

12. The Essence Of Education

*Na Tvevaaham Jaatu Naasam
Na Thwam Neme Janaadhipaah
Na Chaiva Na Bhavishyaamah,
Sarve Vayamatah Param.*

There was never a time when I,
Or you, or any of these ruling Kings did not exist.
And we shall exist in the future,
For all time hereafter.¹

The universe is full of many powers. An omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent power pervades all of Creation. This divine Force is immanent in every atom, like sugar in syrup. The *Upanishads* call this *Raso Vai Sah* or all-pervading sweetness. God is an embodiment of sweetness. Although this sweetness is everywhere, it is not possible to recognize its omnipresence. However, it is possible for all to observe the existence of Divinity.

The existence of Divinity

Sweetness in sugarcane, bitterness in *neem*² leaves, burning in chili, acerbity in lemon and fire in wood—all these are direct proofs of God's existence. A plant germinates from a seed. A bird emerges from an egg. The newborn infant becomes a mother one day. These are all living proofs of the existence of Divinity. Man experiences exhilaration upon seeing majestic peaks, gurgling rivers, the deep ocean, lush forests and colorful gardens. What is the basis of these phenomena? It is God's existence alone.

It is not given to everyone to grasp the omnipresence of God, but all have the capacity to identify His presence. *Jnaanaanaam Jnaanam Agram, Jnaanaanaam Jnaanam Utta-*

mam—Of all kinds of knowledge, *Atma Jnana* is the foremost and the best. We find various forms of knowledge in the world—music, literature, painting, sculpture, dance, materials and so on. *Atma Jnana* is paramount. Worldly knowledge might endow you with scholarship, fame, honor and titles. But, *Atmaanaam Atmam Uttamam*—The title higher than all worldly titles is that you are the *Atma*. The *Vedas* say that man is *Amritaputra*—a child of immortality. This is the highest title.

Qualities for earning wisdom

All worldly knowledge changes with time and deludes your intellect. For this reason, our ancient sages dedicated their lives to the acquisition of *Atma Jnana*, which is changeless and illumines the intellect. Some qualities are necessary for earning such wisdom.

1. *Sarve Loka Hito Ratah*

Desire the welfare of all beings by engaging in actions that benefit others. We should cultivate readiness to serve. Your education should equip you better to render service. Then you will evoke true respect from others.

2. *Sarve Jnaana Sampannah*

Students should excel in all forms of knowledge. This is also called “awareness.” You should understand and experience all the angles of a situation. Worldly subjects grant you competence within a narrow scope. You perceive situations with a limited outlook. If I ask you what this [handkerchief] is, you say, “a piece of cloth”. This answer shows your restricted, worldly knowledge. With broader vision, you identify it as a handkerchief.

Spiritual knowledge is complete and enables one to grasp all fields of knowledge. This is “total awareness”.

3. *Sarve Samuditha Gunaihi*

The student must embody every virtue or *guna*. What is meant by *guna*? Traditionally, the three qualities of creation (*sathwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) are called *gunas*. Indeed, virtue is the union and balance of these three *gunas*. In practice, it is very important to disregard the faults of others and to express your own Divinity. This is true *guna*. This trait is crucial for students and it is the source of all virtues. That which inculcates such virtue alone can be called education. Modern educational systems impart information but not virtues.

*Present-day education teaches only information,
But not even an iota of virtue.
What beneficial fruit can emerge from
A million forms of education, devoid of values?*

Nonviolence

Without human values you cannot deliver the fruits of your learning to society. Therefore, human values must be cultivated. Of these, *sathya* is the most important. Truth is God. Some people went to Buddha and argued about the existence of God. Buddha told them, “All these disputes are a waste of time. *Sathya*, *dharma*, and *ahimsa* are the same as God. Therefore, worship God as the form of Truth first. Speak the truth. Practice *dharma*. Observe nonviolence.”

Now, what is meant by nonviolence? People consider only hurting and harming others as violence. No, no. Harming yourself is also violence. Talking unnecessarily, eating immoderately, and working too much—these are violence. Meaning, one should lead a life of moderation and balance. Anything done beyond limits is violence. Even writing excessively is violence. Why is it bad to transgress limits? Because it wastes energy. By talking more than necessary, we deplete our intellect.

Therefore, nonviolence can be defined as the regulation of human life along moderate and beneficial paths. The *Vedas* say, *Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*—Speak the truth and follow *dharma*. Truth is God. Right action is God. That is why the *Vedas* advise us to adhere to *sathya* and *dharma*. This is true virtue.

Individual soul and All-pervading Soul

Nowadays, people make many attempts to reach Divinity. But they go around in circles because some spiritual concepts have been left inadequately explained for a long time. These are: *jeeva* and *Deva* (individual soul and God), *Atma* and *Paramatma* (limited soul and all-pervading soul), *Anu* and *Brahmaanu* (atom and universe), *sthoolam* and *sookshmam* (gross and subtle). No one is able to interpret these concepts correctly today.

Vedanta discovered such profound concepts which science has never been able to fathom. On the other hand, science has gathered facts that *Vedanta* considered unessential. But in spite of investigations by both scientists and Vedantins, these

basic truths are not understood properly by the common man. How should we describe Divinity? What is the distinction between *Atma* and *Paramatma*, between *Anu* and *Brahmaanu*?

If we reflect, the atom and the universe are one and the same! This tumbler has water from River Godavari. Suppose we bring Godavari water in a huge pot. And then again, in a big tanker. All of them are the same water. They differ only in quantity. Quality is one.

In the same way, when we study the atom we come across microcosmic phenomena. In the flame of a lamp, we find heat and light. Upon closer examination, a flame has the same innate qualities as an atom. The water in this tumbler has the same taste, color and form as that in River Godavari. This is That, That is This. When we grasp this one principle, we grasp everything.

God is described in our scriptures as *Anoraneeyaan Mahato Maheeyaan*—smaller than the smallest, bigger than the biggest. The universe is really a reflection of the same forces present in an atom. Without the combination of atoms, the universe cannot exist. The principle that is present in all is Divinity alone.

This is what Sage Uddalaka taught his son.³ “Son, God is everywhere. Observe the relation between an atom and the cosmos and you will understand *Atma* and *Paramatma*. Go into the house and bring some sugar and some water.” His son obeyed. Uddalaka said, “Observe the sugar carefully.” The boy looked at it and felt it. Then he mixed it in water. Then Udda-

laka asked him to find the sugar. But the sugar could not be collected with the hand because it had dissolved. Still, its presence could be proved by tasting a drop of the sweet water. Where was the sugar? It cannot be said to be “here” or “there”. It was everywhere in the water.

In the same way, the sugar that can be seen and touched is *Atma*. It is limited. The sugar that is dissolved, which is beyond touch and sight, beyond name and form, beyond spatial limitations, is *Paramatma*. The *Atma* present in your body also pervades the universe as *Paramatma*. *Paramatma* is called Consciousness. The *Atma* in the body is called Conscience. That Consciousness is present in your Conscience and your Conscience is a part of the Consciousness.

A seed contains roots, branches, leaves, fruits, flower—everything. Krishna said, *Beejam Maam Sarva Bhootaanaam*⁴—I am the seed of all beings. This seed is present in the mighty tree and the entire tree is present within the seed. *Anoraneeyaan*—smaller than the smallest—that is the seed. *Mahatomaheeyaan*—bigger than the biggest—this is the tree. There is no difference between the seed and the tree. The difference is only in vision. Meaning, the extroverted vision sees multiple forms but the inner eye perceives unity in diversity.

Know yourself

Therefore, it is not possible for anyone to recognize this all-pervasive Divinity. But that is not required! If you recognize the divine spark present in yourself, you become the

knower of the omnipresent Divinity also! That is why *Vedanta* urges man, “Know Thyself.”

If you ask a person, “Who are you?” he answers, “I am the son of...” Or he may say he is a doctor or a lawyer. Or he may say, “American,” “Indian,” “Italian.” None of these is correct. When you base your identity on your father, you speak out of body-consciousness. Doctor or lawyer is your profession. The third response is your country of birth. These answers are like artificial dialogue heard in a cinema. Your true nature is *Atma*. No one can change the conscience in each person. You may change countries and behavior, but not the conscience.

The principle present in everyone is the *Atma*. Modern people do not perform such subtle investigations and so, do not believe these truths. They dedicate their time, body and actions to this temporary, physical existence. Hence, they give only worldly responses. *Jnaanaanaam Jnaanam Uttamam*—*Atma Jnana* is the best kind of knowledge. Once you have *Atma Jnana*, you may blend other sciences in it. *Atma Jnana* is the ocean, worldly sciences are rivers. *Nadeenaam Saagaro Gatih*—all rivers merge into the ocean.

A small example. Rice is your staple food. But you do not eat rice by itself. You mix vegetables and curries in it. With such side dishes you can enjoy a tasty meal. Take the rice of *Atma Vidya* and mix into it the dishes of worldly knowledge. This will lend taste to your physical life. In any situation, *Atma Vidya* must never be renounced.

Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara

The principles that teach and nourish *Atma Vidya*, sustain its awareness and protect it are known as Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara. These are only names. Today, there is no one who has seen these Beings. Yes, we see them in cinemas and books, but no one has seen them directly. As per *jnana* philosophy, this is delusion also!

Truly, who is this Brahma and where is He? Brahma is the Creator. The subtle secrets of the Creator are present in every mother and father. The parents who bestow this physical body on you have all the qualities of Brahma. Make every effort to understand the sacred principles in your parents. Your mother is the basis of your birth. She sustained you and brought you into this world. The one who created you is none other than your mother. The mother fosters her child in hundreds of ways, like Brahma. Therefore, when you respect your mother and worship her, you worship Brahma. That is why our ancients said, *Maatru Devo Bhava*—The mother is equal to God.

Birth is not enough. The means to live must be provided to the child. When the child ventures into the world, it must be taught right behavior. The ways for earning respect in society must be inculcated. Education and a home must be furnished. All these are responsibilities of the father. Lord Vishnu sustains and protects the souls created by Brahma. That same Vishnu is the father. When you worship and honor your father, you truly worship Vishnu.

Next, Maheswara. He is described as *bhola* (innocent) by devotees. He is known for granting every desire, without hesitation, even if the boons might result in trouble to Him! He is *sulabha priya*—easily pleased. You know the story of the demon Bhasmaasura. Maheswara gave him the boon of burning anything with his palm. Then He Himself ran to escape the demon's palm! What does this mean? Sankara grants desires without prejudice or hesitation. A *guru* teaches all without preference. To one who wants proficiency in mathematics, the teacher teaches math. If another desires physics, that is taught. The *guru* teaches whatever one wishes to learn, to anyone who comes with the desire. When the student's desires are not elevating, he advises him accordingly. No student turns back from a *guru* empty-handed. Thus, the *guru* is equal to Maheswara. When you respect your *guru*, you really worship Maheswara.

Pillars of Indian culture

Therefore, Hindus consider mother, father, and teacher as being equal to God. The *Vedas* propagate these glorious values by saying:

Maatru Devo Bhava.

Pitru Devo Bhava.

Acharya Devo Bhava.

Treat the mother as God.

Treat the father as God.

Treat the teacher as God.

This is Indian Culture. This is the first pillar of Indian culture: devotion and obedience to mother, father, and guru.

Next, in what manner must a child born of such parents conduct himself in society? Speak the truth, he is advised. Never yield to falsehood out of selfishness. Never follow unrighteousness for self-interest. To uphold our respect in society, we should speak the truth and follow *dharma*. Indian Culture says:

Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara
Speak the truth, Follow *dharma*.

This is the second identifying feature of Indian Culture.

Not just this. If we want to experience unsullied reputation, we must strengthen the faith that Divinity is immanent in everyone. These days, scientists claim that a microcosmic power pervades the universe. They conduct complex experiments to convince the world of their findings. There are only two components present in this world: matter and energy. One cannot exist without the other. Science investigates into the interactions of matter and energy, into the physical world accessible to the senses.

Spirituality teaches the same concept: People may be different. Names and forms may differ, cultures may differ, but the force within everyone is the One *Atma*. Scientists took thousands of years to discover this truth. Since when? Not just in the modern era. The first scientist, the greatest scientist, was Hiranya Kashyapa, who existed thousands of years ago. Hiranya Kashyapa investigated into the five elements that constitute creation. He even brought the elements under his control!

But despite his towering accomplishments in the physical realm, Hiranya Kashyapa could not limit his own bad qualities.

For this reason, what did our ancients teach? Science is preoccupied with describing the forces within an atom. Our ancient *Vedanta* says, “O foolish scientists! First of all, everything is in You!” The external world has been described by scientists. The inner cosmos is the subject of *Vedanta*. Scientists are reluctant to develop inner vision. And *Vedanta* has neglected the external world. But which of these is more important?

Students should recognize one fact. You can see the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits of a tree. But the bases for their existence are the unseen roots. Which are more important, roots or branches? Without roots, branches cannot exist. However, you may chop off the branches and the roots will make them grow again. Those who are content understanding the branches, venturing no further, are scientists. The ones who go to the roots are *Vedantins*.

Scientists describe the branches, the effects, not the cause. Therefore, the *moolaadhaara*—Primal Cause—is very important. Once we find the Primal Cause behind everything, we can build a foundation upon it and live in the world as we please.

Students know that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen produce water. Scientists pride themselves on this discovery. Yes, you can produce water. But if we ask, “Who created hydrogen and oxygen?” there is no answer. When confronted by such questions, scientists evade them by saying,

“Law of Nature”. Fine. From where did Nature emerge? Who is its basis? When we inquire in this fashion, the *moolaadhaara* is God alone. No one can grasp Divinity. We can only attempt to describe it as a power that is changeless, indestructible, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

The study that reveals to us our innate Divinity has been termed *vidya* (education). Worldly studies do not measure up to this qualification. However, worldly studies have got their importance. Today man studies, gets a job, goes overseas, accepts positions of authority—all for money alone. *Dhana Moolam Idam Jagat*—Money is the basis for the world. Money is the basis for worldly existence. But *Vedanta* does not give it such importance.

Dharma moolam idam jagat

Dharma is the basis for the world. This is the declaration of *Vedanta*. This is Indian Culture.

You find planets revolving around the Sun, stars in distant galaxies shining brightly, the Moon orbiting the Earth, rivers flowing into the ocean, the sea rising and ebbing with tides, and so on. All these phenomena occur within the limits of *dharma*. When *dharma* is transgressed, all is destroyed. All these activities are possible only by adherence to *dharma*. These are proofs of God’s existence.

Yearn for true knowledge

To discover the existence of God is within everyone’s capability. You do not need degrees, education, skills, or proficiencies for this achievement. All that is required is an effort to

understand the secrets of Creation. Look at this world. It is so vast, so full of wonders. From where has it emerged? There are 5,700 million people in the world. Are any two identical? Are there no distinctions even between identical twins? Every individual is unique. Who designed such a wondrous creation? This act of creation is not possible for anyone. The mind cannot gauge its wonders.

Thus, the unseen Divinity underlies the visible world. Some people think, “I have attained this,” “I have made this discovery through my experiments.” They gloat over the smallest of achievements. What the man of today knows is close to nothing. But the pomp is huge. One who knows does not indulge in publicity. The vessel full of water remains steady. The half-full vessel rocks back and forth noisily. Those who yield to self-praise have half understanding.

Inquire, inquire, inquire. Make a determined attempt. Don't relax your spiritual efforts in any way. What we need to recognize is the *moolaadhaara* principle. This principle is not visible through a telescope and cannot be captured through a camera. You only need yearning in your heart, which gets transformed into spiritual inquiry. Without yearning, the search for God cannot be sustained. Every student should cultivate yearning, “I should know, I should know.” Then you will realize the fruits of your search for God, sooner or later.

Desires vs. ideals

Develop good thoughts. Your desires may or may not be fulfilled. Students! You are living for desires (*aasa*) today. This is not the right approach. Live for ideals (*aasaya*). Even if

your desires are satisfied today, what is the guarantee that tomorrow's desires will be granted? But if you uphold ideals, people will follow your example long after you die. Do not base your life on desires—you are bound to meet disappointment one day or the other. The only desire you should have is the desire to follow ideals!

Today man wishes for a long life. This is not important. A life permeated with divine feelings is more desirable. A divine life, even for a moment, brings lasting bliss and fame. What is the meaning in surviving for a thousand years if you live a crow's life? So, do not be satisfied with worldly education. While pursuing your studies, acquire *Atma Vidya* as well.

Unity of thought, word, and deed

Once, Adi Sankaracharya went with thirteen disciples to Kashi. With our extroverted intellect, we think that "sin" means inconveniencing or harming others. Students should recognize correctly what is meant by sin. Sankara was proceeding for a bath in River Ganga. He saw a boy, seated under a tree, learning by heart the rules of grammar (*dukrum-karane*). Sankaracharya stood for some time, observing the student recite his lessons aloud. Then Sankara approached him.

"My boy, why do you spend time learning grammar?" The student replied, "This will help me become a great scholar." "Good. What do you hope to achieve after becoming a scholar?" "I will go to the King's court and become the Royal Poet." "Fine, you will become famous. What will that fame give you?" "With fame, I will get as much wealth as I want." "What happiness can you enjoy with wealth?" "My family

will live in pleasure and comfort.” “How long will that comfort last?” “Till death.” “What will happen to you, your comforts and riches after death?” “I don’t know.”

Then Sankara said:

*Bhaja Govindam Bhaja Govindam
Govindam Bhaja Moodha Mate
Sampraapte Sannihite Kaale
Nahi Nahi Rakshati Dukrunkarane*
Sing the name of Govinda,
Sing Govinda’s name, O fool!
When your final moments approach,
The rules of grammar will not save you!

Think of God always. Worldly knowledge is helpful only as long as the body exists. You must leave the body one day or the other.

After giving this advice, Sankaracharya bathed in the River Ganga and proceeded to the temple for Lord Siva’s darshan. He stood in front of the altar and prayed: “Swami! I have come to You after committing three heinous sins. I pray to You in expiation of those sins.” Students should pay careful attention to his words.

“I have extolled and described You in many ways. However, I know that You are *Avaang Maanasa Gochara*—beyond word and thought. The *Vedas* say, *Yatho Vaacho Nivartante Apraapya Manasa Saha*—From where words and thoughts return, unable to comprehend anything. That is You. I

taught my students that You are beyond word and thought. At the same time, I dared to describe You. I preached something and practiced otherwise. This is my first sin.”

See, how subtle is the concept of sin! To say something and do something else is sin. “I taught to everyone, *Isvara Sarva Bhootaanaam, Isaavaasyam Idam Sarvam*—God is immanent in every being. You are present everywhere. But I have come to Kasi to see You as Viswesvara. Again, I acted contrary to my words. This is my second sin.

“*Ekovasi Sarva Bhoota Antaraatma*—God is present in everyone. In fact, God is manifest as all beings. I taught this truth. Now, am I not one of those beings? Is God not present in me? I have neglected the Divinity in myself. I have journeyed here to see myself! I considered myself different from You. This is my third sin.

“So, Lord, my words and actions are not in unity. Please free me from these faults.” Saying so, Sankaracharya closed His eyes and meditated intently on the Lord. In a few moments, He got the Lord’s vision along with His response. Visveswara told him, “Sankara! Past is past. Your repentance itself is atonement for your sins. Take care that you do not repeat these mistakes.”

Meaning what? We must repent for our mistakes. But today’s devotees have no sincere repentance. Whenever you commit a mistake, even unknowingly, resolve, “I shall not repeat it.” You must not go back on your promise to God. Keep your words and actions in unison. In the modern age it has been

said—The proper study of mankind is man. Meaning, the unity of thoughts, words, and actions.

Keeping these three in unity, love and respect your parents and teacher. Consider your mother, father, and teacher as Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara and make every effort to secure their blessings. This is true worship. But we must not be content even with this. Do not stop there and waste the sacred time at our disposal. There is an unknown power pervading everything. This sacred power is within your mother, father and teachers. You must think, “I will worship, follow and attain that Divinity.” For this reason, *bhajans*, *japa*, meditation, and *sathsanga* are very essential.

Good company

Now the term *sathsanga* (good company) is frequently misunderstood. What is *sathsanga*? Getting together with devotees, singing *bhajans*, undertaking pilgrimages, listening to interpretations of scriptures—these are common conceptions of *sathsanga*. But this is only worldly *sathsanga*. In fact, these are not *sathsanga* at all! The devotees around you have many faults. Scholars also explain scriptures with some expectation in mind. So, none of these can be true *sathsanga*.

Sath is derived from *Sath-chith-ananda*—Being, Awareness, Bliss. *Sath* is Being. Not this temporary, worldly being, but the Being that remains changeless through past, present and future. *Sath* is devoid of name and form. The form of *Sath* is bliss (*Ananda*). *Sath* is God.

Cultivating thoughts of God is true *sathsanga*!

We must acquire the company of Godly thoughts, and thereby, the company of God Himself. Assimilate the principle of the *Atma*.

When we do this, *Chith* (Awareness) dawns. When we inquire into God, all knowledge, all awareness becomes part of us. That total awareness is *Chith*. Now, bliss (*Ananda*) is the natural consequence of *Sath* and *Chith* coming together.

So, the quality of *Sath* is changeless. When these concepts are taught with simple analogies, children absorb them easily. *Sath* is sugar. You may mix sugar in pudding, tea, coffee, water—its sweetness is constant. *Sath* is the sweetness. God is the embodiment of sweetness. *Madhuraadhipate Madhuram Madhuram*—God is sweetness, sweetness, sweetness. In one hand, take this sugar of *Sath*. In the other hand, take *Chith*—awareness of the *Atma*. Everyone may not be able to use *Sath*. For example, diabetic patients are barred from sugar! Atheists are like diabetics. They do not look at the sugar of *Sath*, although they have the desire to taste it! But their disease does not allow them to taste the sweetness.

However, *Chith*—total awareness—is essential for everyone. *Chith* is like water. No one can survive without water. Water is crucial for life. Therefore, water is a form of Divinity. All need water, be they millionaires or paupers, renunciants or hedonists. This water is *jnana*—knowledge, awareness. Mix sugar and water. The result is neither sugar nor water, but syrup. Unite *Sath* and *Chith*, and the syrup of *Ananda* (bliss) will flow in you.

Use education to serve society

So, students! Think of God on one hand. Pursue worldly education on the other hand. Experience the sweetness of life by the unity of these two. Life is meant to be of service to others. We must be careful never to cause suffering to others. Imbibe such skills and knowledge that will benefit you, society and the world. Do not learn just to fulfill your self-interest. If you want to fall to a selfish state, why take the trouble to be educated? You don't need scriptures and spiritual inquiry in order to become selfish! But to attain selflessness, you definitely need education.

In the past ten days, you have participated in this Summer Course on culture and spirituality. *Sathya* and *Dharma*—these are our culture. *Maatru Devo Bhava*, *Pitru Devo Bhava*, *Acharya Devo Bhava*—these constitute our culture. When you keep these three injunctions in view, when you experience Divinity in these three relations, only then will you experience the unity of culture and spirituality, or the unity of matter and energy.

Matter + Energy = God.

Observe limits

Offer worldly resources back to the world in useful forms. There is nothing useless anywhere. We see a twig on the ground and think it is useless. No, no. Even that is useful, for instance, as a toothpick! But today, man himself is useless and wasted. Why? Man does not know his own value. What is his value? Man wrongly bases his worth on position, fame, degrees and wealth. Yes, all these may be desired—but within limits.

When we cross limits, they become dangerous instead of lending enjoyment.

Suppose you are thirsty. Quench your thirst with a glass of water. But today's man says, "I am not satisfied with a glass. I want to drink the whole River Ganga!" If you try to drink Ganga, it will drown you. This is only danger, not enjoyment. Another example. You need air to live. Do you try to inhale all the air in the world? The five elements must be used within limits. The body needs heat to survive. But the body cannot function with excessive heat, like a 105°F temperature. Have limits, have limits, have limits.

Students! Pursue education, acquire positions and remove the unrest that plagues society. There are many agitations around us. All of you should establish peace and security in society and stand out as examples —blessing you with this wish, I bring My long discourse to a close.

¹. Sri Krishna to Arjuna, *Bhagavad Gita* (11:12).

². Indian margosa tree, known for its bitter leaves and medicinal properties.

³. In the *Chandogya Upanishad*.

⁴. *Bhagavad Gita* (VII:10).