

## Chapter 15. Ego-less Service

**Y**ou may master a billion fields of study, but if you have not cultivated the attitude of detachment, the mastery is of no consequence.

Sharing with others, serving others, this is the main rule (*sutra*) of spiritual knowledge (*vidya*), its genuine expression. Education is rendered noble when the spirit of service is inculcated. The service rendered must be free of the slightest trace of narrow selfishness. But that isn't enough. The thought of service should not be marred by the desire for something in return. You have to perform the service as you would perform an important sacrifice (*yajna*).

Just as trees don't eat their fruits but offer them to be eaten by others in an attitude of detachment; just as rivers, without drinking the waters they carry, quench the thirst and cool the heat from which others suffer; just as cows offer their milk, produced primarily for their calves, in a spirit of generosity born of renunciation (*thyaga*), to be shared by others; so too, those who have acquired spiritual knowledge should offer it to others prompted by the motive of service and without consideration of selfish interests. Only thus can they justify their status as noble men (*sajjana*).

The authentic scholar should not entertain egotism in the thoughts, at any time. Today, however, the misfortune is that scholars as a class are afflicted with unbounded egotism. As a consequence, they follow wrong ideals and take to wrong paths; they confer the benefits of education only on themselves and on their kith and kin. As a result, they forgo their position among the wise (*sajjanas*) and the respect it can bring. One must grant generously to others the knowledge, skill, and insight that one has acquired. If this is not done, human progress itself is endangered.

### Cultivate service to all

To promote the best interest of mankind, one has to cultivate the holy urge of service to others and the attitude of sharing. The parrot talk, "Service to people is service to God (*Manava seva is madhava seva*)" does not extend to all people; those who reel off this axiom don't inquire which people are to be served. They are eager only to fill their own stomachs; for this purpose they restrict their mental horizons to the uplift of their own people. Thus, they lay waste the valuable education they have received. One forgets the fact that God is in perceptible form in all beings. Service rendered to any being is service offered to God. This has to be the chief goal of the educated.

A human is God (*nara* is Narayana). Every single act has to be elevated as an act of service to God. But students today don't know what exactly God is and what exactly a person is. How can one claim to be educated when one can't identify the Man-God (*Nara-Narayana*) principle? A person and God are the entities denoted by the *Upanishads* as "you (*thwam*)" and "that (*thath*)." One who hasn't become aware of these two cannot claim to have known himself. And education that does not reveal oneself to one, of what use can it be to reveal anything else?

But, to our misfortune, the educated who are the educators are engaged not in promoting our best interests and serving us but in doing great disservice as much as they need. It is highly strange. For, the educated persons must serve not only those who help them but also those who harm them. This attitude makes the service doubly

holy. Serving those who do service to us is but a natural reaction. Serving those who harm us is the greater virtue. This latter course of action involves deeper understanding of one's best interest and an alert sense of time, place, and circumstance. Education must confer and cultivate these qualities.

When dealing with uncultured folk and with ungrateful fellows who forget the good done to them, one has to exercise caution. The law is the instrument the government uses to punish those who do wrong. But the educated person and the student should not condemn them outright. You must manifest your natural virtue of detachment and practise your characteristic attitude of helpfulness.

### **Shun ostentation; cultivate humility**

Protecting one's motherland is a noble duty. It is the primary duty of each student. Students can't claim to have learned much unless they are able to discover and discharge their duty and their immediate role, when circumstances call for such decisions. The educated person and the student undergoing education must both cultivate simplicity; they must discard ostentation. If they are addicted to ostentation, they lose their genuine nature or individuality. Students must note this point well.

People without humility and discipline in dealings with others are certain to be counted out as scholar or pundits, no matter what sciences they have mastered or how famous they are as intellectuals. Such people will not be honoured by society. They may win respect for some time, but that attitude will decline pretty soon. Such respect does not bring credit to the recipient. Only artlessness and simplicity earn honour—and they render the honour enjoyable. Insane parade of scholarship brings in only spurts of reputation and ridicule. When one gives up ostentation, one can get permanent respect from people. Real education imparts a spirit of renunciation, a dislike for ostentation, and the yearning to serve others.

Some people develop swollen heads as soon as they acquire a little knowledge. They pretend to be experts in every field and boast the whole day about their attainments. They strut about as if they know everything. "The leaf-plate on which a full lunch has been served will lie low on the floor. The leaf-plate on which nothing is placed will hop high with every gust of wind." Thus says the proverb. So too, the person who has much scholarship and many skills will lead an unassuming life. But one who has not derived genuine education and the strength it can confer lives in pomp and pride. That person struggles to hide defects from being known to others. And, in the end, the struggles don't succeed. One meets with double ruin—one doesn't experience spiritual bliss (*ananda*) and one doesn't impart it to others. In the end, one becomes the target of ridicule.

Therefore, don't allow the desire for ostentation to enter the mind; don't allow egotism to approach you. Be humble and be loyal to high ideals. Only then can you serve the cause of world peace and prosperity. Only when the individual succeeds in being good can the world also become good (*vyakthi sreyaṣ becomes viśva śrayaṣ*). One who is eager to be a real student must place before himself the ideal of world peace and prosperity. One has to be unpretentious. One must vow to be of service to others. This is the essence of true education (*vidya*).