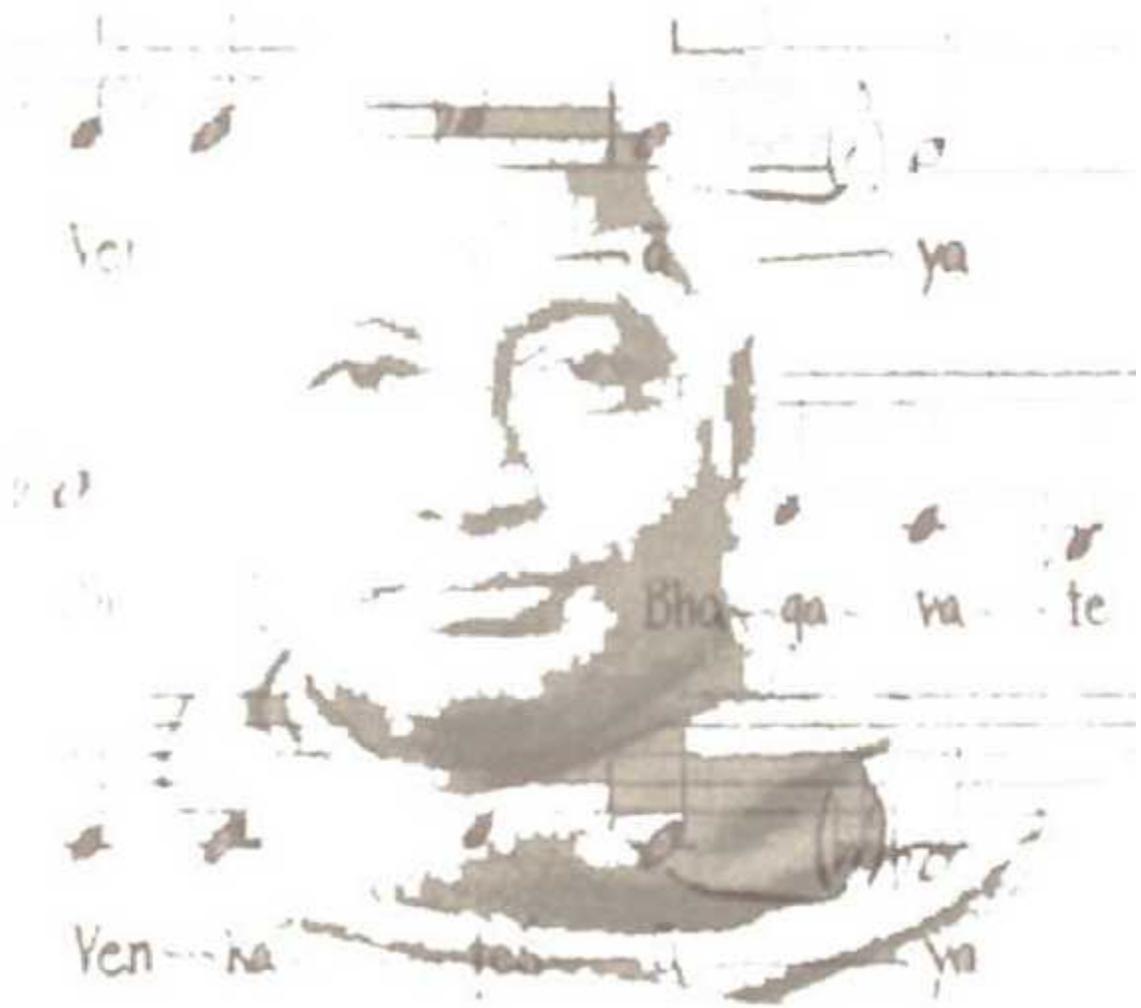


# WISDOM IN ACTION





Om Namah Venkatesaya  
Om Namah Shivaya

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## One

Wisdom in action - or living wisdom - is something which cannot be described or defined. Only an object can be seen, and measured, therefore only an object can be described or defined. However, if that object is a person, you have another problem. It is very difficult to define your friend or enemy, your father or mother, your husband or wife, or your children. It is said that a wise man never judges others. He makes no character assessments whatsoever; neither praises nor condemns, knowing that by the time the report is made, a change may have taken place. So only a non-living object can be defined or described.

Wisdom is not an object, but even if it were to be considered an object it is not something which is static, unmoving. Action itself is motion, movement, energy; and when there is a flow of energy there is action. Even that motion cannot be halted, frozen and described. If it can, it is not wisdom. A Greek philosopher said, "You cannot step into the same river twice ". Such is the nature of life, of action.

There is constant motion in life, therefore it is extremely difficult to define what life is. What is life, what is action? It is this constant flow.

When you realise that life is constant motion, constant flow, in your mind and heart you are afraid, insecure. That is perhaps why we use the word 'constant' to qualify even 'change' or 'motion'. What is constant motion? What is constant change? It is your mind that invents a thing called 'constant' in change, in motion. There is perhaps nothing constant in what is moving, but the mind, being afraid of this, creates or invents or pretends to see that there is something constant.

If it seems a bit of a puzzle, let me explain to you. I suppose about fifteen or twenty years ago many of you were little babies. Do you remember that? You probably remember what you were when you were a naughty little boy, but you don't remember when you were a baby. That little baby grew up into a small boy, and now he is a young man. Later on he will grow into a mature man and then probably will grow old. And then it comes to an end. You see that in the life around you, the sugar cane is planted, it grows, it is harvested, it grows again. You are prepared to accept all those things, but when it comes to yourself you are not prepared to accept the facts. There is a certain fear: "When I die, what's going to happen to me?" In one of the Upanishads a boy goes to Yama the God of Death and says;

"Please Yama, I would like to ask you one question and that is: people here often say that after leaving the world the soul continues to be; others say it is nonsense. Please tell me which is true."

Does this question arise in your mind or not? Somebody was here - your father or perhaps your grandfather - someone who loved you, pampered you; and one day that person is not there. Distressed by the apparent disappearance, you begin

to wonder: Perhaps he is only gone from here, he will be up there waiting for me.

I am not saying this is true or not true, but I am taking another line of approach: what is it that makes you distressed or afraid? The fact that there is change here! Yet, it is a fact. Why do you not want to face the fact? Why do you want to suggest that there is something constant in all this? Because the mind is afraid.

When you are faced with this fear, then you are given quite a number of teachings. The swami or holy man says: "There is reincarnation. Though the body grows and dies, the soul does not die, the soul goes from one body to another." This is one view. Another view is: "You are young now, in a few years' time you'll grow old, then a few years after that you'll die - make the most of it now." Again, there is an unwillingness to accept reality. Can you see that? About fifteen years ago you were a little baby - would you have liked to remain that baby all your life? No. For the next twenty, years you'll be happy that you are growing stronger, more handsome and charming and all that, but after forty you begin to rebel. You don't want to grow any more. How is that? When you are a baby you are happy to grow; after forty you don't want to grow: "There is fear, and that fear tempts you to not recognise or accept reality. It is a very foolish thing.

This is the first time we are using the word 'foolish'. Before we know what wisdom is, we must recognise what foolishness is. It is very foolish not to recognise reality. That is one of the things that parents do. I belong to their age group, and though I am not a parent, I recognise this. That is, parents do not see the reality that their children are growing up, that they are no longer children. There is a blind refusal to accept reality. That is a sign of foolishness.

So much of this philosophy that we talk about is the direct product of man's foolishness, or ignorance. In fact, it is not even honest ignorance. If you are ignorant you seek knowledge, enlightenment, wisdom; but here you are afraid to face the reality. This is the first and foremost sign of foolishness, and unless this is dropped there is no wisdom. Do you have the moral courage, the intelligence and the intellectual honesty to face the reality of change as it is?

You are not what you were fifteen years ago, and you may not be what you are, fifteen years from now. Can you face that and see that this is the truth? Or does your mind, being afraid to face this truth, create a philosophy? If it does, there is foolishness.

I am not contradicting any philosophy. It is quite possible that all they have said is true; that there is a hell somewhere and a heaven somewhere else, and that, after you drop this body, somehow you will find another body. Just as a caterpillar, after finding a foothold on the next leaf, abandons the previous one, even so the soul finds a new abode and then lifts itself off. All this may be true. But watch and see, observe your own intelligence and see if there is honest recognition of the movement of change. If you can do that you are a wise person. If you cannot, you are living a very foolish life, even though you may become a

great philosopher. Within yourself you will be a fool.

What is the sign of a fool? That he is constantly afraid. Because he does not want to recognise change as change, he introduces the word 'constant' there - 'constant change' - and in this there is only one thing that is constant - his own foolishness. He continues to be a constant fool. When you have this foolishness, what do you do? When you are a fool or - let us be more polite - when you are ignorant - both mean the same thing - you are subject to fear and anxiety, and as long as there is fear and anxiety in your heart, you will know you are still ignorant.

Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, mocks Arjuna's intelligence:

"You are worried, and full of sorrow and yet you speak as if you are a wise man. There you have a clue. You pretend to be a wise man, but you are talking foolishness. Your heart is full of sorrow."

This implies that if you are truly a wise man your heart would not be subject to sorrow or anxiety. If it is, be sure that you are ignorant, not wise.

Some people say, "Well, I am no longer subject to anxiety about myself, but I do get anxious about the starving masses." But what is the use of such altruism? If you are really anxious and worried, you become totally unfit for action. Is that sensible? Whether the anxiety or worry is concerning your own welfare or the welfare of others, the moment anxiety or worry creeps in you are dead, and there is no action. Does this mean that we should conclude: "Alright, I have dropped sorrow and anxiety. I will look after myself"? Does it mean that it is alright for the one who is strong enough to exploit others not to care about anything at all except himself? Is that the sign of a wise man?

Let us be careful not to draw false conclusions from Krishna's words. Krishna only tells us that if you are a wise person there will be no sorrow or worry in your heart concerning the past or the future. But life is there, life has to go on - life goes on whether you want it or not! That is what made these great Oriental philosophers conceive of a soul that goes on even after the body has disintegrated. But unfortunately even the belief in a life after death is not a solution to this anxiety, because if you are a fool - even if you believe that this life is not the only one - you will still manage to find an excuse for anxiety. "Heaven exists, how wonderful! But, oh God, am I going to get there?"!

There are people I know who are unconcerned about what happens to them now. They don't want any happiness, they don't want any pleasure, they don't want wealth, position and so on. Do you know why? They are too old. At seventy-five or eighty they don't want pleasure any more. All their teeth are gone, so they don't want any nuts or hard sweets. They have no desire or need to eat them. Their eyesight is dim and they are not interested in going to pictures and theatres. You would think that such a person would at least be free from all worry and anxiety. No, not a bit of it! He is worried about whether he is going to hell or

heaven. Why? Because he is an ignorant person, a fool. He has been worrying about all sorts of other things so far, and now that those doors have been closed he is looking through the one door which is open - death - and worrying about what is going to happen afterwards.

The wise person who sees the truth, who faces the reality, is neither worried nor anxious about what has been or what will come later, about a past life or a future.

We have only established that wisdom is not foolishness, ignorance. Wisdom is. It is not possible to describe wisdom - 'this is it' - because it is not an object; and it is not static it keeps moving, changing. What keeps changing? I don't know, but when I observe life I see that there is constant change here. Change itself is constant. There is only one constancy in this life, and that is the constancy of change.

When you are faced with this simple truth, and when you realise that the past is past and the future is unknown, then you are close to wisdom. You see the whole thing churning and constantly changing, and you realise that the past is past. If you made a mistake two years ago or even two minutes ago, that mistake has been made. At Jewish weddings, after the rings have been exchanged, they throw a glass down, and the bridegroom steps on it and crushes it; rather as if to say, "The thing is done, hereafter we are stuck." That glass, once it is broken to pieces, cannot be put together again. What has been done has been done.

Time is not like a slate or a piece of paper on which you can write something with a pencil and then rub it out. Time keeps flowing, keeps moving. You cannot roll it back and erase it.. Like a broken glass, it is an event which belongs to the past. So whatever is past, whether it was done twenty years ago, two years ago or two minutes ago, is past. What is to come may not come. The future is unknown. The future is not here, so it is unknown.

The recognition of change, and the recognition that the past is completely and totally dead, is an extremely important factor in the cultivation of wisdom. You may repent, but the repentance will not wipe out what has been done. You may forgive, but the forgiveness will not erase from your memory the harm done to you. You may forget, but that is only a word which has absolutely no reality whatsoever.

So, a wise man does not allow himself to be influenced by the past, whether from his own actions or the actions of others. Past is past, completely and irretrievably gone. We cannot say that we abandon it, because it is not here. What are we going to abandon? So, there is no meaning even in the expression "Abandon the past". The past is not here.

Once you begin this quest in search of wisdom, you may come face to face with your own mind, with the content or action of your own mind, and you may discover that at least twenty-five percent of your thoughts every day concern your

past. Every day you are brooding over what you did. "I should have done this," or "I should not have done this." "If only I had done that." All this is rubbish! It is gone! So a wise person does not indulge in brooding over the past or in building something in the future.

What happens to you when you free your intelligence and your life from the past and the future, when you are freed from worry, anxiety, sorrow and grief? When you are not worried at all, what happens to you?

You are filled with energy, you are full of vitality. That is also a sign of wisdom.

## Two

If your attention is not distracted by the past and the future, you have tremendous energy for action. But there is one controversial point - should one have a goal or not?

Perhaps right here it is possible to see that there may be an advantage, there may be wisdom, in having a goal. For instance, when you play football, the goalpost is the goal. You have seen the goal, it is there. Once you have seen the goal, forget all about it and concentrate on the ball. If you are looking at the goal all the time, you miss the ball at your feet. A wise player is one who concentrates all his attention on the ball and makes that his goal. This is another of the great teachings of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita:

"Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction." (II. 47)

You have a right to do. As long as you are alive, action is inevitable, motion is inevitable and is going to happen. Energy is inevitable, it is built into you; you cannot switch off that energy. The switch is with somebody else, because you did not put the switch on. Did you wish to be born, did you have any choice in it? No, you had no choice at all. Funny, isn't it? You had no choice in the most important event in your life, which you even celebrate every year - your birthday. You did not ask to be born at all. You were pushed into this world. The switch is with somebody else. When the finger that manipulates that switch turns that switch off, then, of course, that energy will leave this body. Till then, inevitably, it has to function.

So, seeing the inevitability of the flow of energy, you live, because there is no choice. You have to live as long as you have to live, the switch being with someone else. The action goes on without diverting the attention to something else, to a goal. When you hit the ball all the time, when you concentrate all your attention on the work on hand, then you become efficient. There is no loss of energy. All that you are left with is the action itself. Can we regard right action as a goal? What does this mean? When you enter the football field, where is the goal? The ball is at your feet, but the goal is in the distance.

Can we also in life regard right action as the goal? This is the difference between the football field and the field of life. There you have a goal, a goalpost. Here you have no goal - hitting the ball itself is the goal. And while doing that you must know 'this is right action'.

Doing every action correctly, with wisdom, is itself the goal. There is no goal 'out there'. Action is the goal.

What do you mean by 'action is the goal'? I am sorry - there is no goal. Some may say that you must have some kind of goal. If you like you can have all those

philosophies, but if you come back to what I am trying to suggest - that action itself is the goal - and if your mind is not wandering elsewhere, that action is bound to be right.

I have seen this in the life of My Guru, Swami Sivananda. There were great changes in his life and in His life-style; He was extremely ascetic at one stage, and then there were lots of luxuries in the ashram. At one stage He said, "This should not be done," and then later He Himself did it. For instance, He used to tell people, "Don't take tea or coffee". Then, if you went to the ashram and He knew you liked it, He would prepare first class coffee for you. When you look at all that, it is clear that the goal is not a distant one. Action itself is the goal.

If you are concentrating your attention on something far and distant, your attention is not on your action, on the work on hand. This is clear. But there is something more that is also important. When you have a goal and you are focussing all your attention upon it - "I intend to reach that in three years' time" - your action is likely to be unwise. You run towards that place and, since you are looking there and not here, you fall into a ditch instead. So, there are these two points of view: on the one hand, that you must have a goal, and on the other hand, that you can forget your goal and concentrate on each action as if that were the goal.

When you concentrate on doing that action with all your heart and soul, first of all, there is tremendous energy; secondly, you will have abandoned hope or ambition. This, again may be controversial. There are some people who say that without ambition you cannot do anything! I am tempted to modify that statement by saying that if you have no ambition you will not have a heart attack, you cannot have a nervous breakdown. If you are concentrating on the action itself there is no time for you to generate ambition in yourself There is no need to.

Once there was a boy called Prahlada who was said to have been born of a demon, but who was a great devotee of God. One day at school, his teacher had gone home and he had been entrusted with the class; so, he began teaching his own schoolmates. He asked them a few simple questions. "Boys, is there anyone here who prays for a headache? And have you ever fallen sick? So, you did not ask for it, still it came. Is there anyone here who has prayed to God, 'Please give me unhappiness?' Have you been unhappy in your life? Naturally. And it came without invitation." And in the same way he went on, saying, "People don't want to have a bad name and yet they get a bad name". He asked a very simple question: "If all these things - poverty, ill-health and so on - could come to you without your desiring them, what makes you think that, similarly, good health, happiness, prosperity, good name, etc. would also not come to you without your invitation? Were you praying last night: 'Please God, let the sun rise tomorrow morning'? Are you praying now: 'Please God, make the sun set quickly'? And yet, it rose and will set. And just as the sun rises and the sun sets, day dawns and day comes to an end, even so all these things will come and go in your life."

When the intelligence understands this, then there is no need for ambition. But if you are not ambitious - you don't want to achieve this, you don't want to become a great man - what do you do? You become a lazy man. Psychologists may not agree with me, but as far as I am concerned the lazy man is extremely ambitious. The lazy man wants to enjoy all the privileges without doing anything at all! He is supremely ambitious, while one whose actions are not motivated by ambition is still busy, because the ball is at his feet and he must kick it.

"Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits." (II. 47)

If you are walking along the bank of a river which is in flood and you slip into it, what do you do? You may or may not know how to swim, but if you don't get out you get drowned - whatever happens, you are doing something. Even so, there is this stream of life which is flowing and we are all in it. I won't say drowning in it! We are all in the stream of life. Can you realise that? That is all you need to realise

When you realise that, you don't have one idle moment. And when you realise that, you have no need for ambition. Life brings plenty of opportunities - opportunities fall at your feet! You neglect them because you have some goal or ambition somewhere else, "I don't want to do this, I want to do that." Then this opportunity goes away and that other opportunity does not come. That is it.

So, without ambition, even of being idle, "Be constantly active, because that is inevitable," says Krishna. Kick the ball at your feet, but with total concentration on the action itself. Then one is freed of ambition.

"He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and selfish purposes and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge - him the wise call a sage." (IV. 19)

Who is the wise man? He whose actions are free from ambition or desire, and sankalpa - planning and scheming. Scheming and ambition go together. Greatest wisdom is needed at the commencement of an action. It is important to understand this, because once you have started an action you are stuck with it. Those who are not married yet wonder, "Shall I get married or shall I not?" At least it looks as though you have a choice. Once you have made the choice and have commenced this business of leading a married life, you are trapped. It is not possible for you then to look around and say, "Maybe I can pull back". You cannot pull back, you are in it! So, once you are in it you are floating along - drowning or flowing, that's your problem. So, greatest wisdom is needed at the commencement of an action.

What is the character of a wise man's action? In the beginning, the wise man's action is free from ambition, planning or scheming. That is, the motivation for doing it is neither ambition nor scheming, because in the yogi there is this fire of wisdom, and that fire takes care of desires, ambitions, and all that.

There is another verse in the Bhagavad Gita:

"All commencements of action are veiled, clouded by defects." (XVIII. 48)

And then there is yet another verse where the same expression occurs:

"The yogi abandons all commencements." (XII. 16)

That is a strange expression. "The yogi does not commence anything at all, the yogi does not initiate any action at all." What does that mean? When does the commencement of an action become 'clouded by defect' - impure. And how does the yogi refrain from commencing action if he is going to be constantly active? How can you be constantly active in this world without initiating any action? You have to be busy day and night, and yet you should not commence any action; and you should also be extremely cautious to see that when an action is commenced it is not impure.

This implies absolute vigilance, tremendous care. Which means you are not going to walk through life blindly. You are going to walk through life with both your eyes open - perhaps your third eye also!

What is meant by: "The yogi abandons all commencements"? One great sage suggested that the yogi does not initiate an action, but participates in action initiated by others. That's quite simple. You don't want to get married, but if your parents arrange your marriage you just join in, no problem. You don't want it, but when it happens, it happens.

Unhappiness comes and you suffer it. Somebody comes from behind you and hits you on your head, wittingly or unwittingly, and it hurts you. You endure it without complaining; and on the same day somebody gives you a bar of chocolate. You put it in your mouth and you eat it. You didn't ask for it, you had no, desire for chocolate - somebody gave it to you and you ate it. This is one interpretation.

Of course, in this stream of life, as it flows, every action has its originator. Somebody has had to give the first push; and it is possible that sometimes it has to be your body that has to do that. For instance, this seminar has been organised by somebody. It is possible that that somebody - that body - may be this body. That is what life decides, that is what God determines.

There is the answer already! Can you see, right then and there, that the action is not initiated by you, but by God? When you are apparently initiating an action, can you at the same time look within yourself and see where the action arises? Is there an ambition in you, is there a desire? Do you want to achieve something foolish?

Instead of your parents arranging a marriage, when you are walking along the

road, one day you see a girl, and she looks at you. There seems to be an invitation. It is possible that the invitation comes from you. It is what happens in the stream of life. Somebody has to take the initiative, and it so happens that that somebody is you. What do you do now? You have to take the initiative, then and there. Is it possible for you to become aware of the fact that it is not you? You have no desire for this to happen, nor a desire to avoid it. In exactly the same way can you, looking into yourself at that point and in that situation, observe what is happening in you?

The thought that you should get married has to occur to somebody or other. You don't just get married. If it is not you, it is your father or mother, or the girl, the girl's father or mother or grandparents. The idea has to arise somewhere. Suppose the idea arises in you?

You must observe the sentence "The idea arises in you." What has arisen? Only the idea has arisen. Maybe it is the beginning of an action, but right then and there you look for the source of the idea. Is it that you want this, desire this? Or does even the idea arise from somewhere else - from life itself, from God, from something beyond you? The ability to observe this is called meditation. "I do not desire it and yet, if it has to be, it has to be," is the yogi's attitude.

You realise that this does not arise in you. You are not the originator of this action. It is not as simple as I am making it seem. You will realise that, because you have seen several people - even swamis - indulge in this nice argument: "I don't do it. It is God who does it."

You are a young man, and suddenly the idea arises in you that you want to get married. There is a girl, and you propose to her and the marriage is celebrated. You come and tell me: "Swami, I didn't initiate this thing at all, it is God's Will, it sprang from God. I am a pure yogi." The next year if she abandons you and goes away with someone else, what happens to you? Are you heart-broken? If you are, then the first statement - "The idea didn't arise in me" - was bluff. If it didn't arise in you, then her leaving you wouldn't affect you at all! You would see that also as God's will. If you can't do that, then your observation was not right, or there was hypocrisy - which is more likely. So, this is not a philosophy which is meant for easy application.

Consider again the words of the Bhagavad Gita: "All commencements of action are clouded as smoke clouds fire. There is a very beautiful meaning here. What gives rise to smoke? Fire. But when there is smoke you don't see the fire! How stupid of this fire to give rise to something which veils it, and which can even, put it out if there is no cross ventilation. If a candle is burning and you put a lid on top of it, the candle is put out in a few minutes, because it was emitting smoke and the smoke put out the flame itself. That happens very often. Even so, there is this idea and the action, and you think that the action is pure fire. "Oh, I am wise, I am full of wisdom. I am full of insight." And yet that insight itself creates a confusion. Strange, but it is true. At one point you think, "It is God's Will, it is not

my will at all, I have no ambition at all, I have no desire." That is like the blazing fire of knowledge; but somehow, if you are not careful and vigilant, that knowledge itself gives rise to the smoke of confusion and very soon you are trapped. Is that clear?

You look at that girl and talk to her. "You know, we are not getting married, it is God's Will that is getting us married. So from now on we will not indulge in playing, we will be very serious and remember God's Will all the time." A few months later that flame has given rise to so much smoke that the flame has gone! How to avoid this? Only God's Grace can save us from that error. I don't think it is possible for human intelligence to avoid that.

That which bums all the time in one's heart and prevents such a calamity is called wisdom. It is not as though this wisdom can be acquired or sustained by human effort. It has to be earned. Do you know what that means? You work for someone, you wash his clothes and sweep his house, because he has promised to give you ten rupees. At the end of the day, you come to him and ask for the money. You have worked for him, you have earned it; but still he will have to give it to you. To give or not to give is his business - not yours.

In the same way all this wisdom has to be earned, but eventually it can only be given by God.

There is a beautiful verse in another scripture called the Durga Saptashati which implies:

"You think you are a wise person. Maybe you are a wise person, but at some point your wisdom is switched off without your knowledge."

What is the power that does it? One does not know. The example one has to bear in mind is the flame and the smoke - the candle in a little container. You keep it there, the flame is glowing, the fire is burning; and yet while it bums, the fire itself generates smoke. If you put the lid on it is gone. You didn't blow it out, the smoke created by the fire put out the fire.

In the same way, even if you are very wise, the action generated by this wisdom itself can put out that wisdom, mar that wisdom, cloud that wisdom - and therefore it becomes terribly important to be regular in one's prayers or meditation, and thus sustain constant vigilance and understanding.

## Three

All actions, and the commencement of all actions, are clouded, as fire is clouded by smoke. A girl walks in. Ah, you are the attraction - I was wondering why suddenly all the attention was there and not here! There is a hint here which was demonstrated just now. I am talking to you, and you are listening to me, and the talk is going on. A girl walks in, and suddenly there is a diversion of attention. That is, there is a new beginning there. The discussion has been continuing for the past three days. There is no harm in this, it doesn't produce any mental disturbance; but, when a girl walks past, suddenly you start looking there. If you understand why this is so, you have understood the whole of the Bhagavad Gita teachings and the teaching concerning how to generate and sustain that wisdom while living a full life.

If you are watching an exciting show - it may be football or a striptease act - then your attention will not be distracted by this girl walking past. Is that right? Since you are more interested in what is going on, your attention is not distracted by a new arrival. Only when your interest is not keen is your attention distractable. So that is the mischief.

There is an ongoing thing called life; what is it that makes you turn around? The fact that you are not interested in what is going on in life. If you are not interested in this talk, you are distracted. Do not blame the distraction. Distractions will always happen. If it is not this girl, a bird will fly past, a dog will bark, or a truck will enter the compound. It is not as though you are interested in seeing this girl or the dog barking or the truck entering, because you have seen plenty of girls, you have seen plenty of trucks, and you have heard plenty of dogs bark; but it shows that the interest in what is going on is not keen. This is a vital problem in our life.

Why are you not focussing all your attention on what is happening now? Because the keenness of interest is lost. It is at that time that all distractions take place; whether you are practising meditation, studying your lessons, playing or doing whatever you are doing. When are you distracted? When you are not interested in what you are doing. Otherwise there is no distraction in life.

I don't know what you are interested in - probably football, or some other game, or television. And in other countries they are interested in Go-Go dancing or striptease. That man who is watching these shows cannot be distracted. The man who gambles doesn't care for the world around him. Though people say that concentration and meditation are very difficult, they are not very difficult at all. You are doing it all the time. So Krishna says: "There is an ongoing process called 'life' in which you and I and all of us together are made to do all sorts of things. There is no beginning here."

Day after day the life stream flows on and on, and we are all part of this; jumping and dancing and doing all that we have to do, like flotsam and jetsam -

pieces of wood that are caught up in a flood. You have probably not seen big floods and how even really big objects, like great big trees are borne along by this flood as if they were nothing.

That is what is happening to us. We are being borne along by this stream called life in which we are helplessly behaving in one way or another. Krishna tells us: "In order to be wise we ought to examine this life, and ask 'What is this life? What am I in relation to this life?'" Instead of doing this we live this life so mechanically that we have lost all interest in it. That is when the distraction arises.

Cravings or ambitions do not arise if all the time you are keenly observing the fact of life itself. If I have not understood what makes me sit here and talk to you, where is the sense in entertaining an ambition related to this action? You don't know how well or how badly you have done your exam until the results come, and meanwhile there is no sense in planning the future. Most of the time we do not understand the ongoing process. This is something which is flowing - we do not know when it started, so perhaps it did not start at all! Perhaps there was no beginning to this life.

The correct understanding of the nature of life is itself wisdom, and in that there is no fault and no sin apart from the distraction. We are sitting, this is an ongoing process. In this there is no fault, no error. But in lookingg at something else an error has crept in. If you can understand life, then you become wise. And if you realise that you have not yet understood life, your attention should be extremely keen, for otherwise you will never understand.

As we said on the first day, life is not something static. Because life is a constant flow, you cannot allow the attention to stray at all. If the attention strays, when you come back to it it has changed, and you have to start all over again. That is one reason why most people are uninterested in this thing called wisdom or insight.

Psychology started with the aim of enabling people to get this insight. This aim was dropped long ago, and now they are only interested in psychiatric treatment, because this insight is so terrible. It is very much like the Jewish God, the jealous God who would not tolerate anything else to take his place. This wisdom also is like that. It is such a jealous thing that it does not allow your attention to stray for a moment. If the attention strays, the whole thing is gone, and you have to start all over again, because life is not static, truth is not static. Truth is not a dead thing which you can observe piecemeal - a little bit now, a little bit later and a little bit in the next life. That is the only problem, the only difficulty.

So, if you realise that the basic fact or truth concerning life is not clear, then naturally the whole attention is keenly focussed upon life itself. What is it? This quest is compared to the fire of enquiry, the fire of spiritual yearning - tapas. As long as this fire is burning furiously, you are seeing it. No obstacle, no obstruction can come your way. Fire, when it burns well, has no enemies at all, because it will

burn up all its enemies. But at some point or other in our life, we are influenced by the smoke. Watch carefully. You are paying attention to me, with your eyes and ears open. You are able to see me sitting here because your eyes are open. You are able to hear these words because your ears are open and receptive. That itself becomes a difficulty. The eyes, which are open, see not only me, but also the girl who is coming into the hall. The ears that listen to me also listen to the dog barking or the truck driving in or out. That is the problem. So, it looks as though the very fire that keeps our interest alive also seems to generate the possibility of distraction. It is there that one has to be extremely cautious.

Life, which flows on, seems to bring with it what is called pleasure, and what is called pain. This comes to all, whether you are a saint or a fool, a prince or a peasant, a minister or a mendicant. You will have some experiences which are considered pleasure, and some experiences which are considered painful. This is the stream, these are the things that float down the stream of life. As you are swimming in it, something touches you, and you think: "Ah, it is very nice," and you want it.

So, the very flow of this stream of life seems also to bring with it the potentiality of distraction. Is that clear to you? What is it that at that moment suddenly turns round and grabs you? Haven't you understood what life means? Are you going to be caught up in this silly pleasure? That is where the danger arises. The enlightened sage, who has understood what life is, is also subject to this pleasure and pain; but he is not trapped. If this pleasure comes along he says: "Hello, how are you?", and when it goes, "Go", when pain comes, "Come on!", knowing that all these are flowing in the same stream which is called life. But the fool, who is also being borne down the stream of life, is trapped. When there is pleasure, he immediately grabs it, and then begins to complain: "Ah, it is a problem." It is not. It did not create a problem for you. You created the problem. And the consequence of this pleasure is pain, that's obvious. Most of you know that. So, what you call pain is merely the other side of what you called pleasure - you cannot have one side alone. Have you ever seen a paper with only one side? There must be two sides.

Wisdom lies in understanding the totality of life, the truth concerning life, and in not being distracted by one or the other of the events that are also part of life. This is the beauty, and this is the difficulty. The problem is that the distraction is not something apart from life. You were listening to me, and the people who walked in are also part of us, part of this game. And yet a distraction arose. If you observed this very carefully as you were being distracted, you must have noticed that the distraction arose only because at that moment you were not interested in being here, in what was going on here. In life also, all our distractions, and therefore all of our foolishness, arise only when you are not interested, not wise, not paying attention to life itself. The distracting influence also is part of life, just as pleasure and pain are part of life. There is no life which is completely free of pleasure or pain. These are experiences that are granted to everyone.

Now we go back to this fire. The fire is burning, and smoke arises from that fire. When the smoke hits you, you close your eyes. This may have happened to you, especially when you have a fire burning in your room at night. Near the fireplace, it is even possible to read a book; because the fire is luminous. But then smoke arises from the fire, and you close your eyes; and so, sitting there next to this luminous fire, you can't even see it. So, we realise that life itself is luminous, something alive, and therefore there is light in it. But that light, that fire, is capable of generating its own smoke, which blinds us to the facts concerning life.

Life is full of light. A pleasurable experience comes along, it wakes you up. A painful experience comes along, it wakes you up too. It gives you an experience, it hits you hard; so that, if you are interested, you can sit down and work out the problem of 'what is life?' What a marvellous experience this is. But, as this thing is happening, the fire of life is generating its own smoke called ignorance.

In that state of ignorance, you lose the keenness to observe what life in. So, in life you grab a little pleasure, whatever be your philosophy. Pleasure and pain are not dangerous in life, because they are part of life; but, grabbing them, and holding on to them, is the danger. You cannot own pleasure, it is gone - and when you try to hold pleasure like that, it becomes terribly painful. So, if you are tempted at some stage in your life to say, "Oh, God has given me a lot of wonderful things!", please remember these wonderful things belong to God, and they will go away. Do not hold onto them. Then there is no problem. A little bit of pleasure comes, and then it goes - Hari Om Tat Sat.

Gurudev Swami Sivananda had a dual formula; when something comes - Om Namo Narayanaya, and a little later, when it goes - Om Namah Shivaya. But the fool or the ignorant man treats the pleasure as his own, and encloses it within himself. There is the danger. It immediately becomes painful. I am sure that you have had some experience to prove this. When does it happen? When the smoke of ignorance or foolishness blinds you to the truth concerning life. I repeat, life itself is luminous, full of light. It is full of intelligence. If life is listened to, it can teach us; if life is observed, it will reveal its truth to us. But smoke is also part of this life process.

There is a third element in fire - heat or combustibility. Even so, there is a lot of heat in life - dynamism. In fire there are these three elements: light, heat, and smoke. Even so, in life there are these three elements: wisdom, dynamism, and foolishness. All these are part of life - you cannot escape them, you can only understand them. And, like a wise man when he lights a fire in his fireplace when it is cold outside, it is possible for you to take the fullest advantage of the light and of the warmth, while still avoiding the smoke. Isn't that what you would do?

What do you do in order to avoid being blinded by smoke when you are sitting near the fireplace when the fire is low and the smoke seems to be troublesome? People do one of these two things: one - they introduce some cross ventilation by opening all the windows. Which is exactly what Swami Sivananda used to do.

"Namō Narayanaya, Namah Shivaya." "Come in - go out - I won't hold you."; two - they augment the fire, usually by sprinkling some camphor on it. By deliberately promoting the fire rather than the smoke, you can reduce the smoke.

So, if you can get closer to sattva, you can get away from the effects of ignorance and foolishness. Even then some effect of this ignorance will still remain as long as there is a body and a personality, and the feeling, "I am So and so." You are not totally free, but while remaining in this embodiment, while remaining as a person, it is possible for you to minimise the effect of ignorance. Ignorance is still there, it is that which enables you to sleep, but it does not blind you.

Then there is the heat or warmth of fire, which is like the dynamism involved in life. Life is full of life. You are active, you are dynamic - which is also part of life. What do you do when you are sitting near a fire, knowing that it is hot? You sit at a safe distance, and you are constantly watchful. You cannot afford to go to sleep, or someone else will find your body there! So, when there are sparks which jump out of the fire, you must watch them and immediately put them out, otherwise the fire and the warmth can destroy life. See the beauty here! You do not appreciate it very much in this country, because it is not cold. If you go to some very cold countries, you will appreciate that without a fire you will freeze to death, but if you are too close to the fire you will burn to death. There is danger both ways.

In life we have this dynamism, or energy, and there is no harm in it. In all this intense activity the wise man is alert, watching all the time, because the very activity throws up sparks which, if neglected, can consume the foolish or negligent person.

You have seen this in your own life. Going back to your football ground. Is it good to play football or not? Yes, of course, because it generates energy, gives you first-class exercise for the body, mind and spirit. The body is exercised; and the mind is exercised because your powers of observation and judgement are promoted, and there is also exercise for the spirit - the 'esprit de corps'. But if you are not vigilant and careful while playing, a little foul play creeps in, and then the very play which is supposed to be good for you generates jealousy, ill will and hatred. Instead of walking out healthier in body, mind and spirit, you walk out with a sick body, a deranged mind and a broken spirit. Why is it so? Because in the heat of this play, the observation of what goes on is lost. The respect for the fire is lost. The respect for the dynamism is lost. The respect for life is lost.

This happens at home, too, between husband and wife, parents, and children - strangely enough all of them thinking that they are promoting the welfare, happiness or prosperity of the whole; and yet fighting to destroy it. You can avoid smoke almost completely.

You cannot avoid heat, but you have to learn to live with it. In the same way, in life you can avoid ignorance almost completely, but you cannot avoid dynamism,

activity. But while engaged in this intense activity you should watch carefully to make sure that you are at a safe distance, that that activity is controlled activity. In Sanskrit this is called yama and niyama. Everything is regulated, controlled.

Back to the fireplace. It is dark except for the fire that is burning. How do you understand whether you are too far away from the fire or too close? The fire itself has the light in which you see the fire. With the help of the light of the fire you are able to avoid its damaging effect. In exactly the same way, in life there is this light; and, getting close to that light you realise that activity up to this point is healthy - beyond that point it is dangerous. Activity up to that point is essential - below that point, you are being lazy, you are being stupid. In the light of life itself you must discover at what point there is safety from being burnt by the fire of life, or from freezing because you have withdrawn from life too far. This is supreme wisdom.

The light aspect of life is called sattva. Dullness or ignorance is tamas, heat or energy is rajas, and the third is sattva. What is sattva? Sattva is wisdom in life and is comparable to the light of fire.

What is interesting is that the word is really sat - va. 'Sat' means truth or reality and 'va' is something that is related to this reality, close to this reality, the quality of reality, of truth. So sattva is that which is closely allied to life, closely allied to truth and constantly alive to this truth. To be constantly alive to the truth concerning life without bluffing yourself in the least, without bringing in foolish ideas and philosophies and without bringing in the heat of emotional response is wisdom.

Can life be lived in such a way that it is constantly alive with the truth, constantly alive to truth? Then you will remain constantly wise throughout your life.

## Four

What we call wisdom is not an object and does not come from outside - which means that you cannot say, "I am a fool and the wisdom that I need for my life must come from you, or from a Scripture." The Scripture may be very necessary, and someone to interpret it may also be necessary, but the Scripture does not contain wisdom. What does a Scripture contain? Words, paper, ink. But you can derive wisdom with the help of the Scripture and the teacher.

I think most of you have read some Scripture or other the Bible, the stories of Rama or of Krishna. Today there are millions of people who are devotees of Jesus Christ; millions of people who are devotees of Buddha and millions of people who are devotees of Krishna; but if you read the biographies of Buddha, Krishna or Jesus, you will realise with a shock that in their own time they were not honoured by all. There were a few who were their devotees, but the majority of people were against them - whether it was Buddha or Krishna or Christ. So, if wisdom came automatically from them, everyone who heard them ought to have been enlightened.

Why was it not so? For the very simple reason that, even if God Almighty Himself comes to you as your teacher, it is of no use to you. You may have the greatest of Scriptures in your hand, but even if you understand the words intellectually, it is of no use to you. You have the saying in the Bible - as you have in other Scriptures - "The letter killed the spirit". You stick to the words and you forget the spirit. If you read the sayings of Jesus Christ throughout the New Testament you will find that he is constantly attacking the professors of the Law, the so-called religious men of his time, and they in their turn, condemned Him. Where is wisdom here? It was the same in the case of Krishna. He was attacking the orthodoxy all the time, and the orthodoxy also denied Him. Where is wisdom here? Wisdom is in you! It is within you. Of course the Scripture or the teacher can help you. For instance, one of these boys is wearing glasses. Without the glasses he cannot see well, but it is not the glasses that see. It is his eyesight that sees. If it is weak, put on some glasses; they will help you. If you are totally blind, what sort of glasses will make you see?

The most important thing to remember is that, whereas Scriptures and teachers may be of some help, wisdom must come from within. Wisdom is not an object, it is the quality of the subject itself - the quality of the personality - and not something which exists as an object in the world outside.

What are the qualities of the personality, the subject? We discussed yesterday the three qualities: *tamas* or dullness, *rajas* or energy, and *sattva* or light. The quality called *tamas* is dullness, stupidity. It is very much like the smoke of fire - the smoke that arises in fire, from fire, but which is able to veil or hide that fire. In the same way, this stupidity or foolishness arises in one's own intelligence. That is the paradox! What does 'paradox' mean? It is something that is beyond teaching or reasoning. You cannot reason and understand how stupidity can arise

from intelligence. Yet it does.

You think you are good, and you struggle a little more, you put forth a little more effort and think you are much better. Then suddenly you become bad - like the reformed alcoholic who joins Alcoholics Anonymous and becomes unbearably self-righteous! How does this come about? When you are in trouble and you realise that you are, then you humbly pray to God to ask for mercy, for strength. You gain some strength; then at that point you realise that you are weak, wicked, vicious. The strength comes from God. Slowly you begin to stand upright. "Well, by God's Grace I am alright, I am getting stronger." Then suddenly this God's Grace is completely forgotten and now you think, "I am a holy man and you must obey me."

How does this come about?

We do not ask how it happens, we see it happen. So, what we call *tamas* or smoke - a cloud of ignorance - seems to arise from the fire of knowledge, of intelligence. You are all highly intelligent men and woman; how is it that suddenly you are all overtaken by sleep? What is that sleep, for instance? Do you understand my question? You are a brilliant boy, and you are sitting there listening to the talk, and then suddenly you are nodding off. How did that happen? You cannot say, "I am tired."

Can you really and truly say that you have understood what sleep means? Why does man sleep at all? Even in sleep something is awake. You are awake in sleep. I am not talking even of dreaming. Even when you are fast asleep there is something which does not sleep, which feels the heat or the cold and which is able to respond when the time comes for you to wake up. It wakes you up, because it was not asleep. A big part of you does not sleep even when you are asleep. So, why must you sleep at all?

There is no answer to all these questions. Such is nature - this is part of nature. Just as sleep is part of nature, what one calls *tamas* is also part of nature. Therefore, however intelligent you may be, you are still subject to some foolishness. If you are a wise person, you will recognise this. You have a house, and you realise that if there is a wind blowing or people coming and going in the room, it is likely to get dirty. So what do you do?

You do something very beautiful if you are really wise; that is, the moment there is a little dirt, you remove it. You do not say, "Well, I don't want my room to be dirty and so I shut all the doors and windows and I don't allow anybody to come in." Then it is just as if the room didn't exist! In life, since existence is part of life, you are not going to be able to do that. Even if you go and hide yourself in a cave, there will be some dirt in your mind. Some dirt will definitely enter your mind, whatever you do.

What does a wise man do here? Immediately when there is a little dirt, he

removes it, because if you allow that little dirt to stay there, a little more will come. Once a thing has become really dirty, you will find that you are not at all in a mood to clean it. When a thing is very clean, a little spot shows, but when a thing has become really dirty, it is always 'clean' - in that a little more dirt doesn't matter! That is, to put it concisely, sensitivity is lost.

So the wise man is extremely sensitive, knowing that he is not going to avoid dirt altogether. You are not going to avoid what is called 'evil influences' altogether. It is not possible. As long as you are alive in this world, you are subject to such evil influences - subjective or objective. They may arise from within you or they may come from outside, because that is part of nature. Tamas is part of nature.

How can we deal with this tamas or ignorance? We can minimize it as much as possible, and deal with each little bit then and there, not wait for a tomorrow. Tamas is always undesirable. We saw that these three qualities exist in fire; light, heat, and smoke. Smoke is undesirable. You do not burn fire in order to get the smoke. Smoke is an undesirable byproduct of fire; therefore, a wise person, when he kindles the fire, takes steps to eliminate that smoke as quickly as possible, knowing that smoke is inevitable. It can only be done immediately, it cannot be postponed. If you delay when dealing with some evil in the personality, dirt becomes the pattern. Afterwards you will probably become a philosopher, a revolutionary philosopher - it will need a revolution to clear up that mess!

I am reminded of a little story. Someone had bought a beautiful new carpet, and it so happened that his only child spilled a bottle of ink on it. So, being an indulgent father, what did he do? He bought another bottle of ink and poured it onto the carpet so that it looked as though it was the pattern! I suggest that most philosophies are born in this way. Someone does something bad, someone else does it too, and a third person follows suit; and then comes the philosopher who sort of makes it all legal.

I can give you one example immediately - divorce. First it was considered terrible for a man to divorce his wife, or for a wife to divorce her husband. But then some well-respected person did it, so you say: "Oh well, we can't fight him. It is bad. But if you do it, never mind, that other personage did it." The duke also divorces. One bottle of ink here, one bottle there. Then you and I decide: "Let us start a new movement. In this movement divorce shall be legal and socially acceptable." You pour another bottle of ink here, another bottle of ink there. That has become a pattern, it has become legal, acceptable. It may or may not be desirable, but it is acceptable. Then you devise a philosophy that it is silly for a man and woman who do not like each other to continue to live as husband and wife, it is more righteous for them to separate and go their own way. A new philosophy, and so convenient!

So, when you notice some defect entering your personality, deal with it then and there. Then the personality remains fairly clean, and every little spot shows and

gives you a sleepless night. If that is not there, the sensitivity is lost.

Then comes the other aspect or other quality of nature - the quality of dynamism or activity, rajas. We are also subject to this quality. This is comparable to the heat of the fire. You need the heat, but not too close! Fire has to bum, but not in an uncontrolled manner.

You know the principle of the radiator in motor cars. You pour some water into the radiator and the water keeps the engine comparatively cool, without disturbing the generation of energy. This is because the engine, while generating enough energy to push the car, also produces heat. The driver needs the energy, but not the heat. If the energy is not there, the car does not move. If the heat becomes too much, the engine blows up.

Have you seen a picture of Lord Shiva seated in meditation? And have you also noticed that there is the Ganges on his head? Probably you have also seen in the Shiva temples that on top of the Shiva lingam there is usually a pot, with water constantly pouring on the Shiva lingam. It is exactly the same principle. Shiva is constantly in meditation, and when you are constantly meditating, you generate a lot of energy, and also heat. The body also feels hot. We want the energy that is generated by meditation, but we do not want the heat. This is what Shiva thought. He created Ganga on his own head, so water constantly pours on his head to keep him cool, while the energy is made available to mankind. That is the principle.

So, activity means energy and also heat. The wise man makes the fullest use of the energy and keeps the heat to a minimum. For example, two friends are talking together. As they get warmed up, they start to argue - and in no time at all, if they are not careful, they will be quarrelling. This is true of all activity. There is a lot of energy in activity, but there is also some heat, excitement and emotional upheaval. The yogi or the wise man, as he engages himself in all this activity, is cautious and watchful, so that as soon as the heat is detected he tries to cool it down, and to keep it under check. But the energy involved in dynamism, in work, is essential. We must be very active, and in this activity we must realise that there is also the danger of an emotional turmoil - which always implies selfishness. It is selfishness that generates heat. If this selfishness is not there, the heat is distributed, or not allowed to build up. It is selfishness guarding everything within, bottling up - 'all for me' - that makes the energy and the heat flow towards oneself, so that the heat builds up.

When a wise man serves humanity, the energy and also the heat are spread out. He realises that he is also part of humanity, and that naturally some benefit will also fall on him - but his attitude is completely different. He feels, "What I am doing is not for me, but for the entire humanity. What I am doing is not for my sake, but for God's sake." The moment that attitude is born even the heat seems to be distributed, and it does not burn one.

Then, lastly, there is sattva. This is another quality of the personality, but a quality that is close to the transcendence of personality. Hence it is called sattva. 'Sat' is truth, or God, and 'sattva' is something which is close to God, to the self, to the reality, to Truth. It is far away from the smoke of ignorance; it is at a respectable distance even from this heat of dynamism. It is still part of the personality, but it is also something beyond.

Here is an example of the difference between tamas, rajas and sattva. If you walk along the beach, you will notice the sand is dry; but as you move closer to the water, it becomes a little moist. Then closest to the water itself, it is quite wet. It is not liquid. It is still sand, but with a lot of water in it. The first is tamas, far away from the water - it is bone dry. Then, as you go a little closer, there is some moisture in the sand. This is like rajas. And then, when you go to the edge of the water, that sand is wet. That wet sand is like sattva. It is not pure God, there is a little bit of personality mixed in it, but it is the closest to the Divine. The wise man or the yogi constantly strives to cultivate this.

In the example we took of fire, sattva is comparable to light. Light is needed even to detect the existence of smoke. You need light to know that there is smoke coming up, and you need light in order to know what to do with the smoke, how to get rid of it. You need light in order to know how to approach the fire and how to control it. So, light is most essential in our life.

In the same way, psychologically - spiritually also - this insight, or inner light, is extremely important. He in whom this insight is burning brightly, is clear, unclouded. Such a person is called wise. Wisdom is unclouded insight. In that unclouded insight, one is able to see the truth concerning life, and the truth concerning actions. That is why it is called sattva. Then one knows how to govern this action, and how to lead a self-controlled life which determines what right action is.

There is just one more point. Sattva is the quality of God, or the quality of truth - the quality that is closest to truth, or God, or the Divine. So, when you walk along the seashore, go to that part of the sand which is really wet, and ask yourself: "is it sand or not?" Yes, it is sand, but the quality of wetness does not belong to the sand; it comes from elsewhere - from the sea, from the water. Because that sand is close to the water, it derives its moisture from the water. Similarly, the quality of sattva, being close to truth - or God - is highly influenced by this truth.

The wise man recognises: "If there is goodness in me, it is not because I am good." It is not because the personality is good, for the personality is composed of all these - tamas, rajas and sattva. "If I am good, it is because God is good." That goodness seems to influence the personality.

Wisdom does not regard itself as wise. This is an extremely vital principle. The wise man does not say: "I am a wise man." If he does, he is a fool as well as being

arrogant. The wise man, when he recognises wisdom, sees that that comes from God, not from the personality. This is simple - God enters into the personality - G-O-D enters into your personality - and you do not do anything at all, you add nothing to it. What is nothing? Zero, o. When you add that o to God, what happens? It becomes G-O-O-D. So, the yogi's personality recognises that if there is some goodness, it is not because he is good, but because God has entered into the personality and the yogi's contribution is nothing - zero.

When you do that, you become truly good. In that goodness, there is no arrogance, because nothing belongs to the 'me'; 'my' contribution is nothing - zero. It is God whose influence is experienced by this personality.

Such a person is wisdom. He is not wise, he is wisdom itself, and though this quality is derived from within himself, it does not make him selfish, because the wise man recognises that wisdom is within. He does not become arrogant or selfish, because that which is regarded as 'within' is not within the personality. It arises in the depth of one's personality, where the Divine is contacted - and therefore it is called intuitive wisdom. Wisdom is always intuitive, it is neither intellectual nor emotional. When one acquires that wisdom, when that wisdom is granted to one, then one becomes unselfish, enlightened, humble, noble and good. The whole life becomes Divine Life