

24. The sandalwood tree

THE importance which *Sanaathana* culture (unchanging truth) gives to dharma was explained to you by the Pandith; he outlined some of the main principles of that subtle ideal. *Dharma* (righteousness) is the feet and *Moksha* (Realisation) the head of the human community, while the other two *purusharthas*---*artha* (wealth) and *kaama* (desire)---form the trunk and limbs. Now, feet and head are ignored and the other two reckoned as vital. That is the tragedy of modern times. Enough warning against this tragedy has been given in the ancient texts of this country. The Kauravas are useful examples of the calamity that awaits those who pursue the ideals of *artha* and *kaama*, without the regulating influence of *dharma* and *moksha*. They were drunk with power; they were overcome by greed and pride; they had insatiable desire; they suffered untold misery and were destroyed.

Raavana fell because he strove to accumulate *artha* and was carried away by covetousness, *kaama*. His "ten heads" indicate his mastery over the four *Vedhas* and the six *Shaasthras*; but, of what avail was all that learning? Aanjaneya reported that Lanka was echoing with the recitation of the *Vedhas* and the air was thick with sacrificial smoke. But, the *raakshasas* (demons) were wicked, in spite of all that ritual exactitude. Ritual must result in righteousness; otherwise, it is only rigmarole. Raavana sought to gain *Prakrithi*, not *Purusha* (the manifestation not the manifestor); Seetha not Raama! And, so his life became futile.

Kaama is the three-headed demon; when you win your desire, you develop *lobha* (miserly greed), to retain the gain and see that it multiplies; when you are defeated in desire, you develop *krodha* (resentment, anger); even *thapas* (penance) might not transmute such a character, as seen in the case of Bhasmaasura, who sought to destroy the very Lord who granted him the boon he was after! *Kaama*, *lobha* and *krodha* are all forms of *rajoguna* (quality of passion and activity), the feverish activity that ignores the "means" while concentrating on the "end." *Rajoguna* pursues the goal, but is not particular about the correctness of the path.

Qualify yourself and desire

There is a story of some monkeys who planted a mango garden. They planted the saplings, watered them a few days, and plucked them from off the ground to see how deep the roots had gone! They wanted them to grow fast and yield fruits, but they were unaware of the process by which alone they could get the fruits they craved for! Act right; then, claim the fruit. Cultivate with care, and collect the harvest.

What is good of burdening yourself with desire when you do not have the qualification to fulfil it? Madhuranaath once asked Raamakrishna Paramahansa for a chance to enjoy what was known as *Nirvikalpa samaadhi* (superconscious state of Bliss), about which he had heard. Though Raamakrishna demurred because he had no qualification and preparatory training for it, he insisted; so when at last, the Master acceded, and made him lose consciousness for three days, the poor man protested and appealed for an end to that experience. It was a burden too heavy for his weak shoulders.

The three *gunas* (qualities of the mind) have to be transcended one after the other; *thamas* (lethargy) being transmuted into *rajas* (passionate activity) and *rajas* into *sathwa* (serenity and poise) and *sathwa* too, at last into characteristiclessness. 'The *gunas* bind man and leave impressions. *Thamas* is like the worms that creep and crawl in offal; *rajas* is like the fly that sits on foul things as well as fair; *sathwa* is like the bee that visits only fragrant flowers. But, all three

are drawn towards objects, whereas one should be free from all traces of attachment. When hearts are infested with flies and worms, the flit of *Naamasmarana* (constant remembrance of God's name) has to be used for disinfecting the place. You must recognise the high purpose of this human body and the unique chance man has. Then only will you strive to benefit by this hard-won piece of luck.

The magnanimous king

A *Raaja* (king) was out hunting in the forest and while pursuing the deer, he went too far and discovered that his retinue was left behind. He lost his way and was overcome by hunger and thirst. At last, he saw a tiny hut where lived a poor wood-cutter and his wife selling fuel in the distant villages. Their larder was almost empty, but the wife managed to bring out a *roti* (bread), which the king ate with avidity. He had never known such taste, for he was never so hungry as then. and, he slept soundly that noon, for he was never so tired as then. By that time, the courtiers and soldiers came up to where he was and the astounded wood-cutter learnt that his guest was no less a person than the monarch of the realm. He apologised for the poor fare he offered, though the king never uttered a harsh word.

Tragedy of man everywhere

Next day, a man came from the capital to take him to the court and the poor fellow was certain that he was going to be punished for insulting the ruler. His wife accompanied him, for she offered to share the misery with her lord. The *Raaja* gave him a seat and insisted upon his sitting, an honour which the wood-cutter knew was usually given to animals that were about to be sacrificed. He was fed nicely, along with his wife, another honour which such animals usually get.

Then the king asked him what boon he would ask from him, and the terrified man could ask for only this: "Please allow me to go home alive, with my wife! Please do not cut off my head," he cried. The *Raaja* said, "I am not an ungrateful wretch to treat you so cruelly. If I give you an estate you will ruin it, for you are unaware of agriculture. If I give riches, thieves will carry it away, for you live alone in the jungle. Well, I shall give you a sandalwood plantation in that forest, thirty acres in extent. Make good use of it and prosper." The wood-cutter felt relieved and he went away into the woods.

After about six months, the King went to the forest again for a hunt and remembering the bread, he went in search of the wood-cutter. He found him quite happy for he said, that he had started selling charcoal instead of fuel. The sandalwood trees were being reduced to charcoal by that man; he did not know the value of the gift he had received. Man too does not realise the value of the precious gift of "the number of days" of life he has received from the Lord. He fritters them away for temporary earnings. That is the tragedy of man everywhere.

Sanaathana Dharma has laid down the rules and regulations for the best possible utilisation of life, but for want of teaching, exposition and example, they have been sadly neglected. This is like inflicting injuries on oneself, this neglect of the rules, which give real happiness and peace. This is like the foolishness of living upon your neighbour's leavings, while your own home has a relishing, nourishing banquet ready!

Regulate the way of living

Reform the body, reconstruct the mind; regulate the way of living; then, the country will become automatically strong and prosperous. Do not wail that is a mud pot if it contains nectar; it is far better than having a gold pot with poison in it. The land may be rich, but, if life is mean, it is deplorable. It does not matter if the standard of life is poor, provided the way of life is pure, full of prema, humility, fear-of-sin, and reverence towards elders.

It is easy to restore this way of life, provided the *Vedhas* are once again studied and followed. The *Vedhamaatha* (mother of *Vedhas*) will foster in you love and kindness. Have faith; do not discard a diamond, dismissing it as a piece of glass. The Dharma laid down in the *Vedhas* is the best armour to guard you against sorrow.

Women should observe *sthree* dharma and men purusha 'dharma, the householder, *grihastha dharma*, the monk sanyaasa dharma (the path of righteousness prescribed for each category of persons. The outward symbols like shave head, the ochre cloth, *kamandalu*---these are like the barbed wire erected to protect the crop from depredation. But, what we now find is, there is plenty of fence without, but no crop within!

You may have a grand feast on the plate, but, unless you have hunger, you will not be tempted to eat. There are qualifications for every task, be it eating or fasting, be it leading a householder's life or monk's life. Only a stone that was once Ahalya and was saturated by *dhyaana* (meditation) and remorse can be transmuted into human form and only the feet of a Divine incarnation can so transmute it. All stones trodden by Raama did not get transformed into women; nor did any of the feet that trod upon that stone had the power of giving life. The *Guru* must have the awakening touch and the *sishya* (disciple) must have the eagerness to awake. The relationship should not be like the snake with a frog in the mouth, the frog too weak to escape, the snake too full to swallow. The *Guru* must be able to save; the *sishya* must be ready to be saved.

Hanumaan's dedicated service

Dedicate all tasks of offerings to the Lord. Never deviate from that attitude. Hanumaan was such a bhaktha; Raama was the very life-breath for him. After the coronation, one day, Seetha and the three brothers of Raama met and planned to exclude Hanumaan from the *seva* (service) of Raama and wanted that all the various services for Raama should be divided only among themselves. They felt that Hanumaan had enough chances already. So, they drew up a list, as exhaustive as they could remember, of the service from dawn till dusk, down to the smallest minutiae and assigned each item to one among themselves. They presented the list of items and assignees to the Lord, while Hanumaan was present. Raama heard about the new procedure, read the list and gave His approval, with a smile. He told Hanumaan that all the tasks had been assigned to others and that he could now take rest. Hanumaan prayed that the list might be read and when it was done, he noticed an omission---the task of 'snapping fingers when one yawns.' Of course, being an emperor, Raama should not be allowed to do it himself. It has to be done by a servant, he pleaded. Raama agreed to allot that task to Hanumaan!

It was a great epic piece of good luck for Hanumaan, for it entitled Hanumaan's constant attendance on his Master, for how could anyone predict when the yawn would come? And, he had to be looking on that heart-charming face all the time, to be ready with snap, as soon as the yawn was on! He could not be away for a minute nor could he relax for a moment. You must be

happy that the seva of the Lord keeps you always in His presence and ever vigilant to carry out His behests.

Select a Name and a Form

The Lord cares for *ekaagratha* and *chittha-suddhi* (concentration and purity of mind). You need not feel that you are physically away from Him. He has no 'near' and 'far' Provided the address is clear and correct, your letter will be delivered, either at the next street or at Calcutta or Bombay for the same stamp. *Smarana* (remembering) is the stamp; *manana* (recapitulation) is the address. Have the Name for *smarana*; the Form for *manana*, that is enough.

Select one Name and one Form for *smarana and manana*; but, do not talk ill of other names and forms. Behave like the woman in a joint family; she respects and serves the elders of the family such as the father-in-law, and his brothers and her own brother-in-law, but her heart is dedicated to her husband, whom she loves and reveres in a special manner. If you carp at the faith of others, your devotion is fake. If you are sincere, you will appreciate the sincerity of others. You see faults in others because you yourself have those faults, not otherwise.

While in Dandakaaranya forest, Raama was once reclining with His head on the lap of Sugreeva and the *vaanara* (monkey) leaders were around Him. The moon was shining overhead in full glow, but, there was the tell-tale spot which marred the fullness of the effulgence. Raama asked each one of them what the spot indicated. Each one gave a different explanation; the reflection of the sea, one said; a deep pit, said another; a mountain range, said a third; but, Aanjaneya said, "It is your reflection I see on the moon, your colour, nothing else." That was the measure of his devotion. He saw everywhere, everytime only Raama.

Have faith in your culture, which emphasises the path of self-control and discipline. Do not be led away by the tinsel attractions of foreign cultures. Indian customs, like the wearing of the sari are now adopted by western women, while Indian women are wearing gowns! Indian women bob their hair and discard the *kumkum* (vermilion dot on the forehead), in order to look fashionable; but, every Indian custom has deep significance, ignored in this imitative rush. A vessel of sweetness can be spoiled by a drop of kerosene. Accept good things from other cultures, the things that help you to control the vagaries of the senses and the mind, to investigate and discriminate more dearly.

Of the many lakhs of people who dwell in this city, you alone had the great chance to come and hear the advice given today. So make the best use of this treasure and decide on leading more useful lives from this very moment. Listen to all who speak of the glory of the Lord, who is in you, as in everybody else. Learn from all the methods by which you can discover Him and reach Him. That is my advice to you.

Madras, 15-8-1964