

śraddhā-bhakti-dhyāna-yogād avaihi

Fourth part of the serial article continued from May 2019 issue

If what the *śāstra* says is valid, but we do not understand or we find it is self-contradictory or other *pramāṇas* come in conflict with it, then we need to resolve it. Suppose, a scientist presents a paper propounding a new theory. His theory should not be self-contradictory and should also not contradict proved facts in various disciplines of knowledge. Only then it is acceptable; it is accepted for the time being.

Here too, it is the same. The *śāstra* should not contradict itself. If one *upaniṣad* says one thing and another one says something else, then which one is valid? Both statements are from the same *śāstra* and they need to be reconciled. What it says should also not contradict what other means of knowledge have to say. If *śāstra* says fire is cold, there is *anya-pramāṇa-kopa*, conflict with another means of knowledge, namely perception. *Śāstra* does not say that. Therefore, there should be neither an external contradiction nor an internal one. This is how you understand the *śāstra* and it is how you establish a valid *pramāṇa*.

Suppose, the *śāstra*'s statements appear to be contradictory, then what will you do? You will dismiss the *śāstra*, if you do not have *śraddhā*. If you have *śraddhā*, you will examine your understanding of the *śāstra* and resolve, for good, the seeming contradictions. *Śraddhā* is very important in this pursuit. Lord Kṛṣṇa says¹ in the *Gītā*, "One who has *śraddhā* gains this knowledge."

Śāstra will appear to contradict itself in many places. For instance, in one place in the *Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa praises *karma-yoga* saying, "*Karma-yoga* is better than *karmasannyāsa*"² and asks Arjuna to fight. Elsewhere,³ he praises knowledge saying, "There is no purifier equivalent to knowledge." There appears to be a contradiction here. In another place⁴ Lord Kṛṣṇa says, "Arjuna, you become a *yogin*." To what *yoga* is Lord Kṛṣṇa referring here? Does he mean *karma-yoga* or *dhyāna-yoga*? Arjuna is asking questions because he himself is confused. Lord Kṛṣṇa seems committed to confusing Arjuna. No. Until Arjuna understands Lord Kṛṣṇa confuses him. If we look at it properly, there is no confusion. How are we to look at it properly? Already we go about with a confused mind. How can we look at it properly?

¹ *Śraddhāvān labhate jñānam (Bhagavad Gītā 4.39).*

² *Tayostu karma-sanyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate (Bhagavad Gītā 5.2).*

³ *Nahi jñānena sadṛśam pavitram iha vidyate (Bhagavad Gītā 4.38).*

⁴ *Tasmāt yogī bhavārjuna (Bhagavad Gītā 6.46).*

When we say that *śāstra* is the *pramāṇa*, what goes along with the *śāstra* is also included in it. It is a package deal. We have to understand the package here. First, to look at the *śāstra* as a means of knowledge, *śraddhā* is inevitable. Then, along with the *śāstra* you get a *guru* also. *Guru* and *śāstra* go together. If the *śāstra* has to bless and reveal its meaning to you, you require a *guru*. So *śruti* says elsewhere: “Go to a teacher who is well-versed in the *śāstra*, and who is not committed to anything else except Brahman.”⁵ That is why Āśvalāyana goes to Brahmaji and gets this knowledge from him. Whatever Āśvalāyana got is right from Īśvara. So it is valid knowledge. The *ākhyāyikā*, story, is to reveal the validity of the knowledge.

To understand a book, you require the tools for understanding. The primary tool for understanding a book is the intellectual infrastructure, which is mainly the language. Unless you have the language, you cannot understand what is written in that language. Then, you require certain aptitude to understand. If it is a book that presupposes certain preparation on your part, you require that also. You require covering a syllabus in order to read that book. Unless you cover the syllabus leading to this point, the book will not make any sense to you, just as you have to cover a fourth grade book in order to understand the fifth grade book. Therefore, you need to complete the syllabus.

Here, one can raise an objection: “The subject matter is simple. It is myself alone. Therefore, all that is required is language. If I have the language, why should I have a *guru* included in the package? Why should I buy this *guru* idea along with the *śāstra*?”

It looks as though it is some kind of a trick that the *gurus* play. Like a union leader who creates a problem and then appoints himself as the problem solver, the *gurus* say that the *śāstra* is the *pramāṇa* to know about oneself, and then appoint themselves as the only people who can teach what the *śāstra* says. It is not so. I have many arguments for the necessity of a *guru*.

If we look at the *Gītā*, the first few verses of teaching have nothing much to convey. Then we have this verse:⁶ “*nāsato vidyate bhāvaḥ nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ...*” In this, the meanings of the word ‘*sat*’ and the word ‘*bhāva*’ have no difference really speaking. Both are derived from the root having the meaning ‘to be’. Both being synonyms, will naturally confuse someone who reads this verse. The literal meaning of the above verse is: ‘What is non-existent has no being, what is existent has no non-being’. What can one understand from the above translation? Nothing. Some of the books will read only like this. People’s ignorance is the strength for the *Gītā* teacher.

⁵ *Gurum evābhigacchet ... śrotriyam brahma-niṣṭham (Muṇḍakopaniṣad 1.2.12).*

⁶ *Bhagavad Gītā 2.16*

To understand a given verse in the *Gītā*, you need to understand the whole *Gītā*. Unless you have the whole vision of the *Gītā*, you cannot understand what is said in the individual verse. Even a verse like *aśocyān anvaśocastvam*⁷

you cannot understand properly. Unless you go verse by verse and grasp the meaning of each verse, you cannot understand the whole *Gītā*. Thus, we have here *anyonyāśraya*, mutual dependence—unless you cover the *Gītā* verse by verse you cannot understand the whole *Gītā*, and unless you know the whole *Gītā* you cannot understand any given verse.

This is like a person named Venkatraman, popularly called Venguttu, who has to be married. He was very well known, for he was slightly deranged mentally. The doctor advised that he would be okay if he got married. How to get him married? Unless he is well he cannot marry. Unless he marries he cannot get well. It is called a 'catch 22' situation.

Similarly, unless you know the whole *śāstra* you cannot understand a given *mantra*. You should know the whole. But it is not possible to know the whole unless you go through *mantra* by *mantra*. Therefore, you go to somebody who has the vision of the whole *śāstra*. But how did that person get the whole vision? That person got it from another person. How did that person get it? He got from another person. Who is the first person?

The English third person is *prathama-puruṣa*. In English the first person is 'I' but in Sanskrit the first person is Bhagavān. So you have to go to Bhagavān. There is no other way. too, in the *Kaivalya Upaniṣad*, Brahmaji is the teacher. Brahmaji at least got it from Īśvara. You cannot ask, "From where did Īśvara get it?" Īśvara is *sarvajña*, all-knowledge. Īśvara is the source of allknowledge. The first *guru* is, therefore, the one who does not have a *guru*. He is Īśvara alone.

There is another reason for the need of a *guru* to study Vedanta. It is because Vedanta is a *pramāṇa* in the form of *śabda*, words. You have to go sentence by sentence to understand a given passage and to understand a sentence you have to go word by word. What are the words?

We have words that are verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, particles and articles. Words have only this much scope in any language. When these words fall in syntax, they give rise to a sense and that is the meaning of a sentence. It is really a wonder how the meaning of a sentence takes place.

The Veda says, "You are Brahman." I do not know what Brahman is. Now, I have a new word, 'Brahman'. It is an unknown word. Then I come to know that Brahman is ātman. Nothing is conveyed by these words. The teaching is meant to make me understand what Brahman is. Then one person will say:

⁷You grieve for those who should not be grieved for... (*Bhagavad Gītā* 2.11)

“Brahman is eternal.”

“What is eternal?”

“Eternal is immortal.”

“What is immortal?”

“It is limitless.”

“What is limitless?”

“Limitless is existence.”

“What is existence?”

“It is reality.”

“What is this reality?”

“It is divine consciousness.”

“What is this divine consciousness?”

“It is supreme consciousness.”

“What is supreme consciousness?”

“It is bliss.”

‘Which bliss?’

“It is B-capital bliss. This is spiritual BLISS, not ordinary bliss.”

So, words are simply piled up here. It is similar to the following words:

“What is Brahman?”

“Brahman is *thatha-botha*.”

“What is *thatha-botha*?”

“*Thatha-botha* is *gagabuga*.”

“What is *gagabuga*?”

“*Gagabuga* is *chacha-bucha*.”

“What is *chacha-bucha*?”

“*Chacha-bucha* is *lodaloda*.”

The italicised words that appear in the dialogue are mere jugglery of letters created by Pujya Swamiji.

I can go on and on. If somebody talks like this we dismiss him. But when someone teaches Brahman as 'supreme, divine, immortal, consciousness which is all auspiciousness, purity and at once BLISS' we say, "He talks big, he talks on a high level." These people also say, "Brahman is ever liberated and you have to realise it." What is realisation? The first thing you should realise is you went to the wrong person.

You require a teacher who knows the *śāstra* because it is not *śabda-vācya*, the direct meaning of any word. If it is *śabda-vācya*, then it is easy for you to understand the words; you require only *śabda-jñāna*, knowledge of the meaning of words. If you have the language you will be able to understand, because the subject matter is something available for you to understand through words. But here it is not *śabda-vācya*.

Words like eternal, immortal, divine, supreme and so on, even though they belong to language, are not common; they are not something we understand. What is eternal is not something to be realised, but to be understood. It is knowledge. But how does one understand? One does not understand the word 'eternal' by hearing or repeating it eternally.

The meanings of these words have to be unfolded. Therefore, you require a teacher to handle these words, not merely state the words. A teacher, coming in the tradition, handles the words in such a way that the words really help you appreciate 'what is'. What is being conveyed is limitless which is not available as the meaning of common words, known words. Still, words have to be used to convey. Therefore, words are employed to deliver.

How are they employed? We create a situation in which the words can no longer have the commonly accepted meanings, and at the same time, have their own content. Suppose I use the word '*satya*'. *Satya* means *asti*, is. By the word 'is' we know it to be that which exists. Generally, our concept of existence is in terms of time. Existence, as we understand it, is bound by time. 'He exists but he is not here' means he is elsewhere, in another place. If he is not in another place either, it means that he has passed away, he has gone to heaven. Heaven is a *loka*, a place, and therefore existence is also bound by place. So, our concept of existence is always in terms of time and place.

Now, we want to convey that Brahman exists, but this existence is unlike our understanding of the word 'exists'. Brahman is not bound by time and place. Everything else is bound by time and place; it is all *śabda-vācya*. Brahman is not *śabda-vācya*. Brahman is *śabda-lakṣya*, the implied meaning of the word. Hence, we retain the root meaning of the word '*satya*, exists' and remove all the conditioning factors, like time and place, by using another word '*ananta*, limitless' in apposition. Thus, the reality is conveyed by the word *satya*. At the same time, *satya* is not the direct meaning of any word. So this meaning is to be conveyed by a teacher, creating the proper context.

The teacher creates this context and then makes the words convey only the root meaning of 'asti, exists' without the concepts of time and place that we normally attach to the word 'asti'. This is the special handling of words. How does the teacher come to know about it? He knows because he had exposed himself to the teaching. He is called a *śrotriya*. If anyone says, "I am a self-taught teacher," one should keep away from such teacher. It is not a matter for self-learning.

One may ask, "What about Mirabai?" Mirabai had her own *guru*. She had understood the truth. Her songs do indicate her understanding. She talks about her own *guru*. Some people do not need a regular *gurukula* stay because of their head start, a certain understanding with which they come. They require only brief teaching to get easily connected to whatever they had started with. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that such people get connected to what they understood in their previous birth. One does not quote an exception such as Mirabai. "If Mirabai gained knowledge by herself, why not I?" Never quote an exception.

...to be continued

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Editor.