

An understanding of Spiritual Intelligence (SI) from Vēdānta

(Invited Presentation at FOSWL, Adayar, Chennai)

(Invited Presentation to a class of Visitadvaita under Dr.M.K.Srinivasan, T.Nagar, Chennai)

Introduction

All along man has been innovatively harnessing his intelligence to gain happiness. Problem solving skills (IQ) gave way to emotional intelligence (EQ). Its inadequacy is blatant as society is increasingly grappling with problems of stress, depression, oppression, fear and anxiety, gender and economic inequalities resulting in suicides, drugs, alcoholism, violence and many other negativities. To combat this and to promote the joy of universal love¹, the concept of Spiritual Intelligence is gaining strength in this decade. In fact, it has been declared the ultimate² intelligence. Some models of spiritual intelligence are in vogue abroad. Here, Spiritual intelligence as modeled in the pioneer Vēdānta, has been detailed.

In all models of Spiritual Intelligence that have been propounded until now, the importance of **awareness of inner self** or higher self or the transcendental nature has been emphasized³. **Correct Perception is the key to all goodness.** A jaundiced eye would perceive all things around with a yellow tinge. The problem therefore is not inherent in the material world around but our perception. Even if the world around tries hard to delude you, a strong determination to fight the disease **placing absolute faith and focus on the supreme god within all, will result in a correct understanding and hence bliss.** On the contrary an incorrect

¹ SQ21 – twenty one skills of spiritual intelligence, Cindy Wigglesworth

² 8th habit, Steven Cove

³ Cindy Wigglesworth (2012), David King (2008), Vaughan(2002), Emmons (2000), Zohar (1997)

perception disturbs the mind and causes further ripple effects of negativities. **Therefore it is imperative for all to have the correct perception of all names and forms at all times and live and let live in peace and bliss.** No more needs to be said on this only means to bliss.

The Upaniṣads also called Vēdānta as they are the decisive conclusions of the Vēda, declare univocally that only those with awareness of the self are living; for the rest, life is a great disaster⁴. It implies that this birth has to be utilized for enhancing spiritual intelligence else it is a sheer waste. **It calls a person who is conscious of the self, as *Dhīraḥ* – an intelligent or a wise one.** Being relieved of worldly miseries due to dispassion, a wise one makes an effort to gain knowledge of the Supreme self and is finally liberated⁵, it says.

Definition of spiritual intelligence in Vēdānta

The Kaṭōpaniṣad, naming an intelligent one as a *Dhīraḥ*, describes such a person as one who has turned inward and is aware of the inner self. As in⁶

पराञ्चिखानि व्यतृणत् स्वयंभूः तस्मात् पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।

कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्षतावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥४-१

The self-born (Supreme Lord) condemned the senses to reveal outer objects. Therefore they see the outward objects and not the inner self. A rare **intelligent man** desiring immortality sees the inward self with his eyes turned inward⁷.

This mantra clearly points out to an intelligent one as one who has turned inward i.e. is aware of the inner self. The ordinary, swayed by sense organs that have been created with a capacity to experience only the outer, are therefore the majority, and are materialistic or worldly. Only an exceptionally intelligent one remains unswayed by the world around and desiring permanent bliss turns inward through the knowledge of the self. Thereby

⁴ Kena 2-5

⁵ Kena 2-5

⁶ Kata 4-1

⁷ Dr.N.S,Anantharangachar, Selections from Upaniṣads, Pg. 25

Spiritual Intelligence can be defined as: the ability to be steadily anchored in the self even while being constantly engaged with the material world.

Wise one discriminating material from spiritual, is relieved from all sorrows⁸

Self is of the essential nature of knowledge and is subservient to the Supreme self⁹. The Supreme self is all pervading and is the supporter and inner-controller of the self¹⁰. A body with sense organs and mind has been imposed on the self on account of its *karma*¹¹ – reminiscent impressions. When rid of *karmas*, **the self is in its true nature and possesses eight distinguishing attributes¹² - freedom from all defilements, old age, sorrows, hunger, thirst and death, possessing true desires and true will.** This liberated state is best pictured as: sitting blissfully on the lap of the loving Supreme Lord with a form similar to the Lord and with all the paraphernalia around in Sri Vaikuntam – from which there is no return to the cycle of creation¹³. This identity of oneself can be experienced here in this material world as a stark contrast to the material body that is subjected constantly to the duals – pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow etc.; but this realization is not easily sustainable as the deluding force of *māya* is overpowering¹⁴. Isāvāsyōpaniṣad explains that by performing work while contemplating on the self along with all such attributes, meditating on the Supreme, and surrendering to the Supreme for fructification of efforts to liberation, one remains anchored in the self and gains spiritual intelligence¹⁵.

⁸ Kata – 6-6, 2-12

⁹ Ātma-sidhdhi - 3

¹⁰ Bṛhad 3-7-26, kata 2-12

¹¹ Chan – 5-10-7

¹² Chan 8-7-1

¹³ Kauṣītaki – 1-52

¹⁴ Isa 15

¹⁵ Isa- 11-18

The Katōpaniṣad says that this extraordinarily **intelligent one Dhīraḥ, remains unaffected by worldly joys and sorrows**¹⁶. With spiritual intelligence one is able identify with the self, abnegating the body. The picture of one's true nature immediately brings upon abnegation of the body and all its creations – the joys and sorrows. When in our essential nature, we understand that: the body with its sense organs and mind, all of limited capability has been awarded to us based on our past *karma*¹⁷; the works of this body are limited by its capacity; therefore the joys and sorrows which are product of the works of the body are limited too. Thus, when faced with joy or sorrow, if the identity is shifted to the self, no affections occur.

Generally, desires lead to expectations and disappointments arise when expectations are not met. One's material prosperity is broadly pre-destined therefore however much one tries, disappointments are unavoidable sometimes. Depression is an outcome of extreme disappointment. But **a spiritually intelligent one, knowing material prosperity to be little and transient**¹⁸ **never aspires for that but remains steadfast in spiritual gains**¹⁹ – experiencing the pure consciousness, experiencing inexplicable coincidence – divine providence - and attaining the bliss of divine communion. The Katōpaniṣad says: 'The intelligent one prefers the good for the pleasant whereas the non-intelligent one chooses the pleasant for the sake of worldly prosperity²⁰'. Further praising Nachiketas - the wise one, it says: 'perceiving on one hand the attainment related to several worlds and also perceiving on the other hand the far shore of fearlessness, endlessness, and a host of great qualities like sinless-ness, eternity and fame, you have rejected the desirables with firmness, O wise one!²¹'. Thus, a spiritually intelligent

¹⁶ Kato 4-2

¹⁷ Chan 8-7-1

¹⁸ Sb - laghu sidhdhantam

¹⁹ Kata 4-2

²⁰ Kata 2-2

²¹ Kata 2-11

avoids the traps of material gains and does all work for the sake of enhancing spiritual intelligence, which gives steady unadulterated bliss and a host of other good qualities like compassion, tolerance, universal love, peace and calm.

Conscious of the all-pervading creator - Supreme self, wise one is equanimous

Vēdānta on many occasions states that all is pervaded, controlled and enjoyed by the Supreme self or Bramhan²². The self and the Supreme self are inseparable; therefore being aware of the self includes awareness of the inner-controller of the self: the all pervasive Supreme self. The Mundakōpaniṣad says: that ‘As a spider spins the threads and withdraws them into itself... even so the universe here is produced from that Immutable Principle²³; the wise realize that Immutable Principle which is all pervasive but subtle and is the cause of this universe²⁴; when the wise one has a vivid perception of the Supreme self who shines forth as bliss, then all the knots of the heart are untied and all doubts are cleared and all *karma* is destroyed²⁵. Repeated meditation fructifies as a vision which releases one from all dualities like love and hate, relatives and strangers etc. Then on, **equanimity dawns as one is able to perceive the Lord in all and everywhere.**

Conscious of inner-controller of all - the Supreme self, wise lose fear & anxiety

The Bṛhadaraṇyakōpaniṣad in the Antaryāmi Brāmhaṇa²⁶ declares that Supreme self is omnipresent but is unknown to be so; it is the inner-controller of all – the self and the five elements that compose matter.

²² Isa – 1, Bruhad 4-5-6, Mundaka 3-1-4

²³ Mundaka 1-1-7

²⁴ Mundaka 1-1-6

²⁵ Mundaka 2-2-8, 2-2-9

²⁶ Bṛhad 3-7-7 to 3-7-27

Humans are victims of three types of disasters - *tāpatraya*: those caused by demi-gods, the five elements and one's own self. **When it is accepted with full faith that the Supreme self is the inner-controller of all these three sources of disaster, no anxiety on account of these can arise for one who has surrendered to the Supreme self.** When the self perceives the inner-controller of all, it loses all fear, says the Taitriyōpaniṣad²⁷; vice-versa is also true: when the self forgets the Inner-controller for even a moment, mighty fear dawns²⁸. Thus, spiritual intelligence brings relief from all fears. It is only when the mind is relieved of all negativities like fear and anxiety, sorrow and disappointments, love and hatred etc. that the thought of gaining blissful communion will arise and sustain.

Kaṭōpaniṣad says: 'Only, that wise one, who is conscious of the Supreme self as the inner-controller of all and the grantor of all desires of the self attains eternal peace or liberation; none else can attain that eternal peace²⁹'. Thus, only spiritual intelligence can guarantee a sustainable happy life without fear and anxiety of any sort.

Spiritual Intelligence deters desires and fosters gain of human qualities

As Spiritual Intelligence ripens, the aspirant naturally detaches from the world. Exemplifying that the Veda³⁰ says, 'A cucumber that has ripened will separate from the plant naturally...'. With no worldly desires, the aspirant is free from all unrighteousness – as desires are the source of all vile³¹. Being conscious of the Supreme Self as the inner-controller of all, a wise one is not annoyed in any situation and hence does not abuse anyone³². Then, '*Sādhana*

²⁷ Tait -2-7, Sloka 1 of Abhitistava of Svami Vedanta Desika

²⁸ Tait – 2-7, Sloka 1 of Abhitistava of Svami Vedanta Desika

²⁹ Kata 5-12,13, shevata 6-12, atharva shiras 5

³⁰ Tait samhita 1-8-62

³¹ Bg 3-36,37,43

³² Isa 6

*saptaka*³³ – the prerequisite for being a spiritual aspirant will get satisfied with ease. Being aware of the omnipresent Lord, an aspirant naturally loves all. **A host of good qualities that enable the aspirant to obtain all goodness for the self will develop and lead to liberation**³⁴.

Spiritual intelligence begets eternal joy: moments of bliss and final liberation

While here, an aspirant experiences inexplicable coincidences in daily life. Contemplating on the Lord before and after an action, the aspirant feels the role of the Lord in all work done. Miracles are experienced after prayers. Vivid perception of the Lord during meditation and prayers become possible. These are the moments of bliss which an aspirant enjoys in ecstasy. These joys are eternal and incomparable to the evanescent material joys.

Attachment to the Supreme self that shines in the wise one's heart, grows each time a coincidence, miracle or vivid perception is felt. Gradually, a strong relationship is built with the Lord in the heart - '*personal god*'³⁵; then on, all spiritual activities like listening to discourses, self-study, prayers etc. which involve contemplation on the attributes and works of the Lord become very pleasant, as now they concern the Lord who is very close to the heart. '**The Lord grants unalloyed bliss every moment to the wise ones who have surrendered to Him**'³⁶, says the Pāncarātra Āgama.

Finally, after the drop of the mortal coils, liberation is granted to the aspirant.

³³ Sb – laghu sidhdhantha

³⁴ Bg 16-22

³⁵ M. Yamunācārya, The life and teachings of Ramanuja in his own words, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

³⁶ Sātvata samhita 7-124

Spiritual work followed by meditation leads to spiritual intelligence³⁷

Mere textual knowledge does not guarantee spiritual intelligence³⁸. A three step process is delineated by the Maitreya Brāmhaṇa of the Bṛhadāraṇyakōpaniṣad for gaining this intelligence³⁹. First, the aspirant is urged to listen to the sacred knowledge imparted by the wise ones, then convince oneself of the correctness of that knowledge by analyzing it repeatedly and finally apply the knowledge in life and gain experiential knowledge which is spiritual intelligence⁴⁰. Meditation on Brahman, contemplation on Brahman during work, experiential knowledge gained by applying Vēdānta in daily life etc. build spiritual intelligence. **Total surrender to the Lord⁴¹ is advocated for fructification of this experiential knowledge.** Surrender is a six-step process which includes the will to conform to dictates of the scriptures⁴².

Vēdānta has to be imbibed at the feet of a guru, after performing service to the guru⁴³. The aura of the compassionate guru will impress that of the student and over long periods change it permanently. This is done effectively only *directly in physical presence*. Knowledge is experiential. Self-study of Vēdānta books has the *dangers of misinterpretation* due to our unbridled thoughts. Therefore knowledge has to be gained only at the feet of the master.

After having an understanding of the Vēdānta texts at the feet of a guru, one has to unflinchingly contemplate on them to ascertain their correctness and then apply them to each life situation⁴⁴. One has to ensure that every act henceforth is aligned with the ultimate goal of enhancing spiritual intelligence. To achieve this, **regular and timely introspection and self-**

³⁷ Isa - 11

³⁸ Sb – laghu sidhdhanta

³⁹ Bruhad 4-5-6, Mundaka 3-1-4

⁴⁰ Bruhad 4-4-21

⁴¹ Isa-18, Mundaka – 2-2-4

⁴² Dr.N.A.Anantherangachar, Pg -74, The three entities – Man, matter and God

⁴³ Mundaka 1-2-12

⁴⁴ Bruhad 4-5-6

evaluation followed by analysis and corrective action plan, will help. The assistance of a spiritual intelligence coach or guru in this process will make it very effective, just as training under a coach rather than self-practice helps in imbibing any sport or art.

Reciting and singing prayers and hymns - from the time of waking up to going to sleep, chanting mantra, spiritual work, Vedic worship, meditation, listening to discourses, keeping company of wise ones, serving the guru, self-study are various tools that an aspirant can choose from for gaining this intelligence. However, the single-minded focus on enhancing spiritual intelligence has to be continuous, conscious and concentrated⁴⁵. Describing the process of gaining spiritual intelligence, the Upaniṣad says, ‘The aspirant uses the Praṇava mantra as a bow and releases himself as an arrow that gets deeply implanted at the feet of the Lord’⁴⁶. An aspirant has to be very deeply engrossed in the Lord. Thus, after long periods of association with a guru, one gains spiritual intelligence. ‘The process of spiritual growth is very gradual and cannot be hurried up’⁴⁷, says the Bhagavadgīta.

Spiritually intelligent one propagates spiritualism

The teachings of the Upaniṣads have come to us from an ancient hierarchy of the wise ones. The Isāvāsyōpaniṣad mantra says: ‘spiritual intelligence does not come from mere knowledge or mere action – **we hear from the wise ones who have taught us this truth clearly**’⁴⁸. After gaining knowledge of realities, spiritual intelligence is gained by putting both

⁴⁵ Dr.N.S.Anantharangachar, The three entities - Man, matter and god, Pg.109

⁴⁶ Mundaka 2-2-4

⁴⁷ Bg 6-24

⁴⁸ Isa 10

action and knowledge together. By performing action with self-awareness one is rid of the miseries of this world and after that by meditating on the Supreme self, liberation is attained⁴⁹.

Wise ones worship all other wise ones

Just as meditating on the Supreme self grants liberation, so also **worshipping the knower of the Supreme self grants transcending of rebirth**⁵⁰. Thereby, the hierarchy of teachers of spiritual intelligence – *guru parampara* - is to be worshipped daily by the aspirant.

Conclusion

Mankind is now searching for spiritual intelligence which will relieve stress and grant sustainable happiness. As an answer, Vēdānta teaches: ‘a person who is conscious of the self, as *Dhīraḥ* is an intelligent or a wise one. Spiritual intelligence is all about anchoring oneself in the true identity of self which is subservient to Supreme self. Experience of the supreme powerful universal inner-controller, grants freedom from all fears and sorrows also grants the bliss of divine interruptions. Actualization of spiritual intelligence has a two step benefit:

1. Getting rid of negativities that bog the mind like fear, anxiety, sorrow, depression etc. and getting rid of desire for material joys that are little and transitory.
2. Blissfully enjoying the acts of the divine like coincidence, miracles and vivid perception of the Lord and finally liberation.

This actualization is very gradual and may take long periods of continuous, conscious and concentrated effort. Obtaining this intelligence, one sails through life, performing duties with absolute faith in the Lord; and spends the rest of the time enjoying the *leela* – works - of the Lord

⁴⁹ Isa 11

⁵⁰ Mundaka 3-2-1

that is experienced here and those chronicled in books. The bliss of divine communion is the ultimate happiness and is never-ending'. Thus, the pressing problem of today, that of gaining sustained happiness, is solved by gaining spiritual intelligence as described in Vēdānta.

Bibliography and Abbreviation

1. *Ātma Sidhhi* in Sanskrit by Acharya Yamunacharya, Uttamur veeraraghvachariar trust
2. Isa – isavasyopnishad, kata – katopnishad, sveta – svetassetaropanaishad, mun – mundakopnishad, Ait - Aitareyopnishad in Principal Upanishads, Vol -1
Dr.N.S.AnanthaRangacharya
3. Cha – Chandogya Upanishad, Principal Upanishads Vol II, Dr.N.S.AnanthaRangacharya
4. Bṛhad–Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Principal Upaniṣads Vol 3, Dr.N.S.Anantharangacharya
5. Sb – Shri Bhashya by Bhagavad Ramanujacharya, Uttamur veeraraghvachariar trust
6. Bg –Bhagavadgita, Gita bhasya by Bhagavad Ramanuja, Dr. N.S.AnanthaRangacharya
7. The three entities - Man, matter and god, Navyug Prakashana
8. The life and teachings of Ramanuja in his own words, M.Yamunacharya
9. SQ21- The twenty skills of spiritual intelligence, Cindy Wiggelsworth, 2012