Personality Development Courses are the rage of the age. Promising charisma, intellectual enhancement, impeccable demeanors, charming countenances, these courses are a source of “big bucks” for entrepreneurs. The highest compliment one may give another is to say, “He has such a good personality”. Elections are won or lost on this issue. Automobiles are bought and sold on the model’s media personality. Screen careers are assured and even sporting heroes have to exude that “personal oomph and charm” if they want to grab their fair share of those lucrative advertising contracts. Billions of dollars are poured into the projection of this illusive entity – the human personality, which has no more substance than a whirl of cloud in the blue sky!

Ironic that something so unreal, transitory and flimsy should be invested with such value. The root of the word “persona” itself enlightens us as to its essence. “Persona” comes from the Latin word for “mask”. What is a mask? A mask is a covering. A “personality”, or a “persona” is actually only a “covering” – it is not the “Real Self.” The mask may be glamorous, beautiful, grotesque, comic, but in the end, it is only a covering for the “Real Self.” One may construct a marvelous mask, with the aid of so many New Age Gurus, but it still remains at the end of the day, what it is – something unreal covering That Which Is, The Real.

That Which Is – The Reality – has no “persona” – no personality – no qualities – It indeed – is the opposite – It is the Great Impersonality – Brahman – Sat – The Impersonality stands alone – filled with all qualities – and yet, completely empty. It consists of all forms, Rupa, and yet has no form. It is the composite of all names (Nama) yet it is Nameless. What a wonder! It is this “Impersonality” that one must cultivate, in the true spiritual Sadhana – detached, serene, the Eternal Observer – observation – observed all rolled into one – watching – being – unaffected.

The “Persona” or mask of this great “Impersona” is the varied manifestation of forms pervading the entire Universe. Indeed, the Ultimate Self Development course of the sincere spiritual life is
“Impersonality Development” – This is the discarding of all masks and becoming what one truly is!

Stepping back a bit, however, one realizes that one cannot obtain the end-goal without starting the journey. The evolutionary trip through myriad forms in multiple lifetimes begins at least in the human incarnation with a “Persona”. Persona is another name for Asmita, Ahamhara or in plain English terms “ego”. Ego is the sense of “I AM”, “I EXIST”, I am Different, I am Separate. Ego – Persona – is the entity which observes and is observed. As Jane Austine put it so succinctly in her brilliant novel, Pride and Prejudice, they came “to see and be seen”. The Persona loves to “be seen”, particularly in a flattering light. There is a wonderful adrenaline high in “collecting admirations” from all and sundry, in luring others to love, appreciate and sometimes even worship the image, the mask, the attractive covering one has created for oneself.

In the long course of evolution, particularly in the twilight transition stage from animal to man, this sense of self is a necessary impetus to the evolutionary process. It is the core root of Patanjali’s Fifth Klesha, Abhinivesha, or clinging to life, the self-survival instinct. As the Jiva collects Vasanas and Samskaras through various human incarnations, the mask-persona is polished, refined, camouflaged. The old animal instincts are controlled and sublimated. Social niceties cover the raw harsh needs to dominate, to control, to devour.

The ego-persona is a necessary step in the evolutionary process. Therefore it must be cultivated, sculpted, refined, beautified and presented well. The Persona – the personality – must be developed in a positive manner. The Yama and Niyama of Patanjali’s Yoga are great tools in this polishing process. The Persona when subjected to the limits of these Yama and Niyama, begins to refine itself. It becomes softer, less intent on its own needs and gratifications. The survival instinct is sublimated in a positive manner, as is Raga – Dwesha, attractions and repulsion. A soft sensitive nature begins to emerge from the infantile immature desire to “BE BETTER – STRONGER – RICHER – MORE POWERFUL than any other sports entity in the Universe.” The emphasis shifts from “becoming more” to “becoming less” from getting more, to getting less. In other words, having served its purpose in propelling the Jiva through myriad experiences over hundreds of incarnation, the Persona, the ego, begins to melt away, to evaporate. The personality having been cultivated in a positive manner to its very heights has served its purpose and now begins to dissolve into a universality.
The journey which began with the animal instinct for self survival, than evolved into dull Tamasic sense of self which excludes even the acknowledgement of the existence of the other than refines itself into the Rajasic experience of desire for domination, control, superiority, finally evolves into the Sattwic Personality in which the Persona’s sense of self begins to melt into a sense of Cosmic Oneness.

The drama ends. The curtain falls. The actor removes his / her mask and basks in the joy of being his / her real self. The personality evolves into the universality and the long journey culminates in the ocean of Blissful Oneness.

This is the concept of Personality Development for those who walk the Yoga Path! It is a razor’s edge, no doubt, but nevertheless, an edge every Jiva must walk on – now or later!