

7. Vishwamitra

Naasti Lobha Samo Vyaadhih

Naasti Krodha Samo Ripuh.

Naasti Daaridryavat Dukham

Naasti Jnaana Samo Sukham.

There is no disease like greed,

No enemy like anger,

No sorrow greater than poverty,

No happiness equal to wisdom.

Everyone strives to acquire happiness and to remove misery, but is unsuccessful. Creation is vast and endless. Man is just a tiny part of the Cosmos and therefore, should lead his life in keeping with the welfare of all. Instead, man believes that Creation is meant for his own enjoyment, and exploits it. Just as a child draws milk from its mother and a bee draws nectar from a flower, man can also draw necessary resources from Nature.

The importance of limits

These days we see Nature revolting by way of disasters because man ignores all limits in exploiting its resources. Torrential rain, drought, earthquakes, floods—such are the repercussions of man's greed. On account of scientific progress, scientists have grown selfish without regard for the world's welfare. They provoke Nature to retaliation.

The *Bhagavatham* says, *Durlabho Maanusha Janmah*—a human birth is difficult to acquire. *Viveka Choodamani* says, *Jantoonaam Nara Janma Durlabham*—A human birth is rarest among all beings. The *Puranas* teach that among the 8,400,000 species of beings in the world, humans are the most

evolved. When we ponder over these scriptural statements, we realize how pure, valuable and sacred human life is. Today we have forgotten that a human birth is priceless, potentially Divine and full of Bliss. Thus we invite sorrow upon ourselves.

For happiness and sorrow, your behavior alone is responsible, not anyone else. People are unable to believe this fact. With pure conduct, you can acquire all the happiness and comfort you desire. Your desires also must be within limits if you want peace of mind. Men are going mad since they do not limit unreasonable desires.

The story of King Trisanku

In the *Chandravamsha*¹ there was an emperor called Trisanku. He was a great King in every way. He was truthful, an embodiment of *dharma*, and he treated his subjects as if they were his own children. His heart was full of compassion. In spite of his excellent qualities, Trisanku could not limit one peculiar desire that found a way into his heart: He yearned to dwell in heaven in his physical body.

To this end, Trisanku went to his family guru, Sage Vashishta. He said, “Respected Guru, please help me achieve this desire and bring fulfillment into my life.” Vashishta remarked, “Shame on you! Your desire is unnatural. This body is dirty. It is the home of mucus, waste matter, and disease. To take this ephemeral body to the heavenly realms is like dragging a corpse along with you. People earn heaven after good actions and yagnas done over many lifetimes. It is impossible to take the physical body there. It is against God’s rules for Creation to even attempt it. This thought is not worthy of you. I cannot

help you. If you are adamant, you may approach another sage.”

Trisanku went home dejected. After some time he journeyed northward. He went to meet the bright, austere, powerful and highly esteemed sons of Vashishta. The sons of Vashishta had surpassed even their father! No one was greater than them in wisdom, fame, and austerity. Trisanku told them his problem as well as Vashishta’s words. They said, “Trisanku! Our father is your personal guru and the guru of your dynasty. By coming to us, you have disobeyed him, insulted him. Why would we overrule our father? Do you want us to go against our father like you did? There is no place among us for a disciple who doesn’t value his guru’s words. Go away!”

Trisanku had nowhere to go. So he went to Kausika.² This Kausika was also a King originally. But his kingly pride took a fall when he opposed Vashishta’s spiritual power. So, at that time, he was engaged in arduous penance for spiritual powers. Kausika decided to satisfy Trisanku at any cost, only because Vashishta had refused to do so. Why? Kausika hated and envied Vashishta intensely. Vashishta was a *Brahmarishi*³ while he was only a *Rajarishi*.⁴

Kausika had exerted tremendously to achieve the status of a *Brahmarishi*, but had failed till then. What was the reason? His hatred, anger, and jealousy prevented him from advancing beyond the stage of *Rajarishi*. One who harbors anger and jealousy can never prosper. He can never achieve his goals. There is no enemy greater than anger. There is no disease greater than envy. There is a medicine for every disease but none for jeal-

ousy. And Trisanku sought help from Kausika, in whom so many bad qualities were present.

Kausika assured him, “I will send you to heaven in your physical body without fail!” He began planning a *yagna* and summoned many *rithwiks*.⁵ None of them approved of this *yagna*, but they still came, fearing Kausika’s wrath. Kausika was anger personified. The *rithwiks* did not want to be burnt in the fire of his anger. They told themselves, “Let us just go there quietly and do our job.”

The *yagna* to send Trisanku to heaven began. No *Devas*⁶ were seen approaching to accept the offerings of the *yagna*. Kausika understood that the *Devas* disapproved of Trisanku’s motive. He decided to send Trisanku to heaven solely by the power of his penance. He poured all his spiritual powers into a wooden staff. Then, holding the staff aloft, he announced, “Trisanku! I command you to ascend to heaven.” Trisanku began rising in the air and soon, he went out of sight. Everyone was speechless at this incredible event. After some time, they heard shouts, “*Guru Ji! Guru Ji!*” When they looked up, they saw Trisanku falling down shouting, “*Guru Ji! Indra*⁷ did not permit me to enter heaven. What should I do? I await your command.”

Kausika was incensed at the audacity of the *Devas* who had refused admission to his supplicant. He said, “You stay there, don’t come down.” With Trisanku as the central point, Kausika began creating a second universe by the strength of his spiritual power! He created new Sun, Moon, planets, stars,

heaven, and so on. But the *Devas* looked upon these creations as artificial and ignored them.

The story of Sunassepha

While Trisanku was in that state, his son Harischandra ruled the kingdom. This was not Sathya Harischandra, who is famous for his truthfulness! His name was Harischandra, that's all! This Harischandra prayed to Lord Varuna⁸ for a son. He promised that he would surrender the son to Varuna soon after he was born. Varuna heard his prayer and a son was born in a few months. The son was named Rohita. Harischandra could not bring himself to give Rohita away to Varuna. He reneged on his promise. Rohita came to know of his father's mistake. He thought, "I wonder what calamities might beset me in this kingdom," and ran away to the forest. He spent many years wandering aimlessly, subsisting on roots and tubers. Meanwhile, as a consequence of breaking his promise, Harischandra was afflicted with a chronic disease.

What is the inner meaning of these stories? The father, Trisanku, nursed a desire that went against the Laws of Nature. The son, Harischandra, did not keep his word. These stories are told to illustrate the sorrow that ensues from these two actions—breaking one's word and going against the Divine Law. Everyone, without distinction, must necessarily follow the rules and disciplines of Nature. No one has the authority to oppose these rules, which represent the Divine Law. To break such laws is to invite great calamity. This is an important teaching of the *Bhagavatham*.

Rohita came to know of his father's disease. He attempted to return home many times. But Indra appeared to him and dissuaded him every time. Rohita considered himself responsible for his father's condition. He continuously searched for a solution to this dilemma. He thought about his father's promise to Varuna—One living being had to be offered to Varuna in a *yagna*.

The father can have love for his sons, no doubt. But it should be within limits. It should be neither excessive like Dhritarashtra's love, nor deficient like Hiranya Kashyapa's love. Years roll by and old age arrives, but man's attachment only grows and grows! This is the reason why today's man experiences hell. Why? Attachment and possessiveness alone are responsible for misery. Attachment must have limits. Without limits, man forgets his Divine nature, behaves like an animal and loses respect in society.

Rohita resolved to return and put an end to his father's suffering. On the way, he met a couple and their three sons. Rohita told them, "I will give you untold wealth and cows and land in exchange for one of your sons. I need a boy for a *yagna*. Will you give me your oldest son?" The man said, "I love my oldest son immensely. I cannot live without him." Rohita persisted, "How about your youngest son, then?" The wife interjected, "He is the darling of my heart. I cannot part with him." The middle son was not as much loved as the other two. The father said, "You can have our second son."

The second son told himself, "How unfortunate I am! I couldn't become worthy of my parents' affection. It is much better to offer my life in a *yagna* than to live such a life." He

went with Rohita of his own volition. This boy was Sunassepha. They walked for a long distance and felt tired. They felt hungry but could see no human habitation nearby. They noticed a hermitage at a distance and ran into it. The hermitage was the abode of the noble Sage Vishwamitra.

Sunassepha spoke his heart to Vishwamitra. “O Great Sage! This is my pitiable situation. Please protect me somehow and make me your disciple,” he pleaded. Vishwamitra assured him, “Don’t worry, I will definitely save you.” Immediately he sent for his three sons and instructed, “One of you must agree to go to the *yagna* instead of this boy. Harischandra is performing a *yagna* in which one being must be offered to Varuna. *Paropakaarartham Idam Sareeram*—Our bodies are meant to be of service to others. We must be ever ready to give our life to protect another’s.” Vishwamitra’s sons burst out laughing. “Father, you are ready to sacrifice your own sons for the sake of some unknown boy? Is this what you are supposed to teach us?” None of them agreed to renounce his life. Then Vishwamitra called Sunassepha near and said, “Son, two mantras are required for this *yagna* to be completed. I will teach them to you now. Recite them in the *yagna*.”

Sunassepha learnt the two mantras by heart and proceeded with Rohita. Harischandra’s *yagna* began. Harischandra felt guilty that he was ready to sacrifice someone else’s son to Varuna. He recognized his acute selfishness. Rohita also suffered terribly with feelings of guilt. But he could not go against his father’s order for Sunassepha to be sacrificed.

As the *yagna* neared conclusion, Sunassepha recited his mantras loudly. In that peaceful atmosphere, those mantras

illuminated the surroundings. Varuna noticed the brilliance of the mantras and descended to the site Himself. Varuna said, “Harischandra! You promised me something and did something else. Your disease is nothing but the fruit of this sinful act. The given word must be upheld. No one is exempt from this injunction. Even at the cost of one’s life, do not go back on your promise. *Sathyam Naasti Paro Dharmah*—There is no *dharma* higher than truth. This whole universe has emerged from sathya, and it merges into sathya ultimately. There is no place in the world without Truth. Instead of protecting and experiencing Truth, you opposed it and invited misery. However, your son Rohita prayed that Sunassepha should be saved at any cost. Yielding to Rohita’s *sraddha*⁹ and pure feelings, I have come Myself.” Paying money to buy someone else’s son and sacrifice him? This is a great sin. The parents also offered the son by yielding to greed.

We must realize the inner meaning here. Who was the root cause of all this suffering? It was Trisanku. He went against the Natural Law. He wanted a second creation to be made just for himself! This is against the Will of God. These traits also appeared in his son to a certain extent. One who opposes God’s Will cannot survive in this world. To disobey the Will of God is *bhagavat-droham* and *guru-droham*, treachery towards God and guru. Trisanku suffered because he was a traitor to God and to his guru. One should be ever obedient to one’s father also. Devotion and obedience to God, father, and guru: these are the hallmarks of Indian Culture. Trisanku was one who disregarded the sanctity of these three relations.

The story of Kausika

Trisanku was only a king. But look at the Sage Kausika! He had immense wisdom and tremendous penance to his credit. Yet, he stooped to the level of helping Trisanku in his questionable desire. Kausika would not have helped Trisanku under normal circumstances, but his hatred for Vashishta made him take that step. Hatred clouds discrimination. What is the use of arduous penance, yagnas and many kinds of education? Kausika was a master of all scriptures, possessed boundless spiritual power and was an embodiment of *dharmā*. But he allowed hatred into his heart and laid all these virtues to waste. He performed a task that even ordinary people would have recognized as wrong!

For this reason Kausika's respect gradually diminished. Only his penance and powers sustained his waning reputation. Kausika's penance had jealousy as its foundation. He was jealous that Vashishta had earned the title of Brahmarishi. Despite his penance, Kausika could not curb his anger. Even after Brahma appeared to him and honored him with the title of Rajarishi, his anger did not subside. Brahma knew that Kausika was full of *Rajo Guna* and hence, gave him the title of Rajarishi. One with *rajas* is a Rajarishi. The one who recognizes the nature of Brahman and acts according to the prompting of the Atma is a Brahmarishi.

Kausika was originally a king. Many, many years ago, he went to the forest for a hunt. He was exhausted after a full day of hunting. He came across a hermitage—Sage Vashishta's hermitage. He paid his respects to Vashishta. Enthralled by the serenity and natural beauty of the hermitage, Kausika tarried there, conversing with Vashishta. After some time, he re-

quested Vashishta's permission to return to his city. Vashishta said, "You are the emperor of this land. Under your rule, we ascetics are able to live peacefully in the forest. Through your administrative policies, you are ever attentive to the protection and care of sages. It is our duty to honor our King as a special guest. You must accept my hospitality."

Kausika said humbly, "Swami! I am not here alone. Thousands of soldiers are with me. If you give me a glass of water or milk, that is sufficient. Please don't trouble yourself." Vashishta said, "O King! There is no dearth of anything in this hermitage. Where God's Grace showers, all-round abundance follows. I am capable of providing hospitality to any number of your soldiers." Kausika was surprised. He wondered, "How is this sage planning to provide my entire army with food?" Kausika's arrogance rose and he thought, "Let me test this sage." He agreed to Vashishta's request.

Vashishta called out lovingly, "Sabali, Sabali!" A cow came there. Vashishta told the cow, "Look here, Sabali. The king is our guest today. Please arrange for his comfort and that of his soldiers." In the twinkling of an eye, everything appeared! Sabali was a *kamadhenu*, a wish-fulfilling cow gifted by Lord Brahma. There was food even for Kausika's elephants and horses, what to talk of his soldiers and himself! Kausika was an emperor. But even his royal kitchens had never produced such delicious food. Arrogance and greed entered Kausika's heart. He thought, "This miraculous cow must reside with a King, not with a recluse in a forest."

Kausika finished eating. Then he told Vashishta, "O Sage! I have a small request. Please give me Sabali." Vashishta

said, "That is impossible. Sabali is meant to be with me." Kausika tried to convince him in many ways but Vashishta wouldn't yield. Kausika lost his patience, turned to his soldiers and said, "Drag this cow to our city." The soldiers began dragging Sabali away and she cried out to Vashishta, "*Guru Ji!* What fault have I done? Why do you let them drag me away?"

Vashishta told her, "Here is a king who is proud of his physical and intellectual strength, but he has no strength of virtue. How can I reason with a king devoid of virtue?" He tried advising Kausika, but to no avail. Now, Kausika's army consisted of hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Who could defy such a force? Knowing Sabali's strength, Vashishta told her, "I permit you to deal with them as you wish."

All of a sudden, Sabali created a divine army of millions out of nowhere, which fell upon Kausika's army. Kausika's men were annihilated in a matter of minutes. Not a single soldier survived. Even the sons of Kausika were not spared! The only one left alive was Kausika himself, who returned home humiliated. Since then, his hatred for Vashishta grew into a raging fire.

Kausika's anger and hatred were a curse to him. Vashishta was ever peaceful, even during this incident. Vashishta cautioned him, "The angry man cannot succeed. He commits sins and loses his respect. He distances himself from his near and dear ones and is despised by all. This dire enemy, anger, destroys every happiness of man. Your enemy is within you, not outside." But Vashishta's peaceful demeanor and advice would cause Kausika's anger to increase even more!

The true meaning of sacrifice

What is the reason for anger and loss of discrimination? It is only attachment! Why should a prosperous emperor desire this cow? He has all comforts in his kingdom. This cow belonged to the sage and was a Divine blessing for feeding the denizens of the forest. Why not let the cow dwell where its services were most needed? Craving for objects that he shouldn't desire is the reason for man's ruin. *Bhagavatham* is replete with ideals: (1) Keep your word. (2) Never lie. (3) Limit desires and attachment.

Yes, you may have attachment for your wife and children. But keep it within limits. Not only must you limit your attachment but limit its duration also. Your householder life is only till fifty years of age. By sixty years, you must enter *Vanaprastha*. You should snap ties with wife and children and be free of all responsibilities. The age of seventy years is the time for complete renunciation (*sanyasa*).

Instead of cultivating such sacrifice, men today refuse to renounce attachments till death. Only hell can result to such people. Help your family and others to the extent possible. Discharge your duties towards everyone. And remember that every person is independent, governed by his individual *karma*. Everyone is responsible for himself. Don't cultivate attachment, which is the root cause of sorrow.

In this modern age, 99 out of 100 people spend their lives in attachment. Even those with perfect renunciation in ancient Bharath could not escape sorrow! Then how can mod-

ern man, submerged in attachment, expect to live happily? Remember, each one is responsible for oneself. Develop such feelings of sacrifice. For this reason the *Vedas* advise:

*Na Karmana Na Prajaya Dhanena
Tyaagenaike Amritatvamaanashu.*

Not by good deeds, children or wealth but only by sacrifice is immortality attained.

What is the meaning of “sacrifice”? Attachment (*raga*) and hatred (*dvesha*) must be sacrificed. People talk about the *nava grahas*¹⁰ who must be appeased so that our lives are free of misfortunes. Really, there are not nine, but only two *grahas* that we must be mindful of: attachment and hatred! These two put us through suffering. Renounce attachment and hatred. This alone is true sacrifice, true renunciation:

Cultivate thoughts of God and think of everyone’s welfare. *Lokaah Samastaah Sukhino Bhavantu*—May all the worlds be happy. You must pray in this manner every day. Do not limit yourself to your family, friends, and relatives. Everyone must be happy. With such prayer, victory and peace will fill you!

So, gradually strengthen your spirit of sacrifice. What is sacrifice? You must sacrifice attachment and hatred. These feelings lie at the root of all possessiveness. If you only give up money, clothes, property and possessions—that is not sacrifice.

Decrease attachment to the body

Students! Develop this correct outlook from a tender age. Get rid of bodily attachment gradually, to the extent possible. Use the body merely as a tool to perform your duties. The body has been given for performing actions but it is not everlasting. Do not develop attachment or pride on its account. The body is like a glass tumbler. It might break at any moment.

Body is a water bubble.
Mind is a mad monkey.
Don't follow the body.
Don't follow the mind.
Follow the conscience.

Don't cultivate attachment to the body beyond limits. That is why our ancient sages went into solitude to overcome bodily attachment. They took care of their bodies but at the same time, decreased their physical attachment. Those who aspire for Divinity must necessarily embark on this path. However, if you don't want God, you can remain preoccupied with the body for as long as you wish, because that will give you the temporary happiness you seek.

One small example: Once, for a mistake, Narada was cursed by Lord Narayana and took birth as a pig. He wallowed in mud all day and it seemed to be Vaikunta¹¹ to him! Then he married a she-pig and became a father to nine piglets. This pig-Narada was so happy wading through filth along with his wife and children. For him, that filth was Vaikunta, his pig-wife was Kailasa¹² and his children were heaven! From time to time, Devas would pass-by and remonstrate with him, "What is this pitiable state, Narada? Shed this attachment to a pig's body.

We are on our way to meet Lord Narayana. Realize your true identity and come with us.”

Then the pig-Narada would reply, “No, no, no! I don’t want your tasteless world. See how happy I am here! My wife is so beautiful! I have nine children, as glorious as the nine planets. And the enjoyment of wading in this mud is not available to me even in heaven! How can I simply leave these joys and come away?”

What is the lesson here? Who was overcome by attachment? None other than Narada, a mentally created son of Brahma! So, you may definitely have attachment and desires. But limit them. With limited desires, attain the limitless Divinity—This is the easy path. If you fail to put a ceiling on desires, you distance yourself from God.

Students, plan your life along idealistic lines from a young age and demonstrate it to society. You definitely have the freedom and the right to desire the necessities of life. But don’t cultivate too many desires. Cut your ego and limit attachment, thereby letting Divine feelings flourish. This is what *Vedanta*¹³ and the *Bhagavatham* advise.

The *Bhagavatham* is “His Story”

There are many stories, some strange, in *Bhagavatham*. You might find them long or cumbersome. No, no. They are all “histories”. “History” means “His Story”—stories of God. Unfortunately we are unable to appreciate the *Bhagavatham*. Hence, we violate its teachings. Truly, every verse of this scripture is a pearl, a diamond. *Bhagavatham* was written for the very purpose of teaching the secrets of attaining God. Oth-

erwise, why would Vyasa sit dispiritedly on the banks of River Saraswati after composing the eighteen Puranas, and why would Narada go there and advise him to compose *Bhagavatham*?

Narada told Vyasa, “You wrote the *Puranas* and the *Mahabharatha* and earned the name *sloka daata*—giver of divine verses. But your *slokas* (divine verses) could not dispel your *soka* (sorrow). You inquired into the intentions of the wicked Kauravas and described their characters in the *Mahabharatha*. Thus your mind was sullied. To cleanse yourself, now describe the stories of the Lord. Write the *Bhagavatham*.” There is no text greater than the *Bhagavatham*. Why? The *Bhagavatham* alone explains the nature of God in entirety.

Give up kama to attain Rama

There was a being who was able to assume different forms. Assuming the form of a monkey, he went around telling people, “You fools! Look at me. I am a monkey. I dwell inside you as your mind. I am responsible for your fickleness. Even monkeys served Rama despite their unsteadiness. But you men follow *kama*¹⁴ instead of Rama.”

Do you see? Even monkeys were intelligent to serve Rama. But men run after *kama*. They are more foolish than monkeys! Desires, desires, desires... How can Rama grant His Vision to one drowned in desires? Decrease your desires gradually. Like the horns of a bull, which grow with age, your desires are ever-increasing! This is not proper. Human values will degenerate into animal qualities if this trend persists.

Students! As much as possible, decrease your desires. Desires are the prime cause of sorrow. The less our desires, the more our bliss. While performing worldly duties, do virtuous actions and think of spiritual matters. Our country is full of miserable situations. Students should arm themselves with skills and capacity and rectify these situations.

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1. The “Lunar Dynasty” - A lineage of great kings in ancient India.
 2. Kausika and Vishwamitra are the same person. Originally angry and proud as Kausika, he undertook arduous penance and conquered his ego. Then he came to be known as Sage Vishwamitra. In this discourse, the name Kausika is used when he was a King or an “unripe” sage. The name Vishwamitra is used after he became a perfect sage or *Brahmarishi*.
 3. “Sage established in *Brahman* (Self)”- Highest class of sages.
 4. “King among Sages” - A title granted to eminent sages.
 5. Chanters of *Vedic* mantras.
 6. Divine beings, denizens of heaven.
 7. King of Heavens.
 8. Lord of the Water Element.
 9. Faith, dedication.
 10. *Nava* (nine) *Grahas* (celestial powers) in Hindu astrology - Aditya, Soma, Mangala, Budha, Guru, Sukra, Sani, Rahu and Ketu.
 11. Abode of Lord Vishnu.
 12. Abode of Lord Shiva.
 13. Branch of Hindu philosophy expounded in the Upanishads, elaborating on the nonduality of Creation based on the One Atma.
 14. Desire.