

28. The Avatar As Liberator

Nishkriyo Nithyo Nirvikalpo Niranjanah

Nirvikaaro Niraakaaro Nithyamukthosmi Nirmalah.

*(Actionless, ever abiding, free from delusions, ever blissful,
unchanging, formless, ever liberated and untainted am I).*

God transcends the *Gunas* (attributes). He is without cause. He is without form and is unchanging. He is beyond all thoughts and fancies. He is eternal, pure, omniscient and infinite. The cosmos is the embodiment of the Divine. There is nothing, not even an atom, in the world without the Divine.

Embodiments of love! Inside us and outside and all around there is air. But it cannot be seen, nor can it be grasped by the hand. Can you deny the existence of air for this reason? How can one exist if there is no air? To deny the existence of air is to deny one's own existence.

God is all-pervading. He is omnipresent. He transcends time, space and circumstances. According to one's level of understanding of the Divine, God exists at that level. The mind is the means, of comprehending everything in the world. In the world, which is a projection of the mind, the Lord exists as *Chittaswarupa* (Universal Consciousness).

It is foolish to deny the existence of the Divine

All the animate and inanimate objects in the world are *Vishnuswarupa* (manifestations of the Divine). It is foolish to look at the cosmos and deny the principle that pervades the cosmos. Equally is it not foolish to look at the universe, which is the embodiment of the Divine, and deny the existence of the Divine? That is the reason why the scripture declared: "*Pashyannapi na pashyathi Mudho*" (The foolish one, even though he beholds the Lord of the cosmos, does not recognise Him).

What is the reason for this failure? Man is looking at the cosmos as a physical *phenomenon*---*Vishvabhaavam*. He does not look at it from the point of view of divinity. It is only when the attitude changes that the Eternal will also be seen differently. The external world is a reflection, a resound and reaction of the inner feelings. The outer world has been described as a reflection of the inner being. What is felt within appears as a phenomenon outside. Therefore, it is only when every man renounces the worldly point of view and adopts a divine point of view that he can comprehend divinity in the cosmos.

For man to acquire peace, he has to cultivate *Thyaaga* (sacrifice) and get rid of the sense of dualism. The highest wisdom consists in seeing the One *alone*---"*Adwaita Darsanam Jnaanam*" The shedding of all attachment is *Thyaaga*. The Gita declares that supreme peace is obtained only through *Thyaaga*.

Mental transformation of sages Vyasa and Shuka

Once Shuka, the son of Sage Vyasa, renouncing all attachments, left his home. Unable to endure his departure. Vyasa followed Shuka. Vyasa appealed to him: "Dear son, you should not leave your home." Shuka told him: "You are not a father nor am I a son. Both of us are embodiments of Bliss.

Because of the forms which we bear, you consider yourself as the father and me as the son. The world consists of forms. You cannot comprehend the Divine without giving up attachment to forms. You cannot be the Seer without giving up the seen. You are carried away by your attachment to the external world."

As soon as he heard this, Vyasa experienced a mental transformation and started considering himself as an embodiment of bliss.

It is asked: "Is it possible to sacrifice (worldly things)?" The answer is: "It is not impossible if you make a determined effort." Unfortunately, man today is unable to give up addiction to even the most trivial things. Many are unable to give up cigarettes or bidis, tea or coffee. If one cannot give up such acquired tastes, how is he going to give up qualities like *raaga and dwesha* (attachment and hatred)?

Man is, in essence, the embodiment of *puurnaprema* (complete love). But this love is constantly changing because of attachment to forms. When he is born, he depends on the mother and is deeply attached to her. As he grows, giving up attachment to the mother, he develops attachment to friends in the outside world. He regards his friends as his life itself. As the years pass, he gets married. Deeming his wife as the breath of his life, he gives up his friends. As children are born, he wearies of his wife. He gets more attached to the children and interests himself in their education. After some time differences arise between the children and the father. At that stage the father attaches great value to wealth. This becomes the source of discord between father and sons. The affection which started with love of the mother ends in love of wealth. And then, he becomes a prey to greed.

Emperor Janaka's practice of *Raja Yoga*

It is evident from this that changes in the objects of one's affection bring about changes which cause grief. This kind of love is not proper love. Love which arises at one moment and fades the next moment is not love at all. True love shines like a pure divine flame in the heart of the man whose soul has no birth and death. True love is not subject to growth and decay. Whatever grows or declines is related to the ego. True love should be regarded as an effulgent flame.

Once, Emperor Janaka approached the Sage Yajnavalkya and asked him: "Oh Sage! Please let me know the facts about my previous life." The Sage replied: "What is past is past. There is no use in recalling it. You have completed a journey along a road. Do not bother about the road that has been traversed. It does not redound to your glory." Although the sage used many arguments to dissuade Janaka from persisting in his request, Janaka was insistent on knowing about his previous birth. Yajnavalkya then resorted to his divine insight and told the Emperor: "Janaka, your wife in the present birth was your mother in your previous life." On hearing this, Janaka was shocked. He reflected: "What a wicked person have I been to treat my former mother as my wife! I must give up such a wicked life." From that moment he began to treat his queen as his mother, and giving up all attachments to worldly things, began to pursue spiritual wisdom. (The spiritual discipline he practised is known as *Raja Yoga*).

When, while performing one's duties, one cherishes divine aspirations and contemplates on God, leading a purposeful life, it is called *Raja Yoga*. This kind of devotion to duty, while pursuing one's spiritual *Sadhana*, was exemplified by Emperor Janaka, who attained liberation in this way. Every person has to discharge his duties in this spirit. Then, duty is God.

Sisupala's mergence with Krishna

Once a great assemblage of kings and sages had gathered at a *yajna* performed by Yudhistira. In that assemblage Sisupala and Dantavakra levelled abuses at Krishna recklessly. They rebuked Dharmaraja (Yudhistira) for giving precedence to Krishna by offering him *Agrathaambuula* (the first honours symbolised by the offer of betel leaves) at the assembly. They asked: "Are there not more eminent and worthy preceptors in this assembly than Krishna? There are, in this assembly, *yogis*, *rishis* and eminent ascetics. There are *Acharyas* (preceptors) like Dronacharya, Krupacharya and others. Bhishmacharya is pre-eminent among them. When such preceptors are present, why give the place of honour to Krishna?" Sisupala referred sneeringly to the boyhood pranks of Krishna to suggest that he was unworthy of such high honours.

Dharmaraja could not bear listening to the abuses of Sisupala. His mind was racked with anguish. At that moment Krishna took the plate on which the offerings had been made to him and hurled it at Sisupala's throat. Krishna did not wield his *Sudarsana Chakra* (discus). He only threw the plate at Sisupala. That plate severed Sisupala's head. Dharmaraja was happy. The very next moment, the blood coming out of Sisupala's body flowed towards Krishna's feet while a flame from Sisupala's body merged in Sri Krishna.

Who attains lasting liberation and bliss?

Dharmaraja was even more astonished at this phenomenon. Dharmaraja wondered, "Should the soul of a wicked person like Sisupala get merged in the Divine? Should his blood touch the Lord's feet?" Dharmaraja's mind was filled with such doubts. Unable to contain himself, he went to the sage Narada and sought from him an explanation of the inner significance of what had happened. Narada said, "Praise and blame, abuse and appreciation are all related to the body and not to the *Atma*. You imagine that Krishna is merely the physical form in which you see Him. Because of this misconception, you interpret praise and blame in worldly terms. But the Divine is not confined to the body. He is eternally pure. He is ever pure and omniscient and omnipresent. For such a Lord, both abuse and praise have no meaning. However, in the world many persons secure *Moksha* (liberation) by abusing the Lord, many others achieve salvation by adoring God. Others achieve liberation by friendship with the Divine. Some achieve the same through Love. But wicked persons achieve liberation more easily than those who love the Divine. The wicked person achieves merger in the divine very quickly. The devotee goes through many trials and tribulations before attaining liberation. What is the difference between the two types of merger? The devotee who merges in the Divine after experiencing many trials and difficulties, attains lasting liberation. It is a blissful experience. The wicked person attains momentary merger. It is not an experience of bliss."

This means that all persons may attain merger with the divine. But the devotee who surrenders himself to the Lord attains everlasting merger.

The inner secret of the spiritual process

The manner in which the *Atmic* Principle operates has to be properly understood. It appears as if many bad, sinful and unrighteous persons in the world secure liberation while many good devotees appear to be suffering from many difficulties and troubles. These things, however, should not be viewed purely from the external point of view. The inner secret of the spiritual process should be understood. It was to give such an inner spiritual experience to Emperor Bali that the Lord assumed the form of Vamana and came to him.

Bali was the grandson of Prahlada, who was the son of Hiranya Kashyapa. No one mentions the name of Bali's father Virochana, who was a wicked asura. While Prahlada's father, Hiranya Kashyapa was a hater of Hari, Bali worshipped Hari. Bali was ruling over his realm righteously. He loved his subjects as his own children. The land enjoyed plenty and peace.

"As is the king so are the subjects" is an old saying. The ancients always prayed for righteous rulers. Emperor Manu laid down three prescriptions. They are "*Bhadram Pashyanthu*" (See what is good), "*Bhadram Shrunvanthu*" (Listen to what is good), "*Bhadram Kurvanthu*" (Do what is good). These are the life-breath of *Dharma* (righteous conduct). It is not enough for us merely to say "See good." These injunctions have to be observed. If these are not observed, righteousness will cease to exist. Emperor Bali practised these three precepts and inspired his people to observe them.

One returns to the place from which he came

On one occasion Prahlada's father, Hiranya Kashyapa, went to his mother to console her on the death of Hiranyaksha (Hiranya Kashyapa's elder brother). The mother was wailing over the corpse of her son. Hiranya Kashyapa told his mother: "Mother, this whole world is transient. Every being is a traveller in this world of *Karma* and after completing one's pilgrimage, one returns to the place from which he came. Such being the case, why do you grieve? Moreover, my elder brother, who hated Hari, was slain by Him. That is his good fortune. He did not die at the hands of some ordinary person. The Creator became his destroyer. The one who created him also punished him. How fortunate was my brother! I am praying for a similar end for myself." On hearing these words, the mother was happy and declared, "Be it so."

Hiranya Kashyapa was killed by Hari and thereby his wish was fulfilled. This episode indicates how God is realised even through hatred and abuse of the Divine.

Emperor Bali's gift to Vamana

Vamana sought from Emperor Bali three footsteps of land. What is the reason for the Lord appearing as a dwarf before Bali? When the Lord could measure the earth and the heavens with two steps (after Bali had made the offering that Vamana wanted), why did He appear at first as a dwarf?. This shows that however mighty a person may be, when he appears as a supplicant he gets diminished in stature. When one stretches his palm for an offering he becomes small. The giver of gifts acquires a high stature. Bali realised the greatness of his status as a giver. He rejoiced over his good fortune. When Bali agreed to make the gift which Vamana sought, Sukracharya intervened to tell the Emperor: "Don't give Him what He asks. He is not a mere Brahmin lad. He is Lord Vishnu Himself." Bali replied: "Oh *Guru*, I esteem no one higher than God. I will rather give up the preceptor than renounce God."

There are any number of people in the world who are willing to make gifts of wealth, education and many other things, but there are few who offer themselves as a gift. Considering the gift which he was making to Vamana as a total offering of himself, Bali made the gift. Bali declared: "I am offering my wealth, my family and everything else and surrendering myself totally to you. O Lord! Save me." Bali offered his all to the Lord.

After the Lord had used two footsteps to measure the earth and the firmament, Bali prayed to the Lord to place his foot upon his head for the third footstep. What is the inner meaning of this action? As the Lord had measured the entire earth with one footstep it meant that the place occupied by Bali was also covered by the first step. What separate claim could he make

regarding his head? The inner significance of this should be understood. By measuring the earth the Lord has covered the earthly realm. By His second step He had covered the heavenly realm. By placing his foot on the head of Bali, the Lord covered *Manoraajyam* (the realm of the mind). This indicates that the Lord accepted and received from Bali the kingdom of his mind.

Vamana confers liberating glory to Bali

The mind is at the root of this phenomenal world. The mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation for men. It is only when one is free from the trammels of the mind that he obtains true *Moksha* (liberation). Vamana conferred liberation on Bali by freeing him from his bondage to the mind. It should be realised that Vamana did not come to Bali just to seek a gift. He came to Bali to liberate him. He came to Bali as a protector. He sought to make Bali an ideal example to the world. For what reason? Bali was the very embodiment of righteousness. He was a just ruler. In looking after the welfare of his subjects, he was exemplary. He excelled also in his generosity and his adoration of the Divine. He was steadfast in his faith. The advent of Vamana was intended to glorify Bali and make him an ideal example to the world.

Inner significance of Onam festival

Emperor Bali made one request to Vamana. "O Lord, my virtues are not very important. The devotion of my people is of great importance. I could be a great ruler because of the good qualities of my subjects. It is only when the goodness of the subjects and righteousness of the ruler are both present that there is real fulfilment. Lord Narayana, it is not enough if you give salvation to me alone. My subjects are responsible for making me what I am. You must bless my people also." Bali appealed to the Lord to permit him to visit his people once a year. Bali prayed that in the month of Shravana, when the Moon is in the constellation of Shravana and on a Saturday he should be allowed to appear among his subjects. Unfortunately, this year, the Shravana month is over. Only the Shravana constellation is present today. Vamana granted Bali's prayer. The Kerala people observe this day as a festival day in the belief that on this day Bali visits their homes and blesses them.

There is, however, another significance for the Onam festival. Onam means wearing new clothes. But is it enough to wear new clothes? The word *Vastra* not only means cloth but also means the heart. Therefore, the significance of wearing new clothes is that one should make the heart new by getting rid of all bad thoughts and feelings.

Today in Kerala every home is cleaned and a festoon of green leaves is hung over the front door and the trunks of plantain trees are put up in front of each house. The significance of this observance is that both the external dwelling and the internal heart should be kept clean and pure, because God dwells both inside and outside of everything in the world. The real purpose of our festivals is that they should be an occasion for purifying our heart and getting rid of selfishness. There is also a scientific significance of having festoons of green leaves at the entrance of houses and the use of cow-dung for cleaning the floors inside and outside houses. The sweet preparations made from bananas by Keralites on festive occasions has special dietetic properties, besides being tasty.

Give up worldly feelings and develop devotion

The offering of sweets to the Lord on festive occasions has a spiritual significance. The Lord is the very embodiment of *Madhuram* (sweetness). Krishna took birth in Mathura itself. The inner

purpose of partaking sweets on festive days is to cultivate sweet thoughts and feelings. Bad thoughts and bad feelings should be given no room.

Although Emperor Bali was of Rakshasa (demonic) lineage, he exemplified great virtues and sought to promote among his people noble feelings and Godly qualities. Though born in a family of Rakshasas, he was a devotee of God. What matters is not the lineage or caste of a person. What matters is the way one feels and thinks. Everything is transformed by the nature of one's thoughts.

Therefore, everyone should give up wordly feelings and develop devotion to God. This is the means to the realisation of oneness with the Divine. One should not make a distinction between the phenomenal world and the Divine. The cosmos is permeated by the Divine, and there is nothing in the world apart from the Divine. But, because of attachment to the body and out of egoistic feelings, men react to praise or blame as affecting them. They ought to be indifferent to them. If one abuses loudly, it will be lost in the air. If the abuse is uttered in a low voice, it remains with him. Why should one be concerned about accusations or get agitated over them? Because there are few who express this point of view, people today are making themselves victims of praise or blame.

The Lord cares only for the purity of heart

People are lost in the observance of external rituals. The Lord is not concerned with formal observances. The Lord cares only for the purity of the heart. The saint Thiruthondar expresses this feeling in one of his hymns. He exclaimed: "O Rama, I am worshipping you with a pure heart." Purity of heart is essential. Without such purity all forms of worship and all pious acts are of no avail. True spirituality consists in getting rid of the demonic and animal qualities in one and cultivating godly qualities.

Today people are filled with anger and hatred. When men utter the word "peace" three times, it signifies the desire for peace of body, peace of mind and peace of the *Aatma*. Men should aspire for this triple peace. People go on building rest houses. But they do not build "peace houses." Peace of mind is most important. It can be got only by renunciation. Egoism and possessiveness have to be utterly eradicated.

Emperor Bali was a supreme example of one who had completely given up the ego and attachment. It is not enough to offer worship to Bali or praise him. People must practice the qualities which Bali represented. People must develop Bali's spirit of generosity. They must be prepared to offer themselves totally to God as Emperor Bali did. Many people go on reciting the name of Rama, but how many follow his example either in the matter of obeying their parents: commands or cherishing love for their brothers? The real devotee of Rama should develop Rama's qualities. A devotee of Krishna should at least follow one or two precepts of Krishna. The birthdays of great men are celebrated mainly by feasting and not by following their example. This is not the way to observe their birthdays. You must give birth to the qualities of the great men within you when you celebrate their birthdays.

Keralites' adherence to their old traditions

Embodiments of the Divine Aatma! From ancient times the people of Kerala have been adhering, by and large, to their old traditions. It used to be said that Kerala is a communist area and atheism is rampant there. The truth is that Kerala is a theistic state. Other things are only part of the game of politics. At heart the people of Kerala are filled with devotion. Nambudiripad was a

communist leader and was for some time Chief Minister of Kerala. But he translated the Upanishads. The spiritual urge is present in all Keralites. Political changes may come and go, but the inner feelings remain unchanged. The Kerala people are fortunate in having been blessed with the advent of three *Avatars* in their country. I desire that you should develop your devotional tendencies and sanctify your lives. The people of Kerala are especially devoted to the worship of Krishna. It is Krishna as a child that is worshipped in Guruvayur. I desire that they should experience the bliss of the worship of Krishna and share it with all others in the world.

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