In Retrospect

In the first part of this essay, published in Tapovan Prasad, September 2002, we saw that sadhana-chatuṣṭaya is the four-fold means that makes one an adhikāri, i.e. a qualified aspirant for the knowledge of Brahma. Of the four, 1. Viveka (discrimination) 2. Vairagya (dispassion) 3. śamādi-ṣaṭka-sampatti (six disciplines or inner-wealths beginning with śama) and 4. Mumukṣutva (desire for liberation), we have seen in detail the first one, viveka.

Viveka, which literally means discrimination, stands for the firm and decisive conviction (niścaya) that Brahma alone is permanent and all else – the whole perceivable world (drṣya-prapañca) is impermanent. Such a viveka, an ‘intellectual-heartfelt-sureness’ is a great achievement in one’s spiritual path. Decisiveness in this matter has far-reaching results. In fact viveka is the very foundation of sādhanā (spiritual practice). It transforms the individual into a sādhaka (seeker of Truth) and also paves the way for the birth of the other three aspects of the sādhanā-chatuṣṭaya.

In this part, we shall elaborate on vairāgya, the second aspect of sādhanā-chatuṣṭaya.

Vairāgya — The three types

The word vairāgya literally means the ‘state of absence (vigata) of attachment (rāga) — vigatarāgasya bhāvah vairāgyah’. It can be translated as detachment, desirelessness or dispassion. Vairāgya is of
three types: manda (dull), madhyama (mediocre), and tīvra (intense).

a. Manda Vairagya

This is only a temporary vairagya. When one's near and dear die or when one loses all one's hard earned wealth due to some unexpected calamity, there arises an intense sorrow and in the spur of the moment one exclaims, 'Ah! Samsāra (worldly life) is too painful to bear'. At that moment of heart-rending pain, one feels like giving up everything. But this feeling of renunciation is only momentary. After some time when things become a little better, one is back to square one — whipped up by desire, once again sweating and toiling for the fleeting pleasures of the senses.

b. Madhyama Vairagya

Though there is dispassion to things of this world, there is a strong desire for the pleasures of the other higher worlds. Due to a little merit (puñya), one understands painful nature of sense-enjoyments — the tension of acquiring and hoarding, then the fear of losing and even after acquiring, the possibility of prolonged disease or sudden death ever hanging over one's head like the sword of Damocles. Yet, this is not a perfect vairagya as the individual has dreams of subtler and greater enjoyments in more permanent realms like Swarga loka, Brahma loka etc. And he plans to go there after death by living here a life of virtue and also meticulously performing various Vedic rituals which promise those realms. He believes that he can be truly happy with those heavenly pleasures. So the individual has only substituted the desire of objects of this world with those of some other higher world. The passion for sense-enjoyments has not faded.

c. Tīvra Vairagya

This is true, intense and complete vairagya where one is totally dispassionate to everything — objects of this world and also the higher heavenly pleasures. This arises out of tremendous merit (puñya) and from a clear perception that all enjoyments whether of this world or of the other can never give one the permanent happiness for, they are all born of actions and hence that which has a beginning will
surely end. One sees the impermanence of such pleasures and judges clearly that the seeking of pleasures can only further push a person neck deep into samsāra. It is such a firm, absolute and true vairāgya that is the means for Knowledge.

Vairāgya — the definition

Bhagavadpada Shankaracharya defines itvra vairāgya in Vivekacūḍāmaṇī:

तद्वैराग्यं ज्ञुमस्य या दर्शनश्रवणादिभिः ।
देहविद्यावपर्यते द्वानित्ये भोगवस्तुनि ॥

“Vairāgya is revulsion from all things seen, heard etc. and from all transient objects of enjoyment beginning with the body up to Brahma.”

Here the word Brahma does not mean the Supreme Brahman but stands for the joys of Brahma-loka, the highest realm of worldly enjoyment. Now, we shall analyse vairāgya on the five-fold criteria as we had done for viveka*.

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* For the five-fold criteria and the analysis of Viveka please refer to 'What is sādhana-chatusṭaya Part-I', published in the September issue of Tapovan Prasad.

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The five-fold analysis of Vairāgya

a. Hetu — the cause: The cause for vairāgya is viveka (discrimination). One sees clearly that the sense-pleasures, here or hereafter, are no solution to the emptiness within. One understands that they are temporary in nature, are impure, weaken the person, create rāga (likes) and dveṣa (dislikes), strengthen the vāsanas, cause further births and thus cause only more trouble rather than bring happiness. When the intellect is firmly convinced about the hollowness of sense-pleasures, it will no more blindly rush towards it.

b. Svarūpa — the nature: Just as one feels a revulsion (jugupsā) to one’s own vomit or the faeces of a crow, one has a strong dislike towards sense-pleasures and even starts fearing their enjoyment. Thus there is an absolute cessation of desire and the consequent pursuit of worldly enjoyment.

Sant Jnaneshwar in his commentary on the Geeta brings out this feeling of revulsion beautifully when he gives a series of similes to describe the attitude of a man of detachment towards
sense-objects. He says that “a man of true detachment will run towards sense-objects with as much enthusiasm as one would rush out to embrace a dead queen’s rotting body, with as much satisfaction as one would decide to quench one’s thirst by drinking the pus flowing out from a leper’s wound and with as much readiness as one would enter a boiling cauldron of molten iron to take a refreshing bath. It is a powerful way of expressing the idea that where the intellect has come to a firm conviction about the hollowness of sense-objects, the mind will not gush forth towards them with hopes and expectations of satisfaction therein”. (Quoted from Pujya Gurudev’s commentary on Verse 21 of Viveka-cūḍāmaṇī).

c. Kārya — the effect: This is described as the absence of desire even for objects which can be enjoyed, for example food, which one has to eat daily. Further, even while experiencing them he finds no sense of enjoyment as such.

d. Avati — the perfection or culmination: Indifference (upekṣā) towards the whole gamut of pleasures — right from kāmini, kāncana and kirti (lust, wealth and fame — as Sri Ramakrishna puts it) of this world, up to the extremely subtle celestial pleasures of Brahma-loka. Brahma-loka is the highest and most sublime of the fourteen worlds. This indifference is like the utter unconcern which one has for, say, a torn cloth or a straw that one may find on the wayside.

e. Phala — the result or fruit: Vairāgya gives rise to the next aspect of the sādhanachatuṣṭaya namely šāmādi-śaṭka-sampatti. Certain texts also indicate sāmipyā type* of mukti with regard to brahma-loka. This secondary result is pointed out taking into consideration the death of the seeker before Self-realisation.

**Importance of Vairāgya**

Vairāgya is the practical application of viveka. If viveka is the knowledge that all sense-pleasures are impermanent in nature and that they do not give any real happiness, vairāgya is not to hanker after them. What is the purpose of Knowledge if

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* Four kinds of mukti with respect to Brahma-loka are pointed out. They are: 1. Sālōkya, 2. Sāmipyā, 3. Sārāpya and 4. Sāyujya. These four form a topic by themselves and hence will be elaborated in the later essays.
one cannot reap the benefit of it? Mere viveka is as good as having wealth that cannot be used in one’s need. Viveka reaches its fulfilment only in vairāgya and as long as it remains without vairāgya one can never see the benefit of spiritual pursuit. Without vairāgya there is no spiritual progress at all. Spiritual progress is measured by the amount of vairāgya one has. Hence vairāgya is very very important.

How to cultivate  Vairāgya

Since viveka is the foundation of vairāgya, unless viveka is strengthened, vairāgya will remain shaky. Three wrong estimations regarding the objects of the world make a person stagnate in a mire of sensory pleasures. They are:

1. Satyatvam: the sense of reality about the objects of the world.
2. Nityatvam: the sense of their permanence.
3. Sukhitvam: the false imagination that there is 'joy-content' in the objects (technically called sankalpa).

As long as a sadhaka entertains these three notions about the objects of the world, he cannot but seek them for his happiness. It is only in the removal of these three false notions that there is freedom from desire. Satyatvam should be removed by understanding the objects' mithyatvam (illusory nature), nityatvam by their anityatvam (ephemeral nature) and sukhitvam by their duḥkhitvam (their pain causing nature). Once an individual recognises that the world of objects is illusory like mirage waters, impermanent like the bubbles in water and are only capable of creating pain and sorrow, one would never run after them. Nachiketas of Kathopanishad fame reveals viveka beautifully when he says to Yama:

“O Death! Ephemeral are these, and they waste away the vigour of all organs that a man has. All life, without exception, is fleeting indeed. Let the chariots be yours alone; let the dances and songs be yours alone.”

Please note how Nachiketas speaks of the ephemeral nature (anityatvam) of sense-pleasures
and how they cause only more and more pain (*duḥkhitvam*) by sapping one’s strength and vitality. When one applies steadily such *viveka*, the mind is slowly weaned away from its foolish, dangerous and many a time mere habitual pursuit of sense-pleasures.

**Conclusion**

The never-ending hunt for joy and comfort from the world of objects only makes us go in purposeless, joyless circles. The sense of frustration and gnawing emptiness within from which one tries to escape by revelling in sense-objects only becomes stronger and stronger making the whole exercise of sensuous pursuit futile. Momentary thrills do not satisfy us. Real joy is only in cultivating *viveka* and *vairāgya* and realising the Supreme, which alone is *satyam* (true), *śivam* (auspicious) and *sundaram* (beautiful). The *Mahabharata* declares the greatness of that state of total *vairāgya*:

न सुख देवराजस्य न सुख चक्रवर्तिनः।
यदां वीरागस्य मुनेरकान्तशीलिनः।
यच्च कामसुखं लोके यच्च दिवं महत् सुखम्।
तृष्णाक्षयसुखस्येते नाहतः।
पोडळी कलाम्॥

“The happiness of Devendra (the Lord of the gods) or that of an emperor is nothing compared to that of a saint devoid of all attachment, and living alone. The joy of sense-pleasures or even the most marvellous celestial joys cannot approach even a sixteenth part of the joy of a man in whom all desires have disappeared.”

May that state be ours by the Lord’s grace and Pujya Gurudev’s blessings.

In the next part of this essay, we shall elaborate on the third aspect of *sādhana*-chatusṭaya, which is *śamādi-śaṭka-sampatti* or the six-fold inner wealth of discipline.