

THE STRUCTURE OF LIFE

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

It is an indisputable fact that what we value the most is life itself. It is not many among us that have a correct understanding of the nature of life, though we all know that life is what is the most valuable. We cannot conceive of anything more desirable than life, and this notion we cherish even without having a correct grasp of the true nature of life. On a careful investigation of what we mean by life, we understand that life includes everything that is comprehended by the fact of our *being aware*. The principle of consciousness includes the totality of our life.

Concept of Self

Life is attended with a kind of knowledge, consciousness, understanding, intelligence, awareness. When I say that I live, I mean that I have self-consciousness, whether it is implicit or explicit. It is implicit in the vegetable kingdom. It is explicit in the human kingdom. It is in a stage of transition in the animal kingdom. Life can be defined as the process of the development of consciousness, whatever be the degree of its manifestation in any particular individual. Taking into consideration the phenomenon of human life, we find that life is based essentially on experience. And what do we mean by experience? If you ask an ordinary man what he means by life's experience, he will not be able to give you a correct logical definition of it. But from the explanation of it which he

will try to give, you will draw the conclusion that he means by 'experience of life' the series of the processes of the reception of sensations from outside, the ordering of the sensations into perceptions and the converting of the perceptions into concepts, and then the passing of a judgment on whatever was originally experienced - sensuously.

Empirical Life

The five senses of knowledge form the basis of ordinary life. It is this that we refer to as temporal life, mundane life, empirical life, or earthly life, because it is based on the consciousness of the world presented to us by the senses. To put it concisely, experience is brought about in us by the senses. So we call this the sense-world, the world that is known or experienced by the senses. The man who relies upon the values of this material world is said to live in a world of the senses. He is confined to the functions of the senses, and his intellectual or rational judgments are based on what he experiences through the senses.

Just reflect for a while as to what ideas you have in your minds. You will find that you cannot think of anything which you have not seen or heard. You can stretch your imagination to the farthest limit, but you will notice that no thought of anything is possible, which neither the eyes have seen, nor the ears have heard. Now, what does this mean? It means that our life is based on sense-experience. Even our idea of God is tinged by the ideas of the objects of the senses. Our logical scrutiny, our intellectual judgment, is based on what we know through the senses. We need not pride ourselves over our intellectuality, for an intelligent student of philosophy or science will detect that our judgments, even if they are rational, are ultimately based on sense-experience. We are better than animals in the sense that we are able to order sense-perceptions into intellectual concepts, and exercise a determined will over them, whereas the animals are not able to do so. That is why we say that a human being

is rational, while the animal is only instinctive. Great thinkers have held that even our rational activity can be resolved into instinctive roots. The sages of yore, men of wisdom, the Rishis, have declared that human experience is not all, that the intellect is limited, because it is not capable of comprehending things as they are really in themselves. The life of reason is that of ordered instinct.

Yet there is one special feature which we have to notice in human experience which distinguishes it from instinctive life. Human life is centred in self-consciousness, i.e., all experiences in man are referred to a unit of the self, the 'I'. When the 'I' is recognised in an object, it becomes a 'he,' a 'she', or an 'it'. All these are comprehended by what we mean by the 'I'. The 'I' is an individual unit to which all sense-experiences are referred. You may call it my self or your self, as you please. This particular unit called the self is the point of reference in all experience. 'I see', 'I hear', 'I taste', 'I feel', 'I touch', 'I am happy', and 'I am sorry': all these experiences are tagged on to the fundamental unit of the 'I'. There is no such thing as 'you' or 'he', in truth, for these also are only the 'I' objectified. These are the 'I' as observed in objects outside the centre of perception. If life is experience, if experience is given to us through the senses, and if all experiences refer to the self, what is life? Life is an interpretation of the self. This may be done through the senses, through the intellect, or a faculty higher than the intellect; but all reference has ultimately to be made to the self. Suppose the self or the 'I' is completely abolished from life, experience would be impossible. Without the 'I' there is no experience, no life. There cannot be the process of seeing without an individual seeing. There cannot be an experience without a basic substratum of experience. There is thus a self – you may call it my self, your self, or any kind of self. The self is an experiencing unit which is endowed with the faculties of conception, perception and sensation. The whole life of man is centred in the idea of the self. Minus the self, the world is not. There is then no experience whatsoever – nothing is possible without the existence of this basic entity of the self.

Spatio-Temporal Personality

Now, what is this self? We began the analysis with immediate experience through the senses. Then we rose up to the conception of the self. Now, we have to understand and interpret the self. "What is self?" Put this question to anyone. "You say: 'your self', 'my self', etc. What do you mean by 'you', 'I', 'he' or 'it'?" By this unitary self one ordinarily means the constitution of the individuality, the body as an immediate presentation. What again is meant by this individual unit called 'body'? This object situated in space and time, exhibiting intelligence, the spatio-temporal personality conditioned by causation, is, then, this 'I'.

The material form, the bodily self, is the self known by the common man. When I say, "I feel heat" or "I feel cold", I refer to this material or bodily self. But I do not always live in this material body alone. When I say that I am hungry or thirsty, I refer to a stratum of self which is higher than the material one. You may call it the 'vital self'. It is the vital energy animating my body that is responsible for my feeling of hunger and thirst. That is why Yogins do not feel hunger and thirst when they control the vital self through Pranayama. The physical body is the gross form of another order of self animating it from within, as force or energy, the vital self. And when I refer to myself as being happy or sorry, I do not refer either to the bodily self or the vital self, but to the mental self. It is the mind that is happy or sorry, not the body or the Prana. When I say, 'I understand', or 'I do not understand', 'I am wise', or 'I am ignorant', I refer to the intellectual self, and not to the bodily self, the vital self, or even the mental self.

We are, ordinarily, not aware of any other form of the self than these. We live either in the body or in the Prana or in the mind or in the intellect. The highest living faculty manifest in this material universe is the intellect. The human being is not endowed with any power superior to the intellect or reason. Therefore, man calls himself a rational being. Now, viewing our analysis with a retrospective effect,

we find that life is experience, experience ordinarily is sensuous, and experience is referred to a self. And the self is manifest in various layers of personality – the material, the vital, the mental and the intellectual. Even here we do not exhaust the function of the self.

Objectification of Self

Consider your position in society. You are not satisfied with referring all experiences merely to your personal or individual self. You have a consciousness of something wider than your own personality. If you are the head of a family, you will find that your consciousness of the self is extended to the family. You are not confined merely to your body, to your mind, or to your intellect, but your self expands into the family. "If the family is happy, I am happy. If the family is sorry, I am sorry. If the family is dead, I feel as though I am dead." Here the individual has transferred the characteristics of the self to the family, and the characteristics of the family are superimposed on the self. Herein is disclosed one of the striking features of human life.

Life, though it is confined to the idea or the notion of the self, is not always confined to the individual or the bodily self. It expands itself into the group-life or the family-life. This is the meaning behind the usual attachment of self to the family. The self is transferred, as it were, to the totality of bodies constituting the family. From the outside this appears to be a wider form of self. A person who sacrifices his life for his family is supposed to be more altruistic, in the ordinary sense of the term, than the one who lives for his own bodily comfort. When a person lives merely for his own body, you call him selfish, and if he does so for the sake of the family, you say that he is more unselfish.

Extension of Self

The extension of the self does not come to an end with the family. It extends itself, sometimes, to the society or the community to which one belongs. A person is capable of

identifying his self with the community, a vast society consisting of many members, many families or many villages. Here, as one commonly thinks, altruism is increased further. A person who confines himself merely to his family is considered to be more selfish than a person who identifies himself with a vast society or a group of human beings. We may call this form of the self the community-self.

Further on, the self may expand itself to the nation. A patriotic person may sacrifice his life for the sake of the country. He feels that his self is spread over the country, not restricted to his family or community. Here the self has moved itself externally to such an extent that it goes beyond the ordinary notion of self which people usually are familiar with. There are people who have died for the sake of their country, because they never felt that the self is the body or the individual personality, that the self is the family or a small group of their own, but that the self has the whole country or the nation for its sphere of operation. We say the patriot is the most unselfish man, because he works for a wider form of the self, a country-self, or a national self. But there are others who live for the whole world, whose self gets itself identified with the entire humanity, not merely with a particular country or a nation. These are patriots of a still higher order. They lead the life of the consciousness of the world itself. Here the self has expanded itself to the being of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Superimposition

Are there, then, many selves – an individual self, a family-self, a community-self, a national self, a world-self? Is there a multiplicity of selves in the world? This question can be answered only if we know what the self can be, ought to be, or is. Let us bring back to our minds the result of our analysis. We began with the analysis of sense experience. We referred it to the unit of the self. Then we began to take notice of the different forms taken by the self in this world of

space and time. Now we are in a position to answer the question: "What is life?"

Life is a function of the self, whatever be the extent of its manifestation in the space-time world. We may say that life, as we know it, is, as a whole, empirical. By the word 'empirical' we mean 'connected with or known in sense-experience'. Though the life of the individual self is apparently transcended in the self which gets identified with the family or the society or the country, you will find that it has not really expanded itself in its wanderings in these external fields, but has merely transferred its own personal characteristics to its external environment. The meaning of this transference can be clear only if we understand what the head of a family does by identifying himself with his family. Nothing more happens when he identifies himself with the family than the superimposition of the characteristics of the individual self to the different members of the family taken as a single unit of reference.

Fundamental Urges

What are the fundamental urges of the individual? Hunger, libido and fame. Hunger is the foremost among the instincts which limit the individual to a circumscribed field. "I must feed my body – I must feed every member of my family" is an instinctive feeling. Here an individual need has been recognised in other individuals with whom a particular individual has identified himself. There is also the desire for fame, power, respect and honour. No one wishes to be censured or degraded.

Everybody wishes to retain self-respect, self-esteem. This individual characteristic is transferred to the family. No one wishes that one's family should be censured or be inferior. "As I am honoured, my family, too, should be honoured and exalted." These individual characteristics are, again, transferred to the community. "My community should not be censured, my community should be fed well." The same feeling is transferred to the nation. "Everybody in my nation

should be fed, nobody in my nation should starve. My country should not be censured or lowered in any way." The fundamental instincts which drag the individual to earthly life are the desire for wealth, power and sex-fulfilment. These fundamental gross urges are transferred in various degrees, gradually, from the individual to the environment, through family, country, nation, etc., which are but names of groups of individuals enjoying common characteristics.

Essential Self

But are these the essential properties of the self? Is the self merely an aggregate of divided bodies? As we have noted before, the self is a centre of experience. Experience is nothing if it is not attended with awareness or consciousness. Now, can this consciousness of the self be expanded, in the way stated before, to the external environment in space and time? Is there any such thing as a family-self, a community-self or a country-self? Though people identify their selves with such external forms and suffer or rejoice, those who had the intuitional experience of the Truth have declared that the self cannot be divided in such a way.

We cannot have a multiplicity of selves, because the moment a second self is posited, it becomes not a self, but a 'not-self,' Anatman. It is something external to the self. That which is posited as something external to the self can be experienced only through the senses. Now let us come back to our previous analysis. Nothing that is not known through the senses is known to man. So, if there is a second self, it ought to be a body known through the senses, as everything in this world is an object of the senses. We know the world merely as made up of particles or bodies of matter. Our own bodies are the configurations of matter.

So the external sensible forms of the self ought to be material expressions. They are not conscious entities. We cannot see consciousness or hear consciousness. We cannot sense it in any way. There is no such thing as sensuous experience of consciousness. This leads us to the conclusion

that there is no sense-experience of the Atman. The moment you objectify the self, it becomes a material body, and not a centre of consciousness. If I know you are intelligent, it is not because I directly perceive your intelligence, but because I perceive in you certain effects of intelligence which I perceive in myself.

So there is no such thing as objective perception of the self. There is only inference of the characteristics of the presence of the intelligent self in others. It is on account of this inference that I deduce that there is a self in you all. This inference is drawn from my own experience. The fundamental experience is of the self, not of the 'not-self', not of the family, society or country, not of anything outside me. The entirety of life, therefore, is based on the fact of self-consciousness.

Aberration from Truth

We have seen how the self gets transferred to external conditions in various degrees. The self is a centre of consciousness, and it cannot be divided. It is *Akhanda-Satchidananda* – indivisible existence-consciousness-bliss. This is the essential Atman. It is this that erroneously gets identified with external spatio-temporal conditions. It is this life of *self-othering* that is called *samsara*. *Samsara* is aberration from Truth, running away from the centre of Self (Atman). It is the moving away of the Self, as it were, from Itself, in search of external conditions of Itself. The whole life of *samsara* is thus explained by the search of the Self for Itself in conditions outside Itself. This is the very essence of *samsara* or mundane becoming. It is the attempt of the Self to look at Itself through the senses as the objects external to Itself and then enjoy Itself.

If I try to possess myself, how can I do it? I cannot possess myself as an object, for I am what I am. There is no question of desiring myself; but the world is ruled by desires, by ambitions, cravings, longings, urges and instincts. Why? Because the Self has been falsely projected to external spatio-

temporal appearances. To withdraw the consciousness of the Self from materialisation into the existence of external things and conditions is the essence of spiritual Sadhana; and the essence of worldly life is to believe in the reality of the presence of these external spatio-temporal phenomena. This is the distinction between the life worldly and the life spiritual.

Even the attempt at a withdrawal of the sense-consciousness from outward conditions and the endeavour to centre it in the Self is a great step taken forward along the path of spiritual Sadhana. But if we allow the senses to run amuck among what they consider to be real or true, they will be bound by what they consider to be true. The essence of evil and sin is belief in things that perish. The moment we pin our faith in fleeting things, we begin to bind ourselves with chains created by ourselves, and throw ourselves into the prison-house which we ourselves have built.

We suffer on account of a lack of knowledge of the true nature of things. If the Self should ultimately be a centre of consciousness, and if this consciousness cannot be more than one, then, there can be only one Self in the universe. There can be no such thing as a multiplicity of selves. It is very hard for us, bound souls, to grasp this point, because we are so much wedded to sense-experience. We have so much identified ourselves with the senses that we cannot conceive of anything other than what is perceived by us through them. We are all living in a sense-world. We are all sensual beings, knowing and feeling in terms of the senses. Such beings the Upanishads refer to as Asuras, devilish, demoniac, who do not know their own essential divine nature. To be a Sura or a divine entity one has to turn one's attention from sense-experience to spiritual realisation.

Aims of Human Existence

The wise seers have conceived of four values, or ends of human existence – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. They have summed up the entire life of the human being in the

concept of these four values. There is nothing on earth which is not comprehended by these great aims. Dharma is the ethical value of life, Artha the material value, Kama the vital value, and Moksha the infinite value. It is this last which comprehends all the other lower values.

Life is based on Dharma. It is Dharma that forms the basis of the attainment of even Moksha, not to speak of Artha and Kama. Bereft of Dharma, there is no scope of even the justness of Artha and Kama. The scriptures declare that there is no such thing as eternal enjoyment of any object of this world. We cannot possess Artha or material objects eternally with Kama or desire for them. Why? Because such desire is based on the fundamental error of the objectification of the Self or the separation of the Self into something other than Itself. But a person who has the consciousness of the unity of the Self lives a happy life in this world. The ideal of the Karma Yogi sums up this goal of a happy life of Pravritti.

The life of the householder, or the Grihastha, is said to be a well-ordered and regularised attempt to lead the life of Pravritti for the acquisition of Artha and Kama with the ideal of Moksha as their determining factor. The fulfilment of desires and the possession of wealth are to be based on Dharma which is an empirical expression of the nature of Moksha itself. No one can lead a life of Adharma and be happy, because happiness is the nature of the Self, and Dharma, too, is an expression of the law of Self. Dharma is not a law imposed upon us by another external being, not even by any God outside us. It is called Sanatana, the eternal.

Eternal Law

The Dharma of the Eternal is inseparable from the Dharma of our own Self. This Dharma is conceived of in the Rig-Veda as Rita. There are two significant words, 'Rita' and 'Satya'. Rita is the order of nature, the regularity which is visible in the universe. Satya is the Reality behind Rita. We may say that there is no regularity here, there is only chaos. No. There is no real chaos. There is system, method, order,

regularity, everywhere in the universe, because this universe is ultimately governed by the Self. It is the body of the universal Self. It is the external appearance of the Virat Purusha.

There is one God. He is the Absolute; He is everything. As the different limbs of the body are held together and comprehended in the consciousness of a single personality, so the different individuals here are held together and comprehended in the one consciousness of the Universal Self. Hence there is no such thing as a multiplicity of selves. My right hand is not different from the left, as far as 'mine-ness' in regard to them is concerned. If either of these hands is hurt, I say, "I am hurt." If the foot is hurt, I say, "I am hurt". The whole body is "I". In the same way the whole universe is "I".

There can be no existence of the individual self without the Universal Self. We are expressions of that Self. As the different cells of the body are integrated into a single personal consciousness, so this Virat Consciousness, the Ishwara-Chaitanya, integrates the different individuals of the universe into one whole Being. To be aware of this fact is the fundamental duty of one's life.

Fundamental Duty

All Yogas aim at the maintenance of this consciousness. One cannot be happy in the world, unless one conforms to the law of this universal Self in some way or the other. One has to conform to the law of the Self to the best of one's ability. This is Yoga. This is Dharma. This is Rita. Dharma does not belong to any particular religion. It is an expression of the law of the Supreme Reality Itself. Dharma is the manner or the way in which the law of the Supreme Self works in the world of space and time. Adharma is that which goes contrary to the nature of this fundamental Self.

The Self is one; It is the Root, the Reality Itself. It has no religion, no philosophy. It is what It is. It is Being Itself. Every

religion is an attempt to recognise Its presence in life, in the best possible way. Our allegiance to that Self is expressed in our practice of religion. Our understanding of the nature of the Self is the central function of philosophy. Religion is practical philosophy. Philosophy is theoretical religion. The two go together.

As life springs from the Self, it has to be based on Dharma. Life in the family should be based on Dharma, and so also social life and national life. In every way we have to adhere to the eternal law. It is obvious therefore that Dharma is the basis of Artha and Kama. The four Purusharthas form an integrated whole. Dharma is common to all levels and grades of life. Artha and Kama are predominantly the conditions of the life of a householder, and Moksha is the ideal of everyone, as Dharma is the law for all. The nature of the manner in which Artha and Kama are to be aspired for is determined by Dharma. And Dharma is the law of Moksha. In order to understand Dharma, we have, therefore, to understand Moksha.

Moksha is nothing but the condition of the Absolute, the Eternal Self. It is the state of unconditioned freedom, untouched by the existence of external entities. It is not freedom conditioned by anything outside. It does not come to an end. That is why it is called Kevalata or singleness of Being, not in the sense of a single individuality, but as one existence without limitations from anything outside. To be conscious of this Universal Life and then to act on the basis of that consciousness as an individual forming a member of the family, society, country or the world, is Karma Yoga. It is to do one's duty with the consciousness of the Atman.

Means to Realisation

What is duty? Duty again, may take many forms. It expresses itself in various degrees of intensity and extensiveness. But at every step it exhibits itself as part and parcel of our advance towards the realisation of God. Duty is

the fulfilment of Rita and Satya in the temporal realm. It is abiding by the law of the Self in every stage and state of life.

There is no duty, in the strictest sense of the term, which is not concerned with our march towards Self-realisation. All duties in life are accessories to this supreme duty of Self-realisation. The ideal of such realisation is not merely the ideal of the Sannyasin, or the recluse; it is the ideal of every human being. It is the goal of every individual in this world.

There is no such thing as a genuine individual happiness, individual pleasure or individual good. The individual good is a part of the universal good. Every action of ours should be directed to the universal good. This is the ideal of the Karma Yogi – to act not for personal pleasure, but for duty's sake.

Duty for the sake of duty, not for the acquisition of anything outside itself, is the rule of the good and the wise life. The moment one utters the word 'duty,' one has said everything. One need not add any adjective to it. The recognition in life of the Universal Self is the principle that ought to govern every action in our life, and it is this goal that is aimed at by the practice of the different Yogas – Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga etc.

Truth is the Law of Life

Meditation on the Supreme Being is our highest ideal, our greatest good. One cannot completely forget this aim and yet be happy in this world. Every action in life should be converted into a form of Yoga. We do not know at which moment of life we may cast off this body, and the dominant thought of our present life determines the nature of our next life. We must be continuously practising Yoga, because that is the way in which we can conform to the law of Truth. Our mainstay should always be Truth.

Truth, Rita, is the law of life. Anything that goes contrary to it is Anrita, falsehood. Rita is the cosmic unitary law of nature, and Anrita is its opposite. Anrita should be abolished from life. Rita is the glory of God. To lead this life of Rita we

have to adopt various methods of conduct and practice. Yoga is the main clue. Yoga is not difficult to practise, if only it is properly understood. It is living in tune with God; it is abiding by the principle of Truth, and avoiding the path of untruth. Personal interest should never govern one's action.

A Karma Yogi sees God in action. A Bhakti Yogi sees God in every form, and loves every form as God Himself. A Raja Yogi ever concentrates his mind on the concept of God or Self, either by inhibition of the mind's functions or by positive concentration of it on Reality. The Jnana Yogi realises the Eternal Presence, inside and outside, and the whole of his life's activity becomes a spontaneous expression of Divine Life. His life is inundated by a ceaseless consciousness of the Supreme Being. Meditation on this Reality, this Self, is one's supreme duty in life.

Meditation

We may practise meditation in any way that is in fitness to our capacity, aptitude or temperament. It should not be confined merely to a particular part of the day. It ought to be a continuous awareness of the Divine Presence. Though in the beginning we may start by meditating for a few minutes every morning, later on meditation should extend to a few hours at least, and afterwards it should completely occupy a part of our mind throughout day and night.

The ordinary life of the individual is one of Kamachitta or the mind filled with desires, which is related to the Rupachitta or the mind associated with forms. Without forms there is no Kama. Kama is always associated with Rupa. Desire is an urge for any external entity, some phenomenon known to the senses. The first purpose of Yoga is to withdraw the Kamachitta from its natural operations in conjunction with Rupa and to centre it in the essence behind the Rupa or form, i.e., in the form unassociated with the Kamachitta.

From Kamachitta we rise to Rupachitta, the mind contemplating the subtle essence. In all this, we should have a positive aspiration, a yearning to withdraw ourselves from the world of Kamachitta. Without that aspiration or Mumukshutwa, there is no possibility of practising any kind of Yoga. Yoga does not drop from the heavens. It has to be practised with a deliberate, intensified consciousness. It is the systematised attempt to become aware of Truth as It is.

Process of Sublation

From Kamachitta it is very difficult to go to Rupachitta. The processes that have to be undergone by the Sadhaka in transcending the sense-world and entering the world of concepts are fourfold. First, there is concentration on a chosen visible form. It is very difficult to teach Yoga to an ordinary man, because he is so much attached to the notion of the reality of visible objects. If you tell him, "Withdraw your mind from the object which you see before you," he will not be able to do that. He will say: "I see the hard reality before me; I cannot feel that it is unreal; therefore I cannot concentrate on the unreality of the object of the senses." Such persons are asked first to concentrate their minds on a form.

Together with this practice the inhibition of the bodily and mental functions should be attempted. The body is to be seated in one posture, Siddhasana, Padmasana, Svastikasana or Sukhasana. The mind usually is concentrated on different objects. It then flits from one object to another, because of distraction. In this stage of Yoga the mind is made to centre itself on one particular physical object alone.

From the notion of the reality of the physical form of the object, the aspirant is asked to go to the notion of the reality of the abstract concept behind that object. In other words, it is what the philosopher Plato referred to as the eternal idea underlying an object. In Hindu philosophy we call it the subtle body, Sukshma Sareera. From the physical form, we have to go to the subtle. First, many objects are presented to us in the world. Then we come to the consciousness of a

single object. Then again we come to the subtler aspect of it. The fourth stage is where we divest even that subtler aspect of all individuality and rest the consciousness on its pure existence alone. This is the last stage of meditation, first began on form, to be practised for transcending the Kamachitta and entering the world of the Rupachitta.

Impediments

It is hard to realise this Rupa-consciousness. The greatest obstacle, the immediate impediment which presents itself to the aspirant is stupor or torpidity. This stupor has to be overcome by the exercise of reason and other means such as dietetic discipline, etc. Reason should be used every moment of one's life. The Tamasic nature is overcome by Vitarka (reason).

Then we have to overcome doubt. Various forms of doubt will enter the mind. "Am I right in practising this form of meditation? Perhaps not. Am I right in choosing this Guru, or not? Has my Guru attained Self-realisation, or not? Is it necessary to practise meditation, or not? Many are happy even without practising meditation. Why should I meditate?" Then the persistent notion of the reality of the world will be there. "The world is real. Who says that it is unreal? I am feeling it as hard as I can feel a rock. Perhaps the spiritual teachings are false. They do not conform to truth."

Thus the mind will turn away from Sadhana again and again. Various types of doubt will begin to crop up. These doubts have to be rent asunder by discrimination, study, holy company, self-analysis and deep meditation. Many other obstacles will follow. There may be Dvesha or hatred for the objects of the world. The worldly man hates God. The spiritual man may start hating the world. One should be very careful here. There should be no hatred of any kind. This element of hatred or aversion should be conquered generating the pure emotions of love and compassion and right knowledge.

Then there will be Vikshepa, distraction or the flitting of the mind from one object to another, attended with worry. Concentrate the mind on one idea, it will run to another idea or form. This is unsteadiness, a great impediment in Sadhana. This Vikshepa should be overcome by persistent endeavour. Yet another obstacle to be overcome is Kama or desire-desire for pleasurable objects or conditions of life. This has to be overcome by strict self-discipline, by disassociation with distracting objects (it is essential in the beginning), by practice of dispassion and one-pointedness of mind.

Graduated Abstraction

As a famous verse of a minor Upanishad puts it: *Andhavad pasya rupaani sabdam badhiravat srunu* – “Like a blind man, look at objects; like a deaf man, hear sounds.” This means to say that sense-experience should not be allowed to penetrate within. The mind gets fattened on account of its being fed by sense-objects. The senses have to be restrained first by the process of Pratyahara, abstraction. Then the mind becomes transparent, filled with purity or Sattva. Thus one has to go from the realm of Kamachitta to that of Rupachitta, and then to the world of Arupachitta, the purified mind, which we call Hiranyagarbha. After this stage of realisation comes the last stage of what the Buddhists call Lokottarachitta or the transcendental mind, which is freed from all desires, absolutely.

The process of graduated abstraction begins with meditation on a concrete object. Take the form of an Ishta-Devata – Rama, Krishna, Siva or Devi or any form which is the best suited to one’s mind. In the initial stages an aspirant should take the aid of a Murti or an image, or at least a picture. Take, for example, the form of Siva. How to meditate on Siva? You have first to keep an image of Siva before you. It does not mean that Siva is like the image. You have to concentrate the mind on the form not because Siva is like that form, but because the form is necessary to take you to

the real Siva. You transfer all the qualities of Siva to that form.

Open your eyes; look at the picture. When you look at the picture, you should have no other idea in the mind. Only one idea of the form should be there; none else. Go on looking at the picture. This is the first stage. Then shut your eyes and think of the picture in the mind. When you cannot think of the picture properly, open your eyes and look again at the picture. Continue the practice as long as you cannot dispense with the concrete picture. Then concentrate the mind on the abstract form of the Deity. This is the second stage.

One in the Many

Then the third stage is that in which one tries to visualise this abstract form in every object of this universe. The Supreme Siva is not confined to one personality alone. All the objects of this world are manifestations of Siva. The infinite forms of the Lord have to be visualised in this third form of meditation, not as separate entities but as one consciousness revealed through many objects. By this time the Tamoguna of the mind is completely overcome. In this third stage the mind will be lifted up by its own impetus of meditation.

The mind, ordinarily, lives on diverse foods. It never likes to be fed with only one thing continuously. It wants variety. One would have noted that if one goes on doing Japa for a long time, sleep is induced. But when one sees a cinema show, one does not fall asleep. Why? Because there is a variety of objects in it. There is sense-communication and diversity. But in Japa and meditation there is no pleasure, because there is no variety, nothing to attract the mind. Sleep is the trick played by the mind to cease from the act of concentration. It does not want to concentrate itself on any one object alone. It wants to jump from one thing to another. Variety sustains the mind in this world.

All forms of the world are manifestations of the one Absolute. The mind should be made to understand that the Substance out of which all things are made is One. Then the mind will not be distracted or restless. It runs from one object to another, because it thinks that there is some value in that object which is different from the object of meditation. The mind should be educated and made to understand that it need not flit from one object to another for obtaining happiness. If Truth is one, It is in every form at every time. The mind should be aware of this substance present in multiple forms and thus will not be distracted by their diversity.

In the fourth stage, the multiplicity of the substance in objects gives rise to a single universal form of the Divine Being. Then all forms vanish altogether, and there is an experience of the oneness of the meditator's consciousness with the object of meditation itself. This stage is that of self-absorption or Samadhi.

Our Ideal

Meditation on the Supreme Self has therefore to be practised in every possible way, externally as well as internally. Our whole life should be one of meditation. We should live according to Dharma, which is the law of the Self. This can be possible only if we maintain a continuous consciousness of the Self, the Eternal.

The highest Dharma is the recognition of our intimate relation to the Absolute Self, and every other form of Dharma is a partial manifestation of this ultimate Dharma. The lower Dharma is a movement towards the affirmation of this Supreme Dharma. Our activities in life should be processes of our evolution towards the Infinite. Our life amidst the things of this world should be converted, transformed and transfigured into divine life.

Our life should be centred in the Self, and not in objects. Life ought to reflect God-Being. Our duty in life is to adhere to this law, this Dharma of the Divine Being, the Self. The universe is essentially a unitary whole. It is One Being, a single individual experience. Therefore, our attitude to the universe should be the same as the attitude which we have towards ourselves. This is the meaning of the saying "Love your neighbour as yourself." The universe is an expression of ourself, but only we should understand what we actually mean by 'Self'.

We have noticed that there are various forms of the expression of the Self. All these expressions should be considered as appearances of the one Self alone. Our ultimate happiness is in the Knowledge of the true Self, not in its empirical expressions as the family, community or nation, though their relative bearing in our life is acknowledged. *Yo vai bhuma tat sukham* – "the Infinite alone is bliss." The pleasure that we derive from the objects of this world is only a drop of that Supreme Bliss. But for the existence of That, we would not have experienced any joy in life. We live, because the Supreme Self Is. We understand, because the Self is Intelligence. We enjoy, because the Self is Bliss. Satchidananda is the nature of the Self. It is this one Self that goes by different names – God, Brahman, the Absolute.

"To love all as one loves oneself" is the succinct statement of Dharma. Universal love is a mark of saintliness. It cannot come to all. Universal love is the consequence of Self-realisation. Only saints and sages can have it. It is to see the Self in every being and to work in this world as an instrument in the hands of the Supreme Being. The fruits of actions will not then cling to the individual, because then it is not the individual that acts, it is God that acts in this world. The actor, the action, the goal of action – all these are but a combined process in the one Reality. The agent is not separate from the result of the action, nor is the process of the action of the agent different. There is but one universal process, of which we are just bits, parts or aspects.

Pre-Conditions of Realisation

In the spiritual path a Guru's help is necessary. Mere study of books and ratiocination cannot help us much, because these are mere intellectual processes. The Guru's initiation opens the portals of realisation. Satsanga is absolutely necessary in the attainment of spiritual knowledge and the practice of meditation. One must be well-equipped for the reception of this knowledge. There should be correct understanding, perfect detachment and a yearning for Moksha, or Mumukshutwa. Genuine aspiration is the pre-condition of success in leading a spiritual life.

Spiritual life is not some queer form of life distinct from the ordinary way of life. It is *the* life, the only true life. One should give the transforming touch of spirituality to every form of life that one lives in this world. Life is essentially spiritual, whether we recognise it or not. When one recognises it, one becomes a saint. When we do not do that, we live as ordinary mortals and go through the rounds of birth and death. Desires can be completely uprooted only by a sincere love for God, an aspiration for Self-realisation, which we ought to have every moment of our life. This is the *background* of the fourfold means prescribed by the ancient seers – Sadhana-Chatushtaya.

The four means to Self-realisation are correct understanding and discrimination; dispassion or Vairagya; the sixfold virtue – tranquillity of mind, control of the senses, etc. – and intense yearning for the Ideal. Unless we have an intense desire for Self-realisation, we will not progress much in the spiritual path; and this yearning comes from Viveka and Vairagya, accelerated by Gurukripa. Gurukripa and Ishvarakripa (God's grace) are necessary for leading the spiritual life. The goal of life is the realisation of God or the Self. This Self or God is not some otherworldly entity, something beyond us, but It is here and now; It is identical with us. We are That. To recognise and realise That is the purpose of life.