⁶

Personal self-identity is how people define their intrapsychic self-structure (sva-bhava) in terms of their ideals and desires. It is a set of meanings and expectations specific to a given individual that guides their behavior, determines their duties (sva-dharma), and indicates to the person who they are. This is our empirical self in the phenomenal world, not our spiritual or ideal self as being the Atman, image of God, etc.

In some cases a major obstacle for spiritual development can be caused by cultural identity brought on by cultural determinism. The culture in which we are raised influences our self-conception and self-perception and has a lifelong effect in determining the content of our emotional attachments. It is greatly encouraged through interpersonal contacts, television, the Internet, and YouTube. It is an obstacle if these attachments interfere with our spiritual advancement.⁶⁷

Vivekananda “told us of the old Sannyasin in Benares who saw him annoyed by troops of monkeys and, afraid that he might turn and run, shouted, “Always face the brute!”⁶⁸ This is the attitude we should have when dealing with the problems of daily life.

4. The Reason for Renunciation

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).

On this subject Swami Vivekananda discerned, “We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. We came to work; we are being worked.... That is the one cause of misery; we are attached, we are being caught.... If only we had the power to detach ourselves at will, there would not be any misery. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who, having the power of attaching himself

to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so.”⁶⁹ “It is the greatest manifestation of power—this tremendous restraint; self-restraint is a manifestation of greater power than all outgoing action.” “By non-attachment, you overcome and deny the power of anything to act upon you.... The sign is that good or ill fortune causes no change in his mind: in all conditions he continues to remain the same.” “The man that has practiced control over himself cannot be acted upon by anything outside; there is no more slavery for him. His mind has become free.”⁷⁰ “Until we give up the thirst after life, the strong attachment to this our transient conditioned existence, we have no hope of catching even a glimpse of that infinite freedom beyond.... If we give up our attachment to this little universe of the senses or of the mind, we shall be free immediately. The only way to come out of bondage is to go beyond the limitations of law, to go beyond causation.”⁷¹ “What is meant by renunciation? That there is only one ideal in morality: unselfishness. Be selfless. The ideal is perfect unselfishness.”⁷²

The Swami continues, “To attain this unattachment is almost a life-work, but as soon as we have reached this point, we have attained the goal of love and become free; the bondage of nature falls from us, and we see nature as she is; she forges no more chains for us; we stand entirely free and take not the results of work into consideration; who then cares for what the results may be?... Expect nothing in return. If you can invariably take the position of a giver, in which everything given by you is a free offering to the world, without any thought of return, then will your work bring you no attachment. Attachment comes only where we expect a return. If working like slaves results in selfishness and attachment, working as master of our own mind gives rise to the bliss of non-attachment.”⁷³ “Renunciation is the power of battling against these forces and holding the mind in check.... Again, the experience of the worldly-minded teaches us that sense-enjoyments are the highest ideal. These are tremendous temptations. To deny them, and not allow the mind to come to a wave form with regard to them, is renunciation.” “The Yoga which we are now considering consists chiefly in controlling the senses. When the senses are held as slaves by the human soul, when they can no longer disturb the mind, then the Yogi has reached the goal.” “It is always for greater joy that you give up the lesser.” “To deny sense-enjoyments, “and not allow the mind to come to a wave form with regard to them, is renunciation.”⁷⁴

The ultimate form of fasting was attained by Swami Vivekananda. “At the end of his life, having undertaken to go through the hot season in

Calcutta without swallowing water—and being allowed to rinse out the mouth—he found that the muscles of his throat closed, of their own accord, against the passage of a single drop, and he could not have drunk it, if he would.”⁷⁵

Swami Brahmananda informs us, “When a man has renounced all worldly cravings and regards God as his own, God is very near. Such a man binds God to him with the fetters of love. Think of him as your very own. Pray to him, "Lord, reveal yourself to me!" God cannot remain unmoved by the pleas of such a devotee. He hastens to him and takes him in his arms. Oh, how inexpressible is that joy! How boundless that bliss! Only he can know who has had that experience, compared to which all worldly pleasures seem insipid and worthless. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "He who has given up sense-enjoyments for God's sake has already covered three parts of the journey." Is it easy to renounce bodily cravings? Only if one has God's grace and has practiced severe spiritual disciplines in past lives, can he have the strength to renounce the world in this life. Purify your mind so that no worldly desire can arise in it. You have renounced everything and pledged your life to God.”⁷⁶

A monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Turiyananda (1863-1922) explains, “To humans alone is given the power to distinguish good from evil, to have control over their passions, and to become master of them all if they only desire it and try to act conscientiously and with a firm determination in that direction and, thus, free themselves. And by so freeing themselves from all bondages, they can know their real Self and serve the highest purpose of life once and for all. This is possible for human beings alone, and therefore it behooves them at least to try for that laudable end.”⁷⁷

In the following quotation Thomas Aquinas maintains, “It is impossible for any created good to constitute man’s happiness. For happiness is the perfect good, which, quiets the appetite altogether since it would not be the last end if something yet remained to be desired.... nothing can quiet man’s will except the universal good. This is to be found not in any creature, but in God alone, because every creature has goodness by participation.... The universe of creatures, to which man is related as part to whole, is not the last end, but is ordered to God, as its last end. Therefore, the last end of man is not the good of the universe, but God Himself.”⁷⁸ “The higher our mind is elevated to the contemplation of spiritual beings, the more it is withdrawn from sensible things. Now, the

final limit to which contemplation can reach is the Divine Substance, hence, the mind which sees the Divine Substance must be completely cut off from the bodily senses, either by death or by ecstasy.”⁷⁹ “Through the aforesaid pleasures, man is kept away from a close approach to God, for this approach is effected through contemplation, and the aforementioned pleasures are the chief impediment to contemplation, since they plunge man very deep into sensible things, consequently distracting him from intellectual objects. Therefore, human felicity must not be located in bodily pleasures.”⁸⁰ “Accordingly when an inordinate will loves some temporal good, for example riches or pleasure, more than the order of reason or Divine law, or Divine charity, or some such thing, it follows that it is willing to suffer the loss of some spiritual good so that it may obtain the possession of some temporal good.”⁸¹ “A thing of an inferior nature cannot be brought to what is proper to a higher nature except by the power of that higher nature. For example, the moon, which does not shine by its own light, becomes luminous by the power and action of the sun, and water which is not hot of itself, becomes hot by the power and action of fire.... he is attached to sensible and lower things; and the more he attaches himself to these, the farther he is removed from the ultimate end, for these things are below man, whereas man’s end is above him.”⁸²

The Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) noted, “When a thing is not loved, no quarrels will arise concerning it, no sadness will be felt if it perishes, no envy if it is possessed by another, no fear, no hatred, in short no disturbance of the mind. All these arise from the love of what is perishable, such as the objects already mentioned. But love towards a thing eternal and infinite feeds the mind wholly with joy, and is itself unmingled with any sadness, wherefore it is greatly to be desired and sought for with all our strength.”⁸³

For Max Weber “inner-worldly asceticism.... demanded of the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of all idle and exploitative enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth.”⁸⁴ “The ascetic rejects the world’s empirical character of creatureliness and ethical irrationality, and rejects its ethical temptations to sexual indulgences, to epicurean satisfaction, and to reliance upon natural joys and gifts. But at the same time he affirms individual rational activity within the institutional framework of the world.”⁸⁵ It seeks to attain mastery over the flesh and to control worldly motivation in the interest of a spiritual goal. This is

accomplished by turning toward and not away from the world, which is “a creation of God.”⁸⁶

The need for renunciation is well expressed by Ken Wilber (b. 1949), “What sort of death is good?... actual transcendence demands the death of the present structure in the sense that the structure must be released or let-go of in order to make room for the higher-order unity of the next structure. The release factor in this case is indeed a type of death; it is a real dying to an exclusive identity with a lower structure in order to awaken, via love-expansion or transcendence, to a higher-order life and unity. In this sense, such death-and-transcendence occurs at every stage of growth, matter to body to mind to body-mind [integration] to spirit. One accepts the death and release of the lower stage in order to find the life and unity of the next higher stage.”⁸⁷

It has been said, “Renunciation is the beginning, the middle, and the end of religion.” Renunciation is a broad concept that involves giving up many negative characteristics. It involves: ethical living, truthfulness, kindness, gentleness, abstention from anger, avoidance of rashness, non-violence (ahimsa), chastity, self-control, self-restraint, kindness to all creatures, non-stealing, purity of speech, and mind, cleanliness, and purity in eating.⁸⁸

A serious limitation of sense enjoyment is that it follows the “Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility.” For example, if one is hungry and eats chocolate cake, at first it brings happiness, but eventually the point is reached, where each additional increment of cake brings less and less pleasure and in time displeasure. A second disadvantage is that sense pleasure produces only short-term happiness, compared to the long-time satisfaction of productive activity and spiritual experience.

Living a materialistic life is apt to bring happiness at first, but in time is followed by a negative reaction. Conversely, living a spiritual life might be difficult at first (particularity if it differs from the prior life-style), but the longer a person endures the more happiness and joy they will receive.

The Unconscious Mind is continually functioning through brain activity even during deep sleep. Suppose one gets angry and explodes. This was preceded by a vague awareness in the subconscious (Freud’s preconscious) mind. Before that those angry vibrations were brewing unaware to us in the unconscious mind. This is why emphasis is placed on the discipline of renunciation. 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. This is why it is important to be living in the correct environment that will manifest your higher and not your lower nature. Consciousness exists in four states: superconscious, conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. The term unconscious consciousness may sound paradoxical. It means that objectively consciousness exists, but subjectively it is unconscious for us since we are not aware of it.

The Subconscious Mind is active when we are awake and is the source of habits. For example, if we are driving a car because of it we do everything automatically. If we take a daily walk it guides us on the proper route to take. This way the conscious mind can think of other things. If we are having a problem remember something, the conscious mind must search the subconscious mind to locate the information. If the information is buried in the unconscious mind it is not assemble. Upon getting old some people have trouble finding things because their conscious mind cannot make contact with the subconscious mind.

Lack of spiritual progress is due in part to a psychological resistance to change. One may not understand the need to change, feeling relatively happy, secure, and comfortable in their present lifestyle. They may not believe they have the skills, abilities, or strengths to bring about the transformation. Fear of the unknown is another factor, compared to the safe feeling we have following our present behavior patterns. Most important it is difficult to break from attachment to longstanding habits and pleasant mental impressions (samskaras) and inherent tendencies (vasanas). Old habits that have brought us happiness for decades are difficult to renounce. They continue to work but prevent us from making necessary progress that would benefit us. These habits deal with our behavior, and the ways we think and feel.⁸⁹ Vivekananda concluded, "Every new thought that we have must make, as it were, a new channel through the brain, and that explains the tremendous conservatism of human nature. Human nature likes to run through the ruts that are already there, because it is easy."⁹⁰ There is a big difference between a rational fear such as taking precautions not to fall off a cliff and an emotional feeling of fear.

First renounce tamas, then aspects of rajas, but most difficult to overcome is the maya of sattva. It is difficult to renounce those worldly pleasures that bring us sattvic happiness. The mind of a person who meditates is more alive and enjoys subtle worldly pleasures more than an ordinary person. Our life is dominated by our attachment to certain mental

impressions, which are the cause of habits, so we should make every effort to develop the best samskaras possible.

Renunciation as a subtraction factor involves two steps. First one must avoid the object and second the mind must not think of or desire the object. It is more difficult to renounce in modern times, since so many distractions exist today that were absent in the past. People seek name and fame and the result sometimes is name and blame. It is easiest to renounce if you can replace the old habit that is harming you with a new habit that will benefit you. For example, you do not just stop performing the undesired form of activity, but replace it with a better one. Since you have a substitute there is no void, an abyss, no feeling of emptiness. Through self-denial one can practice the austerity of renunciation in order to build the mental strength of willpower and self-control. Positive renunciation involves replacing the lower with something higher.

If we want to advance to a higher level and do not pass the test, we are continually retested until we make the necessary changes within ourselves to overcome our faults. This can be very difficult and some people fail the test and stagnate. As an ego defense mechanism they might place the blame on others. To make spiritual progress we have to change. It's not that other people have to change. Is renunciation the beginning, the middle, and the end of religion?

Karl Marx mistakenly thought he could do away with greed by employing political means. He wrote, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." His mistake is that he did not realize that fulfilling all basic physical needs will not satisfy the psychological need to acquire more wealth. For example, if a person is a billionaire they are apt to want to increase the size of their fortune with no upper limit. Changes in the gross world are certainly of value, but they are incomplete without alterations in the subtle world of thoughts, feelings, etc.

Renunciation is difficult because we do not want to give up pleasant attractive thoughts even if they are keeping us from progressing to a higher level. It is best to attempt to be as moral as possible even if it involves making personal sacrifices. The root of suffering comes from being attached to the wrong things. This is due to allowing your thoughts to control you. It boils down to what is a person's main source of happiness. Is it religious experience, knowledge, activity, feeling for others, beauty, power, sensual enjoyment, etc.?

5. Love All People

Indian: “Who burns with the bliss and suffers the sorrow of every creature within his own heart, making his own each bliss and each sorrow: Him I hold highest of all the yogis” (BG* 6:32, p. 85).

Old and New Testament: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; cf. Mt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jam. 2:8). “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt. 5:44). “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk. 6:27).

Shankara defined a loving person as one who “hates nothing, not even that which causes him pain. He regards all beings as himself. He is friendly and compassionate. He is full of compassion for the distressed i.e., he has offered security of life to all beings, he is a sannyasin. He does not regard anything as ‘mine’ and is free from egoism, from the notion of ‘I.’ Pain and pleasure do not cause him hatred and attachment. He remains unaffected when abused or beaten. He is always content.”⁹¹

Quoting Swami Vivekananda, “With love there is no painful reaction; love only brings a reaction of bliss; if it does not, it is not love; it is mistaking something else for love. When you have succeeded in loving your husband, your wife, your children, the whole world, the universe, in such a manner that there is no reaction of pain or jealousy, no selfish feeling, then you are in a fit state to be unattached.”⁹² “The first test of love is that it knows no bargaining. Love is always the giver, and never the taker.... The second test is that love knows no fear.”⁹³ “Love is truth, and hatred is false, because hatred makes for multiplicity. It is hatred that separates man from man; therefore it is wrong and false. It is a disintegrating power; it separates and destroys. Love binds, love makes for that oneness. You become one, the mother with the child, families with the city, the whole world becomes one with the animals. For love is Existence, God Himself; and all this is the manifestation of that One Love, more or less expressed. The difference is only in degree, but it is the manifestation of that One Love throughout.”⁹⁴

It was understood by Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) that true love is an expression of the oneness of existence. “If you love somebody, you become one with the beloved; otherwise there is no love. Love means the attraction of two souls, which would vibrate in the same degree, and which would be tuned in the same key.... When the thoughts and ideas, which arise in the mind of the lover, will vibrate in the mind of the beloved

and produce a similar response, then there is love, and that means oneness in thought and in spirit. Again, where there is true love, there cannot be any selfishness.”⁹⁵ “If you tell me the thing you love most, if you show me the object of your intense love, you have shown me your life; because we live in what we love. If we love the highest then we live on the highest plane. If we love material things we are on the material plane. If we have self-love we are selfish.”⁹⁶ Human love is a reflection of Brahman’s (God’s) love, which manifests through the material world. “Every drop of that stream of love which flows in the human heart contains the germ of Divine Love. But it varies in its character according to the direction toward which it flows, and to the motive by which it is governed. When it flows toward one’s own self, it is animal; when toward another for mutual benefit, it is human; but when it flows toward an object only for the good of that object, then it is Divine.”⁹⁷

Dr. Paul Tillich (1886-1965) formulated that, “Love is an ontological concept. Its emotional element is a consequence of its ontological nature.” All forms of love involve the unity of what is individualized and fragmentized, the “urge toward the reunion of the separated.” Estrangement is overcome by love, which is a basic drive toward unification. There are four major forms of love. First is libido that seeks to fulfill a need and is a drive toward self-fulfillment, expressed as a desire for union with an object that brings pleasure. Second is philia (friendship), “the movement of the equal toward union with the equal” in a spirit of friendship. Third is eros that is characterized by a spiritual aspirant’s love for God. It “is the movement of that which is lower in power and meaning to that which is higher.” Here there is a striving for truth, beauty, and a mystical union with God.⁹⁸ Fourth is agape which “is first of all the love God has toward the creature and through the creature toward himself.” Agape is characterized by “acceptance of the object of love without restrictions ... in spite of the estranged, profanized, and demonized state of its objects” and “the re-establishment of the holiness, greatness, and dignity of the object of love through its accepting him.”⁹⁹ Agape is not “dependent on repulsion and attraction, on passion and sympathy,” which are contingent characteristics. It “seeks the other because of the ultimate unity of being with being within the Divine ground.” “It has been said that man’s love of God is the love with which God loves Himself.... Without separation from one’s self, self-love is impossible. This is even more obvious if the distinction within God includes the infinity of finite forms,

which are separated and reunited in the eternal process of the Divine life.” Then, “Through the separation within Himself God loves Himself. And through separation from Himself (in creaturely freedom) God fulfills his love of Himself—primarily because He loves that which estranged from Himself.... God works toward the fulfillment of every creature and toward the bringing-together into the unity of his life all who are separated and disrupted.”¹⁰⁰

Human love is a partial manifestation of Divine Love, as all virtues are limited manifestations of Divine virtues. Love is a feeling of strong attraction and emotional attachment. It is patient and kind. Love does not envy, boast, is neither proud nor self-seeking, does not dishonor others, and is not easily angered. Four types of love mentioned by the Greeks are found in the *Bible*: Storge is love of family. Eros is romantic love; Philia is friendship based on brotherly affection (Rom. 12:10); and Agape is love for God and others desiring their best for them. Other desirable forms of love include: compassion and mercy for the suffering, love of animals and nature, aesthetic love, rajasic love of activity, love of virtue, love of knowledge, and the highest is spiritual love of Brahman-God or the Atman (Agape, Bhakti).¹⁰¹ From one standpoint there are three kinds of love. To love Brahman-God is devotion toward a superior being. Next is to love equals as in friendship, and thirdly to love people in some ways beneath us as expressed through compassion and altruism.

6. Sympathy, Compassion, Empathy, and Altruism

Follow the Golden Rule by acting toward other people the way you want them to act to you. For over two thousand years this Rule has appeared in most religions in either a positive or negative (Do not treat others in ways that you would not like to be treated) form. It is a universal moral principle that is easy to understand and to apply. Compassion (daya, karuna) is an important concept in traditional Hindu thought. It involves showing love, kindness, sensitivity, mercy, and sympathy to others. This altruistic emotion is caused by the perception of the suffering of others. By desiring the welfare and good of all people, one expresses and feels sympathetic identification, and offers solace and understanding. One possesses the virtuous desire to alleviate the unhappiness and suffering of other people by putting forth whatever effort is necessary. Compassion means feeling in your heart their sorrow and suffering as if it is your own. A truly compassionate person not only recognizes and feels the sufferings

of others but also tries to alleviate it selflessly. In its most sublime form it is unconditional (nirupadhika), the attitude of showing compassion to anyone who suffers irrespective of their status or affiliation, without expectation, and without self-interest. The ideal is to treat a relative, a stranger, a friend, and a foe as one's own self; and everyone's suffering is experienced as one's own suffering. One must seek to understand the other from their perspective. While arrogance is a source of sin, compassion is a source of moral life. Compassion is the basis of non-violence (ahimsa), a core virtue in the Hindu religion. True compassion arises out of pure love, which is free from egotism, selfishness, and self-promotion. Without any selfish motive, it involves the active desire to relieve the miseries of others. It is a form of kindness to distressed people. Compassion rightly performed will wash away past sins and hasten the process of self-transformation. It not only heals others but also is self-healing.¹⁰²

Swami Vivekananda, related, “Your religion teaches you that every being is only your own self multiplied. But it was the want of practical application, the want of sympathy--the want of heart. The Lord once more came to you as Buddha and taught you how to feel, how to sympathize with the poor, the miserable, the sinner, but you heard Him not.... by following the great teachings of the Hindu faith, and joining with it the wonderful sympathy of that logical development of Hinduism--Buddhism. A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land.”¹⁰³ More statements along this line are found in *Swami Vivekananda and Others on Religious Philosophy*, Ch. II. The Atman, Section 4. Atma-Dharma the Highest of All Ethical Systems.

Definitions of empathy (broadly defined) include those of sympathy and compassion, along with the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. There are three steps in the empathy-altruism process. First, is the ability to understand or feel what another individual is experiencing from within the other person's frame of reference. Through empathy an individual is able to place oneself in another's position, discerning both their emotional states and ways of thinking. This process involves being able to imagine oneself as another person and to feel and share their emotions. Cognitive empathy is the capacity to understand the other person's perspective and mental state. Affective empathy, also

called emotional empathy is the capacity to respond with an appropriate emotion to another's mental states. There is a difference between feeling for others, and feeling as others feel, e.g., feeling sorry for a person who is depressed is different from actually feeling that depression yourself. The empathetic person should be detached, since sharing the emotions of the victims can cause distress, helplessness, and might lead to avoidance rather than helping. Second, is the desire to help other people in need. The compassionate and sympathetic individual expresses concern for the suffering or misfortune of others. They respond to the suffering of others with a desire to help.

Third, feeling sympathy, compassion, and empathy for others in response to their suffering leads to altruistic action. Altruism is a form of selflessness where the person undergoes a self-sacrifice to be of benefit to others. This is one of the foundations and greatest motivations of ethical behavior. An internal psychological event such as compassion, sympathy, and empathy leads to altruism an external active social event. The reverse process also occurs. Altruism involves an individual performing an action aimed to enhance the welfare of others. People with empathic concern help others in distress even when they are not required to do so. One must determine who is in need and feel personal responsibility for reducing their distress. Altruism is behavior that is aimed at benefitting another person without expecting reciprocity or compensation for that action. Conversely, egoistic motivation leads to behavior that is performed for personal gain. If empathy is felt, an individual will help others, regardless of whether it is in their self-interest or not. Altruism involves "prosocial behaviors such as helping, comforting, sharing, cooperation, philanthropy, and community service." Selfless concern for the well-being of others lessens the psychological distance between oneself and other people. Empathetic-altruistic behavior is learnable and achieved with various degrees of success. It is enhanced if the participants are of a similar background in relation to social status, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, age, etc.¹⁰⁴

Many scientific studies dealing with the effects of volunteering in community services work among older adults, have found those people who volunteered scored "higher on life satisfaction and will to live, and lower on depression and anxiety." Volunteerism and helping behavior have shown to improve mental health, happiness, and feeling good about oneself, along with physical health and longevity.

7. Avoid Egotism, Selfishness, 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).

Writing from a philosophical standpoint, Swami Vivekananda explained, “The main effect of work done for others is to purify ourselves. By means of the constant effort to do good to others we are trying to forget ourselves; this forgetfulness of self is the one great lesson we have to learn in life. Man thinks foolishly that he can make himself happy, and after years of struggle finds out at last that true happiness consists in killing selfishness and that no one can make him happy except himself. Every act of charity, every thought of sympathy, every action of help, every good deed, is taking so much of self-importance away from our little selves and making us think of ourselves as the lowest and the least, and, therefore, it is all good. Here we find that Jnana, Bhakti, and Karma—all come to one point. The highest ideal is eternal and entire self-abnegation, where there is no ‘I’, but all is ‘Thou’.... Just as unconscious work is beneath consciousness, so there is another work which is above consciousness, and which also is not accompanied with the feeling of egoism. The feeling of egoism is only on the middle plane. When the mind is above or below that line, there is no feeling of ‘I’, and yet the mind works. When the mind goes beyond this line of self-consciousness, it is called Samadhi or superconsciousness.”¹⁰⁵ “What is perfect self-abnegation? It means the abnegation of this apparent self, the abnegation of all selfishness. This idea of ‘me and mine’—Ahamkara [Egotism] and Mamata—is the result of past superstition, and the more this present self passes away, the more the real Self becomes manifest. This is true self-

abnegation, the centre, the basis, the gist of all moral teaching.... The history of the world shows that those who never thought of their little individuality were the greatest benefactors of the human race, and that the more men and women think of themselves, the less are they able to do for others.”¹⁰⁶ “We become forgetful of the ego when we think of the body as dedicated to the service of others—the body with which most complacently we identify the ego. And in the long run comes the consciousness of disembodiness. The more intently you think of the well-being of others; the more oblivious of self you become. In this way, as gradually your heart gets purified by work, you will come to feel the truth that your own Self is pervading all beings and all things.”¹⁰⁷

Vivekananda’s brother disciple Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) pointed out, “When you live constantly in the presence of Divinity, the ego loses its power; but so long as the ego rules a man, he is a bond-slave. All your anxieties and worries come from egotism and selfishness. Let go your little self and they will all disappear.... We are all only puppets in the hands of God. When we understand this, all pride and ambition, all vanity and egotism will go.... The ego blinds our sight so that we cannot perceive the beauty of God. This ego must be conquered. It is always a falsifier. It places itself on the throne, which belongs to God, and tries to hide God. So long as the ego is on the throne, we can never hope to see or love God. Hatred and anger are signs of ego. If a man hates anyone or gets angry with anyone, you may be sure he has not conquered his ego and cannot feel true love in his heart.... It is the greatest relief when we get rid of egotism. It is as if a heavy burden rolled off. At once all our doubts and fears, anxieties and troubles disappear. When the ‘I’ is gone, nothing remains but God or Divinity. Let Him exist alone in his glory. Deny ego, it is the cause of all your miseries.”¹⁰⁸

St. Augustine (354-430) asked, “What is the origin of our evil will but pride? For ‘pride is the beginning of sin.’ And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself. This happens when it becomes its own satisfaction. And it does so when it falls away from that unchangeable good which ought to satisfy it more than itself. This falling away is spontaneous; for if the will had remained steadfast in the love of that higher and changeless good, by which it was illumined to intelligence and kindled into love, it would not have turned away to find satisfaction in itself.... For it is good to have the

heart lifted up, yet not to one's self, for this is proud, but to the Lord, for this is obedient, and can be the act only of the humble. There is, therefore, something in humility which strangely enough, exalts the heart, and something in pride which debases it. This seems, indeed, to be contradictory, that loftiness should debase and lowliness exalt. But pious humility enables us to submit to what is above us; and nothing is more exalted than God; and therefore humility, by making us subject to God, exalts us.”¹⁰⁹

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) explained that, “In the love of concupiscence, the lover, properly speaking, loves himself, in willing the good that he desires. But a man loves himself more than another, because he is one with himself substantially, while with another he is one only in likeness of some form.” “Every sinful act proceeds from inordinate desire for some temporal good. Now the fact that anyone desires a temporal good inordinately, is due to the fact that he loves himself inordinately, for to wish anyone some good is to love him. Therefore it is evident that inordinate love of self is the cause of every sin. Well-ordered self-love, by which man desires a fitting good for himself, is right and natural ... Man is said to love both the good he desires for himself, and himself, to whom he desires it.”¹¹⁰

Hubris (excessive pride) is defined by Paul Tillich as “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, elevating them into matters of ultimate concern.... He makes himself the center of himself and of his world (hubris). The question naturally arises concerning why man is tempted to become centered in himself. The answer is that it places him in the position of drawing the whole of his world into himself.”¹¹¹ Self-elevation arises because, “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. He is estranged from his true being.... [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.”¹¹²

It states in the Katha Up. I.3.14, “Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path [that leads to Brahman], so say the wise--hard to tread and difficult to cross.” Meaning unless a devotee is very discriminative there is always the chance of being led astray.

We are by nature egocentric because we experience our own internal and external events directly and other peoples indirectly. That’s why it is best to develop empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of other beings.

Happiness is being in congruity with the Divine Will, while egocentrism causes a person to become disharmonious with the Divine Will. The word egotism rather than ego is used here since the latter word can be defined positively or negatively. Possibly the ego has two functions positively to build self-confidence and esteem or negatively to make one egotistical. “Superiority Complex” a concept developed by the psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937) refers to a person's exaggerated sense of self-importance, and treating others as lesser. This self-image appears to be every bit as prevalent as an “Inferiority Complex” and comes in many shapes and forms. In Section 1. Karma Yoga, Adler mentions how all psychological problems are caused by a lack of social interests. In other words, they are due to being ego-attached to oneself and not helping other people.

Yet many psychologists consider ego-strength to be a virtue and a sign of mental health. An individual with strong ego-strength approaches the challenges of life optimistically and with confidence, with a sense that he or she can handle the problem and even grow as a result. They can tolerate life’s problems and discomfort, without being overwhelmed by them. The ego can be a source of inspiration and motivation and an inspirer of meaningful activity. Ego-strength reflects an inner feeling of self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, resiliency, adaptability, flexibility, resourcefulness, manifesting personal power, a sense of purpose and competence, a positive relationship with oneself and others, satisfaction with life, and realistic and consistent life goals. Ego-strength is an integral part of our psycho-social-emotional and cultural development. A person with low ego-strength is apt to resort to wishful thinking, substance use, inactivity, and/or fantasies to avoid their problems. Neuroscience believes that self-esteem is related to the connectivity of the frontostriatal circuit of the brain. There is a big difference between the ego of self-centeredness and the ego of self-confidence. In judging others some people get them mixed up. Ken Wilber’s idea is that one must first

overcome the lower immature realms by developing ego-strength and ego-esteem. Only at this mature stage can one then proceed on to transcend the ego.

Ego is synonymous with the self, a sense of personhood. We have been entrusted with an individual self and it is our duty to make that self as good as possible. A positive aspect of an ego is if we feel we are the doer and consequently take responsibility for our shortcomings. If a person thought someone else was doing evil deeds through them they would not feel any guilt for their deeds. Ego can refer positively to a sense of self that can optimistically deal with the challenges of life and is not overwhelmed by them or negatively to an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Pride in oneself can inspire self-confidence and can be looked upon as a virtue. It is a feeling of satisfaction derived from one's own personal achievements and from those of the group to which they belong.¹¹³

This was affirmed by Vivekananda when he stated, "The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great."¹¹⁴

When a person begins to meditate, some people make contact with their Shadow that was formerly hidden in their unconscious mind. There is an unexpected release and awareness of deeply embedded negative memories, thoughts, and feelings. In addition they are apt to focus on their ideal self and realize its limitations in regards to their real self. They begin to notice the discrepancies between their thoughts, behavior, and attitudes. In Jungian psychology the shadow is the instinctive and irrational dark side of a person. Some people refuse to consciously acknowledge these deficiencies about themselves. At the same time they plainly see all kinds of failings in other people, which brings them temporary happiness. One of the main reasons people are tamasically hypercritical is because they are unhappy with themselves. What they notice in others is simply a reflection of what they see in themselves. As a result they externalize and project their own feeling of personal inferiority and moral shortcomings into other people. Becoming chronically hypercritical they create a veil of delusion between their ego and the real world. Due to

the ego defense mechanisms it is more difficult to spot our faults than other peoples. They judge other people by what they did wrong and themselves by that they did right. Hypercriticism is due to a will to destroy that results in a Destruction Complex. To be a creative thinker it is better to seek the right solution rather than concentrating only on what is wrong with something. A few people derive happiness from thinking about what they think are other people's shortcomings. These people want to think other people are worse than they really are. They enjoy criticizing others, but very much dislike receiving it themselves. There are two types of errors, one can criticize what is right or endorse what is wrong. Positive statements are expected to maintain a certain level of rationality and creditability, but with hypercriticism the standards are much lower and any kind of nonsense will do. What is worse is that hypercriticism creates a psychologically harsh society. Rather than wasting your energy on being hypercritical, it is far better to use your vitality in a productive manner. The most successful people do this and the higher their ideal the more useful they are to society. One of the best ways to overcome hypercriticism is to develop an attitude of "melio rem partem" to evaluate other people you know in the best possible light. The British have done a good job in emphasizing being a gentleman and treating your opponent with respect.

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) founder of the Vedanta Society of Southern California warns us, "Those who dwell on the faults of others develop the same faults themselves; for in the mind of every individual both good and bad impressions and tendencies are stored up, and if you criticize another person for a certain fault, and go on criticizing, similar tendencies which were dormant in your own subconscious mind are released and become active. If, on the other hand, you make a habit of seeing the good in others, your own good tendencies are released and strengthened"¹¹⁵ He also mentioned that some people get all kinds of crazy negative ideas about other people. But if you are the victim and identify with it, you will go crazy yourself. Creativity results from positiveness by appreciating what is right about something, not wrong, combined with hard work. The "Power of Positive Thinking," involves concentrating on other people's strengths rather than their weaknesses.

Avoid destructive criticism that is given with the intention to belittle the other person. The result is the person is apt to feel they are being attacked and might respond with depression, anger, or even aggression. Conversely, constructive criticism is designed to be helpful and might

include complementary statements. It is offered in a friendly and helpful manner, rather than a hostile one. It includes suggestions for improvement on how things could be done better. People are attracted to a group that has high morale and inner cohesion.¹¹⁶

Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) sold over 30 million copies, making it one of the best-selling books of all time. The book recommends in dealing with other people: don't criticize, condemn, or complain about them to their face or to others; be friendly to them, be a good listener, make them feel appreciated without resorting to insincere flattery, and try to see things from their point of view; become genuinely interested in them and the topics they are involved in, make suggestion rather than giving orders, and encourage them to do their best.¹¹⁷

A difficulty in making spiritual development is that a single blemish can prevent an aspirant from making further progress. The blemish could be due to egoism, anger, hypercriticism, subtle lust, using a psychic power, jealousy, laziness, etc. The person will be retested but they might not be able to break through the barrier. To remain chaste, Vivekananda recommended, "To all women every man save her husband should be as her son. To all men every woman save his own wife should be as his mother."¹¹⁸

Another group of people after practicing the religion for some time (possibly years) run into a dry spell. Rather than blaming themselves, they adapt the ego defense mechanism of becoming harshly overcritical of the religion. They know a little and think they understand much more. Since they employ reason to defend their views, they falsely think they are rationally motivated.

As an ego: 1) we think of ourselves as a spatially separate being, 2) having a temporal continuity, 3) a self-identity of a certain nature that undergoes some change, and 4) consider ourselves to be the source of the ideas and powers we have. It is difficult to overcome the ego because we experience our own thoughts and feelings directly, while with other people we have an indirect empathetic conception of theirs. Often, this makes it easier to be detached concerning other people's problems than our own. In this way we are innately hardwired to have an ego. To overcome the ego we can surrender it to Brahman-God or the Avatara (Divine Incarnation), or realize that we have a higher spiritual Self that transcends it. Many of the problems people have are due to a distorted view of their surroundings caused by their ego. It is easy too see other

peoples faults, but because of the ego it is difficult to see our own. When something is not right and people go out of their way to place the blame on others it is because their mind is under the domination of their ego. Since each of us identifies with a particular person, it is our supreme duty to make that person as good as possible.

There are types of egotism. One is to glorify oneself and to tell others how fantastic they themselves are. Another is to be hypercritical and to constantly belittle others. Egotism involves viewing things from our own particular standpoint as compared with empathy that is seeing the matter from the other person's standpoint. Vivekananda mentioned, "It is a well-known psychological fact that those who are ever ready to abuse others cannot bear the slightest touch of criticism from others."¹¹⁹

Egotism also manifests in other ways such as self-pity, and worry and fear.

In extreme cases the ego can lead to Delusions of Grandeur, a false exaggerated persistent belief in one's greatness. They can manifest in virtually limitless ways such as being a famous person or having an inflated sense of intelligence. The person might not want to be healed since these false beliefs enhance their self-esteem and make them feel happy. They serve the purpose of being a defense against low self-esteem and depression.¹²⁰

A narcissistic person who is controlled by their ego has the following characteristics. They have a distorted opinion of them self, other people, and the world. Narcissists are apt to spend a great deal of time talking about themselves. They have a feeling of self-importance, believing they are special and unique, a desire for attention and praise, while overestimating their skills and accomplishments. In addition narcissists have a sense of entitlement expecting to receive more than they deserve, belittle or look down on other people they perceive as inferior, might exploit other people to get what they want, are envious of others, and are unable or unwilling to recognize the needs and feelings of other people lacking empathy and compassion. Narcissists are hypersensitive, get angry when criticized, deny their mistakes or make excuses for them. At times they may blame others, hold grudges, are hypercritical, and overreact to situations. Because of these traits they irritate other people and are not able to relate well with them.¹²¹

An expression of maya as delusion is that a part of the mind may be quite rational even at the genius level and another part quite irrational holding harmful ideas.

One should avoid swearing and profanity because that puts the mind in the lower chakras.

There is the avidyamaya of commission that includes doing a forbidden act like stealing, teaching a false theory, or holding an undeserved feeling of hate. Examples of the avidyamaya of omission are not doing, thinking, or feeling the right thing such as not performing one's required duty, being ignorant of a well-known subject, or a lack of a feeling of compassion.

A collective form of ego is known as ethnocentrism, the belief that the values, customs, and behavioral and ethical standards of one's own society and culture are superior to those of other people. It is often accompanied by a sense of superiority and/or a sense of victimhood. Historically this idea has led to the notion of one's own group superiority and contempt for outsiders resulting in violent military conflicts. As Vivekananda wrote, "The more selfish a man, the more immoral he is. And so also with the race. That race which is bound down to itself has been the most cruel and the most wicked in the whole world."¹²² Ethnocentrism is psychologically related to egocentrism. The idea of overcoming ethnocentrism was developed in the field of sociology by William G. Sumner (in 1906) and in anthropology by Franz Boas (1858-1942).¹²³ In world history aggressive ethnocentrism, the Collective Ego, the idea of group superiority, has manifested through the political, religious, military, economic, racial, and cultural spheres; and through the clergy, nobility, business, and working class. For more on the ego see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. XI. Renunciation and Morality, Section 4. Avoid Egotism and Pride (Hubris).¹²⁴

Seeking name and fame is egoistic if a person seeks admiration from others, but not if a person wants their labours to be productive which is measured by the response they receive from others.

There is also Generational Centristism where some older people think that the new generation has certain faults that makes it less than theirs.

8. Truthfulness

Indian: "Truth alone succeeds, not untruth. By truthfulness the path of felicity is opened up, the path ... which leads them to truth's eternal abode [Brahmaloka, Kingdom of Heaven]" (Mun. Up.* 3:1.6, p. 66; cf. Br. Up. 1:4.14). "Let him say what is true ... utter no disagreeable truth, and let him utter no agreeable falsehood; that is the eternal law" (LM 4:138;

cf. 4:256; 6:46; 8:74-76, 81-83; 10:63; 11:56-57).

Old Testament: “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 12:22; cf. Lev. 19:11; Ps. 101:7). New Testament: “He who does what is true comes to the light” (Jn. 3:21; cf. 8:32, 44; 14:6; 18:37). “Putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor” (Eph. 4:25; cf. Jer. 5:1-3; Zech. 8:16; Mt. 12:36-37). “Worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:23). “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn. 8:32). “I am the way and the truth” (Jn. 14:6). “Every one who is of truth hears my voice” (Jn. 18:37).

Concerning perfection in truthfulness Swami Vivekananda mentioned, “When this power of truth will be established with you, then even in a dream you will never tell an untruth. You will be true in thought, word, and deed. Whatever you say will be truth. You may say to a man, ‘Be blessed,’ and that man will be blessed. If a man is diseased, and you say to him, ‘Be thou cured,’ he will be cured immediately.” His philosophy is, “Truth alone abides. God of Truth, be Thou alone my guide!” “That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical. That is my opinion; and if society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so; and the sooner, the better.”¹²⁵

Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) a brother disciple of Vivekananda explained, “You must feel the utter hollowness of everything but Truth, as Nachiketa did. Wealth, kingdoms, enjoyments, power, were to him nothing—less than zero. He wanted nothing but Truth and Truth was bound to come to him.... Great Incarnations like Christ, Krishna, Buddha were perfectly clear mirrors which gave us a perfect reflection of God or Truth.... Each was a reflector of the Eternal Truth. One man catches the light from Christ so he says, ‘Christ has given me the Truth. I belong to Christ. I am a Christian,’ another sees the light through Mohammed and says, ‘I am a Mohammedan.’ A third says, ‘Buddha reveals the Truth, I belong to Buddha.’ So each great teacher has his followers who believe that the Truth can come from him alone; but all teachers reflect the same Truth.... Various religious doctrines and beliefs are merely partial manifestations of Truth. But because they have that little reflected light of Truth in them we take them to be the whole of Truth.... It is true that the average man is not ready to perceive Truth. You must be Truth to know Truth. You must live it and make it a part of your experience; otherwise you cannot know it.”¹²⁶ “Your hunger will be satisfied only when you perceive Truth. Truth is that food, eating which you will never hunger

again. Truth is that, drinking of which you will never thirst again.... Truth dwells in the heart of every man. It is the nearest thing to each one of us, but the mind has been dragged out so long by the things of this world that now it is difficult for it to come home.”¹²⁷ “All slavery comes to an end when man realises Truth.” “You must labour hard before you realize the Truth.”¹²⁸

Truthfulness was central to Mahatma Gandhi’s (1869-1948) outlook on life. For one thing, truth is universal and comprehensive and is accepted by both theists and atheists. He writes, “But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be God, God is Truth above all.... But two years ago I went a step further and said Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz. that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth.... My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth ... the little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence.”¹²⁹ “Ahimsa [Non-violence] and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse? Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later.”¹³⁰

In the above quote Swami Ramakrishnanada uses the term “perceive Truth.” Is rational thinking not only a form of conception but also of perception? When we think do we perceive an idea? Tesla and Einstein had some visualization of their creative ideas.

Bertrand Russell’s (1872-1970) message to future generations is, “When you are studying any matter or considering any philosophy ask yourself what are the facts and what is the truth the facts bear out. Never let yourself be diverted either by what you wish to believe or by what you think would have beneficent social effects if it were believed. But look only, and solely, at what are the facts.”¹³¹ In another interview he mentioned that one should always do intellectual work with “kindly

feelings.” A great deal of harm has been done by those who wrote with hate in their mind and heart.

Paul Tillich made this powerful statement that in the Fourth Gospel, “The truth of which Jesus speaks is not a doctrine but a reality, namely, He Himself: ‘I am the truth.’ This is a profound transformation of the ordinary meaning of truth.... If Jesus says, ‘I am the truth,’ He indicates that in Him the true, the genuine, the ultimate reality is present; or, in other words, that God is present, unveiled, undistorted, in His infinite depth, in His unapproachable mystery. Jesus is not the truth because His teachings are true. But His teachings are true because they express the truth which He Himself is. He is more than His words. And He is more than any word said about Him. The truth, which makes us free, is neither the teaching of Jesus nor the teaching about Jesus. Those who have called the teaching of Jesus ‘the truth’ have subjected the people to a servitude under the law. And most people like to live under a law. They want to be told what to think and what not to think. And they accept Jesus as the infallible teacher and giver of a new law. But even the words of Jesus, if taken as a law, are not the truth which makes us free. And they should not be used as such by our scholars and preachers and religious teachers. They should not be used as a collection of infallible prescriptions for life and thought. They point to the truth, but they are not a law of truth. Nor are the doctrines about Him the truth that liberates. I say this to you as somebody who all his life has worked for a true expression of the truth which is the Christ. But the more one works, the more one realizes that our expressions, including everything we have learned from our teachers and from the teaching of the Church in all generations, is not the truth that makes us free. The Church very early forgot the word of our Gospel that He is the truth; and claimed that her doctrines about Him are the truth. But these doctrines, however necessary and good they were, proved to be not the truth that liberates. Soon they became tools of suppression, of servitude under authorities; they became means to prevent the honest search for truth—weapons to split the souls of people between loyalty to the Church and sincerity to truth.... Doing the truth means living out of the reality which is He who is the truth, making His being the being of ourselves and of our world. And again, we ask, ‘How can this happen?’ ‘By remaining in Him’ is the answer of the Fourth Gospel, i.e., by participating in His being. ‘Abide in me and I in you,’ He says.” Christ is the true undistorted ultimate reality whose essence is Truth itself. We realize the truth by participating in Christ’s essence and making

His being, the being of ourself.”¹³²

Ontological Truth is the truth of our Divine Being or Self, and the truth of our Atman. It is the idea Brahman-God has about us. The more our empirical self conforms to our perfect Self, the more truthful we are.

What Jesus Christ said was true (level 3) because he is the embodiment of the Truth (level 2) (Jn. 14:6). This implies Christ and Truth are two separate entities. At the highest level (1), Christ and the Truth are one and the same entity, there is no distinction.

A person is willfully truthful if they always attempt to tell the truth, though sometimes they may be in error. At the highest stage of unerring veridical truthfulness, the great soul like Sri Ramakrishna is in perfect harmony with truth, and consequently always tells the truth and is never in error.

Truthfulness is an essential virtue for a jnani yoga who seeks the truth. Study alone will not do the job. The advantage of following the “yoga of truthfulness” is that one develops objectivity and is free from personal biases as much as possible. One must be a realist, not just evaluate things from the standpoint of the ideal. The practice of truthfulness helps one to avoid the domination of the ego that can get people into trouble. At the middle level there are people who seldom tell an out and out lie, yet they lack objectivity. Their ego may distort their thinking as in paranoia, or they simply tell fibs because it is expedient to do so. Of course as Swami Brahmananda stated, “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.”¹³³

Various biases prevent the truth from being realized. A bias is a tendency, inclination, or prejudice in favor or against a thing, person, or group. They include:

Anchoring: the propensity to rely on the first solution derived at when making a decision even if it is later disproven,

Apophenia: the tendency to perceive meaningful connections between unrelated things,

Attribution bias: assuming other peoples actions result from internal factors such as their personality, while our actions are due to external circumstances,

Confirmation bias: to search for, interpret, and recall information that supports one’s pre-existing beliefs, while ignoring alternative ideas,

Conservatism bias: the tendency to insufficiently revise one's belief when presented with new evidence or to reject new evidence that contradicts an established idea,

Cultural bias: interpreting and judging phenomena from the perspective of one's own culture,

Ego bias: to judge our self positively and disregard our flaws and failures and to do just the opposite with some other people. For example, studies have found that over 90% of US drivers rate themselves above average, and 68% of professors consider themselves in the top 25% for teaching ability.

Experimenter's or expectation bias: the tendency for experimenters to believe, certify, and publish data that agree with their expectations for the outcome of an experiment, and to disbelieve, discard, or downgrade the corresponding weightings for data that appear to conflict with those expectations,

False consensus effect: the tendency for people to overestimate the degree to which others agree with them,

Frequency illusion is that once something has been noticed then every instance of that thing is noticed, leading to the belief it has a high frequency of occurrence,

Fundamental attribution error: the tendency for people to overemphasize personality-based explanations for behaviors observed in others while under-emphasizing the role and power of situational influences on the same behavior,

Halo effect: having a positive predisposition toward something and its other characteristics also, or its opposite Horn effect: of having a negative view of something and evaluating its other characteristics similarly,

Hindsight bias: the inclination to think of past events as haven been more predictable than they were,

In-group bias: favoring the members of one's own group over outsiders,

Naïve realism: the belief that we see things as they are, objectively without bias,

Out-group homogeneity bias: where individuals see members of other groups as being relatively less varied than members of their own group,

Overconfidence effect: a tendency to have excessive confidence in one's own answers to questions. For example, for certain types of

questions, answers that people rate as "99% certain" turn out to be wrong 40% of the time,

Pessimism bias: The tendency for some people, especially those with depression, to overestimate the likelihood of negative things happening to them,

Self-serving bias: Perceiving oneself responsible for desirable outcomes but not responsible for undesirable ones,

Status quo bias: preference for the current state of affairs even if it is faulty and to reject any form of change, and

Transparency: the tendency for people to overestimate how well they understand others' personal mental states.¹³⁴

Being true to yourself makes people realize their own strengths and weaknesses. People get mad at each other because they do not look at the matter truthfully and realize their own faults. Two countries go to war and 95% of the people in each country think they are on the right side because they are not objective. The purpose of psychoanalysis is to get the people to look at themselves truthfully.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. XI. Renunciation and Morality, Section 5. Truthfulness.¹³⁵

9. Distinguishing Good from Evil

Indian: "You must learn what kind of work to do, what kind of work to avoid" (BG* 4:17, p. 62).

New Testament: "Those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:14; cf. 1 Pet. 3:11). "We have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things" (Heb. 13:18; cf. 1 Tim. 1:19).

Distinguishing between good and evil deeds Vivekananda concluded, "Any action that makes us go Godward is a good action, and is our duty; any action that makes us go downward is evil, and is not our duty. From the subjective standpoint we may see that certain acts have a tendency to exalt and ennoble us, while certain other acts have a tendency to degrade and to brutalize us. But it is not possible to make out with certainty which acts have which kind of tendency in relation to all persons, of all sorts and conditions. There is, however, only one idea of duty which has been universally accepted by all mankind, of all ages and sects and

countries, and that has been summed up in a Sanskrit aphorism: ‘Do not injure any being; not injuring any being is virtue, injuring any being is sin.’”¹³⁶ “All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal. Supposing this absolute unselfishness can be reached by a man, what becomes of him? He is no more the little Mr. So-and-so; he has acquired infinite expansion. The little personality which he had before is now lost to him forever; he has become infinite, and the attainment of this infinite expansion is indeed the goal of all religions and of all moral and philosophical teachings.... Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal; that is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this: That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.”¹³⁷ “If the soul can be acted upon by a good or a bad deed, the soul amounts to nothing. Bad deeds put a bar to the manifestation of the nature of the Purusha [Atman]; good deeds take the obstacles off, and the glory of the Purusha becomes manifest.”¹³⁸

Scholastic philosophers like St. Bonaventure (1217/21-74) used the term *Synderesis* which implies, “Everyone grasps by intuition the basic rules and principles of morality, even without special training.... the basic moral intuitions are the same in all men and at all times.”¹³⁹ It “refers to the natural or innate habit of the mind to know the first principles of the practical or moral order without recourse to a process of discursive reasoning.... *Synderesis* assures possession of the most general and universal knowledge of first principles of the moral order, whereas conscience is concerned with particular applications, i.e., with the practical reasoning that provides answers to particular moral problems.”¹⁴⁰

Synderesis reminds one of the “moral *a priori*,” an innate moral sense similar in some ways to the “religious *a priori*” discussed in Ch. II. Striving to Realize God, Section 7. Knowledge of Brahman-God is Within. Following Immanuel Kant’s logic, *a priori*s are purely logical forms until they are applied to experience. The “moral *a priori*,” is the predisposition that underlies moral experience (practical reason) universally found in all of humanity. The relative consistency of the fundamental notions of morality found in all cultures offers support for this idea.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) posited, “There is a single law, effective in all ages and known to all men because it is written in everyone's heart. From the beginning to the end no one can excuse himself [for] the Spirit never stops speaking this law in the hearts of all men.”¹⁴¹

The Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suarez (1548-1617) discussed self-evident moral principles known to all people. His views as expressed by Frederick Copleston (1907-94), S.J. are, "First of all, there are general and primary principles of morality, such as 'one must do good and shun evil.' Secondly, there are principles which are more definite and specific, like 'God must be worshipped' and 'one must live temperately.' Both these types of ethical propositions are self-evident, according to Suarez. Thirdly, there are moral precepts which are not immediately self-evident but which are deduced from self-evident propositions and become known through rational reflection. In the case of some of these precepts, like 'adultery is wrong,' their truth is easily recognized; but in the case of some other precepts, like 'usury is unjust' and 'lying can never be justified,' more reflection is required in order to see their truth."¹⁴²

According to the correspondence theory of truth the statement made must correspond with the empirical reality. Moral Realists believe that moral statements are objectively true if they correspond with the moral reality. They are objective not just subjective preferences. For this to be so there must be a moral reality existing somewhere. Moral entities can exist as a Platonic Ideal or as thoughts in the mind of Brahman-God. Humans gain access to the moral realm indirectly through inference. The nature of these moral facts is known by means of reason and religious scriptures. Consequently, most people have an inner sense of right and wrong and of good and bad. They agree with each other that certain behavior is good and other conduct is bad.

Ethical good is that action which manifests a person's inner divinity thereby promoting personal evolution towards their final goal (moral realism and moral objectivism). This is the main purpose of life. A bad act is that which causes a person to regress to a lower level. The nature of the ethical action depends on a number of factors such a person's age, gender, culture, etc. (moral relativism).

Goodness relates to a lack of self-centeredness, the ability to empathize with other people, and to feel compassion for others. A good person is willing to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of others, to work for a greater cause, and to relate positively to the common human nature of people of a different gender, race, or nationality.

Values are abstract concepts that distinguish between good and bad. They provide standards for determining what actions are best to perform, what goals should be pursued, and what is the best way to live. Values like

needs, interests, and habits determine the behavior patterns of individuals. There is a greater possibility of changing secondary values than primary ones. While values are abstract and general, norms are concrete and specific. Norms are rules of conduct that provide guidelines for determining the range of appropriate behavior in particular social situations. They are the expected behavior patterns of individuals expressed in formal or informal rules. Society, social institutions and roles, and moral systems are based on normative structures.¹⁴³ The goal is to have an internal nature that always freely chooses the good.

Antinomianism (i.e. above the moral law) is to be avoided. For example a person should not think that they are so spiritually advanced that they are above the moral law and therefore can violate it. In another context, a person who thinks they are doing the Lord's work or serving a religious organization should not think that this entitles them to break the moral law in order to bring about their desired goals.

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- ³ CW, I:84; VII:112.
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³⁴ CW, I:76, 32.

³⁵ CW, I:59-60, 71, 76-77, 84, 90; III:246; V:245-49.

³⁶ VATTP, p. 318.

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⁵⁷ William Armstrong, ed., *Calvin and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 123-24, 129.

⁵⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works*, ed. Thomas Abbott (New York: Longmans, 1788, 1873, 1967), pp. 226-27.

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⁶² Theodorson, p. 319; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1922, 1969), pp. 171-74, 182-83.

⁶³ Weber (1969), pp. 167-68.

⁶⁴ Weber (1969), pp. 171, 173, 182-83. In support of the social value of religion, philosophers and theologians who were sons of clergymen include: Karl Barth, F. H. Bradley, Edgar Brightman, Sergei Bulgakov, Isaak Dorner, Émile Durkheim, Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Hartshorne, Gerald Heard, Carl Jung, Martin Luther King, Cotton Mather, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jaroslav Pelikan, Albert Schweitzer, Huston Smith, Emanuel Swedenborg, Archbishop William Temple, Paul Tillich, John Wesley, Cornel West, and Alfred North Whitehead. In addition, three United States Presidents were sons of clergymen: Chester Arthur, Grover Cleveland, and Woodrow Wilson (Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_children_of_clergy).

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⁶⁹ CW, II:2-3.

⁷⁰ CW, I:33, 90, 92.

⁷¹ CW, I:97-98, 209.

⁷² CW, IV:150.

⁷³ CW, I:59.

⁷⁴ CW, I:209; II:185; IV:243.

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⁹⁴ CW, II:304.

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¹⁰⁶ CW, II:83, 351.

¹⁰⁷ CW, VII:111-12.

¹⁰⁸ Tipple, pp. 150-51.

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