

CHAPTER 27

ENTER SAGE SUKA

Some ascetics who heard the story of the curse from the lips of the King were so incensed at the son of Sameeka that they declared he must be a fake, an unworthy child, for no child born of a Rishi of the stature of Sameeka will ever pronounce such a devastating curse, for such a trivial misdemeanour. He must be an ignorant fool or a madcap, they guessed. How can the curse emanating from the tongue of such a one take effect?—they asked. The King cannot come to harm, as a consequence of his curse, they affirmed. They tried to convince the King that he need have no fear on that account.

Many who felt similarly argued that the King had no reason to take the curse seriously, but the King was unmoved. He replied to them with folded hands: “You are thinking

and speaking on these lines, prompted by sympathy and kindness towards me. But I know that the wrong I have committed is not light and inconsiderable. Is there a more terrible sin than casting insult on those deserving reverence? Besides, I am the King, responsible for their welfare and the maintenance of their honour. How can my act be dismissed as light and inconsiderable? Moreover, if you only consider it deeply, the curse pronounced by the boy is no curse at all. It is on the other hand, a great big boon.

“For, I had fallen into the well of sin called empire. I had deluded myself into the belief that pleasure is the be-all and end-all of life. I was leading the life of a mere beast. I had forgotten God and my duty towards Him. God Himself has, by this means and through this instrument, directed me along the correct path. God has blessed me. This is a boon, not a punishment for past wrongs, as you imagine.”

When the King spoke thus, tears of joy and thankfulness flowed from his eyes. He was visibly moved by extreme sincerity and devotion. He was uttering what he felt in calm, unruffled contentment. The ascetics and the subjects around him were amazed at his equanimity. They knew his declaration was true.

The aged ascetic rose and standing before the wailing populace, he addressed the gathering thus, “Oh best of Kings! your words are rays of sunlight to the hearts of the ascetics. They are so appropriate to your lineage and

upbringing; for, you are a Pandava born. The Pandavas never even once slipped into wrong or sin. They held fast always to the Feet of Hari, the Lord. They stuck to the commands of the Lord, unwaveringly. When the Lord returned to His Abode, they gave up the kingdom as a result of spontaneous renunciation. They left for the northern regions. You too are today following this holy path, since you belong to this great clan, which has inherited this way of life.”

At this, the King prayed to them, with palms folded in adoration: “Oh best among ascetics! I have just one doubt. Please remove it from my mind. Make my days worthwhile.” “Tell me what it is,” responded the ascetic. The king asked that he be informed what the man for whom death is imminent can best do. At this, one sage rose and said that, so far as time permitted, one could perform yajnas or yagas, or one could engage himself in japa or thapa, acts of charity or pilgrimages, or fasts or ritual worship. Another declared that liberation can be acquired only through the acquisition of Jnana, “*Jnaanaa devathu Kaivalyam.*” A third spoke of the supreme importance of holy acts prescribed in the Vedas and Sastras, “*Karmanyai vahi samsiddhi.*” Some others argued that cultivating devotion to God is the best method of using the week. “*Bhakthirvasah Purushah,*” the Lord is won over by devotion alone. In this confusion of conflicting opinions, the king sought the true path and the ascetics were silenced by the persistence of the king to get a real answer to the problem he had posed.

Meanwhile, a youthful ascetic, with an extraordinarily bright face, and a personality of attractive splendour, moved through the gathering of aged sages, like a fast stream of light; and reaching the presence of the king, he seated himself on a height. The onlookers were amazed at this sudden appearance. Some among them were stricken with curiosity about his antecedents. To all outward appearance, he was a ‘*munikumar*’ that is to say, the son of an ascetic. But his stance, his pose and poise, his personality—all affirmed that he was a Master. In years, he was quite tender. Yet there was a divine halo, bathing him.

Very soon, one wise old sage, identified him and approached him reverentially with folded palms. “Blessed indeed are all of us. This ray of Divine effulgence is no other than Sri Suka, the precious offspring of Vyasa-bhagavan.” Introducing the stranger thus to the gathering, the sage continued: “From the moment of birth, this person is free from all attachment. He is the master of all knowledge.” The king who heard this shed tears of gratitude and joy. He rose like a kite in the air, so light and full of joy, and fell prostrate at his feet. His palms were folded in prayer when he stood up. He was straight and silent as a pillar. He was immersed in bliss. He visualised the youth before him as Krishna Himself. The splendour of Suka was too brilliant for his eyes. His charm appeared to the king, equal to the God of Love. The black curly rings of hair moved like black serpent-hoods hovering over the white oval face. As stars amidst the dark clouds, his eyes shed cool lustre and shone

extraordinarily bright. A smile showered drops of joy from his lips.

The King neared Suka, with slow steps. His voice was broken and indistinct, his throat was quivering with emotion. He said, “Master! I have no strength to describe the depth of your grace. Every act of yours is aimed at the welfare of the world. It is indeed my fortune that I had your Darsan today, so easily, for I know it can be won only by protracted and persistent effort. Oh, how fortunate am I! I must ascribe it to the merit earned by my grandparents.” The King was overcome with grateful joy at the presence of Suka. He stood with tears of joy streaming from his eyes.

With a smile hovering on his lips, Suka directed the King to sit by his side. He said: “Oh King! You are no doubt straight and steadfast in moral conduct. You are ever intent on the service of the good and the godly. Your meritorious life has drawn this large gathering of sages around you, this day. Or else these ascetics who are concerned with spiritual discipline would not have left their schedules to come here and pray that you may attain the realisation of the Highest. This is no act of charity! You have earned this gift by many lives spent virtuously and well.”

The King was gazing with devoted admiration at the face of Suka, while he was speaking to him. Suddenly, he raised his head and addressed the young sage thus: “Lord! I have a doubt pestering me. Remove it and give peace to my heart. I was laying it before this assembly when you

came. You can, I know, solve that doubt, in a trice. It must be child’s play for you.” Suka interrupted him and said, “Parikshit, the reason I came to you is to solve this doubt that is pestering you. You can ask me what you have in mind. I shall resolve your doubt and grant you satisfaction.” When the great Suka uttered these words, the sages who had gathered, exclaimed, “What great fortune!” “Blessed indeed!” and clapped their hands in joy so loud that the acclamation reached the sky.

The King spoke humbly and with evident anxiety, “Lord, what should a person facing death who is aware of the oncoming of the end, engage himself in? What should his mind dwell upon? At succumbing to death, he should not be born again. When that is his prayer, how should he spend the days at his disposal? This is the problem that is bothering me at present. What is my highest duty?” The King pleaded again and again for guidance.

Suka answered: “King, withdraw your mind from worldly thoughts and fix it on Hari, the Lord who charms all hearts. I shall instruct you in the wisdom of the Divine, the *Bhagavathathathwa*. Listen to it with all your heart. There is no activity holier than that. There can be no greater spiritual exercise, or discipline or vow. The human body is a worthy boat. The story of Hari is the rudder, this world of change, this constant flow, this *samsara*, is the sea. Hari is the boatman. Today, this sacred equipment is available for you.

“The problem you have raised is not concerned with just one individual, the whole world is concerned with it, and its solution. It is the most vital of all problems that deserves inquiry. The Atma principle is the panacea for all beings. That is the ultimate Truth. No one can escape it. To establish oneself in that faith during the final days is the duty of living beings. It is on this basis that status in the next birth is determined. So, the question that you asked, the doubt that you raised, are matters of great moment for the welfare of the whole world. The answer is not for you alone. Listen.”