

THROUGH HARDSHIP AND VICISSITUDE

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

We have heard the saying that the viaticum for a journey and knowledge that is obtained from others do not last long. Our convictions should guide us, though instructions from others may clear the way.

To come to the point, we are unhappy not because we are not wise, but because we are unable to apply our wisdom to suit the conditions or circumstances in which we live. Wisdom in the wrong place and at the wrong time has led some philosophers to grief. One should not wish to be too wise, beyond the prescribed limits. To adjust and adapt oneself to circumstances, while giving that magical touch of utter faith in the omniscience and omnipotence of God to all that we humbly try to do here is, in my opinion, better than a lofty ambition to transform the earth into heaven—which even Buddha and Christ have not done. The truly wise have often been indifferent to many things in which most people take an avid interest; and this is for a good reason, of course. Absorption, not repulsion, is the way in which Nature works. Even an initial isolation is for a higher inclusion.

If we want to be happy, we should not judge the present by a future ideal or a standard that ought to be, for the 'ought' is different from the 'is'. Though the ideal should guide our present activity, we should not compare the two

and feel despair. We seem to be displeased with the present setup of things because we are comparing it with an ideal which is yet to be, which is in our minds. While the ideal is good and should be in our minds always to keep our spirits elevated, we should not become theorists and forget the causes of the present circumstance, which is differentiated from the future ideal. Our duty is to understand, and not judge. "Judge not, lest ye be judged." Essentially, to see the good in things is real virtue, for the so-called ugliness is a phase of God's mystery.

Nimittamatram bhava: "Bemerely an instrument in work." An instrument has no right to judge or hold opinion, but to take things as they are, and when things go beyond one's control, leave them to Him, and not lament over the matter. But we should do what is within our capacity without involving our emotions or prejudices for certain things or even for ways of thinking. This is hard to appreciate and harder to practise, but there is no other go.

Man has many passions within him. One of the passions is the ego, which wants its ideas to be displayed throughout the world. People should not wish that their ideas should always prevail over the ideas of others. Ideas are not for lording over other people or imposing on other people's minds. Ideas should only be expressed, and suggestions sometimes given, and if they are not accepted we should not feel internal agony or annoyance. We should not expect that our thoughts be accepted by others, for appreciation cannot be thrust into people's minds. We are cogwheels in a cosmic machine; and as the machine works, the wheels move automatically. The Operator of the machine knows things better than we do, and it is not the business of the wheel to intrude or butt in as if it is an independent something. Its duty is merely to cooperate, not to assert. This, in my humble opinion, is the spirit of the karma yoga of the Bhagavadgita—to be in tune with a universal Be-ness.

Wholly unselfish persons cannot be found in the world. Those who are unselfish are only conditionally so. They are

good under certain circumstances. Flout their wishes, and they change. It is a pity that even those sworn bonds of love among human beings can become estranged overnight when people assume elevated positions in society. Then they sunder past relations as if they had never existed, and an entirely new life of mutual suspicion, distrust and dislike commences from the time of the appearance of Nature's illusions called power and wealth. These twin monsters gain access into both public and private sectors. Therefore, no one who is susceptible to these subtle subterfuges of the devil can be said to have a mastery over themselves. Plus, there are two gross forms in which Nature's impulses reveal themselves in one's person—sex and self-esteem. The slightest interference with these weak spots throws one into a fit of ireful retaliation. Hence, it is no wonder that the malady of the world has a fourfold root of power, wealth, sex and self-esteem.

Karma works in most intriguing and often annoying ways. That all our experiences are due to our past karmas cannot be doubted, because every event has a cause, and if our karma is not the cause of our pleasures and pains, to what else can they be attributed? They cannot be related to God, since He is free from prejudice and partiality and hence He cannot be held responsible for the variety of individualistic experience. Karma, therefore, is the cause.

Our karmas come back to us as boomerangs, proving that all karma is an interference with the equilibrium of Nature. When the results of karma return to us, we have, unfortunately, no knowledge of their causes, and so we grieve and curse ourselves and the world around us when we hear something that displeases us, when someone speaks ill of us though the criticism is false, when someone imputes motives to our actions that we have never thought of, when we are told that we are good-for-nothings just because we have not been able to abide by the irrational whims of some person or persons, when we are suspected for ill-founded reasons and imagined causes, when we are condemned for acts which we have not done, when we are belittled as the

cause of an unpleasantness of which we have no knowledge, when a tyrant rides roughshod over us in expressing his insatiated egoism, when we are done a wrong turn for the good we have done, when everyone turns against us for mistakes which we have not committed, when our friends become unkind to us when they rise to power and pomp, when our righteousness is lost sight of in the complacency and pride of those who do not want to understand others.

Though we may be aware of these shortcomings of human nature, we should have no complaints, no longing to be blazoned to the public eye, no ideas to be forced into others' minds, and no sorrow that such and such a thing has not been done. Why? I am of opinion that one's pleasure is not to be sought in *doing* something, but in *being* something. Until this is achieved, there cannot be joy either in our actions or in the things that we obtain. These will give us only misery.

This world, which is full of so many bad things, is tolerated by God. Even now, in this condition, it is His. Therefore, let there be patience and understanding of even the worst of things, so that we may be at peace within ourselves even when we are insulted with ungratefulness for the good that we try to do to people. Pericles of Greece raised the status of his country to a golden age, to the height of its glory, but he was stoned to death by his countrymen. As the Lord's ways are mysterious, we have only to wait with the patience of a servant for the descent of the knowledge of this mystery. We should not be displeased at heart, because we have no business either to be pleased or displeased with anything, though we do our duties as if we are pleased with things. We have neither the requisite knowledge nor the power to do what we want. Then, what is the way out? Should we cry and lament? Definitely not! The way out is to lift ourselves with the faith that God is great always.

Our importance and happiness should not always depend on what others think of us or feel about us. Our destiny is entirely dependent on what we are in the eyes of God. We should do our duty; let the world not respect us. But it is not

easy to know what our duty is at any given moment. Particular duties vary from circumstance to circumstance, irrespective of the fact that there is one general duty for everyone, which is God-realisation. Most of our sufferings and griefs arise because we do not understand the shifting of particular duties in our daily life, and we make the mistake of applying the same standard to everyone, to all things and always. When God Himself adjusts His laws to the conditions of the changing times, why should we not also do that?

This superior art of adjusting oneself to circumstances should be distinguished from hypocrisy, which is an artificial attitude born of selfishness. That is why a life of real wisdom is so difficult to live; there are so many slight shades of difference even in the apparently same dharma. Our thoughts, feelings and actions should not defeat the highest purpose for which we are supposed to live. Otherwise, it will not be a correct adjustment. We should not shun the world, nor should we live in such a way that the world shuns us. This is the secret of self-adjustment. At same time, we should not forget our true Goal. Bravo! May God bless us!