

20. The Race and the Prize

MAN'S life has a beginning and an end; the beginning and the end are both governed by the law of cause and effect. The nest of a bird built with arduous circumspection on the branch is swayed by the gale and felled by the storm. The lovely petals of the rose, dancing in the breeze, and spreading fragrance around, are blown to the ground by the sudden gust of wind! Man too is floored at the height of his triumph by the stroke of some unseen hand. Man is aghast at the consequence that he experiences; he is unaware of the cause, for he has no inclination to seek it. The cause for birth is the same as the cause for death' fascination for sense-objects and the trail of activity that it involves.

Children are happy since they have not yet got involved in such activity. They scatter joy and enthusiasm, innocence and confidence. How comes it that they are so fresh and gay? Their minds are free from the infection of sense-pleasure-seeking. They are ravelling in the untainted joy of their own innate nature. That is the reason why Christ fondled a child, and advised all the grown-ups to become children, so that they may be saved. How sweet is the smile of the babe in the cradle or of the child playing in the garden? That is the genuine nature of man which he tarnishes foolishly, year by year, as he grows.

Move on and climb ahead towards the goal of God

In the pure pellucid lake in the heart of man, the Lotus of Divine aspiration is blossoming; instead of offering that flower at the Feet of God, you try the trick placing there flowers that fade, fruits that rot, and leaves that dry. Offer the heart that He has endowed you with, filled with adoration and love! Your *Aanandha* is my *Aahaara* (sustenance), so, cultivate it. It grows only when you meditate on the source of *Aanandha*, the goal of *Aanandha*, namely, God. Seetha was interned by the cruel King Ravaana in the most beautifully laid-out garden in Lanka, called *Ashokavana* (the Forest of No-sorrow). The flower-beds, lawns and greeneries, trees and creepers, bowers and groves were most pleasing to the eye and refreshing to the mind. But, Seetha derived no joy therefrom! She found therein only empty vanity, lust for power and foul pleasure. But, Seetha felt real *Aanandha* when an ugly monkey started repeating the name of Raama from the branch of the tree under which She sat! That name was for her the source of unfailing *Aanandha*.

The stage of life, the status in society, the profession, the company into which you are ushered, the recreation you like---all these are to be used by you for cleansing the inner mirror, so that God may be reflected clearly therein. *Grihastaashrama* (the householder stage of life) is a step in the ladder to God-realisation. You do not settle down on a step, or stay on a rung, or build a home on a bridge. Move on, climb ahead, cross over, towards the goal of God. From *Iham* (this world) you proceed to *Param* (the world beyond); through the practise of the *Dharma* (code of virtuous conduct), pertaining to life in the world as a member of the human community, you transcend it and earn the right and the qualification to know about the *Dharma* of the beyond, the Nature and Glory of the Divine. *Iha dharma* gives *Aanandha*; but *Paradharma* reveals to you the source of *Aanandha* and merges you in that source.

In reality there is 'no bondage and no release'

The Lord, who incarnates to restore *Dharma*, Himself advises the renouncing of all *Dharma* for the sake of the ultimate Liberation or *Moksha* and in the same Bhagavadgeetha He recommends in the last chapter the giving up of even the craving for *Moksha* or Liberation, for there is in

reality, "no bondage and no release." It is only a delusion born of ignorance, which disappears when the Light of knowledge is allowed to illumine the place where Darkness prevailed.

When you know that you are ill, you should try to take such a medicine that you will not need any other medicine, ever afterwards. You should not fall ill again. When you engage in activity, you must choose such an activity that will not involve you in its chain of consequences. *Karma* must be such that it does not involve you in further *karma*. *Karma* dedicated to God, karma done in a spirit of surrender, with no concern for the consequence---these alone can prevent the sprouting of further shoots from each individual *karma*.

As a result of recent movements in world-thought man's heart is being hardened by hate and greed, not softened by love and sympathy. Intelligence (the '*dhee*') which the *Gaayathri* prayer attempts to urge into enlightened activity, blinds man from recognising in the beauty of nature, in the sublimity of space, time and causation, the might and majesty of God. It is perverted so much that questions like, "Where is God to be found?" "Why does He not reveal Himself to me now?" arise in the mind.

You can find God if only you look into yourself and understand yourself. He can be realised only after a long process of cleansing and at the end of a systematic disciplined preparation. Without learning the alphabet, how can any one dare condemn a classic? The culture embedded in the ancient texts promoted the composure and mental poise that is needed to delve into the depths of one's being. It is concerned with making every one aware of the *Aathma*, the basic Truth, the only entity of which everything else is a by-product.

Religion is the product of awareness

Confusing religion with social customs like taking a bride, or dining with some one or declining to do so, people talk glibly discarding religion or disregarding it. Religion is the Mother and how can any one do without her or deny her or discard her? You can divorce a wife and marry again; but, you cannot deny a mother and declare another as the person who gave birth to you. Religion is not constituted of human fancies; it is the call of the Spirit from which we have come, of the Sea in the heart of the river. It is the sense of kinship one feels, when one sees other beings immersed in grief or joy. It is the exultation one feels when one experiences Truth, Beauty and Goodness. He who denies religion, has no discrimination, no heart, no feeling, no emotion. *Matham* (religion) is the product of *mathi* (awareness). Only, he who has none of these will argue that Religion is harmful or superfluous.

You can pluck a few leaves off the tree or chop off a few of its branches, but the Tree of Religion is deep-rooted in the human heart; it can never be destroyed or ignored. The fact that the body is but a shaky receptacle that is liable to crash any moment, that the senses are imperfect instruments of knowledge, that objects are not *per se* sources of pleasure or happiness, that the sense of 'I' persists in deep sleep too--these cannot be denied by decree or by swearing them off. Like all attainments, the attainment of self-realisation also involves hard discipline and concentrated effort. The price has to be paid!

Love the highest, Love the Most Lovable, God

Let us suppose you are abused, reviled, and grievously hurt, in a dream! Though you are pained at that time, when you awake, you are not aware of what has happened so realistically a few minutes ago. So too, when you awake into the higher consciousness of *Jnaana* (spiritual wisdom), all the grief and joy, the pleasure and pain you experience in the waking stage are

found to be as ephemeral as dreams. Report to the police that you killed a person; they will throw you into the lock-up. Tell them you killed him in your dream, they will brush you aside as a nuisance.

Having come upon the world stage as 'man,' one should act the role effectively. The tree is known by the fruit. The human body is the temple of God. He is installed there. Yearn for the realisation of this Truth, seek to discover It and derive Bliss therefrom---that is *Bhakthi* (Devotion, the path of Love to God). Love the Highest, Love the most Lovable; do not love anything.

There was a *Pandith* once who taught grammar and rhetoric to a group of pupils. After finishing a course of lessons, he gave them an assignment to compose four lines of poetry. One young man, who struggled with himself to produce appropriate rhyme, had the first two lines:

The Full Moon is shining bright
The tree has fruits at a height;
and in his despair; he completed that quatrain with
two more lines, more absurd than those two
The food is not cooked aright!
Ganganna's face is a horrid sight!
The assignment of course is completed; but, how
futile, how pathetic, how worthless the result.

By meditation alone can you develop good vision

Man's years of life are also spent in such futilities. He completes the assignments of spending the allotted years, but how worthless is the achievement! Every one composes the four lines; but do they make any sense? Do they deserve attention or appreciation? No. They pursue every will-o'-the-wisp, every chance desire, every line of thought, and are satisfied that they have 'lived.' But, this complacency is entirely misplaced. When the accounts are closed and debit and credit calculated, what is the profit earned?

You have wandered far and wide, but neglected your home. You peep into the stars in space, but keep your inner sky unexplored. You peep into other's lives and pick faults, and talk ill of them; but, you do not care to peep into your own thoughts, acts and emotions and judge whether they are good or bad. The faults you see in others are but projections of your own; the good that you see in others is but a reflection of your own goodness. By *dhyaana* (meditation) alone can you cultivate the good vision, the taste for good listening, good thoughts and good deeds.

By *Dhyaana*, you get immersed in the idea of the Universality and the Omnipotence of God. Is it not your daily experience that a bigger worry overpowers the smaller one and makes you forget it? When you fill your mind with idea of God and yearn for Him, and pine plaintively for Him, all lesser desires and disappointments, and even achievements will pale into insignificance. You will forget them all; they will be submerged in the flood of Divine yearning and very soon, in the Ocean of Divine Bliss.

Yearn for God, all lesser yearnings will disappear

I shall give an example from the Raamaayana, which will make this point clear. When

Dhasharatha the Emperor died, there was no one at hand to perform the obsequies and so, they sent word to the younger sons, Bharatha and Shathrughna, who had left for their kinsman's capital. They were not informed of the death, and when they came and saw the body, they were too shocked at the inert silence of their dear father, that they ran to Kaushalya, the Queen, their step-mother. She burst into tears when the two boys ran into her apartments. They were shocked at this and inquired why. It was then that she broke the sad news of the death of their father.

Bharatha was plunged in grief at this tragedy; he wept aloud, beating his breast. It was inconsolable agony. Then amidst the distress, he said, "Mother, how unfortunate I am. I had no chance to nurse him in his illness, during his last days. Alas, dear brother, you too lost the, precious chance of service," he said, patting Shathrughna on the head. After some moments, he continued, "Mother, how fortunate are Raama and Lakshmana. They were with him. They nursed him and ran on little errands for him. They were with him when he breathed his last. Since we were far away, did father leave any command for us? What was his last wish regarding us? Did he remember us, ask that we should be sent for?" Kaushalya said, "Son, he had only one word on his lips, one form before his eye; that word was Raama, that form was Raama." Bharatha looked surprised. He asked, "How is it that he uttered the name and craved for the form of Raama, who was by his bedside, and did not yearn for me who was far away? O, how unlucky I am? Have I lost the affection of my dear father?" Kausalya replied, "Well, if Raama was by his bedside or near him, he would not have passed away."

Bharatha ejaculated, "Mother, where had Raama gone? Why was he away? Where is he now? Did he go a-hunting to the forest? Was he on a pleasure trip on the Sarayu?" The mother said, "No, no. He went into the forest for fourteen years." Bharatha Could bear it no longer. "Alas, what an outrageous tragedy, this? What crime, which sin, did Raama commit to deserve this exile? Why had he to go?" "Your mother wished that he should go, and so he went:" said the Queen. When Bharatha heard this, the grief that he sustained on hearing of the death of his father paled, and the grief that arose at his mother sending Raama into exile for fourteen years supervened overwhelming all else. The greater grief scours off the smaller.

So too, the greater yearning will dominate and deluge the lesser. So, yearn for God, and all lesser yearnings will disappear. Loss or gain, honour or dishonour, health or ill-health, joy or grief---keep the mind steadily pointed towards God; that is the goal; that is the prize, for the race of life. Overcome all obstacles by means of that faith, treat the obstacles as ineffective and futile and have the goal alone in view. Visualise God, seek God and merge in God---that is the duty of man.

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