

CHAPTER 31

DOUBTS AND QUESTIONS

When the sage Suka heard this answer, he said, “King! Since your heart is merged in Syamasundara, the Lord Krishna, I am pleased so much that you can ask me all the questions that trouble you. I shall give appropriate answers and explanations. I shall thrill you and heighten your yearning for Syamasundara, the Charming Lord with the Complexion of Dark Rain-heavy Clouds.”

Parikshit was filled with delight at these words of the Master. He said, “Illustrious Preceptor, what qualifications have I which entitle me to put questions to you? Instruct me as you think best. Tell me what I most need during these critical days. Teach me what is most beneficial, most worthy of attention, most important. You know this more than I.

Discourse to me, irrespective of my asking and desire. Of course, doubts pester me off and on, since I am bound by the temptations of delusion and ignorance. When such arise, I shall communicate my doubts and misgivings and receive from you curative explanations. I pray that you should not attribute other motives to me. Do not weigh my attainments. Treat me with affection as if I were a son. Transform me into a quiet restful person.

“Let me present before you however, one doubt that has been with me for a long time. Are the experiences of the individual in this body directed by his own nature or are they directed by the sum of the consequences of deeds in the past? Then, there is another: You said that from the Navel of the Primal Person (the Purana Purusha), a lotus arose and bloomed, and that all creation originated from that Lotus. Now, did God appear with limbs and organs like the individual *Jivi*? Is there any distinction between the Jiva and Brahma (the individual and the Personified Absolute)?

“Let me ask also another question: On what basis are the past, the present and the future differentiated? And, the fourth: Which deeds of the Jivis lead to which results and consequences, which statuses, in the future? The fifth: What are the characteristics of the great (the Mahapurushas)? What are their activities? By what signs can we know them? The sixth: What are the stories of the amazing and charming incarnations of God? The seventh: How are we to distinguish between the Kritha, Thretha, and Dwapara Yugas or ages?

How can we name a yuga as such? The ninth: What are the disciplines that one must practise in order to merge in the inner Soul, which is the Oversoul, the Universal Soul? And finally the tenth: What are the Vedas and the Upavedas? Which Upavedas are attached to which Vedas?

“Please tell me the answer to these as well as other subjects deserving attention. Master, I surrender to you. There is no one else who can enlighten me on these and other points. Therefore, save me from the perdition of ignorance.” The King fell at the Master’s Feet and prayed for grace.

With an affectionate smile, the Sage said, “Rise up, Oh, King. If you pile up these many questions all in a heap, how can you understand the answers? Moreover, you have not slaked your thirst or eaten any food, since long. Come eat some fruits and drink a little milk, at least. They are the privileges, the rights of the physical body. With a famished body, you may pass away in the middle, with your doubts unresolved. So, take some food,” he ordered.

The King replied, “Master! Those whose last days have come, should not prefer the food that nourishes falsehood, to the food that grants immortality? How can I pass away in the middle, though the body may be famished, when I am imbibing the nectar of immortality and when you are filling me with the exhilaration of tasting sweet panacea for the illness of Death? No! it will not happen. Even if the angry Sringi had not cursed me, even if the snake Thakshaka had

not been deputed to kill me after seven days, I would not pass away in the middle while listening to the stories of the Lord. I listen to them, without thought of food and drink. My food, my drink, are the nectarine stories of Krishna. So, do not think of my food and drink. Make me fit for the Highest Bliss, the Supreme Stage of Realisation. Save me from downfall. I am prostrating at your feet.”

The King shed tears of contrition and sat praying to the Preceptor. The sage said, “Listen, then. In the beginning, Brahma shed light on the world manifested by Maya, or Delusion. Brahma willed that creation might proliferate. But a voice from the void above (the *Akasa*) warned, ‘Thapas is the essential base for everything.’ Through Thapas, delusion will disappear!” At this Parikshit intervened. He asked, “What is the meaning and value of Thapas? Please enlighten me.”

Suka took this interruption kindly. He said, “Son, Thapas means sadhana, discipline, spiritual exercise. It is through Thapas that the great processes of Creation, Preservation and Destruction are happening. Thapas is the cause for the Realisation of the Self. That is to say, when the mind, the intellect and the senses are subjected to Thapas or the crucible of disciplinary exercise, the Self will stand revealed. I shall tell you about this technique of Thapas, listen. The mind, the intellect and the senses are ever bent towards exterior objects. They are perpetually turned outward. When some sound from the external world strikes it, the ear hears it. As soon as the ear hears it, the eye attempts

to see it. When the eye sees it, the mind desires it. Immediately, the intellect approves the idea and sets about to acquire it, as quickly as possible.

“Thus, every sense runs after external objects one after the other, one supporting the other, restless and miserable. One must bring under control the mind, the reasoning faculty and the senses which roam aimlessly behind objective pleasures. One must train them to take on the task of concentrating all attention on the glory and majesty of God to follow one systematic course of one-pointed discipline. Bring them all and lead them towards the higher Path. Their unlicensed behaviour has to be curbed. They must be educated by means of Japa, Dhyana or Good Works, or some other dedicatory and elevating activity that purifies.

“This process of purifying the inner equipment of man in the crucible of single-pointed speech, feeling and activity, directed towards God is called Thapas. The inner consciousness will be rid of all blemishes, and defects. When the inner consciousness has been rendered pure and unsullied, God will reside therein. Finally, he will experience the vision of the Lord Himself, within him.

“Oh King, what can one picture, grander than this? The great sages, the Mahatmas, all engaged themselves in Thapas and as a result gained continuous and rare spiritual splendour. Why, even the wicked demons Ravana, and Hiranyakasipu won mastery over the material world and acquired their tremendous powers of destruction through

the arduous discipline of Thapas, directed along aggressive channels. If only their efforts were directed along *Sathwic* (pure, balanced) paths, instead of the *Rajasic* (passionate) path they preferred, they could have attained the Peace and Joy of Self-realisation. On the basis of the underlying urge, Thapas is classified into three groups: *Tamasic* (sloth and dullness), *Rajasic* and *Sathwic*. Of these, for the visualising of God, the *Sathwic* is the most effective.

“Vashista, Viswamithra and other sages acquired amazing powers through their *Sathwic* Thapas, performed with pure unselfish motives. They rose at last to the status of Brahmarishis too. Thapas is classified into another series of three: mental, physical and vocal. You may ask which is the most important of these three. I must tell you that all three are important. Yet, if the mental thapas is attended to, the other two follow.

“The person bound by objective desire will try in various ways to fulfil them. He is a slave to his senses and their pursuits. But if he withdraws the senses from the world and gets control over their master, the Mind, and engages that Mind in Thapas, then, he can establish *Swa-rajya* or Self-mastery or ‘Independence’ over himself. To allow the senses to attach themselves to objects—that is the bondage. When the mind that flows through the senses towards the outer world is turned inwards and is made to contemplate on the Atma, it attains Liberation or *Moksha*.

“Oh King! All things that are seen are transient, unreal. God alone is eternal, real. Attachment with objects ends in

grief. God is one's own Reality. That Reality, the God in you, has no relationship with the changing transitory objective world. He is Pure Consciousness only. Even if you posit some relationship for it, it can only be the type of relationship that exists between the dreamer and the objects seen and experienced in dreams."

At this the King started questioning thus: "Master! On this matter a doubt is bothering me. In dreams, only those things that have been cognised directly while awake appear and so there must be reality as the basis of the false appearances, isn't it? While experiencing the dream, all the objects are taken as real. On waking from sleep, it is realised that they are all unreal. But this is the experience of us, men. Can God too be deluded? Again, if objects are one and of uniform type, then, it can be said that Maya deludes and this is the effect. But they are manifold and of multifarious forms. They all appear real and true. How can these be compared to the dream-experiences?"

Suka was induced to laugh at this question. "Oh King, Maya itself has caused the multifarious forms. This is clever stage play, a kind of fancy dress. The objective world or Nature assumes manifold forms through the manipulations of Maya, the Deluding Urge. On account of the primary impulse of Delusion or Ignorance, the *Gunas* (quality, characteristics) arose and got intermixed, and Time manifested with the change, and all this multiplicity called the Universe appeared. So, the Jivi must dedicate himself to the Master of this delusion, the director of this play, the

manipulator of this time, the actor who sports the *Gunas* (types of behaviour, groups of qualities, bundles of attributes), the mother of all the worlds (*Maya*). He must fill himself with the understanding of the immeasurable Power and Glory of the Imperishable Absolute (*Akshara Para Brahma*). He must immerse himself in the Bliss derivable therefrom. Then, he sheds all *Ajnana* and can be unattached, even when he uses the creations of *Maya*!"

The King was struck with wonder at these words of the Sage. He said, "Lord, how did this Creation first happen? What is the original substance which *Maya* caused to proliferate?" Suka elaborated these points. He said, "Creation is happening from beyond the beginning of Time. First, the lotus arose from the Navel of the Primal Person, called in the scriptures *Narayana*. From this Lotus, the Lord Himself manifested as *Brahma*. *Brahma* felt an urge to look at all the four quarters; so, he developed four faces.

"*Brahma* became aware that he must activate himself, so that creation can happen. So He seated Himself in the *Padmasana* posture of Yoga and, entertained the Idea of all this Creation. *Parikshit*, the mystery of Creation cannot be unravelled so easily, or understood so quickly. There can be no Cause-Consequence chain in the activities of the Absolute. No one can examine or inquire successfully into the creative faculty and achievements of the Supreme which is omnipotent and omniscient. King, when I was just attempting to answer the questions you had framed earlier, you came forward with another. Perhaps you felt that I might

forget to give you the answers for those in my eagerness to answer the latest. No, you will certainly be enlightened on all the points, during the ensuing narration of the Bhagavatha story. All your questions are within the bounds of the Puranas.”

When these consoling and satisfying words were heard by him, Parikshit queried, “Master, what are the Puranas? What are their contents? How many are they?” Suka replied, “The texts that elaborate the terse truths that are enshrined in the Vedas are called Puranas. They are numberless in extent. But at present, eighteen of them are outstandingly famous. These were collated and edited by my father, Vyasa. They have ten common characteristics. The supplements to these Puranas, called Upapuranas have five characteristics only. You may ask what those ten are. I shall relate them to you, even before you ask! They are: *Sarga*, *Visarga*, *Sthana*, *Poshana*, *Oothi*, *Manvanthara*, *Isanucharitha*, *Nirodha*, *Mukthi*, and *Asraya*. The *Asraya* is the most important of these ten.”