

14. From Knowledge To Wisdom

Not one in a hundred among today's students

Cares to study the prescribed texts.

They are anxious only to secure a pass

Modern education has become a farce.

Vidya dhadhaathi Vinayam (Education confers humility). Humility does not mean merely an external show of respect. The true meaning of humility is the absence of a feeling of *Ahamkaara* and *Mamakaara* (egoism and the pride of possession). Education should aim at inculcating such an attitude among students. Every man should cultivate such feelings of egolessness and detachment and lead his life on this basis.

"*Adhyaatma Vidya Vidhyaanaam*" (Among studies, I am the study of the spiritual), declared Lord Krishna in the Gita. He also observed, "I am the embodiment of spiritual knowledge," in the Gita. Pursuing spiritual studies, the ancient sages realised spiritual truths and divinised their lives. The greatness and glory of Bharath are based on its spiritual heritage. The true wealth of Bharath consists in its spirituality. If spirituality declines in this land, the nation will go to seed.

Together with this spirituality it is essential to have morality. Morality means ethical behaviour. It is the supreme duty of students to demonstrate such conduct in their daily life. A characterless student can never enjoy peace or happiness. Morality, thus, determines humanness and leads to spiritual illumination. Students should recognise this truth. It was for this reason that in ancient times the people of Bharath propagated constantly the value of morality and proclaimed the greatness of spirituality.

Goodness is present within everyone

Students! "Through perseverance anything can be accomplished," is a well-known adage. For instance, goodness in a person is like a piece of burning charcoal. However, the fire in it is covered by the ashes of worldly desires. When the ashes are removed by *sadhana* (spiritual practice) the fire of goodness is revealed. Without this *sadhana*, the goodness will not be manifest. In fact, in every man, goodness is shining within as an effulgent light. But this remains invisible because it is enveloped in a cloak of worldly attachments.

Science and technology are making rapid strides today. But along with scientific knowledge, ignorance is also growing *pari passu*. *Vijnaana* means light. Where there is light there can be no darkness. So where there is *Vijnaana* there is no room for ignorance. But today we notice that everywhere, every moment ignorance is apparent. This means that the light of *Vijnaana* (scientific knowledge) is not shining brightly enough. If we had the full light of *Vijnaana*, there would be no sign of ignorance at all. It is clear, therefore, that the light of *Vijnaana* (science) today is not comparable to the light of *prajnaana* (the light of complete awareness). *Vijnaana* is form of ignorance.

It is obvious, therefore, that more than knowledge, what is essential is the refinement of human behaviour and *Samskara* (conduct). Sacrifice and charity are more important than wealth or position. Hence, for every individual, practical knowledge of the world is more essential than mere *adhikaaram* (position or authority). The first prerequisite for this is the promotion of human values.

Human values come first

Because of the absence of human values, it has been impossible to demonstrate the value of human existence. Man, therefore, has to start with the cultivation of human values. These human values can be developed only by spiritual practices and by no other means. Only when a seed is planted in the soil and watered can it sprout and grow from a sapling into a big tree.

But if the seed is kept in a tin and watered, it will only rot. Likewise with human values, it is only when they are implanted in a heart that is sacred and spiritual and nurtured there, that they will flourish and shine in all their splendour. Unfortunately, today man's heart is filled with narrow selfish concerns. His love is confined to himself and his nearest kith and kin. He does not realise that his welfare and the welfare of his family are dependent on the well-being of the society. This interrelationship should be grasped by students. They should take a firm resolve to eschew selfishness and self-interest and dedicate themselves to the service of society. When the society fares well, the nation also will be prosperous. Students should realise the integral unity of their individual well-being and the well-being of the society and the nation.

Spirituality should manifest in your behaviour

Man aspires for a fruit that is ripe and sweet. Whatever the quality of the seed, if the fruit is unripe it will not be enjoyable. No one likes a tasteless fruit. Likewise, society will shun an individual who lacks a social consciousness. A student who seeks to earn the respect and regard of society should conduct himself properly. He should be a person of integrity. Spirituality should be manifested in his behaviour. He should set an example to others. Most students today are lacking in such idealism.

Students tend to have narrow ideas and petty objectives. They have no conception of human values. Whatever studies one may pursue or position one may occupy, one must cherish human values.

As a youth, one tends to be hot blooded and conceited. Puffed up with pride, he treats others as men of straw. Most students today are immersed in trivial chatter and meaningless pastimes. Sacred and ennobling ideas have no appeal for them. In this situation, when they enter on their studies, they develop arrogance and ostentation and get into evil ways. They are filled with bad thoughts, bad feelings and indulge in bad actions. In the process the primary purpose of education is forgotten. Education is regarded as an exercise in getting acquainted with books. He forgets that the aim of education is to understand the purpose of life. He relies on the strength of body, wealth, position and scholarship and forgets that true strength is derived from Righteousness and Divine Grace. Without the power of Righteousness and the grace of the Divine, all other forms of strength are of no use. The world has plenty of men with wealth, physical prowess, position and authority. Have any of these given them mental peace? No. They can only confer name and fame in the mundane sphere. They cannot confer peace or happiness. Recognising this truth, students should consider the royal road that will take them to the fight goal in the future.

Man's best friends and worst enemies

The foremost thing that should be considered by the students today is how to get rid of the bad thoughts and bad desires in which they are enveloped. They are the worst enemies of man. Man's best friends are good thoughts and good intentions and good behaviour.

From ancient times it has been the greatness and glory of Bharath to proclaim to the world the message of human welfare and praying for the good of all mankind. The world acclaimed the fame of Bharath. In those days no other country enjoyed such peace and prosperity as Bharath. Bharath was esteemed as the spiritual leader among nations. She was regarded as the preceptor for all countries. It is a sign of thoughtlessness for students to forget the greatness of Bharath's sacred culture, develop a fascination for exotic manners and customs, and give up Bharath's own traditions and practices. It is good for the well-being of every nation to adhere to its own traditions and practices. Students should learn to stand on their own legs and not depend on others. You must rely on the Divine and not become subservient to others in worldly matters. That alone is *swechcha* (true freedom).

Act according to dictates of your conscience

Swechcha means knowledge of the *Aatma* (Spirit). Self-control is true freedom. Spiritual bliss is freedom. Self-realisation is freedom. *Swa + Ichha = Swechcha*. *Swechcha* does not consist in living according to one's whims and fancies, indulging in the fleeting pleasures of the senses and wasting one's entire life in experiencing momentary joys. *Swechcha* (freedom) means acting according to the dictates of one's conscience.

In his address earlier this morning, Dr. G. Ventaktaraman mentioned that the Divine, after creation, did not keep all powers within Himself but gave them to mankind. This is true. God is the Creator. He created everything in the Cosmos. But He did not retain within His hands the responsibilities relating to the Creation. He gave to human beings all capacities. But He laid down a condition relating to the use of these capacities. Men are free to live as they like. They can utilise all the material objects in creation. There can be no objection to this from anyone, not even from God. But, the Divine has declared that there is no escape from the consequences of one's action. This has to be properly understood.

No one can go against the laws of Nature

For instance, in the morning's lecture a good illustration was given. The wind blows; rains fall. In the *Dwapara* age, Indra caused a heavy downpour. The people who were affected by the deluge, prayed to the Lord: "Oh Lord! We and our cattle are suffering from this downpour. Save us from the rain." The Lord replied: "I cannot stop this rain. Whatever has to happen in nature has to go on. But I have the right to protect you from its adverse effects. Rain comes according to the laws of Nature. These natural phenomena should go on in their respective ways. But, having regard to your devotion and prayers, I shall lift this hill and provide shelter to all of you. But I will not stop the rain." (The reference is to the lifting of the Govardhana mountain by Sri Krishna).

Now, the wind has the power to blow out a lamp. The Divine has endowed the lamp with the power to shed light. The powers of the wind and of light are derived from God. But it is foolish for anyone to order the wind not to blow out the lamp. What one can do is to protect the lamp from the blast of wind by fixing a chimney. This is within human capacity.

Through these examples you should learn how to regulate the forces of Nature and not seek to go against natural laws. It follows that man has the freedom to enjoy the things provided by the Creator.

But man should exercise his discrimination to determine what are beneficial for him and what are not fit to be used. Because all things are available, one should not use them as he likes for the simple reason that each use is accompanied by its natural consequences. One cannot avoid these

consequences. If you are prepared to face the consequences, you can act as you want. What is happening, however, is enjoyment of something with relish and later bemoaning the adverse aftereffects. This is a mark of mental weakness.

Prakruthi (Nature) is like a mirror. It reflects your action. Standing before a mirror, you offer a *Namaskar* to it. The image in the mirror reflects your actions. If you attempt to hit the image, the reflection will hit back. Basing on this law of action and reaction, the Vedanta declared: "*Yadbhaavam Thadbhavathi.*" (Whatever your thought, that you become).

Hence, in the realm of natural phenomena, whatever actions you do will be followed by consequences which are inescapable, sometime or other.

No escape from the consequences of your actions

Students! As human beings, you have to ascertain by the use of your intelligence and *Vijnaana* (discriminating power) what are the actions that are proper and what are to be avoided. Whatever appears to be good, you better do it. But, if knowing that something is wrong, you do it, you can never escape from its consequences. The Lord created the Cosmos and offered it to mankind. Consequently, the responsibility for properly utilising all objects in the world rests on humanity and not on the Lord. If men use things in the right way and benefit from them, they will experience happiness. If you misuse them or put them to wrong uses, you will have to bear the troubles resulting therefrom. This is the lesson to be learnt through *Vidya* (education).

What is the meaning of *Vidya*? It means *Jnaana* (knowledge). Is it worldly knowledge or spiritual knowledge? Is it experience of the external or the internal? The meaning of knowledge will vary according to whether it relates to the external or the internal. Students should enquire into both of these. After such enquiry, they should try to reconcile both of them in practice.

Do as you would be done by

The divinity present in man is present everywhere. It is not limited to man. It is common to all living creatures. You should realise that, if what is done by others causes pain to you, similar action by you will cause similar pain to others. If you desire others to show respect towards you, show that respect to others first yourself. It is not possible for you to win the esteem of others without your showing the same feeling towards them.

The world is governed by three principles: Reaction, Reflection and Resound. Hence you should see that your actions, your vision and your words are right. For every man, humility and reverence are valuable ornaments. Humility is the hallmark of right education. Humility is lost when men are filled with self-pride, or discontentment. Humility should be observed in all circumstances. It should be manifested from the heart. Egoism is an acquisition from outside. The arrogance of knowledge is an acquired vice. In young persons, it is destructive of human values.

Students! Remember that adolescence is an intermediate stage in one's life. It comes in the middle and passes off quickly. In the brief period that it lasts, it appears glamorous but only for a fleeting moment. Hence, one should be very careful how this period in one's life is used. Adi Sankara declared: "There is pain at birth. Old age is painful. Therefore, be vigilant always." All relationships and all possessions are temporary. One should not get deluded by them. All things pass away in due course. Only the Divine abides forever. Only the present matters, because both the past and future are in the present. Today's sapling has come out of yesterday's seed and is the parent of the tree into which it will grow. Don't worry about the future or brood over the past.

Make good use of the present. Then life will be filled with joy. Be happy. That will lead you to union with God.

Insatiable desires result in disappointment

In the railway journey of life, students are like long-distance passengers. They should not burden themselves with too many desires. Reasonable aspirations to achieve distinction in one or other field are legitimate. But there should be a limit to such desires. Insatiable desires result in disappointments which cause mental disability. Man forfeits peace largely because of the desire to amass and hoard wealth. As birds and animals have no such tendencies, they lead a freer and more contented life.

Students! You are entitled to become masters of Nature. Do not become its bond-slaves. Make faith in God the breath of your life. Realise that you have to share with others whatever you acquire by way of knowledge or wealth. It was the spirit of sacrifice and sharing which made Bharath famous in the past. Today the spirit of sacrifice has given place to selfish enjoyment. This has become a cause of disease.

The truly educated person is one who uses his knowledge for the good of others. He is entitled to be called a *Jnaani* (a man of wisdom). Knowledge which is used for sense-enjoyment or for the satisfaction of worldly desires is not *Jnaana* (wisdom).

Students! Become messengers of peace and security for the world. Prepare yourselves to make sacrifices for the world rather than to derive personal benefits from it. Derive joy from renunciation and not from sensuous pleasures.

Auditorium at Brindavan, 22 May 1992