

6. Priyavrata and Jada Bharata

Sukhaarthi Tyajate Vidya.

Vidyarthi Tyajate Sukham.

Sukhaarthinah Kuto Vidyaa.

Kutah Kuto Vidyarthinah Sukham.

One who craves pleasure is not able to pursue education.

A true student renounces worldly pleasures.

One who desires comfort cannot obtain true education.

And comfort is not necessary to acquire education.

The human body is given for a purpose, not for the enjoyment of worldly joys. Craving for worldly joys is an animal quality. Priyavrata was a man who understood these truths. Every human life has a purpose, a meaning. Recognize the purpose of your life and achieve it. A life without a goal is an animal's life, a foolish life.

Prince Priyavrata

Priyavrata felt strongly, "Having taken a human birth, it is improper of me to desire physical comforts." Priyavrata was the second son of Manu. Yesterday you understood the nature of Dhruva, the son of Uttaanapaada. Today, grasp the character of Priyavrata, the younger brother of Uttaanapaada.

Physical pleasures are like dreams. They are ephemeral and unreal. All dream experiences are non-existent in the waking state. Similarly, all the joys of this world cannot confer happiness on the Atma. Recognizing this, Priyavrata sacrificed all comforts, left his kingdom and departed for the forest. At what age? At the age of nineteen years. Today, no one of that age even attempts to sacrifice worldly comforts. They believe

that youth is the time to indulge in physical pleasures to the full extent.

Not so with Priyavrata. He entered the forest to sanctify his time in Divine contemplation, to dedicate his life to the search for God. He ceaselessly meditated on God, picturing the Lord's form in his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Students of ancient India

Worldly people are bound in the ideas of "I" and "Mine." Thus, they invite sorrow and waste their valuable lifetimes. Man is trapped because he does not recognize the correct approach to deal with the feelings of "I" and "Mine". He considers "I" to be the body and "Mine" to be his physical possessions. This misinterpretation leads him astray. "I" is the *Atma*. "Mine" refers to the body. The correct attitude is: "I (*Atma*) must use my possession (body) for knowing myself. I should dedicate actions to myself (*Atma*) and not to my possession (body)." "Mine" refers to *kshetra* while "I" is the *Kshetrajna*.¹ The *kshetra* is only a tool to know the *Kshetrajna*. Priyavrata realized that the body was given to know the Indweller, not to enjoy the world. This is the difference between the students of today and students of ancient India.

Today, students set their aspirations on the physical world. They believe worldly joys to be true and lasting. They dedicate their time, body and actions to the pursuit of temporary happiness. But ancient students trusted that the *Atma* alone is permanent. They understood that the body was given to realize the *Atma* and exerted their utmost to experience inner bliss after renouncing external joys. For many years, Priyavrata

ate only roots and tubers, drank only water and underwent great austerities to secure knowledge of the *Atma*. He sat alone in caves and purified his mind. Purity of the mind is most important for the vision of the *Atma*.

What causes impurity of the mind? Attachment to worldly objects through the senses. We should not allow the senses to follow objects and pleasures. These ephemeral objects attract man in a variety of ways. Falling prey to attraction, man is cheated of Bliss. Objects are alluring, no doubt, but they bind and trap. The seriousness of the bondage is not apparent initially. Priyavrata realized the supreme importance of sense control. The same idea was taught by Kapila Muni² when he said, *Yogah Chitta Vritti Nirodhakah*—sense control is the greatest yoga. *Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam*—yoga is also skill in action, which sense control bestows.

Narada teaches Priyavrata

Priyavrata determined to achieve nothing less than perfection in yoga. He didn't go home for many years. Manu went in search of him, pleaded and even ordered him to return, but without success. "I have no interest in the kingdom. I don't even know myself. How can I understand the people and give them satisfaction? I'm sorry. This task of administration is beyond me," Priyavrata told Manu flatly. With no alternative, Manu continued to rule the world.

One day Narada saw Emperor Manu in the throes of depression and inquired, "O Emperor! There is no dearth of anything in your kingdom. Why this dejection?" It was usual for Narada to probe into others' affairs to ensure their welfare!

Manu said, “My son Priyavrata does not agree with me. I want him to rule this kingdom. Please help me convince him.” What other work does Narada have, anyway? He went to Priyavrata’s cave and taught him at length: “O foolish boy! God has given us a body for a task. You can experience Divinity by using the body in worldly duties while keeping the mind focused on the Lord.” Priyavrata asked, “How is that possible?”

Narada explained, “Your prime duty is to obey God’s command. God bestowed this body on you for certain duties. Will God give you a body for no reason? Each individual body has its responsibility. Each responsibility has a goal. You are a prince. Your dharma lies in administering your kingdom. Return home, initiate projects for public welfare and make your subjects happy. Redeem your life in this manner.

You have seen how a farmer controls his bulls by ropes. When he tugs at the rope tied to the left horn, the bull turns left. He pulls the rope on the right side to make the bull turn right. When both ropes are pulled, the bull moves straight ahead. Similarly, human life is controlled by the ropes of duty. God pulls these ropes to steer people along the path of their individual responsibilities. Thus, performing your duty is obeying God. Do not stand in the way of God’s decisions. Do not be a traitor to your true Self. Obey the divine command.”

Priyavrata could not disobey Narada or the Lord. He took Narada’s teaching to heart and returned to the kingdom. Manu established both his sons as kings and retired to the forest of Saunikaaranya. In deference to Narada and Manu, Priyavrata ruled the kingdom for a few years. But he could not

continue for long. He felt joyous only in solitude. He recognized that true spiritual practice is difficult, if not impossible, in the midst of people, objects and worldly activities.

Human attachment vs. divine attachment

More human attachment means less divine attachment. The more we yield to the attraction of worldly joys, the more our one-pointedness declines. The root causes of all sorrow are (1) attraction to worldly objects and (2) attachment arising from human relationships.

Priyavrata realized that each person has come to this world for himself, not for anyone else. There is no lasting bond between people. A traveler reaches an inn. He meets other travelers there. The next day, each one departs to their own destination. Scores of birds collect on a tree at sunset. At dawn, they fly away in their individual directions. Devotees should not lose focus of why they are here and where they are headed. Your journey is eternal—cultivate eternal qualities, not attachment. Today we behave like animals by giving too much importance to the body. We should progress from animal to human, then from human to Divine. For these reasons, Priyavrata longed for solitude and left his kingdom eventually.

Rushika succeeded Priyavrata as King. Rushika was also a seeker of the *Atma*. But he did not consider it necessary to renounce the kingdom to perform spiritual effort. He spent his days ruling efficiently, purifying his mind and performing spiritual inquiry. He maintained a harmonious balance between worldly and spiritual duties. Rushika's son was the famed Bharata.

The story of Jada Bharata

Bharata was truthful and honest. He took excellent care of his subjects. He performed actions only after thinking of God. He never did even the smallest action, like drinking water, without offering it to God. At all times, in all situations, Bharata never forgot God. It is said that Bharath (India) is named after him. After many years as monarch, Bharata handed over the kingdom to his son and went to Rishikesh³ where he built a hermitage for himself. Having severed all worldly attachments, he passed his days meditating on the Lord.

One day, Bharata was sitting on the banks of the Ganga and watching the waves of the river. He reflected about the ups and downs of the waves being like the joys and sorrows in life. To him, the waves had consciousness. He felt that everything in Creation had awareness and was a form of God. While he contemplated in this manner, he heard a loud roar—the roar of a lion. Meanwhile, a doe had come there to drink water. She also heard the roar, panicked and jumped into the river. She was in the final stages of pregnancy. The fear and physical stress of the situation caused her baby deer to be delivered immediately. The doe was swept away in the river's current but Bharata was able to reach out and save the baby deer.

Bharata cleaned the deer, took it back to his hermitage and began tending it with parental affection. Now all his time was occupied in attending to this deer. If the deer wasn't in his sight, it was in his mind. Feeding it milk, collecting grass for it, cleaning it—He wasted all his time in such activities. Bharata's attachment for the deer kept increasing and consequently,

thoughts of God decreased. He thought of the deer constantly. A few years passed in this manner. When Bharata's death came unexpectedly, he took his last breath while thinking fondly of the deer and calling it by name.

Practice remembrance of God

What is the inner meaning of this story? Bharata left his body at a time when he was incapable of entertaining elevating thoughts. His final thought was about the deer and so, he was born as a deer in his next life. But he was able to remember his past life and the needless attachment. "My mind, which delighted in thoughts of God, fell prey to attachment for an animal. How foolish! What a pitiable life I am leading now," he regretted. Such are the disastrous consequences of uncontrolled attachment.

That is why when *Bharathiyas* go on pilgrimage to Kasi,⁴ we find dying people repeating the name of God continuously. No one can tell if the Divine Name will come to one's lips at the final moment. So, these bedridden people have someone whispering into their ears, the mantra:

Sri Rama Rama Rameti, Rame Raame Manorame

Sahasra Naama Tattulyam, Rama Naama Varaanane.

The repetition of the name "Rama" once is equal to repeating the entire *Vishnu Sahasra nama* (thousand names of Vishnu).

Whatever thought you entertain last, you will achieve that form in your next birth. The contemplation (*smarana*) done during your lifetime becomes your sole ornament (*aabha-*

rana) after death. If you remember the Lord's name throughout your life, it will be easy to recall it in your last moments.

Some people do not agree. They say, "If we must practice japa in youth, when are we to enjoy the world? When I have nothing to do after retirement, I will begin japa." This is foolishness. Suppose a man joins the army. If he is given a gun on his first day and asked to go to battle, he will be confused! He must undergo rigorous training in a variety of martial skills. With diligent practice over many years, he will become a good soldier. For this reason, Krishna talked about the importance of practice in the Gita.

Practice (*abhyasa*) is very essential. Even mundane activities like walking, talking, speaking, reading, writing are based on practice. We must prepare for death also by constantly remembering the Lord's Name and Form. Only then is it possible to recollect Him in our final moments. Therefore, practice, practice, practice, from a tender age. This is the main significance of the story of Bharata.

Rebirth as "Jada" Bharata

After his life as a deer, Bharata was born as a *brahmin*. Recalling his past mistake, he resolved not to cultivate attachment to anyone. He decided that this would be his repentance, although his mistake was done unknowingly. So he behaved like a vegetable. If anyone called him, he did not respond. Whatever anyone said to him, he didn't pay attention. People thought he was deaf and dumb, but Jada⁵ Bharata was unmoved.

He stuck to the faith that he was not the body. Memories of valuable time wasted in previous births disturbed him to no end. He left the city and went into the forest. He spent many years living under trees. Thoughts of God were foremost in his mind.

In the forest lived a gang of robbers. The leader of the gang had no children. Someone advised him that if he sacrificed a human being to Goddess Kali, he would obtain a son. So the leader commanded his henchmen to catch a healthy man for this purpose. The robbers spread out in the forest and began searching. Jada Bharata was seated under a tree. The robbers found him and carried him to their leader. Bharata hadn't had a bath for a long time. He was dirty. They took him to a river and forcibly bathed him. They applied sandalwood paste on his body and decorated him like a sacrificial offering. Bharata was not mindful of their actions or the reasons for those actions. The robbers took him to the temple of Kali. They asked him to sit down and he complied. They lifted a sword to behead him.

As the sword was about to strike, Goddess Kali appeared. She came walking from the inner enclosure of the temple and slew the entire gang of thieves. Then the Mother Goddess blessed Bharata with words of advice: "I am very pleased with your devotion and perseverance. Continue in this manner, and establish yourself in the Self. Don't worry what the world thinks of you. Be unaffected by praise and blame. Be fearless. Think of the Lord all the time." But Jada Bharata did not even hear Her! He was engrossed in the *Atma*, without interruption.

Then Mother Kali disappeared. Bharata walked out of the temple, still engrossed in the *Atma*.

On another occasion, Rahuguna, King of Sindhu-Sauvari, was passing by in a palanquin. Bharata was seated under a tree. The palanquin-bearers found the palanquin very heavy and accosted Bharata to lend them a hand. They dragged him from his spot and placed the palanquin on his shoulders. Bharata quietly obeyed. But before taking every step, he would make sure he wasn't stepping on any insect, since he perceived the *Atma* in every being. *Sarva Bhoota Antaratma Paramaatma*—God is the Indweller in all beings. This truth was recognized by Bharata. The feeling of unity—that no being should be harmed—was steadfast in him. Bharata's caution caused the palanquin to be slow and jerky. The king got angry, "Hey, men! Why are you walking so strangely?" The bearers said, "O King! This new man is responsible," pointing to Bharata.

The king turned to Bharata and abused him at length, calling him a "walking corpse". Then Bharata opened his mouth, "O King! Not only this body but all bodies are walking corpses. Yes, the body is walking, but it is only a *sava* (dead body). The One making all bodies walk, the only One alive, is Shiva. Bodies are inert. The inner consciousness is God." The king heard these words and commanded the palanquin to be lowered.

Rahuguna was actually on his way to see Sage Kapila to learn about the *Atma*. He stepped down in humility and said, "Kapila himself has appeared to me here." He sat with Bharata and clarified his understanding of the *Atma*. Jada Bharata taught

him *Atma Vidya* in a clear, lucid manner. Rahuguna was overwhelmed by Bharata's teachings and fell at his feet.

Vasanas—remnants of desires

Jada Bharata's wisdom spread all over India. His main teachings for eradication of worldly attachments were (1) control of the senses and (2) ceiling on desires. We should not let desires grow without limit. Desires alone are responsible for our joy and sorrow. One who desires is not a devotee. The one who works with an expectation in mind is not a devotee. You must work for others, for God.

You may chant the *Vedas* morning to night, know all the scripture, undertake various sadhanas or perform yagnas—God will not be achieved by any of these activities. This was the truth taught by Jada Bharata. These acts are only for mental satisfaction. How far is their reach, how permanent is their effect? This body composed of desires can never achieve God—Bharata recognized this truth.

An example. A camphor box has the smell of camphor even after all the camphor is removed. The body is a container smelling of sensual pleasures. Even after desires are curbed, vasanas (remnants of desire) exist. As long as the slightest tinge of desire exists, vasanas will prevail. As long as vasanas exist, one cannot reach God. So, patiently maintain self-effort with determination till the final trace of desire is erased. This is *Atma Bodha*—Teaching of the *Atma*.

Pray to God for God

Man has not taken birth to cultivate and satisfy desires. A life based on desires is narrow. Human life is meant to be as sacred and infinite as our innate Divinity. Do not pray to God with desires. “Lord, if I pass this exam, I’ll break two coconuts for You.” Is God short of coconuts? Will He satisfy your desires in fond anticipation of your coconuts? People go to Tirupathi and pray, “O Venkateswara!⁶ Fulfill my desire and I will give you every hair on my head.” What good is your hair to the Lord? You entertain rotten desires and hold your rotten hair as ransom! No, no. This is not true prayer. It is only begging, with selfishness as the motive.

A servant works hard all day. But in the evening, he comes to the master and demands wages. One who demands compensation is an outsider, a paid servant. The wife and children also work hard at home. But does the wife demand wages at the end of the day? No. She is an owner, not a servant. The wife and children work out of a sense of duty. Those who realize that their primary duty is to dedicate their lives to God qualify as “owners.”

Therefore, do not pray to God with desires. You should be able to assert, “I pray to You for You! I do not want anything else.” This truth was propagated by Jada Bharata. With such sublime teachings, Bharata succeeded in destroying the false pride and excessive desire in many kings of his time.

Karma is inescapable

Why was Bharata able to teach the kings of his time? Because he had experienced and overcome these obstacles himself. At one time, he used to delight in thoughts of God. Then

he fell to the status of an animal. He toiled to regain his original state of detachment and devotion. Thus, Bharata preached—*Karma* cannot be escaped at any time, in any place. Good for good, bad for bad, you are bound to reap what you sow.

*Karma daata vasamaa, narudaa, karma daata
vasamaa?*

Ghana paathambulu chadivina kaanee,

Kula devatalanu kolachina kaanee,

Kaaradavulake poyina kaanee,

Kathina tapassule chesina kaanee,

*Karma daata vasamaa, narudaa, karma daata
vasamaa?*

Is it possible to evade *karma*, O man, is it possible?

You may have studied all the scriptures,

Pleased your family deities,

Departed into forests,

Performed austere penance,

But, is it possible to evade *karma*, O man, is it possible?

Chinna chelimilo munchina kaanee,

Enni samudramul ninchina kaanee,

Kadavento ra, Neerante ra,

Kaavaalannanu ekkuva raadu ra,

*Karma daata vasamaa, narudua, karma daata
vasamaa?*

Whether you dip it in a small pond,

Or in a mighty ocean,

As is the container, so is the amount of water you collect.

You cannot get more, even if you want.

Is it possible to evade *karma*, O man, is it possible?

Your experiences and your destiny are only as grand as the size of your heart. To gain more peace and bliss, expand your heart. Many millionaires have become paupers and paupers have become rich. These are consequences of God's grace, not results of your desires. Jada Bharata told the kings, "You do not get joy by desiring it. Joys and sorrows come by themselves, as they please. They may come alone or even together! So, increase the size of your heart."

Limit your desires to acquire a pure mind. More desires mean more pollution of your mind. A dirty mind can never contemplate on God.

Uplift yourself by practice

All your *sadhana* must be directed to achieving God alone. You must uplift yourself. No one else will do it for you. *Uddharet Atmanaatmaanam.*⁷ Raise yourself by your own efforts. Consider a guidepost on the road. It points to Chikbalapuram in one direction, to Belathuru in another direction and so on. Destinations are indicated, but walking is still required! And the one who should walk is yourself. In the same way, reading scriptures and undertaking different *sadhanas* are of no avail till you contemplate on Divinity with a pure heart.

Today men read sacred texts but without faith. A student requested his teacher, "*Guru Ji!* I've been reading the

Bhagavad Gita for twenty years. I know all 700 verses by heart. But I haven't acquired any good fruits from this effort. Please prescribe a mantra by which I can get results." The teacher exclaimed, "Get out, you madman! You have been reading the *Gita*—instructions of the Lord Himself. You have no faith in the Lord's words, and you profess faith in some obscure mantra? If you followed the *Gita* sincerely, why would you need a mantra? What good is a mantra to one who has no faith in the Lord?" People today also do not follow teachings. As a result, their mantras, *japa*, *yagnas*, pilgrimages ... all are a waste.

When we put teachings into practice, the unity of thought, word and deed must be present. While reciting a mantra, we must demonstrate its meaning in action. Only then can we win the fruit of the mantra.

One student learnt about the nature of Divinity. He heard his teacher often speaking of the mantra *Shivoham*, which means, "I am Shiva." So he began reciting it all day. A passer-by was intrigued.

He asked the boy, "Son, where did you learn this mantra?" The boy replied, "From a great teacher." "What does *Shivoham* mean?" "It means—I am Shiva." "Indeed, you are Shiva. So how is Goddess Parvathi related to you?" "How sinful, how sinful," the student exclaimed.

If the boy considered himself Shiva, then Parvathi would be his wife, wouldn't she? However, with faith, the student would have realized that Parvathi and all of Creation are

Shiva as well! We must recognize that all powers reside within us. Merely reciting mantras without experiencing their significance is a waste of time.

Students, you have seen that the descendants of Manu were seekers of *Atma Jnana*. They attained and delighted in *Atma Jnana*. Not just Manu's family, but all characters of the *Bhagavatham* were pure. Unfortunately, scholars misinterpret *Bhagavatham* and disparage God. The great devotees of the *Bhagavatham* considered their bodies as God's property and the Indweller as Divine. They rightly recognized the body to be like a bulb and the inherent Divinity to be like the current.

Balance worldly studies and Atma Vidya

Therefore, students should not pursue education with only worldly happiness in mind. Students constantly ask, "What job will this study equip me for? How much will I earn? What lifestyle could I sustain?" They are busy planning their future, but not bothering to understand the meaning of education. They expect to become highly-paid executives after securing MBA degrees. They think, "I will command a monthly salary of Rs. 5000, 10000, even 20000." But they have no motivation to apply their skills towards social welfare.

It is wrong to think, "What can I get from society?" With proliferation of useless education, security is absent in Bharath. Why? Because educated people are like thieves, feeding off society for their costly lifestyles. It is only uneducated people who are trying to render service to society as per their capacity. With worldly studies, pursue *Atma Vidya* as well.

Then you will find ways to deliver peace and security to society, thus lending meaning to your life.

I do not ask that you earn high positions or wealth. Authority comes and goes. Become ideal men and women—this is what I desire for you. The characters in the *Bhagavatham* are immortal for their glorious deeds. You heard the stories of nineteen-year-old Priyavrata and Dhruva, a mere five-year-old boy! Their virtues are sung thousands of years after their times. Imagine, how sacred and pure they must have been, for their names to be taken with reverence in this Kali Yuga!

We also hear of Einstein and Newton—great scientists. They have come and gone. But where are their names? Einstein is mentioned in scientific discussions, no doubt. But when we talk of other subjects, like art, Einstein is nowhere. However, exalted beings like Dhruva and Jada Bharata shine constantly in the hearts of young and old, paupers and millionaires alike.

I do not say that you should neglect or renounce your studies. No. But do not consider them as the main purpose of life. Education without contemplation on God is useless. Cultivate Divine Love like these great devotees and make your lives meaningful. In ancient India, even young boys had great renunciation. Not just boys, girls were exemplary also. So, boys and girls, follow the ideals of *Atma Vidya*, fulfill your own lives and set ideal examples to society. Blessing you with this expectation, I conclude My discourse.

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- ¹. *Kshetra* (field) and *Kshetrajna* (“Knower of the field”) are terms used in *Bhagavad Gita* (Ch. XIII) to represent the body and the Indwelling *Atma*, respectively. Swami explains that a field is symbolic of sowing and reaping. With the body, man sows good/bad actions and reaps corresponding results.
 - ². An *Avatar* of Lord Vishnu also mentioned in *Bhagavatham*.
 - ³. Holy city on the banks of River Ganga.
 - ⁴. The city of Varanasi, holy to Hindus.
 - ⁵. *Jada* = dumb, inert, non-living.
 - ⁶. The form of Lord Vishnu worshipped at the temple of Tirupati in southern India.
 - ⁷. *Bhagavad Gita* (VI:5).