



MODESTY in Sadhana

Second Edition

A COMPILATION FROM THE WORKS OF
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Compiled by Jamshed M Mavalwalla



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Sri Aurobindo Society

AUROPUBLICATIONS

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

Modesty in Sadhana

Second Edition

First Edition: 2019
Second Edition: 2026

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www.aurosociety.org

The idea for the comprehensive compilation: Vijay bhai

Compiler: Jamshed M Mavalwalla

Proofreading: Archana Udaykumar, Puja Narula and Shivakumar

Cover: Kavita Dutta and Uttam Mondal

E-book: Vivechana Saraf and Uttam Mondal

Help in preparing the second edition: Uttam Mondal

The photograph of the flower on the cover has been given the spiritual significance 'Modesty' by the Mother.

(The Spiritual Significance of Flowers, Part I, page 119)

Vijaybhai's Note on Comprehensive Compilation

All over the world, there is a growing interest in spirituality and Yoga. There is a search for the true meaning and purpose of life, for deeper solutions to the problems that confront us all, and for ways in which we can contribute to evolutionary change and progress.

In this search, more and more people are turning to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for guidance and enlightenment. But in their voluminous writings, they do not know where to find the answers they are looking for.

In this regard the Mother has said,

"It is not by books that Sri Aurobindo ought to be studied but by subjects—what he has said on the Divine, on Unity, on religion, on evolution, on education, on self-perfection, on supermind, etc., etc."

(CWM 12: 206)

On another occasion She said:

"If you want to know what Sri Aurobindo has said on a given subject, you must at least read all he has written on that subject. You will then see that he seems to have said the most contradictory things. But when one has read everything and understood a little, one sees that all the contradictions complement

one another and are organised and unified in an integral synthesis."

(CWM 16: 309–310)

While several compilations are now available, many sincere spiritual seekers have felt the need for Comprehensive Compilations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on specific subjects, in which the contents are further organised into sub-topics, so that one can find everything one is looking for in one place.

This compilation is an effort to fulfil this need and thus help spiritual seekers in their journey and sadhana. We hope that this compilation will help us gain greater mental clarity about a subject so that we can channel our efforts in the right direction. For Sri Aurobindo has written:

"It is always better to make an effort in the right direction; even if one fails the effort bears some result and is never lost."

(CWSA 29: 87)

We will be glad to receive suggestions and feedback from the readers.

Vijay

Preface

The seventh book in the series of comprehensive compilations on virtues and qualities prescribed by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as necessary for doing Yoga is Modesty in Sadhana.

The Mother emphasizes that, if one wishes always to progress, one must understand more completely what one already knows.

“For those who want always to progress, there are three major ways of progressing:

- (1) To widen the field of one’s consciousness.
- (2) To understand ever better and more completely what one knows.
- (3) To find the Divine and surrender more and more to His Will.” (CWM 16: 435–436)

The purpose of this comprehensive compilation is to help the reader gain an understanding of the virtue of modesty. The headings are intended to guide the reader towards a clearer and deeper understanding. However, it is important to read the quotations themselves, for the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are infused with a consciousness infinitely higher than our own. Therefore, reading these quotations will also help the reader elevate their consciousness.

The quotations in this compilation are taken from the volumes of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) and the *Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), Second Edition. Each quotation is followed by the title of the book, the volume number, and the page number from which it has been taken.

While the passages from Sri Aurobindo are in the original English, most of the passages from the Mother (selections from her talks and writings) are translations from the original French. We must also bear in mind that the excerpts have been taken out of their original context and that a compilation, by its very nature, is likely to have a personal and subjective approach. A sincere attempt, however, has been made to remain faithful to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Those who would like to read the fuller text are advised to consult *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) and the *Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), Second Edition.

Jamshed M. Mavalwalla

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I—Meaning of Modesty

1.

“If you want to be fully conscious, be always in front of the Truth—completely open yourself and try your utmost to let it see deep inside you, into every corner of your being. That alone will bring into you light and consciousness and all that is most true. Be absolutely modest—that is to say, know the distance between what you are and what is to be, not allowing the crude physical mentality to think that it knows when it does not, that it can judge when it cannot. Modesty implies the giving up of yourself to the Divine whole-heartedly, asking for help and, by submission, winning the freedom and absence of responsibility which imparts to the mind utter quietness. Not otherwise can you hope to attain the union with the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Will.” (CWM 3: 133)

2.

“AN IDEAL CHILD

...

IS MODEST

He does not become conceited over his success, neither does he feel himself superior to his comrades.” (CWM 12: 150)

3.

"Modesty is satisfied with its own charm and does not draw attention to itself." (CWM 14: 152)

4.

"Mother comments upon some of the qualities enumerated in her article 'What a Child Should Always Remember' (*On Education*).

'To be modest'

This is to take oneself at one's true worth.

Generally people pass from an excessive appreciation of their personal value to an equally excessive discouragement. One day they say, 'I am wonderful', and the next day, 'Oh! I am good for nothing, I can do nothing.' That is like a pendulum, isn't it? There is nothing more difficult than knowing exactly what one is; one must neither overrate oneself nor depreciate oneself, but understand one's limits and know how to advance towards the ideal set before oneself. There are people who see in a big way and immediately imagine they can do everything. There are petty officers, for example, who imagine themselves capable of winning all the battles of the world, and small people who think they surpass everybody in the world. On the other hand, I have known some people who had abilities but who spent their time thinking, 'I am good for nothing.' Generally the two extremes are found in the

I—Meaning of Modesty

same person. But to find someone who knows exactly where he stands and exactly where he can go, is very rare. We have avoided speaking of vanity because we expect that you won't be filled with vanity as soon as you score a success." (CWM 4: 29–30)

II—For an Ashramite Modesty Is Indispensable

1.

“By definition the Ashramite has resolved to consecrate his life to the realisation and service of the Divine.

For this four virtues are indispensable, without which progress is uncertain and subject to interruptions and troublesome falls at the first opportunity:

Sincerity, faithfulness, modesty and gratitude.”
(CWM 13: 113)

2.

“When, in ignorance, one speaks ill of others, he debases his consciousness and degrades his soul.

A respectful and modest silence is the only attitude befitting a disciple.” (CWM 14: 205–206)

3.

“My most beloved Mother, an introspection has revealed to me many things. There is a jealousy in me which blinds me; another part in me is very vain, it gives me the idea that I have already reached my goal.

You have just given a very correct description, but it becomes useful only from the moment you resolve that it is no longer going to be like this, and that you will strive to conquer your two great enemies: jealousy and vanity. The

II—For an Ashramite Modesty Is Indispensable

more we advance on the road, the more modest we become, and the more we find that we have done nothing in comparison with what remains to be done.” (CWM 16: 176)

4.

“If you want to learn to work *really well*, you must be modest, become aware of your imperfections and always maintain the will to progress.

One does not progress through boasting.” (CWM 17: 164)

5.

“And it is precisely to teach you.... The great words, the great attitudes, the great experiences, all that is very good up there, but here... nothing spectacular—everything is very modest, very calm, very effaced—very modest. And this is the condition for progress, the condition for transformation.” (CWM 11: 83)

6.

“So, one must not cherish any illusions and fancy that one can begin to know what the supermind is and form any idea of it or assess it in any way, however minimal, before having had *that* experience.

Therefore, if you want to advance on the path, you must very modestly start on your way towards the new

II—For an Ashramite Modesty Is Indispensable

birth, first, and realise it before cherishing the illusion that you can have supramental experiences.

To console you I may tell you that by the very fact that you live on earth at this time—whether you are conscious of it or not, even whether you want it or not—you are absorbing with the air you breathe this new supramental substance which is now spreading in the earth atmosphere. And it is preparing things in you which will manifest *very suddenly*, as soon as you have taken the decisive step.” (CWM 9: 337)

III—The Greatest Sages Are the Most Modest

1.

“That is why the sincere lover of knowledge also knows that the greatest sages are always the most modest and the most unknown. For one who has the knowledge and the capacity prefers silence and retirement where he is free to accomplish his work without being disturbed by anything, to the fanfares of glory which would throw him as fodder to men.” (CWM 2: 83–84)

2.

“The Deva nature is distinguished by an acme of the sattwic habits and qualities; self-control, sacrifice, the religious habit, cleanness and purity, candour and straightforwardness, truth, calm and self-denial, compassion to all beings, modesty, gentleness, forgivingness, patience, steadfastness, a deep sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity and inconstancy are its native attributes.” (CWSA 19: 471)

3.

“The most varied qualities met in the Indian conception of the best, *śreṣṭha*, the good and nobleman, *ārya*. In the heart benevolence, ... a fine modesty and yet a strong independence and noble pride; ... this was the total ideal

III—The Greatest Sages Are the Most Modest
of the Arya, the man of high upbringing and noble nature.”
(CWSA 20: 164)

4.

“The greater beings are always the most simple and
modest.

Blessings.” (CWM 17: 307) (CWM 14: 151)

IV—The Mother Prefers Modest Persons for Her Work

1.

“For what is most difficult is to convince someone who has already had a realisation. He believes he is above all progress.

Not necessarily. It is not necessarily someone who has some experience who is most advanced. He lacks an element of simplicity, modesty, and the plasticity that comes from the fact that one is not yet totally developed. As one grows, something crystallizes in the head; it gets more and more fixed and unless you try very hard you finish by becoming fossilised. This is what usually happens to people, particularly those who have tried for some realisation and succeeded in it or those who have come to believe they have reached the goal. In any case, it was their personal goal. They have reached it, they have attained. It is done, they remain there; they settle there, they say ‘that’s it.’ And they do no more any more. So, after that they may live ten years more, or twenty or thirty, they will not budge. They are there, they will stay there. Such people lack all the suppleness of stuff that’s necessary for going further and progressing. They are stuck. They are very good objects to be put in a museum, but not for doing work. They are like samples to show what can be done but they are not the stuff to do more. For me [the Mother]

IV—The Mother Prefers Modest Persons for Her Work

personally, I admit I prefer for my work someone who knows very little, has not laboured too much, but who has a great aspiration, much goodwill and who feels in himself this flame, this need for progressing. He may know very little, may have realised still less, but if he has that within him, it is good stuff with which one can go very far, much further. For one must know the way (it is the same thing here as with your library), one must know the way to go. Well, usually in life when you climb a mountain or go to an unknown land, you look for a man who has been there, who is a guide, and you ask him to direct you. It is the same thing. If you follow the guide, you can go much quicker than someone else who has made much effort, found his own way and is usually quite proud of himself and, in any case, has the feeling of having come to the end, reached the goal he aimed at, finally arrived—and he stops, settles down. And he does not move any more.” (CWM 5: 284–285)

V—A Modest Person's Behaviour

1.

"The truth is that the human personality has come in contact with some Being, some Power, and under the influence of education and tradition calls it Buddha or Christ or by any other familiar name. It is difficult to affirm that it was Buddha himself or the very Christ with whom there was the contact, but none can assert either that the inspiration did not come from that which inspired the Christ or the Buddha. These human vessels may very well have received the inspiration from some such source. If they were modest and simple, they would be content to say that much and no more; they would say, 'I have received this inspiration from such and such a Great One', but instead they proclaim, 'I am that Great One.' I knew one who affirmed that he was both Christ and Buddha! He had received something, had experienced a truth, had seen the Divine Presence in himself and in others. But the experience was too strong for him, the truth too great. He became half crazy and the next day went out into the streets, proclaiming that in him Christ and Buddha had become one." (CWM 3: 80)

2.

[The Mother's translation of a verse from the Dhammapada:]

"The Bhikkhu who is master over his tongue and is moderate in speech, who is modest, who luminously interprets the Doctrine, in truth his words are as sweet as honey." (CWM 3: 288)

3.

"Sweet Mother,

I want an electric lamp in the corridor of my room.

It would be more proper to write (and above all, to think):
'Would it be possible to have an electric lamp in the corridor?'

The *ego* would do well to become a little more modest." (CWM 16: 263)

4.

"The more we advance on the Path, the more modest we become and the more we see that we have done nothing in comparison to what remains to be done." (CWM 14: 152)

5.

"The student should come to school not like someone going to his daily grind because he cannot avoid it, but because it would be possible for him to do something interesting. The teacher should not be in school, come to school with the idea that for half an hour or three-quarters of an hour he is going to recite something which he has

more or less well prepared and which is boring even for him, and that therefore he cannot amuse the students, but instead to try to come into contact mentally—and if possible more deeply—with a number of little developing individualities who, we hope, have some curiosity about things, and in order to be able to satisfy this curiosity. So he himself must be aware, very modestly, that he does not know enough and that he has a lot to learn; but not to learn from books—by trying to understand life.” (CWM 12: 407–408)

6.

“You must have lived what you want to teach.

To speak of the new consciousness, let it penetrate you and reveal to you its secrets. For only then can you speak with any competence.

To rise into the new consciousness, the first condition is to have enough modesty of mind to be convinced that all that you think you know is nothing in comparison to what yet remains to be learnt.

All that you have learnt outwardly must be just a step allowing you to rise towards a higher knowledge.” (CWM 12: 114)

VI—Being Modest Does Not Make the Path Easy

1.

“There was a third thing?... Yes, you must not cherish the illusion that if you want to follow the straight path, if you are modest, if you seek purity, if you are disinterested, if you want to lead a solitary existence and have a clear judgment, things will become easy.... It is quite the contrary! When you begin to advance towards inner and outer perfection, the difficulties start at the same time.”
(CWM 3: 264)

2.

“Life is hard for the modest one who seeks purity, who is detached, unassuming and whose judgment is correct.”
(CWM 3: 262)

VII—A Modest Mind's Receptivity

1.

"From the point of view of individual development and for those who are still at the beginning of the path, to know how to remain silent before what one does not understand is one of the things which would help most in the progress ... not only externally, without uttering a word, but also to know how to be silent within, so that the mind does not assert its ignorance ... does not try to understand with an instrument that is incapable of understanding, ... and open simply, quietly, waiting until the time has come for it to receive the light, because only the Light, the true Light, can give it understanding. ... And until this something else—which is the expression of the Grace—manifests within it, if, very quietly, very modestly the mind remains silent and does not try to understand and, above all, to judge, things would go *much* faster." (CWM 9: 422)

2.

"The mind is silent, the brain is still, everything is clear, quiet, calm; and at the right moment, by divine Grace a drop of light falls into the consciousness and what needs to be known is known. Why should one care to remember—why try to retain that knowledge? On the day or at the moment that it is needed one will have it again. At each second one is a blank page on which what must

VII—A Modest Mind's Receptivity

be known will be inscribed—in the peace, the repose, the silence of a perfect receptivity. ... Silence and a modest, humble, attentive receptivity; no concern for appearances or even any anxiety to be—one is quite modestly, quite humbly, quite simply the instrument which of itself is nothing and knows nothing, but is ready to receive everything and transmit everything.” (CWM 10: 10)

VIII—All Other Things That Are Modest

1.

“Correct self-evaluation: simple and modest, does not try to push itself forward.” (CWM 14: 151)

2.

“Divine help: modest in appearance, powerful in action.” (CWM 14: 86)

3.

“Devotion: modest and fragrant, it gives itself without seeking for anything in return.” (CWM 14:98)

4.

“Joy’s call: it is modest and rarely makes itself heard.” (CWM 14: 182)

5.

“Goodwill: of modest appearance, it makes no noise but is ever ready to be useful.” (CWM 14: 186)

6.

“Vital consecration: delightfully modest and fragrant, it smiles at life without wanting to draw attention to itself.” (CWM 14: 354)

7.

“Supramental influence in the subconscious: under its modest appearance it is a great force for transformation.” (CWM 15: 90)

8.

“There are people who have spent entire lifetimes seated in contemplation and attained nothing. There are people (we have well-known examples) who used to do the most modest of manual works, like a cobbler mending old shoes, and who had an experience. It is altogether beyond what one thinks and says of it. It is a gift, that’s all. And all that is needed is to be that — to succeed in identifying oneself with it and live it. At times you read one sentence in a book and that leads you there.” (CWM 6: 26)

9.

“Of course this is not always absolute, because it depends on the importance of the individual in relation to the importance of the surrounding circumstances. That is why I said at the beginning: every predestined being. What I mean by ‘predestined’ is a being who has come down upon earth to accomplish a precise mission and who, naturally, will be helped in the accomplishment of this mission. It may be a very modest mission but it is a precise one that he has to accomplish upon earth. Well, all these beings... their life is organised in this way; but ninety nine and a half per

cent are not aware of it, and they revolt or lament or... And then, above all, they pity themselves greatly and lament their own difficulties, their own miseries, their own sufferings, and caress themselves gently: 'Oh, my poor little one, how unhappy you are!' But it is their inner being which has done everything." (CWM 6: 386–387)

10.

"We should never tell ourselves, openly or indirectly, 'I want to be great, what vocation can I find for myself in order to become great?'

On the contrary, we should tell ourselves, 'There must certainly be something I can do better than anyone else, since each one of us is a special mode of manifestation of the divine power which, in its essence, is one in all. However humble and modest it may be, this is precisely the thing to which I should devote myself, and in order to find it, I shall observe and analyse my tastes, tendencies and preferences, and I shall do it without pride or excessive humility, whatever others may think I shall do it just as I breathe, just as the flower smells sweet, quite simply, quite naturally, because I cannot do otherwise. ...

The conception of our work will inevitably grow more perfect as we grow more perfect ourselves; and to realise this growing perfection, no effort to exceed ourselves should be neglected, but the work we perform must

become always more and more joyful and spontaneous, like water welling from a pure spring.” (CWM 2: 53–54)

11.

“Thus the intelligence one can acquire is proportionate to the intelligence one uses. We are formed to manifest a certain quantity of intellectual forces, but if we develop ourselves mentally, if we put our brains to work, if we meditate regularly and above all if we make others benefit by the fruit, however modest, of our efforts, we make ourselves capable of receiving a greater quantity of ever deeper and purer intellectual forces. And the same holds true for love and spirituality.” (CWM 2: 102)

12.

Reply to Prayers of the Physical Education Groups
GROUP C

“Lord, free from all ignorance Thy supreme workers and guide their standard of purity by the shortest way towards the Realisation.

May Thy will be done and not ours.

The Lord will name ‘supreme’ only those of his workers who will have wholly surmounted and over passed in them all animality. Let us be at the outset his faithful and sincere workers and when this more modest programme is

accomplished we shall prepare ourselves for greater realisations.” (CWM 12: 270)

13.

“Therefore are pride and satisfaction with oneself the worst of all obstacles. Very modestly we must take advantage of all the minute opportunities offered to knead and purify some of the innumerable elements, to make them supple, to make them impersonal, to teach them forgetfulness of self and abnegation and devotion and kindness and gentleness; and when all these modes of being have become habitual to them, then are they ready to participate in the Contemplation, and to identify themselves with Thee in the supreme Concentration. That is why it seems to me that the work must be long and slow even for the best and that striking conversions cannot be integral.” (CWM 1: 5–6)

14.

“Humbly, quietly, my prayer rises to Thee, O sweet Master, Thou who acceptest without argument and without censure all that is offered to Thee, Thou who givest Thyself and makest Thyself known to all, without asking whether they are worthy of it or not, Thou who findest nothing too weak, too small, too modest, too inadequate to manifest Thee. ...” (CWM 1: 211)

15.

“Thy voice is so modest, so impartial, so sublime in its patience and mercy that it does not make itself heard with any authority, any force of will but comes like a cool breeze, sweet and pure, like a crystalline murmur that brings a note of harmony to a discordant concert. Yet, for him who knows how to listen to the note, to breathe that breeze, it holds such treasures of beauty, such a fragrance of pure serenity and noble grandeur, that all foolish illusions vanish or are transformed into a joyful acceptance of the marvellous truth that has been glimpsed.” (CWM 1: 23)

IX—People Who Only Appear to Be Modest

1.

“There are people who say at times that they know nothing, just to appear modest, but they don’t believe what they say!

There are insincere and hypocritical people everywhere in the world. So much the worse for them. These shut the door completely to all progress. That is all.”
(CWM 5: 29–30)

2.

“You cannot do a thing well, cannot have a fine idea, cannot have a right movement, cannot make a little progress without getting puffed up inside (even without being aware of it), with a self-satisfaction full of vanity. And you are obliged then to hammer it hard to break it. And still broken bits remain and these begin to germinate. One must work the whole of one’s life and never forget to work in order to uproot this weed that springs up again and again and again so insidiously that you believe it is gone and you feel very modest and say: ‘It is not I who have done it, I feel it is the Divine, I am nothing if He is not there’, and then the next minute, you are so satisfied with yourself simply for having thought that!” (CWM 5: 45)

X—Pride, Vanity and Modesty

1.

"The truth is that the human personality has come in contact with some Being, some Power, and under the influence of education and tradition calls it Buddha or Christ or by any other familiar name. It is difficult to affirm that it was Buddha himself or the very Christ with whom there was the contact, but none can assert either that the inspiration did not come from that which inspired the Christ or the Buddha. These human vessels may very well have received the inspiration from some such source. If they were modest and simple, they would be content to say that much and no more; they would say, 'I have received this inspiration from such and such a Great One', but instead they proclaim, 'I am that Great One.' I knew one who affirmed that he was both Christ and Buddha! He had received something, had experienced a truth, had seen the Divine Presence in himself and in others. But the experience was too strong for him, the truth too great. He became half crazy and the next day went out into the streets, proclaiming that in him Christ and Buddha had become one." (CWM 3: 80)

2.

"Sweet Mother! When will the vital yearn for the Divine? May its passion be changed into psychic love, its anger into

Equanimity

its jealousy into

Trust

its vanity into

Modesty

..." (CWM 17: 41)

3.

"So long as man prides himself on his virtue, the Supreme Lord will make him fall into sin to teach him the necessity of modesty." (CWM 10: 340)

XI—Excessive Modesty

1.

“... there are people who have what may be called a warped and excessive modesty or humility and who tell themselves, ‘Surely the Divine has thrown me out, I am good for nothing, He can do nothing with me, the only thing for me is to give up the game, for He finds me unworthy of Him!’

So, unless one adds to faith a total and complete trust in the Divine Grace, there will be difficulties. So both [Faith and trust in the Divine] are necessary....” (CWM 8: 39)

XII—The Mother's Body Is Full of Perfect Modesty

1.

"This Consciousness that came more than a year ago, a year and a half now, seems to be working very very hard, very positively, for sincerity. It does not allow 'pretence', that one should pretend to be that and not be that. He wants that the thing should be *the true thing*.

Yes, everything comes up.

It is an excellent mentor for this body, it is giving it lessons continually.... I do not know if all bodies are like that, but this one feels just like a little child and it *wants* to go to school, it wants to be shown where it is making a mistake and to learn everything. And it is learning constantly. ... It [The Mother's body] knows the distance there is between the consciousness of the being which uses it and itself, and it does not suffer for that but is full of a perfect humility, a perfect modesty. And it is not surprised, it is not anxious, because it is: 'Let Thy will be done; it is not my affair, I am not capable of judging and I do not try—let Thy will be done.' So, the body is like that (*gesture, passive and abandoned*).” (CWM 11: 240)

XIII—Stories on Modesty by the Mother

1.

“Who is this coming to the door of this Japanese house? It is the flower-artist, the man who is skilled in arranging flowers.

The master of the house brings a tray with some flowers, a pair of scissors, a knife, a little saw, and a beautiful vase.

‘Sir,’ he says, I cannot make a bouquet beautiful enough for such a beautiful vase.’

‘I am sure you can,’ replies the master politely as he leaves the room.

Left alone, the artist sets to work, cutting, snipping, twisting and tying until a beautiful bunch of flowers fills the vase — a delight to the eyes.

The master and his friends enter the room; the artist stands to one side and murmurs, ‘My bouquet is too poor, let it be taken away.

‘No,’ replies the master, ‘it is good.’

To one side of the table, near the vase, the artist has left a pair of scissors. By this he means that if there is any flaw in the bouquet, anyone can take the scissors and cut away what offends the eye.

The artist has done a fine piece of work, but he would not dream of exalting its merits. He admits that he may have made mistakes. He is modest.

Perhaps the Japanese artist really thinks that his work deserves compliments. I cannot tell his thoughts. But at any rate he does not boast and his behaviour is pleasing.

On the other hand, we smile at people who are vain.

Suleiman, Caliph of Damascus, was like that. One Friday, coming out of his hot bath, he dressed himself in green clothes, put on a green turban, sat on a green couch, and even the carpet all around was green. And then looking into a mirror and feeling pleased with himself, he said, 'The Prophet Mohammed was an apostle, Ali Bakr was a faithful servant of the truth, Omar could distinguish the true from the false, Otman was modest, Ali was brave, Muawiyah was merciful, Yazid was patient, Abdul-Malik a good governor, Walid a powerful master, but I am young and handsome.'

The flowers in the vase are beautifully arranged and our eyes are delighted. But it is for us and not for the artist to praise them.

Suleiman is handsome. It is true that there is no harm in his knowing it, but we laugh at his vanity when he gazes at himself in a mirror and tells himself that his good looks make him a finer man than Omar the truthful or Yazid the patient." (CWM 2: 254–255)

2.

"Still more absurd was the vanity of the man who thought that the earth was not large enough for his glory and that he must soar into higher regions.

This is the story.

A king of Persia named Kai Kaus had waged many wars and won many battles. He was so rich with the spoils of his enemies that he built two palaces in the Elburz mountains; and the gold and silver in the chambers were so plentiful that the brightness of the polished metal rivalled the light of day.

Kai Kaus was filled with presumptuous pride; he thought that he was the greatest king on earth.

Iblis, the evil spirit, observing the high opinion the king had of himself, resolved to trick him. He sent a demon disguised as a servant to the palace, with a bunch of flowers to present to the king.

The servant kissed the ground before Kai Kaus and said:

'Sire, no king in the world is like unto you. And yet one realm remains for you to conquer, the upper world, the kingdom of the sun, the moon, the planets and the secret corners of the heavens. Follow the birds, O King, and ascend to the sky.'

'But how can I ascend without wings?' asked the king.

'Your wise men will tell you, Sire.'

So King Kai Kaus asked the astrologers how he might fly to the upper regions, and they invented a novel plan. They suggested ordinary methods but the king would not hear of them.

They took four young eagles from a nest, fed and trained them until they were big and strong.

They made a square wooden frame; at each corner they fixed a pole and on each pole a piece of goat's meat. One of the four eagles was tied to each corner.

The king's throne was attached to the frame and a jar of wine was placed at the side of the throne. The king sat down.

The four eagles tried to catch hold of the meat and in order to do so flew upwards, at the same time lifting up the frame, which rose into the air to the amazement of the crowd. The eagles went up and up, nearer and nearer to the moon, until, wearied by their flight, they stopped beating their wings. Then the frame, the throne, the king, the wine-jar and all fell with a crash into the wilderness of China. The king lay all alone, bruised, hungry and wretched, until messengers came and took him back to the palace.

The king himself now saw how stupid and vain he had been.

He decided not to attempt any more flights beyond his power.

He settled down to the work of his kingdom and ruled it so justly that all men praised him.

This is how he came down from the high places of vanity to the honesty of the good, firm earth." (CWM 2: 255–256)

3.

"Sometimes we feel contempt for vain people who not only admire themselves too much, but boast. No one likes a braggart; even braggarts despise braggarts.

We are not surprised to learn that Ravana the terrible foe of Rama, whose wife Sita he had stolen away, was a braggart; it was quite natural for such a monster.

In the last great battle between Rama and the demons of Lanka, the glorious lord stood in his chariot face to face with the demon king, also in his chariot. It was a single combat. The army of demons and the army of monkeys and bears watched the fight.

Then with a dreadful voice, Ravana the king of Lanka cried:

'Today, O Rama, this war will come to an end unless you save yourself by running away from the battlefield. Today, wretch, I shall give you over to death. It is with Ravana that you must fight.'

Rama smiled calmly. He knew that Ravana's doom was near and he said: 'Yes, I have heard of all your might, O Ravana, but now I want to see as well as hear. I beg you to remember that there are three kinds of men in this world, who are like three kinds of trees: the dhak, the mango and the bread-fruit. The dhak tree bears flowers. It is like the man who only speaks. The mango tree has both flowers and fruits. It is like a man who both speaks and

acts. The bread-fruit tree bears only fruit. It is like the man who speaks not but acts.'

The demon laughed at these wise words. But before long his boasting tongue was silent for ever." (CWM 2: 256–257)

4.

"You have heard of great Solomon who was the King of Israel many years ago. There are many stories in the Bible and in other books which tell of his glory and his majesty. I shall tell you one story about him.

He was very rich. He had a magnificent throne, his plates were of gold, and in his palace silver was as common as stones in the city of Jerusalem. Merchants were constantly bringing him gold, silver, ivory, peacocks, monkeys, beautiful clothes, armour, spices, horses, mules and many other riches. King Solomon built a splendid temple in honour of the God of his fathers and his nation. But before the temple was built, while the timber for it was still growing in the form of cedar-trees on the mountains, Solomon had a dream in which his God appeared to him and said:

'Ask of me what you wish me to give you.'

Solomon answered:

'My father David was a just and truthful man and now I have succeeded to his throne. The work that lies before me is great. I feel like a little child. I do not know

how to go out or come in. I do not even know how to rule this people of which I am king. Therefore my desire is to have knowledge, so that I may know good from evil.'

And God replied:

'Because you have not asked for long life or riches but have desired knowledge and a heart which can distinguish justice from injustice, I will give you this wise mind so that none shall surpass you in understanding; and long life and riches will be yours also.'

You will notice the modest words spoken by the king, 'I am but a little child.'

Do we think less of Solomon because he spoke humbly of himself?

On the contrary, it is a real joy to see greatness that is modest." (CWM 2: 257–258)

5.

"I shall tell you three stories about the modesty of the Prophet Mohammed.

It is said that the Prophet of Islam was always willing to ride on an ass, while prouder men would only be content with a horse. And sometimes he would invite someone to ride behind him. And he would say:

'I sit at meals as servants do and I eat like a servant, for in truth I am a servant'.

Here is the second story. One day the Prophet was at a meeting-place where many people were gathered, and

there was not much room to sit. So he sat with his legs folded under him.

An Arab of the desert was present, and knowing that Mohammed was a great leader of men, he was surprised that the Prophet was not seated like a lord upon a throne.

‘Is this the way to sit?’ he scoffed.

‘Verily,’ said Mohammed, ‘Allah has made me a humble servant and not a proud king.’

Here is the third story. Mohammed was deep in conversation with the chief of a tribe of Quraish, when a blind man named Abdullah, not knowing that someone was with the Prophet, suddenly interrupted the conversation and asked to hear some verses from the Koran.

Mohammed spoke to him very roughly and ordered him to be silent. But afterwards he felt sorry that he had been so harsh and very humbly apologised for it. And from that time he treated Abdullah with great respect and even conferred honorable posts on him.” (CWM 2: 258–259)

6.

“After these stories of the king and the prophet, I shall tell you one about a famous man of science, the Englishman Isaac Newton.

Newton was born in 1642 and died in 1727. In the course of his long life he studied Nature; the universal force of attraction called gravitation, the effect of the sun and the moon on the tides; the light of the sun and how its

white ray is broken up into the seven colours of the rainbow; and many other things besides. Everyone marvelled at the wisdom of this man who was so skilled in reading the works and wonders of Nature. One day a lady spoke to Newton of his learning and knowledge and he replied:

‘Alas! I am only like a little child picking up pebbles on the shore of the great ocean of truth.’

You will understand that the ocean of truth means the laws of Nature which even the most learned men hardly know at all. A little child collects pebbles on the sea-shore, but how much vaster is the sea than the child thinks! And how much vaster still is the universe compared to our little thoughts!

And do we think less of Newton because he compared himself to a little child? Certainly not. We honour him for his modesty.” (CWM 2: 259–260)

7.

“Many years ago a great singer, who had won a world-wide reputation for her wonderful voice and outstanding talent, happened to be at a party. There, a little girl with a beautiful voice was asked to sing. The piece she was ready to sing was a duet, a piece of music for two voices. The child was to sing the main part, but no one wanted to sing the accompaniment. All the grownups thought that it was

beneath them to sing the second voice to a child. There was a pause; no one offered to accompany the child.

Then the famous singer said:

‘I will sing the second voice if you wish.’

And she did so. The duet was sung to the audience; the little girl’s voice rose high and clear, with the voice of the most famous singer of her time following sweetly, making a lovely harmony.

Noble was the heart of the modest lady who was willing to give her service to a child.” (CWM 2: 260)

8.

“In 1844 the Sanskrit College of Calcutta needed a teacher of grammar, and the post was offered to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. At that time he was earning fifty rupees a month, and in this new position he could earn ninety. But he thought that his friend Tarkavachaspati was a better grammar teacher than himself and he said so. So it was decided that his friend should take the post. Vidyasagar was very happy. He walked some distance from Calcutta to find his friend and tell him the news.

Tarkavachaspati was struck by the noble modesty of the scholar and exclaimed, ‘You are not a man, Vidyasagar, but a god in human form!’” (CWM 2: 260–261)

9.

“Now here is the story of a conceited [proud] glow-worm.

A man looked up at the glorious sun and exclaimed:
'How bright!'

'Like all the rest of us shining ones,' answered a voice.

The man looked all around him and saw a glow-worm in the shade of a bush.

'Was it you who spoke?'

'Yes,' replied the glow-worm. 'I said that the sun and I are shining ones.'

'The sun and you, really!' laughed the man.

'Yes, the sun, the moon, the stars, and me,' insisted the glow-worm complacently." (CWM 2: 261)

10.

"Four men were climbing a mountain in Italy. All four of them were monks: St. Francis was leading three brothers of his order. The mountain-side was covered with trees, and at the top there was an open flat space where St. Francis wished to pray, in the hope of having a new vision of things divine. The saint was well known and revered by rich lords and poor villagers alike.

The day was hot and the path steep. Francis was too tired to walk. So one of the monks went to a peasant and asked him to lend his ass for Francis to ride.

The peasant willingly agreed; the saint mounted the ass and the monks walked by his side while the peasant followed behind.

‘Tell me,’ asked the peasant, ‘are you Brother Francis?’

‘Yes,’ he replied.

‘Then,’ said the peasant, ‘try to be as good as people think you are, so that men may keep their faith in you.’

When he heard this, St. Francis was not at all displeased, for he would take advice from anyone, whether prince or poor peasant. He got down from the ass, bowed down before the countryman and thanked him for his good advice.” (CWM 2: 261–262)

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