

7. Prasnopnishad – Answers to the Second and Third Students

Just as the reflection is not stuck to the mirror,
Just as lotus leaves are not wet by the water they
dwell in,
Sins cannot stick to a devotee.

Birth and death are an inseparable pair,
Like the two wheels of a chariot.
If one of them ceases to exist, so will Creation.
This is the secret of the Cosmos.

Students, Embodiments of Divine Love!

The One has become many (*Ekoham bahusyaam*). The will of God presiding over creation (Prajapati) created the pairs of basis and based (*moolam* and *sthooram*), inert and conscious (*jada* and *chaitanya*), life force and living being (*praana* and *praani*), matter and energy.

The interaction of these dualities resulted in the living and non-living universe. The foundation of the world is the union of the Sun and the Moon principles. The Sun represents life force (*prana*) and the Moon, the living being (*prani*). You saw yesterday that this wisdom was imparted by Sage Pippalada to Kabandhi, the son of Sage Katya. Kabandhi heard the sage's words attentively, appreciated the secrets of creation, and experienced bliss.

The cycle of birth and death

At this time, a disciple from the kingdom of Vidarbha, Bhargava by name, entered the hermitage. Bhargava saluted Sage Pippalada and asked, "Swami! Birth and death seem to be incurable diseases. All scriptures propagate that death follows birth and vice versa. Is existence nothing but this cycle of life and death? Is there no end to this cycle?"

Pippalada said, "My child! God is without beginning and end. The living and non-living world is transitory (*mithya*). Although there is truth (*sathya*) in this transient world (*mithya*), it is formless. Everything must perish one day.

The north and south journey

The Sun causes days, seasons, and years. They are cogs in the wheel of time. The path of the Sun is the basis for time. These divisions of time are as per Prajapati's (God, the Creator) will. Time is a form of Prajapati.

Time is divided into two halves: the north journey and the south journey (*uttarayana* and *dakshinayana*).

Ayana means journey. When the Sun travels toward the north, this period of time is called *uttarayana*¹. The Sun's southward trajectory occurs during *dakshinayana*. The north journey is characterised by brightness, peace, contentment, fearlessness, and purity. The south journey is a period of darkness, unrest, fear, and delusion.

Those who seek to travel during the south journey (*dakshinayana*) perform various rituals and acts of charity and embark in the 'southerly' direction. Their journey takes them to the Moon. The Moon represents matter. In other words, with impressions of worldly desires, you will attain only the material world, not God. As long as the results of your good deeds permit, you stay in the world called the lunar plane of existence (*chandra loka*). When that store of merit is exhausted, you return to this world. The scriptures say, Depletion of merit forces a return to the world of mortals (*Ksheene punye marthya lokam visanti*).

Take an example. The victor in a political election becomes a member of the legislative assembly for five years. As each year passes, he recedes further and further away from the assembly. His membership ceases after five years. Similarly, a person achieves the lunar plane of existence with good deeds but returns for rebirth in the physical world when the fruits of their merit are exhausted.

The one who travels during north journey (*uttarayana*) acquires attachment to Brahman, leading him to knowledge of Brahman. He reaches the solar plane of existence (*surya mandala*). This solar plane represents life-force (*prana*). One who merges into the life force does not take rebirth.

Therefore, child, only when your life force (*prana*) is merged into the universal life force do you escape from birth and death. As long as you have delusion (*bhrama*), you cannot attain God (*Brahma*). Cultivate the feeling of Brahman (*brahma bhava*) and reach the world of the Sun. The one who recognises Brahman becomes Brahman Himself (*Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavati*). Thus, understand the link between north journey, south journey, and rebirth. Those who journey during south time (*dakshinayana*) have rebirth, while the north journey (*uttarayana*) leads to immortality.

¹ *Uttara* = North, *Dakshina* = South. Like most *Vedic* terms, *uttarayana* and *dakshinayana* have literal meanings (northern solstice and southern solstice), as well as higher, spiritual meanings.

Bright and dark fortnights

The five elements are like the five parts of the sun. We have twelve months. In each month, the sun enters a specific house. As the sun traces its path through these houses, its radiance changes and gives birth to the seven colours. Every month has two fortnights: the bright half and dark half (*sukla paksha* and *krishna paksha*). What are these bright and dark halves?

The moon is in front of the sun and catches the sun's aura, shining with 16 aspects (*kalas*). Meaning, due to its proximity to the sun (life force), the moon (living being) shines brightly with all its 16 aspects. This is called full moon (*poornima*).

During the new moon day, the moon merges into the sun and is unseen. The dark half (*krishna paksha*) is the period from full moon to new moon, when the moon's brightness wanes. From the new moon to the full moon, the brightness of the moon increases. This is the bright half (*sukla paksha*). The bright fortnight is the life force (*prana*), and the dark fortnight is the living being (*prani*). The combination of *prana* and *prani* is this divine world. All these are merely results of Prajapati's (the Creator's) will.

Living beings and life force

The One manifests as many (*Ekoham bahusyaam*). How? When you sow one seed in the earth, it becomes a gigantic tree with thousands of fruits, each of which contains innumerable seeds. These seeds give birth to many other trees, in turn. Thus, one seed becomes many trees. One life force (*prana*) has become countless living beings (*pranis*). Creation has no bounds.

In the very beginning, there were only *prani* and *prana*. Their union brought about the universe. The world has no beginning or end. Since people see diversity in this manifestation of God's will, they see it as finite. Creation, sustenance, and destruction are not solely God's will, but human effort also matters to a certain extent. Depending on a person's actions and thoughts, a person achieves the destination they decide for themselves, good or bad. People (*manava*) born of God (*Madhava*) has forgotten their Divinity. Thus, they become demons, behave like animals, and waste their innate potential.

Child! Death is inescapable. However, one has the capacity to prevent further rebirth. Take a seed of green gram. When sown, it becomes a plant with many fruits. But no one knows the seed's parents, its grandfather, great-grandfather, and so on. No one knows how long it has been born as a green gram seed. Thus, the beginning is beyond anyone's reach. But pop the seed into your mouth and chew —its life ends. The beginning is beyond us, but the end is in our control! Similarly, no

one can tell when humanity began its existence, in what manner. The end, however, is dependent on our spiritual effort (*sadhana*). When you journey during the north path (*uttarayana*), you become one with Brahman.

Students! A paddy seed is covered with husk. Till the husk remains, you can plant it and water it, and it germinates. This is: repeated birth and death (*punarapi jananam, punarapi maranam*). Remove the husk, and it becomes rice. Rice will never germinate in soil, no matter how much you try. This is: no more rebirths (*punarjanma na vidyate*). Paddy has rebirth, rice does not. Husk distinguishes paddy from rice. Husk represents desire. Desires compel you to take birth again and again. Without desires, you are free.

We spend our entire life on matter, matter, matter ... This is the moon (*chandra*). The "moon" in the *Upanishads* does not refer to the planetary body circling the Earth! From His mind emerged the moon and from His eyes, the sun² (*Chadramaa manaso jaatah, chaksho suryo ajaayatah*).

Rebirth is unavoidable as long as the mind harbours thoughts and counter thoughts (*sankalpas* and *vikalpas*). When you nullify both likes and dislikes in the awareness of Brahman (*brahma bhaavam*), you destroy the mind and conquer rebirth. Therefore, O Bhargava, do not fear that birth and death are grim finalities. There is a state beyond birth and death, and it is possible to attain it," were Pippalada's beautiful words.

Channels of the life force

Then the third disciple entered. He prostrated to the *guru*. "Swami, in each living being (*jivi*), what kind of life forces sustain and protect the life energy? Swami, who is the most exalted of all beings? What is the power that pervades the various limbs of a living being?", asked Asvalaayana, son of Asvala.

Pippalada replied, "Son! Wind, fire, water, and earth take birth from the ether. Their manifestations in the human body are speech, vision, hearing, and mind. These four faculties protect the living being. Of these, the Sun principle or life force (*prana*) is primary. Without the life force, the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, the mouth cannot speak, and the mind cannot think. The life force is more important than any other part of the body. The body is the home for the life force, its dwelling place, its temple. The body is the temple, the Indweller is the eternal One (*Deho devaalayam prokto, jeevo Devo sanaatanah*). The life force is eternal. It takes shelter in the temporary body.

² From the *Purusha Suktam* – A prayer to Lord Narayana, the primordial personality of the Godhead.

The body contains thousands of *nadis*³. Do not consider the human body as ordinary. Truly, there are 720 million *nadis* in the human body. A life force by the name of *vyana* travels in these *nadis*. Without *vyana*, the *nadis* cannot function. There is another force, *udana*, that witnesses the good and bad done by a person and takes them to the corresponding destinations. Our state of existence depends on our actions. Thus, the scriptures advise us not to be elated in joy or depressed in sorrow but to follow the eternal principle of equanimity.

The five life forces

Difficulties are not caused by someone else. Joys are also not favours done to us by others. Due to weakness, you blame others for your grief and praise them for your joy, but both actions are baseless. For joy and sorrow, profit and loss, honour and dishonour, your thoughts and actions alone are responsible. Sin does not exist somewhere, waiting to grab you. God also does not reside in some secluded corner. Both God and sin dwell in your own body, in your actions. We attain heaven, hell, liberation, or any other after-death state based only on our *karmas*. The principle of *udana* decides this destination.

There are five types of life forces (*pranas*): *prana*, *apana*, *samana*, *udana*, and *vyana*. They reside in the body and in the five elements outside. The sun is composed of *prana*. From the earth emanates *apana*. From the sky or ether, *samana*. From the wind, *udana*. From fire, *vyana*. In each of the five elements, its corresponding life force is immanent. Clinging inseparably to the five life forces is the repercussions of the good and bad done by man.

You reap what you sow

The secrets of Creation are not easily explained by anyone. Every object has a shadow associated with it. The results of actions (*karmas*) follow the life force (*prana*) like a shadow. Wherever the life force ventures, actions follow. Results of actions are attached to your present body as well. When the life force leaves your

body and dons another one, the *karmic* shadows go to the new body instead of staying with the dead body.

Where does the life force go? After death, your the life force does not just acquire a random body. It attains the kind of body determined by your actions. We obtain a good rebirth only when we perform good actions and entertain good thoughts. Can you expect sweet mangos to emerge from bitter lemon seeds? People forget this truth.

“I will do this, I will attain that” —
Do not tire yourself in such planning.
Whatever seeds you have sown yesterday,
You will get the corresponding results today.
When your seeds do not fit the fruits you expect,
How can your ambitions be achieved?

All your actions are recorded, one by one,
Whether good or bad, without exception.
Brahma sends with you a heavy necklace —
The necklace of the results of past actions.

At birth, no necklace is seen around your neck.
There isn't a string of pearls adorning you,
Nor a gold chain,
Nor a set of diamonds shining brilliantly,
Nor an ornament of green emeralds.
But it is there: an unbreakable necklace
Put together the results of past actions.
Brahma sends with you a heavy necklace —
The necklace of the results of past actions.

Therefore, O people! Your joy and sorrows are repercussions of your own good and bad actions. First, recognise this truth. Then engage in good thoughts, words, and deeds to obtain a good life and after-life. We reap what we sow — no more, no less. Whatever you eat, you experience its belch! [laughter] When you eat a cucumber, is it possible to taste mango in your burp? God is not responsible for your joys or sorrows. God is merely a witness.

Devotion burns away results of past actions

Having said that, bear in mind: No matter how large the pile of your results of your bad actions (*karmas*), if you pray to God with genuine feeling emanating from the depth of your heart, all *karmas* disappear like snow on a summer day.

The reflection appears inside the mirror, but it is not stuck to the mirror. The lotus dwells in a lake, but its leaves are not wet by the water. Similarly, no *karmas*, however heinous or numerous, can trouble a person who has pure devotion. A small spark can consume mountains of cotton. The tiniest spark is enough. Therefore:

³ Channels of the life force in the astral body, like veins and arteries in the physical body. There are five “vital airs”, and English does not have names for them. Therefore, we use Sanskrit names. *Prana* is the general name for the life force, but it is also the name of one of the five vital airs. It is the “forward moving air”, which receives things coming into the body in the form of food, liquid, and air. *Apana* is the downward air, which goes out through the anus. *Samana* is the digestive air. *Udana* is the breath that moves upward from the throat. *Vyana* is diffused throughout the whole body.

You cry for wife, children, friends,
wealth, business, pleasures, name, and fame.
If you yearn for Krishna's Lotus Feet for a moment,
You can easily cross the terrible doors of death.

For the amount of time you spend on crying for wife, children, friends, and fame, if you set aside just a moment—a single moment—for heartfelt contemplation on the Lord, it is said that the terrible doors of hell can be transcended. How can we expect peace if we do not even dedicate a fraction of our time to meditate on God?

Dedicate actions to the Lord

Therefore, son, the life-force (*prana*) is most important. You need to follow a specific path. Merge your senses into your mind. Merge your mind into your *Atma*. In other words, whatever actions you perform, dedicate them to the *Atma*. Perform actions with the motivation to become dear to the Lord (*Sarva karma Bhagavat pretyartham*). Do not be inactive."

You can be a lawyer, doctor, banker, businessman. Whatever your vocation, work is transformed into worship with this pure outlook. Transform work into worship, offer it to the Lord. With work done in this manner, you will have no rebirth.

It is not enough to repeat "Offered to Krishna (*Krishnaarpanam*)," with your tongue. It must come from your heart! Dedication through mere words will produce mere verbal results! How? For example, if you tell Me, "Swami, please grace my home with a visit", my reply is, "Definitely, I will come." But if, in reality, you are not inviting Me, I'm not going to come! When you call me from the core of your heart, I will definitely come — with all My heart. As is your feeling, so is the result you experience (*Yat bhaavam tat bhavati*).

As is your desire, so is your feeling. As is your feeling, so is the result you experience. It is important that whatever you do, you do it with your heart. The heart is the junction of all energy channels (*nadis*) in the human body. When pious intentions emerge in the heart, the entire body is filled with enthusiasm and Divinity.

Everything originates in the heart. This is not the physical heart, but the spiritual heart. The way to overcome birth and death is to harness this heart through Love.

Thoughts: the root cause

Thus, six students approached Pippalada with basic doubts that assail every human being. The great sage gave them detailed and satisfactory answers. The first question was put by Kabandhi, "What is the cause of Creation?" Thought is the cause of Creation. Pippalada

gave a simple analogy. "Son, what causes dreams? Some people think that indigestion causes dreams. Others say it is excess thoughts or weakness in the body. None of these are true. Truly, sleep alone causes dreams! One without sleep can never have dreams! Therefore, thought causes Creation. When thought is destroyed, Creation is no more. Then the sight (*drishti*) becomes the seer (*drashta*). Everything is perceived as One, full of Bliss." Pippalada taught his disciples to gradually limit thoughts and to control the mind.

Tomorrow we shall talk about the fourth disciple and the question he posed. The spiritual education (*bal vikas*) children of Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar are ready, waiting with costumes and make-up. They have prepared a beautiful dance-drama. For this reason I conclude with our discussion of the third disciple.

[Swami sang "Govinda Krishna Jai, Gopala Krishna Jai, Gopala Pala Bala Radha Krishna Jai!"]

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