

## Methods of Education in Vedanta (I)

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Vedanta is taken in two different senses. Generally, people take it as a school of philosophy, as a system of thought. There are six systems of orthodox Indian philosophy. Vedanta is supposed to be the best of them.

Vedanta, however, has a much more direct meaning than being just a system. *Anta* of the Vedas is Vedanta. Here, in this term, a school of philosophy is not implied. So we start with what the 'Veda' is. The word Veda comes from the root *vid*, which means 'to know'. But all knowledge is not the Veda. Swami Vivekananda says nicely in his small essay 'Hinduism and Shri Ramakrishna' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. VI, pp. 181-186) that the knowledge gained, or perceived through our five external senses and the inference built upon that knowledge is called science. And that knowledge which is cognizable by the subtle, supersensuous power of yoga is called the Vedas. Here I must tell you that *yoga* should not be understood in the modern sense of the word.

Vedic knowledge has three aspects. Generally, people divide the Vedas into *karma-kānda* and *jnāna-kānda*. But the Vedas are basically what we know as the *Samhitās*. The Vedas, I think, are better divided into *Samhitās*, *Brahmanas* and *Āranyakas*.

The perception of the *devatā* is the basic Veda. Take for example the fire. Fire is in my house, in your house, in the forest, in the ocean and also in my stomach. Is there any difference? No, they all are one and there is

a god, a *devatā*, presiding over that. There is a consciousness associated with fire. Similarly, there are other *devatās* such as *Jala devatā*, *Vriksha devatā* and so on. When we construct a building we usually have to conduct two worship—the worship of the *Vāstu devatā* and the worship of the *Griha devatā*. So the building itself has a *devatā* called the *Vāstu devatā* and the *Griha devatā*. The latter is one who is to stay in that building. So, in the perception of the Vedic rishis, *devatā jnāna* or the knowledge of god is the primary meaning of the word Veda. And when one gets such knowledge of gods one likes to praise them. He says, O, Fire God! You are such and such, you are all-pervading, you are this, you are that. The collection of such praises of all the gods constitutes the *Samhitā* portion.

Now, man is basically selfish. When he sees that the *devatās* are more powerful than himself he wants something from them saying, please give me this, please give me that. This led to the portion which is known as the *Brāhmanas* or the *karma-kānda*. This again is a much subtler perception as you cannot see with the help of your eyes what *karma* produces what results. Nevertheless you may experience that result. So, the relation between *karma* and its effects is also a part of subtle knowledge that is included in the Vedas.

The Western psychology is all behavioural psychology. It has absolutely no idea of what the mind is. Mind is actually a subtle thing which can be perceived. In the commentary on Patanjali Yoga, Swamiji has

pointed out that we are not satisfied with inference after inference. When we propose the subtler elements, or the mind, or the *buddhi* we must perceive them and then generalize further. This perception of subtler entities is also the Vedas. Subtler knowledge or the supersensuous knowledge in the Vedas primarily are of three types namely *devatā jnāna*, the knowledge of *karma* and *karma-kānda*, the direct knowledge of the subtler entities.

Vedanta means the end of the Vedas. This end is not physical. Here, the end means the climax of the Vedas where the highest knowledge is given. So, Vedanta, I repeat, is not a system of thought, or a school of philosophy. The question then is: What it is?

In the beginning, while talking about *devatā jnāna*, we have referred to the Fire God. Though cosmic, it is a particularised deity, for the Fire God is not *Jala devatā*. Similarly, *Jala devatā* is not Indra *devatā*; Indra *devatā* is not Varun *devatā*. So they are just cosmic particulars.

If a man is not selfish, if his mind is pure, and he praises the gods, the very devotion to gods and the praise raise his level of consciousness. And when the level of consciousness is raised, man perceives something different. He perceives that there is One consciousness in this world—*Agni devatā* and *Chandra devatā* are not different. They are different aspects of the same God, just like our eyes, ears and nose through which the consciousness flows. So these different *devatās* are like different aspects of One single consciousness.

Now it is a big jump. If it is a *devatā* I follow the *karma-kānda* and I have every right to pray, ‘O God, give me this, give me that’. But if there is only one consciousness, what happens? I cannot remain separate from you. The One consciousness tells me that there is no ‘I’ and ‘you’. It may be a

reflection of the Supreme Consciousness on the individual body and mind. That is what I am. That is what you are.

The first point of jump between the Veda and Vedanta is this fact of One universal Consciousness. The *Gītā* (13.2) tells us,

*Kshetrajnam c’āpi mām viddhi  
sarvakshetreshu Bhārata;  
Kshetra-kshetra-jnāyor jnānam  
yat taj jnānam matam mama.*

—‘Know Me, O scion of the Bhārata race, to be the *Kshetrajna* (the Spirit) in all *kshetras* (bodies). The knowledge of the distinction between *kshetra* and *Kshetrajna* alone is real knowledge, according to Me.’

So if there is only One consciousness in this world, you and I cannot be separate. The second point is that the different *devatās* cannot be different. The world cannot be different.

Some good Vedantins used to ask me: What is *jada* (insentient)? Can there be anything *jada*? The Sāmkhya philosophy and some other systems propose the idea of *jada* and *cetana* (sentient). But in his book, *Aparokshānubhuti*, Shankarāchārya starts with analysing the concepts of *jada* (insentient) and *cetana* (sentient). He himself raises the questions: Do you want to end like the Sāmkhyas? Then he himself answers, ‘no’, because, the *jada* obstructs our vision. There is actually nothing *jada*. The One consciousness which we like to call Brahman expresses Itself. It is the nature of Brahman to manifest Itself through various names and forms, though names and forms are not true. They are merely empty sounds. Holy Mother Sarada Devi has put the whole Vedanta simply in a few words. To the question—‘What is the world?’—She said, empty sound. Sound is always empty. But to emphasize that, she says that the whole world is an empty sound.

As of now we do not perceive consciousness. What we perceive is the name and the form. Then these become *jada*. *Jada* is the name given by us to the reality when we do not perceive consciousness; we perceive only the name and the form and that we call *jada*.

So from the Vedas we jump into Vedanta due to elevation proposed by the very praise of the gods. Then Veda becomes Vedanta, and Vedanta becomes the knowledge of One Reality. You can call It Existence, you can call It Consciousness, you can call It *Anandam* (Bliss), you can call It *akhandam* (Indivisible), *anantam* (Infinite) and so forth. So this is what is Vedanta.

### Education

Now let us talk about education. I was in Chandigarh for ten years. The education department of the Punjab University once called me to give a lecture on the 'Vedantic Idea of Education'. They used to have an ear for American idiom. That was how they expressed everything. So they requested me to express everything in American mode. I said, I cannot. The problem was that if I expressed my ideas using Vedantic idiom, or in Swami Vivekananda's language, they would not accept what I would say. So I said: Let us start from a neutral ground and see what the New Webster Dictionary says about 'education'. It may not be perfect because it would have a tinge of the Western idea. Nevertheless, let us start with a neutral definition. The way the New Webster Dictionary defines 'education' has no relevance to what real education is, or it is at best an extremely small part of true education. According to this dictionary, the learning or training by which we learn to develop our mental, moral, and physical properties and to use them properly is education.

Please note the definition—the learning

or the training by which a man knows how to control and use his mental, moral and physical abilities is 'education'. Three words are used here—*mental*, *moral* and *physical*. A little bit of physical education has entered our system these days. But what about mental education? Generally, when somebody goes mad you say that fellow is not mentally sound. I am not using that word 'mental'. So I again refer to the dictionary which says, 'mental' means in relation to the mind. But what is mind? Again, take the same dictionary to find what it means. It says, 'mind' is the seat of consciousness, thought, feeling and will by which we develop the mental power. That is, the power of thought, feeling, and will can be developed. Also it is possible to develop the power of consciousness.

Swami Vivekananda tells the Americans: You are trying to develop only that part which you call the rational or intellectual; you have not touched the part which is called the heart. You have not touched the part which is called feeling.

I want to put my idea a little humourously and say that when we make a man literate, we call him *sākshara*. Suppose due to some reason something goes wrong. If the word *sākshara* is reversed, what happens? It becomes *rākshasa* (demon). Swamiji said, this is what you all are producing. You are creating selfish demons (who torture others) simply by polishing or sharpening the intellect; you have no method of training the heart. When someone develops his heart, then and then only you call him a human being—*saras*. Curiously, if you try to reverse the word *saras* you again get the same word—*saras* only. But where is that training of the heart? This is one thing. Again, where is the training of the will? This is another thing. All these come when there is true development of mind.

In the last twenty years or so a new

expression is being heard here and there which makes me very happy, and very sad at the same time. That is *value education*. It makes me happy to think that some people at least are thinking about values. On the other hand, I feel very sad and wonder that if education is not value, then what else it is?

I read a letter of Abraham Lincoln. It was written by him to the principal of a school where he wanted to send his son. It is a beautiful document about education. The sum and substance of that letter was that he was sending his son to the school expecting that he would be an ideal human being, in the real sense of the term. Swamiji therefore says, education is ‘man-making’.

I have tried to define ‘education’, I have tried to define ‘Vedanta’. Now let us come to the subject—‘Methods of education’ according to Vedanta. The aim of education in Vedanta can be put in a few words. Vedanta has got three types of texts as its authority. We call them *prasthānatraya*—the Upanishads, the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasutras* of Vyāsa. The *Brahmasutras* do not give us any new idea. It is only a systematic arrangement of the different Upanishadic texts.

A wonderful thing is said in the *Gītā*. In its second chapter (2.3) we find Arjuna feels that he is filled with *parākrīpā*. The commentator Sanjaya also refers to it as *parākrīpā*. But not the Lord. He says,

*Klaibyam mā sma gamah Pārtha  
naitat tvayy upapadyate;  
Kshudram hridaya-daurbalyam  
tyaktv'ottishtha parantapa.*

—‘O Pārtha! Yield not to unmanliness! It befits you not. Abandoning this base faint-heartedness, stand up, O dreaded hero!’

What lesson do we get from Krishna’s teaching? Krishna does not condemn Arjuna, He condemns his faint-heartedness, his unmanliness. He calls him a hero. But

what happens commonly in families? Because you are attached to your children (or your students in case of teachers), whatever they do, you support them. That is not allowed. That is the result of your attachment. If some wrong thought has entered into them, condemn it, but do not condemn the man. Tell them, you are not bad, only your action does not befit you. You are a hero. You are great. This is the principle of education. You should not support a child’s, or a student’s wrong action because you are attached to him. You condemn the action. But never condemn the child or the student himself. He is great. This principle I am taking from *Gītā*.

### Education in the Upanishads

Now let us go back to education as propounded in the Upanishads. The Upanishadic education may be divided into two parts—the preliminary or preparatory education, and the final or higher education. The aim of the preparatory education is to make a student fit for higher education, while aim of higher education is knowledge or wisdom, perfection (*purnatva*). If you train an individual to become perfect the whole society becomes perfect. But the American idiom tells us that education is meant to preserve and communicate the present culture to future generations. This is how education is used and this kind of education is breeding social selfishness. But if you train an individual to be perfect, will not the society become perfect? Will not the society become happy? Yes, it will and this is the right direction of education.

The preparatory education is best described in the ‘shikshāvalli’ of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, and also in the first five chapters of the *Chāndogya Upanishad*. The ‘shikshāvalli’ is particularly wonderful.

In Sanskrit, you know, there is something called *sandhi* (the meeting point

or link that joins two things together). The teacher of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* is teaching the student with the help of this method. He says: ‘*Athātah samhitāyā upanishadam vyākhyāsyāmah*’—‘Now we will explain the estoric meditation on the *samhitā* (which is a part of the Upanishad).’ The word ‘upanishad’ stands for the secret science. But what is the secret science of *sandhi*? ‘*Pancasvadhikaraneshu*’, ie matters relating to five areas, namely all that relates to the earth and other worlds, all that relates to fire and all shining things, all that relates to the teacher and learning, matters relating to the parents and the child and finally all things concerning the body and the mind.

The teacher first tells the student to open his eyes and look at Nature. He says,

*Prithivi purvarupam; Dyauruttararupam;  
Ākāsah sandhih; Vāyuh sandhānam.*

That is, *prithivi* is the *purva rupam*—meditate on the first part of this *adhiloka samhitā* [first letter in a juxtaposition] as the earth. Then, ‘*dyauh uttararupam*’. The last letter is *dyauh*. Meditate on it as heaven. *Ākasah* or sky connects them. So it is *sandhih*, the meeting point between the two. ‘*Vāyuh sandhānam*’—*vāyu* or air is that which brings about this union. So, what is happening here? The mind of the student is being gradually broadened so that he is able to think of the cosmos, so that his mind becomes cosmic. This is the very process of education.

Then the teacher tells the philosophy about the luminous bodies. He says, ‘*Athādhijyautisham; Agnih purvarupam; Āditya uttararupam; Āpah sandhih; Vaidyutah sandhānam*’. That is to say, consider the first part as fire and treat the last part as *Āditya*, the sun. ‘*Āpa sandhih*’, water is the meeting point while ‘*vaidyutah sandhānam*’, lightning is the link. This is the meditation on shining things.

Next the teacher says about *adhividyām*, meditation on learning or knowledge. He says, ‘*Ācāryah purvarupam; Antevāsi uttararupam; vidyā sandhi; pravacanam sandhānam*.’ That is, the teacher is the first letter, the student is the last letter, knowledge is the meeting place, while instruction is the link that joins the two. The word *antevāsi* used here at once reveals to us that the Vedantic education is essentially *guru griha vāsa*. So the student is not called a disciple. He is called *antevāsi*—one who stays with the teacher. This is all about learning.

Then the teacher goes on expounding the philosophy of progeny in the following manner:

*Mātāpurvarupam; Pitottararupam; Prajā sandhih; Prajananam sandhānam; . . . Adharā hanuh purvarupam; Uttārā hanuruttararupam; Vāksandhih; Jihvā sandhānam.*’ So while teaching the *sandhi*, the teacher is trying to broaden the mind of the student. He is trying to take him out of the individual context and place him into the cosmic context. This is the whole purpose of what is called the preparatory or preliminary education.

I will add a little funny story here. The Pāndavas and the Kauravas were learning from their teacher. On the first day the teacher taught them only two sentences—‘Always speak the truth and never get angry.’ Next day he asked the students: Have you learnt? All of them except Yudhishtira said ‘yes’. Yudhishtira said: I could learn only the first lesson, for I always speak the truth. But I could not learn the second lesson because there are certain things in life which do make me angry.

The *āchārya* got so angry to hear Yudhishtira’s reply that he said, ‘A small lesson I gave and you are not able to master that lesson!’ So, you see, the *āchārya* himself was not educated. This is just a story. But mark Yudhishtira’s honesty. To

him learning means practising the truth. So he replied that he could not learn the second lesson, because he finds he gets angry sometimes. But the *āchārya* was getting so angry he came to beat Yudhishtira on that point. The story tells us that learning means change. Learning should change our character. It should change our mind. It should make us broader than what we are now. That is the preliminary education.

How this education started? There is a ceremony called *upanayana*. In this ceremony, in the presence of the guru, the father gives the *Gāyatri* mantra to the student. Then the guru takes him away to the

*gurukul* where the student is supposed to practise *Gāyatri* thrice a day. *Gāyatri* is a *devatā* of the *chanda* or meter and sun is the deity being worshipped. As one sun gives light to the whole universe, similarly, *Hiranyagarbha* with the cosmic mind is inside all of us. He gives light to our *buddhi*. This is the meaning of the *Gāyatri* mantra. So the students were taught to worship, pray and meditate on him daily. This practice has to be carried even after the marriage of the students. Only at the point of *sannyāsa* this worship drops down because the *sannyasin* aspires to realize *nirguna Brahman* (Brahman without attributes). ■

(To be continued)

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good at length. But it should also be noted that in Advaita Vedanta, the material world of diversity is said to be a presented unreality (*mithyā*) projected upon the Self or Brahman. Though ultimately false, the world is empirically real. *The causal relation is meaningful in the world*. Thus the relation is also empirically real. That fire causes burning is a fact in our day-to-day life. This is an empirical reality. From the ultimate point of view, however, there is neither fire nor burning since the empirical world itself ultimately ceases to be there. *Avidyā* or *Ajnāna* is said to be

positive in nature (*bhāvarupamajñānam*). It has got two functions, namely, concealment (*āvarana*) and projection (*vikshepa*). One is prevented from knowing what is real and is also made to know something else—a mere false appearance. Thus nescience (*ajñāna*) is the cause of the false appearance. But when nescience is removed through self-knowledge, there is Pure Self or Brahman (*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*) alone. There is neither the cause nor the effect. The causal relation is absolutely irrelevant to a realized self getting one with Brahman—‘*Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati*’. ■

#### REFERENCES

- 1 *Hume's Enquiry* (Introduction of J. N. Mohanty). 2 *A Handbook of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Rashbehary Das).

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