

12. Grace Of God Can Change A Foolish Person Into A Learned Scholar

శుభ్ర భీతా కింశ వ నీతాః
'సంసాజల లవ క్షీణో పీతా
సక్రందపి యోవ ముఖాతిసమజా
ఆస్త్వయమృతం కిం కురుతే పశ్యం?

కంబు క్షీణ భీతా పతనము
కొంపోయి సంసాతీర్థము పానము
సూరికృష్ణాబిసయెక స్థిరకారణంబున
ఆశ్రయి యముజ్జీకుని ఆర్చింపును.

Recitation of even a very small portion of the Gita, taking in even a small quantity of the sacred water from the Ganges, performing the puja of Hari even once, can

make one so sacred that Yama, the Lord of death, will have nothing to say to or ask any questions of such a person.

Divyatma Swarupas!

Sankara, along with his disciples, gave us the *Bhaja Govindam* verses. One of his principal disciples by name Ananda gave this particular verse. Anandai was a dull-minded individual and hence was called Giri by his associates. Giri means a dull-minded individual. He became Ananda Giri from then onwards. This dull-minded Ananda Giri wanted to be with the *guru* and serve him. This was his only aim. Other students were so attentive and clever that they could learn by heart their lessons and recite them to the *guru* the same evening. Ananda Giri was so dull that he could not recite anything. He made up for this by spending all his time in the service of the *guru*. Because he was serving the *guru* at all times, he received extraordinary grace on one occasion and he was able to compose a set of verses called the *Totaka* verses.

Ananda Giri himself was called Totaka thereafter. It was implied in these verses that an understanding of the essence of our scriptures would lead one to apprehend the *Atma*. The other disciples read many books, and each one of them converted their heads into a book. Ananda Giri was serving the *guru* in such a way that he turned himself into a bee which could go and take the very

honey from inside the flower of the heart of *guru*. Study, divorced from practice, does not make the mind steady. Totaka thought that it is better to know only that part of knowledge which would lead him to immortality. That is why Ananda Giri said in this verse, that it is sufficient even if you read the *Bhagavad Gita*, which contains the essence of Indian culture, even once.

A person who is hungry need not go and eat all the different kinds of foods that are produced in the world. It is sufficient if he eats what is required to satisfy him and relieve his hunger. It is enough if you take one verse out of the *Bhagavad Gita* and understand the true meaning of it. It is in this context that Anandai Giri said that taking a small quantity of the Ganges water is sufficient. When you are thirsty, it is enough if you take a small quantity of water to quench your thirst. You do not have to drink up the entire Ganges. In the same manner, Totaka believed that one single ray of God's grace is quite enough for him to demonstrate to the world the nature of the *Atma*. It is because of the fact that this disciple enjoyed such confidence of the *guru*, that Sankara established a *peetha* or seat of learning at Badri and put him in charge of that *peetha*.

There were four principal disciples of Sankara and they were Padmapada, Sureswara, Totaka and Hastaamalaka. These four disciples were chosen by Sankara, and he put them in charge of the four *peethas* or the principal seats of learning throughout the country.

Sureswara had also another name and that was Mandana Misra. Sankara had several arguments with Mandana Misra on various religious matters. At the end of these arguments, Sankara came out victorious. Thereafter Sankara gave *sanyasa* to Mandana Misra as he was then a family man. His wife was Ubhayabharathi. Mandana Misra was a learned man. He was learned in all the *Sastras* and *Vedas* and in truth he was a *Jnani*. He was the embodiment of all knowledge.

There is a need for us to understand clearly the nature of the teachings given by Sankara to his disciples. Our country is in a deplorable condition because, today, we neither have *gurus* like Sankara nor single-minded disciples like Mandana Misra. Teaching is of two kinds. One method is to teach by word of mouth. This can be accomplished by imparting information and knowledge, which helps and does not hinder to change the outlook, but it does not necessarily transform the listener. Precept and practice remain distinct. The second method of teaching consists of the *guru* himself setting an example by his behaviour and actions for the disciples to follow. This method is more effective.

Sankara used to thoroughly examine the intent and meaning of the verses composed by the disciples before accepting them. Sankara called Ananda Giri and asked him what he meant when he said that reading a small portion of *Bhagavad Gita* was sufficient. He questioned him on how reading a small portion out of seven hundred

verses could be sufficient to give all the understanding of the *Sastras*. Ananda Giri gave a very sweet and attractive reply. He said that the prospect of having to read 18 chapters and 700 verses from the beginning to the end would scare away all dull-minded people and they would, in that context, not even make a beginning. On the other hand, if they are asked to read one verse only, they would do so and then develop a taste for the rest of it. They may then read other verses day after day.

This is similar to our efforts to feed a small baby. When he begins to eat, we do not in the first instance give salt, sambar, rice and all at one time. We give a little soft and sweet quantity of food first, so that he will develop a proper taste. Thereafter, the child will want to eat platesfull of food. So also, if dull-minded people are given the taste of *Bhagavad Gita* through a small bit, thereafter they will desire to read more.

Then Sankara enquired as to what he meant by saying that taking a small quantity of Ganges water would be sufficient. Ananda Giri replied that Ganges is a sacred river and is in the position of a mother to our country, and it has been responsible for our reputation and status. It is known that Ganges water remains unspoilt for any length of time. It contains the elements which give us health and strength. It is sacred in that it comes from the *Vishnupada* and even if one drop is taken in, it will do a lot of good. Not only this, the Ganges river flows in all the three possible worlds, in three

different names, and with three different qualities. In heaven, it flows with the name Mandakini. On earth, it flows with the name Bhageerathi. In the Netherlands or *Pathala*, it flows with the name Bhogavathi. The three *gunas*, *Sathwa Guna*, *Thamo Guna* and *Rajo Guna*, are all contained in the river. In the same manner, in the three possible divisions of time—past, present and future, the same river is flowing. These are the extraordinary qualities of Ganges.

Sankara was not satisfied with the meaning given and questioned Ananda Giri further, with a view to go deeper. Sankara asked him what he meant by speaking about the three worlds. He asked how man experiences these three worlds. Ananda Giri gave the reply that he who recognises that the *Atma* in all beings is the same, he who recognises this oneness in the universe and derives peace from such knowledge, should be considered to be living in heaven or *Swarga*. On the other hand, the person who makes a distinction between insects, animals and birds on the one hand and human beings on the other and thinks that the human is a distinctive and superior entity will be in the *Martya Loka* or the earth, where the human beings live. He then went on to say that if individuals forget the sacredness of human nature and become animals, exhibit qualities like selfishness and greed, and ignore the contents of our scriptures like the *Sastras* and *Vedas*, all such individuals will be living in *Pathala* or the lower world.

Just as our body exhibits depressions and

elevations, our ideas also are both high and low. The three *gunas*, namely *sathwa*, *rajo*, and *thamo*, are present in everyone and what comes up to a point of time will be decided by the circumstances. Life is a mixture of all these three *gunas*. When a man is happy and is in good circumstances, his ideas too will be of the *sathwa* type. On the other hand, when something goes wrong, he is immediately excited and the *rajo guna* shows up. When he has eaten heavily, he will slowly go to sleep and the *thamo guna* appears. In this way, all the three *gunas* coexist in the same body and a mixture of them comes up according to the circumstances.

Similarly the heaven, the earth and the lower world are all present in one and the same individual and each one shows up in accordance with his state of mind. The same has been divided into different categories like the believing, the non-believing and the believing non-believing. It is better to be a non-believer than being a believing non-believer. In this verse, it has been suggested that you should never ride two horses. If you do not know how to ride a horse, it is better not to do so. It is most dangerous to ride two horses at one time.

In man's mind, the *Atma* is flowing like a clear stream as water flows in the river Ganges. The Indian culture has been flowing through time like the Ganges river has been flowing in a clean and clear manner. It does not get contaminated, it remains everlasting and it flows permanently. That is how Indian culture is in many

respects like Ganges. The verses that have been handed over to us by Sankara in the form of *Bhaja Govindam* are in the sense that there is no selfishness of any kind in them.

The Ganges river, when it flows, does not make any attempt to enjoy the sweetness of its own water. The fruit tree, when it gives fruits, itself never enjoys the taste of its fruits. In the same manner, all the great saints like Sankara have given all their strength and wisdom for the benefit of others. They never utilised it for their own benefit.

In the third line of the verse, Ananda Giri said that if you perform the *Vishnu puja* even once, you will attain a status where even Yama or the Lord of death, cannot question you. Vishnu here means the omnipresence and if you understand the significance of omnipresence even once, Yama cannot question you. The word Vishnu does not here refer to one wearing the insignia of *sankha*, *chakra*, *gada*, *padma*. Vishnu here stands for omnipresence, and has no particular form. The bliss that we experience when we think of God is the aspect of Vishnu.

Ananda Giri gave a beautiful example for this. If you take rice and convert it into rice flour, it will not have any taste when you put it into your mouth. Similarly, if you take wheat flour and put it on your tongue, it will not have any taste. If you mix sugar with

the wheat flour or the rice flour and prepare some kind of a sweet, you will get the sweet taste of such a preparation in your mouth. Although there is no inherent sweetness in either the rice or the wheat, the sugar gives the sweetness. In the same manner, when Vishnu *Thathwa* is added even to a lifeless thing, that object gives a good feeling of omnipresence. This is how Vishnu *Thathwa* can impart omnipresence even to lifeless things.

Although the sweets which we prepare and eat have many different forms and names, the fact is that all of them contain one common thing and that is sugar. Just as we must realise this truth, we must also realise that in this world, while there are so many individuals with different forms and names, the one common thing that is present in all of them is the Vishnu *Thathwa* or the omnipresent *Atma*. This realisation will enable you to develop love for the entire humanity. It is necessary for every individual to recognise the presence of *Atma* in everyone. You should realise this by your own effort or by listening to what the elders tell you or by having *darshan*, *sparsan* and *sambhashan*, that is by seeing, touching and hearing great people.

On one occasion, Narada went to Krishna and told him that the gopikas in Brindavan who are not very intelligent, are having some foolish and irrational ideas about Krishna. He said that he would go and tell them the truth about Krishna. He asked Krishna's permission to do so. Krishna smiled and thought within himself that

there can only be one kind of devotion and there cannot be two types, one appropriate to the intelligent people and the other appropriate to ignorant people. He wanted to teach Narada a lesson and permitted him to go and tell the gopikas what he wished to tell. Krishna thought that Narada was foolish to think that the gopikas were irrational and did not have the right kind of devotion. He knew that no one could excel the gopikas in the matter of devotion.

As soon as Narada got Krishna's permission, he went to Brindavan and met the gopikas. The gopikas came and surrounded him with the eager expectation that he would give some news of Krishna. Narada told them that they were ignorant to realise the real nature of Krishna and that they do not understand the *Vedas* and *Sastras* and said that he would teach them these aspects. Just as one cannot separate the print from the paper on which it is printed, you cannot separate Krishna from the hearts of the gopikas. We say that one who knows *Brahman* is *Brahman* himself. That is why the gopikas, who know Krishna are like Krishna himself. Narada realised his own foolishness and left after blessing the gopikas. The fact is that these gopikas have realised the omnipresence or the Vishnu *Thathwa* that has been described by Ananda Giri in his verse.

It is in this context that Ananda Giri gave another verse. In that verse, he said that we think so much about our families, our relations, our children and our grandchildren. We spend so much time and effort in

thinking about the wealth that we have to amass, the methods by which to preserve this wealth and so on. If only we can spend a thousandth part of this time and effort in thinking about Krishna, the Nandanandana, and in surrendering ourselves at His feet, all fears will go. Even the most fearful of all aspects, the aspect of death, will not bother those who develop this kind of thinking. They will live in happiness and bliss, in this world.

In this *Kali Yuga*, there are many people who do not realise the value of time. They spend so much time in fulfilling their worldly desires that they have very little time left to do good things. They are willing to spend days, weeks and even months on satisfying some foolish desire of theirs, but they say that they have no time for good things. If someone asks you to participate in *sathsanga* for even half an hour, you say that you have no time, but you do not hesitate to spend several hours in a club. In a house, if someone suggests that you should do *abhishekam* to a *Saligram* with a little water, you say that there is no time. Your misfortune is such that on the contrary, you spend gallons of water cleaning a buffalo or some animal like that. For good things, you have neither time nor energy.

Man is not able to determine what is wrong and what is right, and this is the reason why we have landed ourselves in this mess. Therefore we must make a sincere attempt to distinguish truth from untruth. We must realise the omnipresence of God. This will make our lives happy

and purposeful. On the other hand, people go on complaining of family difficulties and professional problems which prevent them from their participating in *sathsanga*. We have to make an enquiry and see if such responsibilities are really tying a person down or is he using them only as an excuse for tying himself down.

There is a small example for this. In our country, there is a peculiar method of trapping monkeys. This process consists of bringing a big pot with a small mouth and putting some material which is attractive to the monkey inside that pot. The monkey will put its hand inside the pot and catch hold of a handful of that material. It will then not be able to pull out its hand from within the pot. It will imagine that someone inside the pot is holding its hand. Then, it makes an attempt to run away along with the pot; but the monkey is thus trapped. No one is holding the monkey. The monkey got trapped by itself, because it has taken in its hand such a lot of material. The moment it lets the material in its hand go, it will be free.

In the same manner, in this big pot of the world with a narrow mouth of the family, man is tempted by the pleasures of the world and when he gets lost with involvement in those pleasures, he thinks that someone or something is binding him down. No other person is responsible for this bondage. The moment he gives up the pleasures and detaches himself, he will be free. That

is the way to free himself from the imagined bondage.

There is another good story of Gajendra, the elephant, which conveys well the meaning of bondage. In the thick forest of life, a wild elephant, the mind of man, will be roaming about. This mind which is roaming about like a wild elephant in the forest of life, becomes thirsty for sensuous pleasures. To quench that thirst, it begins to drink in the lake of the family. The moment the elephant puts its foot in the lake, the crocodile of attachment catches hold of its leg. The moment this attachment catches hold of its leg, the elephant cannot free itself. With this attachment, the elephant struggles till it becomes weak. When it becomes weak, it prays to God and asks to be saved. When in desperation, such a prayer is made to God, grace of God will descend on the person. When the elephant's vision turns towards God, God's vision also turns towards the elephant. This is what is called *sudarsana* or holy vision. This word does not mean a *chakra*, as is commonly thought, but it means good vision. When you turn towards God, God will turn towards you.

To understand this particular verse, we need not go as far as the story of Gajendra. There is an event in my own experience to show how an individual, who initially was completely immersed in worldly pleasures later changed his attitude. I will narrate this event. One person came to me about twenty years ago and prayed that he should meet with success in his examination and

secure a high first class. I told him that there will have to be his effort and then the result will be according to God's will. I gave him my blessings and sent him away.

He did secure a high first class and came to me again after passing his examination and asked for my blessings so that he may get a job. Because of his good luck, he did get a job within two months. He again came to me after a few months and I asked him if he had a job. He said he had a job and he was happy. He also said that he wanted to marry a typist girl in his own office. I told him that if it is agreeable to his father and mother, he may do so, but they may not like it. He was not inclined to listen to me. He said that even if it meant transgressing the wishes of his parents, he was determined to marry that girl. He in fact suggested that he would even give up his life if this marriage was not possible. Under those circumstances, I criticised him and told him that he must convince his parents before entering into such an alliance. He brought a lot of pressure on his parents and they, finding no other alternatives, agreed to the marriage.

The marriage was over and after a year, both of them came to me again and said they wanted to have a son. After the birth of a son, his expenses multiplied, his wife gave up the job, and he again came to me desiring to get a promotion. By his good luck, he got a promotion. Although he was somewhat foolish in regard to worldly matters, he had great faith in regard to matters

relating to Swami. I gave him my blessings and he got a promotion. He did not turn up thereafter for over five years. He was quite happy. In the next five years they had five children.

He came to me again after five years and said that he was fed up with the family, that he cannot bear the burden of the family and that he was looking for relief from all the mess. He said that he wanted a small job in the *ashram* itself and said that his family has now got a hold over him like a big serpent. I asked him if the serpent caught him on its own or whether he let the serpent come to him and catch him.

Therefore, you must learn to distinguish between good and bad, between truth and untruth. You must use your education for the purpose of developing faith in God and respect for your parents. Your life should rest on morality and truth. Your life may or may not go on well but you must base it on correct foundations. Money comes and goes but morality comes and grows. It is a matter of great satisfaction if you are educated on the right lines, become an example to others and accept positions of responsibility. In all these things, always keep your heart straight and clear. Then you will get the grace of God. Remember that Ananda Giri, an uneducated and foolish person, became a great scholar and could be the head of a seat of learning in Badri, just because he won the grace of his *guru* and the grace of God.