

Selfishness

SELFISHNESS comes into existence owing to the tendency of the desires to find fulfillment in action and experience. It is born of fundamental ignorance about one's own true nature. Human con-

Analysis of selfishness sciousness is clouded by the accumulation of various types of impressions deposited by the long course of the evolution of consciousness. These impressions express themselves as desires, and the range of the operation of consciousness is strictly limited by these desires. The *sanskaras* or impressions form an enclosure around the possible field of consciousness. The circle of *sanskaras* constitutes that limited area in which alone the individual consciousness can be focussed. Some of the desires have mere latency of action, but others can actually translate themselves into action. The capacity of a desire to find expression in conduct depends upon the intensity and the amount of the *sanskaras* connected with it. To use a geometrical metaphor, we might say that when a desire passes into action, it traverses a distance which is equal to the radius of a circle describing the boundary of the *sanskaras* connected with it. When a desire gathers sufficient strength, it projects itself into action for getting fulfilled.

The range of selfishness is equal to the range of

desires. Owing to the hindrance of multifarious desires, it becomes impossible for the soul to find free and full expression of its true

Wanting ends in dissatisfaction being and life becomes self-centred and narrow. The entire life of the personal ego is continually

in the grip of wanting, *i. e.*, an attempt to seek fulfillment of desires through things that change and vanish. But *there can be no real fulfillment through the transient things*. The satisfaction derived from the fleeting things of life is not lasting and the wants of man remain unfulfilled. There is thus a general sense of dissatisfaction accompanied by all kinds of worries.

The chief forms in which the frustrated ego finds expression are lust, greed and anger. Lust is very much like greed in many respects, but it differs in the manner of its fulfillment, which is directly related to the gross sphere. Lust

Lust, greed and anger finds its expression through the medium of the physical body and is concerned

with the flesh. It is a form of entanglement with the gross sphere. Greed is a state of restlessness of the heart, and it consists mainly of craving for power and possessions. Possessions and power are sought for the fulfillment of desires. Man is only partially satisfied in his attempt to have the fulfillment of his desires, and this partial satisfaction fans and increases the flame of craving instead of extinguishing it. Thus greed always finds an endless field of conquest and leaves the man endlessly dissatisfied. The chief expressions of greed are related to the emotional part of man. It is a form of entanglement with the *subtle* sphere. Anger is the fume of an irritated mind. It is caused by the thwarting of desires. It feeds the limited ego and is used for domination and aggression. It aims at removing the obstacles existing

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in the fulfillment of desires. The frenzy of anger nourishes egoism and conceit and it is the greatest benefactor of the limited ego. Mind is the seat of anger, and its expressions are mostly through the activities of the mind. Anger is a form of *mental* entanglement. Lust, greed and anger respectively have body, heart and mind as their vehicles of expression.

Man experiences disappointment through lust, greed and anger; and the frustrated ego, in its turn, seeks further gratification through lust, greed and anger. Consciousness is thus caught up in a

The vicious circle *vicious circle of endless disappointment.*

Disappointment comes into existence when either lust, greed or anger is thwarted in its expression. It is thus a general reaction of the gross, subtle and mental entanglement. It is a depression caused by the non-fulfillment of lust, greed and anger which, together, are co-extensive with selfishness. Selfishness, which is the common basis of these three ingredient vices, is thus the ultimate cause of disappointment and worries. It defeats itself. It seeks fulfillment through desires but succeeds only in arriving at unending dissatisfaction.

Selfishness inevitably leads to dissatisfaction and disappointment, because desires are endless. The problem of happiness is, therefore the problem of dropping out desires.

The road to happiness Desires, however cannot be effectively overcome through mechanical repression.

They can be annihilated only through knowledge. If you dive deep in the realm of thoughts and think seriously for just a few minutes, you will realise the emptiness of desires. Think of what you have enjoyed all these years and what you have suffered. All that you have enjoyed through life is today nil. All that you have

suffered through life is also nothing in the present. All was illusory. It is your right to be happy and yet you create your own unhappiness by wanting things. Wanting is the source of perpetual restlessness. If you do not get the thing you wanted, you are disappointed. And if you get it, you want more and more of it and become unhappy. Say, "I do not want anything," and be happy. The continuous realisation of the futility of wants will eventually lead you to Knowledge. This Self-knowledge will give you the freedom from wants which leads to the road to abiding happiness.

Wants should be carefully distinguished from needs. Pride and anger, greed and lust are all different from needs. You might think, "I need all that I want," but this is a mistake. If you are thirsty in a desert, what you need is good water, not lemonade. As long as man has a body there will be some needs, and it is necessary to meet these needs. But wants are an outcome of infatuated imagination. They must be scrupulously killed if there is to be any happiness. As the very being of selfishness consists of desires, *renunciation of wants becomes a process of death*. Dying in the ordinary sense means parting with the physical body, but dying in the real sense means renunciation of low sense-desires. The priests prepare men for false death by painting gloomy pictures of hell and heaven, but their death is illusory, as life is one unbroken continuity. The real death consists of the cessation of desires, and it comes by gradual stages.

The dawn of love facilitates the death of selfishness. Being is dying by loving. If you cannot love one another, how can you love even those who torture you? The limits of selfishness are created by ignorance. When a man

realises that he can have a more glorious satisfaction by widening the sphere of his interest and activities, he is heading towards the life of service. At this stage he entertains many good desires. He wants to make others happy by relieving distress and helping them. And though even in such good desires there is often an indirect and latent reference to the self, narrow selfishness has no grip over good deeds. Even good desires may, in a sense, be said to be a form of enlightened and extended selfishness, for, like bad desires, they too move within the domain of duality. But as man entertains good desires his selfishness embraces a larger conception which eventually brings about its own extinction. Instead of merely trying to be luminous, arrestive and possessive, man learns to be useful to others.

The desires which enter into a constitution of the personal ego are either good or bad. Bad desires are ordinarily referred to as forms of selfishness and good desires are referred to as forms of selflessness. But there is no hard and fast line dividing selfishness from selflessness. Both move in the domain of duality and, from the ultimate point of view which transcends the opposites of good and bad, the distinction between selfishness and selflessness is chiefly one of range. Selfishness and selflessness are two phases of the life of the personal ego, and these two phases are continuous with each other. Selfishness arises when all the desires are centred around the narrow individuality. Selflessness arises when this crude organisation of desires suffers disintegration and there is a general dispersing of desires with the result that they cover a much wider sphere. Selfishness is the narrowing down of interests to a limited field; selflessness is the extension of interests over a wide field. To put it paradoxically, selfishness is

a restricted form of selflessness, and selflessness is the drawing out of selfishness into a wide sphere of activity.

Selfishness must be transmuted into selflessness before the domain of duality is completely transcended. Persistent and continuous performance of good deeds wears out selfishness. Self-

Transformation of selfishness into selflessness selfishness extended and expressed in the form of good deeds becomes the instrument of its own destruction. *The good is the main link between selfishness thriving and dying.*

Selfishness, which in the beginning is the father of evil tendencies, becomes through good deeds the hero of its own defeat. When the evil tendencies are completely replaced by good tendencies, selfishness is transformed into selflessness, *i. e.*, individual selfishness loses itself in universal interest. Though this selfless and good life is also bound by the opposites, goodness is a necessary step towards freedom from the opposites. Goodness is the means by which the soul annihilates its own ignorance.

From the good the soul passes on to God. Selflessness is merged into *Universal Selfhood*, which is beyond good and bad, virtue and vice and all the other dual aspects of *Maya*. The height

Universal Selfhood of selflessness is the beginning of the feeling of oneness with all. In the state of liberation there is neither selfishness nor selflessness in the ordinary sense, but both of these are taken up and merged into the feeling of *selfness for all*. Realisation of the unity of all is accompanied by peace and unfathomable bliss. It does not in any way lead either to spiritual stagnation or to the obliteration of relative values. *Selfness for all brings about undisturbed harmony without loss of discrimination, and unshakable peace without indifference to the surroundings.* This selfness for all is not an outcome of merely subjective synthesis. It is a result of an actual attainment of union

with the Ultimate Reality which includes all.

Open your heart by weeding out all desires and by harbouring only one longing—the longing for union with the Ultimate Reality. The Ultimate Reality is not to be sought in the changing things of external environment, but in one's own being. Every time your soul intends to enter your human heart it finds the doors locked and the inside too full of desires. Do not keep the doors of your hearts closed. Everywhere there is the source of abiding bliss, and yet all are miserable because of desires born of ignorance. The goal of lasting happiness shines forth fully only when the limited ego, with all its desires, finds its complete and final extinction.

Renunciation of desires does not mean asceticism or a merely negative attitude to life. Any such negation of life would make man inhuman. Divinity is not devoid of humanity. Spirituality must make man more human. It is a positive attitude of releasing all that is good, noble and beautiful in man. It also contributes to all that is gracious and lovely in the environment. It does not require the external renunciation of worldly activities or the avoiding of duties and responsibilities. It only requires that, while performing the worldly activities or discharging the responsibilities arising from the specific place and position of the individual, the inner spirit should remain free from the burden of desires. Perfection consists in remaining free from the entanglements of duality. Such freedom from entanglements is the most essential requirement of unhindered creativity. But this freedom cannot be attained by running away from life for fear of entanglement. This would mean denial of life.

Perfection does not consist in shrinking from the dual expressions of nature. The attempt to escape from entanglement implies fear of life. Spirituality consists in meeting life adequately and fully without being overpowered by the opposites. It must assert its dominion over all illusions—however attractive or powerful. Without avoiding contact with the different forms of life, a perfect man functions with complete detachment in the midst of intense activity.