

12. Enemy number one

THE world today is rolling in a sick-bed, afflicted with fear, anxiety and all types of phobia. It is not as if there is no remedy to cure it and make it whole and healthy again. What is the treatment that can set the world right? Man must realise his high destiny, his precious heritage and his innate strength and virtues. That will remove the hatred, greed and suspicion that have caused this morbid situation. Developing the bond of brotherhood is the remedy suggested by various practitioners. But that is not enough. Peace and harmony cannot be ensured when people tell themselves that they are brothers. We find that brothers and sisters born of the same mother fight against each other, seldom placing full trust in each other: They pollute their minds with anger and envy and render their lives miserable. Filial reverence and fraternal co-operation are mostly absent today among mankind. They fight for shares in property and spend most of their time and money in courts, trying to wreak vengeance against one another.

As a consequence of pride in one's own strength and power a person might injure thousands, but the pride will injure that person most, being like a devil (difficult to exorcise) that possesses man. Man cannot claim to be man until this ego, that prompts him to ruin others and ride over others, is destroyed by *saadhana* (spiritual discipline). The Geetha directs man to be "*nir-mamo, nir-ahamkaarah*" (without 'mine' and 'I'). The Divine in him can manifest only when the dark forces of 'mine' and 'I' are rendered ineffective. To overpower the ego is a well-nigh impossible task.

We have heard of the six internal foes that haunt man every moment of his life. But the sense of 'I' and 'mine' are far more deep-rooted. People have conquered the six foes---lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and hatred. Indeed there are many who have achieved this victory. But rare indeed is the-hero who has demolished his ego and escaped from its nefarious urges.

Egotism makes enemies of fast friends

Egotism is a thorny bush which, when planted and fostered in one's heart, one has to pay the penalty. Egotism makes enemies of fast friends and ruins many good causes and projects, for it does not allow two good men to work together. Grief follows it like a shadow. Where there is no ego, joy, peace, courage, co-operation and love flourish. When man is aware that the same Divine Consciousness that motivates him is equally motivating all others, then love ousts the ego into the background and takes charge of man's activities, words and thoughts.

When ego is awake, no wisdom can appeal

Consider this incident: A man suddenly loses his son and is in great grief. So a neighbour goes to him and tries to console and comfort him by various arguments and anecdotes. "My dear friend! Why is a man born? Why does he die? The reason why he was born also explains why he died. Birth means death. Fate plays strange games with us. We are but puppets in the show. What is the good of grieving over the dead?" He pours into the ears of the bereaved person all the *Vedhaantha* (philosophy of detachment) he knows. But the grief continues as before until the man becomes aware of the truth himself, unaided.

A few months later, the neighbour loses his son. Now the man who received all the *Vedhaantha* a few months ago comes to him and repeats the same questions seriatim, He says that one lives only so long as one's *karma* (destined activity) lasts, and that one's life is cut short when one has no more *karma* to atone for. It is all a question of paying off old debts. But these statements do

not console the aggrieved neighbour, for the loss is entirely his. When ego is awake, no wisdom can appeal. The feeling, 'my son,' is the root cause of one's grief and another's calm.

We build a house for ourselves and are happy it is 'ours.' When some one pastes a cinema poster on the wall, we feel 'our house' is tarnished and we even go to court to punish the offender. When the election time comes around the walls are disfigured by loud and loathesome slogans, and we quarrel with all and sundry for defacing 'our' walls. Some time later we sell 'our house' to someone and move off. After that, even if the house is bombed, we are not in the least worried.

It was the ego that caused all the worry so long. How does this egotism get into our system? Is it a weed that grows in us and is cultivated by us until it destroys us root and branch? Where was this ego in the beginning? Where were we before we were born? Where will we be after we die?

All our ideas and inferences are but products of the period between birth and death. When the girl you married was seriously ill as a child, you did not worry for she had not become 'yours.' We ourselves develop this attachment, as a cohesive and stabilising factor in life. But we then allow it to grow into huge dimensions, till it hinders our spiritual progress. Cultivate love, not delusion. Love your wife and children and do your duty towards them as a husband and a father. But always hold on to the true values. Do not lose your sense of proportion.

All kinship is basically only physical

Take this illustration: There is an areca-nut palm, swaying, tall and slim, in the wind, It has a long shadow, also swaying, on the sandy ground below. God is the truth and the world is His shadow. You desire to pluck a few nuts, but mistaking the shadow for the tree, walk along the thin dark line and clutch the shadow nuts. This is your delusion. But climb the tree, the truth. You get the fruits, while your shadow also appears hopping along the thin dark line plucking nuts. So proceed on the path of love, the path of God, and you can get both the worlds. Love will expand your heart so much that you cannot escape from your duties .to your kith and kin. Remember always that wife, son, mother---all kinship is basically only physical, body-bound, time-limited.

The ego brings wave after wave of wants and wishes before your attention, and tempts you to attempt to gain them. It is a never ending circle. So try to reduce your wants and expand the range of your love in order to be free from the coils of your ego. Living involves many confrontations, companionships, separations, conflicts and neglects. We have to give up both the types of contacts---*viyoga* (the repugnant separation) and *samyoga* (the pleasant union). Attach yourself to God, and the delusion of the world will automatically fall off. Take the case of Hiranyaaksha, Hiranyakashipu, Kamsa, Raavana and the rest. They had all the wealth and power to be happy and peaceful. But they were ruled over by their ego, which finally led them to ruin.

Monks should be free from egotistic pride

The ego attacks the sage, the scholar, the teacher and the devout spiritual aspirant, even more than ordinary men. Their ego makes them proclaim that they, can defeat all others in controversy, that they are the most learned and that they are the ones nearest God. When egotism enters man, envy follows fast and occupies the heart.

Some *Gurus* who have religious institutions under them, laugh at you when you tell them that you are proceeding to Puttaparthi for this year's Dhashara. "So you have also become a victim of this Sai Baba madness?" they tease you. Instead they should be pleased and say, "Good! You

should gladly go to any place where you can get peace of mind, where you can acquire *aanandha* (divine bliss) and become aware of Divinity. I am glad you have secured such a place. God is One and is Omnipresent."

Monks wearing ochre, robes should be free from egotistic pride and envy. I always tell you that God is present everywhere, in everyone; that all names and forms are His. I direct you to go to any place where you can carry on *saadhana* quietly, where you sense the atmosphere of Divinity and where you receive love and can cultivate love through service.

When Arjuna reduced to ashes the huge Khandava Forest, his ego did not raise its head. But when he stood before the Kaurava army, the ego told him to flee. He had made enormous preparations for the fray; he had amassed specially destructive weapons after years of austerity and adventure.

When Krishna offered to mediate with the Kauravas and gain some token of their having yielded to the entreaties of the Paandavas so that war could be averted. Arjuna argued with Him and told Him that His mission was bound to fail: "Can jasmine flowers yield fragrance when thrown into fire? Why waste Your sweet words of persuasion on their deaf ears? Can life-sustaining nectar be got from life-killing poison? You may please yourself by going amidst them. For myself, I am all for battle, this very moment."

Arjuna who was so bold and bellicose, was suddenly attacked by the delusion of egotism. He said, "I have no desire to rule over a burial-ground, I would rather beg and eke out my livelihood than kill these kinsmen of mine." Then Krishna told him in the Geetha, '*nir-mamo nirahankaarah prashaanthim adhigachchathi*' ---"He who is devoid of the 'I' and 'mine' tendencies, these are not mine, 'this is I' and 'this is not I,' he alone can attain *Prashaanthi* (the Higher Peace)."

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