

*This is the tenth part of the serial article, continuation from Feb 2022 newsletter.*

## ***Sādhana and Sādhyā: Means and End***

**Now the teacher responds to the request of the student.**

तस्मै स होवाच पितामहश्च  
श्रद्धाभक्तिध्यानयोगादवेहि ॥ २ ॥  
*tasmai sa hovāca pitāmahaśca*  
*śraddhābhaktidhyānayogādavehi*

तस्मै - to him सः - he ह - indeed उवाच - said पितामहः - the grandsire च - and श्रद्धा-भक्ति-  
ध्यानयोगात्स्वे - by trust (in the teaching), commitment and meditation अवेहि - may  
you know

To him the grandsire said, “May you know through *śraddhā*, trust in the teaching, *bhakti*, commitment, and *dhyāna*, meditation.” (2)

*Pitāmaha* means grandfather. This is another name of Brahmājī, because, as the creator, all the creatures are his progeny. He is the grandfather also because he created the Prajāpatis, who then created this world. Prajāpati is our creator and father, and his father, Brahmājī, is, therefore, our grandfather or grandsire.

To Āśvalāyana, who thus requested, the grandsire responded.

The fact that the teacher responded to the student's request means that the teacher must have been convinced that the student was sincere and eligible, along the lines we mentioned before. It is just as possible that the teacher may ignore or postpone granting the request. There are instances described in the *śāstra* where the teacher did not respond right away. In the *Praśnopaniṣad*<sup>1</sup>, six learned aspirants go to the *guru*, called Pippalāda. The teacher welcomes them but says, “Live here the life of austerity, self-control, and faith for one year and at the end of the year, ask me whatever questions you have. If I know the answers to your

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<sup>1</sup> Pr.Up. 1.2

questions I will explain them to you.” It means that they were asked to live with the teacher for one year to prepare themselves. Here *pitāmaha* Parameṣṭhī replies to the student right away. However, even though the request is for *brahma-vidyā*, Brahmājī does not start teaching it right away. He first teaches the requisite preparedness or the means to gain *brahma-vidyā*.

### ***Sraddhā*, implicit trust and understanding**

There are two steps in the *sādhana* or means to prepare for this subtle knowledge. The first is called the *bahiraṅga-sādhana* or external means and the second is the *antaraṅga-sādhana* or inner means. *Karma-yoga* or performing actions in the spirit of worship constitutes the *bahiraṅga-sādhana*. Here, however, *pitāmaha* skips this step and prescribes instead, only the threefold *antaraṅga-sādhana*. He says, “*śraddhā-bhakti-dhyānayogād avehi.*” ‘May you know *brahman* through *śraddhā*, *bhakti*, and *dhyāna*, may you cultivate these three qualities, may your mind enjoy these three dispositions.’

The first quality is *śraddhā*. This is not quite the same as faith. We often find *śraddhā* being translated as faith and it seems to create an impression that it is like the faith that is required by other religions. Here the meaning is somewhat different. As Pūjya Swamiji would say, faith is of two kinds: one is believing in something that is unverifiable and the other is believing in something that is verifiable. The first kind of belief is believing in something that you can never verify in your lifetime. Take heaven, for instance. We have to accept the existence of heaven on trust, because we can never see it. As long as we are in a human body, we can never see heaven. For that matter, that there is a God in heaven also becomes a matter of unverifiable belief. Vedānta does not demand that kind of belief or that kind of faith. Vedānta teaches something that we can discover here and now in our own lives. We can verify the truth of what Vedānta teaches. If not now, it can be verified at some later date in this life itself. We can keep on verifying as we proceed, because there are landmarks and we can keep on discovering those landmarks; that is how one’s faith becomes more and more firm. This faith or *śraddhā* or trust is based on understanding, rather than simply on blind belief.

The same principle of trust applies even in the discipline of science. The fact that  $e = mc^2$  is not a matter of belief for a student of physics. He has to equip himself with the proper courses, as well as continuous study, so that he may understand the equation one day; until then he has to have *śraddhā* in a verifiable belief.

A Vedāntin has no need for a faith that is blind or without understanding. Sometimes, it is very convenient for people to have blind faith, "I trust you, so I need not take any responsibility. I am at your disposal so just tell me what to do." Vedāntins do not tell us what to do; they only ask us to understand. If we do something because someone tells us to, it is an obligation we are fulfilling. If our attitude is, "This is how it is said in the Bhagavad Gita, so I should speak the truth," or "Swamiji says I should speak the truth, so I should speak the truth," how long can we oblige this way? We cannot oblige even the teacher forever. We can only oblige him as long as it is convenient and then, at some point, stop obliging. However, when the teacher's value becomes our own value, following the value is no more an obligation. Similarly, here, our trust is based on our convictions.

The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi<sup>2</sup> describes *śraddhā* as *śāstrasya guruvākyasya satyabuddhyāvadhāraṇā*, "the conviction that the words of the *śāstra* and the teacher are true is called *śraddhā*." What is the response of the mind when one listens to the words of the teacher unfolding the scriptures? If the mind resists or if the mind questions, it is not a learning mind; it is not favorably disposed to understand what the teacher is unfolding. The mind should be favorably disposed to the unfoldment or instructions of the teacher. That favorable disposition is called *śraddhā*. As Pūjya Swamiji would say, *śraddhā* is giving the teaching the benefit of the doubt. The *śraddhā* that Vedānta calls for is not simply accepting whatever the teacher says. Having *śraddhā* implies giving fair and due consideration to what the teacher says, because, in the end, it is possible that one may not agree with what is said.

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<sup>2</sup> VC 25

The 'I' is the subject matter of this teaching and yet we already have conclusions about ourselves. The ego is a bunch of conclusions and the ego usually wants to perpetuate itself. Therefore, whenever something is said that goes against the perception of the ego, there is a tendency to resist or reject. One cannot learn as long as this tendency prevails. Having both *śraddhā* and *bhakti* or devotion, the second quality mentioned by Brahmājī, enables the student to identify with the teacher and with the scriptures. It is important for the student to develop identification with the teacher and, through the teacher, identification with the scriptures. Only then can he become objective to his own self.

The learning requires that we scrutinize the various notions and conclusions we have about ourselves. The individual or 'I' is the subject matter of the scriptures and the only obstruction to the right perception of the self is the fact that we entertain various misconceptions or misperceptions about ourselves. It is possible to recognize a misconception only when one is objective with reference to that idea. Therefore, we need to become objective with reference to ourselves and with reference to our conclusions, by creating a distance with them. How do we create such a distance? It can be done by identifying with the teacher and then scrutinizing or examining our own conclusions about ourselves from the standpoint of the teacher and the scriptures.

Traditionally, we do not see a difference between the teacher and the scriptures. We believe that the teacher is identified with the scriptures and, therefore, becomes our gateway to the scriptures. What we really want to learn is the teaching of the scripture, the Upaniṣad. But inasmuch as we do not have the direct access to the Upaniṣad, the teacher becomes our gateway to the Upaniṣad. Because we accept that the teacher is identified with the scripture, our identification with the teacher also becomes identification with the scripture. It is then that we can examine our own conclusions about ourselves, about the world, and about God from the standpoint of the scripture, and whenever we find that our conclusions need to be changed, we are willing to change them. That degree of preparedness is all

that is required.

It is necessary that we understand and realize the fallacy of our own notions about ourselves because it is in that understanding that the notions can be dropped. This is the process of letting go of our notions, called the letting go of ignorance. It is possible to let go of one's notions only when there is *śraddhā*, the implicit trust that what the teacher is saying is right. We see him as a well-wisher and recognize that he has no agenda. We know that there is no reason why the scriptures or teacher should wish ill of us or misguide us. That person alone is ideally suited to be a teacher who has no personal agenda and no agenda for the student. Other than a commitment to make the student see the self the teacher doesn't want anything, so when the student is convinced of this, it is very easy for him to surrender to the teacher. *Tadviddhi praṇipātena*, "Know that by prostration (to the wise)."<sup>3</sup> Such *praṇipāta* or long prostration is nothing but the student's expression of faith and trust. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *śraddhāvān labhate jñānam*, "One who has *śraddhā* indeed gains the knowledge."<sup>4</sup> So having *śraddhā* is required as an *antaraṅga-sādhana* or internal means. It is not possible to will *śraddhā*, just as it is not possible to will love. One cannot will to have trust in somebody; it just has to happen.

I often come across the question, "How does one find a *guru*?" Well, somehow it has to click. When one discovers *śraddhā* and *bhakti* for a teacher, I would say it has clicked. It is nothing but the grace of God; it is the grace of our virtuous deeds or *punyakarma*. If we find that we lack *śraddhā* and *bhakti*, we can pray to the Lord to grant us *śraddhā* and *bhakti*.

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<sup>3</sup> BG 4.34

<sup>3</sup> BG 4.39

*To be continued...*