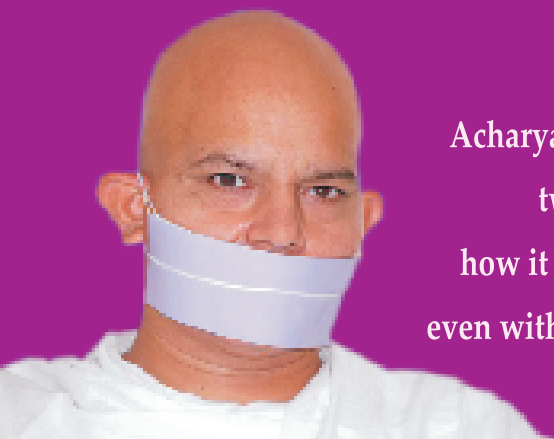


Let Us Learn To Live

Twelve Golden Principles for Holistic Living

Acharya Mahashraman





In this book
Acharya Mahashraman shows through
twelve guiding principles
how it is possible to live as an ascetic
even within the confines of a worldly life.

Read Inside

The Art of Living
The Art of Viewing
The Art of Walking
The Art of Sitting
The Art of Sleeping
The Art of Eating
The Art of Speaking
The Art of Tolerance
The Art of Thinking
· The Art of Aging
· The Art of Dying
· The Art of Assuring
A Fortunate
Life In The Next Birth



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Acharya Mahashraman



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Author's Message

Living is fundamental to every creature born on this planet. For most species, from the minuscule to the gigantic, living is a primarily instinctual function—survival is an end in itself. Humans, however, are developmentally far advanced relative to other species. Their cognitive skill makes them distinctively different from the rest of the living world. With these abilities they are expected to accomplish much more than mere existence in life. A highly evolved intellect, refined psyche and discerning skills have given the human race not only thoughtfulness, but an opportunity to choose between a routine existence and a the “artistic” life. The key is to awaken our potential for such a life. This potential can be realized, with relative ease, through Dharma, and it yields rich results. We become serene, sincere, successful, and poised.

The greatest achievement in life is to master the art of living. I myself wish I could! In this book, I have made an attempt to shed light on some of the principles of a worthy, righteous and wholesome life. If my readers encounter some useful and nurturing pointers from it, then I would consider my effort has been indeed not in vain.

Sadhvi Jinaprabhaji worked diligently to prepare transcripts from my lectures. Significant effort was also put by Muni Kumar Shramanji to proof-read the original Hindi text. The task of translation and composition of this book in English was undertaken by Samani Sanmati Pragya. She was assiduously assisted by Mr. Chetan V. Sanghvi (San Francisco Bay Area), Dr. Sukh Sampat Mehta, MD (Southern California), and Ms. Sangeeta Mehta (New York). Prof. Glenn D. Paige of Center for Global Nonviolence- Honolulu, Dr. Anne Vallely of University of Ottawa, and Prof. Gary L. Francione, Rutgers University, School of Law also provided very valuable comments.

May the gracious blessings of H.H. Gurudev Tulsi and H.H. Acharya Mahapragya be with this book! I pray I will be endowed with their divinity and grace for ever.

Acharya Mahashraman

PREFACE

Jain scriptures proffer multifaceted wisdom complete with pragmatic solutions to better our lives. Long ago, a newly initiated disciple asked his Guru, "Now that I have become a monk, how should I shield myself from the bondage of new Karmas? What is expected of me in my new role? What makes me different from a lay person? In what manner should I consume by food? Which physical activities should I limit, or refrain from engaging in - sitting, walking, talking or sleeping?" The Guru replied, "All these activities are essential in the normal course of life. You must continue with these as you have always done. The only difference, my son, is now you should do them with Awareness."

Jainism's most noteworthy contribution to the world is a comprehensive thesis on the Ahimsic way of life. It is the foundation of Right Conduct that extends beyond mere physical action and applies to every conscious and unconscious thought in our mind. Society invariably employs punishment to contain physical violence. How do we restrain a wandering mind steeped in negative fantasies, emotions, and intentions? The path of Ahimsa begins with heightening of an individual's level of awareness, as this is the precursor to mental training for the state of Equanimity or Samata. Equanimity and Ahimsa are two sides of the same coin. Ahimsa is the philosophy and Equanimity is the goal. In this book, Acharya Mahashraman, whose disciples revere him for his unparalleled equanimous disposition, describes a systematic approach towards increasing our level of awareness.

"Dasavaikalika", one of the Jain scriptures, provides a detailed description of conduct for "artistic living." Acharya Mahashraman has extensively quoted from this great resource of wisdom. His interpretation of "Dasavaikalika", coupled with his own prudent and astute observations in his sermons and writings, has formed the basis of the "twelve golden principles" in this book, which are aimed at refining not only the inner-self but also the overall personality.

A few years ago, while contemplating a prior discussion session with some of the younger participants of the JVB Center in Houston, the thought of translating this book - authored by Acharya Mahashraman - into English came to mind. The idea was to advance his simple and very practical message beyond those who occasionally study the Jain philosophy to reach a much larger readership. As far as the potential obstacles of language were concerned, I consider myself an ongoing student of the English language, keen on expanding my vocabulary and proficiency. I fully realized that this project would be a daunting task, but I felt energized and inspired by the blessings of my great Gurus. A strong positive inner force solidified my resolve to try. Despite starting off as a novice in the area of accurately translating a book, I convinced myself that there was nothing to lose in this endeavor and the opportunity to share this valuable work with others became my guiding motivation. In this project I received help from Rajeemati Sethia of Mumbai who assisted in typing this work and Mrs. Lalita Dhariwal of Raipur, who was equally helpful in editing the text.

Early on in this process, I realized that - as is often encountered in any translation - my work lacked a natural flow and I had to make it more appealing so the reader would not lose interest after just a few pages. The well known phrase, "lost in translation" became a frustrating reality that I had to accept and painstakingly work through. However I remained determined to maintain the integrity and sanctity of the message and to not distort the expression or the intent of what had been conveyed in Hindi by Acharya Mahashraman.

In 2004, when I once again returned to the U.S., I discussed my concerns and thoughts with Mr. Chetan Sanghvi, Dr. Sukh Sampat Mehta and his daughter Sangeeta Mehta. We all went through the translation process several more times. Finally, we were confident that we had achieved the goal of refining the words, sentences and paragraphs as well as adding some flavor to the language. This conviction was echoed by Mr. Gordon Anderson, a devotee of JVB Center, Houston, after a thorough read of the resulting manuscript. The progress was slow - this effort took nearly two years to complete. In accomplishing this prolonged effort I must not forget Muni Shree Kumarshraman-ji for many reasons. Since this work was done with the inspiration of spreading the works of Jainism through Acharya, I was very happy with the final results.

The manuscript was sent for review and comments to Prof. Glenn D. Paige (Center for Global Nonviolence, Honolulu and author of "Non-killing Global Political Science"), Prof. Anne Vallely, PhD (Department of Religion, University of Ottawa, Canada) and Prof. Gary L. Francione (Distinguished Professor of Law and Philosophy, Rutgers University School of Law). I deeply appreciate their gracious and thoughtful endorsements. My gratitude also goes to Professor Padmanabh Jaini for his scholarly and painstaking review of the scriptures from which this book has drawn the pedestal references. Although he generally doesn't write book reviews he provided an in-depth analysis of the Sanskrit poetry quoted in the book in order to encourage me in my first effort. Moreover, I treasure the very inspiring note Professor Jaini sent to Mr. Chetan Sanghvi. It reads as follows..."I have received the draft of the translation of the booklet by Shri Yuvacharya Mahashraman. I have not seen the original Hindi work. Even so, I must say that this is an excellent translation. It retains the original flavor of the sermon like the writing of the Yuvacharya, and provides an ideal guidebook for students of Jainism....."

I am deeply grateful to Mr. Ranjit Dugar, head of the charitable trust "Spiritual Quest, Kolkata" for volunteering to take on the sole responsibility of publishing this book. What was once just a thought has now come to tangible and meaningful fruition.

So come, let us all reflect upon living a holistic life. It begins with introspection, self-evaluation and practicing a conscious "mindfulness" in every voluntary activity. Practitioners can experience true grace in their life and can expect to be rewarded with an enlightened understanding of our essential daily activities.

Finally, I would like to once again convey my wholehearted thanks to each and every contributor who participated in this endeavor. This unique, collaborative experience reminds me of how blessed I am to have a Guru who leads me step by step to my final destination and equally how fortunate I am to have such esteemed people as resources to assist in taking this project to its completion.

Samani Sanmati Pragya

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CHAPTER I

THE ART OF LIVING

*Why lose today As, who has seen tomorrow?
The moments we can smile, Why spend them in sorrow?*

Life begins with birth and ends with death. Both the body and the soul form life. Where there is only body, there is no life. Conversely, where there is only a form of consciousness, life cannot exist. The combination of body and soul is what we know as life. Every embodied being in this world, whether human, animal, bird, or plant, represents life. But simply living is a wasted life experience for the sentient being. What humans should aspire for is to lead an “artistic” life.

What Is Artistic Living?

An “artistic” life is inspired by religion and dexterity. Humans strive for expertise in multiple spheres and may attain perfection in some. In ancient texts, seventy-two types of teachable arts and crafts for men, and sixty-four for women, have been mentioned. A person may learn and even master all of these arts, but this does not imply he has learned the art of living. In fact, he has probably not learned anything at all!

In his poem “Vyavahar Bodh,” H.H. Gurudev Tulsi writes:

*“Sabhi kalaen hain vikalaen, Pandit sabhi apandit hain.
Nabin janate kaise jina, keval mahima mandit hai.”*

*“All arts are maimed, all scholars are ignorant.
If they don't know how a life should be spent,
They are only overwhelmed with grandeur.”*

A king, annoyed by some incident, ordered his chief minister to be hanged to death. The execution was set for 6 p.m. A few hours before

this time, the minister was observed sitting relaxed and engrossed in his work. The king, who had been informed about the minister's demeanor, was surprised to hear that, despite his doomed fate, the minister was calm and at peace. He called him and asked, "How could you be so serene when death is looming before you?" The minister replied, "Your Majesty! Death will come in a couple of hours. Why should I die before that? I must enjoy every remaining moment of my life. It is said:

*"Kal ka din kisne dekha hai, Aaj ke din ko khyen kyon?
Jin ghadiyon mein hans sakte hain, Un ghadiyon mein royen kyon?"*

*"Why lose today As, who has seen tomorrow?
The moments we can smile, Why spend them in sorrow?"*

Impressed by the minister's attitude, the king said, "I can't hang a person who can truly live in spite of any circumstance."

The purpose of an artistic life is to remain in a state of happiness, peace, and equanimity until the end. To attain such a life, one needs to change their outlook on life and learn to self reflect. In the Jain scripture, Dasavaikalika, it is said:

*"Jo puvvarattavara-rattakale, Sampikkhae appaga-mappa-enam.
Kim me kadam kim cha me kichcha-sesam, Kim sakkanijjam na
samayarami."*

"In the silence of midnight, let a man look within himself and contemplate: What I did, what remains to be done, and what I can do that I am not yet doing." Such contemplation is self-observation or introspection, the process of seeing yourself through you.

Procedure for Introspection

The natural tendency of humans is to see vice and weakness in others, simply because these qualities are easy to spot, and overlook their own flaws even when they may be clearly evident. When they do recognize

their own shortcomings, they try to ignore, even hide them. It is important to acknowledge this behavior within the self and to pledge, "I must refine and cleanse my own thinking. I should be aware of my mistakes and faults. Regardless of whether or not I am being watched, I should be cognizant of my conduct. If I know I have done wrong, I should not repeat it."

Awareness is an integral part of introspection and with these practices, every single page in the book of a person's life can be written anew.

Once there was a spiritual practitioner - a Mahatma - dedicated to self-improvement. He was engrossed in meditation and doing penance all of the time. He had no interest in miracles, which he considered unspiritual. One day a youth came to the Mahatma. So impressed was he by the Mahatma's personality and knowledge that he requested to become his disciple. The Mahatma agreed and thought, "My old age is fast approaching. If I have a pupil, he will be of help." He initiated the youth then and there.

The disciple was very restless and unsteady. He could neither concentrate on religious studies, nor did he have the patience for meditation. The Mahatma tried very hard to awaken him spiritually and to engage him in the quest for knowledge, contemplation, and selfless service, but he did not succeed.

Convinced that knowing the power of miracles could confer instantaneous recognition upon him, the disciple came to the Mahatma and said, "Gurudev! Please teach me a miracle." His Guru said, "Son! Miracles are not advisable or prudent for us, as we are saints. Miracles might lead to fame and celebrity for a while, but in the end they will not serve any meaningful purpose and may even distract us from our noble mission."

Despite this explanation, the disciple insisted on learning more about miracles. Eventually, his Guru gave in. The Mahatma took a crystal

bar from his bag, handed it to his follower, and said, “This is a magic stick. If you pass it over the heart of any person, their vices and weaknesses will become visible.” Intrigued by this possibility the student excitedly took the stick.

The disciple was already capricious and flippant, and the rod exaggerated these traits. When he experimented with his stick to discover the weaknesses of others, he soon began to exploit the situation by divulging this information. His actions exemplify a famous Sanskrit poet's writing:

*“Markatasya sura panam, tatra vrisbhika-danshanam.
Tatrapi bhoota-sancharo, yad va tad va bhavishyati.”*

“A monkey is fickle by nature. Then, when he drinks wine, gets stung by a scorpion, and the devil enters him as well, his fickleness reaches a level beyond imagination.”

The helpless people felt ashamed. They wondered, “Who doesn't have weaknesses? Until he becomes omniscient man will continue to have faults. And of course, nobody wants their weaknesses to be exposed.”

One day, a few people garnered the courage to complain to the Mahatma. “Mahatmaji!” they said, “What kind of tool have you given your devotee? He is ruining our honor and reputation. Please restrain him before he does irreparable damage.” The Mahatma tried hard to subdue his follower, but the youth was obsessed with the vices of others and would not return the magic stick.

One day, when the Mahatma was asleep, the disciple thought, “I have looked at the vices of so many but I've not yet seen the vices of Guruji! This is a great opportunity, while Guruji is sleeping! Why don't I move this stick toward Guruji's heart?” When he did so, traces of deceit, greed, anger, pride, jealousy, aversion and hatred appeared on the stick. This revelation prompted him to conclude that he did not need such a “phony” Guru. “I regarded him as a pure soul, but he has

hidden vices. As soon as he wakes up, I will inform him that I am no longer his disciple.

When the Mahatma got up, the devotee said, “Guruji Good morning. I have decided to go back home.” When the Mahatma asked him why, he replied, “Guruji! I considered you a very noble soul, but you have anger, pride, jealousy, aversion, hatred, deceit and greed in you. Why would I stay with you?”

The Mahatma immediately realized what had happened. He said, “Son! You are absolutely right. I am not free from vices. I am also on trial but I am doing my best to overcome these shortcomings. If you want to go, by all means do so. But, before you leave, place the stick on your own heart, so you may judge yourself as well!” The disciple agreed, and moved the stick towards his heart. When he did so, to his shame, a multitude of his vices appeared on the stick. The Mahatma said calmly, “Son! Now compare yours to mine.” The disciple was taken aback by the intensity and magnitude of his faults. Whereas his Guru's weaknesses were as small as mustard seeds, the disciple's vices were as enormous as the mountains. He immediately fell at his Guru's feet, asking for forgiveness. He said, “I will never again commit the mistake of looking for the imperfections in others but rather, watch for my own instead.”

Until one identifies his own vices, inner cleansing is not possible. One must contemplate ones weaknesses with detachment. For example, a person should reflect on how long and how unnecessarily he has talked in any given day, or how forgetful he has been. When he acknowledges his own faults, this is the first step in an attempt to correct them. Even if he cannot rid himself of all his bad habits and weaknesses, he can at least try to rectify them one at a time. Always remember, “*Iyanim no puvva-makasia pamaenam.*” which means “Whatever I did out of delusion, I shall never repeat.” This awareness is like a lamp that illuminates a dark path, the path to enlighten the slumbering mind.

When to Introspect

Introspection is essential for self-development. It is necessary not just on a given day or on a particular occasion, but is needed everyday and on every occasion - from the moment we wake up to the instant we go to sleep. Before sleeping, one should ask:

“Uttbayotthaya bodharyam, kimadya sukritam kṛitam.

Ayushab khandam adaya, ravir astamayam gataḥ.”

“Did I do any good today? This life is transitory and its span progressively decreases. With each sunset, a part of life has passed.” Only when there is true purpose in life will good deeds tend to accrue and real success be achieved.

Through contemplation one's preoccupation with the vices of others can be eliminated. With self-awareness one acquires a positive attitude and steers this attitude in the right direction.

CHAPTER II

THE ART OF VIEWING

For the swan, the lotuses and pearls represented the height of existence, whereas for the herons, only the fish were important.

Humans are the highest form of life in the universe. We have five sense organs: the eyes, the nose, the ears, the tongue and the skin. In addition, we have a mind and intellect. All the sense organs are vital, but the eyes are the most important because they are used more than the others.

Possessing the ability to see is one thing, using it is quite another. There is no reason to ponder the use or misuse of eyes for those who do not have them. But for those who do ask, do they deserve the gift of sight? Those who visit monks, read high quality literature and religious books, choose to see spiritually-uplifting sights and practice Animesh-preksha—that is, fixing the eyes on an object for a given duration of time—are making worthy use of their eyes. Looking with evil intention, enjoying indecent scenes, and reading unhealthy or vulgar literature constitute abuse of the eyes. Eyesight is extremely valuable. Those who possess vision may or may not value it, but for those who cannot see, sight is beyond value. The world is perceived as small, dark and colorless for the blind.

The immense value of eyesight is exemplified by this historic incident:

Some people came to Mahatma Buddha and said, “Lord! A man in our village doesn't accept the existence of the sun. We tried to teach about the sun, light, and dawn, but he refuses to acknowledge they exist!” Mahatma Buddha asked, “Does he have vision?” They replied, “Lord! He has no eyesight. He is totally blind.” Mahatma Buddha said, “Then how can you expect him to believe? Take him to a doctor. When his blindness is cured, then only will he see the world with light. After that his views will also change.”

Leave aside those without sight, even people with perfect eyesight often see the world through glasses tinted by their own biases. They are unable to visualize reality in an objective manner. To a jaundiced eye everything looks yellow. To see and perceive reality as it is rather than what we would like it to be, one needs to release one's prejudices.

The Value of Vision

Perspective plays an important role in every action. For example, a cat grabs a kitten as well as a mouse. The reasoning, however, for these acts is entirely different and so is the grip! The baby—the kitten—is loved and protected whereas the mouse is hunted and eaten. The difference is in the intention behind the action. How a person acts upon a situation is dictated by the intent with which the person views it. A surgeon cuts into the stomach of a person with a knife. A murderer might do the same. Though similar actions, the objectives behind them are different. The doctor's aim is to save a life and the murderer's is to end it. Change in intention changes the action.

The Value of Human Life

Human life is precious. Can a primarily materialistic man assess its value?

A king went to an ascetic. Greeting him arrogantly he said, “Mahatma! Do you know who I am? I am an emperor. My empire is vast and prosperous. I have a huge army and an enormous treasury.”

The Mahatma ignored the king's arrogance, and listened to him patiently and without reacting. When the king paused he said, “O King! I am aware of your prosperity and position. But from my point of view it is not worth more than two glasses of water.”

The astonished king asked, “How can my great empire be worth only two glasses of water?”

The Mahatma replied, “Imagine you have lost your way in a dense jungle. You are all alone. It is summer. You are extremely thirsty, but

there is no water in sight. You become aware that you may soon die of thirst. Suddenly someone appears and offers you a glass of water. What would you give for it?"

The king immediately replied, "What less could I give my savior than half of my empire?"

"Well, now imagine again. You went riding on a scorching hot day. Your newly trained horse led you into a thick forest, away from all your ministers and guards. You badly wanted to urinate but you couldn't, and this resulted in excruciating pain. Suddenly a doctor arrived and gave you some medicine, enabling you to pass a glass of urine and relieving your discomfort. You felt good. Now tell me, what would you give the doctor for helping you?"

The king answered, "I would reward him with half of my kingdom."

The Mahatma said, "O, King! Now do you understand? You would give half of your empire for a glass of water and the other half for getting it out. So your kingdom, by your own assessment, is valued at two glasses of water. So why are you so proud and egotistical?" Realizing his distorted vision, the king fell down at the Mahatma's feet and resolved to embrace humility.

False pride and the inability to face reality lead to misconception. An egotistical person shuns reality. He might exhibit his pride among others, but his pride cannot overcome his own fear of death.

Why should a man become egotistical? After all, he has attained human life only recently. According to Jainism, in previous births he may have been a seed in a berry or some other form of vegetation, or a poisonous snake or a scorpion or any other lower form of life.

When this reality, this truth, is understood, false pride will dissipate. Only by comprehending the nature of things in its real form can right knowledge be attained.

One needs to amend one's perspective by understanding the importance of being human and striving for perfection through contemplation. Only a human being has the capacity to become a Supreme Being. Soul has the power to turn into a supreme soul. Neither animals nor birds nor even angels can achieve this ultimate state in their present forms. Humans alone can develop such qualities and end the cycle of birth and death. That is why this human life is so significant. Humans can think, discriminate and follow ethical rules. Only a sense of morality differentiates humans from animals.

A saint named Bhartarihari once said:

*“Ahar-nidra-bhaya-maithunam cha,
Samanyametad pashubhir naranam.
Dharmo hi tesham adbhiko vishesho,
dharmena hinah pashubhib samanah.”*

“Food, sleep, fear, and sex are common to animals as well as human beings. Only morality and discerning power differentiates man from animal.”

As Is the View So Is the World

Once a swan living in a sacred lake flew out and reached a pond where there were many herons. Seeing a strange bird in their midst, the herons became curious and asked the swan many questions, as in this beautiful hymn of their dialogue composed by a poet in Sanskrit:

*“Kastvam lohita-lochanasya charano hansah kuto manasat,
Kin tatrasti suvarna-pankajavanany ambhab sudha-sannibham.
Muktashuktir atbasti shankhanivaha vaidurya-rohab kvachit,
Shambukah kimu santi neti cha bakair akarnya hib hib kritam.”*

The herons asked, “Friend! Who are you? You are red-faced, red-legged, and even red-eyed. What is your sweet name?”

The swan replied, “I am a species of swan, known as flamingo.”

“Where do you come from?”

“From a sacred lake called Manasarovar, situated below Mt. Kailash in the Himalayas.”

The name 'Manasarovar' [sacred lake] was new to the herons. They asked, “What is there in Manasarovar?”

The swan replied, “It is beaming with golden lotuses. Its water is as sweet as nectar. Countless pearls, shells, conches, lapis lazuli, and jewels adorn its waters.”

“Tell us! Does it have fish?”

“No, there are no fish at all.”

The herons, expressing their dismay, said, “Then, your Manasarovar is useless. What value does it have if there are no fish in it?”

From the herons' perspective, fish were everything—the only thing they valued. The pearls, shells, conches, etc. were of no use to them. And what meaning could there be in golden lotuses?

The essence of this story is the differing perspectives of swan and herons. For the swan, the lotuses and pearls represented the height of existence, whereas for the herons, only the fish were important. Man is what his perception is, and his perception formulates his opinion and ultimately, his intention. If man's intention is like that of the herons, he will not seek anything beyond fish. How then can he evaluate the pearls and conches of his life?

CHAPTER III

THE ART OF WALKING

Indian culture lays emphasis on Charaiveti, which means "to keep going". According to this concept, luck favors those who put forth the most effort, whereas a person who sits idle can never enjoy good fortune.

A Sanskrit poet wrote:

*"Hasti sthoolavapuh sa chankushavashbah kim bastimatro 'n'kushbah.
Dipe prajvalite pranashyati tamah kim dipamatram tamah.
Vajrenapi batab patanti girayah kim vajramatro nagah.
Tejo yasya virajate sa balavan sthuleshu kab pratyayah."*

"A small prod can control a huge elephant, a small lamp can remove intense darkness, and a small thunderbolt can destroy big mountains. Therefore 'small' should not be ignored."

Human life is precious. To make it worthwhile, it is necessary to pay attention to matters that may seem small and simple but can actually shape one's life. These include how to stand, how to sit, how to talk, and how to walk.

Walking

Walking is a fundamental activity of life. Moving one foot after another is the result of muscle movements. However, the act of walking projects more about a person than just his muscular activity.

Let us reflect on the act of walking. A newborn cannot walk on his legs because his physique is too weak. After a few months the baby begins to sit. Then he learns to walk by holding his parent's finger. After that he tries to walk without any assistance. His first tottering steps bring joy to all. Thus walking is not a mere coordination of muscles; it involves many other faculties as well.

Purposeful Walking

To walk means to move. There are two types of movements. One refers to moving with the legs and the other implies progress in life.

The former is physical whereas the latter is abstract. All creatures in this world move methodically. However, walking should be a conscious act. The mind should be engaged in telling you how to walk, when to walk, and why.

The first thing to consider is the purpose of walking. Walking miles and miles is meaningful only if it has an objective. To walk even a step without an aim is a waste of time and energy. There should be a purpose of goodwill for all.

Morning and evening walks are considered advantageous for maintaining good health. The lungs normally have the capacity to take in five to six liters of oxygen, but generally people do not use their full potential. Walking enhances the capacity of the intake of oxygen, which in turn keeps you more energetic. Morning walks are deemed healthiest because with the sunrise trees release more fresh oxygen and the environment is not polluted. Walking is particularly beneficial for people with diabetes, depression, obesity and asthma.

Mindful Walking (Gamanyoga)

The word Gamanyoga, as described in the Preksha Meditation System, means to walk carefully. Gamanyoga is simply a non-violent walk with the intent to avoid hurting other beings.

It also emphasizes choosing the right place and the right path and following the safety rules. Every so often, despite awareness of the rules of the road, people still walk on the forbidden side just for ease or sheer neglect and such violations could be dangerous. While walking reflection should be limited.

Before embarking on a journey, one should recite a favorite mantra to make the journey auspicious. Once when Acharya Mahapragya was traveling barefoot in Haryana, India, one of his disciples was gravely injured in an accident. To protect them from such calamities in the future, Acharya Mahapragya gave all his monks, nuns, shravaks and shravikas a safety mantra, “Om Phum Hreem Shreem Kleem Thah Thah Thah Swaha” with the advice they must chant it before embarking on any travel.

Change Your Walk to Change Your Personality

Walking is not merely a physical act but also reflects one's personality. Graceful walking leaves a positive impression. Some people tread softly, while others move hastily and heavily, making a great deal of noise. Some keep their body in a straight line and others bend their neck and shoulders forward. Some people walk energetically with firm steps while others walk nervously.

The following guidelines for walking can effectively change your personality:

- Staying conscious of each and every movement of the feet makes you more cautious and alert.
- Taking balanced and firm steps represents courage and confidence.
- Walking on the entire foot is more natural than walking only on the toes.
- A disturbed person tends to split himself while walking: His physical movement is in one direction, his vision is in another, and his mind may be taking an entirely different path. Let the body, mind, and vision go in unison.
- Hitting other people, creatures or objects in the vicinity is a sign of frustration and aggression and should be avoided.
- A mindful walk awakens and energizes the non-violent consciousness within you.

The scripture Dasavaikalika teaches the art of walking to a monk: “A monk should not walk in haste or recklessly. He should not walk looking upwards. He should also not talk, laugh, study, or get distracted while walking.” Conscious walking is also mentioned in another scripture called Uttaradhyayana: “Uvavutte riyam riye.” Meaning “a monk should consciously involve himself in walking.” A Rajasthani hymn says:

“Neeche joyan char gun, gami vastu mil jaye.
Daya pale hinsa tale, drishti dosh tal jaye.”

“Watchfully walking looking down helps avoid violence, find lost objects, and spares one from habitual carelessness.”

Global Change through Walking

Walking for a cause can bring about awareness and positive change in society. History attests the success of peace walks and marches in achieving the seemingly impossible all around the world. Walking for a cause draws global attention to poverty, exploitation, inhumane behavior, racism, nuclear armament, and war. Many great men like Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Martin Luther King, Jr., Lech Walesa and Nelson Mandela have been crusaders of peaceful revolutions through peace marches. I myself, along with the H.H. Acharya Mahapragya, have been on peace marches that have resulted in awakening non-violent consciousness and reinforcing the moral values of society.

Internal Walking: Spiritual Progress

The abstract or metaphysical meaning of walking is progress, and specifically spiritual progress.

Indian culture lays emphasis on Charaiveti, which means “to keep going”. According to this concept, luck favors those who put forth the most effort, whereas a person who sits idle can never be expected to enjoy good fortune.

“To keep going” in the context of this book is to proceed on the spiritual path. Of course, such movement requires right perception and guidance besides physical effort.

Here is a story how a king tested the spiritual progress of his sons to select his heir

A king with three sons had to choose his heir. He decided to evaluate their aptitude become king. Giving each of them a dollar, he ordered that each furnish his palace with that dollar by 8 p.m. the following night.

The eldest thought, “Furnishing the palace with just one dollar is impossible. If I buy some stock that appreciates in value, I may be able to carry out my father's wish.” After some more thinking he decided to take a shortcut. He said to himself, “Why not gamble and win some money?” He did so and lost the only dollar he had.

The other two princes carried out their father's command.

At the scheduled hour the king set out to inspect the palaces. He found that the eldest prince's palace was empty, and the prince was sitting outside dejected. His explanation why he could not fulfill his father's wish did not impress the king.

Without uttering a single word to his son, the king proceeded to the second palace where a foul smell emanated from within. Holding his nose, he asked the second prince to explain the stench. The prince replied, "Father! What could I get except garbage with the one dollar you gave me? Since it was necessary to carry out your order in time, I stuffed the palace with garbage." The king moved away silently from there, too.

Now, it was the youngest prince's turn. The king was astonished when he entered his palace: It had a pleasing fragrance and was full of divine candlelight. This prince had bought candles, incense sticks, and flowers with the dollar to illuminate and aromatize the palace. The king admired his youngest son and announced him as his heir.

The first prince had neither the right perception of the king's intent nor the knowledge to execute the task. The second prince comprehended the king's intent but lacked the wisdom to find a creative solution. The third prince not only understood the king's intent but also astutely executed his command. By beautifying the entire palace with just a dollar, he demonstrated that even little things can make a big difference!

What really matters is how effectively one uses knowledge for progress in life. Usually, people stress the importance of bookish knowledge. Progress in life should not be judged by this or name or fame. The most meaningful measure of one's knowledge is its proper use for spirituality and enlightenment.

CHAPTER IV

THE ART OF SITTING

*A person's posture reflects his personality and state of mind.
Sitting erect and relaxed keeps one not only emotionally at
ease but also energetic.*

Sitting properly is an art. Different situations call for different protocols of sitting. Sitting in meditation in an assembly during a religious discourse or in the presence of elders demands a certain decorum. Assuming the appropriate sitting posture in front of an audience involves etiquette and respect. Sitting becomes an art for those who are sensitive to the occasion.

When you adopt the wrong sitting posture you expose your physical weaknesses and indifference and even disrespect for the place or occasion. Inattention to what's going on, stretching the body, swinging the legs, making unnecessary gestures or displaying other signs of restlessness are some of the manifestations of plain rudeness and contempt. Some people spend their time just sitting idle, gossiping and backbiting or day-dreaming. They have no aim or goal, unlike those who sit quietly, or in contemplation.

People who are aware of their sitting posture are more inclined towards meritorious occupations. The type and locale of the activity depends upon the character of an individual and also the circumstances. For those with intellectual pursuits reading is a favorite activity. For those interested in religion, chanting is a productive and simple means of purifying the soul. When there is time to spare, one should close the eyes and chant in silence. People who spend hours in planes, trains and buses can utilize their travel time in chanting or reading.

Sitting In Meditation

Sitting erect and relaxed is the primary requisite of meditation. Some special postures such as the lotus, diamond or the simple cross-legged

position are recommended but not mandatory. Basically any posture in which one can sit comfortably for a length of time is acceptable.

The diamond posture is considered beneficial for meditation as well as for general health. Sitting in this posture for a few minutes after every meal strengthens the digestive system. You should of course be relaxed and free from anxiety and aggression. Whenever you sit down be composed and smiling. There is a strong relation between physical stance and state of mind. The physical posture is the mirror of the inner or emotional world. The face reveals the emotions and the posture exposes the moods.

Sitting In Good Company

A person is judged by the company he keeps. The choice you make reflects of your temperament. The proverb, “Evil pursuits bring evil reputation” is full of meaning. Therefore, be cognizant of the character of the friends you choose. It is undoubtedly better to be alone than in bad company.

A couplet written in the Rajasthani language illustrates this concept:

*“Gyani syun gyani mile, kare gyan ki bat.
Moorakh syun moorakh mile, ke mukka ke lat.”*

“The wise go together by endowing the group with true knowledge, and the ignorant propel themselves into evil fist fights.”

More precisely, the company of the wise will bestow you with a true understanding of reality whereas associating with the ignorant has the opposite effect. Sitting with saints and monks is valuable even if their teachings or talk is not always fully comprehensible. The time spent with them is very auspicious and is conducive to a moralistic lifestyle. In their noble presence, you can learn to cleanse the emotions, improve ability to tackle worldly problems, and resist unhealthy habits. Therefore, whenever such an opportunity arises avail it enthusiastically.

Sitting In Assembly

Sitting properly in an assembly is tantamount to being a good audience. A speaker can be thoroughly understood only when undivided attention is paid to him. The audience's interest energizes the speaker, whereas its indifference and inattention discourages him. A lively interaction between speaker and audience results in a constructive session. An interesting story illustrates this point:

Once a skillful craftsman carved three beautiful idols that looked exactly alike and showed them to a king. The king was so impressed that he offered to buy them. The craftsman requested the king to assess their value himself. The king estimated them to be worth \$100 each. The craftsman replied, "Pardon me, your Highness! Your assessment is incorrect. Each idol has a different value." The king wondered why there should be a difference since all three idols were made of the same stone, were of the same size and weight, and had the same detailing.

The craftsman pointed to the first idol. He tried to insert a piece of straw into its ear but was not successful. "This idol's value is \$50," he said. He tried the same with the second. The straw went into the idol's one ear and came out through the other. He assessed it at \$100. Next, he thrust the piece of straw into the third statue's ear. This time it didn't come out; it had gone into the idol's stomach. He valued it at \$1000. Complimenting him the king said, "Now I get your message."

The three idols are like three types of audiences. The first presents a deaf ear to the speaker. Such people can neither concentrate nor let others do so. The second idol represents people who listen but do not follow up on what they hear. Sermons slip away like drops of water on an oily pot. The third listens attentively, reflects on the message, and then tries to practice it.

There are many benefits to sitting and listening with concentration. A person who sits still and listens carefully to a good speaker can improve his language, speaking and problem solving skills.

You should sit in a place:

- where your presence does not disturb others
- where there are no distractions
- which is clean and pollution-free
- You should follow non-violence by ensuring the place to be devoid of tiny creatures and vegetation.

It should also be known that the physical energy in the body is stored in the tail of the spine. By sitting erect the energy has easy access to the brain. Hence assuming the proper sitting posture positively impacts the entire personality.

CHAPTER V

THE ART OF SLEEPING

*One whose consciousness is sleeping is deluded even while physically awake.
Conversely, a spiritual person is consciously awake even in sleep.*

Alternating activity and rest is natural. It's symbolized by night and day and the sun and moon. The physical body is impacted by the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. Balancing sleep and wakefulness is crucial to imparting balance to life.

After being active through the day, one needs to “recharge” by sleeping. Sleep not only keeps the body fit and functional but is also conducive to mental relaxation.

The amount of sleep required varies from person to person. Some feel rested and refreshed even after a brief nap, whereas others, despite sleeping for hours and hours, may remain tired, sluggish and aching. Yogis and saints reduce their sleep requirements by training their body and mind. Bhagavan Mahavira slept very little during his twelve-and-a-half long years of penance.

Generally speaking, the duration of sleep is determined by body's conditioning. Newborns and infants tend to sleep, sweet and sound, most of the day and night. As they grow, the need for sleep gradually decreases. Adults manage well with just a few hours of snoozing.

Art of Deep Sleep

Everyone longs for regular sound, deep, and restful sleep. Acharya Shree Mahapragya, who recently passed away in at the age of ninety, who led a group of nearly eight hundred monks and nuns and had millions of followers, drifted off as soon as he lay down. This kind of sleep is truly artistic. Everybody sleeps, but only a few know the art of sleeping.

People also desire the right amount of sleep. Neither excessive sleeping nor staying awake too long is healthy. Experts believe that sleep deprivation in the early years has a negative impact on mental and physical health later in life.

While eating, drinking, sitting, standing or walking, a person's mind is cluttered by all kinds of thoughts. And even sleep does not leave one alone since the thinking process may keep going on and on! The following anecdote illustrates this point:

A cloth merchant was so besieged with his business while sleeping that he dreamed he was selling clothes to a customer. He measured and began tearing pieces of cloth. When he awoke, he found that he had torn the very clothes he was wearing!

People perform different activities in their dreams because they are unable to sleep restfully. They sleep with all sorts of information stored in the mind, fueling continuous subconscious churning of the thought process. For a sweet and deep sleep, one must expunge these thoughts and their emotional impact before going to bed. A relaxed state of psyche facilitates soothing sleep.

In these times man has lost many of his valuable natural assets, including the ability to sleep, with deleterious and sometimes even disastrous consequences. Insomniacs resort to all sorts of remedies, even prescription medications, which may eventually take a heavy toll. An easier and more practical solution for sleeplessness is Preksha, a technique of yoga and meditation. Kayotsarg, a Preksha exercise that relaxes the mind and body is a prerequisite for refreshing sleep. Deep breathing also calms the flickering mind. And both these “therapies” are completely safe and totally free!

Sleeping Consciousness

Both the quality as well as the quantity of sleep is governed by the nature of a person. When looked at from the perspective of karma sleep is related to Darshanavaraniya Karma (Perception covering karma). Sleeping consciousness—sleeping even when awake—has been attributed to bad karma and is deemed unhealthy. It hampers self-development, results in Avirati (lack of restraint) and Adharmacharan (sinful indulgence), all of which ultimately lead to misery. Insomnia has been ascribed to Asatavedaniya Karma (pain rendering karma).

The Acharanga Agama (Scripture) states: “Sutta amuni saya, munino

saya jagaranti” meaning “the spiritual person is always awake while the naïve remain asleep”. It points to the vigilance of a spiritual practitioner and the ignorance of the ordinary. The Gita says: “Ya nisha sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami.” This means “night is the time for common people to drift off to sleep, but monks stay vigilant even while snoozing.”

In conveying the same message Gurudev Tulsi included the ignorant also in it. In his composition Ahrat Vani he says:

*“Amuni-agyani sada sote rabe hain,
Jagkar bhi ve abo din rat sote.
Muni-gyani jagte rabate nirantar,
Dravya nidra leen bhi ve sajjag bote.”*

“The attached and the unaware actually lie in slumber day and night, even when they are awake. However, the monks and the learned remain attentive while asleep.”

If a person cannot free himself from attachments and does not practice restraint even after becoming a monk he is not truly awake - despite being physically awake.

Once there lived an ascetic who was initiated at a young age. Although he had renounced the world, he was still mentally attached to it. He had not overcome his lust and his inner being remained dormant. He felt that any talk of atma-paramatma (soul and Supreme Soul) was false. If there was a God, he should have seen him by now. Further, he felt he was misled when persuaded to leave the pleasures of the world in pursuit of the spiritual life. Thinking thus he decided to return home.

On his way home he spotted a childhood friend at work in shop. As they conversed, the ascetic asked him what was stored in the containers on display. His friend opened a few of them to show him what they contained - butter, sugar, salt, chilies, ginger, etc. However, there were two containers in a corner that aroused the ascetic's curiosity. The friend told him they contained just 'Ram-Ram'. The ascetic was baffled by this answer. The friend explained with a smile,

“Mahatmaji! You won't understand the language of our society. When any item is completely sold out, we don't always tell the customer the container is empty. Instead we say it is now 'Ram-Ram' and they immediately understand!”

This simple event diverted and impressed the ascetic. He realized that one had to be “empty” (free from negativities) to achieve 'Ram-Ram'. And to reach this goal he had to clear his mind too. As long as the mind is filled with anger, jealousy, hatred, pride and doubts it continuously breeds common human desires, leaving no room for Ram (the hero of the Ramayana), the power of discrimination, and spirituality. This became a turning point for the ascetic and he retreated towards the self. This is the type of moment everyone needs in life to go on the path to enlightenment.

Key to Conscious Sleep

There are two avenues for accomplishing conscious sleep: spiritual studies and the company of saints. For those who question the importance of regularly attending religious discourses it should be pointed out that if one wishes to improve the quality of life, to comprehend the truth, to satisfy the quest for spirituality, to find solutions to problems, and to understand equanimity, there is no better resource than monks and Gurus! They are indeed invaluable in waking one up from conventional sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE ART OF EATING

*It is healthful to be calm when eating and chew properly.
Emotional stress and the turmoil induced by anger, greed, jealousy, fear and
the like impair digestion.*

Food is an essential requisite of life. It provides the energy to sustain physical existence. Everyone eats but not many comprehend the right way to eat. There are three important aspects of proper eating:

1. Controlled and restrained food intake
2. Wholesome and nutritious diet
3. Food obtained by honest and socially acceptable means

Controlled Diet and Restrained Food Intake

The type and amount of food consumed by each person varies. Some eat to meet the basic necessities of the body whereas others may have voracious appetites, far exceeding and ignoring even the sensors of satiety. According to the common concepts of digestion, it is healthier to eat at least two morsels less than what hunger demands. For instance, if one has the appetite for two chapattis (a type of bread), it is advisable to just eat one and a half. To eat more is an unwelcome invitation to poor health. Unfortunately, despite awareness that certain foods lead to ailments, it is not uncommon for people to eat them and also to overeat. When rich food is served the tongue enjoys it but the stomach often suffers. One should allow the tongue to rest for three to four hours after a meal so that the digestive system can carry out its normal function unimpeded. The Jain tradition of periodically abstaining from food and even water for a specified duration constitutes penance. A controlled diet thus has dual benefits: practicing restraint and maintaining good health.

During my childhood visits to the monks, I once met an elderly person who showed me a booklet entitled “How to Get Liberation While Eating and Drinking”. One of its pages was divided into squares with the following instructions for the practitioner who renounces food: When abstaining from food for an hour, he should mark a square with

a dot, and this marking should be continued for each additional hour of fasting, until the page is filled. The purpose of this exercise is to keep track of one's progress in the practice of self restraint.

The following anecdote, translated from Sanskrit, illustrates the pitfalls of excessive eating:

Once a young boy who had just finished a full meal received an invitation from his friend to eat dinner with him. The youth was tempted by the prospect of delicious food, but decided to ask his father before accepting the invitation.

He asked through a Sanskrit Couplet:

*“Urdhvam gacchbanti nodgarah, nadho gacchbanti vayavah.
Nimantranam samayatam, tata! bruhi karomi kim?”*

“Dear father!” he said, “I had a good lunch and I am too full to eat any more. But I have an invitation for another meal and I am tempted. Please tell me what I should do.”

The father thought it might not serve any useful purpose to directly discourage his son from attending the party. Instead he found another way.

He said:

*“Bhojanam kuru durbuddhe!, ma pranesu dayam kuru.
Parannam durlabham loke, sharirani punah punah.”*

“Dear son! What is there to ask? Eat as much as you want! What can happen other than bodily harm! You may become ill, you may even die. Even if you die, you will be able to get another body in the next life, but you may not get another invitation for such a feast!”

The son quickly understood the message of the adverse effects of overeating. The father's subtle words were more effective than if he had simply forbidden his son not to eat right after a full meal, no matter how tempting the occasion.

There are several ways to control food intake, ranging from complete fasting to limiting quantity or quality. After a certain age, one should minimize the evening meal or even completely forgo it. A devotee once came to me and said, "I routinely don't eat at night, but sometimes when I travel I am compelled to do so. What should I do?" I replied that at his age, two meals a day were enough. Not to eat in the evening is healthy, with physical as well as spiritual benefits.

Some people practice Ekasana (eating once a day). However, if they try to make up for what they would be missing by excessive eating in one sitting, this can create problems. Neither breakfast nor any other meal should be heavy. People also tend to eat more at Parna (the meal after a fast) than they normally would. Speaking from experience, Gurudev Tulsi says that eating excessively after Parna might upset the stomach and create heaviness in the legs. Avoiding solid food and drinking some milk during Parna is healthful and soothing. A controlled Parna is essential. If a person fasts for eight days or fifteen days or even an entire month but fails to control his intake at Parna, he puts his health at risk even if the food is wholesome.

Besides controlling the amount of food you should also control the speed at which you eat. Eating in haste is deleterious. The digestive system becomes overworked when food is swallowed without thorough chewing. Since digestion starts from the mouth and not in the stomach, it is important to chew properly. Equally essential is the need to keep the mind calm and free of anger, greed, jealousy, and fear. Emotional stress can impair digestion. Right and restrained food intake boosts the production of energy.

Eating Nutritious and Wholesome Food

Wholesome food is obviously good for health. However, what is wholesome for one person might not be right for the other. Not all foods are suitable for or tolerated by everyone. The Jain scripture Uttaradhyayana tells the story of a king who lost his life precisely because he ate forbidden food:

A king, who was very fond of mangoes, ate a large quantity of them every day and that eventually made him ill. He was prescribed

medication and was prohibited from eating mangoes. Soon his regained his health. To avoid temptation he ordered all the mango trees in his kingdom be uprooted.

A few weeks later, the king went for a ride with his minister. They wandered far off his kingdom and entered a grove of mango trees. Captivated by the fragrance, the king expressed his desire to rest there. The minister politely reminded him that he was supposed to stay away from mangoes, warning him it would be risky to linger there. But the king insisted and the minister had to give in to his master.

While the king was resting under a mango tree, a gust of wind blew a mango down into his lap. The king picked it up and looked at it. The minister begged him to throw it away but the king argued, "What harm is there in simply looking at a mango? After all, the doctor only forbade me from eating mangoes, and not from enjoying their beauty and aroma." As the King glanced at the mango, his temptation grew and he brought it closer to his nose to sniff the enticing fragrance. The minister again protested, but the king repeated his argument.

Then the king couldn't resist his craving for the fruit. But sucking on the mango was like ingesting a poison. Although the minister rushed the king back to the palace, his condition worsened. The royal physician made a dire diagnosis. The king was in a serious condition on account of the mango he had eaten. The king protested, "I didn't eat much. I only sucked a little juice." "Your Majesty!" said the doctor, "Even that little bit has done irreparable harm to you and unfortunately, we are now helpless!"

The king exhaled his last breath even as the doctor was speaking. The king could have avoided death if he had only exerted self-control. But he gave in to temptation. The mango by itself is not unhealthy for most people, but for the king it certainly was! The definition of "wholesome" food varies from person to person and is determined by physiology and body makeup.

Eating Food Obtained through Honest and Socially Acceptable Means

Eating food obtained through legitimate efforts brings gratification and serenity and thus promotes good health. Such food is digested easily and generates positive energy. Food procured via dishonest means and by defrauding others can instill a sense of guilt and thereby corrode one's energy at the physical as well as mental level.

Unlike monks lay people cannot exist without possessions. Nor can they resort to begging to supply themselves with the necessities of life. But their source of earnings should be ethical. Pure earnings nurture peaceful living and high thinking. A person who earns righteously is called Shravak (a lay follower). The Jain Agamas (scriptures) say, **“Dhammenam cheva vittim kappemana”**, which means: “A controlled diet, comprised of wholesome eatables, procured through righteous means constitutes the right way to eat.”

CHAPTER VII

THE ART OF SPEAKING

The cuckoo chirps and the crow caws, They may look alike, but they have distinctive voices. The cuckoo's sweet chirping calms whereas the crow's cawing irritates. Similarly, the effect of one's speech is determined by the manner of speaking.

Mind, body, and speech are intertwined and together are the instrumental forces of life. Speech, the foundation of human relationships and social interaction, has been a boon to civilization. Animals cannot speak, and therefore any grouping of them (like cattle) is not deemed a society. Speech reveals and expresses intentions. It is the fundamental means for communication between individuals. Although animals can make a few simple sounds, they lack the ability to converse verbally. Only human beings have been empowered with comprehensible speech and have used it to formulate clear languages.

Speaking abilities vary from person to person. Some of us are more articulate and expressive. Some of us stutter or have other speech impediments. Some others, despite speaking distinctly, are unable to put forth their ideas in a meaningful manner. Few are those who can enunciate clearly and convey their thoughts intelligibly. This dexterity in speech can be a natural gift or a learned and mastered art.

Words and sentences transmit thoughts. Words tend to play a dual role; they can create problems and also solve them. Words can misguide as well as elucidate. In order to be effective, speech needs to be moderate, soft, truthful and thoughtful.

Speaking With Moderation

Moderation in speech can be described as the use of right words in the right number at the appropriate time in all conversations and transactions. Some people talk more than required and so deviate

from the subject. Their indiscretion can easily make a mountain out of a molehill and cause trouble. There is truth in the saying, “If a word is worth a coin, silence is worth two”.

In ancient Jain scriptures, Moun (silence) used to refer to knowledge but now it generally means not speaking. Observing Moun for a few hours can be peace rendering, energy saving, and relaxing. But often people tend to speak after Moun as if to make up for lost time! I believe that although remaining silent for a specified period of time is good, it is even better not to speak too much and unnecessarily at any time. There is likely no need for the self-imposition of complete silence if one can routinely control the amount and content of their speech. Limited speech is the simplest way of keeping Moun vrata (the religious observance not to speak).

Maintaining silence may appear easy, but it is actually a very difficult practice. An anecdote illustrates just how arduous it is:

Once four youths encountered a celebrated Sanyasi (ascetic and asked him to teach them yoga and meditation.

The Mahatma observed that they were too talkative and restless to meditate. He said, “Look. Before you learn meditation, you must learn to keep silent. Once you have disciplined your tongue I'll teach you. But first observe complete silence for an hour and” The youths agreed. They all sat in silence.

It was evening. The sun had begun to set and as they watched the darkness fall one of the four youths commented, “Nobody has lit a lamp yet.” The youth sitting beside him said, “Keep quiet. We are observing silence.” The third youth warned the second, “You both broke your vow.” When his three friends spoke the fourth said, “Only I have kept my vow.” Hearing this conversation, the Sanyasi said, “None of you could keep silent for even an hour. How can you meditate?”

Controlling speech is indispensable for meditation. It is also a prerequisite for leading a spiritual life. The Jain scriptures Dasavaikalika and Uttaradhyayana advise monks to restrain speech. Many people come to us seeking advice to control their anger. We suggest that they keep silent for ten minutes whenever they feel angry. This practice prevents quarrels and subdues violent instincts.

A Sanskrit poet composed a beautiful metaphorical verse that says:

*“Moukhyam laghavakaram, mounam unnati-karakam,
mukharo nupuro pade, kanthe haro virajate.”*

“Talkativeness marginalizes a person whereas silence elevates him. A garland around the neck is for beautification but why are ankle-bells placed on the feet?”

The poet suggests that the ankle-bells are too noisy and are therefore relegated to the feet, whereas the silent, peaceful garland gets a place of honor on the neck. This example illustrates that silence earns respect and loquaciousness invites censure.

An economical use of words is always more effective than using too many. Sometimes, disregarding the mood and receptiveness of the audience, speakers pour out all they know, and thereby lose their attention. Reading the mood of the audience is the key to mastering the art of public speaking.

Silence is important, but knowing when to be silent and when to speak is imperative. The following story illustrates this point:

Once, a religious leader sent three of his pupils to a village to spread his message. They stayed there for four months. When they returned, the Guru inquired about their preaching experience. The disciples replied that they taught nothing. They observed silence the entire period. The Guru reproached them. “You were sent to teach and guide the people spiritually. By observing silence you ignored my directive and failed in your assignment.”

In this instance, silence was inappropriate. Speech as well as silence can be unsuitable if wrongly chosen. One must use discrimination at all times to speak or stay silent.

Speaking Sweetly

A sweet and melodious voice soothes the burning heart. Calming words have the power to tame even the most aggressive people. They also help nurture healthy relationships. A poet has said:

*“Priyavakya-pradanena, sarve tushyanti manavah.
Tasmad tadeva vaktavyam, vachane ka daridrata.”*

*“Loving words are a pleasure.
Why be stingy with this treasure?”*

A student once failed his examination. His furious father scolded him for wasting his time watching television and hanging around with friends instead of studying. He labeled his son as an incompetent and chastised him saying, “You have taken the hard earned money I’ve spent on your education and thrown it down the drain!” These harsh words made the boy rebellious. He thought, “What is a big deal in failing an examination? Everyone fails some time or another.” He began hating his father and made up his mind to one day avenge himself for this rebuke.

One of the boy's classmates had also failed the same examination. However, this boy's father politely told his son that he should have concentrated more on his studies and tried harder to succeed. He suggested that he practice meditation to improve his concentration, and study diligently during his summer vacation. Empowering his son with confidence, the father predicted success for his son the next time. The encouraging and reassuring words of his father built self-confidence in the boy and he scored the highest grade in his class at the next examination.

Loving and kind words are much more effective than the harsh reprimand. Sweet, comforting comments are capable of healing wounds whereas abrasive language can create deep divisions and generate vengefulness.

Speaking Truthfully

Bhagavan Mahavira said that Truth is God. Truth is like a fragrant flower which can be enjoyed by all. Speaking the truth, as we all know, is being honest without being malicious. People tell lies out of fear, cowardice, greed and anger, and sometimes even for fun. Liars can never be trusted.

Monks observe the vow of being truthful in all circumstances. Such a rigorous practice may be difficult for a lay person. However, a person lacking the willpower and resolve to follow this principle is likely to deviate from truth. At the very least a lay person should refrain from unnecessary lies. Since honesty can be equated with truth, both candor and integrity are perhaps the most practical form of truth.

Truth has the power to cultivate other good virtues. Even Godliness is manifest through the practice of absolute truth.

A poem written in the Rajasthani language says:

*“Sanch barobar tapa nabin, jbooth barobar pap.
Jake hirade sanch hai, ta hirade prabhu aap”*

“No austerity equals truth. No offense equals lies. Those who hold truth in their hearts harbor God within.”

Speaking with Awareness

Analytical speaking is another important aspect of communication. Analyzing while speaking is like chewing while eating. What you speak is important, but how and when you speak will make your message more effective. Even with the right thoughts, if you are blunt and hasty, you tend to lose impact. Therefore, it is crucial that your oral presentation be as organized and thoughtful as possible. Reflect before speaking, do not speak without purpose or occasion or thought. Weigh your words before they are uttered.

Moderation, modulation, truthfulness and awareness are the pillars of artistic speaking, which enhances and enlivens all-round personality.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ART OF TOLERANCE

Both tolerance and intolerance are inherent in all three forms of yoga (action): physical, mental, and vocal. Tolerance mends broken relationships, fosters affection and cultivates respect, while intolerance does the opposite.

Tolerance is a human virtue essential for creating and sustaining a harmonious society. It is also a necessity for one's own well being and for maintaining a happy, stress-free life. "To live and let others live peacefully" is both a social and a personal obligation. A tolerant person possesses the prerequisite to lead a balanced life. Anyone who cannot put up with internal and external situations with equanimity not only disturbs his own peace but also the peace around him. One who lacks the aptitude to listen, understand, make allowances, and respect others' ideas and opinions will always cause strife. The root cause of disputes, struggles, and unrest in life is intolerance.

Most people are peace loving by nature, but at times they do exhibit violent or tumultuous tendencies. Such behavior can be ascribed to certain indiscernible phobias, greed, or ego. A serene person is ideal for the family as well as society. Such individuals can tackle even the most unpleasant and explosive situations with patience. On the other hand violent or turbulent human traits can break families and result in oppressed and uncivilized societies. Fortunately, humans have the potential to overcome these weaknesses by exercising their willpower.

According to Jain philosophy, all activities, good and bad, are the result of three forms of yoga (action): physical movement, mental processes, and verbal or written communication.

Physical Tolerance

Physical strength and stamina varies from person to person. Some people can easily walk five to ten miles everyday, whereas others cannot cover even short distances. Some can endure hard work for hours and have the strength to lift enormous weights while others get exhausted very easily. Farmers who must work in open fields carry on

their routines in the scorching sun or torrential rain. But those accustomed to luxuries and comforts such as air-conditioning, heating, soft furnishings and other modern conveniences become distressed by the slightest change in weather.

While all humans share basic physiology, each one of us exhibits different physical traits. They reflect the lifestyle we have adopted. The physical intolerances evident in today's society can mostly be attributed to our modern lifestyle.

Once, while walking in a forest, Emperor Akbar and his confidant Birbal spotted a boy asleep on an uneven rock. This unusual sight perplexed Akbar and he asked Birbal as to how could it be possible for anyone to lie on a rugged rock, let alone sleep on it. Birbal replied, "Your Majesty! What is so surprising about it? This is simply a habit one develops. The body adapts as it is trained. This boy is accustomed to harsh living." Astounded by Birbal's explanation, the King asked him to prove it.

Birbal invited the boy to stay with them at the palace. The boy was overwhelmed and could not resist the tempting invitation. He enthusiastically followed them and soon began enjoying a life full of luxury.

One day, Birbal spread some gravel on the boy's bedding. The boy went to bed as usual but couldn't sleep at all that night. The next day Birbal summoned the boy before the King and asked him about his sleep.

The boy confessed he hadn't slept a wink during the night. He stated that he normally slept soundly but couldn't rest last night and as a result, his whole body was still aching.

Birbal turned to the King and said, "Your Majesty! This boy, who not too long ago was accustomed to rough surfaces, is now unable to sleep on his bed because of a little gravel on it. This is because he is no longer physically and mentally used to hardship. In a short time he forgot his old habits and now he cannot tolerate the slightest discomfort."

The human body is an anatomical marvel that can be trained to adapt and survive in very harsh environments. Some people, out of fear of getting sick in the winter, put on warm gloves, socks, and thermals and wear a scarf around their necks. Gurudev Tulsi casually advised against such precautions. Wrapping yourself warmly all the time reduces your immunity to cold. If you try to overprotect your body will react to the slightest change in outside temperature, thereby courting sickness. It is therefore prudent to condition your body to tolerate and even enjoy temperature variations.

Mental Tolerance

Forbearance not only imparts serenity and well being to the practitioner but is also conducive to harmony and peace for others who come in contact with him. The mind needs to be trained to endure the body in all circumstances, because intolerance can only generate tension, frustration, oppression and unhappiness. An excessively intolerant attitude may result in insanity and have tragic consequences, such as murder and suicide. As our society becomes increasingly intolerant even small children are prone to tension. A lady once told me that if she asks her five-year-old son to fetch a glass of water during his play time he gets annoyed and frustrated!

Mental intolerance can terminate friendships and end good will. What will happen to the family if the father has no tolerance for the son, or the mother-in-law for the daughter-in-law, or the daughter for the mother and vice versa? What will happen to the institution of marriage, if a husband and wife cannot be tolerant?

Cordial relationships can flourish only when there are no family conflicts and no strife between husbands and wives. Tolerance mends broken relationships, fosters affection, and generates respect.

Verbal Restraint

Speech, the principle means of communication, has been the cornerstone of human development and civilization. It can bring about unity and stability as well as conflict and chaos. A controlled tongue, which usually means refraining from reacting, can save you from the troubles arising from hasty, thoughtless or misguided words. Conscious silence, i.e., abstinence from inappropriate speech, is one

way to keep the peace. Undoubtedly, there is truth in the saying, "If speech is silver, then silence is gold."

A person who has control over his tongue will not hurt others by using inappropriate, unpleasant or harsh words. Such a restrained person well understands that a seemingly insignificant remark stated the wrong way can ruin a close relationship. The Mahabharata is an excellent example of the importance of verbal restraint. Had Draupadi refrained from one improper remark mocking Duryodhana "the blind son of a blind father" there would not have been a brutal war! When a small matter turns into a major conflict, the person responsible may rather belatedly realize that the unwarranted clash could have been averted had he or she controlled his speech and not had an emotional outburst. He or she regretfully thinks, "I had no right to impose my ideas on other people when I myself hate being imposed upon. If I don't like being dominated, I shouldn't expect others to accept or tolerate my domination." By understanding and sincerely following this principle you can maintain forbearance and remain calm in any situation.

Preventing Anger

Anger is a negative emotion, appreciated by none but felt by all. Anger can be irrational or pretentious. Irrational anger is the loss of self-awareness and self-control, culminating in a rush of negative feelings including antagonism, resentment and helplessness. Assumed anger, on the other hand, does not exist in the mind; it is an outward expression, such as the indignation shown by those making political or religious speeches to make an impact on the masses. Assumed anger is also seen in schools to maintain discipline and in the workplace to drive higher levels of performance and to develop innate abilities or bring errant people on the right path.

I have closely observed Gurudev Tulsi disciplining his disciples. His approach was an ideal combination of toughness and tenderness. He had always maintained that for a medication to be effective it should be right for the specific disease. The pills may be bitter or sugarcoated but the aim of any treatment should be to not only cure the manifestations of the disease, but also eradicate its root cause. Therefore, whether administering medicine or teaching or

disciplining, one must be specific to the target and, simultaneously, as rigorous and furious as thunder and as mild and gentle as a breeze. Such fury cannot be deemed senseless cruelty. Only that anger is harmful and malignant which makes a man lose his consciousness or self-awareness.

One of the ways to protect yourself from the ravages of anger is to observe silence for a minimum of ten minutes whenever anger is imminent. Silence is a quick spiritual remedy that pacifies rage. A story told by Gurudev Tulsi beautifully illustrates this point:

Once upon a time a couple lived with an only child—a daughter. They brought her up with unconditional love and profound devotion. They gave her every freedom and did not discipline her even when she misbehaved. Her pampered upbringing made her willful and impetuous, and she had an uncontrollable temper. Regardless of who she was addressing she spoke her mind with no regard for the consequences.

When she grew up, she was married into a prosperous and respectable family. Her charm, however, did not last and in no time she began getting into trouble for her boorish behavior. She had no clue of her own shortcomings. Instead every member of her new family seemed evil to her.

Time passed. One day, while on a visit to her parents, her father asked her about her new life. She broke down saying, “Father! What shall I say? That house is worse than hell. My father-in-law, mother-in-law, and my husband are like demons. It would have been far better to push me into a well than marry me into such a family. I don't want to go back.”

Her father was distressed, but he wasn't blind to his daughter's character. He said, “My dear, don't worry. I will give you a special medicine that will bring your in-laws under your control. Your hell will then turn into heaven.”

When the time came for the girl to return to her husband's home, her father gave her a bottle filled with sweet water. He told her,

“Whenever you get angry, take a mouthful of this medicine, keep it in your mouth for ten minutes and then spit it out.”

She followed his instructions diligently. Every time she got angry, the mouthful of medicine made her silent for ten minutes. By the time she spat it out, her anger would have already subsided. Gradually her bad temper diminished and her demeanor changed. A few months later, when questioned by her father, she stated that her husband's home was now indeed like heaven.

Such a positive change can certainly be achieved by conquering anger. Silence is a potent antidote for bringing anger under control. If need be, leave the scene that is causing distress. Deep breathing and periodic breath holding can also help pacify anger.

Practicing physical, mental, and verbal tolerance improves character and brings lasting happiness. Tolerance empowers the body, mind, and spirit and instills inner peace and contentment.

CHAPTER IX

THE ART OF THINKING

*Thinking “rich” is conducive to a wealthy state of mind.
Rich are the thoughts that are controlled, benevolent, and realistic.*

Human beings are constantly involved in one activity or another. The Gita says, “Nahi dehabhrita shakyam tyaktum karmanyasheshatah.” “A creature with a physical body cannot remain idle.” There are two types of activities: physical and mental. While physical activities are not feasible without periodic rest, mental activities, for the most part, do not cease. The mind is active all the time. Its flickering is evident even during sleep.

Once, a philosopher was asked four questions. To the first, “What is the largest object in the world?” the philosopher replied, “The sky.” To the second “What is the easiest job in the world?” he replied, “To give advice without being asked.” To the next, “What is the toughest task in the world?” he replied, “Self-recognition.” And to the last question, “What is the swiftest thing in the universe?” he replied, “The Mind.”

Thoughts are not bound by medium or time; they can travel at lightening speed.

The mind is the repository for memory, and also a seat for reflection and imagination. Once a man asked his friend, “I’m thinking of going to America. How long will it take me to reach there?” The friend replied, “No time at all. You can be there this instant! Thinking will take you off to the spot within a split second.”

While the ability to focus on any object is limited, the process of thinking or reflecting can go on nonstop. The mind is indeed fickle and confused, and can easily deviate from concentrating. In the Gita, Arjun asks Lord Krishna:

*“Chanchalam hi manah Krishna!, pramatthi balavad-dridham.
Tasyaham nigratham manye, vayoriva sudushkaram.”*

“O Krishna! The mind is indecisive, obstinate and wandering. I want to control it but I find it no less difficult to subdue than to subjugate air.”

Agreeing, Lord Krishna responded:

*“Asamsbhayam mahabaho!, mano durnigratham chalam.
Abhyasena tu Kounteya!, vairagyena cha grihyate.”*

“Arjun! No doubt the task of controlling the mind is difficult. But effort and detachment from worldly affairs will help you do so.”

People usually act upon their thoughts. Sometimes this can be dangerous because a vacillating and baffled mind may steer one on a wrong and frustrating path. The following Rajasthani couplet,

*“Man lobbi man lalachi, man chanchal man chor.
Man ke mate na chaliye, palak palak man aur.”*

Translates to “The mind is greedy and covetous. It is fickle and thieving. Do not blindly follow your mind, because it changes every moment.”

The very mind that can be capricious and bewildered is also capable of performing positive functions, which in turn reduce or eliminate its fluctuations. Remember that:

- It is the mind and not the eyes that can comprehend, meditate upon, and visualize the virtues of the Divine Soul or “Bhagavan”.
- The mind has the power of discernment and compassion and possesses problem-solving abilities.
- The mind can generate the most creative and innovative ideas.
- A sharp and composed mind can lead one to the next level of consciousness.

The mind is an instrument of the spirit. It carries out the emotions but does not necessarily produce them. Emotions tend to pollute the mind. Only a clear and pure mind can control the emotions. The mind can be compared to an employee, and consciousness to an employer. If the employee is not properly instructed he or she may not be able to follow directives. Just like it is necessary to train and instruct an employee to perform it is also essential to train and discipline the mind.

How can one steer thinking in a positive direction? The enlightened saints have advocated Mit (restrained), Hit (benevolent), and Rit (real) chintan, or thinking, for training the mind. These practices foster personal growth, help establish a complimentary relationship with others as well as yourself, and create a harmonious society.

Restrained Thinking

In these modern times, excessive thinking and the resultant stress have become endemic. Day and night, the mind keeps churning, and sometimes concocting problems. This serves no useful purpose because much of our thinking is aimless and confused and results in unnecessary tension. Sleep is required to rest the body and mind. But if the mind is not relaxed and free of thought, sleep becomes restless and results in insomnia. The function of the mind is akin to surfing channels on television, moving from one program to another. Even while eating, your mind could be elsewhere—flying with ideas, besieged with memories or inflicted by worries. You may not realize what and how much you have eaten! Similarly, while driving, the mind may be so immersed in thoughts that you miss exits or traffic signals and then lose your way.

Indeed, a layperson cannot be expected to be totally free from thoughts. But to an extent one can restrain or control them. That is Mit chintan. While thinking is necessary to address problems and to come up with solutions, it is equally important to contain the thoughts arising from one's greed and desires as they can only confound problems over time.

Rational thoughts are crucial to keeping neurons functional and healthy. This can be achieved thru Preksha, which recommends a specific practice called Bhavakriya, or living in the present. This limits unnecessary thoughts stemming from unpleasant memories and dreams. The other simple exercise is to concentrate and focus on breathing. When the mind is synchronized with breathing, the fickleness of thoughts is automatically restrained.

Once, I demonstrated the Navkar mantra, accompanied by deep breathing, to a group of youngsters. A few days later a youth turned up and gratefully stated that his chronic problem of insomnia was completely cured by this practice. Thus, very simple practices like controlling the breath can mould the mind, just as consistently dripping water can eventually carve the hardest rock.

Benevolent Thinking

The second aspect of positive thinking, Hit chintan, is wishing well for everyone including yourself. Bhagavan Mahavira said, “Thinking negatively about others does not necessarily hurt them, but it definitely harms the thinker.”

Once there lived an old lady in a village. Her neighbor was also an elderly woman. The two spent most of their time arguing, quarreling and plotting against each other.

One day the first old lady went to the temple of the Goddess of Strength and worshipped her with deep devotion. The pleased Goddess said she would grant her any wish she desired. But the blessing came with the condition that whatever she asked for, her neighbor would get twice as much. This strange condition put her in a dilemma.

She pondered, “How can I let my neighbor receive twice what I get, and with no effort on her part at all?” At last she decided to use this opportunity to teach her neighbor a lesson that she would never forget. She requested the Goddess to take away one of her eyes.

Her extreme jealousy made her ignore her own well being, and Such negative and vindictive thinking is self destructive and benefits none.

Indian wisdom teaches:

*“Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah.
Sarve bhadrani pashyantu, ma kashchid dukkhabhag bhavet.”*

*“May all beings be happy! May all enjoy good health!
May none be consumed by miseries! May all dwell in prosperity.”*

Problems and obstacles are the realities of life. Being frightened and running away from them is escapism. Giving up hope is cowardly. Accepting obstacles as part and parcel of life is courageous. One must realize that there is a hidden lesson to be learned from every hurdle. If one has a positive outlook the ultimate outcome is always for the best. With such sensible thinking one can maintain composure in any difficult situation and can easily resolve the predicament at hand.

“To do” and “to happen” are two very different ideas. One can think before doing, but one should bear whatever happens with fortitude. A businessman desiring to establish a business must think about the basics: “What business should I enter? Which is the best place to start off? And with whom should I deal?”

After he makes his decisions he begins his business. Whether he makes a profit or loss from his business, he construes it as “happening” rather than his “doing”. A thoughtful person views both profit and loss positively. Although the effort of his business is entirely his, the result is not. This benevolent way of thinking would illumine the path of his life.

Real Thinking

The third aspect of positive thinking is Rit chintan, which means thinking realistically or pragmatically. Everything begins with a thought. The imaginative mind is capable of conceiving innumerable

innovative ideas and new creations. But this blessing is often misused. The imagination has a tendency to fly far off and begin building castles in thin air. Thoughts that lack solid foundation and a consideration of reality are futile.

Once, Shekh Chili earned a little money. Elated by his success, he bought some milk. He made the milk into yogurt, from which he churned butter, which he then boiled into ghee. With the ghee before of him his mind started to wander: “I'll sell the ghee, make a bigger profit and then buy more milk. I'll again process the milk into ghee and earn even more money. I'll then buy a cow... I'll marry a beautiful girl... my wife will obey my orders and if she tries to ignore me, I'll kick her out.” Lost in dreams he unconsciously kicked the pot, spilling the ghee, and with that his fantasy also came to an end.

People like this start from zero and end up where they began – with nothing. Even if they begin a project well they leave it incomplete. For any thought to be successful it needs to be based on realistic assumptions and followed by a disciplined approach to execution. Procrastination complicates the project and eventually all efforts become fruitless. Thoughts and actions should be closely coordinated and implemented in the right manner at the right time. It is said: “Kalah pibati tad rasam,” which means “Long tarrying takes all the thanks away.”

Emotions influence deeds and can turn them into good as well as bad. Emotions are embedded in the mind. If the emotions are impure, how can the mind be pure? Positive thinking cleanses our emotions, and purified emotions are conducive to positive thinking. Both work synergistically.

It is not difficult to acquire a healthy state of mind. All one needs to do is to think realistic, benevolent and positive thoughts and exercise due restraint.

CHAPTER X

THE ART OF ENJOYING OLD AGE

Old age should not be feared as painful but viewed as a reward. It is a bouquet of experiences, a blessing of solitude, a time for relaxation, and a prospect of a new dawn of bliss. It is not a period of loneliness or the sad final chapter but a new sunrise with graceful and golden times ahead.

There are three stages of life: childhood, adulthood and old age. Old age is generally considered the period after age 70. Usually, a person sails with ease through the first two phases of life but tends to be apprehensive about old age. It need not be so! Old age is the time to relive and build upon past experiences gained through ups and downs, successes and failures, triumphs and defeats, trials and errors. There is no reason why this segment of life cannot be made as fruitful and happy a period as the first two stages. But for old age to be fulfilling, one must cultivate the right perspective, appropriate attitude and right habits.

Train Your Tongue

Food is essential for existence since it is the source of energy that sustains various bodily functions. However, poor eating habits or excessive food intake can hamper the ability to live a long and healthy life. Maintaining a balanced diet and keeping a gap between meals facilitates digestion. A controlled diet is also conducive to generating energy so a person can be mentally and physically fit. A lack of discipline, as manifested by overeating, may provide short-term pleasure to the taste buds, but can also lead to sickness. An unhealthy body results in accelerated aging and even premature death.

As we age, our body's systems change and so should our food habits. After the age of 40, the digestive system's functionality begins to gradually slow down, whereas the desire for relishing unhealthy foods may tend to increase. Such craving digresses one from a sensible and healthy diet. Disciplining the mind and curbing the taste buds is the first important step towards a healthy old age.

Control Your Emotions

The next major move for dignity in old age is gaining control over intense emotions. Although it is important to pacify emotions at every juncture in life it becomes crucial for the elderly. Ageing has a tendency to make most people sensitive and irritable. Their moodiness can distress not only to those around them but also themselves. People must learn to control their emotions and maintain equanimity from the very beginning. After all old age does not appear in one day but begins with birth and continues throughout the life cycle. The essential and invaluable practice of staying calm at all times can, therefore, never be overemphasized. No wonder, a person with a peaceful demeanor can endear himself or herself to all.

Choose Your Language

Old people are experienced and wise. They can provide valuable guidance by communicating their knowledge to others. Speech, as we all know, is the most common form of communication but as we age our method and manner of speaking is likely to change. There are two ways of communicating: injunction and suggestion. Everyone, specially the aged, should refrain from the former, since it is often offensive and can antagonize.

Take a common example of injunction: If a mother-in-law constantly inundates her daughter-in-law with the dos and don'ts, it is bound to breed irritation; ultimately the daughter-in-law ignores her. Such an undesirable outcome can be prevented by being polite and keeping conversations relevant and limited. It is advisable to use language and format that suggests rather than instructs. For example, she could say, "Would it not be better if we do it this way?" Using courteous words is constructive, and can effectively get the desired message across. It can transform even the most recalcitrant daughter-in-law or rebellious child into pleasant and compliant individuals. Harsh words, however logical they may be, can incite even a usually calm person and repeated over time will inevitably result in non-cooperation, a breakdown of the relationship, and eventually despair and loneliness. Mild language, on the other hand, soothes as well as sweetens the environment and helps cultivate cordial relationships with all age groups.

Prove Your Worth

Enthusiasm is an age retardant. It can energize even an old physique. Passiveness, on the other hand, is detrimental to the body. It not only induces physical weakness but also promotes dependence. Old people who are frail can become burdensome to their kith and kin, as well as to themselves. Although the elderly should not be expected to carry out every possible physical activity, it is important to make an effort commensurate with their capability. Old age should not be an excuse. By engaging in reasonable and feasible activities senior citizens can certainly be an asset to society.

Cultivate Sanskars in the Next Generation

Introducing and nurturing good sanskars, culture and values in the next generation could be a rewarding assignment for the elderly. Since the parents are generally too busy with work and family affairs and have little or no time for their children, this important task is often neglected. If grandparents can take over this vital responsibility, it would benefit the entire family in at least three ways:

1. Seniors will make good use of their time by keeping meaningfully occupied.
2. The future generation would have the lasting positive advantages of a good upbringing and right values.
3. The parents will be spared of the worry and even the guilt of not contributing enough to their children's development.

This context reminds me of the glorious King Louis IX of France. A popular and influential king, he credited his success entirely to his mother. When he was a child, his mother told him, “Never walk on the wrong path. I would rather see you as an ordinary but noble soul than a disgraced and dishonored king. I would rather see this throne empty than have it occupied by such a king, and rather see you dead than defamed.” His mother's words sounded harsh but were, nevertheless, heartfelt. The child swore, “Mother, whether or not your son becomes the king, he will definitely be an honorable citizen of the country.” The future king of France thus set his goal by his mother's wise counsel.

History cites innumerable examples of invaluable influence of the elderly on children. Beginning with ancient civilizations, the practice of instilling values in children was the responsibility of grandparents. But nowadays, grandparents hardly ever relate stories to their grandchildren! Media has taken over this job, and the dismal result has become apparent around the world. It is about time we restore this time tested tradition.

There is a cautionary note, however: as the grandparents get actively involved in the noble task of fostering good sanskars in children, they must understand and reconcile with the generation gap and strike a delicate balance between tradition and changing times. Even if they find their advice falling on deaf ears, which is likely to happen every now and then, they should not get discouraged. It is common for youngsters to recall and appreciate their grandparents' words many years later. Grandparents, with their wisdom and experience, are definitely well equipped to plant the seeds of the right sanskars into the minds of their grandchildren.

Practice Preksha Dhyana (Meditation)

Old age does not mean that the need for continuing development or learning has ended! Instead, it is the time to meditate, or practice Preksha, which uplifts one's spirit and directs the energy towards spiritual growth. Preksha is a complete package of yoga and meditation. Preksha means visualization of one's true self through the self. Acharya Mahapragya says that visualizing your body revitalizes you physically, visualizing your mind keeps you in peace, visualizing your emotions purifies them, and a total comprehensive visualization of every aspect of life will allow you to reclaim your pure true self. Perception of breathing (Dirghashvasa Preksha) and total relaxation (Kayotsarg) can also help one feel always young.

These practices can lead to a peaceful, productive and contented period during one's old age. Understanding that aging is inevitable one must make a new beginning with awareness, resolution and effort.

CHAPTER XI

THE ART OF DYING

*If death is a certainty, why should dying not be made an “art”
instead of being dreaded?*

*Death is a final “closure” compelling man to part from all he likes, works and
aspires for: his assets, friends, family, and even his own body. Santhara is a
technique that teaches one to voluntarily, thoughtfully and gladly relinquish all
these without regret.*

Just as living well is an art, dying with dignity and in peace can also be an art. One who has been trained in the art of living must also learn the art of dying. Bhagavan Mahavira placed as much emphasis on the art of dying as of living. Every living creature has to go through the cycle of life and death. Mahavira pointed out that humans have a unique opportunity to transform this routine into an enlightened process. He preached the importance and benefits of living with restraint and dying in peace. Living and dying any other way would simply waste this unique golden opportunity inherent in human birth.

Death frightens every living being. Although death is understood as an inescapable final event of life, most people are not usually ready to face and accept it. Even when the body becomes frail and the faculties begin failing and death is imminent, the desire to live remains strong. Astrologers are consulted, vows of penance are made and deities are vigorously worshipped. Extraordinary efforts are made to delay, if not shun, death. But the truth is ultimately all life must succumb to this destiny.

Laws of Nature

Nature has set laws to regulate our universe. Just as life is natural, so is death. Life and death are cycles; death after life and life after death. Death spares neither the young nor the old, drawing in everyone without distinction, king and commoner. It does not exempt even the saints. All living beings must succumb to it sometime, whether willingly or unwillingly. Neither intimidation nor prayer can defeat death. The following excerpt from a poem written in Hindi tells the truth about death:

*“Swarna-bhasma ko kbane vale isee ghat par aye,
Dane been chabane vale isee ghat par aye.
Gagan-dhvaja faharane vale isee ghat par aye,
Bina kafan mar jane vale isee ghat par aye.”*

“All the dead are brought to the same final destination, irrespective of whether they ingested gold or just subsisted on ordinary staples!

No differences remain between the glorious and the destitute.
Rich or poor, mighty and feeble, all End up on the same pyre.”

Since death cannot be controlled, Bhagavan Mahavira said to his principle disciple, “Samayam Goyama! Ma pamayae.” “Gautam! Practice vigilance every instant!” Here, vigilance means awareness—awareness of thoughts, actions, emotions, attitudes, and the self. His message was, “Just like a dry tree which can crumble when touched, or a drop of dew on a blade of grass which can be blown away by the slightest breeze, life too is fragile and short. Therefore, be cognizant of every moment.”

In this materialistic age people have forgotten spirituality. They equate pleasure with the acquisition of material objects and feel miserable when they do not succeed in their efforts to possess them. This obsession drives them to accumulate far more possessions than they actually need, using any means, fair and foul, to obtain them. They remain engrossed in this pursuit till their last breath, so they have no time to prepare for their end. Because of their foolish pursuits they realize too late that they have missed the opportunity to develop their inner lives.

When asked to do some introspection about their spiritual needs, people commonly tend to sidetrack the issue with the thought, “It is too early to indulge in religious pursuits. There is a long life ahead. This is the time to eat, drink, and be merry. When I retire from work I will look into spirituality.” Such thinking is pseudo-intellectual, short-sighted and egotistic and promotes erroneous beliefs against spirituality, self-analysis and humility.

An amusing story illustrates the present-day disinterest in spirituality:

A Sanyasi told a youth, “You should follow some religious practices. Life is precious. Do not spend it only in worldly pleasures and responsibilities.”

The youth replied, “Sanyasi Ji! I am quite young. This is when I should earn money. The time to be religious is a long way off. My entire future lies ahead. When I grow old I will follow religion.”

During the course of their conversation the Sanyasi asked the youth, “Did you intend to come to see me or were you going somewhere else?” The youth replied, “Well, I was on my way to buy life insurance.” The Sanyasi said, “Life insurance? You look quite young. Why do you need it now?” The youth replied, “You are right. I am young. But these days, safety and security can not be taken for granted and, therefore, one cannot be too confident about life. If a person is insured, his family would be spared the hardships they could face after his death.”

The Sanyasi interrupted, “You are contradicting yourself. Just a while ago you said you would follow the religious path in your old age. Now you say life is uncertain and you may die anytime! You are so unsure about your life that you have decided to buy life insurance, but at the same time you are so confident about living to a ripe old age that you are postponing your religious duties!” The youth immediately realized his mistake.

This is not the story of just this youth, but of all mankind. We postpone spiritual exercises to a tomorrow which never comes but we plan our worldly life for the next moment! How illogical this is! By avoiding spirituality we only perpetuate the cycle of birth and death, and continue to be in bondage to the effects of karma from a succession of past lives.

Jain scriptures mention three types of people with a false perception of death:

- The first are those who court death with the belief that being friendly with death will help them avoid it!
- The second are those who consider themselves to be fast runners, so much so that death cannot catch up with them!
- The third kind thinks that by the time death approaches, they will become immortal and thus remain confident that they are beyond death.

This thinking is futile because death can neither be a friend nor can anyone escape it. Nobody has ever succeeded in evading its clutches. The word “Amar”, meaning exempt from death, is applied to deities and angels, but according to Jain philosophy even they are not eternal. They too will eventually die and follow the cycle of life and death. If death is a certainty, why should dying not be made an art?

Progressing Towards Self-realization: Sanlekhana

People engrossed in sensory pleasures like taste, touch, sight, sound and smell are constantly on the lookout for ways to fulfill these desires. They crave different foods, fragrances and vistas. They live surrounded by “state of the art” entertainment equipment. And undoubtedly they seek love and affection from a partner, friends and family.

It is natural for people to be delighted when their sensual desires are realized, but such joy is temporary since the next craving may already be sprouting! Such pleasures can not bring true happiness which can only come from the satisfaction of giving up or resisting things for which one typically yearns. Curbing desires also imparts the strength needed to gain control over mind and body. This slow yet steady process can lead to a state where one can recognize the true “self” despite the usual worldly distractions. This could be the best phase of one's life.

By limiting desires, a person enters a relaxing phase before death which should be used as an investment for a brighter future beyond life. In Jain scriptures, this period is called Sanlekhana. This is the time to contemplate the past as well as the present, with the understanding

that the imprints of the past can be seen in the present, and that the present will be carried over to the future. This is the time to think over the purpose of life. Life is a lot more than just maintaining relations and carrying out duties and obligations. This could be a definite turning point when no one might be around, yet one can feel the presence of others; when no physical work is carried out, yet one accomplishes by keeping immersed in good thoughts; and even when no great ambitions are to be fulfilled one can stay engrossed in spiritual uplift.

Sanlekhana helps one to become detached physically by limiting food intake and emotionally by letting go of the attachment of relationships. Eventually, Sanlekhana leads one to self-realization which is the right path to a peaceful and dignified death.

State of Self-realization: Santhara

In Jain philosophy Sanlekhana is a prerequisite of Santhara—a unique way of dying. Santhara means voluntarily and consciously giving up everything that sustains life until the end comes without regret. A Hindu Saint Vinobha Bhawe, a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, was so impressed by this practice that he resorted to Jain Santhara for his own death.

One of the three auspicious aspirations prescribed for monks as well as lay people in Jain scriptures is “concentrate on completely detaching the self from physical attachments”. The objective is to enter a state of Samadhi (deep meditation) before achieving an “ideal” death.

Santhara must be differentiated from suicide. Santhara is not suicide. Instead, it is self-attainment. Intense passions and emotions are inherent in suicide which is often attributed to severe frustrations and depression. It is an indiscrete and hasty step taken by the desperate who have reached a state of hopelessness and despair. On the contrary Santhara is the final thoughtful act of life, conducted with full awareness, without passion and with no desire to live or die during the process. This is the state of becoming truly immersed within and amounts to a spiritual “celebration”.

Why should Santhara be observed? Jain scriptures clearly state that “Santhara should not be observed for worldly fame or with the intent of a better next life. The purpose should not be seeking death but looking for the road that makes death a fulfillment. Santhara is indicated when one wishes to conclude life with supreme peace.”

What is the right time for Santhara? Naturally the body should be nourished as long as it is capable of meeting the basic necessities of life and indulging in meaningful spiritual practices. When a person realizes his strength is decreasing, his senses are weakening, and when there is little prospect of recovery from disease or ageing, despite appropriate treatment, Santhara becomes an option. Nevertheless, it should be embraced with courage and only after much deliberation. Sanlekhana is the first and Santhara the final step in the art of dying. Artistic living must incorporate the philosophy of dying. A voluntary end makes one fearless and blissful till the last moment.

CHAPTER XII

THE ART OF ASSURING A PRIVILEGED LIFE IN THE NEXT BIRTH

What the next life is going to be is predominantly determined by how one lives in the present. Penance, simplicity, forgiveness, self-restraint, and forbearance will not only improve the present but also the afterlife.

People who believe in reincarnation desire Sadgati (the fortunate life) in their next life. Those who do not accept the idea of rebirth aspire for a better life in heaven or wherever they believe they will go after death. The prelude to a better next life are explained in the Jain scripture Dasavaikalika:

*“Tavo-guna-pabanassa, ujjumai kbanti-sanjama-rayassa.
Pareesabe jinantassa, sulaba suggai tarisagassa.”*

This translates to: “The practice of penance, simplicity, forgiveness, self-restraint, and forbearance in hardship leads to good standing in one's next birth”.

Penance

Penance is one of the pre-requisites to ensure nobility in the next life. Practitioners of penance can purify their spirit by eliminating the accumulated bad “karmas” and the acquisition of the good “karmas” conducive to a better current as well as future life.

What is penance? Although commonly perceived as abstaining from food and water for a certain period of time, this practice is not limited to fasting. There are twelve different ways of observing penance:

Fasting (**Upavasa**)

Reduced diet (**Unodari**)

Limiting food types (**Bhikshachari**)

Abstinence from delicacies (**Rasaparityaga**)

Physical forbearance (**Kayaklesha**)

Controlling the senses (**Pratisanleenta**)

Repentance (**Prayashchitta**)

Humility (**Vinay**)

Service (**Vaiyavritya**)

Study of the scriptures (**Swadhyaya**)

Meditation (**Dhyana**)

Physical and emotional detachment (**Vyutsarga**)

Fasting is the most widely observed form of penance. People give up food, and sometimes water, for days. While medical studies have consistently shown that periodic fasting, restricted to liquid intake, has many health benefits, the “Jain” fasting is much more valuable. While fasting (Upavasa) may not be possible for everybody, particularly those with physical limitations, limiting food intake (Bhikshachari) is a practical option. Some may find it difficult to eat less than to observe a complete fast and therefore a resolve to abstain from certain delicacies from time to time may be an alternative. Penance disciplines the self. The goal should be to differentiate between “living for eating and eating for living”.

Repentance, humility, service, spiritual books, meditation, and physical and emotional detachment are part and parcel of penance as well. These practices bring about inner purity which in turn cultivates true happiness for the life cycles to come. One should practice penance to the extent one's body can support it, based on one's capabilities and stamina. Contrary to common myth, Jain philosophy does not believe in torturing the body. Instead, it teaches us how to deal with physical suffering gracefully and to judiciously use the power of our senses. Just as a good athlete pushes his body to its limits to reach his goal, the spiritualist forces his thought process to achieve inner purity. Of course, at no time does either ignore the body's well being, since a sound body is essential for penance.

Simplicity

The second criterion for a better next life is simplicity. However, it is not easy to understand the true meaning of “simple”. Simplicity is a

virtue of a great soul. When Jesus was asked, "Who can enter the kingdom of God?" he answered, gesturing towards a child, "One who is as simple and pure as child."

A person who is beyond deceit and subterfuge is capable of achieving this powerful "simple" state. Deceit breeds problematic tension, and yet people resort to this degrading practice because of its perceived short-term advantages. In an assembly, Gurudev Tulsi asked his disciples, "What increases and what decreases with age?" A monk astutely replied, "Knowledge increases and simplicity and purity decrease with age." Very few people can maintain simplicity and purity with escalating knowledge. A truly learned person realizes the importance of "simplicity" in intention and "purity" in feeling, thereby lifting the self from ever present worldly concerns.

Once, a poor man was wandering aimlessly in the streets. A rich man spotted him and offered him a job as watchman for his garden. The poor man accepted the job and fulfilled this duty for a long time.

One day, the rich man had some guests in his house. He instructed his watchman to bring an apple from the garden. The watchman obeyed him, but the apple he brought turned out to be sour. The angry owner summoned the watchman and shouted, "Can't you differentiate between sweet and sour apples?" The watchman replied that he could not. "Why can't you?" the owner shouted again. The watchman replied, "Because I have never tasted any of them." The surprised owner asked, "Having stayed in the garden all day long, you haven't eaten any apples?" The watchman replied, "No sir, I have not, because you have employed me to watch the garden. A watchman is not at liberty to eat the fruit. If I am not supposed to let others steal, then how can I do the same?"

The honest watchman was none other than Abraham Lincoln.

Simplicity indeed is a great virtue. It means oneness of outer and inner self and of speech and action. A simple person is dear to one and all.

Practicing simplicity may be a difficult endeavor, while cheating is often an easily learned trait.

A mother once instructed her child to apply labels to the containers in the kitchen so that she could identify their contents. The child carried out her instructions. The next day when the mother opened the container marked “Sugar” and it turned out to be salt, she asked her son for an explanation. The child said, “I did so to cheat the ants!”

People seem to have lost faith in simplicity. They believe that a simple man is prone to tricks and an easy target for con artists. They do not hesitate to exploit a simple man but would never want themselves to be exploited by others. The attitude that simplicity is a weakness that lowers one's status and esteem is a misconception. In a spiritual sense, a person deceiving another is only deceiving himself. He paves the way for his own downfall. Bhagavan Mahavira said, “Purisa! Tumansi nama schcheva jam hantavvam ti mannasi.” “Man whom thou intend to kill is none other than thyself.” Eventually deceit leads to defeat, whereas simplicity leads to greatness.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is another important quality for a good, tension-free life. It is an antidote to anger. Anger is like fire and forgiveness is like the cool sandalwood or the water that puts it out. It is said that forty pounds of boiling oil can be cooled with just two pinches of sandalwood powder. Likewise, anger can be tamed by forgiveness. Discussing the consequences of anger, Acharya Somaprabha Suri says, “Anger increases anguish, eliminates humility, breaks friendships, generates anxiety, and provokes acrimonious speech. It destroys good will, clouds wisdom, and wipes out fortunes. That is why it is shunned by the wise.”

Anger seems to come easily and naturally to all, but forgiveness is very difficult to adopt. True forgiveness requires a special effort. Therefore, it is said, “forgiveness is an ornament of brave.” Cowards simply cannot forgive.

Spirituality (Dharma) is manifested in four different ways, one of them being forgiveness. Forgiveness nourishes and sweetens relations. It perpetually strengthens the bonds of a family.

A king once asked his old minister, “You have fifty members in your family. You live and eat together everyday. How do you remain happy and peaceful when in all likelihood you have different temperaments and different preferences?” The minister replied, “Your Majesty! The secret of our happiness is tolerance and forgiveness. We have learned to live with one another by forgiving.”

Forgiveness warms the heart and cools the sting. It gives one happiness not only in the present but also hope for happiness next life.

Self-restraint

The fourth consideration is self-restraint. Every society and nation has, at some time or another, experienced the unfortunate consequences of rash or thoughtless actions, either through its own bad judgement or the perpetration of others. Most individuals have experienced and suffered the unpleasant outcome of loss of self-control. Excessive desires are the root of many problems. When desire crosses reasonable bounds, moral values deteriorate, spirituality gets marginalized, and peace of mind is lost. Man gets restless as he seeks more and more than that he already possesses.

There was a time when people were content with simple living. The availability of goods and services as well as the resources to procure them were limited. People were satisfied with whatever they had. In present-day life of unbridled consumption and self-indulgence, nothing is enough. With so much more being available and accessible, people have become overly materialistic. Restraint should be one's password to a happier life. It spells safety and shelter from the extremes and the excesses surrounding us. There is no other alternative to remedy it. Sadgati (fortunate life) is the desired happy outcome for a person who can control his mental, verbal and physical cravings.

Forbearance

The fifth criterion for Sadgati (fortunate life) is forbearance, or overcoming adversities and obstacles. Forbearance requires a strong mind and unwavering resolution. A soldier is trained to defend his country. A warrior entering the battlefield with the determination to do or die earns the respect of his fellow soldiers and his countryman. Conversely, a soldier who trembles upon seeing the might of the opposite side is jeered at and dishonored by everyone. Such cowardly individuals can only serve their tyrant leaders to commit atrocities against ordinary citizens; they are rarely capable of defending their country against strong adversaries.

We once walked from Noida to Delhi, India during the Kargil war. A soldier came to see us and began talking. During the conversation he said, "We like war." When I asked why, he replied, "It is an occasion to test and demonstrate our courage. We don't care about our lives on the battlefield. It is a great moment for us when we die for our nation."

This warrior was no doubt fulfilling the requisite duties that his country had set out for him. However, his professional training had deluded his thinking. Dying for one's country is in itself not a noble act. An act of bravery is one by which one goes unwaveringly and without concern for his own life to help people and to benefit society.

Countries spend huge resources in preparing and training such professional armies. But wars or conflicts are not a solution to problems; at best they may temporarily subdue an unpleasant situation. Permanent solutions are attained on a negotiating table where both parties are made to see long-term benefits. If only countries could spend a small amount of their resources to prepare a non-violent army! Such an army would always look for a win-win result. Such an army would strive to prevent war, and work for the benefit of humanity. The training needed by this non-violent army is rigorous and only the most courageous, disciplined and committed can succeed.

An ascetic life is also a kind of war. The word “war” doesn't always indicate violence. It sometimes connotes courage and firm resolution when facing adversities. Bhagavan Mahavira said:

*“Appanameva Jujjhabhi, kin te jujjbena bajjibhao.
Appanameva appanam jaitta subamehae.”*

“Have war with your own self (deluded self). Why do you intend to fight with outer world? The person who conquers his inner self will achieve peace and happiness.”

It is very difficult to conquer oneself. A monk endures every hardship during his life as a monk with a strong will and a solid purpose. He walks barefoot from village to village, city to city, in the summer and winter, meeting people from all walks of life belonging to different castes and creeds. He does not find comfort and convenience everywhere. He must endure extreme climate. Sometimes he cannot find a proper place to stay or enough food to eat. He faces all difficulties with composure. He stays cool and calm. A soldier is courageous for the sake of his country, a monk for his liberation. A layperson can also practice endurance and become a soldier of non-violence.

To lift oneself up self evaluation and self modification based on the five criteria of Sadgati (fortunate life) is a must. The next life can only be reshaped by the meaningful changes we make in the present.