



ANAHATA CHAKRA SATSANGA

Nine Gates Course Lessons

Manavaka / Student / First Degree

Introduction to the Rank

In lessons 1.1-1.3, you will be developing the strong foundation that you will need to sustain you through the journey of liberation. You will be letting go of bitterness from the past, learning to step away from negative reactions, and holding closely to the path of duty and ethics (dharma). The marks for this rank, the qualities that you will want to cultivate, are equanimity and the absence of greed and anger. The gemstone for this rank is ruby.

Lesson 1.3: Absence of Greed

Hindu Deities and saints are often addressed by the prefix “shri” or “sri.” Even some Hindus don’t know this, but Shri was once a goddess in her own right and is still sometimes worshipped as such. She was associated with the lotus flower and represented wealth, truth, luck, and wisdom. Many of her functions have now been taken over by Lakshmi, but we still remember her whenever we say the syllable “Shri.” We hope to bring the quality of “shree” into our life, that is, an illuminated awareness that all we have comes from divinity. Hinduism is a pretty unique religion in that it is the faith of some of the world’s wealthiest and some of the world’s poorest people. Being materially rich doesn’t really fit into the consciousness of Shri if that wealth is not regarded as an undeserved gift of God. Likewise, material poverty can be spiritualized through the consciousness of God-in-everything. Holding that consciousness takes a good deal of effort and a rejection of many worldly categories of knowledge. Jesus said that faith is like a little bit of yeast leavens the whole loaf (Matthew 13.33) and referred to faith as the grain of mustard seed that becomes a tree so large that the birds come and rest in its branches (Matthew 13: 31-32). In other words, within everything is a hidden germ of divinity. Whether you have been given a mansion and servants or a tin shack and a begging bowl, you have access to the hidden germ.

The wise person, the wealthy person, the fortunate person, cannot be judged based on how many material possessions he or she has managed to accumulate in a given lifetime. How many Hollywood or Bollywood stars have millions of dollars but go around acting like fools, drunk driving,

taking drugs, and destroying their own lives and the lives of others? How many holy men and women have had nothing in terms of material goods but have inspired millions? Think of Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, the Buddha, Saint Francis. These divine figures saw something that others did not see: that divinity goes beyond what can be seen with the naked eye, that the seraphs or gandharvas sing around the hovel of the beggar and the outcast. A broad and generous heart is ultimately more valuable than the most sumptuous feast. We must cultivate the spiritual muscles of generosity and humility in order to make this vision manifest. We have become so conditioned to seeing social hierarchy, race, caste, and creed that we cannot see this inherent divinity within those we meet each day. In order to come into a more complete, accurate, and expansive view of the world, we must re-train our minds to see each person as a divine being, as Rama or Sita. This takes a great deal of effort, and very few people come to see the world with true detachment. Our prejudices die hard, so hard that even years of austerity may fail to eliminate them. Oftentimes, we do not even notice our ingrained habits of thinking and acting, much less try to eliminate them.

The first way to eliminate greed lies in noticing the arising in the mind of prejudicial statements which feed the ego nature. Greed has its basis in the fear of not having enough. And that fear can take many different forms. One person may fear not having enough education and hence may look down upon uneducated people. Another person may fear being perceived as poor and hence may have a haughty attitude towards people who do manual labor or live in humble homes or wear secondhand clothing. Still others may fear not having enough to eat and may hoard food or money. Usually these fears result from some trauma early in life or perhaps in an earlier lifetime. The fear manifests itself as prejudice towards those who have or are perceived as having the undesired trait. The person plagued by fear will go to desperate and irrational lengths to get away from the perceived negative state. This is the root of class prejudice, and the first step to being rid of the prejudice is to understand the fear and eliminate it.

Aghori babas and other sadhus in India wear little more than loincloths and spend most of their time in the open air. Many of them had successful careers, homes, and families before renouncing the material world. They learn to endure the elements, to do without food or live on alms. For a materialistic person, their fate is worse than death. Naga sadhus even do away with clothing, and that would be horrifying to most upwardly-mobile and class conscious individuals! If the sight of such a holy person causes shock or revulsion, we must inquire into the shock and find its source. Again, the same fears rear their ugly heads: the fear of not having enough, the fear of hunger, the fear of exposure, etc.

These are some of the oldest and most primal fears that human beings can face. These fears led us away from hunter-gatherer society and into the agricultural lifestyle, and then through the industrial revolutions and now the computer revolution, etc. All of this time, humanity has been running from the fear of the punishments of nature. This has been a remarkably successful project from a material point of view, but it has left little in the way of peace or spiritual satisfaction and attainment. The wandering holy men and women of India teach us that it is possible to do without comfort, to do without possessions, and that, indeed, we may be happier and wiser without so many things. Most of us spend at least half of our time trying to acquire more things and the rest of the time maintaining and storing and caring for the things that we already have. The flat or house must be cleaned, the car must be taken to the shop, the possessions must be stored and kept in good shape. This creates an endless treadmill of acquisition and maintenance which tortures the average householder. Due to the stress of this cycle, addictive behaviors arise as a coping mechanism: hence alcoholism, food addiction, drug abuse, sex addiction, and so forth. Even if we can't all become naked sadhus, we can slow down the treadmill by requiring fewer luxuries and trimming down the number of possessions. Then we will not have to work so hard, either on the job or at home. Then there will be a greater balance of time for performing *sadhana*.

We should not have prejudice towards either the poor or the wealthy but regard each person as a divine manifestation. The wealthy, too, have their role to play. The Rani Rashmoni caused the Dakshineswar Kali temple to be built with her own funds and then employed Sri Ramakrishna as priest. Without her, the world would have lost many great spiritual teachings and profound miracles. A wealthy person who is generous and has dharmic goals can be a benefit to millions, while an adharmic wealthy person becomes a scourge for the earth. The purpose of wealth should be to increase the harmony in the world and not to undermine it. A dharmic person of means will increase the beauty and health of the natural environment, will increase understanding between people, will bring an end to needless suffering for all beings. Dharma and wealth must always be coupled with one another; when they are uncoupled, great misfortune and disaster are unleashed. Even those of us with smaller means must constantly check to see that the acquisition of material goods does not interfere with the path of duty. I should seek not one penny acquired through dishonest means. I should seek not one penny by causing the suffering of another human being or animal. I should not withhold funds from the gods, from my lineage, from my guru. I should be unfailingly generous, honest, kind, caring, and compassionate. With my customers and clients, I should seek their good, and, in so doing, I will win

their loyalty. The person who practices ethics in business, who does not give in to greed, will always have enough with room to spare.

It takes a certain amount of trust in order to live honestly, to eschew bribery and theft. In many cases, it requires not only living by the law but avoiding some things that are technically legal. It may be legal to charge 18 or 20% interest on a loan, but it is not dharmic. One may not know exactly where to draw the line between just acquisition and theft, but if the activity causes suffering for the client or customer, it is adharmic and should be treated as theft. If you cannot make someone a loan on good terms, do not make the loan. If you cannot make a decent profit and maintain integrity, do not make the profit. Such short term gain reaps the consequence of *samsara*, rebirth into cyclic existence. So it is actually not profitable in the cosmic sense. The thief lives his or her *svadharma*, and, in this sense, fulfills the will of God, but this activity slows the path to realization. A person engaged in a dishonest profession will have to leave that dishonest work behind eventually or suffer the consequences. These consequences are not meted out by a wrathful divinity, but are simply the natural outcome of the activity in which that person has been engaged. The guru may not ever call the dishonest devotee to task, but, somewhere deep inside, each person knows when they have gone down the wrong path. The dishonest path does not lead to joy, does not lead to peace, does not lead to God-realization. When people pursue endless greed, the result is failure. The family falls apart, the city falls apart, the nation falls apart. The gospel of greed simply will not be a firm principle on which to govern the world, because it leads to ruin for the planet and ruin for society.

Sanātana dharma, popularly known as Hinduism, teaches that the cycle of ages goes through four stages, called yugas, before beginning all over again. The first stage is called the Sātya yuga, or age of truth, in which virtue reigns supreme. The gods and mortals live in harmony with the earth and animals, and all is peaceful. With each successive age, virtue declines and vice triumphs, as things get worse by degrees. Enmity between people arises, as does difficulty in accessing the divine realm. People grow more and more alienated from the earth and the non-human animals and spirits. In the second age, the Treta Yuga, there are three parts virtue to one part sin. In the next age, the Dwāpara, there are equal parts virtue and sin, while in the final age, the Kali yuga, there is three quarters wickedness and one part virtue. The Kali Yuga (not to be confused with the goddess, Kālī, who is actually the Remover of Darkness) dawned with the end of the war depicted in *Mahābhārata*, and it is the age that we live in now: an age of moral degeneracy. Dharmic traditions pass down this philosophy of cyclic existence, but they also teach a strong concept of free will. Human beings are not condemned

to sin or inherently sinful, which is to say that the Sātya yuga will be brought back into being through the free choices of good men and women. This will entail a decisive end to exploitation in all of its forms.

For this reason, yogis who sincerely desire to approach the truth and bring an end to this present global wickedness should strive to live as though the Sātya Yuga were already here. This means seeking to live in harmony with earth and other animals by eating a vegetarian diet and eliminating unnecessary desires. It means seeking only just financial arrangements in which all parties benefit. It means eliminating human trafficking and ensuring good and safe working conditions for all people. It means working to end discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race, caste, disability, or any other status. Conscientious devotees will seek to eliminate harm from their own lifestyles and will take the additional step of advocating such a lifestyle for all people. This can be done through teaching, through activism, through service, and through many other channels that will be specific to the life of each seeker. No sincere spiritual aspirant can ever be exempt from the mandate to work for a better world for all beings, human and non-human. A spirituality that ignores the hunger for justice is no spirituality at all but is just another form of exploitation in disguise. Working for justice need not be preachy or proselytizing. We can work for justice through our own example using skillful, efficient means.

On our macro-level journeys as evolving souls, we look to reduce our need to act in this world. We want to act in such a way that we do not create more and more entanglements. For this reason, we share the message only with those well-positioned to hear it, unless some great injustice will otherwise result. Normally, we share our spirituality only with those who have expressed an interest or asked some question that opens the door to such sharing. Unless a person or animal is about to be harmed, in which case the correct thing to do is to speak to prevent harm from happening, insofar as that lies within our power. The stereotype of the “angry activist” is often used as a defense mechanism by people who are too immersed in consumer lifestyles to actually try to affect change in the world. There need be no contradiction between standing up for earth and animals and practicing the dharmic path: indeed, the two go together as necessary complements. Spirituality can make activism more effective, in that it prevents the burnout so often associated with struggles for social change. We seek not only to spark a youth movement of protest against all forms of exploitation, but also to usher dharmic youth into a lifelong path of commitment, a path which binds together the divine, human, and natural orders. The dharma movement, together with allies who may practice pagan, atheist, and other belief systems, represents a great force capable of reversing the greed and egotism of the age of corporate

globalization and environmental degradation. We can know our allies by how they respond to the crises currently affecting Mother Earth. If a co-religionist fails to defend Earth and her creatures, that person is no ally. Likewise, if someone belongs to another faith but stands up for the environment and animals, let us call that person a friend. When the Sātya Yuga dawns, all paths will converge into one harmony: until that happens, we look for help where we can find it!

The current age will look like a bad dream when humanity awakes from its delusional greed, which has reached a crescendo in recent decades. The massive extinction of species, the tragic deforestation, the despoiling of oceans and rivers, the depletion of glaciers and fresh water, and numerous other market-induced degradations will be over, and the healing process will begin. We must not sit by the sidelines and wait for such an outcome to occur. We must build the dharmic civilization step-by-step, by doing our *sadhana*, speaking up for justice, and creating community. We must be relentless critics of European enlightenment values, which have led to the labeling of traditional forms of community as backwards and primitive. We must restore the household deities, the village deities, and the forest deities. When one can worship a sacred tree or venerate the cow without fear, the first rays of the Sātya Yuga will be here. The imperialist consciousness of the colonizer will be replaced with a love for all beings, and universal greed will be replaced with a love for the divine in each particular manifestation.

Assignments. Complete these activities on your own. You need not submit any written feedback.

1. Inquire deep inside yourself for the fears that have hindered you from full and complete love for all beings. Do you fear not having enough money? Do you fear going without food or clothing? Picture the divine in the way that comes easiest for you and release these fears, one by one, after a period of silent meditation.
2. Take a look at your own local environment. Is there something you could do to help protect a local river or bird sanctuary? Is there some way you can speak on behalf of the earth and animals?

Questions for Self-Reflection. If you are interested in moving through the formal system of ranks of the Satsanga, please forward your answers to the General Secretary of the Society.

1. This is the final lesson for the first rank. What changes have you observed in yourself over the course of these first three lessons? Include both “inner” and “outer” work, changes that occur both in your mental makeup and in your daily life.

2. Find a way to practice contentment (sāntosha) and giving (dāna). Write about your experiences.

Retreat for end of Manavaka degree:

Take a day off from work and other obligations. Place yourself as much as possible in a distraction-free environment, preferably in a natural setting. Practice three rounds of contemplation, following this pattern:

1. Sit silently for 30 minutes. You may not be able to silence your thoughts, but try to slow them down and observe them.
2. Read a chapter of scripture, from *Bhagavad Gita*, *Upanishads*, or *Ramayana*. It is okay to read these chapters in English or in your native language. If you have some facility with Sanskrit, you may chant as well.
3. Go for a walk or practice yoga asanas for thirty minutes.
4. Write in a journal for thirty minutes about your Nine Gates experience. Do you still encounter any mental resistance? Do you find areas of excitement or joy? After the end of writing, shred the pages and recycle or burn them.

To close your day of retreat, treat yourself to a good vegetarian meal and a hot bath or shower.

Works Cited / For Further Reading

Bhaskarananda, Swami. *The Essentials of Hinduism*. Seattle: Viveka Press, 2002.

See especially the very nice overview of scriptures and the description of reincarnation and ethics.

Rhodes, Constantina. *Invoking Lakshmi: The Goddess of Wealth in Song and Ceremony*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010.

Rhodes gives a nice account of the goddess, Śrī, and how she blended smoothly into Lakshmī.