

Jnaan, Yoga & Bhakti

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Once Lord Brahma¹ called on Lord Shiva² who was seated in his abode. Lord Shiva welcomed him, respectfully offered him a seat and asked for the reason of his visit. Brahmaji asked, "O Lord Shankar³! People in this world keep on getting afflicted with physical, divine and worldly ailments. How can they rid themselves of it?" To this Lord Shankar replied,

"Yogaheenam katham jnaanam mokshadam bhavateeh bhoh,

Yogopi jnaanaheenastu na kshamo mokshakarmani

Tasmaajjnaanam cha yogam cha mumukshu dridhamabhyaset."

(O Brahma! How can knowledge devoid of yoga lead to liberation? Likewise, Yoga sans knowledge, too, can't be competent in leading one to liberation. Therefore, the one who aspires for deliverance, should firmly practice both jnaan and yoga)

To a query in a similar context, Lord Buddha had answered similarly:

"Natthi jhaanam apayass payya natthi ajhaayato

Yamhi jhaanam cha payya cha sa ve nibbaan santike."

(No meditation can there be without right knowledge; there can be no true knowledge without meditation. Those who have right knowledge as well as practice meditation are closer to liberation.)

Someone asked Goswaamee Tulasidaasjee⁴ for his opinion on this issue. He says,

"Jog kujog jnaan ajnaanoo,

Jah nahi Raam prem pardhaanoo."

(That yoga is impure yoga and that knowledge is no knowledge, which does not give or attach pre-eminence to Raam⁵). So, there is need for jnaana, yoga as well as bhakti (intense love) for Lord Raam (God). All the three - knowledge, yoga and devotion - are needed. If anyone of these three is lacking or is taken away, completeness or perfection would not be achieved. For a bird to be able to fly in the sky, it requires three things - wings, tail and legs. You remove or chop-off any one of these three things, it would not be able to fly.

Just as a bird needs all of these three things to fly in the physical (exoteric) world, flight or progress in the spiritual (esoteric) world compulsorily calls for all the three ingredients - jnaan (knowledge), yoga (union) and bhakti (devotion). Deficiency in any one of these three would arrest or restrict his further progress. While cooking halwaa⁶ (a sweetened dough/ paste made of cooked wheat flour), we have to add stipulated quantities of flour, sugar and ghee (fat). If any one of the three items is deficient, the halwaa would not taste as delicious. Surely, someone who likes more sweetened halwaa, adds relatively more sugar; while the other person who has a taste to the contrary puts in, proportionately, less

sugar. Nevertheless, all the three constituents must be there. Similarly, jnaan, yoga and bhakti - all of the three are essential and must be there. Of course, some attach greater significance to jnaan, while some give preference to yoga, while still others deem bhakti to be more important.

It is said that the grandfather of Aachaarya Vinobaa Bhaave⁷ was very fond of desserts. The grandmother of Vinobaa Bhaave used to cook and serve sweets to him. Whenever she served sweets to Bhaveji's grandfather, he would remark, "sweet is good, but had you added a little more sugar to it, it would have tasted much more delicious." Hearing this, she would increase the amount of sugar the next time. The next time when the grandfather of Bhaaveji ate the sweets, he would again say, "It is surely better today than it was yesterday. But if you enhance the quantity of sugar a little more, it would be still better." An obedient wife that she was, she complied and increased the quantity of sugar. But however much she would raise the proportion of sugar, he would make the same remark every time, "Had you added some more sugar, it would have tasted more delicious!" One day it so happened that she made the dessert wholly out of sugar and sugar only and served it with great hope to him. He said, "Today's preparation is undoubtedly the best you have cooked so far. But still, you have been slightly miserly. A little more sugar and it would have been fantastic!" Bhaaveji's grandmother, at her wits' end, said, "Today I have prepared the sweet wholly of sugar. There is not an iota of food grain in it. Even then you are complaining that I have been miserly in adding sugar? Please tell me, how do I add more sugar to it!"

What I mean to say is that likings of individuals differ: some like to have it more sweet, some less. Likewise, some lay more stress on yoga, while some consider jnaan to be more important, while some others put greater emphasis on bhakti. But, there should be a harmony amongst the three. Jnaan means 'to know'. Unless we know what to do, what will we do? We have to do something. We want to do something. But, how will we be able to do it unless and until we learn how to do it? We want to go, but if we don't know the way (route), we are ignorant as to whither should we go, where we have to go etc., how would we go? Therefore, acquiring some knowledge at the outset is mandatory. Goswaamee Tulaseedaasjee⁸ has said,

"jaane binu na hoya parteetee, binu parteetee hoy nahi preetee

Preetee binaa nahi bhagati dridhaai, jimi khagesh jal kai chikanaai."

(Belief does not come without knowing, without belief love does not result. Devotion does not grow firm in absence of love, just as applying water does not lubricate or oil the skin for long).

So long as we are not acquainted with anyone's greatness, we are not inclined to respect him so much. Unless and until we realize the true status or stature of a person, we do not tend to welcome him with the desired warmth. But when we come to know about one's goodness, trust in him comes about quite naturally. We can't spontaneously and truly love a person in whom we can't place our genuine trust; and the service or devotion that is not rooted in true love is not long lasting, just as the conditioning of skin by water is not lasting. If we apply oil or ghee to our skin, the oiliness or smoothness thus created lasts longer, but the lubrication created due to water vanishes as soon as the water evaporates.

That is why, any one who desires to be a voyager on the path of spirituality, ought to acquire some knowledge or information in this regard. What is it that we should know?

That, we have to find or realize God, we have to devote and dedicate ourselves to him, and we have to reach unto him. Before we can do this, let us know something about the true nature of God. This is jnaan. We begin with acquiring indirect knowledge first and, as we proceed, we ultimately obtain direct knowledge or experience. Knowledge (jnaan) has been classified into four types:

1. Shravan Jnaan (Knowledge through listening or reading), 2. Manan Jnaan (Contemplative or Reflective knowledge), 3. Nididhyaasan Jnaan (Meditative knowledge) and 4. Anubhava Jnaan (Experiential knowledge).

Shravan jnaan is the knowledge we acquire by way of listening or studying. When we begin to contemplate or reflect over whatever we have listened or studied - was it right or wrong, was it in my interests or against etc. - it is termed manan jnaan. After a careful thought or contemplation, when we take some decision and begin to follow it or try to practice it, the knowledge so gained is called nididhyaasan jnaan. Continuing, when we reach the destination, the knowledge, the experience or the familiarity we acquire it. The experience is called anubhava jnaan.

Shravan jnaan, Manan jnaan, Nididhyaasan jnaan, and anubhava jnaan have been likened respectively to an ordinary fire, lightning, fire (or heat) within seas and, the fire of mahapralaya (doomsday). Whatever we hear or read is like ordinary fire. Ordinary fire gets extinguished with a little rainfall. Similarly, we tend to forget whatever little we have heard, understood or studied, if some other person explains the same thing in another way. Then we start thinking that this other person seems to be right. But when we start contemplating and applying our faculty of understanding to whatever we had heard from somebody or read in some book, then our learning becomes somewhat sound. But how firm is that? It is like lightning. Normal rainfall quenches the ordinary fire but is not able to put out the lightning; rather, rainfall has no effect on it. However, lightning does not last long. Lightning is superior to fire, is more intense, but has a very short life-span. Likewise, our manan jnaan, too, is not long-lasting. It endures for sometime and gets altered again.

Once there was a meeting of different philosophies. Scholars of different schools of thought got together and gave their talks. Two of the various speeches made on the occasion were most impressive - one given by an adwaitwadi (Non-dualist or Monist) and the other by a dwaitwadi (Dualist). They left a deep impression on the people. Not only the audience, but these two also, were influenced by each other. The Dwaitist got influenced by the non-dualist or adwaitist who expounded the philosophy of non-dualism very forcefully, and, thus, came to believe that Monism or Non-dualism (adwaitwad) only is right. While, on the other hand, by whatever the Dualist had said, the non-dualist got convinced that Dualism (dwaitwad) is the correct philosophy. As a result, the Non-dualist got converted to dualism and he who was hard-core Dualist changed over to non-dualism. So, this is the result of shravan and manna jnaan. It keeps on changing. But, nididhyaasan jnaan is superior. We began to practice in line with what we listened and understood. For instance, we learnt from book that Oxygen and Hydrogen are gases and that, when these two are mixed in right proportions in a specified way, these form water. We pondered over whatever we read and then went to the laboratory. There we took out Oxygen and Hydrogen. We set out to mix them. So long as we are mixing the two gases

in different proportions under different conditions, it is practice going on. That is, we are gaining in nididhyaasan jnaan. When the two gases are appropriately mixed and water is formed, then we have had the direct experience that the two gases, when mixed appropriately, form water. This is the anubhav jnaan. Similarly, we first hear about God, pondered over the matter, and then set out to seek Him. Continuing the journey, the day when the realization of God will dawn within us, we would have the anubhav jnaan.

While practicing mediation, our knowledge is like the fire (heat) within a sea (badwaanal). Badwaanal keeps the quantum of water in a sea within limits, or in check, by evaporating its water, but it does not have the capacity to dry out the sea completely. Just as the badwaanal keeps the sea in check, a practitioner who regularly engages in meditation lives in this outer world in a controlled way, and when he matures in his meditation, he graduates from the practitioner into a saint. Then he comes to possess anubhav jnaan which is like the Cataclysmic (doomsday) fire which searing the dualistic-illusory knowledge takes us ahead and merges with the God. This is the glory of anubhav jnaan.

Sant Sundardaasji Maharaj9 has, in one of his verses, given beautiful simile to these four kinds of jnaan:

"Bhojan kee baat suni, man me mudit bhayo
Mukh me pare jau laun, meliye na graas hai
Sakal saamagree aani, paak koo karan laago
Manan karat kab, jimahoo ye aas hai
Paak jab banyo tab, hai bhojan karan baitho
Mukh me melat jaai, soi nididhyaas hai
Bhojan pooran kari, tripat bhayo hai jab
Sundar saakshaatkaar, anubhav prakaash hai"

(Hearing of food, got delighted in heart
But till it reaches the mouth, it can't be a mouthful
Began pondering when I shall get to eat, this is hope
When is the food cooked, sat to eat it
As began to partake of the food, it is nididhyaasan
When finished & contented with the food
It is, says Sundar, practical experience (anubhava))

That is, we hear that having good food renders contentment to the mind and nutrition to the body, but if we are hungry, mere listening to the merits of food can never quell or end our hunger. Kabir saahib has said,

"Baaton ke pakwaan se, dhaapaa nahi hoy"
(Only wonderful descriptions of desserts can't satiate!)

As many delicious recipes as we might go on enlisting, they are not going to fill our stomach, nor can render us the taste. This can, at best, be shravan jnaan only. Suppose, we procured rice, pulse, vegetables, spices, ghee etc., and started cooking. Now, as the cooking is on, we begin to imagine - when the food is ready, how shall we relish it. Still, it is only ingredients. We have not eaten the dish; have not had a taste of it. We are only imagining it. This is manan jnaan. When the food has been cooked, hungry as we were,

we started eating. Now we can make out how it feels when a hungry one gets to eat. This is nididhyaasan jnaan. How do different items - rice, pulse, vegetables, desserts etc. - taste! As we began to relish the taste, we started having experience, partly. After we have eaten to our full satisfaction, we say that now we are sated, and need no more to eat. Similarly, when we begin to meditate, we get some spiritual experiences during the meditation. Following regular, perseverant practice of meditation, when the last stage has been reached, we become perfect. Just as, after having complete diet, a hungry person is infused with full physical strength, gets full contentment, complete satisfaction, when a spiritual practitioner becomes ripened in meditation, he/she becomes invigorated with spiritual strength, gets complete contentment, full satisfaction and the ultimate peace. Only such persons, who have attained the ultimate tranquility of mind, springing from direct realization of the Absolute being, are called saints. It is another matter that we pay obeisance to whoever we find in saffron clothes, thinking them to be saints. But though we bow down to such persons, they don't become saints only by sporting saffron cloak. Only those who have had the anubhava jnaan, who have directly experienced identity or union with Him, become saints in the true sense of the word. There is a couplet in Mahopnishad:

"Bhidyate Hridayagranthih, chidyante sarva sanshayaah
Ksheyante chaasya karmaani, tasmin drishti paraaware"

(On having seen Him who is beyond the furthest, beyond everything, the knots of the seer's or the beholder's heart open up, shattered are all the doubts or confusions, and dissolved get all his actions)

They alone are saints whose knots of the heart have been opened up; whose knots of consciousness (chetan) and ignorance (jad) have been disentangled.

Goswami Tulasidaasji Mahaaraaj has written:

"Jad chetanahi granthi pari gai. Jadapi mrisaa chutat kathinai"

(In a jeeva (living being) have formed the ties of jad and chetan. Unreal though they are, they untangle with great difficulty.)

Of those, whose tethers of sentience and ignorance have been unscrambled, all doubts are demolished. Their actions do not give rise to any sort of bondage for them. They can perceive the Ultimate which transcends all, the Supreme Lord. Such and such persons only can be called 'sant' or saints. Unless and until this state has been attained, one can not be called a 'saadhu', sage, 'mahaatmaa', yogi and what not, but can not be called a 'sant'. Only after one has perceived the Supreme Master, he/she becomes entitled to be called a 'sant'. This is anubhava jnaan. Knowledge reaches its zenith or climax in anubhava jnaan.

Yog consists of eight limbs or parts namely, 'yam', 'nyam', 'aasan', 'praanaayaam', 'pratyahaar', 'dhaaranaa', 'dhyaan' and 'samaadhi'. Again yam and nyam each consists of five parts. 'Satya' (Truth), 'ahimsaa' (non-violence - mental as well as physical), 'asteya' (non-stealing), 'brahmacharya' (continence or celibacy) and 'aparigraha' (not amassing or storing more than necessary) - these five together comprise yam. 'Shaucha' (purity),

'santosh' (contentment), 'tap' (asceticism or abstinence), 'swaadhyaya' (study of sacred scriptures) and 'ishwara-pranidhana' (meditating upon God) constitute niyam.

First & foremost is truthfulness. What should be the form or mode of truthfulness? One should be truthful in thoughts, words as well as actions. Thinking something and uttering something else - this is not truthfulness! Truth means being one and the same - inside as well as outside. It's been well said:

"Saanch baraabar tap nahee, jhooth baraabar paap.

Jaake hirday saanch hai, taake hirday aap."

(No other ascetic practice is as great as truthfulness, and there is no sin greater than lying. Truth finds abode in whose heart, God resides there.)

Truthfulness is the greatest and the highest duty (dharma). Those who are truthful are respected by all. While those who keep on shifting on what they say every time are called liars and trusted by none. Guru Nanak said, "saanche sachiyaar vitahu kurbaanu"

(Sacrifice yourself onto God who alone is real.). Kabir Saahab says,

"Saanche shaap na laagai, saanche kaal na khaay.

Saanche ko saanchaa milai, saanche maahi samaay."

(Curses have no effect on the truthful. Time can't weather him. The truthful finds the Truthful (God) and merges into Him.)

Maharishi Mehi, my Gurudev has also said,

"Sat Varat mein dridha aap ho, koi shaap kyaa kare."

Who remains rock-solid, steadfast in truth is untouched & unharmed by curses.

As the story has it, Arjun¹⁰ had once gone to the heavenly kingdom of Lord Indra¹¹. Several deities were seated there and a beautiful fairy named Urvashee was presenting her dance show. Arjun, the son of Indra, was gifted with many godly virtues. Indra had, on numerous occasions in the past, talked very high of him. Urvashee, who, too, had heard a lot about Arjun, was infatuated by him. After the dance was over, and all others had gone to their respective places, Urvashi went to where Arjuna was staying and introduced herself. Arjun, like the civilized person he was, greeted her and enquired of the purpose of her coming. Urvashi revealed her sentiments, "Hello, I am Urvashee. I have heard a lot about your many qualities and want to have a son as gifted as you. This is why I've come to you." A stunned Arjun asked how that was possible. He, trying to save the situation, said that it has been observed that:

"Hoy bhalo ko poot buro, bhalo buro te hoy.

Deepak te kaajal pare, kamal keech te hoy."

(Ignoble sons might be born to even perfectly noble parents, while evil parents might come to have virtuous sons just as an illuminating oil lamp gives off black shoot while the beautiful lotus blooms amidst filth.)

Pulastya¹² was a rishi¹³ and Vishwashrava¹⁴ was a muni¹⁵. However, Raavan¹⁶ who was born in their lineage turned out to be a demon. In spite of having got birth in a noble family, owing to his own intellect, character and deeds, Raavan became a monster.

Hiranyakashyapu¹⁷, on the other hand, was a demon. Yet his son, Prahlada, despite

Hiranyakasyapu's best efforts to the contrary, grew into a deeply religious and staunch devotee of God. An earthen lamp lights up everything around it, but produces a black lamp. And, the lotus flower, on the other hand, though born amidst mud or filth, fills its surroundings with its fragrance and beauty. So, what is the guarantee that the son you yearn to have from me would be the same as or identical with me? Also, sometimes it so happens, too, that neither a son is born nor a daughter. In that case, too, your desire won't be fulfilled. Suppose, by chance, our relationship bears out a daughter, then what? Again your aim won't be accomplished! So, if you, really, want to have a son exactly like me, consider me to be your son, from today, and yourself to be my mother, said Arjun, respectfully. However, Urvashee, who had ulterior motives in her mind, felt insulted. She, therefore, cursed Arjun that because even though being a male, he had not satisfied her sexual urge, he would turn impotent for one year. Even as Urvashee passed a curse on Arjun, it turned into a boon for him. Had Arjun not gone impotent, he could not have been allowed to stay at the palace of King Viraat during his one year of hiding¹⁸.

Therefore, of all, the foremost thing is to adopt and imbibe truthfulness. Our scripture advises, however:

"Satyam bruyaat priyam bruyaat, na bruyaat satyamapriyam."

(Do speak truth, but mind, it should be pleasant also. Speak not the unpleasant truth, that which hurts others)

Kabir Saahab opined:

"Saadhu aisaa chaahiye, saanchee kahe banaay"

(A sage should be such that he makes the truth palatable before uttering the same)

Listen to what our Gurudev says,

"Satya suhaata wachan kahiye, choree taji deejai"

(Utter pleasant truth and shun stealing)

Let our talks be truthful, but not hurting or stinging to others – They should be truthful as well as likeable. Listen to an anecdote in this regard:

Two sages while traveling in a hot afternoon, felt thirsty. They sat down under a tree. One of them said, "I'll wait here. You first go and quench your thirst". The other sage found a well nearby. Seeing a motherly lady fetching water from the well, he approached her and requested, "O mother! Could you please give me some water to drink?" Struck by the sweetness in his voice, she readily & willingly obliged. Satisfied, he came back to the tree. Now was the turn of the other sage. As coincidence would have it, he, too, went to the same lady and pronounced, "O my father's wife, fetch me some water". No sooner than the lady had heard these words "My father's wife" that she began to beat him with the same rope she had been using to draw water from the well, and angrily remarked, "You don't have any manners. You deserve thrashing, not water." Now, just think! Mother is the same as the father's wife. But speech should be courteous and sweet. One uttered "Mother". He got water and came back satiated. While the other said, "Father's wife" and got a beating instead of water. Both had used equivalent words, but differed in their styles of talking.

We should adopt truth in every walk of life. In fact, truth is 'paramaatmaa' i.e. God, and its indivisible part, 'jeevaatmaa' i.e. soul or personal ego, also, is true or real. Adopting or practicing truth alone may lead to realization of God who is all-truth. Practicing dishonesty or leading untruthful life can never lead to God.

'Ahimsaa' (Non-violence) is the second part of yam of the Ashtaanga-Yoga (Eight-fold Yoga) of Patanjali¹⁹. Not to harm or hurt any creature by one's mind, utterances and deeds is what ahimsa is. In company of those who are resolute in ahimsa, even violent animals give up violence. There was a famous saint named Chaitanya Mahaaprabhu²⁰. While roaming he was lost in chanting prayers to God. On occasions he happened to pass through a forest, even violent animals of that jungle like the tiger and bear would follow him, attentively listening to his prayers. The feelings or attitude of enmity or ill-will is automatically destroyed in those who adhere steadfastly to non-violence.

Once Lord Buddha needed hot water and asked one of his disciples to get the same for him. As the disciple went to ignite the stove for heating water, he saw a serpent sitting coiled inside the stove. He came back to Lord Buddha and said anxiously, "O Lord! How do I light the stove? There is a snake sitting inside." Lord Buddha went calmly to the stove, saw the snake and removed it holding it gently with his hand. The serpent made no attempt to move, and did no harm to Lord Buddha. Why so? Because Lord Buddha was resolutely rooted in ahimsaa. 'Ahimsaa paramo dharmah' (Non-violence is the supreme religion).

There is a district by the name of Godda in the state of Bihar in India. A large number of people here are initiated in Santmat. In such a satsangi's (follower of Santmat) family there were two girls. They had built a small cottage behind their house for practicing meditation. One day while they were meditating in that cottage, a serpent fell down from the thatched roof onto one of the girls and moved away slowly. The girl continued, unperturbed, with her meditation. As fate would have it, one more serpent fell on her, but she remained unmoved and continued to meditate. Then a third snake, fourth, fifth, seven snakes fell onto her, but she, without getting excited or agitated, went on with her meditation with true love & devotion in her heart. No harm was done to her by the serpents. When a non-violent person practices meditation, even violent creatures shun their inherent nature and bring no harm to him/her!

Once Lord Buddha was traveling to some place. Violence was rampant in those days. People used to frequently offer sacrifices in the name of yajna (religious rituals conducted with some special pre-determined objectives). A shepherd was taking several sheep along. Among the herd, there was a lame lamb that could walk with great difficulty. Lord Buddha asked the shepherd, "Whither are you headed?" The shepherd replied, "The king is performing a yajna wherein sheep are to be sacrificed. I am going there only." Seeing the lame lamb struggling to walk, the compassionate Lord Buddha lifted it on his shoulders and further queried the shepherd, "Will the king sacrifice so many sheep?" "Yes" came the answer. Lord Buddha said, "O.K. then. I, too, will come along with you." Carrying the lame sheep Lord Buddha went to the king. The shepherd, too, reached along. The king was struck by the divine looks and the magnetic persona of

Lord Buddha and kept on gazing at him for some time. Then seeing the sheep on his shoulders he asked, "What is this?" Lord Buddha, apart from being an ascetic, was adept at diplomacy, too, as he himself came from a royal family. He said, "You are going to sacrifice so many sheep! Do you have the capacity to save any one of these? I don't know how many creatures you have got killed so far. How much more sin do you want to amass? This poor sheep is lame, is not even able to walk. You see, I have carried it throughout on my own shoulders. Shun your sins at least now!" The words of Lord Buddha had such a profound & magical effect on the king that he relinquished sacrificing animals for good, from that very day.

Who is purely, entirely non-violent casts powerful influence on others.

Next come 'Asteya'. Asteya means not to steal. Whatever has been endowed unto us by God, let us be content with that only. We should not take or lift a thing that belongs to another person without seeking his/her permission. Remember, stealing is committed not only with body but also with mind, and is also done with words. We should refrain ourselves from all the three kinds of stealing.

Practicing Brahmacharya or continence is also immensely significant. How could we, you might ask, practice continence while living a householder's life? Only those who are monks, hermits or sages can observe celibacy, how can we? It's not so. Grihasthas or householders, too, can live a life of continence. Brahmacharis (those who practice continence) are of two kinds - khanda brahmachari (one who practices continence partially) and akhanda brahmachari (one who observes continence in its fullest purity or entirety). He who has never, by any way, let his 'veerya' (semen) out is akhanda brahmachari. And he who has let his veerya out only for reproduction, and not for any other purpose, is khanda brahmachari. Similarly, even those who practice restraint and have hundred percent fidelity towards their spouses, also practice continence. These five constitute what is called yama by Patanjali.

Likewise 'niyam', too, consists of five elements- 'shauch' (purity), 'santosh' (contentment), 'tap' (abstinence), 'swaadhyay' (study of and reflecting upon Holy Scriptures) and 'ishwar-pranidhaan' (meditating on God).

Shauch means shuchyaachar which is a word formed of two other words shuchi (pure) and aachar (living or conduct). Purity should be reflected in all its aspects - our body, mind and action. For this, we have to pay attention to, be careful about even the smallest details. When we go to toilet, sometimes without washing our hands, we touch different parts of our body and clothes. Before washing our hands, we begin to brush our teeth. This is not shuchyaachar. Unless we wash our hands after going to toilet, we must not do anything else. People clean their own homes and throw away debris besides their homes or on roads. This, too, is not good. We should be pure in body, mind as well as our utterances - in all respects should we try to be sacred. However, purity should be genuine and not a mere show-off.

There was a panditjee (priest). He used to cook his own food, and never accepted anything cooked by others. He would collect all the ingredients required for cooking, clean the kitchen and while he cooked, no other person was allowed inside the kitchen. He would always eat with his right hand only. Even while cooking, he kept his left hand away from the burner and the utensils. Coincidentally, once he went to one of his clients who arranged all the items for cooking. After cleaning the kitchen, the priest began to cook. The client, who was watching him cook using his right hand only and keeping the left hand at bay, asked out of curiosity, "Panditjee, why are you cooking with one hand only and keeping your left hand out?". Panditjee became upset at this and shouted angrily, "Blockhead! What would you know why I am keeping my left hand a side? Don't you know, for what the left hand is used, which places does it move on?" The client said innocently, "Panditjee wherever the left hand might be moving, it is in the kitchen only. What wrong has the poor left hand done?" Panditji, realising his mistake, was ashamed. This is artificial purity, only making a show of purity.

'Santosh' means contentment - remaining satisfied with whatever we earn honestly. Kabir sahib has said,

"Saain itnaa deejaye, jaamen kutumb samaay.

Main bhee bhookhaa naa rahoo, saadhu na bhookhaa jaaye"

(O Lord, give me only as much as is required to support my family. Neither may I remain hungry nor should any visitor or saint coming to my house go hungry)

"Kabir saain mujhako, sookhee rotee dey.

Chupadee maangat mai daroon, sookhee chheen na ley."

(Kabir prays God to give him plain chapati only. He is afraid to ask for rich dishes, lest the plain one, too, is taken away.)

While an ascetic or a saadhu must be contented, householders, too, should try to live a life of contentment.

"Kabir chaale haat ko, kahe na koi patiyaaye.

Paanch take kaa dopataa, saat take me jaaye."

(Kabir goes to market for selling the shawl woven by him. Nobody believes him when he honestly quotes its price to be Rupees five, whereas some cunning person, by conning people, is able to sell it for Rupees seven.)

Kabir saahib used to weave clothes on a handloom and supported his family with whatever he could earn by way of selling them.

There was another saint named Ravidasjee²¹. He was a cobbler. He made shoes and earned his livelihood by selling the shoes. Once, God came to his house. He saw the ceiling of his cottage leaking. His heart was filled with pity. He said, "O Ravidas, why do you live in such a wretched hut? Take this; I have got a touch stone (paaras) for you. Whichever iron piece would you bring into contact with this paaras, would turn into gold. Build a grand house with its help, live a life of luxury and also practice meditation in it. If you don't believe me, let me show you a proof of its miraculous power." He took one of the many needles Ravidasjee used to make shoes and made it touch the paaras stone. Lo! It was really transformed into a needle of gold. God said, "Did you see? Now make as much gold as you wish for..." Ravidasji replied, "Oh! What did you do? You converted

the needle of iron I had into that of gold. You did not do the right thing. Now, will I be able to use this golden needle for sewing my shoes? I have lost my iron needle instead." When God went away, Ravidasji tucked the golden needle along with the paaras stone in the thatched roof and forgot. God came back after a few days and asked, "Ravidas, will your hut remain forever in a poor condition like this?" Ravidasji replied, "what will I do Lord? I try to make my two ends meet and remain happy with whatever I earn." A surprised God asked, "man what is it you can't have now? I had left the paras stone with you last time!" Ravidasjee said, "Oh! I had tucked the golden needle in the roof, and also the paaras stone. It must be lying there only." What an admirable sense of contentment or santosh did he have!

Keeping control over body mind and sensory and functional organs as well as ready to undergo ordeals for noble causes is 'tap' (asceticism or abstinence).

Swaadhyaay means to study good books, Holy Scriptures reflectively. Studying these does have an effect on our minds. The types of books we study have an according influence on our mind. If we read good books, good literature, good thoughts, our mind would be affected accordingly and our thoughts would become truthful and pure. Pure thoughts lead to pure and noble conduct. Therefore, we should study sacred scriptures.

'Ishwar-pranidhan' means concentrating, focusing one's thought on God, meditating upon God. We should always keep on thinking of God. It is possible to do so, even while performing our regular activities.

Those who meticulously practice yam and niyam, achieve 'aasan-siddhi' (proficiency in sitting in a correct yogic posture). Aasan-siddhi means the ability to sit still and without moving, in a prescribed sitting posture for a long time; it is not that sometimes we bring our left leg down, then after some time we move our right leg. Now we move this hand and now that hand. No, this is not aasan-siddhi. That is why, Saint Soordaasji²¹ has warned,

"Aasan dridh, aahaar dridh, bhajan niyam dridh hoye.

Tau praani paavai kachhuk, nahi to rahe vishay ras moye."

(If we can sit firmly in a correct posture, be firm in ideal diet and immaculately regular in meditation and niyam, then and then only, we can accomplish something, or else, we will remain absorbed in sensual pleasures only.)

Therefore, our aasan should be firm. If a weaver can sit for long, at a stretch, on a spinning wheel, it is possible for him to spin more yarn/thread out of cotton. Likewise, the longer you sit in meditation, the firmer would be your aasan. Only if you try sitting for longer durations, will you be able to sit for long times. If you don't practice, don't inculcate the habit of prolonged sitting, it will not be done. The accomplishment of aasan-siddhi is also related to our eating. How long and how well are we able to sit in one posture also depends on what we eat. You must have observed that almost everyday when you take normal, regular food, you can easily proceed on your job, or go wherever you wish to and do your work there. We have one's meal and on to one's job. But, occasionally, when we go to some dinner parties and have rich diet there, rejoicing the

delicious dishes there, sometimes eating much beyond our normal limits, what happens? We don't feel like working and have a natural tendency to recline and rest for a long time or even the next day. Why so? We have our meals at our homes too, and in parties too. In the latter case, however, the balance in diet is gone. So, Gorakhaathjee22 has said, "Dhaaye na khaaiba, bhookhe na maribaa, Ahi nishi lebaa, Brahma agini kaa bhevam." (Do not hanker after eating, nor fast yourself unto death. Day and night, all the time keep on gazing at the divine light.)

The divine flame that keeps on burning all the time within you, the light which is a illumining your inner being, how would you see that light? "Not by over eating", says Gorakhaathji, "And nor by extreme fasting". That is, if you want to see the divine light within you, extremes have to be avoided. Lord Shree Krishna has said in the sixth chapter of BhagavadGita that he, who eats too much, will not succeed in yoga, nor will he who remains absolutely hungry. He, who has forsaken sleep completely, will not be able to attain perfection in yoga, nor will he who keeps on sleeping all the time. "Yuktaahaar vihaarasya" that is, there should be balance or moderation in eating and living.

"Jaisaa anna-jal khaaiye, vaisaa hee man hoye,
Jaisaa paani peejiye, vaisaa vaanee hoye,
Man bhaavai so khaawataa, indreei kere swaad,
Naak talak pooran kare, kaun kahe parsaad,
Khush-khaanaa hai kheechadee, maahi padaa tuk lon,
Maans paraayaa khaaike, galaa kataave kaun."

(As the food you take, so becomes your mind. As the water you drink, so becomes your tongue or speech. For the pleasure (taste) of your organs, you go on eating whatever your mind tells you to. You eat, eat and over eat and call it Prasaad (offering)? In fact, the best diet is eating kheechadee (rice and pulse boiled together) to which a little salt is added. Who would like to get his/her throat slit in lieu of eating meat?)

Firmness of diet is essential for firmness of sitting in a correct posture. Therefore, don't take food consisting of meat, wine etc. which enhances 'tamoguna' (ignorance and negative tendencies) in you. Diet should be controlled and 'saatwik' (which induces noble and spiritual bent of mind) to accomplish perfection of aasan.

Next is 'Praanaayam'. Through praanaayaam, exercise of 'praan' (vital force which is responsible for life in us) is affected. It consists of several steps - 'rechak' (exhaling air out of lungs), 'poorak' (filling air into lungs), 'kumbhak' (holding the inhaled air inside), 'swas-nirodh' (holding breath) etc. However, this process is fraught with risks, and is not advisable for common people. This comes under the category of 'hathyog' (forcible and obstinate yoga). Lord Shree Krishna has taught the process of 'dhyaan yog' (union through meditation) in the sixth chapter, and this dhyaan yoga is simple, easy and pleasant for all. This involves no risk. Men, women, children and the aged all alike can do this.

Praanaayaam is followed by 'pratyahaar' which is formed of two words, 'prati' and 'aahaar'. When we sit in meditation, our mind does not remain focused on a single

subject, it rather keeps on wandering from one thing, one place, one idea, and one person to others. When we realize its flight, we try to bring it back to the subject of meditation. The mind, in a few moments, flies again. Again we bring it back. This process of bringing back the mind again and again on to the prescribed mantra, form or image etc. is termed pratyahaar.

Doing pratyahaar repeatedly results into 'dhaaranaa'. Dhaaranaa means mind being continuously focussed or fixed on the desired subject for a short duration. During the initial phases of pratyahaar, the mind keeps on wandering away and away from the meditated object quite frequently. As we perseveringly keep on attempting to bring it back again and again, it begins to remain fixed for a short duration - this is dhaaranaa.

And when we are capable of sustaining dhaaranaa for relatively longer durations, dhaaranaa becomes 'dhyaan'. Perseverance in dhyaan results in 'jeev' (personal ego or individual soul) merging into 'peev' (universal soul or God), to become one with him. This state is termed 'Samadhi'. During Samadhi, one's awareness of the outer world, one's own body and senses is completely gone and the soul becomes one with the absolute power that is, God.

Thus yam, niyam, aasan, praanaayaam, pratyahaar, dhaaranaa, dhyaan, and Samaadhi - the eight limbs of yog or the eight-fold yog and four types of jnaan (knowledge) - shraavan, manan, nidhidhyaasan and anubhav jnaan - were explained to you in this discourse. Try to practice these. Along with these, do try to earn your livelihood through honest, pure and pious means. This will result in the betterment of this world of yours and the other world, too.

2) Look for Him within you!

All the saints of all times and the world over have been in unison on the point that though God permeates through each & every particle, however tiny, of the universe, the path to Him as well as He Himself can

be found only within us and that all other attempts, whatever and howsoever grand, to probe for Him in the outside world are, in fact, exercises in futility and, therefore, are bound to fail. Below is presented an English translation of a verse composed by one of the greatest exponents of Santmat humanity has ever seen, Maharshi Mehi Paramhans ji Maharaj of Bhagalpur, Bihar, taken from his book "Maharshi Mehi Padaavali:

Look for (Him) within you, loiter not in the outside world in the

search

of God. For He dwells within us only. Gathering your current of consciousness scattered in both your eyes, focus it on a point as a result of which you would get to see (the inner divine light, brahma jyoti) and hear (the inner divine sound, brahma naad), and thus carry on your search inside you. Channelise or draw your consciousness (surat) straight unto the tiniest gate (tenth gate, dasham dwaar, til dwaar, vindu, or ajna chakra) where you will be able to listen to a large variety of vibrations or sounds (anhad naad). Get inspired by these and ascend or raise yourself further & further up in the search (of your true self). Each of the five mandals or spheres of creation (namely, gross or `sthool', subtle or `sookshma', causal or `kaaran', supra-causal or `mahaakaan', and pure conscious or 'chetan') has its own vibration/sound (which is responsible

for its creation) arising from its centre. Getting hold of each of these

central sounds one by one, go on leaping into the higher (subtler) spheres in search for your true master (God or your own real self). Maharshi Mehi Paramhans says that with your unstinted, unwavering devotion & dedication unto your Guru and, as a result, the latter's grace, strive to catch hold of the fifth (the subtlest) sound or vibration (called variously as anaahat naad, saar shabd, aadi shabd, pranav, sfoot, aadi naam, raam naam etc.) which springs from the Almighty's realm (beyond all the five aforementioned spheres or mandals) and which would escort you along to Him only, thus completing & fulfilling your search.

3) Make my Consciousness Soar in the Inner Sky (Padavali Of Marshi Mehi I believe is what this is from)

Guidance and help of Guru is inevitable and indispensable for progress in one's spiritual pursuits. Without his help it is impossible to move ahead in the spiritual sojourn. Hence, all the saints have underscored the importance of Sadguru and glorified the role and noble virtues of the Guru in their numerous hymns. Below is presented an English translation of a verse taken from "Mehi Padaavali" composed by Maharshi Mehi Paramhansji Maharaj, one of the greatest exponents of Santmat .

O exemplary and Honourable Guru! Kindly bless me so that my consciousness may ascend/ rise in the inner (spiritual) sky. Please be generous enough to enable me catch hold of (perceive) the current

of the all-pervading eternal Divine Sound. Holding on to your benevolent ray, may I be able to behold your refulgent subtle form. There is none other so lacking or destitute in spiritual means and meditation as am I. So, O Lord! Kindly cast aside these weaknesses and deficiencies inherent in me. Please be forgiving and merciful and destroy or demolish the huge stockpile of evil samskaras I have amassed during my numerous previous births owing to my own improper actions or deeds. O Guru! It is in your basic nature to liberate the disgraceful, sinful souls (mortals). Kindly emancipate me, too, beseeches Maharshi Mehi, in keeping with your true & natural disposition.

4) Kindly Take Me Across the Dreadful Ocean of Existence

We don't know for how many births, and in how many species, each one of us has been wandering and suffering the agonizing pains due to the captivity of our individual soul in the multi-dimensional bondages of body, mind, intellect etc.. And now that we have been endowed, by the grace of the God, with this invaluable human body, let us not forget our

prime objective which is to free ourselves of all the illusory but excruciatingly painful bondages and merge ourselves into Him who is all pure bliss, pure love! However, all our strivings, all our endeavors in

this direction are not going to succeed unless and until we seek refuge in a true, perfect Master who has already done so successfully! Below is

presented an English translation of a verse composed by the exemplary SadGuru Maharshi Mehi Paramhansji Maharaj:

O Merciful Master, My Guru! Kindly take me across the dreadful ocean of existence/creation/universe. I have been suffering the insufferable miseries of this universe in this body of nine gates (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, a mouth, an opening each for excretion of liquid & solid excreta) and fourteen organs (five functional organs, five sense-organs, man(mind), buddhi (intellect), chitta (that which renders the feeling of consciousness within us or that which actuates or puts life into the mind), and ahankaar (which is responsible for the feeling of `I' and `Mine' in us)). O Lord! Without the refuge of your lotus feet I have been through myriads of excruciating cycles of birth & death. Entangled in the illusory but strong attachments of the body, wealth, kith & kins and false ego & pride, I have lost or forgotten the very quintessence of all that exists i.e. the God Himself.

O Lord! This mind of mine is extremely terrible and difficult of control and does not forsake the five objects of desire (form, taste, smell, touch & sound) and six anomalies or grunges (lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy). As a result, this restless mind of mine, which is beyond my control, is not able to focus itself steadfastly on your lotus feet. O Compassionate Guru! This state of misery has been continuing through countless eons. So now, please take pity on me and liberate me. None of the numerous gods & goddesses, forefathers and family members possesses the competence of imparting this deliverance. Only Guru, says Maharshi Mehi, is capable of this noble & impossible feat. Therefore, the greatness of Guru has been adored and adulated profusely. So, O Great Guru! Please be merciful and take me across this dreadful ocean of existence.

5) Love the Eternal Ocean and Not the Ephemeral Pond!

Presented below is the english rendering of the Hindi couplets composed by Maharshi Santsewiji Paramhans, the current Acharya of Santmat published (in Hindi) in the December 2006 edition of Shanti Sandesh, spiritual monthly brought out by Maharshi Mehi Ashram, Kuppaghat, Bhagalpur, Bihar, India:

"O unwise, ignorant fish (jivatma)! You did not do right. You forsook the ocean (God) and fell in love with the petty pond (outer material transient world). ||1||

Now that the pond is on the verge of drying up and your life drawing to its end, arise & awake at least now and surrender yourself to the ocean, advise all saints. ||2||

With filth (in form of perversions of mind) filled all inside, you keep passing sermons to others, and go on accepting gifts and offerings from the gullible, trusting people? Remember, such deeds would land you in Hell! ||3||

You find pleasure in doing all undoable, evil things; enjoy performing sinful activities; and dislike or detest well-intentioned counsels. You will have to undergo, mind you, untold sufferings in the kingdom of Yamaraj, the Hell. ||4||

It's not yet too late. Begin to meditate on God, giving up the temptations & trappings of sensual pleasures, objects of senses, because you never know when you will breathe your last.||5||

You take to lethargy when it comes to doing bhajan (worship, meditation), and show swiftness, felicity and adeptness at talking big, sermonizing others. With the heart full of all sorts of attachments and ill-will, animosity & jealousy, you are sure to be courted by the Death-God, Yamaraj. ||6||

Purify your body by doing selfless service to the Sadguru, purify your wealth by giving alms to the poor and the needy. Sanctify your mind by doing bhajan and make your way towards salvation. ||7||

Every moment that passes should remind you of the end nearing, coming closer. The one who wastes his life not by meditating has to repent in the end. ||8||

Begin bhajan with internally chanting or repeating the Guru- mantra/ incantation (the charged words given by the Guru). And then try to visualize the radiant form or image of the Sadguru in the still darkness of the inner sky (with eyes closed). Follow that with focusing your attention at the seat of the soul within, i.e. at the third eye or the inner eye or the til dwaar, by making the two streams of consciousness in your two eyes converge in a point. ||9||

When the two currents of consciousness meet in a point, divine light appears within. Then, practice surat shabd yog (yog of divine sound) i.e., try to shift your attention to listening to the divine sounds or myriads of melodies (anahad naad) ringing inside. Listening to the divine sound destroys all the perversions, agitations and fickleness of the mind. ||10||

Ascending beyond or transcending myriads of sounds, try to identify and tune in to the quintessential unstruck melody, called "saar shabd" or "anaahat naad" which alone is capable of taking you and merging you into oneness with the Supreme Lord; this is the ultimate deliverance, emancipation, welfare, or liberation. ||11||

Kaaminee or female (for male; similarly male for female) is hundred times as intoxicating as kanak (gold or, the opium). One loses one's saneness or balance of mind or rationality by mere sight of hers, why to talk of acquiring kanak (gold) or consuming kanak (opium). ||12||"