

4. Isaavaasya Upanishad – Renunciation and Pleasure

*Creation emerges from Truth
And merges back into Truth.
There is no place without Truth.
All that exists is a manifestation of pure, unsullied
Truth.*

Truth is one, but seers describe it in various ways (*Ekam sat vipraah bahudaa vadanti*). Truth is not the property of any one person. It is not related to a particular country, religion, or era. People of all times and places have equal right to attain the Truth.

Truth does not follow anyone—all must follow Truth. The forefather of mankind, Manu, taught this fact. The word *manuja* (man) means “one born of Manu”. Manu also decreed that one must be prepared to sacrifice everything for Truth. However, people yield to the pressures of situations and give up Truth for everything else!

Speak the pleasant truth

People perceive Truth as their enemy and derive enjoyment from falsehood. They endeavour to understand everything except the Truth. All pleasures and prosperity emerge from Truth alone. Since ancient times, kings ruled only with the strength of Truth. Truth is character, Truth is religion, Truth is life, Truth is penance, Truth is God. It is weakness to forget the eternal Truth and trust in falsehood.

Manu declared another aspect of Truth to mankind. He said, “Speak the truth, speak pleasantly, and do not speak an unpleasant truth (*Satyam brooyaat, priyam brooyaat, na brooyaat satyam apriyam*).” Meaning, we should not lie to sound sweet. On the other hand, we should not bluntly state the truth when it is difficult to palate. Truth must be spoken all the time, but in a way producing a beneficial effect on the listener. This is also emphasised in the *Gita*: Speech must be truthful, pleasant, beneficial and cause no excitement (*Anudvega-karam vaakyam satyam priya hitam cha yat¹*).

Suppose you meet a blind man. If you shout, “O blind man!”, it will pain him. The words are true, but unpleasant. When you call out to a lame man, “Hey cripple!”, you will hurt him badly. It is best to greet him in some other manner. Never hurt others under the

excuse of truth. Day-to-day actions accrue to become our character. It is important to speak the pleasant truth to develop a sterling character.

Isaavaasya Upanishad

The *Upanishads* are the head in the body of *Vedas*, among which the *Isaavaasya Upanishad*² is chief. This *Upanishad* appears as a collection of *mantras* in the *Sukla Yajur Veda*³. The path of action, *karma yoga*, is expounded in the *Sukla Yajur Veda* till the thirty-ninth chapter. *Jnana yoga*, the path of wisdom, begins in the fortieth chapter. This is also the beginning of *Isaavaasya Upanishad*.

Action (*karma*) flourishes in knowledge (*jnana*). Knowledge is strengthened and demonstrated by action. This union of action and knowledge is explained in the *Upanishads*. You have no choice but to engage in action. But don’t let attachment dictate to you, “I must enjoy the fruits of this action.” Recognise the misleading voice of ego when you feel, “This action happened because of me.” Attachment and ego bind you to actions.

Pleasure with sacrifice

The *Isaavaasya Upanishad* proclaims that all pleasures (*bhoga*) should be enjoyed with a feeling of renunciation (*thyaga*). Upon casual enquiry, pleasure and renunciation seem to be opposites. A renunciant does not crave for pleasure, and a pleasure seeker cannot even entertain thoughts of sacrifice! Therefore, you might ask, how can one enjoy pleasures with an outlook of sacrifice.

The *Isaavaasya Upanishad* reveals that when you perform actions without ego and when you experience the world without attachment, no distinction remains between pleasure and renunciation. Work without ego and attachment is selfless work—a pleasurable sacrifice. All selfless work is nothing but delightful renunciation.

Every person must perform actions without the egoistic feeling, “These are the results of my action.” When one considers the action as one’s own, it is

¹ *Bhagavad Gita* (XVII:15)

² Named after its first phrase: “*Isaavaasyam Idam Jagat – Creation resides in God*”.

³ The *Yajur Veda* is divided into two sections: *Sukla* (bright) and *Krishna* (dark).

natural to take credit for the results and get attached to them. The *Isaavaasya Upanishad* demonstrates that *yoga*, the path to Knowledge of the Self (*Atma Jnana*), is the merger of renunciation (*thyaga*) and pleasure (*bhoga*).

Yoga and welfare (kshema)

What is *yoga*? the divine treasure earned after spiritual practices is called *yoga*. Krishna told Arjuna, “I shall look after your *yoga* and welfare (*kshema*) (*Yoga kshemam vahaamyaham*⁴.” In everyday usage, the terms *yoga-kshema* mean the welfare of wife, children, job, property, and so on. But Krishna did not intend this worldly concept of welfare.

Yoga is the name given to attempts to achieve Godhood. To attain the unattainable God is *yoga*. To envision the invisible Divine is *yoga*. To bring into daily experience that which cannot be seen by the eyes, heard by the ears, comprehended by the mind, or felt by the heart is *yoga*. To manifest the unmanifest Divinity is *yoga*.

The treasure of *yoga*, won after arduous spiritual effort, needs to be safeguarded. This preservation of *yoga* is *kshema*. Therefore, the true significance of Krishna’s usage of *yoga-kshemam* is (1) the attainment of Divinity, which is beyond the mind, and (2) the preservation of that sacred Realisation. *Yoga* with *kshe-ma* is, therefore, equivalent to pleasure (*bhoga*) with renunciation (*thyaga*).

The inner instrument

Pleasure (*bhoga*) with renunciation (*thyaga*) is most important. Sacrifice is the soil in which divine traits of man sprout. Instead of treating the *Upanishadic* statements as worthless dry grass, people should try to live them in their daily life and, thereby, watch Divinity dawn in themselves.

A person is not just a combination of body and mind. A person possesses *prajnaana* —constant integrated awareness. *Prajnaana* is the permanent witness or awareness pervading the inner instrument (*antah-karana*). What is the inner instrument? The thinking faculty is categorised into four entities based on function: mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), memory (*chitta*), and ego (*ahamkara*).

What is the mind? The mind is a bundle of thoughts. The mind continuously decides for and against issues (*Sankalpa vikalpaatmanam manah*). A cloth is made of vertical and horizontal threads —comparable to likes and dislikes. When the thread is extracted from one side, the cloth falls apart. Similarly, pull out and discard

the thread of thought, and the cloth of mind ceases to exist. This is expressed in our scriptures as: Repetition strengthens thoughts (*Manana traaana sammilitam*). We strengthen our mind by repeatedly remembering unnecessary matters.

Next, memory. This is just a repository of past impressions.

The third, intellect. The intellect is the link to the Divine, discriminating between the temporary and the permanent.

The fourth, ego, identifies with the body. *Aham* (I) + *aakaaram* (form) is *ahamkaaram*, ego. Ego merges the sense of individuality with the physical form.

All four —mind, intellect, memory, and ego— are aberrations of the true mind. The one mind has four names. For example, a *brahmin*⁵ is called a cook-*brahmin* when he specialises in cooking for feasts. The same *brahmin*, engaged in worship, is called a priest (*pujari*); when imparting *Vedic* education, he is called a teacher (*acharya*); when reading a horoscope, he is called an astrologer (*panchanga brahmin*). The *brahmin* is one but, based on his task, his name differs. The mind, intellect, memory, and ego are thus synonyms.

The inner instrument (*antahkarana*) is not a separate entity. It is part of our other instruments (*karanas*). Our senses are instruments pointing outward. The eyes see the external world, ears hear external sounds, and nose breathes air from outside. Similarly, the mind, intellect, memory, and ego are inner instruments. When the inner instrument is sacrificed, it does not matter if the external instruments contact worldly objects. This is exactly pleasure coupled with sacrifice (*bhoga* with *thyaga*).

Desireless actions purify the mind

First, purify the inner instrument. To this end, it is compulsory to engage in action. Without activities, the mind cannot be purified. The *Vedas* say: The mind is refined with action (*Chittasya suddhaye karmaha*). Every person must undertake good deeds to purify the mind. What are ‘good actions’? Without an eye on results, without selfish intent, all actions performed are desireless actions (*nishkama karma*). *Nishkama karma* is nothing but pleasure with sacrifice (*bhoga* with *thyaga*).

Thus, the *Isaavaasya Upanishad* elaborates beautifully on the unity of pleasure and sacrifice. We must not be inactive. Action sanctifies the body and time. The goal of human life is to harmonise time, action, cause, and duty (*kala, karma, karana, and kartavyam*).

⁴ *Bhagavad Gita* (IX:22)

⁵ A person of the priestly class

How do we use our time? We increase our selfishness, selfishness, selfishness. How then can we expect the union of pleasure and sacrifice (*bhoga* and *thyaga*)? Instead of merging *thyaga* into *bhoga*, we attain *roga* (disease) through *bhoga*! Aspire to be a *yogi*, not a seeker of pleasure (*bhogi*). What is *bhoga*? Eating, sleeping, and living life forgetful of time.

Craving is a disease, action is the cure

Food is necessary for the upkeep of the body. Food protects the body, clothes shield against adverse weather (*Bhikshaannam deha rakshaartham, vastram sheeta nivaaranam*). The body is the home of mucus, phlegm, urine, and disease. The body is a mound of waste matter, hardly the boat to ferry one across the ocean of birth and death! O mind, do not trust this body. Instead, seek refuge at the Lotus Feet of Hari. The body is bound to rot like waste, collapse like a broken chariot.

To prevent disease, we must take medicine. What is disease and what is good health? Everything is a disease. Hunger is an affliction, food is its medicine. Thirst is the disease, water is the cure. For every disease, there is a prescribed remedy.

Similarly, the craving for pleasure is a disease. Action is the medicine. We may desire bliss. But how can we secure it without action? You can place potato and *chapati* in a plate and repeat their names as long as you wish —your hunger is not satisfied. To fill your stomach, put your hand and mouth to work! Meaning, hands busy in work and mouth busy in repetition of the divine Name. With such dual effort, you will definitely attain bliss.

Everything in this world is a disease (*roga*). With the right outlook, we can convert every situation into *yoga*. Our scriptures say that a person who eats one meal per day is a *yogi*, two meals a day makes one a *bhogi* (pleasure seeker), and three meals make one a *rogi* (diseased)! One who eats four times a day is as good as dead! These days, we struggle to fill our stomachs but not to get established in an idealistic, moral life and realise the goal of human birth.

Students! Everything perishes with time. When time, deed, circumstances, and duty (*kala, karma, karana, kartavya*) so decree, the body itself will collapse. The body may die, but ideals remain immortal. Be idealistic and live in hearts forever.

Yes, some desires are necessary, but they must be within limits. Keep limits, focus on the welfare of all, and perform actions with a sense of duty —This is the union of renunciation and pleasure (*thyaga* and *bhoga*). Truly, the joy we derive from selfless actions cannot be measured. Through the sacrifice of service to society,

we are able to experience the pleasure of bliss. When we act with the fruits in mind, joy eludes us.

Forget your help and others' hurts

In this world, if we forget two issues, we succeed in bringing renunciation (*thyaga*) and pleasure (*bhoga*) together. First, the good we have done to others. If we recollect favours done by us, we begin expecting something in return and open ourselves to disappointment. This also paves the way to jealousy and hatred. Forget the help you give, immediately.

Second, forget the harm others have done to you. With the recollection of suffering, you develop vengeance and related defects. Before such harmful feelings sprout, forget the harm caused by others.

When we are able to set aside these two thoughts, we merge renunciation and pleasure (*thyaga* and *bhoga*). If we unearth these issues in our memory all the time, we become a heap of foul-smelling vices. Our thoughts create reactions. In ancient Indian tradition, reactions of actions are held paramount.

Sacrifice to receive more

Indian culture stands on certain strong convictions:

- (1) Results of action (*karma*) are inescapable.
- (2) God incarnates in human form as an *Avatar*.
- (3) Everything in the world is a form of God and is naturally sacred.

With purity, patience, and perseverance, we can realise the truth of these ancient beliefs.

Students! Enquire into these matters from a tender age. Desire renunciation (*thyaga*) with pleasure (*bhoga*), not disease (*roga*) with *bhoga*! Renunciation, renunciation, renunciation ... renunciation is our true pleasure.

I often quote: Not by actions, wealth, or children but by sacrifice alone is immortality attained (*Na karmana na prajana na dhanena thyaagenaike amritathwamaanasu*). If we do not release the air we inhale, do we help or hurt ourselves? Our lungs will perish. If the remnants of digested food are not excreted, is it sacrifice or pleasure (*thyaga* or *bhoga*)? It is neither. It becomes disease (*roga*), and the stomach suffers.

Just as we release air and food, we must sacrifice the money we earn. In the above quotation, what is wealth (*dhana*)? Wealth refers to education, youth, wisdom, joy, and so on. For instance, having earned the wealth of education, you must apply it to serve others, disseminate its gist to others. Then your knowledge will grow. If you do not propagate and apply your skills, you lose them. The more you sacrifice, the more you receive and

progress. Never feel that you help someone else. You help only yourself!

Every day is an opportunity

Students! In our worldly, physical view of life, we pay attention only to growth but not to the decay that accompanies it. Our body grows, but our life span decays correspondingly! We rejoice upon sunrise and sunset. At sunrise we feel, “Good, now I can do my tasks.” At sunset, we feel equally happy, “Finally, I can take some rest”. This is nothing but ignorance. Every sunrise and sunset consume a day of our lifespan, which we treat carelessly.

Therefore, engage in your duty by understanding the significance of dawn and dusk. Sri Ramakrishna used to pant for the Lord’s vision from dawn to dusk. At the end of the day, just before sleeping, he used to look around dispiritedly and cry, “Oh no! Yet another day has gone by without the Lord’s vision!” Treating every moment as a day, he used to ache for the Lord without interruption. Our ancient *rishis* also turned their yearning into penance and experienced Divinity.

Unity and purity in thought, word, and deed

What is meant by penance (*tapas*)? Standing on your head and squinting your eyes is not penance! Unity and purity in thought, word, and deed (*trikarana suddhi*) is penance. A great soul has unity in thought, word, and deed (*Manassyekam vachassekam karmanyekam ma-haatmanam*). A sinful soul is characterised by disagreement in thought, word, and deed (*Manas anyat vachas anyat karman anyat duraatmanam*).

When thought, word, and deed are not one, only darkness (*thamas*) will result instead of penance (*tapas*). A human birth is rare in living beings (*Jantoonam nara janma durlabham*). We should aspire for the Divinity beyond us, not for worldly pleasures beneath us. Therefore, it is no mistake to pursue secular education. But keep the permanent goal of life in view. We are truly *yogis*, not *bhogis* (pleasure seekers) or *rogis* (sick people). *Yogis* are known by sacrifice or renunciation (*thyaga*).

Attain God through troubles

Students! The *Upanishads* express the most profound subjects in the most lucid manner. Secrets are inherent in every statement of the *Upanishads*. If we enquire where secrets are present, it is only in pain and troubles. The *Vedas* say: There is peace in unrest, light in peace, supreme light in light, and God in supreme light (*prasanti in asanti, prakanti in prasanti, parama jyoti in prakanti, and paramatma in parama jyoti*).

Without darkness, there is no value for light. No-body would value food if hunger did not exist. Without the oppressive heat of summer, why would anyone buy air conditioners? Happiness does *not* result from happiness (*Na sukhaat labhate sukham*)! True tranquility is obtained only through difficulties and troubles. If you spend the entire day in an air-conditioned room, you become desensitised to its comfort. Step outside for two hours and return — you will realise why air conditioners are so desirable! Thus, human life is necessarily a combination of joy and sorrow, profit and loss, heat and cold. Without duality (*dwaita*), there is no value for the state of non-duality (*advaita*).

Lesser truth to higher truth

Today man is half-blind. How? “A man with dual mind is half-blind!” Today, we perceive a difference between “that” and “this”. “That” is the *Atma*. “This” is *thwam*, the body. “That” is He, “this” is I. We must experience that He and I are really not separate. We must journey from I to “we”. We feel we need to proceed from untruth to truth. No, no. Our path starts at “lesser truth” and ends at “higher truth”. How? Imagine a full circle.

That is full, this is full,
From the full emerges the full again.
If the full is subtracted from the full,
What remains is full.

*Poornamadah poornamidam
Poornaat poornam udachyate
Poornasya poornamaadaaya
Poornam evaavasishyate*

Think of a circle. Inside this circle is a smaller circle. Inside it, a still smaller circle. The smallest circle is the body. The middle circle is the mind. The largest circle is the *Atma*. The circle of the *Atma* is immutable. We must broaden our heart, enlarge the innermost circle ... expand, expand, expand, till it becomes the middle circle. That means: merge into the mind. Then, expand the mind, make it vast as an ocean, till it merges into the *Atma*. That is when we realise the unity of the body, mind, and *Atma*.

Another example. You see a wall clock here. It has three hands: the second hand, the minute hand, and the hour hand. Which is more important? The hour hand is of no use if the second hand is absent. The minute hand is equally useless. All three are essential, but the chief hand is the second hand. Sixty revolutions of the second hand cause once in the minute hand. Similarly, the hour hand circles once every sixty revolutions of the minute hand.

Our body is a wall clock. When innumerable good actions are done, our mind is refined slightly to a purer

state. When the mind, in turn, entertains innumerable thoughts of the Divine, the *Atma* dawns in it gradually. Therefore, good deeds with the body and good thoughts in the mind are the only means to attain bliss of the *Atma*.

Atma pervades everything

In the world, we find three indispensable elements (*aadhaara*) for existence: earth, sky, and light. Water and air are food (*aahaara*). Without *aadhaara* and *aahaara*, nothing can exist. The presence of water and air is evidence of the *Atma*. The *Atma* is ever present, even in the absence of water and air, but they cannot exist without the *Atma*. The *Atma* is not related to anything in any way. It is described as:

Attributeless, stainless, eternal, the final abode,
Ever pure, intelligent, free and purity itself.

*Nirgunam niranjanam sanaatanam nikanam
Nitya sudha buddha mukta nirmala swaroopinam*

Everything thrives and survives only on the power of the *Atma*. You find fathers without sons, but can you find a son without a father? You find water without fish, but not fish outside of water. Similarly, *Atma* exists even without air and water, but these two elements cannot exist without the *Atma*.

The five elements do not constitute the *Atma*, but rather, they are formed and sustained by the *Atma*. The five elements are nothing but a manifestation of God's divine glory.

To experience Divinity through the five elements with renunciation (*thyaga*) is true pleasure (*bhoga*). Every moment, we cannot but experience the five elements. Can we stop breathing? Air is all around, inside and outside us. But it is invisible and intangible. Likewise, God is omnipresent.

With hands, feet, face and head everywhere,
Pervading all the worlds, God envelops everything.⁶

*Sarvatah paani paadam, tat sarvatokshi siro mukham
Sarvatah srutimal loke, sarvamavritya tishtati*

Expand love to experience God

God is everywhere, but God is not realised through the senses. Fools demand sensory perception. No, no, God can only be experienced. He is called *aprameya* because He is beyond physical measurement. Here is a tumbler full of water. If you mix sugar in it, it dissolves. Where is the sugar? It is at the bottom, top, all over. But you cannot see it or touch it. How do you realise its

existence? Place a drop of water on your tongue, and you can taste its sweetness. Therefore, God can be known only through experience, not by physical measurements. Direct experience of God is the bliss obtained from spiritual effort.

Thus, enquire into the *Atma*, fix your sights on eternal Bliss, desire only proximity and merger with God and expand your Love. Then the embodiment of Love Himself will awaken in you.

In these hearts barren without Love,
To sprout the seedlings of Love,
Shower nectarine Love
To drench everything,
To make rivers of Love flow,
Compose melodious notes on the flute,
— O Krishna, play a song!

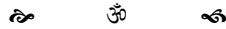
The cowherd maidens (*gopikas*) prayed, "Krishna! Our hearts are deficient in Love. For Love to sprout, we crave water. What water? The rain of divine Love."

Words of love are pure, cool rain. Our hearts are fields where this rain produces a harvest. Love is like flowing water, and our bliss is the fruit of Love. This flow of bliss leads us into the ocean of Divinity.

The individual who seeks to offer himself into the infinite ocean of Grace must tread the path of Love. This is renunciation (*thyaga*) coupled with pleasure (*bhoga*). The pleasure united with renunciation is not the pleasure of the body or the mind. It is the pleasure of the *Atma*, which is natural to us, not artificial or acquired. It is the bliss of the *Atma*. Today, anger and hatred are so pervasive that it seems that dry grass placed between any two people will catch fire! Therefore, expand your hearts and cultivate Love.

[Swami sang "Prema Mudita Mana Se Kaho, Rama Rama Ram" in His Golden Voice.]

24 May 1991



⁶ *Bhagavad Gita* (XIII:13)