

The Setbacks and Joys in the Pursuit of Religious and Spiritual Freedom.

The way it was

As far as I can remember in the 1950s while growing up, we as children took part in the family's traditions as a matter of routine. We went to temples and gatherings herded by our parents. We met men and women that were considered holy by our elders. Later books became sources of religious and spiritual knowledge. Thus adventures into a wider world opened up. Often this world was unfamiliar to parents who remained within their tradition. During the years of higher education and onto a professional life, the expanse of this world took place with new faces, new concepts and even new rituals.

The way it is today

Sampradaya-s or traditions based on a heritage- lineage are still maintained by many. Those that have families have their young ones exposed to many an inherited tradition out of a desire to give them a foundation. Motivation derived from fear and a reluctance to give up cultural comforts do play a role here. Many a family attend church more for social reasons rather than for deep spiritual needs. A sense of belonging to a community that pray alike is valued here. When these children reach adulthood and move away from home it is not surprising to see them take to very different paths. To compound to this development, the two income family so common these days, have much of their energies drained due to the demands made at work. This leaves very little time and willingness to continue many a custom that they as children grew up with. Many have moved away from their hometowns in order to pursue their careers. There is an increasing number of families that move away from even their homeland and so find themselves in a less comfortable cultural surrounding.

It is not an exaggeration when I state that both in the east and in the west amongst the educated, there is an increased feeling of irrelevancy of old practices. With goods, knowledge and jobs crisscrossing the world, no longer are roots being put down in a single culturally homogenous area anymore. So customs and traditions are being eroded. This vacuity has induced searches into other avenues of fulfillment especially religious and spiritual disciplines that have become popular which at one time were restricted to certain lands. A market place lined with stalls selling God, miracles, short cuts, quick fixes seem to pop up everywhere thus bombarding spiritual needs. Curiosity springing out of such needs and a sense of dissatisfaction with day to day life become the prime motive for seekers to shop at many a stall.

The setbacks

There are no real demerits incurred with this type of juggling however there are indeed setbacks to one's progress. An integrated personal growth fails to occur. It is like a tree

being shifted from place to place at different times. It is never given a chance to develop a strong root system, which if allowed to remain, would have facilitated a fuller and healthier growth.

There is a plethora of imprints being received by the seeker, often contributing to much confusion. Authors and teachers who are convinced of their patented hold on truth and leaders of many spirit based movements are colored by wanting to be popular thereby falling easy prey to fashion and ending up with inflated egos. Their need to have a following overtakes their own personal transformation and spiritual evolution. It is not surprising to see them share the same weaknesses that movie stars suffer when they are away from the limelight. Many a vision quest to remote areas are undertaken not realizing that it cannot displace gains, that accrue when quests are take, by developing a witness mode to oneself no matter where we are. When we allow others and the media to do our thinking then the capacity for *viveka* is untapped. This is a faculty that man possesses, which facilitates personal sifting and refining of all inputs and imprints, prior to making them one's one.

The Joys and Rewards

Motivated by a sheer love of the Divine, or by the sincere need to know the Ultimate truth, or urged by feelings of wanting to live alifeconsistent to the Cosmic Order that is built into creation, this pursuit of spiritual and religious freedom can indeed present a cornucopia of joys and rewards. This occurs only when certain conditions are met and practices are maintained with diligence.

Below are some tools.

1. Establishing a personal clear cut estimation of one's needs which will change at different times of one's life. A student's need is not the same as the head of a household.
2. Remaining vigilant and selective without being judgemental, in what is selected for our growth. Allowing the mind to stay clear and simply observe trends that come and go from time to time.
3. Consistency in self observation of changes taking place within. Knowing when to stop and when to move on and how to adjust.
4. Refraining from blind adherence to any one or any single teaching coming from outside of oneself. Being your own person and thus never losing the objectivity of one's precious mind which is a divine gift that is given to man.

The Outcome

These practices over a period of time end up in giving a deep seated relationship with the universe and its inhabitants, all connected by the Thread-Divine. Experiences in life

will demonstrate in unexplainable ways, the increasing presence of the divine behind many an event. An inner strength is drawn whereby many time tested values become the coins for daily transactions in life and which provides the boat to sail safely through periods of turbulence. No longer attached to labels, true freedom to connect with the source becomes totally available to each and everyone.

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