

11. The Fifth Veda

Gullapalli BuchiRamaya Sastry spoke about the *Mahabharatha* so well and with so much scholarship since he has been specialising in its exposition for years. The *Mahabharatha* is considered by many as not so conducive to devotion as the *Bhagavatha*, for instance, or the *Ramayana*, but if once you know the taste, no one will give it up or consider it as of lower value. It is called the *Fifth Veda*, not without reason. The *Vedas* reveal things that are beyond the reach of the intellect. The truths declared by the *Vedas* are made practicable and simple, interesting and instructive, by means of stories and homilies in the *Mahabharatha*.

The *Purva Mimamsa* (an inquiry into the ritualistic action part of the *Veda*) deals with the path of worldly desire and the *Uttara Mimamsa* with the path of renunciation. The *Purva Mimamsa* deals with the reason (*karana*) and the *Uttara Mimamsa* with the duty (*karyam*), which is wisdom (*jnanam*). In the *Mahabharatha*, both paths are fully explained, so it is called the *Fifth Veda*. It is the essence of *Veda* itself.

In Telugu there is a proverb, “If it is a question of listening, listen to *Bharatham* (meaning the *Mahabharatha*); if it is a question of eating, eat *gaarelu* (a kind of cake).” That is because the *Bharatham* gives in a sweet, simple style all the inspiration that one needs for this world and for the next.

Where there is dharma, victory is assured

The *Veda* spiritual discipline (*sadhana*) has four pillars on which it stands: truth, right conduct, peace, and love (*sathya*, *dharma*, *santhi*, and *prema*). They have to be practised and experienced, and their combined result, namely bliss (*ananda*) has to be enjoyed.

Krishna told the Pandavas that He did not know anything about the fateful dice game, which started the succession of calamities. “I was in Dwaraka at the time,” He said. Dwaraka means the citadel with the nine gates (*dwaras*), the body itself. Krishna is the witness of everything; anything done without His approval or without being dedicated to Him will be a failure.

The five Pandava brothers are the five vital energies (*pranas*), symbolised in story, and with the help of the Lord, they won the battle against the forces of evil. Where there is *dharma*, victory is assured. The *Mahabharatha* teaches that truth. The Pandavas had many temptations placed before them to slide back into unrighteousness (*a-dharma*), but they held on to the difficult path of *dharma* and won. The status of manhood has been won after aeons of arduous struggle, and to waste it in vain pursuits, forgetting the Divinity that has to be manifested, is indeed pitiable.

God weighs only the feelings behind prayer

Droupadi praying in distress from the assembly hall of the Kauravas is an instance in point. The *Mahabharatha* proves times and again that the Lord answers prayers that come out of faith and agony in yearning.

A cowherder called Maladhasa was determined to see the Lord as He was described in the sacred texts he had heard expounded in the village temple by a pandit. So he prayed and prayed to the “black Lord riding on the white bird” all the time his cows were pasturing in the fields. Eleven days passed, but there was no sign of the “black Lord riding the white bird”. Maladhasa had forgotten to take food and drink during all those days and had

become weak —too weak to walk or talk. At last, the Lord melted at his entreaties and presented Himself before him as an old *Brahmin*. But the *Brahmin* was not riding a white bird, nor was he black, beautifully black, as the pandit had described. So, he asked the *Brahmin* to come the next day at seven in the morning so that he may bring the pandit and verify whether He was the Lord Himself. The pandit laughed at the whole affair and refused to take part in it; but Maladhassa was so overly persistent that he agreed.

The entire village turned out on the river bank the next day, long before seven o'clock. The *Brahmin* was there, exactly as he had promised, and Maladhassa showed Him to all. But they could not see him! They began to laugh at the cowherder's antics and threatened him with a severe beating for bringing them along as butts for his joke. Maladhassa could see the *Brahmin* clearly, but no one else could. At last, he got so enraged that he walked up to the old *Brahmin* and gave him a whacking blow on the cheek, saying, "Why don't you show yourself to all?"

That blow changed the entire scene. Krishna appeared in resplendent robes, smiling face, captivating form, and the white bird. As the astounded villagers were recovering from amazement, the heavenly chariot floated down from the sky, and Krishna asked Maladhassa to sit inside it. Then, with the Lord by his side, Maladhassa rose up and was soon out of sight.

Mahabharatha is an inspiration for all time

The Lord always weighs only the feeling behind the prayer to satisfy and please. The form with quality is visible to the eye and cognisable by the senses, but something unapproachable by the senses has to be offered. In this way, action (*karma*) itself becomes worship by the addition, to the saturation point, of dedication. Attachment is the seed; feeling is the sapling; love is the tree; being-awareness-bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*) is the fruit. The *Vedas* have section on action, devotion, and knowledge (*karma*, *upasana*, and *jnana*). The *Mahabharatha* teaches all three, so, for the *Veda* tree, the *Mahabharatha* can be said to be the fruit.

You have heard that the Lord comes down when *dharma* declines. Well, the decline of the *Vedas* is equivalent to the decline of *dharma*, for *Veda* is the very root of *dharma*. There are five treasures that the good always try to guard and that you should endeavour to foster: the cow, the *Brahmin*, the *Vedas*, the *sastras* (scriptures), and chastity. If these are lost, then life is lost; everything that adds value to life is lost.

You are your own foe and friend

Where there is *dharma*, there Krishna is; so think for yourself, each one of you! How far have you deserved the grace of the Lord? You draw Him near; you keep Him far. You entangle yourself, bind yourself, and get caught in the trap. No one is your foe except yourself. No one else is your friend. You are your only friend. The *guru* shows you the road, and you have to trudge alone, without fear or hesitation.

The *Mahabharatha* clearly explains the dikes that the Eternal Universal Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*) has constructed to direct the wild flocks of the senses and the emotions into the sea, without harming the banks. Student celibate, householder, recluse in the forest, ascetic —these stages of life, with the restrictions and regulations prescribed for each, are such dikes to guard the individual and society from the upsurge of the beast in man. Even today, the *Mahabharatha* can be of great help; it is an inspiration for all time, for all humanity.

The battle between *Dharmakshethra* (the camp of the virtue-bound, noble Pandavas) and *Kurukshetra* (the camp of the egoistic, wicked Kauravas) is ever on, and however strong the Kurukshetra might appear to be, even

if it has the Yadavas (Krishna's clan) on its side, as long as the Lord is the charioteer, victory is certain for the champions of *dharmā*.

Even now, when the Chinese are pressing on the frontier, the best armour for the country is *dharmā*, which will win the Grace of God. What is not possible for a people who have won that?

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If only people knew the path to permanent joy and peace, they would not wander distracted among the by-lanes of sensual pleasure.

Just as the joy felt in dreams disappears when you wake, the joy felt in the waking stages disappears when you wake into the higher awareness, called *jnana*. Use the moment while it is available for the best of uses, the awareness of the Divine in all.

When you die, you must die not like a tree or a beast or a worm but like a human being who has realised that they are God (Madhava). That is the consummation of all the years you spend in the human frame.

Sathya Sai Baba