

39. The greatness of Bali and Prahlada

EMBODIMENTS of Love! In this phenomenal world, physical relationships like parents, brothers, sisters, wife and children are natural. But in the spiritual context, man should develop relations which are permanent, sacred and transcendental.

One's true relations are *Sathyam* (Truth) as mother, *Jnaanam* (Wisdom) as father, *Dharmam* (Righteousness) as brother, *Dhaya* (compassion) as friend, *Shaanthi* (Peace) as wife and *Kshama* (forgiveness) as son. The physical relations are temporary and bound to pass away. But the six great virtues are the true imperishable relations.

*The foremost duty of everyone is to make
love of God flow towards all in creation.*

*Every man lives not for his own sake
but to render service to society.*

*To forget concern for the body
is the way to realise self-realisation.*

*Of what use is human birth if you do not manifest
unsullied love towards all beings? (Telugu Poem.)*

Oneness with God

Man performs a variety of spiritual exercises to achieve self-realisation and the bliss of oneness with the Divine. These include the nine forms of devotion. In these forms of worship God is regarded as mother, father, friend or master. The highest form of worship is to regard God and the individual as one. "You are I and I am you." This attitude frees man from bondage.

Human beings are different in form and name. Oneness amongst them can be achieved only by a feeling of oneness in thought, by a recognition that the whole cosmos is permeated by the Divine.

God is the cause, the world is the effect. In this marvellous universe, why is man unable to recognise his true nature? Divinity is present in every atom of the cosmos. You have to realise that you are that Divinity.

This truth was declared by Prahlada long ago. Emperor Bali, whose return to the earth for one day in a year is celebrated today in the Onam festival, was the grandson of Prahlada. Bali belonged to a line of great renunciants. His father, Virochana was also known for his spirit of sacrifice. He regarded the welfare of his people as his own well-being.

Mr. Wellington (who had spoken earlier) said that service to humanity is service to God. This principle was observed by Virochana. Emperor Bali also followed the same rule.

Experiencing God by renouncing bad qualities

Once several persons gathered round Buddha and asked him to teach them something about God as he had been pursuing the spiritual path for a long time. The Buddha remained silent. No one is competent to engage in discussions about God. God is in "Yes" and in "No." He is *in Dharma* and *Adharma*, in Truth and untruth. How can you have an argument over one who is

omnipresent? It is a waste of time. (God is the very embodiment of Dharma, of *Sathya* and of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Hence, *Vedhaantha* exhorted mankind: "Speak the Truth, follow Righteousness.

Some persons gathered round Raamakrishna Paramahansa and asked him: "Sir! Have you seen God?" Raamakrishna had a hearty laugh. He said: "Yes! I have seen God as I am seeing you. All are forms of God. However, your vision is different. You look at all persons as human beings. But all that you see is Divine. Why are you failing to see the Divine? You cry about your wife, your children, your wealth and your position. Have you ever cried for God in the same way? No. When you cry for God intensely, God will appear before you." Once you renounce your bad qualities you will experience God.

When the Lord as Vaamana, was approaching Emperor Bali's *yaaga*, the Emperor received him reverentially and asked him what he wanted. He said: "I want three feet of ground measured by my feet." Ball said: "Why come all the way to ask for just three feet of ground?" Vaamana declared: "That is all I want." The Emperor's preceptor, Shukraachaarya warned the Emperor against making the gift, as the seeker was no ordinary person. But the Emperor firmly declared that there is no greater sin than going back on one's promise. He kept his word.

Emperor Ball stands forth as the great upholder of the plighted word. That is the reason why the people of Kerala worship him to this day and celebrate the festival of Onam in his memory.

Love is the supreme value

What is that is adored today? It is Truth. Without truth nothing has any value. Without the values of Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love, all education and other attainments are useless.

Love is the supreme value. It is not mundane love, but Divine love that is precious. That Divine love encompasses every other form of attachment to friends and others. Cultivate the enduring friendship of God.

Emperor Ball was prepared to offer everything, including himself, to God. That is his greatness. It is not the gift of mere three feet of land. He offered himself to the Lord. "I am offering all that is mine, my family and wealth, and myself, keeping nothing for myself. Save me, Oh lord, who has sought refuge in you," says a *Sanskrit shloka*. "The heart which you gave to me, I am offering to you. What else can I offer at your Lotus Feet?" says a Telugu poem. This is the spirit in which Bali surrendered to the Lord.

Prahlaadha's gift of his character to Indhra

Many students do not know the full story of Prahlaadha (grandfather of Bali). If you have to name anyone for his highest character, it is Prahlaadha alone.

Once, Indhra conquered Prahlaadha and enjoyed *Swarga* (the realm of the gods). Later Prahlaadha overcame Indhra and deprived him of *Swarga*. Indhra was forlorn and sought the advice of his high-priest for winning back his kingdom. The priest told him that Prahlaadha was performing a great *yaaga* called Vishvajith and Indhra should assume the form of a *Brahmana* and seek a gift from Prahlaadha. Prahlaadha will give whatever one seeks from him. Indhra went to Prahlaadha in the guise of a poor *Brahmana*. Prahlaadha welcomed him and asked him what he wanted.

As advised earlier by his high-priest, he asked Prahlaadha to offer him Prahlaadha's *Sheelam* (character). Prahlaadha enquired of the *Brahmana* of what use was his character to the seeker.

The *Brahmana* replied that there was no need to go into all that. He had expressed what he wanted in response to Prahlaadha's offer to give whatever anyone asked at the Vishvajith sacrifice. "Are you prepared to give or not?" Prahlaadha immediately gave what the *Brahmana* asked with due ceremony.

Within a few minutes, an effulgent flame emerged from Prahlaadha. Seeing the effulgent form, he asked: "Who are you?" The effulgent figure prostrated before Prahlaadha and said: "I am your character. Hitherto I was in you. I fostered your name and fame. Now you have given me away as a gift. Hence I am leaving you."

When character is lost everything is lost

When character left Prahlaadha, shortly thereafter another beautiful effulgent form issued forth from Prahlaadha. Prahlaadha asked him: "Who are you, oh King?" The radiant figure replied "Prahlaadha! I am your *Keerthi* (Reputation). When character has left you, I have no place within you. Hitherto I was the servant of Character. When Character has left you, I have to follow suit."

Prahlaadha was puzzled. Then came another beautiful radiant female form from Prahlaadha. Prahlaadha respectfully asked her: "Mother! Who are you?" "Prahlaadha! After the departure of Character and Reputation, I, namely Rajyalakshmi, (the goddess of royal prosperity) have no place within you." Indhra, who had come in the form of a *Brahmana*, took all the three with him.

That very moment, Prahlaadha lost his kingdom. You can see from this how one's fame and prosperity are dependent on one's character. Character is a supremely Divine quality. Hence God is described as having six great attributes including Righteousness, infinite wealth, boundless prosperity, indescribable fame and unfathomable wisdom.

Prahlaadha was the embodiment of character. After Indhra had taken away his character from Prahlaadha, the latter got married and had a son by name Virochana.

You may realise from this episode what importance is attached to character in the spiritual process. This character should be offered only to God and none else. God is utterly selfless and therefore offering your character to God will mean no loss to you.

In the relationship between the devotee and God, no other relationship should be allowed to prevail. Ball ignored the warning of his preceptor in carrying out his promise to Vaamana. Bharatha condemned his mother's action which resulted in his separation from Raama. Prahlaadha did not submit to his father when it was a question of his devotion to Naaraayana. Meera did not allow her husband's conduct to come in the way of her devotion to Krishna.

Do not give up God

Whatever may happen you should not give up God. God is the only unfailing protector. Abhimanyu obtained his mother's blessings before going into battle at a time when Arjuna was away and Krishna was not available for advice. But her blessings were of no avail when God's strength was not available. Abhimanyu died in the battle valiantly like a hero.

All forms of strength, physical, material, manpower, etc., are of no use without Divine strength on your side.

Divine support and *Dharma* (Righteousness) are the two things essential for success. Whatever spiritual exercise one may practise, one should concentrate on achieving union with the Divine as the primary aim.

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