

## **For Young Adults<sup>1</sup>**

Swami Dayananda Saraswati

### **How Learning Takes Place**

If you have to learn something, naturally you should have a mind that is capable of learning. What is the mind that learns? Sure, you all know that if the mind is busy elsewhere it does not learn. One has to have a mind that is with the present, what is going on right now. Even these words that I speak now need not be heard by everyone. I find that in the audience there will always be someone nudging another asking what the swami said. Well, that is because the mind was elsewhere. Our span of attention is very short. You can be attentive for a few minutes together, then the mind goes elsewhere. So one has to be alert to have the mind with what is going on. One cannot learn for want of a mind that is not alert, that is not with the present. Even though the mind is capable of learning, if it is engaged otherwise it cannot learn. There is another reason why the mind does not learn.

If the language of the message, what is to be learned, is not understood, then also one cannot learn. Even if the language is understood, if one is not prepared for the type of knowledge that is given, then also one cannot learn. The language may be understood, but the arguments and various implications may not be understood at all. Therefore, you cannot learn if the one who teaches does not have the language and the method to communicate. You get bored because you cannot learn. And if the teacher has something to convey and has the means of communication, he can reach you, but if you are not reachable because your mind is elsewhere, there cannot be any learning. Therefore, it takes two to learn.

The one who teaches should know what he teaches. If he is confused and not sure, then there is nothing he can give. He will only duck under big words. He cannot convey, being unsure of himself. Or, he may be sure, but he has no means or no method of communication. Or the methods are not proper. If the teacher cannot hold

---

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Pujya Swami Dayanandaji's Discourse to Young Adults, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, August, 2004. Transcribed and edited by Swamini Srividyananda.

the minds of the listeners in his or her hands then you cannot learn. You must be experiencing this in school. Some teachers are capable of making you understand and others are not. Therefore, it definitely takes two to learn. The teacher must be able to communicate and the student should be alert enough to receive.

So you give the benefit of doubt to me, assuming that I have a message to give, and that I am going to give it. I must have a means of communication, because I have declared that I am going to teach. Until I prove otherwise, you give the benefit of doubt to me, assuming that the swami has something to convey and is able to communicate. This is an assumption. Some of you might have listened to me and may have that kind of trust. But some of you are quite new to the swami. You don't know what to expect. Perhaps your parents have sent you here. Some of you might have come because of their insistence, or, you insisted. For those who are new and do not know what to expect, I say give the benefit of doubt to the swami. I have something to convey something that will be useful in your life, something that will change your ways of thinking. If you give that benefit of doubt, then your mind will stay. If you know that you are going to learn something, then your mind will stay attentive during the class. I am not going to give simple lectures. It is going to be a class each time we meet. You know what a class is. The subject matter is there which we are going to unfold.

Unfolding is different from lecturing. When I lecture, you may or may not follow me. If I am going to unfold, I make sure that you see what I see. This is called unfolding. I will tell you what unfolding is by an example. A sculptor and his friend were walking together. On the way side there was a rock. The sculptor stopped and was admiring the rock, telling his friend "Look at this beautiful rock." The friend replied, "What is there in the rock? It is like any other rock. I don't see any beauty in it." The sculptor asked the friend to help him take the rock to his studio where he works. Together they engaged a truck and had it delivered to the studio. The friend left. After three months the friend came to visit and went into the studio. Right in front was an exquisitely sculptured statue of Krishna with a gesture of a flute in his hands. The

friend happened to be a great devotee of Krishna and was struck by the beauty of the statue. He went near it and was filled with admiration. The sculptor was standing behind the door unnoticed with a small chisel and hammer. When the friend saw the sculptor he said “Did you create this idol of Krishna?” “No,” said the sculptor. “I didn’t create Krishna, I didn’t shape Krishna, I only unfolded Krishna’. Understand the difference? “I didn’t shape a Krishna as you would shape a form of Krishna out of wax.” What does it mean? ‘This is the Krishna you helped me bring from the wayside.” “No,” said the friend, “We brought only a rock.” The sculptor replied, “No. I didn’t bring a rock. I brought Krishna. When I saw the rock, I didn’t see just a rock, but Krishna lying there.” In the sculptor’s vision Krishna was already there. It was seen by the eye of a sculptor. When he brought the rock to the studio it was Krishna that he brought and not a rock. All he did was to reveal in the rock what he saw in his mind. He went on unfolding that Krishna by chipping off the portions of rock that were covering Krishna to the naked eyes. He went on comparing the Krishna visualized by his mind and the Krishna seen by the eyes. Even though Krishna is ready now, still he is not happy with the lips and nose. With the chisel he continues to unfold. He is not creating but unfolding Krishna. Chipping off the portions that hide Krishna is called unfolding.

In the same way, knowledge is something that is unfolded. There is something that the teacher sees. What he has to do is make you see too. Teaching is nothing but helping you to see what the teacher sees. If the teacher has a vision and has something to convey then that is unfolded. Chip by chip he removes things that cover. If there is doubt, it is removed. If there is vagueness, it is removed. If there is error it is removed. Then what is inside is conveyed. Therefore, knowledge is always unfolded by one person to another. In this, the sculptor and the teacher are identical. The sculptor unfolds and the teacher also unfolds. The only difference is that the sculptor is not in the unenviable position in which the teacher happens to be. The stone doesn’t run away when the sculptor sculpts. Even if it is shaky he can make it firm, so that where the chisel is placed is where the hammering takes place; where it is placed there the effect is seen. But here, even though the teacher sculpts, if the mind is elsewhere,

then he is sculpting in space. So you have to place yourself, your mind, where it needs to be. When the teaching takes place, your mind has got to stay there. Only then can the sculpting can take place.

### **What is Hinduism?**

Before we get into the topic of values, I want you to understand a few things about what is known as Hindu religion. The name Hindu was given to the people who were following the Vedas and had a unique religious culture. When some Persians from across the Himalayas came to North India where the river Sindhu flows, they saw a people living a highly civilized life with a unique religious culture. They called these people Sindhus. The letter *s* was pronounced in their language as *h*, so the word became Hindu. We are told that that is how we have come to be known as Hindus. In fact we didn't have a name. The people were following a body of knowledge called Veda. Perhaps you have heard about the Vedas. It is important for you know the names of the Vedas because the Veda is the most ancient body of knowledge. The Vedas are four in number—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. Like the Bible for the Christians, for the Hindus these are the Bibles. All together they form the scriptures.

Veda in Sanskrit means a body of knowledge. These scriptures form the basis of the spiritual life of Hindus. The Hindus may not know the content of the four Vedas because they are voluminous. Your parents may not know them at all. But they have imbibed the essence of the lifestyle based upon these four Vedas, the value structure based upon these four Vedas, and certain attitudes, again, based upon the Vedas. These things are handed over to the children. This is something very unique, which you must know.

In humanity there are lots of things that are ancient, so ancient that they cannot be claimed by any given country. For instance, we have the pyramids in Egypt. Suppose the Egyptian Government chooses to demolish one so that they can create a housing

colony. Do you think humanity will allow that? Definitely not. Even though the pyramids happen to be within the borders of Egypt, still, the government of Egypt doesn't have the right to destroy a pyramid, because it is too ancient to be claimed by any nation or group of people. More ancient than the pyramids are the Vedas. Till today, the Veda is handed over by one generation to another generation orally. You must know that there are people even today in India who can repeat the entire Veda, a given Veda, from memory, and it takes them many days. In chanting the Vedas there is a style, based on intonations, which we call *svaras*. That style is retained even today. It is the same as it has always been. The Vedas are learned from a teacher with whom you sit every day, and learn and commit to memory a given Veda. It takes twelve years to learn one Veda. There are a lot of people, even today, who have family names such as Trivedi, Caturvedi, Dvivedi, that indicate how many Vedas were learned in that family. Somewhere in the history of the family someone knew three Vedas, not one, and was given the title Trivedi. Or someone in the family knew four Vedas so the family name is Caturvedi. Thus the Vedas were committed to memory and handed over to the next generation of students. This forms the body of knowledge called the Vedas.

The Vedas belongs to humanity. They are too ancient to be claimed even by Indians. Most of the religions have beliefs that can be found in the Vedas, as many would accept. And these Vedas form the basis for the Hindu religious life. Since what is known as Hindu religion today is based upon these four Vedas, the religion is a 'Vedic' religion or Sanātana dharma. These Vedas have a view of human destiny, of what exactly one is seeking in life and wants to accomplish, essentially. This is addressed by the Vedas. They have a clear vision of what is it that is to be discovered in one's life and what it takes to be a mature person. It is a universal vision. It is something that everyone wants to have, whether the person knows it or not. This vision can be called a view of life. The Vedas have a view of life and to achieve the view, the end, they prescribe a way of life. The way and view of life form the Hindu religion.

The view of life concerns: What is life? What is the reality you are seeking? What is God? Is there one? If there is, where is he, or she? What is this world? How it is related to that Lord? How are you related to the world, and what are you all about? Once you have a view, then you must definitely have a way to accomplish that end in view. The view is something that is entirely distinct and different from the views that many religions have about human destiny. For instance, the church has a view of life—it looks upon the individual basically as a helpless person who is a sinner and born of sin because he is born of parents. Therefore, for the birth to be sinless it has to be immaculate. People born of sin require to be saved and there are means for that such as confession, etc. If you live your life according to these means, after death you will go to heaven. So heaven-going is their view of the purpose of life. Whether it is any form of Christianity or Islam, going to heaven is the end.

The view of life in Hinduism is entirely different. It is to be accomplished here, while you are alive. That is why it is so important. It is something that is connected to your life here. We are not worried about going to heaven later. We are concerned about making our life here. All that you have to accomplish as a successful individual, to be able to say, “I have made it,” is to be done here, and not in the hereafter. It becomes at once different and meaningful to you. We must know that this is something unique. The highest thing that a human being can accomplish is to be accomplished here and now when you are alive and kicking, when your mind is working and when you are not too old. For this, a clean life style is given, a life style that will help you to grow into an adult, a mature adult. That is what we call a religious life. One requires a structure to grow that implies a personal prayerful life, and also, a social structure.

There is a certain structure that governs your interaction with society, and when every member of society follow those rules, you have a societal structure. This is based upon universal moral structures, and within that, you operate, for your self-growth. Once you are grown up, of course you have something to discover—the view and way of life which is what we call Hindu ‘religion’.

There were religions in the world that are non-existent today. In Greece there was a religion. In the whole of Europe and the Arab countries there were a number of religions. All those are totally wiped out. All we have left are monuments and books about them. There are religions today that were non-existent before—Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. All these were founded by some people, so they have a beginning. If you look at the Vedic religion, you can't determine when it was non-existent. Maybe it grew up with humanity. When did physics not exist? When did it come into being? When you learn to walk it is physics, remember. That you don't fly, and that, if you are not careful, you will fall from a tree, is all physics. It was there even for the cave man. Therefore, physics doesn't have a beginning. It has been existing with humanity. It is important to understand that the Vedic religion was not founded by anybody. That is its uniqueness. That is why anybody can say, "I am Hindu," and you have no way of saying, "No you are not," because, being a religion that was not founded by anybody, you don't need to subscribe to a particular faith. It is based upon facts that are in the Vedas.

The main vision of Hinduism and the various things advocated by it are for one's self-growth. They are universal and anybody can understand them. That is why I can talk in this country, in Japan, Norway, Brazil etc. and I will pass. In spite of my funny dress I will pass because this vision has relevance to your life, your human life. It is not a religion founded by any one person for a particular group. If at all you call them common founders we have the ṛṣis, the 'ones who know'. These ṛṣis were the people to whom this Vedic knowledge was revealed. You can say that it was revealed or it was discovered, but it is considered to be revealed because the nature of the knowledge is such that it has to be revealed. The ṛṣis form the media through which the Vedic knowledge came to us. That is all we know. It is too ancient and, at the same time, relevant.

Sometimes things that are ancient are not relevant today. Think of a person riding a bullock cart on the freeway! They will arrest him. In this country it is irrelevant. He can't say, "I love this cart." Some things may be relevant in other countries but not

here. There are lots of habits that are irrelevant. Thus, we have grown out of a lot of things, which is but proper and natural. The stone-age man had tools made of stones. You can't say, "My forefathers used these stone tools, therefore I am going to use them." They are irrelevant now. They were in a different age. They didn't have modern knowledge and technology, therefore they had to make tools with what was available then. We have figured out new things and, therefore, we don't need to follow our forefathers' footsteps in this area. Even though we have respect for them, we need not follow them. Thus, a number of things that the forefathers did have become irrelevant today. But a few things survived.

Eating has not become obsolete. It continues to be the same. They also had minds to deal with. Our problems are not all physical, in fact, most of our problems are mental. All complexes, concerns, sorrows, depressions, anger, hatred and jealousy were our forefathers' problems and are our problems. They are not ancient and irrelevant. They would always be there. As long as the human mind is there, there will be problems. This mind has to be dealt with. If our forefathers could manage the mind well, those things that helped them to do that would be applicable even today. Even though we may present those things in a language that we can understand, we may change the accent, and perhaps the phrasing, still, the basic principles cannot change. If they cannot be changed, then we retain them, and if they can be changed, then we change them. What is applicable today should not be changed, cannot be changed.

In the Hindu religion as in all other religions there are things that are optional for you. I can come in this dress or in some other dress also. This is optional for me. I am a *sannyāsi*, a Hindu monk, and we have certain traditional colors and robes that we wear. I have respect for the tradition, so I wear them. But I can change, there is no problem. I can give up this dress, and in giving it up my knowledge will not suffer any loss. Please understand this. There are certain things that are essential, there are some that are important but optional, and there are things that are non-essential. The non-essentials we always drop. Even if you ask people to retain them, they won't. You will have this problem at home. Sometimes your parents will say, "Do this," and you



don't understand why you should do it. It doesn't seem relevant at all. Some things may be non-essential in your view, but in their view they may be essential. You need to understand some of these things so that you can make informed choices about what is important to you. When I talk to you, don't think that I am someone who is going to impose ideas on you. Not at all, I am a teacher. So keep an open mind.

At home you have a certain culture, and when you go out, there is a different culture. At home there are certain values, and outside the values are totally different. Therefore, it is always a problem. You can't own up your own parents because you can't understand why they are insisting on some things that seem opposed to the culture in which you are living day to day. You feel that they are imposing some irrelevant ideas upon you. To grow properly, you must understand your parents first. To understand your parents you must go to the roots. The parents themselves do not know much. As I told you, they don't know the Vedas. But, in spite of that, they have received the Vedic vision and view of life, in a small measure, from their parents. Do you know why? It is because this is not a founded religion. It is a view and way of life. There is no pontiff at the top.

In the Hindu religion there is no papacy, diocese, bishops, parish or congregation. We don't have that kind of organization. This may be our weakness, but I say this is our strength. Some think it is a weakness and that is unfortunate, because it means that they don't understand our strength. There is some weakness in the lack of organizational structure, naturally; anything has its own weakness. But what is viewed as a weakness, is, in fact, its strength. Its strength lies in the fact that it is not an organization. If a religion is based on an organization, when the organization is removed, the whole religion will fall apart. Here, in order to destroy the Hindu religion you have to destroy every Hindu. Muslims tried and Christians are still trying, but it is difficult, because Hindu dharma has no organization. Do you know why it has survived? It is because it has an intrinsic worth. What is worthy will always endure, because it is based upon certain facts and realities about life. You have to know this in order to grow up in a society where alternatives are available.

This is a country of choices. When you have too many choices you must have a better understanding so that you can choose appropriately. Having choices means that we have to learn how to choose responsibly and intelligently, and for that we have to be informed.

Everything is open to choice. Two fellows shared a ranch. Each one bought a horse, and they decided that an identification mark was needed to distinguish them. One said, "I will paint my horse with red ink, and you paint yours with blue." It was done, and they could tell which horse belonged to whom. Fine, but the rain came and washed off the paint. So one fellow said, "Why don't I cut the mane off my horse and you leave yours uncut?" After some time, the mane grew and they had the same problem, "Which is my horse?" Then they cut the hair on the tail of one horse, but that also grew. They got vexed with the problem. So one fellow said, "Why don't we solve the problem this way. Let us say that the brown horse is yours and the white is mine!" This is what was available originally. When you have choices you must know how to choose. When you are driving and come to a crossroad, you have choose whether to go left or right. When you get onto the freeway, you must know which exit you have to take, otherwise you will be going in the opposite direction. Since you are growing up in a society of choices you are better off, I tell you, but you have to be informed. If you are informed, you are better off than children growing up in India who don't have as many choices. So you have to know what is what. That is what you are trying to do at the gurukulam. You are trying to understand what exactly is the basic structure of the Hindu religion, what are its values, what is universal and special there, and what is its unique vision. All this you must necessarily know; there is no choice in this. Since you happen to be born in a given family, you must know where your parents came from, what their values are, and what their vision is all about. They themselves may not know and may not be able to explain it, because for them it is way of life. For them it is easy; for you it is not. They didn't have any choice, but you have. They just grew up with certain values. Here you have choices, so you have got to know and choose responsibly. That is the difference between a person growing up in India and a

person growing up here. That is the reason why in this religion, being not an organized religion, every individual has to know his or her religion. You have to learn by first imbibing it from your parents, and later, you imbibe more from a teacher.

In Hinduism the teachers, called gurus, play an important role because you have to learn only from an individual. There is no organization to fulfil that function. From the rishis, the four Vedas have come down to us. The rishis themselves received the four Vedas from the Lord, they say. This body of knowledge, thus, has come down to us. What we are going to see is nothing but what the Vedas say in essence. The essence you should know.

The four Vedas are supported by a number of other books. The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are called *itihāsa*, while the Vedas are scriptures. *Itihāsa* means ‘this is how it was’, *itī ha āsa*; *itī* thus; *ha* verily, indeed *āsa*, was. The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are based on historical facts, and therefore, they will have a skeletal historical background. Based on those historical facts, a lot of things were poetically expressed, like the *rākṣasa* Rāvaṇa in the Rāmāyaṇa having ten heads. This is imaginary, but it has a meaning. It is not meant to be understood literally. Suppose a thought occurs in one head, like a thought of a mango, and all the other nine heads think of a mango. If this is so, then nine heads are useless. You only need one. You should have surgery to get rid of the extra nine. You can’t even walk into a house, so naturally, it is better to get rid of the extra nine heads. Otherwise, you have to have nine shampoos, nine towelings; you’ll have nine headaches! It is a problem. But suppose they think differently—one head says “Grab Sītā,” the other says, “No,” another says, “You can grab her, or you need not grab her.” If you have ten heads, with each one saying one thing or the other, then what will you have? Rāvaṇa. That is the meaning there. Vālmīkī pictured Rāvaṇa as a person who had conflicting ideas, good and bad, right and wrong. He constantly had this problem. So who is a Rāvaṇa? Anybody who has conflicting ideas all the time, is never able to judge and proceed, is a Rāvaṇa. That person is likened to a person with ten heads. That is all what Rāvaṇa was. That is purely poetry. But there was a person named Rāvaṇa who had that

nature. Thus, there is a lot of poetry, and there is a skeletal fact also. Because there are some basic facts that are historical, it is called *itihāsa*. If it is purely imagination then it is called *purāṇa*. The Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are *itihāsa*, historical, but there is a lot of imagination involved to make them poetic works. In these works you will find a lot of stories that you cannot believe, but they are not any different from Star Wars. You have to understand some of them because behind them there is a lot of meaning. They are composed in a language that is meant to make you think. Thus, we have the two supporting scriptures called *itihāsas* and eighteen *purāṇas*. They are supporting scriptures to the Vedas, and illustrate and elaborate what the Vedas say. These scriptures form the basis of the Hindu religion.

Though the name Hindu was given by somebody from Persia, as we saw in the beginning, we accept it. We are stuck with a name that is a product of the language limitations of somebody. But then, the Sanskrit language is such a thing that even in this we can find a meaning. The word *him* (which becomes *hin* when followed by *d* according to grammar rules) in Hindu means falsehood, and *du* is one who condemns. Thus, a Hindu is one who condemns falsehood. Expressed positively, the one who pursues truth is called a Hindu. It is a good word; it is in keeping with what we are talking about. Therefore, for a Hindu truth is important. It is a fact, a truth, that is most important in our religion. What is truth, what is the truth of everything, what is the truth of life? Anyone who condemns untruth, one who wants to discover the truth is a Hindu. It is view and a way of life.

