

20. Everyone can win spiritual wisdom, regardless of status, class, or sex

Everyone, whatever the status, class, or sex, can win spiritual wisdom. If women aren't entitled to it, why is it mentioned that Siva taught *Vedanta* to Parvathi? How did the great *yogi* Kapilamaharshi teach the *sankhya* system to his mother, Devahuthi? How did Yajnavalkya, the great sage (*rishi*), impart the essential principles of *Vedantic* philosophy to his wife, Maitreyi, as mentioned in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*? The *Upanishad* cannot be false. The scriptures that mention these facts speak only the truth.

There is no doubt that sage Mathanga is a great ascetic. Doesn't the *Ramayana* declare that he taught the woman Sabari the secret of the sacred doctrine of Brahman? Is that statement false? Coming to this age itself, who does not know that the scholarly wife of Sureswaracharya contended with Sankaracharya himself in philosophic discussion of Brahman?

So the chief qualification for the path leading to spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is only spiritual discipline, the spiritual exercises (*tapas*) in which one is engaged, not the irrelevant consideration of caste, creed, or sex. Leaving all other matters aside, one should concentrate on spiritual discipline.

The Lord is accessible and available to all. He is all mercy. No one except the Lord has the authority to declare anyone unfit for the discipline of spiritual wisdom. If you reflect a little deeper, you will realise that the Lord would not deny anyone the chance to reach Him. How can the flame deny refuge to sparks of the same fire? How can the sea deny refuge to drops of that sea? The Lord also will not refuse or reject.

A father with four sons cannot state that one of them has no right to a share in his property. It wouldn't be just or proper. Then what should be said of the Lord, who is devoid of the slightest tinge of partiality or prejudice and who is full of mercy? To attribute favouritism to Him is to commit sacrilege.

Referring to this question of who is or isn't entitled to knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-vidya*), Krishna said in the *Gita*,

I have no favourite. Nor do I dislike anyone. Whatever might be the caste, whether the person be man or woman, whoever worships Me with faith and devotion will reach Me. Nothing can stand in their way. I too will manifest in the hearts of such.

Is the *Gita* mistaken? No, it speaks profound truth.

21. Wisdom consists of the feeling of oneness without distinctions

There is another wrong belief current today. It is said that in order to be entitled to the practice of spiritual exercise for the realisation of Brahman—like prayerful repetition of the name (*japa*) and meditation (*dhyana*)—one must adhere strictly to certain modes of daily conduct laid down in tradition and thus attain purity. I do not agree. As an analogy, should a bedridden person have to take a course on medicine before being allowed to take medicines? To require a person to be pure and good and to follow certain codes of conduct before treading the path of God is to say that someone must be free from disease in order to deserve medical treatment! How absurd.

Purity, goodness, etc., are all consequences of the journey toward God; they can't be insisted upon as essential for starting upon the path. The taking in of the drug will gradually induce health and cheer; health and cheer should not be insisted upon before the drug is even prescribed or supplied! This obvious fact is ignored by many; that is a serious malady indeed!

All those suffering from the malady of ignorance (*a-jnana*) must read and ponder over the books dealing with the treatment of that disease, namely, the experiences of the great elders in the field of spiritual endeavour. Only then can they understand the real state of things.

One other secret of success has to be kept in mind. Every course of medical treatment involves some regulation and restriction of diet, movements, habits, and conduct. These should not be neglected or taken lightly. In fact, if the doctor's advice on these matters is not strictly followed, even the costliest or latest or most efficacious medicine will be ineffective.

Consider the people who underwent the treatment —drugs, restrictions, limitations and all— and successfully emerged from the sickroom hale and happy! They are of all castes and ages and of both sexes. Vasishta was born of a public woman; Narada's mother was a washerwoman; Valmiki belonged to the hunter caste; Viswamitra was a warrior (*kshatriya*); Mathanga was a member of the depressed classes. The inference is that what is important enough is constant meditation on the Lord, not the labels of caste or creed. Wisdom (*jnana*) is the attainment of the feeling of Oneness, the realisation that there is nothing high or low. That is the true divine Principle, the Brahman.

A sugar doll has head, neck, arms, and limbs, but each part is as sweet as the other. From head to foot, it is one uniform sweetness; there cannot be two types of sweetness. That is why it is said to be not dual (*dwaitha*) but non-dual (*a-dwaitha*). Those who emanate from the Lord's face and those who emanate from His feet are both His children. The realisation of this truth is the sign of wisdom (*jnana*).

Some trees, like the jack tree, bear fruit from the root up to the topmost branch! Does the fruit near the ground differ from the fruit on the tallest branch? No, they are all the same? Or do they taste differently, like distinct fruits? Of course, among the fruits some may be tender, some unripe, some a little ripe, and some fully ripe, and they may differ in taste, too, as is only natural. But never can you find bitterness in the bottom and sweetness in the top or sourness in the middle. Tender, green, and ripe are three stages, or three characteristics.