

## 18. The Path of Devotion

You all rejoice when you look at the pictures on the screen and mistake them for reality. What you should really do is to keep your attention riveted upon what lies behind the screen; and if you are able to understand what is real and what is not real, all your doubts will be set at rest.

The foolish crow will live upon rotten flesh and other putrefied objects. On the other hand, parrots, and cuckoos drink the honey that is hidden in the flowers and thereby they feel thrilled with delight. In the same manner, foolish people run after temporal objects and worldly things and waste their time and energy. On the other hand, those who have pure minds drink the nectar of God-realisation and Godly love and experience supreme happiness.

“No pains, no gains” is a well-known principle, and we derive the fruit only if we are prepared to undertake the work. This truth is seen in all walks of life. We cannot achieve any fruit without paying the price for it. It is not proper to follow our mind and live according to the dictates of its whims. Life, which is lived according to the *Sastras*, is the real life. The *Sastras* alone contain an authoritative declaration of the real goal of life. It is even not necessary for us to read the different *Sastras* in order to realise the nature, significance and the purpose of life. If you follow the truth that flows from your heart, you will be led the perfect way.

Today, we do not believe that what the *Sastras* have laid down is really the expression of truth. The purport of the *Sastras* is known by different names and this variety of names sometimes leads to confusion. When we listen to discourses delivered by experienced and wise elders, we land ourselves in doubt whether to adopt this one or the other, and we do not know which is the right path and which is not. The statement in the *Sastras* may be interpreted differently and

we land ourselves into trouble by trying to follow the different interpretations.

With the help of an analogy, we will be able to realise whether God is serving man or man is serving God. We imagine that man, *manava*, is offering everything that he has for the sake of the realisation of God, *Madhava*. It is not difficult for man to follow the path and try to realise *Madhava*. Every discipline and every action that leads man to God is not difficult to be implemented. For instance, a *Vedic* Brahmin takes the holy water of the Ganges in the palm of his hand and offers the same water back to the sacred river. The truth is that he is not offering his property or his father's property or his grandfather's property, but he is offering the holy water that he has drawn from the sacred river back to the river. Similarly, when we look at the objects offered by man to God, they are all created, preserved and bestowed upon man by God Himself. Man is not offering anything of his own, except when he is offering his devotion arising from his heart. God takes care of that devotee who completely surrenders himself with single-minded devotion at the Lotus Feet of the Lord. If one is intoxicated with divine love and forgets all worldly responsibilities, God will take upon Himself all the responsibilities of that devotee.

Our *Sastras* teach us many good things through the examples of the lives of great saints and great teachers. One devotee addressed God thus, "I am not Sakkubai to let you get bound to the pillar and beaten up in my place. I am not Ramdas to demand the return of the money that I have spent for you. I am not Jayadeva to demand that the ruined house should once more be repaired and that the roof should be put over it and covered with hay." We find several such devotees in our history, who have thus served God and made God serve them. All our *Sastras* unanimously declare that love alone is the one essential requisite for developing unswerving devotion. Realisation, which is not possible through logic, through offering sacrifices and through discussion and other disciplines, can be

achieved only through love. Therefore, we should examine why we should cultivate and cherish this love.

The nature of the body, of the mind and of the desires and senses are not conducive to the realisation of God. We all hear about the Lord who sleeps on *ksheerasagara*, the ocean of milk. Our *antha karana*, or the inner subtle body, is the *ksheerasagara*, or the ocean of milk. And that which remains after *dhyana*—the *sesha* or the remnant—is the *adishesha* or the great serpent. The consciousness that lies between the two is Lord Vishnu Himself. And the one who worships or the worshipper is Goddess Lakshmi. Several great men have taught us how to make God sleep on the ocean of milk—in our own *antha karana*, or in our own heart.

There is hidden meaning as to why we think of the *sadhaka* as Lakshmi. Unless the inert nature is completely shaken off, the *jivi* cannot be called *Purusha*. It is possible to attain that principle of *Purusha* through the feminine nature or *stree thathwa*. We must examine what this *jadathwa* or inertness is. There are five phases or aspects of this inertness. The first one is called *ghataakasa*—the sky within the pot. The second is *jalaakasa*, the sky reflected in the water. The third is the *daharaakasa*, the sky that is reflected in the heart. The fourth one is *chidaakasa* and the fifth one is *mahadaakasa* or the grand sky. So when we look at these five kinds of *akasas*, they are all inert or *jada*.

Each one of you has got a name. The name refers to the body but not the *Atma* or the soul in you. The name is given by the parents to the body, which is inert and it refers only to the body but not to the *Atma*. *Ghataakasa* is that state which says, “This is I.” Man uses the word “I”, referring to the body, though there is deeply lodged within him the higher principle of *Atma* or the soul. Even when we are lost in the knowledge of the body, thinking only of the body, still there is that feeling for the *Atma* within us.

Coming to *jalaakasa*, it is the state that is full of *sankalpa* or intention and may be described as the sky reflected in water. If in a little pond of water the blue sky is reflected and the sky may also

have the shining moon, we have the illusion that the sky and the moon reflected in the water seem to be mobile or moving. The sky and the moon do not move, but only the water moves when the breeze blows over it. The *sankalpa* and the *vikalpas* in us are the water.

*Daharaakasa* is the state when one looks at *sankalpas* and *vikalpas* but one is aware that he is looking at them. Let us take an example. We pour water into a tub and we look at it. We see our own face reflected in it, and we say that it is a reflection. Even though that image reflected in the water is beaten, not even a single stroke is felt by the object, namely, the body. If the object and the image were one, any injury done to the image must be felt by the object also. Though your face is reflected in water, the goodness or the badness of the image does not affect you, the object. You may then ask, “Is it not my reflection?” Yes, it is yours. When the image is hurt and that injury is not registered by you, it is “not you.” But when you are abused, you and the image become one. When the image is hurt physically by anybody, that injury is not felt by the object, but when the image is insulted and abused by anybody, then the object, whose reflection is found in the water, also feels the insult. You feel angry because you are there in the image also. In *sabda* or sound, there is unity, but in action or *kriya* there is no unity. And the nature of *Sabda Brahma Thathwa* is hidden here. In *jalaakasa*, we also find the nature of *daharaakasa*.

Coming to *chidaakasa*, this refers to man remaining a mere spectator. *Chidaakasa* is the state when a man, without being upset, without being in any way influenced by emotion, just observes and remains like an observer or a spectator. Whatever may happen to the body —it may be insulted or injured— the person is not affected by them; he is always engrossed in the higher consciousness and that is the state of *Chidaakasa*. The pot may be broken, the pond may run dry, the canvas may be torn to shreds, but that *akasa* stands there. The sky reflected in the pot, the sky painted on the canvas, only refer to the media, but not to the great sky itself. Though this is reflected

in our body, mind and senses, this *thathwa* is something that transcends all of them.

Only when the senses are brought under control and when there is a state of *nirvikalpa*, we reach the highest state of realisation. It is possible for us to realise the nature of the *mahadaakasa*, or the great sky, in the state known as *nirvikalpa*. *Nirvikalpa* means arresting the activity of all the senses and assuming supreme control over them. Then the consciousness is not lost in the body or in any part of the body, but it is entirely devoted to that higher or transcendental state. The *mahadaakasa* is called *akasa* because it has an element of *jada* or inertness in it.

We sometimes call a conglomeration of clouds by the name of sky. The sky has no separate entity or existence. It is not a shape which is concrete and made up of the five elements. It has only one quality, namely *sabda* or sound. And this sound is all-pervading. It is wrong to identify *sabda* alone with the sky. The sky is known by several names such as *akasa*, *gagana*, *soonya*, or nothingness, and so on. There is nothing there in the sky. The state of nothingness is called by the name of sky. When we sometimes refer to our heart and say, this is *hridayakasa*, it is because there is no shape for the *hridaya* or heart in a spiritual sense. The *akasa* has to be cleared of all baser intentions and instincts, all *sankalpas*, and *vikalpas*.

If a boy is admitted to a school, he gradually progresses from the nursery to the first standard, from the first to the second, third, and so on. He does not suddenly jump from the nursery to the highest class in the school. The same boy, if he remains at home and under-goes private studies and takes the help of tutors, it is possible for him to go straight to the 6th standard. When we gain God's grace and love, it is possible for us to go straight to the highest state of *mahadaakasa* without passing through all the various stages of *ghataakasa*, *jalaakasa*, and so on. It is necessary for us to search for the path that easily takes us to the feet of the Lord and realise Him.

Elders very often say that this world is an illusion and God alone is the reality. They say that life is tasteless, that life has no

charm and that life has no substance. Even the scholars who say that this world is an illusion are themselves caught up in the illusion and are not able to extricate themselves from it. Though this is transient, false, and ephemeral, it is not possible for us at once to extricate ourselves from it. Though we know that this body grows weak, perishes, drops down dead, still we take all pains to protect it, to attend to it and to beautify it. Though we know that death is an inescapable reality, are we not trying to escape it?

Though we know that the world is false, it is desirable that we recognise the truth even in this falsehood. Let us examine carefully whatever truth there is in it. Even in boyhood, we have all the qualities of old age latent and hidden. We do not find any basic changes though we may pass on from the state of adolescence to youth, to middle age and to old age. And the same body is present through all these stages of change from boyhood to old age. Nobody can identify exactly the point of transition when boyhood comes to an end and youth begins, when youth comes to an end and old age comes. The body does not undergo any death. The body remains and, within the same body, these changes come about. When we contemplate upon this, we verily find truth in falsehood, falsehood in truth, truth in truth and falsehood in falsehood.

In this world, which is false, we are leading a life which is false. If this world was real, why do we, after our dinner and retiring to sleep, forget all the lectures that we have listened to during the day and all the experiences of the day? Nothing remains in our mind. It is not forgetting, but we simply become unaware of all the experience through which we have gone during the day. Though your body may be resting in the shed at Brindavan, your mind may be dreaming at night wandering in the streets of Delhi. In the dream, you think that you are moving in Delhi in body. The truth is that though your body is here, you are dreaming that the body has gone to Delhi and has gone for shopping. Your body has not gone there at all. What is true in the waking state is false in the dream state and

what is true in the dream state becomes false in the waking state. Therefore, this is falsehood in falsehood.

The sun shines brilliantly when there is no obstruction, but when we build a house and fit it with doors and windows and close all of them, there is only darkness but no light inside that house. When we want the sun's light to penetrate into the house, either of two things must be done by us. We must remove the top or we must get rid of *deha bhranthi*. We demolish the top, which is made of *ahamkara*, or ego, and *mamakara*, or attachment. Alternatively, we can fit a mirror and see that the sun is reflected into the house. Then the mirror also will be able to radiate the effulgence of the sun. It is possible by moving the mirror to spread the light in the dark interior of the house. But does the light come from the sun or does it come from the mirror? The mirror is inert and it is not luminous by nature. The moon also is like the mirror and the moon has no brightness of its own. The light of the sun is reflected on the surface of the moon and therefore the light of the moon is so cool and so pleasant.

Our *Vedas* teach that the moon is like the mind, which reflects the glory of the soul. If the light of the *Atma* is reflected in the mirror of the *buddhi*, or intelligence, then the entire dark mind may be seen shining with light. Mind is responsible for our being able to derive *prajnana*, even though we are in the state of *ajnana*. If we make our mind radiant and illumined, then there is no room for darkness, *ajnana*, or ignorance. When we turn our *buddhi* toward *Atma*, we shall be able to dispel all the darkness from our minds. Mind is the master of the senses and intelligence is the master of the mind. *Atma* is the master of intelligence. And what is grasped in intelligence is beyond the senses. It transcends the senses. The attempt to gain liberation, ultimately, by passing through all these intermediate stages, is known by the name of *moksha marga* or the path for liberation.

Some days back, I said that I would deal with the subject of the different *padas* in the different *yugas* and explain how *dharma* has lost its *padas*, in spite of the appearance of the great *Avatars*. I

shall elucidate it now. *Dharma* used to live and move about in *Kritha Yuga* on four feet. The four feet are *yajna*, *yaga*, *yoga*, and *thapas*. There is a saying that there is no *dharma* higher than truth. Truth is the basis of all *dharma* and truth depends upon the *rutha* or the *sankalpa*. So these three—*rutha*, *sathya*, and *dharma*—are inseparably and inextricably connected. *Rishis* in the *Kritha Yuga* followed these fourfold paths, described in the foregoing as the four feet, in order to gain harmony between thought, word and deed.

The loss of one *pada* in *Thretha Yuga* really means the loss of one *sadhana*, namely, *thapas*. The work of the *pada* is to help man walk. *Thapas* also is the process of enforcement in action. It was possible in *Thretha Yuga* to attain *dharma* without *thapas* by following the other three, namely *yajna*, *yaga*, and *yoga*. In the *Dwapara Yuga* with the help of only two, *yaga* and *yoga*, it was possible to attain liberation. *Yajna* had been eliminated. In the *Kali Yuga*, *dharma* has only one *pada*, namely *yoga*. *Yaga* is gone and *yoga* alone remains. “What kind of *yoga*?” you may ask. That *yoga* which is relevant is *bhakthi yoga*, the *yoga* of devotion. There is no other way to attain liberation in this *Kali Yuga* except through the path of devotion. In the *Thretha Yuga*, people were able to enjoy the proximity to Divinity through the three methods, *yajna*, *yaga*, and *yoga*. In the *Dwapara Yuga*, the same could be achieved with the help of only two *padas*, *yaga* and *yoga*. It is possible to attain this in *Kali Yuga* through *yoga* alone. Thus, the inner meaning is that they have facilitated the process, eliminated the difficult ones and the one that is easily accessible to all, the path of devotion, is what remains in the *Kali Yuga*.

It used to take two months for people to reach Benares some fifty years ago. Ten years ago, it used to take three days for going by train. Today it is possible for us to reach Benares by plane within three hours. Kasi or Benares has not undergone any change. The City of Bangalore has not undergone any change. The four feet we used in the early journeys have finally dwindled into one foot at the present time. Our methods have been rendered easier. Let us take

our life itself as an example. During your first year you use all the four limbs to move. After a few months, you walk on two feet taking the help of the wall with your hands. Sometimes you may take the help of the mother's hand. In that stage, you use three limbs. After some time, you do not depend upon either the mother or the wall. You can just walk on your two feet. Later, when you want to be very swift in your movement, you use only one foot. When you run, the two feet do not touch the ground at the same time. Only one foot touches the ground at a time. Because you set only one foot on the ground, you are able to reach the destination very quickly. *Dharma* has not changed. Only the means of attainment have been facilitated. *dharma* remains the same.

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