

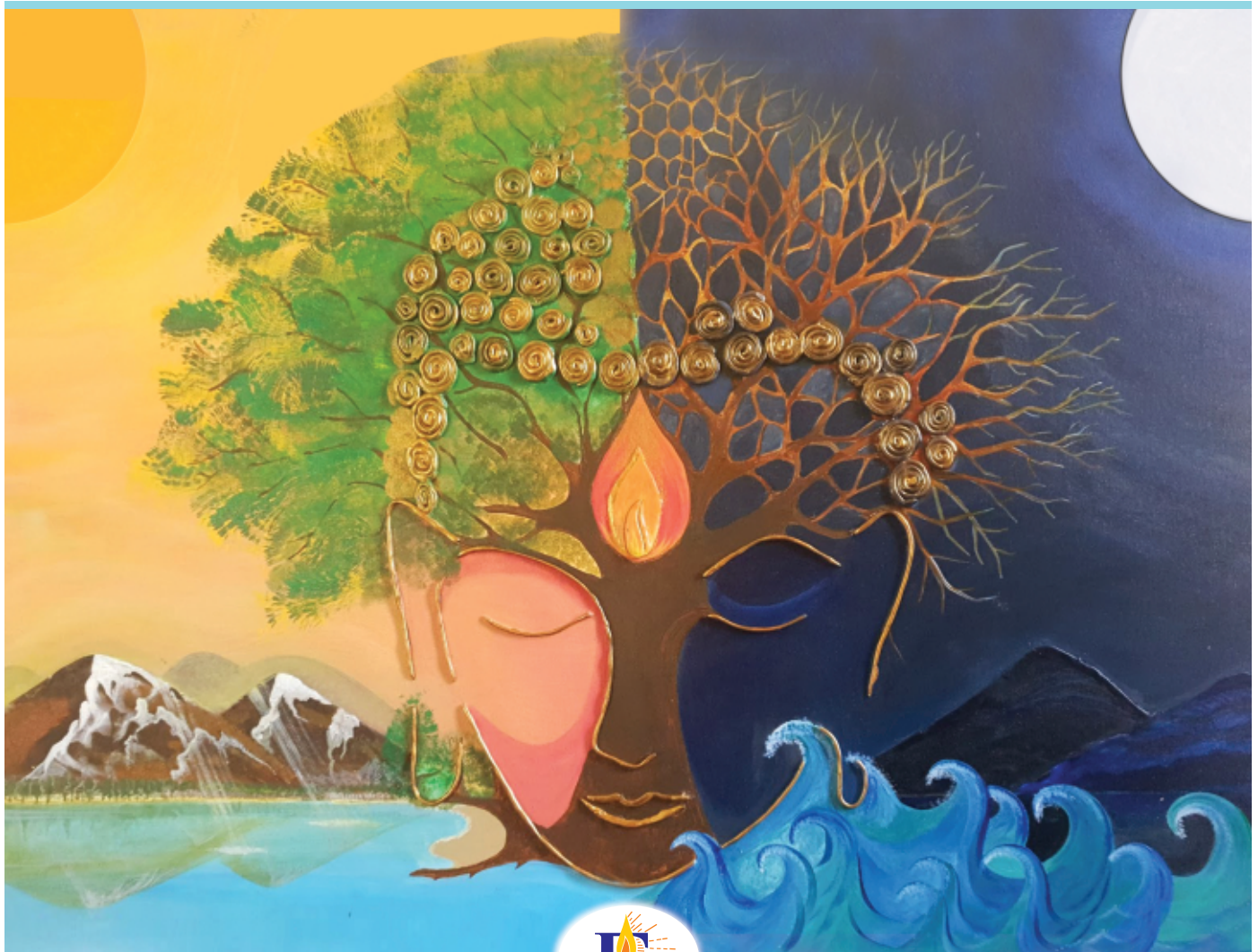
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# Inner Flame

Volume XIV

Issue 2

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

### ORDER IN DAILY LIFE

While the scriptures (or books of wisdom) of this world have all along talked about right living and given to humanity countless instructions consisting of do's and don'ts, it is tragic and surprising that hardly anyone lives in right ways. As we know, these days, many diseases are understood to arise from disorderly living or 'lifestyle errors'.

After getting the foundation of spirituality from Pujya Swami Chinmayanandaji, who introduced to me the glory of Upanishads and Geeta, and then getting great inspiration from Shri Ramana Maharshi, who threw precious light on self-inquiry, I had the good fortune to study Shri J Krishnamurti's teachings, and I discovered a distinct flavour in his works. Among many powerful observations, he noted that *the description is not the described*. The huge number of people, who go to churches, temples, ashrams and mosques, draw great satisfaction from hearing the descriptions of ideal living, but stop there, it seems, without being aware of stark contradictions in their actual life. It is a rare few, who *live the teachings* of the scriptures.

In the light of this serious problem, the article in this issue, under the column *Perceiving Phoenix*, talks about what awareness can do. Being aware of 'how we actually live' can do wonders, while 'memorizing volumes of holy books' can leave us where we began.

Saint Ravidas, who is covered in the feature THE BEACONS, is an all-time inspiration to humanity, especially considering the underprivileged background from which he came, and the heights he reached, despite all odds. The compilation by Dakshuji is very touching, and encourages us to rise above all social divisions, in our pursuit of truth.

A beautiful article on Shantadurga temple in Goa by Vatsala Ravikrishnan can evoke in the readers, both devotion to the Divine Mother and great sympathy towards the generations of Hindus who had to run for their lives, saving the idols of their deities, and avoiding persecution by the Portuguese.

On the whole, dear readers, here is an issue of INNER FLAME, replete with lots of thought-provoking pieces of writing and, once more, we hope you will find these pages enriching and delightful.

We sincerely appreciate your support to our work in various ways.

- *Swāmi Chidānanda*

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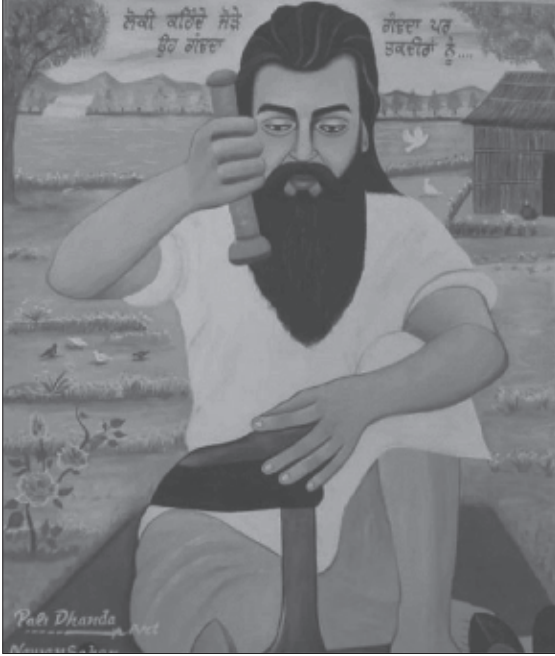
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*Tohi mohi, mohi tohi, antar kaisa?  
kanak katik, jal tarang jaisa.  
(There is no difference between you (God)  
and me, as there is no difference between  
gold and its ornaments, between water  
and its waves.) – Guru Ravidās*

Hindi, the treasured national language of India, with 615 million speakers worldwide, was the primary tool used by many of the great *bhaktā* poet-saints of North India. Hindu devotees from all regional and language backgrounds engage with Hindi in many ways, big and small. They do this through popular devotional songs (*bhajans*), scriptures such as *Rām Charit mānas* (the story of Lord Rāma), the poems of

Kabir and religious stories (*kathā*). Hindi is written in the *Devanāgarī* script, which it shares with Sanskrit, Marathi, Nepali, Rajasthani, Kashmiri and with dialects such as *Braj-bhāshā* and *Awadhī*, which can both be linguistically classified as Hindi. This family of tongues is the medium of a vast body of literature, with every dialect carrying unique nuances. *Braj-bhāshā*, meaning ‘the language of *Braj*’, was one of North India’s most notable literary languages from the 16th to the early 20th century. *Braj* is a region that extends on both sides of the Yamunā river, with its centre at Mathura-Vrindavan in the state of Uttar Pradesh. *Braj-bhāshā* was also a major court language, in addition to being the poetic vehicle of many Krishna *bhaktas*. *Sanātana Dharma* has given rise to a plethora of poet-saints, immortalized by tradition. Their devotional songs have lived long after their physical passing, carrying on the spirit of their soulful love and longing for God. There are seven North Indian saints – viz, Lāl Ded, Swāmi Rāmānanda, Narasimha Mehtā, Ravidās, Surdās, Dādu Dayāl and Tulsidās. They sang the universal language of *bhakti* in five Indian languages: Kashmiri, Hindi, Gujarati, *Braj-bhāshā* and *Awadhī*. They represent a broad spectrum of *bhaktas*: from those who sang about the formless

Truth, to those with overflowing love for the Divinities - Shiva, Rāma and Krishna. We know little about them from historical records, and much from sacred narratives that developed over the centuries. When surveyed together, these reveal consistent legends and themes. Therefore, each poet-saint's story is cobbled together from narratives, oral and written, popular and historical, drawn from several sources. A genre of poems called '*pada*' was the favoured mode of many of these composers. The closing lines of a *pada* would provide the author's oral signature, called '*chaap*', an indication to the audience that the poem was about to conclude. Practically, this also creates an inner 'wow', as listeners reflect on the poet's legendary life story, *bhakti*, and poetic genius, all at once. Swāmi Sivānanda queries, "Who is a saint? He who lives in God, or the Eternal, who is free from egoism, likes and dislikes, selfishness, vanity, meanness, lust, greed and anger, who is endowed with equal vision, balanced mind, mercy, tolerance, righteousness and cosmic love, and who has divine knowledge, is a saint." According to an article in *Sunday Guardian*, "The word '*bhakti*' has its origins in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad (hymn 6.23), which, as translated by Paul Deussen in his 'Sixty Upanishads of the Veda, Volume 1', reads, "He who has highest *bhakti* (love, devotion) of *deva* (God), just like his *deva*, so for his guru (teacher), to him who is high-minded, these teachings will be illuminating."

One such *sant*/saint was Ravidās.

Sant Ravidās rose to fame as a result of his unwavering faith in one God and his unbiased poetry. He also refuted the notion that persons from lower castes cannot meet God. Caste is at the social level. At a spiritual level, every soul is equal. That is why we find that there were numerous *sants* who belonged to the so-called lower castes. For instance, Veda Vyāsa was born to a fisherwoman, Tiruvalluvar was a weaver by caste, Tirupann, the Alvar saint was *pandar*, an untouchable caste. Namdev (1270-1350) was a tailor and Tukaram (d1650) was a peasant. (*Hinduism, The Faith Eternal* by Dr Satish K Kapoor.)

Ravidās was born in 1377; his mother Kalsa Devi and father Santokh Dass belonged to the *chamār* community (those who used leather to make footwear). Ravidās's father did shoemaking and repairing. Although Sant Ravidās was a *chamār*, he spent most of his time in spiritual pursuits. Though Ravidās was sent to school, his education turned out to be short and ungratifying. He soon realized that, being from a lower caste, nobody would treat him well. This made Ravidās think hard. He would often be thinking so deeply that it would appear as if he were in *samādhi*. His teacher noticed that he was not an ordinary child, and was born for something higher.

Ravidās showed a lot of interest in spirituality, and soon, he was actively looking for a teacher. Swāmi

Rāmānanda (1400-1480 A.D), considered a pioneer of the *bhakti* movement in North India, accepted Ravidās as his disciple. Swāmi Rāmānanda's teachings left an indelible mark on Ravidās; it was Rāmānanda who declared, "Let no one ask a man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man is devoted to hari, he becomes hari's own." Political conquest by Muslims was taking root and Indian society, ever divided over caste hierarchy, was slowly forgetting its glorious past of universal brotherhood, transcendental knowledge and realization of God. Several saints appeared on the scene, making people aware of age-old values, especially when there was the challenge of Islamic supremacy. Ravidās was one of them.

Ravidās understood the true meaning of life, because of Swāmi Rāmānanda. He started to grasp what Indian culture and traditions were all about. This is how Ravidās found enlightenment. After this, there was no turning back. Ravidās realized that he had a spiritual mission to fulfil. This is how Ravidās became Sant Ravidās. Kāshi (the city of Light) became the base for his spiritual activities.

According to Volume 4 of *The Cultural Heritage of India*, published by the Rāmākrishna Mission Institute of Culture, "Kabir had, more than once, expressed reverence for Ravidās (also known as Raidās). Ravidās was the worshipper of one infinite God, who is above all religious sects and without beginning or end. He preached that the

Lord resides within the hearts of His devotees. Only one who has felt the pangs of divine love will find him, and the highest expression of religion in life is in the service of man. It is said that Jhali, the queen of Chittor, received her initiation into religious life from him and Mirābāi also completed spiritual discipleship under his guidance." "Kabir described him as a saint par excellence (*Santon mein Ravidās sant hain*)."

### **The Philosophy of Sant Ravidās**

Sant Ravidās propounded the concept of *Begumpura*, meaning 'a city without sorrow'. Even as he dreamt of a utopian world with the absence of discrimination and inequality, Ravidās emphasized the importance of *Kirāt* (labour). He insisted on continuing the vocation of his community (*chamārs* were leather tanners), and to thus criticize the existing, dehumanised logic of caste. Most importantly, Sant Ravidās believed in impressing people, not by his supreme intelligence, but by his humility. He believed in equanimity. He usually used the term *sahaj*, to describe a mystical condition, in which 'the truth of the many and the one is united'. Being an outspoken opponent of the caste system, Sant Ravidās advocated social harmony, spiritual freedom, and equality. In fact, his disciples included the Rajput princess, Mirābāi. His *guru*, Swāmi Rāmānanda was a *brāhmana*. Mirābāi sang about her Guru - "*guru milyā Ravidās ji ...*"

Ravidās himself sings:  
“Raidās says, what shall I sing?  
Singing, singing, I am defeated.  
How long shall I consider and proclaim:  
absorb the self into the Self?”

This experience is such,  
that it defies all description.  
I have met the Lord,  
Who can cause me harm?

Hari in everything, everything in Hari  
For him, who knows Hari and the sense  
of self,  
no other testimony is needed:  
the knower is absorbed.

-Translated by Wynand Callewaert  
and Peter Friedlander

David Lorenzen states that Ravidās's poetry is imbued with themes of boundless, loving devotion to God, wherein 'the divine' is envisioned as *nirguna* (devoid of all qualities or properties). In the Sikh tradition, the themes of Nanak's poetry are very broadly similar to the *nirguna bhakti* ideas of Ravidās and other leading North Indian saint-poets. Most postmodern scholars consider Guru Ravidās's ideas as belonging to the *nirguna* philosophy within the *bhakti* movement.

Multiple manuscripts found in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, dated to be from the 18th and 19th centuries, contain a theosophical debate between Kabir and Ravidās on the nature of the Absolute, more specifically whether *brahman* (Ultimate Reality, Eternal

Truth) is a monistic Oneness or a separate anthropomorphic incarnate. Kabir argues for the former. Ravidās, in contrast, argues from the latter premise, to the effect that both are one. In these manuscripts, Kabir initially prevails. Ravidās accepts that Brahman is monistic, but till the end, Kabir does not accept the worship of a divine avatar (*saguna* conception).

Ravindra Khare states that there are two divergent versions that emerge from the study of texts relating to Ravidās's philosophy. The 17th century *bhaktamal* text by Nabhadās provides one version, while the 20th-century texts by the Dalits (the modern term for those, who were earlier called 'untouchables') provide another.

According to the *bhaktamal* text, Ravidās was of pure speech, capable of resolving spiritual doubts of those who held discussions with him, and was unafraid to state his humble origins and real caste. Further, the *bhaktamal* text states that Ravidās's teachings agreed with Vedic and ancient scriptures, he subscribed to non-dualism, discussed spiritual ideas and philosophy with everyone, including *brahmins* without gender or caste discrimination, and his abilities reflected an individual, who had reached the inner state of contentment of the highest ascetic.

The 20th-century version, prevalent in the texts of the Dalit community, concurs with the parts about pure speech and resolving spiritual doubts.

However, they differ on other points. The texts and the prevalent beliefs of the Dalit community hold that Ravidās rejected the Hindu Vedas, he was opposed by the *Brahmins*, and resisted by the caste Hindus as well as Hindu ascetics, throughout his life, and that some members of the Dalit community believed Ravidās was an idol worshipper (*saguni bhakti* saint), while other 20th-century texts assert that Ravidās rejected idol-worship. For example, the following hymn of Ravidās, present in Guru Granth Sahib, supports such claims where he rejects Vedas and the belief that taking a ritualistic bath can make someone pure.

*“One may distinguish between good and evil actions, and listen to the Vedas and the Puranas, but doubts still persist. Skepticism continually dwells in the heart, so who can eradicate egotistical pride? Outwardly, he washes with water, but deep within, his heart is tarnished by all sorts of vices. So how can he become pure? His method of purification is like that of an elephant, covering himself with dust right after his bath!”* Guru Granth Sahib 346

Ravidās was a follower of *ananya bhakti* (unswerving devotion), in which the worshipper and his object of worship lose their sense of duality. He believed that *bhakti* could be developed through cleaning one's *antahkarana* (inner equipment), living in accordance with God's will, and remaining in good company. He opposed formal devotion and favoured personal *bhakti*, which

requires meditating on the holy name. In his opinion, fasts, pilgrimages and penances were not the best ways to realize God. He regarded the killing of living creatures, either for religious sacrifice or for food, as inhuman, because the Lord resides in them too.

He was a true messenger of God. He came to the earth when it was necessary to save the real Dharma, as at that time, social and religious patterns were causing suffering, because of various kinds of man-made discrimination over social beliefs, caste, colour, etc. He bravely faced all such discrimination, and educated people about the real definition and beliefs of castes. He taught that one is not known by his caste, religion, or beliefs in God; he is known only for his great actions (*karma*). One day, some of his disciples and followers asked him to take a holy dip in the sacred Ganga but he declined it, saying that he had already promised to deliver some shoes to one of his customers, and hence, would not be able to join them. When one of his disciples urged him repeatedly, he answered in accordance with his own beliefs, with the common saying, “*Man changā to kathoti mein gangā*” meaning ‘our body needs to be holy by soul, not by just taking bath in the holy river; if our soul and heart are pure and happy, then we are completely holy, even after taking bath in the water, filled in a tub at home.’

He stood firmly against the social system of untouchability, practised by people of higher caste against those of



lower caste. During his time, people of low caste were neglected. They were also not allowed to do certain things - they were prohibited from going to temples for prayers, prevented from going to schools for education, restricted from visiting the village during the daytime; they were allowed to live only in huts instead of a proper house in the village. There were many such atrocities. After seeing such a social scenario, Sant Ravidās started giving spiritual messages to everybody, in order to permanently tackle the bad situations of the lower caste, his message being “*God created man and not man created God*”; this meant that everyone is created by God and has equal rights on this earth. Regarding this social situation, Sant Ravidās has given various teachings to the people about universal brotherhood and tolerance. The high-caste King and Queen of the Chittor kingdom became his ardent disciples, after being influenced by his teachings.

*“A family that has a true follower of the Lord  
Is neither high caste nor low caste, lordly or  
poor;*

*The world will know it by its fragrance.*

*Priests or merchants, labourers or warriors,  
half breeds, outcasts and those who tend  
cremation fires –*

*their hearts are all the same.*

*He who becomes pure through love of the Lord  
exalts himself and his family as well.*

*Thanks be to his village, thanks to his home,  
thanks to that pure family, each and every one,  
For he’s drunk with the essence of the liquid of*

*life*

*and he pours away all the poisons.*

*No one equals someone so pure and devoted -  
not priests, not heroes, not parasol-led kings.*

*As the lotus leaf floats above the water,*

*Ravidās says,*

*so he flowers above the world of his birth.”*

*-extracted from Songs of the Saints of India*

*translated by Professor John Stratton Hawley*

*and Professor Mark Juergensmeyer*

### ***His Contribution to Sikhism***

Most scholars believe that Guru Ravidās met Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. He is revered in the Sikh scripture, and many of Guru Ravidās' poems are included in the Adi Granth. These poems are one of the oldest attested sources of his ideas and literary works. Another substantial source of legends and stories about the life of Ravidās is the hagiography in the Sikh tradition, named *premambodha*. This text, composed over 170 years after Guru Ravidās' death, in 1693, includes him as one of the seventeen saints of Indian religious tradition. The 17th-century Nabhadās' *bhaktamal*, and the *Parcais* of *Anantadas*, both contain chapters on Guru Ravidās. Other than these, the scriptures and texts of Sikh tradition and the Hindu *Dadupanthi* traditions, most other written sources about the life of Ravidās, including those by the Ravidāsi (followers of Guru Ravidās), were composed in the early 20th century, or about 400 years after his death.

His *padas* (devotional songs and other writings, around 41 verses) are mentioned in the Sikh Scriptures, Guru Granth Sahib, which was compiled by the 5th Sikh Guru Arjan Dev. The followers of Guru Ravidās' teachings are commonly called *Ravidāssia*, and a collection of teachings are called *Ravidāssia Panth*. The 41 holy writings of his, which are included in the Guru Granth Sahib, are mentioned in the following way: Raga – Siri (1), Gauri(5), Asa(6), Gujari(1), Sorath(7), Dhanasari(3), Jaitsari(1), Suhi(3), Bilaval(2), Gaund(2), Ramkali(1), Maru(2), Kedara(1), Bhairau(1), Basant(1), and Malhar(3).

He was the great saint of his time, yet he preferred to live the life of a common man; he was followed by many rich kings and queens of the day and other rich people, but he never accepted any of the wealth that was offered to him. One day, Ravidās was examined by God, for the greed that lies within every individual. A philosopher came to him, and told him about the surprising aspects of a stone that was able to convert iron into gold. Ravidās was persuaded by the philosopher to take that stone and construct big buildings, instead of the simple hut he lived in, but Ravidās refused, and remained unaffected. The philosopher again tried to force him, saying "Keep it; I will collect it when I return." Ravidās accepted this request, placing the stone at a particular place in the hut. The philosopher returned after many years and saw that the stone was

just where he had last seen it being kept, dusty and unused. The philosopher was very happy to note the unremitting integrity and the non-attachment towards phenomenal wealth that this incident showed. He took his precious stone and disappeared. Ravidās constantly taught his disciples not to be greedy for wealth for it was not stable but instead, to work hard for earning a livelihood.

Once, Sant Ravidās was called to the court by the Kāshi Naresh, to defend himself against the complaint of upper-caste men, that the lower caste, the so-called untouchables, were worshipping God through a process of worship made easy by discarding all unnecessary rituals. The king commanded both parties (Ravidās and the pandit priests) to bring their own Thakur statue (idol of god) to the Rajghat bank of river Gangā on a predetermined day. The King announced that the one, whose statue would float, would be proclaimed a true worshipper, the other false. The Brahmin pandit brought a small statue wrapped in cotton cloth whereas Ravidās brought a huge statue of 40 kg made of heavy-weight square stone. A large crowd gathered to watch the spectacle.

The first turn was given to the *brāhman* priests to release their statue in the river, which they did with rituals and the chanting of mantras; the statue sank deep down into the water. Then Ravidās took the large, heavy statue on his shoulder and gently placed it in the water; it started floating on the surface of

the water. It was decided that the Brahmin priests were the false worshippers and Ravidās, the true one. The crowd surged forward to touch his feet for disclosing that untouchables too had the right to worship God. From then, Kāshi Naresh and others (who were initially against Ravidās) started following and honouring him. This auspicious and victorious event was recorded in golden letters in the court for future records.

During his time, *shudras* (untouchables) were not allowed to wear religious symbols such as *janev* (sacred thread), *tilak* on forehead, etc. Ravidās opposed all such bans for the untouchable community, declaring that they had equal rights in society. The *brahmins* were against his activities and tried to stop him. But Ravidās faced all difficulties very bravely and answered the *brahmins* with humble actions, claiming that the *shudras* had the same colour of blood, sacred soul and heart as the others. He made a deep cut on his chest and pulled out four *janev*, made of gold, silver, copper, and cotton, indicating respectively, the four *yugas*: *Satya*, *Tretā*, *Dwāpara*, and *Kali*. People, including the king, were astonished and honoured the Sant by touching his feet. The king was much ashamed, and begged forgiveness for his childish behaviour. Ravidās forgave all, telling them that wearing a sacred thread is not the means to attain God. He engaged in this activity, only to show people the reality and the truth. He took off the *janev*

and gave it to the king; after that, he never used *janev*, *tilak*, etc.

After his father's death, he requested his neighbours to support him in the last rites at the bank of the Gangā. However, the *brahmins* were against this, for fear of polluting the holy river. Ravidās felt sad and helpless, but he never lost his patience and started praying for the peace of his father's soul. Suddenly, there was a heavy thunder shower and the river water started flowing in the reverse direction; a deep wave of water came up to the dead body and washed it away. From that time, it is considered that the holy water of river Gangā flows in a reverse direction.

According to history, Babur was the first king of the Mughal empire, who was enthroned in Delhi after his victory in the battle of Panipat in 1526, where he massacred hundreds of people for their beliefs. He already knew about the spiritual powers of Ravidās, and decided one day to meet him with his son Humayun. He went there and touched the feet of the saint to honour him. Ravidās taught him eternal truths, which influenced Babur so much that he became a great follower and started doing social work by supporting the poor in Delhi and Agra.

### ***The Death of Sant Ravidās***

Day by day, the followers of the Sant were increasing because of the directness of his speech, based on truth, humanity, the outspoken proclamation of the oneness of God, and for bringing

equality in society. A plot was instigated by some members of the upper caste, but through his spiritual powers, Ravidās escaped their plans to kill him. It is believed that he died naturally after 120 or 126 years of his life. Some people believed that he died in Varanasi (his birthplace) in 1540 A.D.

Today, Sant Ravidās is worshipped in Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, amongst other states. In all states, one thing is common - all followers belong to the *chamār* community. His birth anniversary is celebrated at every *puran māshi* (full moon) of the *māgh* month. It was the 644<sup>th</sup> Sant Ravidās Jayanti in 2021. On this special day, a ceremony of Nagar Kirtan procession is performed by people with the chants of mantras during *ārati*. Music, songs, and *doha-s* (couplets) are sung in the temples located on the streets. Some of the followers and devotees also perform the ceremony of a holy bath in the Gangā or other holy places, then go to worship his image at home or in a temple. A grand celebration takes place in Varanasi every year at the most famous place of Shri Guru Ravidās *janmashān* (birth-place) *mandir*, Seer Goverdhanpur, Varanasi, in order to mark the occasion. Devotees from all over the world visit Varanasi to actively participate in the occasion. Ravidās is revered as a saint and well respected by his believers. He is considered by his devotees as someone, who was the living symbol of religious protest, and not as the spiritual symbol of any ultimate unifying cultural principle.

### **If you are a mountain**

- by Ravidās

- (English version by Nirmal Dass)

If You are a mountain,  
then I am a peacock.  
If You are the moon,  
then I am a partridge.

O Madho, if You break from me,  
then I shall break with You.  
And if I break from You,  
to whom shall I then go?

If You are the lamp,  
then I am the wick.  
If You are the shrine,  
then I am the pilgrim.

My love for You  
is true and real.  
When I fell in love with You,  
I gave up my love for others.

Wherever I go,  
there I seek to serve You.  
No other god  
can be a Master like You.

By praising You,  
I cut Yama's noose.  
Yearning for love  
Ravi Dass loudly sings.

Sfile:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/  
insight\_2020-04\_seven-bhakti-  
saints-of-north-India.pdf  
<https://www.varanasi.org.in/ravidas>  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ravidas>

- Swāmi Chidānanda



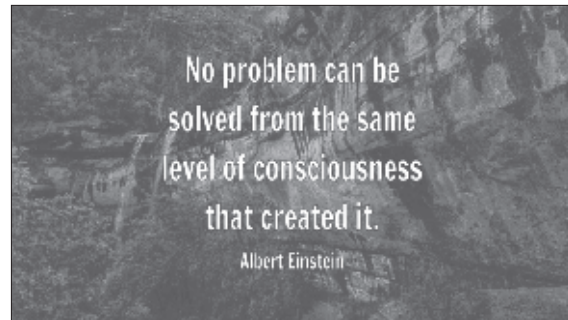
One of the great statements in the Upanishads is that 'Awareness<sup>1</sup> is the Ultimate Truth'. 'Awareness' is presented in the sacred texts as 'a principle<sup>2</sup> above thought and word'. The highest literature in the Indian wisdom traditions has maintained the position that 'studying and reflecting upon the revelations in the Vedas' leads to our anchoring ourselves in the 'Witnessing Consciousness' that notices<sup>3</sup> everything, but does not identify with anything. This article examines the practical implications of our being the witness, rather than believing that we are the doer<sup>4</sup> or the enjoyer.

### ***False Identity is the Crux of a Vicious Circle***

When there is the belief that we are this personality – constituted of the body-mind complex, our mind reacts to a wide range of dualities like success and failure, with pleasure or pain respectively. These reactions strengthen the belief, which is a false identity. Ādi Shankarāchārya calls this belief

*adhyāsa*, a superimposition, which he defines<sup>5</sup> as *the notion of that, about what is not that*. The popular illustration is the notion of a snake, about what is not a snake. Unknowingly, therefore, this error about who we really are, plays havoc with our life. Bhagavān Bhāshyakāra (Ādi Shankarāchārya) rightly refers to this 'fundamental error in perception' as the cause<sup>6</sup> of (all) evil, and declares that the study of the Upanishads is meant to eliminate this colossal error.

*To solve a problem, we need to rise to a level higher than that of the problem itself.* Einstein is quoted as having said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I would spend 55 minutes, thinking about



the problem, and 5 minutes, thinking about solutions." The point he makes is important: preparation has great value to problem-solving. When we go through the profound teachings of Advaita Vedānta, it becomes clear to us that we need to spend 55 minutes in 'preparing to see rightly', and 5 minutes to 'actually

see! The 55 minutes are devoted to stepping aside from identification with the personality, the body-mind complex.

This 'stepping aside' and 'standing apart' constitutes 'living in awareness'. In lack of awareness, we ask the wrong (or shallow) question; for example, "Why did I make this mistake?" but, when we operate from the seat of awareness, we ask the right (or deep) questions, "Who made the mistake? Who is repenting? Who am I?"

### ***Let us Learn from the Lion Cub***

In the well-known story of the lion cub that mistook itself for a sheep, the poor animal was caught in an endless struggle, as long as it believed that it was one among the sheep. When an adult lion visited the place where this cub was living and growing up amidst a hundred sheep, and helped the younger one realize who it really was, there was a profound change in the creature. It did not remain a sheep and come upon an elegant solution to its problems. It saw that it was not a sheep, and rose to a higher level of consciousness that enabled it to see itself as a lion. This is what 'awareness', the operation of intelligence on a level that is higher than the field of thought, can do.

The question, 'Who am I?', when rightly employed, can target the sheep in us, which is a false identity, and awaken the lion in us, which is our true nature. For this to happen, we should not doggedly work within the frame of reference of our presently believed identity. Rather, we should stand apart and watch *what we*

*do*, and *our present idea of the self* that drives our actions.

All spirituality finally arrives at the rediscovery of the self. On lower levels, there is no fundamental shift but only a better way of doing things, while we remain where we are. If Prince Siddhārtha had not risen to a higher level, he would have become a better king than what Suddhodana, his father, had been. When he went to higher spirituality, his identity changed from 'I am Siddhārtha, a *kshatriya*, the inheritor of a prosperous kingdom, husband of Yashodhara and father of Rāhula' to 'I am THAT'. Imagine the lion cub becoming the best sheep in the herd; put it in contrast to its realizing its identity as a lion.

### ***Awareness in Daily Life***

There is only daily life for everyone – the wise, the unwise, or otherwise. The expression 'daily life' means, therefore, the context of a common man, who is, at present, operating with medium intelligence. This common man is not able to see the fundamental error (*adhyāsa*) at all. Even if he appreciates it during a Vedānta class, or at the time of his own personal study of Vedānta, he gets back to a strong identification with his social identity or his position in his family, business or some other context. How does he practise awareness?

He is advised to strengthen his 'dharma muscles'! He should consciously avoid compromises with the noble values of life. He should, by letting go of vices and embracing virtue, reduce

conflicts and contradictions in his bosom. This inner purification will enable him to watch the dimensions of his thought processes and beliefs, with greater objectivity. In religious literature, the strong word for 'the basis of sorrow, agitation and the like' is sin (*pāpa*). The sincere effort to live a life of dharma<sup>7</sup> leads to a significant reduction in one's sinful tendencies.

During the lower stages of evolution, awareness helps us see our operations in thought, word, and deed. We can notice with greater clarity, our own delusion, wrong judgments, and false attachments. This leads to the letting go of much psychological burden. As awareness helps us to unburden ourselves of unnecessary baggage, we spontaneously succeed in coming upon creative ways to handle our duties and responsibilities. At higher stages, we

begin to keep an eye on the basic structure of the self (the ego), functioning within us.

No wonder someone wrote: Awareness is the beginning, the middle and the end of the spiritual journey.

Notes:

1. *prajnānam brahma* – Aitareya Upanishad 3.1.3
2. *yato vāco nivartante, aprāpya manasā saha* – Taittiriya Upanishad 2.4
3. Witness, the *sākshi*.
4. *kartā* and *bhoktā*.
5. *atasmin tad-buddhih* (the idea of 'tat' about what is not 'tat'), Introduction to Brahmasutras, called *adhyāsa bhāshya*.
6. *anartha-hetuh* – in *adhyāsa-bhāshya*.
7. *dharmena pāpam-apanudati* – an old saying.



Listen to your feelings, your emotions, your gut instincts, your inner knowing, for they are radar signals telling you which direction to go, and which direction to avoid.

-Tracey Smith



- Author unknown

A gentleman was waiting for his train at a railway station. Meanwhile, a shoe-shine boy came up to him and asked, "Sir, boot-polish?"

Seeing the pitiable condition of the boy, the gentleman extended his foot, saying, "OK, but shine it well."

The boy started his work right away, but unlike other proficient shoe-shine boys, there was no energy in him.

The gentleman said, "Why are you working so slowly? Work fast and energetically."

The boy did not say anything. By then, another shoe-shine boy took his place. This boy started the work with vigour, and polished the shoes well.

Taking out money from his pocket, the gentleman thought to himself, "To which of these two boys, should I pay now?" Deciding that the remuneration should go to the one who had done the work, he paid the money to the second boy. He was expecting an argument or a fight to ensue between the two boys for the money.

The second boy did accept the money, but he placed it on the palm of the first boy. He then lovingly patted the back of the first boy, and went on his way.

The gentleman was stunned at what he saw. He called out to the second boy, and asked him what exactly was going on.

The boy said, "Sir, three months ago, he fell down from a running train. He

suffered severe injuries in all his limbs. With the grace of Ishwara, his life was saved. Else, what would have been the state of his old mother and his sisters? His high self-esteem does not allow him to beg."

He paused for a while, and then continued, "Sir, we have a group of us shoe-shine boys here; we have among us, a God-like man, whom we call *Satsangi* Uncle. This Uncle attends *satsangs*, and he keeps sharing the *satsangi* messages with us. He told us, 'What if this boy is not able to work with as much energy, as before? God has given to all of us, an opportunity to express our proactive goodwill, our willingness to share, our love, our empathy and a sense of unity towards him. Each part of our body is different, but together, all the parts form a single unit, our body. Similarly, each of us is a separate physical entity, but even so, we are one soul. We are all one!' Our group resolved to give him the earnings that each of us gets from polishing one pair of shoes every day, and also to help him in his work, as and when required."

Seeing the mutual affection, cooperation and unity among the group of shoe-shine workers, and witnessing such a fine example of humanitarian spirit, the gentleman was truly amazed. He happily patted the back of the boy, and thought to himself, "Humanity is probably still alive!"



- Compiled by Vatsala Ravikrishnan

The state of Goa, being a coastal region, has had to withstand the onslaught of a number of invasions. Historically, it has seen the reign of the Kadambas, the Bahmani Kingdoms and, between 1510 and 1961, the Portuguese rule. The state has been a witness to the persecution of locals from time to time, depending on who the rulers were. Though the initial settlements of the foreigners did not interfere with the religious practices of the locals, subsequently, under the influence of the counter-reformation in Europe, and with the arrival of the Inquisition to Goa, this liberal policy was reversed. Brutal methods were enforced, either to convert the locals or to kill them; hence, many had to flee the region. In spite of such a horrific past, Goa has some of the finest Hindu temples, revered by many. It is the resilience and the perseverance of the Hindu community that has ensured that its deities, customs and cultural values are retained. This article throws light on one such Hindu temple, considered as a family deity for many in the Sāraswat Brahmin community – Shri Shāntādurḡā temple.

In the Skanda purāna, it has been recorded that Shri Parashurāma, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu, shot an arrow from the top of the Western Ghats into the sea. He then commanded the sea to withdraw where the arrow fell and claimed that land to be his kingdom. That exact spot is reportedly Benāli ('where

the arrow landed'), or today's Benaulim. The land around it is today's Goa. Legend has it that a section of Sāraswat Brahmins became the first wave of Brahmins to settle in Goa. This group of Brahmins was called Sāraswats, because of their origins from the banks of the River Saraswati, an ancient river that existed in Vedic times. The river Saraswati subsequently dried up and caused large scale migration of this group of Brahmins to all corners of India. A group of ninety-six families, known today as Gaud Sāraswats (named after one of their Gurus, Gowdi), settled along the Konkan coast, in and around today's Goa, somewhere around 1000 BC. They reportedly took the sea route and did not use land routes. These groups settled in Tiswadi, Salcete, Bardesh, Pernem and Kudal. Their settlements, known as *agrahāras*, set the pace for agriculture and development in the area, in partnership with the local indigenous people, the Kumbhis. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, Goa was referred to as Gomantak, signifying 'fertile land' in Hindi. The earliest Math of the Sāraswat community was the Kavale Math, founded in 740 AD, by Goudapādācharya and established at Kushasthali near Keloshi in Goa. This Math was subsequently destroyed by the Portuguese in 1564, but the tradition continued on elsewhere.

#### **The story of Shāntādurḡā**

Once, there was a battle between the

*devas*, Shiva and Shrivishnu for some reason, because of which dissolution set in. *Devas*, humans, sages, etc. made an ardent prayer, after which Bhagwati Jagadambā manifested in a form with several arms. Pacifying both Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva), She held both of them as babies in her arms. 'कुद्धौ शान्तियुतौ कृतौ हरिहरौ' means that She pacified both Hari and Hara, who were in a state of anger. Thus, Jagadambā came to be known as 'Shāntādhurgā'. The original place of Shri Shāntādhurgā is Kardalivan, today's Kelshi in Salcete taluka. The temple of Shri Shāntādhurga existed here till the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. During the reign of Parashurāma, he had gifted the village of Kardalipur to Lomasharma, belonging to the Kaushika *gotra* (lineage). He was one of the ten *gotra* Brahmins, whom Parashurāma brought to Goa. As per the Purānas, Lomasharma was the one who installed an idol of Devi Shāntādhurgā there.

The temple had to shift its base during the Portuguese invasion. With the advent of the Portuguese in Goa and the increasing missionary activities, the community feared for the safety of the temples and idols. Hence, the families worshipping Shree Shāntādhurga and Shree Mangesh, on a moonless night, leaving their homes and hearths behind, crossed over the Juari river with the *murthis* of the deities and the *linga* on their heads, and shifted to the region under the rule of the Muslim king, Adilshaha. They reached the village Kavalem in Antruj village via Dandi, and chose a site with beautiful surroundings to install the image of Shree Shāntādhurgā. It is indeed surprising that

a new place could be found by the devotees for installation of Shree Shāntādhurgā, with exactly the same scenic beauty as available at Keloshi. The plot, on which the original temple of Shree Shāntādhurgā stood at Keloshi, is known as Deoolbhata, and it is in the possession of the temple trust.

The village Kavalem belonged to the Harijan community. The people from the village were kind enough to provide a safe place for installation of the Devi. The idol of the Devi was installed in a small house in that village. After some time, the house where the Devi was placed, took the form of a small temple and regular prayers were held in the temple.

The present-day temple was built by Naroram Shenvi Rege, who was a minister in Shāhu Chatrapati's Court during the period 1723 A.D. He believed that he could attain fame and fortune, only because of the blessings of Shree Shāntādhurgā Devi. He felt that he should build a new temple for the Devi with his own money. He started building the temple building around 1730 A.D and with the help from other mahājans, the currently huge and beautiful temple was completed. Due to his efforts, the village Kavalem was given as a gift to the temple by Shāhu Maharaja. Shri Naroram Mantri also gave many donations to the temple. In view of his priceless contribution to the building of the temple, Shri Naroram Mantri and his descendents are given the highest respect, next to the Dharmaguru/Swāmiji. His descendents get all the

respect and facilities from the temple officials and the trust, whenever they visit the temple.

### **The temple architecture**



The temple is a combination of Indo-Portuguese architecture. Unlike other temples of Goa, the temple has a pyramidal *Shikhara*, Roman-arched windows and a flat dome encircled by balustrades. The maroon, peach and white colour paint of the temple gives it a serene, beautiful look. Another major attraction of the temple complex is the Nayanamanohara Deepasthamba. This Deepasthamba is lit during festival times. On either side of the temple building, are the big buildings of Agarshālā (guesthouse). There is a big lake beyond the compound wall in front of the temple. The highlight of the temple is its golden palanquin (pālkhī), in which the deity is carried on festive occasions. At the entrance of the temple compound, there is a huge door, and on top of it is a Nagarakhānā (room housing big drums and other musical instruments). The music is played thrice every day.

Near the entrance to the temple, on the left side, at a slightly lower level, there is a small temple of Lomasharmā, the *moolapurusha* ( first man) of Kaushika *gotra*, who had installed the murti of Shree Shāntādurgā in Keloshi. He is worshipped and offered puja daily, and there is a nandadeep (non-stop burning oil lamp) in the temple.

At a little distance away, to the south of the temple, the Math of Guru Goudapadāchārya of the G.S.B. community, is situated. The Swamiji is known as 'Kaivalyapur Mathādhish' (Head of the Kaivalyapur Math).

The Jatra (annual festival) is held during December. The idol is taken out in a procession in a golden palanquin during the festival. Some of the important festivals that are celebrated at the temple are Lalkhi Utsav, Muktabharani Utsav, Tulsi Vivāha and Kala Utsav, Vasanth Utsav, etc.

### **How to reach the temple**

At a distance of 28 km from Panjim Kadamba Bus Stand, 34 km from Vasco Da Gama Railway Station and 20 km from Margao Railway Station, Shri Shāntādurgā Temple is situated in North Goa at the following address - Kapileswari - Kavlem Rd, Donshiwado, Ponda, Goa

References:

<https://shreeshantadurga.com>

<https://www.vibrantgoa.com/history-of-go/>

<https://www.sanatan.org/en/a/100525.html>

## What Do We Learn from The Upanishads?

## Seek the Higher Life Earnestly

Thousands go through transformational literature, but hardly anyone gets transformed. Why? Most people are not at all earnest about living the higher life. They get into spiritual programmes for various other reasons, social respectability being one of them.

The Upanishads are very clear on this point. "Neither being able to give discourses, nor being able to memorize mantras, can really raise human consciousness. Whoever earnestly aspires to 'understand and live' higher values, will surely arrive at the high

plateau."

"It (the truth) is available to him/ her, who passionately seeks it. The Self reveals its form to such a seeker."

*yamevaisha vrinute, tena labhyah  
tasyaisha ātmā vivrinute tanum svām*

Mundaka Upanishad, mantra 3.2.3

'Waking up' is what Vedānta is all about. We must not be content with being able to talk about Upanishads in impressive ways. That would tantamount to 'continuing to sleep'! We must earnestly seek inner transformation.



The Guru may tell his disciples a thousand times, "You are the Self, you are not what you imagine yourself to be", but none of them ever believes him. They all keep asking the Guru for methods and routes to reach the place where they already are.

**- Annamalai Swami**



(Master – Rāmakrishna Paramahansa M-Mahendranath Gupta)

**Master:** “Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?”

M, rather surprised, said to himself: “How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?”

**M:** “Sir, I like to think of God as formless.”

**Master:** “Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite alright. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction.”

The assertion that both are equally true amazed M; he had never learnt this from his books. Thus his ego received a blow; but since it was not yet completely crushed, he came forward to argue with the Master a little more.

**M:** “Sir, suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!”

**Master (interrupting):** “But why clay? It is an image of Spirit.”

M could not quite understand the significance of this ‘image of Spirit’. “But, sir,” he said to the Master, “one should

explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay.”

**Master (sharply):** “That’s the one hobby of you Calcutta people—giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?”

“He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and the moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things—will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.”

“Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn’t God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself.”

“You were talking of worshipping the clay image. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. God Himself has provided different forms

of worship. He who is Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.”

“The mother cooks different dishes to suit the stomachs of her different children. Suppose she has five children.

If there is a fish to cook, she prepares various dishes from it, to suit their different tastes and power of digestion.”

(Excerpt from the  
'The Gospel of Sri Rāmakrishna'  
Vol.I Chapter 1: Master and Disciple)



Don't wish it was easier, wish you were better. Don't wish for less problems, wish for more skills. Don't wish for less challenges, wish for more wisdom.

- Jim Rohn



- Swāmi Chidānanda

Everyone wants to be efficient and effective in one's field of activity. Many a time, however, one loses interest and enthusiasm and just drags on. What could be some tips to work towards the best results, with peace and joy in the heart?

Negative emotions weaken us and prevent us from playing well in the game of life. When things like guilt, pride and shame (called GPS by somebody humorously) occupy our bosom, it is extremely difficult to do well in complex work situations. When failure depresses us and insult injures us, we tend to withdraw and underperform. In other words, the varieties of "results of action" disturb our equanimity and we are unhappy. How do we remain like the lotus leaf, which does not get wet even when water falls upon it?

Terrible attachment to success, defined by us in narrow terms, is the cause of our getting into low spirits. We need to put things in the larger picture and take a second look. What appears a loss in one sense may come out as a gain in another. Financial loss may help us review some of our relationships and may enable us to weed out false friendships. Loss of health could make us slow down and savor the joy of reading or of music. There is an old story

of a king who did not have the small finger in his right hand. He thought it was a very bad thing, but his prime minister suggested that it could be good in some way. Angered by that suggestion, the king got the prime minister jailed. The next day the king went for hunting and some tribal people captured him. They were about to kill him before a huge idol of their deity, making him a sacrificial offering, when they saw he had a handicap. They let him go for he was unfit for the sacrifice. When he came back to the palace, he released the prime minister, who remarked, "How good it was of you to put me in jail yesterday, otherwise I would have come with you to the forest for hunting and those tribal folks would have severed my head in front of their deity!"

"Every adversity has some blessing hidden in it," observed Swami Chinmayananda. We need to constantly question and review all our opinions on what is good and desirable. All that glitters is not gold. The grass on the other side of the river looks greener. Let us avoid jumping to conclusions and keep an open mind. Our ego, which is nothing but a bundle of memories, invites unnecessary suffering. If only we turn objective, we would regain our poise and balance.

Sage Ramana used to narrate a story where a woman boarded a train with a heavy basket on her head, filled with vegetables. Even after she took her seat, she would not keep the basket down on the ground. When other passengers asked her, her reply was, "The train is taking the burden of my weight; as for the basket of vegetables, let me keep it on my head." That is what we do, when we act egoistically. We burden ourselves where there is no need; the sense of I, me, my and mine is the basket of vegetables. We keep it down and relax when we replace the "I" with "We."

Seeing the falsehood in our present values leads to a change of our mind's content. Then a number of apparently depressing scenarios do not pull us down. We return cheerful and succeed in bringing out the best from within us.

Note:

GPS = Geosynchronous Positioning System.

{The above is chapter 64 in the book "LIGHT ON RIGHT LIVING" (The Little Book of Photons)}



Those who awaken never rest in one place.  
Like swans, they rise and leave the lake.  
On the air they rise and fly an invisible course.  
Their food is knowledge.  
They live on emptiness.  
They have seen how to break free.  
Who can follow them?

**Buddha in the Dhammapada**





### Prison

Enslaved by our own thoughts  
Caged in our relationships  
Controlled by our emotions  
Prisons without walls and doors.

A person jailed could be free  
A free person may not be  
Captivity is not always physical  
A prison is any space we don't want to be.

Opening our eyes to the truth  
Breaking the pretensions facades  
Recognizing our own confines  
Freedom is any space we want to be.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Elusive 'I'

Where and who is the 'I'?  
Am 'I' this physical body or my feelings  
My emotions or my thoughts  
My consciousness or my perceptions  
Or all of them put together  
This identity of 'I' that feels like a constant  
Yet evolves over the years  
Where does it reside?  
And where does this 'I' go when we die?  
Can the 'I' disintegrate or sublimate  
Can it transform or remain a constant?  
Question that set us off on a journey.....

\*\*\*\*\*



लालयेत् पञ्चवर्षाणि  
दशवर्षाणि ताडयेत् ।  
प्राप्ते तु षोडशे वर्षे  
पुत्रे मित्रवदाचरेत् ॥

*lālayet pancha-varshāni  
dasha-varshāni tādayet ।  
prāpte tu shodashe varshe  
putre mitravad-ācharet ॥*

***Treat your child (daughter or son) with lots of love and care for the first five years. Be very strict with your child for the next ten years. When she/he turns sixteen, be her/his friend for the rest of your life.***

### **(From Subhāshita)**

This old saying is good advice for parenting. The above translation brings out the spirit of the verse, rather than giving the literal meaning. The years namely, 0-5, 6-15, and post-15, are not to be taken literally either. Rather, they are rough indicators. All that this verse means is that there is a time when parents may pamper their child; then comes a time, when they may prevent evils like bad habits, lack of discipline, forms of perversion, etc. Thereafter, the last part requires spiritual maturity, when the parents have to – to an extent – let go of their role of advising. They become partners in the further journey of their offspring. – Editors





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This public trust came into being in the year 2006. Registered as per the Mumbai Public Trust Act of 1950, the Forum engages in organizing talks and workshops as well as in publication of books and audio-visual media.

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“Who am I?” is the most basic question of life. The understanding of the self, the ‘me’, can cause radical change in the quality of life. This requires turning (the flame of) attention towards thoughts and emotions. When likes and dislikes fall away, pure perception takes place. That heralds freedom.

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