

15. Eschew selfishness, conceit, and pride

People create and develop in themselves an abounding variety of selfish habits and attitudes, causing great discontent for themselves. The impulse for all this comes from the power complex, the greed for accumulating authority, domination, and power, the greed for things that can never be eternal and full. In fact, it is impossible for anyone to attain them to the level of satiation. Omnipotence belongs only to the Lord of all (*Sarveswara*).

A person might feel elated to become the master of all arts, owner of all wealth, possessor of all knowledge, or repository of all the scriptures (*sastras*), but from whom did the person acquire all these? They must indeed be greater. One might even claim that one earned all this through their own efforts, labour, and toil. But surely someone gave it to them in some form or other. This one cannot gainsay. The source from which all authority and all power originate is the Lord of all. Ignoring that omnipotence, deluding oneself that the little power one has acquired is one's own —this indeed is selfishness, conceit, pride (*ahamkara*).

A person who is a genuine vehicle of power can be recognised by the characteristics of truth, kindness, love, patience, forbearance and gratefulness. Wherever these reside, ego (*ahamkara*) cannot subsist; it has no place. Therefore, seek to develop these.

The effulgence of the *Atma* is obscured by ego. Therefore, when ego is destroyed, all troubles end, all discontents vanish, and bliss is attained. Just as the sun is obscured by mist, so the feeling of ego hides eternal bliss. Even if the eyes are open, a piece of cloth or cardboard can prevent vision from functioning effectively and usefully. So too, the screen of selfishness prevents one from seeing God, who is, in fact, nearer than anything else.

16. Avoid argumentation and exhibition of scholarship

Many a spiritual aspirant (*sadhaka*), recluse, and renunciant (*sanyasin*) has allowed all excellences won by long years of struggle and sacrifice to slip away through this attachment to the self. Power without the bliss of God-realisation is a wall without a basement. Mere punditry is of no use at all; the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the scriptures (*sastras*) are doctrines for living out in daily practice. Without this practice, whatever the wealth of words, whatever the standard of scholarship, it is all a colossal waste. To bring the teachings of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and scriptures into one's actual life, one has to scotch the feeling "I know", open one's eyes to the real essence, and introspect on it. Then, one can attain bliss, without fail.

The almanac might indicate that ten units of rain will fall, but even if the calendar is folded ten times and squeezed, not a drop of rain can be extracted. The purpose of the calendar is not to give rain but only to give information about rain and its quantity. Its pages do not contain the ten units of rain. Rain is in the clouds above.

So, too, the scriptures (*sastras*) can give only information about doctrines, axioms, rules, regulations, and duties. The sublime characteristics of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and scriptures are that they give instruction in the methods of attaining peace and liberation. But they aren't saturated with these essences of bliss; one can't collect the essences by squeezing the texts. One has to discover the path, direction, and goal as described in them; then, one has to tread the path, follow the direction, and reach the goal. However, if the I-consciousness produces the pride "I know all", a fall is inevitable; the delusion causes death. The secret of salvation lies in the realisation of this danger; rebirth is inevitable if this danger is not averted.

Aware of all this, if you get immersed in spiritual practice, the world and its worries will not affect you. It is only when you are far from this truth that you suffer, feel pain, and experience travail. At a distance from the bazaar, one hears only a huge indistinct uproar. But as one approaches it and walks into it, one can clearly distinguish the separate bargainings. So too, until the reality of the Supreme (*Paramatma*) is known to you, you are overpowered and stunned by the uproar of the world; but once you enter deep into the realm of spiritual endeavour, everything becomes clear and the knowledge of the reality awakens within you. Until then, you will be caught up in the meaningless noise of argumentation, disputation, and exhibitionist flamboyance.