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DEALING WITH PROVOCATIONS

Every human has a hot button that is carefully concealed from the world. However careful one may be, every once in a while someone does manage to press the hot button. How does one react when that happens? And instead of pressing the button, what happens when someone hammers it?

When provoked, most humans react either like a hagfish by throwing slimy abusive words or like an electric eel by stinging with physical abuse. Or like an exploding ant by destroying itself by self-abuse.

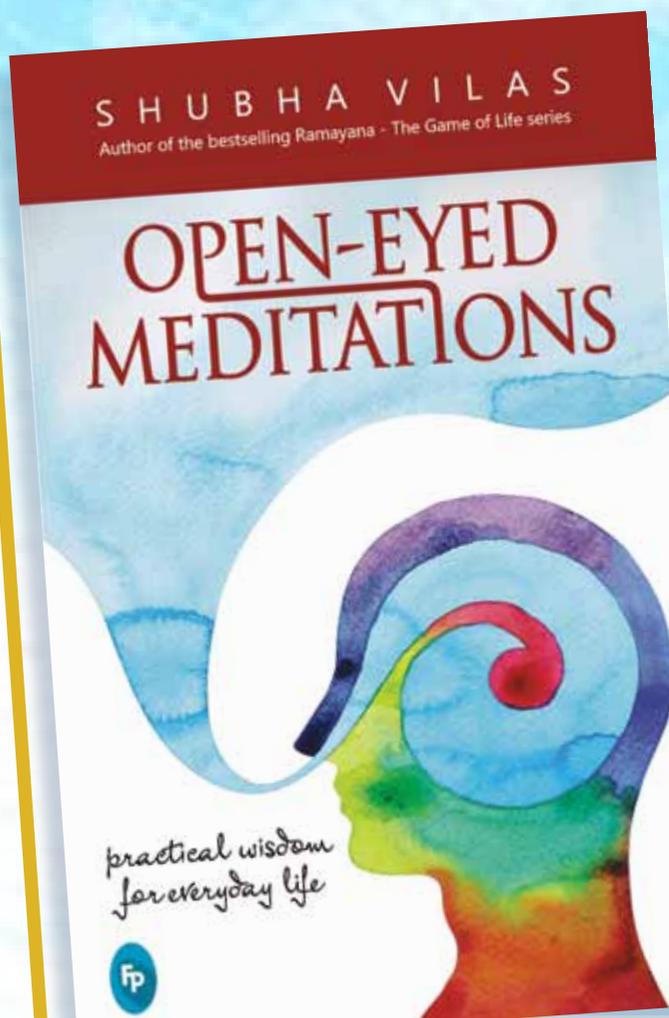
In the Bhagavata Puran, there is a story of king named Muchukunda

who was so great that he was invited by the demigods to lead wars on their behalf. Later he was blessed with a boon of unlimited sleep to rest his tired limbs. While he was asleep, Krishna tricked a demon named Kalayavana to come into the cave and provoke him by kicking him hard. As soon as he was kicked, Muchukunda woke up and burnt the demon to ashes instantly by his yogic powers. Once the anger subsided, guilt of over-reacting took over. Through this episode, Krishna teaches Muchukunda that the ability to handle provocation is the real greatness-tester. One's façade of greatness falls at the first test of provocation.

Generally, people poke and provoke one another for four reasons:

- To hide their own inferiority
- To become happy knowing that just like themselves, others are also immature in dealing with negativity
- To escalate their levels of confidence by winning against those who are weaker
- To transfer guilt of their own wrongdoing by making another guilty of succumbing to a provocation

During a health test, one expects a needle prick and responds with tolerance while an unexpected prick of a thorn causes irritation. Similarly, when one accepts provocations as a test of mental strength, the response is



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patience rather than annoyance.

When Hanuman was captured in Lanka, Ravana's ministers made fun of him and provoked him. Concluding that the tail represents the pride of a monkey, they lit his tail on fire. By taking shelter of prayers and summoning his inner strength, Hanuman did not allow the fire to affect his persona.

Every human also has a tail that represents his pride. The moment that tail is set on fire, we tend to overreact and seethe in anger or become vulnerable and try to defend our self. The provocation per se doesn't create as much disturbance as one's inability to handle it coolly like Hanuman.

As soon as one senses a provocation approaching, one should begin an internal dialogue urging oneself not to grab the bait being thrown. Every time we succumb to reacting to a provocation, we become

like a vulnerable child helplessly controlled by those weak moments. A feather can be blown away in any direction by the slightest breeze. A football can be kicked away in any direction by the lightest kick. But a rock stays intact no matter how much one blows on it and one kicks it. The game of provocation can be won only by de-escalating it. Don't allow the mind to escalate an ordinary provocation to turn you from a respectable hero to a despicable joker.

In the Bhagavata, Bhrgu Muni is out to find who the greatest person in the universe is. He does that by provoking different personalities in different ways and trying to analyse their reactions.

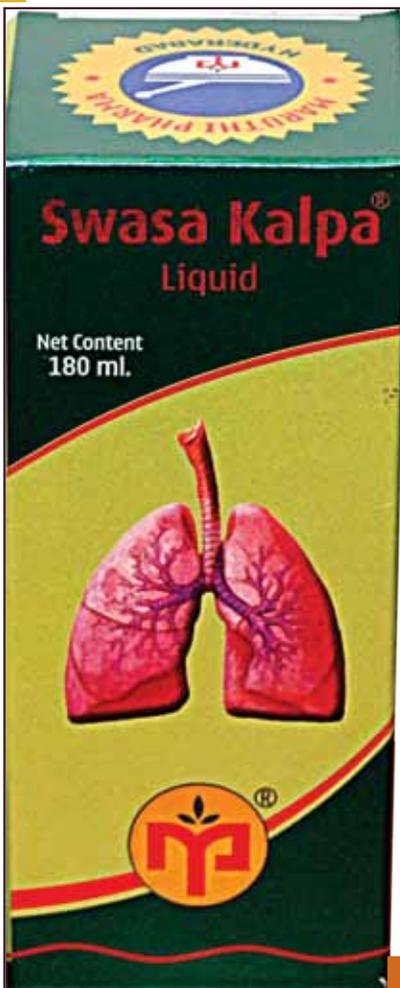
After much research, he approaches Lord Vishnu and tries to provoke Him by physically kicking Him on His chest in His own abode. He is shocked when he sees Vishnu totally unaffected and instead

asks him calmly if his feet hurt after kicking His hard chest. Bhrgu concludes that one who understands that the provoker is the one who is weak with insecurity and needs to be compassionately dealt with. He is the one who can never be provoked due to his greatness of vision.

When provoked, don't react like a hagfish abusing verbally. Don't react like an electric eel abusing physically. Don't react like an exploding ant abusing oneself. Rather, become the rare human that responds like a tortoise by protecting oneself under the impenetrable shell of inner strength, internal self-talk, and a compassionate vision.

Every time one resists succumbing to provocations, it's another milestone covered on the journey of personal evolution. ■

This feature is excerpted from Shubha Vilas' latest book Open-Eyed Meditations available at leading bookstores in Goa



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