

Body: A friend or a Foe

About 3-4 years ago, I was at home on my birthday. I called Guruji to seek his blessings and while he blessed me and said, '*Kalyan Ho*', he also said, 'Take care of your body. Keep it healthy and active'.

These words from Guruji forced me to think about the importance of the body for a seeker. What should be the attitude and understanding of a seeker towards the body? Determining the answer to this becomes difficult sometimes because there exist two diametrically opposite views on this topic. One line of thought says that the body is our enemy; it is one of the biggest hindrances in the path of spirituality. It calls the body a lie, hell, '*Maya*'. It considers that one is not the body since it is nothing but a bundle of dirty stuff & excreta – an impure entity which has nothing to do with the self. It considers one to be the self (aatma) which is tender, pure, pious and a part of the Almighty (*Parmatma*). The second line of thought is that the body is not a hindrance but infact an aid on the path of spirituality. It is a friend and not a foe.

I have heard Guruji speak many a times on this topic and in the below paragraphs I have tried to share my understanding.

There is a very common adage in Hindi, "*Pehla Sukh Nirogi Kaya*" (The first happiness is a healthy body). Our first dharma is towards keeping the body fit, active and energetic. In our shastras, Dharma-Artha-Kaama-Moksha are prescribed as the four pursuits of life. None of these can be pursued without the body. Whatever information we acquire or whatever knowledge we gain it is through the medium of the body. Hence, cursing the body and calling it impure is childishness. If I realize that 'I' am not the body but 'aatma' (soul/ spirit) it is with the aid of the body. When I experience my self or experience God it is through the body. Hence, body should be considered as a great asset, a means without which realization of self or God is not possible. Therefore, realized souls have actually called the body a temple. Our scriptures say that the human body is considered rare even by Gods! Even if Gods want to realize the self they would have to take birth in human form. Only after attaining a human body can they experience the self.

Without the body one cannot experience anything. Even the realization of our existence; of our being is through the body. That which cannot exist without some 'thing' is nothing but that 'thing'. That 'thing' is its nature. Without the body one cannot exist then are we not the body? But if this were to be true then why is it said that 'you are not the body', 'you are beyond the body', 'you are the soul which is nothing but the Almighty' etc? This is said because today, we experience oneness with our body and not with the self. If we were to become steady in the self; experience oneness with the self then we would realize that our body is not separate from our self. However, without first becoming separate from the body one cannot experience oneness with the self.

The reality is that, 'you are not the body' is said because we have become deeply attached to the body. We consider ourselves as the body. Unfortunately instead of focusing on the self our focus is on the body. To loosen these bonds of entanglement, to shake these rigid attachments such statements are made. The intent is to question why we are getting so entangled and bound by the body and hence "you are not the body" is emphasized upon. As soon as we experience our true self we will realize that the self is not different from the body. However, since we don't know what are true, inherent nature is there is duality (body and self). In order to understand what "my self" is I must forgo what I today consider my self. The strong belief that, 'I am the body' must be loosened.

Thus in order to experience the true self the current notion of self must be given up. Once the true self is known the current (notion of) self will merge in it. This is just a method or a tactic. It is not the Truth or maybe just a partial truth. (Note: there is never a half-truth or quarter-truth, this is just for driving the message!)

Here is an analogy. If a wave realizes its true self, what will it learn? It will realize that it is nothing but water. It will understand that until now it considered itself to be a wave and now it understands that it is water. Thus the feeling of 'wave-ness' that it had earlier will dissolve away. It will realize that the wave is no different from water. But after this experience will it stop to become a wave? No, the wave will exist, its form, its behaviour (rising and falling) will exist. After self realization its attachment with the wave will end, the wave will not end. The separate identity that it had created from water will end, it will not end. When it considered itself a wave it had forgotten water and when it realized its self it remembered that it is in reality water. It is as simple as that. Similarly, we have forgotten about our self, we experience only the body. After self-realization it is this attachment with the body that will fade away, the body wont.

Hence, both the line of thoughts are for progress on the spiritual path. The line of thought of a foe is a strategy to push us to loosen our oneness with the body and the line of thought of friend is to encourage us to keep it healthy and energetic so that we are able to focus on our sadhana or pursuits of life (dharma, artha, kaama and moksha).

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