

EGOISM AND ATTACHMENT

I am not merit, nor sin,
 Neither happiness nor sorrow,
 Neither *mantra* nor holy water,
 Neither *Veda* nor *yajna*,
 Neither food nor the enjoyer of food.
 I am *Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram*
 —Truth, Goodness, Beauty
 The embodiment of *Sath-Chith-Ananda*
 —Being-Awareness-Bliss.

The above *mantra* is applicable to everybody. Man is a seeker of happiness and an aspirant for bliss. He strives ceaselessly day and night to achieve happiness and bliss. In all spheres of his life, he aims at two things: attainment of happiness and removal of sorrow. What is the inner significance of this perennial quest of man for happiness? Man's very nature is bliss. He is indeed the embodiment of happiness. He is, therefore, entitled to seek this birthright, happiness. If sugar were to lose its sweetness, it would cease to be sugar. If a rose were to lose its fragrance, it would no longer be a rose. Likewise, if a man loses his natural condition of happiness and bliss, he has forfeited his human state. If, for instance, one notices on the road a man with a sorrowful face, he enquires from him the cause for his sorrow. Such enquiry is made by every passer-by, because it is not natural for a human being to be sad. In the same bazaar, however, if somebody is going in a happy mood, no special notice is taken of him and no one questions him why he is not unhappy. For, it causes no surprise if a man is happy, because it is his natural condition.

Man has been endowed with the body, the senses, the mind and the intellect in order to experience his natural state of bliss. But unfortunately, because these faculties or gifts of God are polluted and misused, man is drowned in misery. The body is tainted with the dirt of *raga* and *dwesha* (attachment and hatred). The senses are shrouded in the soiled cloth of desires and sensuous pleasures. The mind has been polluted by all of these impurities. As a result man is unable to recognise his true nature. He is labouring under the mistaken notion that the worldly pleasures are both dependable and natural to him. In fact, these are all highly transient and ephemeral like the passing clouds.

Recognising that man's moral weaknesses are on the increase, because of the defects in the food that he takes, our forefathers devised simple but sacred ways and means for purifying the food before eating. They used to sprinkle some water on the food, chanting the *mantra*: "*Annam Brahma, Raso Vishnuh, Bhoktaa Maheswarah*" (the solid food is Brahma, the drinking water and the liquid essence of the food is Vishnu, and the enjoyer of the meal is Maheswara). In performing this purificatory rite, the partaker of food prays to the Trinity to protect him with *sathyam* and *ritam*. The invocation to the deities is to endow him with *trikarana suddhi* (the triple purity of thought, word, and deed). By this rite, the food was being sanctified as *prasad*. The so-called intellectuals of today, puffed up with pride of their talents and skills, are ignoring the efficacy and potency of *sathyam* and *ritam*.

Sankaracharya, during his victorious philosophical pilgrimage through the length and breadth of India, had to engage himself in a debate with a scholarly intellectual by name Mandana Mishra on the subject of “*medha sakthi*” (intellectual prowess). Both of them agreed on Ubhaya Bharati to be the umpire to decide who was the winner in the debate. Ubhaya Bharati was not merely a distinguished scholar but also possessed divine qualities like a pure heart and *buddhi* enriched with *sathyam*, *ritam*, *asakthi* or *sraddha*, and *stirathva* (steadfastness, cosmic rhythm, zeal or faith, and firmness respectively.) Ubhaya Bharati was none other than wife of Mandana Mishra. The choice was unique in many respects. It was remarkable that Sankara was willing to have his opponent’s wife as the judge. It was the greatest testimony to his faith in the utter impartiality of Ubhaya Bharati, because her *buddhi*, endowed with the power of discrimination and objectivity, was superior to the mere intellectual ability, which is termed *medhas*.

Students must understand that *buddhi* is more powerful than *medhas*. *Buddhi* is not mere intellectualism, as commonly understood. It is a peaceful state of the intellect endowed with *aastha* or *asakthi* (zeal or faith) and *swastha* or *stirathva* (firmness or steadfastness). This *buddhi* is the intellect, which is enriched by *ritam* and *sathyam* as well as by *yoga* and *Mahat Thathwa*. This *buddhi* has not only the power of deliberation and discrimination but also the power of deep insight, enquiry and impartial judgement. Because Ubhaya Bharati had this kind of *buddhi*, she declared that Sankaracharya had won the debate. Sankara was extremely pleased with Ubhaya Bharati’s unbiased verdict. Ubhaya Bharati then declared that in accordance with the understanding between the two contestants before the commencement of the debate, Mandana Mishra, as the vanquished, should take to *sanyasa* (monkhood) and become a disciple of Sankara. At the same time, as the devoted wife of Mandana Mishra, she decided to become a *sanyasini* (nun) herself, in conformity with the ideals of womanhood, according to which the wife should follow the husband in weal and woe. Although she was under no obligation to adopt a monastic life, she did so in order to set an example to the world. After taking *sanyasa*, Ubhaya Bharati established an *ashram* with the purpose of showing to the arrogant scholars, who relied on mere intellectual acumen or *medhas* that it was inferior to *buddhi*, which is a synthesis of several divine qualities, as mentioned above. One day when she was going to the river for a bath along with her women disciples, she saw an ascetic, who was known for his renunciation of everything in life, sleeping on the wayside, resting his head on a hollow water jug, made of a dried bottle-gourd, using it as a pillow and at the same time ensuring that nobody could steal it from him. In order to convey a lesson to the monk, Ubhaya Bharati spoke within his hearing, the following words to her disciples; “Look at that monk who has ostensibly renounced all attachments. Is it not strange that he has not given up his attachment to his worthless water jug?” On hearing these remarks, the ascetic got enraged. He thought, “After all she is a woman. Is she entitled to teach me how I should behave?” In a short while, when he saw Ubhaya Bharati returning from the river after bath, he flung his water jug at her feet as a proof of his sense of renunciation. Ubhaya Bharati quickly reacted to this, by remarking about him, to her disciples in these words: “Alas! He is not only filled with *abhimana* (attachment), but also with *ahamkara* (egoism).” Immediately the monk ran up to her, fell at her feet regardless of her being a woman, and pleaded for forgiveness of his shortcomings.

From the above episode, it is clear that the root causes of man’s bondage are *abhimana* or *mamakara* (attachment or the possessive sense of “mine”) and *ahamkara* (egoism).

Both *ahamkara* and *mamakara* are the result of consuming improper food. Bad kinds of food or food earned by foul means will plunge a man in ignorance in several ways and suppress pure thoughts from arising in him. He will forget what to talk with whom, when, where and how. The following episode in the *Mahabharatha* illustrates this point. Bhishma was a great *jnani* (man of wisdom) and also a man of great renunciation (*maha tyagi*). Sri Rama, the hero of *Ramayana*, is famous for having obeyed his father's orders for only 14 years. But Bhishma followed his father's commandments throughout his life. He got the name "Bhishma" because of his great determination and strict observance of his vows, which are unparalleled in human history. Such a great hero was very grievously wounded by Arjuna's arrows and, as a result, he fell down on the battle field on the ninth day of the Kurukshetra war.

According to his own grave determination even at that critical period of the fag end of his life, he was lying on a bed of arrows. When the Pandava brothers, along with their spouse, Droupadi approached their grandsire Bhishma to pay their homage to him he began expounding to them all aspects of *dharma* from his bed of arrows. After hearing him for a while, Droupadi suddenly burst into laughter. All the Pandava brothers were very much upset by Droupadi's unaccountable levity and considering it as an affront to the venerable Bhishma, they frowned upon her with angry looks. Understanding their distress, Bhishma calmed them down with his soft and sweet words, and told them that Droupadi, being an exemplary woman in every respect, must be having a valid reason for her laughter. He then asked Droupadi to explain the reason for her laughter, and thereby remove the misapprehension of her husbands. She replied "Revered grandsire! The lessons of *dharma*, which you should have taught to the evil-minded and wicked Kauravas, you are now teaching to my noble and virtuous husbands. This appeared to me both ironical and futile. Hence I could not refrain from laughing, although I knew it would seem impolite."

Bhishma then explained that he had been serving the Kauravas and living on their bounty. He said, "As a result of consuming the food received from such ignoble and vicious persons, my blood became polluted and all the pure thoughts in me were thereby suppressed. Now that Arjuna's arrows have drained away all that impure blood from me, the *dharma* that was lying buried deep in me, is gushing forth, inducing me to communicate it to your husbands." From this episode, students must realise what a crucial role is played by food in determining one's thoughts, words and actions.

In this connection, it may not be out of place to mention that Droupadi was a "*Maha Pativrata*"—the doyen among women who worship their husbands as veritable representatives of God and serve them in that spirit moreover there is an esoteric meaning for her name. "Droupadi" does not merely mean the wife of five husbands, namely the Pandavas. Every human being has, within him or her, five husbands in the form of five life-breaths, *prana*, *apana*, *vyana*, *udana*, and *samana*. When it is said that Droupadi lived harmoniously with all her five husbands, the allegorical meaning is that she ensured the maintenance of harmonious equilibrium among her five life-breaths, which is a prerequisite for a balanced living. In the case of most persons, one or more of these life-breaths become excited beyond the optimum limit, resulting in a loss of equilibrium and harmony among the five life-breaths, and the consequent lack of balance in life as a whole. All should try to follow the example of Droupadi in the matter of leading a life full of contentment and harmony as well as in being satisfied with simple but pure food.

You must realise that food is mainly responsible for your feeling of attachment and hatred (*raga* and *dwesha*) as well as for *ahamkara* and *mamakara* (I and mine). Regulating your food habits is extremely important for the healthy functioning of your mind and intellect. The ways of the mind are really enigmatic. The verdict of the scriptures is that when man follows the senses he becomes an animal. When he is guided by the mind, he becomes a man. One who acts according to the *buddhi*, becomes great among men, while the one who is guided by the *Atma* becomes Brahman. If you cannot follow the *buddhi*, you should at least follow the mind, so that you may at least keep up your human level. But many of you may have the doubt whether the mind itself is not prone to bad tendencies and if so, how to rely on it. The fact is that the mind is pure by itself. It is by implicitly obeying the senses that it becomes impure. Instead of indiscriminately consuming whatever the senses bring to it, if the mind places all such intake through the senses, before the *buddhi* for scrutiny and if it acts according to the decisions of the *Buddhi*, *buddhi* the mind will remain unsullied and retain its pristine purity.

Students! Till now, in this Summer Course, we have considered the body, the senses, the mind, and the intellect which are all insentient and which together constitute the *kshetra* which is also insentient by itself, but which is animated by the *Kshetrajna* (the knower of the field.) The *kshetra* and in fact the entire *srishiti* (creation) is governed by the three *gunas*—*sathwa*, *rajas*, and *thamas*. Tomorrow we shall discuss in detail about these three *gunas*, which are remarkably wonderful.