

13. The Avatar As Guru

The cosmos or creation, time, karma or activity—all these are manifestations of the will of God and are bound to Him. They are considered by some as “false” and “unreal”; but how can God who is the very embodiment of Sathya or Truth “will” anything not true? Therefore, it can be said that these two are true, in one way. When evolution changes over into involution and the ultimate stage of mergence of both the conscious and the unconscious is reached, Easwara is the only One existent.

Time is the manifestation of the power of God, and so it has no end or beginning which can be measured. Karma too is an important Truth to be reckoned as such. Easwara is no wayward force, which is unmindful of bounds and limits. He creates situations and environments strictly according to the activities that men had engaged in during their previous lives. The Creation, the Time and the Karma—

all three are true in Easwara and true along with Easwara. They are instruments which He uses. They are bound to Him.

Easwara or God though not perceptible to the senses ordinarily, becomes so perceptible to the devotee who has such deep attachment to Him that he yearns to merge in Him. Why? Such devotees perceive God as clearly as they perceive external objects. God or Easwara is said to be Formless; that is to say, He can assume or adopt any form. He has endless Forms. Then, in what Form does He grant the clear Vision to the devotee? He manifests in the Form that the devotee yearns for, the Form which will grant him the highest satisfaction. These Forms are His Avatars. Easwara does not limit Himself when He thus manifests. He is fully present in every such Avatar. He manifests Himself with His full Glory in every Avatar.

It is said that there are some manifestations that are partial and some others that are full, and some that are temporary and some that are lasting. But these are called Avatars only by courtesy. Narada, Sanatkumara and other similar sages are referred to in some texts as such Avatars. They have not got all the Divine characteristics. Therefore, they are not worshipped.

The Jiva is by its very nature “eternal and immortal.” It has no end or beginning that can be calculated. It has neither birth nor death. It is self-illuminating. It is the knower and the knowledge, the doer and the enjoyer. Whether bound or

liberated, the Jivi has all these characteristics intact. But whatever it is, it has not got the Freedom that God has. In every act, the Jivi has to involve the body, the senses like the ear, etc., the vital airs that operate in the body. All these coexist with the Divine in the individual. Whatever it is, the Jivi is not a machine that has no will of its own. Just as the activities in this life are determined by the nature of the activities in previous lives, the activities of this life do determine the activities of the next life. Easwara decides the place and time, the circumstance and the consequence in accordance with the nature of the activities presently undertaken. God has the power to shape the Nature of man, but He does not exercise that power and mould it differently. He leaves it to the free will of the individual, which has to learn the lesson by experience.

The flake of stone that is chipped off the rock is a part of the rock; but the individual is not a part of God like that. In one sense, Jivi and Jagath are distinct and different from God. In another sense, they are inseparable. This mystery of separateness and identity cannot be grasped by means of reason and intellect. It can be understood only through the Vedas and their message. This is the main lesson that the *Sathya Sai Vahini* can instil.

Every child arrives into the world, bearing the burden of unrequited consequences, accumulated in previous lives. It does not drop from the lap of Nature, as a streak of lightning from the clouds. It is born in this world in order to

experience the beneficial and the malignant consequences, that are the products of its own acts in past lives. This is the explanation for the differences that are evident among men. This is the principle of Karma.

Among men, each one is himself the cause of his fortune, good or bad. He is himself the builder, the architect. Fate, destiny, predetermination, the Will of God—every one of these explanations is toppled by the principle of Karma. God and man can be reconciled and affiliated only on the basis of this Sutra or principle of Karma. When man realises that God has no share in causing his suffering and that he is himself the sole cause, that no blame attaches to any other person, that he is the initiator as well as the beneficiary—the cause and the effect—of his acts, that he is free to shape his future, then he approaches God with a firmer step and a clearer mind.

If at the present time, a man is afflicted by misfortune, it is assuredly the result of acts done by him. Accordingly, man has to believe that happiness and good fortune also lie in his own hands. If he decides, happiness and good fortune can be gained by him.

If a person is pure in spirit now, he himself is the cause. Unless a person yearns, he cannot earn. So, it is clear that the will inherent in man is beyond all stages and conditions, all formations and transformations. The freedom that it represents, is the result of his past acts. It is powerful, infinitely fruitful and supreme.

The next problem is *Mukthi* or liberation. The Atma is neither masculine nor feminine. It is not possible to impose these distinctions on It. They are merely physical attributes, pertaining to the body. When talking about the Atma, ideas, such as these, are but signs of delusion. They are relevant only when the physical body is under discussion. The discussion of “age” is also a product of this delusion. The Atma is eternal. This ageless Entity is ever One and Only.

How did the Atma get incarnated? In the Sastras, there is just one explanation. For all this encasement and bondage, there is only one reason—*Avidya*, absence of right awareness. Through *Avidya*, man gets bound; so, wisdom is the cure. That alone can take him across. How can this awareness be accomplished?

There are three ways of acquiring it. Through *Prema*, through *Bhakthi*, through worship of God in full devotion and dedication, through loving service and adoration directed towards every living being who is but a moving temple of God—for He resides in each of them—the false knowledge, the *Avidya* can be scattered and the bonds made to fall off. The individual will then be released.

There are two ideas about God described in the Sastras—the idea that He is cognisable as having attributes and the idea that He is free from all attributes and so cannot be described as thus and thus, that is to say, the *Saguna* (Worship of God with attributes) aspect and the *Nirguna*

(Devoid of qualities, formless) aspect. The *Saguna* God is cognised as present everywhere, as the creator, sustainer and destroyer, of every thing and being, as the Father and Mother of the Universe. Therefore, He is beyond and above all beings and things and eternally distinct and different from man. It is said by upholders of the *Saguna* aspect that the very cognition of this attributeful principle brings about “liberation” or *Mukthi*. Liberation is attained when man establishes himself in this knowledge and lives in and through it.

The second way is the contemplation on the attributeless *Nirguna* principle. The truth that the ascription of attributes to the Divine principle is undesirable and inappropriate is realised during this contemplation and the attributes are shed from the concept of God. Then, the one Universal Attributeless person will alone remain in the consciousness. It can be referred to as the Knower, the *Jnatha*. For, *Jnana* or wisdom is relevant only in the context of the human mind and human consciousness. It cannot be designated as the Inquirer, for, inquiry is the mark of the weak. It cannot be related to the intelligence, for intelligence discriminates and the attempt to divide and dissect is again the sign of unsteadiness. It cannot be designated “the Creator,” for creation is the activity of the bound, the limited. It or He has no bonds or limits. Activity implies a wish, a want, a desire; it does not originate from any other cause. All work has as its base some inner pain which is sought to be alleviated.

In the Vedas, the Divine is spoken of only as THAT. The reference is always to THAT. The word “He” is susceptible of provoking ideas of difference, and so the word THAT is used, to indicate that it is free from all limitations and bonds imposed by the ascription of attributes. This is the essence of the philosophy of non-dualism, for, attributes divide and distinguish.

It is the inescapable destiny of everyone to fulfil himself. Every living being has to attain fullness in the end. Each one is at present at a particular stage of this march, as a result of the activities engaged in during previous lives and the feelings he entertained in the past. The future is being built at present by the activities being engaged in now and the feelings that urge and shape them. That is to say, what we do, feel or think about, at present—these are the basic reasons for the good fortune or bad fortune which is in store.

The prompting to save oneself and the power to pull oneself up into liberation cannot be derived from books. This strength has to come from the individual himself. One can spend an entire lifetime scanning profoundly written books; one might earn the highest rank among intellectuals. But at the end of it all, one might not have attained even some little progress in the spiritual field. To conclude that a scholar who has reached the topmost height can therefore be considered ripe in spiritual wisdom will prove to be a

great mistake. The scholar himself might imagine, as he learns more and more from books, that he is progressing more and more on the spiritual path. But when he examines the fruit of his studies, he will recognise that though his intellect has become sharper and heavier, he has not been acquiring the awareness of the Atma to the slightest degree. Most people have the skill to deliver wonderful discourses on spiritual subjects; really speaking, everyone has failed in living the life of the spirit, the *Paramarthika* (aspiration for the eternal) life. What exactly is the reason for this sad state of affairs? Now, spiritual texts are studied to equip oneself with scholarship in the competitive race for superiority, to earn one’s livelihood, to pose oneself as an undefeatable upholder of some specific point of view, and generally, to earn a reputation as a pundit. The scholar might write elaborate commentaries on the Gita. But as a result of all that study, if in his character, behaviour and conduct, he does not prove that the Gita has soaked into him, all that punditry is but a burden he is carrying around. This is the lesson that Bharathiya culture tries to impress. The source from which this lesson emerges is the Guru, the Purusha, latent in you. The study of the scriptures and other texts can reinforce the spiritual urges already in man and induce him to practise the precepts. Do not treat the learning you derive from them as so much fodder for the brain. It must be sublimated into Ananda, for the individual. Envy, pompousness, egoism—such evil traits have to be driven out of the individual.

This spiritual treasure can be got from another too. Only, the giver has to possess supreme attainment, and the recipient has to possess the special merit that deserves the achievement. The seed may have life in it; but the soil must be ploughed and made fit to activate it. When both these conditions are satisfied, the harvest of spiritual success is assured. He who instructs in the field of religion has to be of enthralling excellence. The listener, too, has to be of sharp and clear understanding. When both are surprisingly supreme and extraordinarily enthusiastic, the result will be spiritual awakening of the highest level. Or else, rarely can such results follow. These are the real Gurus. They steal your hearts, not your wealth. The people have to concentrate on service to the Guru, and ruminates over his teachings. The pupil must be eager to translate the teaching into daily activity and actual practices. He must fill his heart with devotion and dedicate all his skill for the actualisation of the Guru's counsel. Such a person deserves the name, *Sishya* (disciple).

When the thirst for liberation and the revelation of one's reality is acute, a strange and mysterious force in Nature will begin operating. When the soil is ready, the seed appears from somewhere! The spiritual Guru will be alerted and the thirst will get quenched. The receiving individual has developed the power to attract the giver of illumination. That power is strong and full. Therefore, naturally the splendour that can confer the illumination will get ready to bless.

Readers! Though Gurus of the common type have increased in numbers, there is available for man, a Guru, far

more supreme and far more compassionate than any or all of them. He is no other than the Avatar of the Lord. He can, by the mere expression of His Will confer on man the highest consummation of spiritual life. He can gift it and get man to accept it. Even the meanest of the mean can acquire the highest wisdom, in a trice. He is the Guru of all Gurus. He is the fullest embodiment of God as man. Man can cognise God only in the human form. The Bharathiya Spiritual Stream has been declaring, over and over again, that adoring God in the human form is the highest duty of man. Unless God incarnates as man, man can never hope to see God or listen to His Voice. Of course, man can picture God in various other forms, but he can never approximate to the genuine form of God. However much one may try, man cannot picture God in any form except the human. People can pour out wonderful discourses and talks on God and the nature and composition of all that exists in the Universe. They may satisfy themselves, asserting that all accounts of God descending in human form are meaningless myths. That is what the poor ordinary eye can discern. This strange inference is not based on Jnana. As a matter of fact, Jnana is absent in these assertions and declarations. What we can notice in them is only the froth floating on ego waves.

“*Koham?* Who am I?” “Why this feeling in me, that I am the doer?” “What is the nature of consciousness that I am the enjoyer?” “Why be born, and die at last?” “How did I deserve this life?” “Can I be liberated from this Samsara, this series of entrances and exits.” The attempt to discover

answers to these questions is what the Rishis of old designated as “thapas.” When the intellect of the individual ripens into this steady inquiry, he enters the path of “thapas.”

This is the first step. As soon as man has ascended this step, the Sastras or the collective wisdom of seekers enshrined in sacred texts, welcome him. The Sruthi, or the Vedas, directs him to “listen, ruminates, and practise” the axiomatic counsel of the sages. They assure him that he will attain the goal of release, and free himself from the delusive fascination for the visible world, portrayed for him by his own mind.

The Divine alone can be the guide, the companion and counsellor on this lone journey of man. Those styled Gurus cannot help or rescue. The Sruthis advise man to approach Gurus who are “*Srotriyas*” and “*Brahmanishtas*.” They warn man against resorting to others. What does Srotriya mean? It means a person who is unquestioningly loyal to the Sruthis or Vedas and who adheres to the rules prescribed and the limits imposed therein, without the slightest deviation. Brahmanishta means a person who is established by Brahma-consciousness. He has no doubts to pester him, no diversion to distract him. For, he has won steady faith in the Atma. He is unconcerned with the material world. He sees all worlds as Brahma, as the manifestation of the Brahma Principle. His activities and movements are in consonance with this awareness. His vision encompasses all of Time. He knows the past, present and the future. He is beyond all

characterisation; the three (modes) do not affect him. He has his being in the One and Only—the Atma. He is unaffected by distinctions and differences, dualities and disparities. He is perpetually in Ananda.

The Vedas exhort the seeker to approach such a Guru. But only one Person has all these attributes. He is Sarveswara, the Lord of All. Scholars who have learnt the truth or are proficient in principles are not in the category of Srotriya and Brahmanishta. They are not the Gurus you need.

The Yogavasistha says that Sri Ramachandra asked the sage Vasishta the question, “Divine Master! Is there a way by which death can be avoided?” This same problem drove Gautama Buddha along the path of renunciation, and forced him to give up all traces of attachment. It showered on him eternal fame, as supreme among men. Prahlada, foremost among the devotees of the Lord, addressed his fellow pupils, even as a boy, “Friends! Have you not observed some boys of our own age fall dead and get burnt or buried?” Thus, he drew their attention to the event of death and invited them to draw lessons from that inevitable fact. He taught them the higher wisdom.

Those who have the inner urge to achieve the higher wisdom which confers liberation have, therefore, to reflect upon and investigate the phenomenon of death. Death should arouse no fear. It should not be regarded as inauspicious. You should not run away from the problem, imagining that

death happens only to others, and that it will not happen to you. Neither should you postpone reflections on death, judging that they are inappropriate now, and profitless. For, inquiry into death is really inquiry into one's own Reality. This truth has to be recognised.

Viveka (discrimination), the special gift to man, has to be employed to unravel the reality of the visible Universe, its nature and validity. The fact of death is the prime cause which originates the problem. "Who am I?" So, that fact ought not to be ignored, as unworthy of attention. You should not flee from it in fear. For, if you behave so, you land yourself on the first step towards *Ajnana*, stupidity, and plant in your mind the seedling of the tree of foolishness. You prop up the pillars of Maya.

Every mystery latent in human existence is entwined with the inquiry into death. The glory and majesty of the Divine are fully revealed only when death is investigated. Among the three boons that Nachiketa asked for from Yama, the God of Death, the chief was, according to the *Kathopanishad*, the one relating to death. "Does man exist after death? Some persons declare that he does, some others assert that he does not. Each argues as his fancy leads. Which of these opinions is true? Solve this problem for me," pleaded Nachiketa, and insisted on an answer. Yama tried to avoid his pleading. He said, "Son! Nachiketa! This is an insoluble mystery. The sacred texts treat it as subtler than the subtlest. I find it impossible to make even the gods

understand this phenomenon. Nevertheless, you are craving for this boon! Why should you be troubled by this problem? You are an innocent little boy. You deserve to live long, enjoying many a happy event. I shall grant you, as boon, enormous riches; accept them and lead a life of unexcelled happiness. Ask for any quantity of material pleasure, they are yours. Come, ask and reach the height of joy."

But Nachiketa replied, "Dharmaraja! However vast the riches, however pleasant the experiences they confer, they have to receive your impact without a murmur? Nothing in creation can escape you, can they? Everything is immersed in death. Why then should I aspire for items that give only temporary relief? Grant me the boon on which my heart is set." In the *Mahabharatha*, Dharmaraja is asked to answer the question, "Name the greatest marvel in the world." And, Dharmaraja replied, "Though we see every day people dying, we do not think we would ourselves die. What can be a greater marvel than this?" Similarly, Yajnavalkya, the famous sage, after deciding that he would join the monastic order, called before him, his two wives—Katyayani and Maitreyi, and informed them that he had partitioned his movable and immovable properties, equally, for both of them. On hearing this, the elder wife, Maitreyi, who was endowed with a high level of intelligence and insight, protested and said, with a smile on her face, "Lord! Can these riches you are handing over to me save me from death and render me immortal? If you assure me that they will do so, certainly I shall accept them, with due reverence to you." Yajnavalkya explained,

“Riches make life pleasant and delightful by the chances they give you to live happily. Do you say that you do not need such valuable riches?” But Maitreyi persisted. She said, “If what you say is true, you could have continued enjoying these riches and deriving happiness therefrom. Why have you decided to give them up and become a monk? No, it is not proper to cheat us, weak-minded women, holding forth before us these delusive trinkets. How can the riches, which *you* refuse to keep, give *us* peace and happiness? These are temporary objects. They are liable to destruction. They entangle us still further in bondage. They foster the ignorance which we yearn to discard. They are the chief promoters of anxiety and worry. They are basically polluted, since they are not within the realm of the Atma.” When Maitreyi placed before him this truth, Yajnavalkya was silenced. Not knowing how to proceed, he stood with his head bent before her. Then, Maitreyi fell at the feet of her husband, and said, “Lord! You are master of all mysteries. You must have called us and placed before us this proposal, in order to test our intelligence. I have no desire for luxury or even comfort. I do not crave for riches and possessions. Instruct me, about the path that can confer eternal Bliss.” In fact, there is only ONE—the Parabrahma. The Adwaitha Sastras proclaim “*Brahma sathyam; jagat Mithya; Jeevo Brahmaiva naaparam.*” “Brahmam alone is true. Creation is a myth. The Jivi or the individual is Brahmam Itself.” All that happens in the world to man is as unreal as the dream-experience. They disappear, and appear again. The pleasures and joys experienced in life are as mirages appearing on the desert

sands of hatred, envy and selfish greed. Now, how can those persons who believe that this mirage is real and run towards it, become Gurus? Will it be proper to address them as Jnanis, the Wise? They are installed on high seats of illusory authority. They teach what they do not practise. They hold forth ideals which they themselves ignore. How can such persons be examples to seekers who need spiritual progress? They are not genuine, for, they have not even an iota of the Guru principle in them.

Sarveswara, or the Lord, alone, is the genuine Guru. For all seekers, this is the path. Let them hold fast to this faith.