

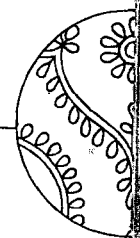
SADHANA

THE REALIZATION OF LIFE

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THE PROBLEM OF SELF



At one pole of my being I am one with sticks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of the comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things.

But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravity of all things. It is small in appearance but great in reality, for it holds its own against the forces that would rob it of its distinction and make it one with the dust.

This is the superstructure of the self, which rises from the indeterminate depth and darkness of its foundation into the

open, proud of its isolation, proud of having given shape to a single individual idea of the architect's that has no duplicate in the whole universe. If this individuality is demolished, then though no material is lost, not an atom destroyed, the creative joy that was crystalized therein is gone. We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this specialty, this individuality which is the only thing we can call our own and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world. It is most valuable because it is not universal. And therefore only through it can we gain the universe more truly than if we were lying within its breast unconscious of our distinctiveness. The universal is always seeking its consummation in the unique. And the desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us. It is our joy of the infinite in us that gives us our joy in ourselves.

That this separateness of self is considered by man as his most precious possession is proved by the sufferings he undergoes and the sins he commits for its sake. But the consciousness of separation has come from the eating of the fruit of knowledge. It has led man to shame and crime and death, yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies securely slumbering in perfect innocence in the womb of Mother Nature.

It is a constant striving and suffering for us to maintain the separateness of this self of ours. And in fact it is this suffering that measures its value. One side of the value is sacrifice, which represents how much the cost has been. The other side of it is the attainment, which represents how much has been gained. If

the self meant nothing to us but pain and sacrifice, it could have no value for us, and on no account would we willingly undergo such sacrifice. In such a case there could be no doubt at all that the highest object of humanity would be the annihilation of self.

But if there is a corresponding gain, if it does not end in a void but in a fullness, then it is clear that its negative qualities, its very sufferings and sacrifices, make it all the more precious. That it is so has been proved by those who have realized the positive significance of self and have accepted its responsibilities with eagerness and undergone sacrifices without flinching.

With the foregoing introduction it will be easy for me to answer the question once asked by one of my audience as to whether the annihilation of self has not been held by India as the supreme goal of humanity.

In the first place we must keep in mind the fact that man is never literal in the expression of his ideas, except in matters most trivial. Very often man's words are not a language at all, but merely a vocal gesture of the dumb. They may indicate, but do not express, his thoughts. The more vital his thoughts, the more have his words to be explained by the context of his life. Those who seek to know his meaning by the aid of the dictionary only technically reach the house, for they are stopped by the outside wall and find no entrance to the hall. This is the reason that the teachings of our greatest prophets give rise to endless disputations when we try to understand them by following their words and not by realizing them in our own lives. The men who are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the

unfortunate ones who are always busy with their nets and neglect the fishing.

It is not only in Buddhism and the Indian religions but in Christianity too that the ideal of selflessness is preached with all fervor. In the last the symbol of death has been used for expressing the idea of man's deliverance from the life that is not true. This is the same as Nirvana, the symbol of the extinction of the lamp.

In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from avidya, from ignorance. It is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but in destroying that which is negative, which obstructs our vision of truth. When this obstruction, which is ignorance, is removed, then only is the eyelid drawn up which is no loss to the eye.

It is our ignorance that makes us think that our self, as self, is real, that it has its complete meaning in itself. When we take that wrong view of self, then we try to live in such a manner as to make self the ultimate object of our life. Then are we doomed to disappointment, like the man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road. Our self has no means of holding us, for its own nature is to pass on, and by clinging to this thread of self which is passing through the loom of life, we cannot make it serve the purpose of the cloth into which it is being woven. When a man, with elaborate care, arranges for an enjoyment of the self, he lights a fire but has no dough to make his bread with; the fire flares up and consumes itself to extinction, like an unnatural beast that eats its own progeny and dies.

In an unknown language the words are tyrannically prominent. They stop us but say nothing. To be rescued from this fetter of words we must rid ourselves of the *avidya*, our ignorance, and then our mind will find its freedom in the inner idea. But it would be foolish to say that our ignorance of the language can be dispelled only by the destruction of the words. No, when the perfect knowledge comes, every word remains in its place, only they do not bind us to themselves but let us pass through them and lead us to the idea that is emancipation.

Thus it is only *avidya* that makes the self our fetter, by making us think that it is an end in itself and by preventing our seeing that it contains the idea that transcends its limits. That is why the wise man comes and says, "Set yourselves free from the avidya; know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you."

We gain our freedom when we attain our truest nature. The man who is an artist finds his artistic freedom when he finds his ideal of art. Then is he freed from laborious attempts at imitation, from the goadings of popular approbation. It is the function of religion not to destroy our nature but to fulfill it. D H ARMA

The Sanskrit word *dharmā*, which is usually translated into English as "religion," has a deeper meaning in our language. *Dharma* is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things. *Dharma* is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done, we say that *dharmā* is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.

But this *dharmā*, which is the truth in us, is not apparent, because it is inherent—so much so that it has been held that sinfulness is the nature of man, and only by the special grace of

God can a particular person be saved. This is like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree. But do we not know that the *appearance* of the seed contradicts its true nature? When you submit it to chemical analysis, you may find in it carbon and protein and a good many other things, but not the idea of a branching tree. Only when the tree begins to take shape do you come to see its *dharmā*, and then you can affirm without doubt that the seed which has been wasted and allowed to rot in the ground has been thwarted in its *dharmā*, in the fulfillment of its true nature. In the history of humanity we have known the living seed in us to sprout. We have seen the great purpose in us taking shape in the lives of our greatest men, and have felt certain that though there are numerous individual lives that seem ineffectual, still it is not their *dharmā* to remain barren, but it is for them to burst their cover and transform themselves into a vigorous spiritual shoot, growing up into the air and light and branching out in all directions.

The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its *dharmā*, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree; it is the nonaccomplishment that is its prison. The sacrifice by which a thing attains its fulfillment is not a sacrifice that ends in death; it is the casting-off of bonds that wins freedom.

When we know the highest ideal of freedom that a man has, we know his *dharmā*, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self. At first sight it seems that man counts as freedom that by which he gets unbounded opportunities for

self-gratification and self-aggrandizement. But surely this is not borne out by history. Our revelatory men have always been those who have lived the life of self-sacrifice. The higher nature in man always seeks for something that transcends itself and yet is its deepest truth, that claims all its sacrifice yet makes this sacrifice its own recompense. This is man's *dharmā*, man's religion, and man's self is the vessel that is to carry this sacrifice to the altar.

We can look at our self in its two different aspects: the self that displays itself, and the self that transcends itself and thereby reveals its own meaning. To display itself it tries to be big, to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations, and to retain everything to itself. To reveal itself it gives up everything it has, thus becoming perfect, like a flower that has blossomed out from the bud, pouring from its chalice of beauty all its sweetness.

The lamp contains its oil, which it holds securely in its close grasp and guards from the least loss. Thus is it separate from all other objects around it and is miserly. But when lighted it finds its meaning at once; its relation with all things far and near is established, and it freely sacrifices its fund of oil to feed the flame.

Such a lamp is our self. As long as it hoards its possessions, it keeps itself dark; its conduct contradicts its true purpose. When it finds illumination, it forgets itself in a moment, holds the light high, and serves it with everything it has, for therein is its revelation. This revelation is the freedom that Buddha preached. He asked the lamp to give up its oil. But purposeless

giving-up is a still darker poverty, which he never could have meant. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding. This is emancipation. The path Buddha pointed out was not merely the practice of self-abnegation but the widening of love. And therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching.

When we find that the state of Nirvana preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that Nirvana is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end unto itself. Everything else raises the question "Why?" in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, "I love," then there is no room for the "Why?"; it is the final answer in itself.

Doubtless even selfishness impels one to give away. But the selfish man does it on compulsion. That is like plucking fruit when it is unripe; you have to tear it from the tree and bruise the branch. But when a man loves, giving becomes a matter of joy to him, like the tree's surrender of the ripe fruit. All our belongings assume a weight by the ceaseless gravity of our selfish desires; we cannot easily cast them away from us. They seem to belong to our very nature, to stick to us as a second skin, and we bleed as we detach them. But when we are possessed by love, its force acts in the opposite direction. The things that closely adhered to us lose their adhesion and weight, and we find that they are not of us. Far from its being a loss to give them away, we find in that the fulfillment of our being.

Thus we find in perfect love the freedom of our self. Only that which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore working for love is freedom in action.

This is the meaning of the teaching of disinterested work in the Gita.

The Gita says action we must have, for only in action do we manifest our nature. But this manifestation is not perfect as long as our action is not free. In fact, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. The mother reveals herself in the service of her children, so our true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action, which can only be attained in the work of love.

God's manifestation is in his work of creation, and it is said in the Upanishad, *Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature;* they are not imposed upon him from outside. Therefore his work is his freedom, and in his creation he realizes himself. The same thing is said elsewhere in other words: *From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, toward joy does it progress, and into joy does it enter.*[†] It means that God's creation has its source not in any necessity, it comes from his fullness of joy, it is his love that creates, therefore in creation is his own revelation.

The artist who has a joy in the fullness of his artistic idea objectifies it and thus gains it more fully by holding it afar. It is joy that detaches itself from us, and then gives it form in creations of love in order to make it more perfectly our own. Hence there must be this separation, not a separation of repulsion but a separation of love. Repulsion has only the one element, the element of severance. But love has two, the element

* "Svabhaviki jnana bala kriyacha."

† Anandadhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante, anandena jatani avanti, anandamprayantyabhisamvicanti.

of severance, which is only an appearance, and the element of union, which is the ultimate truth—just as when the father tosses his child up from his arms it has the appearance of rejection, but its truth is quite the reverse.

So we must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others but in the ceaseless realization of yoga, of union, not on the side of the canvas where it is blank, but on the side where the picture is being painted.

This is the reason that the separateness of our self has been described by our philosophers as maya, an illusion, because it has no intrinsic reality of its own. It looks perilous; it raises its isolation to a giddy height and casts a black shadow upon the fair face of existence; from the outside it has the aspect of a sudden disruption, rebellious and destructive; it is proud, domineering, and wayward; it is ready to rob the world of all its wealth to gratify its craving of a moment, to pluck with a reckless, cruel hand all the plumes from the divine bird of beauty to deck its ugliness for a day. Indeed, man's legend has it that it bears the black mark of disobedience stamped on its forehead forever; but still all this is *maya*, envelopment of *avidya*; it is the mist, it is not the sun; it is the black smoke that presages the fire of love.

Imagine some savage who, in his ignorance, thinks that it is the paper of the banknote that has the magic by virtue of which its possessor gets all he wants. He piles up the papers, hides them, handles them in all sorts of absurd ways, and then at last, wearied by his efforts, comes to the sad conclusion that they

are absolutely worthless, only fit to be thrown into the fire. But the wise man knows that the paper of the banknote is all *maya*, and until it is given up to the bank, it is futile. It is only *avidya*, our ignorance, that makes us believe that the separateness of our self, like the paper of the banknote, is precious in itself, and by acting on this belief our self is rendered valueless. It is only when the *avidya* is removed that this very self comes to us with a wealth that is priceless. For *he manifests himself in forms that his joy assumes*.^{*} These forms are separate from him, and the value that these forms have is only what his joy has imparted to them. When we transfer back these forms into that original joy, which is love, then we cash them at the bank and we find their truth.

When pure necessity drives man to his work, it takes an accidental and contingent character, it becomes a mere make-shift arrangement; it is deserted and left in ruins when necessity changes its course. But when his work is the outcome of joy, the forms that it takes have the elements of immortality. The immortal in man imparts to it its own quality of permanence.

Our self, as a form of God's joy, is deathless, for his joy is *amritam*, eternal. This it is in us that makes us skeptical of death, even when the fact of death cannot be doubted. In reconciling this contradiction in us, we come to the truth that in the dualism of death and life there is a harmony. We know that the life of a soul, which is finite in its expression and infinite in its principle, must go through the portals of death in its journey to realize the infinite. It is death that is monistic; it has no life in it.

* Anandarupamamritam yadvibhati.

But life is dualistic; it has an appearance as well as truth, and death is that appearance, that *maya*, which is an inseparable companion to life. Our self, to live, must go through a continual change and growth of form, which may be termed a continual death and a continual life going on at the same time. It is really courting death when we refuse to accept death; when we wish to give the form of the self some fixed changelessness; when the self feels no impulse that urges it to grow out of itself; when it treats its limits as final and acts accordingly. Then comes our teacher's call to die to this death—not a call to annihilation but to eternal life. It is the extinction of the lamp in the morning light, not the abolition of the sun. It is really asking us consciously to give effect to the innermost wish that we have in the depths of our nature.

We have a dual set of desires in our being, which it should be our endeavor to bring into a harmony. In the region of our physical nature we have one set, of which we are always conscious. We wish to enjoy our food and drink, we hanker after bodily pleasure and comfort. These desires are self-centered; they are solely concerned with their respective impulses. The wishes of our palate often run counter to what our stomach can allow.

But we have another set, which is the desire of our physical system as a whole, of which we are usually unconscious. It is the wish for health. This is always doing its work, mending and repairing, making new adjustments in cases of accident, and skillfully restoring the balance wherever disturbed. It has no concern with the fulfillment of our immediate bodily desires,

but it goes beyond the present time. It is the principle of our physical wholeness; it links our life with its past and its future and maintains the unity of its parts. He who is wise knows it, and makes his other physical wishes harmonize with it.

We have a greater body, which is the social body. Society is an organism, of which we as parts have our individual wishes. We want our own pleasure and license. We want to pay less and gain more than anybody else. This causes scramblings and fights. But there is that other wish in us, which does its work in the depths of the social being. It is the wish for the welfare of the society. It transcends the limits of the present and the personal. It is on the side of the infinite.

He who is wise tries to harmonize the wishes that seek for self-gratification with the wish for the social good, and only thus can he realize his higher self. X

In its finite aspect, the self is conscious of its separateness, and there it is ruthless in its attempt to have more distinction than all others. But in its infinite aspect, its wish is to gain that harmony which leads to its perfection and not its mere aggrandizement.

The emancipation of our physical nature is in attaining health, of our social being in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love. This last is what Buddha describes as extinction—the extinction of selfishness—which is the function of love, and which does not lead to darkness but to illumination. This is the attainment of *bodhi*, or the true awakening; it is the revealing in us of the infinite joy by the light of love. LOVE ultimate goal

The passage of our self is through its selfhood, which is in-

dependent, to its attainment of soul, which is harmonious. This harmony can never be reached through compulsion. So our will, in the history of its growth, must come through independence and rebellion to the ultimate completion. We must have the possibility of the negative form of freedom, which is license, before we can attain the positive freedom, which is love.

This negative freedom, the freedom of self-will, can turn its back upon its highest realization, but it cannot cut itself away from it altogether, for then it will lose its own meaning. Our self-will has freedom up to a certain extent; it can know what it is to break away from the path, but it cannot continue in that direction indefinitely. For we are finite on our negative side. We must come to an end in our evil-doing, in our career of discord, for evil is not infinite, and discord cannot be an end in itself. Our will has freedom so that it may find out that its true course is toward goodness and love, for goodness and love are infinite, and only in the infinite is the perfect realization of freedom possible. So our will can be free not toward the limitations of our self, not where it is maya and negation, but toward the unlimited, where are truth and love. Our freedom cannot go against its own principle of freedom and yet be free; it cannot commit suicide and yet live. We cannot say that we should have infinite freedom to fetter ourselves, for the fettering ends the freedom.

So in the freedom of our will, we have the same dualism of appearance and truth—our self-will is only the appearance of freedom and love is the truth. When we try to make this ap-

pearance independent of truth, then our attempt brings misery and proves its own futility in the end. Everything has this dualism of maya and satyam, appearance and truth. Words are *maya* where they are merely sounds and finite, they are *satyam* where they are ideas and infinite. Our self is maya where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its separateness as absolute; it is satyam where it recognizes its essence in the universal and infinite, in the supreme self, in paramatman. This is what Christ means when he says, "Before Abraham was I am." This is the eternal *I am* that speaks through the *I am* that is in me. The individual *I am* attains its perfect end when it realizes its freedom of harmony in the infinite *I am*. Then is it *mukti*, its deliverance from the thralldom of *maya*, of appearance, which springs from *avidya*, from ignorance; its emancipation in *cantam civam* (advaitam), in the perfect repose in truth, in the perfect activity in goodness, and in the perfect union in love.

Not only in our self but also in nature there is this separateness from God, which has been described as *maya* by our philosophers, because the separateness does not exist by itself, it does not limit God's infinity from outside. It is his own will that has imposed limits to itself, just as the chess player restricts his will with regard to the moving of the chessmen. The player willingly enters into definite relations with each particular piece and realizes the joy of his power by these very restrictions. It is not that he cannot move the chessmen just as he pleases, but if he does so, then there can be no play. If God assumes his role of omnipotence, then his creation is at an end and his power loses all its meaning, for power, to be a power,

must act within limits. God's water must be water, his earth can never be other than earth. The law that has made them water and earth is his own law, by which he has separated the play from the player, for therein consists the joy of the player.

As by the limits of law nature is separated from God, so it is the limits of its egoism that separates the self from him. He has willingly set limits to his will and has given us mastery over the little world of our own. It is like a father's settling upon his son some allowance, within the limit of which he is free to do what he likes. Though it remains a portion of the father's own property, yet he frees it from the operation of his own will. The reason of it is that the will, which is love's will and therefore free, can have its joy only in a union with another free will. The tyrant who must have slaves looks upon them as instruments of his purpose. It is the consciousness of his own necessity that makes him crush the will out of them, to make his self-interest absolutely secure. This self-interest cannot brook the least freedom in others, because it is not itself free. The tyrant is really dependent on his slaves, and therefore he tries to make them completely useful by making them subservient to his own will. But a lover must have two wills for the realization of his love, because the consummation of love is in harmony, the harmony between freedom and freedom. So God's love, from which our self has taken form, has made it separate from God, and it is God's love that again establishes a reconciliation and unites God with our self through the separation. That is why our self has to go through endless renewals, for in its career of separateness it cannot go on forever. Separateness is the finitude where it finds its barriers to come back again and again to

its infinite source. Our self has ceaselessly to cast off its age, repeatedly shed its limits in oblivion and death, in order to realize its immortal youth. Its personality must merge in the universal time after time, in fact pass through it every moment, to refresh its individual life. It must follow the eternal rhythm and touch the fundamental unity at every step, and thus maintain its separation balanced in beauty and strength.

The play of life and death we see everywhere—this transmutation of the old into the new. The day comes to us every morning, naked and white, fresh as a flower. But we know it is old. It is age itself. It is that very ancient day which took up the newborn earth in its arms, covered it with its white mantle of light, and sent it forth on its pilgrimage among the stars.

Yet its feet are untired and its eyes undimmed. It carries the golden amulet of ageless eternity, at whose touch all wrinkles vanish from the forehead of creation. In the very core of the world's heart stands immortal youth. Death and decay cast over its face momentary shadows and pass on; they leave no marks of their steps—and truth remains fresh and young.

This old, old day of our earth is born again and again every morning. It comes back to the original refrain of its music. If its march were the march of an infinite straight line, if it had not the awful pause of its plunge in the abysmal darkness and its repeated rebirth in the life of the endless beginning, then it would gradually soil and bury truth with its dust and spread ceaseless aching over the earth under its heavy tread. Then every moment would leave its load of weariness behind, and decrepitude would reign supreme on its throne of eternal dirt.

But every morning the day is reborn among the newly blos-

somed flowers, with the same message retold and the same assurance renewed that death eternally dies, that the waves of turmoil are on the surface, and that the sea of tranquility is fathomless. The curtain of night is drawn aside and truth emerges without a speck of dust on its garment, without a furrow of age on its lineaments.

We see that he who is before everything else is the same today. Every note of the song of creation comes fresh from his voice. The universe is not a mere echo, reverberating from sky to sky, like a homeless wanderer—the echo of an old song sung once and for all in the dim beginning of things and then left orphaned. Every moment it comes from the heart of the master, it is breathed in his breath.

And that is the reason that it overspreads the sky like a thought taking shape in a poem, and never has to break into pieces with the burden of its own accumulating weight. Hence the surprise of endless variations, the advent of the unaccountable, the ceaseless procession of individuals, each of whom is without a parallel in creation. As at the first so to the last, the beginning never ends—the world is ever old and ever new.

It is for our self to know that it must be born anew every moment of its life. It must break through all illusions that encase it in their crust to make it appear old, burdening it with death.

For life is immortal youthfulness, and it hates age that tries to clog its movements—age that does not belong to life in truth but follows it as the shadow follows the lamp.

Our life, like a river, strikes its banks not to find itself closed

in by them but to realize anew every moment that it has its unending opening toward the sea. It is like a poem that strikes its meter at every step, not to be silenced by its rigid regulations but to give expression every moment to the inner freedom of its harmony.

The boundary walls of our individuality thrust us back within our limits, on the one hand, and thus lead us, on the other, to the unlimited. Only when we try to make these limits infinite are we launched into an impossible contradiction and do we court miserable failure.

This is the cause that leads to the great revolutions in human history. Whenever the part, spurning the whole, tries to run a separate course of its own, the great pull of the all gives it a violent wrench, stops it suddenly, and brings it to the dust. Whenever the individual tries to dam the ever-flowing current of the world force and imprison it within the area of his particular use, it brings on disaster. However powerful a king may be, he cannot raise his standard or rebellion against the infinite source of strength, which is unity, and yet remain powerful.

It has been said, By unrighteousness men prosper, gain what they desire, and triumph over their enemies, but at the end they are cut off at the root and suffer extinction.* Our roots must go deep down into the universal if we are to attain the greatness of personality.

It is the end of our self to seek that union. It must bend its head low in love and meekness and take its stand where great

* Adharmenaidhate tavat tato bhadrani pacyati tatah sapatnan jayati samulastu vinacyati.

and small all meet. It has to gain by its loss and rise by its surrender. His games would be a horror to the child if he could not come back to his mother, and our pride of personality will be a curse to us if we cannot give it up in love. We must know that it is only the revelation of the Infinite that is endlessly new and eternally beautiful in us, and that gives the only meaning to our self.