

24. Purity of Heart: the path to Divinity

"Heaven and hell are not far away places.

They are related to one's actions.

It you sow a neem seed, will you get a wood-apple tree ?

Your birth is the result of your Karma."

KARMAANUBANDHEENI Manushya Loke (Man is bound by actions). *Brahma mayam Jagath* (The Cosmos is permeated by Supreme Reality). *Karmamayam Jagath* (The Cosmos is permeated by action). *Shrishti* (creation) is *Brahman* (Eternal Absolute). All action is impelled by the *Jeeva Shakthi* (Life Force). The vesture worn by this Life Force is the body. The body is the agency for the performance of *Karma*. It is also the product of karma (one's past actions). In a sense, the body and *karma* are one.

The actions performed by men are described as *karmas*. To reap the fruits of their actions, they take birth in bodies. Hence, man is represented as bound by karma. It is for experiencing the results of one's good and bad deeds that one takes birth.

Religious practices will not lead to God-realisation

We are familiar with the pairs of opposites like good and bad, sin and merit, truth and falsehood. The performance of *Vaidheeka Karmas* (prescribed religious rites) like *Yagnas*, *Yaagas* (sacrificial rites) charity and penance, is regarded as *Punya Karmas* (meritorious actions). While engaged in these acts, if a person is concerned with worldly gains, *Ahamkaara* (egotism) arises. There is the feeling, I am doing these sacred rites. On the other hand, indulging in evil deeds like fraud, cruelty and deceit, man forgets his higher nature and is oblivious to the consequences of his actions. Involvement in actions, whether good or bad, results in bondage.

The chains that bind may be made of gold or of iron, but they are chains all the same. Good deeds alone cannot be the means of liberation. The *Vedhas* (ancient spiritual scriptures), *the Upanishaths*, *the Geetha* and the *Brahma Suuthras* have declared that rituals and religious practices will not lead to God-realisation. As they are external acts, they are related only to the body. They are not conducive in any way to the development of the inner vision. Only when one is able to get rid of egotism and attachment can one develop the inner vision. *Saakshaathkaara* (realisation of Divinity) and *Brahma praapthi* (mergence in the *Brahman*) cannot be attained by rituals. "*Advaita Darshanam Jnaanam*"-- Perception of the Unity of the Divine is Wisdom. The sense of duality must be eradicated to realise the oneness of the Absolute.

Aathma Jnaana (knowledge of the true Self) dawns in man when he has *Chithashuddhi* (purity of the heart). This purity can be achieved only through *Karmas*. The body, the mind and the *Aathma*, all three are involved in the human entity. They are inextricably interdependent. When they become disparate, life loses its meaning. When the body is subject to the mind and the mind is controlled by the *Aathma*, life finds fulfilment. When the body alone is predominant, the human descends to the level of the animal. When the mind prevails over the body and the sensory organs, the human level is attained. When the *Aathma* prevails over the mind and the body, Divinity is realised.

Purification of the heart is the basic goal of life

Recognising this fact, the Geetha has indicated a three-stage path to divinity. Engaging the body in good deeds, using the mind to develop good thoughts and human qualities and to contemplate on God through *Upaasana* (worshipping the Divine) man reaches the stage when, like a river joining the ocean, he merges in the *Brahman*. This is the process by which the human becomes one with the Divine.

Whatever scriptures one may study, whatever *saadhanas* (spiritual efforts) one may practise or pilgrimages one may make, unless one succeeds in getting rid of the impurities in the heart, life will remain worthless and meaningless. Purification of the heart is the essence of all scriptural teachings and the basic goal of life.

In this context, the Geetha refers to *Swadharma* (duties that accord with one's nature) and *Paradharma* (duties prescribed for others) and says that *Swadharma* is conducive to the ennobling of the individual, while *Paradharma* is fraught with fearful consequences. *Swadharmo nidhaanam shreyah Paradharmo bhayaavaha*, "Adhering to one's *dharma* is commendable, while practising *Paradharma* is full of dangers." *Swadharma* does not mean the *dharma* (duty) relating to any caste, community, race or religion. *Swa* means *Aathma*. It is the *dharma* that is related to *Aathma*, that is *Swadharma* (Divine duty). *Paradharma* is *dharma* related to the body consciousness. All duties associated with the external world are comprised in *Paradharma*. These duties will inevitably involve one in the bonds of *Samsaara* (worldly life). Though they may confer temporary pleasures they are bound to result in fear and anxiety.

In performing good deeds do not develop ego

In performing *Yaagas*, *Yajnas* and other *Vedhic* rituals, there is the danger that they may become instruments of bondage. We must ensure that in performing these good deeds, we do not develop ego or attachment. "When anything is done with attachment or desire, it results in actions which lead to rebirth. *Yaagas and Yajnas* are expected to take one to *Swarga* (heaven). But how long can the stay in heaven last? When the fruits of the good deeds have been enjoyed, one has to be born again on earth. "*Ksheene punye marthya lokam vishanthi*" (When the accumulated merit is exhausted, one re-enters the mortal world).

One must therefore seek what is permanent and eternal. That can be realised only through *nishkaama karma* (desireless action). Every action done without ego leads to divinity. Ignoring this truth, man indulges in meaningless actions. People recite the Geetha, achieve proficiency in expounding it, but do not live up to the message. The Geetha is interpreted in many ways, according to one's whims and fancies. The Geetha and other scriptural texts are like the *Kalpavriksha* (the Wish-fulfilling Tree). They lend themselves to varied interpretations and meanings. But, what matters is not the manifold interpretation, but the understanding derived from actual experience. Without putting into practice the teachings of the Geetha, we cannot derive the bliss that can be got from it. Reciting the Geetha endlessly or listening to it will be of no avail if nothing is done to purify one's heart and get rid of evil qualities like ego, selfishness and pride. It is better to put into practice a single stanza of the Geetha than to get by heart all the 700 slokhas.

No spiritual study or *saadhana* can help to purify one's heart unless one makes the effort himself. And when the heart is purified, it becomes a worthy abode for the Divine.

Whatever you do you must regard it as a duty done without any motive of self-interest or selfish gain. It is only when all actions- whether they be *Yaagas* or *Yajus* or *Thapas* or any kind of *saadhana*--are done as offerings to the Divine, will they become sanctified and liberating. Through *Icchaashakthi* karmas (desire filled actions) we take birth, through *anaasakthi* karmas (desireless actions) we can attain freedom from re-birth.

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Go gives both protection and punishment; for how can 'He be the Lord, if he does not insist on strict accounting and strict obedience?

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