

1. Then, Ashvalayana addressed the Lord, and said, "Teach, O Bhagavan, the knowledge of the Absolute, the highest, always cultivated by the good, ever a hidden secret, and by which a wise man can drive away all sins and reach that Absolute."

Discontented with the world of appearance and the knowledge of worldly affairs, seeker Ashvalayana urges the Lord to impart to him the highest of the high – the knowledge of the Absolute. The Absolute, being Infinite and Eternal, can hardly be defined in human language, but has often been described by Indian sages as the ultimate Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Transcendental

Bliss [*Satyam, Shivam , Sundaram* and full of *Paramananda*].

Undoubtedly, the goal of everyone's life, including seekers of 'SELF REALISATION', is happiness/bliss. From time immemorial, man has sought happiness through sense gratification from the objects of the world. These material pleasures [*preyas*] are short-term, but make tall promises of enduring bliss [*shreyas*] and of long-term solutions for our inner lack of fulfillment. Over time, all such false promises fail.

We do get glimpses of that 'real' happiness from time to time, but it always somehow manages to escape us. So we keep searching and searching everywhere for it.

But eventually, this constant search feels all in vain.

It is at this time---when the thirst is intense---that we seek out a Guru to help us find the source of permanent bliss. A time arrives in our lives when we all begin a new search---a search for real happiness. We begin this new search because every object seems to have failed to deliver what it had promised.

At this time, there arises the need of the seeker, (the Ashvanalaya within each of us), to approach a GOD/SELF-realized soul who can 'reveal' the 'secret' to that lasting happiness we all so desperately seek, yet never quite find.

We have heard the truth of the matter many times, from many saints, jnanis, and yogis ---that real happiness lies within. So we all do know that the key to unlock the door to happiness is within us.

What it means in the context of this verse is that the SELF is hidden. From experience, we can definitely say that Truth is indeed hidden. It is not as readily available as is suggested by most spiritual teachers these days.

When we first try to meditate by closing our eyes and directing attention within, what we see is a form of darkness with lots of thoughts and emotions arising

like waves within us. And as we intensify our meditative search by repeatedly bringing our attention from the outer to the inner, we can actually feel that there are lots of 'hidden' things within us that keep arising. From time to time, things like thoughts, emotions, images, and memories reveal themselves to us, as well as engage and bind us. These things keep changing and are transient.

Far beneath these transient, changeable things, what is truly hidden, never-changing, and ever-present is the sense of presence---the 'I AMness.' This is the purest form of SELF. That is why Bhagavan, the Lord, calls it a secret. It is that 'I AMness'

which is hidden deep within, covered by the five koshas (sheaths), but at the same time, also ever-present and ever-available. Just how such ignorance of the Truth is ever possible---while Truth stares us in the face---is the real mystery, the hidden secret.

The world offers various streams of knowledge---like medicine, commerce, engineering, and the arts. Yet there is only ONE stream of knowledge that can drive away sin forever. That is knowledge of the SELF!

Contrary to what we might believe, a sin is not an act we have wrongfully committed by violating man-made or divine laws. In truth, the biggest sin is

to be unhappy! It is a fact that no matter what stream of knowledge we may have excelled in, we will always be plagued by the sin of unhappiness---until we have come to abide firmly in the SELF. All forms of knowledge acquired from the world have limitations. But there are no limitations to the science of Self-realization acquired from a competent teacher or Guru who comes from a reputed lineage and who has walked the path himself.

It has been observed by the ancient sages that one cannot be totally free from unhappiness (sin) unless his mind remains free from agitation, and one

cannot be free from agitation unless he can be free from *vasanas*, the habitual tendencies that create such agitation.

Therefore, it becomes critically important for those who want to know the secret of Self-realization to also know the secret of how to destroy the seeds of *vasanas*. These two secrets compliment each other, as it were.

2. And to him the Lord said, "Know this by means of faith, devotion, and meditation. Not by works, nor by progeny, nor by wealth. But by renunciation alone is Immortality attained."

In this verse, the Lord has given us three recipes---the three most important qualities---for gaining the happiness of Self-realization. He has also thrown light on the three commonly held misconceptions that cause us to believe we can gain happiness from the world.

>>>“Know this by means of faith, devotion and meditation.”<<

When you are on the spiritual journey and reach a Guru or teacher, it is most important to have faith in his teachings and to follow his instructions. If you are always doubting the Guru, you will be busy finding every reason to escape his instructions. All the time, you will doubt either your

Guru or yourself. That is why one needs to have faith and trust as prerequisites to get the right results. Some of the instructions from the Guru may not appear to be what you want or desire from him, but you need to understand that the Guru gives what you need and not what you want. The wanting and desires all come from the mind---the cause of all your suffering. On the other hand, as you begin to see the good results of following the instructions of your Guru, you develop more and more faith in the Guru as well as the teachings.

But Bhakti [devotion] is a more subtle, pure and refined form than faith. A bhakta [devotee] does not even care about the results. He has

moved far beyond any measurement of his sadhana. A real bhakta's love and devotion for the Almighty Lord are totally unconditional. Curiously, there could be times when even a bhakta may not feel love in his heart for God, or for anyone else. This is a phase of 'dryness.' Yet the bhakta continues to pour his loving attention into his heart, in an effort to get a response from the Lord.

When love for God and His response to our love finally begin to flow effortlessly, our practice matures into meditation. The Lord's response to us is through the 'I AMness'. Focusing on the 'I AM', we first begin to experience deep peace and stillness, which then gradually transform into a joy and

bliss unparalleled and unmatched by any experience of the world. When we find ourselves firmly established in deep peace and joy, then that peace and joy become love for each and every being of the world. We realize that, in essence, God's response is not through the 'I AM' that appears to embody just me, but through the 'I AM' that truly embodies every sentient being.

The Lord purposely states the three qualities in the given sequence because faith leads us to devotion, and devotion automatically matures into meditation.

>>> "Not by works, nor by progeny, nor by wealth. But by

renunciation alone is Immortality attained." <<<

It is ironic that even though death constantly occurs around us, we do not give much thought to it. It never crosses our minds that death can be round the corner, and that we need to make optimum use of our human form. We get busy and preoccupied with the worldly objects, pleasures, family and earnings. An ordinary man, whose consciousness is steeped in deep ignorance, has no other means to prepare to become 'immortal' other than what he has learned through the world. Ordinarily, work, progeny (children), and wealth are the three means through which happiness is derived from the

world, along with the hope of living on in people's memories!

Let us first examine work. It has been our long-held belief that through outer work, and by keeping ourselves outwardly busy, we can be happy. It has been so deeply entrenched in our consciousness that without work, most of us feel empty and insecure. Society too looks down upon those who do not work. That is why most of us who retire from active work often fall into depression. We somehow equate work with self-confidence and self-worth.

With work, there is position, with position there is often dominance over others, and with dominance there is false pride. This pride gives

rise to ego and a false sense of 'doership'. That sense of accomplishment and worthiness disappears when there is no longer any work. Moreover, when the work we do does not yield the desired result, there is frustration and agitation.

Of course, this verse does not indicate that we have to remain without any outer work. Without work, there can be no personal progress, and no contribution to the betterment of the society. But what is suggested by the Lord is that we must get rid of the hope that work alone is sufficient to make us happy.

The real way to gain true happiness is only through

renunciation (*tyaga*). For that, we must not be totally preoccupied by outer work. We must also begin inner work as soon as possible. This will help us with renunciation--the automatic rewards, satisfaction, and dividends of which are carried with us even when the physical body is left behind.

Next, let us examine progeny. Progeny literally means 'children'--our chance of perpetuating ourselves, and our hopes and dreams, even after our physical death! We believe that we can be alive through our children since they represent us and our bloodlines. Lots of investment and energy go into feeding that dream. But alas, despite our best efforts, destiny has its own plan, and a lot

of frustration and pain ensues when things do not unfold according to our desires and hopes.

Symbolically, 'progeny' means relationships with those who depend on us, and on whom we depend. We often fall back for happiness on those people with whom there is mutual dependency. However, no matter how deep a worldly relationship is, there is always something missing. Relationships cannot be looked upon as the only way to find happiness.

We can look back in time and remember the various 'deep' relationships we have had, and recall the hope of happiness we had for each of them. We can then

also remember the disappointment and pain that ensued from their failure. Nothing has lasted. Even if two people have physically stayed together, they have wandered away from each other mentally or spiritually.

Here too, of course, it does not mean we must not have any relationships with others, or enjoy the companionship of others. But it does mean that we must not be wholly dependent on anyone for our happiness. That is the false hope that this world gives. We can only depend on the SELF.

Finally, let us examine wealth. In this context, wealth means greed--the desire to get more and more money so that we can feel secure and happy. We spend our entire

lifetimes accumulating wealth so that we can lead a luxurious life. But then we also begin to get anxious about protecting it. We become suspicious of others, and have a hard time trusting others because we are always wary of their real intentions. Often rich people invite mischievous or dishonest people into their lives. A rich man can buy a house, a beautiful bed, and elegant curtains. But how can he buy sleep?

Please understand that having money is not the problem. We all need a reasonable amount of money to support our families and meet our needs. But the greed to accumulate and hoard money is the real culprit.

As we can see, we cannot get complete peace and happiness through these three means described above. However, we can still work, maintain relationships, and have wealth, provided there is one thing that is solidly in place. It is the solution to everything. It is called 'renunciation.'

>>> "But by renunciation alone is Immortality attained."<<<

There is a famous short story about a juggler and a monkey. In a mango orchard outside a village, there lived a mischievous monkey. The whole day, he would jump from one tree to another to eat the ripe mangoes. The orchard-keeper often tried to trap the monkey. But

every time he did so, the monkey escaped the trap.

One day, the monkey wandered into the nearby town. "The town people are so busy. There is such a crowd here," the monkey thought. Soon the monkey was sneaking into houses, and running away with stolen food. By evening, he had made life difficult for the townspeople. "The town is more fun than the orchard. I will live here," he decided.

Days went by and the monkey was looked upon with terror by the townspeople. "Here he comes again," they screamed when they saw the monkey.

One day, a juggler came to the town. The people of the town

approached him. "We want you to help us get rid of that mischievous monkey," they said to the juggler. The juggler said in return, "Do not worry. Get me some jars with narrow necks."

When the jars were brought to him, he put peanuts into them, placed the jars out in an open public pathway, and with a stick in hand, hid himself nearby.

When the monkey saw the jars, he became curious and could not resist himself. He went and peeped inside the jars, and saw peanuts. "Yummy! Let me quickly grab the peanuts and run," he thought. He put his hand inside the jar and grabbed a big handful.

But alas! He could not pull out his clenched fist, as the neck of the jar was too narrow. Taking this opportunity, the juggler emerged from his hiding place, and struck a powerful blow on the back of the monkey. Now, if the monkey would have dropped some peanuts back into the jar, he could have pulled his hand out and escaped. But he was greedy! So in spite of his aching back, the monkey kept a firm grip on his handful of peanuts.

Seeing this, the juggler landed another brutal blow on the monkey's back, almost breaking it this time. Realizing that he was trapped and had no choice but to leave the peanuts, or else keep suffering at the hands of the juggler, the monkey finally opened

his fist and dropped the peanuts. He had suffered grave injuries, but had learned his lesson.

The moral of the story is that greed and attachment can destroy our peace of mind. Therefore, it is wiser to let go of things we form attachment to before we receive the painful blows. The one who is aware of this is a true renunciate.

Interestingly, the monkey in the story was always free, but he had to suffer blows due to his attachment and greed. Similarly, we too are always free, but our attachments---our greed to hold on to something/someone---land us in serious trouble.

However, real renunciation is not giving up things, but rather giving

up on things. They may seem similar, but the difference is quite subtle and formidable. 'Giving up' is more physical, while 'giving up on' is more of an inner mental attitude. It is a very tricky matter. On one hand, one could be a renunciate even in the midst of pleasurable objects. But not at all so if, on the other hand, one has renounced those objects physically, and yet continues to take pride in his own so-called renunciation, or has his thoughts centered around that 'attainment.' Often, it is seen that the one who proudly announces he has renounced something is actually holding onto something else. He is not a true renunciate. For example, a charitable person announcing that he has made a donation of so

many dollars is holding on to the image of being charitable. And a *sanyasi* (Hindu renunciate), renouncing the activities of the world, often clings to the activities of the ashram. And a proud vegetarian often wishes to proclaim his spiritual superiority over those who are non-vegetarian.

This is not real renunciation. Real renunciation is from within. The inner attitude of renouncing ownership to anything even while in its physical presence is renunciation. It does not mean physically distancing ourselves or removing ourselves from anything or anyone.

How can one know the difference between true and fake

renunciation, especially when appearances can be so deceptive? Luckily, there are two reliable indicators and preconditions of true renunciation---attention and discernment.

1) Attention: Where is one's attention in any given moment? A real renunciate is never preoccupied by anything other than the truth of the SELF. As long as one's real intention is to know the truth about the SELF, the attention will always fall back into the SELF, irrespective of what one may be doing outwardly. So, if one is clear in his mind that the purpose of every object/activity is to help him pursue and fulfill his Divine goal, then it will not matter whether he is in close proximity to any object

or not, because possession of or engagement with objects is not the decisive factor. It is not the object, but the holding on to it that gets in the way of true renunciation.

2) Discernment: A 'tyagi' is always discerning whether any object and the pleasure derived through it could be detrimental to his deeper quest. If it is not useful or is decidedly harmful for his spiritual progress, instantly, he is willing to drop it. He may often be seen acknowledging and celebrating the meeting with an object or form of pleasure, as he feels it to be a gift from the Divine. But inwardly he is very careful to discern whether such allowance could shake his abidance, or could cause any sort of attachment. He is aware that

even a trace of desire for outward objects can lead him astray---away from the SELF. If there is any such danger of the rising of desire, then a real renunciate quickly distances himself from the object. Indeed, renunciation means letting go of all those desires and fantasies that are in conflict with the interest of the SELF and the welfare of others.

It may be worthwhile to emphasize that renunciation does NOT mean having contempt for any form of object or pleasure, as such an attitude would imply that the so-called renunciate is affected by it. The absence of attachment is not disgust/hatred, but simply a state of neutrality or indifference. There should be a sense of equanimity and neutrality at all times, towards

all objects, and irrespective of whether or not they cause pain or pleasure.

Further, it is important to emphasize here that, *in toto*, renunciation is not just about letting go of an outer object, desire or attachment, but also of our deepest tendencies. We could be indifferent to sensual pleasures and objects, but if we are full of anger, fear, opinions, judgements and hatred for someone or something within me, then that is not complete renunciation. We must be able to drop that too. We must realize the seriousness of this matter! It is impossible to make space for divinity to thrive within us as long as we harbor feelings of animosity, revenge and anger

within ourselves. How can the seeds of love sprout in the soil of hatred? For Love to exist, we need to weed out all the negative, unsavory tendencies that take up so much space within us.

In our experience as human beings, there will always be occasions when we face opposition or are let down, deceived and cheated. We do not have to deny the experience of feeling of being frustrated, let down, betrayed or angry. We must definitely allow ourselves to experience all kinds of emotions, but we must also quickly allow them to move/pass through us, until they go right out of our system. We must not get stuck or obsessed with them for too long, as that can damage the very

temple of our heart, from where the gongs of love reverberate, emanating celestial music into eternity. Indeed, we must guard this temple more than our lives by keeping it clean and pure through the power of true and total renunciation.