

4. THE HUMAN BODY AND ITS IMPORTANCE

*Punarvittam, punarmitram, punarpatni, punar mahi.
Etat sarvam punar labhyam, na sariram punah punah.*

*Wealth lost can be regained;
If friends are lost, new friends can be acquired;
If wife is lost, one can marry again;
But the body once lost never comes back.*

Embodiments of Love!

Wealth, friends, property, and even wife, if lost, can be acquired again, but the human body is not like that; once lost, it can never be got back, no matter how hard one may try. Human life is most precious, highly sacred, beautiful, and invaluable. It is, therefore, the prime duty of every individual to take the greatest possible care of the body. The body is an indispensable

vehicle for experiences. Without it nothing can be done, not even a simple task. The human body is, therefore, more precious than worldly wealth and such other material acquisitions. Life must be sanctified by making proper use of the body and engaging it in sacred actions. Time gone will never come back. Once the Ganges merges with the ocean, you cannot get back even a drop of its sacred water. Likewise, once life ebbs out and the body is gone, it cannot be recovered.

Body is gifted for service

Men are more valuable than all the wealth in the world. How does money acquire value? Who is the one who confers value on money, diamond, gold, and land? It is man who is responsible for this. If man does not exist, wherefrom will all these get their value? From nowhere. Human life is very rare and precious. That is why the *Vedas* declare,

Jantunam nara janma durlabham.

Human birth is a rare gift. Extraordinary things can be achieved with the human body. Yet, there are times when one must be ready to sacrifice life itself, in order to achieve great goals.

Embodiments of Love! It is most important to understand the role and the value of the human body. It is the body that shelters the Divinity within. The body is like an iron safe used for storing jewellery and other such valuables. In the case of the body, the valuables stored are good feelings, good thoughts, and virtues. If

lost, they cannot be recovered easily. Only virtues lend value to human life, and it is qualities like compassion, forbearance, and sacrifice that make human life precious. But man today does not have the faintest idea of what is meant by human values.

The human body is also a clock marking time and the passage of life. It ticks away the seconds, minutes, days, weeks, months, and years. Man knows that life is ticking away but he does not bother to enquire about the real purpose of life. No one can say when the clock will stop. It is, therefore, most essential to make proper use of life while it is still available. The body is the vehicle for the journey of life. If the vehicle is not properly maintained, then one would have to face serious problems on the way.

Man must contemplate on the importance of virtues. He is ignorant about the answers to questions like: “What is Divinity?”, “What is unity?”, “Steadiness?”, “Selfless-ness?”. Without knowing the answers to important and basic questions such as these, man, driven by greed and selfishness, is grossly misusing the body. God has not gifted the body for this. The *Vedas* declare:

Paropakartham idam sariram.

The body is gifted to serve others. You must firmly resolve not only to take care of yourself but also others. Unfortunately, man today does not know what service means. The essence of all the eighteen *Puranas* can be summarised in two short sentences:

Help ever. Hurt never.

Though God has given the body for service man does not seem to understand what ‘help’ means, being ever immersed in selfishness. Every thought, every word, and every action is driven by selfishness. Man has become a puppet in the hands of selfishness and self-interest. How can a puppet be ever called independent? Selfishness must, therefore, be totally rejected and selflessness must be whole-heartedly embraced. Then alone would the real purpose of the human body and human life be realised.

The ‘I’ principle

In addition to the body, the mind too must be used properly in order to derive Bliss. There are three important entities in the body; the heart, the mind, and speech. The *Vedas* refer to the heart as *Atma*. Swami has already told you that Ishwara is represented by the heart. Likewise, the mind is the embodiment of Vishnu, and speech is the embodiment of Brahma. Man is therefore verily the form of the divine Trinity. One is not able to understand why man does not recognise his intrinsic value and the divinity latent in him. Only one who knows himself can know others. One must endeavour to understand the meaning of ‘I’.

Everything is contained in the words that we speak. Once a devotee told Swami, “I want peace.” Swami replied, “Why are you suffering so much? Do you know the meaning of the word ‘I’ in your prayer? It means ego. Similarly, ‘want’ means desire. Remove ego and desire, and what remains is peace!” Every effort must be made to conquer ego. People think this is very difficult but it is a big mistake to think so. Actually, it is very easy to get

rid of ego. Why at all should you have ego in the first place? There is an easy method to remove ego. You think that ‘I’ is associated with the name given to you at birth, and regard it as permanent. In the process, you have forgotten your original name. It is the original name that is permanent and not the name given to your body at birth. The given name serves only as long as the present body exists. When the body perishes, the given name ceases to be significant. How long will the body last?

*Composed of the five elements and devoid of strength,
When this body will go no one knows.
Though a hundred years is said to be the life span,
One cannot be sure when death will overtake.
It may be in childhood, youth, middle age, or old age;
But certain it is that death will one day come.
He alone is intelligent who realises his true nature when alive.*

This truth one must definitely know.

Who is this ‘I’? Who am ‘I’? This ‘I’ is not the body (*deham*) nor the mind (*manas*) nor the intellect (*buddhi*) nor the inner senses (*antahkarana*). I is just I! This primordial ‘I’ came along with the body; in fact, ‘I’ is your correct name. There are so many ‘I’s in this world. If you know yourself, then you will also know all the other ‘I’s. This is why the question “Who am I?” is important.

Embodiments of Love! No one is making any effort to know about the mysteries of human life. There are many secrets associated with life. There are many treasures within you. All the power and potency found in nature are also latent in every human being.

That which cannot be found within a human being cannot be found anywhere else in the universe. Our ancients said to those who went overseas, “O fool, why are you becoming a vagabond, wandering over various lands? What you are looking for outside is already within you. You are not able to recognise the treasures hidden within you.”

The *Vedas* explained clearly the meaning of ‘I’. This ‘I’ is also known as *vyakthi*. Who is this *vyakthi*? *Vyakthi* is that individual who is able to cognise the subtle and the hidden. He is the one who has realised that Divinity is latent within him. He who does not know of the innate Divinity does not merit being called a man. You must understand the identity of the individual with God. Adherence to *sathya* and *dharma* alone would enable one to become a *yakthi*. Hence the twin dicta of the scriptures:

Satyam vada, dharmam Cara.

Always speak the truth and always tread the path of right-teousness. God has gifted you the human form to enable you to follow such a sacred path. Therefore, every effort must be made to bring out the latent human values. One does not become a scholar or a learned person as soon as one is born. These qualifications are acquired over many years and after much effort. Educare is the name given to this process that brings to the surface the latent virtues and values. The secular instruction that is currently offered everywhere is education. Dealing as it does exclusively with the phenomenal world, it is artificial. As Swami often says, “Art is outside while heart is inside.” Therefore art is education while heart is educare. There is no person in the world today who can be said to be truly learned in the sense of educare.

*He has studied everything,
And mastered all;
Yet a fool he remains,
Not knowing about the Self.
No matter how advanced the learning,
Or how high the position held,
A mean person will ever remain mean.
Too much scholarship
Promotes only argumentation.
No matter what the attainments,
The scholar too one day has to die.
Hence seek that Knowledge Supreme,
Which alone leads to Immortality.*

It is this Supreme Knowledge that you must really acquire. What is it that is deathless? The primordial 'I' alone is Eternal and Immortal. It has no death. Mind, the form of Vishnu, is born of 'I', and it too has no death. The Trinity Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara are all ensconced within the human body. They are the embodiment of Truth. Thus, when you say 'I', it refers really to the name of God, the God within you. It is therefore a mistake to identify 'I' with the body, as is invariably done. 'I' is that is within; it is the name of truth when it manifests in a human body.

Always think of God; do not put it off!

Man is conscious only of the inert body, which is just gross matter. All that you can physically see in the external world also consists only of gross matter.

Yaddrsyam tannasyam.

All that can be experienced with the senses is ephemeral. We mistake the transient to be the truth. Indeed, the whole of creation would one day disappear; so, it also is temporary. Nevertheless, the body has a role to play. Sight, for example, has been given so that you may see the external world. True, but you should not stop with just seeing. Your vision must be sacred, which means being aware that God is immanent in all the things that you physically see.

You must make an effort to realise that the body is just an instrument given to you for a specific purpose, and you must understand that purpose. Adi Shankara has highlighted this. Once when Shankara was going along with his disciples, he noticed a man vigorously committing to memory the rules of Panini's grammar. Shankara went to that man and asked, "Why are you struggling so hard to master grammar?" The man replied, "Because I wish to become a scholar." Shankara's next question was, "What will you gain by becoming a scholar?" The man said, "I can get appointed in a royal court and earn a lot of money." Shankara continued, "What will you do with the money?" The man had a ready answer, "Oh, I can keep my family happy." Shankara then said, "What happens after that?" The man thought for a while and said, "Well, I suppose I will die." Shankara pressed on, "What happens after death?" The man said, "I do not know." Shankara then advised that man:

*Bhaja Govindam Bhaja Govindam,
Govindam Bhaja Mudhamate.*

Samprapte Sannihite Kale.
Na Hi Na Hi Raksati Dukrn Karane.

“O foolish man, always be chanting the name of the Lord. Scholarship in grammar would be of no use when the call of death comes. It is God’s name alone that can secure redemption.” The body may live long but one day or the other it has to perish.

*When the end has come,
And death has arrived to take you away,
When relatives abandon hope and get ready for your demise,
When your wife and children are crying piteously,
Is it possible to suddenly think of God?*

Is it of any use if you cry for help at the last moment? No! The proper thing is to prepare for the inevitable right from the beginning by constantly remembering God. He alone can liberate you. Besides singing the glory of God, you must also engage in proper action. What kind of action? Action that would bring out the latent human values. The body must be used only for performing good deeds. You must lead a virtuous life. In the end, you must give up the body with good thoughts.

The human body is not eternal. It contains flesh that can decay, and foul excreta. At the same time, present in this very same body are sacred feelings. It is for safeguarding this hidden treasure that you must take proper care of the body. Once the treasure is tapped and duly made use of, the body can be given up. This is the proper way to go through life. You must plunge wholeheartedly and most enthusiastically into service.

*Na tapamsi na tirthanam na sastranam japa na hi.
Samsara sagaroddhare sajjanam sevanam vina.*

The ocean of life cannot be crossed either through penance, or pilgrimage, or the study of scriptures, or even the ritualistic chant of the name of the Lord. It is service rendered to noble souls alone that can set you free. In the *Gita*, Krishna says:

Anityam asukham lokam imam prapya bhajasva maam.

Realising that the world is ephemeral and full of misery, constantly pray to me.

The real reason for protecting and safeguarding the body is that it is the repository of great powers and capabilities. You do meditation; how? Using your body. You transact business and make money; how? Using your body. You become a great scholar; how? Using the capabilities of your body. The body is, therefore, very important. It must be properly used and the virtues latent in it must be fully experienced.

Preserve your purity and resist contamination

Do not make the mistake of imagining that the body has been given for enjoyment, comfort seeking, beautification, and useless pursuits of that nature. Indulgence in pleasure seeking, comfort, and luxury can be dangerous. In one of the wars between Germany and France, France suffered a crushing defeat. Reflecting on this, the then French Commander-in-Chief said, “We lost not

because we lacked courage but because we had become soft by getting drowned in pleasure-seeking.” You can ruin yourself by pandering to the senses. What does one gain from sensual pleasures? Nothing, because these pleasures are all momentary. God has not given this body for indulgence.

Dakshinamurthy was once walking along the seashore. He was the very embodiment of intellect, and always enquired deeply into the significance of what he observed. As he stood gazing at the ocean, he noticed that wind blew some trash into the water. However, the trash was soon swept back to the shore by the waves. This happened repeatedly. Dakshinamurthy then asked, “O mighty Ocean that art fathomless, why can you not accommodate these tiny pieces of matter that are being blown into you? Why do you repeatedly throw them back on the shore? Why are you so selfish? What do you lose by giving in a little?” Dakshinamurthy then sat in meditation, whereupon he heard the Ocean giving a reply. The Ocean said, “Within me there are innumerable treasures like pearls, corals, etc. If I permit this contamination, in course of time it will swamp and overwhelm me completely. I do not wish to become impure and ugly. Trash is not my ornamentation but waves are.”

*For a village, beauty lies in the houses,
For the ocean, the waves are the ornament,
For the sky, it is the moon that confers grandeur,
For a woman, character is true beauty,
And for a devotee of Siva,
Beauty is the vibhuthi adorning the forehead.*

One must acquire that which adds real beauty. For a human being, virtue is real beauty. Today, man is spurning virtue and is instead turning to jewellery for the enhancement of beauty.

Dharma is the best protection

Embodiments of Love! You have a long journey ahead. You must certainly care for your body but this does not mean you must develop body-consciousness. Protect your body by all means and take full care of your health, but use your body mainly to perform good actions.

*Asthiram jivanam loke,
Asthiram yauvanam dhanam,
Asthiram Dara Putradi,
Satyam Kirti Dvayam sthiram.*

In this world, life, youth, wealth, wife and children, etc. are impermanent. Truth and reputation alone are stable. You must, therefore, tread a truthful path, for that alone will earn for you a good reputation. You must protect truth, and without it you have no chance of becoming reputed. It has become fashionable for politicians to advise youth to protect the country. All this is hollow talk. What is it that confers real protection? *Sathya* and *dharma* alone can provide true protection. If *sathya* and *dharma* are upheld, they in turn will duly protect the country.

*Dharmo raksati raksitah.
Dharma eva hato hanti.*

The one who protects *dharma* will be protected by *dharma*, but if one tries to annihilate *dharma*, that person is sure to get destroyed. Does it make any sense to talk about protection of the country after abandoning *sathya* and *dharma*? The country can be protected only if *dharma* is protected. People today have become indifferent to *dharma*. There is no trace of justice, and truth has gone into hiding. Under the circumstances, how can the country be protected? Instead of pompously uttering empty words, the speechmakers should, by their actions, demonstrate how the country ought to be protected. The words that one uses must reflect the situation and circumstances.

Words and behaviour must match one's position

An actor once came to a King's court to give performances. He came dressed as a *sanyasi* (renunciant). The actor sang admirably and discoursed eloquently on spiritual matters. He also gave a scholarly exposition on the philosophy of Adi Shankara. The King was very pleased and offered a lot of gold. The actor said, "O King, a *sanyasi* does not accept gold. I cannot accept this gift." The next day the actor appeared as a dancer. He danced beautifully and pleased everyone present. At the end of the performance the King offered a small gift of just a few coins. The actor said, "O King, this gift is meagre and not enough." The astonished King asked, "Yesterday you refused a substantial gift but today you are demanding more. What is the meaning of this strange behaviour?" The actor replied, "O King, an actor will not be true to his profession if his words do not match the costume he is wearing. Yesterday I played a renunciant and, therefore,

spurned wealth. Today I am a dancer, and a dancer always expects a handsome reward! My conduct must be in consonance with my garb.”

All of you are in the dress of students; you must therefore have the behaviour and conduct expected of students. You must earn the respect due to students. You should be models of humility, for humility is the hallmark of true learning. You must, therefore, be always humble, speak respectfully to elders, and ever adhere to the path of *sathya* and *dharma*. Education is that which fosters noble qualities, keen intellect, truth, devotion, discipline, and a sense of duty. Students have to patiently cultivate all these qualities and attributes. If your behaviour is not in accordance with what one expects from the dress you wear, you will lose respect.

See no evil; see only what is good!

Embodiments of Love! Swami is aware that all of you are highly regarded. Even so, Swami has to say what needs to be told so that you do not become complacent. Proper vision is most essential for a student. You must see only what you are supposed to, and not other things. Do not gaze at everything in the street like a crow! Do you think eyes are given to you for seeing anything and everything? No, no, no! They are given so that you may see just the things a student ought to. Look at your books, and study them. See your parents; you may see your friends but not others. Regard all others of your age as your brothers and sisters, and all older women as your mother. In the ritualistic worship of the Sun (*Surya namaskaram*), there is a passage to the effect that he who

has evil looks would be blinded by the Sun God. Therefore, be warned; bad looks can be dangerous. When walking on the road, look ahead so that your safety is guaranteed. If, for example, you are cycling and your looks wander all over the place, you are more than likely to meet with an accident. Always concentrate on the traffic ahead. Control of looks is so important that Buddha gave special emphasis to it. He called for *samyak drishti* or good looks. Bad looks would only lead you astray into the path of evil.

Once, Socrates was walking, accompanied by his students. He walked with his head bent down, as he wanted to set an example to his students in the matter of looks. Suddenly, he bumped into a man coming from the opposite direction. This other person who was an officer of the State, angrily demanded, “Who are you?” With humility, Socrates replied, “Sir, that precisely is the question I am grappling with! Please can you tell me who exactly I am?” Socrates was strict not only in the matter of looks but also with respect to listening. He never listened to anything bad. You should not lend your ear to all that is being said. Similarly, thoughts too must be kept under tight check. Thoughts must centre around appropriate matters. The questions *when*, *where*, and *what* you must think are all important. Excessive thought can lead to harm. Excessive thinking (plotting) is what the Kauravas did, and eventually paid dearly for it. They were always seized with evil thoughts, and spent all night devising mean and wicked ways of harming the noble Pandavas. The Kauravas came to ruin because they constantly harboured foul thoughts about the Pandavas who were the very embodiment of *dharma*. Therefore,

always avoid bad looks, listening to bad words and talk, and also bad thoughts. Do not ever utter unbecoming words. Always say good things and speak pleasantly. You cannot always oblige but you can always speak obligingly! Students must cultivate such good qualities for they alone are the true ornaments.

Students —boys and girls! In this phase of life, there are many virtues that you must acquire; later, you must make good and active use of them. Only if you accumulate wealth now, can you spend it later. If there are no ‘earnings’ now, what can you do later? You must, therefore, firmly resolve to develop right now, good intellect, good habits, and good speech. Buddha repeatedly stressed the need for *samyak drishti* or sacred looks, and never tolerated any violation of this maxim by his disciples. Bad looks encourage bad thoughts, which ultimately lead to ruin. Looks must therefore be strictly controlled.

Use the body for sacred actions and become ideal leaders

Students! You must all earn a good reputation now and later provide good leadership to the country. The children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. When you become leaders, you must make this country sacred. As are the leaders, so will be the nation. If you are good, the country too will be good. You will earn much merit if you shape yourselves to be noble citizens of this great country of Bharat, that has the reputation of being a *tyaga bhoomi* (land of sacrifice), *karma bhoomi* (land of noble acts), and *punya bhoomi* (sacred land). It is for serving this country in a noble manner that you must really care for your body, and not for any other purpose.

Remember, the body once gone will never come back. Any other thing lost may possibly be recovered but not the body, never. You must resolve to keep the body in good shape till the goal is fully achieved.

*Having resolved what ought to be,
Hold on till you succeed.*

*Having desired what ought to be,
Hold on till they are fulfilled.*

*Having asked what ought to be,
Hold on till you get it.*

*Having thought what ought to be,
Hold on till the thought is realised.*

*With heart mellowed, the Lord must yield to your wishes,
Or forgetting yourself, you should ask Him with all your heart.*

*Persevere, be tenacious, and never give up,
For it is the quality of a student never to retreat,
Abandoning his resolve.*

Embodiments of Love! Swami blesses that you will duly treasure all the advice given to you by elders, guests, and teachers, and make ample use of them in the years to come so that you can lead ideal lives. With this blessing, Swami brings this discourse to a close.

Bhagavan sang two *bhajans*: *Pibare Rama Rasam ...* and *Govinda Krishna Jai*

17 May 2000.

