

Straightforwardness and service

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Happy Dassehra to all readers !

This day symbolises victory of good over evil. It's a day in which, after doing the Sarasvati puja the previous day, we rededicate ourselves to learning. So lets renew our commitment to learning all the way until we gain *moksha*.

In the previous post, I mentioned that for the sake of dharma, himsa also should be treated as ahimsa. That is why many of our gods and goddesses were shown destroying evil, but it was not considered himsa.

We move on to another one of the twenty values Krishna referred to in the *Bhagavad Gita*. It's called *arjavam* and is very often translated as 'straightforwardness'. It means your thought, word and deed are in harmony; it is the value of being integrated. A person with the quality of *arjavam* is integrated in terms of his behaviour, speech, and thinking. In other words, your action will not contradict your words, your words will not contradict your feelings. All that you think or say you need not do, but whatever you say or do will be in harmony with your thinking, and that will be in harmony with dharma, the universal value structure. This type of uprightness, this type of integrity will ensure that what you know will flow through into your life. Often, we know what is good for us in the sense that very often we know that we should be, for example, waking up early in the morning and going for a walk or meditating. At the same time, when the time comes to do it, we find that we cannot follow through on this. This happens because we have created too many splits between the thinker and doer in us, by not living by what we want, by living our lies, black or white.... . All this creates a great split between the thinker-knower Me and the doer Me.

We must acknowledge that learning does involve a certain amount of confrontation in terms of the student's values, behaviour, etc. The student could get upset and walk away or understand and grow.

How do you correct this problem? You correct it by bringing in the value of *arjavam*, whereby thought, word and deed are in harmony. . The more I live like this, the more I find myself living by what I know. In other words, all that I know flows into my life. So once I come to know the truth, this knowledge, this wisdom also flows into my life. That is the value of *arjavam*. However, straightforwardness is not about being rude. If I think a guy is an idiot, I don't have to go and tell him that he is an idiot, but I also don't call him an intellectual or a great guy So, all that I say will be in harmony with what I know, but that doesn't mean that all that I know has to be said. I can be kind, courteous, and also be honest at the same time.

The next value Krishna talks about is '*acharya upaasna*', meaning 'worship or service of the teacher'. You will not find a mention of this value in any of the secular disciplines. No student is expected to serve or worship his Physics professor nor does the professor expect it. In fact, the professor expects the student to be slightly sceptical. That's what modern education is about. But, here, what we are talking about is very subtle. With finite words, the teacher has to reveal the infinite truth. In our previous posts, we have seen how it is done. Both the student and the teacher have a very subtle job to do—the teacher in terms of unfolding the truth and the student in terms of listening with total attention. The mind, instead of questioning the teaching, is going along with the words until the truth can be seen. You can question it when the class is over or before the next class...In fact, I have mentioned in an earlier post that one can serve the teacher with a lot of questions. We also have examples of this in our vedic tradition, to name a few – Maitreyi & Yagnavalkya in the Brhadaranyaka upanishad, Bhrgu & Varuna in the Taittiriya upanishad, Shvetaketu & Uddhalaka in Chandogya upanishad and Shaunaka & Angirasa in Mundaka upanishad.

When two a people work together, there is a great amount of understanding between the two. Here, 'guru-

seva' will be helping the teacher in what the teacher is involved in and not about pressing the guru's legs, etc. The teacher could be, for example, involved in running an ashram, in reaching out to others...When a student helps his teacher in these areas, they are naturally working together, and, therefore, both of them develop an understanding and empathy for each other. I have noticed that when two people work together, they have a good understanding of each other, often better than the understanding they have with their life partners. In the course of working together, the student has a better idea of why the teacher is doing whatever he is doing. Therefore, when the teacher challenges or confronts the student, the student knows exactly why the teacher is doing this. Therefore, instead of getting upset, the student will understand why the teacher is doing what he is doing and he will stick to the learning. We must acknowledge that learning does involve a certain amount of confrontation in terms of the student's values, behaviour, etc. The student could get upset and walk away or understand and grow.

Similarly, the teacher also knows why his student has behaved in a particular manner. The student may have behaved in an inappropriate manner, but the teacher knows how to help the student grow out of it, because there is a lot of understanding and empathy between the two.

Another aspect from the student's viewpoint would be that the student is willing to do whatever it takes to gain knowledge. There is a risk factor here about which I would like to caution readers — that there may be some charlatans who may be behaving as teachers but may try to exploit their students. No true guru is exploitative. Once you have discovered your ananda, you need nothing in life and, therefore, there is no need to be exploitative. So if you think your guru is being exploitative, you should be able to confront the guru as well, and then come to a decision whether he is just exploiting you or is pushing you to grow. So it's not a blind surrender, it's a healthy rational surrender. Sometimes the student also tries to take advantage by associating himself with a learned guru, but a real teacher will be able to see through this posturing. So one has to be careful about this value. As long as both student and teacher are on the path of wisdom, there can be no problems.

Sometimes, though, the teacher can also learn from the student as the following anecdote will illustrate. Guru Parmananda and his shishya, Ananda, had been invited to a party. The guru-ji was tucking away into all the goodies. Not used to a heavy meal like this one, he was finding it a little difficult to do justice to the food. His shishya, Ananda, on the other hand, was eating away coolly and topping every bite with a sip of water.

'Why are you filling your stomach with water when there's such a great spread here?' the guru-ji asked, struggling laboriously with a stuffed paratha.

'Guru-ji, have you seen how they make rotis?...They pour water over the flour after which the flour gets compressed and settles down...I'm sipping water to compress the food in my tummy to make room for more...'

'Wow...I'm enlightened,' exclaimed the guru. 'You should have told me earlier,' he said, reaching out for some water after which both of them continued to feast on the lavish meal slowly but surely. On a lighter note then, one can say that sometimes the teacher can also learn from the student.

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