

Chapter 10. Need for Spirituality

The world situation

World problems are now assuming stranger forms and larger proportions. They are no longer individual or local. They are global, affecting all mankind. On one side, science and technology are advancing with cosmic developments. Through plastics, electronics, and computer technologies, the wonder has reached even greater heights. On the other side, mankind is afflicted with recurring political and economic crises; national, provincial, religious, racial, and caste rivalries; narrow loyalties and outbursts of disturbance in student campuses. These have spread indiscipline and licentiousness all over the world.

This is an unbalanced and mutually contradictory situation. What really is its cause? Does it lie in the frightening decline that religion and morals have sustained in the human mind? Mankind has within its reach many means and methods through which it can earn wisdom and peace! It can secure invaluable guidance from the *Vedas* and sacred texts (sastras), the *Brahma Sutra*, the *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Zend Avesta*, the *Granth Saheb*, and other holy texts whose number exceeds thousand. There is no dearth in this land, Bharath (India), of heads of monasteries and religious orders, exponents of spiritual doctrines and disciplines, scholars and venerable elders. They too are propagating and publishing on a massive scale. Nevertheless, people's minds are degenerating in the ethical, spiritual, and religious fields of life, continuously and with great speed. What is the reason for this downfall?

People have now become more vicious than ever. Much more than in past ages, they utilise their intelligence and skill to indulge in cruelty. People relish and revel in inflicting pain on others so much that, as history reveals, 15,000 wars have been waged during the last 5,500 years. There are still no signs that this horrid pastime will terminate! The impending atomic war threatens to destroy the entire human race. What exactly is the cause of all this anxiety and fear?

The remedy lies in holiness

It is clear that the beast in people is still predominant. It has not yet been overcome. Only when this is achieved can we, our country, and the world attain peace and joy.

Hatred, envy, greed, desire for pompous display and for comparison and competition with others —these evil traits have to be uprooted. These traits are vitiating not only the generality of men but even ascetics, monks, heads of religious institutions, and pundits. Among these, envy and greed have grown wild. When these masters and preceptors, who project themselves as embodiments of ideals, exhibit such low qualities, how can they set the world right? They can only intensify the pollution.

What the world needs today is neither a new order, a new education, a new system, a new society, nor a new religion. The remedy lies in a mind, in a heart filled with holiness. Holiness must take root and grow in the minds and hearts of youth everywhere, of boys and girls and of children. The good and godly must endeavour to promote this task as the one great spiritual discipline (*sadhana*) that they have to undertake.

Success in this task can be achieved only through knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-vidya*). But today, people

have deep faith only in acquisition and accumulation. They cannot give up or renounce. They have no faith in truth. They are attracted by falsehood; they find truth to be an obstacle. Therefore, they are unable to realise that death is the happy consummation of a glorious life. They die in anxiety and misery. People pronounce the words truth, nonviolence, righteousness, and love ceaselessly, parrot-like. They proclaim that there is no religion higher than truth. But the wonder is that the one thing they have no desire to possess is truth!

People yearn to know all things, but they don't yearn to know the truth. Above all, they don't evince the least desire to know the truth of their own self. They don't turn attention in that direction. Even if they do, it is only to justify fears and prejudices. Therefore, the primary task of people is to discard weakness and tendency to hurt.

The truth is not in the material world

That which is not found at the beginning or at the end, but is manifest only in the interval, the middle period, cannot be really real. It is apparent truth (*mithya*), not eternal truth (*sathya*). The cosmos did not exist before it emerged, nor can it exist after it is submerged (*pralaya*). What is evident in between can only be apparent truth, temporary and limited truth. It cannot be the unchanging truth.

People have to explore the value and validity of every object in the universe along these lines. The body, for example, was not there before birth, and it is not here after death. Like a pot made of clay, it exists as pot with that form and name for some time and later resumes its clay nature. The pot is but clay, with a form and a name added to it by artificial means. Whatever the objects, everything in the universe is inexorably subject to the impact of time, and it has to face death and destruction. The tree and the soil, the house and the body, the king and the kingdom —each has to suffer the same consummation.

People ignore the means of becoming aware of the immortal in them. They are enamoured of the knowledge that is concerned with the phenomenal world. Those who yield to this facile temptation are like the ones who desert the garden of heaven and rush into the jungle of poisonous vegetation. They turn away from the original (the *bimba*), the *Atma*. They are fascinated by the image (the *prathi-bimba*), the visible, the observable phenomena (the *drisya*). By this attitude, they proclaim themselves to be only ignoramuses, not knowers or seekers of truth.

Knowledge of Atma can give happiness

One should know that not even an iota of genuine happiness is derivable from the “three worlds”, the three “divisions of time”, and the “three levels of consciousness in daily life” (wakefulness, dream, sleep). Only the foolish seek to satisfy themselves from the limited counterfeit happiness through worldly activities. The wise know better. Those who bypass the luscious bunches of sweet grapes and run toward bushes of thorns are “camels”. They cannot be classified under other species.

Mountain peaks are charming from a distance, but when approached, they confront us with terror-striking jungles. So too, the world (*samsara*) appears charming when people have not delved into its meaning and value. When discrimination is employed to explore its value, the truth is revealed that the family jungle or the world jungle cannot give genuine happiness. Only the *Atma* can give that blessing. Can the lake that strikes us as invitingly charming as long as the mirage is on quench our thirst? Those who delude themselves with the belief that it can and run toward the non-existent sheet of water can only get thirstier. No other benefit can accrue to them.

Therefore, one should learn the process by which one becomes aware of one's *Atmic* reality, spiritual learn-

ing (*Atma-vidya*) By learning and living it, you can quench your thirst and help to quench the thirst of all mankind.