

Getting Empowered with Humility and Tolerance

By CHAITANYA CHARAN DAS

To experience ceaseless spiritual happiness Chaitanya Mahaprabhu advocated "Being humbler than a blade of grass, more tolerant than a tree and offering all respects to others and expecting none in return, chanting the holy names of the Lord constantly".

He explained that we are spiritual beings, eternal loving children of God. We can find lasting happiness — not in acquiring material positions and possessions, but in reviving our innate love of God. Humility and tolerance, virtues essential for achieving endless bliss, are also

valuable assets for living peacefully and successfully in this world. Humility, sometimes misconstrued as a weakness, is actually a power that few people tap. Srila Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON, explained humility as freedom from "the anxiety of having the satisfaction of being honoured by others".

Pride, the opposite of humility, makes us crave for honour from others as our source of happiness. When a proud person is disrespected, his lack of freedom becomes appallingly obvious; he is forced by pride to lose his prudence and explode with words and actions, often hurting the other person and even himself far beyond what the situation warrants. Humility, on the contrary, brings freedom from the craving for external honour and empowers us to act for our and everyone's long-term good. Humility doesn't mean that we let others trample upon us without protesting, but that we don't let others' (mis)behaviour determine our decisions and lives. Humility allows us to calmly consider the cause of disrespect and maturely adopt a principled course of action to clarify the situation and rectify the misdemeanour.

Tolerance too is an under-

utilised power. A relative behaves unreasonably, a colleague speaks impolitely, a power cut upsets our plans, another vehicle cuts across our path — such daily situations offer rich premiums for the tolerant. Tolerance empowers us to not let irritating circumstances steal our peace of mind. Lack of tolerance makes us a victim of our circumstances, whereas tolerance brings the freedom to choose an intelligent response and stay fixed in our values and goals, irrespective of our circumstances.

Prabhupada summarises, "One's greatness has to be estimated by the ability to tolerate provoking situations". When people lack tolerance, they respond to adverse situations and inimical people in one of two ways: depression or violence. Chronic depression,

self-martyrdom, inferiority complex, addiction and even suicide are fallouts of the first response, whereas divorce, larceny, murder, and even war are results of the second.

Our biceps protect us from physical dangers. Similarly, humility and tolerance protect us from internal over-reactions to externally distasteful situations. Thus they constitute our inner muscles, which we can increase by the spiritual bodybuilding exercise of chanting the holy names of God. God is the reservoir of all powers and when we connect ourselves to Him through mantra meditation, we gain access to the divine powers of humility and tolerance. Let us therefore chant Hare Krishna (or any other bona fide name of God) with devotion, empower ourselves with inner muscles, find peace amidst the ups and downs of life and contribute towards building a peaceful planet.

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