

Saucha or Purity

Sri Krishna describes *saucha* or purity as one of the divine treasures. Purity is not merely a virtue but the culmination of all spiritual practices.

The *sine qua non* of spiritual life is purity of heart. The vision of God, a glimpse of the beyond, never comes until the soul is pure. It is to those who are true in heart, pure indeed, whose senses are controlled, that this Self manifests itself.

Swami Brahmananda says: "God is manifest in the hearts of his devotees, his children. Therefore we must be pure in heart. The pure mind receives a clear reflection of God. If the mirror is covered with dirt it does not reflect, so also the Lord's reflection does not fall upon an unclean mind."

Purity is among the five observances which form one of the eight limbs of yoga. According to the commentator Vyasa, it includes both external and internal purity. While internal purity or the purity of mind is definitely more important, external purity is also recommended in all religious systems.

Purity is stressed in every religion. There cannot be any form of spiritual life without purity in some form or the other. It is the very heart of all spiritual endeavour.

The entire essence of all religions, has been put into that one sentence: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." No other virtue but purity has been mentioned as the precedent for the realization of God. The vision of God, which is the culmination of all spiritual practice, is reserved for the pure in spirit.

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Swami Vivekananda said: "In that one sentence lies the gist of all religions...It alone could save the world were all other scriptures lost. A vision of God, a glimpse of the beyond, never comes until the soul is pure.

"All these forms and ceremonies, these prayers and pilgrimages, these books, bells, candles, and priests, are preparations; they take off the impurities of the soul; and when the soul becomes pure it naturally wants to get to the mine of purity, God Himself."

These were not mere words. Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of purity. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there was nothing on earth or heaven which could pollute Narendra.

Once Swami Vivekananda was asked by his Western disciples whether he had exercised some yogic power while uttering the now famous words, "Sisters and Brothers of America," at the inaugural session of the Parliament of Religions which had such a mesmerizing effect upon the audience. In reply the Swami said that "It was the power of purity." He had, in his life, never even once thought an impure thought.

What is purity? Purity is a state of knowing and being oneself, it is abiding in one's real nature. It is hard to describe what purity is, yet we can recognize it when we encounter it. When we see a baby we know what innocence, purity, simplicity is. We do not detect self-deception and hypocrisy in a baby. Being pure in heart a baby also does not see evil or impurity in others. Similarly a saint also, being pure in heart, sees God only everywhere and in everything.

The *Gita* tells us that only through austerity alone can we become pure in thought, word, and deed.

"The worship of gods, holy people, the *guru*, and the wise; purity, honesty, celibacy, and non-violence; these are said to be the austerity of deed. (17.14)

"Speech that is not offensive, truthful, pleasant, beneficial, and is used for the regular reading of scriptures is called the austerity of word. (17.15)

"Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-restraint, and the cultivation of pure motives; these are called the austerity of thought. (17.16)"

Various techniques have been adopted in various spiritual paths for the purification of mind. *Karma yoga* is, of course, the standard method advocated for purification of the mind. It involves performance of prescribed duties without hankering for their fruits, or by surrendering the fruits and actions to God.

The *Atman* by nature is pure, immortal, and ever blissful. The best way to attain purity is to assert one's eternally pure nature, and to be established in it is the goal of life.

Prayer, japa, meditation, holy company, selfless service, and diligent practice of spiritual disciplines as directed by one's teacher, now and then retiring into solitude; these are some of the means indicated in the scriptures for the attainment of purity.

Hindu scriptures also caution us about taking impure food. "Pure food makes our heart pure. Pure heart results in constant recollectedness of God. Constant recollectedness of God brings union with God."

Food does not mean merely what we eat, but what we gather through all our senses. How do we gather pure food through our senses? We must learn to see God everywhere. Wherever the senses go, let us be conscious of the presence of God.

Through diligent spiritual practice the mind gradually becomes pure and becomes blessed with the vision of God.

Swami Dayatmananda
