

39. The wet wick

THERE is a law of cause and effect; every karma has a consequence, whether you like it or not, whether you anticipate it or not. A good karma produces a good result; a bad one has to produce a bad result. Birth is the result of the karma done before death; if you are asked what happens to man after death, you can point to yourselves and declare, "This is what happens"; they are born again. This is no religion of despair; it is a religion of hope, of assurance, of encouragement to lead an active, useful, beneficent life. For the future is in your hands; tomorrow can be shaped by today, though today has already been shaped by yesterday. That is the reason why the biggest section of the *Vedhas* is called 'Karma Kaanda' and deals with various types of Karma, calculated to induce detachment, to canalise the desire towards eternal and universal ends, to transmute all acts into acts of worship, to offer adoration to the Devas who preside over every force of Nature, every energy of man, every limb of his anatomy.

The gross leads one on to the subtle

Elaborate rituals were prescribed so that this inner yearning and outward purity may be firmly established. In the constellation called *Saptha-rishi-mandala* (the Great Bear), the star Vasishtha, has very near it, a faint little star called Arundhathi. Vasishtha and Arundhathi are the ideal couple. The two are inseparable even in the sky, always at the same degree of proximity. Therefore, the newly married pray to them for blessing them with long years of happy companionship. The star Arundhathi is pointed out to the bride by the groom as the model of constancy.

In order that they may identify it, they have first to note the *Mandala* (region), then the Vasishtha star and then fix their eyes on the Arundhathi star. The concrete is a pointer to the abstract; the gross leads one on to the subtle; the ritual guides one to the right: the sacrifice or *Yajna* reveals the Indweller. *The Thaittireeya Upanishadh* takes the student from the gross to the subtle, step by step, in its effort to teach him the Divine Principle. When Bhrigu, the son of Varuna, approached his father, saying, "Teach me *Brahman*," he was told in a general way, "*Brahman* is that from which all this originates, that in which they live, and that in which they enter when they depart," and he was asked to investigate it through meditation himself. Bhrigu declared that 'Food was *Brahman*,' and when asked to proceed with the investigation, he proceeded to the next hypothesis, that *Brahman* was Praana (life); later, he found that *Manas* (*will, sankalpa, ichchaashakthi*) was *Brahman*; then he reached the stage when he could declare that *Brahman* was *Vijaana* (intelligence); the next step was reached when he identified *Brahman* with *Aanandha* (bliss); thus the *Upanishadh* teaches the subtle, supreme, non-dual Bliss, hidden in the cave of the heart. From the material to the spiritual---that is the process of *Upanishadhic* teachings.

The new born baby does '*kevvu*' (onomotopoeic word in Telugu for baby's wail); the dying person, as a result of his experience of life, must do '*navvu*' (laugh, in Telugu). The baby wails, since it does not know its name, its Reality; the dying man must laugh, since he should know it. He must die happy that his life-work has been accomplished. *Koham?* (whom am I)---the question with which he emerged into this world has been answered; he knows: *Soham* (I am He). He is born ignorant; he dies a *jnaani* (possessing spiritual knowledge).

Faith will grow only through good company

In order to acquire this knowledge, a pupil approached a *Guru*. *The Guru* asked him about the

books he had studied. The young man replied, he had learnt the Geetha so well that he could recite it upside down. Then the *Guru* told him, "I do not believe I can help you. For, you have no faith Geetha, the word of God; how then can I expect you to have faith in my word,' Read the Geetha, with faith, with intent to benefit by practising the teaching. Otherwise, it is sacrilege to handle the sacred message of God in a light-hearted manner. Faith can grow only if care is taken not to fall into evil company. *Sath-sangathwe nissangathwam---through* good company, acquire the capacity to be alone with yourself; that is the advice of Shankaraachaarya.

Once there was a hunter who had captured a baby bear and who brought it up as his pet with great love and care. The bear too reciprocated his love and behaved like a good friend for many years. One day, when he was traversing the jungle with his pet, who had grown up into a hefty beast, he felt overcome by sleep; so he laid himself down on the grass, asking the bear to see that he is not disturbed. The bear kept watch very vigilantly. It noticed a fly that flew round and round and settled on the nose of the master. The fly went off when it waved its thick heavy hand; but, it came again, and settled on the nose. The bear got enraged when repeated waves of the hand did not teach the fly that his master's nose was not the fly's resting place. At last, the bear could not bear the insolence any longer! His heavy palm came down with a thump on the nose, a devastating whack! The master died on the spot! That is the consequence of keeping company with the wild and the foolish. However affectionate they are, their ignorance will land you into disaster.

Among the Parsis, there is a story about a *Guru* and a pupil. The pupil prayed that he may be given some advice to make the pilgrimage to God easier and faster. The *Guru* sat silent for a while and then told him, "Go. Light that Lamp." The pupil tried his best, but he could not light it. It was filled with water, not oil. So, the *Guru* asked him to pour the water out squeeze the water from the wick, dry the wick, wipe the lamp clean, fill it with oil and then light it. The water is 'desire,' the Sun that can dry the wick is 'renunciation' and the flame of the lamp is 'Wisdom.' The *Guru* said, "This teaching is enough for you. You can go; may God bless you."

Fill your mind with the desire to see God, be with Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and taste the Glow of His Majesty. There is no bliss higher than that.

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