

Introduction

It is the tradition in the School to start all activities from stillness.

So I invite you all just to sit quietly for a few moments and let the body relax, to let the energies return to rest. And to let any thoughts or ideas to pass.

And now simply connect with the sense of touch – the weight of the feet on the floor, the body on the chair, the clothes on the skin, air on face and hands. Be in touch with the whole body. Here and now.

Pause.

Good

The title of this talk is making the natural law practical.

This immediately raises a number of questions, the first of which is what is meant by natural law.

One aspect, or partial definition, is that Natural law is inherent in the creation. It governs creation - present from the beginning, constant throughout and operates until the end.

We are familiar with this at a physical level. The laws of physics, chemistry etc. appear to be constant in space and time: the speed of light is the speed of light; the composition and nature of the elements in the periodic table do not change.

Law always operates – whether it is followed or not. One can work in accordance with the law or one can work against the law, intentionally or inadvertently, but the law always operates and so the results are always lawful.

An analogy in the physical world could be, for example, the law of gravity. The law of gravity always works. If you build a bridge cognisant of the laws of gravity, it stays up. If you build a bridge ignoring the law of gravity it is going to fall down. Either way the law of gravity operates - success or failure are both lawful.

Before we pursue the Natural Law further I just want to consider the question of what it means to make it practical.

I suggest it means to be able to practise it in our daily lives. That is, not for it to be kept at some theoretical or academic level. Nor for it to be kept just for special occasions – such as for a Saturday morning philosophy lecture.

So it must relate to how we act in our daily lives.

Which brings us neatly to Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas¹ identifies the rational nature of human beings as that which defines moral law: "the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts" (Aquinas, ST I-II, Q.90, A.I).

¹ Thomas Aquinas 1225-1274 Dominican Priest

Based on this view, he argues that since human beings are by nature rational beings, it is morally appropriate that they should behave in a way that conforms to their rational nature. Thus, Aquinas and Aristotle before him derives the moral law from the nature of human beings – which gives us the term natural law.²

For Thomas Aquinas, and for other philosophers, Natural Law relates to the moral law of behaviour for human beings.

From an earlier time we have Cicero³:

True law is right reason in agreement with Nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrong doing by its prohibitions.

So for today, along with our good friends Thomas Aquinas and Cicero, I am going to approach the question of Natural Law in the context of the human being.

Sri Santananda Saraswati, a modern Indian teacher, goes further. He says:

**The essence of humanity is the fulfilment of the law.
The essence of the law is prosperity and freedom.**

² (Aquinas, Summa Theologica I-II, Q.90, A.I. The theory of Natural Law was put forward by Aristotle but championed by Thomas Aquinas. Man desires happiness, but for Aquinas this means fulfilling our purpose as humans. He said, in Summa Theologica, "whatever man desires, he desires it under the aspect of good." Fulfilling our purpose is the only 'good' for humans.

³ Cicero, De Republica 51 BCE

It continues: And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions upon good men in vain, though neither have any effect on the wicked.

He adds that:

..... Education of these laws is very necessary.

And so we find ourselves here today.

There are various philosophical and religious traditions that provide moral guidance – how one should act individually and in society. They are often presented as commandments or virtues. We are familiar with many of them.

From the Old Testament, the ten commandments. I am sure you all know them well but I won't embarrass you by asking you to recite them.

And from the New Testament, we have what is referred to as the Great Commandment:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.⁴

Or from Shakespeare:

This above all: to thine ownself be true,

⁴ Matthew 22:35-40

And it must follow, as the night the day,

Thou canst not then be false to any man. ⁵

All are good prescriptions for how to lead a good life – but not all are necessarily obvious how they might be put into practice. Apparently, there was a town in America that wanted to revoke all laws and just follow the ten commandments – which is fine in principle but quite how they would be enforced is another question. I might have quite a different definition of what honouring one's mother and father might be compared to my children! And as for detecting and punishing coveting

As those who have attended talks here before will know we have looked at the question of how to lead a good life – a fulfilled life, based on the ancient Greek tradition from Socrates to the Stoics.

⁵ Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
...
Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Polonius to Laertes, Hamlet Act 1 Scene 3

It is interesting to note that there have also been various attempts by modern philosophers and writers to postulate a series of commandments that have no religious connotations. It is recognised by many that having a guide for life provides the basis for living civilly in society. It is also recognised that, by abandoning some of the so called ancient, traditional – that is, religious - guides, there is a risk that society in general, and the next generations in particular, lose any established sense of acceptable behaviour.

Although, I do not propose to look in detail at any of these modern attempts, I think it is useful to recognise that modern philosophers, many of them committed atheists, still see the value in articulating a set of guides or virtues. This includes people such as Bertrand Russell, Richard Dawkins, and Alan de Botton. And because of the power of the Ten Commandments these more modern writers also tend to list ten.

So for example:

A.C. Grayling British philosopher and atheist⁶

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- **Love well**
- **Seek the good in all things**
- **Harm no others**
- **Think for yourself**
- **Take responsibility**
- **Respect nature**
- **Do your utmost**
- **Be informed**
- **Be kind**
- **Be courageous**

It is hard to imagine that anyone would have a problem with these.

Professor Grayling adds a rider, which we might find useful to keep in mind as we progress this morning. That is, that, in respect of these injunctions we should **SLIDE** “at least, sincerely try”.

⁶ [The Good Book](#), compiled by [A. C. Grayling](#) (Founder and Master of the New College of the Humanities); Fellow of St Anne’s College, Oxford

But for today we are going to look at an ancient Indian traditional source, the Laws of Manu, and some commentary provided by Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī.

The Laws of Manu are attributed to the legendary first man and lawgiver, Manu. In its present form, it dates from the 1st century BCE.

It contains many sections dealing with cosmogony⁷; with the definition of the law; religious – that is Hindu – rites and practices; societal customs, such as marriage, hospitality, dietary restrictions; the law of kings and others in society; as well as religious topics, such as the doctrine of karma, the soul, and hell.

The text was written down at a time where there was no real distinction between religious law and practices and secular law.

Now, today, I was not planning to get into a full discussion on the merits or otherwise of the Laws of Manu as a complete body of work. It would be a larger and possibly more contentious session.

⁷ **Cosmogony** (or cosmogeny) is any theory concerning the coming into existence (or origin) of either the cosmos (or universe), or the so-called reality of sentient beings

Rather, I want to look at one verse in particular that describes the tenfold law which everyone should obey. And while Manu would encourage everyone from all walks of life and of whatever age to follow these laws, he makes a particular point of their relevance for the householder – that is, for people like you and me who are actively engaged fulfilling our duties in the world.

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So, the ten aspects of law, as Manu, describes it are⁸:

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Patience

Forgiveness

Self Control

Not to Steal

Purification

Mastery over Sensory Organs

Intellect in the Employment of Obedient Service

Knowledge of the Self

The Truth

Not to be Agitated

⁸ Manu 6:92

Looking at this list, I suspect that some of us are immediately giving ourselves a score – yes to some, “could do better” to others.

Now, if we remember that for St Thomas Aquinas the natural law is the natural law because it accords with our nature, then not only is it perfectly natural to be lawful it is, as it were, already in our nature.

And if it is natural, we might ask ourselves why sometimes we are being unnatural; that is, not following the law.

I should point out that this approach is somewhat binary – it’s an either/or. Either one is following the law or one is acting unlawfully.

Remember the bridge – either it is a lawful bridge, built according to the law of gravity and it stays up; or it is an unlawful bridge, built ignoring the law of gravity and it falls down. The law is the law – it is the bridge that is either lawful or unlawful. There is no sort of neutral, middle ground.

So let’s look at these ten in a bit more detail. And to help us we’re also going to use the commentary provided by Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī:

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Patience⁹

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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Patience is an aspect of constancy. Any person who has patience is closer to constancy; this is the first aspect of the human law. To be patient is to live by law and not to have patience is against the law.

{Alternate commentary¹⁰: Having confidence and patience. If there is no confidence, there can't be patience. These two are united. So, Sanatan Dharma wants individuals to develop confidence and patience.}

⁹ Patience, or fortitude (dhriti)

¹⁰ Good Company, p. 125-127

The Sanskrit word that is here translated as patience is more generally translated as fortitude. One example is when the body is tired or in pain, due to illness, or age, or some defect, the attitude that makes you not mind the pain, is what here is called patience or fortitude. Even though there is pain, there is a capacity to put up with it – sometimes happily - not yielding to expressions of complaint.

But of course this is referring to more than just physical discomfort.

Patience, or fortitude, enables us to bear misfortunes and insults with equilibrium. Outward events cannot shake us nor can occasional inner turmoil serve to deflect us from our chosen path and goal. By stability we learn to persevere under all circumstances to stay the course in the outer world.

So we might want to consider, since we are a school of practical philosophy, in which circumstances we are patient and, possibly more importantly, in which circumstances we are impatient.

It is worth noting that generally we will be impatient when what is happening doesn't accord with that we want to happen. We have a picture of how the world should be going and, guess what, it isn't going our way.

Now we may have noticed that sometimes something that would have made us impatient on another occasion isn't this time. Logic and reason would suggest therefore, if it wasn't obvious already, that the impatience comes from ourselves not from the external thing that we might blame as the cause of the impatience – "if the traffic wasn't in the way I wouldn't get impatient"

So we need to see what idea, or desire, is being thwarted which is giving rise to the impatience.

Just the simple memory that it is not the external "thing", whatever it may be, which is causing the impatience has a tremendous ability to transform the situation.

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Forgiveness¹¹

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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Only those who are powerful need to cultivate forgiveness. The weak does it naturally or willy-nilly. He cannot do otherwise. The weak and the poor must forgive because he has nothing to give against insult or injury. To forgive is the human law, and not to forgive is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: Having consideration and giving pardon and being tolerant of all the difficulties and awkwardness and faults of others, so that you provide them with space, and in due course, when they see there is no reaction, they may learn something better which you hold very dear to yourself.}

¹¹ Forgiveness (kshama)

Forgiveness means composure. Composure means that even when you are addressed by someone who is angry or you are assaulted in some way, there is no emotional change within you.

This can happen if you do not internalise the other person's behaviour, but just allow him to be what he is and wait for the disturbance to pass. No angry response would arise in you¹².

This is an accommodation, as it were, which permits you to understand the other person. Unless you have the readiness to allow a person to be as he or she is, there is no way of understanding him or her.

Forgiveness consists in not inflicting, or wishing to inflict, harm on those who harm or wrong us.

This is not to say that wrongdoers should have no curtailment. Social structure demands constraints. Those whose duty it is to enforce just laws for the well-being of humanity act as instruments of law. Their judgments should be meted out without malice or a spirit of revenge.

A passage in the Mahabharata is as follows: "One should forgive, under any injury... Forgiveness is the might of the mighty; forgiveness is sacrifice; forgiveness is quiet of mind. Forgiveness and gentleness are the qualities of the Self-possessed. They represent eternal virtue."

¹² If anger arises and you resolve it, that is called *akrodha*. If anger does not arise, it is *ksama*.

Forgiving means to give your enemy a chance to gain better understanding. If you become vengeful or angry, you only make more enemies, for an angry person is the target of all.

There was an interview on Radio 4¹³ recently with Eddie Makue former general secretary of the South Africa Council of Churches.

Eugene de Kock, a former South African police colonel and assassin, active under the apartheid government was being released from prison after 20 years.

Eddie Makue, who had been personally affected by the crimes of Eugene de Kock, was asked for his reaction to him being released so early. Mr Makue said that as human beings it was a little bit uncomfortable, but he could accept it because he is so supportive of the Constitutional framework and legislative process.

Also, there was a written message from Archbishop Tutu who said that he prays that those who Eugene de Kock hurt can find it in themselves to forgive.

Now, I found the next part of the interview really interesting:

¹³ Radio 4/Sunday interview with Edwin (Eddie) Makue former general secretary of the SA council of churches – 8 Feb 2015

The Questioner asked: "Can you forgive?"

And he answered: "One of the things that Archbishop Tutu, through his witness as a spiritual leader and as a Christian, taught us through the early stages of the Truth & Reconciliation process is that you can only forgive those who ask for their forgiveness and we are therefore appreciative of the written statement of the Archbishop that we urge those who have committed atrocities against the people of South Africa to have the courage to seek forgiveness and Eugene de Kock has practically sought such forgiveness and on that basis we are compelled by our faith and compelled by us being South Africans to grant him forgiveness in the same way that God grants forgiveness to us.¹⁴"

Questioner: "But it must be difficult ..."

Answer: "Forgiveness is always difficult and that is the nice thing about it: that it is not something that comes cheaply; it is not something that comes easily and therefore we attach even more value to the opportunity that we have of being given the choice to forgive."

Which I found interesting and inspiring.

¹⁴ Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Matt Vi 12

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses. Matt V1 14,15

It would appear that forgiveness is not forgiveness if it comes easily!¹⁵¹⁶

15 An eye for eye only ends up making the whole world blind. Gandhi

¹⁶ **Gordon Wilson.** On 8 November 1987 a **bomb** planted by the **Provisional IRA** exploded during Enniskillen's Remembrance Day parade injuring Wilson and fatally injuring his daughter, Marie, a nurse.

Wilson's response to the bombing, "I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge".

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Self-control¹⁷

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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Self-control is the control of the organs of action. This is possible only by discipline imposed on the individual responses in action, caused by one's own temperament. Lower temperaments are wild and powerful; they need control through education and discipline. Self-control is, therefore, the human law and not to have self-control is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: The senses are very fast and if the mind is turbulent, receiving impressions from different sources, it is quite probable that sensual hunger and thirst may be inflamed because of the beautiful things being seen in the world, so every individual needs to have some control over the sensory appetite and its expression.}

¹⁷ damah

Self-control, or self-restraint, in relation to action is intended to cover all activities: talking, walking, eating, moving around. Every expression must be appropriate.

But self-control in relation to actions requires the power to control the senses when they are excited, pleasantly or unpleasantly, by the sensations of sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch.

Being a master of the senses is freedom.

It is alertness with reference to your mind. it is purely a will-based value.

Just as repetition of the lack of self-restraint leads to bad habits, so the repetition of the practice of self-restraint leads to good habits.

Sometimes this seems difficult, but steadfastness in practice helps.

As Shakespeare said¹⁸: Assume a virtue, if you have it not.

¹⁸ Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence; the next more easy;
For use almost can change the stamp of nature.”

Hamlet Act 3 Scene 4

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Not to steal¹⁹

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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Not to steal others' property or wealth. To steal is to take things not given consciously with pleasure. To take more than what one deserves or needs is also stealing. To be fair, equitable, is the human law; to steal is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: You should take only what you deserve, and consider everyone else equally deserving. So, do not take anything extra - all that you accumulate extra is theft. You steal from the universe and you deprive other people. So do not keep anything more than what should be equally available to everybody else.}

Now I trust that most many of us here – hopefully, all of us - do not go around stealing things.

¹⁹ Not to steal: asteyam

But note that the description is fuller and more challenging than blatant larceny.

In this context, to steal includes taking something if it is not given consciously with pleasure. So if something is given to you grudgingly even though you think you might deserve it then that would fall into this category of stealing.

And then, possibly more challenging, to take more than what one deserves or needs is also considered stealing. I suspect that most of might easily accept the idea that it is wrong, unlawful, to take more than one deserves. But to take more than one needs – well, we might consider that more of a challenge.

Also, it might be worth noting that “steal” is the root of the words “stealth” and “stealthy” – which have the sense of doing things secretly, hoping not to be discovered.

This now opens up a new area for consideration in our own actions.

While we may not be going around physically stealing things, and while we may also not be sneaking around furtively, how many things are we doing that we hope are not discovered by others.

This immediately gives the clue as to whether the action is lawful, natural, or not.

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Purification²⁰

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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This is the act of purification, bodily, intellectually and emotionally. Cleanliness of the body, place of residence, environment, clarity of mind, thought and reasoning and purity of emotions and feelings constitute the human law. Not to purify body, mind and heart is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: Cleanliness of body and mind. One has to learn to clean one's body, one's mind and one's heart, and for that one has to find a system through a teacher.}

Note that purification here is not just physical – although that's obviously a good place to start.

²⁰ Purification: saucam

Before I continue, I have the suspicion that we might be about to get on to sensitive ground here – so in case it's been forgotten, it might be worth remembering Professor Grayling's addendum to "at least, sincerely try"

One of the interesting phrases in the commentary here is "clarity of mind" – for the mind, thought and reasoning to be clear.

It does seem sometimes the case that we simply can't see clearly what is going on in the mind – our thought processes are confused and our reasoning muddled.

So the first step in purification is to act in a way that brings about clarity.

Only when we can see clearly what is going on is it really possible to do something about it.

The analogy is sometimes given of the glass full of muddy water – it just looks muddy; cloudy and opaque. But if it is just left alone, left to settle then amazingly the water gradually gets clearer and clearer. Then there is a clear distinction between the water, which is naturally pure and clear, and the stuff that was floating round but which has now fallen to the bottom.

So we have to find for ourselves time for the mind to settle.

It will get naturally shaken up again as we go about our day but periods where the mind comes to rest will help give clarity to the mind and will enable us to see clearly.

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Now it will help if we don't keep throwing mud into the glass – but the choice of what we put in the glass, of what we feed the mind, comes much easier if the mind is clear in the first place.

Which leads us on smoothly to the next aspect of the natural law.

²¹ I can see clearly now the rain is gone.
I can see all obstacles in my way.
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind.
It's gonna be a bright (bright)
bright (bright) sunshiny day.
It's gonna be a bright (bright)
bright (bright) sunshiny day.

Jimmy Cliff

SLIDE

Mastery over sensory organs²²

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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Mastery over sensory organs of knowledge and perceptions. Mastery over senses requires choice of perceptions conducive to righteous life. Withdrawal from depraved sight, vulgar sounds, filthy odour, etc paves the way for life of dignity. Thus mastery over senses is according to the law. Not to master the senses or to pervert the senses of knowledge is against the law.

²² Mastery over sensory organs: indriyanigraha (167/2)

nigraha (546/1) keeping down or back, restraining, binding, coercion, suppression, defeat, ; seizing, catching, arresting, holding fast

{Alternate commentary: There is a natural course of use of the senses and these can be regulated; the rules are prescribed in every tradition, and from these one has to learn how to use one's senses within those limitations. One does not curb the use of the senses but regulates them. The curbing of excessive use will then take place naturally.}

This, as it were, works with the previous aspect of purification – they reinforce each other. This is the avoiding throwing more mud in the glass.

Now restraint of the senses is a challenge. The senses are going to receive whatever is presented to them – and in many cases we do not seem to have much choice. Especially out of doors – where we may be assailed by advertising or graffiti or other pleasant or unpleasant sights.

Now we do have some choices. As it suggests, we should avoid indulging in depravity, vulgarity and filth – and where we find ourselves amongst such things we could refrain from entertaining them.

But there's also this reference to the sensory organs of knowledge. These are the same senses as the physical senses but in the mind – because we appear to see, hear, smell, taste and touch in our mind. And the most obvious restraint that is required here is to restrain the uncontrolled imagining and daydreaming that, I hear, some people can indulge in.

You know, walking down the street, seeing the advert in the travel agent's window and suddenly imagining yourself halfway around the world and maybe years in the past or in the future, lazing on a beach, pina colada in hand, sated after a fine meal, etc etc.

As well as being totally imaginary and a waste of energy, it is a disconnection from the here and now – and who knows what might be missed while you're off in this make belief world – including the lamppost that is about to wake you up abruptly!

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The intellect in the employment of obedient service²³

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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The intellect in the employment of obedient service, listening to discourses, reception of good ideas, accepting these ideas, analysis, science of meaning or semantics and philosophical or spiritual principles is the human law. To misuse the intellect is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: One is expected to use one's intellect or reason and find out the causes of things and use them as necessity may arise.}

Our intellect is one of our most powerful and valuable assets.

²³ Intellect in the employment of obedient service: Dhih

The intellect is the source of reason and of discrimination – not in the pejorative sense but in the sense of discriminating between truth and untruth, the real and the unreal.

It is there to be used and it can be used well or badly.

The suggestion here is that it is put to good use when it considers the higher aims of life – for example, coming to a philosophy talk on a Saturday morning.

I am reminded of the soliloquy from Hamlet:

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**What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason,
how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how
express and admirable! In action how like an Angel!
in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the
world! The paragon of animals!²⁴**

24 I have of late, (but wherefore I know not) lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition; that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'er hanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire: why, it appeareth no other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. 'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an Angel! in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor Woman neither; though by your smiling you seem to say so

Hamlet Act II Scene 2

Use of intellect leads in this direction and we might ourselves whether this is the normal picture that we have of ourselves and of our fellows?

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Knowledge of the Self²⁵

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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In the Gita, Krishna, whilst describing the aspects of the Absolute, says “I am the spiritual knowledge”. Thus, to acquire spiritual knowledge is the human law and to engage in unrepresentable knowledge is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: One has to acquire true knowledge, which is made manifest as far as Sanatan Dharma is concerned through the Vedas, which are supposed to be not man-made. Who made them nobody knows, so one has to acquire the knowledge of the scriptures.}

This may take a little explanation, especially for those unfamiliar with the system of philosophy that is presented here in this School.

²⁵ Knowledge of the Self: vidya

Indeed, it may take a little explanation, even for those who attend the classes here!

The name given to the philosophic tradition followed here is Advaita, which literally means “not two”, unity.

We all, even though we are all individuals, are in essence no different from the universal consciousness that is ever present and unchanging and, here, referred to as Absolute.

In the Indian tradition, Krishna is an incarnation of the Absolute. When he uses the word “I” it is in a universal sense. And since, in the philosophy of Advaita, the individual – that is you and I – is in essence no different to the universal, when Krishna says that I am the spiritual knowledge he is also referring to the essential nature in each of us as well.

So if our nature embodies spiritual knowledge then it is natural, it is lawful, for that to be realised.

In the Sufi tradition it talks of three levels of knowledge:

- Knowledge at the level of facts and information
- Knowledge at the subtle level of how things work, and most essentially
- Knowledge of how things are.

So the question is what are we seeking in terms of knowledge and at what level?

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The truth²⁶

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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The truth, that which exists. To perceive that which really exists, to conceive the truth as it ought to exist and speak the truth as it does and has existed in the mind is the aspect of the human law. To deviate from the truth is against the law.

²⁶ Satyam

{Alternate commentary: The truth. There is only one truth about anything; there can't be two different truths about the same subject. Everybody in the world is hankering for truth, but it happens that people want their particular brand of truth, they are not eager or ready to accept that there can be something different. One may be right or wrong, and then rationalisation is necessary. Even thieves, robbers and evil men, they also wish that the people with whom they cooperate should speak the truth so that they do not get caught by the police! So truth is important not only for people in highly developed and cultured society; the need is everywhere; but somehow people like to serve their own ends through their own concept of truth.}

There is only one truth about anything; there can't be two different truths about the same subject. Everybody in the world is hankering for truth, but it happens that people want their particular brand of truth. They are not eager or ready to accept that there can be something different.

Even criminals want that the people with whom they cooperate to speak their truth so that they do not get caught by the police! We even have the phrase "honour amongst thieves".

Truth is important for everyone in all societies; the need is everywhere; but somehow people like to serve their own ends through their own concept of truth.

It is said that Truth is the foundation stone of the universe. "The worlds are built on truth," says the Mahabharata. Men and civilizations stand or fall according to their attitude toward truth.

An honest person is spontaneously admired by all right-thinking people.

There is a caveat when it comes to speech. We should always exercise judgment and common sense before speaking. It is not enough merely to tell the truth; one's words should also be sweet, healing, and beneficial to others. Hurtful statements, however accurate, are usually better left unsaid. Many a heart has been broken and many a life wrecked by truths spoken by others inopportunistly. But that is not an invitation to speak pleasant untruths.

And, of course, truth in our speech is only part of the picture. Our thoughts and actions are also relevant.

Gandhi said

**Happiness is when what you think, what you say,
and what you do are in harmony**

And finally

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Not to be agitated²⁷

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī says:

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Anger or rage is instrumental to violence. Therefore, not to be agitated, not to fall into rage is to avoid violence. To keep cool, to keep continent is the human law. To be enraged and to be violent is against the law.

{Alternate commentary: One should never get agitated under any circumstances. There may be occasions when a hard line is necessary, usually for the sake of education, but taking a hard line is not necessarily getting agitated. One can tell the difference between righteous agitation or wrong agitation. If one is wrongly agitated, one cannot take right action, so this has to be avoided.}

²⁷ Akrodha

In this description there is an implicit acknowledgement of the existence of anger. It is the situation where we are already angry; something has triggered it.

And anger really stands for any negative emotion.

Cognitively we can change. If we couldn't, we might as well all go home now.

It might be difficult to change and one of the reasons that it seems difficult is that we think that it is in our nature to respond negatively.

There is a zen story:

SLIDE

A Zen student came to Bankei and said: “Master, I have an ungovernable temper — how can I cure it?”

SLIDE

“Show me this temper,” said Bankei, “it sounds fascinating.”

SLIDE

“I haven’t got it right now,” said the student, “so I can’t show it to you.”

SLIDE

“Well then” said Bankei, “bring it to me when you have it.”

SLIDE

“But I can’t bring it just when I happen to have it,” protested the student. “It arises unexpectedly, and I would surely lose it before I got it to you.”

SLIDE

“In that case,” said Bankei, “it cannot be part of your true nature. If it were, you could show it to me at any time. When you were born you did not have it, and your parents did not give it to you — so it must come into you from the outside. I suggest that whenever it gets into you, you beat yourself with a stick until the temper can’t stand it, and runs away.”²⁸

Now you can beat yourself with a stick but I don’t recommend it – physically or mentally.

This aspect of the law is to consciously accept that it is not necessary to be driven by this negative emotion; that it is not in our nature to be driven by these negative feelings.

Just the simple acceptance that it is not necessary to act, or react, angrily changes the situation.

The more that it is practised not to be agitated, even though the agitation has arisen, the easier and quicker it will be seen next time – and eventually it will be possible to see that which has triggered it. And then it can be stepped over, as it were, without it having any effect.

²⁸ The full story can be found in *The unborn: the life and teaching of Zen Master Bankei, 1622-1693* by Bankei , Normal Waddell, translator.

So we have come to the end of the list.

Śrī Vāsudeva Saraswatī finishes:

**These are the human laws, suitable to all
humanity. They are universal, capable of bringing
about prosperity and freedom to one and all,
irrespective of nationality, race or religion.**

So, as I commend these to you, this seems to be the perfect place to finish.

So we'll break now for some refreshments downstairs.

So let us all just return to that stillness with which we started.

Pause briefly

Let us break for about 20 minutes and then we'll see what arises in response to any questions.