

The consequences of not acquiring right knowledge¹

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Today's education is all about getting a job that pays well. The route to this is highly standardized. Therefore, it is exactly the same to everyone and has absolutely no relevance to their nature, skills and character. It is quite possible that many of us may not even have the slightest interest in doing engineering. Still a vast majority passing out of +2 examinations will walk through the portals of an engineering college. Half of them will be forced by their parents and the other half does on account of plain ignorance. Once they are out of the college, they are told to do MBA (Management degree). Again, this has nothing to do with their interest and capability in the domain of management.

Right Knowledge Vs Today's education

In such an approach to the business of education, the last thing that will happen is acquiring the right kind of knowledge. What we mean by right kind of knowledge is that which makes life and work more meaningful, increase the propensity to find true inner satisfaction and align one's life priorities and choices to the true inner calling. No aspect of today's education will bring these issues to the foreground. There is not much to debate on this issue as educational institutions are busy completing syllabus and pressurising the students to get good marks so that the institutions will be seen to be credible. This will enable them to raise their fees further up thereby improving their financial status. The students will get jobs without much difficulty and therefore they and their parents are happy. Because both the interests are aligned it makes no sense to impart the so called "right knowledge".

The question that remains unanswered is whether this status quo is fine. Should we really bother too much about the so called right knowledge or just leave it merely as an interesting idea to be worried about after we finish everything else in life and retire at the age of 70? Shri Krishna provides some perspectives on what happens when individuals are not endowed with right knowledge. We shall look at one *śloka* in Chapter 4 of *Bhagavad Gītā* to understand this in some detail.

The state of persons without right knowledge

Shri Krishna calls one without the right knowledge as ignorant or devoid of knowledge (*ajñāḥ*). Such a person according to Him will have two peculiar characteristics; such a person will not be able to bring faith into the scheme of things that he/she does (*aśraddha-dhānaḥ*), such a person will also be a doubting personality all the time (*saṁśayātmā*). He further makes a point that on account of these, he will perish (*vinaśyati*). Such persons would have achieved nothing worthwhile in this world (*nāyam loko'sti*), nor anything to gain in any other world (*na paraḥ*).

¹ Mahadevan, B. (2015). "The consequences of not acquiring the right knowledge", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 12 (8), April, 2015, pp 10 – 12.

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अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धधानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति ।
नायं लोकोऽस्ति न परः न सुखं संशयात्मनः ॥ 4.40

*ajñāśca-aśraddha-dhānaśca saṁśayātmā vinaśyati
nāyam loko'sti na paraḥ na sukham saṁśyātmanah*

What Shri Krishna has articulated in this *śloka* is profound and it has deep spiritual implications. Further it also has implications to our day-to-day living. We shall look at the latter aspect in some detail to understand the message that Shri Krishna has for us.

The perils of a doubting personality

At the outset it is important to understand that a doubting person may not be able to acquire any serious knowledge of any kind. This is because the doubting nature will come in the way every moment and take the mind and the intellect away from the knowledge gathering process. Take a very simple example of a person producing some good results in the work he/she does (such as performing well in the studies or doing well in sports or performing arts). A mind free from fear, envy and doubt will truly seek to understand how the other person is indeed able to perform better and in the process may even have detected certain things to imbibe in one self or learn from the other. On the other hand, a doubting personality will always wear a colored glass and view the world around. He/she may spend too much time in finding out how the other person managed the task at hand. The doubting mind will look for spurious and unscrupulous or even unethical issues behind the scene which could have resulted in such a good performance in the other person. In the process it will deny itself of any valuable learning.

Most of the events in life which have greater consequences such as career progression, marriage, life partnership, friends and relatives, professional and personal relationships will all undergo a similar pattern of analysis. It will all suffer this inherent limitation arising out of being a doubtful personality. One may wonder why people develop such a personality. This is simply because of lack of conviction and faith that this wonderful world and the complex web of events and outcomes, notwithstanding whether positive or negative, is due to the Divine play. This lack of acceptance or realization is exactly called *aśraddha*.

Once a person develops *aśraddha*, he/she thinks he alone has to solve the problem and engages into all the activities. Since he/she does not have a robust framework to explain adverse events happening to him/her, he develops a great sense of doubtfulness on people, system, entities and even the cosmic order.

Doubting personality has more to lose than gain

Once a person takes such a position, he/she has taken upon himself/herself a responsibility to solve the life problems for which that person has limited wherewithal and capability. This is obviously a losing game in the long run. Therefore Shri Krishna says he may not be able to

find peace of mind or happiness. Also at the end of the day his balance sheet of life will be more tilted towards liabilities than assets and practically would have gained nothing in this world. "Not gaining anything in this world" points to the final scorecard in one's life journey. It merely means that the outcomes, achievements and sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that one gets in various life pursuits will in no way be commensurate to the efforts that one puts in various things in life.

The only way the *aśraddha* will be dispelled is to have the right knowledge. The first step in the process of acquiring right knowledge is to put a realistic value to the kind of knowledge that we acquire through the modern education. Modern education can at best put more money in our hands and let us acquire some material assets. It can in no way enable us buy peace of mind and a sense of fulfillment. Once we are able to value the modern education appropriately, we will seriously begin to think about the need to supplement it with life fulfilling knowledge.

The great ancient wisdom of our seers, *rshis* contained in the vedic texts and *purāṇas* are the primary as well as a rich source of this knowledge. We need to realise the value by spending adequate time on a regular basis in consuming this treasure of knowledge. *Sat Sangas*, Prayers, Bhajans, *Pravacanās* and *Harikathās* are many ways by which we can steadily acquire this knowledge over time.