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The Perennial Philosophy

People have lost the fear of sin. Wickedness has become rampant. Devotion to God has disappeared. Indescribable vice has become the order of the day. Even anchorites have become engrossed in worldly avocations. It is high time that man thought of the Lord and sought the pathway to HIM.

Indian mysticism and the perennial philosophy of spirituality are based on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which enshrines the quintessence of all the *Upanishads*. In those ancient times when modern empirical science had not yet blazed a new trail, *Vedic pundits* had gained an insight into nature. They had developed the tremendous faculties of the mind and even acquired control over natural phenomena. With the aid of their higher spiritual powers, they were able to harness the

material forces of nature. They exemplified the triumph of mind over matter. India has inherited this spiritual tradition of the great *rishis* and holy men of antiquity.

Knowledge of the *Vedas* enabled our ancient *pundits* to do good and to ward off evil. *Karma Kanda*, the chapter on rituals, consists of *mantras* or spiritual incantations. The *Brahmanas* also constitute an important part of the *Vedas* and deal with the correct procedures for performing *yajnas* and *yagas*. Being ceremonial rites for acquiring mundane pleasures, such ceremonies, however, cannot offer *Atmananda* or the pure bliss of the *Atma*. They can only enhance sensory enjoyment and provide epicurean pleasures which are intrinsically transient. The search for the pure abiding bliss of the *Atma* led the ancient *rishis* to the solitude of forests. There they performed *thapas* for enlightenment and liberation. These sages have communicated the spiritual wisdom revealed to them through the *Upanishads*. These mystical revelations are known as the *Upanishads* because they take one closer to the Divine.

Many regard the *Upanishads* as the end-portion of the *Vedas* and therefore designate them collectively as the *Vedanta*, the essence and acme of Indian mysticism. There is an intimate relationship between *jnana* (wisdom) and *vidya* (education). Education can become an aid to wisdom. Education imparts information that is formally known as knowledge.

Wisdom is the spiritualization and sublimation of this knowledge. Real education should not end with the acquisition of knowledge alone, but should transform it into wisdom. True education should lead to liberation from the world of sorrow. But, modern education has, instead, a paradoxical effect on the individual. It has led to the accretion of sorrow and not its elimination. As modern education has advanced, sorrow also has increased. With the explosion of education, the totality of misery in the world has increased enormously. Modern education is thus not conducive to redemption from *dukha* or worldly sorrow. The cause for this multiplication of human sorrow may be traced to man's lack of faith in the essential unity underlying the phenomenal multiplicity. Selfishness, the source of human sorrow, is a concomitant of *ahamkara* or egoism. *mamakara* is extended egoism or selfishness extended to kith and kin and to personal belongings. The combination of *ahamkara* and *mamakara* results in *moha* or attachment to the evanescent objects of the world.

Jnana or spiritual wisdom is an immediate and intimate experience of the absolute, eternal and divine Reality. Truth is one. It becomes false and self-contradictory if it involves dichotomies and relativities. The universe is not composed of two ontologically distinct substances.

“*Aum iti ekaksharam Brahma,*” “*Sathyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma.*” *Akshara* means the

undecaying, undying and imperishable substance. *Akshara* is the Absolute Reality. *Jnana* or spiritual wisdom is *Akshara*. *Anantam* or infinitude is also *Akshara*. The primordial *Akshara* is immanent in all *Aksharas*. A vision of the primordial *Akshara* is vouchsafed to one who has acquired spiritual insight or to one who is endowed with the eye of spiritual wisdom. The trinity of *sathyam*, *jnanam*, and *anantam* (truth, wisdom, and infinitude) should be visualised as an integral and inseparable Reality. The essence of spiritual wisdom lies in apprehending and experiencing the oneness of the trinity of *sathyam*, *jnanam*, and *anantam*. This mystical experience can be acquired by cultivating *samyama* or equanimity. *Samyama* is synonymous with the control of sensory organs.

Control over sensory organs can be attained by constant, steady and systematic practice. It is the privilege of man alone to overcome his natural instincts and change his habits. The tiger in a circus can be taught many kinds of feats. However, it is by nature a carnivorous animal and can never be changed into a mild, herbivorous animal. The tiger wants meat when it is hungry. Can a tiger ever eat *puries* instead of meat? It is an instinct of the tiger to eat flesh. You cannot think of a vegetarian tiger. Instinct cannot be changed. You may feed a cat with milk and curds, but at the very sight of a rat, it will pounce on it and gobble it up. A cat's instinct is to eat rats.

Man has the ability to learn new things and to change himself. Unlike animals, he is endowed with infinite capacity for learning and can transform himself into a better person. He can sublimate and refine his instincts and give up his vicious habits. He can achieve anything by his own effort.

Nevertheless, today we find man's inhumanity to man everywhere. He has lost his capacity for pure and selfless love. If an ant sees a lump of jaggery, it will not eat it up selfishly. It brings all other fellow ants and eats the lump of jaggery in their company. It selflessly shares its food with others. An ant is instinctively unselfish. But man is selfish in all his activities. He seems to be habitually narrow-minded and selfish.

We look down upon the crow with contempt. When it caws near our houses, we pelt it with stones. But a crow never eats alone. It is the most gregarious bird. When it comes across a heap of rice it invites all other crows and shares the rice with them. What have the ants read? What university degrees do the crows possess? Every human being must learn the lesson of mutual love and co-operation from ants and crows.

Man does not live by bread alone. He lives by the Atma. *Bhakthi* (devotion) and *prapatti* (surrender), and not *bhukti* (greed) and *yukti* (deceit), should form the basis for man's life and lead to the blossoming of spiritual wisdom in his heart.

Saint Ramdas was a great devotee of Rama and

he composed thousands of verses in His adoration. He wanted to know which of them really appealed to Rama. However, he had no way of knowing and so he gathered the leaves of his manuscript and dropped them into the river Godavari. All but a few leaves, containing a hundred verses, sank in the water. Only a hundred appealed to Rama as they were composed with sincerity of feeling and one-pointed attention. They were the greatest compositions of Ramdas. They were spontaneous creations of a heart inspired by sincere devotion and absolute self-surrender. The verses which sank into the water were those composed by him with pride and for pomp. Sincerity is the essential criterion of devotional poetry. *Bhakthi* or devotion to God is not enough, it must be coupled with purity of heart.

Sense-control too is a necessity. To stop a running train or a bus, the brake has to be applied. An engine driver brings the train to a halt by pulling a small lever. The sensory organs of man work at a tremendous speed. The terrific agitation to which our sensory organs are subjected can be tranquillised almost instantaneously by filling our hearts and minds with compassion and wisdom. Every person must cultivate universal compassion and develop pure love. He must undertake activities which are dear to the Lord, who is an ocean of compassion.

Usually all parents excuse their prodigal sons who utter lies and steal money at home. But if a servant steals a petty thing, he is at once handed over to the police. If

a son in a family turns out to be a thief, his parents try to reform him by means of affectionate advice and all sorts of inducements. Instead, severe punishment is meted out to a kleptomaniac servant because he happens to be an outsider to the family. In a similar manner, all of us belong to God's family. We have to love God like our father and establish an intimate bond of affection with Him. We must deserve his boundless love and infinite Grace. We may commit sins knowingly or unknowingly, but if we love God wholeheartedly and surrender ourselves to Him, He will surely forgive us.

Krishna advised Arjuna to follow the path of selfless love, implicit devotion and total self-surrender. The unity of divinity must be recognised, comprehended and experienced. The essential unity underlying the phenomenal diversity has to be perceived.

Akshara is the imperishable reality. *Jnana* or spiritual wisdom is the essential nature of *Akshara*. The indestructible form is the reflection of *Akshara*. It is the perfect primordial sound *Aum*. The entire universe is vibrant with the sound of *Aum*. It is erroneous to imagine that sound does not exist just because we cannot listen to it. Sound is a concomitant of all vibrations. Our hearing may not be sensitive enough to register the subtle sounds produced by subtle vibrations. All movements are accompanied by vibrations and vibrations are accompanied by sound. Even the winking

of an eye causes subtle vibrations which produce subtle sounds.

Aumkara is the primordial sound of *Brahman*. It is the primal effulgence and the source of all knowledge. It is the ultimate, absolute and eternal Reality. Krishna imparted the esoteric knowledge of *Aumkara* to Arjuna with great love and affection.

During *sandhyavandana*, every sentence should be preceded by the utterance of *Aum*. But some ignorant people utter *Aum* at the end of each sentence as a matter of practice. *Aum* is like a powerful engine which leads all the compartments—incantations and invocations. India is the country which has led other countries along the path of spirituality. She is the land of the *Avatars*, of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Vedas* have prescribed various ceremonial rites and rituals for the welfare of humanity. India is a *Yoga Bhumi*, the land of *yoga* or communion with the Godhead. India is a *Thyaga Bhumi*, the land of supreme self-sacrifice. India is a *Karma Bhumi*, the country destined to lead other countries along the path of spirituality. However, it is our sacred duty to see that spiritual decadence and degeneration are not allowed to change this great country into a *Roga Bhumi*, a land of diseases.

Thyaga is sacrifice. Indeed, life cannot exist without *thyaga*. The inhalation of oxygen and the exhalation of carbon dioxide and blood circulation in

various organs of the body symbolise sacrifice. Thus, sacrifice is indispensable for the physical well-being of the human body. Similarly, sacrifice is of paramount importance for the spiritual well-being of man. Students should have the spirit of sacrifice for their physical, mental and spiritual welfare. The value of *yaga* has been emphasised by the *Bhagavad Gita* in the most vivid manner and in the most picturesque language.