

23. Why the Avathaar comes

DHEHO devaalayah proktho, Jeevo Dhevah sanaatanah---"The Eternal Supreme dwells in the temple of the human body as the newborn Jeeva. For this reason, all *avathaars* (divine incarnations) assume the human form. The scriptures have declared that the Divine submits to devotion.

In the Geetha the Lord has declared that in Man He is the power of discrimination, the *Buddhi* (intellect). Man cannot achieve greatness by the acquisition of all forms of wealth. It is intelligence that makes man respected. One who does not exercise this power of discrimination is no better than birds or beasts,

It is to raise man to a higher level that the Divine comes down as *Avathaar*. *Avathaar* means descent. To stoop down to lift up the child for coddling and to raise man, who is caught up in petty desires and trivial pursuits, Divinity descends to the human level and teaches how man can divinise himself. This is the teaching of the Geetha. All the great scriptures, the Bible, the Quran and others have originated for the same purpose. The scriptures, by themselves, cannot redeem man. They serve only as guideposts. They indicate the roads to be taken to realise the Divine.

Pilgrimages do not wipe out the sins

All *Avathaars* are *Purna Avathaars*, have all the attributes of the Divine. But the *shaasthras* (revealed scriptures) have held that the *Krishna Avathaar* alone is the complete incarnation, with all the sixteen aspects. Despite His Omnipotence, Krishna was easily accessible to the devotee. He submitted Himself to the devotee. When we are filled with devotion, the Lord is ready to serve us as our servant. The Lord is ever prepared to subject Himself to any kind of difficulty or ordeal to protect or help His devotee. Many a devotee has sung songs in praise of Krishna and lamented the fact that he had not been fortunate enough to be born during His advent and enjoyed His divine music and witnessed His divine exploits. One devotee has decried the dull-witted disbelievers who cannot shed their petty desires and seek the bliss that comes from devotion to the Divine.

Many devotees go on pilgrimages to Benares, Prayaag or other sacred places in the hope that thereby they will be absolved of their sins. Pilgrimages are not the means to wipe out sins. What is required is purification of the heart and the mind. If the mind is cleansed through saadhana (spiritual discipline), Divinity will reveal itself of its own accord. Saint Meera gave the same message when she sang a *bhajan* calling upon the mind to go to the Ganga and Yamuna. The Ganga and the Yamuna she had in mind are not the rivers in Northern India but the inhaling and exhaling breaths in each of us--the *Ida* and *Pingala naadhees*. The central spot between the brows is the *Prayaag*, the place where the Ganga and the Yamuna converge and by concentrating on this spot Krishna can be discovered. This spot is described by Meera as cool, pure and undisturbed. Inhaling and exhaling symbolise what one should take in and what one should reject and the holding of the breath (*Kumbhaka*) signifies what one should hold on to namely, Divinity. One should take in the pure things and reject the impure.

The Lord responds to the yearning of the devotees

The Geetha has laid down three directives: do not be afraid of troubles; do not forget God; do not adore what is false. It is by adhering to these three injunctions that countless devotees all through the ages have sought to realise the Divine through Saadhana.

The Bhaagavatha shows how the Lord responds to the yearning of the devotees and assuages their anguish caused by separation from the Lord. When Krishna left for Mathura, the *gopees* (cowherdesses) were languishing in grief, unable to bear the separation. They were all the time looking towards Mathura to see when Krishna would return. One day, they espied a cloud of dust and imagined that Krishna had at last relented and was returning to Gokulam. They saw a chariot and a man seated in it. The chariot stopped but there was no Krishna in it. With their hearts given over to the Supreme Lord, the *Gopees* were not inclined even to look at the strange visitor, who was none other than Krishna's very dear friend, Uddhava. Krishna, who was aware of the agony the *Gopikas* were experiencing, had sent Uddhava to offer them solace and to cheer them up.

The moment Uddhava got down from the chariot, he started delivering a long exhortation to the *Gopikas*. "Oh ye *Gopikas* !You are ignorant of the *shaasthras*. You have no wisdom. Like silly, dumb persons, you are pining for Krishna. If you know the *shaasthras*, you will realise that Krishna is ever with you. He resides in your hearts. Instead of taking delight in the Krishna that dwells within you, you are pining for the physical form of Krishna. This is due to your ignorance. I shall teach you the science of *Yoga* for which Krishna has sent me."

Uddhava and the Gopees

The *gopikas* did not consider it proper to speak directly to a stranger. They adopted the device of addressing a bee to give their reply to Uddhava. The *gopees* said: "Oh bee! These words (of Uddhava) are adding fuel to the fire that is burning in us because of separation from Krishna. Enough of these words." Uddhava then held out to the *gopikas* the letter Krishna had sent to them and said: "Here is Krishna's message to you. At least read that." One *gopee* immediately said: "Oh bee ! We are illiterate village folk. We are stricken with grief. Show us Krishna." Another *gopee* wailed: "We are being burnt by the fire of agony caused by Krishna's absence. If we touch His letter, it may be burnt to ashes. We dare not touch *it*." Yet another *gopee* said: "The tears from our eyes will stain the pearl-like letters in Krishna's epistle. We cannot endure seeing His message."

Uddhava then said: "At least listen to my message. I shall teach you knowledge of *yoga*." A *gopika* answered, addressing the bee, unable to control her grief: "Oh bee, we have only one mind and that has gone with Krishna to Mathura. If we had four minds, we could turn one to *yoga*, another to some other subject, and so on. But the only mind we had has been surrendered to Krishna. We have no room for any *yoga* lessons." Uddhava was stupefied when he realised their single minded devotion to Krishna.

The essence of all the *Vedhas* and *Shaasthras* (ancient sacred scriptures) is single-mindedness. This single-mindedness results in one-pointed devotion to God. Uddhava reflected within himself that he had not cultivated the single-minded devotion which the *gopees* had demonstrated. He decided to return to Krishna.

Raadhika's grief-stricken message to Krishna

Among the *gopees*, the foremost devotees of Krishna were Raadhika and Neeraja. Before Uddhava left, he heard them address Krishna as the Raama-parrot and pleaded for a vision of Krishna to assuage their grief-stricken hearts. Uddhava asked Raadhika, who was lying unconscious on a sand-dune, whether she had any message for Krishna. Recovering her senses, Raadhika thought only of Krishna. She cried:

*Were you a tree, growing upwards,
I would cling to you like a creeper;
Were you a blossoming flower
I would hover over you like a bee;
Were you the mountain Meru
I would cascade like a river;
Were you the boundless sky,
I would be in you like a star;
Were you the bottomless deep
I would merge in you like a river;
Where are you, Oh Krishna ?
Whither have you gone, Krishna !
Have you no pity, Krishna ! Krishna !*

Love of God is the means and the goal

On seeing Raadhika in this piteous state, Uddhava's heart melted. He realised that Krishna had sent him on this mission to the *gopees* to make him learn what is true *Bhakthi* (devotion). Uddhava realised that Krishna had enacted that episode to show to him that even those well versed in the *shaasthras* had to learn the inner truth about true devotion from the one-pointed, unalloyed devotion shown by the *gopees* towards Krishna. Love of God is the means and the goal. This was the secret revealed by the *gopees*. They saw love in everything--in the music of Krishna's flute, which filled the world with love and flooded the parched earth with love.

The Divine is in every one. But to realise it, there is only one way. It is to cultivate intense love of God. Only that day when one strives to develop such love for God is the day of Krishna's birth. Krishna is not born on every Gokulaashtami day. Krishna is born in us when we try to develop divine love as the means to overcome our bonds. To live up to the teachings of Krishna is the true way to celebrate His birthday.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 31August, 1983.