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HINDU SADHANA

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PREFACE

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HINDU SADHANA

The word *Sadhana* comes from the Sanskrit root *Sadh*, signifying effort, exertion or activity (*Kartritva*). *Sadhana* stands for practice — *Abhyasa* — the special kind of effort (*Prayatna vishesha*) put forth for the attainment of some general or specific objective. The objective itself is called *Sadhya*, which implies practicability. It must be something in keeping with the capacity and fitness (*Adhi- Kara*) of the agent (*Sadhaka*). This is the key doctrine of Hindu Dharma. The Bhagavad Gita puts it succinctly in a half-verse, which is repeated twice — *Shreyan svadharmo vigunah paradharmat svanushtitat*.

Better far, for a man is his own congenial and appropriate duty, albeit of a lower order, than what may be higher, but does not pertain to him. *Adhikara* is the positive and manifest side of a situation, the negative aspect of which is called *Samskara*, the innate aptitudes and dispositions of a person, emerging from his past. A man's capacity or actual freedom of action is circumscribed by these two considerations: *Adhikara* and *Samskara*. Within these limits, however, he has due scope for choice. In the Hindu scheme, a worshipper is free to image the deity of his heart's desire (*Ishta-devata*) in any form which appeals to him. The Lord says in the Bhagavad Gita: "In whatsoever form a devotee should approach me, in that very form do I reveal myself to him." In its more technical form, this principle is enunciated in the *Yogasutra* also, where an aspirant is allowed to meditate in any manner which is congenial to him.

This freedom is a striking feature of Hindu *Sadhana*. So much so, that not merely love and submission, but even hatred and defiance have been shown as means of approaching the Lord. An instance is the story in the Puranas of the attendants of Vishnu—Jaya and Vijaya — who being under a curse to be born as mortals on earth, preferred to regain their original proximity to the Lord after three short lives as enemies, rather than after seven protracted lives as devotees.

The attainment of the goal is called *Siddhi*, which signifies success. This is the crux of all *Sadhana*, whether it is capable of delivering the goods or not. As the proverb has it, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In regard to Tantrik *Sadhana*, which has been the target of much ununderstanding criticism, a great exponent, Sir John Woodroffe, has said "the ultimate test of any form of *Sadhana* is not whether it is ethical, rational and acceptable to prevalent ideas, but solely whether it leads to the end aimed at or not."

The term *Siddhi* has been used in various contexts — worldly as well as spiritual. No doubt, the ultimate goal of all spiritual endeavour, according to the Hindu Dharma is release or *Moksha*. But this should not make us forget that there can be various intermediate grades of *Siddhi*. Thus, the Gita says: "Among many people, seekers for *Siddhi* are rare. But, even among the few who attain *Siddhi*, he who reaches to the essence of the Supreme Being is rarer." Frequently, in the Gita, the idea occurs that human activity, especially of the type of *Yajna*, reaches speedy fulfilment in this world alone. But the quest does not end here. It is after attaining *Siddhi* that the seeker can reach forward towards the supreme experience of Brahma. Thus, it is clear that *Siddhi* in the primary sense is an intermediate stage. It also signifies various attainments endowed with supernatural quality which intervene in the course of spiritual discipline. In themselves, they are of little value. If one should make them the ultimate objective and stop there, they will prove obstacles to release. That is why the *Yogasutra* says that *Siddhis* are obstacles to ultimate realization.

The entire Hindu Dharma can be considered as the science of practice—*Sadhana sastra*. It is noteworthy that the word *Dharma* itself is, in almost every context, treated as if

synonymous with *Karma*. With the prefix *Sva*, *Svadharmā* as well as *Svakarma* signify activity appropriate to the circumstances of each individual person and situation. Thus, *Dharma* in the basic sense is neither contemplation nor speculation, but is activity-centred (*Kartritva pradhana*). This is a crucial characteristic. It is a common misunderstanding, fostered especially by foreigners, that the doctrine of *Karma* implies fatalism. Far from it, if man's actions are predetermined, there would be no scope at all for moral responsibility. But, the doctrine of *Karma* holds above all else that man is entirely responsible for his actions and that as he sows, he shall reap; and that what he now reaps is the fruit of what he has sown in the past. With this concept dominating the entire outlook, Hindu civilization has been, at all times, morally dynamic (*Gatiman*).

That activity has always had priority in the Indian mind over contemplation is shown by the emphasis on the path of activity — *Pravritti*, which alone was prescribed for the majority of men, as against retirement from the world—*Nivritti*. Which is indicated only for the select few? Thus, the entire science of conduct, especially in its religious bearings, is called *Dharma Sastra*, and the rationale of it — *Dharma Mimamsa* or synonymously *Karma Mimamsa*. The fact that it is also called *Purva Mimamsa* testifies to its unquestioned priority. That in the Indian spiritual outlook the emphasis should at some time in the past have been shifted from activity to withdrawal has had insidious results leading to a decline in national vigour and effectiveness. In this connection, we may bear in mind the view of Manu, our great lawgiver: "It is not enough to be born a Brahmin; but one should also be learned. Learning by itself is, however, inadequate, unless the synthetic intelligence (*Buddhi*) has been duly cultivated. But even such intelligence is futile if it does not go hand in hand with appropriate activity; for it is right activity alone which ripens one for the knowledge of Brahma." For India in the past, Manu's words were normative. Even for us today, they may well prove a tonic.

The path of activity suited for the generality of mankind was deemed to be two-fold; worldly (*Laukika*) and spiritual (*Paralaukika* or *Sukshma*). Both are essential, and one is by no means a substitute for the other. This should not be lost sight of, whenever we speak of *Sadhana* as pertaining mainly to the latter aspect: to the field of symbolic activity, of psychic (*Sukshma*) cause and effect. *Sadhana*, in this technical sense, is a special kind of *Karma* (*Karma-vishesha*). In modern idiom, it is the equivalent of practical experimentation, resulting in unique (*Apurva*) experience (*Anubhava*). As a typical form of such activity, universal in Hindu practice may be mentioned the *Sandhyavandana*, which is an epitome of all spiritual practice. But it would be well to remember that practice (*Achāra*), and theory or reflection (*Vichāra*) were never separated. There was a reconciliation (*Samanvaya*) between the two resulting in novel experience. At all stages, there was also a recognition of the need for a balance between two distinct and complementary factors, the sphere of personal effort and the region of possibility which is not open to direct control (*Daiva*). The cooperation of both factors was essential for success.

Viewed from another angle, there is first the sphere of physical causation (*Adhibhuta*). Side by side, is the interpenetrating region of subtle or psychic causation (*Adhidaiva*). It is in this latter sphere that *Karma* in its special sense operates; as such it was also called *Adhiyajna*, *Yajna* being prototype of all spiritual activity. The aim of all spiritual activity was the realization of the fourfold ends of life (*Purushārtha*). These were primarily social and ethical obligation (*Dharma*), the achievement of human ambitions and desires (*Artha* and *Kama*), and finally release from all sense of bondage (*Moksha*). These were arranged in a unified and graded scheme, the harmonized and balanced objective being called *Purushārtha*.

Apart from any specialized *Siddhis*, the one main *Siddhi* was that of *Purushartha*—the attainment of a rounded goal of human life, to the extent possible for any individual.

Now, we may proceed to examine some special features of the purposeful activity, known as *Sadhana*. The outlook involves at the outset a realization of the coexistence in all experience, of unity and diversity, of the one and the many. This Indian insight, which is fundamental, finds its earliest expression in the Rigveda which declares *Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*, existence is one but presents itself as many, as the wise say. This principle makes possible a democratic conception of society (*Samaja*), in which the individual (*Vyakti*) is healthily integrated. The interests of the two are mutual and not exclusive. Philosophically, the concept of totality and particularity find expression respectively in the terms *Samashti* and *Vyashsti*—or in a slightly different perspective—*Brahmanda* and *Pinda*.

The concept of the State (*Rashtra*) and of life lived and ideals held in common figures prominently in the Veda. The prayers embodied in the hymns are generally for common goods to be enjoyed by all together. Even the objective of the *Gayatri*, which by common consent is the most sacred verse in the Veda, is collective illumination of the intelligence not for “me” alone, but for all together (*Nah*). The prayers are all for joint welfare— if we may so put it, the ideal is of a welfare state — spiritually if not politically.

The foundation of the state was envisaged in the family, securely based upon the love and cooperation between man and woman. It was a symbolic union of opposites, a reconciliation of antitheses — *Dvandva somanvaya*. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* says, “The couple is to be revered. It is the couple, which is the origin of progeny (*Praja*) and thus, the couple is the foundation of the State itself (*Tad yad mithunani rashtram bhritah*). Even the Devas (ideals) are upheld by this union of opposites (*Mithuna ete devah*), and it is these Ideals which ultimately support the State (*Tasmad ete rashtra bhritah*). It follows that woman has coeval importance with man. She is not inferior nor a mere appendage of man, but his companion in the path of *Dharma* (*Sahadharmacharini*). The *Brahmana* says that the wife is one-half of the self, and Manu ads: “Where women are honoured, there the Devas rejoice; where they are not honoured, all (spiritual) activity (*Kriya*) is fruitless.

Marriage was not considered a means for sense enjoyment. It was literally intended to keep the home fires burning. The home was identified with woman (*Grihini griham uchryate*). The fire (*Agni*) maintained in the household was not merely the physical element needed for cooking and domestic purposes. It was identified with fire figuratively in all its aspects, as vitality (*Prana*), as the digestive fire (*Jatharagni*) which assimilates food, as the fire of the intelligence (*Jatavedas*) which is understanding, and is venue for the performance of *Yajna*. Fire (*Agni*) and activity (*Karma*) were always associated in the household life. It was only the Sannyasi who was exempt from the obligation to maintain the fire (*Niragni*) and from activity (*Akriya*). As *Yajna* was the principal form of spiritual *Kriya*, the head of the house was called *Yajamana*, the agent of the sacrifice, and no sacrifice was possible without the wife’s participation. It is essential in this connection, to keep in mind the very wide significance which the Oita attaches to the concept of *Yajna*, according to which any activity, if undertaken with the proper intent, becomes *Yajna* in essence.

Incidentally, it may, without hesitation, be held that in the historical perspective, when it began to be decried, it led to loss of virility (*Virya*). It was not for nothing that potency (*Shakti*) had always been associated with the concept of womanhood. It was a realization of the harm done by the depreciation of womanhood, and the ignoring and ignorance of the true function of sex, which perhaps led to the Tantrik reaction against the devitalized beliefs and

practices of Hinduism. The rationale of such apparently objectionable practices has been well expounded, for example, by Woodroffe. The idea was that pure spirituality (*Shiva*) divorced from active potency (*Shakti*) becomes meaningless and unreal. In the words of Shankaracharya's famous hymn "*Shivah shaktya yukto yadi bhavati shaktah* etc." It is only in union with *Shakti* that *Shiva* is effective.

Obviously, in the name of a misconceived 'higher' spirituality, the Veda itself, its ideals (*Devas*) and practices like the *Agnihotra* or its equivalents which had been the backbone of life, fell into desuetude. The Vedanta then literally proved to be the end of the Veda! The fire was then extinguished in this country. When the four-faced Brahma as the living embodiment of the four Vedas traditionally forfeited his claim to worship, the creative intelligence (*Jatavedas*) retired into obscurity. Such, figuratively, has been the fate of India during the last few centuries. What a contrast this presents to the career of the West, where the fire has been kept fully blazing, although it has no doubt assumed some deadly aspects! Symbolically, our problem is how the extinguished fire would be reinstated in its more beneficent forms. Our myths hide in themselves profound truths of the collective experiences of the race. One series of symbolisms in the Puranas depicts the restoration of the national ideals to their due position through the intervention of *Shakti* symbolised as woman, of the mighty Durga who is described as being of the nature of (*Analatmika*). The myth points the way.

The trouble arose when other-worldly and unworldly attitudes like *Bhakti* and the Vedanta came to claim exclusive allegiance. I am not trying to depreciate either of these great disciplines. They are respectively the source and the goal of spiritual endeavour. But *Karma* ought to link them up and form the bulk of the body. If these two termini are identified with the whole of spirituality, the inevitable result is that they will coalesce, and the body will disappear. Symbolically, they are comparable to water, which is the origin of fire as well as the locus of its extinction (*Laya*). Socially they are identifiable with spirituality (*Brahma* or *Brahmanya*), while *Karma* is bound up with fire, vigour and martial spirit (*Virya* or *Kshattra*). Our ancient civilization contemplated the coexistence and mutual reinforcement of these apparently antithetical but really complementary ideals. When they are divorced from each other it leads to the weakening and ultimate extinction of both. This is exactly what seems to have happened.

In the historical perspective, the fire was extinguished in India towards the close of the great age of the Gupta Emperors; and the religion which has survived embodies various forms of pernicious anaemia characterizing a helpless spirituality. If in modern times our leaders have made an outcry against the ancient religion, it is more on this account than on account of the conflicts fostered in the name of religion. Their attitude is not so much hostility towards religion itself, as rather against those effects and excremental forms of it, which have led to contempt for normal human activity and thus hastened the decay of our civilization. Their plea is for a relighting of the extinguished fire, for the reinstatement of activity and objective human interests. Today, there is no lack of spiritual food in India; but the digestion is too weak to assimilate it. What is wanted is the building up of the assimilating fire which will burn up the dross of the ages, and which alone will revitalise our civilization;

We cannot conclude the social aspect of *Sadhana*, without appraising in its proper context, the idea of community, as for example, embodied in our own. In its essence, the community is far from being an organization for economic or political aggrandisement. When employed for such purposes, it altogether loses its rationale and justification. But, the

true community is a community of cultural and spiritual ideals, emotional as well as intellectual. It is an extension of the family (*Kula*) and a means for communion, a vital and necessary link between the family and the world at large.

I am by no means preaching for a restoration, under modern conditions, of obsolete religious practices. That would not be feasible nor even desirable. I am rather hoping for the retention of the principle itself with its fundamental implications. Faced with the prospect of total destruction, would it not be the part of wisdom to sacrifice the burden of the externals, if only we can retain the core? As a Sanskrit maxim (*Nyaya*) puts it: *Sarvanashe samprapte ardhham tyajati panditha*. Half a loaf is certainly better than no bread.

One more aspect of *Sadhana* remains to be considered by us—its relation to modern thought and science. From this angle, *Sadhana* is seen in its true perspective as applied psychology based upon centuries of experience. All ritual is now recognized as a type of language and communication. We may go farther and say that the performance of ritual is not so much imitative activity as experimenting and learning by doing. In the light of this the ancient elements of *Sadhana* such as *Asana*, *Achamana*, *Pranayama*, *Nyasa* and *Mudra* acquire a new and practical significance. Practice of these modes, even for a short time, with intelligent reverence will convince a seeker with the proper *Samskaras* about the reality of a subtle world of experience possessing logic of its own. Personal awareness of the functioning of such a sphere of experience, underlying all gross physical experience, is the first step towards the state of mind known as *Astikya*, which is the starting point of all *Sadhana*. As *Sadhana* progresses, the concept of *Astikya* grow in significance; and it comes to be realized that there is gradation in degrees of subtlety, corresponding to degrees of reality. It is in this context that the Gita says: “The senses (*Indriyas*) are superior to (subtler than) their objects. Mind (*Manas*) in which the senses are centred, like the spokes of a wheel in the hub, is superior to the senses. The determinative intelligence (*Buddhi*) is superior to the mind. Finally, what is beyond *Buddhi*, that which impels *Buddhi* itself is the Supreme Principle/’ that is the ultimate goal of *Sadhana*.

19th century science, with its crude oversimplified materialistic notions of nature and of experience was largely responsible for discrediting the methods of *Sadhana*, which had been developed in the country from time immemorial. They came to be looked upon as superstition. But the advances in the 20th century science are transforming the materialistic world view rapidly and fundamentally. Modern Physics tends to reduce all matter to modifications of energy, and energy itself is coming to be looked upon more and more as a form of mental functioning. The philosophic implications of such a revolutionary change are depicted in the writings of such differently oriented scientists as Eddington, Jeans, Heisenberg and Max Planck.

Side by side with development of the new physics, psychology has stepped into a key position in shaping modern thought. Long ago, William James and the Danish psychologist Lange, had shown to what an extent emotion is the outcome of prior physical movements, and not the reverse, as popularly believed. Although this theory has now been shown to be neither complete nor conclusive, still its applicability to the control of emotion and mental states by the regulation of physical movements is a point of value for *Sadhana*. So are the effects of auto-suggestion and the connected recognition that in mental happenings there is frequently a great deal of “reversed effort” as Baudouin calls it, leading to results contrary to those aimed at. This makes it probable that in the psyche results are achieved more by indirection than directly. This provides the *raison d’etre* of the oft-repeated Vedic dictum: *Paroksha priya Iva hi devah*. ‘The gods love the indirect approach.’ It must have been for

this reason that so much stress was laid in Hindu practice on the need for disinterestedness, *Vairagy* to go with practice, *Abhyasa*. That also explains the emphasis in the Bhagavad Gita on the necessity for the performance of action without anxiety for results.

The most revolutionary discovery in psychology was, however, that of the function of the unconscious mind, demonstrated by Freud and his successors. The importance of this discovery is so basic that McDougall has compared Freud's hypothesis to Newton's formulation of the theory of gravitation. It is now generally admitted that the unconscious part of man's psyche is not only much vaster in extent than the conscious fringe, but is also dynamic and insidious in its working. Dreams and fantasies, which were till recently dismissed as things of no significance, are now considered as playing a crucial role in the functioning of man's mind and as forming gateways to the unconscious.

Freud's researches have been provided with an altogether new dimension by C. G. Jung. His notion of the collective unconscious hierarchically shared by groups and races and ultimately by mankind itself, makes it out as a connected matrix out of which individual minds stand out as projections. Clinical observations suggest that the functioning of the collective unconscious is mainly through archetypes, and that mythology really pictures the interaction of the archetypes. In the light of this, not only mythology, but even such despised topics like alchemy and astrology, acquires a new significance and application. They come to be recognized for what they are, as representations of psychological functioning at deeper levels, and not as primitive and misguided science. In fact, he goes further and posits a new acausal type of functioning in experience, which would account for those mysterious coincidences which are of common occurrence in life, which he terms "Synchronicity."

The relationship between the mind and the body has also been the subject of investigations which have yielded surprising results. It would not be possible to summarize them here, but one point of interest may be mentioned. The practical methods developed by F. M. Alexander demonstrate the possibilities of a more complete and wholesome integration between the activities of mind and body. The implications of these facts and the rationale they afford for elements of Indian practice like *Mudra* and *Nyasa* are valuable. From another direction, the researches of investigators like Korzybski in the new field known as Semantics emphasize that even the bare utterance of words causes electro-chemical and nervous transformations in the human system having far-reaching consequences. This throws light upon the time-honoured Indian idea attributing efficacy to the vocalization of significant formulae called *Mantras*. From one angle, Semantics would appear to be a theory of *Mantratva*.

Then there are the findings of what is known as Parapsychology, which show that the reach of man's mind extends far beyond what has hitherto been considered to be the limit imposed on it by the external senses. Thus, not only has the possibility of extrasensory perception (ESP) been established, but phenomena like telepathy and clairvoyance have been recognized as normal forms of experience occurring under favorable conditions. Even the possibility of physical movement at a distance being initiated by the mind, Psycho-kinesis (PK), is not ruled out. All these uncanny-looking facts which were being summarily dismissed as fantastic by scientists a few years ago, have now acquired due status and respectability. They are no longer deemed "untouchables/* and it is now possible for students to obtain Doctorates by submitting theses on such subjects even in the long-established Universities.

Finally, we may refer to the new wave of understanding which is inundating the study of the topics of ancient Indian science and philosophy. There are scholars and researchers of a

wholly original type like Sir John Wood- roffe to whom reference has already been made, Ananda Coomaraswami, and Heinrich Zimmer who has done for ancient Indian thought what Richard Wilhelm did for Chinese lore. The points which we have referred to are extremely scrappy. But, they may well serve to indicate the trends of modern thought as straws may indicate the directions of the current.

Summing up, we may say that in India's past, *Sadhana* has been seriously treated as practice entailing momentous individual and social consequences. It was based on a world outlook which posited the continuity of experience and the possibility of interaction between the mental and the physical realms, as evidenced for example in the Vedic concept of *Rita* covering the unity of cosmic and human order. In recent times, it was largely discredited by the hypotheses of 19th century materialistic science. There are again signs that modern science may facilitate the re-establishment of such a view. We Indians, whatever our weaknesses, are certainly endowed with the mental equipment (*Samskaras*) essential for pursuing the idea to its farthest limits. It is for us to experiment with *Sadhana* in a spirit of scientific inquiry and not merely out of a sentimental regard for antiquity. *Sadhana* is no substitute for obvious world activity, but rather a supplement to such effort, which enables coming to terms with the unconscious factors which ultimately determine success in human affairs. Understood and lived up to in the right spirit, *Sadhana* will undoubtedly help towards the realization of the ideal of a full and balanced life (*Purushartha*).

It only remains to add that it is indeed possible to live in such a way as to make special forms of *Sadhana* superfluous. As the Gita says: *Svakarmana tam abhyarchya siddhim vindati manavah*. "The Supreme Being can assuredly be worshipped through the due performance of one's own natural duties."

This is what the Isha Upanishad has in mind when it enjoins that only through such activity (*Karma*) shall man desire to live the full span of a hundred years. May we never lose sight of this ancient and tested principle of *Sadhana*? That we may succeed in incessantly adapting it to everchanging circumstances, modifying and developing it, and using it to its utmost capacity in order to attain such fulfilment in life as is possible for each one of us and for all together is ray fervent hope and prayer.
