

Chapter IX. All May Seek Spiritual Wisdom

High and low, rich and poor, male and female—all are affected by illness, and all have the right to seek the drugs that cure illness. So too, all people are affected by the illness of birth and death and all have the right to the drug, named knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-vidya*), that is its effective cure. That is the heritage of all. According to the stage reached by each, the degree of development attained in spiritual discipline, and the extent of assimilation of the drug, each person will improve in health, that is to say, in peace and equanimity. But one thing has to be specially mentioned: along with the drug, the regulations regarding the mode of living have also to be strictly adhered to.

The drug, Brahma-consciousness, has to be supplemented and strengthened by the appropriate *dharma* as well as by cultivation of devotion, wisdom (*jnana*), and discrimination (*vairagya*). Dietary and other restrictions are essential components of the treatment of illness; so also mere initiation into knowledge of Brahman (*Brahmajnana*) is not enough. Without equanimity (*sama*), self-control (*dama*), and the other moral and spiritual excellences, no one, be they emperor or bondsman, high-born or low-born, can reach the goal. Though everyone is entitled to the heritage of knowledge of Brahman, only those who equip themselves with the qualifications can receive it. One must be strong enough to undergo treatment and to digest and assimilate the medicine, right? If the strength is not there, the great physician Himself will not certify that the patient can take the medicine. Some physicians, seeing the plight of the patient, give drugs free to those who are in dire need and are too poor to afford them; what then of the Lord, the greatest physician of all, the source of mercy and grace? He takes into consideration the capacity and need, and He arranges for the supply of the drug.

Women may seek knowledge of Brahman

Now, there is one question: are women entitled to seek knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-vidya*)? This question has already been answered. If women don't deserve this knowledge, how did Vishnumurthi teach Bhudevi the mystery of the *Gita*? How did Parameswara teach Parvathi the *Guru-gita*? "Dhara spoke (*Dharovaacha*)", "Parvathi spoke"—such statements reveal that Dhara and Parvathi took part in the discussions and put questions to clarify the points. The meditational scriptures (*yoga-sastra*) and the sacred-formula scriptures (*mantra-sastra*) were both taught to Parvathi by Iswara. This must therefore be correct, authorized by the scriptures (*sastras*), right? In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, it is mentioned that Yajnavalkya taught the knowledge of Brahman to Maitreyi.

The *Vedas* consist of two parts: the portion on rituals or actions (*Karma-kanda*) for beginners (*a-jnani*) and the portion on spiritual wisdom (*Jnana-kanda*) for the wise (*vijnani*). Even when the scriptures (*sastras*) alone are taken into consideration, they have also two sections; the words of the scholars and the words of the wise, coming out of their experience of knowledge of the *Atma* (*Atma-jnana*). Of these, the words of those who have given up all idea of doer-ship as a result of their realization of the identity of Brahman and *Atma*, of those who know and feel that the same *Atma* is inherent in the multiplicity of life, of those who have lost all distinction between mine and thine, of those who seek the welfare of all animate and inanimate creation—the words of such knowers of *Atman* alone are genuine and valuable.

In the *Brihadaranyaka*, there is mention of such effulgent women-sages as Gargi and Maitreyi, and in the

Mahabharatha, the names of Sulabha and Yogini are found. Women should be inspired by their moral rectitude and their steadfastness and then walk in that path; then only does the question of reaching that height arise. Chudala, Madalasa, and other such women attained knowledge of Brahman while in the householder stage of life itself. Women can, by spiritual practice, attain that unwavering unequalled auspicious Brahman; this is made clear in the *Yoga-vasishta* and in the *Puranas*. Doubts will haunt only those who have not studied the scriptures properly. Novitiates, householders, recluses, all among women, have attained the goal by their pure hearts and holy conduct. All women should strive to acquire these two.

The spiritual guide (*acharya*) is ten times worthier than the teacher of arts and sciences.
The father is ten times worthier than the spiritual guide. The mother is thousand times worthier than the father.

This is the declaration of Manu in the law text *Manusmrithi*. This law text is the binding text for all scriptures on *dharma* (*dharma sastras*); it is the very basis. See what a great honour it pays to the mother!

Lakshmi, the patron of wealth, is a female deity. When addressing letters to women, it is customary to begin, “To ..., who is equal to Lakshmi in every way”. Women are entitled to universal respect. Causative appearances of Godhead like Rama and Krishna, religious teachers like Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhwa, bearers of wisdom like Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Mohammed —were they not all born of women? Their mothers were embodiments of holy glory, and they gave the world sons who transformed it. Women who follow in their footsteps and lead pure, consecrated lives can claim the right to knowledge of Brahman (*Brahmajnana*), and no one can deny it to them.

In fact, the *Atma* is devoid of all differences as between men and women. It is eternal, pure consciousness itself, and self-illuminating (*nithya, suddha buddha, swayam-jyothi*). Women can reach the status of those holy women only when they become aware of the nature of the *Atma*.

The patron deities Saraswathi of education (*vidya*), Lakshmi of wealth, and Parvathi of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) are all women! Therefore, it is unbelievable that women have no right to spiritual discipline, leading to merger with Brahman and to the final emancipation from bondage.

Practise the spiritual injunctions

A lion asleep is unaware of its nature; so too, people asleep in the coils of delusion (*maya*) are not aware of being the splendourful *Atma*. In this stage of ignorance, they elaborate more on their prejudices and give their likes the stamp of scriptures (*sastras*)! The scriptures will not declare so at any time.

Scripture is an eye to humanity; it is the eye that leads and illumines and guides. Follow its directions —that is one’s whole duty. That is the big task before the world today. If the scriptures are fully understood, no doubt will arise, no discussion will be needed.

It is not proper to select and superimpose on the scriptures things that are congenial to you, nor should you go against the injunctions of the scriptures. Even to challenge them and talk lightly of their commands is sinful. The world has come to this sorry pass mainly because the scriptures have been neglected in practice. This is the tragedy, the moral fall.

Aspirants for liberation must first practise the rules and restrictions prescribed in the scriptures for the elevation of character and the consecration of feelings. Devoid of this liberating quantum of knowledge of Brahman

(*Brahmajnana*), mere scholarship acquired by laborious perusal of the scriptures is just so much exhausting burden! Scholars who practise such mere scholarship are like the spoons that turn round in sweets and savouries but do not taste either! The *Mundaka Upanishad* has compared scholars who have not assimilated the essence of the scriptures but guide others, in spite of their own ignorance, to the blind leading the blind, with the result that both the leader and the led fall into the well!

Even without the knowledge of the scriptures, if you have wisdom (*jnana*) gained through experience and practice, you can attain the goal and also lead others along the path you have become familiar with. The dull find no need for scriptures; so too, the holy person who is immersed, always and under all conditions, in the contemplation of Brahman and in the sweetness of that bliss, has no need for scriptures. Of course, strict adherence to truth and practice of *dharma* may entail great hardship, but, having in view the bliss that awaits you in the end, you have to put up with all that and bear them gladly. Only the intelligent can save themselves by knowing the truth; the rest will remain bound.

Classification of the four ages (yugas)

The ages (*yugas*) are classified on the basis of the dominant mental role. In the age of truth (*Kritha-yuga*), it is said that *dharma* walked about on four legs, happy and safe. In the second age (*Thretha-yuga*), *dharma* had only three legs, while in the third age (*Dwapara-yuga*), it had to totter about on just two! In the present *Kali-yuga*, *dharma* has only one leg, according to this tradition.

The four legs are truth, compassion, austerity, and giving (*sathya, daya, tapas, and dana*). A person with all four can be said to be in the Golden Age (*Kritha-yuga*), whatever the age in the calendar. If truth is not steady but one has the other three qualities, one is in the *Thretha-yuga*. If truth and compassion are absent but austerity and giving persist, one is in the *Dwapara-yuga*. If only giving remains out of the four, it is as if *dharma* is standing on one leg, and the person sticking to giving, in spite of everything else having disappeared, is in the Iron Age (*Kali-yuga*)—even if it is chronologically the Golden Age.

The ages (*yugas*) change only with the change in *dharma*, not with the mere passage of time. The wicked Hiranyakasipu and the pure-hearted Prahlada lived in the selfsame chronological *yuga*; the same *yuga* saw Dharmaja, the personification of righteousness and peace (*santhi*), as well as the arch cheat Duryodhana. So, *dharma* is what makes the *yuga* for each; one can always be in the Golden Age (*Kritha-yuga*), if only one has all four qualities of *dharma*. The conduct of man makes and mars history and changes the Golden Age to the Iron Age.