

18. The bottomless pit

By an inordinate attachment or *raaga* to the seen, man has become an alien to the realm of the unseen. But the unseen is the basis of the seen; the thing that gives stability and value to it, the thing that is true and valid. In spite of the warnings administered by countless saints and teachers through the centuries, man has today in this land of Bhaarath forsaken the unseen for the sake of the seen. The unseen alone can confer contentment and courage to face fortune as well as misfortune. Ignoring it has caused the discontent and distress prevalent in every heart and home today.

Develop *bhakthi* (devotion) and you are free, for the Lord takes on the burden you carry. The Raamaayana is the great text for all who yearn to surrender to God and win Him. From beginning to end, it illustrates the various steps leading to it and the blessedness acquired when one accomplishes it. Lakshmana is a great example: he gave up every object of affection in order to be with the Lord and serve Him. Once, while in the forest, Raama directed Lakshmana to search for a suitable location for a *Parnakuti* (adobe) for His stay, and build one thereon. Lakshmana shed tears when he heard these words, for he interpreted this to mean that he had freedom to think and act on his own. He had surrendered his will to his brother and could only follow orders; he had lost all sense of independent judgement.

God is happy when He rescues those in agony

Vibheeshana is another example of full surrender. Raavana had a gang of courtiers and ministers who catered to his whims and flattered his vanity; and while each of them advised him to challenge Raama in open war and keep Seetha for himself, Vibheeshana, his own brother, chastised him for his wilfulness and lust and urged him to save himself, his kingdom and his kith and kin by restoring Seetha unharmed to her Lord. When Vibheeshana went over to Raama, Raama knew that he had a pure heart that could not survive in the poisonous atmosphere of Lanka. So He took him and saved him.

The Lord likes to be called *Aartha-thraana-paraayana* (protection of, and devoted to, the distressed and oppressed) more than any other name, for He is most happy when He rescues those in agony. See how He yielded to the entreaties of Sugreeva who required Him to demonstrate His prowess before surrendering to Him! He wanted to rescue Sugreeva, who had lost his kingdom and his queen, and so He was willing to be put to test by that apprehensive supplicant! Bharatha gave up his mother, his throne and all his wealth and power; he revelled in travail and poverty, he dwelt only in the thought of Raama in the forest and denied himself every thing that his brother could not get. By constant contemplation on Raama, even his complexion changed into Raama's.

Be an instrument in the hands of God; let Him use you for any purpose He prefers. How can any one question His will? There was a merchant who asked the sailor about his grand-father and father. It seems they both died on the sea. So the merchant asked the sailor whether he was not afraid of sailing on the sea. The sailor asked the merchant where his forefathers had died. He was told that they had all died in bed, so he too asked the merchant whether he was 'not afraid to go to bed! Death comes to all, somewhere, somehow; but the wise man achieves the Vision ere the end. Have the cool spring of devotion in you; then, the fires of anxiety cannot harm you. Then, every visitation of calamity will take on a new meaning, as a sign of Grace, to harden you, toughen you and make you seasoned timber, for His purpose.

Sublimation of the senses is essential

A dog lying comfortably in the middle of a busy thoroughfare---you will have seen some dogs enjoying a siesta in that spot full of danger, creating an island for itself in the midst of the traffic flow---was once asked why it had chosen that spot. It replied that it wanted to discover who among the pedestrians were good and who were bad. It explained that though there was enough road space on both sides, some men prodded it just for fun or out of sheer mischief in order to shoo it off. Such men are innately bad, it declared. The others who mind their own business, go their way, and do not concern themselves with things they meet on the way which distract their attention delaying their journey are good, it said. That dog spoke true, for the men who cannot let well alone are really obstructing their own progress.

The main thing is the control and the sublimation of the senses. Letting them have their way, by directing them on the objective world of tastes, smells, shapes, melodies and softnesses is to fall into a bottomless pit. It is like locking up the treasure in a golden box with a golden lock. The thieves get a richer loot, that is all.

The Geetha speaks of *bhakthi*, *jnaana*, *karma*, as *yogas* and *by yoga* is meant what *Pathanjali* intended it to mean: *chiththa vriththi nirodhah*, that is, the stilling of the agitations of the Mind-stuff. Vishnu is the supreme exemplar of this calm, for He is "*shaanthaakaaram bhujaga shayanam*", the very picture of peaceful calm., though reclining on a thousand-hooded serpent; the snake being the symbol of the objective world with its poisonous fangs. Being in the world but not of it, not bound by it---that is the secret. Maareecha gave up even the urge to live when he got the chance to die at the hands of Raama, with his eyes fixed on the charm of that Divine Form. He knew that Raama was, as he said, "*Vigrahavaan Dharmah*"---*Dharma* in cognisable form. So he thanked Raavana for the chance given to him to be killed by Raama's arrow.

Fortitude is the foremost saadhana

The conquest of the senses and of the passions and emotions is a hard process and a slow process, which will be crowned by success only by systematic endeavour. Take anger, for example. There was once a huge big wrestler who was strutting along a street, proud of his physical strength and his victory over many rivals. As he passed, a middle-aged woman tittered at his size and appearance. The wrestler gnashed his teeth in anger and lunged towards her. The woman ejaculated, What type of strong man are you, who cannot take a woman's laughter calmly? and the wrestler had to hang his head in shame. *Sahana* (forbearance) is the best *saadhana*, fortitude is the foremost *saadhana*. That is the greatest lesson of the *Shaasthras*.

How can man serve others or the Lord who is resident in all when the senses drag him away from that service or when passions peep in to tarnish the love that inspires the service? The *Lokesh*a (Lord of the world) is engaged in spreading *aanandha* in the *Loka* (world); man should be engaged in spreading *aanandha* around him. That is the way to co-operate and share in the task of the Lord. Every evil deed hastens one's fall. Raavana carried away Seetha; men many wonder why, when he did that nefarious deed, the flames of Divine wrath did not reduce him to ashes, or why the anger of a chaste woman did not consume him. But the consequence of all the *thapas* (penance) he had gone through and the boons he had won from the Gods stood as an armour for long. Raavana must meet his doom through his own folly and wickedness. The Lord is but a witness; He is above all hate and anger, of attachment derived from mine and thine.

Karma without Dharma leads to destruction

The Raakshasas of Lanka were adepts at *yaagas* (sacrificial rites) and *yajnas* (ceremonies in which oblations are presented); every home in the island was under a canopy of holy smoke emanating from the sacred fires lit for ritual worship. That was the karma-path for blessedness, but that path without *Dharma* led them to destruction. Bhojaraaja once held a discussion in Court on the relative importance of *Karma* and *Dharma*. *Karma*, *Dharma* and *Brahma* (action, virtue, and Supreme Being) are the three stages of spiritual progress. It was seen that they were all equally important at the proper stage of development.

The poets used to ask for patronage with the word, *dehi*, which Kaalidaasa once interpreted as, 'They are not asking you; they are addressing you as *'dehi'*, 'the one with the body', 'the One who has encased Himself in this physical equipment', 'the *Aathma*,'. They are reminding you that you are essentially the dweller in the body, not the body with which you are likely to identify yourself. Once a poet approached Bhoja for help and when the Emperor held before him a purse, he refused to accept it, because he said, 'You must give me something which you have earned by the sweat of your brow, not something which you have appropriated from the earnings of others' toil. The Emperor appreciated the argument; he asked him to call on him the next day. When the poet presented himself the next morning as directed, Bhoja gave him 16 copper coins which he had earned from a smithy, handling the hammer to beat the red hot iron. The poet held out his hand for it; the coins were given; but, what a wonder, they were gold coins, not copper. The toil of the king had made them pure gold. One must give only what one has legitimately earned. Then the *dehi* (the indweller in the body) gives without *deha* (body)- consciousness.

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In this Kali yuga, the principle of Divine Love is not in evidence. It is smothered in jealousy, conceit, hatred, fear, falsehood and greed. That is why it is best referred to as the kalaha yuga (the age of faction) marked by fights between mother and daughter, father and son, teacher and pupil, guru and guru, brother and brother. The recitation of the name of Krishna is the best method for cleansing the mind of all these evil impulses.

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