Begging is a Means to Drop One’s Own Self

SPIRITUALITY | SADHGURU JAGGI VASUDEV

Begging in India was a part of the spiritual tradition. You did not select your food; you begged and ate whatever people gave you. It was considered a great privilege when a person on the spiritual path stood in front of your house and asked for food, and for you to offer food to him. Today, these traditions have been misused and there are so many people wearing the uniform of a spiritual seeker, who are just plain beggars in search of money and food. But when people begged consciously, it had a completely different meaning and possibility.

So, when somebody stretches his hand in front of you, if you feel it is being misused, you can refuse and move along. If you feel that it is really coming out of genuine need, you must respond as a human being. Just think how difficult it would be for you to stretch your hand in front of somebody on the street. That man is putting himself through that. A beggar may be doing so out of helplessness but a sanyasi is doing it consciously for his own growth so that he does not get too full of himself. A beggar does not have such great goals. He is just trying to fill his belly which he has become incapable of doing by himself. You need to understand, disability is not just in terms of losing a hand or a leg. You can become disabled just in the way you think and feel about life. Actually, almost the whole population is mentally and emotionally handicapped because of their patterns of thinking and feelings. Similarly, the beggar has gotten himself into a corner, and he knows that begging is the easiest way to earn a living.

In our tradition, at least once a year you must go begging for food, so that you do not think too much of yourself.

A spiritual person, however, takes to begging because he wants to drop himself. The idea, “I earn my own living, my own money, my own food, my own home,” is a big part of your ego. One day, a guest came to Gau-
tama the Buddha carrying a few flowers. It is a part of our culture that when people go to meet a guru, they take flowers as an offering. When the man came, Gau-
tama looked at him and said, “Drop it.” The man looked around and wondered, “What to drop?” He thought it was the flowers. He hesitated, “But I brought it for you.” Gau-
tama again said, “Drop it.” So the man dropped the flowers. Gautama looked at him and again said, “Drop it.” The man said, “I have dropped the flowers. I brought them as a gift, but you asked me to drop them, so I did. What else to drop?” Gau-
tama said, “No, you drop yourself first. The flowers are not the problem. You plucked the flowers for me that is fine, I will take them, but you drop yourself.”

So begging was used as a tool to drop yourself because in earning a living, you gather yourself. But you drop yourself in just stretching your hand in front of some-
body and asking for food. When you drop yourself, you are dropping the capability to earn your living, to rule a kingdom, yet you still choose to beg. That is a tremendous shift in a human being. So, in our tradition, at least once a year you must go begging for food, so that you do not think too much of yourself. People may give you food or they might just ask you to get out. It does not matter but be-
ing a beggar is not a small thing.

The author is a significant spiritual leader. www.isafoundation.org