

12. Good character, virtue is wisdom

Spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) means understanding, but it is not just an intellectual feat. “Eating” doesn’t mean placing food on the tongue; it is worthwhile only when food is chewed, swallowed, digested, assimilated into the blood stream, and transformed into muscle and bone, into strength and vigour. So too, spiritual understanding must permeate and invigorate all moments of life. It must be expressed through all the organs and senses (*karmendriyas* and *jnanendriyas*). One must reach up to this high stage.

Mere accumulation of learning is not spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). Only good conduct (*sat-guna*) is spiritual wisdom. In order that one might do selfless service (*seva*), a little eating (*bhoga*) has to be gone through. Such eating is a part of sacrifice (*yajna*). To make this body-machine function, the fuel of food (*anna*) has to be used. Food is not sacrifice, but it makes sacrifice possible. Therefore, eating food is not to be laughed at as catering to greed, as feeding of the stomach. It is part of worship.

Worship (*puja*) is not merely plucking a flower and placing it on top of the image; the gardener who toiled to nurse the plant that gave the flower is also a worshipper. It is only when food is given that the body can function. Even the means for a sacrifice is an offering (*yajna*).

All action (*karma*) done for the sake of three goals is sacrifice, viz. to utilise the world for the worship of the Lord, to establish peace and justice in society, and to control and coordinate the functions of the body. The first is called a holy, sacrificial ritual (*yajna*); the second, charity (*dana*); the third, penance (*tapas*). All human acts must subserve these three needs.