

35. The first step

Man is endowed with memory, as well as the faculty to forget. Both these are useful skills. Perhaps, the power to forget is even more important, for, otherwise, man will have to lament over the loss of millions of parents and kinsmen he had in millions of previous births; man will remember and resent the many insults and injuries he has suffered in this birth. Luckily, he forgets all that. He remembers only those things that have impressed him as significant, or crucial, namely, the date of his marriage, the names of those who have to pay him money, etc. The tragedy is, he has forgotten the most significant and crucial thing about his earthly career---the key to happiness and liberation, his real Name and Identity!

Man cannot afford to forget who he is and for what purpose he has come. He must know the answer to the questions' "*Kasthwam, koham, kutha aayaathah?*" as Shankara said. "Who are you, who am I, where am I going, where did I come from, what is the nature and purpose of all this movement and change, is there any stable base, any goal or aim, direction or director?"--these questions cannot be brushed aside from the mind of man. They come to him and harass him, when he is alone with something grand and awe-inspiring in Nature, or with some incident, terrible and shocking, in his own experience. It is not wise to forgo these precious moments and turn once again to the humdrum of life, without pursuing the inquiry to which one is prompted.

The disciple must have the yearning

But, man forgets: he ignores. He mistakes the unreal to be the real. He is deceived by appearance; he does not peer behind the veil. He misleads himself and others. He takes *sunna* as *venna*, (slaked lime as butter), since both are white; but, what a difference in quality and effect? The baby sucks its thumb and derives immense satisfaction and joy therefrom; we know that it has no taste, no sweetness. But, the baby weeps when the thumb is pulled out. The sweetness in the thumb was imposed on it, by the baby itself. So too, the happiness that one derives from the world is not the nature of the world; it is subjective; it is only the projection, upon the world, of the happiness the *Aathma* (the self) is capable of deriving, of which it is the source and goal. The baby imagines the thumb to be an external object which is providing it with pleasure; but, it is only itself.

The Guru warns 'and wakens. He reveals the truth and encourages you to progress towards it. Unless, you have the yearning, the questioning heart, the seeking intelligence, he cannot do much. The hungry can be fed; he who has no hunger will discard food as an infliction. *The Guru* is a gardener, who will tend the plant; but, the sapling must have sprouted before he can take charge. He does not add anything new to the plant; he only helps it to grow according to its own destiny, quicker perhaps, more fully perhaps, but, not against its inner nature. He removes poverty by pointing to the treasure that lies buried in the very habitation of man; he advises the method of recovering it, the vigilance needed to use it to the best advantage, etc.

Money has a fascinating influence

There was a man once who was afflicted with extreme miserliness. He never parted with cash, on any pretext. But, when his father died, he had to get his scalp shaved, in order to satisfy the requirements of the *Shaastras* (scriptures) and public opinion. The barber demanded an impossible sum; the miser higgled quite a lot and the fellow's rate was brought down to one paisa. The miser did not clinch the bargain at that price; he bargained still and asked that he should shave two heads for one paisa! The barber agreed, for, he guessed that since the dead man

had only one son, there was no second candidate for the razor. But, the miser after the barber had finished with him, called out his wife and insisted that she too must be shaved, before payment could be made! Money has such a fascinating influence on some foolish individuals.

One has to practise detachment at every step, or else, greed and miserliness will overpower the finer natures of man. That nature is Divine, because, God is the very substance of which man is but a name and form. To realise it, one has to possess and develop the discrimination between the unchanging and the changing, the permanent and the temporary. *Saadhana-Chatushtaya: Nithyaanithya Viveka* i.e., knowing that the Universe is constantly subject to change and modification and that *Brahman* alone is unmodified; *Iha amuthra-phala-bhoga-viraaga*--detachment from the pleasures of this world as well as the pleasures obtainable in Heaven after attaining the conviction that they are evanescent and fraught with grief; *Sama damaadi-shatka sampaththi*---attaining the six desirable qualifications' the control of external and internal senses and sensory promptings: fortitude in the midst of grief and pain, of joy and victory; *uparathi*---withdrawal from all activity that brings about consequences that bind; *shraddha*---firm faith in the Teacher and the Texts that he expounds; *samaadhaanam*---even contemplation on the basic *Brahmam*, without being disturbed by other waves of thought. Though milk is under formation throughout the body of the cow, you have to resort to the four teats, in order to get it; so also these four *saadhanas* or teats have to be pressed (into service) if spiritual knowledge is to be gained.

Reform your habits to win Lord's Grace

This world is 'unreal', in the sense that a dream is unreal. You sleep in the verandah of the *Mandhir* (temple) here and you dream you are in Kasi, bathing in the Ganga. You feel the cool comfort, the holy satisfaction. It is very real at the time. But, when did you actually go? And how did you transport yourself? The *Jnaani* (the liberated person), from his more genuine awareness, asks the same question about the experiences of your waking state!

Here, I must tell you one thing. Which dreams are real? Dreams relating to God are real. You see Me in the dream, I allow you to do *Namaskaam* (prostration), I bless you, I grant Grace...that is true; that is due to My will and your *saadhana* (spiritual practice). If the Lord or your *Guru* appears in dream, it must be the result of *sankalpa* (His will), not due to any of the other reasons which cause dreams. It can never happen as result of your wish.

Above all, try to win Grace by reforming your habits, reducing your desires, and refining your higher nature. One step makes the next one easier; that is the excellence of the spiritual journey. At each step, your strength and confidence increase and you get bigger and bigger instalments of Grace. There was a wicked man once who heard quite by chance a religious discourse which affected him much. He went to a great sage and offered himself as his disciple. He asked him how he spent his days. The reply was, "I gamble by day and break into houses for theft at night. I revel in falsehood, both day and night." The sage said, "I shall accept you as my disciple, provided you give up one of these three; you must make some sacrifice, to deserve this favour". The man pondered for some little time: "I cannot give up gambling, I find it so exciting; I cannot give up house- breaking, for, that is the only means of earning livelihood that I know; well I shall give up telling lies." So, he gave word that he will no longer utter lies and was accepted. The Sage was glad that he had fallen into the trap; now he could not escape.

'Thief' appointed Minister for speaking truth

That night the man decided to break into the palace itself. He dodged the guards and climbed up to the terrace and was stealthily creeping along the wall on the edge, when some one accosted him, with the question, "Who goes there?" He spoke the truth, "I am a thief; who are you?" The man who accosted him was the King himself; he had come out on the terrace, for the breeze was pleasant there. He replied, "I am also thief. So, they decided on joint efforts, dividing the spoils half and half. The thief proposed that they break into the palace treasury; the new companion said he knew where the keys were; so, he escaped into the darkness and brought the keys. They both got into the treasury and divided the loot half and half. But, they found there three big diamonds, big and beautiful. The King took one, the thief another and the third was left where it was, with mutual consent, for as the thief said, "Let the unfortunate King who has lost his all have at least this one gem as a consolation." Then, they parted, but, not before the thief replied to a question from the King. "Where do you live?" The thief, who had given up lying, had to give his correct address and he did.

The next morning, news spread that the treasury had been burgled and the King deputed his Chief Minister to proceed to the treasury and take stock. He went and saw the things lying helter-skelter amidst open boxes and safes. He found one big fine diamond, which had evidently escaped the eyes of the miscreants. He pocketed the precious gem and after a few minutes spent there, he came to the Royal presence and described the scene and the loss. The King asked that the thieves known to the police be brought before him, including one whose address he himself gave. They were brought, but the King interrogated the one whom he had indicated specially. He revealed that he and 'another' who had already broken into the palace had shared the loot half and half from the treasury the previous night. The King asked him about the diamonds. He said that one of the three was left behind; they took only one each. He was pledged to speak the truth. The king knew that the Minister must have appropriated the third and so, he ordered a search of the minister in open court. Needless to say, it was retrieved from his pocket and the Minister was revealed as an unreliable fellow. The King, thereupon, dismissed him on the spot and appointed the 'thief as the Minister, instead.

The Guru should guide the disciple

Now that he was Minister, the thief gave up stealing, for, there was enough and more, so far as means of livelihood were concerned. There was no time to gamble either. He became famous as an upright efficient Minister. The *Guru* was drawn by stories of his efficiency to visit the city and, when the Minister saw him, he fell at his feet in gratitude for the way in which he had reformed him.

That is how the first step works. It makes further steps possible with much less effort. The *Guru* must persuade you to take that first step, by describing the shame of standing still or going back and by pointing out the pleasures of the journey and the magnificence of the goal. Not all *Gurus* now enjoying that status are capable of this. The disciples rule them and guide them, rather than their guiding the disciples. There was a shepherd boy, who was elevated to the position of a *Guru*; he uttered two sounds, always the two, Thurrur thurrur and Thak thak thak. The disciples discovered meanings in those sounds and saved the reputation of the *guru*. They said that the *guru* was declaring that a life spent in material pursuits is just thurrur, and clays spent in vain pastimes without *seva* (service) of the Lord are to be condemned as thak thak thak! If the *guru* bends and yields to the whims and fancies of the disciples and is afraid to lose their loyalty or is

anxious to win it, then, he is the servant of the disciple, not his master! The disciple must learn to follow the commands of the *guru*; that is the best way to benefit by his wisdom.

I command you on this *Guru Pournima* to do *geetha saadhana*; that is enough to grant you liberation. Many people ask Me, "Swaami! Give me a *Naamam* (name of God) which I can repeat." Take any *Naamam* you like, any name which appeals to you. All His Names are equally sweet. It is only a crooked intellect that will discover difference between one Name and another. There is an American lady here who is keen on liberation. The nationality does not matter at all. All belong to the State of God.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 14- 7-1965

Perfect freedom is not given to any man on earth.

Lesser the number of wants, the greater is the freedom.

Hence perfect freedom is absolute desirelessness.

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