The vow of non-violence

Ahimsā satyamakrodaḥ tyāgaśśāntirapaiśunaṃ
Dayā bhūteṣva lōluptvaṃ mārdhavaṃ hṛī racāpalaṃ

Non-violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquillity, not finding faults in others, compassion towards all forms of life, absence of covetousness, gentleness in behaviour, modesty and steady determination- are the 11 qualities described by the Lord as belonging to people endowed with godly traits. These traits make a complete man. Putting them into practice bestows one with comforts both in this world and the next, after which he obtains salvation.

It is important for everyone to cultivate these godly qualities. Only then will they shine in their chosen field. Victory will be theirs. They will receive acclaim from both elders and youngsters alike. By cultivating these noble traits, the desire to harm others will never arise in the mind. The need to verbally abuse and hurt the feelings of others ceases completely. Under no circumstances will the person seek to resort to uttering falsehood. He will aspire to remain truthful at all times. The ability to utter those words that are pleasing to the mind arises in him.

Ability to restrain anger arises in him. Quality of sharing his belongings with others comes to him. The desire to give away in charity strengthens in him. Covetousness vanishes and compassion towards all forms of life arises in him. Neither will he bloat at times of praise nor will he shrink when insulted. He instead is filled with equanimity. Love towards the Lord fills his heart completely. Fear towards sinful deeds intensifies. He becomes diligent in living up to the rules laid down by the society. In every object and in every situation, he now perceives only goodness. His demeanour becomes more divine. He transforms into a living God.

Such is the benefit that is obtained due to faithful adherence to godly traits! Needless to say, life becomes a smooth journey thereafter. All the hurdles that come up in the path vanish automatically. Life is rendered fruitful.

A cow and a tiger are not comparable by any standards although both are four-legged animals. While the former is gentle-natured, the latter is ferocious and wild. Leading a gentle life, a cow is revered by one and all. Although it lives only on grass, it has a gentle pleasing nature. Aspire to develop such noble qualities.

Let us recount an incident from the life of Maharishi Jājili, who was filled with godly traits. Seated motionless, Jājili Maharishi was absorbed in intense penance. As time passed by, his hair began to grow enormously and resembled a nest. Attracted by the wide, spacious nest, a few birds began to reside in it. The great saint who could understand the language of the birds was pleased that they decided to use his hair as their nesting ground.

Gradually, he prided in himself thinking, 'Undoubtedly I am the best among saints, for I never harm others. Contrary to it, I am useful to them all. I have provided a home even for birds'. As more time passed, his thinking further underwent a change. 'There is none who can beat me in goodness and in assisting others. Neither is there anyone who can match my levels of endurance and sacrifice. I am the wisest of all. In fact, there is none on earth who can equal me in adherence to the vow of non-violence. I have obtained those supreme levels of penance far beyond the reach of others'. Self-conceitedness thus made its way into him.

His condemnation of others was actually a violent deed. It was sinful. Hearing the vain boasts of the saint, the birds that were resting on his head laughed contemptuously. Exactly at that moment, a celestial voice resounded from heavens, 'O saint! A trader by name Tulādhāra resides in the city of Kashi. People praise him as the best among men. Seated here in solitude you consider yourself to be the best. It would be wise if you could consult others prior to concluding thus'.

The saint was ashamed. He was now envious of that trader. 'I am an ascetic who is leading a life of rigorous austerities and disciplines. How could a trader who is engaged in monetary worldly transactions be superior to me? This is perplexing'. He now proceeded to Kashi. Seeing him approaching, the trader Tulādhāra said, 'O revered saint! You have arrived here to know if there was any element of truth in the celestial message, isn't it?'

In absolute disbelief Maharishi Jājili stared at Tulādhara. He then enquired, 'How could you, who are eternally engrossed in trading activities, know the purpose behind my visit? How could you obtain this transcendental knowledge? What were your efforts towards it? Surely I am perplexed at your accomplishment and am curious to know details pertaining to it. Please elaborate'.

The trader replied, 'O great saint! Adherence to the vow of non-violence has rewarded me with this knowledge. (Non-violence means to not hurt anyone or anything under any circumstances). I strive to be useful to all living entities in creation. To the best of my abilities I try not to harm them in any way. I refrain from getting into quarrels or misunderstandings with anyone. There is none whom I despise and nothing that I deeply

aspire. Contentment is my way of life. Due to these factors, supreme knowledge has dawned in me.

Amongst all dharmas, the vow of non-violence is the best. Akin to humans, even animals have love for their offspring. Thus, it is to be ensured that they are not harmed in any way. With this understanding, one must not overburden them in any way. He must never physically torture them. Our ancient scriptures emphatically dictate that one must develop compassion towards all forms of life, don't they? I strictly put this principle into practice.

I am an ordinary commoner. By no means can I be classified as great. I'm not educated. I have no knowledge of penance, yogic practices and the like. I diligently complete the trading activities that have been passed down many generations considering it my mandated duty. Mud and gold are equal in my eyes. Neither do I seek anything nor do I reject anything. I try to ensure that I do not trouble others needlessly. I have learnt this to be the unwavering final essence'.

In absolute astonishment, Maharishi Jājili enquired of the birds living on his head, 'Dear birds! Is there any truth in the words of this trader?'

The birds replied, "Yes, dear sage. Every word he has spoken is absolutely true. The truth is that we are agents of the Lord of righteousness (dharma devata). You led a life of sacrifice for your benefit, but then prided that you were aiding others. Considering yourself as supreme you condemned others. This trader never seeks profits although trading is his livelihood. Selflessness is visible in his actions. You prided that you had provided us a nesting ground. You considered yourself the best among saints and best among those who served others. You were haughty while this man was engaged in selfless service. Now you decide for yourself- whose path is better? Yours or his?'

Maharishi Jājili prostrated to the celestial agents. He returned to his hermitage, corrected his mistakes, engaged once again in penance and reached the highest states.

From this it is evident that while cultivating noble traits, we must ensure that arrogance does not near us. Simultaneously we must unfailingly complete the duties allotted to us. We must engage in righteous deeds without any form of expectations. Our thoughts, beliefs and speech must eternally be good.

With the grace of Lord Datta may all of you tread the righteous path, take up the vow of non-violence and reap the ultimate benefits!