

CHAPTER XXVI

“Krishna! You say that the Daivic (Divine) and Aasuric (demonic) natures of man are the consequences of acts and feelings that had impact on the individual in previous births. Since it is impossible to escape from such impacts, what is the fate of those who are condemned to carry with them this burden? Are there any means by which this can be avoided? Or can their consequences be mitigated? If such exist, please tell me those for I could save myself thereby.” Arjuna asked thus, in order to draw out from the Lord the remedy for all mankind.

Krishna gave an immediate answer. “There is no paucity of means. Listen. There are three types of Gunas: Sathwik, Rajasik and Thamasik. They are based on the Antha Karana, the Inner Consciousness. That too is dependent on the intake of food. You are what you feed on: your activities

shape your nature. So at least in this birth, by regulating food and activity (*aahaara* and *vihara*), man can overcome the Aasuric tendencies that tend to prevail upon him. He can promote Sathwik tendencies through planned self-effort.” This advice was tendered lovingly by the Lord to the eager inquirer, Arjuna.

Arjuna was thrilled with joy when he heard that man has the means of saving himself. He longed to inform himself further. Krishna showered Grace through His enchanting smile and condescended to reply. “Arjuna! food is the chief formative force. The soiled mind dulls the brilliance of moral excellence. How can a muddy lake reflect clearly? The Divine cannot be reflected in the wicked or vicious mind. food makes man strong in body. The body is intimately connected with the mind. Strength of mind depends upon strength of body, too. Moral conduct, good habits, spiritual effort—all depend upon the quality of the food. Disease, mental weakness, spiritual slackness—all are produced by faulty food.” “Krishna!” asked Arjuna, “Pray tell me the constituents of Sathwik, Rajasik and Thamasik food.”

“Arjuna! food to be Sathwik should be capable of strengthening the mind as well as the body. It should not be too salty, too hot, too bitter, too sweet or too sour. It should not be taken while steaming hot. food which fans the flames of thirst should be avoided. The general principle is that there should be a limit, a restraint. food cooked in water should not be used the next day. It becomes harmful. Even fried articles should be consumed before they develop unpleasant odours.

“Rajasik food is the opposite of the Sathwik. It is too salty, too sweet, too hot, too sour, too odorous. Such food excites and intoxicates.”

“Lord, excuse me if I appear impertinent. I ask with a desire to know, that is all. By mere change in food habits, can character be changed from one Guna to another? Or, has something more to be done to supplement the purification process? Tell me, if there is anything more.”

“My dear brother-in-law! If transformation of character were so easy, wickedness and vice, so characteristic of the *Danava* nature, could have been wiped off the surface of the earth in a trice. Of course, there are some things more to be done. Listen, there are three ‘purities’ to be observed: purity of the provisions, purity of the vessels in which food is prepared and purity of the persons who serve the prepared food.”

“It is not enough if the provisions are pure and of good quality. They should have been procured by fair means. No unfair, unjust, untrue earnings should be used for one’s maintenance. These are fouled at the very source. The source as well as the course and the goal must all be equally pure. The vessel must be clean, free from tarnish. The person who serves must not only be clean in dress, but clean in habits, character and conduct. He should be free from hate, anger, worry and indifference while serving the dishes. He should be cheerful and fresh. And he must be humble and full of love. While attending on those who are dining, he

should not allow his mind to dwell on wicked or vicious ideas. Mere physical cleanliness or charm is no compensation for evil thoughts and habits. The Sadhaka who has to secure concentration has to be careful about these restrictions. Otherwise, during Dhyanam, the subtle influences of the wicked thoughts of the cook and the servers will haunt the Sadhaka. Care should be taken to have only virtuous individuals around. Outer charm, professional excellence, reduced wages—these should not be allowed to prejudice you in favour of dangerous cooks and attendants. Examine carefully their habits and their character. The food you eat is such an important constituent of the physical and mental stuff with which you have to struggle in the spiritual field. The purity of the mind can be and has to be supplemented by the purity of the body as well as purity in its important function, speech. That is the real Thapas; physical, mental and vocal.

“The mind should be free from anxiety and worry, hate and fear, greed and pride. It should be saturated with love for all beings. It has to dwell in God. It has to be restrained from pursuing objective pleasures. No lower thought should be allowed to creep in. All thoughts must be directed towards the elevation of the individual to higher planes. This is the proper Thapas of the mind or manas.

“Now for the physical Thapas. Use the body and its strength and capabilities for the service of others, for the worship of the Lord, for the singing of His Glory, for visiting places hallowed by His Name, for regulated exercises in

breath control, for holding the senses away from deleterious paths and for treading the path of God. The service of the sick and the distressed, the observance of moral codes and such beneficial acts must make it sacrosanct.

“Vocal Thapas too has to be engaged in. Avoid talking too much. Desist from false statements. Do not take delight in backbiting and in scandal mongering. Never speak harshly. Speak soft and sweet. Speak with the memory of Madhava ever in the background of the mind.

“Of these three, physical Thapas, mental Thapas and vocal Thapas, even if one is absent, the Atmic effulgence (*Atmajyothi*) cannot radiate light. The lamp, the wick and the oil are all essential for a light. The body is the lamp. The mind is the oil and the tongue is the wick. All three must be in good trim.

“Some pious people consider that acts of charity are also physical Thapas. It is good that they think so. But when doing charity, one has to do so after pondering over the place, the time and the nature of the recipient. For example, charities for schools should be given at places where there are no schools until then. Hospitals have to be established in areas where diseases are rampant. The hunger of people has to be appeased where famine conditions have been caused by floods or drought. The nature and condition of the recipient has to be considered while imparting teaching of Dharma and Brahma Vidya, and while doing service of various kinds. The charitable act that removes from a person

the deficiency that is most harmful to his progress is called Sathwik.”

“Krishna,” interrupted Arjuna, “May I ask a question here? Charity however done, is charity, is it not? Why do you distinguish between Sathwik, Rajasik and Thamasik. Are there any such?”

Krishna answered, “Of course, there are. Among those who donate for charities, most are anxious to get name and fame. That is the motive for the act. They are after something in return for what they offer. Very few desire the Grace of the Lord and nothing else. Gifts made with that one end in view, to receive the Grace of the Lord, are Sathwik. Gifts made expecting something in return like fame and publicity, public esteem and power, or made in a huff or made reluctantly under pressure—these are to be classed as Rajasik.

“Charity should be given with reverence and faith. It should not be just thrown at the face of the recipient. Nor should it be given to an undeserving person or at an inopportune moment. Food for the overfed is a burden, not a boon. Hospitals in places that are inaccessible are as good as charity thrown away. Such benefitless and wasteful charity is called Thamasik.

“While engaged in Daana or charity, one has to be very vigilant. You should not scatter it to whomsoever pleads for it. Nor, can you shower it on all kinds of places. Be careful that you remember the three types mentioned by Me

and then, do as seems most proper. The gift you make must not be for name or fame, it should have no motive of pomp or publicity. It should be purposeful and useful. In all acts, the Sathwik attitude is best. This attitude must permeate all things seen, heard and spoken.”

Arjuna who was listening with head bent and with great concentration to all this, drinking in the sweetness of the Lord’s countenance, asked Him thus, “What exactly is true listening and true seeing—please tell me this in some detail. I can then follow the instruction.” He prayed to Krishna in such a pleading tone that the Lord smiled kindly at him.

Krishna patted Arjuna on the back. He said, “Sathwik listening is listening to the stories, experiences and messages of Sages and Saints who aspired after God and realised Him. Sathwik seeing is seeing the worshippers of the Lord, seeing the portraits of saints and sages, attending festivals in temples, etc. Rajasik seeing is seeing scenes of luxury, pictures of sensuous joy, of pompous pageantry, of the exhibition of power and status and display of egoistic authority. Taking delight in the description of sensuous scenes and incidents, in the demonstration of power and authority, in the assertion of might and prowess—these are to be classified as Rajasik listening. Others take delight in listening to gruesome adventures, stories of wicked ogres and vicious deeds. Such are Thamasik individuals. They admire cruelty and terrifying tactics and they take pleasure in keeping such pictures before them. They worship demonic

bloodthirsty Gods and they revel in the lore of ghosts and evil forces.”

Dear Reader! This is the heart of the teaching of the Bhagavad Geetha. The body and life in it are based on food and they are sustained by food, *anna*. So, food decides the level of attainment, high or low. Nowadays, emphasis is being laid on discipline and regulated behaviour (*Nishta*), without reference to the *Naashtha* (food)! However great and learned a person may be, however much he pays attention to the teachings of the Vedantha and takes care to spread them, if he neglects the strict code laid down for the food, that is the very basis of the body and its functions, he cannot succeed. The purity of the provisions, of the cook, and of those who serve what has been prepared, these are not attended to. They feel content when their stomachs are filled, when hunger is appeased. The first temple they visit when dawn breaks is the restaurant where ‘idli’ and ‘sambar’ are offered to the Atmarama! How can such gourmands get concentration? Purity in cooking, purity in provisions, and purity of service—how can these be guaranteed in restaurants? Who pays attention to these? Without doing this, people complain aloud that they do not get success in concentration, and suffer greater confusion! The effect will be secured only when the proper causes function well. When bitter things are cooked, how can the final dish be sweet?

Aahaara and Vihaara (food and recreation) are both very carefully regulated in the Geetha, but little heed is paid

to its teaching. Nor is it considered so essential. There are people everywhere who swear by the Geetha, who expound it for hours together and who preach about it. But very few put its teachings into practice. The *verses* fill their heads, but they are powerless to meet the *reverses*, with philosophical cheer. Ananda and Shanthi can be secured only when food and recreation are cleansed and purified.

Darkness and light cannot coexist; Kama (God of lust) and Rama cannot be in the same place together. They are like fire and water. How can one escape an evil reaction if the Geetha is held in one hand and hot tea or coffee or a lighted cigarette or beedi or a pinch of snuff is held in the other? Some even justify their unregulated lives, by declaring that whatever is eaten, however eaten, wherever eaten, the stuff is rendered pure and acceptable on account of the raging fire of Jnana which they have in them!

How can a bitter fruit be transformed into a sweet one, when it is dipped in a series of holy rivers? How can persons who simply speak on the Geetha get saturated with the sweetness of its message? What really happens is that those who listen to such hypocrisies lose even the little faith they have in our scriptures and become hardened disbelievers.

How can a person who feels helpless to restrict and regulate his food habits be trusted to restrict and regulate his senses? If he cannot limit and control his feeding, how can he limit and control the senses? Can the nose which falls down at a cough survive a sneeze? How can one who

is too weak to climb stairs, climb to heaven's heights? When a man is a helpless victim of coffee or cigarettes or snuff how can he muster strength and courage to overcome the more powerful foes; anger, lust and greed? When he cannot renounce dirt, how can he renounce desire? Become master of the tongue and then you can master sex. They are firmly interconnected, as close as the eyes and the feet.