

# Shikshavalli of the Taittiriya Upanishad

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## Introduction

India has a long tradition of learning. The earliest Vedic education was an intimate endeavour of the teacher and the taught in which the pupil lived in the *gurukul* of his teacher, as part of his household, for several years. The Upanishads, the philosophic part of the Vedas, also called Vedanta, deal primarily with imparting education to students, of giving in-depth knowledge. Upanishad literally signifies sitting by the teacher and these are usually in the question-answer format. At their core are concepts of Brahman or the Ultimate Reality and Atman, the divine spirit of the individual together with the relationship between the two.

In the Vedic tradition, knowledge is said to be of two types, lower and higher. The lower knowledge, according to the *Mundaka Upanishad*, is that of the four Vedas and it covers subjects such as pronunciation, ceremonial sacrificial rituals, grammar, etymology, poetry, and astronomy. The higher knowledge is the knowledge of Brahman, the everlasting and the infinite, the substratum of the entire creation. Learning evolves from the lower to the higher, from an understanding of an ethical code of conduct for living in the world to the realization of Brahman embodied in the four *mahavakyas* or the “Great Sayings” of the Vedas:

• *Prajanam Brahman:*

Consciousness is Brahman — *Aitareya Upanishad 3.3 of the Rig Veda*

• *Ayam Atman Brahman:* This Self

(Atman) is Brahman — *Mandukya Upanishad 1.2 of the Atharva Veda*  
• *Aham Brahmasmi:* I am Brahman, or I am Divine — *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10 of the Yajur Veda*  
• *Tat Tvam Asi:* That Thou Art or Thou Art Brahman— *Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 of the Sama Veda*

These eternal sayings enunciate the essential oneness of the Creator and the created. A duality is experienced between Brahman and the Atman because of limited understanding. The ancient Vedic education tried to make the student understand and experience the unity between the two. He was to lead his life situated in this understanding, free of fear and insecurities, and after completing all his duties could attain liberation. What greater purpose can there be of education?

## Shikshavalli

Several *rishis* or teachers in different Upanishads expounded on the subject in the light of their own understanding and experience. The *Taittiriya Upanishad*, part of the *Yajur Veda*, consists of three chapters or *adhyayas*. The first *adhyaya* is Shikshavalli and it consists of twelve *anuvakas* or sections. Two *anuvakas*, at the beginning and the end, consist of a prayer. The second *anuvaka* defines education and several of the following *anuvakas* outline the syllabus taught. The subjects expound on the interconnectedness of all creation and the

unity of being. The teaching deals with life in this world and the final liberation or union with Brahman. They culminate in the eleventh *anuvaka* in which the student prepares to leave the teacher after completing his course to embark on the life of a householder. It reads like a convocation address in which the teacher gives his final instructions and advice before the student leaves after completing his course.

### *The Prayer*

Shikshavalli begins with a prayer in which blessings are invoked and the student promises to be truthful in thought and word. Truth will protect both him and his teacher in the integrity of their joint endeavour. He then prays for peace because without it neither teaching nor learning is possible. In the fourth *anuvaka*, both the student and the teacher pray for intelligence and immortality. Obviously, immortality cannot be of the body but of the validity and integrity of the knowledge imparted. A healthy body is required because it is the sheath that encloses the intelligence needed for acquiring wisdom. It is also the sheath around the divine spark or Brahman within. Hence the prayer continues for a healthy and vigorous body, a sweet tongue, ears that hear only beautiful words, and the intelligence or mental processes that remain ever stable.

The teacher prays for prosperity and wisdom. Without prosperity, there cannot be good clothes, food and drink, and wealth, and bereft of wisdom the teacher will have no students. Hence the teacher needs prosperity and wisdom to provide for the students and accommodate supplicants who come to him for advice.

### *Shiksha*

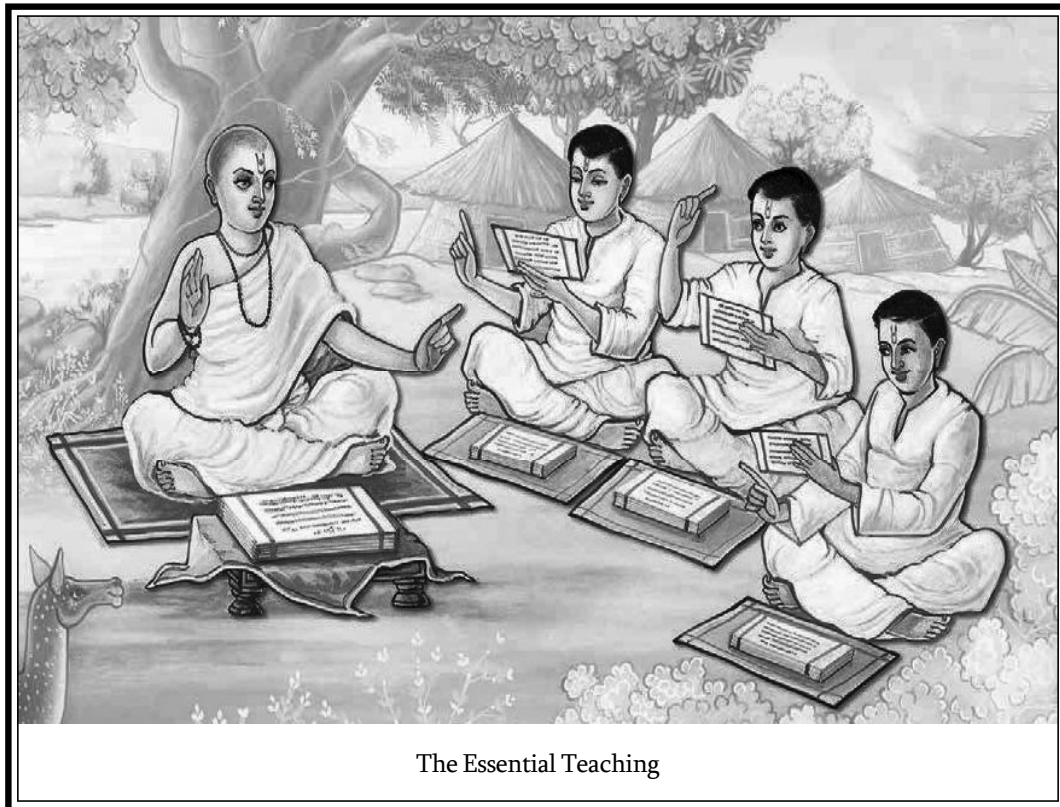
Shiksha is defined as the science of enunciation in which each word must be spoken with the correct number of syllables; with proper sound and duration; with correct emphasis; in an even tone; and with the correct juxtaposition of sounds and words. This is because teaching in ancient times was oral, a verbal communication between the teacher and the taught. Unless the words were spoken clearly, correctly, and pleasingly, the transmission of knowledge from one to the other was not possible.

### *The Essential Teaching*

After the prayer and the definition of *shiksha*, the syllabus is given. Through different approaches, interconnectedness and the “Unity of Being” is taught. The first five *samhitas* or conjunctions are enumerated: the world, the heavenly bodies, education, progeny, and language. The emphasis is on mutual attraction in all creation without which there can be neither worldly prosperity nor wisdom.

- In the world there is the earth below and heaven above with space in between and the all-pervading air as the connecting link.
- The heavenly bodies have fire on the one side, the sun on the other with water in between, both being connected by lightning. The water balances the potentially destructive excess heat from the fire and the sun.
- Education has the teacher on the one side, the pupil on the other, knowledge is between them, imparted through the link of discourse.

- Progeny has mother on the one side, father on the other, with the child between them, joined by procreation. And language is the lower jaw on the one side, upper on the other, words between them uttered with the link of the tongue. This is the summary of the subject and he who knows it will have children, cattle, food, knowledge, and heaven.
- imbues all creation. Their oneness is expounded by showing the connection between them:
- When *bhu* is the world; *bhuvah* is the intermediate space, *svaha* the other world and *mahah* is the sun that illuminates and sustains it all.
  - *Bhu* then becomes fire, *bhuvah* the air, *svaha* the sun, and *mahah* the moon that illuminates the entire world



The principle of unity is continued in the next approach that shows the interconnectedness of the entire creation through the symbolism of *bhu*, *bhuvah* and *svaha* to which a fourth *mahah* was added by Rishi Mahachamsya. *Mahah* can be said to be the Spirit or the Consciousness that

- at night and sustains it.
- *Bhu* then becomes the *Rig Veda*, *bhuvah* the *Sama Veda*, *svaha* the *Yajur Veda* and *mahah* is Brahman, which sustains the Vedas.
  - Finally, as the vital forces or energies, *bhu* is the *prana* (the inward-moving

energy), *bhuvah* the *apana* (outward-moving energy), *svaha* the *vyana* (circulation of energy), and *mahah* the food on which the body depends.

The person who understands the unity of the cosmos through these fourfold sets becomes so wise that even the gods become his supplicants.

The same principle is to be understood in another way through the five-fold nature of existence. There is the earth, atmosphere, heaven, the main quarters or directions, and the four intermediate quarters. The cosmic universe has fire, air, sun, moon, and the stars. The individual has five *pranas*: *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana* (energy of the head and throat), and *samana* (energy of digestion and assimilation). There are five senses: sight, hearing, mind, speech, and touch. The body consists of skin, flesh, muscle, bone, and marrow. One fivefold group has to support the other, although which groups must support each other is not specified. Perhaps it is not material since all are part of an indivisible whole. *Aum* is the primordial sound, which symbolizes creation or Brahman. Hence, the one who contemplates the extremely subtle and inclusive meaning of *Aum* attains or realizes Brahman.

The student learns that he is a part of the same Brahman, a link in the entire chain of creation. He is the microcosm of the macrocosm. In the hollow of his heart resides God or the divine spark, the *chaitanya purusha*, the heart being the seat of all feelings and emotions. The *uvula* at the entrance of the throat enables him to pronounce *Aum*. It is connected to the *sahasrara*, the thousand-petalled seventh chakra at the top of the skull. It connects to the divine energy. The energy of the

kundalini or the sexual energy travels from the *mooladhara chakra* at the base of the body and crossing the other *chakras* rises up the *sahasrara* by which time it is sublimated into spiritual energy. The hollow of the heart, the *uvula* and the *sahasrara* are all interconnected. The heart together with *akasha* at the other end of the axis symbolize that the individual consciousness is the same as cosmic consciousness. The *uvula*, which extends upto the *sahasrara*, forms a single axis. The *sahasrara* opens to the *akasha* showing that the individual energy is only a continuum of the cosmic energy. This realization comes through *tapas*, or the practice of austerities. Essentially, this section is trying to convey that the energy within is the energy without; the Self within is the Self without and all is Brahman. Hence, a person who learns to see himself in all creation and all creation in himself is truly wise or a realized being.

The student having learnt the interconnectedness and unity in the cosmos is then asked to see the entire range of experiences that he encounters in his life in this light, from the inert matter to the most sublime. For this *svadhyaya* and *pravachana* or listening to the expositions of wise men are necessary. While it is important to pronounce and recite the Vedic hymns correctly, it is equally important to understand their meaning. Self-study and the words of wise men serve as constant reminders that all the various names and forms that the student may encounter are the manifestations of the one ultimate truth and that the same cosmic law or *rtam* governs everything whether it is the individual conduct or the cosmic universe. Hence, it is important to know the ethical code of conduct.

### ***The Farewell***

Finally, the teacher prepares to bid farewell and gives his last instructions. The student is enjoined to do his duty; speak the truth; learn and teach; meditate; and control the senses and the mind. Truth is not merely a matter of understanding but also of practice. Understanding only shows the path but the individual must tread that path. That is why teaching, listening, and learning have to be a lifelong endeavour. They do not end with the completion of the course and leaving the *gurukul*. Constant effort has to be made so that knowledge and wisdom grow continuously.

As a householder, the student must ensure progeny and its wellbeing. He must be prosperous as it is essential for a householder's life. The four *purusharthas*, or goals of a householder's life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* — which means the righteous quest for wealth and joy, but with the final goal of freedom. For that, Self-study, which also includes the study of the Self, together with the words of wise men will ensure that the seeker attains wealth, uses it righteously, and walks the path to Self-realization. He will have to take many decisions in life. The teacher instructs him on how that has to be done. Only two paths are open to him.

One is to decide boldly according to his own understanding; and the second is to see what wiser people would do in a similar situation. If he decides to act on his own, he must ensure that he acts righteously. Even if he chooses to follow the example of someone wiser, he must only emulate the good deeds of that person and the onus of evaluating what those deeds are rests upon him only.

Finally, as a householder he must always give in charity. Gifts must be given for public and religious purposes and only to a reliable person for a righteous cause. These should be substantial but always given modestly with an awareness that more could possibly have been done. The final instruction is that if the student, in his future life, is not sure about his action or conduct or his reaction to something, he must ask himself how a brahmin would behave. Here brahmin is used in the sense of one situated in Brahman or the Self. Such a person is bound to be balanced, righteous, largehearted, forgiving, and compassionate. Therefore, what the teacher is essentially telling the student is that when in doubt, think and act as one who is situated in the Self or seek the counsel of a person so situated.

### **Conclusion**

The study is complete. A whole range of concepts have been explained from the basic ethical conduct in daily life to the most sublime philosophy. The last instructions have been given. The only thing that remains is the final prayer and affirmation by the student that the promises in the opening prayer have been fulfilled. Apart from the benediction, the student affirms that during the course of his study and stay with the teacher, he has spoken whatever is right and true. This has satisfied both him and the teacher. The hearts of both are full of gratitude. With this acknowledgement and affirmation, may there be peace. The student is now ready for the future with the blessings of his teacher. ❀

# Life Through the Spiritual Paradigm

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JYOTI MODI

Each person has a personal perspective of life. The mind decides the angle through which it views the spectrum. For the biologist it is all about cells and tissues, for the scientist it would be all about atoms and molecules, for the psychologist it could mean thoughts and emotions and so on. Though each view has been thoroughly researched and can be proven to be right yet it isn't the totality of what human life is. Spirituality is the only lens through which this deep and mysterious life process can be completely comprehended. It gives a wholesome as well as a holistic insight of this very special force called life.

There is an energy beyond this body-mind complex, it is that which distinctly defines the living from the dead. This is viewed as the light that renders consciousness into all beings- *Atman*, or soul, whatever we may call it. Most religions across the world acknowledge the presence of this energy in their own way. It is safe to say that there is hardly anyone who dismisses the presence of the soul be it a theist or an atheist. As man progresses in the stages of life this realization becomes more real. As a child the awareness is totally based on sense objects but as the child steps into adulthood the questions like "who am I?" start to knock. It is then when the quest to find out the truth sets pace. The famous proverb, where there is a will there is a way holds true here because for the real seekers of self the answers do come through aides like our scriptures and our spiritual teachers our *gurus*.

With the guide illumining the path one starts to tread gradually on the journey of 'self-realization'. This invisible indivisible soul resides within each being as the same consciousness- a fragment of the of the all-pervading infinite Supersoul. As the sparks coming out of the fire are fire itself, the *jivas* emerge out of the *paramatama* yet have an individual identity.

The *jiva* after many million lifetimes gets the human birth with the sole purpose to recognize his true nature and go back home to Godhead where he really belongs. For this search one has to direct the outward looking senses to turn within because as long as the senses are engaged with the sense objects the mind is distracted making it impossible to come to a point of focus. The foremost reason for the mind to be scattered is ignorance of who we truly are. According to Hindu theology there are six enemies of the mind the *shad ripu*, which are *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *mada* (arrogance), *moha* (delusion), and *matsarya* (jealousy): the negative characteristics of which prevent man from attaining *moksha* or liberation from this cycle of birth and death. How much we are able to win over these enemies makes us responsible for our own successes and failures.

We all are in search of happiness. Almost everything we do is for this search. Eternal unbounded happiness without a flash of suffering. However, on this path to achieving this happiness, we suffer. The problem is that we are looking for this happiness in the wrong place in this

material world which Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* calls it '*dukhalaya*' the house of unhappiness. Ignorance is the foundation of all, causes the "I"ness and leads to attachment and aversion, finally inflicting fear. To further elaborate on this the sense objects draws our minds towards them causing us to like or dislike the end result, which finally causes concern about not

that is to render selfless service. When one thinks beyond self and places oneself into another person's shoes and helps fellow beings without expecting anything in return or without attaching oneself with the result of the action performed the mind releases the negativities. To take it a step forward when all action is done for the supreme lord meaning to say when action is



satisfying these needs. All this generates the negative feeling of fear hence resulting in suffering. Only when the feelings of 'I' and 'Mine' disappear, the mind becomes free of the enemies. It becomes purified and makes one fit to lead to the atman residing in the body mind complex. The spiritual path is the only path where the pleasure and pains of the world stop making an impact.

The best way to overcome the impurities of the mind is to do karma yoga

divinized one is able to firmly establish oneself on this path. As Swami Vivekananda says, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy- by one, or more, or all of these- and be free. This is the whole of religion."

What he meant to say was every human being is born with the ability to find who he really is, but not each one is able

to, the reason being the mind gets so entangled in the material world that it loses sight of its original path. Only through meditation the mind can be withdrawn and be made to focus on either a mantra, a deity, one's breath or any particular sound. The reason behind this is to keep the mind concentrated on one subject with full attention and not to get easily distracted. Though in various scriptures and even the BhagwadGita shri Krishna says that mere concentration is not enough, it needs to be blended with selfless work too.

A man's action is driven by his predominant nature. The material modes of nature are broadly classified into three types- goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*) and ignorance (*tamas*). Each one is a combination of these in varied ratios. The ones who are of the nature of goodness for them concentration or meditation is easier than a person whose dominant quality is of passion or ignorance. All actions are based on these three 'gunas' and these are responsible for keeping one bound to this material world. This bondage is called 'Maya'.

The good news though is we can free ourselves from it. We are essentially Divine. We have the freedom, only we don't exercise it; we need to struggle, we need to make sincere efforts in this direction. This is our own responsibility and our privilege; no animal can do it, only human beings can. When we start exercising that freedom we start evolving

upwards. At a particular stage in our life, we get the capacity to go beyond these modes of material nature we realize that Divine which is the creator of this entire universe. That is the freedom, exclusive freedom for all human beings. But these three modes are very difficult to overcome, only with the Lord's special grace and blessings one can make it happen. This special grace is called *bhakti*.

According to the scriptures there are three paths to reach God- the path of *jnana*, *karma* and *bhakti*. Its not that one has to choose one of the paths instead the road leading to God is a combination of all. Shri Krishna gives *bhakti* as the topmost stature. He says *bhakti* alone is sufficient for a person who is on the quest of God realization. We understand bhakti as the love for God, along with trust and complete surrender. When one becomes a devotee and completely surrenders then he becomes the servant of the lord and Lord his master. The ego disappears and one thus performs actions out of the love for his master rather than by the influence of the modes of material nature and brings one closest to the Divine. All the senses are engaged to usher a person into the devotional path. Let's say that a person hears some devotional song or hears a spiritual talk, some higher thoughts arise in his mind, this is what we can say is spiritualawakening or *bhakti*. This world being our temporary home and the Self searching its way back, *bhakti* alone can lead us back to our original abode. ❀

