

## Acquisition Of Power & Gaining Of Wisdom, Times of India, 24 May 2016



Many today associate spirituality with acquiring extra powers or mobilising cleansing energy which could solve our problems. Hence they conclude that a spiritually evolved person will acquire extraordinary powers. But there is a difference between acquiring powers and becoming spiritually evolved.

Hindu tradition does recognize that through specific practices, one can acquire extraordinary powers. But these may not necessarily be spiritual in nature. Many examples are given to show extra powers can be meaningless, become a curse or be responsible for one's destruction if one abuses them.

The first story is about a person who did great penance for 12 years and acquired the power to walk on water. He wanted to show off his power to a boatman crossing the river, and told him, "You need a boat to cross whereas I can just walk across the river". The boatman asked, "How long did it take for you to acquire this power of walking on water"? The person proudly said "12 years of hard work". The boatman replied, "Why did you waste 12 years of your life trying to acquire this skill when you can easily cross the river in a boat?"

The second story is about a king who was greedy for wealth. He managed to acquire the power whereby whatever he touches would become gold. Initially he was thrilled that when he touched his table, chair and other objects, they turned golden. But when he sat down to eat and the food turned gold, he was in distress. Finally, when he embraced his daughter, she became gold. Now the king begged for the boon to be reversed.

Finally, the story about Hiranyakashyapu. Through penance, he gained a boon that he cannot be killed by man or animal, neither inside nor outside the house, not during the day or at night. Now he thought he was invincible and so he abused his extraordinary powers. Finally, Vishnu in the form of Narasimha, half-man half-lion -- neither man nor animal-- at the threshold of the house that was neither inside nor outside, killed him at dusk, between day and night.

Do these examples mean that acquiring additional power is necessarily bad? No. One can become more intuitive, one's prayers begin to get answered, and one can actually use it for common benefit. Power has to be put in perspective. The Bhagwad Gita enables you to see that every individual has some sphere of influence, and some can acquire more power than

others through practices. However, these powers are nothing in comparison to the all-powerful Ishwara that governs the universe since time immemorial, generating cycles of creation and destruction, making everything the way it is. No one who claims to have powers can stop day, a tsunami or other natural calamities such as cyclones and hurricanes, that follow the laws of nature. That means, the objective position to have towards power is that one can have it, use it for common benefit, but that cannot be the measure of one's spiritual progress.

Spirituality is not about gaining powers; it is about making a deliberate attempt to expose oneself to wisdom that enables one to see things in the right perspective. Evolving spiritually includes gaining mastery over one's emotions, making appropriate choices of action, responding to challenging situations with equanimity and dwelling into the deeper meaning of life. Just like any higher learning such as mathematics, physics, and economics, gaining wisdom requires deliberate effort and perseverance.