

19. Redemption through Renunciation

The day when devotees hail

the Lord with adoration;

The day when people fraternise with

the poor and the distressed;

When servants of the Lord are

treated to a pleasing feast;

When the great ones come and relate

the glories of the Lord;

That day alone is a sacred and

memorable day;

All others are days of mourning.

THE mind is ever in quest of peace, without which here is no happiness. From time immemorial man has been engaged in striving for peace. But peace has eluded him because he has pursued wrong paths for achieving it. He has considered the satisfactions derived through the sense organs seeing, hearing, etc.--as the source of mental peace. He has taken the wrong road by surrendering to the demands of the senses. For the sake of enjoying sensuous pleasures man has been ready to adopt wrongful, unfair and unrighteous means. In seeking his individual happiness and pleasure, he has not hesitated to destroy the peace and pleasure of others. In this process both the individual and society have lost peace' and happiness.

As a result of the growth of the self-centered desires, selfishness and egoistic conceit have developed in society. Consequently, the basic human relationship that should exist between man and man has been totally undermined.

Without discipline man will ruin himself

The human heart is essentially like the milky ocean. The Puranas have declared that it is such an ocean that the Lord has His abode. The human heart that should' be an ocean of milk has been turned today into an ocean of brine. The quality of milk is whiteness. White symbolises the *Satwic* nature (that is, purity). In the *Satwic* heart, qualities like love, compassion, forbearance and peace will be enshrined. In the salty water dangerous creatures like whales and crocodiles will roam freely. Likewise in a heart that is not pure qualities like selfishness and pride will be dominant.

In the heart of man today, selfishness and conceit have grown to inconceivable heights. Everything in the world should be governed by certain bounds. *Nassreyo Niysmam Vinaa* (There can be nothing great without restraint). Without discipline and restraint man will ruin himself. The sun and the moon, the stars and the planets, wind and weather are all subject to certain laws. Nature itself observes certain Divine laws in its functioning. All things in Nature obey their respective rules of conduct, including birds and beasts. They lack control over their sense organs. But man endowed with a sacred birth and having intelligence and reason, fails to observe restraint. Birds and animals have no prescribed rules of conduct (samskaras). But these rules are

the guide-posts for man. What accompanies man in his final destiny is not Sarasota (worldly achievements), but *Samskara* (his good acts). Today man is giving the go-by to such *samskaras*.

Man can change his nature from bad to good

Animals live and die without change in their original nature. Man is different. By practice and discipline, man can change his nature--from bad to good or good to bad. All man's thoughts, feelings and actions are determined by habit and perseverance. Even a person who is cruel in early years can turn into a votary of peace and love. Ratnakara, who was a highwayman, became the sage Valmiki.

Through association with good people, through good conduct and good thoughts, one can cultivate virtue and goodness. Above everything, man needs today *Satsangam* (the company of good). For physical health, one needs to get rid of impurities inside the body and take in pure things. Likewise, for mental health, man needs to eliminate all impure thoughts and desires from the mind and acquire good thoughts and good feelings by association with good people. Everyone must send out a prayer: "Oh deities, come and dwell within me! Oh demons, flee from me!"

Prahlada and Bali were great devotees

Prahlada was a great devotee of God. Hiranyakasipu did not believe in God. He asked his son, "Where is your Narayana?" Prahlada replied: "There is no place where He is not. You can find Him wherever you search for Him." Hiranyakasipu pointed to a pillar and asked Prahlada: "Is your God in this pillar?"-Prahlada replied unhesitatingly: "Yes. He is in it." Hiranyakasipu shattered the pillar with a club. Immediately Lord Narasimha emerged from it. What is the inner meaning of this episode? Our body is like a pillar. It is only when delusion pertaining to the body is destroyed that the Divine will manifest Himself. Today, everyone is promoting the body consciousness by fostering the desires prompted by the senses.

Prahlada who was an ardent devotee of Hari, had a son, Virochana, who was an atheist. Virochana's son, the emperor Bali, was a great devotee of God. The Onam celebration is in commemoration of the greatness of Bali. Emperor Bali was a highly righteous ruler. A great devotee, he was dedicated to the welfare of his subjects. He identified the well-being of the people with his own good. This was the characteristic of rulers in ancient times. During Bali's rule the land was prosperous and the people lived happily and harmoniously. Bali was popular throughout the realm. When his fame and reputation were growing, Bali was affected by a tinge of ego. Egoism brings in its train the downfall of the individual.

King Bali was an ideal ruler

There is no real ground for any man to feel inflated about himself. When the Lord's feet, eyes, head and hands are everywhere and everything in the Cosmos is permeated by the Divine, how can any man feel proud about his possessions or achievements? He is only an instrument of the Divine. Man should strive to recognise the Unity that underlies the apparent diversity which he sees everywhere. Prahlada saw divinity in everything. He realised that the Divine pervades everything inside and outside.

The Onam celebration is an occasion for the people to remind themselves of the all-pervasive nature of the Divine. Onam is celebrated by Keralites by wearing new clothes after a ceremonial bath and partaking the delicacies prepared for the festival. But the Onam celebration should not

be confined to these activities alone. It should be remembered that emperor Bali was an ideal ruler whose sole concern was the welfare and happiness of his subjects.

When Bali gave away his entire kingdom to Vamana as a gift, the people felt intensely unhappy over the absence of such a beloved ruler. It was to make them happy that Bali got permission from Vamana to return to the world once every year to see the people and rejoice in their happiness. Onam is the day when Bali is believed to honor his pledge to the people and when people show their love and reverence to a great, benevolent and righteous ruler.

Growth of selfishness among rulers and public

In ancient days, there was immense mutual love and regard between the rulers and the people. Today such relations do not exist. The people are wasting their lives in selfish pursuits. The rulers, for their part, are also occupied with their own selfish ambitions and desires and are concerned only about achieving or retaining power and position. Selfishness has grown extensively both among rulers and the public. Unless this process is reversed, man cannot find peace or happiness. There should be control over desires. Peace will grow in proportion to the limitation on desires. All man's worries, difficulties and problems increase with the growth of desires.

Man is the architect of his own happiness or misery. Only good actions can produce good results. When the individual is good, the family is good. When families are good, the society is reformed. When society improves, the nation improves. When the nations improve, the world is transformed. Hence, the transformation must begin with the individual. How can this transformation be brought about? There are two impurities in man which have to be cast out: Selfishness and Conceit. But that is not enough. Pure qualities like love, forbearance and compassion have to be imbibed. Life has to be divinised.

What is the kind of existence people lead today? They are engaged in talking ill of others. They indulge in carping criticism. They are filled with envy. They gloat over trivial achievements. They speak one thing and act in a contrary way. This type of behaviour dehumanises them. There should be unity in thought, word and deed.

We are witnessing today the unchecked growth of selfishness all around. This evil has struck deep roots, growing from generation to generation. There must be total eradication of this selfishness. Real peace can be secured only by renunciation and sacrifice. There is supreme joy in giving. In renunciation lies the elimination of fear. As long as desires remain, fear and insecurity will dog us. Enquire into the joy that is to be derived from sacrifice and the grief that is the ultimate outcome of sensuous pleasures.

Bali's example of the spirit of sacrifice

Whatever you enjoy through renunciation will become a kind of yoga. Self-conceit in the performance of actions and attachment to the fruits of one's actions have both to be given up. There should be no sense of egoism in doing one's work. "This is my work. I alone am entitled to its fruits" this attitude should be given up. If you plant a tree, what guarantee do you have that you will live to enjoy its fruits? Your progeny may enjoy the fruits. Your duty is to do your allotted work. *Karthavyam yogam Uchyathe* ("Doing one's duty is yoga").

Emperor Bali stands out as an example of purity and sacrifice. He rejected the advice of his preceptor, Sukracharya, when the latter opposed the grant of three feet of land to Vamana on the ground that Vamana was Lord Vishnu Himself and that offering the gift that He sought would

result in the ruin of Bali. Bali declared: "When the Lord Himself has come seeking a gift from me, what greater good can happen to me than that of being the donor, with the Lord as the recipient?"

Realising that Bali would not heed his advice, Sukracharya resorted to a device to block the gift Bali was about to make, by turning into an insect and filling the mouth of the vessel through which water was to be poured by Bali while making the gift. Vamana, who was aware of this stratagem, cleared the block by pricking the mouth of the vessel with a poker. As a result Sukracharya lost one of his eyes.

One must be prepared to make any offering to God, including one's life itself. Such was the greatness of Emperor Bali. He was prepared to make any kind of sacrifice for God. He lacked nothing in the world--wealth, power, position. But all these he was ready to give up to honour his word. It is rare to find persons who have everything and still have the spirit of sacrifice. The affluent are seldom generous. Often they are mean and greedy.

Ideal relations between the ruler and people

Because Bali stood out as an ideal renunciant, he achieved undying fame. Prahlada and Bali belonged to the lineage of the *Asuras*. But both were great devotees of God. Their lives are an example to all mankind.

There is a story to illustrate the ideal relations between the ruler and the ruled. There was a king who was being anointed by the queen before he took an oil bath. While the queen was applying oil to the king's head, the king noticed in the mirror that the queen was in tears. He asked her the reason for her shedding tears. The queen said that while applying oil she had noticed some grey hairs on the king's head and the thought that the king was getting old had made her sad.

That very moment the king also felt that he had enjoyed royal pleasures long enough and it was high time he repaired to a forest to devote himself to the matters of the Spirit. The king and queen summoned the ministers, entrusted the reins of the government to them and betook themselves to a forest to lead the life of ascetics. When the people heard about the decision of the royal couple, they felt that they could not live away from such noble rulers and decided to go to the forest en masse.

They approached the king and prayed to him: "Why have you given up the kingdom? Is it because of any lapses on our part?" The king told them: "I have ruled the kingdom long enough. Now that I am old, I wish to devote the rest of my life to the thoughts of God." On hearing these words, the entire people wailed in anguish. They decided to perform penance in the forest.

Queen's selfless concern for the people

Brahma appeared before them and asked them what they wanted. As they were utterly unselfish, they prayed to Brahma to give their king a long life. Brahma granted their prayer. The people went in joy to the king and said that Brahma had granted him a long life and therefore he should return to the kingdom to rule over it for many years.

The king started to go back to the capital. But the queen declined to accompany him. She said she would continue to stay in the forest. The people mistook the reason for the queen's decision. They thought perhaps the queen was angry because they had prayed only for the long life of the king and not for the queen. The queen was cast in a different mould. She was not concerned about herself. She performed a severe penance. Brahma appeared before her and asked what she

wanted. She asked: "Is it true that you have granted the king a long life? Of what use is it, if the king alone has a long life, while the subjects are short-lived? I pray you should grant a long life to the people also." Brahma was so pleased with her selfless concern for the people that he granted long life to the people and the queen also.

Kerala's spiritual heritage

Kerala is a very sacred region. It is a land of great natural beauty. Its luscious vegetation endows it with a charm all its own. This beauty is a divine gift. God is beauty. Beauty is God. Keralites must revere their land as one sanctified by three avatars--Narasimha, Vamana and Parasurama. Kerala has been known for its unbroken tradition of devotion to God. While the vicissitudes of politics may have caused some changes, essentially Keralites have been adhering to the spiritual way of life. Even those who appear externally to be atheists are believers of the Divine deep in their being. Keralites should try to preserve their spiritual heritage whatever the challenges they may have to face. This is a great treasure which they have to guard and cherish. They must live up to their ancient ideals and promote faith in them by precept and practice.

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