

CHAPTER 29

THE DIALOGUE BEGINS

Describing the stages of Creation, Sage Suka said, “Satharupa and Manu together approached the Lord of Creation and inquired what they had to fulfil. Brahma replied with a smile, ‘Be mates of each other. Beget and people the Earth.’ Equipped with the authority derived from this command, they filled the earth with people,” said the sage Suka to the King.

At this the King interceded: “Master! I have learnt from my own experience that the origin of all grief in this world is Infatuation or *Moha*. I have no desire to hear about these matters; please relate to me how to overcome infatuation, delusion and attachment. In these last days, what exactly has man to do? Which Name has he to keep constantly in mind so that he can avoid forever this round of birth and death? Tell me these things,” he asked.

Suka was very much delighted at this query. He replied, “Oh King! You are a spiritual soul. You serve sages with devotion. This large gathering of monks, ascetics and sages is proof of your meritorious acts. For, these do not usually congregate in any place.” The King interrupted him, with his protests. “No, no my Lord! I am a great sinner; I have no trace of spiritual progress in me. If I had the least merit, if I had served sages devotedly, I would not have become the target for the curse of the Brahmin. The fortune that I now enjoy, namely, the company of these great sages and the chance of adoring your feet, is the consequence of the meritorious acts of my forefathers. I know fully well that my activities have not contributed anything to it. The grace that Syamasundara (Krishna) showered on my grandparents is the cause. Had it been otherwise, can persons like me who are sunk in the well of Samsara, immersed in the vain pursuit of sensory pleasure, who do not contemplate for a moment the true, the eternal and the pure—can we ever hope to see before us, in concrete form, your presence, ever roaming in the silences of the forests, unknown to man? Really, this is an unattainable piece of good fortune. All this is due to the blessings of my grandparents and the Grace of Syamasundara (Krishna) and not to anything else. You are full of affection for me and so, you attribute this to my own merit. I am only too aware of my failings.

“Kindly continue to shower on me the same affection and help me to decide what has to be given up by a person whose death is imminent, what has to be adopted and

practised by him. Advise me this and make my days worthwhile. You alone can solve this for me. Relate to me the Bhagavatha, as you said you would. You told me that it is the basis for progress and for liberation; it will destroy sins; it will result in prosperity. Let me quaff the sacred nectar of the Name of Krishna and refresh myself, in this feverish heat,” he pleaded.

Suka smiled at the King and said, “The Bhagavatha is as worthy of reverence as the Vedas, as worthy of study and observance. At the end of the Dwapara age, on the Gandhamadana mountain, in the hermitage of my father Vyasa, I had listened to that sacred text. I shall repeat the same to you. Listen.” At this, the King inquired, with his palms held together in prayer, “Oh Incomparable Sage! I have heard that you were an ascetic deep in detachment from the very moment of birth. Even without the traditional ceremonial rites which purify and clarify the intellect, (such as *Jathakarma* (first cleansing of the infant), *Namakarana* (Obeissance to all the Gods), and *Upanayana* (rite of initiation, being led to teacher) you had won the fullest awareness of the Reality, and hence, I have heard you were moving about in the consciousness of that Truth, away from men, in the forests. Hence, I am surprised that your heart was drawn towards this text which, you say, is saturated with devotion. What caused your interest in this path? I pray that you describe the circumstances to me.”

Suka started explaining with a calm unruffled countenance. “Yes, I am beyond prescriptions and prohibitions. I am in unbroken mergence in the attributeless

Nirguna Brahma. That is the truth about me. Nevertheless, I must declare, that there is an inexpressible sweetness in God that attracts you and captivates you by His Sportive Activities and Attributes. I must confess also that I have listened to the description of the beauty and the sweetness of God. My mind delighted in hearing and reading the Glories of God, manifesting His Divine attributes, through each of these. I could not remain at peace. I exulted like a mad man, thrilled by the bliss I derived from listening and reading. His sweet pranks and sports intoxicated me with infinite joy. This day I came hither, since I became aware that a chance has arisen to relate them to a group of eager listeners, persons who, in all respects, deserve to hear them, and understand their significance. Therefore, I shall relate that sacred Bhagavatha to you and through you, to the personages gathered here. You have the avidity and the attainment necessary to listen to it. You have resolved to achieve the Highest Goal of Man.”

“Those who listen to this narrative with earnest devotion (not merely listen) and reflect upon its value and significance and act according to the Light it sheds on their minds, such will merge in the Bliss of which Vaasudeva, the Lord, is the embodiment. Their hearts will be filled with the sweet nectar of the Personification of Captivating Charm (*madanamohana*) and they will experience the Adwaitha Ananda, the Bliss of being One and Only. The highest Sadhana is the recitation of the Name of God with full vigilance of thought, feeling and utterance (*Manovaakkaya*) and the loud singing of His Glory. No better Sadhana exists.

“Oh King, do not lose yourselves in anxiety that time is short. Not much time is needed to win the Grace of God. The rays of Grace from that Embodiment of Compassion can fall on you as quick as the wink of the eye. I shall enable you to listen during these seven days, to the stories of many who experienced spiritual bliss, how Vaasudeva blessed them with spiritual progress, how persons crossed the Ocean of Birth and Death through the hearing of such stories and the singing of the Glory of God that is manifest in them. We shall not waste a single moment. You are conscious that you have only seven more days of life. Therefore, give up all sense of ‘mine’ and ‘thine,’ of the body in which you live and the home in which the body lives. Be aware only of the story of Madhava, the Lord of the Universe; drink the nectarine narratives of the Incarnations of the Lord. It is quite a common occurrence that stories are told and heard by gatherings of thousands. But *Jnana* (wisdom) can be achieved only by placing complete faith in what is heard. That faith must result in a cleansed mind, a pure heart.

“One further point, Oh King, there are countless exponents who go about discoursing on morals and spiritual matters on the basis of mere study. They do not have an iota of experience of what they preach. They have no faith in the authenticity of the various Manifestations of Divine Glory which they dilate upon. Such exhortation is as ineffective as offerings of ghee, made not in flames but on a cold heap of ashes. It will not cure the mind of faults and failures.

“In your case, there is no fear of such ineffectiveness. Your heart is immersed in the uninterrupted flood of Love for Shyamasundara (Krishna). Whoever listens to this narrative and imbibes the nectar of this story with a heart, bubbling over with Divine yearning, unshakeable faith in God, and constant joy can attain the realisation of the Self. This is beyond the realm of doubt. Oh King, this occasion, this text and this listener are all quite appropriate and excellent.”

Saying, “Oh, how fortunate you are!” the sage Suka placed his hand on the head of the King in benediction. He caressed the thick curls of his hair. The King pleaded most humbly, “Master, You know too well that I have very little time before me.” Therefore he continued with folded palms, “give me highest guidance, and I shall get myself established in it, all these seven days. Give me the holy formula so that I can repeat it in the short time I have, and keep it fresh in memory and save myself.”

The sage laughed. “Parikshit! Those who are intent on sensory pleasures spend their days in worry, in anxiety, in pain, grief and tears throughout a long period of life, they breed like birds and beasts. They eat good food and cast it away as urine and faeces. This is the purposeless life that most people lead. Can you call this the process of living? Enormous numbers of living beings exist on the earth. Living is not enough. It has no value by itself, for itself. It is the motives, the feelings, the thoughts, the attitudes that prompt

the day to day life that matters. If a person has divine qualities manifesting themselves as thoughts, feelings, etc. then he is alive. Instead, if a person defiles the holy encasement of his, (body) by utilising it for unholy purposes that cater to momentary happiness, thereby ignoring the All-knowing, All-powerful Providence, it is to be condemned as a calculated denial of one's humanity. Take the case of a person who has fixed his mind on the Lotus Feet of the Lord (Hari). It does not matter if he is short-lived. During that short period, he can make his life fruitful and auspicious. Oh King, to remove your doubt, I shall tell you the beautiful story of a Rajarshi. Listen.

“In the Solar Dynasty, there was once a ruler who was mighty in prowess, heroic on the field, prolific in charity, upright in character, and just in his dealings. He was named Khatvanga. He had no equal, no one who could challenge him. Meanwhile, the wicked Daityas and Danavas mustered their forces and went to war against the Devas (gods). The gods were afraid of being overwhelmed. They realised their weakness and came down to earth and sought help from King Khatvanga. The king was also longing for the adventure of battle. So, he collected his bow and arrows and riding his chariot, he proceeded to the scene of war. There, he shook the hearts of the Daityas and Danavas by the sheer terror of his valour. The enemy fled in panic, unable to withstand the terrific onslaught. Since it is immoral to subject a fleeing foe to hot pursuit, Khatvanga desisted from further clashes.

“The gods (Devas) were happy that they could achieve victory through the timely help of Khatvanga. They praised his might and his sense of righteousness. ‘Oh King, there is no one who can compare with you, in contemporary history. You granted us triumph in this deadly struggle against the forces of evil. We desire that you should accept from us in return any help that you need that we can render.’ The King told them, ‘Ye gods! Yajnas and Yagas are performed by men to please you, isn't it? This battle in which I had the privilege to participate is therefore a Yajna, so far as I am concerned. What else do I need from you than this Grace that you have showered on me? This is adequate boon.’ Declaring thus, he fell at the feet of the gods.

“Not satisfied with this reply, the gods compelled him to ask for something, some boon from them. Though he had no mind to ask anything, he was forced to frame some wish, since he felt he would not be left alone. At last he said, ‘Ye gods! Reveal to me how many more years I shall live. Only then can I decide which boon I can ask from you.’ Purandara (Indra), the monarch of the gods is all-knowing and so, without a moment's delay, he replied, ‘Oh King, your span of life is very nearly over. You can live only for one more *muhurtha* (a period of a few minutes).’ On hearing this, Khatvanga said, ‘I have nothing to ask. I do not need anything. I feel that all the pleasures of this world and the next are trifles to be discarded. I shall not enter again the slush of sensory pleasure. Give me the boon of attaining the Sublime Presence of the Lord, from which there

is no return, for which all life is dedicated.’ Then, he sat with closed eyes repeating the Name of God and, at the end of the Muhurtha he achieved the Lotus Feet of Hari (God).

“Note how in a few moments, he cast off from the mind all attachment to objective pleasure! Khatvanga was thus able to reach the Feet of the Lord, where fear dare not approach. You have *seven* days, while he had a few minutes only. Therefore, you have no reason to be anxious. During these days, purify your inner consciousness by attentively listening to the best and holiest narrative of the manifestation of God.”

At this, Parikshit shed tears of joy, remembering the supreme benediction, won by the great devotee, Khatvanga. He exclaimed, “Master! Instruct me what I must do now. I do not get words to express my yearning. My heart is overflowing with bliss.” He sat in petrified silence.

Suka advised, “Oh King, equip yourself with the sword of detachment. Cut into pieces the deluded affection for the body. Give up the ‘myness’ that makes you cling to your kith and kin. Be seated firmly on the bank of this sacred river.” Then, when Suka was about to begin his narrative, Parikshit appeared anxious to ask some question. Seeing this, Suka said, “You seem to be perplexed with something. Ask me what you wish to know and have that doubt removed from your mind.” Immediately, the King said, “Master! You are indeed an Ocean of Compassion. As a tasty meal to a starving person, your words bring cool comfort to my

burning heart. Revered Preceptor, you had spoken to me a short while ago about the beginnings of Creation. I did not understand it clearly. Why did the Attributeless *Para Brahma* (Formless-Immanence-Transcendence) assume Form and Attributes? Tell me about that.” The King sat with expectant face, all attention, and praying sincerely, eager to hear and learn.