Chapter III. The External World, Internal World, and Bhagavan

Swami: Oh! When did you arrive? You were not visible anywhere outside. Are you well?

Devotee: I came two days ago. I see here a number of people everywhere outside. I hear the incessant confusion of voices. Coming from my place to avoid that confusion, I find here crowds also. Therefore, I came inside. There, it is fine, blissful, quiet. That is why I was inside the Hall. It is as quiet inside as it is restless outside.

Swami: What is special about this? It is natural. Where there is sugar, the ants gather —and between outside and inside, this is the distinction! That is the characteristic. That is how it is.

Devotee: Swami! I don't understand what You say. If You tell me in detail, I shall listen and be happy.

Swami: You yourself said, didn't you, that there is an outside and an inside? Well. Those are what we call the external world (*bahya-prapancha*) and the internal world (*antara-prapancha*). Now, which is the internal? Give me your idea.

Devotee: You want it to come from my mouth itself? It would be so good if You speak.

Swami: Well. Making the questioner give out the answers is the ancient and eternal method of teaching. If those who question gave the answers, they would clearly understand the subject. The lecturing style is now different. In olden days, all the sages enabled their disciples to understand *Vedanta* by only this method. So come on! Speak! Let us see.

Devotee: Do you ask me to speak of the objects I have seen with the eye?

Swami: Not only the eye. Tell me all that you have experienced and known through all the senses of cognition, the eye, the ear, etc.

Devotee: Earth, sky, water, sun, moon, wind, fire, stars, dusk, mountains, hills, trees, rivers, women, men, children, old persons, animals, birds, coldness, heat, the happy, the miserable, fishes, insects, diseases —like these I have seen many.

Swami: Enough, enough, that's enough! This is the world (*prapancha*). Did you see it only today? Did it exist yesterday? Will it exist tomorrow?

Devotee: Why do you ask me, Swami? It has existed like this for ages, hasn't it? Who knows for how long it will exist, or for how long it has existed?

Swami: "For how long it has existed!", you said, right? That is what we speak of as beginningless. This external world is beginningless.

Where there is "external", there must also be "internal", right? Well, have you ever seen a cinema?

Devotee: Ever seen! Why, Swami, the cinema is also part of the world (*prapancha*), isn't it? I have seen many.

Swami: What did you see? Tell me.

Devotee: I have seen many wonderful "pictures"; I have heard numerous experiences of joy and sorrow.

Swami: "I have seen," you say. The screen is one; the "picture" is another. Did you see both?

Devotee: Yes.

Swami: Did you see the screen and the "picture" at the same time?

Devotee: How is that possible, Swami? When the picture is seen, the screen is not visible; when the screen is visible the picture is not seen.

Swami: Right! The screen, the pictures, do they exist always?

Devotee: No. The screen is permanent; the pictures come and go.

Swami: As you say, the screen is permanent and the pictures come and go. For this "permanent" and "impermanent", we use the words steady (*sthira*) and unsteady (*a-sthira*), permanent (*nithya*) and impermanent (*a-nithya*), imperishable (*a-kshara*) and perishable (*kshara*).

I'll ask questions on another subject. Does the picture project on the screen or the screen on the picture? Which is the basis for what?

Devotee: The pictures project on the screen, so the screen is the basis for the picture.

Swami: So too, the external world, which is like the picture, has no permanence; it changes. The internal world is fixed; it does not change. The external has the internal as its basis, its substratum.

Devotee: But, Swami! I heard you say imperishable-perishable and permanent-impermanent.

Swami: Yes, my boy! You were speaking now of pictures; do they have names and forms?

Devotee: Haven't they? It's only because they have names and forms that the story is understood. Only then do we recollect *Ramayana* and Bharatha. There is no formless name and nameless form.

Swami: Good! That is well said! Where there is form there must be name; where there is name, there must be form. They are connected with each other. When we say, "separable relationship", it is to this relationship that we refer. Have you understood now the meaning of "cosmos (*prapancha*)"?

Devotee: I have grasped that it is identified with name and form. But Swami, I would like to hear you describe how it originated.

Swami: Do not fall into the tangle now. If we engage ourselves in describing that, it would be like getting into a mango garden without eating the fruit we have plucked —calculating the number of trees in the garden, the number of twigs on each branch, the number of fruits on each twig, and what the total price of all the mangoes would be if the price of one mango were so much. Instead of senselessly wasting precious time in the collection of this information, we should, like the person who eats the fruit, find out what is of primary importance, understand that thing first, and attain contentment and joy. Leave that alone.

What did you say is the nature of this world (*prapancha*)? This world has another name —do you know it?

Devotee: I said that the world is identified with name and form. I have heard that it is known by another name, creation (*jagath*).

Swami: This name-form world, this creation (*jagath*), is like magician's art: it is real only as long as you see it. So too, the world is real only as long as you experience with your senses (*indriyas*). That is to say, anything not experienced in the wakeful stage is taken as non-existent. Under such circumstances, we say *sat* for existence and *a-sat* for non-existence. Now what do you say of this world? Is it existence or non-existence?

Devotee: It exists in experience in the wakeful stage, so it is existence (*sat*); it doesn't exist in the deep sleep stage, so it is non-existence (*a-sat*).

Swami: Oh! Existence, non-existence (*sat*, *a-sat*), did you say? These two words together give *sadasat*, right? This is what is spoken of by us as illusion (*maya*), do you know?

Devotee: Is that illusion (*maya*) similar to magic?

Swami: Is it not? "All this is magician's work (*indra-jalam idam sarvam*)." That is what the sages have been saying for ages.

Devotee: Then there must be a performer of all this magic, right?

Swami: Certainly, there is. That magician is God. He is endowed with countless auspicious attributes. The great sages have formed a name on the basis of each attribute and a form on the basis of each name and have attained Realisation meditating on those forms, making the Attributeless attributeful and the Formless formful. Is it not their experience that is being proclaimed through a thousand tongues? In the holy scriptures (*Sastras*), *Vedas*, and *Upanishads* haven't they declared how they have realised God in their totally absorbed meditation (*dhyana samadhi*), each in their own way, according to their attitude and devotion and worship? Haven't they declared how each has been blessed with the vision of the Lord and the actual consummation of union with Him?

Devotee: Yes. Swami! I have understood that. But you said that name and form are based on attributes. Kindly explain this to me.

Swami: Certainly. We must now pay attention to such important topics only because the others are beyond your powers of imagination. Listen carefully. Since the Lord pleases all, He is known as Rama. So also He is the embodiment of love (*Prema-swarupa*); He is full of affection to His devotees; He is the ocean of mercy. In each such name and form, He has vouchsafed direct experience of the Lord (*sakshatkara*) to devotees and blessed them with union with the Divine (*sayujya*). The formless God assumes all forms in order to bless devotees.

Devotee: I am happy. I am indeed so happy, Swami! Through Your grace, I am understanding quite clearly. Just one doubt: You said that the formless Supreme Self (*Param-atma*) has countless names. Are all names and forms equal? Is there any difference?

Swami: What a question! Certainly, all names and forms are equal. Whatever name and form are worshiped, the Lord is only of that unique real form (*swa-rupa*). It is possible to realise Him through that name and form. But, the devotee should pay attention to one matter. In whichever form the Lord is worshipped, the favour prayed for, the purpose, must be one.

Devotee: What type of purpose, Swami?

Swami: Desire for liberation. The Lord alone should be loved, nothing else. Love That. Meditate on That. Concretise That. Finally, resolve to merge in That. You should have only this type of acute desire.

Devotee: True, Swami! I have understood well. As you said, I have heard many stories from the *Bhagavatha* and the *Ramayana* of people who asked the Lord all kinds of favours and brought about their own ruin. Hiranyaksha, Ravana, Bhasmasura and others are remembered for their ways from that day to this. You have said it clearly. It is something that devotees should carefully consider.

Swami: Well! There is no use simply nodding the head for everything, relishing them as "true", "true". Once it is firmly fixed in your heart that this is true and this is good, then it is necessary to put it into practice. If you say

that it is true as long as I speak and forget when you go away, this listening itself is useless. The food that is eaten is to remove hunger, not for being kept on the tongue, away from the stomach. Then hunger will start again. So also, hearing and not acting accordingly is useless.

Devotee: So far, you have discussed some important things: (1) the external world, (2) the internal world, and (3) *Bhagavan*, the Lord. Are these separate entities, like cause and effect? Or are they connected one with the other?

Swami: Think about it yourself! For this I have already sent the reply in *Prema Vahini*. It must have reached you today. Look into that. Look closely at what is said there of the relationship between "he that serves", "he that is served", and "the wherewithal of service".

Devotee: Swami, You said also perishable-imperishable (*kshara-akshara*), impermanent-permanent (*nithya-anithya*). Are there any other names too?

Swami: These two are also known as the Supreme (*Purusha*). They are said to be consciousness (*chetana*) and unconsciousness (*a-chetana*). They are also referred to as soul (*jiva*) and inert matter (*jada*). The perishable-imperishable are named in another context as higher nature (*para-prakriti*) and lower nature (*a-para-prakriti*).

If you contemplate with a clear intelligence, you will find that only names change; the thing does not change.

Devotee: Then, Swami, just as perishable and imperishable have as synonym souls (*purushas*), does *Bhagavan-tha*, the Lord, have any synonym?

Swami: Why? *Bhagavan* is well known by a very appropriate name, Supreme Lord of All (*Purushothama*), since He is the Highest of the Supreme Spirits (*Purushas*).

Devotee: Oh! How sweet! What a sweet name! Did the souls originate from the Supreme Lord of All?

Swami: Here comes the big problem. Once before you asked, "did it originate?" We must use correct words. Otherwise, we get wrong meanings. We should not say, "originating" from the Supreme Lord of All (*Purushothama*). In Him they shine. I told you before that these entities (*purushas*) are indicated by the words higher-lower nature and soul-inert matter (*jiva-jada*). The word "nature (*prakriti*)" gives the sense of essential nature (*swa-bhava*) and divine energy (*sakthi*), right?

Devotee: It does. I understand that the Supreme Lord of All is one, and His nature (*prakriti*) is the second.

Swami: No. You are mistaken. Think again. Is there any difference between a thing and its nature? Is it possible to separate and see the nature apart from the thing? Still, you said "two".

Devotee: It's a mistake, Swami. It's wrong. No one can separate them. The two are one.

Swami: In current speech we say that sugar is sweet, the sun gives light, it is hot, etc. Sweetness is in sugar, light is in the Sun. They are not separate; they are one. Sweetness cannot be known unless sugar is placed on the tongue; without seeing the sun, light and heat cannot be known. Thus, *Bhagavan* has two characteristics. When we speak of them as two, they are referred to as spirit (*Purusha*) and nature (*prakriti*), but they are really one. Nature in the *Bhagavan* (this is what is known by the name Great Illusion (*Maha-maya*) is unmanifested and inseparable, like sweetness in sugar. "Inseparable relationship" means just this relationship. By mere willing, this illusion (*maya*) envelops *Bhagavan* and manifests in the form of cosmos or *Brahma*'s egg. This is what is called Absolute-Full-World-Form. It is this Absolute that expresses itself as creation (*jagath*), through the power of ignorance (*a-vidya*) according to the divine will.

Devotee: What is this, Swami? It was all so clear so far, but this new word ignorance (*a-vidya*) has upset my train

of thought! I didn't understand anything. Please explain.

Swami: Don't be in a hurry! Have you heard the word "education (*vidya*)"? Do you know its meaning?

Devotee: Certainly. *Vidya* means study!

Swami: *Vidya* means spiritual knowledge (*jnana*). When "a" is added, it becomes *a-jnana* (ignorance). Although one, ignorance takes multifarious forms.

Devotee: Yes, Swami. How did this ignorance come about? Where did it come from?

Swami: You know, don't you, of light and darkness. Do they both exist at the same time?

Devotee: There can be no darkness when there is light nor light when there is darkness.

Swami: When there is light, where does darkness exist? When there is darkness, where does light exist? Think well.

Devotee: This subject is very difficult, Swami! Still, I will reply as best as I can. Pardon me if I am wrong. Darkness must be in light; light must be in darkness; how else can it be?

Swami: I will ask another small question. Answer me. This light and this darkness, are they independent, or are they dependent on anything else?

Devotee: They are dependent on the Sun. When the Sun rises, it is light; when the Sun sets, it is darkness.

Swami: Well, my boy, knowledge (*vidya*) and ignorance (*a-vidya*) are dependent on *Bhagavan*. Knowledge has another name: consciousness or awareness (*chit*). I will describe all that to you if you come next month. This is enough for today. Go and come. If all is eaten at the same time, it won't be digested. It would lead to bad health. What we have heard, what we have eaten, requires time to get digested and assimilated. That is why I have given a month's interval. If within that time all this is fully digested and practised, I will gladly tell you the rest. Otherwise, you can imagine what that day would be like.

Devotee: Salutations (*namaskaram*). I am indeed blessed. To digest what is heard and what is eaten —the power to do this should be vouchsafed by You alone. When everything is the Lord's, how can this alone be ours? But I will use the power and knowledge with which You have endowed me as much as possible, without any waste. Beyond that, it is all my destiny and Your grace. I will leave, with your permission.

Swami: Placing your burden on destiny and keeping quiet means diminution of effort. With effort and prayer, destiny can be attained. Without effort and prayer, destiny and grace are not gained. Start the effort! Well, my boy, go and come gladly again.