

BUDDHI THE CHARIOTEER

Purity of mind is the pathway to progress,
 Purity of mind means mighty power;
 A pure mind is like a precious pearl in the sea;
 Never forget these words of wisdom.

See no evil, speak no evil;
 Hear no evil—anytime, anywhere, in the world;
 Remember always the picture of the three monkeys;
 What I say is truth, indeed!

You have been told previously that, according to the *Upanishads*, the human body is a chariot, the sense organs being the horses, with the mind as the reins. However beautiful the chariot may be, however dependable the horses, however firm and secure the reins, all of these are of no use if there is no charioteer. So also, however efficient the body, the senses and the mind may be, they serve no purpose in the absence of the charioteer, namely, *buddhi* (intellect). In life's journey, the intellect is of supreme importance. It is called *nischayatmika buddhi*, which means that the *buddhi* has the decision-making capacity. In daily life, many difficulties, problems and disturbances arise from time to time. For overcoming all these obstacles, *buddhi* is our mainstay. Without the intervention of the *buddhi*, none of our problems can be solved. "*Samsayaatma vinasyathi*", says the *Gita*, which means that a man filled with doubts will perish. Because the *buddhi* destroys doubts, the *Gita* affirms, "*Buddhi grahayam athindriyam (buddhi can grasp that which is beyond the grasp of the sense organs).*"

The *Bhagavad Gita* has laid down two banks to channelise its message. In the absence of these banks, the river of life will be subject to many problems, difficulties, and hazards. The two banks are symbolised by two *mantras*. One is: *Sraddhavaan labhathe Jnanam* (the man of faith acquires supreme wisdom). The other is: *Samsayaatma vinasyathi* (the one filled with doubts will perish). When the river of life flows in between these two banks of *mantras*, it will be blessed with peace and happiness and ultimately reach the sea of Divine Grace which is its goal.

"*Antarvaani*" (inner voice) is another name for the *buddhi*. Man is guided by this inner voice in the conduct of his life. Whenever problems arise, he awaits the directives of the inner voice. If satisfactory answers are not forthcoming from his inner voice, man will have no satisfaction in life. In other words, his satisfaction with the external world is a function of his satisfaction with his inner world, represented by the inner voice. Sometimes you hear people saying, "My conscience is not satisfied; or my conscience does not approve of this." Here conscience refers to the inner voice. So when you are exhorted to "Follow the Master," the Master stands for your conscience. Only when you follow the dictates of your conscience can you reach the right destination.

The name *vijnana* is also sometimes attributed to the *buddhi*. But it is not correct, because *vijnana* means the so-called scientific or mundane knowledge, which helps man to discover facts relating to the objective or phenomenal world, whereas *buddhi* is con-

cerned with the subtle realm of the inner world. Hence, the role of the *buddhi* should be correctly understood.

Off and on, the *buddhi* tends to be covered by *ahamkara* (the ego sense). In this context, one should remember that the senses are subtler than the body, the mind is even more subtle than the senses, and the *buddhi* is far more subtle than the mind. The *Atma*, of course, is subtlest of all. In the light of this fact, when we say that *ahamkara* is able to envelop the *buddhi*, it means that *ahamkara* is subtler than the *buddhi*. Thus, *ahamkara* being extremely subtle, is all-pervasive and permeates all our actions. This is why man is unable to transcend *ahamkara* and experience the *Atma* (the Self).

Once, a king summoned an assembly of great scholars to his court. He posed the following question before them. "You are all distinguished scholars who have mastered the scriptures. Can you tell me how many among you are capable of attaining liberation?" Despite all their academic learning, none of the *pundits* had the courage to stand up and give an affirmative answer. The whole assembly was stunned into silence. At that stage, an ordinary man from among the public got up and said boldly, (In Telugu), *Nenu pothe povachchunu*. His reply has two meanings: (i) "I may possibly go to *moksha*" and (ii) "If the I goes, one can attain liberation." The second meaning did not occur to any of the scholars. So, taking the first meaning only, all the *pundits* felt outraged by the audacity of that uneducated person, who appeared to be totally ignorant of the scriptures and had done no spiritual *sadhana*. When the scholars began murmuring among themselves, the king asked that ordinary-looking person, "On what grounds did you make your claim? It appears to be an affront to all the scholars present here." The man politely replied, "Your Excellency! Please forgive me. The meaning of my statement is that if the 'I' goes, liberation can be attained. I am sure no one has any objection to this statement of mine." So, the purpose of this story is that the *ahamkara*, which veils the *buddhi* and which leads one to the wrong identification of the body with the Self, should be removed before one can realise the *Atma*.

The *buddhi* is very close to the *Atma* and therefore well located to receive 90% of the *Atmic* energy and illumination. The mind derives its power from the *buddhi*, the senses from the mind, and the body from the senses. In this process of the flow of power from the *Atma* to the body in stages, there occurs a gradual quantitative and qualitative diminution of the power. Here is a simple illustration for the quantitative decrease. Suppose there is a dark room, which cannot directly receive sunlight. If you want to illuminate that room, you can do it by holding a mirror in the open vicinity and by directing the sun's rays reflected on the mirror towards the interior of the room. However, when compared to the direct rays of the sun, the reflected rays on the mirror are less powerful, and the reflected light in the room is much less powerful. Regarding the gradual deterioration in the quality, let us consider the example of a river. At the source of the springs that give rise to the river, the water will be pure and crystal clear. But as several rivulets and tributaries join its course, and as it wends its way through the countryside, the river gets more and more polluted as people begin making use of the water. Similarly, the purity of the *Atma* gets gradually contaminated as it passes through the *buddhi*, the mind, and the senses and finally reaches the body. Nevertheless, it is possible, through effort, to minimise this quantitative and qualitative deterioration, by sanctifying and purifying the *Buddhi* and by facilitating the direct influence of the *buddhi* on the body.

In the *Taithiriya Upanishad*, which is one of the important among the ten principal *Upanishads*, the *buddhi* is described as a bird. "*Sraddha* (faith)" is the head of the bird.

Its right wing is “*ritam*” (the cosmic rhythm), and its left wing is “*sathyam*” (truth.) The main body of the bird is “*Mahat Thathwa*” (the Great Principle), its tail is called *yoga*. The *buddhi*, in its complete form, is thus composed of five constituents and is extraordinarily powerful.

Once, King Vikramaditya convened an assembly of great scholars and asked them for their opinion regarding which is the most important among the three, viz., *sraddha*, *medha*, and *buddhi*. The scholars came out with different answers. However, they finally expressed their consensus that *medha* (talent) was the most important. Disappointed with their conclusion, the king told the assembly, “Oh *pundits*! ‘*Aastha*’ means *asakthi* or *sraddha* (zeal and faith); ‘*swaastha*’ means *sthiratva* and firmness. Without *asakthi* and *sthiratva*, *medha* (talent) is useless. In other words, it would be futile on the part of man to depend only on his talents and cleverness for leading a purposeful life. He should develop faith and zeal together with steadiness and firm determination. Then only will he be able to accomplish great things in his life. *Sraddha* or faith is of paramount importance. Without *sraddha*, you can achieve nothing. If you have a small spark of fire, you can fan it and create a big blazing fire from out of it, provided you have *sraddha*. If you lack *sraddha*, you will allow even a blazing fire to die out. Similarly with faith, you can produce a mighty banyan tree from a minute seed. Today’s man has *sraddha* no doubt, but only in securing the fruit and not in the labour required for getting it. He does not have the spirit of work in him. The advances in science and technology have made man a lover of comfort for ease with no interest in hard work. There is nothing wrong with science as such. It is the improper use of science that is leading man astray. What is needed today is to pay attention to love and spiritual advancement along with scientific progress. The difference between science and spirituality is brought out vividly, albeit succinctly, by the two simple equations:

- i. Spirit of love = Spirituality
- ii. Split of love = Science

When the pleasure-giving objects are transient, and when the body that enjoys the pleasures is also impermanent, how illogical it is to expect permanent happiness from the conveniences and comforts offered by science and technology! If you want permanent happiness, you have to purify your *antha karana* and develop universal love by following the spiritual path.

Today, we are witnessing rapid and radical changes in almost every field of life—political, economic, social, scientific, etc. However, there is no mental ethical and spiritual transformation. This is because no effort is made to understand the nature and role of the human mind. The food consumed by man provides the source of origin, sustenance and development of his mind. After digestion, the grossest part of the food is thrown out as excreta. The subtle part becomes blood and flesh, while the subtlest part assumes the form of the mind. So the nature of the mind depends on the quality and quantity of food consumed. While the gross body or the food sheath (*annamaya kosa*) is chiefly derived from food, the subtle part of the water we drink contributes to the life sheath (*pranamaya kosa*). The grosser part of the water goes out as urine. The food sheath and the life sheath provide the basis for the other three sheaths, namely, the *manomaya kosa* (the mental sheath), the *vijnanamaya kosa* (the intellectual sheath), and the

anandamaya kosa (the bliss sheath). This shows the paramount importance of food and drink in moulding and developing the human personality.

Reference has been made earlier to the supreme need for ridding the *buddhi* of the *ahamkara* that often envelops it. You should understand the difference between *ahamkara*, the ego and the *Atma* (Self). *ahamkara* is the father of *ahamkara*, grandfather of the mind or thought, the great grandfather of *vaak* (speech). Thus, the *ahamkara*, the *ahamkara*, the mind (*manas*), and *vaak* are all members of the same family. *Ahamkara* is the one that comes and goes, whereas there is no such coming and going for the *Atma*. Usually, the Sanskrit word *ahamkara* is translated into English as “ego”. Both these words are employed in common usage to mean self-esteem or pride born of delusion about one’s wealth or scholarship etc. This is a wrong usage of the words. Their correct meaning is the mistaken identification of oneself with the body. All may not be proud of their wealth or knowledge, but everyone is a victim of *ahamkara* in the sense of considering oneself to be the body. It is this *ahamkara* that shrouds the *buddhi* and misleads it on the wrong path. Hence, if the *buddhi* is to develop *sraddha*, we should first eliminate *ahamkara*.

As mentioned earlier, *ritam*, is the right wing of the bird of *buddhi*. In *Vedantic* parlance *ritam* and *sathyam* have been used as synonyms. However, there is a difference between the two, *sathyam* means putting your words into action, and factually reporting in words what you have done. *Ritam*, on the other hand, has a wider connotation, namely, purity, harmony, and unity of the *trikaranas* (thought, word, and deed). We may also say that *sathyam* is concerned more with the external world, while *ritam* relates more to the internal world of mind and its modifications. *Sathyam* is said to transcend time—past, present, and future, while *Atma* transcends time and space.

Yoga is the tail of the *buddhi*-bird. This tail of *yoga* is needed to maintain the required balance between the two wings of *sathyam* and *ritam*, just as the tail of an aeroplane serves the purpose of balancing the two wings of the aircraft. *Yoga* as envisaged here should not be confused with *asanas*, physical exercises of various kinds. *Yoga* here means the control of the mind and senses.

Then there is the *Mahat Thathwa*, which is the body of the bird of *buddhi*. *Mahat Thathwa* signifies the realisation of the *mahavakya* “*Thath-thwam-asi*—the great *Upanishadic* declaration That Thou Art.” In other words, it is experiencing one’s real Self as *Sath-chith-ananda*. *Buddhi* should not therefore be confused with *medha*, which refers to the possession of worldly talents, intelligence, and cleverness etc., without having Self-knowledge. Thus *buddhi* consisting of *sraddha*, *sathyam*, *ritam*, *Mahat Thathwam*, and *yoga* may be considered as the resound, reflection, and reaction of the *Atma*. On the other hand, *medha sakthi* (the power of worldly knowledge) corresponds to *maya sakthi* (the divine power of delusion).

On Rama’s return to Ayodhya after finishing His 14 years of exile in the forests, Kaikeyi, who felt penitent about this grievous wrong she had done to Rama, approached Him when He was alone and prayed, “My dear Rama, even though I knew about your divine nature, I caused you a lot of unnecessary hardship, blinded by narrow feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Kindly give me some *upadesh* (spiritual instruction), so that I may be absolved of the heinous sin I have committed against such a noble person like yourself.” In response to her request, Rama did not give her the *upadesh* directly but gave her some hints indirectly. This is characteristic of all *Avatars* from time immemorial. *Avatars* seldom give advice directly. Whatever they wish to communicate they convey more often by way of

indirect suggestions and only rarely by the direct method of instruction. The reason for this is there is divinity inherent in every human being, which he can manifest spontaneously, if favourable conditions are provided, just as a viable seed will germinate and grow into a tree because of its inherent nature, if only suitable facilities are provided for the manifestation of its potentiality. Man should be enabled to correct himself by his own efforts, by merely giving timely suggestions, rather than by stultifying his freedom and dignity through directives imposed from without. In short, the best maxim for helping people either in worldly matters or in the spiritual field is “Help them to help themselves” or “Self-help is the best help.”

Following the same strategy, therefore, Sri Rama, in the present instance told, Kaikeyi, “Mother! Please take bath in the holy Sarayu river and come back for My *upadesh*. But while bathing in the Sarayu please observe what is going along the riverside.” Kaikeyi went along with her retinue to the river and returned to Rama after bath. Rama asked her, “Mother! Now tell Me what you noticed on the banks of Sarayu.” Kaikeyi replied that she saw a number of sheep and goats grazing the green grass on the banks, bleating “mae, mae,” as usual, every now and then. Then Rama told her promptly that “mae, mae” was His *upadesh* for her. He disclosed to her that the bleating of the sheep and goats meant, “Who am I? Who am I?” He further remarked that when even sheep are concerned with the question of, “Who am I?” if a man does not concern himself with this question, he is worse than sheep.

Everyone should first seek to know the answer to the question, “Who am I?” Without knowing who you are, what is the use of trying to know everything about others? At birth you cried out “*Koham* (Who am I)?” You should not die with the same question on your lips. When you die, you should be able to assert cheerfully “*Soham* (I am That or He)”. Then alone can you justify your birth as a man and enjoy the satisfaction of having fulfilled the purpose of human life. There is only one path to get rid of *ahamkara*, namely pursuing the Godly way of life. Whenever you feel the sense of ego, sit silently in a corner and observe what your breathing is telling you. It is declaring, “*So...Ham*”. “*So*” while inhaling and “*Ham*” while exhaling. The two syllables “*So*” and “*Ham*”, which together constitute the word *Soham* convey the meaning: “I am Brahman.” If you constantly meditate upon this, your ego-sense characterised by the idea: “I am the body,” will cease to bother you. This “*So-ham*” mantra repeats itself in each of you 21,600 times per day. Thus “I am Brahman” is the message of your inner voice all the time. Ignoring this, however, everyone identifies himself with the temporary, artificial name given to the body. Thinking yourself to be Ramaiah, Krishnaiah, or Seenaiyah (the names given to your body) however long you may engage yourself in spiritual practices, you will not achieve any progress. You will continue to be what you have been according to the name given to your body. “*Soham*” is the name with which you were born. That alone is your natural and permanent name. That indeed is your Reality or Truth. Realise it and experience *Sath-chith-ananda*. Krishna is known as *Partha Sarathi* (the Charioteer of Partha). Partha does not mean Arjuna alone. It applies to all children of *prithvi* (the earth). So, make Krishna your charioteer. As the *buddhi* is a reflection of the divine *Atma*, make use of it as the charioteer in your journey to realise the *Atma*. Also remember that for success in every endeavour, *prema* (universal love) is essential. The Lord is the embodiment of Love, the Sun of Truth. Therefore, through Love, seek to know your true Self with the help of the *buddhi* and purify your mind. This is what I expect of you.