

Purushartha

According to the Upanishads, we are living life in a stupor. It is only when the inner eye awakens that we truly arise from this slumber. As the awareness starts to develop, we begin to become Conscious, and the realization dawns that we are a part of that Cosmic Whole, the Atman and begin to experience those dimensions which were lying dormant within us. But for that new awareness to dawn, we have to make self-effort.

In Sanskrit, self-effort is called *purushartha*. There are four purusharthas: dharma 'right living', artha 'material acquisition', kama 'desire', and moksha 'liberation'. These purusharthas are the four expressions we are drawn to in life. Undertaking them harmoniously is to live according to the laws of nature. What are the laws of nature? Does the tree eat its own fruit? Does the river drink its own water? Does the cow drink its own milk? No. they follow the laws of nature and offer the fruits of their efforts to others selflessly. Selfless service is a basic law of nature. When we start living according to this law, we begin our journey towards our inner self, the Atman.

Self-effort is essential to begin our journey towards the inner self. But only when self-effort is coupled with selfless service does grace descend to enable us to complete this journey. Grace is the bridge connecting us to our inner self. Without grace, there can be no hope of having any inner connection and there can be no grace without self-effort. If there is any contamination, any adulteration or any impurity in our self-effort, then grace does not descend. We won't experience grace if there is egocentricity, personal whims or personal ambitions. Yes, we may be successful when we strive to fulfil our ambitions, but only in the mundane world, not the spiritual. Self-effort alone is not enough to connect with our inner self and awaken those sleeping potentials within us. The secret to success is to couple self-effort with selfless service.

Life is a constant struggle. But when we face challenges with selfless self-effort, it triggers grace and then the most difficult things become possible to attain. Life is a struggle, a challenge, whether we want it or not. Don't run away from struggle because it is only after emerging through the struggles that the grace dawns. It is only after we experience darkness that we can see light.

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