

LIVING IN VEDANTA

MEDITATIONS

AND

CONTEMPLATIONS



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1. Meditation
2. Common themes in techniques
3. The Gita on Meditation
4. Attitudes in Meditation
5. The basics of Meditation
6. Relaxation
7. Chanting
8. The roles and the actor
9. Meditation
10. Surrender
11. Grace
12. Living a spiritual life
13. My life
14. Learning
15. My future
16. Karma
17. The unknown
18. The Evil Eye
19. Dreams
20. Seeking the guru.
21. The disciple
22. Indian ethos
23. Who am I?
24. Limitations and Freedom
25. Truth
26. Growing up
27. The mind
28. The Ideal
29. Opposites
30. Disappointments
31. Healthy Love
32. Peace

1. Meditation

Meditation is about getting in touch with myself, the simple, uncomplicated Self, the Self that is free from the various roles that I play in life.

Meditation is also a quiet prayer in which I invoke the higher self - the self that supports, encourages, inspires, motivates, and guides.

Meditation thus involves two aspects one, separating myself from all complications, two, recharging myself to reach my potential.

Meditation, in the ultimate analysis, is settling with the understanding of what I really am in essence as revealed in Vedanta - boundless, timeless, limitless awareness.

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2.Common themes in techniques

Among the many forms of meditation like yoga, transcendental meditation, vipaasana, zen, etc., there are many common themes.

These techniques are geared to heighten the ability to be aware,
be focused,
be centred,
be relaxed,
be objective,
be flexible in thought,
be prayerful in one's attitudes.

Each technique caters to an aspect of the spirit, and helps to build it up.

The stated objective of some forms of meditation apparently seems to be the elimination of the mind.

The result is however generally a relaxed, tranquil, abiding, awareful, centred and focused mind.

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3. The Geeta on meditation

The Bhagavad Geeta describes meditation as placing the mind in the Self - "Aatma", to the exclusion of everything else.

It talks about the meditator seated with head, neck and torso all aligned and erect, with attention directed towards the place between the two eyebrows.

The seat is neither too high nor too low, and is made by spreading kusha grass, deerskin and cloth one over the other.

The meditator does not fast too much or eat too much, and is moderate in sleep and waking.

The Geeta describes the mind as fickle and hard to control. Yet regular practice along with a dispassionate objective approach is able to overcome the mind's tendencies.

4. Attitudes in meditation

A prayerful attitude helps in meditation,
whereby I invoke my higher self,
and in the process bring to surface
the innocent, trusting aspect
in myself.

I keep all my problems aside for the moment
and let divinity into my heart.
There is a non-demanding attitude
and I am open to situations -
"this is how the world is,
and this is how I have to take it."

The serenity prayer says it all -
"Lord, grant me
the serenity to face the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can, and
the wisdom to know the difference."

There is no hurry in meditation.
I allow peace and serenity to take over my being.
The more I struggle, the less tranquil I am.
I just let me be myself, -
the simple uncomplicated self.

My regrets and resentments,
my failures and shattered hopes,
are all surrendered unto the higher self, -
"Eesha", the Lord.

I set aside all judgements,
and just am what I was as a child -
innocent, wondrous, trusting self.
I am in the presence of the Lord.
I am at peace. I surrender unto him.

Om Eeshaaya Namah.
Om Eeshaaya Namah.
Om Eeshaaya Namah.

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5. The basics of meditation

The beautiful thing about meditation
is that I have already arrived at the destination
before I have even started -
i.e. I have arrived at myself!

The process of meditation
is only an aid
to help me familiarise myself
with that fact.

There is nowhere to go,
nothing to be gained.
I simply am myself,
the simple awareful Self.

Even if I'm not exposed
to the teachings of Geeta and Upanishads,
I can still be myself
at a relative level...
as the one aware of all my experiences,
as the one unchangingly present
in and through the changes
in my life.

All this seems to be theory...
It appears to be
a different world altogether
from the real world I live in.
That is what I have been
conditioned to believe.

Meditation, to a certain extent,
helps to bridge that gap
between what I believe and what really is.

I consciously turn my attention around,
I return to my roots,
coming back to what I am,
coming back to myself.

What is the best time for meditation?
Although certain times
like early dawn are conducive,
there is really no right time for it.

Rather the time is right
when I am ready
and mentally prepared
for meditation.

It is helpful however to have
certain regular hours while meditating,
for that ensures that I keep in touch
even when I am not in the mood for it.

I wear clothing that is not too tight,
comfortable and appropriate for the weather.
Simple measures
like a wash or a bath
can refresh me.

What if I feel sleepy?
Sometimes a sip of hot coffee
can be a great help
(provided it does not become a habit).

By the same logic,
a full meal immediately before a session
is not a great idea.

Religious rituals like poojaa
may go along with the practice of meditation
but are not essential.

6.Relaxation

What do I usually associate
with the word "relaxation"?
An easy chair... Watching TV. ...
Vacations... Lunch-break... Sleep!

Generally, in the complexities
of my life and lifestyles,
the only relaxation I know
is in taking a break,
getting away from it all,
spacing out.

Many of us have only two mental modes -
either "full steam ahead"
or "switched off".

Yet there are others
who are quite relaxed
while being fully alive
and are achievers in their own way.

Relaxation happens when I am able to let go
of the unnecessary unimportant stuff,
without losing track of
essential, vital matters.

I often see this inner leisure
in persons who are adepts in their field, -
like musicians, scientists, orators, etc.

I start with the essentials.
I tell myself
that I have something important to do,
that I want no disturbance
or distractions.

I invoking within myself
the spirit of meditation,
a mind that is alive to itself.

I tell myself
that every time I am distracted
I will be aware of the fact,
and will promptly return to my meditation.

Once I have registered this
in my subconscious,
I am ready for meditation.

Every time the mind wanders,
I am aware of it
and I simply come back
to the meditative state of mind.

I have created a filter
that screens every thought
before being allowed admission
in my mind.

I sit in a comfortable posture,
with the back comfortably erect.
My posture is such
that I can remain undisturbed
for a length of time.

If I am not used
to sitting cross-legged on the floor,
I use a chair.

My hands rest on the lap,
and I rest my eyes
by gently shutting the eyelids.

Mentally I review
my entire body
part by part -
feet, legs,
waist, hips,
abdomen, sides...

Chest, lower and upper back,
shoulders,
neck,
face,
eyes,
forehead,
back and top of the head.

I acknowledge any tension or pain
wherever it occurs in my body.
I do not try to control it -
*just allow it to be there
and leave it alone.

I observe my breathing.
I watch the breath
as it goes in
and goes out.

I do not try to control it,
letting it just happen naturally
until I feel rested.

I am now ready
for the next step -
"Japa".

7. Chanting

If a particular form of invocation and prayer
is already part of my routine,
I recite it now in my mind.

In invoking the Lord,
I am also invoking
the worshipper in myself.

As a devotee, I can afford to let go
of my anxieties and hurts
and just let myself be enveloped
by the Lord's grace.

If I am used to chanting a "mantra",
I chant it now.
Or else I simply repeat the words -
"I bow to the Lord" -
Om Eeshaaya Namah.

I use the mental filter
that I have already set up
at the beginning of meditation
to ignore distractions of any kind,
especially from within myself.

Whenever I get distracted,
I simply come back to the chant again.
If I have been chanting loudly till now,
I let go of it, and chant mentally.

I have now set up
an unbroken stream of thought -
each one similar to the other -
"sajaateeya vritti pravaaha".

I listen to each chant
as it comes and goes
in my awareness.

I listen after each chant
to the silence that comes after.
The chant dies
into silence.
The silence yields
to the chant.

Chant. Silence.
Chant. Silence.
Chant. Silence.

After I have completed
the chanting,
there is only silence.

No chant. Silence.
No chant. Silence.

Silence.
Silence.
Silence.

Om.

8. The roles and the actor

In life I play many roles.
I am a householder, employee,
parent, friend, tax payer, citizen, and much more.
In every role, I have obligations...
I have challenges.

Each role comes with its own quota
of roses and thorns.
Sometimes I am overwhelmed
by the stress of playing the roles.

Often there is unpleasantness
that I could do without.
In the midst of this role-playing,
I forget the central role I play -
"Myself".

I could do much better
by getting in touch with myself,
the central role
that pervades all my other roles.

How do I get in touch with myself?
Is there really someone behind all roles?
Am I not a complex personality,
all the roles put together in one?

This doubt comes
because I have not taken the opportunity
of distancing myself from the roles,
of being objective to my own role-playing.

Of course, I judge myself most of the time
and rate my performance
for better or worse,
but rarely have I succeeded
in separating myself
from my performance.

In quieter moments at times,
when I look back
and review my interactions,
I find many of my behaviours
are unlike myself -they are not I.

Rather they are learnt behaviours
picked up from different sources
and incorporated by me.
Some behaviours I have learnt from my parents,
some from siblings,
from teachers, friends and others.

Who, then, is the simple person?
Separated from my roles, I stand,
shorn of all unpleasantness
associated with my roles.

Unpleasantness is limited
to role-playing, they do not pass on to me -
the one behind the roles.

By myself, I am the simple person,
uncomplicated, untroubled, undisturbed.
I am simply myself,
acceptable, relaxed, at ease.
I rest comfortable with myself,
lovable, peaceful, and happy.

I am not the roles,
I am not complex -
I am simply myself.

I am myself...
am myself...
myself...
self..

..I...
.I...
I

9.Meditation

One problem in meditation is that I am not used to being quiet. My mind is used to continuous activity, and gives up only when it is tired.

Thus my mind is associated only with two modes: active thought or passive quiet.

The disturbed mind is seen as something natural whereas the quiet mind is seen as a vacuum.

Something has to fill up that so-called vacuum - all sorts of thoughts seem to rush in and occupy my mind.

The other possibility is that I lull myself into sleep, identifying quietness with sleep.

Labels too can create problems. I tend to associate activity as work - positive; and relaxation as idleness - negative.

Society judges by labels, and I too am influenced by society.

How often have I heard
my parents tell me -
"do something, don't be idle?"

In meditation,
I do the reverse.
I do not "do",
I just "am".

As such, a quiet and relaxed mind
is a healthy mind.
Relaxation is not idleness -
it is renewal.
Relaxation is the opposite of frenzy.

A relaxed mind is flexible, not rigid.
It is responsive to situations
and sees things in the right perspective.

All creativity is rooted
in the quiet, relaxed mind.
A quiet mind is the 'laboratory'
of the soul.

I have to understand
that a quiet mind is not a vacuum
but a contemplative, undisturbed mind.
A quiet mind is one
that is at peace
with itself and the world.

It accommodates thoughts
without being carried away by them.
A quiet mind is relaxed
and free to choose between thoughts.

With a contemplative mind,
I can freely choose
to focus on a particular activity
that needs to be done.

I can, with equal freedom,
choose to let go the activity
and just enjoy a few moments
of silence -
enjoy 'being' myself.

There is a simple way
of arriving at silence.
Silence is not something
that I have to create -
it is something I invoke.

I take the word 'silence'
and just see the meaning of the word.
I visualise what it means to be silent,
what it means to be free from disturbance.

I visualise myself
as relaxed and comfortable,
undisturbed by thoughts.

This visualisation itself
is a relaxing exercise
that helps me move away
from distractions.

The mind, when it moves away
from its preoccupations and anxieties,
gravitates naturally
towards silence.

There is another fact knowing which
I can invoke silence easily.
The fact is that I am
essentially silence in spite of thoughts.

Silence is very natural to me,
since I am the silent witness
by whose presence sound is registered.

I keep this fact in mind,
and shift my attention
from the thought
to the silent witness of thought.

Instead of willing myself
to be silent,
I shift my attention
to the fact
that I am the silent one.

I am not
at the mercy of
my own thoughts.

Thoughts come and go -
they are variable and superficial,
whereas I am present
in and through them -
I am invariable and essential.

Silence is not displaced
by thought.
I am the silent one.

10. Surrender

I am not weak and helpless.
Weakness is what I feel,
not what I am.
Physically I may be helpless,
but this is not so with my mind.

Identifying with the feeling
of helplessness,
the devotee in me may say -
"I am weak"
and ask for help.

Surrender is a beautiful attitude,
but surrender does not imply
passing the responsibility
to god and guru.

The Bhagavad Geeta says
"uplift yourself by yourself,
do not look down at yourself.
You are your own best friend,
you are your own worst enemy."

Surrender is alignment with something higher,
and that involves my being responsible
for remaining aligned.
It requires living appropriately
and choosing dharma over adharma -
it requires all my strength and commitment.

I ask for help. I pray.
I pray for strength.
Prayer is to enhance me,
not to weaken me.

"I surrender to the Lord !"
Om Eeshaaya Namah !

"I surrender to the Lord !"
Om Eeshaaya Namah !

"I surrender to the Lord !"
Om Eeshaaya Namah !

The Lord in the Bhagavad Geeta
assures me,
"my devotee will not reach a bad end."

It is never too late
to start.
I must help myself
and then god will
give me a helping hand.

11. Grace

Grace marks are the extra marks
that are allotted
either to help me
get through an exam
or make the merit list.

Grace marks are given not to all,
they are granted
on the basis of
my past record.

Grace, in life,
is also like that -
it is nothing but my past actions
giving results today.

What seems to be fated
is really my own
past karmas coming to fruition -
and I have no control
over the past.

It seems as though
I am a victim of fate,
for I am helpless and ignorant
about karmas done in previous lifetimes.

What about my present?
Can I not use my present
to create the future?
The future is not the victim of the past,
but a packaged result
of the past and the present.

And here am I
in the present
with my initiative,
knowledge, and power,
capable of modifying the future
to a great degree.

Which means the future is not
something absolute,
but only a set
of probabilities.

Certain events are more probable
than others,
based on past karma.
But my present initiative
can tilt the balance
in my favour.

I do not know the past in its entirety,
but I understand that
there are hidden laws of creation
connecting action and results
over a length of time.

I understand also
that there is a lawgiver
who administers these laws.

When I accept the power
of past actions,
I am ready to deal
with the present,
and accordingly plan
for the future.

And "grace"
is a graceful way
of accounting for past actions
that yielded unexpected results.

"Grace" is my way of acknowledging
the lawgiver
and reconfirming my faith
in his laws.

Grace also comes in when there is a hung future.
When everything else balances out,
intangibles have to be brought in.
In an exam, my career record or a similar yardstick
is used to determine the granting of grace marks.

Grace is the net effect of my intangible actions
like prayer, righteous living and the like.
I then ask not what grace can do for me, because
grace can change my life.

But grace is intangible
- its influence is registered only in selected cases.
In most cases, the tangible past karmas
combine or contrast with the present actions
to yield a future that is flexible and not absolute.

Grace has its own place.
Stories of grace and power of prayer abound
in the scriptures and elsewhere.
Grace is given a miraculous status.

However grace is not a magic solution for all problems.
Grace is not a crutch meant to replace legs,
it is a walking stick that helps a trekker climb mountains.

I work my own miracles, depending on my efforts,
and not on grace.

I build up, however, a steady bank balance of grace
through prayer, right attitudes, helpful behaviour etc.

When the time comes,
even clutching straws can save my life.
And therein lies the beauty of grace.

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12. Living a spiritual life

Spiritual life begins with aligning myself to the universal order and harmony of the universe. It does not mean giving up my identity and uniqueness.

Spiritual life means re-orienting myself and committing myself to dharma ; valuing and conserving the beauty of my surroundings ; finding out my appropriate roles in life and playing them out with a glad heart;

It means learning to relate to others with openness, trust and intimacy ; sharing my joys and talents with the world to make the earth more liveable and fulfilling; committing myself to learning, personal growth, emotional maturity and spiritual enhancement.

Dealing with difficulties and overcoming obstacles is part of this learning and personal growth. The game of life is played out not in the reaching but in the process of living.

It is human to feel frustrated or unhappy about obstacles. As long as there is life, there is affinity for the pleasant and aversion to the unpleasant. I take it as the deha dharma - the nature of the body (& mind).

Spirituality is not about feeling happy all the time. Rather, it is about managing my happy and unhappy feelings. I grow and learn from my experiences in life.

I am free not because I eliminate human feelings,
but because of my choice and wisdom in handling them.

The final culmination is in terms of
recognition of my true nature, - Self-knowledge.
I am not the limited role that I play in life.
I am greater than the roles.
I am limitless awareness,
unconditioned by the limitations of the world.

There is no distance between the almighty and me.
The wave is not away from the ocean.
In understanding water,
the wave has become the ocean.
The seeker happens to be the sought.

I seek the knowledge of that Self,
knowing which I own up my limitless nature.
All spiritual growth culminates here
in this knowledge.

13. My life

I have lived a lifetime trying to convince myself about my own worth.
I have also suffered a lot of pain.

Sometimes I feel like my life is going nowhere.
I spend my time trying to figure out who I am and what my purpose here is.
I wish there could be ready answers to all my questions.

There is a lot of pain and suffering in the world that I would have been better off without.
No matter how much I may philosophise and rationalise the phenomenon of suffering, pain is still pain, no less no more.

I can communicate my pain to my guide and ask for help spiritually.
Occasionally I may also require the help of a personal counsellor to help me sort out my thoughts and feelings.

My friends may not be able to give me the time and insights into myself - a counsellor or therapist trained in helping people can.
It is important that I come to terms with the emotional past; for otherwise I will be running away from myself.

I care to know and understand myself.
I am prepared to do what is necessary to help myself grow and achieve fulfilment.

I see myself as worthwhile and my life as meaningful,
whether or not I have found
the answers to all my questions.

As an individual, I am unique.
And that is worth a lot.
I treasure my friends and people
who give me genuine feedback about myself.

I learn to trust myself more
and to be a true friend
to myself.

I am not lost
as long as I have not abandoned myself!
I am my own friend, I am my own enemy,
says the Bhagavad Geeta .

14. Learning

I have been rather fortunate
to be blessed a probing mind
that is generally restless until it finds
answers to questions very important to me.

I look around for answers
from various quarters -
books, songs, movies, conversations,
lectures, teachers,
as well as my own good sense.

I am happy that I have been
brought up exposed to different cultures
and philosophical systems.
I see myself as belonging to the world.

I find that my search for understanding
has helped others
going through a similar search.
Conversely, I have benefited greatly
by associating with others who have been
searching for understanding in their own way.

I see myself one who encourages others
to think for themselves
and find their own answers.
I welcome diverse answers as I believe
that reality is not limited to single answers.

I also see that there is a larger framework
that holds all the answers together
in a mosaic of meaning.

I have also found that
there are certain common answers
to questions that are universal.

The wisdom literature all over the world
beginning from ancient times
is full of such answers.
They are not my answers.
They belong to humanity.
I am only an explorer diving deep
into the bottom of the ocean
to uncover precious treasures of the deep.

I have found working solutions
to a great number of my questions.
I am also a continuing student,
always eager to know something more
that can make a little bit of difference
to my life and to others.

And I know that the answers I get
are deeply satisfying
and personally fulfilling.

I know that all my questions
will never be fully answered.
And that is what keeps me going.
I know I will remain young
as long as I keep learning.

I welcome others to join
in this quest for answers.
I find it enjoyable
when we explore together
and mutually share our discoveries.

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15. My future

Would I rather I know everything about my future?
Shouldn't I ask myself what I will do,
instead of asking someone else about it?
After all it's my life and shouldn't I know better?

Would I really like to leave my decisions to fate?
I don't believe I'd like to do that.
What if I knew for definite that I would
suffer a terrible accident two years hence?
Could I handle it?
What if I knew I would become
the president of my company next year?

Astrology and other predictive sciences
generally forecast the future
by considering factors that are true as of now.
They predict trends and possibilities of certain events,
rather than foretell definite happenings.

My own responses are also generally predictable
they too depend on my present abilities,
my tendencies, my thoughts and intentions.

What happens if I take pains
to enhance my abilities and skills,
manage my tendencies and change my habits?
The future can change radically!

These sciences provide some guidance to me
in as much as they are mapping the future.
But it is up to me how well I use the map
and make the most out of it.

I can use it for its indicative value,
it gives me some information
about myself, my abilities,
and about challenges I may be required to face.

With greater awareness about myself
and the world around me,
I can strike a better deal in my life.
I can also make the best out of a bad bargain.

There are no absolutes regarding the future, -
only possibilities.
In this limited sense, I am
the architect of my own future.
It is my life,
and I have to make my own future.

Destiny is like the flowing river.
I cannot stop it from flowing,
but I can definitely divert its course
or canalise it for productive purposes.

Destiny and free will are two sides of a coin.
They come in pairs - I cannot have one without the other.
I trust myself to plot my future and plan what to do.
I will actively work for results.

The responsibility for decisions lies with me,
not with fate.
If the expected comes to pass,
it is my efforts paying off.

If the unexpected happens,
it means there are other unknown factors in the fray.
The ball is not always in my court.
There's many a slip between the cup and the lip.

Stargazing might help me think about various aspects of my life and future possibilities that I might have not thought about. It is a good exercise in logistics - planning for a fuzzy future.

The perspective of Hinduism extends beyond this life - into the past before our birth, and into the future beyond our death.

Creation is a cycle and time is not linear but cyclic. The present is connected to the past and the future through the principle of causation, resulting in a patterns that yields itself to analysis and inference.

Patterns tend to repeat themselves and can be often relied as predictors of forthcoming events.

There is also some truth in astrology in as much as all creation is an organic whole where everything is connected to everything else. in an organic system e.g. our body, our ecosystem etc.

We have begun to predict the weather, even though we are at the mercy of multiple parameters that are constantly varying and spread over different parts of the world.

If an increase in temperature
can be a sign of infection in the body,
why cannot the same principle be applied to astrology?

The stars and planets do not rule my life;
rather they are as much an effect
of the same causes that have
caused changes in my life.

Does all this mean that my life is
totally controlled, run by destiny? Not really.
Patterns suggest probability of events taking place,
and probabilities are not certainties.

When I consider the multiple-parameters model
of the universe, the distinction between cause and effect
is reduced significantly.

Each parameter is a cause as well as an effect
of the other parameters. In a circle,
which point comes before and which comes later?
And has not the poet said:
"When you pluck a flower, you are shaking a star?"

As a human being, my choice of action
may be limited by the past causes,
but is not totally negated.
The horsepower of my car is destiny,
whereas my steering wheel control is free will.

I can choose to be or not to be different,
I can choose to break through my past
or to confirm the past.

I am free to look forward to
a significantly different future
or to live in the dungeons of the past.
The steering wheel is in my hand.

It is good to know about
past influences and causes,
for these give me a sort of map
regarding where I stand today.

The past is not meant for regret or for pride;
the past is dead and gone.
But it leaves behind in its trail the present
and I have to deal with the present.

Any insight into my past can help in this work.
I can set more realistic and reachable targets
when I am made aware of
My strengths and weakness,
opportunities and threats.
I look back only to learn.

Belief in astrology is harmful
when I see it in absolute terms.
There is nothing absolute in creation.
Everything in creation is fuzzy
including the past, present and future.

I need not ask when my troubles will roll away.
I will rather ask about healthy ways
by which I will be able to face my troubles
and come out wiser.

I will recycle my troubles into opportunities.
In the long run then,
I can look back and say -
"all those experiences are worth the trouble"

16. Karma

Karma is long-term, not short-term.
All the contradictions I see about good and bad
is in fact my shortsightedness.
Over the long-term, these contradictions are ironed out.

And the long-term goes way back
into the past and into the future -
perhaps even my past and future lives.
Here too, I have to start from where I am-

I may wish I were better off or better-educated etc.
but there is nothing like coming to terms
with the reality of my present.
There is nothing I can do about my past.
What I can do is to take charge of the present.

With a proper understanding of where I am
and where I need to grow,
I can invest in the right karmas for my future progress.

What I speak of as chance is really karma - my own past.
Despite my present actions,
when I get results that are not in conformity
with my efforts, I attribute it
to karma - good or bad.

It is good to know whether
I am on good grounds
or on a sticky wicket.
The better my awareness of these chance factors,
the better feedback I get.

The wise one welcomes karma -
the unwise blames karma.
The choice is with me.
Am I ready to make the right choice?

-

17. The unknown

There are many mysteries in this creation that are stranger than fiction. One lifetime is not enough to know all of them. Reading and hearing about such things is interesting, and it promises great adventure - an explorer's dream.

It is said generally that it is not a good thing to call spirits and misuse their powers. As it is painful to the spirits concerned. I do not know much about spirits, but I can appreciate the logic.

Practices like astrology, tarot cards, etc. Are generally harmless and do not involve "raising" the spirits. I can have fun trying out my abilities, test my skills and intuitive powers.

There are so many factors, known and unknown, that determines future happenings, and it is impossible for one person to have an intimate knowledge of all of them. It makes me humble to know that intuition is not infallible, and that I can be wrong. The question is how often am I right?

There are some people naturally blessed with intuitive and occult powers; some others may be able to learn the skills through study and practice. But such people are rare.

The majority of people who pursue these powers
are like spectators in the show,
paying for the whole circus.
I may be taken for a ride also,
for some may be fraudulent
and interested only in my money or contacts.

It may be a job of many lifetimes to find out
the truth of all these things.
Do I see myself as a researcher
of the occult and the unknown?
It may get me a job as a researcher,
it may also get me fame and wealth,
if that is what I want.

However if I am interested
in my own personal and spiritual growth,
there are other things
more important and immediate,
issues that have to be addressed by me now,
issues that concern my living,
my priorities, my relationships,
my own self-image,
my search for fullness and freedom.

These are the things that have to be handled first.
I keep first things first.
And only then decide, whether I have the time,
leisure and energy to pursue other things.
I will then know where to draw the line.

-

18. Evil Eye

Originally, prayers were a form of our inner communication with God.

I convey my feelings
and my desires to God.

I ask for grace and courage
to deal with my world
and fulfill my needs.

Sometimes, such prayer transform into a deal.

I expect God to repay me for our prayers.

The puraanas are full of stories
of asuras obtaining and misusing
the special powers granted to them by God.

I unconsciously tend to transmit
negative energies to others

through my thoughts and prayers.

However this negativity saps my own strength
by binding me down to bitterness, anger,
vindictiveness and unhappiness.

When I point out one finger
at someone, three are pointing to me.

Trying to control someone else

or trying to totally conform

to another person in a relationship

is an interplay of negative energy.

It results in mechanical conformity
and inner frustration,

or in open confrontation and rebellion.

When love is used as

an additional weapon of control,

the result is emotional blackmail.

Unconsciously I try to resolve
my bitterness, anger, and frustration
through shaming or blaming behaviour.

In childhood when I fell and hit the floor,
I was told to blame the floor
and hit it back.
Strange, but how true!
Curses are something like that -
it gives me instant psychological satisfaction.
But only for a moment.

I make the other person the butt
of my bitterness
without in any way resolving
the original problem that caused it.
I hit out in anger or in pain.

It is childish to think that
by punishing the other person,
I have solved the problem.

The truth is that I am only
extending and enhancing my negative cycle
by including the other person in it.
The problem does not go away,
it only becomes worse.

It takes wisdom to come to terms
with my pain, bitterness and unhappiness.
When I take responsibility
for healing my wounds,
I am not concerned with blaming and shaming.

I protect the wound from festering.
I give it time to heal.
I seek healing potions.

A spiritual person does not intend
harm to others in thought, word or deed.
I do not require to curse someone.
At most I can pray for divine justice
if all other avenues have become closed.

And if my adversary is adversely affected,
it is no credit to me -
he had his desserts coming.

What happens if someone has
cast an evil eye on me?
It is said that spirits cannot harm
a person who is spiritual.
I simply chant a mantra, cross my fingers,
or sing Hanuman Chalisa.

Any harm that may come
is not because of someone's black eye
but in spite of it.
It is part of the divine wisdom
of the universe.

There is a lot for us to learn
from our experiences, both good and bad.
Persons trapped in a negative cycle
tend to drag us into their cycle.

It takes wisdom to be tactful
with such people and to avoid
pressing their buttons while dealing with them.

I need to learn to distinguish
emotions from facts
and deal with both separately.

And it requires greater wisdom
to function without my buttons being pressed.
I can stand dignified -
I do not have to sell myself
to buy peace at all costs.

It is rare that another person
is out to destroy me.
In rare cases where this does happen,
I have every right to protect myself
in every legitimate way.

When survival is primary,
healing comes second.
And unless I am willing
to assert myself and stand up
for my rights right from the beginning,
the fightback may be too little
and too late.

-

19. Dreams

Dreams are an intimate part of my life that I cannot wish away.
Dreams are generally tied up with my sub-conscious mind.
The language of dreams is analogy and myth (as in "mythology").

Psychoanalysts make use of this rich source of information to know more about me as a person.
My native wisdom prompts me to respond to different situations and sends signals to the conscious mind in the form of feelings and body reactions.

However, in the process of making a living, one generally loses touch with these promptings and remains blissfully unaware of them.
When ignored too long, they manifest as stress in the mind and disease in the body - psychosomatic diseases.

Dreams get in touch with these messages coded in myth and analogy.
For example, a monster in a dream may represent an authority figure in real life or my own inner obsessive drives.
A back pain may represent my problem in handling responsibility.

These interpretations are subjective
and the explanations true for one person
may not work for another.
Psychologists and others
are doing much research in dream-work.

As a spiritual person, I can
make use of dream interpretations
to enhance and re-orient my life
through greater awareness
of myself and my goals.

There is a point where I have to say enough,
and let go of these analyses,
since it is endless and can tie me down
into minor and unnecessary details

A simpler explanation of dream is that
the mind is cleansing itself
of all the waste residue
after processing and filing away
the events of the day.

After a good night's sleep,
I get up refreshed and ready for a new day.
Ideally, the mind has no backlog
of unprocessed experiences -
it has flushed out everything that is unnecessary
and stored for future use all that is important.

Vedanta makes use of the dream experience
to understand the nature of the Self.
It uses the three states of experiences -
waking, dream and deep-sleep
to unfold the one that is behind these three.

It also uses dream as an analogy for waking,
to show the relative nature of creation.
What appears and disappears in time is
appearance, not reality,
because of its non-eternal nature.

Reality does not disappear,
and what disappears is not reality, e.g. Dream.
The dream is not falsity
for it is an experienced fact,
but neither is it reality
for it is also negated.

I use a special word
- "mithyaa",
to classify such appearances
Mithyaa means relative,
conditional, apparent reality.

A degree of reality is less than reality -
reality has no degrees
the Maandookya Upanishad deals elaborately
with these three states of experience.

Ideally, I require a guide, a teacher
who can unfold the meaning
through the process of teaching.

Spirituality cannot be
a trial-and-error or a hit and miss thing.
I cannot afford to make mistakes
with what is truly important in my life.

-

20. Seeking the guru.

The guru will come.
In fact he/she is always around.
Beginning from my parents at home,
and the teacher in school,
everything in creation is teaching me something.
And having learnt,
it is time to move on towards new learning.

There is much to learn in creation,
and so much more to learn about myself too.
Learning is generally in steps.
I take one step at a time -
I do not stop or give up.
I keep my eyes and ears open,
and keep a questioning mind

Am I sincere in this search?
There are answers all around me,
and some of them may be within myself.
However they may not be in the sequence I desire.
Hence I am open for correction.

I keep an open mind,
and admit mistakes gracefully.
I am honest to myself and face facts.
The guru is not meant to please me -
only to guide me.

My guide is someone who has
gone ahead of me -
who guides me from ahead.
He/she may or may not have
completed or fulfilled this seeking.

That is ok,
because I have still something to learn.
I am grateful to all my teachers
who made me discover new horizons.

I have respect for all those who
contributed to my learning.
But my commitment is not to personalities -
only to truth.

I do not belong to the guru.
Ultimately I am answerable
to my own conscience.
I keep this truth in mind
as I learn and find that
the right person comes when the time is right.

How do I recognise the guru?
The scriptures talk about the teacher as
Shrotriya & Brahmanishtha
(one who has mastered the scriptures
and is rooted in self-knowledge.)

I check out whether
the teacher has a commitment to,
and lives in accordance with, his teaching.
I also see whether what he speaks is
rooted in tradition and the scriptures.
The Vedic tradition
has perfected a methodology of teaching
that takes no chances with this knowledge.

The guru-shishya parampara is evidence of this.
As each lamp lights the other in turn,
the knowledge is passed down
from the teacher through the student
to the next generation and to posterity.

21. The disciple

. with the spirit of
surrender, questioning, and service.

Surrender is a beautiful attitude
involving acceptance and willingness to learn.
Surrender however does not imply
passing the responsibility to god and guru.

Surrender is alignment to something higher,
and this involves my own responsibility.
The serenity prayer says it all:

"Lord, grant me
serenity to accept the things that I cannot change,
courage to change the things that I can, and
wisdom to know the difference."

Questioning implies my eagerness to learn,
not taking anything for granted.
In Self-knowledge, assumptions are dangerous,
and a miss is as good as a mile.

Listening to a Ramayana discourse,
I may fall asleep
while Raama goes to the forest.
Raama might be still in the forest when I wake up.
In Self-knowledge, on the other hand,
if I fall asleep, I end up in the forest!

I respect the guru because he/she has knowledge.
But in the matter of learning I question,
for knowledge has to be released from doubts and errors.

2+2=4 is true
not because the teacher says so,
but because I see the truth of that equation.
I cannot settle for belief in the matter of knowledge.

Service is my readiness to be of help to the teacher
in exchange for this knowledge.
Knowledge was not charged or sold in old times.
Every person in society contributed his/her mite
to make this knowledge available and alive.

The whole process thus became a yajna
and society as a whole benefited as a result.
This was how knowledge was kept alive
and how the community honoured teachers.

Service is the acknowledgement
of my debt
to the teacher.

22. Indian ethos

Sanaatana dharma represents the culture, values, attitudes, practices, beliefs and a holistic worldview of the people of ancient India. These were based on timeless wisdom that is not restricted to a cult or creed.

The Hindu view of life is holistic and integrates both material & spiritual life through the four pursuits of ethical values, wealth, pleasure and liberation.

It sees the entire creation as an organic whole emanating from, and resolving back into, a single source Brahman (pure consciousness), every aspect of creation is interconnected as in a network, and there are no independent entities separate from the whole.

Creation as a whole is seen as the cosmic form of Brahman, who is beyond the limitations of created forms. Every form in creation is divine and can be visualised as a deity.

In some cases, the whole is invoked through the parts, i.e. The individual deity is invoked as Brahman, the source and reality of creation.

Living becomes a spiritual exercise, with individual aspirations being harmonised and balanced to match the greater order of the universe,

- dharma and the laws of karma.
The individual and the whole form a unity.
This oneness is seen at different levels,
- form, interconnections, and content.
For instance, consider the waves in the ocean.
There are many individual waves
in the vast, boundless ocean.

As forms, the ocean and the waves are not the same.
In terms of interconnections,
the waves are integrated into the ocean
and are intimate parts of the whole.

In the ultimate analysis, - in terms of what essentially is,
there is only water and nothing else.
Both the wave and the ocean are nothing but water.

This is how the three schools
of Vedanta -
Dvaita,
Vishishtha Advaita, and
Advaita
see reality.

Each view is valid from its own place.
Sanaatana dharma is all about
understanding the whole,
and alignment of myself
to the harmony of creation
in the vision of the whole.

Sanaatana dharma is not a belief,
because it welcomes diverse views
and integrates them into the whole.

It is not a philosophy or speculation -
rather it is a way of life
wherein every aspect of human pursuit,
dharma, artha, kaama or moksha,
is integrated into the vision of the whole.

23. Who am I?

Who am I ?

In practical terms, I am the individual
endowed with body-mind
seeking to survive, grow, multiply
and prosper in life -
to make a mark in life and search
for meaning of my existence.

The scriptures speak about me
as the self which survives the body after death.
Which means that I am not the body.
The body is like the clothes that I wear
and shed when they become old or torn.

I, the Self am called the jiva,
the limited soul,
connected to results of good and evil actions,
experiencing joy and sorrow
in higher and lower worlds,
and constantly transmigrating
from one state of existence to another.

Connected to the human form,
I also becomes the doer of action -
good and evil.
In higher and lower worlds,
I merely experiences the results of action,
whereas in the human world,
I also initiates new action
which gives rise to new births.

Vedaanta comes as an answer to the question -
"where does this cycle of births and deaths end?"
The answer comes as a great surprise.

Birth and death are phenomenal appearances
that do not have an absolute nature.
As long as I am mistaken as a limited soul,
there is transmigration.

In knowledge, I realise
that the self is actually limitless
and the supposed limitation is apparent.

It is ignorance that keeps me believing
that I am limited
whereas in reality,
I am untouched by it.

What is the nature of this absolute reality?
It is in the nature of awareness
unconditioned by mind or body.

I am used to thinking about awareness
as being a property of the thinking mind.
The upanishads on the other hand
speak about awareness as the source
of the conscious mind.

One awareness is relative,
the other is absolute.
One is appearance,
the other is reality.
One is reflection,
the other is original.

In the beginning, say the Upanishads,
what existed was but one reality -
one alone without a second.
It thought (as though) -
"May I become many".

The process of creation is effortless,
just as thinking or breathing is effortless.
Like the clay which is the truth of the pot,
so too is Oneness the reality of creation.

Having created everything,
the One is said to have entered the creation
and to be residing
in the hearts of all beings
as individual consciousness, "I".

The Upanishads reveal
that this individual consciousness
is the same as that universal consciousness
which existed before the appearance of creation.

Vedaanta declares that "I am Brahman, the limitless".
The differences between creator, creation, and the created
is shown to be relative.
Oneness underlies the difference
and is the reality of all appearances.
And Oneness is absolute and unconditional.

This oneness is my nature.
All else is the play of appearance - Maaya.
I am the absolute reality, Brahman.
If I know, I know.
If I don't, I am running around searching for myself.
The poets like Kabir put it very vividly:

Insaan ki badbakti andaaz se baahar hai
Khambakt Khudaa hokar bandaa nazar aataa hai.

"The misfortune of the human is beyond all imagination.
The fool, despite being the omnipotent Lord,
is looked upon (by himself) as a miserable servant."

Lahar doondhe lahari ko, kapadaa dhoonde soot
Jeeva doondhe brahm ko, teeno oot ke oot.

"The wave searches for the ocean,
the cloth searches for the thread,
the individual searches for the limitless, -
all the three are biggest fools among fools.

24. Limitations and Freedom

The teaching of Vedanta
is all about what I am -
not about how I feel !
As long as I have a body, I will be
subject to aches and pains.
So is the case with the mind.

My guide pointed this out to me -
"it is ok for the mind to be bothered,
as long as the bothered mind doesn't bother you."
the first bother is an event, the second one a conclusion.

Vedanta resolves the second bother
and makes me sail past the first one.
It is like enjoying a good round of physical exercise
where I come home with a song in my heart
and soreness in my muscles.

The Bhagavad Geeta talks about a person who,
despite being bad and criminal,
is capable of crossing over all sins
by the boat of knowledge.
That apart, all that is required
for a person to reform is a change of heart.

And such a change comes in unexpected ways.
For Ratnaakar to become Vaalmiki,
it required just a probing question by Naarada.
For Ashoka to become Devanaam Priya
it required the Kalinga war.

And for Baalan Menon
to become Swami Chinmayananda
it required a journalistic stint in Rishikesh.

I cannot hope to overcome all my physical limitations
in one lifetime. Not even in many lifetimes.
That is the nature of creation. I gain some, I lose some.
If I am wise, I can strike a good bargain.

I make even the best out of a bad bargain.
At the end of the day, I can settle down to rest,
knowing that in terms of timeless eternity,
there never was a loss, there never was a gain.
There was no seeker and sought.
There lies only eternity,
where I the seeker am the sought.

If Vedanta is all that simple,
then why do I require to reform at all in the first place?
That is because like recognises like.
To recognise freedom that is absolute,
I require to be familiar with relative freedom.

A habitually disturbed mind
cannot understand silence.
An anger-prone mind
cannot understand tranquillity.

With a mind that is in readiness for this knowledge,
Vedanta can be simple -
in fact it is myself, plain and simple.
I am silence. Silence is me.
Om.

-

25. Truth

What is truth?

How do I find truth?

Whom should you look towards for truth?

I ask myself whether I am satisfied
with the answers that I have got up to now.

If not, I keep on asking
and searching for answers.

Truth has a ring of authenticity
which is easy to recognise.

However I need to discriminate
between partial truths
and the whole truth,
for this area is where I generally get stuck.

Generally truths are relative,
and these have to be integrated
into the whole.

Truth is generally revealed
in terms of thesis or antithesis,
and these have to be woven into a synthesis
by looking for the larger picture.
Intellectual honesty and love of truth
can take me far.

It so happens many times that
my questions far outstrip the answers
that are there around me.
It is tempting to think
that there are no answers -
to become cynical about things.

It is advisable for me to have
a scientist's attitude to truth -
when I do not have answers,
I propose tentative answers
and test it out.

Whether I get solutions or not,
my search for truth is not forsaken.
No avenue is left unsearched,
no stone is left unturned,
for answers may be lurking
in the most unlikely places.

I require is the eye of curiosity and wonderment
to keep me going and looking without fatigue.
The process of looking for answers
is as enjoyable
as finding the answers.

Sri Sureshvaraacharya mentions that
the intellect has a natural partiality to truth.
Truth is that which is consistent with proof.
Absolute truth is that which withstands all tests,
and cannot be negated.

Truth can be approached
through relative points of view,
but truth itself is not a point of view.
It is the integrated picture of the whole.

The problem with recognising the truth is
that I confuse the relative with the absolute.
Anything that can be negated is
relative and not absolute.
But everything in creation is relative.
Is there anything that is absolute?

I asked my guide. He replied -
"when every thing else is negated,
the negater still remains."
the negater cannot negate himself.

The scriptures talk about consciousness
as the survivor that remains unchanged
in and through all change.
And consciousness happens to be the Self,
- i.e., me myself,
stripped of all my changing roles.

My body, mind, and individuality
is part of creation, changeable.
But I am much more than these.
I am timeless, limitless consciousness,
the very backbone of creation.

Creation arises from consciousness,
plays about in consciousness,
resolves unto consciousness.
Consciousness is absolute.
That alone is the truth.

I, consciousness,
is the changeless substratum of the entire creation.
Everything else is name and form,
relative, changing.

I do not make any claims on truth.
But my love for truth has brought me this far.
I see truth as that which integrates
various relative points of view.

Truth is that which remains consistent
in and through all these relative points of view.

I welcome anything that helps me
to see clearly the larger picture.
I keep an open mind.
I also keep my eyes and ears open.

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26. Growing up

Understanding my feelings
is a necessary part of personal growth.
I keep changing my skin and personality
every few years,
and there is a lot of rethinking
and re-engineering going on within,
in terms of priorities, relationships,
career and the like.

Talking over my thoughts with a friend
or writing them down on paper
helps clarify my thinking.
In healthy growth there is the sense of proportion,
balance and appropriate change.

Along with the need to change and break loose,
comes the adult capacity
of engineering creative solutions
through win-win thinking.

To grow up means to be my own person
and not being an appendage
to some one else.

Growth is a movement
from dependence to independence.
And yet, that is only part of the story.

Ultimately, growth is a progress
from independence to inter-dependence,
where we complement each other
to enhance one another's effectiveness
without being a burden to each other.

It is tempting to play games of control,
where one or both parties feel suffocated by the other.
Such games only result in victimising myself
and ends up blaming the other.

Growing up is in terms of taking responsibility
for my own life
and refusing to play victim
even when the other person invites me to.
Nobody can really control me.
No one can get into my mind and tell me what to do.
People can only suggest, but it is up to me to oblige.

In the ultimate analysis,
nobody else hurts or irritates me but myself.
It is my own beliefs and my victim image
that manipulate me into feeling hurt and angry.

It is a tragedy that I often hurt
the people I love the most.
It is because I do not give the person
enough space to be himself or herself.

Others want me to change to suit them
and I too try harder to change others to my convenience.
Isn't it time that I see the pointlessness of it all
and accommodate differences ?

In most relationships the sad fact is that
we cannot live together with others
nor live apart from others.
Is there another alternative?
Are there any mutually satisfying solutions?
Discovering that is what growing up is all about.

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27. The mind

The mind is full of endless activities,
and even yogis and rishis seem to be under its sway.
Is there a way to control my mind?
Who can help me in this regard?

Today, as at no date before, we are faced
with unprecedented social upheaval and conflict.
We have lost sight of the meaning and purposes in life.

We are blind consumers of images
presented to us by market savvy advertisers
who decide what is good and what is not good for us.

The human mind is comparable to a child
- it is extremely pliable, loves comforts and pleasure,
avoids the unpleasant and the difficult,

It is curious about anything new and colourful,
fearful of authority and danger,
given to unreasonable demands and manipulative behaviours,
ever begging for attention and acknowledgement.

It is also loveable, friendly,
open, intelligent,
resilient, adaptable,
thoughtful, and learning.

The mind has infinite capacity for creating trouble.
However, it is also the source
of everything that is good in humanity.
The choice rests with me.

I need to tend the mind like a loving and capable parent
- kind and soft at times, firm and hard at other times.
The mind needs nourishment and acknowledgement.
It also needs enlightened guidance.

There is no one specific way to control the mind.
The mind adapts itself very well
and develops strategies
to counter any particular form of control.

What I need is to acknowledge its demands
and meet them in acceptable ways
or else develop reasonable alternatives.

I cannot order the mind about
if I wish it to co-operate with me.
As in modern management,
I need to look for win-win solutions.

A mind that is conditioned by fear reacts blindly
- either aggressive and offensive,
or submissive and retiring.

A mind that has not settled past issues
of hurt and loss and guilt
is complex-ridden and unhelpful.

A mind whose legitimate needs are ignored
is not going to be very co-operative.
A mind that is ignorant
about what is beneficial and harmful
will not be reasonable.

A mind that is rigid and judgement prone
is not going to change readily
or learn anew.

In short, I cannot force change upon myself.
A mind that has no purpose to live for
is a source of trouble -
"an idle mind is a devil's workshop".

What I can do is to create conditions
and live a life that will help me confront and deal with
my inner fears, hopes, needs,
frustrations, conflicts, sadness, judgements, etc.
In a non-threatening atmosphere.

I need to find practical solutions.
I need to learn how to let go of certain aspects of my life
and tighten up other aspects,
so that the machinery of my mind hums
and is ready to go.

I have to learn to deal with
unpleasantness in my life
and to face it instead of avoiding or reacting.

I need to stop unproductive ways of functioning
and look for alternatives,
instead of merely becoming a creature of habit
and living a life blaming others or myself.

There is no one single way of controlling the mind.
What I can do is to understand the nature of the mind in its
different facets
and work with it instead of against it.

The Bhagavad Geeta puts this very clearly -
"the human mind alone is responsible
for both bondage as well as release".

28. The Ideal

What makes an ideal human being?
Coming to think of it,
I ask myself - would I like to become
an ideal human being or a good human?

One is a reasonable and achievable goal,
whereas the other is a concept.
There are no ideal (idea-I) people,
only real ones.

In our culture, we find stories
that present the ideal wife, mother, etc.
It shows how much a person can
willingly sacrifice in performing her duties.

Ideals are meant to inspire me,
certainly not meant to be copied blindly.
What applies in one case does not
automatically become applicable in all cases.

I think about my own times -
we have decorated so many
of our war veterans with medals for bravery.
On Republic Day, we also honor
small kids who showed great courage
in the face of danger.

Some of them have been decorated
posthumously after they died a hero's death.
The medals were given to them
for going "beyond" the call of duty.

These are the people who did
a little bit extra..., much more
than what was expected out of them.
They are honored for what they did.
They are our inspiration.

But it does not follow that
everyone should necessarily follow
what they have done.
It also does not follow that
the heroes themselves would
behave in the same way on another occasion.

The same logic applies
to cultural and spiritual ideals.
Sati Savitri and Rani Sati
are both honored in our tradition.
Both followed their husbands in death.

One of them managed
to bring back her husband alive too.
But to say that every woman
should live like that would be
tragedy, something unthinkable!

Being a good human being is
the basis for all the roles I play in life.
As a human being,
I have my important needs -
physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.

I also have many strengths and capacities,
like self awareness,
knowledge of causes and effects,
will power and creativity.

With these abilities, I can go about fulfilling not only my own needs but also of society and community around me - my near and dear ones.

Sometimes, in my anxiety to fulfill the needs of my loved ones, I tend to neglect my own needs.

That is OK in the short run. However, in the long run it may not work in my best interests.

Wisdom of perspective tells me that I have to learn to balance the needs of both - my own and my loved ones.

It is difficult to achieve perfect balance, but then I need not be perfect all the time, do I?

I require some time for myself, for my thoughts, for my feelings, for my healings.

I also require to give my precious time to loved ones, for that is what life is all about.

Sometimes it gets frustrating, for I do not know how much is too much. Instead of trying to become perfect, it would be wiser for me to gradually improve in small steps.

I could learn from my mistakes,
from other's advice,
from my own questioning mind,
from books,
from example of others,
from my own imagination,
and from my guides and mentors.

To start with, what I require
is a strong sense of belief
and trust in myself -
that I am capable of
searching for and arriving at solutions.

I also need to invoke
my inner strength and wisdom for doing
everything that is necessary and important,
in order to achieve my goals.

-

29. Opposites

Why is it that where happiness is,
there is pain waiting to come forth...
where love is, there is hate,
where light is, there is darkness?
Philosophers all over the world have been
trying to answer this riddle for ages.

Creation is characterised by opposites;
and these opposites cannot be wished away
as long as there is life.

All personal and spiritual growth
involves understanding the nature of these opposites
and coming to terms with it,
not as a victim but as a survivor,
eventually to gain a degree of mastery
in dealing with them.

Life is like a computer game
that starts from the simple stage,
progressively moving on to greater degrees
of skill and difficulty.
The challenge in life is to move on to the difficult levels
once the elementary levels are mastered.

Yet no matter how skilful we may be,
there is always a level where
we are out of our depth and have to struggle.
While struggle may be good for the soul,
our life is not meant to be a mere struggle.

Ultimately we have to strike a balance between
blindly pushing ourselves ahead
or giving up too easily.

Pain and sorrow can be faced
through courage, grace and acceptance
instead of timidity, bitterness and rejection.

A healthy body is that which is exercised
and nourished adequately.
Similarly a healthy mind is that which grows
with challenges and proper attitudes.

Freedom from pain through spirituality
is a different dimension altogether
and is not to be taken

in a physical or psychological sense.
It is a freedom that comes from the understanding
that pain is relative and not absolute.

Spirituality speaks of the timeless dimension
where there is no pain whatsoever.
The timeless is not a point in time,
it is not a destination.

Vedanta reveals this timeless
as the very nature of the Self.
Life is a play of the timeless,
assuming the robes of time,
and masquerading as though time-bound
- bound by the whims and fancies of change.

The timeless is not the opposite of time.
It is the very substratum of time;
it is in and through time.

Time is; timeless is. Time gone; timeless still is.
Joy and sorrow exist; I am. Joy and sorrow gone; I still am.
I am. I always am. Free from joy and sorrow, timeless I am.
I am. I always am. Timeless I am.
Om.

30. Disappointments

I deal with my disappointments
in life and in relationships
by beginning to tell the truth to myself.

Is there really something positive I can do
to revive a broken relationship?
Or is the relationship completely finished?
Either way, I have to face the truth.

I may believe one or the other,
but truth generally has the last laugh.
Learning to live with the truth,
I can deal with any situation appropriately..

Life is for living, for learning, and for growing.
I can live long, learn much
and grow wise and fulfilled.

I cannot destroy my precious life
over a single tragic event.
I grieve , yes, for my loss. I cry my heart out.
But at the end of it all, I learn to let go
and say "finito, I have put it
behind me.

My destination lies
ahead of me,
not behind me.

I pray for help and for strength.
Spirituality,
good friends,
fulfilling work,
helping others, etc.
can all help
in my attempt to cope with sadness.

Sadness is an experience
to be assimilated,
not a burden to be borne.

There finally comes a time when I see
light at the end of the tunnel,
and then I can thank my stars
that I had the patience to wait
and strength and faith to sustain me
in my darkest hours.

There is a lot of pain and suffering in the world
that we would have been better off without.
No matter how much one may philosophise
and rationalise the phenomenon of suffering,
pain is still pain, no less no more.

I cannot relieve another's pain -
at most I can seek to
to understand their hurt.

My guide may be able to help me spiritually.
However, if the person is not a regular counsellor,
he or she may not be able to give me the time
and the counselling skills
which only a counsellor or therapist can.

It is important that I come to terms
with the emotional past;
and therapy helps me to confront
and assimilate my past experiences.

I do have a purpose in life
because I am alive and am human.
I care to know and understand myself.

I am worthy human being
and my life as meaningful,
whether or not I have found the answers.
Every individual is unique
and that is worth a lot.

I learn to treasure my friends and people
who give me genuine feedback about myself.
I learn to trust myself too,
and be a true friend to myself.

I am not lost as long
as I have not abandoned myself!
"You are your own friend, and
you are your own enemy"
says the Bhagavad Geeta .

31. Healthy Love

I am told that in relationships
we are to experience things together.
Romance is good but not the basis
and that this romance is an illusion.
Is that why romantic love fades?
Does a spiritual connection
make it more meaningful?

Romantic love as presented
in most novels and in the movies
is not really healthy love.
Rather, it is obsessive love.
It is blind and childish -
it ignores or avoids the real issues.

Love becomes enhancing only when
it is balanced by objectivity
and appreciation of realities.

In essence, Romantic love is not
the antithesis of spiritual love.
Nor is it less real or illusion.

Spiritual growth involves
both strengthening myself from within
as well as extending myself
towards others.

I require to discover interdependence
without losing my independence.
Love lasts only when I am prepared
to give as much if not more to the relationship
as what I get from it.

Love also lasts where there is
respect for myself as well as for the other,
free from manipulation, possessiveness or control.

Relationships are fulfilling when they
enrich us as human beings.
Relationships are not crutches
meant to substitute for my insecurities.

When I focus exclusively on relationships
and neglect my inner growth,
I am externally controlled.
In that case, my love lasts
only as long as the relationship is smooth.

In stormy conditions however
I am all at sea,
and there is an irresistible tendency
towards blame or withdrawal,
for I am spiritually bankrupt.

Spirituality focuses on
inner strength and independence,
and serves as the foundation
for relationships.

Each of my relationships in life
give feedback about some aspect of myself.
They serve as mirrors
to understand myself better.

If the relationship does not really work out,
I can look back
to learn and change.

Relationships also involve commitment,
which motivates and brings out
the best in myself.

However relationships are not
an end in themselves.
Ultimately I have to live
with my own self.

I come alone, depart alone.
How well do I relate to myself?
That is the million dollar question.

32. Peace

Peace is not an event,
- rather, it is the outcome of a certain attitude.
It comes from the willingness to come face-to-face
and take stock of myself, warts and all.

I need to see objectively
where I am headed
and whether I really want
to go there.

Generally, I carry with me a backpack
of emotional hurts,
regrets,
fears, and anger.
These I have to resolve one way or another,
if only to travel lighter.

I also require a person who sees way ahead
to tell me where to turn,
and to warn me of the dangers on the road ahead.

Life is not a hit and run or trial and error process.
It is a journey,
a spiritual journey if it can be called so.
Unless I am prepared for the journey,
I cannot enjoy the ride.

Peace comes when I am willing to stand up
to situations and respond appropriately.
Peace also comes when I am willing
to accept the results and let go
- since the past is no longer in my hands.

I do not blame or criticise, I do not rake the past.
The question to ask is
"am I here with a solution
or am I part of the problem?"

I build myself up and do not pull myself down.
I act in ways that help me look up to myself
instead of looking down at myself.
I ask for grace to help me
deal with my problems in life.

I have been assigned my roles in life
and I find out how best I can fulfil them.
At the end of it all, I am ready to depart
without regrets
- I have done what I could.

I may have made mistakes,
and I have the grace
to accept responsibility for them
- that is part of the living process.
But deep within, I am at peace,
for I know I did what I could.

I pray for grace, yes.
I ask the Lord -

"Grant me
serenity to face the things that I cannot change,
courage to change the things that I can, and
wisdom to know the difference.

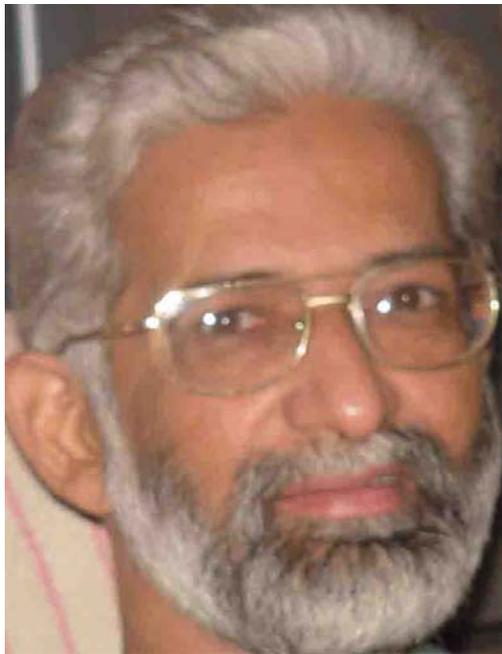
LIVING IN VEDANTA

MEDITATIONS

AND

CONTEMPLATIONS

- End -



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