

Chapter X

Qualities of a wise person; kinds of sacrifice or spiritual offerings; the qualities of guru and disciple.

“Dhananjaya! People are entitled to be called pundits only if they have seen clearly the distinction between action (*karma*) and non-action. If they have only stuffed in their head what they read in books, they are not pundits. The pundit must have an intellect that grants the vision of the truth. When that vision is gained, all action becomes ineffective and harmless. The fire of wisdom has the power to consume and burn *karma*.

“Some people say that a wise person (*jnani*) must perforce suffer the consequences of action in previous births (*prarabdha-karma*); they cannot be escaped. This conclusion is drawn by other people; it is not the experience of the wise person. The wise person might appear to others to be reaping the fruit of past actions, but the wise person is absolutely unaffected. Whoever is dependent on objects for happiness or pursues sensory pleasures, whoever is motivated by impulses and desires, is bound by *karma*. But those free from these cannot be affected by the temptations of sound, touch, form, taste, smell and other attractions of the senses. Such is the true renunciant (*sanyasin*) —He is unmoved. Wise people are supremely happy by themselves, without the need to be dependent on other things. They find action in non-action and non-action in action. They may be engaged in action but they are not affected in the least. They have no eye on the fruit.

“You may ask how they are able to do that. Listen. They are ever content. The contented person is free and does not depend upon others. The person is unaffected by the feeling of doership and is content with whatever happens, well or ill, for the contented person is convinced that the Lord’s will must prevail. The mind is unshaken, steady; the person is ever jubilant. Want of contentment is a sign of the ignorant. Those who give up the goals of human life (*purusha-arthas*) and walk the path of sloth, how can they be said to be happy, whatever happens? Contentment is the treasure that is won by the wise one; it cannot be won by the ignorant one, who piles one wish on another and builds one plan after another, who pines perpetually, worries himself, and sets the heart ablaze with greed.

“Wise people are not mastered by the dualities of joy and grief, victory and defeat, gain and loss. They are beyond duality. They scorn hatred and never allow it to affect them. Both the embodiment (*swarupa*) and the innate nature (*swa-bhava*) of the *Atma* guarantee that It is unaffected. It is unattached. It is uninfluenced by anything that is not *Atma*. It has neither birth nor death, hunger nor thirst, grief nor delusion.

“Hunger and thirst are qualities of life; birth and death are characteristics of the body; grief and delusion are affections of the mind. So, Arjuna, do not assign any status to these. Know yourself as the *Atma*, give up all delusion, and become unattached. Be like the lotus leaf in the marshy lake of change; do not get smeared with the mud around you. That is the sign of detachment: in it but yet outside it. Be like the lotus leaf, not like the porous blotting paper that gets tainted with whatever it comes in contact with.

“Do the besprinkling (*abhisheka*) of the *Atma* symbolized by the oval stone (*Atma-linga*) with the pure waters of your own mental impulses. When the mind moves in one direction and the senses in another, you are doubly confused. So, keep attachment afar. When that is done, whatever you do becomes a sacrifice (*yajna*). Whatever you speak becomes a holy mantra; wherever you plant your foot renders that place holy.

“Arjuna! I shall tell you something about sacrifice or spiritual offerings (*yajna*) also. Listen calmly, controlling all agitations of the mind. People talk of performing a material sacrifice, offering penance as sacrifice, a *yogic* sacrifice, etc. If a pit is dug, the earth excavated becomes a mound by its side; there is no pit without a mound. When riches accumulate in one place, there must be corresponding charity too. The proper utilization of one’s riches is material sacrifice. What is proper utilization? Gift of cows, of lands, of skill are included under material sacrifice.

“Again, when all physical activities, mental activities, and speech are utilized for spiritual discipline, then it becomes offerings of penance (*tapoyajna*). How can it be spiritual penance (*tapas*) if you have lain down due to weakness arising from missing a meal?

“Doing action but yet remaining unbound by action, that is *yogic* spiritual offering.

“And study of the scriptures? That means studying with humility and reverence the sacred scriptures that lead you to liberation. This study is the means to repay the debt due to the sages who put the scriptures together.

“The next one is the sacrifice involving spiritual knowledge (*jnana-yajna*). By this is meant not the knowledge of the visible and perceptible but the wisdom of the invisible and imperceptible. Listen to the scriptures that are related to this wisdom, study them, and ponder over the teachings in your mind, weighing the pros and cons; this is called the sacrifice involving knowledge. Wisdom (*jnana*) means also the eagerness to realize the reality of the soul (*Atma-thathwa*) through inquiry from elders and those who have spiritual experience.

“Arjuna! You may ask Me how this wisdom can be acquired. Those anxious to get it have to go to realized souls, win their grace, study well their moods and manners, and await the chance to ask them for help. When doubts arise, they should approach the realized souls calmly and courageously. Studying bundles of books, delivering hours-long discourses, and wearing the ochre robe do not make a genuine wise one. Wisdom can be won only from and through elders who have experienced the Absolute. You have to serve them and win their love. How can doubts be ended by the study of books? They tend only to confuse the mind.

“Books can at best inform; they cannot demonstrate by direct proof. Only the realized can convince by direct demonstration. So, they have to be sought after and served reverentially. Only then can this precious wisdom be won. No amount of sea water can slake one’s thirst; no amount of study of the scriptures can solve doubt.

“Besides, the aspirant for wisdom must have not only devotion and faith; they should also be simple and pure. They should not grow impatient and irritate the teacher. Haste ruins chances of success. Whatever the guru says should be practised and experienced. Don’t try out every single item of advice that you hear or learn, thus changing your spiritual discipline as fancy takes hold, even from the desire to become a wise one quickly. Doing thus, you will only end up completely ignorant. Why, it is sometimes preferable to remain an ignorant, for such people tend to end up in madness. Therefore, one has to be very careful.

“You must try to please the guru and win favour by obeying orders and serving lovingly. You should have no other thought than the guru’s welfare and happiness. Give up all else and win the guru’s grace; then, wisdom is yours. Instead, if you are disobedient and critical through egotism and want of faith, you cannot be blessed by the vision of the truth, and you will be plunged into gloom.

“Just as the cow takes her calf near upon seeing it, so the guru will draw the disciple to their presence and give the disciple the milk of grace. The disciple ought to be of sterling character; then, just as a clean piece of iron

will be attracted by the magnet, the disciple will receive the immediate attention of the teacher.

“Disciples can inquire into the qualifications of the guru. In fact, they ought to, for they need a teacher. Arjuna! I shall describe the characteristics that a teacher should possess. The teacher must have not merely book knowledge but the wisdom derived through direct experience. The teacher must be established in the reality, that is, in the steady contemplation of *Brahman* (*Brahma-nishta*). Mere knowledge of the scriptures is incompetent to grant liberation; it can at best help in gaining a living. Why, there are some who by sheer self-experience have won liberation, without a grain of knowledge of the scriptures. But such people cannot save disciples who are pestered by doubt; they cannot understand their difficulties and sympathize with them.

“There are thousands and thousands of people who are gurus in name only. All those in saffron are now ‘gurus’; even those who smoke marijuana are ‘gurus’; all those who indulge in discourses are ‘gurus’; all who write books are ‘gurus’!

“No one can claim the name by wandering over the country and learning to argue. Instead, through direct experience, the guru should possess the power to uplift disciples and put them on the track of spiritual disciplines prescribed by the scriptures. Of what use is argumentative skill? Whatever is said and done by him must have the sanction of the scriptures. Spouting things imbibed from books in long speeches that move the listeners from one wave of excitement to another does not make a guru. They may be heroes in lecturing; but they are zeros in spiritual discipline and in the mastery of the spiritual field. They can be schoolmasters, but they cannot confer devotion or point the way to liberation. These ‘gurus’ attain only that stage, and the disciples who resort to such gurus get just that. They have as much value as the books that contain all the matter that they pour forth.

“Many unwary spiritual aspirants are attracted by the magic of words and the verbal gymnastics of such showy ‘gurus’. The ‘gurus’ may be called pundits and may give lectures; but, just because of this, they do not become entitled to grant the boon of wisdom. That can be done only by *Avatars*, people who represent divine attributes and glory, and wise people who have attained the highest good of spiritual discipline and have tasted the supreme bliss, who have realized the Absolute. It is no use claiming a fraction of this or that experience. The experience must be of the Full and itself full. Those who know only a fraction will take you up to a certain point and leave you there, in the middle region, like Thrisanku, who was hung between heaven and earth.

“The guru must study the virtues and qualities of aspirants who seek guidance; the guru must not be moved or prejudiced by their wealth, status, or position. The guru must be able to judge aspirants’ hearts, their real nature. The guru must act as the alarm clock for disciples who are caught in the sleep of ignorance. If the guru is a miser and the disciple is a sloth, woe be to both.”

Thus, Krishna taught Arjuna very clearly the qualifications of both the guru and the disciple: their conduct, scholarship, virtues and weaknesses, activities and characteristics. These valuable gems of advice were addressed not only to Arjuna but to the whole world. All who seek to become either gurus or disciples must pay attention to these precious words.

The natures of the gurus and disciples of today are in keeping with the low standards of today. In ancient times, a guru could be found only with great difficulty; thousands of eager seekers searched the forests for them, for they were so rare and precious. Now, gurus are available by the dozen at every street corner, but true disciples are declining in number. Both are deteriorating fast, and each is becoming like the other, suited to the other’s level. The gurus have been reduced to the necessity of feeding and fostering disciples —not that it is wrong when

the disciples are worthy, but the gurus are afraid of the disciples deserting them, so they cater to their tastes and fancies. The disciples claim to be guru's sons, to be residents of ashrams, spiritual aspirants, etc., but their lives are untouched by the ashram atmosphere, spiritual exercises, or qualities of the virtuous. They don't have even elementary gratitude to the guru. They mouth slogans like "dedication to God", but their acts reveal only dedication to the body!

Besides, the disciples lay down conditions! Their desire for recreation, easy living, and comfort has to be honoured by the guru. The guru must ensure the happiness of the disciples without insisting on any spiritual discipline or causing any loss or worry. Liberation must fall like a fruit into their lap. The guru should not recommend any rigorous discipline or rule of life. The guru must respect all the wishes of the disciple. A guru who goes against the disciple is immediately given up and condemned.