

13. Develop devotion to Dharma

HUMANITY has achieved today tremendous progress through science. Astonishing advances have been made in areas like plastics, computers, electronics and exploration of space. On the other hand, in the sphere of ethics, the picture is depressing. The world is confronted with grave economic and political problems. International, racial, religious, caste and communal differences, inter-state conflicts, violent agitations by students are rampant, all over the world. What is the reason for these contradictory developments scientific progress on the one side and moral deterioration on the other. How has mankind fallen to this egregious depth of ethical and spiritual degradation?

Wickedness and cruelty are spreading among men today. Lacking in devotion and righteousness, men are developing only their bad habits and tendencies. Mankind does not lack scriptures like the *Vedhas* (sacred ancient scriptures), the *Upanishads* (*Vedhic* metaphysical treatises), the Bible, the Quran, the Zend Avesta and other great works to show how peace and the higher wisdom are to be got. Spiritual books are published in countless numbers. Nor is there any dearth of religious preachers. heads of mutts, religious scholars, *saadhus and sanyaasis* are proclaiming spiritual and ethical truths to warn mankind. In spite of all these well-meaning efforts, why is it that men's minds are turned towards narrow, unrighteous pursuits?

Social transformation is related to spiritual change

There has been any amount of transformation in the political, social and scientific fields. But all this development is of no avail if there is no commensurate transformation in the mental outlook of the people. Ethical transformation depends on social transformation. Social transformation is related to spiritual change. Without tends to Spiritual transformation, social progress tends to become inimical to human advancement. Spiritual transformation is the basis for ethical transformation.

There is a belief that science is opposed to spirituality. Science by itself tends to make man's life artificial. Demonic qualities like envy, greed, selfishness and ostentation are today dominating men's minds. Selfishness has grown beyond limits in men. Behind every action there is the desire for personal gain. Man is attached to worldly things out of selfishness. The world will make genuine progress only when men give up self-interest and self-centredness.

Dear students! Time is infinitely precious. You should not waste even one moment of it. In a man's life, the period as a student is most valuable and sacred. You should make the best use of it. Milk mixed with water cannot get back its original purity, however much you may try to separate it. But once you have converted the milk into butter, it will not be affected by association with water. It will float above the water and maintain its distinctive quality. Likewise, *Samsaara* (worldly attachment) is like water. The mind of man is like milk. When the pure, sacred, uncontaminated mind is mixed with the water of worldly desires, it is difficult to recover the original purity. However, if in this sacred period of study you derive from your unspoilt mind the butter of knowledge, wisdom and right conduct, you will be able to remain unpolluted by the attractions of the world even when you are in it.

Teachers who can inspire are becoming rare

Students should realise the importance of ethical, *dharmic* (virtuous) and spiritual development. These three should be present in teachers to a greater degree.

The reputation of teachers and their success depend primarily on their conduct. The future of numerous innocent children is in their hands. The good conduct of the students depends on the example set by teachers. The teaching profession is a highly responsible one. Today there are three kinds of teachers. The first type consists of teachers who revel in "complaints." They are the teachers with grouses of one kind or another. The second type consists of teachers who "explain". They "explain" what the students have to learn. To the third type belong teachers who "inspire." This category of teachers arouses the enthusiasm of students and inspires them to take deep interest in their studies. Such teachers are becoming rare these days.

Once the enthusiasm of the student is aroused, learning becomes a creative process. The teacher should patiently understand the problems of students and help to solve them. Teaching today has become more and more mechanical, with each teacher content to "teach" the prescribed portions of the syllabus. Teachers should see whether the students have properly comprehended the subjects taught to them. Any deficiency on the student's part should be ascribed to the teacher's failure to do his job well.

Pursuit of the science of the spirit is essential today

In the field of science today, there is great emphasis on research and discovery. But unless the results of research are applied in practice, it will be an expensive futility. If all the time is spent on research when is it to find useful application in practice? Nor is there any sense of discrimination in the promotion of research.

To give an example: When I attended recently a symposium in Bombay on "Science and Spirituality," a prominent scientist said that the nuclear arsenals of the Big Powers contained enough atom bombs to destroy the world ten times over. What is the sense in building up such arsenals? If you have destroyed the world once, what is there left for the other bombs to destroy? In the process, you would have destroyed yourself.

Those engaged in research seem to be more concerned about boosting their name and fame by their research than about promoting public well-being through the results of their research. Nor do they seem to be bothered about the harmful consequences of their discoveries. There is nothing great about causing harm to others. To destroy a million persons by a single bomb is no great thing. To do good to a single individual in the world is more praise-worthy. The scientific knowledge we acquire must be used for the benefit of our fellow-men. Only that is proper education which prepares the student for disinterested action. The pursuit of the Science of the Supreme Spirit (*Paraartha Vijnana Shaasthra*) is more essential than involvement with the Physical Sciences (*Padhaartha Vijnanam*).

The Supreme is in the subtlest and the vastest

In every *padaartham* (object) in the Universe there is a *Parartham* (Supreme Principle). The physical object is Matter. The Supreme Principle within it is Energy. There is no matter without energy or energy without matter. The *Vedhas* proclaimed this by saying that the Supreme is in the *Anoraniyaan* (subtlest of the subtle) and the *Mahathomahiyaan* (vastest of the vast).

Students! By deriving pleasure from a small fraction of the *Pancha Bhuthas* (Five Elements--Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth) we are forgetting the truth of the Cosmos. What is it that sustains these Five Elements? The five elements have their respective qualities: sound, touch, form, fluidity and smell. The corresponding sense organs in man are important for experiencing these qualities. But the power behind these sense organs should be noted. For instance, the eyes

are able to see things. But the retina on which the images are reflected is more potent than the eye itself. The power of sight is more important than the eye. There are many who possess eyes but who cannot see. There are persons with ears but who cannot hear because they lack the power of hearing. We are trying to control the sense organs without trying to regulate the power that is responsible for their functioning.

For example, there is in the body a digestive organ. When one takes a balanced diet, the food is properly digested and the body is kept healthy. Similarly the body's temperature has to be kept at a certain norm. If the temperature goes above or below that norm it is a sign of illness. Similarly if the Five Elements that constitute the natural environment are kept in balance, the world is in a healthy state. If this balance is upset or if the elements are polluted, then the country suffers in various ways. If the products of science and technology result in upsetting the balance of Nature and pollute the atmosphere or the rivers and the seas, many harmful consequences follow.

Pollution gives rise to many new diseases. Today even pure air has become a rare commodity. Three-fourths of the earth is covered by water. There are many minerals in the ocean bed. But in extracting them, some limits should be observed. Otherwise, even the ocean, which has been adhering to its bounds, will exceed its limits. Even earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are caused by the unsettling of the ecological balance in nature.

The five types of life-breaths or vital airs

Take the body, for example. The body derives its vital force from the Sun. There are five types of Praanas (life-breaths). These are known as *Praana*, *Apaana*, *Vyaana*, *Udhaana* and *Samaana Vaayus*. (*Praana Vaayu* is the life-wind or vital air which has its seat in the lungs; *Apaana Vaayu* is the life-wind that goes downwards and out at the anus; *Samaana Vaayu* is the vital air which has its seat in the cavity of the navel; *Vyaana Vaayu* is the life-wind which is diffused through the whole body; *Udhaana Vaayu* is the life-wind which rises up the throat and enters the head). The *Praana* (life-breath) comes from the Sun. The *Vyaana* comes from *Vaagu* (air). The *Apaana* comes from the earth. *Udhaana* comes from *Agni* (fire). The *Samaana* comes from *Aakaasha* (space). Because of these five breaths functioning in us, we are able to live healthily. There are 72,000 blood-vessels in a human being. The *Vyaana Vaayu* blows through the entire circulatory system. The *Vyaana Vaayu* is derived from *Vaagu* (air). When the air is polluted, the 72,000 blood-vessels get polluted and the effect of this on the *Apaana Vaayu* leads to cancer and heart attacks.

Difference between worldly and spiritually minded

Man needs pure *Vyaana Vaayu* for good health. Students should realise the importance of maintaining the purity of the environment and developing a pure heart in the interests of their body and mind. Some kind of cleaning powder is used for cleaning vessels. Similarly prayer is the means of cleansing the heart. Through a pure heart one achieves spiritual insight. Impure minds are the cause of many heart troubles. When the heart is filled with all kinds of worldly desires, there is no room in it for spiritual effort.

There is a vast difference between one who is attached to worldly things and one who is devoted to Dharma. This may be illustrated from the actions of Dhrona and Bheeshma, the two principal *Gurus* of the Kauravas. Both Bheeshma and Dhrona were supreme masters in the arts of using *Asthuras* (weapons directed by *manthras*) and *Shaasthras* (lethal weapons). But what a difference between the two! Bheeshma was highly spiritually minded. After he was wounded all over the

body in the Kurukshetra battle, when blood was flowing from the wounds, lying on a bed of arrows he taught *Dharma* (righteousness) to the Paandavas. His teachings are contained in the *Shaanthi Parva* (part dealing with peace-keeping) of the Mahaabhaaratha.

On the other hand, when Dhronaachaarya heard Yudhishtira say "*Aswathaama hatah*" (Aswathaama is killed), he did not even wait to hear that it was the elephant named Aswathaama that had died, he concluded that his son Aswathaama had died, and he collapsed on the battlefield. Dhronaachaarya was filled with worldly attachments. Bheeshmaachaarya was filled with love of *Dharma* (virtuous action).

Use scriptures as guides for right action

There is another example in the Mahaabhaaratha of the differences in response of those attached to *Dharma* and those filled with worldly attachments. When the news of the death of her son, Abhimanyu, was conveyed to Subhadra (Arjuna's wife), she saw in her son's death the signs of the impending *Kali age* in which mothers would lose their young children and unrighteousness would prevail on earth. She recalled that during Raama's reign' no woman wept over the loss of her child.

When Arjuna received the news he bitterly lamented the fact that there would be no one to inherit the kingdom after his victory over the Kauravas. What use was there in winning a kingdom after he lost his son Abhimanyu, he wailed. While Subhadra was grieved about the impending plight of all mothers in the *Kali age*, Arjuna was only worried about his personal loss.

Men today are either indifferent to *Dharma* or seek to use even the scriptures for their selfish purposes. The scriptures are to be used as guides for right action. They are signposts showing the way to the realisation of the Divine. We must be ever conscious of what we owe to God. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the light that enables us to see the world, all these are the gifts of Providence. What gratitude are we showing to the Great Giver of all these benefits? We are thankful to many for small favours. But to the Lord who is the source of all the innumerable things we enjoy, we show no regard at all. The man without gratitude is worse than a cruel animal.

Six virtues to be cultivated in life

Students! Realise that without the Grace of the Divine we cannot exist for a moment. Cultivate good qualities and strive for the promotion of *Dharma* in the world. This will give you more enduring happiness than the acquisition of perishable worldly things. Once the sage Maarkandeya asked the Goddess of *Dharma* why she was leaving the earth. She smiled and replied: "I have no place in a land where wickedness prevails and there is no truth or Righteousness."

Education consists in cultivating the following six qualities: "Good thoughts, good actions, adherence to truth, devotion, discipline and discharge of one's duties." When you have acquired the friendship of these six virtues, your life will become purposeful and satisfying.

Students! Concentrate on your studies from the beginning of the academic year itself and develop discipline and right habits so that you may make the best use of your opportunities in the Institute. Teachers should not consider that they are teaching for the sake of emoluments and students should not consider their studies as primarily for the purpose of getting a job. Education must develop in you self-reliance and prepare you for all the challenges of life. With faith in God and leading a righteous life, you must become true citizens of Bharath. The discipline and

regulations you observe now will stand you in good stead all your life. Prepare yourselves to serve society and thereby propitiate God, whose Grace is a greater benediction than all the gains from the world.

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The best saadhana (spiritual practice) is to discover your Aathmic reality and to recognise your kinship in the Aathmic fold with all others. The body has to be kept trim until this is achieved; its purpose too is just this. Keep it light and bright. It is a boat which can take you across the sea of illusion, of false multiplicity. Don't add to its weight by attachment to things and others; then, it is in danger of sinking during the voyage.

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