

Chapter 7. Culture of Dharma

The human being is like a seed. Just as the seed sprouts into a sapling and grows continuously into a tree, the human has to grow and attain fulfilment. This requires mastering two fields of knowledge. Knowledge of the world, that is to say, knowledge concerning the manifested universe. And knowledge of the other world. The first confers means for living (*jivana-upadhi*); the second confers the goal of life (*jivana-paramavadhi*).

The means for living are the things that can satisfy one's day-to-day needs. One has to acquire them and store them, or acquire the capacity to get them when required. The knowledge of the goal of life involves inquiry into problems like: "For what end should one live?" "Who is the Creator of all that we become aware of?" "What exactly am I, this distinct individual I?" This enquiry ultimately reveals the goal. The scriptures of all religions and the many moral codes derived from them are concerned with problems that transcend the limits of this world like: "Why are we here?" "What do we really have to do to deserve this chance of life?" "What are we to become?"

Living a regulated and disciplined life

What is the most beneficial way for man to live in this world? The answer: live a regulated and disciplined life. Real education must train one to observe these limits and restrictions. We take great pains and suffer privations to master worldly knowledge. We follow some regimen with strict care in order to develop the physique. Whatever our objective, we obey an appropriate code of discipline.

What exactly are the gains of disciplined thought and conduct? The rules and regulations are elementary at first. Then, they enable one to be aware of regions beyond the reach of the senses. Later, one can journey beyond the reach of one's mind, and beyond even the outermost walls of what is reachable by all powers enclosed in the human body. Finally, one realises and experiences the truth of Truth, namely, one is the One that is immanent in all, that is, in the entire cosmos. One is filled with bliss when fixed in this faith and in this awareness.

This process is the acquisition of real education (*vidya*), the culmination of the best educational process. During the process, real education also instructs incidentally about the ideal configuration of society, the most desirable affiliations between people, the most beneficial relations between peoples, races, nations, and communities, and the best mode and manner for day-to-day life. Real education implants these in the heart, as deep as is necessary for human progress.

Of all professions, the teacher's profession has to adhere to the ideal of truth. When teachers stray from truth, society meets with disaster. Thousands of tender children, unacquainted with the ways of the world, pass through their hands. The impact of their teachings and their personality will be great and lasting. Therefore, the teacher has to be free from bad habits.

Children automatically adopt the habits and manners of elders—this is an ever-present danger. When evil influence is directed toward the thousands who receive the impact, society gets polluted. And, in time, the social evil also contaminates the teacher in some other way. "This is the lesson you taught me, O Lord!" runs the song. The teacher is laughed at and humiliated one day by his own pupils. So, the teacher must equip himself with virtues.

The king is honoured only inside his kingdom. He is adored only within its borders. But the virtuous man is honoured and adored in all countries.

A person may have outstanding physical beauty, may have the sparkle of robust youth, may boast of a high noble lineage, and may be a famed scholar. But if the person lacks the virtues that spiritual discipline can ensure, the person is to be reckoned only as a beautiful flower, with no fragrance.

Following one's dharma

When quite young, Mohandas Karamachand Gandhi witnessed along with his mother a drama on “Sravana and his devotion to his parents”, and he resolved that he must also become Sravana. He witnessed a play on Harischandra, and it impressed him so deeply that he resolved to become as heroically devoted to virtue as Harischandra himself. These transformed him so much that he became a great soul (*mahatma*). Gandhi had a teacher who taught him wrong paths. But Gandhi did not adopt his advice. As a consequence, he was able to bring freedom to the country. In this land of India (Bharath), there are thousands and thousands of prospective great souls. The examples we have to hold before them are the men and women who have learned and practised spiritual education (*Atma-vidya*).

The ancient culture of India (the *Sanathana Dharma*) is acclaimed as of supreme value, not merely by Indians (*Bharathiyas*) but by people of all lands. The reason for its universal renown is that it is based on the *Vedas*. “The *Vedas* are the source of all principles of morality or *dharma* (*Vedhokhilo dharma moolam*)”. *Dharma* implies all the prescriptions for actions and attitudes that are needed to preserve the status one has gained as the highest among animals and living beings. The *Vedas* are the treasure chests that contain all the duties and obligations, rights and responsibilities that one has to accept and abide by in life.

Advice for pupils

In the ancient hermitages, after a pupil had finished the studies, the *guru* gave the pupil such exalted advice as no pupil in any other country received from a master. These were the commands:

Consider mother as God; consider father as God; consider preceptor as God. Speak the truth; act righteously; do not adopt other ways.

Mathru Devo bhava; pithru Devo bhava; acharya Devo bhava. Sathyam vadha; dharmam chara; no itharaani.

This was the advice: “Stop all acts that are unrighteous. Engage yourselves only in such activities as would promote your progress.” The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are referring only to these commands when they lay down that we should utter peace, peace, peace (*santhi, santhi, santhi*), praying for peace on earth.

The advice given to the pupils is, every bit of it, highly powerful. By his devoted service to his mother and father, Dharmavyadha won eternal fame. Through consistent adherence to truth, Rama and Harischandra made themselves immortal. By means of right conduct, mere men rose to the position of great sages (*maha-purushas*). Buddha desisted from harm to living beings. He spoke of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) as “the highest morality (paramo dharmah). So, he was revered as a world teacher.

The real penance in life is to observe disciplines and restrictions as prescribed above. The mind is the foremost of the three inner instruments in man (*thri-karanas*). We must protect the mind so that attachment, passion, and excitement do not enter. These extremes are natural to the mind. The waves that rise in fury in it are the six inner foes of man: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride, and envy. The first two bring the remaining four in their

trail. To release ourselves from the first two and thus proceed on the spiritual path, we have to practise spiritual discipline. We learn these practices through spiritual learning (*vidya*).