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Bhaktha: Swami, the inner meaning of the *Mahabharatha* and the *Ramayana* which You explained is really very interesting. If only one probes deeply, what else is there in them? That kind of Mahabharatha and Ramayana is taking place in every heart, through the action and interaction of manas, chittam and buddhi. You said that the *Bhagavatham* is also occurring in the same manner. If you will kindly explain how that is happening, we can, after knowing its inner meaning also, start following the “Subtle” Ramayana and Mahabharatha and Bhagavatham, all three. So please tell me about the Bhagavatham.

Swami: Well, the *Bhagavatham* is not like the other two. It has no qualities and no Form! It deals with the Atma which is beyond and behind the qualities or gunas, senses or indriyas, the manas and the chittam. It deals

with the powers and prowess of the Atma, and Its apparent activities or leelas. The *Bhagavatham* contains the stories of the incarnations of that which is the Witness of Everything.

Bhaktha: What are the forms which that Witness assumed? Why did He assume those Forms?

Swami: Really speaking, He is all Forms, *Sarvaswaroopa*. There is no limit to the number or nature of His Forms. Still, if something must be said in conformity with what has happened, Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Narasimha, Rama, and Krishna, these are Its incarnations. In order to transact the Creation, the Preservation and the Destruction of the World, and to punish the wicked and protect the good, He assumes Himself the form He designs as best at the time and for the purpose He has set before Himself. When that purpose is realised, He is as before, the Witness, the *Atmarupa*.

Bhaktha: Rama and Krishna also punished the wicked and protected the good, isn't it, Swami? Then, how do you say that in the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha, there is the *Gunaswarupa*, while in the Bhagavatham there is no Gunaswarupa?

Swami: You see, Gunas have a beginning and an end; the Atma has neither. Rama and Krishna too have no qualities, essentially. They have demonstrated how,

being above Gunas, it is possible to keep all Gunas under control. The Ramayana and the Mahabharatha stories have an end, isn't it? In that sense, the Bhagavatham has no end. It speaks of the Lord who has no beginning or end. It tells of the forms which the Lord wore in the context of the age, the time and the object. The other two, on the other hand, teach the correct policies to be followed in this false, evanescent world and urge men to follow Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema. Do you understand?

Bhaktha: Then, the *Bhagavatham* is of no practical use to us, so to say!

Swami: What! It is the *Bhagavatham* that is of most use to the Sadhakas. It alone explains the real secret of the Lord. His real Glory and His real Path! The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* endeavour to some extent to uplift the common man, the ordinary man, by moral teaching and example. They show how man can deserve the Lord's grace. But those who seek to know the nature of the Atma and of Paramathma should study, more than anything else, the Bhagavatham.

Bhaktha: Swami, what is the relation between Bhagawantha, Bhagavatha and the Bhaktha?

Swami: The relationship between the Maharaja, the Yuvaraja and the Kumararaja! Bhagawantha or the Lord is the Maharaja, of course; The Bhagavatha is second in rank

because it has come from the Lord as a derivative, with the status of Yuvaraja; the Kumararaja is dependent on both these and so is the Bhaktha. The status of Kumararaja is not an ordinary one, he merits the position of the Maharaja. The rest are inferior to these three. Those who do not rise up to the status of Bhaktha or Kumararaja have no access to the Court of Maharaja.

Bhaktha: Then, Swami, the Yogis, the Jnanis, the Ascetics, do these not deserve that position?

Swami: Whoever he may be, without Bhakthi and the love of the Higher Truth, how can anyone become a Yogi, or a Jnani or an Ascetic? They too have Bhakthi in an equal measure. Take Laddu, Jilebi, Mysore Pak and a number of other sweets; in each of them, as the common cause of sweetness, there must be the one article, sugar, isn't it? How else can they be made? So also, in these three paths, the sweetness of the Lord's Name or Bhakthi is an ingredient. Without it, the very names of these objects become absurd!

Bhaktha: Another point, Swami! Can one approach the presence of the Lord, only if he has faith in the Lord and only if with that faith he performs Japa, Dhyana, Bhajana and Puja? That is to say, is it not possible to attain that position through the path of Truth, the path of Dharma, the path of Prema, the path of Service to others?

Swami: Well, how can the qualities you mention originate without the fear of sin and the fear of God? Are these paths and the qualifications needed for them, ordinary and common? No. They are the doors to the Inner Apartment of the Lord. Those that follow those Paths can easily reach the precincts of the Lord. But yet, there is a difference between relatives and friends! Those who develop only these qualities are friends; but those who practise them, along with devotion to the Name and Form, become relatives, that is the difference. The meditation on the Name and the Rupa helps to strengthen the Gunas also. Without that foundation, the Gunas cannot be strong and firm and pure. The Lord's Name and the Lord's Rupa remove the dross from the qualities of man.

Bhaktha: But the Bhaktha and the man with good qualities, both attain the same place, isn't it, Swami?

Swami: Certainly. The merely good man becomes a candidate who deserves the place. The good man who has Bhakthi has a title to the place, he cannot be passed over.

Bhaktha: Swami, there are many people who are active, doing various things under the slogan, "The Service of man is the Service of God"; do their deeds entitle them to the place?

Swami: Why do you ask so? Certainly; for those that do service with that attitude. But it is very hard to get that real feeling. Considering others as men, simply saying

that "serving them is to serve God," is not sincerity. The mind will then run in two channels. Grasp the glory of *Madhava* (God) fully; understand that Madhava is in every *Manava*; believe that service to Manava or Man is serving Madhava only. Then your actions will certainly entitle you to the place. What greater qualification is needed than that? Instead, if "service" is done for name and honour and fame, and if there is a craving in the mind for the fruits of one's actions, then the statement, "Service to man is service to God" has no meaning, nor will one get the result expected.

Bhaktha: It is very interesting, Swami! Speaking about the *Bhagavatham* evoked many holy ideas and morals today. So if one delves into It, what invaluable Truths will emanate! I am indeed blessed, this day.

Swami: Have you understood it all? *Bhagavatham* is the story of the beginningless, the endingless Atma. It is in both forms, subtle and gross. It is subtler than the subtlest; grosser than the grossest. It has no limit or measure. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* are Ithihasas, historical epics. The *Bhagavatham* is different; it is the description of the Atma; it instructs in the Path of Bhakthi. It can never end, nor has it ever a "Finis." This is the significance of the *Bhagavatham*.

XV

BHAKTHA: You must remove a big load from my head, Swami. However much I try to forget it, in whichever direction I turn, I suffer from it; I am hearing only that! Then how can I dismiss it from my mind? Finding it impossible, I am praying to You. Please do not mistake my intention; kindly give me a direct answer, because if you do so, the weight will be lifted from the heads of all people like me and enthusiasm will increase for Sadhana. Otherwise, I am worried, we may lose even the little faith that we have in the Lord and I am afraid we may turn atheists. Your answer will be of immense help, not only to me but to all Bhakthas everywhere. Therefore, I pray to You to wipe off my doubts without hesitation and tell me the real truth, in very clear terms.

Swami: What is it? Tell me. What is the cause of so much headache?

Bhaktha: Swami, You have told us that man has Four Asramas: *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and the *Sanyasa*; and that those who reach the last stage are indeed blessed, for they attain Realisation. Now, please tell us what exactly is that Sanyasam?

Swami: So this has caused you all the worry! Is it? My dear fellow, the wearing of the *gerua* (orange) cloth, the shaving of the head, these do not make a Sanyasi. He is a person who has given up all desires. He must be fully immersed in desire, design and deed, fully in the One Godhead and in the discipline to attain Him. Whoever is so immersed is a Sanyasi. Instead, if they retain all kinds of desires, if they engage themselves in every activity to realise their desires, then they are *Sanyasis*, as the saying goes; that is to say, counterfeits, do you understand?

Bhaktha: But Swami, now we get sanyasis very cheap for a rupee, or for a paisa, or even for a cigarette! Among these, whom should we approach, whom should we accept?

Swami: Why are you concerned with all this? You are concerned with your advancement, your progress. You must crave for a person to point out to you the right path for your Sadhana. Or, if that is not possible, you approach and accept your Self; that is enough to give you what you require. Depend upon yourself and your doubts will be destroyed.

Bhaktha: In that case, Swami, what about the statement, “Gurules Vidya is Sightless Vidya”? It is essential to rely on some great person, is it not? To show the way, I mean.

Swami: Great men have not vanished from the face of the earth, my child! Do not think that all are of the type you mention. There are many great men even now; otherwise, how could the world have daylight, as the saying goes?

Bhaktha: Great men may exist among Grahasthas, Vanaprasthas or Brahmacharins, Swami! I haven’t much experience with such; but still, I have seen among them people with big name and fame. However, I can say this: it is very difficult to discover really holy men among Sanyasis. It is impossible to find a single Sanyasi without some desire or other. When Sanyasis have so much desire, what is wrong if householders have them? To whichever place we go, the one demand is, “Money, Money, Money!”

Swami: Really speaking, Sanyasis should have no desire, as you said. Lust and greed are their dreadful enemies. They should have no contact with them. They can accept only whatever little food is given, whenever it is offered, that is all. They can have no desire for more. That is the vow, the rule. They have nothing to do with money.

Bhaktha: Well, Swami, excuse me. Sanyasis are perpetually in need of money! No householder worries so much as they, for money! They exploit and extract from the disciples their hard-earned cash. Those who do not give are condemned. Is all this right, Swami? Is this just? Are these people, Gurus?

Swami: No wise person will say that these things are just. How can I say it is right? Why, can you not ask such Sanyasis once, “Sirs, why do you need cash? Is it not wrong for you to have this craving for the fame that comes through money?”

Bhaktha: Oh, I have asked them, Swami.

Swami: What did they say?

Bhaktha: Some said, they wanted money for their expenses. Others said, they wanted to develop their Asram further. Many such reasons were given. For those who have learnt to argue, reason-giving is not very hard. It is only when it comes to believing, that we have to choose and discriminate, isn’t it?

Swami: The Guru must engage himself in the progress of the disciples who come to him for guidance, and not the Asram; the *Asritha* (disciple) is more important than the Asram. The excitement, the anxiety about the Asram, becomes itself a huge *Sramam* or burden. It is on account of this that people lose even the little faith and devotion that they have and are transformed into

atheists. Such Gurus, instead of giving up all ties, have yoked themselves tighter; they are beasts of burden, rather. My dear fellow, listen to Me, do not cast your looks upon the Guru who inflicts pressure on a disciple to extract money. Keep as far away as possible from such persons. Do not lose Faith by contact with them. Preserve it and develop it, all by yourself.

Bhaktha: We go to such people eager to learn the higher things of life and to know the path for the attainment of the Lord. We seek and search for them, for we do not know which snake lives in which hole; but we find these cobra sanyasis and are shocked! The anxious desire that they exhibit for the Asram, is not that also wrong, Swami? If they want to serve the public like that, they can as well be just ordinary people and retain their original names and go about collecting funds and spending them, isn't it? Calling themselves Sanyasis, and wearing that dress, getting *Upadesam* (spiritual instruction), taking upon themselves numerous vows at the time of initiation into monkhood, declaring that they have destroyed all desire...if later they follow the path of accumulation, is it not spoiling the very sacredness?

Swami: That individual may be spoiled, that is all, my dear fellow; the sacredness of *Sanyas* can never be diminished! Do not run away with that idea. Of course, there are such men in the world today. But please do

not include them in the list of Sanyasis or Swamis. They have no relationship with these two categories. They only do harm to their disciples by retaining those designations. Do not even spend a single thought on them.

Bhaktha: All right, Swami. But there are some who have built Asrams and who are established as Gurus: for them, this desire for money, etc. is wrong, is it not?

Swami: Why do you ask? Have these people any special adornment like horns on the head? Really speaking, these people have to be even more careful. For they train many disciples, and so they must make a special effort to see that the trainees acquire the right attitudes and get fully immersed in the contemplation of the Lord. Otherwise, much injury will be caused. If the Guru pays attention to the spiritual progress and inward joy of the disciples, the disciples themselves will struggle for the development of the Asram. No one need exert any pressure. Instead, forgetting *their* progress, if he clamours for so much of money from this disciple and so much from this devotee for the development of "his" Asram, he will lose the Asram itself! The disciple will lose devotion and the Guru will lose his institution!

Bhaktha: Besides all this, Swami, if anyone points out to them that it is wrong, they get wild and threaten severe punishments. Is that right, Swami?

Swami: This is an additional wrong. How can it be right? It is not correct for any Guru to weaken the heart of any disciple; he must please it and satisfy it. People who frighten and extract are not teachers, but cheaters. They are not shepherds, but sheep.

Bhaktha: Then what do you advise us to do? How are we to deal with these people? Please tell us.

Swami: My dear child, give up all talk of people who have lost their way. Speak of *your* reaching the path. Give up all contact with such persons, and cultivate contact with such persons and cultivate contacts with places where there is neither lust nor greed nor any other desire. Seek for the Guru who looks on all with equal Prema. The real Guru must have certain qualities. Note this. If those qualities are present, go there and be happy. If you do not get such a place, meditate on God within yourself. Do Dhyanam and Bhajana. That is enough, you need not search for another place at all. Whenever you have leisure, read good devotional books. Even from these books, take what you need and discard the rest. Be careful; do not get entangled in all kinds of nets and traps.

Bhaktha: What are the qualities of those Great Men, Swami?

Swami: They will not have the craving for wealth, nor the ambition to develop their Asrams. They will neither love those who praise them nor hate those who blame

them. They will not prevent their disciples from approaching them. They will not prohibit anyone from approaching them. They will look upon all with equal Love. They will not relish the defamation of others. They will not be vengeful against those who point out to them their own mistakes and wrongs. They will always spread Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema. They will ever yearn for the joy, welfare and progress of the devotees. Seek such persons. They are the true Gurus. Do not even cast a glance at those who are afflicted with anger, anxiety, hatred, envy, etc., or those worrying about name and fame and honour and status, however pompous their personality, however resounding their reputation.

Bhaktha: All right, Swami. It is all very good. But just one little doubt. These big Gurus, highly learned, giving long lectures for hours together, how is it that they do not realise all this? Cannot these big men see their faults themselves and set them right?

Swami: Well, even an ounce of experience is useful! But a ton of learning may prove useless. Many people lecture in Colleges, and pour forth hour after hour, things they have learnt by rote. Can one become great by merely the length or grandeur of his lectures? That is like vomiting the swallowed meal. You must see how much of what is spoken is practised. Those who give advice must follow it themselves. If you cannot avoid doing a thing, do not ask others to avoid it. So, however

learned a person may be, unless he has experience and practice, it will be simply a nine-days wonder, and after that he will be neither here nor there. Of course, the qualities I mentioned are to be noted, not merely in the Gurus, but in all. So give up this talk about others being bad or wrong; develop your faith and devotion. Strengthen your discipline for meditation on the Lord. Engage yourself in beneficial deeds. Speak only what will bring good. Worship the Lord, keep Him ever in the memory. Do Japam and Dhyanam. If you are immersed in these, you will not worry at all about the right and wrong of others.

Bhaktha: Swami, you explained the relationship of the Guru and the *Sishya* (aspiring disciple). Looking at present conditions, he who reveals the reality is not liked at all. Many of the Gurus, Swamis and Sadhus are, as you said, behaving wrongly and in many ways ruining their very name. Besides they are acting contrary to the vows of Sanyasa and the Dharma relating to the Lord. Such people may not appreciate your statements. They may even develop animosity, for your laying bare their defects. Or, what is worse, they may try to justify their conduct and invent stories and arguments to make their actions appear correct. Your remarks apply only to the wrongdoers, they do not refer to those who are engaged in good activities. So, really good Sadhus and those interested in upholding the ideas will be happy that You have spoken thus. But regardless of

what people might say, please Swami, help Sadhakas to progress and reveal to us the glory of the Lord.

Swami: Well, what does it matter to Me how people talk? How can falsehood be supported, fearing comment? As the burden so the bearer, says the proverb. Only fakes will resent and comment adversely. The genuine Gurus will rejoice. Only a thief will feel his shoulder, when someone announces the theft of a gourd (as the saying goes) because he is afraid, whether at the time, he has the stolen gourd actually on his shoulders! Those who do not steal gourds will not feel their shoulders. Those who are genuine will have no fear or anger. The others can learn a lesson if they develop a sense of shame and resolve to mend their ways, at least, hereafter. For deeds done in ignorance, repentance is the way to make amends and to earn pardon. Not to repeat the same deed is the sign of the morally strong.