

## 17. Lessons of a debate

*I am not merit nor sin.*

*Neither happiness nor sorrow.*

*Neither mantra nor holy water.*

*Neither Veda nor Yajna.*

*Neither food nor the enjoyer of food.*

*I am Sat-Chit-Ananda Swaroopa;*

*Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram.*

THIS *mantra* is likely to arise in everybody. In the world man is a seeker of happiness, an aspirant for bliss. He strives ceaselessly, night and day, to achieve this comfort and bliss. In every sphere man desires two things: enjoyment of happiness, removal of sorrow. What is the inner significance of man's perennial quest for happiness? The answer is given both in spiritual and scientific terms. Man's natural state is bliss. He is the embodiment of happiness. He is therefore entitled to seek happiness. If sugar loses its sweetness, it ceases to be sugar. If a rose loses its fragrance, it ceases to be a rose. Likewise, if man loses his natural condition of happiness and bliss, he has forfeited his human state.

For instance, if one notices on the road a man with sad looks, he enquires why the other man is miserable, what is the cause of his sadness. This enquiry is made by every passerby because it is not natural for a human being to be sad. Everyone is surprised at the man's sorrowful state. In the same bazaar, somebody is going in joyous mood; no notice is taken of him and no one questions him why he is not sad. His joy and gaiety are regarded as his natural condition and cause no surprise.

### **Role of food in increasing sensuous pleasures**

Man has been endowed with the body, the senses, the mind and the intelligence to experience his natural state of bliss. But unfortunately, because these agencies are polluted and misused, man is plunged in misery. The body is enveloped in the tainted cloaks of *Raga* and *Dwesh* (attachment and hatred). The senses are shrouded in the soiled cloth of desires and sensuous pleasures. The mind is enveloped by all these four coverings. As a result, man is prevented from recognising his true nature. He believes that the physical and worldly pleasures and attachments and aversions are natural to him. These are all transient and ephemeral like passing clouds.

Realising that man's attraction for sensual pleasures is due to the kind of food that he takes, the ancients devised an easy and sacred method for purifying the food before eating. They used to sprinkle some water on the food and utter the *mantra*: "*Annam Brahma! Raso Vishnuh! Bhoktaa devo Maheswarah!*" (The solid food is Brahma, the liquids are Vishnu and the enjoyer of the meal is Maheswara). The sprinkling is done with *Sathya* and *Rita* (Truth and the Cosmic order which together sustain the universe). In performing this rite, the partaker of food is praying to the trinity to protect him with "*Sathya and Rita.*" The prayer to the deities is to endow him with *Trikarana Suddhi*--the triple purity of thought, word and deed. By this rite, the food was being sanctified. The intellectuals of today, full of pride in their knowledge and skills, are ignoring the potency of *Sathya and Rita*.

### **A historic debate**

Adi Sankaracharya, during his victorious philosophical travels through Bharat met Sri Mandana Misra and had a debate with him on *Medha Sakti* (intellectual ability). Both of them agreed on Ubhaya Bharati, a high-souled scholar, pure-hearted and utterly selfless, as one most competent to decide who was the victor in the debate. Ubhaya Bharati was none other than the wife of Mandana Misra. The choice was unique in many respects. That Sankaracharya was willing to have as judge in the debate his opponent's wife was remarkable. It was the greatest testimony to his faith in the utter impartiality of Ubhaya Bharati. Sankaracharya knew that the discriminating power of the *Buddhi* (intelligence) was superior to the intellectual ability of the *Medhas*.

Students should understand the power of the *Buddhi*. It is not *Buddhi* as commonly understood—mere intellectual ability. It is intelligence in which *Rita* and *Sathya* are combined with *Aasakthi* (zeal) and *Sthiratvam* (steadfastness). Ubhaya Bharati was endowed with such intelligence. *Buddhi* includes *Yoga* and *Mahat-Tatwa* also, which have a purifying influence on the *Buddhi*. *Buddhi* is, thus, not only the capacity to think. Nor is it only the power of deliberation or the discriminating faculty. Beyond all these, it is the power of deep enquiry and judgement. Endowed with this capacity, Ubhaya Bharati decided in favour of Sankaracharya and against her husband. She declared that Sankaracharya had the better of the argument in the debate. This decision is based on *Sathya* and *Ritam*.

### **Example of Ubhaya Bharati**

Sankaracharya was extremely pleased with Ubhaya Bharati's verdict. Ubhaya Bharati then declared that in *accordance* with the understanding between the two disputants before the debate started, Mandana Misra, as the vanquished, should take to *Sanyasa* and become a disciple of Sankaracharya.

At the same time, as the devoted wife of Mandana Misra, acting upto the ideals of Indian womanhood, according to which the wife should follow the husband in weal and woe, Ubhaya Bharati decided to become a *Sanyasini* herself.

Although she was under no obligation to adopt a monastic life, she decided to do so to set an example to the world. After that, she established an *ashram* in which she wanted to show to the arrogant scholars, who relied on mere intellectual acumen, that it was inferior to the intelligence that was associated with *Sathya* and *Rita*.

One day when she was going to the river for a bath with her women disciples, she saw an ascetic, who had renounced everything in life, sleeping on the wayside, resting his head on a hollow water jug, using it as a pillow and at the same time ensuring that nobody took it away. As long as you have attachment and ego, you can never understand the *Atma* or experience *Atmic* bliss. In order to convey a lesson to the ascetic, Ubhaya Bharati spoke within his hearing the following words to one of her disciples: "Look at that ascetic, who has ostensibly renounced every kind of attachment. But he has not given up his attachment to his water jug!"

On hearing these words, the ascetic got enraged. He thought: "Is a mere woman entitled to teach me how I should behave?" While Ubhaya Bharati was returning from the river, the ascetic threw the jug at her feet and said: "Now, see what my renunciation is?" Ubhaya Bharati remarked: "Alas! You are not only filled with *Abhimana* (attachment) but you are also filled with *Ahamkara* (ego)." On hearing these words, the ascetic ran upto her, fell at her feet and pleaded for forgiveness of his faults.

### **The root causes of man's bondage**

The root causes of man's bondage are *Abhimana* and *Ahamkara*, the possessive sense of "Mine," and the arrogance of egoism. Both these are the result of consuming improper food. When one gets rid of the feelings of "I" and "Mine" he will realise his true Self. These feelings are caused by the kind of food that is consumed.

In the Mahabharata the grandsire Bhishma was expounding all aspects of *Dharma* to the Pandavas from his bed of arrows. At one stage, Draupadi burst into laughter. The Pandava brothers were upset by Draupadi's unaccountable levity. Understanding their distress, Bhishma told them that Draupadi was an exemplary woman in every respect and there must be a good reason for her laughter. He asked Draupadi to explain her reason. She said: "Grandsire! The lessons which you should have taught to the evil-minded and wicked Kauravas, you are now teaching to my high-souled and righteous husbands. This appeared to me ironic and futile." Bhishma explained that he had been serving the Kauravas and living on their bounty. "Consuming the food received from such unrighteous and evil-minded persons, my blood got polluted. Arjuna's arrows have drained away all that bad blood. And the *Dharma* which was deep in me is now coming forth."

### **Inner meaning of "Drau-padi"**

Students should realise from this episode how important food is in determining one's thoughts and actions. They should also understand the esoteric meaning of "Draupadi". Bhishma was full of praise for Draupadi's devotion to her five husbands. But there is an inner meaning for "Draupadi" which has a relevance to every person. "Drau-padi" refers to the five *pranas Prana, Apaana, Vyaana, Udaana and Samaana*--which are the life-breaths in everyone. All these five function in harmony in every person--man or woman--and maintain the balance in life.

The ways of the mind are remarkable. The scriptures have pointed out that when man follows the senses he becomes an animal. When he follows the mind he becomes a man. When he acts according to the *Buddhi* (intelligence) he achieves the state of *Mahat-Tatwa* (recognition of his great potentialities). When he recognises his identity with the *Atma*, he becomes *Brahman*.

If man cannot follow the *Buddhi* or the *Atma*, he should at least follow the mind so that he may be human. It may be asked whether the mind is not prone to bad tendencies. The truth is, the mind by itself is pure. It is by succumbing to the senses that it goes astray. If the mind allows itself to be guided by the *Buddhi*, it will not go astray.

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*The flower is Karma (work), the emerging fruit is Bhakti (worship) and the ripe sweet fruit is Jnana (wisdom). It is one continuous and spontaneous process, this spiritual fulfilment of the Sadhaka, the Sevaka. They are like Childhood, Youth and Old age, each imperceptibly growing into the succeeding stage.*

*BABA*