

# Book of Enlightening Laughter

Collection of Stories & Anecdotes From the Talks of

H.H. Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Pujya Swamiji had many funny anecdotes from real life as well as from the experiences of his disciples, which he suitably used in his talk to convey vedantic messages. These have been compiled in to a book form, which is being reproduced in this aerial articles starting from this issue. Index indicates the topics that will be covered.

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## TARANA VIDYA

(001)

There is an interesting Indian story that is relevant to the commencement of Vedantic studies pointing out its importance.

Once, there was a great scholar in Sanskrit. He happened to be born in a family of scholars. His father and grandfather were great scholars. He grew up among scholars. He happened to go on a pilgrimage alone. He had to cross a wide river on a boat and there was a boatman to take him across. Since he was the only passenger, he picked up a conversation with the boatman.

He asked him: "Do you know Sanskrit Grammar?"

The boatman said: "No. I do not know."

"You do not know Sanskrit Grammar?"

"I do not. What is Grammar?" the boatman asked.

Because his father and grandfather had been boatmen, he had not thought it necessary to study in order to make a living. Nor did he know that there was a discipline of knowledge known as grammar. The scholar was both astounded and horrified. He had lived among scholars all his life and could not imagine anyone not knowing grammar. He said to the boatman, "You do not know grammar? You do not even know what grammar is? What kind of a life is that? What access do you have to all the compounds in Sanskrit? You must necessarily know grammar in order to enjoy the language. You are only living three-fourths of a life. One fourth is gone!" The boatman did not seem to mind.

The scholar continued, "Do you know at least s̄ahitya, literature?"

The boatman once again answered, "I have not read any literature."

"Did you study phonetics? Did you study Kalidasa?"

Again the answer was 'No'.

The scholar then told him, "Another one fourth of your life is gone."

"Can you read and write?" he asked him.

"No, I cannot read nor write. I cannot even sign my name."

"You cannot read! You cannot write! What can you get out of life? You cannot take a book in hand and read and enjoy it. You can only enjoy what your simple senses can satisfy, nothing more. This means that yet another fourth of your life is gone."

The scholar concluded that the boatman was living only one-fourth of his life since he was alive and rowing the boat. So he told him that three-fourths of his life was gone.

The boatman became very sad now. Rowing the boat, he thought to himself, "My father told me to go to school. He advised me not to be like him. But I had always told him that if he could live his life by rowing a boat, why not me? I should have gone to school. Three fourths of my life is gone. I am living only one fourth of my life."

As the boat continued to proceed, the scholar noticed water seeping into the boat. Alarmed, he said:

"Yeh, down below, there is water under my feet!"

The boatman saw water gushing in through a hole. All efforts to block the hole failed. The boat was now half-filled with water and sinking. It became clear to the boatman that he could not save the boat.

He looked at the scholar and asked him "Panditji, do you know swimming?"

"No," the scholar replied. "I do not know swimming."

Then the boatman said to him, "Panditji, I am sorry. Your whole life is gone."

Without the knowledge that counts, that makes a difference between life and death, what is the use of knowing everything else? Vedanta is like taraṇavidyā, knowledge of swimming, which helps one cross the ocean of saṁsāra.

...to be continued

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