

The Spiritual Response

We act based on what we believe to be true. The end of our life is usually what we cherish most. Our ideals evolve with our beliefs and convictions. For some money is everything. For some others it is knowledge. There are some who cherish love the most. Some want to possess all power. Our actions are also based on what we consider ourselves to be. If we consider ourselves to be weak, our efforts would be faint. If we consider ourselves to be strong, our endeavour would be resolute.

All of us live in a cocoon. What differs is only the size of the cocoon. There are small cocoons, big cocoons, and extremely large cocoons. Mind proves its materiality by being finite. Its finitude is evidenced by the limit of one's cocoon. The larger the cocoon of one's personality the closer one is to the infinite reality. However, it is only the bursting of the cocoon that would enable one to merge with the ultimate reality or Brahman.

The world we perceive is a mirror image of our cocoon. Narrow understandings and limited world views are signs of a crunched cocoon. Our beliefs weave the cocoon we live in. They determine what are material or immaterial to us. For the poor, basic needs could often become a luxury. For the rich, luxurious comforts are taken for granted. What one holds as essential to one's existence is what one is most afraid to lose. A child's bout at wrestling with adults is never seen as a challenge because the grown-ups are sure of their

supremacy. It is only when one is apprehensive of losing one's very basis of life that one becomes defensive or many a time, offensive. That is when people come out with their ugly fangs and try to sting their perceived enemies. Why perceived enemies? That is because most rela-

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tionships we make are just perceived and do not have much permanent reality to them. And thus, our friends and our foes are perceived. No friend or foe is greater than our own faith in ourselves.

All danger is also perceived. Ever walked cautiously so that no insect gets on your feet? No, at least, not in human habitations. One might do that in a forest with no defined pathways. Generally, we do not care about the numerous insects that surround us. Because, we do not perceive any threat. However, that may not be the case with the person we confront while on a walk. For all we know, that person could pose a larger threat to our lives and property than a miniscule member of our ecosystem. So, that is decided. Yes, most of our threats are perceived. That is why most people are more afraid of air travel than walking on a road with busy traffic. Though statistics tell us that travel by air is the safest mode of transport and that a large number of accidents happen every year on our roads,

most of us feel jittery in an aircraft. That is because of perception.

We consider our responses to our perceptions to be signs of evolution. We consider it imperative to protect ourselves from unfavourable external circumstances. To protect our body and mind, we create buildings, clothing, security, knowledge systems, and the list goes on. We go to great lengths to ensure that we do not lag in the race for the survival of the fittest. We constantly endeavour to improve this world of ours and to innovate to create better and better places to live in. We seek fulfilment and progress outside of us as an effort to attain inner peace and calm. Love is meaningful to us only as long as it produces things.

Naturally, how we respond to a problem depends largely or in most cases, solely, on how we perceive the problem. If a mentally disturbed person were to call us names, we would not bother and would probably pray for that person's welfare. On the other hand, if an otherwise healthy person were to verbally abuse us, we would not tolerate it and would come out with a fitting retort even before that person is finished. That would be our response because we perceive a threat in the verbal abuse. Deeper thought would make us see our faulty perception in this instance. How does someone calling us something bad change our nature? It does not. Apart from being disturbed by what you have heard, you do not change. And even that little disturbance would not occur if you choose not to be affected by those meaningless words.

Same is the case with anyone telling something bad about your body. Say, someone calls you a cripple. How would it change your body, if you are healthy? It would not. That shows us that we are disturbed because of our identification with external circumstances that really do not mean much. If we could train our mind to

stay rooted in the reality of our personality and not be swayed by what we experience, then we could achieve much more in life.

Till now the discussion has been primarily on the material level. What has been discussed is applicable to anyone irrespective of their religious or spiritual affiliation. What about the religious or spiritual person? Particularly one who considers oneself to be beyond the body and the mind and believes that one's true personality is a spiritual personality, the Atman. How would that person respond to external stimuli? Such a person's response would be that of indifference, not of the kind displayed by an ignoramus, but the indifference of a wise mind. This indifference is based on the belief that one is beyond the body and the mind and is unaffected by the external circumstances. It is with this poise and aplomb that the wise person chooses not to react to any external stimuli, either of attraction or of repulsion, either of love or of hatred, either of good or of evil. With this equanimity, the wise person chooses to continue to focus on one's true nature that is beyond name and form and ignores wrong perceptions of experiences based on ignorance. There is no reaction, lamentation, or brooding over anything with this person. This makes this wise person wiser by the day and takes that person closer to self-realisation.

The spiritual response is a response that would take one closer to complete identification with and realisation of one's spiritual identity. That is a response with the choice of not to respond. Just like grown-ups do not care to respond to the loving punches of a toddler, the spiritual aspirant chooses not to respond to the vagaries of life that are brought upon oneself because of ignorant identification with the body and the mind. Such response is the spiritual response since it is anchored in the knowledge of Atman. 