

## CHAPTER XXIII

“The three Gunas, Sathwa, Rajas and Thamas, undergo various permutations, combinations and modifications and become manifested as all this Creation, this Universe, this Prakruthi. Therefore, this Prakruthi is subject to changes. It is not fixed. True. But the Atma is Chaithanya (consciousness) which is *Theojorupam*, sheer effulgence. And so it is not subject to blemishes or modifications. The body is Prakruthi. Buddhi and Manas are also Prakruthi. For this reason, they too differ according to the degree of excess or deficiency of one or other of the Gunas.

“Sathwa Guna is steady, pure, unselfish, light. So those who have this characteristic will have no wish or want. They will be fit for the knowledge of Atma. Those with Rajo Guna will be engaged in acts tarnished with a tinge of ego. They may have the urge to do service to others, but that

urge will drive them on to win fame and take pride in their achievements. They will yearn for their own good, along with the good of others. Those who are endowed with Thamo Guna are overcome by the darkness of ignorance and so, they grope about, not knowing what is right and what is wrong.

“Any one of these three Gunas makes the person unfit for the realisation of the highest Reality, which liberates the individual and merges him in the Universal. Since the person is embedded in Prakruthi, he fondly believes himself to be experiencing the Gunas which form Prakruthi. But this is an illusion. To destroy this illusion, inquiry into the nature and characteristics of the Kshetra or Prakruthi has become necessary. For the beginner, the Sadhaka, inquiry into Knowledge and the Known are essential. But the Jnani has to pay more attention to these Gunas. The Known is the Reality, the experience of the Divine Basis of All.”

Arjuna listened attentively to all this and at the end, he asked, “O Lord! What are the qualities that a Jnani should possess?” Krishna replied, “Partha! He must have the twenty virtues in ample measure. You might ask what they are. I shall tell you about them, listen. But do not conclude that the goal can be reached when you have them all. The goal is Immortality, *Amrithathwam*. That can be reached only by *Brahma Sakshathkara*, experiencing Brahman, as *Sarvam Brahman*. When Knowledge is full, the Knower becomes the Known.

“For this consummation, one has to be purified by virtues. Then the Known can be experienced and Realisation reached. I shall, therefore, first tell you about this. Virtue first, then victory. What a splendid path! To seek Brahman without first ensuring a moral and virtuous life is like desiring a flame, without lamp or wick or oil! Acquire all these three, then, you light it and get light. So it is with the light of Brahma Jnana, or Realisation of Brahman.

“There is one point here which Sadhakas have to note carefully. The lamp, the wick and the oil must be proportionate. If the wick is too big for the lamp or too small, if the oil is too much or too little for the wick, if the lamp is too small or too huge for the oil or the wick, the flame will not burn brightly, and give light. Clear steady light can be secured only when all three are in proper proportion. The three Gunas too must be in equilibrium to yield maximum result, the result of Liberation. The three Gunas are bonds. Man is bound by them like a cow whose forelegs are tied together, whose hind legs too are bound and whose neck and horns are bound by a third bond. The threefold Gunas are such threefold bonds. How can the poor beast move freely when it is bound so? The Sathwa Guna is a golden rope, the Rajo Guna, a copper rope and the Thamo Guna, an iron rope. All three bind effectively in spite of the difference in the cost of material. As bonds, all three are obstacles to freedom of movement.”

Arjuna asked, “O Lord! You said that twenty virtues are essential for becoming entitled to Jnana. Which are they?

Please describe them to me in some detail.” Krishna said, “Arjuna! I am delighted at your earnestness. Listen.

“The first virtue is *Amaanithwam*, Pridelessness, humility. So long as you have *Maanam* or pride, you cannot earn Jnana. Man’s behaviour should be like the behaviour of water. Whatever colour you pour into water, it absorbs it and it never asserts its own colour. It is humble, without conceit. But now, the behaviour of man is quite contrary. When he does the smallest service or donates the slightest amount, he is anxious that people should know about it. For this, he himself goes about prattling or arranges to get it published. The absence of such pride and ambition is what is recommended as *Amaanithwam*.

“Now for the second: *Adambhithwam*, vanitylessness. This is a very great virtue in man. It means the absence of pretence, pompousness, boasting that one is great when one is not, claiming that one has power when one has nothing, that one has authority when one has no such title.” Here, readers will note one point. The world today is full of this false pretence, this hypocrisy. Whichever field of activity you watch, whomsoever you observe, you discover this dire defect. The government of nations are in the hands of people who are pretenders to power, authority and capacity. Those who have no knowledge claim to know everything. Those who have no one even to help them at home, claim that they have a huge following.

“In every activity, this hypocrisy is the very first step. This ruins man in every field, like a pest that destroys the

crop. If this is wiped off, the world will be saved from disaster. Pretence will make you lose this world and the next. It is harmful at all times and places. It does not suit ordinary men. How can it then be beneficial to the Sadhaka?

“The third virtue is *Ahimsa*. This also is an important virtue. *Himsa* (violence) is not simply physical. It means even more, the mental pain that is inflicted, the anxiety and worry that are caused to others by your actions and words. If you desist from causing physical pain to others, you cannot claim to have *Ahimsa*. Your activities must not cause pain, must be unselfish. Your thoughts, words and deeds must all be free from any motive to cause such pain.

“Then, we have *Kshama* (forbearance) as the fourth. This is called *Kshanthi*, as well as *Sahana* (putting up with something). It means that you should consider as unreal, the evil that others do unto you, the loss that you suffer through them, the hatred they evince towards you. Treat these as you treat a mirage. That is to say, you must develop that degree of patience or fortitude. It is not the helpless putting up with the evil that others do because you are powerless to retaliate. It is the expression of the Peace that reigns in the heart, this outer behaviour or *Kshanthi*. True many people put up with the injury that others inflict because they lack physical, economic or popular support. Their suffering cannot be honoured as real *Kshama*.

“Next, let us consider the fifth: *Rjuthwam*, straightforwardness, integrity, sincerity. It means the

agreement of action, speech and thought. This applies to secular and spiritual activity. This is a facet of the fourth virtue, *Adambhithwam* (vanity).

“The sixth is *Aacharyo Pasana*: the reverential service rendered to the spiritual teacher. This will promote affection for the pupil and so he will benefit a great deal. But the Guru who has no goal will only mislead the disciple into perdition. The Guru must shower Grace on the disciple as freely and as spontaneously as the mother cow feeds the young calf with milk. The teaching of the Guru is the source and sustenance for attaining God and acquiring Liberation.

“The seventh virtue is *Soucham*, or cleanliness—not merely outer cleanliness but inner cleanliness. And what is inner cleanliness? The absence of affection and hatred, of desire and discontent, lust and anger, and the presence of *Daivi* (good i.e., godly) qualities. Water cleans the body. Truth cleans the mind. Knowledge cleans the reasoning faculty. The individual is cleaned by penance and discipline.

“The eighth virtue is called *Sthairyam*: steadfastness, fixity of Faith, the absence of fickleness or waywardness. The Sadhaka must hold fast to what he has once fixed his faith upon, as conducive to his spiritual progress. He should not flirt from one ideal to another, changing the goal from day to day. This is also referred to as *Deeksha*. Fickleness is the product of weakness, a weakness that has to be scrupulously avoided.

“The ninth in the list is *Indriyanigraha*, the control of the senses. Be convinced that the senses have to subserve your best interests, not that you should subserve the interests of the senses. Do not be the slave of the senses, rather make them your slaves.

“Next: the tenth virtue, *Vairagyam*, detachment, renunciation, loss of appetite for sound, touch, form, taste, smell, etc. The senses run after these, for, they titillate them and give them temporary joy. But the senses are not interested in Dharma-artha-kama-moksha of the sublime type. The Atma can be discovered only through the pursuit of the sublime.

“The eleventh virtue is *Anahamkara*, absence of egoism. Egoism is the breeding ground of all vices and faults. The egocentric individual pays no regard to right and wrong, good and bad, godly or wicked. He does not care for them, nor does he know about them. He is completely ignorant of Dharma and morals. He will not conform to justice. To be devoid of this poisonous quality is to be endowed with *Anahamkaram*. Egoism is a foe in the guise of a friend.

“The next virtue is called: *Janma-mrthyu-jaraa-vyaadhi-dukha-doshaanudarsanam*, which means only this—the awareness of the inevitable cycle of birth and death, of senility and disease, of grief and evil and other signs of the temporariness of this created world, and life in it. Though people see these things happening to them as well as others, they do not investigate the reasons for these and the methods

of escaping from them. That is the greatest mystery, the wonder.

“If only you go to the root of the problem, you will realise that whatever else you may escape, you cannot escape Death. What man conceives as happiness now is, in reality, only misery in the guise of happiness. So, understand the truth of these things. Reflect upon the flaws in the reasoning which delude you. Then, as a result, detachment is strengthened and through that, you attain Jnana. Therefore, O Arjuna, liberate yourself from janma (birth), mrthyu (death), jaraa (senility), vyadhi (illness) and dukha (grief).” Thus spoke Krishna exhorting Arjuna with a great deal of affection.

Then He spoke of *Aasakthi* or *Anaasakthi*, the withdrawal of desire from objects, the absence of yearning. The greed to possess things that you see is caused by egoism. “I must have this,” “I must be the proud owner of this valuable thing.” This is how egoism prompts. It is a strong cord that binds you to objects. Withdraw the mind and treat all as manifestations of the Lord’s Glory. Love all things as expressions of His Glory, but do not delude yourself into the belief that possessing them will make you happy. That is an illusion. Do not dedicate your life for their sake. Use them for your needs, as and when necessary, that is all. That kind of impulse activating you will be a great handicap in your progress towards liberation. Whatever you may acquire as property will have to be given up some day. You cannot take with you on that last journey even a blade

of grass or a pinch of dust. Keep this fact ever before the mind's eye and then, you can realise the Reality.

Before one's birth, one has no relationship with this world and its material objects. After death, they and all kith and kin disappear. This sojourn is just a game played in the interval. Getting fascinated with this three-day-fair is foolish indeed. Desire tarnishes the mind, and makes man unfit for higher pursuits. The Sadhakas who seek Liberation and Realisation must rid themselves of desire. For, like grease, it sticks and is difficult to remove once it is contacted.

After this, attention has to be paid also to another virtue, *Samathwasthithi*, the state of equanimity, of undisturbed peace, during joy and grief, prosperity and adversity, happiness and misery. This is the fifteenth virtue of a Jnani. Being elevated or depressed by success and defeat, profit and loss, honour and dishonour is an activity that is futile. Accept all equally as from the Grace of God, His *Prasada* (sacrament or divine gift). As you wear shoes to tread over thorny places, or hold an umbrella to escape getting wet in rain or sleep inside a mosquito curtain to escape the stings of insects so too, arm yourself with an unshaken mind that is confident of the Lord's Grace and bear with equanimity, praise or blame, defeat or victory, pleasure or pain. To live bravely through life, thus *Sama-chith-thathwam* (equanimity under all circumstances) is declared essential.

Next is Bhakthi without any other thought or feeling, *Ananya Bhakthi*. When grief overtakes you, you run to

God. When *Sankata* (trouble) overpowers, you take refuge in the Lord of Venkata. When joy is restored, you throw Him overboard. When you are down with fever and your taste is ruined and your tongue is bitter, you crave for some hot pickle. But when the fever subsides, you are normal again, you do not relish the same pickle. Bhakthi is not a temporary salve. It is the unbroken contemplation of God without any other interposing thought or feeling.

Whatever the activity, or recreation or talk, it must be saturated with the Love of God. That is *Ananya Bhakthi*. Thereafter comes *Ekanthavasam*, dwelling in Solitude. He must be fond of being alone. This does not mean keeping the body in some solitary place, far from the haunts of men. There must be solitude and silence in the mind. All its occupants must be forced or persuaded to quit. The mind should be *nirvishaya*, contentless, turned away from the objective world.

The eighteenth virtue which helps to promote Jnana is said to be absence of interest in the company of men. That is to say, absence of the desire to mix with people engrossed in affairs that concern the objective world. One can attain equanimity even in the midst of wild animals. But it is difficult to win it while among worldly-minded men. Sadhana will be affected by the company one keeps. Good men keep you good. Bad men drag you away into badness.

Of course, it is hard to find out who are good and who are bad and then settle among the good. So, it is

advisable to avoid people and concentrate on sadhana. The human mind is like iron. If it falls in mud, it rusts and disintegrates. If it falls into fire, it loses dross and becomes pure. Therefore, if man joins the company of Jnanis, it is better than being in solitude. Note how Narada who was the son of a housemaid became a Rishi because he fell in the company of good men; Ratnakara who was a cruel hunter got the company of the Seven Rishis and so he was transformed into the First Among Poets, the Adikavi. Evil company is highly detrimental. A red-hot iron ball is capable of causing more damage than a flame of fire. A sinful man is more to be avoided than sin itself. Sadhakas have to be vigilant about the company they keep.

The nineteenth virtue is the “awareness of the distinction between Atma and Anatma.” Fix your consciousness always on the Atmic Reality and discard the body and the senses as unreal and impermanent. Atma is the Eternal. So establish yourself only in that and not in the transient non-Atmic illusions or objects. Life is a struggle to achieve victory over the illusion which haunts: “I am the eternal Atma in you and in all. So fix the mind on Me and engage yourself in the struggle, confident of victory.”

The twentieth and the last qualification one has to earn is “Thathwa Jnana Darsanam,” the vision of the true nature of “thath” (that), the Universal Principle of which the particular is but a shadow. It means that the Sadhaka should have a keen desire to visualise the universal.

Of the above-mentioned twenty, if honest efforts are made to earn even two or three, the rest will come naturally to the seeker. No special effort is needed to earn them. As progress is made on the path, one acquires not only the twenty, but even a larger number of virtues. The twenty are mentioned here because they are the outstanding ones, that is all. Sadhana, based on these virtues, takes one easily to the goal. That is why Krishna emphasised these.

Equipped with these, one can realise the Self. There need be no doubt on that for they lead to the knowledge that the body, the senses, the intelligence, the inner consciousness—all are affiliated to the Prakruthi aspect. He who is distinct from all this is the Purusha. Purusha is He who is aware of the Kshetra, the Kshetrajna. When one is able to distinguish between Purusha and Prakruthi or which is the same thing, between Kshetra and Kshetrajna, he becomes the witness and is free from all touch of want or wish.