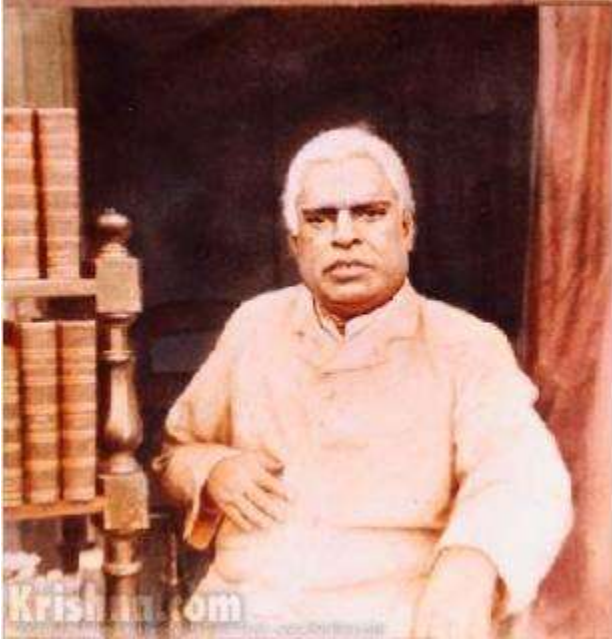


- **Overcoming obstacles**

MEDITATION 3: RETRACTION OF BAD HABITS



Summary: The text which you have received as an attached file is an English translation of a passage taken from a book written by Bhaktivinoda Thakura in Sanskrit entitled Tattva Sutra. The quoted passage from this book describes Bhaktivinoda Thakura's analysis of how bad habits are to be removed. Although Bhaktivinoda Thakura does not go into great detail about the method of retraction of bad habits, he certainly gives his reader the clear picture that retraction of bad habits is a **MUST**, that it takes great commitment sustained over time to accomplish the result, and that its successful accomplishment brings us closer to reaching our spiritual goal.

Note that retraction of bad habits is **NOT** the goal in itself. There are three statements made by Bhaktivinoda Thakura in this text which stand out the most, for me.

- 1) Lack of proper effort results in no progress in retraction of bad habits.
- 2) Proper effort must be accompanied by devotional practices; conversely, w/o strong devotional effort, retraction of bad habits will be unsuccessful, from an absolute perspective.
- 3) Quote: "If retraction of bad habits is progressive, one's devotional performances turn into devotional sentiments, which in turn blossom into the Divine-love, prema."

Questions:

- 1) Outline the four steps involved in the Retraction process given to us by Bhaktivinoda Thakura in this essay.
- 2) What good will come from self-assessment of one's bad habits, if properly and regularly monitored, in a devotional mood?

3) Briefly describe how this week's "Meditation upon Krishna" topic, namely Retraction of Bad Habits, can be seen as a natural extension of the 'Consciousness and Free Will' topic of last week.

Reading Assignment Excerpt from Tattva Viveka by Bhaktivinoda Thakura a) Retraction of bad habits and b) reading assignment from next sutra, p. 182

a) Retraction of bad habits - Srila Bhaktinode Thakur

The physical body is the chariot, the mind is the steering mechanism, the senses are the horses.

Driving this chariot back towards the Divinity away from the path of worldly attachments by the help of divine knowledge and balanced abnegation is termed as retraction. (36) The transcendental jiva-soul has entered into this material world and is enjoying the results of his actions. The returning back of this jiva to his own abode is known as retraction. An allegory has been adopted here, by comparing the physical body with the chariot, mind with the steering mechanism and the senses with horses. All the religious scriptures have been written for the benefit of the fallen souls. Therefore, all the scriptural injunctions are useful for retraction. Penance, sacrifice, abnegation, renunciation, restraint, asceticism, self-control, forgiveness, sincerity, refraining from stealing, purity, abstinence from enjoyments, temperance, truthfulness, penance of mind, learning, knowledge of sankhya, etc. are a few among the innumerable methods of retraction found in the scriptures. Among them some are beneficial for the body, some are for the mind and the others are for the senses.

Abnegation, renunciation, asceticism, restraint, self-control, sense-control, etc. are useful for the retraction of the senses. Penance, sacrifice, purity and several types of yoga performances endow the retraction of the body. Forgiveness, sincerity, non-stealing, temperance, truthfulness, presence of mind, learning, etc. are the retractions of the mind. All these practices are productive of desired retraction. All these retractive activities need not be elaborated here, since they can be learned from various scriptures. It should be known however that, by adopting these methods whereby the body, mind and senses are properly controlled, self-realization of the soul results. When the jiva-soul attains purification from the influences of mundane qualities and attachments, its natural function, Krishna-bhakti, flourishes. Bhakti is the ultimate fruit of all these yoga-sadhanas. This has been declared by the Lord in Bhagavad-gita, 6.47. The performance of the three types of retractions related to the body, mind and senses, destroys all the respective sins. In the determination of the spiritual reality of the jiva-soul all those sins create a lot of obstacles. As mentioned earlier, retraction is a part of upaya bhakti, i.e. the process of cultivation of devotion. Destruction of sins brings gradual self-purification and helps in the blooming of bhakti. Many people are endowed with a deep-rooted illusory idea that the performance of sankhya, yoga, karma, tapasya, etc. result in separate individual fruits, i.e. fruits not available through bhakti. The opposite is the fact, as Gita 6.47 instructs us. Even through retraction is a part of upaya bhakti, as far as the ignorant people are concerned, it may prove to be dangerous to them. By considering the limbs of retraction like penance, liberation, karma, monistic

knowledge, yoga, truth, austerity, etc. as to be the real fruits in themselves, those ignorant people unfortunately cause the shutting down of the door of their own upliftment. This is quite regrettable since at the end of their hard labor, if the real result is not secured, it is a matter of extreme misfortune. If a pilgrim traveling to reach any certain holy abode stops in midway at some traveler's asylum and imagines that it to be the place of his destination, how unfortunate he would be! Therefore, the followers of devotion should be cautious enough to know the features of upaya bhakti as only a means and not the end itself. Considering the different means of retraction one adopts to be an end in itself, this is where sectarian differences arise. But, this controversy is quite unnecessary. Therefore, it must be observed that, retraction should be properly followed in association with theistic knowledge and balanced abnegation.

b) Reading Assignment, from the next Sutra, p 182

If physical wants like eating, sleeping, wandering, recreation, etc., are exclusively controlled through legitimate means, it will provide ample of time for devotional cultivation. This principle itself can be called as true asceticism. This is confirmed by Srila Rupa Goswami in his book 'Sri Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu': Scriptures enjoin that a householder devotee is to be dutiful; monogamous; balanced in the activities of eating, sleeping, talking, smelling, etc.; given to the hearing of holy narrations; living according to his natural occupation; and enthusiastic in the observation of Divine love. Such a householder devotee is really detached and liberated. Apart from this type of life, no other form of balanced detachment can be seen. By the help of this type of balanced detachment only is retraction properly carried out. An apprehension may arise here that, while practicing devotional cultivation, if the retraction is not properly carried on, what will be the result of it. The following aphorism satisfies this doubt: In the observation of devotional cultivation, if retraction is not properly followed, the ultimate stage of bhakti is not attained although the aspirant is safeguarded thereby from downfall.

Unless the body, mind and senses are controlled by the help of retractional measures of both theistic knowledge and balanced detachment, the mere observation of devotional cultivation cannot provide any upliftment. The only gain of such a practice is that thereby the aspirant is safeguarded from downfall. Sins committed by human beings are innumerable. Among them, the important ones are - falsehood, hypocrisy, robbery, violence to animals, intoxication, voluptuousness, laziness, greed, disparaging, trespassing one's superiors, idling, deceiving, breach of duty towards parents, treason, evil company in the guise of dance and music, ignorance, egotism, etc. Attainment of relief from these and other innumerable sins is meant by retraction. Although the tendency for sins is not inherent within the constitution of the jivas, since they have gained ground in the heart of the jivas from time immemorial, they act as if they were the natural character of the jivas. Experienced robbers are instigated in their work by means of their previous robbery. Lascivious people having a beastly nature take recourse to concubinage and adultery by violating the rule of monogamy. By the

eating of flesh and meat when the human nature becomes demoniac, killing of the animal becomes a natural act for them and their characteristic kindness towards living being disappears. Becoming slaves to such innumerable acts, the conditioned jiva souls remain quite entangled within the world. The implication of retraction is that, when those unnatural habits are subdued by regular practice, the aspirant will receive so much help in his quest to discover the intrinsic nature of the jiva soul. The normal span of human life is very short; therefore all the evil habits cannot be abandoned within a single lifespan. For this reason, those who practice retraction should first of all examine themselves and ascertain about their individual evil habits. If the most important one among them is taken for elimination, it may take two or three years to control it.

When that first evil habit is properly controlled, then the attention should be given for the next one. Everyone should keep a thorough list of all these sinful habits. Even though most of the human beings do not possess all the sinful tendencies, keeping a complete list of these sins can help the detachment. When a particular evil habit is brought under control it should be removed from the list, and attention should be given to the rest of the list. Within the lifespan of an individual, normally it may be possible to bring ten evil habits under control. If not, there will be no possibility of control at all. Many people are unable to avoid their sinful tendencies even by being aware of them, because of the lack of proper effort in controlling them. It is very important that, at the time of controlling the sins in the said manner, there should be due regard for devotional cultivation also. Otherwise, the performances will end in dry asceticism. Even while practicing retraction, if the aspirant has to meet with the end of his present life, it is not harmful, because death itself is not the end of everything. It is a self-evident faith that there will be existence even after death. In that future existence, one's previous bad habits which have been successfully eradicated will remain that way and thereby that jiva soul will get continued relief from past sins. Many people are seen following the various items of devotional culture, but they do not follow the retraction in the prescribed manner. Therefore, their performances do not attain the stage of devotional sentiments and Divine-love. Only the tendency of devotional cultivation remains present in them. Even lascivious people are sometimes seen to have horripilations and shedding of tears when mentioning devotional service. One may show doubt in this regard that, even without observing retraction, how those people have developed Divine-love. But this cannot be a real fact, because worldly lust cannot remain within a person who has attained devotional sentiments and Divine-love. Therefore, these signs exhibited by those who have not followed the retraction, they are only conditional to the circumstances and are not genuine. The exhibition of devotional signs by such persons is called as the semblance of rati. Even this type of semblance is not condemnable but if these individuals incur any offence at the feet of real vaishnavas, this semblance will disappear at once along with any real devotional sentiments. Therefore it is the duty of everybody to practice retraction. One need not worry about shortness of lifespan that the practice of retraction

may not be completed. Why? Unless the retraction is accepted as a constant companion of devotional practices, the Divine love will not be manifested. Hence the following aphorism: If retraction is progressive, then devotional performances turn into the devotional sentiments, which in turn bloom into Divine-Love. To whatever extent retraction has progressed, the self of the aspirant attains purity to the same proportion. Again, to whatever extent the soul attains purification, to the same degree of clarity the spiritual Form of the Supreme Lord is revealed to the devotee. In this way, bhakti or the tie of the loving relation between the Supreme Lord and the jiva soul also attains purity. The grossness of devotional performances is not present in the devotional sentiments. So also, phenomenality of sentiment is totally absent in the Divine love or Krishna Prema (Note: this means that one's devotional feelings and sentiments become free from any material influence, to the degree that one has overcome one's implication in sinful behavior and sinful reactions. See Bhagavad gita 7.28). It has been already shown in the commentary of the 35th aphorism that, along with the devotional performances, Sentiments and Love are respectively manifested in the receptacles of the mind and the spirit.

Thus, when devotional performances become devoid of the grossness, they attain the state of devotional sentiments. Also when the devotional sentiments or Bhava Bhakti becomes transcendental, it becomes the unalloyed Divine-love. Devotional performances should always remain subordinate to devotional sentiments and devotional love. In the advancement of devotion, one's sentiments become independent of the physical acts of devotional performance and gradually continue to follow only the Divine-love. When the unconditional Divine-love is manifested in the liberated soul, then it will not retain any relationship with the devotional sentiments as well as with the devotional performances, because of its unconditional nature. All these stages are meant by the term "Bhakti". Spiritual upliftment depends upon the practices of retraction. Therefore if proper retraction is followed with devotional performances, it will result in the arising of devotional sentiments, and when the sentiments are associated with befitting retraction, it will positively help the manifestation of Divine-love.