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In My Opinion

The Light of the Spirit

An ancient story leads us to five laws that, if we heed them, will lead us to the goal of life

By Dada J.P. Vaswani

A beautiful story is given to us in our ancient legends. A great rishi, Yajnavalkya, comes to the palace of Raja Janaka, one of the greatest kings this land has known. Raja Janaka sat on a throne, but his heart was the heart of a saint, a holy man of God.

After the sage is received with due respect by the king, he begins, "Tell me, O King, what is the light whereby a man lives and moves and works and walks and finally to his home returns?" Raja Janaka replies readily, "O Gurudeva, the light by which all men live and move, the light by which they work and walk and then to their homes return is the light of the sun!"

The rishi smiles. "When the sun has set, what is the light whereby men live and move and work and walk and then to their homes return?" The king replies, "When the sun has set, men must live and move, work and walk and then to their homes return by the light of the moon."

"And what if the sun and the moon have both disappeared?" queries the rishi. "Then, men must live and move and work and walk by the light of the fire," says the king.

"When the light of the sun, the moon and the fire have all gone out," continues the

rishi, “what is the light by which men can live and move and work and walk and to their homes return?” The king is puzzled. He has no ready answer and begs the rishi to enlighten him.

Rishi Yajnavalkya gives Raja Janaka the teaching I believe is the message of the Hindu faith to modern civilization: “When all external light has gone out—when the sun does not shine, when the moon does not radiate and the fire is put out—there is still one light that shines. It is the light of the atman, the light of the Spirit. It is by this, the light of all lights, that the sun shines, the moon is radiant and the fire is aglow. It is this light by which man must live and work and walk and to his eternal home return.”

The light of the atman, the Self, the Spirit: it was around this that our glorious culture was built in ancient India. This culture was known as atma vidya, the science of the spirit. For spirituality too, is a science; it concerns the discovery of the one Self in all. Spirituality makes us raise the fundamental question: What is man? Or, to put it more personally, what am I? It is this self-knowledge that the Hindu faith leads us to seek.

There are five laws of atma vidya, which every individual and every nation must obey if we are to reach the goal of life. The first is what I would describe as the law of the seed: as you sow, so you shall reap. The second is the law of the wheel. This law of reincarnation emphasizes a cardinal Hindu doctrine: the body dies, but the soul does not die. The law of the seed and the law of the wheel are intertwined. We must face the consequences of our actions, and our karma will be carried forward from birth to birth until we become wise enough to end all karma.

When we accept the second law, the question arises: how long shall we keep whirling on this wheel of birth and death? How may we seek liberation from this wheel? Therefore, we come upon the third law, of nidhyasana, assimilation: you must assimilate the teachings you have been given into your daily life.

The fourth is the law of reverence, shraddha. The essence of the Vedas, what we call Vedanta, teaches us that there is but One Life in all!

Fifth is the law of yajna, sacrifice. Krishna says to his dear, devoted disciple Arjuna: "Whatever you do, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerity you practice, do it as an offering unto me!" This is true yajna: to make your entire life an offering to the Lord. Sacrifice your ego-self, sacrifice your desire, and do whatever you do for the love of God.

Dada J.P. Vaswani is the spiritual head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Pune, India.