

36. How far is God?

It is really unfortunate that the *Ashtami* and *Navamithithis* (the eighth and ninth days of the lunar fortnight), are held inauspicious in popular belief; for, the facts are quite contrary. Both these days mark the auspicious arrival of *an Avathaar* of God, the advent of the Formless, Nameless, Timeless, Locationless Absolute as the Formful, Named, Living, Particular. Shri Krishna was born on the eighth day, and Shri Raama on the ninth day of the white half of the lunar fortnight. Ignoring the sacredness of these days and imagining them to be fraught with unpredictable dangers, if new enterprises are started on those days, is sheer perversity, indeed.

God takes human form when the Godliness that is inherent in man is submerged, when the moral code and the spiritual discipline that have been prescribed by the experience of godly seekers are neglected, when man slides into beast from which he rose and becomes a terror to brother man. Krishna is a *Yogeeshwara* (Lord of the *Yogis*), unattached to the fruits of His labour; God appeared as Krishna to charm humanity by His pranks, His play, His song and sweetness, and to instruct man by His teaching and Grace. He was born on this *Janmaashtami* Day in the prison where His 'parents' were incarcerated by the very evil forces He had come to exterminate. Shri Raama came to lead man into *Dharma*, and so, He had to be the very embodiment of right, justice and integrity. He taught the *Dharma* that should guide the lives of the son, the brother, the friend, the ruler, the husband.

The stars under which these two Incarnations of God descended on the earth are also significant. *When Avathaars* come, they choose the time and place, clan and the family, and they decide and bring the comrades and the co-workers. When Vishnu incarnated as Raama, *Sesha*, *Shankha*, *Chakra* (the thousand-headed serpent forming the couch of Vishnu, His conch and discus) and other inseparable adjuncts of the Lord also incarnated; the *Devas* (celestials) also came down, in order to taste the sweetness of the Lord's company and service. *Rohini*, the star under which Krishna was born, is related to the attainment of yogic success and the powers that flow from it. *Punarvasu*, the star under which Raama was born, has a mysterious influence on the authority which accepts all who submit, the *Sharanaagatha-thraana* (protector of those who take refuge in Him) aspect of Raama's glory.

Do not ascribe evil to any day or star

What man has to do on these auspicious days is to dwell on the elevating thoughts centering round the two *Avathaars* and take the first or further steps in *saadhana*. Use these days as starting points for propitiating the Form of Godhead which you have chosen for offering homage, the Form which appeals to your innermost yearnings. Do not ascribe evil to any day or star. Every day is good when you spend it for God. Every star is good, provided its light guides your feet to God. This is my advice to you, this day.

Men are eager to get happiness and when there is a prospect of earning undiminishable happiness, they jump at the idea; but, they are soon tired of the effort. They seek shortcuts, lean on others to carry their weight, and aspire for much fruit in return for little cultivation. But, rigorous discipline and steady faith are absolutely necessary for success in the spiritual struggle. Mere listening to discourses or even delivering discourses will not be of any use. To have that discipline, one has to control the senses which drag the mind towards the pleasurable attractions of the external world; to have the steady faith, one must control the wayward mind, that paints attractive pictures in false colours to lure you on from birth to birth.

God pays heed to devotee's cry

Provided your intellect is sharp and free from prejudices and predilections, the Reality will reveal itself to you in a flash, for it is quite a simple thing. Only, it must be capable of seeing the problem in its basic essence, apart from all the jumble of irrelevancies. Once a very learned Pandit was holding forth in a very pedantic manner the story of *Gajendramoksha* (liberation of Elephant King) from the Bhaagavatha, before the Maharaaja in his Durbaar Hall, before a large gathering of courtiers. He described how the Lord, on hearing the agonised call for succour from the elephant held by the jaws of the monstrous crocodile, hurried from Heaven (*Vaikuntha*) without stopping even to collect His insignia and weapons, without even intimating to His consort whither He was bound and on what mission. Suddenly the Maharaaja interrupted him with the question, "Tell me, Pandit, how far is this Vaikuntha?" The learned Pandit did not know the distance; he was nonplussed. Nor did any of the other scholars in the palace know the answer.

But, the servant, who was fanning the King from behind the throne, offered to furnish the answer, if his impertinence was pardoned. The Pandit was shocked at his effrontery, but the Maharaaja allowed him to speak. "Your Majesty! Vaikuntha is as far as the cry of the elephant could be heard", he said. Yes; when the anguish of a devotee's heart is expressed as a cry or a groan or a sigh, the Lord is as far only as that sound could reach; He rushes to the rescue. His ear is always on the alert to listen to the cry of His children. His residence, Vaikuntha, is within hearing distance of every cry, from every grief-stricken heart. That illiterate servant knew in a flash the Omnipresence and the compassion of the Lord.

Mahaabhaaratha war is happening within every one

The Lord is devoid of attachment or hatred. He comes on a Mission and is bent only on that task. It is His nature to support the right and admonish the wrong. His task is to restore vision to man, to turn his footsteps along the path of morality and self-control, so that he may achieve Self-knowledge.

He is Himself the supreme example of the teachings of the Geetha. He reveals Himself in the Geetha; the Geetha is the one text wherefrom you can get a complete picture of the nature and characteristics of *Avathaars*. He acts as friend, companion, charioteer, teacher, guide and guardian of His devotees. The Mahaabhaaratha War is not a chapter in ancient history; it is taking place in every human breast, between the forces of good and evil. He who recognises the value of installing the Lord, the *Yogeeshwara* Krishna, as the Charioteer, is certain to win; others fail to foil the forces of evil; they succumb and fall. Accept Him as your Master; surrender all activities to Him; dedicate your words and deeds and thoughts to Him, as flowers at His Feet; He assures you, '*Mokshayishyaami*'--I shall liberate you; He assuages you, '*Maa suchaah*'---Do not grieve.

Devotees who loved Krishna's company

Arjuna was a qualified candidate for being told the highest truth. He had discrimination, renunciation and the aspiration to know. He was aware all the time of the glory that was Krishna; he had implicit faith in Krishna's wisdom, power and grace. He belongs to the category of *priya naamra sakha*---a loved and humble friend. Bheeshma, Uddhava, Bheema, Dhroupadhi---all belong to this category of devotees. Uddhava was such a close friend that Krishna gave him

advance information of the destruction and disappearance of the Yaadavas. Bheeshma knew that Krishna was the Lord Incarnate; he asserted this in the Kaurava court on many a crucial occasion, and he was happy that he got a vision of Krishna in his last moments. Then there are some who are *priya-sakhas* (loved friends), with whom Krishna played and joked and kept joyful company. Others were delighted with His *darshan*, *sparshan* and *sambhaashana* (sight, touch and conversation) and sought to be in His presence as long as possible. Such were the cowherd boys. They are friends. Then, we have a group of *suhrids* or senior comrades, well-wishers and companions, who had a parental affection towards Him, anxious about Him and His circumstances, happy when they can fondle Him or serve Him or make Him glad.

The *Gopees*, however, are a class of devotees by themselves. They reached the highest peak of devotion. They had no consciousness of anything other than the Lord; they had renounced the consciousness of the senses and the body. They were attached only to the Principle of Krishna that was resident in that body. They were eager to know the "other", not to experience "this". When King Pareekshith asked Sage Shuka, who was relating to him the wonderful tale of the *Gopees* and their love towards Krishna, about the nature of that love, Shuka replied that since they had no body-consciousness they were always immersed in God-consciousness only; therefore there was no touch of the gross or material or physical in their love towards the Lord. It is the identification with the body and the slavery to the senses that it breeds that cause all the cruelty, injustice and violence that stalk the world.

There was a court clown once who was discovered by the king searching for some lost thing on the top terrace of the palace. The king asked him what he was looking for; he replied that a camel had broken loose and it might have climbed up the steps, on to the terrace; so, he had ascended the steps to verify. The king laughed at his absurd surmise, but, the clown said, "If you, with all that hump of pride and crookedness of belief, can reach Heaven as you believe you can, a camel too could reach the terrace, climbing up the five stairs."

The Gopees knew the secret of spiritual surrender. Their worship was not tainted by any bargaining spirit. For those who bargain and crave for profit, reverence is equated with the returns; they sell homage at so much per unit of satisfactory response. They are like paid servants, clamouring for wages, overtime allowance, bonus, etc. They calculate how much they are able to extract for the service rendered. Be, on the other hand, a member of the family, a kinsman, a friend. Feel that you are the Lord's own. Then, the work will not tire; it will be done much better; it will yield more satisfaction; and, the wages? The master will maintain you in bliss. What more can any one aspire for? Leave the rest to Him; He knows best; He is All; the joy of having Him is enough reward. This is the secret of human happiness. Live out your lives on these lines and you will never come to grief. *Na me bhakthaah pranashyathi*, says Krishna--- "My devotees never suffer sorrow".

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