

50. The Labyrinth

THE real and the unreal (that appears to the ignorant as 'real') are not two distinct things; one is the absence of the other, that is all. The 'absence' of reality cannot be an 'unreal thing.' The absence of light cannot be raised to the level of a distinct thing called 'darkness.' There is only One; it appears as two. In order to explain this, Brahmāsri Mudigonda Pichayya Shaasthry gave a good example. He spoke of a red-hot cinder, which burns the hand, since fire has entered into the piece of coal. So too, when the ego enters the *jeeva* (individual being), the ego develops attributes and appears many-faced.

But, just inquire, how the coal itself came into being. That too was a result of fire! The *jeeva* itself was manifested since the feeling of *aham* (ego) arose in the *nirguna Brahman* (the attributeless, desireless Universal).

The Shaasthry also spoke of the difficulties involved in releasing the *jeeva* from the clutches of the ego. He said it is like separating the heat from the red-hot cinder, it has become part and parcel of the coal. But, by the process of cooling, the coal can again rid itself of the heat that informed every particle of its substance.

He called 'life,' a labyrinth, from which few can escape, though all have entered it easily! He quoted the Mahaabhaaratha episode where Dhrona, the teacher of the clans in the art of warfare (also called Kumbhaja, born in pot) had arrayed the Kaurava troops as a labyrinth on the battlefield of Kurukshethra; Dhrona challenged the teenage son of Arjuna, Abhimanyu by name, to come into the *padhmavyuha* (labyrinth of the lotus shape) and fight his way out, if he dared. His father Arjuna was not present in camp; his wife was pregnant at the time and, so, as the *Shaasthras* (spiritual sciences) declare, the prospective father had no right to gamble with his life. When the young warrior mentioned the challenge, his mother expostulated with him, and told him that he could well excuse himself from the ordeal.

The pure mind reflects the Reality of God

The reasons she gave him for this withdrawal have a deeper meaning. The labyrinth was constructed by Kumbhaja, which means, one born in intelligence, *Brahman* Itself, for, *Brahman* is *Prajnaanam* (the Supermost Wisdom). How can a person break through the labyrinth devised by *Brahman*, when he is overwhelmed by the egoistic pulls, consideration for his-wife and his child-in-the-womb and the absence of his father? These two excuses are the symbols of I and Mine.

The Mahaabhaaratha declares that Arjuna alone had capacity and skill to break the *Padhmavyuha* (that is to say, the labyrinth of birth and death, the tangle of desires and fulfilments). Why? Because, Arjuna, (the word means, pure, unblemished, immaculate) was free from the ego and so could foil its stratagems. Through the pure mind alone can the chain be broken, the tangle cleared. The pure mind reflects the Reality clearly, the Reality of God that is the basis of One---Self as well as the objective world. *Chiththa-shuddhi* brings *Jnaana-siddhi*---"the pure mind confers the boon of wisdom." God is immanent in every particle in the Universe; the clear vision can experience Him everywhere at all times.

"Soham" is the refrain of every breath

That vision gives immeasurable, inexpressible bliss. Of what avail is all the loud chanting, praying, singing and wailing, when the heart is soiled by egoism and selfish desire? A person

behaving so might be taken by ordinary mortals as highly devoted to the spiritual path; but, deep in his disturbed consciousness, he will be tormented by anxiety and fear. On the other hand, a person might appear poor, distressed, and depressed, to ordinary mortals; he might not have the exterior demonstration of devotion. But, God would be ever installed in his heart, guiding and guarding him. He might be doing all acts as acts of worship to the God residing in his heart.

The bird in this physical cage wherein man is imprisoned is always, from the moment of birth to the moment of death, chirping '*Soham*,' declaring that 'in reality the *jeeva* (embodied soul) and *dheha* (body) are ONE. It is this affirmation that is the justification for the gift of life. When that chirp does not emanate from the breath, the body is a *shavam* (corpse)! When it manifests, illumines and fills the cage with the Divine fragrance, it is a tabernacle, *Shivam*! Identify yourselves with the *manthra* (sacred formulae) the bird chirps, the breath repeats. You might forget any other *saadhana* (spiritual discipline) or any other duty to yourself--but, the breath never, even for a moment forgets this *Saadhana*--reminding you of your innate Reality, namely, *Sah* (He). "I am He. He is I"---that is the refrain of every breath. What deeper instruction, what greater inspiration do you require, to keep you on an even keel of equanimity?

Faith in God must be constant and firm

A devotee once lamented, saying, "O God! You have forgotten me!" This is never possible; it is the devotee who forgets that he is the child of God, that God is his never-failing friend and guide. God is all-knowledge, all-power, all mercy. Faith in God has to be constant, firm in the face of every challenge by fate or fortune.

On one occasion, the deers of the forest held a huge conference to consider their plight. The leader of the vast multitude that had assembled counselled courage and unity; he said that it was a real shame that mean creatures like dogs, who were not as fleet as they and had no horns, could put terror in their hearts. At this, the vast congregation unanimously resolved with loud acclamation that no deer shall henceforth turn its back when dogs pursue them, should stand their ground and give a fight to the finish. While the echoes of the acclamation were still booming through the forest, but with the distant barking in an instant, not a single deer could be spotted where thousands had assembled to pass that resolution. They dissolved into thin air, and denied their own resolution. This is verbal hypocrisy, which is fatal to spiritual progress, and ruinous in any field.

The fault lies in the belief that things happen as a result of human effort and planning, human intelligence and care. No one can succeed in any venture without Divine Grace. It is a God's plan that is being worked out through man but, man prides himself that he has worked for it.

This reminds me of a story. A poor simple villager made his first rail journey. He purchased a ticket and entered a compartment; he found it occupied already by a few passengers who had kept their boxes, bundles and odd items of luggage on the racks or under the benches on which they sat. They were unconcerned with the extra effort that the engine would have to make to drag along those boxes and bundles. How cruel of them, the villager thought. The engine has to pull along their weights, and now they are imposing on the train, this additional burden too. He for one was not going to inflict this extra trouble on the poor thing; so he kept his box on his shoulder and his bundle on his head. He believed that he was carrying his box and bundle along, and not the engine. Most people behave in the same silly fashion, ignoring the fact that God is All; man is but an instrument in His hands, for the execution of His Plan. Faith in this fact is the key to peace and joy.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 23-10-1974

Desire destroys devotion, anger destroys wisdom, greed destroys work. Hence these bad qualities must be sacrificed. With good and sweet words, keeping desires under check and control (for ultimate removal), one should start on the path of sacrifice.

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