

10. Root or rope?

In the discourse you heard just now on the methods by which the *Shaastras* have asked man to pay his debt to the gods, the sages and the ancestors, you heard how *Sanaathana Dharma* has laid down a "thornless path" for the progress of man, from humanity to divinity! Thornless or thornful, each has to tread the path, alone and in full confidence.

Arjuna was the brother-in-law of Krishna; they were great friends too; there was obviously no time to lose, in elaborate explanations and questionings while on the battlefield. Besides, Krishna had undoubtedly the power to transform in a trice the way-ward mind of his kinsman into an illumined instrument for resolute action. But, Krishna did not use the power! He only prescribed the medicine and the regimen; Arjuna had to swallow the drug and follow the regimen himself, in order to be saved. He said, "You are My friend, you are My kinsman, you are now so near to Me that I am now your charioteer, you are also in great distress; I agree that the delusion which has overpowered you must be removed quickly; but, your *ajnaana* (ignorance) must fall off through your own efforts, not through some miracle of My design." Truth that is won by one's own struggle with untruth will be lasting treasure; the struggle strengthens one to treasure the treasure, for not all can bear the revolutionary consequences of that possession.

Unsteady mind can be tamed

Arjuna confessed to Krishna that the mind is ever agitated and restless; he said he had failed to calm it. He said it was like the wind, blowing where it listeth. There is a fine story about Karna which I shall tell you. He was applying oil to his head, preliminary to bath, from a jewelled cup. Karna had taken the oil in his right hand and robbed it well into his hair, when Krishna appeared and when Karna rose to revere Him, He said He had come to demand the cup from him as a gift! 'I am surprised that You, the Master of the Universe, have a desire for this paltry thing, but who am I to ask you questions? Here is the cup; I gift it to You,' he said, and placed it in the Lord's right hand with his left hand. Krishna took him to task for that error in *Dharma*, offering a gift with the left hand. But, Karna said, "Pardon me, O Lord ! My fight hand is smeared with oil; I was afraid that if I take time to wash the hand and make it fit to give the cup, wayward mind, which now has agreed to the gift, might discover some argument not to accede to your request; I might therefore be deprived of the unique good fortune, by the fickle mind with which I am burdened. This is the reason why I acted on the moment and passed it on to you, regardless of the breach of a rule of etiquette; please sympathise with me and pardon me", Karna pleaded. Karna knew that the mind was unsteady. But, as Krishna advised Arjuna, it can be tamed by detachment and discipline.

The mind must become the servant of the intellect, not the slave of the senses. It must discriminate and detach itself from the body. Like the ripe tamarind fruit, which becomes loose inside the shell, it must be unattached to this shell, this casement called body. Strike a green tamarind fruit with a stone and you cause harm to the pulp inside; but, strike the ripe fruit and see what happens. It is the dry rind that falls off; nothing affects the pulp or the seed. The ripe *saadhaka* (aspirant) does not feel the blows of fate or fortune; it is the unripe man who is wounded by every blow.

The secret of liberation

A king was once out hunting in the forest and while pursuing a fleeing stag, he fell into a forsaken well which was very deep, No one of his retinue knew of his plight, for the stag had

taken him far away into the woods, before his men could get trace Of him. Luckily, even as he fell, he grasped the root of a tree that was hanging aloof from the side of the well, and thus escaped the death that yawned underneath. After a few agonising hours, he heard some one reciting aloud the names of the Lord, near the mouth of the well. It was a holy man and when he caught the faint echo of the unfortunate king's cry, he let down a rope and called out to the King to hold on to it tight, so that he might be pulled up into safety. The question now before the King-was Root or Rope?

Of course the root helped him to survive, but, it had value only until the rope was offered. It would be folly to stick to the root even after the rope was ready to save. The root must be appreciated, but, thankfulness should not be exaggerated into attachment. *Samsaara* or worldly existence is like the root; the rope is the secret of liberation, through some *Mahaavaakyaa* (sacred utterance of Truth), that discloses in a flash the Truth.

Liberation is just the awareness of Truth, the falling off of the scales of delusion from the eye. It is not a special suburb of select souls; it is not a closed monopoly of expert *saadhakas*. Like the Godaavari losing its form, its name and its taste in the sea, liberation dissolves the name and form, aptitudes and attitudes. You are no more a separate, particular, individual. The rain drop has merged in the sea, from where the drop arose. Of course there was no bondage, at any time, and no prison; there was only a fixation in the mind that one was bound, that one was in prison, that one was limited and finite!

Caution to be observed regarding food

To purify the mind and the intellect for the correct reflection of the Truth, the first caution is in regard to food. Indeed, this is a very serious matter *for saadhakas*. There lived in Malur, Mysore State, a pious Brahmin who was a great scholar. He had an equally pious wife, He was always intent *on puja* and *japa-dhyaana* and was known far and wide for his virtuous character. One day, a *sanyaasin* (mendicant) called Nithyaananda came to his door seeking alms; so, he was happy beyond measure. He invited the monk to take dinner with him the next day so that he might honour him with due hospitality. He hung green festoons over his doors and made elaborate arrangements for the reception.. But, at the eleventh hour physical impurity rendered his wife unfit to prepare food for the honoured guest or for any one else. A neighbour volunteered to cook the meal and she was brought in and introduced into the kitchen.

Everything went off well and all were happy as they could be, under the circumstances. Only, the monk was wrung during meals by an overpowering desire to steal the silver cup which the host had placed near his plate. In spite of his best efforts, the evil idea won and the monk hurried to his abode with the cup hidden in the folds of his robe. He could not sleep that night, for his conscience pricked him so. He felt he had brought disgrace on his *Guru*, and on the rishis (sages) whom he invoked by the *manthras* he recited. He could not rest until he ran back into the Brahmin's house and, falling at his feet, restored the article with tears of repentance trickling down his cheeks.

Every one wondered how such a saint could stoop so low; then, some one suggested it might be the fault transmitted to the food he ate, by the person who cooked it. And, when they examined the history of the neighbour, they found that she was an irrepressible thief! The thieving tendency had by subtle contact affected the food she prepared. This is the reason why spiritual aspirants are advised to live on fruits and tubers only when they reach a certain stage of spiritual achievement.

Wants of man are neverending

The saadhaka must welcome obstacles, for, they are but challenges, opportunities to prove one's mettle, to help one in overcoming attachment to the body. *Shivam* has no fear; only *shavam* (corpse) fears. This is Shivarathri, the Night of Fearlessness, of Auspiciousness, of *Mangalam*. You are happy you have come on pilgrimage here' but let Me tell you one thing: unless you control the stream of desire that springs in the mind, this is just wasted opportunity. If your wish is fulfilled, you revere Me; if it is not, you revile Me. That is how desire debases you.

When one wish is fulfilled, ten rise in its place. For, there is no dearth of want; the same person has come to Me seeking success at the examination, then, a job, then a father-in-law, then a child, then a rise in the salary, a transfer to a cheaper place, a seat in the Medical College for the son--a never-ending series of wants, until at last, he comes seeking My Grace for an end to worldly pursuits and for initiation into the path of spiritual liberation! *Chintha* (anxiety) is what such people dwell on. *Chintha* means, in Telugu, the tamarind tree. They dwell on the tamarind tree, the Chintha tree; but, My tree is the 'Santhosha tree, the Tree of Joy'.

Man is worse than even a dog, for he forgets favours received; he denies his master; he trusts the ear, even though the eye belies the ear. He behaves as if he has two tongues; whom he praises to the sky today, he belittles and disbelieves the next. The dog knows its master, whatever role he may put on in the play--king, servant, clown. It is grateful for the leavings on your plates, which it is allowed to lick after your dinner. But, man has no gratitude even for the *amritha* he gets.

Give up attachment and be free

No one can liberate you, for no one has bound you. You hold on to the nettle of worldly pleasure and you weep for pain. The kite is pursued by crows so long as it carries the fish in its beak; it twists and turns in the sky trying to dodge the crows who seek to snatch the fish; tired at last, it drops the fish. That moment it is free. So give up the attachment to the senses, then grief and worry can harass you no more. The kite sits on a tree, preening its wings, enjoying its happiness. You too can be so happy, provided you drop the fish you have in your beak.

When you know that thieves have broken into your neighbour's house, you become extra-cautious and every night, before you retire, you examine every lock and bolt in the house. When you know that death has carried away a victim from the house next door, why do you not examine yourselves, whether you are equipped to meet it when it comes for you? Why do you immerse yourselves in distractions like building houses, piling bank-balances, celebrating picnics, contesting elections? Engage yourselves rather in things that will make you immortal, serve your best interests by service to the world. Seek your own reality? That is what a wise man should do.

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