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Introduction to Upanishads Volume 5

We have been talking about वेद-उपदेश मन्त्रs *veda-upadeśa mantras* - The Basic Teaching of Vedic Education - as presented in the last Section of the First Chapter of Tattriya Upanishad, which we read and listen, together, at this Temple every week at this time. We have already talked about the context of these Teachings. They read as follows:

वेद-मनूच्याचार्यो ऽन्तेवासिन मनु शास्ति *veda-manūcyācārya 'ntevāsina manu śāsti*

वेदं अनूच्य *vedam anūcya*- Having taught the कर्म काण्ड or the pre-Upanishadic part of the Vedas,

आचार्यः *ācārya* - The Teacher,

अन्तेवासिनं अनुशास्ति *antevāsinam anu śāsti* - gives the following advice to the departing students, in commanding words. Now follows the Teacher's advice and command in the words of the Vedas.

This is the first command सत्यं वद *satyaṁ vada* | धर्मं चर *dharmam cara* |

सत्यं वद *satyaṁ vada* - Speak the truth;

धर्मं चर *dharmam cara* - Follow धर्म *dharma*

These two simple looking sentences are in fact inseparable. When you speak the Truth, you follow धर्म *dharma*, and when you follow धर्म *dharma*, you can only speak the Truth. Thus सत्यं वद *satyaṁ vada* and धर्मं चर *dharmam cara* are inseparable from each other. Together they constitute the single overriding message, the single overriding advice, and the single overriding Vedic command for every human being, in one's daily life.

It is the overriding message in the sense that

- ❖ It is the essential message of all our Vedas, and indeed all our scriptures;
- ❖ It is the essence of सनातन धर्म *sanātana dharma*; - the Eternal Order of Life - the Natural Law of Human Existence
- ❖ It is our every day religion
- ❖ It is Hinduism, in essence.

It is the overriding advice in the sense that



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- It is the surest and the ONLY means of gaining total fulfillment in life;
- It is the only means for realizing Peace and Happiness in daily life - there is no other means.

It is the overriding command in the sense that to disobey that command is only to court self-degradation, and all its consequences. *Therefore, the importance of Vedic Education, conveyed by the words सत्यं वद satyam vada - धर्मं चर dharmaṁ cara cannot be overemphasized.*

This Vedic Message - This Vedic Advice - This Vedic command - has to be brought to the comprehension of every human being, repeatedly through one's life, until the person becomes the very embodiment of सत्यं satyam and धर्मं dharmaṁ in daily life.

Thus सत्यं satyam and धर्मं dharmaṁ, constitute the very core of Hindu life. When we worship God, in any manner, we are only worshipping सत्यं satyam and धर्मं dharmaṁ, and when we recognize सत्यं satyam and धर्मं dharmaṁ anywhere, there we recognize the direct manifestation of God as सत्यं satyam and धर्मं dharmaṁ.

It is often said that we, Hindus, have too many scriptures - indeed so many of them that we do not know even the names of most of them. If that is so, be it so; It is a Blessing. All our scriptures convey the same message, the same advice, and the same command namely सत्यं वद satyam vada - धर्मं चर dharmaṁ cara. So long as we absorb that message, and live accordingly, whether we know more about our scriptures or not, does not really matter. On the other hand, even detailed knowledge of our own scriptures does not mean anything if we do not, for any reason, absorb the essential message of our scriptures, namely सत्यं वद satyam vada - धर्मं चर dharmaṁ cara.

The absorption of this message - this advice - this command - is a matter of continuing endeavour for every human being. That is why, one has to be reminded of this message, again and again, in different ways, and that is exactly what all our scriptures do.

In this process of absorption, the message सत्यं वद satyam vada - धर्मं चर dharmaṁ cara progressively assumes wider and wider, deeper and deeper dimensions, with the growth of one's spiritual maturity, until finally, all notions of धर्मं dharmaṁ merge into सत्यं satyam - dissolve into and disappear into सत्यं satyam,



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and That सत्यं satyam is realized as सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म satyam jñānam anantam brahma.

We will talk about this merger a little later. Let us now briefly reflect on the simple meaning of the words सत्यं वद satyam vada - धर्मं चर dharmam cara.

सत्यं वद satyam vada - Speak the Truth. वद vada means "speak"; "speak" means what? All that we speak is really not speaking. We often misuse our own organ of speech and create problems for ourselves and others.

वद vada means वदनाहं वद vadanāham vada, or वक्तव्यं वद vaktavyam vada - Speak only what deserves to be spoken. Speak only what needs to be spoken.

Speaking is वाक् तपस् vāk tapas, self-discipline at the level of speech, which means, speak with full control over what you speak, so that whatever needs to be spoken, is always सत्यं satyam, हितं hitam, and प्रियं priyam - truthful, helpful and caring. With respect to such speech, सत्यं वद satyam vada - speak the Truth.

Now "Truth" means what? In every day life, सत्यं satyam is only ordinary truth, सामान्य सत्यं sāmānya satyam - what is true to the best of your knowledge in this objective, ever-changing world of plurality. As one becomes mature, one will realize, that सत्यं satyam is far more than सामान्य सत्यं sāmānya satyam. There is indeed a Higher Truth, which is सत्यस्य सत्यं satyasya satyam - the Truth of all Truths, which is never subject to change.

But there is no contradiction between the ordinary truth and the higher truth, and, in fact, the ordinary truth is non-separate from the Higher Truth, and the Higher Truth can be realized only by adhering to the ordinary truth at all times.

Therefore सत्यं वद satyam vada - "Speak the Truth" is an advice and a command for all times - which means "Speak the Truth at all times".

Further, the action of speaking is the distinguishing characteristic of a human being. The action of speaking is the most exalted among all human actions. Being so, the action of "speaking" represents all actions of a human being. Therefore, सत्यं वद satyam vada not only means "speak the Truth at all times", it also means, "Be truthful in all actions - thought, word and deed - at all times".



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Be सत्यं satyam at all times, why? Because, Your true nature is सत्यं satyam at all times, as you will discover later.

Thus the Vedic Education expressed by the command word "सत्यं वद *satyam vada*" is about, one's own very Being, which means, Realize your true nature, and Be your true self - only then, you can enjoy Peace and Happiness.

Now about धर्म चर *dharmaṁ cara* - Follow धर्म *dharma*, move in the path of धर्म *dharma*.

While सत्यं वद *satyam vada* is concerned with "Being", धर्म चर *dharmaṁ cara* is concerned with "Doing". Being and Doing form the entire life of an individual.

धर्म *dharma* is a generic word for कर्म *karma* that is proper. What कर्म *karma* one should do and one should not do, under one's immediate circumstances, that धर्म *dharma* cannot be defined in exclusive terms. That धर्म *dharma* is not simple ordinary ethics in terms of man-made law. That धर्म *dharma* is enlightened, inspired and uplifting action in terms of Sanatana Dharma - Eternal Law of Human Existence.

What That धर्म *dharma* is - one has to discover for oneself, on the basis of ones own विवेक बुद्धि *viveka buddhi* - faculty of discrimination. That is where our scriptures come in. Thus, we must understand that धर्म *dharma* is कर्म *karma* that is proper - but it is not any particular कर्म *karma*. It is कर्म *karma* with a special qualification.

Such धर्म कर्म *dharma karma* is श्रौत स्मार्थ कर्म *śrauta smārtha karma* which means कर्म *karma* that is consistent with the Teachings of our श्रुतिस *śr̥tis*, namely The Upanishads and The भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* and also the lessons of our स्मृतिस *sm̥tis* such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, भागवत *bhāgavat*, etc.

Therefore we have to continuously educate ourselves, by reading again and again, at least some of these scriptures, and try to assimilate their Teachings in our daily lives.

That is why, the next Vedic Command is:

स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः *svādhyāyānmā pramadaḥ* - स्वाध्यायात् मा प्रमदः - *svādhyāyāt mā pramadaḥ*



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स्वाध्यायात् *svādhyāyāt* means स्व अध्ययनात् *sva adhyayanāt* - From one's own study and practice of Scriptural Teachings,

मा प्रमदः *mā pramadaḥ* - do not dissociate yourself, either because of ignorance, indifference or disregard. If you neglect Scriptural studies and practice, for any reason, you can never gain a clear vision of धर्म *dharma*. You will always remain confused as to what is right, and what is wrong, in the varied circumstances of life, and ultimately, you will let yourself down at some point and degrade yourself as a human being.

That is why स्वाध्याय *svādhyāya* and प्रवचन *pravacana* - studying and practicing Scriptural Teachings should never be missed, even while being engaged in various day-to-day activities of life. This was emphasized 12 times in the earlier section of this Upanishad, as a matter of personal discipline. Now it is being emphasized again as the means of gaining Wisdom in daily life. If one has to answer the question "What is Hinduism?"

"सत्यं वद *satyaṁ vada* - धर्मं चर *dharmam cara* - स्वाध्यायात् मा प्रमदः *svādhyāyāt mā pramadaḥ*" is the complete answer.

The Vedic Teaching continues:

आचार्याय प्रियं धनं आहृत्य प्रजातन्तुं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः *ācāryāya priyaṁ dhanam āhṛtya prajātantuṁ mā vyavacchetsiḥ*

आचार्याय प्रियं धनं *ācāryāya priyaṁ dhanam* - इष्टं धनं आहृत्य अनीत्य *iṣṭam dhanam āhṛtya anītya* - After bringing to the Teacher, after giving the Teacher the wealth as you wish as दक्षिण *dakṣiṇa* - as an expression of your gratitude to him, receive the अनुज्ञा *anujñā* from the Teacher - receive the blessings from the Teacher for you to get married, and then,

प्रजातन्तुं *prajātantuṁ* means सन्ततिं विस्तारं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः *santatiṁ vistāram mā vyavacchetsiḥ* - do not snap - do not cut out continuity of family. You do what you have to do, to ensure continuity of family in terms of children and grand children.

The Teacher is now referring to an ancient tradition in the Vedic Society. The student, while living with the Teacher, does not pay any money to the गुरुकुल *gurukul*. In time, the student leaves the गुरुकुल *gurukul*, starts his own career, and just before his marriage, goes to the Teacher, expresses his gratitude to him by giving him some material wealth as दक्षिण *dakṣiṇa*, and seeks his blessings for his proposed marriage.



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Only after receiving the Teacher's blessings, which is called अनुज्ञा *anujñā*, the marriage proposal is finalized, and the marriage itself later solemnized. Symbolically, this tradition continues even today in all Vedic marriage ceremonies. By this tradition, the गुरुकुल *gurukul* institution tradition is maintained, and the Teacher, by his very presence, exerts a beneficial influence in the mutual choice of the families of the marriage partners involved.

In the Vedic Tradition, the marriage partners must naturally share some common spiritual values and traditions, and must also be in a comparable state of spiritual maturity, for the marriage to provide a reliable basis for a stable society. The above tradition of seeking the Teacher's blessings prior to finalizing the marriage decision largely ensures the above criteria.

Further, the overriding purpose of marriage in Vedic Society is to ensure the continuity of the family through children and grandchildren, whose mission is to preserve सत्यं *satyaṁ* and धर्म *dharmam* in society.

Therefore, the marriage and the married life themselves must be governed by सत्यं *satyaṁ* and धर्म *dharmam*. Only then the results of marriage and married life can preserve सत्यं *satyaṁ* and धर्म *dharmam* in Society. That is how धर्म *dharma* becomes सनातन धर्म *sanātana dharma*, and सनातन धर्म *sanātana dharma* protects society through the institution of गुरुकुल *gurukuls* by giving दक्षिण *dakṣiṇas* to the Teachers.

Therefore, the Upanishad says: " Give the Teacher the दक्षिण *dakṣiṇa* due to him, as much as you can, on your own free will. Seek the blessings of the Teacher for your proposed marriage, then, marry according to सनातन धर्म *sanātana dharma*, and live a full life, so that your children and grand children may sustain सत्यं *satyaṁ* and धर्म *dharmam* in the society through Vedic Knowledge and traditions transmitted from generation to generation.

After marriage, life takes different dimensions - even more different than what was imagined by the person as a bachelor. Life becomes more complex, and in the midst of such complexities, it is easy to forget even the fundamentals one learned in one's school days. Therefore the Veda repeats again:

सत्यान्न प्रमदितव्यं । धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यं *satyānna pramaditavyaṁ* । धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यं *dharmānna pramaditavyam*



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सत्यात् न प्रमदितव्यं *satyāna pramaditavyam* - Let there never be any negligence, indifference or disregard, with respect to सत्यं *satyam* - being truthful in thought, word and deed at all times. Indifference to being truthful simply provides an opportunity to fall into falsehood. Once you fall into falsehood, you have already degraded yourself, and it is very difficult to uplift yourself from such degradation. Therefore even forgetfully, or even jokingly, or even to save your life, untruth should never be spoken. Don't be untruthful in thought word or deed, at any time. Similarly,

धर्मात् न प्रमदितव्यं *dharmāt na pramaditavyam* - even forgetfully, even temporarily, either due to ignorance or due to passions, do not neglect धर्म *dharma*. Do not neglect the proper कर्म *karmas* or don't do improper कर्म *karmas*.

Again, neglecting proper कर्म *karmas* or doing improper कर्म *karmas* means letting yourself down and degrading yourself. Further,

कुशलान्न प्रमदितव्यं *kuśalāna pramaditavyam* - कुशलं *kuśalam* is योग क्षेम *yoga kṣema* of the family. The needs and welfare of each member in the family. Therefore,

कुशलान्न प्रमदितव्यं *kuśalāna pramaditavyam* means - Do not neglect your duties with respect to the needs and welfare of each and every member of the family. Further

भृत्यै न प्रमदितव्यं *bhūtyai na pramaditavyam* refers to मङ्गल कर्म *maṅgaḷa karmas* as well as अर्थ कर्म *artha karmas*. मङ्गल कर्म *maṅgaḷa karmas* means activities relating to auspicious occasions, whether they are religious or secular. अर्थ कर्म *artha karmas* means actions to be done to maintain the health and wealth of the family. Therefore,

भृत्यै न प्रमदितव्यं *bhūtyai na pramaditavyam* - means Never be indifferent to मङ्गल कर्म *maṅgaḷa karmas* and अर्थ कर्म *artha karmas* because they are कर्तव्य कर्म *kartavya karmas* - they are कर्म *karmas* to be done . They are ज्ञान साधनं *jñāna sādhanam* - Doing what needs to be done to maintain the health and wealth of the family are helpful to gaining wisdom. Therefore never be indifferent towards them.

स्वाध्याय प्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यं *svādhyāya pravacanābhyām na pramaditavyam* - Even while you are busy doing all these कर्म *karmas*, do not



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neglect स्वाध्याय *svādhyāya* and प्रवचन *pravacan* - studying and practicing Teachings of our scriptures. Scripture reading and practicing the Teachings of the Scriptures must go on every day, all through your life. It is the rule for living your every day life well.

Let us stop to think for a minute. The Veda says again and again. Read the Scriptures and practice the Teachings of the Scriptures every day. Now in the circumstances of our life here, what is the Scripture we should read and follow every day? Fortunately, in our tradition the choices are many and every one is free to choose one's own form of Scripture Reading in accordance with one's own disposition.

On the basis of the knowledge we have already cultivated, the following choice is also open to every person. Just read every day, with understanding and appreciation, what we recite together at this Temple every Sunday, namely

- The Peace Invocations from all the four Vedas, then
- The वेद उपदेश मन्त्र *veda upadeśa mantra* which we are reading right now, followed by
- The first two verses of ईशावास्य उपनिषत् *īśāvāsya upaniṣat* and
- end with शान्ति पाठ *śānti pāṭh* - पूर्ण अदः पूर्ण इदं *pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idam*, etc

That is our Scripture Reading complete in itself. It takes less than 10 minutes to read this scripture and its content when absorbed and followed at all times will certainly keep us prosperous and happy throughout our life time; so is my own understanding. Now let us continue with the वेद मन्त्रs *veda mantras*

देव-पितृ कार्याभ्यान्न प्रमदितव्यं *deva-pitṛ kāryābhyānna pramaditavyam* - Never neglect, never be indifferent to देव कार्य *deva kārya* and पितृ कार्य *pitṛ kārya*. देव कार्यs *deva kāryas* are duties relating to all aspects of one's own forms of worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvar*. and पितृ कार्यs *pitṛ kāryas* are duties relating to departed ancestors. Never neglect such duties. Never lose sight of your roots. Your ancestors are your roots, and परमेश्वर *parameśvar* is the root of all ancestors. When we say ॐ नमः शिवाय *om namaḥ śivāya* you are recognizing your roots. By doing your duties with respect to देव कार्यs *deva kāryas* and पितृ कार्यs *pitṛ kāryas*, you are only holding on to your roots. Never cut your roots, and also, never let others cut your roots.

मातृ देवो भव । पितृ देवो भव । आचार्य देवो भव । अतिथि देवो भव ।



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mātr̥ devo bhava | pitṛ̥ devo bhava | ācārya devo bhava | atithi devo bhava |

मातृ देवो भव *mātr̥ devo bhava* - You be the one for whom Mother is God. Mother is the very manifestation of God. Similarly

पितृ देवो भव *pitṛ̥ devo bhava* - You be the one for whom Father is God. Father is the very manifestation of God.

आचार्य देवो भव *ācārya devo bhava* - You be the one for whom Teacher is God. Teacher is the very manifestation of God.

अतिथि देवो भव *atithi devo bhava* - You be the one for whom The Guest is God. Guest is the very manifestation of God.

These are very beautiful Vedic commands. They have to be understood properly. There is no replacement for God here. There are no descriptions here for mother, father, teacher or guest. There is only one thing involved here, and That is सत्यं *satyaṁ* - TRUTH. Whoever my mother is, I am the son of my mother - that is सत्यं *satyaṁ* - That is truth. That is both सामान्य सत्यं *sāmānya satyaṁ* ordinary truth as well as सत्यस्य सत्यं *satyasya satyaṁ* the Highest Truth - The Truth not subject to change.

In terms of आत्मा *ātmā*, I, my mother, my father, my teacher, my guest and in fact, everyone else are one and the SAME.

But, unless I learn to worship, I learn to respect , I learn to cultivate a sense of overriding gratitude to my mother, whoever she is, to my father, whoever he is, to my Teacher, whoever That is, and to my guest, whoever that person is, I can never realize what सत्यं *satyaṁ* is, what TRUTH is. I can never realize the Divine presence in anything. I can never realize the true nature of existence and I can never realize the true nature of my own self.

Therefore the Vedic command is " Cultivate a Divine respect to your mother, your father, your teacher, your guest, known or unknown, that is the first step in realizing सत्यं *satyaṁ*, in gaining ज्ञानं *jñānaṁ* - Wisdom and in living a life of fulfillment. Further, the Vedic command continues,

यान्यनवध्यानि कर्माणि । तानि सेवितव्यानि ।

yānyanavadhyāni karmāṇi | tāni sevityāni |

नो इतराणि । यान्यस्माकं सुचरितानि ।

no itarāṇi | yānyasmākaṁ sucharitāni |



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तानि त्वयो पास्यानि । नो इतराणि ।
tāni tvayo pāsyāni | no itarāṇi |

The daily कर्मs *karmas* are infinite in number. Then what should one watch about one's कर्मs *karmas* in one's daily life? The Veda says,

यानि अनवध्यानि कर्माणि, तानि सेवितव्यानि *yāni anavadhyāni karmāṇi, tāni sevityāni*

-Those कर्मs *karmas* which are अनवध्यानि *anavadhyāni*, which cannot hurt anybody including yourself, which are proper beyond doubt and which are rooted in proper sense of values,

तानि सेवितव्यानि तानि कर्तव्यानि *tāni sevityāni tāni kartavyāni* - only such कर्मs *karmas* must be done by you

न उ इतराणि *na u itarāṇi* - certainly not any other kind of कर्म *karmas*. A proper sense of values must govern all one's actions in daily life. These values include humility, modesty, non-violence, etc., the 20 qualities Sri Krishna listed in Chapter 13 of भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*.

न उ इतराणि *na u itarāṇi* - the word उ *u* here is for emphasis. It means "certainly". Certainly you should never do any improper action, any action that hurts anybody.

An improper action is improper no matter who does it, even if that person is a learned person or a generally well respected person. One should follow respected people only with respect to their respectable actions, not with respect to their shortcomings.

Similarly,

यानि अस्माकं सुचरितानि । *yāni asmākaṁ sucharitāni*

तानि त्वया उपास्यानि *tāni tvayā upāsyāni* । न उ इतराणि *na u itarāṇi* । - those कर्मs *karmas* that are taught and practiced by us, teachers, as teachers of Vedic knowledge, only those कर्मs *karmas* should be followed and practiced by you, all the time reflecting on them, as a rule of right conduct in life, certainly not any other actions of the teacher.

A teacher is a teacher only with respect to his teachings, otherwise he is just an ordinary person. As a person he may have his own shortcomings. Therefore follow a teacher only with respect to his teachings. Never follow the teacher with respect to his shortcomings. So says the Veda.

The Teachings continue; we will see the rest next time.