

19. Vijnana and Dharma

VERY country develops its own system of *Vijnana* (knowledge). But in all systems there are certain good traits that are common like morality, character, truth, sacrifice and forbearance. The *Bharatiya* system of education contained five elements' conduct, tradition, religion, art and study. This comprehensive scheme of acquiring knowledge is not kept in mind by educationists today. The value of this system of knowledge is measured by the degree of righteousness which is promoted. The progress of knowledge in the world is determined by the progress of righteousness. The well-being and advancement of a country depend on the combined progress of *Dharma and Vijnana*.

Vyasa and Valmiki are great sages. Through their poetical works they propagated among the people righteousness and the highest knowledge, which would make them adore the Supreme Lord, the giver of all gifts. Their works are ancient and have been described as *puranas* because of their antiquity.

Unifying mantra of Bharatiya culture

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana teach the laws of righteousness not only to Bharat but for the whole world. From the most ancient times, *Bharatiya* culture has been promoting security and prosperity in all countries. Transcending all differences of nationality or religion, *Bharatiya* culture taught to the world the unifying mantra: "*Lokaas samasthaas sukhino bhavanthu*" (Let all the worlds be happy). This message transcends the barriers of time, space and circumstances and preaches the doctrine of oneness. Bharat alone has held forth the broad-minded principle of the happiness of all people everywhere, eschewing the idea of '*I*' and "*my people*."

What is the inner significance of the fact that the sage Vyasa, without any regard for the wealth, power, physical prowess and abilities of Duryodhana, Dussasana and others, esteemed only Dharmaja, (the eldest of the Pandavas)? The great men of those days had the highest respect for *Dharma* (Righteousness), regarded *Dharma* as the sole sustaining power in the world, and considered that all institutions in Bharat should be based on *Dharma*. It was out of his supreme regard for *Dharma* that Vyasa esteemed Dharmaja highly.

The Ramayana, which taught to the entire world the greatness of morality and integrity, should be the life-breath of every family. How should the brothers in a family conduct themselves, how should a son carry out the injunction of the father, how should husband and wife live in harmony--all these aspects of family life are excellently expounded in the Ramayana. Ramayana taught how the unity among the elder and younger brothers should be fostered, how affection should prevail among kinsfolk, and how the reputation of the family should be safeguarded. The author of the great Ramayana is Valmiki.

Rama is the very image of Dharma

Ravana was one who was endowed with all wealth and prosperity. He lacked nothing in terms of comforts and luxuries. He had mastered the 64 categories of knowledge. His capital, Lanka, rivalled *Swarga* (heaven) itself in its grandeur. Instead of showing regard for Ravana, Valmiki extolled Rama, who gave up the kingdom, donned the robes of an ascetic and lived a simple life in the forest. What is the reason? It was because Rama was the very embodiment of *Dharma*. Everyone of his actions stemmed from *Dharma*. Every word he spoke was truth. Every step he

trod was based on *Dharma*. Hence, Rama has been described as the very image of *Dharma* (*Ramo Vighrahaan Dharma*).

What is the inner meaning of the fact that the great sages attached no value to wealth or possessions or intellectual abilities, but esteemed only righteousness as of supreme value? It shows their concern to demonstrate to the world the truth that the world is based on *Dharma* and that *Dharma* is vital for the life of man.

In the *Bharatiya* concept of *Purusharthas*, the four goals of human life--*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*--*Dharma* (righteousness) comes first. It is only when the pursuit of *Artha* (material prosperity) and *Kama* (desires) is based on *Dharma* that man will have genuine happiness. If he pursues *Artha* and *Kama* without regard to *Dharma*, he will be plunged in misery. Hence, the acquisition of wealth should be based on *Dharma*. Equally, *Kama* should be infused with *Dharma*. Only then, the desires will lead to *Moksha* (liberation). This is the real lesson taught by the *Purusharthas*.

Unfortunately, today, the people have cut off the foot (*Dharma*) and the head (*Moksha*) of the *Purusharthas* and are leading lives based solely on *Artha* (wealth) and *Kama*. This is the reason why the country is a prey to every conceivable trouble. Because the people have forgotten *Dharma* the entire land wears the mantle of unrighteousness.

In such a situation, the students should take a pledge to acquire knowledge based on *Dharma* and to use that knowledge for promoting the progress of the nation and raise it to glorious heights.

Understand the real message of the Gita

The message of the *Bhagavad Gita* has been interpreted by scholars in many different ways. They have argued that it prescribes the *Karma Marga*, the *Jnana Marga* or the *Bhakti Marga* as the primary path. But the real message of the *Gita* is to be got from the first word of the first *sloka* (*Dharma*) and the last word of the last *sloka* "*Mama*." "*Mama Dharma*" each individual has to act up to his duty---that is the lesson of the *Gita*. Householders should follow the *Grihastha Dharma* (the duties of householders), old people should follow the *Vaanaprastha Dharma* (the duties of those who have withdrawn from family duties). There are *Sanyasa Dharma* (the duties of a renunciant) and *Brahmachari Dharma* (the duties of a celibate during the years before marriage). These duties are prescribed for each in his particular stage in life and they should not be mixed up. The *Gita* taught these duties for people in different *asramas* (stages). The basis for all the *dharmas* is the *Manu Dharma Sastra* (Code of Manu). There is no Code of conduct equal to the one laid down by Manu anywhere in the world.

The greatness of "*Manu Dharma Sastra*"

Once upon a time, a German philosopher called Nietzsche wrote a book called "The will to power." While engaged in writing his book, he happened to see a copy of "*Manu Dharma Sastra*." On reading the book he experienced inexpressible joy. He laid aside his own writing. He observed that "When in the firmament the Code of Manu is shining effulgently like the sun, the book I am writing is like a candle. You cannot come across in the whole world a treatise like this."

In spite of the fact that such great and sacred books and moral treatises are available within Bharat itself, why are Bharatiyas going after exotic ideas and practices disregarding their own

dharma ? In this there is a sort of false fascination. Though one possesses invaluable gems and precious truths, if he is attracted by the doctrines of others, he becomes a prey to such maladies.

There is a Telugu adage which says that a man prefers the neighbour's stale food to the delicacies in his own house. Can there be greater folly than ignoring the matchless treasures of one's own cultural heritage and going after the tinsel from other countries?

Knowledge must promote human personality

Students! The knowledge developed by each country is essential for it. This should not be underrated. According to its historical circumstances and the requirements of the place and the time, each country develops its own store of *Vijnana* (knowledge). No one has the right to criticise it. Each country evolves its own code of righteousness and its corpus of knowledge and culture based on its conditions and needs and this is the proof of its validity. Each system of knowledge, however, is designed to promote the human personality. The Indian system is intended to foster what is sublime and exemplary in human nature. Without considering this aspect of promoting human excellence and helping people to lead ideal lives, mere study of ancient texts is of no use. What is learnt from books should be put into practice. Only then there is the real bliss of knowledge. If a myriad books are studied, but good qualities are not cultivated, of what avail is that study? Qualities are most important. From earliest times our ancients laid stress on good qualities.

No scientist has the competence to criticise the Indian texts dealing with philosophy and metaphysics. Science today claims to discover some truth, which on later investigation is found to be untenable. A science which is constantly revising its theories, cannot sit in judgment on the eternal verities presented by the Indian sages in Vedanta. If you examine the speculations of European philosophers from Kant to Spencer, you will find that compared to the downpour of philosophic thought presented by the three schools of Vedanta *Dvaita* (Dualism), *Advaita* (Non-dualism) and *Visishtadvaita* (Qualified Non-dualism)—the speculations of these philosophers are a mere trickle.

All the explorations of modern science are not greater than what Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha carried out aeons ago. Hiranyakasipu explored the earth, the sky and the five elements and was so proud of his mastery over all the elements that he persecuted his own son (for not recognising his powers). What is it that happens when one acquires mastery over the physical elements? He develops his ego and forgets his true nature. The son Prahlada is a worshipper of Hari. The father, Hiranyakasipu, is a hater of Hari. There can be no common ground between the two. Likewise there is no common ground between philosophy and the physical sciences today.

Lesson to be learnt from *Narasimha Avatar*

"Where is your God?" asked Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada replied: "Do not have any doubts that he is here and not there." "Is he in this pillar?" "Yes," replied Prahlada. When Hiranyakasipu struck the pillar with his mace, a divine power emerged from it. The lesson of this episode is that until man shatters the pillars of his ego, he will not be able to discover the Divine within him. As long as man is filled with body-consciousness, he cannot experience the divine. Only when he gets rid of the body-consciousness he be able to understand the Divine within him.

No doubt it is necessary to pursue the study of physical sciences. But one should not get puffed up by one's scientific knowledge. Realising that there are innumerable other things which are yet to be learnt, the scientist should cultivate humility and modesty.

Students! You are the future leaders of the nation. The nation's weal or woe depends on how you conduct yourselves. If you are good, the nation will be good. If you behave badly, the nation will go down. You have to understand the true role of science. A student today after acquiring a mustard seed quantum of knowledge develops a swelled head as big as a pumpkin. This is totally wrong. Rather than preach a ton of precepts to others, you would do well to practise an ounce of them yourself. Practice should precede precept.

In this way, *Bharatiya Vijnana*, (science) containing the essence of all *Sastras* (scriptures), laid down the goal of all human endeavour in the form of a divine *sutra* (maxim).

The close link between *Vaak* and Divinity

This entire cosmos is made up of two components: One is the name and the other is the form. There is nothing that can be perceived without name or form. Name implies sound. Sound permeates the universe. The sound is called *Vaak* (word or speech). For speech the *prana* (life) is *bhava* (feeling). For feeling, the life is desire. For desire, the life is *Ajnana* (ignorance). For ignorance, Divinity is the life-source. You have to recognise the close link between *Vaak* and Divinity.

Without words you cannot identify anything. Every object has a sound (or name) attached to it. All things have originated from sound. We have not created sound. Hence, from ancient times every *sabda* (sound) had a specific meaning. These meanings are not the creation of any scientist. For instance, here is a plate. Who made this plate? A goldsmith might have made the plate, but who gave it its name? It may be said that the name has come down from the past. Here is a tumbler. It is called a tumbler because of its form. Thus it is evident that the name is associated with the form of an object. For the form the proof is the name. The two are interdependent and inseparable. You must recognise this truth.

For every word in the world there is a form. What, then, is the form of the word *Duhkham* (grief)? The troubles you experience are its form. For *Ananda* (bliss), the joy you experience is the form. This is a 'hall.' The form gives it the name. For every word there is a form.

God should be realised by His name

Scientists do not recognise the logic implicit in this truth. For instance, you have a dictionary. It contains numerous words and gives their meanings. Does not the user accept the meanings given in it? The dictionary contains the word "God." This word must have a form. If it had no form, how could the word have come into existence? Why is this fact not recognised? This is due to individual prejudices and is not true of the generality of the people. Basing on one's personal preferences and narrow attitudes, a certain opinion (about God) may be held.

There are only two things in the world: name and form. Hence, Vedanta prescribed that God should be realised by His name. It is difficult to realise the form from the description of the form. For instance, if a person is described as wearing a shirt and tie and of a certain height, you cannot make someone answer to that description in a crowd. But the moment the name is mentioned and the identification marks are given, the person can be picked up from a crowd of a hundred

thousand. Through the name, the form can be easily envisaged. Hence, the Sruti declared: "*Smarane Taranopayah*" (The remembrance of the name is the means of redemption).

Students! Bharatiya Vijnana (supreme knowledge) encompasses all potencies. No other system of knowledge contains what is in *Bharatiya Vijnana*. You have not got this knowledge. You have not tried to make practical use of it. Consequently you have no conception of its prodigious value. Seek to know it and put it to proper use. Thereby you will experience bliss.

Dharma is the primary maxim of life

Bharatiya Vijnana is suffused with *Dharma* (Righteousness). *Dharma* is the primary maxim of life. It is life itself. What is *Dharma*? It is said: "*Dhaarayati iti Dharmah*" (*Dharma* is that which bears or supports everything). This derivation is not adequate. In every object, there is a vital principle running like a thread.

Here is 'fire'. What is it that 'fire' bears within it? Heat and light. Only when heat and light are present, can you regard it as *Agni* (fire). If heat and light are not present, it will be a piece of charcoal and not fire. What, then, is the *Dharma* (the vital principle) of 'fire'? To manifest heat and light.

Here is a lump of ice. What is its form? It is white. It is cold. If it is not cold, it will cease to be ice. Likewise, the vital principle of sugar is sweetness. If it has no sweetness, it will turn into salt or mud.

Dharma of man is a life of sacrifice

What is the *Dharma* of man? A life of sacrifice on the basis of morality and integrity is the *Dharma* of man. How should the *Dharma* be practised? With *Trikarana Suddhi* (purity in thought, word and deed). True humanness consists in the harmony of thought, word and deed. Today it is because there is no unity of thought, word and deed among men, *Dharma* has declined. As a result *Vijnana* (science) has lost its true form. The nation's prosperity and well-being have been destroyed. Security has become scarce. Morality and integrity have disappeared. Mammon-worship reigns supreme. In the insane pursuit of wealth, men are losing their morality and integrity.

Money earned by unworthy means is nothing but dust. That wealth will not be of use to you. Hoarding wealth is of no avail. Ill-gotten wealth is not truly yours. There are four covetous elements waiting to get at it. The first entity is the Government. In the name of some tax or law, the Government will make a raid on the hoarded wealth. The second entity is fire, somehow or other fire reaches the ill-gotten wealth and destroys it. The third entity is a thief. The thief is after secreted wealth. Somehow he tries to steal it. The fourth entity is disease. To deprive a person of his ill-gotten wealth, disease seizes hold of him and makes him spend money on treatment. Misers, who will not part with a paisa to a beggar, will spend any amount on doctors and medicines. These are the ways in which money earned by dishonest means is taken away.

Therefore, you students, who are the nation's hope for the future, should rigorously eschew unfair means to earn money, adhere to morality and integrity in your professional life and uphold *Dharma* through love and truth and serve the nation. Only then will the nation recover its ancient greatness and glory. It is impossible for anyone to eradicate the basic truths embedded in Bharatiya culture and tradition.

Engage in prayer for the welfare of the world

For everything, the foundation is devotion to the Lord. Without devotions, nothing can be accomplished. Only the power of the Divine can save the world and not any tank or bomb or Government. Therefore engage yourselves in prayer to God for the welfare of the world. Always chant, the name of the Lord. Don't waste time because Time is the embodiment of God. Try to be helpful to others in all your activities. There is no greater *sadhana* or *puja* than this. There is no need to install a picture of the Lord in your small shrine to worship Him.. Install Him in your heart and adore Him.

Worship of the Lord externally has its hazards. Mira was a great devotee. Apart from Krishna she saw nothing else in the world. But she had a desire based on the external. She wanted to install an idol of Krishna in a temple and please Him with her songs all day long. How could she build a temple? It was beyond her means. She wondered whether this would be possible at all in her life-time. She was filled with these doubts. One day, the Maharana (of Udaipur) saw her and wished to marry her. Mira had no desire for marriage as her main aim in life was different. She saw that the Maharana was a powerful and fabulously rich person. She felt that if she married him her innermost desire might be realised. By marrying the Maharana, she could get a temple erected in marble and install a marble idol of Krishna in it and devote her entire time to worshipping Krishna and sanctifying her life. Because she was deluded by this desire, she courted disappointment.

After the marriage, the Maharana was displeased with her way of life and asked her to leave the mandir. This was a great shock to Mira. She was in deep agony. At the same time, it was a great moment of truth for her. She realised that the mandir was built by the Maharana and was liable to decay some time or other. "But the temple of my heart has been erected by the Lord. God is installed in it." Mira recalled Krishna's assurance to Narada: "Wherever my praise is sung, I am there." She addressed her mind thus: "Oh mind, go to the junction of the Ganga and the Yamuna." Where is this junction of the two rivers? It is in the middle of the two brows (Swami sang Mira's song).

Students should redeem the Nation

Today only the grace of the Divine can save the country from the chaos and disorder in which it is plunged. Peace and progress in the future are dependent on the abilities and endeavours of the students. When a country, known for its spiritual greatness for millennia is overwhelmed by corruption, violence and injustice, it is the privilege of students to redeem the nation by the practice of truth, righteousness, love and forbearance and ensure peace and security in the country. Such students are needed by the thousands today.

A lone Prahlada could attempt to transform only his father. All of you should attempt to transform your parents by your own exemplary life and make them lead noble lives. All of you should exemplify the life of Prahlada. He was a lad of about your own age. He was a student like you. Even the teachers were good men. But owing to the perverse nature of the father and his threats, they tried to teach wrong things to Prahlada. But Prahlada ventured even to teach to the preceptors. They were so much influenced by Prahlada's teachings that they came to Hiranyakasipu and said: "Oh Lord of the *Rakshasas!* Your son is not an ordinary boy. He is endowed with great qualities. It is not right for you to punish such a child."

When the minions of the king hurled their javelins at him, Prahlada would not wince or utter a cry, but only prayed to Vishnu calling Him, "Oh Pannagasaayi!" (Oh Lord, resting on the serpent couch!). (Poem). He was ever smiling. When he was thrust into a blazing fire, he was calmly glowing in the name of Narayana. When he was pushed into the sea, he continued to chant the name of Narayana. He was unconcerned about the *deha* (body). He was contemplating only *the Dehi* (Indwelling Spirit). One such child is enough.

Wisdom should shine forth from education

Hence, in this world, which is making such advances in science and technology, students should lead a life dedicated to truth. Anil Kumar (in his speech earlier) had observed that education does not mean mere study of books. Like the lightning that flashes from clouds, wisdom should shine forth from your education. Deem your heart as the sky. In that sky, your thoughts are the clouds. The mind is the moon, your intellect is the sun. At this young age of yours, dark clouds are likely to gather in your hearts. At that moment, the sun and the moon will not be visible. But for how long? Only for a brief period. The clouds are passing clouds, not permanent. If you have forbearance, the clouds will pass and then you will be able to see your true Self. Then your mind and intellect will shine brightly. Therefore, cultivate patience and forbearance to experience peace.

Students nowadays are prone to get easily excited. Don't allow yourselves to be provoked. Today the student world is filled with agitations. It may seem incidental to the period of adolescence. But you should not regard it in that light. It is from the years of adolescence that you should develop all your faculties and talents. You must practise sense-control from now itself. What kind of discipline is possible in old age?

Do not postpone spirituality for old age

There are some persons who ask "*What is the need for thinking about God at this age? Is it not enough if we start thinking of God after taking up a job, earning wealth and retiring from work?*" There are some who declare that they will take to spiritual activities after retirement. But in fact they seek other jobs after retirement and continue to be in harness right upto the end of their lives. They do not give up the desire for money. When will they ever embark on the spiritual path? "*Is it possible to think of Hari when the messengers of the Lord of Death have caught the man's life in their noose, when the relations are in a hurry to get the dead body out of the house, and when wife and children are wailing around the body?*" (Poem). It is impossible to think of the Lord at that moment. Therefore, you have to start adoring the Lord from this age itself. Hence from this age itself, you must fill your heart with love of the Divine. You can make use of your devotion in your old age. This is the task before you.

Combine spirituality with academics

Regardless of what anyone may say, combine spiritual pursuits with your academic studies. You cannot run the cart of life on a single wheel. It is too hazardous. No bird can fly with a single wing. It can fly freely when it can use both the wings. Likewise man needs mundane knowledge for carrying on worldly affairs and *Brahma- Vidya* (Spiritual knowledge) for his spiritual welfare. Acquire knowledge of the physical sciences; that is necessary. At the same time seek spiritual wisdom also. You have to conduct your life based on both these kinds of knowledge.

Students! Do not spend your entire time solely on worldly concerns. Devote some time to what is essential for realising the highest goal of life. It is only when the country is filled with such students that it will be prosperous and happy and regain its ancient glory. Only the power of the Divine can protect any individual, society or nation. Seek to realise that divine power. It is not to be got from outside. It is inherent in you. That is why the *Vedantic* texts declared: "The One Lord dwells in all beings."

Discourse at the Institute Auditorium, Brindavan, on 2-6-1991.