

**Satsang with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**  
**Qualifications of the teacher**

***Question***

Can you please elaborate on the two qualifications of the teacher mentioned in the Gītā, namely ‘*jñāninaḥ tattvadarśinaḥ*’ and ‘*śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham*’?

***Answer***

In the Bhagavadgītā, Lord Krishna says, *tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā*, [4-34] may you approach the teacher with long prostration (*praṇipātena*), serve the teacher (*sevayā*), and ask the appropriate questions (*paripraśnena*). Then in the second line he says *upadekṣyanti te jñānaṃ jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ*, the teacher will definitely impart knowledge to you, finding that you are a fit student, you have the right attitudes, and you have the right desire to gain the knowledge. Lord Krishna uses two adjectives for the teacher, *jñāninaḥ* and *tattvadarśinaḥ*. Both these words are used in the plural to show the respect for the teacher. It is like the usage of the royal ‘we’ in English.

Lord Krishna says that ideally, a teacher should be a *jñāni* as well as a *tattvadarśi*. A *jñāni* is one who has knowledge. A *tattva-darśi* is one who has the *darśanam*, the vision or immediate knowledge of *tattva* or the Truth. Actually, both these words mean the same. A *jñāni* is a wise person who has the knowledge of the Truth. Since Lord Krishna uses both these words together, they have to mean somewhat differently. The word *jñāni* in this context means a person who has a thorough knowledge of the scriptures.

*Tattvadarśi* indicates one who abides in the knowledge of the Truth. These are the two qualifications necessary in a teacher.

### **The teacher unfolds his own self**

The teacher should have the vision of the Truth and be abiding in the Truth. What is meant by abiding in the Truth is that he lives the Truth. He is an embodiment of what the scriptures talk about because that Truth is a living reality for him. The teacher is also required to communicate well. What is to be communicated is what you should be. Unfolding the Self is the same as unfolding the meaning of the statements of the Upaniṣads. Essentially, a teacher communicates his own self as the very self of the student. The Kāthopaniṣad says, *ananyaprokte'gatiratra nāsti*, [1-2-9], when this knowledge is communicated *ananya*, by one who is identical or non-different from *brahman*, then *gatiratra nāsti*, the knowledge has but to take place. It will take place because the teacher is unfolding his own self, and also unfolding the self of the student. This is the ideal way of communication and this becomes effective when it comes from the heart. The words have impact only when they come from the heart, and when they are born of one's own experience. That is why the teacher should be a *tattvadarśi*, a knower of the Truth, and at the same time, have the facility to be able to communicate, to articulate his thoughts.

### **The teacher unfolds his own self with words**

The subject matter of Vedānta or the Upaniṣads is the Self, and therefore the words or statements of the Upaniṣads reveal the nature of the Self. Therefore, to understand the Self we need to understand the meaning of the statements of the Upaniṣads, presented by the teacher. The teacher not only knows the Self, but at the same time, he has the facility to

communicate this by way of analyzing the statements of the scriptures. That is where, as Pujya Swamiji would say, *sampradāya* or tradition comes in. The tradition of communicating this to the students has been enriched over hundreds of years. After all, what is being communicated cannot really be confined to the words, because the Self or *brahman* or God or the Truth cannot be the literal meaning of a word. Even the word *brahman* also does not literally convey what *brahman* is.

### **Words communicate *brahman* through their implied meaning, not literal meaning**

Every word conveys a certain concept. A word is a sound symbol to communicate a concept. A concept is abstract and the abstract concept is communicated through the word. The Truth cannot be confined to a concept. By its very nature, a concept is limited. It excludes every other concept and therefore, there cannot be an all-encompassing concept. An all-encompassing concept will have no form, and therefore, no word can literally communicate the Truth. In Vedānta, the literal meaning is called *vācyārtha*.

What word can we use so that there is an appreciation of *brahman*? Any word such as ‘limitless’, is always in contrast to something else. Every word or every concept will exclude some other concept. When we say something is good, it indicates that it is not bad. Similarly, when we say it is great, we mean that it is not small. Anything that you say about it can only mean that it is only that and not something else whereas, the Truth is all-encompassing. Therefore, no word or combination of words can, communicate the nature of Truth. How, then, will the knowledge take place?

Words are used or employed to communicate that which is beyond the scope of words. The Taittirīyopaniṣad says, *yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha*, [2-4], Truth is that from where the words along with the thoughts return without having reached it. Neither the words nor the thoughts can adequately describe it. Thoughts always correspond to the concept behind the words; the words stand for *nāma* and thoughts stand for *rūpa*. Neither the name nor the form, neither the word nor the concept can ever reach the Truth. Thus, that which is beyond the scope of the words is nevertheless to be communicated by the words. The Upaniṣad says that this is beyond the word and the thought, but the Upaniṣad is itself nothing but a group of words. What, then, is the Upaniṣad doing? How does the Upaniṣad expect to communicate what it wants to communicate because the only medium available is that of words? This communication takes place not by *vācyārtha* or the literal meaning, but by what is called *lakṣyārtha*, the implied meaning.

### **Words of the scripture communicate *brahman* only if our mind is prepared**

When they are uttered, words have the capacity to communicate their meaning if our mind is prepared. We know what a flower is. We know what a pot is. When I utter the word ‘flower’, the meaning of the word will flash in your mind. There is no question of choice. It will automatically happen. If I use the word ‘mango’ and you have the right *saṃskāras*, then that word ‘mango’ will create the appreciation of that object, mango.

A word is like an arrow; the arrow is not the destination, but it shows what the destination is. Similarly, if there is adequate preparation in the mind, a word can communicate the meaning when the right *saṃskāra* or the

right preparation is there. Thus, words such as *nitya*, *suddha*, *buddha*, or *mukta* that are used to communicate the nature of *brahman* will also communicate their meaning when the right preparation is there in the mind of the student. That is why so much emphasis is placed on *anthaḥkaraṇa suddhi*, the purification of the mind, to acquire a mind that is a learning mind free from any impulses, free from reactions, free from projections.

As a result of investigating the meaning of the words of the Upaniṣads, the mind in due course of time, does gain a disposition wherein these words can communicate their meaning. We can observe this with respect to the words denoting worldly objects; these words did not convey the same meaning to us when we were children. For example, a child does not understand what a cow is. In course of time, the child learns what a cow is. How does a child come to know that? In the presence of the child, someone says, “Hey Rama, bring the cow.” The little child hears these words. He knows Rama, but he does not know what a cow is. He sees Rama going and bringing something. Then he recognizes that *this* is a cow. So the word ‘cow’ and the object, ‘cow’ are connected in the mind of the child. This is how the child picks up the meanings of the words. Thus, the association of the word and the meaning takes place. Later on when that word is used, then child knows what it means. It took some training on the part of the child in order to be able to connect the meaning and the word. So also, a lot of training is required in our mind before we can connect the word with the meaning or meaning with the word.

### **Preparation of the mind can take time**

Communication has taken place when the listener understands words in the same sense in which the speaker has used them. It takes a long time

for that to happen. How much time it takes is hard to say. It depends on the preparation of the student. They talk of *uttama-adhikāri*, the most qualified student. Vedānta talks about *sādhana-catusaṣṭaya-saṃpattiḥ*<sup>1</sup>. If one has that level of maturity, these words communicate very easily because there is the right *saṃskāra*, training, disposition, and preparation of the mind.

### **That is why the teacher has to be wise and well-versed in the scriptures**

In order for effective communication to happen, the teacher must have the ability to use the right words and create the right frame of mind in the student so that the words that the teacher uses communicate the meaning to the student. This is all the teacher has to do. All the student needs to do is to be available. The rest is to be done by the teacher. The student, of course, works with the teacher. When we say the student is available, it means that as the teacher is unfolding the teaching, the same process of thinking, investigation or deliberation takes place in the mind of the student. The teacher is silently operating in the mind of the student when the student is available and there is no resistance. As we saw earlier, there is *śraddhā* or trust, and *bhakti* or devotion, and therefore, the requisite conditions are present. The teacher must have the capability for inspiring this in the student. This capability comes when he has a thorough knowledge of the scriptures, and the tools such as grammar, reasoning, and the various other skills that he can use in order to communicate what he has gained from his own teacher to his student.

Therefore these two qualifications are said: *jñāninaḥ* and *tattvadarśinaḥ*. The teacher is both wise as well as well-versed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Consists of *viveka* (discrimination), *vairāgya* (dispassion), *ṣaṭka-saṃpatti* (six-fold discipline beginning with *śama*) and *mumukṣutvam* (intense desire for freedom)

scriptures, both in his understanding as well in his ability to communicate. In the Muṇḍakopaniṣad [1-2-12], the same idea is said in different words: *śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham*. *Śrotriyaṃ* means one who is well-versed in the scriptures and *brahmaniṣṭham* is one who abides in *brahman*.

If such a teacher is there then *ananya prokte*, he only communicates the truth as his own self, and *gatirastra nāsti*, then the knowledge has to take place. It is true that the student also should be prepared. If such a combination is there, then it is like dry gun powder coming into contact with a little flame. In the mind which is ready, these words do communicate their meaning and the knowledge takes place.

It is rare to have teachers like that. It is rare to have students also like that. We have to make do with what we have. It is a joint project on the part of the teacher and the student. Both of them grow in the process<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.