

Chapter 5. Spiritual Discipline

Education must determine and delve into the nature and characteristics of spiritual search for the Absolute or the Overself—the Highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*). It must prove its true character by manifesting as a spring of morality, laying down axioms of virtue. Spiritual education (*vidya*) is its own visible proof. It is the root of faith in every faith. It prepares the mind of man to appreciate and adhere to the faith and to direct man's living along that course. This has been named philosophy.

Philosophy means love of knowledge. Knowledge is a treasure of incalculable richness. Education is the relentless pursuit of knowledge, urged by love for its value and undeterred by difficulties. Spiritual education tries to probe behind the forms assumed by things and the appearances they put on and discover the reality that alone can explain them. The truth has to be known and lived by; it has to be visualised; this is the function of spiritual learning.

Spiritual learning (*vidya*) is the effulgence that permeates a full life. In the West, education deals more with concepts and conjectures; in the East, education deals more with truth and totality. The principle sought by spiritual education is beyond the field of the senses.

The human body

Man is a triune composite of body, mind, and spirit (*Atma*). As a consequence, man has three natures in his make up: (1) a low, animal nature, (2) a human nature, replete with worldly knowledge and skill, and (3) the genuine nature of man, namely, the divine, *Atmic* nature. Becoming aware of this third nature and establishing oneself in it—this is spiritual education (*vidya*).

The body is a machine with the five elements as its components: space, air, fire, water, and earth. God is playing with it, Himself unseen.

The body is a tree; love of Self is the root; desires are the branches it sends forth; qualities, attributes, and modes of behaviour based on basic nature are the flowers issuing therefrom; joy and grief are the fruits it offers.

The human body is a world in itself. The blood flows through and animates every part of the body. God flows in and through and activates every spot in the world.

Education reveals the good and bad

Only one law guides and guards this world: the law of love. The joy or grief, good life or bad, of each nation or community is decided by and derived from its activities. The “bad” is in fact “good” in reverse. It serves to teach what has to be avoided. It would not be “bad” for all time; it is ever short lived. Neither “bad” nor “good” can be pronounced as “absolutely unrelieved” states. Spiritual learning (*vidya*) reveals and makes clear that “good” and “bad” are only reactions caused by the failings and feelings of the mind.

One must be able to judge the difference between one “good thing” and another that seems to us to be “better”. If one cannot do so, one will hold on to the first thing that seems good and discard the rest. But it must be understood that the “better” is not harmful to the good. Just as “unrighteousness” prods one to cultivate “righteousness”, troubles induce one to manifest compassion and charity. Suffering is the inevitable seed of compassion. If

there were no wrong and no suffering, one would have become either stock or stone. One who has no capacity to weigh and to respond to the call of agony and pain is like a blind person who cannot distinguish between what is good and what is bad. People without discrimination behave in this blind manner.

Desires and thoughts cause birth and death

Desire breeds wishes. Wishes cause birth and death. When one is devoid of desire, one need not go through birth and death. The next birth is the result of unfulfilled desires in this life and is determined by them. Those who have no trace of desire for material objects can achieve the awareness of the *Atmic* reality.

In fact, the desire to know God, to love God, and to be loved by God does not bind. When awareness of God dawns in all its splendour, every worldly, sensual desire is reduced to ashes in the flames of that awareness. The individual Self will turn toward the Universal Self as soon as desire comes to an end and the Self delights in supreme peace (*paramasanthi*). The Self must break off all contact with non-self, so that it can earn immortality.

You are a heap of thoughts. Your thoughts play a vital role in shaping your life. That is why you are advised to watch your thoughts and to welcome only good ones. Spiritual learning (*vidya*) stabilises good thoughts in the mind and thus rises to the status of knowledge of the supreme Reality (*Atma-vidya*). For example, a chair evokes an idea in your mind of a certain form and name. The word wood doesn't produce the same idea and name-form. The value of that name-form depends on the usefulness you attribute to the wood. The relationship between you and the material world must be such as to make desires flee from you, not to make desires more intensive and extensive.

Really speaking, no one loves or desires any article or thing, appreciating it as itself. One loves it at all times only for selfish reasons, for one's own sake. No move is indulged in without a specific purpose.

But the learning derived from spiritual education will reveal that the individual is not entirely responsible for even the motive that prompts him. The activity (*karma*) is not fully one's own! Nevertheless, it is one's *karma* that elevates or degrades one's status.

Death involves certain developments that weaken and extinguish life. It does not affect the *Atma*; which has no death and cannot be destroyed. Therefore one should not fear death. Death is but another stage of life. However long one suffers from illness or however severe the injury, death can happen only when time signals the right moment. When the yearning for living ends, there can be no more birth.

The Atma activates all

One single energy (*sakthi*) activates all hands, sees through all eyes, and hears through all ears. In fact, all mankind is made of one divine substance. The human body, whether in America, China, Africa, or India, has the same components of flesh, blood, and bone. The instinctive urges and awareness are common to all living beings. When investigation is done through scientific means, the truth that there are signs of awareness of life in stone and tree and metals can be demonstrated.

The *Atma* is a spark of the Divine. Its latent existence can be known by inquirers. God is ONE. Whatever one's nationality, whatever religion one professes, one can realise the Universal Absolute (Brahman) if one masters the science of spiritual advancement (*Atma-vidya*). Faith in the ONE God is the crux, the central point. Other beliefs, concepts, and conjectures revolve as the rim, on the periphery.