

18. The Avatar as the Ideal

Men seek a good time, position and good life

But will not cultivate good thoughts, wisdom or right conduct.

Do you know why legs have been given?

Is it to roam aimlessly in alleys and bylanes?

No. It is to take to the shrine of Lord Siva.

Do you know why you have been endowed with eyes?

Is it to gaze on all kinds of things?

No. It is to behold the Lord of Kailasa..

WHAT the nation needs today is idealism. Society and the world need the inspiring examples of ideal leaders. There are, no doubt, individuals who are exemplars in their particular fields. But it is rare to find any one person who is an ideal in every respect. It is possible for God alone to be such an ideal. Lord Sri Krishna stands out as a unique ideal figure, exemplifying the highest qualities in every respect--social, political, ethical and spiritual.

That Krishna was a war-monger and not a lover of peace has long been a matter for discussion. But Krishna was essentially a lover of peace. The ways of the Divine are not necessarily intelligible to all.

Today people worship God as God but do not try to understand the ideal human qualities displayed by an *Avatar*. It is only when the human ideals exemplified by Sri Krishna, when He incarnated as man and lived and moved amongst men, are recognized that human life can be rendered meaningful. It is worth examining in what manner Krishna displayed these marks of human excellence.

Dharmaja and Arjuna lose patience

The great Mahabharata war was on. Each of the Pandava brothers was involved in separate encounters. Dharmaja, the eldest brother, was engaged in a fierce battle with Karna. The Pandava forces could not withstand the missiles coming from Karna. Dharmaja was under great strain. The Pandava forces were fleeing. Dharmaja retired to his tent in great anguish, unable to bear reverses in the battle. At that moment Arjuna entered his brother's tent. On seeing him, Dharmaja flew into a rage. Burning with anger, Dharmaja burst out at Arjuna that all his prowess and the power of his mighty bow, Gandiva, had been utterly useless. He went on railing at Arjuna. Unable to suffer these accusations, Arjuna lifted his Gandiva and was about to strike Dharmaja. At that very moment Krishna appeared there.

Krishna tried to pacify Arjuna. He said, "Arjuna! it is not mete that you should raise your arm against your elder brother. The primary trait of brothers is to show respect towards elders and earn their regard. Forgetting your duty you have allowed yourself to be provoked by words and resorted to wrongful action." Krishna advised Arjuna strongly in this manner. He requested Dharmaja to withdraw and gave proper advice to Arjuna on how he should conduct himself. Assuaged by Krishna's appeal and accepting his wise counsel, Arjuna retired to his tent.

Example in humility

Proceeding next to Dharmaja's tent and seeing the agony he was experiencing, Krishna bent down and held Dharmaja's feet. Krishna told him: "Dharmaja! It is not fitting that an elder brother like you should behave in this fashion. It is not right that you should blame your younger brother Arjuna in such strong language. You may have used these words only in a fit of anger. You Pandava brothers who have been an example to the world in brotherly love, should not allow discord to mar your unity. The Pandavas are looked upon as an ideal for the world. You should live up to that reputation. Therefore, you must go immediately to Arjuna and seek his forgiveness."

Listening to Krishna's loving words, Dharmaja was in tears. "*Swami*", he said, "for you, the prop and sustainer of the world, to hold my feet makes me feel ashamed." Begging Krishna to forgive him, Dharmaja went forthwith to Arjuna and appealed to him to forgive him.

Those who look at these actions as acts of God may consider them too trivial and small for the Divine to undertake. "Why should the Almighty Lord Krishna demean Himself in this way?" some critics might ask. But the ideals which the Divine seeks to exemplify for mankind are revealed only through such small incidents.

Out of His abundant love for His devotees, the Lord does many things some of which may not seem right. All of them are done entirely out of concern for the well-being of the world. They are intended to serve as guidelines to society.

God declares the truth without mincing words

To set an example to the world, the Lord engages Himself in apparently trivial activities and teaches the lessons to be learnt from them. God sets an example in humility and reverence. On occasions, the Lord (in human form) can be harsh and relentless. He will declare the truth without mincing words. Here again Krishna provides the example.

Dharmaja wanted to perform the *Rajasooya Yajna* (sacrificial ritual for Paramountcy) after getting the approval of the citizens and the ministers and priests. Dharmaja sought Krishna's blessings for the performance of the *yajna*. After listening to Dharmaja's proposal, Krishna smiled and said, "Only a supreme sovereign ruler, whose suzerainty is accepted by all rulers in the country, can perform such a *yajna*. You are not such a sovereign emperor. There are quite a few rulers like Sisupala, Jarasandha and Dhanthavakra, who do not recognise your power. As long as there are such kings, you are not qualified to perform the *Rajasooya Yajna*."

Krishna's actions in Statecraft

Krishna thus wanted to dissuade Dharmaja from proceeding with his plan. At all times, Krishna never hesitated to tell the truth, without regard to persons, place or circumstance. He told Dharmaja that if he wanted to perform the *Rajasooya Yajna* he should first conquer these powerful rulers.

Misinterpreting the purport of Krishna's advice, some people characterised him as an instigator of wars. Krishna did not call on Dharmaja to go to war. All that he told him was about the qualifications required for performing the *Rajasooya Yajna*. Then, Dharmaja took counsel with his brothers and effected the conquest of Sisupala, Jarasandha and others. Krishna's actions in the field of State craft should be properly understood.

When the *Rajasooya Yajna* began, each of the brothers was allotted a specific function. Krishna also approached Dharmaja respectfully and pleaded for some function to be assigned to him, saying: "As the world sees it, you (Dharmaja) are the overlord and I am the subject. Hence, please assign to me some task in this Yajna." Dharmaja was distressed at this request, coming as it did from one whom Dharmaja regarded as All-Knowing Omnipresent Lord. Dharmaja said: "I owe everything to you. You are the ruler and I am only your servant." Krishna replied: "What you have said as a devotee is true. But from the worldly point of view, as a king you have to respect the obligations prescribed for the king. You must distinguish your obligations to God and your secular duties as a ruler."

This distinction is as true today as it was in the olden days. Individual Freedom and Fundamental Law are distinct things. What relates to affairs of State should not be linked with one's personal concerns.

Krishna urged that he should be allotted a specific task. Dharmaja said, "Krishna, you take up any assignment that you like." Krishna retorted: "For taking up any assignment of my choice I need not ask you. I wish to do what you would like me to do."

Krishna's example in elimination of ego

The argument between the two went on for a long while and ultimately Krishna said he would like to be responsible for receiving the scholars and the priests who would be attending the *yajna*, washing their feet and doing all honours to them.

Here is an illustration of how Krishna set an example in the elimination of the ego. Why should Krishna, who was such a great and powerful personality, take upon himself such a humble task as washing the feet of *pandits*? The moral is clear. One who aspires to be a leader should show qualities of leadership in every field. It was to serve an example to the world in every sphere that Krishna undertook many tasks and never considered anything as too small or trivial. Out of his boundless love for the Pandavas and on account of his deep concern for the preservation of their unity and brotherly love, Krishna did several things which cannot be easily understood.

Before the Kurukshetra war, Krishna was sent as the envoy of the Pandavas to negotiate with Duryodhana and the Kauravas. The love that subsisted between the Pandavas and Krishna was not based on mere kinship or political interests. It was a unity of hearts, The Pandavas were devoted to Krishna as much as Krishna loved them. They had no option but to send Krishna as their envoy to the Kauravas.

When Krishna reached Hastinapura, the Kaurava capital, he found that elaborate arrangements had been made for according him a grand welcome. (The Kauravas apparently in their narrow-mindedness, hoped to win over Krishna to 'their side by this show of extravagant hospitality).

Krishna's example as an envoy

When Krishna alighted from the chariot, Duryodhana, Dussasana and others greeted him and invited him to stay in their palatial guest-house and accept their hospitality. Even at that moment Krishna taught them the proprieties governing affairs of State. He said: "Dussasana, I have come as an envoy. It is only after completing my mission as envoy can I accept your hospitality. Till then I cannot be your guest."

After giving this lesson in political proprieties in unmistakable terms, Krishna proceeded to the house of Vidura. Vidura was deeply agitated on seeing Krishna and asked him: "Krishna, you are

all-knowing and can see the shape of things, to come. How, then, did you agree to this mission? How did the Pandavas agree to send you here? The wicked Kauravas are capable of doing harm to you by all kinds of foul means; knowing all this, why did you come here?"

Krishna replied: "Vidura, it is not as if I do not know this. But in the interest of the people and welfare of the world, I have to undertake such missions. No one can understand my purposes. My sole concern is the preservation of Dharma. I wish to see that no rift develops among the Pandavas and that complete harmony and unity prevail amongst them. Any differences among the Pandavas will be disastrous for the world. I am ready to undertake any mission, however trivial or hazardous."

Krishna then went to the Assembly Hall of the Kauravas. As he entered, Duryodana and Dussasana welcomed him and invited him to take the special elevated seat that had been arranged for him. All the sages and other worthies in the hall rose as Krishna entered. Bhishma, assisted by Drona and Dhritarashtra, approached Krishna and requested him to take the pre-eminent seat intended for him.

What Krishna said on that occasion is an object-lesson to the world. He said: "Oh King! I shall take my seat only after all the people here have taken their seats. Until then I cannot, take my seat."

Krishna pleads for the Pandavas

When all had resumed their seats, Krishna continued standing and said: "I must first complete the ambassadorial mission on which I have come." He turned to Dhritarashtra and said: "Oh King! As stipulated by you, the Pandavas have returned after spending 12 years in exile in the forest and living one year incognito. Today you have to fulfill the pledge you gave to them that you will return their kingdom to them. It is your duty to honour your word." Krishna argued with Dhritarashtra that he should keep the pledge that he had given, to the Pandavas. He told the king: "The Pandavas are the very embodiment of *Dharma*. They entertain no feelings of enmity or hatred towards anyone. When I was about to leave for Hastinapura, Dharmaja clasped my hands together and entreated me to inform you that if he had committed any lapse, wittingly or unwittingly, he wished to be forgiven by you. If necessary, he was ready to come in person and seek your forgiveness at your feet. This is the noble and righteous attitude of the Pandavas towards you and your people. It is not proper to have any ill-feeling towards the high-minded Pandavas."

On listening to Krishna, Dhritarashtra said, "Why are the progeny of two brothers. Are not all of them equal in your eyes Krishna? This is one family and one kingdom. Is it proper for you to view the Kauravas in one way and the Pandavas in another way?."

The bond of love between Krishna and Pandavas

Krishna then explained clearly to Dhritarashtra the truth of the situation, without reservation or mincing words "Dhritarashtra! There is nothing in common between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The Pandavas are the very embodiment of *Dharma*. I am moving with them as their life-breath. Let me tell you what binds me to the Pandavas. A body has many limbs. In my body, Dharmaja is like the head. Arjuna represents my two arms. Bhima is like my stomach. Nakula and Sahadeva are like my two feet. Krishna is the heart of this body. My relationship with the Pandavas is like that of the heart to the rest of the body."

The moment Duryodana and Dussasana heard these words, they became indignant and their eyes became red with anger. When one is puffed up with pride and physical prowess, one has blood-shot eyes. For the evil-minded Kauravas this kind of reaction was natural. All the elders in the Assembly were in agreement with Krishna. Dhritarashtra, however, wanted to retire to take rest for a while. His real intention was to have a talk with Krishna in private, away from the presence of his sons. He retired to his private chamber. Krishna came there. Holding both his hands, Dhritarashtra pleaded with Krishna: "My sons are wicked fellows. My infatuation for them has blinded my vision. The Pandavas are undoubtedly righteous. Their adherence to truth and justice is exemplary. I am unable to see a way out."

Give no quarter to evil

Krishna spoke to Dhritarashtra in strong terms: "Dhritarashtra! Fondness for sons is a good thing. But excessive attachment to them is likely to prove harmful and dangerous. Don't we try to get rid of urine and feces from our body?." Dhritarashtra said: "These are inanimate things, but how can I get rid of my sons who are my flesh and blood?" Krishna said that what is evil should be cast away without any compunction. He declared that those who are wicked--whether it be a son, a wife or one's parents... should be given up without hesitation. "Strive your best to persuade them to return to the right path. But when these attempts fail they should be abandoned."

After these talks, Krishna realised that his mission of parleys for peace would not succeed. He did not go back to the Kaurava Assembly Hall. He mounted his chariot and returned to Vidura's residence.

Meanwhile, the Pandavas were in great agony, contemplating how Krishna would fare at the hands of the wicked Kauravas. Without taking food and drink, they were brooding over what might happen to Krishna and were anxiously awaiting his return.

On seeing Krishna back, alighting from the chariot, the Pandavas rejoiced beyond words. They did not ask how his mission had fared. All they were concerned about was the safe return of Krishna. That was enough for them. They had no thought about their future. Their love for Krishna was so great that they felt boundless joy to see him safe. Dharmaja was the first to embrace Krishna. Then all the brothers hugged him and bathed him with tears of joy.

Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandavas then spoke in a choked voice: "Although I did not like Sri Krishna to go on this mission to the Kauravas, I did not speak out because of my youth and because it would have been inauspicious to object to a journey when one was starting on it. The safe return of our brother-in-law makes me feel richer than a billionaire. I do not care whether there is peace or war or whether I lose my life. It is enough for me if Krishna is safe and well."

How the Divine works for the good of devotees

Such was the love the Pandavas bore towards Krishna. *Yadbhaavam tadbhavati* ("As one feels, so he becomes"). The Lord's love for a devotee is as intense as a devotee's love for the Lord. Having regard to the well-being of the devotee and the good of the world, Krishna performed actions whether big or small, solely for the good of others. He was indifferent to praise or blame. His sole purpose was protection of devotees and fulfilling their wishes whether small or otherwise. In His view all things are equal.

Correcting the defects among men, directing them on a right path, the Lord in His human incarnation seeks to raise humanity to the highest level by all methods. Ordinary people may question whether it is proper for God to do certain things and not certain others. From a mundane

point of view, things may appear trivial or big. But in the Divine calculus there are no such differences because He views everything with the same Divine love. He does not examine whether one is great or small.

A lesson to Arjuna taught by Krishna

Once Arjuna was in a greatly despondent mood. He was disgusted with life and wanted to commit suicide that very night. The All-Knowing Lord Krishna, decided to avert this. He went to Arjuna's residence and told him that he wanted to discuss some urgent matter with him and therefore he wanted to dine with him that day. When Subhadra (Arjuna's wife) and others were engaged otherwise, Krishna called Arjuna to a private chamber. As soon as Arjuna was inside, Krishna bolted the door. He then took firm hold of Arjuna's feet. Arjuna immediately burst out: "Swami!" What unworthy act have I done? Why are you acting like this?" Krishna said: "With all your titles and achievements, it is utterly unbecoming of you to entertain thoughts of suicide. You are foremost among the Pandavas. You acquired the Gandiva (from Shiva) after going through severe penances and ordeals. You should be the master of your senses and not their slave. Today you have been overcome by your mind and your senses. This is unworthy of you. Give me a pledge that in no circumstances in the future will you think of suicide. Your life is mine and my life is yours. The divine is the indweller in all beings. Hence I am present in all beings. If you contemplate suicide, you will be guilty of attempting on the life of your dear Krishna."

Arjuna said, "Swami ! I was ignorant of the subtle truths you have revealed. Please forgive me. Henceforth, in all my life I will not think of any such act."

In this manner, Krishna, in His love for the Pandavas, was prepared to go to any length and do even menial act to protect them. The Lord is Omnipresent. His eyes, feet and hands are everywhere. There is nothing low or high for Him. On one occasion He carried even the sandals of Draupadi when He advised her to seek Bhishma's blessings to save her husbands from destruction. For the sake of setting an example to the world, the Lord does many things in His human incarnation.

Arjuna disagrees with Krishna

On one occasion, Krishna was conversing with the Pandava brothers when Arjuna expressed disagreement with certain statements of Krishna. Krishna assumed an angry pose and left the place. Hardly had He gone a short distance when Dharmaja, Bhima and Nakula turned on Arjuna and berated him for insulting Krishna, who was their very life-breath.

Unable to bear this rebuke, Arjuna prayed internally to Krishna. Meanwhile Krishna returned and told the brothers: "What Arjuna has done is true to human nature. Man is fickle-minded and prone to doubts. The more intellectual a person is, the more he is subject to these traits. Such persons have no firm belief in anything. Because of your intellect, you Arjuna behaved without understanding what has gone before or what is to come. Henceforth don't rely on your intellect. Carry out the will of the Divine."

Then Arjuna said: "*Karishye Vachanam Thava*" (I shall abide by whatever you say). It was then that the Lord gave Arjuna the assurance: "Centre your thoughts on Me, be My devotee, worship Me always and I assure you will reach Me."

Follow the ideals set for humanity by God

These days there are many who profess to be devotees but do not conduct themselves as true devotees. What is called for is adherence in action to what one says in speech. Only then are people fit to earn the grace of the Lord. There is no use merely offering worship to God as God. One should understand the ideals set for humanity by God in His human incarnation and live up to them. Human values have to be fostered. Without human qualities, the mere human form is worthless. Only by practising human values does man become truly human.

Man derives his name from the possession of the mind. The mind is a bundle of good and bad thoughts. When man fills his mind with good and pure thoughts, he becomes pure and leads a pure life. Morality is based on good conduct. Sacred, pure and helpful activities constitute right conduct. It is such conduct that is conducive to the blossoming of human excellence.

Men should first of all develop faith in God. On the basis of that faith, they should strive to live up to the ideals God in his human form has given, both by precept and example to mankind.

Today, despite the enormous progress made in science and technology, men suffer from lack of peace and security. Real peace can be got only through spiritual means. It cannot be got by any other way.

Living in society, you have to understand the interaction between the individual and society. It is a continuous process of give and take. The individual contributes to society and derives benefits from the society. This interaction may be understood from an episode from the life of Einstein, the great scientist.

Einstein's example of humility

In the ward in which Einstein was living, there was a girl who was weak in mathematics and was repeatedly failing in that subject. A friend suggested to her that if she went to Einstein, the greatest living mathematician, he would help her to learn the subject well. The girl approached Einstein and he readily agreed to give her tuition everyday. The girl was immensely grateful and gained confidence from Einstein's offer. The girl's mother, who had observed her daughter going to the great mathematician for tuition everyday, felt that the little girl was wasting Einstein's time by asking him to teach her elementary mathematics. She went one day to Einstein and apologised to him for her daughter's intrusion on his valuable time. Einstein told her: "Do not think I am just teaching mathematics to her. I am learning as many things from her as I am teaching her." Einstein was conscious that people who might excel in some subject might be lacking in general knowledge or common sense and knowledge of worldly matters. Even though he was a great scientist, he did not disdain to learn quite a few things from a young school girl. This readiness to learn from any person or source is the real mark of greatness.

Einstein attached great importance to the kind of associates with whom one moved. He used to say: "Tell me what company you keep and I shall tell you what you are." If you associate with good people you become good; if you move with wicked persons you become bad.

The human life is a great gift from God. It should be valued as such and used for sacred purposes.

Discourse at the Prashaanthi Mandir, on 16-8-1987.

The greatness of any individual depends upon the reform of his character. It does not depend upon his power, money or position. Thus, you must try to first increase the good qualities or the virtues in you.

BABA