

Prem Yatra Volume 1

Chapter 3

Truth

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The Meaning of Truth

Today I will present to you some important aspects of the second yama, or spiritual discipline, called "satya" or "truth." Among the countless possible meanings of truth, I have selected the meaning of "truth in speech" to discuss today. Truth is defined as "that which promotes the welfare of all living beings and which is not adulterated with untruth." Spiritual masters who have realized the truth and who have lived their lives according to this definition eventually feel that the whole world is their family. Since these saints have dropped all ego and become free, their every action is, consequently, inspired by the Lord, nature, or the social welfare. People who are so totally free have no reason to speak less than the full truth. Please remember, however, that this stage culminates a very long period of practicing truth in speech.

Truth and the Family

Great masters who have realized the ultimate truth actually come to us carrying a brilliant lamp, which disperses the darkness of untruth. Just as an owl can't tolerate the light of day, we can't tolerate the light of truth; so we hide the truth behind our backs and live in the farthest corner of the untruth. The word truth is ancient and has been defined in our dictionaries for hundreds of years; but being staunch devotees of novelty, we refuse to use the word. From earliest childhood, we have developed the habit of speaking untruth. Our condition is such that we need not worry about practicing truth in speech but merely need to delete a little untruth from the mass of untruth we usually speak. Thus, to practice truth, we should decrease our practice of untruth.

We cannot have harmony in our family life, because we, and our family members do not know how to speak truthfully with one another. Why do we find it so hard to speak truth fully with five to ten relatives and loved ones? If we can't speak truthfully with them, how can we speak truthfully in our larger social systems and the whole nation? We are so devoid of love and so full of selfishness that all we can utter is untruth.

Of course, we all know how to talk well enough, but whether we can call what we say communication is another question altogether. We cannot truthfully say that we know how to speak simply because we know how to pronounce vowels and consonants. Unless we speak truthfully, speech is only noise.

A person who speaks truthfully should be considered more than merely courageous; he is supremely valiant. On the other hand, the make believe valor of one who speaks untruthfully is sheer deception; what seems to be courage is pure helplessness. Untruth erects walls between hearts and turns even loved ones into strangers and enemies. Truth destroys the walls between hearts and transforms even strangers and enemies into loved ones.

Untruth breeds chaos and hatred, while truth breeds love and peace.

Silence: The First Step Toward Truth

Truth is feared by everyone more than anything else in the world, even though it breeds peace and prosperity. Why do we fear truth, which is a form of God and love? We are afraid of speaking the truth for many reasons. One important reason is that we believe that truth is as worthless as a counterfeit coin and cannot help us get what we want in the world. We believe that we must speak untruth in order to get along in life and be happy. Our firm belief that untruth is universally valuable leads us down the primrose path to decline.

Let's say that truth is on the hundredth step. To reach truth, then, we would have to start on step one and walk one-by-one up the ninety-nine steps toward truth. To do this, we need the help of various techniques. A person who needs to catch a snake must start by grasping its vital point with forceps to prevent it from biting him. Although truth is a pot of nectar rather than a poisonous snake, our egotistical traits such as hatred and selfishness are like poisonous snakes. We can only begin to curb our speech and conduct by grasping their vital points with the forceps of silence.

Silence is the first step toward obtaining truth since it helps us curb untruth, which we generally express by talking excessively all day. This incessant flood of speech makes us prone to the bad habit of speaking untruth. Now, this habit might be tolerable if it died with our bodies, but it goes on affecting us life after life. Speaking untruth is, consequently, a major cause of our downfall.

The best way to remove the bad habit of speaking untruth is to stay in seclusion. Start by staying one hour, then two hours, then three hours, and gradually increasing the duration of the silence until, eventually, you are observing silence all day on any day that is convenient. You can't count the silence which everyone observes during sleep, however. Count only the time you are deliberately restraining your speech during the waking state.

The most useful way to observe silence is to stay in seclusion. Restraining speech is natural, then, since there's no one around. Anyone who tries to begin observing silence without seeking refuge in this useful technique must tolerate countless disturbances.

But remember: although you restrain your speech when you practice silence, your potent thoughts do not need to be expressed through speech. Silent behavior easily expresses potent thoughts. For example, once someone who was observing silence was abused by someone. All of a sudden, without uttering a single word, he slapped the offender. The purpose of observing silence is not merely to restrain speech, but to restrain the mind. Just as pulling one end of the carpet draws the whole carpet, restraining one desire controls the entire mind.

Therefore, in order to accomplish the purpose of restraining speech, one must restrain his behavior. Just as water can't be stored in a container with a hole, thoughts can't be controlled in silence in which one exhibits indiscriminate behavior.

Silence with discrimination is like a wishfulfilling tree or a touchstone; it has the power to transform an ordinary seeker into an accomplished master. I have observed constant silence for nineteen years. Although I have not noted specifically what silence has given me, it has brought me everything worth having without my asking for it. Silence has enabled me to practice yoga sadhana steadily.

Silence has blessed me with the habit of practicing self-observation. Silence has constantly kept me awake and aware. Whenever I engage in behavior which I consider improper, my mind is afflicted with great pain. If I cannot spot a mistake in my behavior right away, that very mistake stands before me when I practice self-observation, and I am extremely surprised! If such subtle mistakes spring to my awareness so effortlessly during self-observation, it can only be due to the Lord's grace.

Thought, which is the first stage of the speech process, is subtle, covert, and un verbalized speech. That which we call speech is the overt, gross, verbalized thought, which is in spoken or written form and is the second stage of the speech process. One cannot restrain his thoughts merely by restraining speech. On the contrary, when one observes silence and seclusion, even more thought flows are generated. It is as if the mind speaks on behalf of the tongue and then listens to itself on behalf of the ears. Likewise, when one practices meditation, more thoughts arise. Usually, when the seeker performs external activities, his mind is so absorbed in the external environment that he does not realize all the thoughts that are filling his mind. However, when he either observes silence in seclusion or sits for meditation, he becomes introspective. He then becomes acutely aware of the types of thoughts which fill his mind.

Thus, the more a seeker practices silence, seclusion, and meditation, the more introspective he becomes. And, with more practice, he progresses naturally from introspection to self-observation. Only self-observation enables a sadhak to clearly visualize his virtues and vices; and as he progresses in internal purification, his affinity for virtues increases and his affinity for vices decreases.

The seeker who cannot see his true self in the reflection of self-observation cannot become a true sadhak. One who becomes an ocean of virtues through sadhana is truly an accomplished, great master.

Every night, before you sleep, practice self-observation and, then, end your session with prayers.

Anecdote: The businessman of Bengalgranus and silence

Silence teaches a seeker to discriminate and contemplate, while talking teaches him indiscretion and unsteadiness.

Once upon a time, a poor orphan boy named Mohan lived in a city among a colony of poor people. Since Mohan's parents had died when he was just a little boy, he was raised by all his neighbors, who pitied him. Now Mohan was no longer a child; he was a young man and could support himself well as a laborer. Everyone loved Mohan because he was naturally, loving, generous, polite, tolerant, honest, and quiet spoken. He had saved some of his wages as a laborer and with it opened up a small shop in which he sold roasted chickpeas. Within a short time, Mohan's honesty caused him to rise from a laborer into a small, highly prosperous businessman.

After becoming prosperous, Mohan got married and eventually had three children. Every Sunday a market was arranged in his section of the city. He would sit there with heaps of bags containing roasted chickpeas and always made a good profit. One Sunday he was going to the market with his cart loaded with bags of chickpeas. He passed other markets on the way which were very crowded. To avoid accidents he would drive his cart very slowly and continually shout, "Hey brother! Please let me by. Oh sister! Please make way for me. Old mother! Please allow me to pass."

At one intersection, the crowd was terribly dense. He continued onward, still shouting, when, suddenly, a child ran right in front of him and was crushed to death under his cart! People gathered around. The police came and recorded an account of the accident.

Mohan's mind was terribly upset. Although he was innocent, he had become very frightened by this misfortune. He made his report to the court, and a day was fixed for his trial.

Today Mohan sat at the Sunday market with his heaps of chickpea bags and with a very unsteady mind. Tomorrow he must stand trial. His face was full of dark lines of grief. He continually struggled to remove the unsteadiness by praying to God. Suddenly, a sanyasi appeared; he often came to market and would always lovingly receive alms of roasted chickpeas from Mohan.

The renunciate was free of worldly desires, and Mohan and the people of the city loved him dearly. After accepting the alms, he gazed at Mohan's sad face and asked, "Brother, why do you seem so sad today?"

Tears began flowing from Mohan's eyes. After a few moments he became steady and began to relate the story of his cart accident, concluding with the news that he must stand trial the next day.

Mohan answered a few questions about the accident from the sanyasi who then became contemplative for a time. Finally, he asked Mohan, "During the trial, will you behave as I advise?"

Mohan replied, "I trust you as I do my father and mother."

"Okay," replied the renunciate. "Then, tomorrow when the prosecuting attorney interrogates you, observe silence and continually reflect upon the Lord."

"I will follow your instructions," replied Mohan humbly. The sanyasi blessed him and then departed.

The next day Mohan went to court. First, the woman whose child had died under the cart recounted the whole incident. Her advocate then began to interrogate Mohan, who remained silent and would not answer a single question. Unable to tolerate Mohan's silence, the woman lost her temper. Interrupting her attorney, she loudly snapped, "Boy! When you were on your way to the market in your cart, your voice was certainly loud enough! You could have broken someone's eardrums shouting 'Make way! Make Way.' Why are you playing dumb now? Why won't you speak?"

Mohan's advocate immediately picked up on this point. Jumping to his feet, he asked her, "When Mohan was shouting so loudly for the right-of-way, while passing through the crowd, why didn't you hold your son? Why didn't you stop him from running?"

The mother could not reply.

After hearing all the testimony, the judge declared Mohan innocent and set him free. Afterwards, Mohan's attorney asked him privately, "Why did you observe silence?"

Mohan replied, "A renunciate living in our city had advised me to observe silence and reflect upon God when the prosecuting attorney interrogated me."

The advocate laughed and said, "Mohanbhai, you may not know it, but that renunciate used to be a famous lawyer before taking the vow of sanyas. Since you were innocent, you were bound to be acquitted; but his advice helped you very clearly demonstrate your innocence."

Although Mohan had observed silence for mere moments, they were just the right moments to stay quiet, so he derived maximum benefits.

Conversely, although the irate mother had let her tongue loose for just a few moments, those were just the wrong moments to let it loose, so she was bound to lose. Silence is a tremendously powerful weapon with surprising protective power.

Observing silence removes many miseries which we gather by gabbing too much. When gentle people speak, it seems like a bottle of perfume has opened. But when boisterous people speak, it seems like a foul smelling sewer has opened.

Discrimination in Speech: The Second Step To Truth

The second step toward silence and truth in speech is discrimination in speech. A person who habitually talks too much can be firm in observing total silence, but he does not know how to be discreet when he allows himself to speak. It is more difficult to speak discreetly than to keep totally silent, because silence doesn't require the effort of restraint that speaking does. Thus, discrimination in speech is considered to be the step after learning complete silence.

Anyone who is skillful in any action and has achieved financial success as a result of successful verbal communication knows how to observe silence and talk discreetly. One who places no value on his own speech and misuses it can never achieve success.

Many people, even lawyers themselves, believe that whoever wants to be a successful lawyer must be eloquent; but this is a mistaken belief. A lawyer must often curb his eloquence and practice discrimination in speech. One who does not know how to use his speech properly can never become a successful lawyer. A single word from a disciplined speaker is worth more than any number of gold coins.

Orators read many books, so when they stand up to speak, a cyclone surges from their mouth and shakes the heads of the audience forcefully back and forth. Great masters do not deliver discourses because these require a lot of speaking. How can the audience practice all that is said? Why should a patient suffering from one disease gulp down medicines meant for countless other diseases. Great masters do not show off knowledge; they are like the ancient physicians of India. They give a small packet of knowledge when it is asked for.

Anecdote: Do not answer this notice!

Highly qualified lawyers earn hundreds of thousands of rupees by giving merely a word of advice. They value each word and won't utter a single word that is unnecessary.

I will now narrate an incident related to me by Shri Vitthalbhai Patel, elder brother of Shri Sardar Patel who was an executive for a large corporation. Vitthalbhai received a notice, which presented an issue which could cost him hundreds of thousands of rupees.

Although he was a lawyer himself, he felt that he should consult an expert to prevent the organization from suffering a great loss. He went to an expert lawyer and briefly described the entire incident to him. The lawyer replied, "Vitthalbhai, the fee for this advice is 100,000 rupees. Vitthalbhai consented, and the lawyer advised him, "Do not answer this notice."

The lawyer had charged 100,000 rupees for a statement containing twenty letters! However, Vitthalbhai acted according to the advice, and the organization did not suffer a loss.

Disciplined Speech

Lord Shri Krishnachandra preaches that before the spiritual seeker speaks, he must observe several vows: (1) He will always speak only those words which please others; (2) Before uttering a statement, he will first examine every single word to determine if there is any bitterness or selfishness in it; (3) Whatever he says will be for the welfare of others; (4) He will never disturb anyone's mind with his speech; and (5) His statements will be full of truth.

Anecdote: A sweet joke

I will tell you about an incident from my previous stage of life. I was a poet as well as the assistant director of a drama company.

Our drama company was traveling through Kathiawad. To make people laugh, we had an expert comic actor who had performed as the chief comic actor with two famous drama companies of Gujarat. Lately he had been working as a jester with a man from Nawab. After the merger of the states he joined the drama company once again. He had a reasonable grasp of languages such as Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and Farsi. He also understood a little English and Sanskrit. Since we were literary people, when-

ever we met, we would crack literary jokes. My actor friend was always smiling, and his conduct showed the discretion of a gentleman. Anything he said or did was civil and would make the audience laugh. In short, he was a skillful and popular actor.

Not only was he a comedian, but he was a deep thinker as well. This unique combination of qualities touched my heart. Although my friend loved both literature and humor very much, he was fully satisfied just being an actor. In spite of having tremendous potential to become a literary scholar, he was unable to progress in that field. Whenever he would seriously discuss this major sorrow in his life, no one observing him could imagine that he was a comedian.

One day I was feeling uncomfortable. My mind would not concentrate on any task. I was pleased when my actor friend arrived unexpectedly. As I sat on a chair on the porch of my residence, he came and sat in front of me on one of the spare chairs. As he began discussing various types of humor in his comical style, I was enchanted and listened wholeheartedly. I soon forgot my unsteadiness. While he was discussing an incident in which he had pulled off a sweet stunt, I saw a brother coming from a distance. This brother was the best actor of the drama company. He was wearing clean white clothes and had very black skin, so his appearance was very bright. I said to the comedian brother, "Friend! Please play a sweet joke on the brother approaching us."

He nodded his consent. Soon the brother approached us and we all greeted one another. Then the comedian said, "Welcome! Welcome!" Then he began to compliment the brother's dazzling white clothes. "Really, it is impossible to resist appreciating your clothes. They are so clean and white that if you were walking on a dark night it would appear as if the clothes were walking by themselves."

I immediately understood the humor in his sweet joke. The comedian had complimented the actor's clothes while criticizing his black skin. He really meant to say, "You are so black that in the dark if there were not clothes on your body it would be impossible to spot you." I was amused by his humor. He was so innocent that he had made a sweet joke that was free of contempt. To prevent the actor from feeling displeased, he had said a second sentence, which concealed the satire in the first one.

Thought and conduct are one's life, and speech is one's soul. For this reason, householders and renunciates alike should speak with discrimination. Others like to hear sweet words and hate bitter words just as we do. We should remember this and try to speak so very gently. We should remain vigilant so that we do not mix bitterness and untruth in our speech.

Advice similar to that given in the Bhagavad Gita is depicted in Manusmriti. Always remember: "One should speak the truth; one should speak sweetly; one should not speak bitter truth; nor should one speak sweet untruth either. This is sanatan dharma, the eternal truth."