

## 12. Chaitanya and the thief

KRISHNA Chaitanya was once moving about, dancing and singing ecstatically, oblivious to everything, being immersed in the contemplation of the Lord. He entered Navadhveep, where the leaders of the town joined him in his *Bhajan*

with equal ecstasy. A thief also joined this group. He had been a thief all his life and an arrant liar. He joined in their dance and thought that as there were many rich men in the group, who were wholly lost in their singing and dancing, he could easily pick their pockets. While this was his intention, what happened was entirely different. The moment he joined the devout group, he forgot himself and began to sing and dance with the same fervour as others. After the others had left, he, sat apart for a while, watching Chaitanya. A small group of children were listening to Chaitanya's discourse.

The thief ran towards Chaitanya and said: "Swami! You are giving advice to so many persons. Please impart some holy name to me." Chaitanya replied, "Tell me first of all who you are and what is your life story. I shall then give you a message." The man confessed: "Swami! I am a thief. I have been leading the life of a thief and a liar. My name is Rama. People call me as Rama the Thief." Chaitanya said: "What a pity! I shall, however, give you a message. What will you give me as *Gurudakshina* (offering to the teacher)?" The thief replied: "I shall give you a share in the booty I get from stealing." Chaitanya said: "I have no need for any such thing. Give me as an offering a promise that you will not commit theft in future." He replied: "Swami! I am prepared to offer you anything, but I cannot agree to give up stealing." Chaitanya then said: "If that is so, I shall impart the sacred name to you on one condition. Whichever place you may choose for thieving you must recite the sacred name 108 times before you break into the place."

### A holy person can change even a thief

Chaitanya then drew the thief near to him. The thief's heart had considerably softened after listening to Chaitanya's words. *Sambhaashanam* Sankatanaashanam ("conversation with a holy person removes distress"). The thief was getting rid of the fear. He neared Chaitanya. *Sparsanam Karma Vimochanam* (the touch of a holy person frees one from the effects of past deeds). Chaitanya held the thief's head and whispered in his ear three times the mantra: "Om *Namo Bhagavathe Vaasudevaaya*." The mere sight (*darsanam*) of Chaitanya destroyed the sins committed by the thief. His words dispelled the worry felt by the thief. The touch of the saint freed him from the bonds of past deeds.

The thief went back with a purified heart. As he was leaving, he saw large numbers of people going to Chaitanya. Many rich persons were amongst them. The thief thought that this was a good opportunity for him to break into their houses. The richest man in the building had taken his wife and children to meet Chaitanya, leaving his house unguarded. The thief broke into the house and entered the safe-room in which all the valuables were kept. He saw gems of all kinds. He was resolved not to touch any of the valuables till he had completed recitation of the mantra given to him by Chaitanya. But before he completed the *mantra japa*(recitation of holy formula), the master of the house and others arrived there.

### A thief is turned into a saint

The lady of the house, who had gone with all her jewels, wanted to replace them in the safe. She saw a stranger in the room engaged in deep meditation. She thought it must be some great sage

who had come into the house in their absence and was meditating on God. She called her husband. The stranger continued to be immersed in meditation. He did not appear like a thief. They thought he must be some saintly person who had honoured their home by his visit. All of them began to offer worship to him and prostrate before him. They thought that in the wake of the saint Chaitanya other saintly persons were also visiting their village.

Meanwhile, on the completion of the recitation of *the mantra*, the thief opened his eyes and to his astonishment found a large group of people standing reverently before him. The master of the house asked him: "Oh sir! Who are you? Where from have you come? We have been sanctified by your visit. Please take your food in our home and redeem our lives by doing us this honour."

A great change came over the thief. He thought: "If the mere recitation of the Lord's name can bring me so much honour and respect, although I had come here only to steal, how many greater things may be in store for me if I genuinely recite the Lord's name for its own sake? I may hope for the highest position by the grace of the Lord." That very moment he decided to give up stealing. He prostrated before the master of the house and his wife and said: "Mother! Let me tell you the truth. I am a thief. Let me go to a forest. I shall spend the rest of my days contemplating on God and leading my life of a true ascetic."

Listening to his words of truth, the elders present were deeply moved and they arranged to carry him in a palanquin in procession round the village and to leave him in a forest as desired by him. Later, the man went to Chaitanya and reverently requested him to bless him so that he may become a real sage worthy of respect from the people.

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