

VAIRAGYA

by Swami Sivananda



O Adorable Lord! Thou art the subtle. Hence it is very difficult to understand and realize Thee. Thou art the past, present and future. There is nothing but Thee. Thou art the Infinite ocean of Grace and Mercy. Thou art known to Thy devotee alone. Thou art without attributes and without forms and yet Thou possess attributes and forms. It is very difficult to comprehend Thy glory and greatness. Thou art my father, mother, Guru and sole refuge. Salutations unto Thee! Protect me. Guide me. Lift me up from this terrible round of births and deaths.

O Lord! Thou art the indweller of all Thou art the soul in all! Thou art the womb of all! Thou art the protector of all: Thou art the bestower of fruits of Karma to all: Thou art all; Thou dwellest in all; Thou art the source of all; Thou art the giver of Moksha to all. Prostrations unto Thee!

O Lord! If Thou art the sun, then I am the ray; if Thou art the ocean, I am the wave: if Thou art the Himalayas, I am the tree; if Thou art the Ganga, I am the drop; if Thou art the garden, I am the flower; if Thou art the electric light, I am the bulb; If Thou art the landscape, I am the grass. By loving Thee, I have become Immortal. The noose of Yama is cut asunder. Salutations unto Thee!

O Self-effulgent Lord! Thou art the Supporter, the Saviour, the Creator, the Inner Ruler, the Governor, the Master, the Protector and the Deliverer. Thou art the Dispeller of the darkness of ignorance. Thou art the Remover of the miseries and sufferings of Thy devotees. Thou art the Destroyer of the three kinds of sufferings (Tapas) or fevers of human beings. O Venerable Lord! Salutations unto Thee! In Thee I take refuge. Give me purity and devotion. Let my wandering, mischievous mind always rest in Thy blessed Lotus feet.

O Sovereign Lord of all creations! I do not want any wealth, or Moksha or power or dominion. But I do want that sufferings and troubles of all beings should come to an end for ever. Thou art ocean of mercy. Thou art omnipotent. Thou can do this.

Man wants happiness. He shuns pain. He moves heaven and earth to get the happiness he wants from sensual objects and, lo, gets himself entangled in the inextricable meshes of *maya*. Poor man! He does not know that these objects are perishable and evanescent, finite and conditioned in time, space and causation. And what is more, he fails to get the desired happiness from them.

There is not an iota of happiness in objects, because they are insentient (*jada*). Sensual pleasure is a reflection of *atmic* bliss only. Just as a dog that sucks a dry bone in the street imagines foolishly that blood is oozing out of the dry bone, whereas blood is really oozing from its own palate, so also worldly-minded people foolishly imagine that the happiness they enjoy in everyday life comes from objects only. This world is imperfect (*apurna*) and there is uncertainty of life. A barrister-at-law talks on the telephone, ascends the staircase to take his meals and, alas, while ascending he dies on the staircase. Such instances are not uncommon to you all.

There is mental uneasiness, dissatisfaction, discontentment and restlessness even in multimillionaires and kings. Some kind of sorrow, misery or pain is invariably present even when they are in the height of enjoyment of worldly pleasures. Show me a man who is perfectly happy? When the marriage of his second son is being celebrated, the remembrance of the death of his first son who passed away only sometime ago torments his mind.

Mind is so constituted that the rhythm of pleasure and pain is kept up like the rhythm of systole and diastole of the heart. You entertain the fear that the happiness will pass away soon, when you are in happy surroundings. This adds pain, when you are in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Even if you remove the pain by some means or other, it again manifests in some other form such as loss of property, disease, death, hostility and disappointment. There is no hope of immortality by means of riches.

Every person in this world is restless, discontented and dissatisfied. He feels that he is in want of something, the nature of which he does not really understand. He seeks, in the accomplishment of ambitious projects, the rest and peace that he feels he is in need of. But he finds to his great sorrow and disappointment that worldly greatness when secured is a delusion and a snare. He does not find any happiness in it. He gets coveted degrees, diplomas, titles, honors, power, position, name and fame; he marries; he begets beautiful babies; in short, he gets all that he supposes would give him happiness. But yet he finds no real rest and peace. On account of ignorance man runs hither and thither to seek happiness in objects.

You yourself have made your life complex and intricate. You have entangled yourself in this quagmire of samsara. You have multiplied your wants and desires. Everyday you are forging an additional link to the chain of bondage. Simplicity has vanished. Luxurious habits and ways of living are embraced. No wonder there is unemployment everywhere. People are dying of starvation. There is depression in trade. There is unrest everywhere. There is wholesale devastation by earthquake. Divorce courts are also multiplying. One nation is afraid of another nation. One nation suspects that other nations are preparing for war. Life has thus become a matter of uncertainty. It has become a mass of confusion, chaos and bewilderment. It has become stormy and boisterous. It is full of under-currents, cross-currents, subterranean currents and mixed currents.

Is there no way of escape from these troubles and difficulties? There is only one way. Lead a life of *vairagya* or dispassion, self-control, purity, selfless service, cosmic love. Develop the habit of taking the right point of view, right thinking, right feeling, right acting, with right mental attitude or *bhava*. Practice devotion and meditation. Such indeed is the emphatic and irrefutable declaration

of the *Upanishads*. “*Na karmana na prajayana dhanena tyagenaike amritatva-manasuh. Neither by rituals, nor by progeny, nor by riches but by renunciation alone can one attain immortality.*” Ah! How uncertain is sensual life in this world! If you constantly think of the transitory nature of sensual pleasure and its concomitant evils viz., miseries, worries, troubles, tribulations, anxieties and premature death, then you will slowly develop *vairagya*, or detachment.

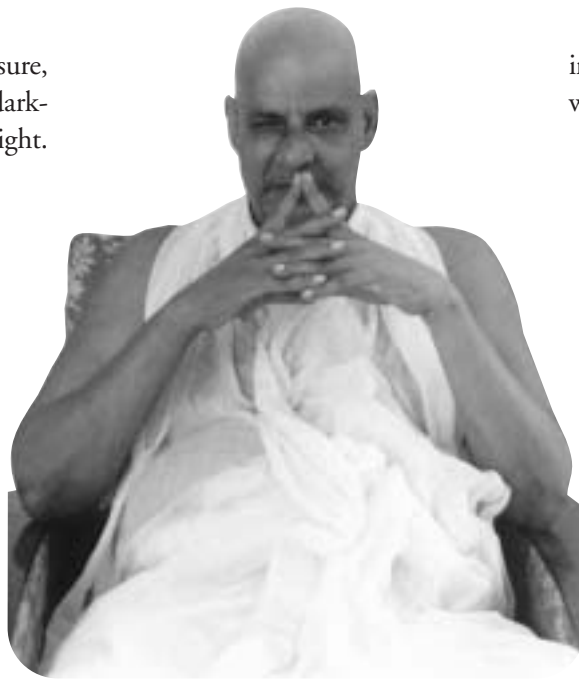
Vairagya is the opposite of *raga*, or desire. It is dispassion or non-attachment. It is indifference to sensual objects herein and hereafter. *Vairagya* thins out the fatty sensual mind. It turns the mind inward (*antarmukh vritti*). This is the most important qualification for an aspirant. It is the one and the only means to enter into *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

Pious men, saints, sages, *acharyas* and prophets are never tired of saying that this restlessness of every man, this state of discontentment, dissatisfaction and being ill at ease with oneself and one's environment is solely due to the loss of the companionship of the partner of the soul, who is ever eternally shining in the chambers of your heart, who is ready to embrace you with outstretched hands, if you really care to see Him and if you are really spiritually thirsty and hungry. The shadow of clouds, the friendship with a fool, the beauty of youth, wealth, all these last only for a very short time. They are impermanent. Shun them all ruthlessly. Only a thirsty person drinks water. Only a hungry person eats food. Even so, a person who is spiritually hungry and thirsty will only drink the nectar of immortality. Is not a kingdom valuable to be owned? Is not the company of young *maharanis* with tender waists and lotus-like eyes dear as life itself, very pleasing? Yet wise, dispassionate men like Bhartrihari, Buddha, Gopichand and others retired into forests kicking all these things as worthless as straw, to realize the Self which alone can confer infinite bliss, immortality, and eternal peace.

In the presence of sensual pleasure, spiritual bliss cannot exist, just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light. Therefore show extreme contempt for worldly objects. Destroy all desires. Turn the mind away from the sensual objects. You will develop vairagya. You can find eternal, infinite, supreme peace and bliss only in your *atma* which shines in all its splendour and glory in the chambers of your heart. It is an embodiment of bliss (*ananda swarupa*). You will now ask me the pertinent question: "Why should I realize the *atman*?" I say because Self-realization gives you freedom from the *samsaric* wheel of births and deaths with its concomitant evils. Hear the emphatic declaration of the Upanishads: "This atman (Self) which is free from sin, undecaying, undying, free from sorrow, hunger and thirst, with true desires and true resolves – that is what is to be sought after, and which one must wish to understand; one who has sought after the Self and understands It, obtains all worlds and all desires." *Chhandogya Upanishad*.

Hear again the forcible utterances of the same *Chhandogya Upanishad*: *Yo vai bhuma tat sukham na alpe sukham asti, bhumaiva sukham bhuma tveva vijijnasitavyah*. (The infinite (the Great) is bliss. There is no bliss in what is small (finite). The Infinite alone is bliss. But one should wish to understand the Infinite.) For all beings a human birth is difficult to attain. It is said that there are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God viz., a human birth, the longing for liberation and the protecting care of a perfected sage. The person who having by some virtuous actions done in previous births obtained a human birth with a good intellect and is foolish enough not to exert for Self-realization verily commits suicide, for he kills himself by clinging to things unreal.

Believe me; one *can* obliterate a *samskaras* by *purushartha* or right exertion.



He is *not* a creature of environment or circumstance. He is the master of his destiny. One part of pleasure is mixed with fifteen parts of pain. Pleasure that is mixed with pain, fear and worry is no pleasure at all. If you carefully begin to analyze this one part of pleasure also, it will dwindle into an airy nothing. You will find that it is a mere play of the mind. Wake up. Open your eyes. Develop *viveka* (discrimination). You cannot get the real happiness from finite objects.

Amidst the din and boisterous bustle of worldly activities, there do come moments of tranquility and peace, when the mind for the time being, however short it may be, soars above worldly things and reflects on the higher problems of life viz., the why and wherefore of life and the riddle of the universe. One begins to enquire: "Who am I?" The sincere enquirer becomes serious and gets absorbed in his reflections. He begins to search and understand the truth. Discrimination dawns on him. He seeks vairagya, concentration, meditation, and purification of the body and mind and eventually attains the highest knowledge of Self. But the mind which is saturated with worldly *vasanas* and materialistic poison is quite heedless and is irresistibly carried away by the two currents of *raga* (attraction) and *dvesha* (repulsion) and tossed about helplessly hither and thither

in the tumultuous *samsaric* stream of worldly concerns.

Try to understand the riddle of life. Acquire discrimination. Take recourse to *satsang*. Enquire into the nature of the *atman*. Study the *Yoga-Vasishtha* and the Upanishads. The spirit comes and goes. Therefore you will have to be careful always in nourishing and protecting your spiritual *samskaras* (mental impressions) with burning vairagya, intense and constant *sadhana* and burning longing for liberation (*mumukshutwa*). You will have to increase your good *samskaras*. You will have to develop them. You will have to multiply them. Seek the happiness within.

Vairagya born of discrimination or *viveka* is the premonitory symptom of spiritual development. It will help the aspirant. It will give him a good spiritual uplift. If you seriously think of the various kinds of pain in this *samsara* such as birth, death, worries, depression, suffering, disease, loss, hostility, disappointment, fear, etc., if you understand intelligently the defects of sensual life (*dosha drishti*), and the transitory and perishable nature of all objects of the world, vairagya will immediately dawn. Dear brother! If you have no real sustained vairagya, you will find no improvement or progress in spirituality. Vows, austerities, energy and meditation will leak out like water from a cracked pot. Be careful. *Atma-vichara* (enquiry into the nature of the *atman*, or Self) and yogic practices done without intense vairagya becomes fruitless. The things that used to afford you delight before give you displeasure now. That is a sign of vairagya.

What should be renounced is that *bhedabuddhi* which says: "I am superior to that man. I have done that. I have done this. I am the body" and the *kartritwa abhimana* which thinks: "I am the doer." There is no use of renouncing your home, wife and children, if you cannot renounce these also. Mere giving up of objects will not constitute real

renunciation. Dear friends, remember this point well. True *tyaga* or renunciation consists in renouncing egoism, “I-ness,” “mine-ness,” selfishness, desires and cravings of all sorts. He cannot be truly regarded as having renounced the world altogether who has merely withdrawn himself from worldly possessions. But he, who living in actual contact with the world, finds out its faults (*doshas*), who is free from every passion and whose soul depends on nothing, may well be said to have truly renounced the world. Renounce this world. Renounce the desire for *moksha*. Renounce renunciation itself. Then you will become That.

Vairagya does not mean abandoning social duties and responsibilities of life. It does not mean detachment from the world. It does not mean a life in the solitary caves of the Himalayas or in the crematorium. It does not mean living on neem-leaves, cow's urine and dung. It does not mean wearing of matted-hair and a kamandalu made of fence-gourd or coconut shell in the hand. It does not mean shaving of head and throwing of clothes. Even if he lives in solitude, still he is the same worldly man, if he is engaged in building castles in the air, and thinking of the objects of the world. In such case even the cave becomes a big city to him. Wherever a man may go, he carries with him his fickle, restless mind, his vasanas and samskaras. Vairagya is purely an internal mental state. Vairagya is mental detachment from all connections with the world. That is all. A man can do his spiritual sadhana and can develop inner mental detachment from pleasure and pain while living in the world. He should see that he is not carried away by the pleasant experiences of the world. He should not cling to them. He should simply remain as a silent spectator. A man may remain in the busy world amidst various luxuries, women and wealth, and yet he may possess perfect vairagya. If the mind remains quiet, if it is free from attachments, one can be a perfect *vairagi* even while living in a mansion in the busiest part of a city.

Such a mansion will be converted in a dense jungle by him. That person who has perfect mental detachment while remaining in the world is a hero indeed—much better than a sadhu living in the Himalayan caves because the former has to face the innumerable temptations of life every moment.

The vairagya that comes momentarily is due to the loss of relation, friend, child or property; this will not help you much in the spiritual path. What is really wanted is vairagya born of discrimination or viveka. Vairagya that comes momentarily after such accidents as the loss of some dearly loved relative or wealth is known as *karana vairagya*. It will not help you much in your spiritual advancement. The mind will be simply waiting for an opportunity to catch hold of the sensual objects, when an opportunity arises.

A dispassionate person has a different mind, a different experience altogether. He is a past master in the art or science of separating himself from the impermanent, perishable objects of the world. He has absolutely no attraction for them. He constantly dwells on the Eternal or the Absolute. He identifies himself every moment of his life with the witnessing consciousness present in pleasure and in pain, joy and sorrow, censure and praise, honor and dishonor, in all states of life. He stands adamant as a peak amid a turbulent storm, as a spectator of this wonderful world show. He learns valuable lessons from pleasant and painful experiences, with no attraction or repulsion. He knows quite well that pain helps a lot in his spiritual progress and evolution, it is the best teacher in the world. After practicing for some years, every experience will be a positive step in the ascent of the spiritual ladder. Eventually the mind will be unruffled and poised. Dispassion makes one the happiest, richest and most powerful person in the universe because Maya is no longer a temptation. ॐ

Stages in Vairagya

There are four stages in Vairagya

1. *Yatamana* - This is an attempt not to allow the mind to run into sensual grooves;
2. *Vyatireka* - In this stage some objects are attracting you and you are endeavoring to cut off the attachment and attraction. Slowly vairagya develops for these objects also. Then the vairagya matures. When some objects tempt and delude you, you should ruthlessly avoid them. You will have to develop vairagya for these tempting objects and it must also mature. In this stage you are conscious of your degree of vairagya towards different objects;
3. *Ekendriya* - The senses stand still and subdued, but the mind has either raga or dwesha for objects. Mind is, in other words, the only sense that functions independently;
4. *Vasirara* - In this highest stage of vairagya, the objects no longer tempt you. They cause no attraction. The senses are perfectly quiet. The mind also is free from likes and dislikes (raga and dwesha). Then you get supremacy or independence. Now you are conscious of your supremacy. Without vairagya no spiritual progress is possible.

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