



## Calmness & Virtue

Swami Chetanananda

Why is cultivating calmness and virtue important? Because calmness is the condition of deep internal openness which we hope will become our permanent state, and virtue is extending that openness to other people. They are two of the most important cornerstones in the choice to be happy because without them, we cannot sustain a deep connection with the Self.

Without calmness and virtue, every vision, every inspiration, any idealism that dawns within us will be reduced to a vehicle for fulfilling our limited, personal ends. Without calmness and virtue, our lives will be connected only to the small self, and that's a formula for unhappiness.



As virtuous people, we are strong in ourselves, and at the same time, we are deeply concerned with the welfare of others. The presence of virtue is necessary in order to form the deep inner vision we discussed in Chapter Two. This is because the thick and sticky chemical atmosphere existing inside a self-absorbed person denies the possibility for any authentic condensation of Creative Energy in the form of a deep inner vision. When we allow ourselves to become deeply self-absorbed, we put ourselves in a double bind: We become fearful of the world and fearful of ourselves. There's no possibility for vision and change, and we're continuously obsessed with the mantra of stupidity, "What's going to happen to me?" That is one mantra, by the way, that does not quiet the mind.

So in your choice to be happy, one of the first things you do is to quiet your mind, and from that stillness, surrender your little self to the Self and become calm and deeply open. From that state of inner calmness—which takes time to establish, both each day and over time—you move in the world with as much virtue as you can.

Some of you may be tightening at the word, "virtue," and asking what exactly I mean by it. Does it have the same connotations as Christian virtue? Virtue in this discussion is not a

moral term any more than “karma” is the Hindu variant of the Christian notion of sin. Virtue here is analogous to integrity. Look up “integrity” in the dictionary; it means “the quality or state of being complete; wholeness.” It comes from the same root as “integer,” which means a “whole number, not a fraction,” or “anything complete in itself.” In addition, integrity means “the quality or state of being unimpaired; soundness” and “uprightness, honesty, sincerity.”

Now doesn’t this sound familiar? The core of all these definitions is precisely the quality we talked about when we discussed living from our deepest Self. Wholeness. An understanding that everything, including ourselves and our lives—no matter what our life circumstances—is wonderful just as it is; that we are whole in and of ourselves.

But I use the word “virtue” and not “integrity” in this discussion because integrity is where virtue begins. If your growth stops with you, then ultimately, it is no growth at all; it is just more stuff of the little self and can only lead to that state of self-absorbed collapse we mentioned earlier. The notion of virtue has two dimensions. Within ourselves, it is integrity—it is becoming skillful in everything we do—which requires a high degree of self-honesty and the ability to take feedback or even criticism in the proper spirit.

The second dimension of virtue is beyond the interior; it is to behave with the awareness of flow, not to create unnecessary tensions, and to speak and act toward the highest best interest of everybody involved in the situations in which we live and work. Virtue is releasing tension and allowing creative energy to flow for the benefit of everyone, not just ourselves. There is no cookbook of rules about virtue—no one way to do things. Virtue is not a moral issue; it is about values instead. Morals are imposed on you by other people and by social convention. Values evolve from within you. Morals are behavioral by design; values are substantive. Being chaste or some such moral behavior is not being virtuous. Virtuous is being “good,” yes, but not in the Christian sense; virtue is goodness because virtue is releasing tension, within oneself and in one’s environment. Virtue is having the capacity to go anywhere, experience anything, and maintain your integrity at all times.

Virtue is the ability to walk through hell without getting the hair on your feet singed.

Practicing virtue means that you will always keep your values in front of you because, among other things, they will enliven your deep inner vision of your Self and your Life. Having a higher and finer vision of your Self and where you want to live on the pendulum is not enough; you must express the values of that vision in the world as well. This is why it’s important to remember exactly what your values are every minute of every day.

You cannot allow your work in the world to precede your values. Often, we see a kind of expediency manifest in people who, because they have no values, fall into lust, greed, selfishness, confusion, arrogance, egotism—all the antitheses of virtue.

People fall into these behaviors by thinking: “I’m in thus-and-such a business, and it requires me to do this and that. As a result, I will mistreat my friends and behave not-so-

virtuously, but that's only temporary. When I'm done with my business, I'll have money and be able to be a calm and virtuous person, and then I'll be really nice to everyone and everything. I'll be calm and virtuous once I have enough money."

Wrong. You have to be calm and virtuous now. Without that, there is no chance for you to choose to be happy. There is always a better way to do something and a better time to do it, and the time is now and the way is clear. In moving through life, recognize how you can think and behave in such a manner that continually speaks to and expresses that better way. That's being virtuous.

Virtue is a mechanism by which we come to understand ourselves more deeply and extend our awareness through our experiential life. We must be strong inside ourselves first before we can display virtue, but once we've made that deep connection with the Self and are living from that, we have found value inside ourselves; in order for that value to grow, we will eventually have to, and naturally want to, share it with others. In this way, we create and reinforce sources of nourishment which, over time, uplift us and those around us. Practicing virtue, we continuously revitalize our connections as we create within ourselves the bridge toward an ever more refined quality of contact with people and life.

Swami Chetanananda (1996), *Choose To Be Happy*. Portland, OR : Rudra Press

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