

## Highest Object of Knowledge

### **Highest Object of Knowledge**

From The Mahabharata

Aswamedha Parva, Section XXXV

Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Arjuna said: It behoveth thee to expound Brahman to me, - that which is the highest object of knowledge. Through thy favour, my mind is delighted with these subtle disquisitions.

Vasudeva (Krishna) said: In this connection is recited the old story of the discourse between the preceptor and his disciple on the subject of Brahman.

Once on a time, O scorcher of foes, an intelligent disciple questioned a certain Brahmana (Brahmin) of rigid vows who was his preceptor, as he was seated (at his ease), saying: What indeed, is the highest good? Desirous of attaining to that which constitutes the highest good, I throw myself at thy feet, O holy one. O learned Brahmana, I solicit thee, bending my head, to explain to me what I ask.

Unto that disciple, O son of Pritha (Arjuna), who said so, the preceptor said: O regenerate one, I shall explain to thee everything about which you may have any doubts.

**Thus addressed, O foremost one of Kuru's race, by his preceptor, that disciple who was exceedingly devoted to his preceptor, spoke as follows, with joined hands. Do thou hear what he said, O thou of great intelligence.**

The disciple said: Whence am I? Whence art thou? Explain that which is the highest truth. From what source have sprung all creatures mobile and immobile? By what do creatures live? What is the limit of their life? What is truth? What is penance, O learned Brahmana? What are called attributes by the good? What paths are to be called auspicious? What is happiness? What is sin? O holy one, O thou of excellent vows, it behoves thee to answer these questions of mine, O learned Rishi, correctly, truly, and accurately. Who else is there in this world than thee that is capable of answering these questions? Do thou answer them, O foremost of all persons conversant with duties. My curiosity is great. Thou art celebrated in all the worlds as one well skilled in the duties relating to Emancipation. There is none else than thou that is

## Highest Object of Knowledge

competent to remove all kinds of doubts. Afraid of worldly life, we have become desirous of achieving Emancipation.

Vasudeva said: Unto that disciple who had humbly sought his instruction and put the questions duly, who was devoted to his preceptor and possessed of tranquillity, and who always behaved in a manner that was agreeable (to his instructor), who lived so constantly by the side of his instructor as to have almost become his shadow, who was self-restrained, and who had the life of a Yati and Brahmachari, O son of Pritha, that preceptor possessed of intelligence and observant of vows, explained all the questions, O foremost one of Kuru's race, O chastiser of all foes.

The preceptor said: All this was declared (in days of old) by Brahma himself (the Grandsire of all the worlds). Applauded and practised by the foremost of Rishis, and depending on a knowledge of the Vedas, it involves a consideration of what constitutes the real entity.

**We regard knowledge (Adhyatma Gyan) to be the highest object, and renunciation as the best penance.**

He who, with certainty, knows the true object of knowledge which is incapable of being modified by circumstances, viz., the soul abiding in all creatures, succeed in going wherever he wishes and comes to be regarded as the highest. That learned man who beholds the residence of all things in one place and their reverence as well, and who sees unity in diversity, succeeds in freeing himself from misery. He, who does not covet anything and does not cherish the idea of mineness with regard to anything, comes to be regarded, although residing in this world, as identifiable with Brahman. He who is conversant with the truth about the qualities of Pradhana (or Nature), acquainted with the creation of all existent objects, divested of the idea of mineness, and without pride, succeeds, without doubt, in emancipating himself.

Understanding properly that great tree which has the unmanifest for its seed sprout, and the understanding for its trunk, and high consciousness of self for its branches, and the senses for the cells whence its twigs issue, and the five great elements for its flower-buds, and the gross elements for its smaller boughs, which is always endued with leaves, which always puts forth flowers, and upon which all existent objects depend, whose seed is Brahman, and

## Highest Object of Knowledge

which is eternal, - and cutting all topics with the sharp sword of knowledge, one attains to immortality and casts off birth and death.

The conclusions with regard to the past, present, and future, etc., and religion, pleasure and wealth, which are all well known to conclaves of Siddhas, which appertain to remote cycles, and which are, indeed, eternal, I shall declare to thee, O thou of great wisdom. These constitute what is called Good. Men of wisdom, understanding them in this world, attain to success. In days of old, the Rishis Vrihaspati and Bharadwaja, and Gautama and Bhargava, and Vasishtha, and Kasyapa, and Viswamitra and Atri, assembled together for the purpose of asking one another. They thus assembled together after having travelled over all paths and after they had got tired with the acts each of them had done. Those regenerate persons, placing the sage son of Angiras at their head, proceeded to the region of the Grandsire. There they beheld Brahma perfectly cleansed of all sins. Bowing their heads unto that high-souled one who was seated at his ease, the great Rishis, endued with humility, asked him this grave question regarding the highest good. How should a good man act? How would one be released from sin? What paths are auspicious for us? What is truth, and what is sin? By what action are the two paths, northern and southern, obtained? What is destruction? What is Emancipation? What is birth and what is death of all existent objects? I shall tell thee, O disciple, what the Grandsire, thus addressed, said unto them, confirmable to the scriptures. Do thou listen.

**Brahma said: It is from Truth that all creatures, mobile and immobile, have been born. They live by penance (of action). Understand this, O ye of excellent vows. In consequence of their own actions they live, transcending their own origin.**

[Note: Their origin is Brahman or Truth. They live, dissociated from their origin in consequence of their acts. When their acts cease, they return to and become merged in Brahman.]

For Truth, when united with qualities, becomes always possessed of five indications. Brahman is Truth. Penance is Truth. Prajapati is Truth. It is from Truth that all creatures have sprung. Truth is the universe of being. It is for this that Brahmanas (Brahmins) who are always devoted to Yoga, who have transcended wrath and sorrow, and who always regard Religion as the

## Highest Object of Knowledge

causeway(along which everyone must pass for avoiding the morass below), take refuge in Truth.

I shall now speak of those Brahmanas who are restrained by one another and possessed of knowledge, of the orders, and of those who belong to the four modes of life. The wise say that Religion or duty is one, (though) having four quarters. Ye regenerate ones, I shall speak to ye now of that path which is auspicious and productive of good. That path has constantly been trod over by men possessed of wisdom in order to achieve an identity with Brahman. I shall speak now of that path which is the highest and which is exceedingly difficult of being understood. Do you understand, in all its details, ye highly blessed ones, what is the highest seat?

**The first step has been said to be the mode of life that appertains to Brahmacharis (celibate students). The second step is domesticity. After this is the residence in the woods. After that it should be known, is the highest step, viz., that relating to Adhyatma.**

[Note: Adhyatma: That course of life, which has for its object the acquisition of knowledge relating to the soul. This, of course, includes the knowledge that is needed for achieving identification with the Supreme Soul or Brahman.]

Light, space, sun, wind, Indra, and Prajapati, - one sees these as long as one does not attain to Adhyatma. I shall declare the means (by which that Adhyatma may be attained). Do ye first understand them. The forest mode of life that is followed by ascetics residing in the woods and subsisting upon fruits and roots and air is laid down for the three regenerate classes. The domestic mode of life is ordained for all the orders. They that are possessed of wisdom say that Religion or duty has Faith for its (chief) indication. Thus have I declared to you the paths leading to the deities. They are adopted by those that are good and wise by their acts. Those paths are the causeways of piety. That person of rigid vows, who adopts any one of these modes separately, always succeeds in time to understand the production and destruction of all creatures.

I shall now declare accurately and with reasons, the elements that reside in parts in all objects. The great soul, the unmanifest, egoism (consciousness of

## Highest Object of Knowledge

identity), the ten and one organs (of knowledge and action), the five great elements, the specific characteristics of the five elements, - these constitute the eternal creation. The number of elements has been said to be four and twenty, and one (more). That person of wisdom who understands the production and destruction of all these elements, that man among all creatures, never meets with delusion.

He who understands the elements accurately, all the qualities, all the deities, succeeds in cleansing himself of all sin. Freed from all bonds, such a man succeeds in enjoying all regions of spotless purity.

