

INTRODUCTION TO SATYARTH PRAKASH

Main ideas are presented by chapter in a question answer manner

as per the original book

Satyartha Prakasha (THE LIGHT OF TRUTH)

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Background to the text

The ideas are presented as a discussion between a few students and a Mahatma.

Under the shade of a thick tree, a radiant sage (Mahatma) was sitting on a mat (asana). Few students (Manav, Gautam, Bhuvnesh and others) approached the Mahatma, greeted him respectfully, touched his feet, and took their seat on the several mats placed in front of him.

With a gentle smile, the Mahatma asked them, “What is the question you have today? Ask me. I will try to answer it to the best of my ability.”

One student stated, “Last Sunday, you instructed us to go through Satyarth Prakash, a great book by Swami Dayanand. We tried to read the Satyarth Prakash but we have not been able to understand it.”

Mahatma Ji responded gently, “I will explain it to you in a way that you can easily understand. Is there any method that you prefer?” To this, another student replied, “It would be wonderful if you could use the dialogue or question and answer method.” The Mahatma replied, “Fine. I will answer your questions.”

CHAPTER 1: ARE THERE MANY GODS?

Manav: “Are there many Gods?”

Mahatma: “God is only one, not many, but gods are many. God is addressed by different names according to His nature, work/ functions, merit/ properties (guna, karma, swabhaw).”

Gautam: “What is His name, and what does it signify?”

Mahatma: “His name is AUM. The root word from which AUM is derived is ‘AV,’ known as dhatu. The dhatu ‘Av’ means ‘rakshne’ - i.e., to protect. Thus, the meaning of the word AUM is one who protects.”

Bhuvnesh: “You stated that God can have different names. Please explain this?”

Mahatma: “God has, besides His own (principal) name, several subsidiary (gaun) names such as Agni, Jal, Vayu, Akash, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Indra, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Rahu, Ketu, Shaineshchar, etc. Let me explain through an example. One man is named Devpal for practical purposes. Everyone addresses him as Devpal. When he teaches, he is called a teacher. If he practices law, he is called a lawyer. Thus, he will have this categorization according to his profession. In his family, he is known as an uncle, father, husband, etc., according to the relationship. So, can you see how the same Devpal can be known by different names? Similarly, God (Ishwar) is known as Jal, Prithvi Agni, Vayu, Akash, etc.”

Manav: “Agni, Vayu, etc. are the names of physical matter, and are also perhaps terms in Ayurveda. Please clarify how do we comprehend?”

Mahatma: “I will ask you a question to explain this. The Sanskrit word ‘Saindhav’ has two meanings – salt and horse. The master told his servant, ‘Saindhavam anaya?’ (bring the Saindhav). Now, tell me, what will the servant do?

Gautam: “Oh, this is simple. If the master is having his meal, he will fetch salt. If the master is going out, he will bring the horse.”

Mahatma: “That is wonderful, Gautam! Your statement is the answer to Manav’s question.”

Bhuvnesh: “Excuse me, how is this relevant to learn Vedas and the meanings of different Veda mantras?”

Mahatma: “Sanskrit words have to be interpreted in reference to the context. In Sanskrit, the word Gau means cow, but the same word has various other meanings, like earth, the senses, speech, knowledge, etc. So, we must pay attention to the context.”

Gautam: “Please, explain this with reference to Veda mantras?”

Mahatma: “Look, Sanskrit words are to be interpreted by referring to their roots. To explain Veda mantras, we must study some of the famous grammar books. These are Asthadhayee, Mahabhashya, Nighantu, Nirukta, etc. Following points will help you understand how to interpret the meanings.

Words indicating God: “It is important to know the context of the matras as well as the adjectives. Whenever the adjectives glorious, prayer, worship, omniscient, universal, pure, eternal, and creator are written, the words signify God.

Words indicating material matters: Whenever the adjectives origin, holocaust, root, and disease prevention are used, the words indicate worldly matters not God.

Words indicating Atma (Jiva): Atma has two meanings: Divine (Parmatama) as well as soul (Jivatma). Omniscient, all-pervading, universal refer to God, while jealousy, envy, anger, effort, sorrow, ignorance, etc., refer to Jivatma.”

Manav: “We understand this now. You mentioned two classifications of Sanskrit – Laukik, and Vedic. Please tell us more about Vedic Sanskrit?”

Mahatma: “For Vedic Sanskrit, you must study two important Sanskrit grammar texts, Ashtadhyayi written by Panini, and Mahabhashya. To understand the meaning of Vedic Sanskrit words, study Dhatu Path and Unadi Gan. The dictionary Nighantu will also be very useful. Nirukta Shastra is an explanatory text that should be further studied to understand Vedic Sanskrit comprehensively.”

Manav: “This appears to be a very tough task.”

Mahatma: “You can read and follow the explanation written by other experts until you get an opportunity to study these original texts.”

Gautam: “You stated that God is one, but He is addressed by many names according to His various attributes, etc. Do the Vedas or other texts provide any evidence of this?”

Mahatma: “Sure. There are many proofs.

इमं वणमिनिम आहुरथो दयस सपणु गमान् ।

एकम सद वा बहुधा वदित्तिनिम यमं मातरवानमाहु ।

indram mitram varuṇamagnim ahuratho divyasa suparṇō garutmāna

ēkam sada viprā bahudhā vadanti agnim yamaṁ mātariśvānamāhu ।

This is cited from Rigveda Mandal 1, Sukta 164, Mantra 46.

Indra, Mitra, Varun, Agni, Divya, Suparna, Garutman, Yam, Matrishva – these are all names of the same one God.

Another proof that the vipra (wise) address the same one God by different names is found in Kaivalya Upanishad.

स मा स वणः सुसः स शवः स अरः स परमः वराट् । स इः स कालाग्निः स चमाः ।

He is Brahma, He is Vishnu, He is Rudra, He is Shiva, He is Akshar, He is Svarat, He is Indra, Kalagni, He is called the Moon.

Bhuvnesh: “Certainly, we will do so later. Please explain to us some of the famous names of God?”

Mahatma: The root word for Ishwar is Isha Aishwarya. He whose every thought is true, pious, and endless aishwarya – such Parmatma is called Ishwar.

Indra – *idee parmashwarya* dhatu makes the word Indra; He who is endowed with great aishwarya.

Brahma – dhatu creates the word Brahma; He who creates the whole world and expands it, that Paramatma is named Brahma.

Vishnu – This dhatu is the root of this word. The Almighty is named Vishnu as He exists in all beings and objects (animate or inanimate).

Shanker – dhatu creates this name. He who looks after the welfare of all and makes happy is known as Shanker.

Rudra – This word is formed from the dhatu *rudir akruvimochna*ॐ. Parmatma is the One that punishes those who trouble others.

Yama – *yamu uperme* dhatu forms the word Yama which stands for the One who impartially arranges, to all beings, the fruits of their deeds.

Bhagwan – is formed from the dhatu *bhaj sevayam* . Bhagwan is He who is opulent and worthy of worshipping.

Narayana – It comes from the word ‘Nar,’ a living being,’ while ‘ayan’ implies the dwelling place. He who is prevalent in all beings is called Narayana.

Lakshmi – *laksha darshaikanyo* dhatu creates the word Lakshmi. Parmatma who sees this *char achar jagat* and creates its fascinating creatures, astonishing *gyanendriya and karmendriya* possessed by human beings, flora and fauna, and the planets are named Lakshmi.

Saraswati – *sri gati* dhatu is the root of the word Saraswati. Gati has three meanings in grammar: knowledge, movement, and attainment. Saraswati is the Lord who has attained various kinds of knowledge.”

Bhuvnesh: “Can we say that the above are the only names for God?”

Mahatma: “Not at all. I described only some of the commonly used names. In the first chapter of his famous book Satyarth Prakash, Swami Dayananda described more than 100 names of God. He is the same One. You can study this book for the enhancement of your knowledge regarding other names.”

Gautam: “May I raise another question? What does ‘saguna’ ‘nirguna’ signify? Does the word Sagun signify form and the word Nirgun formless, please elucidate?”

Mahatma: “OK. Let us see how these words can be explained. Do you know the 10 meaning of ‘Sajal’ (hydrated) and ‘Nirjal’ (dehydrated)?”

Manav: "That's simple. Sajal is that where there is water and Nirjal is that where there is no water."

Mahatma: "Exactly, in the same way, Saguna means with 'guna' that is with certain attributes, and Nirguna is without guna, i.e., without certain attributes. Since God has the qualities of being omniscient, all-pervasive, pure, kind, etc., hence he is called Saguna. On the other hand, God does not have attributes like ignorance, affliction, form or shape, etc. Therefore, He is called Nirguna. In any object, some gunas are present and some gunas are absent. Animate objects are devoid of some of the qualities of animate objects, and vice versa. Similarly, living objects are devoid of some of the qualities of non-living objects. Also, Saguna because they possess the attributes of will and effort. In the same way, God can be understood both as the Nirgun and the Sagun.

Thus, the word Sagun doesn't signify Saakaar and Nirgun doesn't signify Niraakaar. Saakaar means with form or shape, Niraakaar means without form and shape, having attributes of formlessness and shapelessness. Coming to the question of saakaar (one who has form or shape) and niraakaar (one who is formless or shapeless), one who is all-pervasive cannot have a form or a shape. The Entity that extends to the whole cosmos, how it can have a form or shape?"

Bhuvnesh: "Who should be worshipped?"

Mahatma: "Whom do you worship?"

Gautam: "We go to the temples and pray to the idols there, as God."

Mahatma: "According to our discussion so far, what is your opinion?"

Bhuvnesh: "You told us the own name of God is Aum and He protects everyone. But we cannot expect idols to protect us as we hear that many times locked up idols get stolen."

Mahatma: "Absolutely right. What do you think, Gautam?"

Gautam: "An idol cannot see or hear. One is seldom scared of telling a lie or doing any wrong before it, while one would hesitate to do the same things even in front of a child. Hence, the idol does not possess the attribute of omniscience as God does."

Bhuvnesh: "And you also told us that One who is all-pervasive cannot have a form or shape. Since idols have shapes, it is not appropriate to treat an idol as God."

Mahatma: "That's right; you are correct. Idols are made by a sculptor and are inanimate objects. As Bhuvnesh said, if an idol cannot protect itself, how can it protect us? Therefore, the sculptor (God) who has created the entire universe and us, is omniscient, omnipresent, ubiquitous, and par excellence, so He should alone be worshipped."

Manav: "Lord Ram and Lord Krishna are also worshipped as the Almighty God."

Mahatma: "Lord Rama was 'Maryada Purusottam' and Lord Krishna was 'Yogeshwar,' one of the greatest Yogis of their own times. Therefore, instead of worshipping their pictures and idols, we should emulate and imbibe their great characters and deeds."

Gautam: "Why do we chant the word 'Shanti' three times at the end of the prayer?"

Mahatma: "The Shastras and the Upanishads describe three types of suffering (dukkha):

Adhayatmik - relates to the body, such as fever and pain

Adhibhoutik - relates to the sorrows caused by a creature to another creature such as snake biting, a person hit by another person

Adhidaivik - these sorrows result from natural disasters and calamities, such as earthquake, lightning, flood, drought, etc. We pray to God for protection from all these three types of sorrows and sufferings.

So, we recite - Aum Shantih Shantih Shantih!!!"