

6. Prasnopanishad – Answers to the First Student

Trees bear fruit for the benefit of others.
Rivers flow to help others.
Cows give milk in the interest of others.
This body has been given to serve others.

Embodiments of Love!

Trees do not eat their own fruits. They bear them for others. They are full of selflessness. Rivers also do not drink their own water. They offer themselves to the people subsisting on them. Out of concern for people, cows yield milk. They do not drink it themselves. However, people have forgotten that they acquired this body for helping others. They follow, instead, the narrow-minded path of selfishness.

People do not have even a thousandth of the sacrifice demonstrated by trees, rivers, and cows. From waking to sleeping... selfishness, selfishness, selfishness. What is the reason for the deplorable state of our country? Selfishness alone. Yes, selfishness and self-interest are necessary. But, there cannot be lasting good without limits (*Nah sreyo niyamam vinaa*). Selfishness must be within limits. A selfish person cannot even sustain human qualities. If today a person can live like a human, that itself is equal to attaining Divinity!

God and the world — cause and effect

What you think you see does not exist.
What you cannot see alone exists.
For all time, there is only one God.
Only God exists, not the world.

The world cannot exist independent of God. The world is full of Vishnu (God) (*Vishvam Vishnumayam jagat*). All this is Brahma (*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*). God resides throughout this world (*Isaavaasyam idam sarvam*). The world and God are not separate. *Prasnopanishad*¹ investigates into the unity of God and the world.

Every object (*padaartha*) has a higher basis (*paraartha*). No material can exist without a basis. A living being ceases to exist when its life force departs. The object is a gross manifestation (*sthoolam*) while its basis is the foundation (*moolam*). The foundation is the cause (*aadhaaram*) while the object is the effect (*adheyam*).

¹ *Prasnopanishad* = *Prasna* (question) + *Upanishad*. This *Upanishad* deals with questions posed by six students.

In a worldly sense, these two concepts seem contradictory. However, the spiritual vision knows that just as an animal cannot survive without its life force, nothing can exist in the world without a consciousness. Science calls this duality—matter and energy.

Unity of gross and subtle

Prasnopanishad emphatically declares the unity of matter and energy, the unity of Siva-Sakthi. Therefore, science and spirituality are not disjoined. We confine science to the material world and spirituality to philosophical enquiry. The object and basis (*padaartha* and *paraartha*) are inseparably intertwined. The impact of the *Upanishads* is to teach this oneness in glorious terms. Unfortunately, people regard the *Upanishads* as a bundle of spiritual teachings that have nothing to do with the material world. They are convinced that spirituality is itself to be distinct from the world. This is a big mistake. Spirituality is the life force, the world is the living being. One is the foundation, the other is its manifestation. Creation is a synthesis of these two concepts.

To believe in God while rejecting the world is also a narrow outlook! We must strengthen faith in the truth that the world is not different from God. We are helpless in our search for God without the aid of the world. We are able to enquire and conclude as to what is true and eternal only because the world is present for our observation. Strive to experience Godhead with the world as your foundation. That means, to understand Divinity, first understand what it means to be a human.

The six students of Sage Pippalada

Once upon a time, there were six students². They were skillful enquirers into the Truth. They wanted to know the secrets inherent in a human birth and considered this quest their primary duty. To this end, they approached Sage Pippalada. They bowed to him in great humility and said, “*Maharshi!* From where did this world emerge? What is the purpose of human life? Pray, teach us and dispel our doubts.”

Pippalada said, “Sons! You are indeed fortunate to be curious about the Truth. However, the questioner

² They were (1) Kabandhi, son of Sage Katya, (2) Bhargava, from the kingdom of Vidarbha, (3) Asvalaayana, son of Asvala, (4) Gargya or Souryaayani, grandson of the Sun God, (5) Satyakaama, son of Sibi, and (6) Sukesha, son of Sage Bharadvaja.

must meet certain qualifications. Without eligibility, you will misinterpret my answers and be dissatisfied.”

Only a doctor is eligible to prescribe medicine to a patient. An engineer alone is qualified to construct a bridge. Even the smallest worldly task requires eligibility. The amount of water gathered depends on the capacity of the container.

“Yes, your aspirations are noble. Take time, enquire. Discriminate between the temporary and the permanent. Gradually, you will recognise the Truth. With haste, you will go farther from the goal. Impatience leads to waste of time, waste of the body, and worry.”

Haste makes waste.
Waste makes worry.
So do not be in a hurry!

“Curb your impatience. Be patient, stay in the hermitage. and obey the disciplines,” was Pippalada’s reply.

The Sun — basis for the world

One year passed. The son of the great sage Katya, Kabandhi, came to Pippalada and said, “*Swami*, I’ve stayed for a full year but I find none of my intents satisfied. Bless me with peace of mind. Who is responsible for the Universe? Who created the countless beings?” Pippalada replied, “Prajapati created all”. Kabandhi’s heart sank. “Is this the answer I deserve after such patient dedication?”, he moaned.

“Who is Prajapati?”, he asked next.

“Food itself is Prajapati, the sustainer”, said Pippalada.

“Who is the basis for food?”

“Lord Varuna. He causes harvests, which lead to other commodities. Son, conduct is most important. As is the fire, so is the smoke. As is the smoke, so is the cloud. As is the cloud, so is the rain. As is the rain, so is the crop. As is the crop, so is the food. As is the food, so is life. Thus, the primary basis for human life is food.

“Now, food itself has a basis also. The Sun represents the life principle and the Moon, inert matter. This union of matter and energy forms the basis for Creation. Matter (*jada*) and energy (*chaitanya*) occur naturally in the world. The Sun’s rays extend all over the Earth and even enter the digestive fire (*jatharaagni*) in humans. Through that avenue, the Sun makes creation possible.

The Sun’s rays are indispensable for the Earth composed of soil, trees of wood, mountains of rock, and bodies of blood. The rays are saturated with life force, which creates and sustains the whole world. Therefore,

for creation, sustenance, and destruction, the Sun is the cause”, said Pippalada.

The goal of life

The sage continued, “Son, students do not recognise their innate power. They struggle to satisfy fleeting desires. As a result, they become defeated, dispirited, and, in frustration, cause disturbance in society.” Every person should recognise their capacities. No one tries to understand the goal of life. They do not even regret their ignorance about this matter. One in a thousand or a million exerts sincerely to know the Truth about existence. This is the first step in spirituality.

Most people, when asked about the goal of human life, reply that it is for the satisfaction of hunger, sufficient sleep for the eyes, clothes for the body, and a house full of children! This is their purpose in life! No, no. Even animals satisfy these four mundane needs. People’s nature is such that they cannot be appeased by mere eating. They eat, then move around in the world. They develop familiarity with good and bad and make an effort to follow the good. They convey the good to others for their welfare. This is the true purpose of life.

A fish dwells in water, consumes the dirt, and purifies the water. Likewise, students must enter society, transform its ills, establish ideals, experience bliss, and propagate it to others. This is the answer of *Prasnopanishad*.

“Son, life is not meant to be solitary. It is to be woven into society. The individual cannot exist without society. The joys and sorrows of the individual are contained in those of society. Therefore, desire the welfare of society above all else. May all the worlds be happy (*Lokaah samastaah sukhino bhavantu*). That automatically assures our happiness. Our happiness is not isolated like a drop of oil on a leaf. Like water in water, milk in milk, our life must assimilate into society. Students must recognise this truth”, preached Pippalada.

Face difficulties with fortitude

Now, we must necessarily undergo difficulties in the course of human life. We must face troubles and stand up to censure and calumny. Only then can we progress and understand the Truth.

There was a gardener who nursed his master’s garden with great care, bringing water for each sapling in a pot from a distant well. With such dedication, he earned the love and respect of his master. One day he was weighed down by family problems. Putting the pot of water aside, he sat down dispiritedly. He tried hard but could not clamber out of depression. “What am I worth? Am I meant to be a gardener all my life? People everywhere are enjoying comforts and peace of mind. Why

not I? I am a pauper, a sinner.” He demeaned himself thus.

At this point, the pot spoke, “O Gardener! This frustration over a trifle is unworthy of you. Hard work yields rich rewards (*Kashte phalli*). Look at me. I started out as mud, trampled by everyone. Then a potter picked me up. He mixed me with water, crushed me, mounted me on a wheel, spun me around, hammered me, fashioned me into this shape, and roasted me in fire at length. That is not all. I had to endure endless pain from buyers who assessed my quality by knocking me with their fingers. Only after such hardship am I worthy of being carried on the *heads* of human beings today. Had I given up in despair, could I have earned this lofty state?

Whoever wishes to achieve success must similarly experience various trials. Happiness is not born out of happiness (*Na sukhaat labhyate sukham*). Conquering difficulties alone grants lasting peace. The body is given to undergo ordeals! Provided our attitude is correct, troubles serve only to enhance our courage and strength.

Truly, nothing compares to person’s inborn strength. Nevertheless, they moan, “How can I bear these difficulties?” No, you need not become weak and anxious. The strength to encounter troubles is within us. If not, how could we survive the countless worries of life? Your survival is proof of your strength!

You talk of hardship, but you pass the time, surviving all the while. So, within this time you are continuously conquering difficulties! The strength to be victorious is our very nature. But unable to harness it, we bend to sorrow. We must promote fearlessness ceaselessly. I teach mettle to children via the “Four Fs”.

Follow the master
Face the devil
Fight to the end
Finish the game

“The Master is your conscience, your heart. The four Fs are the story of our life. We must face life! If we wail, ‘sorrow, sorrow, sorrow,’ the burden will only increase. Troubles are exactly the time to build courage. Everything can be achieved with courage (*Dhairyam sarva saadhakam*). Problems of various kinds pursue us throughout life. Instead of dreading them, welcome them with boldness.” Pippalada instructed his students in this manner.

Children’s hearts are tender and impressionable, but with incorrect understanding, confusion arises! With confusion they lose their “fuse”! What follows is depression. Life itself becomes a disappointment if melancholy is allowed to grow. Everything is based on courage, a sense of adventure. Adhering unflinchingly

to truth, courage, and love, students must develop a steady mind and unwavering vision. Then you will experience the reward following hard work.

No one can attain peace without tribulations. If you prostrate to a sugar cane and pray, “O cane, please give me some sugar,” will it simply obey? You need to harvest it, crush it, heat the juice in fire, and process it. Only thus is sugar obtained. If you do not want to harm the sugarcane, if you simply rest it against a wall and repeat, “Sugar cane has sugar, sugar cane has sugar” — what good is that? It will shrivel, and its sweet juice will be wasted.

Our body is the sugar cane. Troubles are the process of refinement, which produces the sweet juice of Divinity within us. God is sweetness itself (*Raso Vai Sah*). This sweetness is the sustaining and guiding force of life. Hence, do not dwell on troubles. Overcome them with valour, a sense of adventure. Achieve the path of Truth.

Knowing, seeing, experiencing

Today we do not seek to understand before experiencing the world. We want to experience without enquiry.

The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of three stages: knowing, seeing, experiencing (*jnaatum, drashtum, praveshtum*).

Knowing (*jnaatum*). Do not follow life blindly. If you want something, ask “How can I acquire it, where can I find it?” We have many varieties of sweet mangos in our area³. To taste its sweet juice, we need to ask, Where are these mangos available, when and how? Mangos are available only in the summer season. Where? In the market. How? By paying money. Such investigation is knowing. When you go to the market and see the mangos, it is seeing (*drashtum*). Yes, the sight of the luscious fruits is satisfying, indeed. In order to taste them, pay the money, and buy them. This is experiencing (*praveshtum*).

Knowing, seeing, experiencing. This is the journey from the birth of a desire to its fulfilment. You cannot fulfil your desire by merely wishing for it or even by seeing it. Acquire what you see, and digest what you acquire. This alone grants contentment.

Therefore, students, to gain proficiency in anything, you must approach one who is knowledgeable in the subject. Do not harbour ego, “I know everything. I do not need guidance.” What you know is negligible, but what you need to know is boundless. Even the greatest scientist has infinite gaps in their knowledge.

³ Andhra Pradesh is known for its mangos in the summer season.

When we know the Infinite, we attain true contentment. This is called “awareness”. What is “awareness”? If I ask, “What is this?”, you say, “piece of cloth”. This is only the partial truth. If you open it and examine, you can say it is a handkerchief. Such complete knowledge is “awareness”. Today we use words indiscriminately. We do not pause to think what words should be used when, where, and how.

Control your senses and mind

Therefore, to become adepts in any subject, first identify who is qualified to disseminate knowledge on it. *Prasnopanishad* is supremely important for students. It contains wisdom to dispel all the doubts that emerge in a student’s inquisitive mind.

How did the students of ancient India conduct themselves? Displaying humility and obedience, having conquered their senses and purified their minds, they abounded in renunciation and focused only on their goal. What is our goal today? It runs amuck, changing many times a day. One goal in the morning, another at noon, yet another in the evening! Time may change but your goal should not.

Students, you are celibates. That is why you are called “masters”. Who is a master? One who controls the senses. When we succumb to sensual allurements, we become “mistresses”. Control your senses, do not be pleasure seekers. Develop firmness of mind. In this manner, the students of ancient Indian sages (*rishis*) lived lives full of intense penance. The determination of those students was formidable, indeed. They used to offer everything to the Lord in devotion. The power of discrimination shone brightly in them.

Devotion, discrimination, and determination

Devotion, discrimination, and determination pave the way to Divinity. Today’s “devotion” is as invisible as “deep ocean”! Devotion is not limited to recitation of the Name or meditation. We must offer our lives to the realisation of our noblest aspirations —this is true devotion. The smallest act must be done with faith and dedication (*sraddha*). Do not relax till the objective is met. This is determination. “Duty is God, work is worship.” Whatever work you do, do it with sincerity — consider that as your devotion.

Next, discrimination. What discrimination do we have today? Discrimination to promote worldly joys, to defend our lapses. No, no. This is “selfish discrimination”, “individual discrimination”. We want “fundamental discrimination”. Truth is truth, for everyone. Your discrimination must be such that whoever discriminates must pronounce your actions faultless.

Today, this broad feeling is absent. It is harmful to use discrimination to support your personal opinions.

Perform “social discrimination,” and you will be worthy of everything. Otherwise, you are bound to suffer. “Individual freedom” is one, “fundamental law” is another. Suppose you take a long stick and wish to exercise with it. You can do so within the bounds of your property or on your rooftop; this is your individual freedom. If you stand on the main road and wave the stick around, you transgress “fundamental law”. The police will arrest you. You must allow for others’ freedom, which is as inviolable to them as your freedom is to you. To wave your stick on a road is not freedom.

The end of wisdom is freedom.

The end of culture is perfection.

The end of knowledge is love.

Today’s students fill and express their love with weaknesses. No, no. Love must be an energy composed of purity and resolution. When we let our “energy” sap, we become victims of “allergy”. Develop this “energy”, your mental strength. Guard your mental fortitude with care. Such are the exalted teachings of Sage Pippalada.

Right and responsibility

Students are the future saviours of India, the future leaders of the world. Imagine, what power and strength must the inheritors of such responsibility attain! Instead of becoming stalwarts, you clamour for “right, right”. What about responsibility? Discharge responsibilities, and your rights follow automatically. Right and responsibility are like two wheels of a cart, two wings of a bird.

Students, do not fight for rights. Acknowledge your duties. We are students! We have duties to parents, to society, to our country, to our human birth. Fulfil all these obligations.

The real and the shadow

These six students, who were curious about the purpose of life, put forth six questions. Sage Pippalada gave beautiful answers to each question. Pippalada’s answers are vital to today’s students, who are assailed by the negative influence of the *Kali Yuga* (the age we are now in). Students helplessly act as per the influences of time and situation, without anchoring themselves in the heart.

Your vision is outward. “Outlook, outlook” — we promote only extroverted tendencies. Cultivate inner vision. Inner-view will reveal the truth about the external world as well. “Outside is a reflection of the Inner Being.” This is the awareness we must all attain. This lends “balance” to our character.

Today's students are very clever but grossly lacking in virtue. They do not "skill" their intelligence in the right channels. Instead, they "kill" their knowledge. This upsets their "balance". To restore "balance", one must turn one's vision inward.

Here is a tree. It has fruits. It casts a shadow. If you climb the shadow tree, you will reach the shadows of the fruits, not the real fruits! We chase the shadow and attain fruits which are just as unreal. If you are intelligent, climb the real tree —then you simultaneously climb the shadow tree as well! And you attain both fruits. How? You get the real fruit, and your shadow gets the shadow fruit!

Therefore, the path worth following is that which grants both fruits —worldly and spiritual— without double effort. This is the path of the heart. Follow your conscience.

Students like these six aspirants are a dire necessity. Students are good, but those who set examples to them are at fault. The environment is impure. Not to worry — you can be victorious in the midst of impurity. Courage and faith are most essential. First, self-confidence, the foundation of life. On this base, we can build the walls of self-satisfaction. With strong walls of self-satisfaction, lay the roof of self-sacrifice. The end result is self-realisation.

The real Self

Confidence, satisfaction, sacrifice, and realization — all four terms— have the prefix "self". Who is the Self? Determine this fact. Why? Without the "self", there cannot be self-confidence, much less the other three results.

This "self" is nothing but the *Atma*. Everything in the world is matter, based on the *Atma*. The world is the living being, the Self is the life force. Self is changeless. "Selfish" alone hides its awareness. Therefore, "Fish is better than selfish"! We must not permit selfishness to sprout in our hearts.

Love lives by giving and forgiving,
self lives by getting and forgetting.
Love is selflessness, self is lovelessness.

Recognise the pure Self, not the individual self. Pipalada taught that the Self must be the centre of one's focus. Do not think, "I am Ramayya" or "I am Krishnayya." These are acquired names of bodies after birth. The *Atma* is neither acquired nor ever born.

I have told students on many occasions that there are two types of "self". What are they? The single-letter self, "I", and the three-letter self, "eye". "Eye" is the body, "I" is the *Atma*. The single-letter self is alone real (*Eka aksharam*). Truth is one, but seers express it in various ways (*Ekam sat vipraah bahudaa vadanti*).

Now, the letter "I" and the number "1" look identical. The straight line is called "I" in the alphabet and "1" in arithmetic.

$$1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 4, \text{ but}$$

$$I + I + I + I = I!$$

The Self neither grows nor decays. If all of you add your "I", it is transformed into a united, strong I — the *Atma*. If I call out in this hall, "Where is Ramayya?", someone will raise his hand and say, "I". The same response for other names like Krishnayya, Ramamma, and so on. These are all distinct names and forms, but the answer from all of them is identical: "I". Therefore, "I" is everywhere.

Have faith that the *Atma* is omnipresent. We base our identity on names and forms as temporary as water bubbles. The changeless, indestructible, eternal truth is the *Atma*. Keeping the *Atma* as the basis, use the body, senses, and mind as tools to perform your duties.

Develop equanimity and desire happiness for all. Our happiness is included in others' happiness. Such expansive feelings must dominate the hearts of students. To develop large-heartedness, to become established in selflessness, *Prasnopanishad* has many grand ideals.

Serve with confidence

Starting tomorrow, we shall discuss subjects that are new, inspiring, and elevating. We shall continue tomorrow since some more items remain in today's function.

Today is a Sunday, and students have done "social work". In my view, it is not "social work" but "show work"! Not a single boy worked properly. They sat in groups under trees and whiled away time in idle talk. This is the social work of the *Kali* Age (the age we are in). No, no, this is not right. Whatever you do, do it for your sake, not for anyone else. Your conscience will tell you if you have executed the task with sincerity. Most students were sitting down in the lawns, pulling out weeds at leisure. Is this social work? Not at all.

Exert to improve your health, bliss, and comfort. Ensure that our environments are clean. Such work will benefit you and others as well. Do service that promotes convenience and health in society. Set ideals for society —this is also service. The girls worked very well! The boys alone were negligent. This is not right, *bangaru*⁴.

Look only to your conscience and do not care what others think. You take a bath daily. Would you desist from bathing if someone derided you for it? "No matter what anyone may say, my actions are correct!" Such courage and faith are essential. Today's youth lack in

⁴ Endearing term in Telugu, like "dear". Literally it means "gold".

these virtues. Service must be performed wholeheartedly. Only then will the result be most favourable.

Be heroes in action

You are all tired today. You participated in the music programme as well. Come back tomorrow with your hearts pure and attentive. Record these important instructions in your hearts, not in a tape recorder! What is recorded in your heart is like a photo-negative. You can print photos from a negative at any time. What is recorded on a tape, in contrast, is like a Polaroid picture—it cannot be duplicated.

Students! The words of elders, the advice of veterans must fill your hearts. When you are full of these ideals, they can be instantly made to surface as actions at the appropriate situations. With practice, you can achieve all the bliss you seek, face all troubles, and surmount them. With such an outlook, India can progress to any height of greatness.

Bharat (India) is the purest nation among all the countries of the world. Yes, all nations are good, but India is the land of sacrifice, of self-realisation, and of selfless actions (*thyaga-bhoomi*, *yoga-bhoomi*, and *karma-bhoomi*). Unfortunately, today Indians imitate foreign values and threaten to turn this land into a land of worldly pleasures (*bhoga-bhoomi*). No, no, we do not want pleasure (*bhoga*). Sacrifice (*thyaga*) and action (*karma*) alone are our goals.

You have a right only to action,
Not to the fruits thereof.
Do not be motivated by results of actions,
Nor should you be inactive.⁵

*Karmanyeva adhikaaraste
Maa phaleshu kadaachana
Maa karma phala heturbhoooh
Maa te sangostvakarmani*

You have a right to perform action alone. The world of people is bound by action (*Karmaanubandheeni manushya loke*). We must be heroes in action, renunciants of the fruits of actions! In closing, I wish and bless that you set examples to the world.

[Swami sang “*Govinda Hare, Gopala Hare, He Gopi Gopa Bala*” in His Golden Voice]

May 26, 1991

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⁵ *Bhagavad Gita* (II:47)