



SAMVIT

[Knowledge that Leads to Enlightenment]

स नो बुद्ध्या शुभया संयुनक्तु

May He endow us with good thoughts.

Shvetashvatara Upanishad III.4

Universal Prayers

मनुशकरमीनाय मथन कूर्म रूपिणे ।

हन्तु वराह पोताय विष्णवे वै नमो नमः ॥

प्रह्लादत्र नृसिंहाय दानस्य बटुग्राहिणे ।

क्षत्रघ्नजामदग्न्याय त्रेतात्रसूर्य वंशिने ॥

द्वापर चंद्रकृष्णय बुद्धपुर्णेन्दवे किल ।

कल्किकाले विनाशाय नमः दशावतारिणे ॥

Salutations unto Vishnu of omnipresent existence, who incarnated as the shaphara fish (a kind of small glittering fish) to the king Manu in the Malaya region; who took the form of a turtle (to bear the Mandara mountain) on the occasion of the churning of the ocean in the *Satya* era and who was the destroyer of the demon Hiranyaksha, in his incarnation as the young boar (who raised the Earth by the point of the tooth).

Salutations unto Vishnu, who incarnated as Nrisimha (man-lion), as the protector of Prahlada, who accepted the gift of land from king Bali in the guise of a young boy (Vamana), to Parashurama who, born as the son of Jamadagni, killed the *Kshatriyas* (in twenty one rounds) and as Sri Rama who incarnated in the solar race and protected the *Treta* era (from Ravana).

Salutations unto Vishnu who incarnated primarily ten times, as Krishna of the Lunar race in the *Dvapara* era, as Buddha (the enlightened one) who is called thrice blessed because of having attained birth, enlightenment and deliverance on the same day and as Kalki who is the destroyer of the *Kali* age (which is given to strife, etc.)

PRACHI DEVI

Turning Within

A story from the *Puranas* makes an interesting study: It so happened, that once the demons (*asuras*) drove the gods (*devas*) out of the heavens. They became the lords of heaven and earth and usurped all that belonged to the gods. The mighty king of the demons had even greater plans. He now wanted to conquer the realms of Vishnu and Shiva, respectively called Vaikunta and Kailash. Lord Vishnu was worried. He thought 'I better hide myself somewhere until the gods get back their power. That way the *asuras* will not plunder Vaikunta. They will also get more egoistic, thinking I had to flee due to them. Their rising, mounting egos will bring about their own destruction.' So thinking, Vishnu started searching for a place to hide. He scanned the three worlds but found that the demons were accessible everywhere. He thought the ocean was a good place, but he found the demons even there. The skies were no place, for they could fly. After searching hither and thither, Vishnu hit upon a great idea. He knew that the demons always looked outward, their eyes restlessly spanned the expanse of the three worlds and their senses scooped up all that the worlds had to offer. They revelled in the senses alone. They never looked within. Their minds did not know what it was to turn within. So Vishnu went and hid himself in the heart of the *asura* king! And truly, that was the best place to hide, for the *asura* never looked within! Exhilarated by their conquest of the heavens, the demons tried to find Vishnu but never could find him. They turned away disappointed and Vaikunta was saved.

This story showcases a number of profound psychological truths. We would all agree, the battle-field of the gods and demons, is not quite unlike the tumult in our minds. Occasionally the demons, undesirable thoughts, triumph. The poor *devas*, noble thoughts, vanish somewhere. Discrimination takes a backseat. Even the ego, our seat of integrity, our centre of existence, the pivot of our personality, is unhinged. It becomes too proud or too selfish. It becomes demoniacal-*asuric*. But the core of the human personality is divine. The heart is the seat of God and just as Vishnu lay hidden in the demon's heart, the Self lies hidden within the human heart. As long as we act *asura*-like, that is, do not turn our gaze within, so long the God within us remains unknown, unrecognized. And when we start looking within, the clouds clear, discrimination shines forth and the Self manifests itself.

Says the Katha Upanishad (Ch. 2. 4.1),
पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भूतस्मात्पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानैश्वदावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ।।

It means, 'The self-existent Lord afflicted the outgoing senses, due to which one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes inward and sees the indwelling Self.'

How exactly does this 'affliction' work? It works because the senses are made of the refined (*sattvic*) aspects of the very same elements (*panchabhutas*) out of which the external nature of objects is made. Hence there is a natural correspondence, correlation and hence connection between the sense organs and

sense objects. Thus the senses are programmed to consume the outer world.

But a little forethought will convince us that the experience of the senses is delimiting. This is the point when we start looking within. As we start gazing inward, indeed a whole new world opens up—a world quite engaging and surprising, intimidating and absorbing. Sublime thoughts, stark emotions, undiscovered intentions, perilous impulses—they are all there. You can peer into the source of your thoughts, the womb of your actions. And then there is also the light of understanding, that shines through the density; the glow of divine love that vanquishes the darkness. Some of the doors cannot be opened. There is too much dust and debris waiting to crumble on you. Some doors open into roomy, airy space, so clean and fresh.

Once we discover the manor within us, by looking within, we will naturally wish to clean it up. After all, we are the mind and the mind requires clean mental space (*chitta-akasa*) to thrive. So we start the process of cleaning. This is technically called *sadhana*. *Sadhana* is derived from the Sanskrit root '*sadh*' which means 'to accomplish'. To accomplish the spiritual goal through the proper means is to do *sadhana*. The *Sadhana Pada* which is the second chapter of Patanjali Yoga Sutras describes the actual preliminary requirements of *sadhana* in its two-fold disciplines termed *Yama* and *Niyama* which offer a blueprint for ethical living. It is interesting to see the effects of these disciplines.

Yama includes codes for outer discipline or regulating our relationships with others:

Ahimsa: The practice of non-violence produces a perpetual state of acceptance and cheerfulness in the mind.

Satya: Truthfulness is a value par-excellence and the foundation of a sane, healthy, integrated life.

Asteya: Non-stealing is a value that supports *Satya* and renders the mind free.

Brahmacharya: Celibacy is the mother of all values and brings sanctity to life and social relationships.

Aparigraha: Non-avarice is fundamental to a peaceful state of mind.

Niyama includes codes for inner discipline or self-regulation:

Saucha: Purity leads to clarity of mind and body.

Santosha: Basic contentment is a state of mind that gives us the freedom to pursue higher goals in life.

Tapas: Persistent meditation is required to acutely experience life and to actualize our higher goals.

Svadyaya: Studies and self-reflection help us tackle our own lives and minds better.

Isvarapranidhana: Contemplation on God sustains and ennobles the human experience.

It is important to note that every discipline produces a positive, constructive change in our minds. Thus moral perfection has a deep inner connotation; it is a personal acquisition of eternal value. Subjectively, in addition to bringing clarity to our thinking and stability to our emotions, the disciplines have the potential to turn our will inward. This helps us pinpoint our spiritual goals. We will know what exactly we are seeking and why. We will also know what exactly we should not be seeking and why not. Besides, we will have the strength and will-power to proceed along the determined path. The same demon who perceives Vishnu within him, becomes a god. The same mind, turned inwards and purified, intuits the Self and becomes divine. ❀