

Perseverance

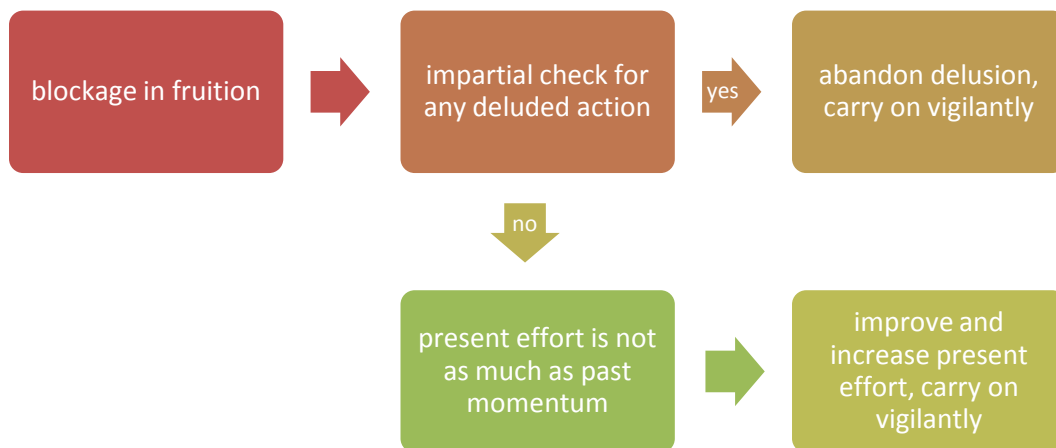
To persevere is to make self-effort continually. We persevere because the first effort did not make the mark, not because our effort is in any way an incremental step-by-step process. Unless each effort is a whole-hearted effort, we will not see what changes need to be made. If there is a lacking in the effort itself, what is the point of looking at other variables?

Blockages in fruition

Earlier, we have discussed that there should be no expectation of results of any kind. Here, in fruition, we are not talking about things external or internal to us but of 'being' itself. Discovery of false notions, ideas and conditioning however should result in disentanglement from them if we are at all serious. If we have clearly seen the danger of conditioning and clearly see the rise of it in life and practice—there must be *transformation by non-identification with them*. Disuse *must make them weaker* and use of the inner undivided intelligence, *must increase natural goodness*, give rise to serenity and inner balance. We don't have to bring this about, this is a natural result of sincerity and if this does not happen, there must be some blockage in fruition.

GOING BEYOND BLOCKAGES

The Yoga Vasistha tells us that whenever there seems to be a blockage in fruition, to impartially examine two things: deluded action and inadequate effort in the present in contrast to one's existing karma. Let us take a closer look at both of these.



1. DELUDED ACTION

Deluded action is action that is based on flawed understanding which includes memory, ideas, hopes, expectations and other notions which we allow play in our daily life as well as practice. In contrast, enlightened actions are wholehearted responses to actual situations—free of all conditioning and personal interests.

Deluded action may appear to protect one's interests better, but what is always hidden is that it is always at the cost diminishing our sense of being or our real nature. To take care of 'my interests' better, I have to stand outside others, conditions and things and must become smaller, more apart and eventually isolated from my own larger existence.

Total action on the other hand, being a wholehearted response to actual situations, universalizes one's being as one does not stand apart from anyone or anything. You cannot have one set of rules for the 'day-to-day life' and another for the so-called 'spiritual life'—this just does not work. The mind that is needed for meditation must be cultivated in every step of our day-to-day normal living.

We have already covered this earlier in 'Sharpening the Edge'—unless we live a life of yoga or a life that is free of all dichotomy, the fragmented mind will be asked to do the impossible—to meditate. We must discover a way of living in which every action is a total action and free of reaction. Results and consequences are quite different from the reaction I am talking about. When I say or do something hurtful for example, an act that had a feeling to hurt as a motive—however subtle or camouflaged it may be in socially astute appearances—many reactions are instantly triggered—some reactions precede the tangible face of action itself and the hidden cost of these are not usually seen.

Errors in understanding or delusion leads to errors in action or deluded action and it is these that concern the yogi most as errors in understanding get stronger and will continue to generate errors in action all through one's life. We can easily fix something that went wrong but when the springs of action themselves are defective, we will soon find it almost impossible to keep-up damage control with actions they throw-up. Each time we strengthen these springs of action, we also give a tranquilizer to the inner intelligence. We have covered this in detail earlier.

Rather than talk further on flawed understanding, let us look closer at the reactions that are instantly generated before, during and after—when the inner intelligence is not empowered. It is better to approach this topic rationally instead of under social, theological or apocalyptic views. This will make raising one's understanding as immediately beneficial to oneself rather than under fear or hope of some sort—these conditions can never generate any real or lasting change. Instead of using words like 'ignorance' or 'I just did not know it would hurt you'—I prefer using 'foolishness' as it keeps the springs of action up close and personal—we can and should do something about it this moment.

When we are not vigilant, thought colors the situation and existing conditioning shapes action. This is self-centered action and causes hurt to oneself and others—let us take this example to examine some reactions that are triggered...

1. Increased conditioning: I strengthen and increase division in the mind and increase the effort I will have to make to remove fragmentation which is necessary for self-discovery later. For 'me' to think ill of someone or hurt someone, aside from the hurt caused—the sense of 'me' or ego strengthens each time as all thoughts and feelings are anchored to that sense of 'me' or ego. The 'me' has to stand outside you, the other, conditions and things to take care of my interests better and in standing outside—I diminish in 'being'. Simply put, I stand apart and become smaller.

If we do not separate thought from action in life first, it will be impossible to keep from identifying with thought in meditation where everything is in the same inner space. Our spiritual efforts must bring us to meditation and the mind for meditation must be cultivated in life.

The error of identifying with thought is perhaps the most important reason we must live vigilantly. We hurt and hurt others because of this carelessness. Each time we act on thought, and this includes all forms of conditioning however useful they appear, we become oblivious to what is actually in front of us from moment to moment or reality. We live in a bubble of thought though outwardly, we come go and do things on the world outside. When conditioning increases, it responds to life and I continue to hurt and hurt others and prolonged meditation becomes impossible.

2. Loss of goodness, balance and peace: The inner justification to hurt someone or even think of hurting someone, creates the propensity to hurt others as well. Goodness is present or manifest to the degree of the absence of the ability to hurt. When we act on the impulse to hurt, we lose our inner balance as impulses eclipse wisdom and surge on their own momentum. Inner balance is when thought does not impinge on consciousness by trying to be you or assume the sense of being. We are not talking about things like social courtesies and polite mannerisms but about the very core of understanding. If natural goodness abounds in the heart or this core of understanding; thought, feelings, words and actions that emanate from there will naturally be kind and loving. Whereas, social politeness may be a facade without any feeling or spirit.

This natural goodness and balance give stability in meditation and are the fuel to take the mind beyond its capacity to be observed for longer periods of time. Initially, the longer you sit, the more you will encounter oscillation in the mind. This is why the earlier limbs of yoga: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and pratyahara become essential as you discover how to bring about harmony within and without by a way of living that is universal and not self-centered.

3. Likes, dislikes, attachments and aversion: These are the contaminants in understanding and the seeds, fuel and remnants of deluded action. When I allow these unjustified opposites to dwell within, even after the actions they insist on, I am stuck with stronger negative feelings once I've acted on initial ones. These opposites are the breeding ground of aversion and hatred which will give rise to more hurtful actions.

One can enjoy all that comes naturally without coming under the sway of likes and dislikes. By 'what comes naturally', I do not mean one should diminish their zeal to exert in life but to see that effort and result are two things. This instantly frees me to exert wholeheartedly in any endeavor as no energy is wasted or held back to watch for results. Can we not act or do what needs to be done on its own merit—just because it needs to be done? If it needs to be done—do it, leave it and then, do what else needs to be done wholeheartedly. If we are awake and alert, what needs to be done will be very visible and apparent. Justifications and their inner mechanism of selfishness will weaken by disuse as insight or living wisdom has taken its place by preference. There is no struggle, suppression or any of that involved.

Likes and dislikes are of equal danger to the sincere seeker as both impel one to act instead of the situation and inherent wisdom. This increases the energy flow in the mind and a mind with much energy is incapable of meditation.

4. Karmic fruition: Every action is bound by the law of karma. Karma or fruition is the law of being, no one punishes—we summon to ourselves by every action and thought is real action—the conditions necessary to learn and go beyond its causes.

You may believe in the law of karma or not but one can at least see that if I have the right to act selfishly, putting my interests first—others can claim the same and this does not make for good conditions to live in. It may seem that putting our interests first is necessary because everyone else is doing it but let's examine it impartially.

Why should my actions be influenced by what others are doing or feeling? If something seems right and needs to be done—do it wholeheartedly like there is no tomorrow and let it go. When we entertain 'others are doing it...', we stop seeing the situation and see these notions or thought and this is foolishness as we have lost step with reality and are ruminating in thought's dark corridors instead of the bright sunshine of reality—what actually is.

Others may make a quick buck or get ahead by putting personal interests first but at what cost? The price tag is always reduction of being—for outer expansion there is inner contraction. For 'my interests...', I must stand apart and outside others, conditions and things as we've discussed earlier.

Universalizing your existence is to get and to stay in step with all things, everywhere, all the time—to breathe, act and live as part of life and discover your inseparability with this entire grand creation we find ourselves amidst.

5. Fear of retaliation: In hurting someone, I have opened the field for retaliation in the present or future and this will necessitate being ever alert or fearful of inbound retaliation.

The immediate reactions when we even open the door to conditioning, are of great concern to the yogi. Increasing conditioning or the play of thought in perception and action, its resulting hold on consciousness—make meditation and self-inquiry almost impossible. The others, including loss of goodness, inner balance, peace, increase of the opposites of likes and dislikes follow naturally as thought is given a free reign. These first few are the immediate reactions that are most damaging to the yogi or sincere spiritual seeker and are triggered instantly by thought or mental action—even before there is physical action—and these then trigger more deluded action. The play of karma and fear of retaliation are also damaging—they appear over time. Deluded action are actions that set-up these reactions.

Two habits that increase conditioning, cause imbalance, loss of goodness and increase likes and dislikes are: fault finding and the blame game. These two wipe out all the effort you can make and take you to negative numbers—they must be abandoned.

Hurt resulting without intention

You may feel that sometimes, even the best of intentions causes hurt and sets the stage for retaliation but examine this. If you acted in wisdom and the action was absolutely free of any form of delusion and self-centeredness—you are free of causing hurt. Someone may still get hurt and retaliate but that is because they feel your action caused them hurt whereas, it was their own reaction and they will be responsible for their actions and its reactions. There may always be someone who does not like something I say, do or just the way I live but I am not responsible for their feelings—their hurt is not the result of my actions but their own feelings are responsible for their experience.

Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita: *yoga karmasu kaushalam*—yoga is expertness in action. This skill is not acting in such a way to get away with things or come out on top somehow but to act without triggering reactions by design. For this, one has to be extremely vigilant—the mind has to be observed without remission.

A story from the Yoga Vasistha

In the Yoga Vasistha there is a story that brings out this subtle point very nicely. Before I go further, let me mention that the Yoga Vasistha is a mighty scripture with a revolutionary way of seeing things and brings out lofty truths with the help of illustrations which may seem fantastic but the illustrations are used to point to something beyond them and if we get stuck in these stories and illustrations—we will never see what they point to. There was a person who lived a good long life and at some point, the messengers of Yama, the lord of death tried to bring an end to his full-lived life naturally. Being unsuccessful, they returned to Yama and conveyed their

failure. Yama asked them to look for action in the person's life that would necessitate fruition as fruition would mean another life which would be grounds for ending the present life which had reached its limitations. They considered every action of this person but found nothing and reported back the same. Yama too examined each action and to his amazement, every action of this person was a universal action which is completely free of individuality in any form. Yama then explained that this person, though appearing to be an individual, was just a *perceivable form taken by consciousness* as every and all actions were completely free of the triggers of fruition, and consciousness was functioning directly through what appeared to be a person.

This story points to something very important. Can we too find a way to live that does not throw up reactions? However small be the start, can we live in such a way so we see things *as they are*, free of the ego's play (it may still throw its tantrums but we don't have to get mixed-up with it) and, can we do what needs to be done and not what 'I want to do'? If we can, our life will be free of delusion in one big way—the interference of thought. We will at least be dealing with 'what actually is', instead of 'how thought or conditioning sees it'. There is another big step which is a metaphysical correction of going beyond individuality and universalizing one's existence. Let's save this one for another time.

We are still talking about deluded action and we have to include in its gamut all forms of delusion or notions that do not correspond with absolute reality. This is a very tall order and that is why we practice and every action is practice only—whether we consider the action belonging to our day-to-day life or what we call our 'spiritual life'.

One perseveres to avoid deluded action or action that triggers reactions by being eternally vigilant and making choices that are free of reaction in their place. This single double-sided process is called *vairagya* and *abhyasa* in the language of yoga.

Aside from better choices or choices that do not involve reaction, *abhyasa* also includes perseverance in practice. The *Yoga Vasistha* prescription we started with says: whenever there seems to be a blockage in fruition, to impartially examine two things: deluded action and inadequate effort in the present in contrast to one's existing karma. We have dealt with some of the reactions that indicate there was deluded action and have covered total action in detail earlier. Now, let us look at the second part of *Vasistha's* prescription of improving and increasing the effort in the present.

2. INADEQUATE EFFORT

Many seekers put forth good effort in life and practice but there are some other variables that cause a leakage—sort of like shutting the front door to keep out the draft but leaving the backdoor wide open.

The same single double-sided process called *vairagya* and *abhyasa* applied to our day-to-day life, also applies to our practice. Let us take an example of a person in debt who would like to be debt

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free and in positive standing financially. First, he would have to cut up his credit cards so as to not incur spending money he does not have. Second, he would have to learn the lessons of frugality so he only purchases what is necessary at present. Third, he would have to work hard at one or two jobs to raise income. Fourth, he would have to have a good plan to consolidate and pay off his debts in the shortest period possible. Fifth, he should start a savings plan to be in positive numbers financially. These same five principles apply to spiritual life or the leakage of consciousness into energy for fulfillment of desires will render effort inadequate at best.

People often say, 'I am doing these things but the mind is still turbulent...'—well, who is doing these things? If the same old Joe-on-the-block is doing these things—how can anything change? The *changed practitioner* must practice, not the same old Joe-on-the-block. The old can never bring in the new. There must be a change of heart before, during and after practice—there must be a change of heart period! Let us first look at going beyond desires and attachments and then go into some points on improving practice.

When there are desires

If you still have many or few deep-rooted desires, recognize this and know that karma yoga is essential—not mere social work but karma yoga—action as yoga. There is a big difference between doing something, however well-intended, and doing something as yoga. In karma yoga, the 'I' is taken out of the equation to find a way to do something without this silly 'I' chattering selfishly. Initially, you may feel you are doing something to help others but you have to quickly go beyond that to doing what needs to be done because it needs to be done.

Since it is very difficult to do this to 'our work' or some work we have a vested interest in somehow—we offer ourselves to work in places where there is absolutely no personal interest. When you find a way to do something wholeheartedly, without any vested interest or personal gain—you discover more gets done, better usually and without the unnecessary noisy monologue of the mind. All desires surge from this noisy mind and when we find a way to act, to do something without concern to rising and falling thought—they exhaust themselves and get no new energy. All desires are tethered to the ego or 'I' and when the circumference is dismantled, the center or ego loses its anchoring. Having learnt this lesson in a field where there is no personal gain, you can apply this to all action.

When there are many desires or a few desires that are strong, the heart or center of being, center of understanding feels convinced that happiness comes from 'this thing'. This is an error because happiness does not come from anything but is already resident within or it can never be experienced within. To discover this, one exerts without personal interest but still wholeheartedly and realizes that more gets done, better perhaps when one does not concern with selfish interests and result—results just come.

You learn to do or act for action's sake—because it needs to be done. If there must be personal interest, gain or call it what you may—in everything we do—our selfishness will increase and bring along with it mistrust of others, increased suspicion and restlessness. The mind would work overtime to protect 'your interests' and this mind can never know peace, happiness or love—much less be able to meditate.

The most important discovery is that happiness is experienced when and to the degree selfishness is absent. Selfishness or protection of personal interests is the denial of happiness. Happiness is already there but selfishness eclipses it like the clouds hide the sun's warmth by being closer and directly overhead.

When there are attachments

If you still have strong attachments—bhakti yoga or the devotion as yoga is essential. This does not mean you simply start a routine of worship and ritual as the heart will sit silent while you are busy with these activities but roar into action just as you finish. Praying and saying prayers are very different. The heart or core of your being that feels happiness comes from the way you relate to this or that person must first flow unto God in the prayer area and then within. Here too, we are not going to get in depth as it will be outside the scope of today's topic but a few more thoughts are in order.

When the heart begins to love God within, one discovers the same joy experienced earlier in attachments but now within and realizes that this thing called joy and happiness are already there. Attachments are mental circuits or tracks we create in the mind and when we feel a sense of joy not because of the person we are attached to but because we run inwardly in this circuit or track which we have convinced ourselves is the source of joy—we experience the result of our erroneous beliefs.

I call it erroneous because attachment breeds possessiveness and this is destructive. We try to camouflage possessiveness as love and caring but it does not work as it is the denial of freedom of being and to deal with this increases inner turbulence. Anger is the surging of frustration based on hopes and expectations which are anchored to possessiveness born of attachment. Since attachment and its offspring possessiveness are camouflaged as love, we find it hard to detect the source of frustration and its offspring anger.

The different practices of puja and kirtan among others are very helpful but you have to do it yourself as your heart has to love God. Just as in human relationships, no one can love another for you, you have to do it—similarly here. Since with attachments, love is used to being poured outside, to another—love is now poured onto God in the image in your prayer area. When the heart starts loving God within that image, it can also sit silently and love God within oneself. When your heart fills with love for God within, you discover the heart that loves is itself joy—unselfish or pure love which is love for love's sake is itself experienced as great joy. You learn to

let go or disentangle from attachments by seeing that they are not what you thought them to be—they breed possessiveness and this being selfish is the denial of love.

Practice is not difficult

No form of practice to include asanas, pranayama, prayer, worship, study or meditation should ever be difficult. Difficulty or struggle is a sure sign something is very wrong in your approach and understanding. Let's examine some of the practices. It will be helpful to remember that these are all yoga, which means vistas of self-discovery and if the yoga is taken out of it—difficulties and struggle are inevitable.

Asanas and pranayama: When you do asanas and pranayama, you are not supposed to be trying to 'get into the posture' but to offer yourself wholly to the posture and see how the inner intelligence that controls the body makes it possible gradually.

Prayer and worship: When you pray or worship, there should be no desperation unless you are praying and worshipping for some purpose but then it is not prayer, not love—it is deal-making or pleading and these are the difficulties you experience. How can love be difficult? Especially if you are loving God as transcendent and immanent or omnipresent at the same time? What special technique do you need in loving God, the source of your existence? Why fear that your prayers will not be heard because 'the prayer was not correct'? When every cell in your being surges in prayer—your very existence prays to its source and fullness.

Study: When you study, you are not studying a language or the scripture as these will not help you discover the existing unity and abandon ignorance. Academic or intellectual learning is just a light, watery coat of paint that will wash away in the first rains of difficult times. You approach the scripture to study yourself. Something in what you read must trigger a change in understanding which makes you want to experience what was being read personally. Confucius said, "The essence of knowledge is its application". If what you study does not act or respond to life—nothing has been learnt. If what you study does not inspire you to know this for yourself personally—nothing has been learnt. To learn is to change. What is the point of saying, 'I know...' and being the same old person who gets hurt and hurts others? In such cases, the 'I know...' is actually a 'I no'.

Swadhyaya is study of self through the scripture. Just as you look in the mirror to shave, you look there but shave here. The mirror is just so you can see yourself and apply the razor properly. The scripture too must show just where things are wrong and right so you can make the changes needed. Fortunately for us, today, good translations of most scriptures are available in English and many are freely available on the internet too. So, where is the difficulty in study?

Meditation: When we meditate, why should there be any struggle at all? You are aware of things without thinking at all as you are aware of thought too. Existence and awareness are non-different. That which exists is aware. So, when you sit initially, you are not doing something

strenuous in being aware of the rise and fall of thought as that happens without your effort or involvement. Your part initially is to 'not be doing something else' or to 'cooperate with what you yourself have started'—where is the difficulty in this? You repeat the mantra and listen to the sound of the mantra within you mentally to keep grounded, fresh and to discover that anything else but the mantra is another thought—thereby, not get entangled with it. Meditation does go deeper than this initial state and we have already talked about it in some detail but struggle is always a sure sign of leakage of consciousness and energy or open backdoors and secret alliances which have not been checked.

As you go deeper in meditation, things change and there is a period of what seems like struggle because of the force of conditioning awareness faces—this is the stage of inner purification. There are many variables in this and no two people will have the same experiences. Perhaps, we can talk more about this separately in the future.

Well-rounded practice

Swami Sivananda's 'Yoga of Synthesis' or 'Yoga of Little' is an excellent approach. Do a little of each practice but wholeheartedly. Some like to do just those elements they are good at—you have to be careful here as developing expertise is not the focus—self-discovery is. Often, doing what you are good at can lead to 'expertise' and often leads to feelings of superiority or contempt of others and their practices. Doing a little of many practices will keep you fresh in each, non-mechanical and give rise to humility as you work on areas you are not so good at. It will also expand the heart by genuine respect for the practices of others. Besides, it is better to have a full toolbox so if you are for some reason unable to do one practice, there are other ways to keep at it as through all practices, you find a way to weaken thought.

Staying motivated

Practice is not difficult, staying motivated can be a real challenge if we are not wholehearted in our aspiration and do not understand practice well.

When you first get started, there is great enthusiasm and you are sure that enlightenment is what you want, nothing less. You gather all of what you think you need and start with admirable enthusiasm. Very soon, you start to see yourself—you as you really are. All sorts of fantastic thoughts rise in the mind and you are bewildered to say the least! "Am I thinking all these things? No, it cannot be. I am a spiritual seeker and cannot be thinking these things." But, the thoughts continue and it gets very interesting. "There is no one else in me, I have to be thinking these things or even if I am not thinking these things—I soon get caught up in them ... what is happening and how do I put an end to this?" *You* don't put an end to them—they end *themselves* once you start something new wholeheartedly and stay with it. You will still be bewildered by all that surges, let it spill over, you have put them there at some time or in some life—they need to spill out—let them, you continue what you are supposed to be doing and don't identify with

them or reject them. Let them exhaust themselves completely! The foundation has to be solid. All too often, seekers start with complex subjects and activities and do not nourish the heart first—when the inner climate changes, everything shakes.

This is why it is good to start practice with some basics but wholeheartedly—without much fanfare, discussion or equipment. You have to want to practice, not for what it will bring but for practice's sake. Cultivate the heart or aspiration first and dig deep roots or it will not wither the storm of habit and latent tendencies later. Sincere practice increases sincerity which will sustain itself. It is also good to practice by yourself so your practice *is not dependent* on a class, group, friends or a certain atmosphere. Dependency of any kind can never lead to freedom. You can learn a few things in different settings but it is no substitute for solo effort as practice is not about what *you* do but *who* does it and the activity of the mind while doing. When the heart-mind identifies with some collective like a group, it tends to become complacent in its quest for the truth. This does not mean collective settings are not somewhat useful but the heart-mind has to be intent on identification with God only.

Too much group effort will lead to group paralysis and mob mentality. You become very comfortable with the tempo and activity of the group and complacent in heart and mind. Then, the collective thought replaces individual thought and inquiry becomes impossible as it requires individual examination and effort at discovery. I've used the phrase 'mob mentality' deliberately instead of group mentality as collective thought takes the place of individual thought and the group soon places the group's interests or continuance of the group's ways ahead of the purpose or activity that initially brought them together and this destroys aspiration.

We are very motivated to spend time with those we love and things we love to do—it seems time always flies when we are with loved ones and doing fun things. Why should there be any dwindling of enthusiasm and motivation in practice? If you look close, you may discover that the practice is not as important, what is hoped for is, and since that is not here yet, the heart meanders to other so-called joy-enhancing choices that are in stock and readily available. But, if you love your practice, the heart has no need to loiter here and there because you love what you are doing and this will endure encounters with bigger challenges as you go deeper.

The only way to love your practice is to love everything you do—period. To do all things wholeheartedly, with all your heart and soul, completely free of distractions (including urges to always communicate which is a serious problem) and without concern for personal interest. You have to learn this lesson through every blessed action in life till nothing is mundane or worldly—these labels will fall away. Every action has equal potential for discovery and transformation and has to have the same spirit of yoga behind it—each action must be total action.

You will soon become very interested in all you do and interest will rivet the heart to action—self-centeredness will have no room to insert its claws and weaken by disuse. When there is no vista for self-centeredness to act, the little self or 'I' behind it starts weakening.

Systematic practice

A systematic, well-organized but non-mechanical approach is essential to make sure you are doing what you have set out to do, to avoid being distracted by other activity and to keep track of your progress so you can make the changes as necessary. Swami Sivananda calls these his 'trishul' or trident as it has three elements.

Resolve: There must be firm resolve of the goal and this can be short term or long term. Swami Sivananda recommends putting this in writing, signing it and placing it in your prayer or meditation are to remind you what you have set out to do. Resolve cannot be a flimsy, whimsical idea as each time you waiver in your resolve, you weaken will-power and work against your own self. Better to take slow steps but they must be firm steps that hold.

Well-organized plan: Some abhor planned practice as they say it makes things mechanical but it is not so. Mechanical is in the heart and mind of the practitioner, and being systematic has nothing to do with it. The best of athletes have a goal, training program and log; doctors have their tests that lead to their diagnosis, plan of treatment and charts to monitor progress and make changes—what is mechanical in this?

You can easily start a weekly diary with your plan made as a sort of checklist that questions you and you answer in the day's column. A review of the plan at intervals during the day initially and later at the end of the day will allow you to be your own physician and make the adjustments necessary. This introspection will keep 'mechanical' out of your practice, heart and mind.

Self-accountability: If one is steady in vigilance, there is a good degree of self-accountability as you go along. This said, the self-accountability that should follow introspection of self-examination with the diary we have spoken about is necessary. When something you have planned has not happened for some reason, there must be some form of self-accountability or one's will-power will gradually erode. For example, if you have slept in later and missed morning meditation, there is no harm either going very light on breakfast or skipping breakfast to use that time to meditate or skipping dinner at the end of the day to meditate longer.

Self-discipline is not something imposed by another—you are simply holding yourself accountable for something you have set out to do. I feel self-discipline and its enforcing arm of self-accountability are essential for progress and most necessary. Let me be clear, I am not talking about silly ways like punishing the body etc.—that is foolishness. Intelligent ways of self-accountability that send a stern message and contribute to the progress desired are positive and not punitive. It is good to be very clear to yourself how you plan to hold your own self accountable and not waiver from it one bit. There should be no room for flimsy excuses and justification in the process—it should be quite black and white. You see something was missed and this is what needs to happen now—that's it, do it. The inner intelligence cannot justify as it knows no other. Self-justification is the ego's operation and should be avoided.

Closing thoughts on motivation

For motivation to be unwavering, one should be steady in resolve and not see practice as different from the result sought. Take an example of running as runners run each day. Aside from running, they have to eat well and have a lifestyle that supports running if they are at all serious. If the act of running is itself fulfilling and enjoyable—how can motivation waiver?

Now, let us look at some of the practices to see how it can apply. When doing asanas for example, if your heart and mind are on 'getting into the asana'—you will naturally experience all sorts of feelings if you are not able to 'get into the asana' in a short period of time. Doing the asana becomes much less important, 'getting into the asana' is the thing and there is no joy in the heart while doing the asana. If there is no joy in doing, how can you say you are truly giving it your all? You are using the practice for the results. This great error is behind much of the dissatisfaction people experience in work and relationships too. If work is a means to a paycheck to do this and that, work can never be joyful as the paycheck is the real deal. If work is not joyful, you will never be able to give it your 100%—someone else who has his act together will and take the recognition and promotion too. This will increase your dissatisfaction and it will keep spiraling inwards and downwards.

You must find complete satisfaction and joy in practice just like runners and serious athletes who love their sport. But, you must love it for its own sake and never for what it may bring—this without becoming complacent. When you find a way to give your all, your very best to all you do, you will also experience joy in doing and find no struggle in letting go physically and psychologically once done as the joy is in doing and it is done. You will discover something quite amazing—you are no longer concerned about the result, praise or censure as your concern is with 'doing wholeheartedly' and that no one can take away from you or prevent you from doing. Those who find it hard to let go or to do without recognition or feedback of some sort—have not found the way to do things wholeheartedly among other issues. See, you've already experienced joy in the doing—now, something else and joy again.

Some people talk about good and bad days in meditation—what makes it good or bad? Say the mind is turbulent, throwing up all sorts of fantastic thoughts in rapid fire—great, I have an opportunity to really sharpen awareness because of all the activity which will be in the gamut of observation. I am concerned with the mantra and being aware of all activity on the inner radar—there more activity, the more awareness rises and you don't have to struggle with it as you are aware as long as you are alive and well. Look in front of you and tell yourself you will not be aware of that thing—as long as the eyes are open, seeing happens. You can also get up for a little while, walk in a small circle or take to a little japa or kirtan but without desperation and then sit back down again—undaunted in spirit without being forceful. If thoughts in the mind are not identified with or given new energy, they run on residual energy and must exhaust themselves—your stoic resolve to practice will help them exhaust themselves.

There may be a day when you cannot study for example as the mind is quite fired-up—great, you can do some asanas or chanting as it can use that spiked-up energy nicely. A fired-up mind does not make for a bad day or not as good practice—especially if you have a full toolbox of different practices. It is just something else to work with—shift gears and continue. This is another reason to do a little of different practices as we've discussed earlier.

Lastly

When you take to the spiritual path, be firm, stay with the basics and avoid ostentation, much group activity and equipment. Bring to mind that He who you seek is existence itself, consciousness itself and there is naught other. Take small steps but with all your heart and soul and unflinching regularity. You cannot simplify life, it is what it is. Simplify yourself and know what is beneficial to your aspiration and practice and what is not. Reduce your wants. The past is self-burying, let it bury itself by exerting in the present—a bright future will be built. Your connection now is to all that supports your aspiration. Struggle with what does not support your aspiration now is unnecessary and can be abandoned. Don't delay anything. Don't do anything halfheartedly. Make time for things and do them in their time. Keep a small notebook or journal and write the things that need to be done so the mind does not have to think about it and remind you at the oddest time. Put your heart to every action in the present like it is the last thing you would do. Take care of the body by giving it daily exercise, simple diet and a little time in the fresh air. Take care of the mind by placing in front of it all that supports your aspiration. Reduce the exposure to unnecessary stimulus like too much information, sensationalism and communication as it will reignite old pathways in the mind. Gossip is any form of mental involvement in 'others' affairs—avoid gossip and gossipers completely—it silently reinforces 'otherness'. Strive for a good foundation right where you are. Never let the mind dictate changes, be rational and examine things. Dissatisfaction can never bring satisfaction, the old can never bring the new. Your sincere practice is your best guide. You will see what needs to be done and what changes need to be made based on an accurate barometer—your practice. Spirituality must enter life for life to enter and sustain your spirituality. Be alert and measured when you speak. Do not allow any opinions to register, remind yourself that 'you' are the only project to be concerned with. Be cheerful, the darkest clouds must give way to the radiance and warmth of the sun. Start and end the day with prayer. Be eternally vigilant. Persevere relentlessly!

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