

12. No Greater Sin Than Ingratitude

When rain falls on a sandy bed, it seeps down;

When the same rain falls on a bed of clay,

it remains sweet water;

When raindrops fall into an oyster,

they become pearls.

Likewise, devotion results in what one deserves.

Embodiments of Divine Love! For all names and forms in the world, there is one that is basic. Without that basis no object can have a name or form. For instance, here is a tumbler. It has name and form. But its primary base is silver. When the tumbler is melted, what remains is only the silver. What happened to the earlier name and form? They have merged in the silver.

Likewise, the basic truth underlying all the myriad names and forms in the world is the *Sathwik* principle. It is pure *Sathya*. It is Divine. It is this Divine Principle that enables everything to have a name and form.

"Ekoham Bahushyaam" (I am One, let me become the Many). It was by the Will of the Divine that all the myriad objects came into existence. The basic principle in this multiplicity is oneness. Between the numbers one and nine, nine is the larger number. But, in fact, the number nine is made up of nine ones (1 + 1 + 1...). One is the basic number. So also all the diversity has emanated from the One.

Life is an interlude between birth and death

What is the meaning of human life? It is an interlude between birth and death. In this interlude, men are victims of a variety of desires. There is no harmony between men's thoughts, words and actions. What is the reason? Man's actions are not in accordance with his thoughts.

Man's thoughts are full of ideals. But he makes no effort to act up to these ideals. He thinks in one way, speaks in another way and acts in a different way. Consequently, he is subject to all kinds of sorrow and disorder. This is because he fails to satisfy his conscience. A man without self-satisfaction can have no peace. When can self-satisfaction be realised? When there is unity and harmony in thought, word and deed: to speak as you feel and to act up to your words.

Man today is racked by all kinds of troubles. Are these troubles designed to make man miserable or to elevate him to a higher level of existence? Every trouble is really a step in elevating man. If there are no troubles, man will have no proper lessons. Troubles constitute good lessons. Trouble and pleasure are inextricably mixed and cannot be separated from each other by anyone. Pleasure has no separate existence. It is the fruit of pain. This basic truth is not recognised by man. When grief smites him, he succumbs to it. He gloats over some happy experience. His entire life is bound up with these varying experiences of pleasure and pain.

Therefore, man has to cultivate the sense of equanimity in pleasure and suffering. There is a joy in sorrow. There is suffering in happiness. It is only when man cultivates the sense of equanimity in all circumstances, in pleasure or pain, that he will be able to experience peace.

Thoughts are basis for the actions

All experiences of pleasure and pain have their origin in the thoughts of man. Thought is like the seed of a tree, which in due course puts forth branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. All that you see in a tree has come from a small seed. Likewise, although man's thought is subtle, it contains potentially the entire universe. The atom is the microcosm of the Universe. Students are aware of the huge size of the banyan tree. Its seed, however, is very small. The seed and the tree are essentially one.

Man has to keep a watch over his thoughts because they form the basis for his actions. When his wishes are fulfilled, he is content. When they are not realised, he feels disappointed. Man does not enquire into the causes of these divergent results. His failures are the result of his own shortcomings. When his heart is pure, his actions yield beneficial results. His thoughts are the cause of the success or failure of his efforts. Hence, man must utilise his thoughts in the proper manner. His vision of the world depends on how he looks at it. "As he feels, so he becomes." When one's thoughts are sublime, the results are also sublime.

Man owes the society for all his achievements

Man receives help from various people in the world. Without such help, men cannot progress towards a higher level of existence. In childhood, the mother looks after the child. In boyhood, the father provides for his education. Later, he is involved in activities with friends. And then his kith and kin involve him in family relationships. Thus various persons assist man in his life. Without the help of various people, no one can progress towards a higher life.

A man who has derived help in this manner, what help is he rendering to his fellowmen? It is good to render help to one who has helped you. It is even greater to help one who has done you harm. When this is the case, it is essential that man should serve the society that has helped him in so many ways. He owes to society the name and position he has achieved. Hence he must render service. This was the dictum of sage Vyasa as the distilled essence of his eighteen *Puranas*: "It is meritorious to render help to others; it is sinful to do them harm." This means: Help ever, hurt never. Do not cause harm to anyone. If you can help anyone, do so.

The difference between mistake and sin

Once Duryodhana declared, "I know what is good and what is bad. I also know that bad consequences will follow bad actions. But I am impelled to do only bad deeds. I know what is good. I know that good deeds will yield good results. But my mind is not inclined towards doing good. What is the reason for this? It is the absence of purity in my thoughts. My heart is filled with selfishness. My life has grown in the soil of selfishness. Out of selfishness I am seeking gains for myself. For selfish reasons I am harassing the Pandavas. I am aware of this. I am doing all this consciously."

If one commits a wrong unwittingly, he is guilty of committing a mistake. But if he commits it deliberately, he is committing a sin. This is the difference between a mistake and a sin.

In this context, it may be pointed out that Karna is a great example of one who cherished gratitude for the good done to him. He was not only a great donor who gave away whatever was sought from him. His loyalty to his master was unbounded. He was ever ready to lay down his life for his master.

The ruler of Panchala announced that his daughter Draupadi would be given in marriage to any bowman who could bring down an overhanging fish-yantra by looking at its reflection in water. Rulers from many countries had assembled there. Draupadi was no ordinary woman. She emanated from a blaze of fire. Who was worthy of her hand in marriage? Those taking part in the wedding contest had to abide by one of two conditions. Either he should be a ruler or a Kshatriya. Karna was a great warrior. He had come to take part in the contest. Unfortunately, he was not the ruler of any state and he was a charioteer's son, not a Kshatriya. For these reasons, he was asked to withdraw from the contest. He felt depressed that in spite of all his other accomplishments he could not take part in the contest. As he was walking back, Duryodhana got up with the feeling, "There is no one equal in prowess to Karna excepting Arjuna. With Karna on my side I can always deal with the Pandavas." He came to Karna's help at that moment. In that assemblage, he made Karna King of Angadesa.

For that one act of magnanimity, by which he was made a ruler, Karna pledged himself to serve Duryodhana by shedding the last drop of blood for him.

Later on, the Kauravas and Pandavas had gathered their forces for war. Krishna had tried his best to prevent the Armageddon as he knew the infinite calamities war brought in its train. He went as an envoy of the Pandavas to plead for a peaceful settlement with the Kauravas. Arjuna told Krishna that it was futile to parley with the wicked Kauravas and that they should get ready for battle.

A mother's love is unbounded

A day before the battle was to begin, Kunthi, the mother of the Pandavas, realised what was impending. She was the mother of Karna also. Karna was her first-born who was the child of a boon from the Sun-God. She was aware of his extraordinary powers and sought an opportunity to meet him. There may be bad sons, but there is no bad mother. A mother's love is unbounded. One day, Karna was performing *Sandhya vandanam* in the morning after taking a bath in the river. Getting news of this from her maids, Kunthi went to the river bank. Karna was in meditation. Kunthi stood behind him. As she stood, she was overwhelmed by grief at seeing him after a long time. She was also stricken with sorrow at the prospect of her near and dear ones dying in the impending battle.

Kunthi reveals that Karna was her son

Unable to bear the grief, she wailed aloud. Karna emerged suddenly from his meditation. He saw Kunthidevi before him. He did not know that she was his mother, though he knew she was the mother of the Pandavas. He asked her, "Mother! Why are you in such great sorrow? I am Karna the son of Radha. I offer my salutations to you. Please let me know the cause of your grief."

Kunthi replied, "Dear child, you are not the son of Radha. You are my son. You were born to me as a boon from the Sun-God. To avoid public ignominy, I left you on the Ganga. I am a great sinner. I pitilessly abandoned you on the Ganga though you were a new-born babe. For selfish reasons, to safeguard my name, I abandoned you in this manner. You are my eldest son. The Pandavas are your brothers and Dharmaraja is your younger brother. Dear son, give me one promise. If all of you were united, you could rule the entire world. You could become the emperor. All the Pandavas will obey and follow your footsteps like a shadow. I give you my word. Do not bear any enmity towards the Pandavas in the impending battle. Consider them in your heart as your brothers. Ponder over the sorrow that afflicts your mother."

When Karna heard these words, he was caught in a whirl and his mind was in confusion. "I had heard now and then about the secret of my origin, but never before from the mouth of my mother. The Pandavas are indeed my brothers. I am Kunthidevi's son. But at this juncture, am I to abide by my mother's words? Or am I to show my gratitude to my master?" Karna debated thus within himself.

Karna's refusal to betray his master

He told Kunthi: "Whether he was a wicked or an unrighteous person, it was Duryodhana who gave me a position of honour and raised me to my present state. I cannot betray my master. But, because you are my Mother, I will give you one promise declared Karna. "Promise to the mother is one thing; loyalty to the master is a different thing. The former is in the nature of a fight. The latter is a responsibility. They are like the two wheels of a chariot or the two wings of a bird. They go together. Mother, I give you this promise. When the occasion arises, I shall spare Dharmaraja, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva. I will not harm them. But I will not spare Arjuna. If in this battle I lose my life, the five Pandavas will be your sons. In case Arjuna dies, you will still have five sons. I will take the place of Arjuna among the Pandavas. In any case, there will be no diminution in the number of your five sons. This is my plighted word."

Saying this, Karna caught hold of his mother's feet and said, "Mother! The other day, in the court of Dhruvpadha, Duryodhana saved my honour. I know he is a wicked man. I also know that the Pandavas are the very embodiment of *Dharma*. But I will be worse than a cruel animal in the forest if I forget the good done to me by Duryodhana. I have to show my gratitude to my master. In this respect, there can be no change in my attitude," declared Karna.

No atonement for betraying the Divine

Later, Karna gave away even the earrings given to him by the Sun-God. And he offered to Indra the armour he was wearing. He even laid down his life for his master. But he did not give up the gratitude he owed to Duryodhana.

It must be remembered that there is a means of atoning for the killing of a Brahmin or a cow or an infant. But there is no way of atoning for betraying the preceptor or the Divine. If you turn ungrateful you will be worse than a wild beast.

Kunthi then declared: "I shall be happy if you remain a man with such high ideals. Let me tell you there is no one who can slay Arjuna. You bear animosity towards Arjuna. I am content with your promise. It is enough if you spare Dharmaraja, Bheema, Nakula and Sahadeva."

In this context, observe how much gratitude existed among the Pandavas. Dharmaraja, Bheema and Arjuna were the sons of Kunthi. Nakula and Sahadeva were the sons of Madri (the second wife of Pandu). When Madri was about to commit *Sari* on her husband's funeral pyre, Dharmaraja gave her a promise. He said, "Mother! You are about to give up your life for the sake of my father. I shall look after your sons with even greater concern than for my uterine brothers. Whatever differences may arise between us, I shall treat them as my own brothers." He gave this pledge to Madri.

In the *Mahabharatha*, during the stay of the Pandavas in exile, the four brothers--Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva---died at a pond where they had gone to bring water because they refused to answer the questions which the guardian Yaksha (spirit) of the pond wished to put to them before they were allowed to take the water. Dharmaraja then came to the pond and answered all the questions put to him by the Yaksha.

The Yaksha was so pleased with the replies that he granted a boon to Dharmaraja. He was prepared to restore to life one of the four brothers whom Dharmaraja would name. Dharmaraja promptly asked that Nakula or Sahadeva might be restored to life. The Yaksha wondered why Dharmaraja did not ask for the restoration of one of his own brothers, Bheema or Arjuna, but preferred one of the two stepbrothers. Dharmaraja replied that as he was there as a surviving son for his mother Kunthi, he wanted that a son of his stepmother, Madri, should be alive. Dharmaraja mentioned the pledge he had given to Madri. Appreciating the large-mindedness of Dharmaraja, the Yaksha restored all the four brothers to life.

Gratitude is a great virtue

Gratitude is a great virtue. When the power of gratitude is realised, it will be seen that it can give benefits much more than anyone can imagine. If out of narrow-mindedness, men become ungrateful, they will suffer grievously. If such is the case in regard to purely human relationships, how much more rewarding gratitude can be when it is offered to God?

Dear Students! This is a period of innocence and inexperience in your life. You are filled with desires. You tend to be selfish and self-centred. But even so, you can make your lives sacred and meaningful by carrying out the injunctions of the Divine. If you adhere to this one rule, you will redeem your lives and promote the welfare of your families and your society. Although Dharmaraja asked only for the restoration to life of only one stepbrother, the Yaksha revived all the brothers.

Karna stands out as the supreme exemplar of gratitude. He demonstrated what it means to be grateful to one who has helped you, even if he happens to be a wicked person.

Kalyana Mandap, Brindavan, 10 May 1992