

The Life of the Spirit



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The Life of the Spirit

IN true *Karma Yoga* or the life of perfect action, there is proper adjustment between the material and the spiritual aspects of life. In this type of life consciousness

***Karmayogin* faces the problems of life**

is not fettered to the mundane and material things, but at the same time it is not allowed to

fly away from everyday existence. The mind is not allowed to be immersed in the material life of gnawing wants, nor is it allowed to be merged in spiritual bliss. It is used to face and tackle the problems of life from the point of view of spiritual understanding.

Proper adjustment between the material and the spiritual aspects of life is not secured by giving equal importance to them. It is not secured by taking some-

Matter to be used as pliable instrument for expression of spirit

thing from the material and something from the spiritual and then striking a balance between the two. *The spirit*

must and ever will have an inviolable primacy over matter, but the primacy is not expressed by avoiding or rejecting matter, rather by using it as an adequate vehicle for the expressions of the spirit. In intelligent adjustment matter has to play the role of a pliable instrument for the self-manifestation of the spirit, and must not in any way become obtrusive in its own rights. Just as the

musical instrument is valuable only if it gives vent to the song of the musician, and becomes a hindrance if it does not yield complete subservience, matter is valuable if it gives free and adequate expression to the creative flow of life and becomes an obstacle if it interferes with it.

Owing to the multifarious cravings of the mind, matter has a tendency to assume importance for itself. For the drunkard wine is everything; for the greedy

**Spirituality requires
subordination of matter,
not rejection**

man the hoarding of money is all-important; and for the flirt the chase of sensations is the supreme end of life. These are

examples of how, through diverse cravings of the mind, matter becomes unduly obtrusive and perverts the expressions of the spirit. *The way to restore the dignity of the spirit is not to reject matter but to use it for the claims of the spirit.* This is possible only when the spirit is free from all cravings and is fully conscious of its own true status. When this is achieved, man may have material goods but is not caught up in them. When necessary he may use them as means for the life of the spirit but he is not allured by them nor does he become restless for them. He realises that in themselves they do not constitute the real significance of life. He dwells in the material and social environment without any hankering for them and, being unattached, is able to convert them into the field for spiritual life.

When once true adjustment between spirit and matter is secured there is no phase of life which cannot be utilised for the expression of divinity. No longer is

**Freedom of soul is
expressed through
dominion over matter**

there any need to run away from everyday life and its tangles. The freedom of the spirit, which is sought by

avoiding contact with the world and by going to the caves or mountains, is a negative freedom. When such retirement is temporary and is meant to digest worldly experiences and develop detachment it has its own advantages. It gives breathing time in the race of life. But when such retirement is grounded in fear of the world or lack of confidence in the spirit, it is far from helpful towards the attainment of real freedom. *Real freedom is essentially positive and must express itself through unhampered dominion of the spirit over matter.* This is the true life of the spirit.

The life of the spirit is the expression of Infinity and, as such, knows no artificial limits. True spirituality is not to be mistaken for an exclusive enthusiasm for

Spirituality covers the whole of life

some fad. It is not concerned with any "ism." When people seek spirituality apart from life, as if it had nothing to do with the material world, their search is futile. All creeds and cults have a tendency to emphasise some fragmentary aspect of life, but *true spirituality is totalitarian in its outlook.* The essence of spirituality does not consist in a specialised or narrow interest in some imagined part of life, but in a certain enlightened attitude to all the various situations which obtain in life. It covers and includes the whole of life. All the material things of this world can be made subservient to the divine game, and when they are thus subordinated they become auxiliary to the self-affirmation of the spirit.

The value of material things depends upon the part they play in the life of the spirit. In themselves

Body is not necessarily a hindrance to spiritual life

they are neither good nor bad. They become good or bad according to whether they help or hinder the manifestation of

Divinity through matter. Take for example the place of the physical body in the life of the spirit. It is a mistake to set up an antithesis between "flesh" and "spirit." Such contrast almost inevitably ends in an unqualified condemnation of the body. The body obstructs spiritual fulfillment only if it is pampered as having claims in its own right. Its proper function is rightly understood as ancillary to spiritual purposes. The rider needs a horse if he is to fight a battle, though the horse can become an impediment if it refuses to be completely submissive to his will. In the same way *the spirit needs to be clothed in matter if it is to come into full possession of its own possibilities*, although the body can at times become a hindrance if it refuses to be compliant with the requirements of the spirit. If the body yields to the claims of the spirit as it should, it is instrumental in bringing down the kingdom of heaven on earth. It becomes a vehicle for the release of divine life, and when it subserves this purpose it might aptly be called the temple of God on earth.

Since the physical body and other material things can be used for the life of the spirit, true spirituality does not take any hostile attitude towards them, but

Science, art and politics can subserve spiritual ends

seeks expression in and through them. Thus the perfect man does not look down upon things of beauty or

works of art, attainments of science or achievements of politics. The things of beauty can be degraded by being made objects of craving or jealous and exclusive possessiveness; the works of art can often be used to augment and exploit egoism and other human frailties; the attainments of science can be used for mutual destruction, as in modern wars; and political enthusiasm, without spiritual insight, can perpetuate social and

international chaos; but all these can also be rightly handled and spiritualised. The things of beauty can become the source of purity, happiness and inspiration; the works of art can ennoble and raise the consciousness of people; the attainments of science can redeem humanity from unnecessary suffering and handicaps; and political action can be instrumental in establishing a real brotherhood of humanity. *The life of the spirit does not consist in turning away from worldly spheres of existence, but in reclaiming them for the divine purpose which is to bring love, peace, happiness, beauty and spiritual perfection within the reach of everyone.*

However, he who would live the life of the spirit must remain detached in the midst of worldly things without becoming cold or indifferent to them. Detach-

Detachment does not mean indifference

ment should not be misunderstood as lack of appreciation.

It is not only compatible with true evaluation of things, but is its very condition. Craving creates delusion and prevents right perception. It nourishes obsessions and sustains the feeling of dependence upon external objects. Detachment promotes right understanding and facilitates perception of the true worth of things without making consciousness dependent upon external things. To see things as they are is to grasp their real significance as parts of the manifestation of the One Life, and to see through the veil of their apparent multiplicity is to be free from the insistent obsession for anything in its imagined isolation and exclusiveness. *The life of the spirit is to be found in comprehensiveness which is free from clinging, and appreciation which is free from entanglement.* It is a life of positive freedom in which the spirit infuses itself into matter and shines through it without submitting to any curtailment of its own claims.

The things and the happenings of this earthly existence are looked upon as foreign only so long as they are not engulfed in the advancing tide of comprehensive

True spirituality is comprehensive

spirituality. When once they find their right place in the scheme of life, each of them is seen to participate in the symphony of creation. Then the expression of spirituality does not require a separate or exclusive field; it does not become degraded by being concerned with the ordinary physical, intellectual and emotional needs of people. The life of the spirit is a *unified and integral existence which does not admit of exclusive or unrelated compartments.*

The life of the spirit is an unceasing manifestation of divine love and spiritual understanding, and both these aspects of divinity are unrestricted in their uni-

Divine love is creatively dynamic in relation to environment

versality and unchallengeable in their exclusiveness. Thus divine love does not require any special type of context for making itself felt; it need not await some rare moments for its expression, nor is it on the lookout for sombre situations which savour of special sanctity. It discovers its field of expression in every incident and situation which might be passed over by an unenlightened person as too insignificant to deserve attention. Ordinary human love is released only under suitable conditions. It is a response to certain types of situations and is relative to them. But *divine love which springs from the source within is independent of stimuli.* It is released, therefore, even in circumstances which would be looked upon as unfavourable by those who have tasted only of human love. If there is lack of happiness or beauty or goodness in those by whom the Master is surrounded, these very things become for him the opportunity to

shower his divine love on them and to redeem them from the state of material or spiritual poverty. His everyday responses to his worldly environment become expressions of dynamic and creative divinity which spreads itself and spiritualises everything to which he puts his mind.

Spiritual understanding, which is the complementary aspect of the life of the spirit, must be distinguished from worldly wisdom, which is the quintessence of the

Spiritual understanding not born of blind imitation

conventions of the world. Spiritual wisdom does not consist in the unquestioning acceptance of the ways of the world.

The ways of the world are almost always a collective effect of the actions of materially inclined people. Worldly people consider something to be right and make it right for persons of similar inclination. Therefore the blind following of convention does not necessarily secure wise action. The life of the spirit cannot be a life of uncritical imitation; it must have its basis in the true understanding of values.



