

16. The human predicament and the Divine

Social norms have vanished;

Contentment among men has disappeared;

Character and moral values have been shattered;

Humanness has been degraded in mankind.

DEAR Students! Food is essential for everyone · the world. Among the *necessities* of life food comes first. But man cannot be satisfied with food alone. A full stomach does not fully satisfy the mind. He cannot merely rest on a satisfied appetite. He has to move about and engage himself in work. While doing work, one has to ask himself: "What am I doing? Why am I doing and how am I doing? When he enquires into these questions, he can derive meaning and joy from his work. In this way, he recognises the purpose and value of what he is doing.

Realising what is good in his actions, he makes it a part of his life. He experiences the joy derived from his actions and shares that joy with others.

Power of *mantra* in *Taithriya Upanishad*

This is the primary message of the *Taithiriya Upanishad*. Starting with food, attaining bliss is the final goal of life. The *Taithiriya Upanishad* is a section of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*. This is an ancient Upanishad. Everything in it is in the form of a *mantra* (a sacred statement). *Mantra* does not merely mean pronouncements like "*Om Namassivaya*" or "*Om Namo Narayanaya*." "*Mananaa thraana samhitham iti mantrah*" (*Mantra* is that which redeems by contemplation). *Mantra* is that which gets established in the mind by the process of contemplation on it. In this Upanishad, every utterance has the import of *mantra*. Every word in it is filled with the power of *mantra*.

"*Sathyam vada. Dharmam chara*" (Speak the truth; practise righteousness). "*Om iti Brahma*" (*Om* is *Brahmam*). "*Sathyam, Jnanam, Anantham Brahma*" (Truth, knowledge, all are *Brahamam*). "*Ekam Sath; Vipraah bahudhaa vadanthi*" (The Real is One; the wise call it by many names). "*Ekoham bahusyaam*" (I am One; let me become many). "*Eko vasi sarvabhutha antharaatma*" (The One is the Indweller in all beings) these aphoristic pronouncements acquired the form and power of *mantras* spread throughout the world and generated bliss among men by raising their consciousness.

There is another remarkable feature of this Upanishad. The other Upanishads are relevant to specific categories of people. But the *Taithiriya Upanishad* is valid for celibates, householders, renunciants and ascetics equally in its message and its practical application. It has thus an appeal and relevance for every human being. Its teachings are essential for persons in the four *asramas* (stages in life).

The five kinds of Fire-principle

There is another important section in it dealing with the *Panchagnis* (the Five Fires). There are five kinds of Fire-principle: *Udara-Agni*, *Manda-Agni*, *Kama-Agni*, *Soka-Agni* and *Badavaa-Agni*. *Udara-Agni* refers to the burning sensation caused by hunger (Fire in the stomach). *Manda-Agni* refers to the burning feeling caused by excessive eating resulting in indigestion. *Kama-Agni* is the burning agony in the mind caused by numerous desires and passions. *Soka-*

Agni does not refer only to consuming grief caused by worldly disappointments and losses. It pertains also to the burning sorrow felt by one who is yearning for God thirsting for experiencing oneness with the Divine.

The Bhagavad Gita is a scriptural text acceptable to people of all faiths. The very first canto in it is titled *Vishaada-Yoga* (the *Yoga* of Despondency). What is this *Vishaada*? Does it relate to any worldly concerns? Is it despondency about the fate of kinsmen and friends? Can such a grief be described as a form of *yoga*? Clearly this grief is not associated with worldly desires or human relationships? Arjuna's grief arose from out of a concern for *Dharma* (Duty) and for God. He realised that in the war (that was about to be waged) many would die. As a consequence of their death, *Dharma* (righteousness) will suffer a mortal blow. There will be confusion of castes. It was because of his concern for *Dharma* and his faith in God that Arjuna was grief stricken, his grief turned into a form of *yoga* (quest for communion with the Divine). Likewise, this *Soka-Agni* is not consuming sorrow over the lack of worldly possessions. It is a grief felt for the sake of *Dharma* and God.

Badavaa-Agni is the burning feeling caused in a person by dire diseases and death.

All these five types of "fire" are related to physical conditions. They have no relation to the *Atma* (Spirit) which is different from the body. The Spirit is a witness to all the experiences resulting from these five forms of fires. Utilising these five fires as experiences witnessed by the Spirit, the Upanishad revealed the truth underlying physical phenomena.

Four types of human beings

There is another inner secret that has to be recognised in this context. Human beings are classified under four categories: *Daiva* (Divine), *Manava* (Human), *Danava* (Demonic) and *Pasutva* (Animal). Of these four categories, the first is *Manava-Daivamu* (the divinely human). "*Daivam maanusha roopena*" the Divine in human form. This means that the Supreme is present as Vishnu in the heart of the human being. The "Divinely human" being is one who is conscious of the Divinity residing within him, who dedicates all his actions to the Divine, who recognises the Divinity present equally in all beings and has love and compassion for all living beings and devotes his life to the service of God.

Manava-manavatwa (Human-humanness) calls for a life dedicated to *Sathya* and *Dharma*. "*Sathya Dharma Bhavo marthyaha*" (He is a man who is devoted to Truth and Righteousness). In this world of delusion, the one who has his sights on Truth and Righteousness, preaches and practises the two virtues and shows love and compassion to his fellow-beings in the conviction that to be truly human is the mark of a human being, is a humane-human being. Such a man practises *Dharma*, engages himself in charitable activities, harmonizes his thoughts, words and deeds and leads a godly life even though living as a *grihasta* (householder). Performing his duties, he stands out as an example to his fellow-men.

Characteristics of a demonic person

Next comes *Manava-Danavatva*---the demonic human being. *Suraapaanodaanavah* (The demonic being is addicted to intoxicating drinks). The demonic man is one who is addicted to drink, who harasses people, inflicts pain on others for selfish reasons, who is without love or compassion, and who is totally immersed in selfish concerns. This is how the Upanishads characterise the demonic human being.

The fourth category is the *Manava-pasutvam* (bestial-human being) "*Jnanena sunyah pasubhi-samanah*" (The man without wisdom is equal to an animal). What is the animal nature? Governed wholly by the senses, considering sensual enjoyment as the sole purpose of his life, leading a sensuous life from birth to death, spending his time in eating and sleeping and forgetting his basic human nature in such a life such a person has been described as an animal in human form. The chief quality that distinguishes a man from an animal is wisdom the power of discrimination as to what is permanent and what is transient. A man who lacks this capacity is no better than an animal. When does a man lose this capacity? When he is self-centred.

God-realisation should be the goal for man

The right cause for man is to pursue the path of God-realisation, If he is unable to do this, he should strive at least to behave as a human being. For man to behave like a demon or an animal is totally opposed to his basic nature. It is because these degrading tendencies have become rampant in the world today that true humanness has declined.

It is because demonic and animal tendencies have grown in the world today that genuine human traits have declined. Morality and integrity have reached their nadir. Social obligations have lost their hold. Men are wasting their lives without any awareness of what is society. Society is regarded as an assemblage of heads. This is not so. Society means the unified expression of the collective group. It implies recognition of the duty by everyone in the community to live in harmony with others. It must be realised that individual happiness is dependent on society.

The Taithiriya Upanishad contains significant message given to the disciples by the preceptor at the end of their education in the preceptor's hermitage. In this message, two paths are indicated: the *Preyo-marga* and the *Sreyo-marga*. *The Preyo-marga* relates to practices which will give pleasure to the senses from time to time. These are momentary, impermanent and unreal. Most people prefer this path of *Preyas*. Very few seek to follow the *Sreyo-marga* (the sublime path), which confers permanent and unchanging good. The reason is it takes time to yield the benefits. Man is eager to get quick results and does not want to wait. He is in a hurry all the time. Even his desires are confined to immediate results. He desires a good name, a good environment and an enjoyable life. He does not seek good knowledge, good conduct or good sense, which are the requisites for following the *Sreyo-marga*. The path of *Preyas* (the mundane path) is concerned with achieving temporary name, power and position.

Do not give up Truth in any circumstance

Summoning all the pupils, the preceptor would address them thus: "Dear students! What is the primary aim of education? It is the cultivation of humility. Character is the life-breath of education." The *Sikshaavalli* chapter of the Upanishad contains all the lessons which the preceptor wanted the students to bear in mind when they went out into the world. Among them were injunctions such as "*Maatru devo bhava! Pitru devo bhava*" (Worship the mother as God. Worship the father as God). Reverence for the parents comes first. They were enjoined not to give up truth in any circumstance and not to forsake righteousness at any time.

Through these teachings, the students of those days were filled with high ideals and were inspired to lead exemplary Godly lives. Unfortunately education today tends to dehumanise the students. While developing their intellectual abilities, nothing is done to develop good qualities in them.

All that our much-vaunted "progress" in education has achieved are a decline in morality and a contempt for teachers.

Cultivate love for your fellow-beings

Students have to outgrow their narrow egoistic ideas and develop a universal outlook. They should strive to enlarge the individual consciousness to comprehend the Universal by recognising that the Spirit that dwells in all beings is one and the same Cosmic *Spirit--"Ekaatma Sarvabhuta antaratma."* When this consciousness of oneness is realised by all, the world will experience peace and prosperity.

To start with, cultivate love for your fellow-beings. If a man cannot love his father, wife or children or his fellowmen, how is he going to love God? Love is not something that waxes and wanes. It is unchanging. It must spread wider and wider till it becomes all-embracing. Such love is Divine. Love is God. Live in love.

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