

11. Destiny and divine Grace

The *Mahabharatha* and the *Ramayana*, which are the most precious jewels of India, are like vast oceans. If we look at these oceans from one side, we will have only a limited view; but if we climb up a hill and have a look at them, we get a fuller view and a better understanding of them. What we have to do is to delve into them and try to explore and understand the treasures contained in these big oceans. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* are very sacred books, which will directly tell us about many things, especially the ways in which we have to conduct ourselves. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* will help us in our daily life, like our two eyes. We are not able to know the true value of these jewels, and we think that the *Mahabharatha* is all about a battle between the sons of two brothers, and that the *Ramayana* is a story wherein a demon stole the wife of Rama and Rama won her back. It is not like that. These two epics are like the heart and the head of India, and are as vital to India as the heart and the head are to a human body.

In the lecture delivered to you this morning, you were told that, “*Swa Dharmo Nidhanam Sreyaha, Para Dharmo Bhayaavahah.*” This means that in carrying out one’s own *dharma*, even if one perishes, it is far better than taking to *dharma* not belonging to oneself. The latter path is beset with fear. We must try to first understand what *dharma* is. Then we can try to know what is our own *dharma* or *swadharma*. In the word *swadharma*, there are actually two words, *swa* and *dharma*. First comes the *swa*, then comes *dharma*. These two are different words. They are not one word, but we use the words together. *swa* means “I”; “I” means *Brahma Thathwa*. Therefore, by the word *swa* we have to mean *Brahman* or *Brahma Thathwa*. *Dharma* means right conduct. So *swadharma* means the path of the *Brahman* or the path of the Supreme Being. That thing that comes straight out of our heart must be considered as

dharma. Between *dharma* and *sathya*, there is yet another thing. The prompting that comes out of the heart or the feeling that emanates from the heart is called *rutha*. *Rutha* means the feelings and the ideas. They are of paramount importance. They set out all the guidelines for action and have a determining influence. So the feeling that has been shaped in the heart, when it comes in the form of speech, is called *sathya* or *rruth*. If whatever is implied in these words is put into practice, that is called *dharma*. We can say that *dharma* is that which is born from the heart, which is then expressed in the shape of words and then put into practice.

Dharma is not a thing that can be determined by each and every person, according to his whim. Some may say that the *dharma* that comes out of one's heart is one's *dharma*; how can it become the *dharma* of God? So, in your heart—not the physical heart but the spiritual heart—you must try to locate and cognise the *Atma Thathwa*. The word "I" belongs to *Atma* and never to the body. Thus, *dharma* is that which comes from our heart and which is to be put into practice by us. We try to put into practice according to the ideals of our culture and try to live up to that ideal.

The *vyavaharika dharma*, or *dharma* relating to the daily routine, will be changing from day to day. Those things that will be changing from day to day are not real *dharma*. *Dharma* is not changeable, it is eternal, it is immutable, it is truth. If it is changeable, why should we establish such a *dharma*? Should we act according to it? Rama has been described in the *Ramayana* by the statement "*Ramo vighrahavaan dharmaha.*" Rama is the embodiment of *dharma*. Even though Rama had a physical body, the *dharma* that he lived and set as example and established in the world for eternity is the eternal *dharma* and unchanging truth.

All the things that begin with the word *swa* have been born in the sanctity of our heart and they are not connected with the physical world. *swadharm*, *swabhava*, *swechcha* are words that begin with *swa*. When we think of these words, they will certainly tell us about our nature and about the *Atma* that is within ourselves. *Swadharm*

is the *dharma* of the *Atma*. *Swabhava* is the nature of the *Atma*. So, also, *Swechcha* means the freewill of the *Atma*. *Swechcha*, in ordinary usage, means freedom or liberty. We should not take it in the ordinary sense. *Swechcha* means the will of the *Atma*. If we take it in the true sense and follow it up, we will be much benefited by our action.

Brahman is described as having the nature of wisdom. That is why it has been said that the end of wisdom is freedom. So, freedom means *jnana thathwa* or the light of wisdom, but not the unrestrained way in which we try to live our lives in this world. There are many things that we have to learn from our *Puranas*, our *Ithihasas*, our *Vedas* and from the sayings of elders. For everything, speech is the authority. We are taking *sabda* or sound of the word as authority or proof. For all the words, *sathya* or truth is the real basis.

You might have heard that of all the *mandalas* or regions, the *Dhruva Mandala* is the highest. We generally think that *Dhruva Mandala* is a place where Dhruva, the son of Uthanapada, lives, but it is a mistake. *Dhruva* means Truth. So *Dhruva Mandala* means a region that is higher than all the other *mandalas*. That is why the saying has come that "Truth is God." So to attain the Truth or the form of Truth, which is called the *Parabrahman*, we have to follow the truthful path, the path of truth. Whatever state we want to obtain we have to follow the kind of path suited to it. So if we want to reach the stage of *Sathya* but follow the path of falsehood, we can never go to the *Sathya* state. I shall give you a small example. When water is put in water, it will certainly get well mixed. There will be no difficulty. But when oil is put in water, they do not mix properly. Water will be separate and oil will be separate. Therefore when *sathya* or truth is combined with *sathya* or truth, then it will be real *sathya*. But if we mix untruth with truth, it will be just like trying to mix oil with water.

Many people have tried to comment upon our great Indian books and have expressed many contradictory and conflicting views. I shall cite here an example. Dayananda Saraswathi established what

is called the Arya Samaj and gave certain ideas through that Samaj. Though what Dayananda Saraswathi gave us are really good ideas, in certain instances, they have some complex meanings also. On account of this, many people discussed what Dayananda Saraswathi is alleged to have said and never tried to understand him in the right spirit. From time immemorial, there has never been a dearth of critics in our country. Because there are no competent people in India who can denounce the critics and their criticism and oppose them, in some respects India has come to the present stage. There are Indians who know what there is in the *Vedas, Puranas, Ithihasas*, and other texts. They are rather indifferent and feel that there is no need to challenge the ideas that have been expressed by people who are not real scholars. But we should not be indifferent like that. If we leave a small plant to take its own course, it will grow up into a big tree and sometimes it spreads its thorns also around it.

Once, Dakshinamurthi wanted to teach the people the real spirit of God and also he wanted to enjoy himself. He took a tree as his *guru*; he took a river as his *guru*, so also he took a stone as his *guru*. He took nature as his preceptor and began to travel with joy. After some time, he reached the shore of an ocean. He sat on the shore and was contemplating. At that time a little dirt had fallen in the ocean. The ocean became very furious and sent wave after wave to repel that dirt to the shore. Dakshinamurthi got angry with the sea. He said, "What is this? This dirt is a very small thing and the ocean is a very expansive one. Can it not contain this small piece of dirt in itself? How selfish is this ocean?" Then he reflected that because the ocean is to be respected, he should find out whether it wished to give him some message. He felt he should not get angry with the ocean and prayerfully asked that he be given the reason for its action and thus make his heart and mind peaceful. Then the ocean spoke thus: "I am very expansive and very large and in me are born many, many animals and creatures. Therefore, I always wish that my form should be very clean. If I give place to dirt, though it be very small, tomorrow it will make all my form unclean. Therefore, I did not want to

give place to that little dirt and wanted to throw it back to the shore.” This, Dakshinamurthi compared to *samsara* or family. If, in the family, we give place to a mean idea or a mean quality, it will certainly grow and will cover up and enmesh the whole family. Therefore, people leading a family life should try to see that not even a small, mean quality enters it. *Samsara* does not refer to family life alone. Our life itself is a *samsara*. So in this life, we should never give place to things that will mislead us or that will make us unclean.

Indians should never go against any religion or any idea or any one's feeling. Some people and some religions of other countries tell us that all of us are the children of God, and so we must live peacefully like brothers. Our religions have taught us the saying, “*Easwara Sarvabhoothaanam*,” or the Lord is in all the living creatures. Our culture teaches us that not only human beings but insects, animals and all living things should be treated equally, and all of them should try to live on a common basis. Indians worship the Bodhi tree. The meaning of this worship is that even trees have something good in them, that they have fragrance that indicates good. We are worshipping animals also; some people worship the lion. It is called the *vahana* or the vehicle of Devi or Lalitamba. We worship the cow. We worship all these because we think that godliness is not only in human beings but also in animals. So among animals, we select the best of them because we see God in them. Indians worship even snakes that are considered to be very poisonous and harmful. To others it may seem ridiculous that we worship trees, animals and the poisonous snakes. However, it has a very significant meaning that in all these things we see Godliness and treat all of them equally. So our real religion points to unity and not to diversity.

Now I shall try to answer the doubts that have arisen in the minds of some of the students; because these doubts, if left unanswered, grow bigger and will go on pestering you, with bad results. Therefore, I want to clear all your doubts. One student mentioned about *prarabhda karma* and *sanchita karma*, the consequence of all

our actions, and asked whether, with the grace of God, these can be overcome, especially the bad part of it. We should not try to worship God only for the sake of overcoming the consequence of all our actions. If you worship him to get His grace, *prarabhda*, *sanchita*, and all other *karma* will become ineffective by themselves. Before trying to rectify these things, first try to know what is *prarabhda*, what is *sanchita*, and what is *agami karma*.

Prarabhda karma is that which we are presently undergoing and experiencing. *Sanchita* means all the past *karma*. *Agami* refers to *karma* that will follow in future. *Prarabhda* is in between the *sanchita* and *agami*, and we are experiencing this *prarabhda* on account of the previous *sanchita karma*. The result of what we do now will come in future.

I shall give you a small example from our daily life. We have got a store room in which we stock all our rice. We have already the old stock of rice in the store. What we have stored in the room is called *sanchita*. When we want to cook, we remove some rice from the store room and begin to cook it. What we bring from the store room for cooking today is called *prarabhda*. What we cook now and what we eat today will pass out of our body tomorrow. Sometimes what we eat may come out in the shape of a belch. Therefore we cannot escape from *prarabhda*, we must experience it in this life. In the store room, there is only rice. When we bring it we will be able to convert it into many preparations. In this way, we can make the rice into food, we can make it in the form of *pulihora*; we can cook it in the shape of *chakrapongal*; we can make from it *idlies* and also *dosas*, and so on, all of which are names for different preparations from rice. We never change the base, which is always rice. You have to start any preparation with rice only. Even though there is *sanchita*, if you try to behave in a *sathwik* way, in a pious and good way, you will be able to change even *sanchita*. You may say that in the rice store, there are big stones. They are the results of our bad actions. They are in the store mixed with rice. Before we cook, do we not try to remove the stones from the rice? So it is quite necessary

that when we experience *sanchita*, we can overcome the bad effects to some extent, or a great extent, and make them clean, just as we make the rice clean.

Here is another example. *Prarabhda* can be compared to the dust that follows in the wake of a bus. When the bus is going, the dust also will be following it. So when the *karma*, which can be compared to the bus, is running, the *prarabhda*, which can be compared to the dust, will be pursuing it. When the bus stops and does not travel, then the dust comes and falls over it. But when the bus does not stop and keeps on running, the dust will be only at a distance. So when we are satisfactorily doing our daily duties without interruption, the dust, or the *prarabhda*, will be at a distance and behind us without affecting us.

You may ask how long can we travel in a bus? We have to stop somewhere. It is not so. This road is of three kinds; work, worship and wisdom. This work is related to *karma* and dust will be only there. You may take this as a village road. But if you pass some distance, then you will have a better road, a tar road. When the tar road comes, the dust will never fall on the bus. If you go still further, you shall reach the trunk road, the highway. So the road of *karma* is called the village road. *bhakthi* or worship is the town road or the tar road. Wisdom is the highway wherein there is no possibility of the dust coming. When we are following only the path of *karma*, this *prarabhda* will never come to an end. But if we do the *karma* in a way that we perform all actions, for the pleasure and for the satisfaction of God, in worship and dedication to Him, no *prarabhda* will trouble us.

From the examples of Dhruva and Markandeya, we know how *karma* can be overcome. Markandeya's parents were to have a son who would live only for sixteen years. But from the time of the birth of the child, not only the child but also the parents were worshipping God in great devotion; and the effect is that they could change even the *sankalpa* of God, and, as a result, Markandeya could live forever. There is this capacity of changing the *sankalpa* of

even God by devotion. We need not be afraid of *prarabhda* or *sanchita*. If we think that the effect of the *prarabhda karma* is inescapable, then what is the use of worshipping God? Even though *prarabhda* is there, the grace of God will certainly remove, to a large extent, the bad effects from the *prarabhda*. Here is a small example for this. There is an injection bottle. It will be written on that, that the medicine inside can be used up to 1970. That bottle is there even in the year 1972 and the medicine is also there in the bottle, but the medicine will have no power. It cannot serve its purpose. In the same way, in our destiny there may be the medicine or *prarabhda*; but by the grace of God we can weaken its effect, blunt its effect. Even though it is there, it cannot trouble us. We can become beneficiaries of God's grace; we need not be afraid of either *prarabhda* or *sanchita* or *agami*. If God is pleased with our worship, He will certainly annul the bad effects of *prarabhda* and *sanchita*. Therefore, the most important thing we have to try is to earn the grace of God, by which we can overcome all these bad effects

Another question is what we hear of the *Kali Yuga*. We must try to make the best of our present age only, and try to do good things and live happily in this world. Past is past, and it will never come again, and we are not sure of the future. Present is not permanent. It will be always changing and moving. That is why we say, "Be good, do good, see good—that is the way to God." Try to be good, fill your heart with good and lead a good life, and the result also will be good. When one falls sick, it is not in any way useful to feel sorry over it. After falling sick, it is necessary that we should somehow try to take proper medicine and get over the sickness. Instead of weeping over the disease we have got, it is better to try and get it cured and help the body to get well. So also instead of feeling sorry for the bad things that are happening in this *Kali Yuga*, we must try always to be good and remove the bad from this world. We are seeing many bad things and distractions among the students nowadays. You are all students, and you have to try to remove all of those distractions and bad things. Try to be good so that you may

reap happiness as a result. Students should not give place to bad associations and bad ideas. The right way of leading a good life in this world is the spiritual, moral and ethical way. We must care for these three paths: the spiritual, the moral and the *dharmic*. Where there is love, there is no room either for hatred or for disease. When there is no love, there will be hatred towards others and that hatred will develop into a big disease. Jealousy, anger, and ego are the biggest diseases. If you want to keep yourself aloof from these three diseases, you must try to love everybody.

When one of the girl students spoke in the beginning, she addressed others as “friends”. This friendship may develop into anything. Therefore, I asked her not to address others as friends. In the life of students today, this friendship is spreading along a blind path and without restraint. So instead of considering others as friends, if you consider them as sisters and brothers, we know that towards sisters we shall never develop a bad feeling. Students must try to consider one another as brothers and sisters, and not mere friends, because even in friendship, sometimes there are bad meanings and bad interpretations. When Swami Vivekananda introduced a new form of address at the Congress of Religions in Chicago, instead of addressing them as “Ladies and Gentlemen”, he addressed them as “Brothers and Sisters”. It was quite new to the foreigners, and they were so much touched and moved by this gesture that they applauded him incessantly for fifteen minutes. Of course, nowadays too, we are addressing the audience as sisters and brothers, but that feeling is not there in our hearts even for the time we are on the platform. What we do not feel in our hearts should not be expressed outwardly. We must give place to true feelings in our hearts and we must try to practice good things in our life.

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