

11. Taittiriya Upanishad

Social norms of behaviour have drowned in the
Ganga.
Contentment has disappeared from the minds of
people.
Morality, character, and human values are
shattered.
Men have lost their humanness.

Students!

Everyone needs food to survive. Food is the prime necessity of life. However, one cannot rest contented by merely filling one's stomach. Why? Food satisfies the body, not the mind. It does not make the heart blossom. To eat and laze around is not human nature. We must eat, then work. While working, we must ask ourselves three questions: "What am I doing? Why am I doing it? How am I doing it?" When one enquires into "what", "where", and "how", one can achieve victory in efforts and derive self-satisfaction.

As a person observes the world, they assimilate the good around them and try to put it into practice. They experience the joy and bliss emanating from good actions. They convey their bliss to others. This is the main teaching of *Taittiriya Upanishad*. This *Upanishad* asserts that the journey of life is to progress from food (*annam*) to bliss (*anandam*).

Sayings of Taittiriya Upanishad

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* belongs to the *Taittiriya* branch of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*¹. It is extremely ancient.

Every couplet of this *Upanishad* is a *mantra*. What is meant by the word *mantra*? We think that only invocations like the five-syllable "*Om Namah Shivaya*" or the eight-syllable "*Om Namo Narayanaya*" are *mantras*. No, no. Whatever is recalled again and again and made steady in one's mind is a *mantra* (*Manana traana sammilitam iti mantrah*). Every verse, every word of this *Upanishad* is a potent *mantra* because it has reverberated in human minds since time immemorial.

Speak the truth, follow righteousness (*Sathyam vada, dharma chara*).
God is Truth, Wisdom, and Infinite (*Sathyam jnanam anantam Brahma*).

Truth is One; sages describe it in various ways
(*Ekam sat vipraah bahudaa vadanti*).
The One is the Indweller in all beings (*Ekovasi sarva bhootaantaraatma*).
The One manifests as many (*Ekoham bahusyaam*).

These truths, in the form of brief aphorisms, are *mantras* known the world over, granting wisdom and delight to mankind. There is a secret in *Upanishads*: They can be interpreted in more than one way, based on the state of the interpreter. *Taittiriya Upanishad* propagates lessons that are indispensable to all —student, householder, hermit, and renunciant (*brahmachari, grihastha, vanaprastha, and sanyasi*). The teachings of this *Upanishad* are absolutely necessary for everyone, irrespective of age, status and other conditions.

The five fires

This text talks about the "five fires" (*panchaagnis*) —the fires of hunger, of indigestion from overeating, of craving for desires, of sorrow, and finally of suffering of terrible diseases, worries, and death (*udaraagni, mandaagni, kaamaagni, sokaagni, badabaagni*).

First, *udaraagni* —fire of the stomach². Yes, this word is long, but its meaning is simple! The longing for hunger is *udaraagni*.

*Mandaagni*³ is the suffering of indigestion arising from overeating.

*Kaamaagni*⁴ is the craving for desires, which assaults the mind endlessly.

Next, *sokaagni*⁵ —the fire of sorrow. What is this sorrow? It is not sorrow born out of unsatisfied worldly desires. The yearning for the divine Vision, permanent bliss, and merger with God gradually becomes a fire within, known as *sokaagni*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is the scripture acknowledged and accepted by peoples of all countries and faith. Open it, and you find the first chapter called "*Arjuna Vishaada Yoga*". What was Arjuna's dejection (*vishaada*)? Was he gloomy about some worldly issue, about relatives and friends? If so, why was his despair given the noble title of *yoga*? No, no. His grief was not related to worldly joys, friends and relatives, money, power or fame. His dilemma was about his duty to God.

² *Udara* = Stomach, *Agni* = Fire.

³ *Manda* = Slow, sluggish, lazy, dumb.

⁴ *Kama* = desire

⁵ *Soka* = sorrow

¹ The *Yajur Veda* is divided into two: *Sukla* (bright) and *Krishna* (dark).

“Countless men will die in this war. With widespread destruction of males, *dharma* will diminish, castes will intermarry, and immorality will reign,” lamented Arjuna. His grief was a result of his adherence to God and duty and hence, qualified as *yoga*. Thus, *sokaagni* is not to pine for wealth, fame, or power but to yearn for God and *dharma*.

Finally, *badabaagni*. This is the suffering of terrible diseases, worries, and death.

These five fires affect only the body, not the *Atma*, which is a witness to the suffering caused by the fires. *Taittiriya Upanishad* teaches how to act as a witness to the five fires.

Four types of human beings

Another deep secret is ingrained in this text. There are four categories of people: divine, human, demonic, and animal. The first type is divine-human. God appears in human form (*Daivam maanusha roopena*). God is present in the heart. Therefore, filling the heart with divine feelings, performing all actions with the motive to please Him, believing that one’s reality is the same *Atma* present in others, being affectionate to all with love and compassion, offering one’s life to God —these are the characteristics of a divine-human.

The second type is human-person. A person is a combination of truth and *dharma* (*Sathya dharma bhavo martyah*). Keeping truth (*sathya*) and *dharma* in view, propagating truth and *dharma*, loving all with kindness and compassion, understanding the importance of human values, performing charity and good deeds, uniting thought-word-deed, executing one’s duty and responsibilities even as a householder, and seeking to demonstrate the divine potential of human life —these are the qualities of a human-person.

Next, the demon-person. Intoxicants identify a demon (*Suraapaanam bhavo daanavah*). Indulging in liquor, hurting others, acting out of selfishness, looking out for one’s own convenience and progress, devoid of kindness and love —such a person is classified as a demon-person by the *Upanishads*.

Finally, the animal-person. The one without discrimination is equal to an animal (*Jnaanena soonyah pasubhih samaanah*). What is animal nature? Considering sensual gratification as the aim of life, submerged in sensual pleasures from birth to death, spending time in eating and sleeping, and forgetting one’s human aspect is animal nature. The needs of food, sleep, and shelter are common to people and animals. Then what distinguishes people from animals? A person lacking in discrimination between the temporary and the permanent is no better than a beast. When does discrimination seem

unpalatable? When the heart is full of selfishness and self-interest.

Having acquired a human birth, the noblest path is to attain Divinity. If Divinity remains beyond one’s reach, acquiring human values and maintaining one’s stature as a human is a matter of blessedness also. But it is a gross violation of *dharma* to stoop down to demonic or animal levels. The world has no human values today because demon-people and animal-people have grown in population. Morality is absent. Even social etiquette is destroyed. People do not understand what is meant by society.

What is society (*sangham*)? Society is not just a collection of heads. That which promotes the awareness of unity in diversity is society. The *dharma* of society is to act with a unified motive and to collectively experience the fruits of actions. The significance of society is to teach people that true happiness is available to individuals only through the collective welfare. Without society, individuals cannot exist. Your joys are dependent on those of society. One who is blind to this truth pursues their selfish aims heedlessly.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* elaborates beautifully on the five fires and four kinds of people. When students completed their education in *gurukulas*⁶, before entering the householder stage of life, they sat around the *guru* to listen to his final instructions on how to lead fulfilling lives. These instructions are collected in this *Upanishad*.

Worldly pleasure and ultimate pleasure

We can make life proceed in one of two directions: *preyas* or *sreyas*. *Preyas* is that which grants happiness immediately, meaning, pleasures of the senses. Such joys are not only just temporary but utterly unreal. The majority of people pursue the allure of *preyas*. Only a small fraction trusts in the permanent and true path of ultimate good (*sreyas*). Why? The fruits of *sreyas* take time to germinate. People do not relish the waiting period. They demand quick results.

Even desires are chosen based on convenience. Position, power, fame, and a comfortable life top the list of wants. Good wisdom, good character, and good virtues are not wished. Those on the *sreyo* path aspire for good character, good qualities, good knowledge, and good behaviour. To hanker after short-lived and immediate gains like fame, power, and money is a *preyo* quality.

⁶ Hermitage-schools of ancient India, where children from all backgrounds and social status lived as equals with the *guru*, imbibing spiritual and secular education.

True education teaches virtue

The *gurus* told their pupils, “Students! What is the aim of education? The aim of education is humility. Humility is the jewel of students. Character is your life.” Such instructions were grouped under the title of *siksha-valli*⁷. Students were instructed to keep *siksha-valli* in view throughout their lives and adhere to it. “Honour your mother and father as God (*Matru Devo bhavah, pitru Devo bhavah*.)” Under any circumstance, do not give up truth (*sathya*) or violate righteousness (*dharma*.)” With such divine instructions and education, the *gurus* filled the minds of students with total satisfaction and *dharma* and transformed them into divine personalities.

Unfortunately, today’s education serves only to turn humans into demons! It fosters guile and cleverness without instilling virtue. Instead of developing gratitude, education fills people with pride and makes them ingrates. No, no. This is contrary to the aims of true education. I told you the other day: What is the great “progress” achieved by modern-day education?

Harming those who help them,
 Destroying those who feed them,
 Making fun of those who teach them —
 This is the “progress” in today’s education.

Yes, all love to preach about morals and character, but they only repeat the words “morality” and “values” without practising them. These words are relegated only to books and scriptures.

Morality and discipline are relegated to books.
 Hearts stink of pollution.
 Hands engage only in selfish actions.
 This is the “progress” in today’s education.

Ancient tutelage was totally unlike current education. Speak the truth, follow righteousness (*Sathyam vada, dharmam vada*). Honour your parents. This is your first duty. Why? Only because the “reflection, reaction, and resound” of your actions will affect you later in life. Disrespect your father today and definitely, your son will deride you. If you cheat your friend, you will be betrayed tomorrow, without a doubt.

You are bound to experience the “reactions” of your actions. The respect you show to your parents today will be reflected in your children’s demeanour tomorrow. Hence, the joys and sorrows of the future are bundled into your present actions. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* reveals that the future is concealed as seeds in your present actions.

⁷ *Valli* means chapter. *Siksha* means learning or instruction, but it is also the science of proper articulation and pronunciation of *Vedic* texts.

Merge into universal consciousness

The Brahman principle is all-pervading. What is Brahman? It is the vast, expansive, all-encompassing awareness. This awareness is present in equal measure in every human being. The consciousness in the individual is narrow and limited, while the universal consciousness is boundless, infinite, and all-inclusive. We must tap the infinite awareness through our limited awareness. How?

You have air all around you, and you can fill air in a balloon. As long as the balloon is intact, there is a distinction between air inside and outside. How can you merge the two bodies of air? Inflate the balloon and make it bloat — till it bursts!

The narrow feelings of “I” and “mine” are like the limited air in the body. The One soul is the Indweller in all beings (*Ekaatma sarva bhotaantaraatma*). Develop this broad attitude to merge your awareness into the cosmic consciousness. Tell yourself repeatedly, “This and That is One, This and That is One”. Then you will find your heart expand to let your awareness become one with the Lord. Only then can the world become a place of peace and happiness.

Acquire practical knowledge with determination

We do not find education that fosters virtues. We are proficient only in “bookish knowledge”, which cannot do good to anyone. We need “practical knowledge”. Determination is essential for practical knowledge. The know-how of students is 99% “superficial knowledge”. They spend all their time merging books with their head (*Pustakam mastakam, pustakam mastakam*)⁸. What good can the nation possibly experience from such cramming? You must ask, “What actions will help me as well as society?” When ancient students were ready to depart from the *gurukulas* and enter into family life, the sages filled their hearts with such expansive feelings.

“Sons, troubles and difficulties are an inseparable part of life. Remain steady without fear or agitation. Never give up Truth, even in the most strenuous conditions. Do not forget your *dharma*. Follow these instructions and you will feel your conscience exuding contentment, which is a treasure.” Satisfy your conscience. Today, students do not even know what ‘conscience’ is! Therefore, satisfying it is a remote possibility. The conscience is the witness.

The four F’s are:

Follow the Master
 Face the devil

⁸ *Pustakam* = book, *Mastakam* = head

Fight to the end
Finish the game

“Follow the Master” means to follow your conscience. “Face the devil, fight to the end, finish the game” describes the journey of life. Such truths are not seen in modern education. Knowledge of the *Atma* (*Atma Vidya*) alone is true education. Every other branch of information is cultivated only to earn a living. Yes, such study is necessary, but we must cultivate Knowledge of the *Atma* as well.

Yes, life can be enjoyed with the body, senses, food, and sleep. But the mind, intellect, and *Atma* go beyond physical existence. Satisfying them is more important. People are content with food for the body, sleep for the eyes, and a house full of children. This is shallow thinking. Mental satisfaction is important. Contentment to the mind is possible only through the spiritual path. The ultimate good (*sreyas*) transcends human existence.

Students! Recognize the path that will foster your human values. If a person cannot love their own mother, spouse, and fellow humans, how can they hope to love God? It is impossible! First, expand your love to your family and fellow humans. Love is not something that emerges and subsides in short bursts. The love that decreases at any time is not love at all. True love grows and grows. “Love is God, Live in Love.”

Taittiriya Upanishad explains the essence of living through succinct and pertinent instructions. Some parts of this *Upanishad* are absolutely essential to students. Since we have a program following this discourse, we shall talk about these matters later.

Knowledge of the Atma is the basis

Students! Worldly education is not your goal. Any number of sciences devoid of human qualities are rubbish. There is no education greater than the knowledge of human qualities and true humanness.

What is the use of all your education?
Who can change the destiny written on your forehead?
As soon as wrong ideas enter your mind,
Your intelligence becomes dead like a rock.

Yes, worldly education and research are necessary. However, the basis of all knowledge must be pursued — that is the *Atma* principle. That is the basis (*moolam*) while all this is gross (*sthoolam*). Can the gross, physical manifestation exist without the basis?

Here is a table and a tumbler on it. The table stands on the Earth. The Earth is the basis (*moolam*), the table and tumbler are the gross (*sthoolam*). We neglect the basis (*adhaaram*) and hold on to the based (*adheyam*). This is why we suffer.

Cultivate the basis (*adhaaram*). All can be known when one is armed with the knowledge of the *Atma* (*Atma Vidya*). This is unity in diversity. This is the teaching of the *Upanishads*. In modern education, no chance is given to the propagation of the *Upanishads*, *Brahma Sutras*, *Vedas*, epics, and *Puranas*. The complete potential and value of human beings is contained in these scriptures. Leaving such valuable “diamonds” aside, we run after pieces of charcoal!

We must acquire “diamonds”. How? When we destroy the mind that pursues worldly matters, the state of “die mind” is “diamond”. Therefore, we must restrict the movement of the mind into mundane matters.

Highly educated people in the world are equipped with complex degrees and elevated positions. To what end? They dedicate their lives to the acquisition of facts. They feed the same stomach day after day, wash the same face! If they are asked the chief aim of life, they are confused. “We can earn a lot of money, deposit it in the bank, even send it overseas.” When their time arrives, they close their eyes and all these possessions disappear forever. What can you buy with money? Earn the wealth of *jnana*. Earn the lofty state of Divinity.

The wealth of spiritual knowledge (*jnana*) can never diminish or be destroyed. Worldly education depletes. You study day and night to master secular knowledge. You collect useless facts in our head. First you transfer everything from the book into your head. In the examination, you transfer everything back from your head to the paper — and come home with an empty head! What is the use? If you are asked to answer the same question one week after the exam, you cannot! No, no. This is not education but only memorisation for the immediate purpose of earning a degree. The world can never benefit from such study. It will help you fill your stomach and earn for your family. But to the world, such studies are totally useless.

Students must desire the welfare of the world. Today, selfishness rules their minds, making them agitate society. They have no trust or respect for the *guru*, no love for parents, no concern for society. How can they call themselves humans? First, pursue education that instills human qualities. Even animals observe limits, but humanity has “no reason, no season”. What universities do animals attend? What degrees do they possess? What positions of authority do they command? None. Still, they acquire morality to the extent possible.

Students must develop human values. Science is soaring in progress, beyond the skies. But senses are descending downward. Is this progress? No, no, no, no! The senses must be controlled. People have travelled millions of miles into space, but not even half an inch into their hearts! Introspect, dive deep into your heart.

Realise that your soul is an eternal witness. Then human qualities will emanate within you.

Students! Devotion is not limited to *bhajans* and worship. The heart must be expanded. Peace and forbearance must be strengthened. Treat love as your life-breath and nurture it with equal care. Life without love is a “living death”. Love is all-important.

(Swami concluded with “*Prema Mudita Mana Se Kaho, Rama Rama Ram*”.)

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