

Qualifications of the Aspirant -1

Entering into the Realities of Inner life

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### Question::

Why are religious rites and rituals introduced into our lives, basically? What are they meant for?

(or)

What actions does BASIC 'Shariat' or 'Karma-kanda' comprise of? What is the next phase of Shariat or Karma-kanda?

(or)

What sort of psychological rigidity can occur by following 'Shariat' or 'Karma-kanda'?

(or)

Why do most persons stay attached to rites and rituals? Why don't they try to transcend them? When can one do so?

(or)

Who is called a 'spiritual aspirant'? What is Tariqat or 'Aadhyatma Marga'?

(or)

When does "inner life" become spiritually barren? When can it become spiritually beautiful?

(or)

Are 'conventions' spiritually rich? Are 'conventional or ritualistic ways' spiritually sound? Why 'unconventional ways' are sought, often by many?

(or)

Is it possible to transcend from 'ritualism' to 'spiritual mentality' on one's own? How can one attain freedom from 'conventional' or 'unconventional' ways??

(or)

When can a 'worldly person' transform into a 'spiritual aspirant'?

(or)

What are the pros and cons of Dogmas and Creeds?

(or)

Why 'critical thought' is necessary in the realm of spirituality? What sort of usage does it have here?

(or)

What is the role of 'true light' in dissipating 'spiritual ignorance'?

(or)

Why is it difficult to give up dogmas and creeds in favor of 'critical thought'? Why is it said that 'Practice is more important than theory'?

(or)

How to make 'critical thought' spiritually fruitful?

(or)

What role does critical and creative thinking play in balancing the mind and heart?

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What role does critical and creative thinking play in balancing the mind and heart?

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How are 'critical and creative thinking' and 'spiritual preparation' RELATED?

**Answer:**

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Though 'realization of Truth' is the ultimate destiny of all persons, there are very few who have the necessary preparation for early fulfillment of this glorious destiny.

***The 'mind' of the worldly individual is darkened by a thick layer of 'accumulated sanskaras', which must be considerably weakened for the aspirant even to enter the 'spiritual path.'***

***The usual method for gradually dissipating the load of sanskaras is to follow, as strictly as possible, the external code of religious rituals and ceremonies.***

**This stage of 'external conformity' to religious injunctions or traditions is known as the pursuit of *shariat*, or *karma kanda*. It covers actions like**

- offering daily prayers,
- visiting holy places,
- performing duties prescribed by the scriptures, and
- observing well established rules of the 'ethical codes' generally accepted by the 'moral consciousness' of the times.

**The stage of 'external conformity' is useful in its own way as a spiritual discipline, though it is, by no means free from evil effects. For, *it not only tends to make one dry, rigid, and mechanical, but it often NOURISHES some kind of 'subtle egoism.'***

*However, most persons are attached to the life of external conformity because they find it the easiest way of placating their uneasy consciences.*

**The soul often spends several lives in gathering the lessons of external conformity; but there always comes a time when it *tires* of external conformity and becomes more interested in the realities of inner life. *When a worldly person takes to this higher kind of search, he might be said to have become an "aspirant."***

Like the insect that passes on through metamorphosis to the next stage of existence, *the aspirant transcends the phase of external conformity (shariat, or karma-kanda) and enters upon the 'path of spiritual emancipation,' known as tariqat or adhyatma-marga.*

In this higher phase, the 'aspirant' is no longer satisfied by external conformity with certain rules, but wants to acquire those "*qualifications*" that would make his inner life spiritually beautiful.

**From the standpoint of the realities of inner life, *the external conformity may often be spiritually barren; and a life that deviates from such rigid conformity may often be spiritually rich.***

In seeking conformity with established conventions and formality, one is almost always prone to slip into a life of 'false' or 'illusory' values, rather than a life based upon 'true' and 'lasting' values. ***What is conventionally recognized need not always be spiritually sound.***

On the contrary, many conventions express and embody 'illusory values' since they have come into existence as a result of the working of average minds that are spiritually ignorant.

**'Illusory values' are mostly conventional because they grow into that matrix of mentality which is most common. This does not mean that conventions necessarily embody nothing but illusory values.**

Sometimes people stick to unconventional things for no other reason than that they are out of the ordinary. ***The unusual nature of their pursuits or interests enables them to feel their 'separateness' and 'difference' from others, and to take delight in it.***

Unconventional things also often generate interest merely through their novelty in contrast with those that are conventional.

The 'illusory values' of the usual become insipid through familiarity; and the mind, then, has a tendency to transfer the illusion of value to those things that are not usual, instead of trying to discover 'true' and 'lasting' values.

**Transcending the stage of 'external conformity' does not imply a merely mechanical or thoughtless change from conventionality to unconventionality.** Such a change would be essentially in the nature of reaction and could in no way contribute toward a life of 'freedom' and 'truth.'

***The freedom from conventionality that appears in the life of the 'aspirant' is not due to any uncritical reaction but is due to the exercise of 'critical thought.'***

***Those who would transcend the stage of 'external conformity' and enter into the high life of 'inner realities' must develop the capacity to distinguish between 'false' and 'true' values, irrespective of conventionality or unconventionality.***

**The rise from *shariat (karma-kanda)* to *tariqat (adyatma-marga)* is not to be interpreted, therefore, as being merely a departure from external conformity.**

- *It is NOT a change from conventionality to idiosyncrasy, from the usual to the unusual.*

- *It is a change from a life of THOUGHTLESS ACCEPTANCE of 'established traditions' to a 'mode of being' that is based upon THOUGHTFUL APPRECIATION of the difference between the 'important' and the 'unimportant.'*
- *It is a change from a state of 'implicit ignorance' to a state of 'critical thoughtfulness'.*

**At the stage of mere external conformity, the spiritual ignorance of an individual is often so complete that *he does not even realize that he is "ignorant"*. But, *when the person is being awakened and enters the path, he begins by realizing the need for true light*.** In the initial stages, the effort to attain this light takes the form of 'intellectual discrimination' between

- the 'lasting' and the 'transitory'
- the 'true' and the 'false',
- the 'real' and the 'unreal',
- the 'important' and the 'unimportant'.

**For the spiritual aspirant, however, *it is not enough to exercise merely intellectual discrimination between the 'false' and the 'true'.***

***Though intellectual discrimination is undoubtedly the basis for all further preparation, it yields its fruit only when newly perceived 'values' are brought into relation with practical life. From the spiritual viewpoint, what matters is not 'theory' but 'practice'!***

The

- ideas,
- beliefs,
- opinions,
- views, or
- doctrines

that a person might hold intellectually constitute a superficial layer of human personality. ***Very often, someone believes in one thing and does exactly the opposite.***

*The bankruptcy of 'barren beliefs' is all the more pitiable because the person who feeds upon them often suffers from the delusion that he is spiritually advanced, when in truth he has not even begun 'spiritual life'.*

**Sometimes, even a 'wrong view', which is held with fervour, may indirectly invite an experience that open the gates to spiritual life.**

***Even at the stage of shariat, or karma-kanda, allegiance to religions is not infrequently a source of inspiration for many 'selfless' and 'noble' acts.***

For while the dogmas and creeds are blindly accepted, they often are held with a 'fervour' and 'enthusiasm' that supply a dynamic element to the ideology that has been accepted by the person for the moment.

**Dogmas and creeds, as compared with barren views and doctrines, have the distinct advantage of being embraced not only by the 'intellect' but also by the 'heart.' *They cover and affect a wider part of personality than purely theoretical opinions.***

**Dogmas and creeds generally, however, are as much a source of evil as of good because in them, *the guiding vision is clouded owing to degeneration or suspension of 'critical thinking.'***

*If allegiance to 'creeds' and 'dogmas' has sometimes been 'good' for the individual or the community to which he belongs, it has more often done harm.*

***Though the 'mind' and the 'heart' are involved in allegiance to 'dogmas and creeds,' both function in such cases under the serious handicap of suspension of 'critical thought.'***

**Hence 'dogmas' and 'creeds' do not contribute to unmixed good.**

**When a person gives up uncritically accepted dogmas and creeds in favor of 'views' and 'doctrines' to which he has devoted thought, there is a certain amount of advance in-so-far, as *his 'mind' has now begun to think and critically examine its 'beliefs.'***

***Very often, however, the newly held beliefs are seen to lack the fervour and enthusiasm that characterized allegiance to dogmas and creeds. IF THESE NEWLY HELD BELIEFS LACK MOTIVE POWER, they belong only***

**to the superficial aspects of life; and they hang loosely upon the person like an overcoat.**

**The 'mind' has been emancipated from the domination of uncultured emotion, but this is often achieved by sacrificing the cooperation of the 'heart.'**

**If the results of 'critical thought' are to be spiritually fruitful, these results must again invade and recapture the "heart" so as to enlist its cooperative functioning.**

In other words, **the "ideas" that have been accepted after 'critical examination' must again be released into active life if they are to yield their full benefit.** In the process of practical living, they often undergo a healthy transformation and become more soundly interwoven with the very fabric of life.

The transition from 'external conformity' (shariat, or karma-kanda) to the 'life of inner realities' (tariqat, or adhyatma-marga) involves two steps::

1. *freeing the "mind" from the inertia of 'uncritical acceptance' based upon blind imitation and stirring it to "critical thinking"; and*
2. *bringing the results of 'critical and discriminative thinking' into practical life.*

**In order to be spiritually fruitful, "thinking" must be not only critical but creative!**

**Critical and creative thinking leads to 'spiritual preparation' by cultivating those qualities that contribute toward the perfection and balancing of the 'mind' and 'heart' and the release of unfettered Divine Life.**

– Meher Baba

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