

**16. Karma Marga, Jnana Marga,
Bhakthi Marga:
All Lead To The Same Destination**

From the time you wake up in the morning until you go back to sleep in the night, you are spending all your time earning some food for your stomach. All the education, knowledge and ability that you have is being spent for this trivial purpose. Think of this, Oh man! and find out what happiness you are getting by forgetting the Lord in this process. What is the use of your feeling very proud that you have read many books and learnt many *Sastras* if you cannot have devotion to God? All such pursuits which do not enable you to strengthen your devotion to God are utterly useless. You should ponder over this truth.

Pavitratma Swarupas!

During the past fifteen days, you have learnt about some aspects of sacred Brahman. However, realising that the worldly affairs in which you have to live everyday are equally important, I will speak to you today about some of these worldly aspects.

If man lives properly as a human being, it will be occasionally possible for him to turn towards the divine but if man does not live as man, it will not be possible for him to even occasionally think of the divine. It is only when man makes an attempt to know who he is, can he understand the divine. Only then is there a chance for him to enter the realm of *Atma* and enjoy bliss and happiness.

It is in the context of this daily living that the great *acharyas*, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa have given their philosophical expositions. Sankara established and expounded that whatever we see around us in the world is simply a manifestation of Easwara. He has been proclaiming that whether in the aspect of the *Jiva* or in the aspect of the Lord or in the aspect of material creation, everything is one and the same and there is no second. In all the three aspects, *Jiva*, Easwara, *Prakruthi*

and all the things that we see around us, what is present is the *Paramatma*; and appearances are an illusion.

Although the coconut appears to us as one single fruit, it still has three distinct parts, the fibre on the outside, the shell as a cover beneath it and the kernal inside. These parts though being distinct, yet constitute one single aspect of the coconut. In the same manner, Sankara regarded *Jiva*, Easwara and *Prakruthi* as three aspects, though apparently different, in reality are one and the same and thus he preached *Adwaita*. The world consists of several ideas: there are many things that we see, there are many desires on the material side and this was treated by Sankara as analogous to the outer fibre of the coconut. He further compared the human body to the shell below the fibre of the coconut. He realised that the human body was made of destructible items like flesh and blood and so he compared it to the shell. But the *Paramatma* which has the form of a lotus in each individual has been compared to the coconut kernal. By comparing this triple aspect of *Jiva*, Easwara and *Prakruthi* to these three constituents of the coconut, Sankara preached the philosophy of *Adwaita*.

Since he was propounding that everything in the world consists of only Brahman, the ordinary people were

somewhat confused. They were not able to clearly grasp the basis of *Adwaita*. He was explaining through the *Mahavakyas* like *Thath thwam asi* (That thou art), *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman) that all that one sees in this world is Brahman. There was some difficulty for ordinary people to comprehend the profound truths being preached by Sankara.

People find it quite easy to utter various words but they find it difficult to put them into practice. It is easy to mentally identify oneself with Brahman but to be able to really feel and practise that identity and to realise divinity in everyone is a difficult matter. By merely uttering such statements without understanding their true meaning, human nature is likely to deteriorate.

Realising this, Ramanuja with a view to arrest such deterioration, expounded what is called qualified *Adwaita* or *Visishta Adwaita*. Sankara, in the seventh century, preached *Adwaita* or the non-dualistic philosophy. On the other hand, in the eleventh century, Ramanuja was preaching qualified non-dualism. If *Adwaita* took deep roots, he was afraid that faith and devotion might become weaker. Therefore, he started preaching *Adwaita* in a special and qualified manner. He gave it some distinctiveness and explained that *Jiva* and Brahman always remain as separate entities.

While Sankara explained and propounded that *Jiva* and Brahman were identical with each other, Ramanuja introduced a special theory that though *Jiva* and Brahman were close and similar to each other, they were not really identical. In this context and in accordance with such teachings, people tried to get closer and closer to the Lord by their devotion.

Later in the 12th century, Madhwacharya propounded that *Jiva*, Brahman and *Prakruthi* were more distant than what had been conceived by the earlier schools of thought. He propounded that *Jiva* and Easwara are to be regarded as distinct and separate from each other and that they can never get close to each other. Madhwacharya opposed and contradicted the view of Sankara according to which Brahman was the only reality and the world was illusory. He asserted that Brahman, *Jiva* and *Prakruthi* were distinct and that each one of them was as real as the other two. We have to interpret this as simply meaning that Madhwacharya preached the concept of *Salokya* (Constant thought of godhead) and that *Jiva* simply lived in the domain of the Lord but it was not identical with the Lord. In this context, one can say that these three great *acharyas* were teaching three different aspects of the same reality.

Sankara was propounding *Sayujya* or identity with the Lord, while Ramanuja was talking in terms of *Sameepya* or closeness to the Lord and Madwacharya was preaching in terms of *Salokya* or living in the domain of the Lord.

In this way, these three acharyas preached three paths for realisation of the same truth, namely the *Jnana Marga*, the *Bhakthi Marga* and the *Karma Marga*. One should not think that these three paths are contradictory to one another. If we can sanctify the work that we do, the time that we spend and sanctify the use to which we put our body, then it will be possible to realise the truth and therefore they have gone from one step to another. They have gone from *Karma*—sanctifying the work—to *Bhakthi* and *Jnana*. That is the reason why all these aspects must be treated as complementary and not contradictory.

If man's effort is noble, then God will support it. The coming together of man's effort and God's grace is responsible for happiness. What is called *purushartha*, or man's effort, must be put in by man. Without this it is not possible for him to acquire the grace of the Lord. Ramanuja realised this and so he talked of different kinds of effort to be put in by man and the support of God.

Sankara taught that “*Sarvam Brahmanam jagat*” (The aspect of Brahman is the basis for all the work we do). He preached that there is nothing which is different from the Lord and that everything was the Lord Himself. Even Sankara, who preached pure *Adwaita* undertook to establish four important religious centres in our country. Through them he tried to propagate the aspect of *Adwaita*. Sankara taught that “*Ekam eva Adwaitiyam Brahma*” that is, Brahman is one and only one, there is no second to Brahman. Even while so preaching, at some places he supported the *Upasana Kanda* at some places.

When we look at them in a superficial manner, we feel that the philosophies expounded by these *Acharyas* are distinct and different from each other. This is not correct. If we examine them in detail and in the context of the time at which they were propounded, we will realise that they are not different in essence or in the basic content. The correct attitude is to see the unity among these three aspects and not to regard them as distinct and different from each other. We shall have to take the essence and inner meaning of all these and appreciate the underlying unity in them.

Sankara always taught pure and undiluted *Adwaita* and he even encouraged *upasana* in the four

centres he established. This practice is continued even today. The people in charge there accept and participate in offerings to the Lord. By such offerings and *puja*, devotees have been attempting to get the grace of the Lord, even in these centres of *Adwaita*. Not only is there a meaning in performing such *upasanas*, they want common people to do the same thing in their daily lives. This is the purpose of participating in *upasana*.

There are two kinds of people—the *Jnanis* and ordinary people. The ordinary people can do the right thing by looking at and imitating the path followed by the *Jnanis*. It is only in the aspect of the body, mind and the daily life that these three philosophies—*Dwaita*, *Adwaita* and *Visishta Adwaita*—were being taught. From the point of view of the body, the path of *karma* or work was taught. From the point of view of the mind, the path of *bhakti* or devotion was taught. From the point of view of one's own daily life, the path of wisdom or *jnana* was taught. Therefore, in order to enable the person to practise these, Sankara, Madhwacharya and Ramanuja taught the three paths which can be called the royal paths for humanity to attain salvation.

One must recognise the purpose and the essence of these three approaches. It is not correct to see only the

outward differences and apparent contradictions between them. If we follow the pure non-dualistic path taught by Sankara and regard everything in the world as Brahman, then we have to ask ourselves what is it that we are able to see in the ordinary human life? Only when we take the other approaches will we be able to understand the human aspects of divinity. It is only from a superficial point of view that these paths appear different. But from the point of view of the ultimate goal, these three are one and the same. It is necessary for us to accept the *upasana* or the work aspect having this common goal in mind.

While recognising the importance of the *Karma Marga* and involving ourselves in the necessary duties that we have to perform, we should also realise the importance of the *Bhakti Marga* and know that we can reach the Lord by the path of devotion. Without inner cleanliness, whatever work you might do will become waste. It will not yield any results. What Sankara taught was that we should have *bhakti* or devotion towards the Lord in view of the temporary and transient nature of the world. In this material world, some kinds of desires and diseases relating to the senses are natural and they appear in human beings. In order to cure these

diseases it is necessary to take the appropriate medicine. There is a small story in support of this.

There was a housewife who had great faith in the Lord and whenever she had time, she used to take a *japamala* and chant the name of the Lord. In this manner, with the idea of sanctifying the time that is available to her, she used to always utter the name of the Lord. She was feeling that her body was like the container and her *prema* like the oil in the lamp. She thought that divinity was a *jyothi* or a bright lamp. In this manner she was spending her life with a view to making it useful. She came to the ultimate conclusion that even while the lamp of life still glowing in her, she should be able to fulfil the duties that are entrusted to her. If this light is extinguished, she would not be able to perform her duties. Hence, she thought that even while living, she must make the best use of it and attain salvation.

Her husband who saw this kind of devotion and attachment to the Lord on the part of his wife, told her that she will not be able to find time for looking after the family if she spends all the time in the contemplation of Lord. He was also of the opinion that they should think of the Lord only after they grow much older. The wife did not agree with this contention. She argued that they

should think of the Lord only when one is physically and mentally sound and not in the old age when these faculties are failing. While strengthening her own belief and conviction in this manner, she was from time to time trying to convince her husband. Once while she was alone and her husband was in a good mood, she told him that the body was temporary like a water bubble. It is not known how long the body will survive and it is wrong to go on postponing one's duties to a later period in life. *Maya* is something which will make one forget the purpose for which one has come into this world. To forget the Lord is due to *Maya*. Therefore, one should think of the Lord while one is still strong and should not postpone it to a later date because the body may disappear at any time.

On the other hand, the husband was arguing that she was out of her mind and asked her to think about who was going to feed them if they spend all their time thinking of the Lord. He asked her if the Lord would come and look after the children and attend to other needs if they spend their time in the thought of the Lord. He said that they will have to earn money because no one will look at them if they do not have sufficient wealth.

He was thus trying to divert the attention of his wife. But the wife who had a total commitment and faith

in the Lord said that the Lord who had sown the seed will also water the plant. God who has given us this life will also provide food for us. If you spend all your time thinking that you have to find food for yourself, you are just like an animal. The one difference between man and the other animals is that man has wisdom which the animals lack. This is the only faculty that distinguishes man from an animal. If you always talk of finding food, you are behaving just like an animal.

Such line of thinking on the part of his wife made a deep impression on his mind and finally he came to the conclusion that these statements were really true. However, He told her that he had to think of the marriages of the children and other such commitments. He said that after these commitments were fulfilled, he would think only of the Lord. He said that he does have faith and devotion but he has other duties as well.

That day had gone in such conversation. As days passed the husband contracted a dreaded disease and the lady had to consult various doctors and specialists. In those difficult days, she went to the bedside of her husband and told him to think of the Lord at least under those circumstances and try to earn His grace. She said that the grace of the Lord was the best medicine for the husband.

The husband had great faith in the doctors and so he forced her to call the doctors again. One doctor who was liked by the husband came and after examination gave a bottle of some liquid and told the wife to give the mixture to the husband three times a day. This was told by the doctor and the husband saw the bottle being handed over to the wife. He knew the instructions that had been given. The wife took the bottle but did not give the husband the medicine regularly. After three days, the husband asked the wife why the medicine had not been given according to instructions. The wife had a very good opportunity to teach a lesson to the husband. She said that after all, the doctor had given a medicine but why should it be taken in the manner in which it was prescribed. It can as well be swallowed in one go. The husband said that the medicine should be taken when the disease was there but what is the use of taking it later. Then the wife explained that on the same analogy, we should take the medicine for the *Bhavaroga* (birth-death cycle), immediately after we are born and not postpone it to a later date. He was told that the medicine given by the doctor was for the physical illness which he got a few days ago, but, for the *Bhavaroga*, which starts right from the birth itself, the

medicine is constant contemplation on the Lord. The husband was convinced at last and he started contemplation seriously on the Lord. Consequently his disease was quickly cured. Since then both of them were very happy.

Students, boys and girls!

Our life is like that. As soon as we are born, our material desires start. Hence, it is very necessary for us to constantly think of the Lord to acquire happiness and bliss right from the time when these desires crop up. To take the view that you will think of the Lord only when you are in difficulties is foolish. It is not correct to postpone thinking of the Lord till you retire from service. We must begin to think of the Lord early. That is why, it is said: Start early, drive slowly and reach safely. If you think that you can think of God after you grow old, it is not right. When the messengers of Yama, the God of death, come and drag you to your end, at the time when your body is put outside the house just before your death, at the time when the anguishing cries of your wife and children are being heard, is it possible for you to utter the name of the Lord? You should think of the Lord while you have all your faculties under your control and when

you have all your mental and physical strength unimpaired. You must earn His grace when you are young and store it for the future.

Prema Swarupas!

When you are still young, your body and mind are like fruits which are just ripe. When your body is in good and ripe condition, you must surrender the body to God. Will he accept it, if you surrender it to Him after it becomes bad, old and rotten? From now on, surrender yourself to the Lord, do good work with the body, have good ideas in your mind and purify your thoughts. It will then be possible for you to earn the grace of God. Such good deeds and the grace thus earned will stand you in good stead in your old age when you can do nothing. If today you are prepared to do good work, then the kind of happiness which you want will be available. If you postpone thinking of the Lord till you become old, there is no guarantee that you will earn His grace.

If you go early enough in the morning to a hotel and buy a ticket for your lunch, you are sure of your meal whether you go at twelve o'clock or at one o'clock, because you have purchased the ticket early enough. If you go for lunch at one o'clock without buying a ticket

early, the hotel keeper may inform you that lunch is not available. Therefore, try and purchase the ticket for God's Grace, which you will want in your old age, while you are young. With that ticket purchased early, it will be available whenever you go, but if you think that you will buy the ticket for the grace of the Lord when you grow old, it may not be available for you. The availability of the Lord's grace will depend upon your luck and fortune.

Students, boys and girls!

The young age in which you now are is a sacred age. That you are born as a human being is a special gift given to you by the Lord. All the animals in the world want to become human beings. If you do not use this gift given by the Lord to earn His grace in this sacred age, it will not be possible when you grow older. As I told you in the beginning, I intend to speak to you about the aspect of Bharath from tomorrow. I thought that between these two—namely Brahman and Bharath—certain ordinary things which relate to daily life should also be communicated to you and therefore, today's discourse has been about matters which relate to normal daily life.