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Steps in Spiritual Development

Essence of Vedanta

\[ \text{vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhā} \]
\[ \text{manmayā mām upāśritāḥ} \]
\[ \text{bahavo jhāna tapasā} \]
\[ \text{pūtā mad-bhāvam āgatāḥ} \]

\text{vīta} -- freed from; \text{rāga} -- attachment; \text{bhaya} -- fear; \text{krodhā} -- and anger; \text{manmayā} -- fully absorbed in Me; \text{mām} -- in Me; \text{upāśritāḥ} -- being fully situated; \text{bahavo} -- many; \text{jhāna} -- of knowledge; \text{tapasā} -- by the penance of knowledge and austerities; \text{pūtā} -- being purified; \text{mad-bhāvam} -- loving devotion for Me; \text{āgatāḥ} -- attained.

Being freed from attachment, fear and anger, being fully absorbed in Me and taking refuge in Me, many, many persons in the past became purified by knowledge and austerities -- and thus they all attained loving devotion for Me.

This particular shloka is of great importance because the entire crux of Vedanta or spiritual unfoldment is beautifully given in a nutshell. The capsule format not only clearly indicates what spirituality is, but it also distinctly unfolds the spiritual processes. It gives us a step-by-step process in a progressive manner to attain peace in one’s own heart and offers a better way of living.

Step 1: Overcoming Obstacles

There are few obstacles in our spiritual development; namely personal \text{vīta} (inhibitions, prejudices,); \text{rāga} (attachments), \text{bhaya} (fears) and \text{krodhā} (anger). We will explore each one of these obstacles in depth; recognize how to manage them when encountered and eventually grow out of them.

\text{vīta} - Inhibitions

We carry a lot of inhibitions and prejudices about the world and about ourselves. These inhibitions can be of various kinds.

Directly experienced inhibitions

Some experiences make us so uncomfortable that we avoid it at all costs. It could be due to a very bad experience the first time you even mustered enough courage to attempt it. That experience leaves such a taste that you will never ever venture towards it even remotely. Often the experience may not be the same next time, but we develop such strong inhibitions that we avoid the experience at any cost. Erroneous conclusions that these experiences happen every single time layer us with lots of inhibitions.
Steps in Spiritual Development

Rather than shutting off the entire experience, identify and address the aspect that makes you uncomfortable. Perhaps you were ridiculed or failed at it. There is nothing wrong in failing, just don’t make it a habit! Learn how not to fail from the first failure, then attempt it again. Take it head-on until you get to a comfort zone interacting with it. That is the only way to get out of inhibitions.

Indirectly imagined experiences

Other inhibitions stem from our own prejudices and pure imaginary causes that we haven’t even experienced it directly. With a psychologically fertile imagination we start seeing all the possible things that could go wrong, and hence therefore you don’t even attempt it. We lack the courage to take that first initial step, thereby blocking ourselves from growing. Whenever there is a change, for example, even the thought of a for a new job. Unless you experience, how will you know? We have inhibitions of the unknown.

We make assumptions and form judgment based on desh, kala, vastu and sthiti. These strong opinions have no facts or basis involved. We work off of our prejudices and these inhibitions keep us away from taking any responsibility full heartedly.

Tackling vīta (inhibitions and prejudices)

So how do we grow out of our inhibitions that we carry? It could be due to the unknown factor, or it could be due to past experience. You may have attempted it and failed at it in the past, and now there is a certain amount of resistance towards it.

First and foremost we must work on these inhibitions, prejudices, and wrong notions. List them out and tackle them by getting into those fields and experiencing it first-hand. It’s okay to fail or to be laughed at. Our strong inhibitions prevent us from even experiencing the experience. For example, if people have inhibitions of swimming, they will not even get into the pool. Let go your inhibitions. Once you cross over those inhibitions, you will experience a liberating feeling. You can’t get out of those inhibitions unless you attempt it. Earlier attempts may have been a failure and you may have been laughed at, but don’t give up. Try to look at the world out of the box without the prejudiced way of looking at it. Put those aside and look with a fresh set of eyes. Observe your thoughts that arise when you encounter these situations. Our prejudices are so strong that we have already pre-judged it even before we interact with the experience. Get beyond these inhibition and prejudices. That’s the first step. The day we have experiential clarity, we realize that it isn’t that strange.

Have the courage to face the experience and go through it. Then you will realize that 99% of our experiences are not that bad. We stall them just because of our inhibitions.
rāga (Attachments)

The next step is to then work on rāga (attachments). This is the opposite of dvesha (hatred). Desire is a breeding ground for attachment. In fact, attachment leads to desires. When you are attached to something then you have desires born out of it. Attachment is the seed for desires, bondage, and possessiveness. Our dependency on it increases and we think we can’t live without it. When we depend on something, it controls our existence and we become attached to it.

Para vasham sarva dukha cha karanam; Atma vasha, sarva sucha cha karanam.

Upanishads clearly say that Para vasham sarva dukhascha karanam. (Para = other; Vasha = being dependent on them.) Our dependency on other factors becomes the cause of our greatest sorrow. The amount of peace or joy that we experience is directly proportional to the reduction on this dependency. Atma vasham sarvam sukhascha karanam.

We define attachment in various ways. We use many synonyms for attachment. We will explore it in terms of love, possessiveness and expectations.

Love, Liking and Affection

Many people confuse the concept of attachment with love, liking and affection. Their understanding is all jumbled up and we use these three words synonymously. Vedantic scriptures clearly indicate that where there is love, there cannot be attachment. Love is already diluted or corrupted where attachment exists. In fact, scriptures make a profound statement and say that if there is attachment, there is no more love.

Possessiveness

Attachment is sometimes explained in terms of sense of belongingness or possessiveness. We use our belongings or things that which we possess to find contentment, happiness, and pride in. However, there isn’t any attachment when you belong to something. For example, when the book belongs to you, there is no attachment between the book and you. You possess the book, hence are attached to the book.

Expectations

Attachment is also a sense of expectation from people, situations or things that we are identified with. Our happiness or sorrow depends on them and their achievements. Our attachment is therefore from our sense of expectation from these external factors. Sometimes we use expectations as emotional torture.

There are two sub-dimensions of this type of an attachment as seen below:

Two Layers of Expectations
Expectations can be divided into two layers. Distinguish between expectations through them and expectations for them. Maintain a distinct clarity for the difference between these two. It is through them for me. The second kind of expectation is for them for their benefit and their growth. This is a beneficial expectation that reduces the attachment and increases the sense of responsibility.

1. One kind of expectation is what I have from the world that I am attached to for my benefit for my joy for my peace and for my pride. This expectation is for myself through them either to a vastu (thing), vyakti (being), or paristhiti (experience) for our benefit, our satisfaction and our pride. When we wonder “what will people say if you do or don’t do certain things?” – this falls under my sense of belonging through them. Such expectations through them unto me are not allowed. Avoid turning others into trophies for us to display – my accomplishment, my child. We then worry what people will say if we (i.e. our trophies) miss the mark. But it is the expectation for myself that brings in wrong sense of attachment ruining their growth and our peace. That leads to frustration. Avoid fulfillment of my expectation through them via the attachment to things, beings, and places.

We almost use that sense of attachment to vastu (thing), vyakti (being), or paristhiti (experience) even for emotional exploit or torture. There are things we expect out of them so that I can pride around claiming that that possession of mine is a cause of my happiness. We then expect them to be molded accordingly so that me and my contentment is important. That environment in the heart is called attachment. We try to gratify our personal existence or state of being through them and that type of expectation is a wrong expectation. Instead of nourishing and flourishing children’s inherent talents, they get throttled and blocked. Such a sense of erroneous attachment corrupts the health of environment around them for their growth and we fail to nurture them. External entities are not for my display or for my trophy. Such attachment to things, beings and experiences has to be cut. The prejudices, inhibitions and attachments have to be dealt with.

2. On the other hand, we have a responsibility and we fulfill that responsibility through expectations. So there is an expectation for their growth, your betterment, and that type of an expectation is fine. Such an expectation is for them, for their own benefit and growth. For example, when we constantly nag them for all small tasks (e.g. keep away clothes, clean your room, etc.) are these expectations for me or for them? We expect certain things for disciplining or a certain code of conduct. Finally we yell and remind them that as long as you are living under this rule you will follow my rules. On the other hand when you constantly push them for higher perfection in their life so that they can flourish higher than your expectations even in your absence. When you aren’t around. That expectation for them is fine.

This kind of expectation is good. That is what propels your responsibility. For example, every household has the same story – towels are lying all over the room, on the floor,
or on the bed, etc. The expectation for them to keep things in their place is not a bad expectation. The good expectations are those where you inculcate the discipline or that system and pattern in them right now, you may be branded as someone nagging and getting on their nerves. They may even say something hurtful - I hate you. In spite of that, you need to keep pushing it.

There are only so many years that you can push them into exploring and trying new things or learn new things. They will have inhibitions, and you will have to push with the expectation that they will learn something new and become a better human being. This expectation is for them for their growth.

**Tackling rāga (attachments)**

How do we work on the attachments? First recognize what are these attachments and where you are attached. Remind yourself that attachment is that which increases your dependency. These expectations are categorized into two categories – expecting through them for *my* satisfaction or existence; or expectation for them for their own growth. The former one is not a good one. The latter one is legitimate and enables you to fulfill your responsibility. We know which one is good and which one not, but we create lots of shades in between wherein it is *my* involvement, *my* satisfaction, *my* contentment, *my* pride comes into picture. It disables us from making good decisions in life.

We get into the shaded area wherein we can’t identify whether expectations belongs to the first category or the second category. Whenever the very premise of our thinking pattern is on a wrong or an indecisive platform, the decisions made off of it will always yield confusions. That enhanced attachment leads to frustration, anger, disenchantment. In love there is no ache. The pain is only in attachment which can be defined as an expectation.

This is applicable even to our attachment with our own kids. If we go by scriptures, it is said that there is no attachment where there is love. When we say we are attached to the children, we think we possess them. Thus instead of being responsible, there is a sense of ownership. All this is the result of a huge layer of expectations.

**bhaya (Fear)**

So far we have seen attachments and inhibitions. The third one is *bhaya* or fear.

We have various types of fears – that of death, of the unknown, of our own actions, of our prejudices, of acceptance or the lack of it, fear of rejection, or how you will be accepted in each one’s mind (stage-fright or public speaking). Greatest fear of human being is not the loss of anything, or the fear of being accepted by the crowd. The highest fear is that of death.
No one knows what happens after death. Psychiatrists often discuss mindsets of people who are with the eastern philosophy and those who grew up in western philosophy. It is said that the fear of death grips and has a higher impact on people who have the western philosophy and mindset. The impact is little less with those from the Eastern mindset.

During the recent Tsunami, reports from various parts of the world discussed at length issues such as the cause and effect of Tsunami, the number of casualties, the death toll and the extent of devastation, etc. One common thread they would all highlight was the high death toll or the number of innocent children who died in the event. The Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) believe in one birth or one life. You get only one chance make it or break it. Once you are done with what you do in this life, you are permanently in either in eternal heaven or eternal hell. The much publicized high number of casualties amongst kids was because they don’t feel it justified that the child has not lived enough worthy years and has already been summoned back. They question the fairness of this game of life. If you’ve lived only 4-5 years of the one life you get, it doesn’t seem justified. Thus there is a high sense of restlessness as you go through life. Depending on how you go through here in this world, will yield either the heaven or the hell. They have only one choice and through this attempt in this one life, they have to face the judgment day.

However, our Hindu perspective considers life as life – whether it is of a small child or of an elderly person. In Hindu philosophy, death is not considered to be an end. It is an intermediary phase. But many of us have the fear of death because it directly correlates to cessation of one’s own existence.

Positive Effect of Fear

Our life is very precious to us, hence there is a lot of effort put towards conserving one’s own life. The fear of annihilation of our existence and the thought that I may no longer exist has spurted tremendous amount of medical advancement. So on the flip side there is a good thing about this fear of death. This philosophy has seen many advances in medical field and created plenty of opportunities to improve upon the quality of life and the life expectancy. A lot of medical research and health improvements have been done so that they could prolong and extend the number of years that they could live. They’ll do whatever it takes to extend the life – whether it is changing the pacemaker or knee replacements, hip replacements, shoulder replacement, kidney transplants, liver transplant, lung transplant, etc.. Anything that can help or whatever can be done to extend what I have for a few more years, and it is worth it. All these improvements are made because of their understanding or their philosophy it is one life. So they don’t mind that it adds another 5-10 years to their life. It is worth the effort for them to extend the life expectancy. This is their concept.

Fear of the (un)Known
So fear of death or what happens after death is the highest fear. Added to the fear of death is the fear of the unknown factor of what happens after death. We have heard enough stories of the experiences of being in hell. We have to go through that experience and we are scared of that.

There is the fear of the unknown which is higher. Actually, it is the fear of the known – we know exactly what type of a life we’ve lived! We know how good, bad, indifferent, wretched we’ve been. No one can know about our life better than us recognizing it ourselves. So it is not fear of unknown where we say we go to heaven if we do good deeds or go to hell if we do bad deeds. We already know all the acts we’ve done, hence we are scared to face the results. That is the human psychology. We know very well how righteous life we have led, and that is the scary part. There is no retribution or getting out of it.

This is very similar to the increase in the number of devotees who visit temples just before the results are published. The rush to visit the temple is not before the exams, or during the exams, but after having given the exams, on the day the results are to be announced. That is when the devotees rush to the temples. That shows the strong human psychological pattern of being scared of the results of our actions. We know exactly how much effort we’ve put. The burden of guilt is inherent in us.

Offshoots of Fear of Death

The eastern mindset believes that there is always a chance next life. So the fear of death is lesser, but it is certainly one common fear because of which there are other fears. This is the primary fear and it creeps while creating other fears. It percolates into various other layers of our personalities and develops sub-sets of this basic fear of death creating different types of phobias. We recognize it as phobias. There is a constricted space – we become claustrophobic. Some of us develop fear of heights, water, spiders, etc.. All these other fears are based off the basic fear of death and it multiplies into other fears. We do not want to get into a phase wherein our existence is annihilated.

Fear of failure is also another offshoot of the fear of death alone. Because of wrong identity we have identified ourselves as a limited identity. The fear of failure is morphing that identity itself – of what I think of myself, what others think of myself. That identity gets morphed, therefore I am scared of that failure. This is born out of that identity which in turn is born out of ignorance.

Root Cause of Fear

Why does this fear exist in the first place? It is due to erroneous convictions that I am this limited body, mind and intellect. The basic root cause for all these fears is due to ignorance of our true nature. On one hand scriptures say that our nature is SatChitAnanda. That means we are eternal. Just knowing and understanding this pure knowledge that I am this conscious being and not the
limited one - this knowledge alone can take us above and beyond the fear of death, and we can transcended time and space. Then nothing of time and space can limit us or shake us up. The fears arise because we don’t understand or experience that we are that eternal principle. Thus it causes the fear of annihilation. It creates the fear of losing that which we are attached to; or fear of losing self-worth, self-cognition from the world. That fear is very deep rooted. The cause of this fear is ignorance. Once we know that we are eternal, all causes for fears are removed. Those who have this knowledge can overcome that basic cause and there will be no further repercussions. But that is the final ultimate stage of moksha wherein we realize our own true nature or the true self or the core within. Once we know that aspect of life, it is impossible to have any fears. If we already know we are eternal, there is nothing to fear about.

Tackling bhaya (fear)

Once you know you are immutable, no other fear can grip you. Hence the shloka budhir balam yasho dhairayam nirbhayatvam arogatam. That fearlessness comes when we understand our true nature. But this is the last step, so until then, how do we tackle our fears?

First thing remember that if not this life, we always have the next life!

Secondly, the only way to manage fear is to face it. There is no circumventing or no other way other than challenging and facing it. It is easier said than done, but there is no alternative. As long as we avoid it, our fears only multiply. The real actual fear is only 1%. Rest of it is our imaginative fears. 99% of the time it is our imagination that creates the vulnerability rather than the reality. We are so creative that we create an elaborate scheme of fears around that 1% of what it could’ve been. The only way to remove is to stand up and face it – whatever the fear may be. Do not shrug the cause of the fear by pushing it under the rug or running away from it to hide yourself. Instead, take it by its horns and face it and deal with it immediately right here right now. Whatever the misconceptions may have been that created the layers of fear, face those instead of hiding away. Unless you face them there is no way to get out of it. That’s when you realize that the root problem is only 1%, rest of it was purely virgin imagination. The fears chase us as long as we allow them to chase us. When we take the courageous step of turning around and facing them, we realize how hollow they are. What I was really afraid of was just 1%, rest all of it was purely my imagination. If the problem was real, there is a real solution. There are no other solutions for the imaginary problems other than getting up and facing the fears.

The final solution is to understand one’s own nature. Only knowledge can remove that fear of annihilation.

The difference between inhibitions and fear are that you have reservations and hang-ups about inhibitions. The inhibitions are based out of prejudices whereas fears are born out of basic ignorance or the fear of annihilation. One is based out of convictions or prejudices, and the other one is out of fear of non-existence.
There is another set of positive fears and these are good fears as well. Fear of somebody you respect and love. Often we have respect but may not have love; or we may have love but no respect. At certain age when we are trying to instill some good discipline in kids, the logic doesn’t reach the children. So we create and instill certain fear or sometimes create superstitions so that they follow the instructions. We thus fear God, parents, teachers, repercussions of unconscious actions or failure to fulfill your responsibilities. These fears pull in some discipline in us and keep us focused.

Krodahā (Anger)

Anger erupts in frustrating situations when our desires and expectations are not met. Our own thresholds of expectations give rise to anger. Should we even have expectations? Why is it difficult for us to live without expectations? Can we really not progress in life without expectations?

Broadly there are two kinds of expectations.

Justified expectations

There are expectations for me, and then there are expectations for my responsibilities. Let’s look at it step-by-step. Most parents will be able to relate to this. We expect that our child learns and grows in the right direction. We have various types of expectations for our children for their own good, and these kinds of expectations are not wrong. It is for the betterment and their own upliftment and we continually push them and nudge them towards developing a greater better themselves. That is one expectation. Somewhere down the lane this expectation gets smudged corrupted and charged with negativity. It starts building in an expectation for my own self through them. That expectation becomes my personal pride, gratification and sense of satisfaction and glory when I start seeing them do what I had expected them to do. Such kinds of expectations are detrimental and will make us frustrated when these expectations are not met. These expectations.

Few layers of such frustrations padded together eventually burst out forth with anger. Sometimes these frustrations keep piling up and they don’t find a suitable vent. We then find a weak link in our system on whom we can unleash our anger. The frustrations are waiting to be vented out to the weakest possible resistance. We can’t behave like this with our superiors, so we find our subordinates or someone else to reprimand. This ripple effect is constantly going on.

The first reason for the frustration is the kind of expectation that I build for myself through the ones I am responsible for (e.g. my family). My pride and self-worth is invested in it. It brings in a certain amount of joy and satisfaction in me. When that is not met, the impact is frustration and it gets expressed as anger. If our expectations are as close to reality as possible, we have fewer frustrations.
Unjustified unreasonable expectations

Sometimes there are unjustified and unrealistic expectations. There is no point crying over spilled milk. So getting frustrated over spilled milk is unjustified. It is over, move on. The frustration is because we are not ready to accept and inadvertently are prone to making mistakes again and again. It is unjustified because when it happens by me, I want everyone else to sympathize with me. However, when it happens because of somebody else, we can’t maintain the same composure. Screaming at that point of time is not going to be beneficial. Best thing would be to manage the damage.

Tackling krodhā (anger)

If you are hitting a wall every single time, find a way to manage it. Giving up is not a solution, rather, adapting is the way to manage it. When a river flows and encounters an immovable mountain, it just finds a contour around it and continues moving ahead. If it is a small boulder or a stone, it works differently! Similarly we just have to learn to distinguish between the mountains and the boulders. Instead of expecting others to work according to your pattern, map your mind and pattern to their ways of working! Or if your daily commute during peak hours leaves you frustrated every day, find another way to manage it. The commute is inevitable, so even if alternate routes don’t reduce the commute time, instead of expecting the traffic to clear up immediately, find a way to spend the time meaningfully. Take care of the backlog of phone calls if required. Or simply use it as your personal time to contemplate. You can accomplish so much instead of getting frustrated.

Anger is bad if it is out of control. However, if it is in control and brings about meaningfulness by its use, there is nothing wrong using it. However many of us don’t even know how to handle it, leave alone knowing how to use it. First and foremost, regain your balance and then think of how to use it productively. Our scriptures provide ample examples of mahatmas who used anger beneficially. Rishi Durvasa is an amazing character in the Puranas and is highly revered. Most of us can’t comprehend him, and we often wonder how can he be so sloppy with his emotions and get angry for everything. But we fail to understand that wherever he has shown his anger, the ultimate result of his showering of anger is that the recipients have had the darshan (vision) of Bhagwan. If somebody’s anger were to give us that vision, it is like a shortcut to moksha!

Anger can be a potential tool provided you know how to use it. You should not get carried away by it. Currently every time the anger erupts, it doesn’t go away. We carry it around wherever we go and corrupt the environment with our anger. Once you know how to express it at the optimal level such that it extracts the best for you and for the other
individual(s), express it only for that moment and then you move forward. Pujya Gurudev Swami chinmayananda ji was such a strict disciplinarian. He would get angry but only for that moment.

So let the krodhā not be a stumbling block, but a good weapon in your toolset such that you can use it and not abuse it.

Step 2: Dedicating Life to a Higher Purpose

Once the channel is cleared of various unnecessary disturbances, then it has to be connected to the altar of worship.

A busy mind is less likely to be in danger. But an idle mind is said to be a devil’s workshop. So far our mind was busy with our own inhibitions, attachments, fear and anger. Once the cause of agitation is removed, there is a certain amount of peace built within. The mind that was so far busy with the internal chaos is now freed. So the next subject to be introduced to the mind is manmayā mām upāsritāḥ. Find that form of God to whom you can relate to the most. We have a wide variety of gods and goddesses to choose from! This form can be the one anchor that you can latch on to. Life has an amazing set of twists and turns that can take us by surprise. Our balance in life can be easily toppled. Various experiences, people, conditioning, and many other factors can throw us apart. At that time when life seems to be shattering, we cannot start building the process of security. That process has to start way earlier while you are on the growth path.

Notice the reflectors on the roads. The white reflectors divide the driving lanes. The yellow reflectors indicate caution, while the red reflectors denote that you are on the wrong side of the road. Blue reflectors are parallel to the fire hydrants so the fire engines can easily locate the nearest fire hydrant in case of fire. They can then use that water source. These fire hydrants could not have been built after a fire in the home or in the neighborhood. They had to be a part of the overall housing development.

As you are getting onto the peaceful platform within wherein the mind and its cause of agitation has been answered, you create the safety network. Hold on to that one form of God whom you can anchor upon or reach out to when everything else fails. The one thing that never fails is your connection to the lord of your hearts. This is very important and goes well beyond the symbolic meaning of gods or goddesses. If we get too caught up in the symbolism, we lose the actual connection with the lord. On the other end of the spectrum we are sometimes so scared that you name any god, and you will find that in the person’s altar. Fear of god is deeply ingrained in some of us and we keep all gods in the altar. Connection with god should not be based out of fear. Worship that form of god which strikes you in your head or your heart. It doesn’t matter which form of god you choose. Gods are quite benevolent and don’t fight with each other! Find one form of god that you can relate to and establish a connection with that form. Every other relationship can fail, but your relationship with god will never ditch you. So sit in front of the lord, connect with the lord and talk to the lord. It is up to you how you connect to the lord. Some
connect with god as their own child, or a friend or a parent. People like Mirabai and Andal worshipped the Lord as their husband.

Create an altar for the lord where you can establish your connections. When you sit here, you can shut out the external disturbances and connect with the lord. If you are not connected, your messages won’t reach the lord. Don’t make this a mechanical routine. Connect with the lord just as you would do with any other person. That is *manmayā*. Then *mām upāśritāḥ* surrender to that lord and communicate with the lord. If your message has to reach the lord, you have to be connected to the lord. Therefore in the sixteen steps of puja, the first step in *dhyana* – invoking; then *asana* - offering Him a seat after which you begin communicating. Sit and relate to whichever form of god you can relate to, and then talk to the lord. Once that relationship or a bond is created, you will have such an amazing strength built within to face come what may. You don’t tell your Lord how big the problem is, but instead tell the problem how big your lord is!

Having such an anchor in your life gives you the stability sooner than later when you are thrown overboard in life. That mental strength and tenacity of mind is built just by building the anchor. It is like a fail-proof method you build that even if you experience a fall, it puts you back on track sooner than when you don’t have it. You can’t guarantee that your life will be flawless or won’t ever have experiences that will topple off your confidence or throw you off-balance. So when it does get toppled, our *shraddha* faith or connection and communication capacity with the lord puts us back on our feet.

Make it a point to sit and connect with the lord daily. In the morning, make it a personal time and do your japa and puja. In the evening time it is similar to all birds who come back together. Make it a family time to collectively chant at least a few prayers and do the aarti. Everybody gets connected to that form. Not only are you connecting, but you are establishing a pattern in your children’s life that they also learn to connect with the lord.

Just having this faith and connection doesn’t take your life in the right direction. For that, you need clarity.

**Step 3: Seek Clarity**

*bahavo jñāna tapasā*: Perform the penance of knowledge consistently. None of us are perfect individuals. At the existing stage of our own maturity right now, we classify certain things as right or wrong; positive or negative; important or unimportant. This classification is not unbeatable, it is just based on the current level of maturity. The *jñāna tapasā* entails taking this knowledge of whatever we have heard during the *satsang*, contemplating on it, and then putting it in terms of small actionable that we can do in the world. The first few attempts will certainly not be successful and they will backfire. When the experience backfires, don’t dump the knowledge or the processing of information. Instead, bring the failure back on the table and analyze where exactly things went wrong. Reflect on whether it was interacting with people, with situation or various other aspects of your interactions. Ask yourself where did you go wrong. Is the knowledge wrong? Is my understanding incorrect? What was it that I did not take into consideration? Reprocess it
and then go back into the world. This consistent effort in refining one’s own wisdom and not fall to a complacent status wherein I assume that I am perfect. As we strive towards perfection, keep making changes albeit small, but consistent. That is called jñāna tapasā.

Step 4: Meditation

_Pūtā mad-bhāvam āgatāh_

*mad-bhāvam* - Take refuge in Me, the Consciousness, the core of our inner being. Don’t depend on the externalities for creating this sanctuary. Reach there by the _tapas_ (austerity) of _karma, bhakti_ and _jñāna_ and dive into meditation. _pūtā_ – purified by meditation, these individuals reach amazing sense of contentment and happiness within. Lord Krishna says _mad-bhāvam āgatāh_ they attain Me in loving devotion. Such individuals alone can provide a happy experience to all those with whom they interact.

Summary

The entire essence of Vedanta is summarized in this _shloka_ which provides a beautiful comprehensive method that has to be memorized and applied in everyday life. The only way to manage our life experiences is to understand crux of divinity and experience it in day to day life. You can attain _moksha_ (i.e. get out of the cycle of birth and death) by connecting yourself to divinity.