

VEDĀNTA 20/20
INTRODUCTION TO VEDĀNTA
PURUṢĀRTHA

I will now start *VEDĀNTA 20/20*, a series of lectures as an introduction to *vedānta*. These lectures will be based on a work by *Ādi Śaṅkarācāya*. The text is called *Tattva Bodha*. It is a basic, fundamental prose work and it gives all the important terms and terminology used in our scriptures in general. Understanding these terms is extremely important to study any *vedic* scripture, whether it is *veda-s*, *upaniṣad*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, *purāṇa* or *itihāsa*. Any Hindu scriptural work, if we have to properly understand, we should be familiar with these definitions and terms. So we start with this text in the beginning. However I will not be going through the text line by line, word by word. Instead I will give a series of lectures and cover all the topics that you will find in *Tattva Bodha*. I will also touch upon a few other topics that are necessary to understand our scriptures properly. You do not need to get a copy *Tattva Bodha*. If you have a copy, you can use it as a reference. Another useful reference text is *Self Unfoldment* by *Svāmi Cinmayānanda*.

I will first start with the topic of *puruṣārtha*. This word is very much used in our scriptures. We should have a clear understanding of the word. It means human goals, human pursuits. *Puruṣaḥ* means a human being. It indicates both the male and female human being. You can translate *puruṣārtha* as *manuṣya arthāḥ*. The word *arthāḥ* has several meanings. One meaning is 'meaning'. If somebody asks what is the *artha* of that word, he wants to know the meaning of the word. It also means wealth. In this context, it means a goal that you want to pursue, a destination you want to reach. That which is sought after by every human being is *arthāḥ*. What is sought after by human beings? The goals sought after are different for different people and at different times. So any goal that anyone is pursuing is called *puruṣārtha*.

The word *puruṣārtha* is also used in other meanings in *śāstra*. Choice, free will, self effort are some other meanings for *puruṣārtha* in different contexts. They are all secondary meanings. The primary meaning is human destination or human goal. By using the word *puruṣārtha* itself, we convey an important idea that these goals are sought after by human beings only. Animals and plants do not have such goals. That is why human beings are different from, distinct from all other things in creation. Human beings are considered to be superior to other being because of this reason. Why do human being only has this *puruṣārtha*? What faculty of human being makes him endowed with this unique opportunity to have *puruṣārtha*? *Śāstra*-s themselves declare, no doubt human beings are very very similar to animals and plants in several respects. There are lot of common features, but there is one unique, uncommon and distinct feature that makes the human being superior.

This idea is conveyed beautifully in a verse, *āhāra nidrā bhaya maithunañca sāmānyam etat paśubhir-narāṇām, buddhirhi teṣām adhiko viśeṣaḥ, buddhyā vihināḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*. Human beings and other beings are similar in many respects like *āhāra*, food; all of them seek food, right from birth they look for food. Then *nidrā*, sleep; after a lot of activities, taking rest or sleeping is also a common feature for animals as well as humans. Then *bhaya*, fear of the external world, a sense of insecurity we see in animals and humans. The last common feature is *maithunam*, the propagation of one's own species. These four are common, *sāmānyam etat*, to, *paśubhiḥ narāṇām*, animals and human beings. If both are the same in all these respects, why do we consider human beings superior? So it is said, *buddhirhi teṣām adhiko viśeṣaḥ*, the intellect, the thinking faculty, ability to judge, discriminate, reason, projecting to the future, farsightedness, planning for future, and to work for the betterment of future, all these come under rational faculty. This is an extra faculty that humans have. Since *buddhi* alone makes a human superior, different from an animal, *buddhyā vihināḥ*, if we do not have the

intellect, or if you do not use the intellect, the *śāstra* says that person is, *paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*, same as an animal. Then he is as good or as bad as an animal.

The unique faculty of intellect makes us self-conscious also. We are capable of self-judgment. We are able to compare ourselves with other human beings. In the Westminster dog show, the competing dogs do not care. It is the dog owners that get all excited. The intellect gives us the ability to compare ourselves to others and motivates us to improve ourselves if there is a need. So we want to plan for improving in the future. The planning can be at many levels, immediate goals, long term goals, make future projections and so forth. Only we human beings are capable of such planning. All animals and plants have an instinctive lifestyle. Their entire life is covered by instincts, whereas human beings are governed by instincts also, but more than the instincts, they have the capacity to choose their future.

With this unique faculty of intellect, human beings are able to entertain goals and these goals are called *puruṣārthāḥ*. The next question is how many such goals are possible? If you start enumerating the goals, they are countless. Even though goals are endless, we can categorize them into four groups. They are called *caturvidha puruṣārthāḥ*. Any goal that you want to reach, will come under one of these. So what are those possible human goal groups? The first one which starts very early in life is the goal of *arthaḥ*. Here in this context, the word means security. Everything that you procure for the sake of your security, all those things will come under *artha*. Security means sheer physical survival. Right from birth, one instinctive and a natural urge, every living being including the humans, is the urge to somehow survive. Anything that you get for your security, all those things that contribute to your security, your physical survival will come under *artha*. They help you in removing your sense of insecurity. Broadly they are, food, clothing, shelter and health.

Food, right from beginning is a struggle. Without food, the body will perish. Next you have to protect your body from the environment. It is not just the clothes that you wear, but the helmet that put on your head when you drive a motorbike, the seat belt that you wear in cars and airplane, all of them are for security. The air conditioning in your car or home, the heater in winter, all of them come under this category because all of them protect your body. Then shelter. Everybody wants to own a house. They do not want live in a rented house or apartment. If you rent a place any day you may be given notice to vacate. Then comes health, fighting all forms of diseases.

Anything that you do to assure these four is for your survival. Initially I am concerned about my immediate security. Then comes the second layer of security. That is the security for my future. In old age I cannot work. I cannot earn. In the past, children were considered as the security for old age. That is changing these days. The feeling of insecurity and fear grows more and more as we grow old. In the earlier part of life food and clothing are important and in the later part of life, it is health that is more important. I am worried about unexpected accidental threats and therefore I take all forms of insurance. So many things we do for present security, future security. Once I possess a few things or people for my security, then I am worried about their security. First I want clothes for the security of the body. Then I have to take care of the clothes. I have to clean them, iron them and store them so that they are in good condition for me to wear. Therefore you have to buy a washer, dryer, iron and chest of drawers. The washing machine may go bad, so I buy extended warranty for the washing machine! See how this multiplies! The story goes on and on. Thus most of the life we are busy providing for security. This is all *artha puruṣārthāḥ*. Animals also seek security, but they take care of security instinctively.

Once security is taken care of, there are no threats. I am comfortable with

my food, clothing and shelter. I have my own house, adequate pension income and a big bank balance. Then the question is what am I do with my life? Once *artha* is taken care of, then I go to *kāma puruṣārthāḥ*. *Kāmaḥ* means all kinds of comforts that you do not need for your survival, but you can enjoy. It will be nice if they are there. It is okay if they are not there, but if they are there, I will be more comfortable. Luxury, comforts and all forms of entertainment fall under this category. No entertainment is needed for your survival. So it does not come under *arthaḥ*, but all these things are a separate *puruṣārtha* that come under *kāma puruṣārtha*. I want to have a gala time. I want to enjoy my life. Music, drama, dance, movie, TV, sports, I look for to entertain myself. The entertainment industry is so big now. Once I have exhausted all the entertainment locally, I want to travel. Travel within the country and then travel abroad. I want to be a globe trotter. I want this experience, I want that adventure, all this comes under *kāma puruṣārtha*, comforts, pleasures, entertainment. Animal also seek comforts but again they do so instinctively. In the case of human beings, because of superior intellect, we plan and entertain ourselves. This is the second goal of human life.

Then comes the third human goal known as *dharma puruṣārtha*. *Dharma puruṣārtha* may be defined as invisible form of wellness, and we can translate it good luck or good fortune. We say that person is very lucky. We say she has the good fortune. I was fortunate. When you use the words like luck or fortune, it is not something that you see, but it seems to contribute to your well-being either in the form of providing *arthaḥ* or *kāmaḥ*. It contributes to your benefit. It is called *adṛṣṭam*. This *dharma* can be acquired by certain appropriate means. We are not going to discuss what those means are, suffice it to say it can be gotten by appropriate means. Since *dharma* or *adṛṣṭam* or good luck is something achievable by some appropriate method, *dharma* also becomes a human goal. It is also translated as *punya*.

Dharma contributes to our well-being in two-fold ways. It can happen in this very life itself by giving us *artha* and *kāma*. It is very very useful because it supplements to my own efforts. The second benefit of *dharmā* is that it contributes in our next birth, especially in the initial stages of life. The first few years of our lives are not under our control. What kind of family I am born into, who are my parents, whether they are rich or poor, loving, caring or otherwise, all that is *adr̥ṣṭam* only. Some children lose their mother or father at a young age, sometimes they are orphaned. Those situations are not under the control of the children. Then under whose control is it? It is determined by *dharmā*. The *dharmā* I acquire now will help me not only in this birth, but also in my future births. So *dharmā puruṣārtha* becomes the third goal and an important one at that.

These three goals, *dharmārthakāma*, as they are quite often enumerated have something in common. Put together they are called *preyaḥ*. *Preyaḥ* is three goals put together, *dharmā + artha + kāma = preyaḥ*. Sometimes it is called *bhogaḥ*. Various names are given, I will use *preyaḥ*. *Preyaḥ* stands for all the human goals either in the form of *dharmā* or *artha* or *kāma*, anything that you acquire, deliberately, legitimately, well-planned, that is called *preyaḥ*. Now the question is what is the next or the fourth *puruṣārtha*? It is called *mokṣaḥ*. It is also called *mukṭiḥ*, otherwise called *śreyaḥ*. *Śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣya yetaḥ*, man strives for *śreyaḥ* and *preyaḥ*, it is said in *Kaṭhopaniṣad*.

What do you mean by *mokṣaḥ*? *Mokṣaḥ* can be translated as freedom, from what? Is it political freedom? Economic freedom? Social freedom? It is an internal freedom! Inner freedom! Freedom from slavery with regard to *preyaḥ*. Freedom from slavery with regard to *dharmārthakāma* pursuits, or all worldly accomplishments. In what way am I a slave to *dharmārthakāma* or anything in the world? Any object in the world, or any person in the world enslaves me into it. An object can enslave me by its very absence. When that

particular object or person is not there for me, if I feel a vacuum, if I feel an emptiness, if I feel worthless, then I am a slave to that object or person. One man complains I do not have money, I am suffering. Another man says I do not have a wife, I am miserable. House binds you, spouse binds you. A thing can bind me by its absence. *Śūnyatā dvārā abhāvaḥ badhnāti*, void enslaves me. I am not happy, I miss things. I miss company, I miss friends. Lacking anything is a form of slavery.

Objects can bind me by their presence also. My problem is not with the absence of spouse, but with the presence. Sometimes children make your life hell! How can I escape? So things bind me with their presence by creating burden. Absence creates void and binds me. So objects are capable of creating problems with their absence or with their presence. Some create by both, money for instance, poverty is a problem, being rich is also a problem. This slavery with regard to *preyas* or external goals is bondage. Freedom from this slavery, otherwise called self mastery is *mokṣaḥ*. I am no longer a *dāsaḥ*, I am a *svāmi*, I am not a servant, but a master. Even a *śamnyāsi* may complain that he does not have nice *āśrama* or he does not have disciples. Freedom is not to have the void when things are absent or be burdened when objects are present. *Mokṣaḥ* is being comfortable with the presence or absence of things. *Dharmārthakāma* do not upset me. This inner strength, this inner maturity, this inner mastery, is called *mokṣaḥ*. The first three, *dharmārthakāma* are secondary *puruṣārtha*; the last one alone is the primary *puruṣārtha*. In *preyas*, slavery continues. In *śreyas* alone I am no more a slave to anything. I am free. Free, free at last! These are the *caturvidha puruṣārtha*.