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Vedic Ideals of Education

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of
Education***

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Cover: The apsaras sprung from the churned milk of the Rig Veda and entertain the gods and fallen heroes with their dancing winsome ways. Every apsara is in a slightly different pose as thousands of them stare outwards from the ruins in and around Angkor Wat. Each figure is almost a millennia old, and they still maintain the fine craftsmanship through the tropical growth and the jungle heat.

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Vedic Ideals of Education and their Contemporary Relevance | 9 |
| Yoga and Knowledge | 34 |

Vedic Ideals of Education and their Contemporary Relevance

Our Contemporary Search

The contemporary moment of human history is riddled with a number of dilemmas, and we find it extremely difficult to resolve them. We erect the ideal of truth, and our quest ends in probabilities filled with mixtures of truth and error; we erect the ideal of liberty; and our experiments oblige us to strangulate it in the interests of equality; we erect the ideal of equality and we find ourselves obliged to abandon it in the interests of liberty; we erect the ideals of peace and unity but we seem to be incapable of fraternity; we erect huge edifices of the victorious analysis of nature, but we find ourselves satiated but not satisfied; we construct marvelous machines and appliances in our rush to conquer space and time, but we find ourselves dwarfed and incapacitated to expand our inner boundaries; we are unable to discover equations of harmony between ourselves and the universe.

At this critical hour, we have started knocking at the doors of past experience and future possibilities. But we are still circumscribed in our search by our familiar categories of thought, and we may be surprised if we are suddenly asked to look for solutions or helpful clues in the Veda, which is the most ancient available record of human experience, composed in antique language, reflecting a mentality quite different from ours.

Vedic Knowledge

And yet, if we consider the Veda dispassionately, applying strict methods of research and interpretation, as has been done by Sri Aurobindo in his "*The Secret of the Veda*", we may find in that ancient record a profound book of wisdom, directly relevant to the central issues of our age, and we may hope to derive from it helpful light and guidance. For Veda is not a mere book of rituals and ceremonies, nor is it a record of primitive or barbaric expression of fear and propitiation of Nature-Forces. Veda is, in the first place, a book of consummate poetry, lyric in intensity and epic in elevation, surcharged with the force of rhythmic word, expressing high substance of thought and experience in inevitable style. It is, in other words, a *mantric* poetry. Secondly, Veda is an exploration of the

human life at all the three levels of experience, – at the most material level, at the intermediate vital and mental level, and at the highest level of spiritual and supramental domains. And, thirdly, the Veda provides well-defined and articulated methods of exploration and discoveries, as also appropriate methods of confirmation and verification. The Veda contains thus a science, and, as in all true science, the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out of all the things.

Perhaps the most important discovery described in the Veda is that of *turiyam svid*, a certain fourth world, a world higher than the three worlds, *prithvi*, *antariksha* and *dyau*, the worlds corresponding to our body, life and mind. In an important hymn, there is a reference to *Ayasya*, the companion of the *Navaguas*, and we are told that *Ayasya* became by this discovery universal, embraced the births in all the worlds and manifested a fourth world or fourfold world, *turiyam svid janayad vishwa janyah*. According to the Veda, the fourth world is the luminous world of *swar*, world of unmixed truth, and if one can dwell in it, one can attain three perfections, perfection of thought and its victorious illuminations, perfection of action and its supreme puissances and perfection of bliss and its highest spiritual ecstasies.

It is by this triple perfection that the Vedic *Rishis* attained to the realisation of immortality.

The Vedic *Rishis* have described, in detail, the path by which that triple perfection and immortality can be achieved. In an impressive and clear statement, *Parashara* describes the path that Vedic *Rishis* followed:

दधन्तं धनयन्नस्य धीतिम्।
आद् इद् अर्यो दिधिज्वा ३ विभृत्राः॥^२

“They held the truth, they enriched its thought; then indeed, aspiring souls they, holding it in thought, bore it diffused in all their being.”

This verse lays stress on the faculty of thought and suggests that thought should be upheld in the truth, and that this thought should vibrate in all the principles of our being.

In another illuminating passage, *Parashara* speaks of the path which leads to immortality:

आ ये विश्वा स्वपत्यानि तस्थुः कृण्वानासो अमृत्वाय गातुम्।
महना महद्भिः पृथिवी वि तस्थे माता पुत्रैश्दितिरथायसे वेः॥^३

“They who entered into all things that bear right fruits formed a path towards immortality; earth stood wide for them by the greatness and by the Great Ones, mother Aditi, with her sons manifested

herself for the upholding.”

This is an extremely important statement and it underlines the fact that the Vedic Rishis achieved their goal, not by escaping from life but by developing powers of our being, including the physical. It says, in effect, that in the highest stage of being, in the state of immortality, the physical being is visited by the greatness of the infinite planes and by the power of the great godheads who reign on those planes. At that stage, the physical being exceeds its limits, opens out to the Light, and is upheld in its new wideness by infinite consciousness (mother *Aditi*), and her sons, the divine Powers of the Supreme *Deva*.

There are further details of the path. There is, first, the emphasis on aspiration. This aspiration is the fire of our inmost being. It is the Vedic *Agni*. It is the *Agni* that enables us to struggle throughout the entire human journey. This *Agni* enables us to seek the help of illumined intelligence, represented by *Indra*. It is *Indra*, who can vanquish obstacles on our path. It is *Indra* who can reveal to us the secret existence of the Supreme Being, as he revealed it to *Agastya*:

न नूनमसित नो श्वः कस्तद्वेद यद् अद्भुतम्।
अन्यस्य चित्तमभि संचरेण्यमुताधीतं वि नश्यति॥⁴

“It is not now, nor is It tomorrow, who knoweth that which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes.”

This supreme and wonderful Reality is referred to in the Veda as “*That One*”, *tad ekam*, or as *ekam sad*. That Reality is, such as we find in the famous declaration of *Dirghatamas*, *ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*,⁵ that Real which is described variously by the wise. But this Supreme Reality and its supreme Light, which is symbolised by *Savitri* is guarded by four guardians, *Varuna*, *Mitra*, *Aryaman* and *Bhaga*. These four guardians have to be embraced and fulfilled. *Varuna* represents vastness and infinity of wideness; *Mitra* represents harmony; *Aryaman* represents austerity, *tapasya*, and *Bhaga* represents the divine enjoyment. The seeker has, therefore, to become as wide as the universe, and attain harmony in all relations of the inner and outer universe. The seeker has to attain mastery over passions by perseverance and the highest effort. The seeker has also to equip himself or herself to bear highest degrees of ecstasy. All this requires sacrifice of limitations, limitations of selfishness and of egoism. The body has to be trained and perfected, the dynamic energies are to be controlled and propelled under the guidance of clarified intelligence, and

mind needs to be offered in an act of union with the Supreme Light.

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि। धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्।⁶

The Supreme Light is symbolised by the Sun, which is the very home of the Truth, the Right and the Vast (*satyam, ritam, brihat*). In that Supreme Light is contained the nectar, *Soma*. It is this nectar which is brought to the seeker by the twin physicians, *Ashwins*. Enjoyment of the sweetness of the nectar of the light builds up immortality.

This goal and this path are described variously and repeatedly by hundreds of Rishis in terms of their authenticated and verified experiences and realisations. This is the core of the Vedic teaching. This, then, is the Vedic affirmation: “Human life is a journey, full of difficulties and obstacles, full of inferior truth mixed with error. This inferior existence we can rise from and attain to the unmixed truth, boundless freedom, and pure delight. This can be attained by burning aspiration, by developing illumined intelligence, by universality, by harmonisation, by purification and by the light that comes from austerity, restraint and self-sacrifice.”

Vedic System of Education

The Vedic Rishi not only announced all this

secret possibility of human life but also built up and perfected a system of education by means of which children and youths can systematically be trained and perfected. They sought to build the bridges between past and the future; they developed not only goals of education but also means and methods of education; they also became themselves teachers and gave example of their conduct by their deeds, by their very life of how to become ideal teachers.

The central pillar of the Vedic system of education was the *Brahmacharin*, the pupil who has resolved to impose on himself or herself the ideal and practice of *Brahmacharya*, which means not only continence, but also a constant burning aspiration for the knowledge of the Brahman. What was expected from the pupil was enthusiasm, *utsaha*, zeal to learn, to discover and to master. Pupils, like Satyakama, Jabala, used to search out their own teachers and seek approval for admission to their *Gurukulas* from them. But teachers, too, used to pray for pupils. The Rishi in the *Taittiriya* Upanishad prays:

आमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।

विमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।

प्रमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।

दमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।

शामायनतु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।⁷

“May the Brahmacharins come unto me.

*From here and there may the Brahmacharins
come unto me.*

May the Brahmacharins set forth unto me.

*May the Brahmacharins have control over them-
selves.*

May the Brahmacharins attain to peace of soul.”

Along with the importance of the pupil was also the importance of the teacher. The teacher represented not only mature worldly and scholarly wisdom but also a high realisation. The teacher was the *Rishi*, who had *seen* the Reality. His task was to uplift the aspiration and knowledge latent in the pupil. The teacher furnished to the pupil the external word or *shruti* that is needed in the beginning and for a long time on the way. But it was recognised that the real teacher is the Supreme Brahman seated in the heart of the pupil, and sooner rather than later, the pupil must discover the inner teacher and inner guide.

The Vedic system of education worked on sound psychological principles and methods of education relevant to the teaching-learning processes. The most important idea was to aim at an all-round perfection. There was a concept of *shreshtha*, the best, or excellent.

The adage for physical education was:

शरीरमाद्य् खलु धर्मसाधनम्।⁷

“A healthy and sound body is the instrument of the performance of the highest ideal.”

The qualities aimed at in regard to the dynamic and vital energies and emotions were those of benevolence, beneficence, compassion, altruism, kindness, as also those of courage, heroism, loyalty, continence, truth, honour, justice, faith, obedience. There was also insistence on the development of power to govern and direct, a fine modesty and yet a strong independence and noble pride. In regard to the mind, the idea was to encourage pursuit of learning and knowledge, openness to poetry, art and beauty, sharp and subtle intelligence, and, above all wisdom. The ideal also included the development of educated capacity and skill in work. While there was an emphasis on the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness, there was also, in accordance with the need of nature, a constant pressure to open up higher faculties of spiritual knowledge and action.

Swadhyaya (self-study) was the cornerstone of the pupil's discipline and method of learning. The teacher had not any set method, but he employed every method that would be suitable for the

awakening of the pupil's interest, capacity and faculty. It was understood that the profoundest truths, like *tad ekam*, were simple in formulation, but hard to practise and realise. Often the teacher left the pupil free to contemplate on one simple formula over a period of years, until the pupil, by means of *manana*, contemplation, *nididhyasana*, constant dwelling, came to internalise the meaning of the formula and arrive at the realisation, *sakshatkara*. Often, the teacher communicated to the pupil in silence or through brief remarks or through dialogues. The teachers interwove their own lives with the lives of the pupils. Togetherness was the watchword of the teacher. He prays:

सह नाववतु॥
सह नौ भनक्तु॥
सह वीर्यं करवावहै॥
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषवहै॥⁸

*“Together may He protect us.
Together may He possess us.
Together may we make unto us strength and virility;
May our study be full to us of light and power.
May we never hate.”*

The pupil was expected to develop extraordinary memory, imagination and thought. The predominance of the oral tradition necessitated the

cultivation of power of memory; the high content of philosophical and spiritual knowledge necessitated cultivation of subtlety and complexity of thought; the setting of the Ashrams and Gurukulas in the open forests necessitated cultivation of intimate communion with nature and the power of inner harmony, imagination and spontaneous delight.

Another important element of the Vedic system of education was in respect of Time. To observe, follow and guide the rhythms of progress, to respect seasons of preparation and seasons of readiness, and seasons of flowering and fruition, to allow for patience and perseverance, to encourage increasing acceleration, to appreciate leisure and to promote quickness of action – all these were harmoniously blended so that each individual got the right measure of guidance, encouragement and inspiration from the teacher and the system.

The Vedic text was indeed the basic content of education. But this implied also a great emphasis on language, pronunciation, phonetics, etymology and grammar. Courses or study also included medicine and sciences and arts of various kinds. For the Vedic text contains profound psychology, astronomy, science and art of living. Study and practice of various crafts were incidental to the day-

to-day life, since the pupils lived in the very home of the teacher. Living with the teacher provided a natural setting for sharing not only daily chores and duties, but also aspirations, trials of life, problems of conduct, and realisation of higher ideals and values. The *Gurukula* system provided to the teacher natural opportunities to teach through instruction, example and influence. Instruction had a role lesser than the living example of the inner life of the teacher. But more important than instruction or example was the influence of the teacher, emanating not from any arbitrary authority but from the nearness of the soul of the teacher to the soul of the pupil.

Overarching the entire *Gurukula* system was the air and atmosphere that chanted the vibration of aspiration:

असतो मा सद् गमय।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय।
मृत्सोर्माँऽ मृतं गमय॥⁹

*“Lead me from falsehood to Truth.
Lead me from darkness to Light.
Lead me from death to Immortality.”*

This is a very brief outline of some of the salient features of the Vedic system of education; but it is obvious that there is a gulf of difference between

that system and the system that obtains today in our schools, colleges and universities.

Our objects are much more limited, our methods lack sound psychological foundations and contents of education confine our students and teachers to a narrow range of facts and ideas presented almost entirely in an uninteresting manner. There is a deep cry in the soul of our country to redesign our system of education.

Relevance of Vedic System of Education to our Needs

(a) A major possession of our times is science, and there is a need to augment the importance that is given to it. The chief merit of science is its precision of knowledge derived from application of the methods of impartial observation, experimentation and verification. Science rejects dogma and unsupported authority. In the work of the scientists, there is perfection of purity and satisfaction, and even if there is any individual error or limitation, it will not matter, since in the collective progression of knowledge the error will get eliminated. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that the balance sheet of science is a mixed one, particularly because when science turns to apply its discoveries and inventions to life-situations, it tends

And Their Contemporary Relevance

to become a playing of forces over which it has little control. Modern commercialism, which is actually economic barbarism, derives much of its brutal sharpness from technology that science has provided to the society. There is, therefore, a growing awareness that all is not well with science, particularly with technology and things cannot be allowed to develop unchecked and unchallenged. It has been contended that science is knowledge and knowledge is power, power for evil as much as for good. We have, therefore, the need to relate science with the dimension of values. It has now been acknowledged that unless human beings increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow. It has been suggested that there should be a synthesis of science and humanism and that science must advocate avoidance of cruelty, envy, greed, competitiveness, fear, lust for power and intolerance.

At the same time, there are no convincing answers to the deeper questions as to how science can be induced to avoid these undesirable things. What is the alchemy, it has been pertinently asked, by which human nature can be changed? This question becomes much more agonising when we realise that neither ethics nor religion does provide us with adequate answers. This has, therefore,

brought us sharply to the theme of science and spirituality. But here, again, the two cannot easily harmonise with each other, if science continues to have its own dogma derived from exclusive materialism which assumes without questioning that physical senses are the only means of knowledge. On the other hand, spirituality tends also to be presented in the form of exclusive affirmations and negations of conflicting religions, or else, it is presented as a matter merely of sporadic or occasional ethereal experiences. It is only when spirituality becomes as wide and open as science and when it develops into an ever-increasing body of authentic knowledge and effective power of realisation and action that we can hope to arrive at a possible meeting-ground of science and spirituality.

But precisely here the Veda can come to our aid. For Veda is a systematic body of physical, psycho-physical, spiritual and supramental knowledge. It is a body of knowledge built up by accumulation of experiences and realisations derived from application of appropriate methods which were themselves determined by repeated and assured results. The Veda is an open book of an ever-widening and ever-integrating science of Yoga.

As in true science, so in Veda, there is no dogma.

Vedic *Rishis* were explorers, they were seekers, they were questioners. The truths that they perceived and recorded were derived from illuminations which occurred to them at the intense point of friction of their questioning with reality. Truths once discovered were enlarged by subsequent discoveries, and, as the Veda itself declared, when the *Rishis* climb higher and higher, vaster and vaster ranges of truth begin to unfold themselves.

For this reason also Vedic knowledge has continued to expand in subsequent ages, even as it has continued to be confirmed. Upanishads themselves marked an advancement, in several respects, over the Veda and that is why they have been known as Vedanta, culmination of the Veda. Again, the Gita is a confirmation of both the Veda and the Upanishad, but also an advancement, in some respects, over both of them. The same thing can be said about the Tantra and many other yogic developments, such as we find in Sri Chaitanya, and even up to the present day, in the mighty yogic endeavour of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Like every science, Vedic science of Yoga has continued to develop, and it is in that background that we can confidently put forward the Vedic knowledge and Vedic system of education as an

extremely helpful aid to our contemporary need to relate science with spirituality. In the harmonisation of these two great movements we can hope to find the solution of the difficult problem of how to change human nature, the problem that seems to be so central for human survival and fulfilment.

(b) Apart from science, another important possession of our times is individualism. Modern science itself was a consequence of the revolt of individualism against authority. Individualism refuses to allow the collective to crush the individual; indeed, it admits rational and reasonable subordination of the individual to the collective good; but it admits it on the condition that the collective good includes the rational and reasonable good of the individual. Individualism goes farther. It seeks increasing affirmation of individual freedom, and it aims at the discovery of the deeper potentialities of the individual and his or her integral fulfilment. In education, individualism has given rise to the concepts of child-centered education, of individual differentiation, and of integral perfection for each individual on the lines appropriate to his or her temperament and law of being. These concepts advocate radical reforms in education and insist on individual freedom not only in choice of subjects but also in choice of teachers, pace and direction of progress.

And Their Contemporary Relevance

Our contemporary need is to place the child in the centre of education, and for that reason to place the child in the centre of society itself. There is a dominant trend towards, what we might call the sovereignty of the child. And corresponding to this sovereignty, we have also the concept of what has come to be called “learning society”. This ideal of learning society is being reinforced by an unprecedented explosion of knowledge and rapid rate of progress in all domains of life.

In this background, the question that arises is as to whether the Vedic system of education can meet our contemporary concern for the sovereignty of the child and the learning society. The question is what place Vedic system of education assigns to the learner and whether in that system there is flexibility to allow for individual freedom. The question also relates as to whether the Vedic system of education had any concept of society comparable to that of learning society.

The answer is not difficult to find. For, indeed, the pupil was looked upon as the central pillar of the Vedic system of education and the *Gurukula* system was so devised that teachers could interweave their own life with the life of pupils. Again, teachers had freedom to suit the programmes of study for

each pupil according to his or her own interests and pace of progress. The concept of *swabhava* and *swadharma* were developed under the pressure of the realisation that each individual has a deeper soul in him or her, which has its own unique path of fulfillment. In fact, the concept of the individual in the Vedic system is much deeper than what obtains in modern psychology. In the modern view, the individual is conceived as a body-life-mind-complex and the highest ideal conceived for the individual is the utmost perfection of physical, vital and mental capacities. Equilibrium of the intellectual, aesthetic and ethical being was the Greek ideal and that is being put forward in our own time. But the Veda conceives of the individual as a pure entity suffused with knowledge and delight capable of guiding, controlling and integrating all the parts of the being. It looks upon the individual as an end in himself or herself because it finds purity and sacredness of the spiritual presence in the inmost depth of the individual. And the entire aim and method of education conceived in the Vedic system is to bring forward that spiritual element and make it active as a guide of the growth of the body, life and mind as also of higher faculties of intuition, inspiration and discrimination. Divine fulfillment of each individual was the goal of the system of Vedic tradition.

Following the Vedic tradition of education, modern India has made bold attempts to resurrect the importance of individuality and human personality in education. Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati spoke of the ideal of *brahmacharya* as an indispensable instrument of individual perfection, and in the *Gurukula* system that he advocated, he underlined the importance of the individual and of the life of discipline, for both boys and girls, for attaining full development of personality. Swami Vivekananda spoke of man-making education and declared that every individual soul is potentially divine; and this is the ideal that has been greatly experimented upon in the educational endeavour initiated by Swami Vivekananda. Rabindra Nath Tagore created *Shanti Niketan* as a cradle of the creative development of personality in its harmonious relationship with universal Nature. In basic education, too, the emphasis on human personality and the harmony between hand, head and heart is unmistakably underlined. Sri Aurobindo gave the concept of integral personality as a harmony of four basic powers of the soul, – knowledge, strength, harmony and skill, – and, the integral system of education developed by the Mother has provided framework that would enable every individual to develop full potentialities of personality as also their spiritual

transformation. These experiments need to be understood properly and we need to draw lessons from there to design a comprehensive process of learning and teaching that can foster the manpower and woman-power that is urgently required at the present moment.

God, unity and freedom were the watchwords of the Vedic system; and to translate this trinity into progressive form of social system was also a part of the aim. This aim can very well harmonise with the concept of learning society. The Vedic Rishis looked upon different stages of life as specific levels of learning and preparation for the next level of learning and preparation. All life was in this view a process of perpetual education. Contrary to the rigid caste system that reigns today, the Rishis looked upon the society as a body consisting of individuals engaged in the processes of learning and teaching. In any case, the Vedic idea aimed at universal emancipation and upliftment of all. कृष्वन्तो विश्वमार्यम् was the call of the Vedic *Rishis*. Common action and common movement, perpetual harmony and perpetual togetherness – this is the social message that the Vedic Rishis have put forward in the field:

सं गच्छध्वं सं वो मनासी जानताम्।
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वे संजानाना उपासते।

And Their Contemporary Relevance

समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी मनः सह चित्तमेषाम्।
समानं मन्त्रामि मन्त्रये वः समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि॥
समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः।
समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति॥¹⁰

“Join together; speak one word; let your minds arrive at one knowledge even as the ancient gods arriving at one knowledge partake each of his own portion.

Common Mantra have all these, a common gathering to union, one mind common to all, they are together in one knowledge; I pronounce for you a common Mantra, I do sacrifice for you with a common offering.

One and common be your aspiration, united your hearts, common to you be your mind, – so that close companionship may be yours.”

(c) But more than all this and more than what the contemporary world demands consciously from life and education is also to be found in the Veda. Veda may be looked upon as the first book of evolution, in which we find the seeds of knowledge which are relevant to the next stage of evolution, of which we are now becoming conscious slowly under the pressure of crushing circumstances. The question here is not merely whether the human being

can be changed, but the question here is whether the human being can be radically changed. The question here relates to the mutation of human species. As Sri Aurobindo points out, mankind is passing today through an evolutionary crisis and in meeting this crisis, the knowledge contained in the Veda is of capital importance. If the present humanity is to be prepared for the next stage of evolution and if for that purpose a new educational programme is to be envisaged, as we must, then the knowledge contained in the Veda and in the Vedic system of education will have to be viewed as directly relevant to our most important contemporary need.

Indeed, this subject is very vast, and one need not enter into it here any farther. But it is very clear that the Veda and Vedic system of education need to be looked into by us with open and fresh eyes, not merely as an interesting chapter of history, but as a treasure from which we can draw for our profit and for our advantage, so that we can build appropriately not only for the contemporary moment but also for the posterity.

NOTES

- ¹ *Rigveda*, X.67.1.
- ² *Rigveda*, I.71.3. .
- ³ *Rigveda*, 1.72.9.
- ⁴ *Rigveda*, 1.170.1.
- ⁵ *Rigveda*, 1.164.46.
- ⁶ *Rigveda*, 3.62.10.
- ⁷ *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Shikshavalli, Chapter 1.4.
- ⁸ *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Brahmanandavalli, Chapter II.
- ⁹ *Brihadaranayaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28.
- ¹⁰ *Rigveda*, X.191.2-4.

Yoga And Knowledge

Knowledge may be regarded as the most fundamental aim of Yoga. Even Hathayoga, which utilises the body as its instrument and aims at its perfection, lays down that the enjoyment of knowledge of our liberated being which brings us into unity or union with the Supreme, is its consummation. A complete mastery of the body and the life and a free and effective use of them established upon a purification of their workings serves as a basis for the more important matter of the psychical and spiritual effects to which that base can be turned. At this stage, Hathayoga takes its stand on the connection between the body and the mind and the spirit and between the gross and the subtle body, and it comes into the line with Rajayoga. A point is then reached at which a transition from the one to the other can be made. And Rajayoga, with its psycho-physical science taking account of the psychical or mental body of which the physical is a sort of reproduction in gross form, aims at the awakening of the Kundalini, the

Supreme energy, lying coiled up and slumbering like a snake in the lowest chakra, ganglionic centre, in the *muladhara*, so that it may rise upward breaking open each lotus as it ascends until it meets the Purusha in *brahmarandhra*, with the aid of various stages of concentration, in a deep *samadhi* of union marked with knowledge. In Karmayoga, works fulfil themselves in knowledge; all totality of works, says the Gita, finds its rounded culmination in Knowledge, *sarvam karmakhilam jnane parisamapyate*.¹ In Bhaktiyoga, where love is fulfilled, it brings Knowledge, and the completer the Knowledge, the richer the possibility of love. “By Bhakti”, says Lord Sri Krishna in the Gita, “shall a man know Me in all my extent and greatness and as I am in the principles of my being, and when he has known Me in the principles of my being, then he enters into Me.”² In Jnanayoga, the attainment of the highest and integral Knowledge is obviously its ultimate aim.

Validity of Yogic Knowledge

The knowledge that yoga affirms is a self-revelation in consciousness where subjectivity and objectivity are discovered to be not independent realities, but as interdependent; they are the Being, through consciousness, looking at itself as subject on the object and the same being offering itself to

its own consciousness as object to subject. There is, indeed, a view which concedes no substantive reality to anything which exists only in the consciousness, or to anything to which the inner consciousness or sense bears testimony but which the outer physical senses do not provide with a ground or do not substantiate. But the outer senses can bear a reliable evidence only when they refer their version of the object to the consciousness and that consciousness gives a significance to their report, adds to its externality its own internal intuitive interpretation and justifies it by a reasoned adherence; for the evidence of the senses is always by itself imperfect, not altogether reliable and certainly not final, because it is incomplete and constantly subject to error. Actually, we are obliged to argue that we have no means of knowing the objective universe except by our subjective consciousness of which the physical senses themselves are instruments; as the world appears not only to that but in that, so it is to us. If we deny reality to the evidence of this universal witness for subjective or for supra-physical objectivities, there is no sufficient reason to concede reality to its evidence for physical objectivities; if the inner or the supra-physical objects of consciousness are unreal, the objective physical universe has also

every chance of being unreal.

It is true that in each case understanding, discrimination, verification are necessary; but the subjective and the supra-physical must have another method of verification than that which we apply successfully to the physical and external objective. Subjective experience cannot be referred to the evidence of the external senses; it has its own standards of seeing and its inner method of verification; so also supra-physical realities by their very nature cannot be referred to the judgment of the physical or the sense-mind except when they project themselves into the physical, and even then that judgment is often incompetent or subject to caution; they can only be verified by other senses and by a method of scrutiny and affirmation which is applicable to their own reality, their own nature.

It may be admitted that all reality, all experience must, to be held as true, be capable of verification by a same or similar experience. In fact, yoga affirms that all human beings can have a spiritual experience and follow it out and verify it in themselves. But just as not every untrained mind can follow the mathematics of relativity or other difficult truths or the physical world such as those of the fourth dimension or judge the validity either

of their result or their process, even so, the truth of the yogic knowledge, can be followed and verified only when the required capacity is acquired by training and methodical practice.

Integral Knowledge

The knowledge that yoga affirms is a knowledge of the truth of all sides of existence both separately and in the relation of each to all and the relation of all to the truth of the Spirit. “That being known all will be known”, such is the conclusion of the Upanishadic inquiry. The Isha Upanishad insists on the unity and reality of all the manifestations of the Absolute; it refuses to confine truth to any one aspect. It declares that Brahman is the stable and the mobile, the internal and the external, all that is near and all that is far whether spirituality or in the extension of Time and Space; it is the Being and all becomings, the Pure and Silent who is without feature or action and the Seer and Thinker who organises the world and its objects; it is the One who becomes all that we are sensible of in the universe, the Immanent and that in which he takes up his dwelling. The Upanishad affirms the perfect and the liberating Knowledge to be that which excludes neither the Self nor its creation; the liberated spirit sees all these as becomings of the Self-existent in

an internal vision and by a consciousness which perceives the universe within itself instead of looking out on it, like the limited and egoistic mind, as a thing other than itself. To live in the cosmic Ignorance is a blindness; but to confine oneself in an exclusive Absolutism of knowledge is also a blindness; to know Brahman as at once and together the Knowledge and the Ignorance, to attain to the supreme status at once by the Becoming and Non-Becoming, to relate together realisation of the transcendent and the Cosmic Self, to achieve foundation in the supra-mundane and a self-aware manifestation in the mundane, is the integral knowledge; that is the possession of immortality. It is this whole consciousness with its complete knowledge that builds the foundation of the Life Divine and makes its attainment possible.

Elementary Methods and Techniques for Integral Knowledge

The starting-point of the method and techniques that Yoga has developed and perfected to attain to the status of integral knowledge is the purification of our faculty of understanding, *buddhi*.

Buddhi is the true reason of human beings which is not subservient to the senses, to desire or to the

blind force of habit, but works in its own right for mastery and for knowledge. It at once perceives, judges and discriminates. Normally, it is mixed with the lower half-animal action; in its purity, it should stand back from the object and observe it disinterestedly, put it in its right place in the whole by comparison, contrast, analogy, reason from its rightly observed data by deduction, induction, inference and holding all its gains in memory and in supplementing them by a chastened and rightly-guided imagination, view all in the light of a trained and disciplined judgment.

The first cause of impurity in the understanding is the intervention of desire in the thinking functions. When the vital and emotional desire interfere with the pure Will to know, thought becomes subservient to them, pursues ends other than those proper to itself and its perceptions are clogged and deranged. For purifying understanding, one must lift it beyond the seat of desire and emotion.

Secondly, the vital parts and the emotions themselves should be purified; they must be trained to rid themselves of craving and attachment.

Thirdly, the heart must be liberated from

subjection to false emotions of fear, wrath, hatred and lust. The tranquillisation and mastery (*shama* and *dama*) is most important for the immunity of the understanding from ignorance and perversion.

Fourthly, the power of understanding should be freed from the illusion of the senses and the intervention of the sense-mind in thought functions. For true knowledge comes by the examination of the truths of the world-force and by the examination of the principles of things which the senses mistranslate to us. The sense-mind must be stilled and taught to leave the function of thought to the mind that judges and understands.

Fifthly, understanding should be liberated from partiality and attachment to its own preferred ideas and opinions and its tendency to ignore the truth in other ideas and opinions. Cultivation of an entire intellectual rectitude and perfection of mental disinterestedness are the radical means of purifying understanding.

The result of this purification of understanding provide to it the capacity of true and complete a perception of the truths of the Self and the Universe.

But for pure yogic knowledge something more is necessary.

First, intellect has to be trained to recognise the faculties of the intuitive mind. This intuitive mind is also sometimes called a higher *buddhi*, which is not understanding through concepts but which consists of vision; it is not understanding but rather “over-standing” in knowledge. It does not seek knowledge and attain it in subjection to the data it observes but possesses already the truth and brings it out in the terms of revelatory and intuitional thought. Our ordinary human mind usually gets nearest to this power of over-standing when there is a great stress of thought and the intellect electrified by constant discharges from behind the veil and there occurs a resultant imperfect action of illumined finding. Again, usually, when one attempts to go beyond this imperfect action, and succeeds in some sort of instreaming of the intuition and inspired faculty of knowledge, it is found that the action of intuition and inspiration in us is imperfect as well as intermittent in action. Intuition and inspiration are immediately seized upon by the intellectual understanding and dissipated or broken up so as to fit in with our imperfect intellectual knowledge or by the heart and remoulded to suit our blind or half-blind emotional longings and preferences. Therefore, secondly, there has to be a great tranquillity of the intellectual activity so that there is a clear recognition

of the true intuition as distinguished from the false and a look upward without impatience and mixtures which begin to invade. Frequency of this kind of movement and the development of great stillness of the mind will create the necessary condition for the knowledge of the Self, of the Brahman.

Thirdly, turning of our consciousness inward for psychological self-observation and analysis is a great and effective instrument. It is only in ourselves that we can observe and know the process of Self in its becoming and follow the process by which it draws back into Self-being. Therefore, the ancient counsel “Know thyself” will always stand as the first word that directs us towards true knowledge. But mere psychological self-knowledge is not enough. Fourthly, therefore, there are further levels of developments until one arrives at what is known as the state of “realisation”, which is making real to ourselves and in ourselves of the Self, the transcendence and universal Divine and it is the subsequent impossibility of viewing modes of being except in the light of that Self and in their true aspect as its flux of becoming under the psychological and physical conditions of our world-existence.

Three Movements Leading up to Realisation

According to the yogic science, this realisation

consists of three successive movements, internal vision, complete internal experience and identity.

Internal vision or *drishti* is the direct perception of psychical things and of the Self. To begin with, we may hold firmly the conception of the Self, – derived from teachers or from luminous teachings. We may fix it by an entire and exclusive concentration; we may thus use the triple operation of Jnanayoga, *shravana, manana, nidhidhyasana*. It is only when after long and persistent concentration that the veil of the mind is rent or swept aside, and a flood of light breaks over the awakened mentality, and conception gives place to a knowledge, – vision in which the Self is as present, real, concrete, as physical object to physical eye that we possess in knowledge.

This experience must become more frequent till it is constant.

In due course, there are other internal experiences so that the vision of the Self is completed by experiences of it in all our members. All this knowledge and experience are primary means of arriving at and of possessing identity.

One not only sees the Self or God, one even embraces Him and become that Reality. The Isho-

panishad describes the great experience culminating in identity in the following terms:

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति।
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते॥
यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः।
तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः॥³

“But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from anything. He in whom it is the Self-being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?”

With this culmination in identity, one is able to live in the supreme Vedantic knowledge, “He am I” (सोऽहमस्मि)

Such is the foundational knowledge that Yoga promises, and from this foundational knowledge, several practical capacities of knowledge and will can be developed which should lift us from what Sri Aurobindo calls seven-fold ignorance to seven-fold integral knowledge. The result for practical life would be elimination of ignorance in our thought, will, sensations, actions and prevention from returning wrong or imperfect responses to the

questionings of the world, liberation from wandering in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling. Our crooked road of blind groping and changing goal is turned into a sunlit path.

Yoga and Science

Yoga has been rightly looked upon as practical psychology, and yogic methods have something of the same relation to the customary psychological workings of man as has the scientific handling of the natural forces of electricity or steam to the normal operations of steam and of electricity. And they, too, are formed upon a knowledge developed and confirmed by regular experiments, practical analysis and constant results. Yoga depends upon the perception and experience that our inner elements, combinations, functions, forces can be separated or dissolved, can be new-combined and set to novel and formerly impossible workings or can be transformed or resolved into a new general synthesis by fixed internal processes. Yoga is an attempt to realise psychological and physical perfection of our being by devising self-conscious means and willed arrangement of activities and by ever-increasing expression of inner-capacities in a persistent and guided effort to unite our being with the Divine

Reality and Divine Nature. Indeed, Yoga is a science, which deals with ranges of the psychical and spiritual being and even discovers greater secrets of physical, psycho-physical and other higher realities and worlds. As in all true sciences, the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out all the things found. There is also in it a high intention to hold the truth, the light found in our inner power or being and turn it to a power of being our psychic self, our spirit, our self of knowledge and will, our self of love and joy, our self of life and action.

NOTES

¹ Gita, 4.33.

² *Ibid.*, 11.54.

³ *Isha Upanishad*, 6,7.

Kireet Joshi

Kireet Joshi (b.1931) studied philosophy and law at the Bombay University. He was selected for I.A.S. in 1955 but in 1956 he resigned in order to devote himself to the study and practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at Pondicherry. He taught Philosophy and Psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education at Pondicherry and participated in numerous educational experiments under the direct guidance of the Mother.

In 1976, Government of India invited him to be Educational Advisor in the Ministry of Education. In 1983, he was appointed Special Secretary to the Government of India, and held this post until 1988. He was Member-Secretary of Indian Council of Philosophical Research from 1981 to 1990. He was also Member-Secretary of Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan from 1987 to 1993. He was the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, from 1987 to 1989.

From 1999 to 2004, he was the Chairman of Auroville Foundation. From 2000 to 2006, he was Chairman of Indian Council of Philosophical Research. From 2006 to 2008, he was Editorial

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