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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 Indian 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, “Secondly, entire devotion to the cause, knowing that your SALVATION depends upon making the *Brahmavadin* a success. Let this paper be your Ishtadevata, and 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 Ishta Devata [Chosen Ideal or Deity]. While the emphasis here is on karma yoga, this statement also implies that at the time 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.

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 Catholic Ursula King, Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Bristol 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 him “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 arouse 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?” God does not consider the importance of the work, but the devotion by which it is performed.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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.’”¹⁶

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.”¹⁷

Actions of karma yoga 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.¹⁸

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). 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” of Daryl Bem, 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 perceive ourselves as being a

religious person. Self-identity is largely a function of the activities we participate in.¹⁹ 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, every Swami of the Order is 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" 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. Properly performed these acts yield the grace of Brahman-God that transcends the laws of nature.

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.

Make Brahman-God both the goal of existence, and the means to attain It, so they become identical. As the means concentrate on It, undertake all undertakings with the mind centered on It, so that all actions are performed for Its sake alone. Karma yoga relates doing and action to 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 done. Following the *Bhagavad Gita* duties are to be performed without any desire for the benefits that normally could be expected from such action. This way the person remains detached from

their activities that aids in the liberation process. The goal is to center the mind on God and surrendering the fruit of action to the Lord.

People read biographies because they internalize moral standards based on the admiral life of role models, in addition to intellectually reflecting on general moral maxims.

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.²⁰ 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 Vaisheshika 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.”²¹

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.”²² 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.”²³ “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.”²⁴

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.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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.²⁷ He added, “the immoral remain weak” and can never “raise themselves intellectually, much less spiritually.”²⁸

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.²⁹ “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.³⁰ "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."³¹ 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.³²

One of the pioneers of Western psychology Alfred Adler (1870-1937) of Austria taught, "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.... 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.”³³

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.”³⁴

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. 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. 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 guide 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.

A major obstacle for spiritual development for Westerners can be caused by cultural identity brought on by cultural determinism. The culture in which we are raised has lifelong effects in determining the content of our emotional attachments. It is greatly encouraged through interpersonal contacts, television, the Internet, and YouTube.

Morality 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 are properly motivated and directed toward the right ends. The role of the will is to choose the correct action that reason commands. We should be motivated by the concern for others and their welfare. Among the influences on applied practical reason are a person's formed attitudes, habitual responses, and guiding concerns. Our moral acts should be in conformity with general principles and an attempt to participate 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.³⁵

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) habits (vasanas) that help to purify the mind and open the person up to receiving the Divine light of grace.

Short term bad karma can be good karma if one understands its meaning and we react properly to it. Then in the long run it will result in good karma.

Religious practices such as meditation, prayer, image worship, karma yoga, renunciation, moral practices, good works involve “learning by doing.” 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. Reading or listening to a lecture involve abstract conceptualization, whereas experiential learning actively places the person in a more concrete experience. 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.³⁶

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.³⁷

3. Follow Your Duty

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 like kindness, truthfulness, and so on (*sadharana-dharma*); fulfilling one’s vocational or caste duties (*varna-dharma*); the stages of human life, student, householder, transition, and ascetic (*ashrama-dharma*); and uniquely individual duties (*sva-dharma*) based on the person’s essential nature (*sva-bhava*). *Dharma* not only deals with one’s actions but also their systems of beliefs and values.

Dharma is a manifestation of Brahman’s (God’s) will and commands based on the objective law of goodness. 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*.”³⁸ 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]."

The Prabhakara (fl. 700) Mimamsa school of philosophy taught (according Balbir Gauchhwal), "The status and authority of the *Vedas* being sui generis [unique], 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.”³⁹

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.”⁴⁰ “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.”⁴¹

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.”⁴² 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.⁴³

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.”⁴⁴

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.”⁴⁵ 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.”⁴⁶ 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”⁴⁷

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, 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.⁴⁸ “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.”⁴⁹ 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.”⁵⁰

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?

Max Weber's discussion of the "Protestant Ethic" 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."⁵¹ 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.

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*).

In comparison with the Indian four stages of ashrama-dharma, Erik Erikson (1902-94) (who authored an admirable biography of Mahatma Gandhi) presented eight stages of life and psychosocial development: trust the world (age 0-2), autonomy (age 2-4), purpose (age 4-5), competence and industry (age 5-12), identity and role (age 13-19), love and intimacy (20-39), make my life count (40-64), and reflection on life (age 65-death). The goal of the final stage is wisdom, a sense of contentment, and ego integrity, derived from the feeling and belief that our life was a productive success. Erikson's emphasis is on the first two stages of ashrama-dharma with little interest in ascetic renunciation.⁵²

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.

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).

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.”⁵³ “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.”⁵⁴ “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.”⁵⁵

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.”⁵⁶

“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.”⁵⁷

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.”⁵⁸

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.”⁵⁹

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 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."⁶⁰ "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."⁶¹ "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."⁶² "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."⁶³ "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."⁶⁴

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."⁶⁵

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.”⁶⁶ “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.”⁶⁷ 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.”⁶⁸

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.”⁶⁹

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 is short-lived and of no lasting value. 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. Another key factor is that sense enjoyment produces only short-term happiness, compared to the long-time satisfaction of productive activity and spiritual experience.

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. Consciousness exists in four states: superconscious, conscious, subconscious (preconscious), 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.

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.⁷⁰ 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.”⁷¹

First renounce *tamas*, then aspects of *rajas*, but most difficult to overcome is the *maya* of *sattva*. We mistakenly associate *sattva* with goodness, when it might be better to renounce this subtle pleasure. 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.

There are two steps to renunciation. 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.

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 the resistance.

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.

Meditate so you can identify with a Divine Incarnation rather than with a famous political leader, intellectual, actor, athlete, 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).

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.”⁷²

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.”⁷³ “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.”⁷⁴ “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.”⁷⁵

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.”⁷⁶ “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.”⁷⁷ 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.”⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹ 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.”⁸⁰ 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.”⁸¹

From one standpoint there are three kinds of love. To love Brahman-God is devotion toward a superior being. Next is to love equals, and thirdly to love people in some ways beneath us as expressed through compassion and altruism.

6. Sympathy, Compassion, Empathy, and Altruism

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 egoism, 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.⁸²

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.”⁸³ 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.

Today the words “empathy” and “altruism” are used in the scientific literature to express these ideas. Definitions of empathy 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 or 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 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.

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.⁸⁴

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.”⁸⁵ “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.”⁸⁶ “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.”⁸⁷

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.”⁸⁸

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.”⁸⁹

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.”⁹⁰

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.”⁹¹ 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.”⁹²

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.

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 has more than one definition. 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. Yet many psychologists consider high ego-strength 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 rajasic activity. A person with low ego-strength is apt to resort to wishful thinking, substance use, inactivity, and/or fantasies to avoid their problems. For them ego is synonymous with the word self. 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. Pride is discussed here in a negative sense meaning hubris, an inflated sense of one's status or accomplishments. In the positive sense, pride refers to a feeling of satisfaction derived from one's own personal achievements or from those of the group to which they belong. Pride in oneself can inspire self-confidence and can be looked upon as a virtue.⁹³

When a person begins to meditate, some people make contact with their shadow that was formerly hidden in their unconscious mind. 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. As a result they project their own perceived personal inferiority and moral shortcomings into other people. Becoming chronically hypercritical they create a veil of delusion between their ego and the real world. Positive statements are expected to maintain a certain level of creditability, but with hypercriticism the standards are much lower and any kind of nonsense will do.

It is difficult to overcome the ego because we experience our own suffering directly and other peoples discomfort indirectly through empathy. Often, this makes it easier to be detached concerning other people's problems than our own. 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.

The 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. Historically this idea has led to the notion of one's own group superiority and contempt for outsiders resulting in violent military conflicts. 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).⁹⁴

One 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.

For more on the ego see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. XI. Renunciation and Morality, Section 4. Avoid Egotism and Pride (Hubris).⁹⁵

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.”⁹⁶

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.”⁹⁷ “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.”⁹⁸ “All slavery comes to an end when man realises Truth.” “You must labour hard before you realize the Truth.”⁹⁹

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.”¹⁰⁰ “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.”¹⁰¹

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.”¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³

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 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 (which is not easy) is that one develops objectivity. 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 in 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.”¹⁰⁴

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, Its Image within us. The more our empirical self conforms to our perfect Self, the more truthful we are.

For more on this subject see: Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought, Ch. XI. Renunciation and Morality, Section 5. Truthfulness.¹⁰⁵

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.’”¹⁰⁶ “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.”¹⁰⁷ “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.”¹⁰⁸

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.”¹⁰⁹ 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.”¹¹⁰

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 prioris* 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 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.”¹¹¹

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."¹¹²

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 end.

Having secular interests can be an obstacle for a yogi, one problem being that a yogi with a concentrated mind enjoys them more than other people.

10. Relationship Between Good and Evil

Swami Vivekananda insightfully ascertained that good and evil are not independent of each other, "They are the diverse manifestations of one and the same fact, one time appearing as bad, and at another time as good. The difference does not exist in kind, but only in degree. They differ from each other in degree of intensity.... The same phenomenon will produce pleasure in one, and pain in another. The eating of meat produces pleasure to a man, but pain to the animal which is eaten." "The difference between virtue and vice is one of degree ... all differences in this world are of degree and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything. All is One, which manifests Itself" in various ways.¹¹³ "We cannot admit two causes of the universe. If we simply hold that by limitation the same beautiful, wonderful love appears to be evil or vile, we find the whole universe explained by the one force of love. If not, two causes of the universe have to be taken for granted, one good and the other evil, one love and the other hatred. Which is more logical? Certainly the one-force theory." "There are no two Gods. When He is less manifested, it is called darkness, evil; and when He is more manifested, it is called light. That is all. Good and evil are only a question of degree: more manifested or less manifested.... It is all a manifestation of that Atman; He is being

manifested in everything; only, when the manifestation is very thick we call it evil; and when it is very thin, we call it good.”¹¹⁴ Though the light of the Atman shines through all people, its perfection is expressed more in the saint than in the sinner. A misdirected power of the good, which is focused on one thing, to the exclusion of the others, is the cause of evil. Humans have only a partial view of good and evil, given that things are perceived in relation to the five senses and understood in reference to restricted mental conceptions. “We only know the universe from the point of view of beings with five senses. Suppose we obtain another sense, the whole universe must change for us.” Because we perceive only a small portion of the universe, it appears to be inharmonious.¹¹⁵

In agreement with Vivekananda, Swami Abhedananda indicated, “The difference between good and evil is not one of kind, but of degree, like the difference between light and darkness. Again the same thing can appear as good and as evil under different circumstances. That which appears as good in one case, may appear as evil if the conditions change and the results be different.”¹¹⁶ What is considered to be a virtue in one society may be deemed a vice in another. “That which fulfills our interests is called good, and that which brings us misery or anything which we do not want, is called evil. When we look at the phenomena of nature by piecemeal, without recognizing their connection, we do not get the proper explanation of events. But if we look at the same phenomena as related to one another and to the whole universe, then we discover the true explanation.... It is limitation, the inability to recognize the relation of the part to the whole.”¹¹⁷ “If we judge everything from our standpoint, we can never know whether it is really good or evil, because our standard is limited and imperfect. Those who do not recognize the results of acts from different standpoints are liable to all kinds of error. If I judge the whole universe by my standard, my judgment will be very poor. But when I look at things from various standpoints, I can understand how the same event can produce good and evil in relation to different conditions.”¹¹⁸

The Church Father Augustine who had a Neo-Platonic background upheld the idea that, “Evil is not a natural thing, it is rather the name given to the privation of good (*privatio boni*). Thus there can be good without evil, but there cannot be evil without good.... Therefore, when we call a thing good, we praise its inherent nature; when we call a thing evil, we blame not its nature, but some defect in it contrary to its nature which is good.” “For what is evil by reason of a defect must obviously be good

of its own nature. For a defect is something that is contrary to nature, something which damages the nature of a thing—and it can do so only by diminishing that thing’s goodness. Evil therefore is nothing but the privation of the good. And thus it can have no existence anywhere except in some good thing.”¹¹⁹ An evil will is not an efficient cause, but a deficient cause since evil is the absence of the good, a negative condition of privation without any positive characteristics. Privation is the absence of the virtue that should be present in the object.¹²⁰

To quote Thomas Aquinas, “Evil is the absence of good which is natural and due to a thing.... But Evil has no formal cause, but is rather a privation of form. So, too, neither has it a final cause, but is rather a privation of order to the proper end.”¹²¹ Nothing is wholly evil, for the reason that it is not possible for corruption to fully consume what is good. “Now in things, each one has so much good as it has being, for good and being are convertible.”¹²² “The highest good is the cause of every being. Therefore there cannot be any principle opposed to it as the cause of evils.... Nothing can be evil in its very essence.... every being, as such is good, and that evil can exist only in good as its subject.... every evil is caused by good ... evil can be only an accidental cause and thus, it cannot be the first cause, for the accidental cause is subsequent to an essential cause.”¹²³ Privation is not a substance or an essence, but its negation, “as privation of sight is called blindness.” God and His creation would be equal in perfection, if the supernatural power fully objectified in His effects. Each entity receives only a portion of Divine goodness since, “His effect is always less than His power,” and is ordered according to a hierarchical scale of partial perfection. “The evil that accompanies one good is the privation of another good. Never therefore would evil be sought after, not even accidentally, unless the good that accompanies the evil were more desired than the good of which the evil is a privation.”¹²⁴ If evil were nonexistent, much good would be absent from the universe. For example, “the life of a lion would not be preserved unless the ass were killed. Neither would avenging justice nor the patients of a sufferer be praised if there were no injustice.” God allows evil to exist, but he skillfully creates a greater good from it. “The judgment, however, of the goodness of anything does not depend upon its reference to any particular thing, but rather upon what it is in itself, and on its reference to the whole universe, wherein every part has its own perfectly ordered place.”¹²⁵

The Doctrine of Privation is supported by the Sufi Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240), “Evil is the opposite of good, and nothing emerges from

the good but good; evil is only nonexistence of good. Hence, all good is existence, while evil is nonexistence ... Ignorance consists of the lack of knowledge, nothing else. Hence it is not an ontological quality.”¹²⁶

Arthur Lovejoy (1873-1962) who in 1897 while a student at Harvard was one of the signers of a letter requesting Swami Vivekananda to return to the United States from India, later termed this “The Great Chain of Being.” According to this conceptualization particularly held by the Platonist’s in the West: 1) the Principle of Oneness requires that all things are manifestation of the plenitude of a single entity called Spirit (or Goodness); 2) there a continuum and continuity in nature and not discrete differences, there are no gaps all things are coherently interwoven with one another; and 3) the continuum of Being is based on a hierarchy of levels, a gradation with emergent properties.¹²⁷ There is a hierarchy of levels of existence ranging from matter at the lower end through life, mind, and spirit. They proceed from the grossest to the subtlest level, from the external to the internal. Phenomena at a higher-scale level of organization exert causal influence on a lower-scale level, in a system of downward causation. Each of the four levels has a branch of knowledge that investigates it corresponding to physics, biology, psychology, and religion. Each of these four disciplines require different laws, concepts, and generalizations to explain them. Reality is multi-layered, the layers are intimately interconnected, and each contains the one below it. Reductionism does not deny the existence of the phenomena (eliminationism), but explains them in terms of epiphenomena of a more basic reality.¹²⁸

Concerning the imperfections of this world, as a very broad generalization (with many exceptions), Christians emphasize the active evil and sin, Hindus the mental ignorance and misunderstanding (avidya), and Buddhist the suffering and pain (dukkha) in the world.

In summary the relationship between evil and goodness is accounted for in these ways: 1 a) Things are not evil in their inherent nature or essence, but as a privation or an absence of the good (Augustine, Aquinas, Vivekananda); b) Evil is nothingness, the absence of being (Aquinas); c) Good and evil differ from each other not in kind, but in degree of intensity (Vivekananda, Abhedananda); and d) A single entity manifests Itself in various ways and degrees (Vivekananda). 2) If evil were nonexistent, much good would be absent from the world (Aquinas). 3) What appears to be evil from a limited perspective is good when viewed from the standpoint of the whole (Aquinas, Vivekananda, Abhedananda).

4a) What is good for one person or group can be bad for another (Vivekananda); and b) The same thing appears as good and as evil under different circumstances (Abhedananda).

The view of theodicy one takes is determined by the person's metaphysics and theology. Other attempts to explain the imperfections of the world (theodicy) include: Evil is an unreal illusion (Plotinus, Shankara, Mary Baker Eddy); Human reason is too limited to understand the workings of God; Problems and obstacles are necessary for personal growth (John Hicks); and There can be no virtues like compassion if some people are not suffering. If one believes Brahman-God is not fully omnipotent then the problem is solved by stating: Due to His "Permissive Will" God voluntarily surrenders some of His Omnipotence to allow for human free will (some Protestants); God created the world and then let it run by itself (Deism); God is the Final Cause (goal) and not the First Cause (creator) of the universe (George H. Howison); and a Finite God is not omnipotent (Zarathustra, Edgar Brightman). All of this assumes that human reason has the ability to explain the defects of the world.

An omnipotent Divine Will is not subject to any external restraints. Therefore reason cannot be external to the Divine Will forcing It to act in a particular way. Reason is Brahman-God in a nonpersonal form. Brahman-God follows reason because it is part of and one with Its nature. We cannot say that Brahman-God has to follow Its nature, because It is one with Its nature. They are not two separate entities. The human will reacts to something apart from it, but this is not the case for the Divine Will that is one with Brahman-God.

Endnotes

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³⁴ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 159.

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