

35. Terrible and tender

YAATHE Rudhra Shiva thanoo raghora paapa Kaasini--The Prajaapathi, who is the Divine Inspirer of the *Vedhas* has two natures and names, two forms and features---the terrible known as *Rudhra*, and the tender known as Shiva. When the *Nara-simha* Incarnation of God, human with the head of a lion, emerged from the pillar in the Audience Hall of Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada, his little son, saw Him as tender, charming and compassionate. For, he was saturated with devotion to God. But, the father who ignored God and dared to insult Him and injure His devotees, saw before him a terror-striking form of total destruction. While Prahlada sang and danced in ecstasy, Hiranyakashipu shivered and shook in fear. It is therefore clear that man visualises in the One God the two opposites of terror and tenderness, reflections of his own mental make-up.

The One God manifests Himself in these two aspects, so that the world may be sustained and fostered, improved and cleansed. These two---the terrible and the tender---are the characteristics found together in every single thing on earth, for, are not they all parts of the selfsame God?

It is the mind that decides the desire

Take the articles of food. It has the *Shivam* aspect, when taken in, intelligently and in moderate quantities. It can also be *Rudhram*, or devastating in its effects, if taken unintelligently and in excess. Every thing or thought that obstructs the surge of *Aanandha* (divine bliss)---every such situation, experience, idea---is *Rudhra*; every step towards limitation, regulation, control, progress, sublimation, is tender, *Shivam*, auspicious, fruitful, beneficial.

It is the desire which haunts man that is responsible for making the one item, food, either a boon or a bane. It is the mind that decides the desire and directs it. A sharp knife can be used for slicing fruit or for stabbing: in the hands of a surgeon, it can save a life, rather than destroy one. The mind can liberate you from bondage or bind you more tightly with the objective world.

God is Omnipresent, the inner motivator in every being. So, we have to posit Him as resident in, and manipulating the mind too. When He manipulates it to our benefit we can call Him, *Shivam*; when He playfully or purposefully turns it against our best interests, we can call Him, *Rudhra*.

One point has to be emphasised here. We should not identify God as *Shivam* when we get happiness and *Rudhram* when we fall into misery. For, happiness and misery are not two distinct experiences. The absence of one is the presence of the other. Each is inextricably intertwined with the other. Undiluted happiness is a chimera; pleasure is the interval between two moments of pain; pain is the gap between two moments of pleasure.

God is eager to award victory to the aspirants

Again, God assumes or appears to assume the terrible aspect only to ensure the welfare of mankind and the happiness of the worlds. It is mentioned in the Epics and *Puraanas* that God placed various temptations and tribulations in the path of ascetics and aspirants, thus demonstrating that He is either cruel or vindictive or positively mischievous! No! God has no desire to prevent or postpone their spiritual progress; nor has He any apprehension that they might trouble Him if they succeed! He is eager to award them the victory they seek; that is the reason why He puts them through the obstacles.

Being students, you know very well, that the University has prescribed certain examinations, at the end of every academic year. Do you ascribe the tiffs system to any desire for persecuting you?

Do you think it is a sign of displeasure? You know that they are conducted so that you could be promoted, aren't they? The *Yogins*, *saadhaks*, and aspirants are being tested by God, only to promote them. Instead of accepting the tests as signs of His Care and Love, people grow desperate and defeatist; they cry out, "O God! We cannot face these tests," just as students cry out, "We don't want examinations!" How then can progress be measured and achievement recognised? Those who pilot planes or drive cars or captain ships must possess certificates of having attained the required proficiency. They are tested before the certificates are awarded. Those *saadhaks*, who protest and clamour when tests confront them, are only proclaiming themselves as unworthy of higher positions, as content to remain where they are.

God's test of Emperor Sibi's spirit of renunciation

The story of Emperor Sibi is an illustration of this truth. Though endowed with power and authority, prosperity and wealth, Sibi was a genuine *Saadhak*, having attained a high stage in detachment and the spirit of renunciation. God decided to discover whether his achievements were deep-rooted and unshakeable. *Agni* (the God of Fire) and Indhra (God of the Heavenly Regions) took on the forms of a dove and a hawk. The hawk (Indhra) pursued the dove (*Agm*) across the sky, until the frightened bird fell into the lap of Sibi sitting on his throne, pleading for protection from the hawk.

As befitted his *Dharma*, Sibi gave word that he would save the dove from its enemy and assured full protection for it. At that moment, the hawk presented itself before the Emperor and demanded its meal, its legitimate prey. "I am hungry, I had secured my food, you have deprived me of my meal," it complained. "Of what use is all your vaunted spirituality, if you rob me of my meal?" it lamented. At this, Sibi said, "Yes, I shall slice off flesh from my body weighing as much as this dove weighs; you can appease your hunger with that."

The hawk agreed; a balance was brought; the dove was placed on one pan, pieces of flesh cut from the body of Sibi were placed in the other pan. But, lo and behold, however many pieces of flesh were laid thereon, the pan on which the dove sat did not rise at all! It was indeed a mystery how a bird could weigh so much. At last, Sibi said, "Well. You can take all of me. Eat me whole. Here am I at your disposal." No sooner did he utter these words than the hawk became Indhra and the dove was transformed into *Agni*---Gods effulgent in their Glory! They were supremely happy at the depth of Sibi's spirit of renunciation; they blessed him profusely and departed.

Though Indhra and *Agni* might appear to be terribly cruel in their dealings with Sibi, it was indeed only a test to provide him a chance to express his sovereign qualities of self-control, compassion, and charity.

Krishna's test for Emperor Mayuuradhwaaja

The *Mahaabhaaratha* has a fine story which proves the same point. The fact that God might assume terrible aspects in order to examine attainment and establish the truth of achievement is witnessed in the story of Mayuuradhwaaja. The Paandavas celebrated the *Aswamedha Yaaga* (Horse Sacrifice), and as part of that ceremony released the chosen horse so that it may take its own course across the length and breadth of the land. Whoever stops and binds the horse is thereby challenging the sacrificant for a fight; he has to win back the horse, after defeating the audacious obstructionist!

Mayuuradhwaaja, a great devotee of Krishna, a virtuous ruler, a wise man learned in the *Vedhas*, a man of deep compassion, held the horse, and Arjuna, the Paandava hero decided to meet him in

battle. But, Krishna advised him to desist; for, he desired to demonstrate to Arjuna the devotion of Mayuuradhwaya which far surpassed his own; he also desired to proclaim to the whole world, the heights that Mayuuradhwaya could reach in the realm of self-sacrifice and truthfulness.

So, He proposed that He and Arjuna proceed to Mayuuradhwaya's palace in the guise of a pair of Brahmins, seeking a meal. They were welcomed by the King, who offered them rich hospitality. But, before they could eat the very first mouthful, Krishna stopped very dramatically and recited a tale of woe.

Emperor's humility rewarded, Arjuna's pride humbled

"Listen! O Soft-hearted Emperor! As we were coming along through a forest on the border of your empire, a tiger snatched away the young son of my companion here. Before we could come up with the beast, it had swallowed half the body; but, it heard our piteous appeal, and promised to release the boy, and return him alive to us, provided it is given as substitute, one half of the sanctifying body of the pure and holy Emperor of the land, Mayuuradhwaya. How can we relish your hospitality with this agony in our hearts? Promise to give the tiger half your body in exchange for the full living body of this Brahmin boy, and then, we shall partake of your hospitality". Mayuuradhwaya agreed most gladly; when the lunch was over, he sat on the floor and instructed his queen and his son to saw his body into two halves.

They placed the saw on the head and began the process of division, with the Brahmins witnessing the operation. They saw drops of tears in the left eye of the King. Krishna said, "O You are giving us the promised gift with tears, not with unalloyed willingness. I cannot accept anything given with tears." But Mayuuradhwaya replied, "Sir, If I am unwilling or hesitating, both eyes should shed tears, shouldn't they? Only the left eye is shedding them now; and the reason is this- the right half is being used for a highly sacred purpose, to save a person from cruel death. But, what will happen to the left half? Cast away, to be eaten by dogs and vultures? So, the left half-is weeping, but the right half is jubilant that it is being put to some meritorious purpose." At that moment, Krishna manifested Himself to the great Mayuuradhwaya in all His Glory and Majesty; He blessed him that he would have Krishna always installed in his heart and that he would be ever blissful and content. Arjuna too realised that there were devotees of Krishna far more advanced than he was His pride was humbled. Mayuuradhwaya's humility was rewarded.

Tests such as these are evidences of Grace rather than of anger. The terrible aspect of God is not terrible in essence. God is described in the scriptural texts as, *Raso vai sah---*"He is sweetness Itself." How can sweetness ever become bitter? Godhead is a spotlessly clean mirror; you see in It your own reflection. When you have terror-striking propensities, the reflection you see will strike terror into you. When you have soft harmless propensities, the reflection will be tender and soft. Do not lay the blame on Godhead, as you are prone to do. When everything goes right, you say that God has come close to you; when something goes wrong, you say that God has deserted you and gone afar! He does not move far or near. The distance from Him to you is as much as the distance from you to Him. He is everywhere. He always is in your heart. Recognise Him there; realise Him as closest and nearest to you. He is your own Self, neither terrible nor tender, but, simply IS.

Brindhaavan, 30-5-1974

You are not doing service for others. You are doing it always for yourselves, to the God in you, the God who is equally present in others.

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