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The wise and the envious

Students! You are the inheritors of Truth and Righteousness (*Sathya* and *Dharma*). Different persons are propagating these two principles in different ways. Truth and Righteousness are eternal. They remain unchanged through all the three categories of time –past, present, and future. It may be asked: What is the need to propagate ideals, which are ever-present and permanent? But the Lord declared in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Whenever there is decline of *dharma* (righteousness) and a resurgence of *adharma* (unrighteousness) I incarnate Myself. Righteousness is imperishable. It is the practice of righteousness that declines not righteousness itself. It is like the sun being covered for a time by a cloud. The sun is not apparently visible. But it is always there and shines again when the cloud moves away. Truth is the sun. Its effulgence is righteousness. Truth and righteousness are inseparable. They go together. They are inseparable like matter and energy.

The Sun of Truth illumines the world with the effulgence of Righteousness. It is the foremost duty of young people today to uphold Truth and Righteousness. Students ask today, "What is our duty?" Most of them feel that it is the job that makes the man (*Udyogam Purushalakshanam*). What then about the unemployed? Are they not men at all?

Righteousness is not related to gender. It is the manifestation of unity in thought, word, and deed. The same unity is the characteristic of Truth. Truth concerns utterance. Righteousness pertains to practice. Nowadays, precept prevails over practice. Practice is all-important. When righteousness is not practiced, it appears as if it has decayed. But Righteousness cannot decay or disappear.

The story of Akbar and Birbal

Today, students should consider it their primary duty to foster Truth and Righteousness. It is easy to talk about them, but putting them into practice is difficult. In this connection, I would relate a story about an episode during the reign of Emperor Akbar in Delhi.

Akbar had a very wise minister named Birbal. Birbal could always give satisfactory replies to the questions of the Emperor. Seeing how much the Emperor relied on Birbal, other ministers and dignitaries in the court were envious of Birbal. The Commander-in-Chief of the army, who was one of this group, seized the opportunity of Birbal's absence from the *darbar* hall one day to tell the Emperor: "Your Majesty! Here we are so many of us with considerable experience. Please consult us also. Why do you ask Birbal for everything?"

On another day, Akbar came to the audience hall and inquired about Birbal. The Commander-in-Chief said Birbal was away and informed the Emperor that he was ready to answer

the Emperor's questions. All others also got up and said they were prepared to do so.

Akbar got up and put the first question to the assembled dignitaries. He warned them that their answer should satisfy him. The first question he put was: *In this world, which is the best flower?* The Commander-in-Chief replied that the rose was the best flower. Other ministers mentioned the names of jasmine, *champak*, and other flowers. The Emperor was not satisfied.

He then put a second question: *Which milk is the best milk?* Once again, there were a variety of answers, none of which satisfied the Emperor.

He then put the third question: *What is the sweetest thing in the world?* Many replied: jaggery (brown sugar). One said honey. Like that, there were varied replies.

The Emperor then passed on to the fourth question: *Which leaf ranks highest among leaves?* The assembled men gave different answers. Akbar was not satisfied.

By this time, Birbal had entered the hall. Akbar then put him the four questions.

Which is the best flower in the world?

Birbal: The flower of the cotton plant is the best. From the cotton flower, we have cotton, out of which yarn is made and clothes are woven. The cotton flower is therefore of lasting use to mankind. Other flowers are only of temporary value and are useless when their fragrance is gone.

Which is the best milk in the world?

Birbal said, the mother's breast milk is the best, because it nourishes the child.

What is the sweetest thing in the world?

Birbal replied, Sweet speech. Through sweet words you can transform any person and give great joy. Men throw stones

when a crow caws. But they listen raptly to the sweet call of the cuckoo. Sweetness in speech is sweeter than anything else

Which is the best leaf in the world?

Birbal said: The betel leaf is the best, Your Majesty. Betel leaves are offered on all auspicious occasions like weddings. The betel leaf is considered sacred and auspicious. Other leaves like plantain leaves have no special value at all.

Everyone in the audience was amazed at Birbal's intelligent answers, which pleased the Emperor. Akbar told the gathering that none of their answers had satisfied him. Akbar expressed his appreciation of Birbal's replies. The courtiers realized why the Emperor valued so much the words of Birbal.

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Trayee Brindavan (address to students and staff)

God is Omnipresent. So do not act differently when you are away from My Presence. Be always and everywhere conscious of the Presence. Be vigilant even while engaged in small tasks. Maintain silence in the recesses of the heart as well as outside.

—Baba