

Chapter 40. From Death to Immortality

The King, who was listening to the thrilling narrative of Krishna's gratitude toward His guru, suddenly opened his eyes. Seeing the sage before him, he said, "Ah the miracles (*leelas*) of Krishna! His wonder-filled acts exceed each other in miracle and mystery. God is prepared to assume any burden in order to correct and improve the world. By this means, He proclaims His genuine majesty and might. But the dark smoke of illusion (*maya*) settles hard on man's eye and renders him incapable of recognising divinity. Thus, he misses the inner significance of these 'miracles'."

Faith in God is the harvest from previous lives

Suka understood the working of the King's mind, "King! The confusing influence of illusion (*maya*) is the consequence of accumulated activities in previous lives. One can escape illusion through good consequence; one succumbs to it through deleterious consequence. If good activity has marked previous lives, any sinful tendency will be overwhelmed by virtuous tendencies in this life, and one will have faith in divinity. One will attach himself to the divine and spend his life on the basis of the divine.

"On the other hand, those who have committed horrible crimes in past lives have dreadful darkened visions, which prevent them from seeing the divine. Such a one never reminds himself of God and His handiwork, never yearns for his own 'good' and the good of others. He sees things in false perspective; he revels in wickedness and engages in vicious acts. Faith in God is the harvest of the seeds planted in previous lives. It cannot be grown and harvested on the spur of the moment."

Hearing these words, the king grew anxious to know more about the merit acquired by means of good activity (*punya*), the demerit acquired by means of evil activity (*papa*), and their impact on the lives of men. So he asked the Sage Suka to tell him one more incident from Krishna's career that dealt with a curse and its cure, illustrating the principle of destiny.

Suka laughed at this request. "King! Countless are the cures that Krishna effected on those affected by curses! The demons (*rakshasas*) whom He killed while He was yet a child, and later, as a boy, as I have told you, were all cursed to be born so as punishment for some evil deed, and when they met with death at His hands, they were liberated from the curse."

The king put in a suggestion. "I have heard that the 'uprooting of the tree' was an amazing incident of outstanding importance; I could derive deep joy from your elaboration of that."

Mother exasperated by Krishna stealing butter

Suka who was ever ready to oblige him, began the story. "King! Though there was no paucity of servants, it was Yasoda, the mistress of the house, who, according to traditional custom, did all the chores of the household. Boiling the milk, curdling it, churning it, and preparing butter—all these activities were personally done by her. One day, she woke up as usual at 4:30 A.M. (the beginning of the *Brahma-muhurtha*). She took her bath and did her early morning duties. Later, placing the milk pot before her, she started churning the contents, vigorously pulling the ropes that kept the churn-rod steady in the liquid—all the while singing sweet hymns on God.

“Meanwhile, Gopala (Krishna) came forward with slow but steady steps to where the mother was churning and singing and gave a sudden sharp pull at the end of her sari. Yasoda was startled at this unexpected pull. She turned around and was most pleasantly surprised when she found it was the mischievous child, Krishna! Putting a stop to the churning, she took Krishna into her arms and fondled Him. ‘Dear son! It’s not dawn yet! Why did you get up so soon? Go, my darling! Sleep again for a few minutes!’

“But the divine child lisped most entrancingly that It was hungry and began sobbing pathetically, to confirm its yearning to be fed. The mother’s heart melted. She placed the churning rod on one side and covered the pot with a lid. Then, she took Krishna on her lap, sitting just where she was. While feeding Him at her breast, she stroked His head gently and softly.

Just then, she heard the noise of a pot rolling down from the oven in the kitchen inside. She suspected it was the mischief of the cat. She lifted the child from her lap and placed it on the floor, for she had to run to the kitchen to examine what had happened!

When Yasoda disappeared into the next room, Krishna was incensed at her behaviour, dropping Him in the middle of His meal. He saw the pot and turned all His anger toward it. He gave it a hard blow with the churning rod, and when the curds flowed along the floor, He collected the butter, stuffed it into His mouth, and hastened out of the room, lest He be admonished. When Yasoda came into the room, she saw the broken pot, the curds on the floor, and the butter gone. And Krishna had made Himself scarce! Knowing this to be His handiwork, she searched for Him, in every nook and corner.

“She couldn’t find Him anywhere. She went into the neighbouring houses and inquired whether He had been found by anyone there. Everyone declared that they had not seen the child; they didn’t know where He was.

“Yasoda was really frightened. ‘He must have run away, dreading punishment for having broken the pot and spilling its contents! Poor child! He ran out into the darkness!’ she thought. She searched house after house.

“At last, she caught Him in the act of taking a pot of butter from a sling, where the mistress of the house had kept a series of pots full of milk, curds, and butter. Krishna was standing on an upturned mortar so that He could lift the butter pot and bring it down safely, to be shared with His comrades!

Krishna allows Yasoda to catch him

“Yasoda shouted, ‘You thief! Do you behave like this in every house? When the poor cowherd maids (*gopis*) complained to me about your thefts, I used to blame them without verifying their charge and send them away. I have now seen it with my own eyes! Yes, I can scarcely believe my eyes! O, how mistaken I was all these days! I cannot let you escape hereafter. No! If I let you off, on the plea that you are a child, later, it will lead you on to calamitous crime. I must punish you effectively now, and not pardon you at all. When the child of a great family turns thief, it is a disgrace to the entire clan. This ill fame can’t easily be wiped off. The reputation of our family will suffer.’ Her agony was beyond expression. She had never before suffered so much humiliation. She yielded to a great rush of anger. She brought a long thick rope and went near Him, intending to tie Him to the heavy mortar.

“Gopala, knowing her intention, slipped in and out of every door and dodged her attempts to catch Him. Yasoda ran behind Him, through every lane and street. She was well on the side of fat and had never before run so fast. She was soon exhausted. She slowed and gasped for breath. Men, women, and children began laughing at her vain pursuit of the little child. They enjoyed the fun and derived all the more merriment from Krishna’s prank

and His mother's foiled attempt to bind Him.

“Gopala is omniscient; nothing is hidden from Him. He realised that the mother was too tired to move, and He allowed Himself to be caught. Yasoda couldn't lift her hand to beat Him. She caught Him firmly by the hand, saying, ‘Come home, you thief! It wouldn't be nice for me to beat you in the bazaar. I'll teach you a lesson at home.’

“She drew Him home. There, she dragged Him to the side of a huge stone mortar in order to bind Him to it with a strong rope. But the rope was too short, so she went in and brought another to tie it on to the first. She had to do this again and again, for however long the rope, Krishna seemed to grow so big that it wouldn't reach around Him. Just a bit more length was always needed to tie Him! The mother wondered at this amazing development. To what was this miracle to be ascribed? She didn't know. At last, she somehow tied a knot, leaving Him bound to the mortar. Yasoda went into the house to do her regular household duties.

Krishna frees twin brothers from a curse

“Krishna drew the mortar along, went into the garden, with the mortar rolling behind him. There, a tree grew with twin trunks side by side, very near each other. The mortar caught between the twin trunks, and when the divine child gave a slight pull to overcome the obstacle, the tree was uprooted! It fell with a great resounding noise. The noise attracted everyone to Yasoda's house, where the tree had fallen even though there was no storm!

“Yasoda hurried to see what had happened and was astounded at what she saw! Gopala was in the midst of the fallen foliage, between the enmeshed branches. Yasoda groaned aloud and went to Him. Unloosening the rope, she carried away the child and felt quite relieved that He had escaped another terrible calamity.

“‘My child! Were you frightened? O, how wicked I was!’, the mother wailed aloud.

But while she was lamenting thus, two divine forms, both male, emerged from the tree! They fell at Gopala's feet. They stood with folded palms and said, ‘O Lord! We are the sons of Kubera, the twin brothers Nalakubera and Manigriva. Through the curse of Sage Narada, we were turned into this tree and existed as such. This day has seen the end of that curse, through Your grace. If you permit us, we'll go back to our own place.’ Then the two divine forms disappeared. At the sight of these strange divine forms, the people of Gokula were taken aback; they were filled with great joy.

“Though they listened to the glorification of Gopala as God, though they had concrete evidence of His Divinity, they relapsed into delusion (*maya*) and resumed their conversation about Gopala being the son of Nanda and Yasoda and felt He was their cowherd friend. They were caught up in the coils of illusion.”

Divine illusory power hides reality

The king interposed with the question, “Master! How did this illusion (*maya*) acquire such overwhelming power? Who endowed illusion with the capacity to hide the glory of Madhava (God) Himself? What exactly is the real nature of illusion? Please tell me.”

Then Suka explained, “King! This illusion (*maya*) is not anything separate, with its own form. God is discernible only with the sheath of illusion; He is evident because He has worn the accoutrement of illusion. It is His disguise (*upadhi*). That is to say, illusion obstructs reality. Its nature is to hide reality and make it appear as unreal.

Only those who remove It, destroy It, beat It off, cut across It —only those people can have a vision of God. Only those can attain God. Illusion makes you feel that the nonexistent exists. It shows water in the mirage; it makes you see as truth what is imagined and desired. Delusion can't affect those whose are able to give up desire or imagining and planning.

“Or else, how could Yasoda, who has seen the divinity of Krishna on many occasions with her own eyes, slide back into the belief that He was her son? The imagining, the desire —that was the cause of this delusion. The body is of the son, and of the mother, but the real core, the embodied (*dehi*) —that has neither son nor mother! The mother-body is related to the son-body, but there is no embodied mother, no embodied son! If one gets this faith firm in themselves there can be no more desire for external pleasures. Inquire and investigate, and you will know this truth. Without this inquiry, delusion will grow and intellect will be slowly subdued.”

“Ah! The role that divinity takes upon Itself brings about results that are really momentous! *Vedanta* teaches that one should penetrate behind the role into the reality; this is its inner meaning. Deluded by the role, people pursue desire! Believing the body that is assumed to be real and true, people fall into illusion (*maya*).

“For those whose attention is concentrated on the body, the person within won't be visible, right? When ashes cover, the red cinders won't be visible. When clouds gather thick, the sun and the moon can't be seen! Moss floating thick upon the waters of a lake gives the illusion that it is hard ground, over which there is vegetation. When the eye has a cataract over the pupil, one can't see anything at all. So too, when the notion of the body being the reality is predominant, the resident in the body isn't noticed at all.”

“Master! This day, in truth, the veil has fallen from my mind. Your teaching has, like a gust of wind, shaken off the ash over the live cinders. The illusion that this composite of five elements, namely, this body, is the reality has been totally exploded and exterminated. I'm blessed, I am indeed blessed.” With these words, *Maharaja* Parikshith fell at the feet of the guru, Suka.

Mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation

The gathering of holy men, sages, and common citizens fell into animated conversation. When time clicks fast toward the end, the body has to get ready to drop, right? The body drops when the vital airs stop flowing in it, but the mind won't leave off. For this reason, newer and newer bodies have to be assumed until the mind is rendered empty, devoid of content, vacant of wants. “This day our *Maharaja* has differentiated the mind from the body! Now he is in such bliss that even vital airs can't make any impact. When the mind is merged ever in God (Madhava), the body will be all divinity; its humanness cannot be identified.”

The teaching conferred by Suka today is not directed at Parikshith alone. It is for all of us, they said; it is for all who are afflicted by the delusion that they are the body in which they are encased. This type of delusion is the cause of bondage, but the other type, the belief that we are the *Atma*, that is the means of liberation. This is what the *Vedas* and the scriptures (*sastras*) declare.

The mind that welcomes the delusion or that entertains the idea of the reality is therefore the instrument for either bondage or liberation.

Mana eva manushyaanaam kaaranam bandha mokshayoh.

This statement of the revealed scripture (*sruthi*) is the truth. Ruminating thus for some time, the people sat

with eyes closed, lost in prayer. When the sun was about to set, the sages walked toward the bank of the sacred Ganga, holding the water pot and stick in their hands, so that they could perform the evening rites.