

# AN INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUALITY



SRI AUROBINDO SOCIETY  
PUDUCHERRY

## AN INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUALITY

The objective of our life is to form a contact with God and the process through which we unite is called the spiritual process.

Spirituality should not be misunderstood. Many of us do not know that there is a difference between Religion and Spirituality and it is essential to realise the difference. All of us have grown up with one religion or the other. Religion has no doubt established God in our lives. We have become aware of God through our parents and have accompanied them to temples, mosques and churches as the case may be. Religion was never started by the original saint; it was turned into religion by the disciples later on and then as time passed the message, which was originally spiritual, got lost and we got involved in the surface part of religion which is as it stands today — full of rites and rituals without much substance. However, religion has played a role but the time has come to go beyond religion and reach the Spirit. Religion, as Sri Aurobindo says, is like a scaffolding which is used to construct a building and discarded once the building is completed. The time of religion is gone and we have to go beyond it.

**What is spirituality?** Spirituality is related to the Spirit, what we call the soul. Each one has a soul which is the spark of God in all of us. In other words, the individual soul is a part of the Universal Soul. Who is God? God is not a person who sits on a throne somewhere in the skies. He is Absolute and total Perfection, a Perfect Force which

permeates this world and guides its destiny.

The question, therefore, arises is that if God is total perfection and He resides within us then why are we not perfect. The reason is that we are not even aware of our soul. Our involvement today is more with the surface life which is governed by three levels of consciousness — the mental, emotional and the physical. We have a **mind** which observes, thinks, analyses, remembers and is the best instrument available to us today on which we rely heavily. Secondly, we live on an **emotional** level and it is through the heart that we feel emotions such as love, hate, envy etc. Lastly, there is the **physical** consciousness which governs the body. To most of us the body is perhaps the most important thing. This is something which all our five senses are aware of — touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing. We are so involved in these three levels that we are completely unaware most of the time of our soul which lives within us and is not reachable by the five senses. Because we are not aware of the Spirit within we are cut off from perfection and that is why our lives are so imperfect. It is because of this reason that since time immemorial effort is being made to find our soul, unite with it, so that our lives can become perfect.

Living at these levels of consciousness we find that our lives are full of friction and struggle. There is no peace in any relationship - individual, community or nations. The reason is that the mind, the emotional being and the body are not in harmony with each other. Mind pulls in one direction, the heart in another and the body has its own

demands. If an individual is not at peace with himself he cannot have a harmonious relationship with others. This is the crux of the problem. It is also clear that it is not possible for the mind, the heart and the body to come to a peaceful arrangement. It seems that they are like fighting children who cannot get along. The only way is that they come under the control of the Spirit within. As the Spirit comes forward and begins to influence more and more it unifies the mind, heart and the body. As the three levels of consciousness come under the light of the Spirit we will find that there is harmony within us leading to a progressive harmony outside.

**How to go about this?** Let us first start with the **mind**. Don't get confused between the mind and the brain. Mind is a consciousness and brain is the physical part just like the heart is the physical part of the emotional consciousness and the body of the physical consciousness. We are at present talking of the mind. The habit of the mind is to produce thoughts. It cannot sit quiet. Moreover, the mind does not have the capacity to look at things in totality. It is like looking through a keyhole which shows us a very small part of the picture and we think it is the full picture. Each one of us looks through his own keyhole and that leads to friction because each one of us sees a different 'totality'. Mind, therefore, has to be quietened, expanded and finally elevated. A question was put to Sri Aurobindo by a sadhak that if one's mind is not still then how does one meditate and follow the spiritual life which requires steadiness and equilibrium. Sri Aurobindo said that in the initial

stages two things should be done. First we should always try and remember the Mother or whoever your God is - Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Christ etc. Visualise the Mother in your heart and remember Her. Remembrance is easier than meditation. Secondly, take a concentrated attitude for a few minutes calling the Mother's presence daily. These two practices will definitely quieten the mind and pave the way for a concentrated meditation.

One can remember the Mother while carrying out the natural activities like eating, sleeping, walking, bathing etc. If, along with remembering the Mother, we offer our actions to Her every activity becomes spiritual. In Sri Aurobindo's yoga it is not necessary to go to temples to unite with God. It can be done here and now through the activities of life provided the attitude is right and the aspiration is strong.

Secondly, be careful about what you read because when one reads one comes into contact with the consciousness of the writer. It is, therefore, necessary to read beautiful, uplifting books especially when one is going to sleep as the vibration continues throughout the night.

Coming to the **emotional** level we come into contact with contrary emotions and opposites which we find difficult to control. We are a mixed bag and our emotions also are mixed. The heart must be channelised in the right direction which is devotion to the Mother or whoever your deity is. A conscious effort should be made to love God through devotion and bhakti. If one cannot control one's emotions one must offer them to God and seek His help

and guidance. This will lead to purification of the heart and stabilise the emotional being.

Lastly, we come to the **physical** level i.e. the body. Body is matter. Take life out of it and it is inert. But even something as gross as the body has to be awakened as otherwise the spiritual life cannot become integral. This is not an easy task. The body has the vibrations of matter, plant and animal gathered over millions of years. The body is a very difficult instrument to be awakened. But an effort has to be made to prepare it and for that the body also must pray. It sounds rather strange since the body cannot think then how can it pray? If our physical actions are consecrated to God the body also begins to pray. We must remember that the body, like the mind and the heart, is an instrument of the soul. As far as asanas are concerned, when you start them it should be with an attitude of offering to the Lord. That is why asanas are called yogasanas. Yoga means union. Therefore, an asana which is done as a consecration to God is yogasana. If consecration is not there it is only an exercise and will have a limited effect. What we must remember is that the body too has a role to play in spiritual life. In some of the olden traditions of spirituality the body was not given much importance. What was important was to receive gyan through the mind and bhakti through the heart. But in Sri Aurobindo 's yoga the body has an equal importance as ultimately the destiny of the body is to be transformed into a divine body.

In order to prepare the body for the ultimate transformation it is no doubt important to exercise. But it is equal-

ly important to avoid doing those things which harm the body such as smoking, consuming alcohol etc. Sometimes habits die hard; but if our aspiration is strong and we offer the problem to the Mother sincerely it is possible to get rid of bad habits. One should not give up the effort.

A question arises as to why should we have to call God as He is omniscient and omnipresent. Here we must understand that calling is a part of the relationship between God and the human being. Even Draupadi, who was so close to Krishna, had to call Him before He appeared and protected her.

There is a misconception that spirituality is for the old. Spiritual life has nothing to do with age and the sooner we start the better it is. Life is like a slate where one writes all accounts of experiences, most of them of not much value. By the time we are old the slate is full and when we realize that what we have written on the slate is not of any value it is too late and most of the balance period one wastes in rubbing off the slate. Therefore, start now and write the correct thing on your slate.

A couple of things more . One must understand the importance of **prayer**. Prayer is not a crutch. Prayer is a movement of surrender. A prayer is like the physical expression of 'sāshtāṅg' when you bow before God in supplication. So pray as much as you can. It is a most powerful way of connecting yourself to God.

Similarly **mantra**. A repetition of the mantra links you to the deity to whom the mantra is dedicated. There are

hundreds of mantras of Lord Ganesha. As soon as you start chanting that mantra either loudly or silently it immediately links you with the consciousness of Ganesha, the remover of all difficulties. Mantra must be repeated slowly and consciously so that it vibrates in your being.

For those of us who are dedicated to the Mother the most powerful mantra is : **Om Anandamayi, Chaitanyamayi, Satyamayi Parame.**

**Remembrance** or smaran creates a direct link with the Divine. Mother told us that when you remember God be sure that He remembers you. This creates a lasting relationship of love and protection between man and God.

### **The advice that the Mother gives us all :**

'In all pursuits, intellectual or active, your one motto should be, "Remember and Offer." Let whatever you do be done as an offering to the Divine. And this too will be an excellent discipline for you; it will prevent you from doing many foolish and useless things.'

*It is spirituality when you begin to become aware of another consciousness than the ego and begin to live in it or under its influence more and more.*

*It is that consciousness wide, infinite, self-existent, pure of ego etc., which is called Spirit (Self, Brahman, Divine)...*

**Sri Aurobindo**