

Chapter III. The Basic Flaw

One cannot escape from disquiet as long as fundamental ignorance persists; mere change of occupation, prompted by the desire for more comfort or the need for satisfying some passing likes, will not give lasting satisfaction. It is like hoping to improve matters in a dark room by a mere readjustment of furniture. However, if a lamp is lit, passage across the room is rendered easier even without readjusting furniture. There is no need to interfere with the furniture at all.

So too, in this benighted world, it is difficult to move about truthfully, correctly, and peacefully without knocking against some obstacle or other. How then are you to succeed? Light the lamp! Let it reveal the reality; get the light of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). That will solve all the difficulties. You may claim that you live according to *dharma*, but your basic flaw is that your acts are not done in the spirit of dedication. If so done, they get stamped with the authentic mark of *dharma*.

Some clever people might raise a doubt and ask: “Can we then kill and injure in the name of the Lord, dedicating the act to Him?” Well, how can a person get the attitude of dedicating all activities to the Lord without at the same time being pure in thought, word, and deed? Love, equanimity, rectitude, nonviolence —these are the attendant virtues of the servant of the Lord. How can cruelty and callousness coexist with these virtues? To have selflessness, the spirit of self-sacrifice, and the spiritual eminence required for the dedicatory outlook, one must have first won the four characteristics of truth, peace, love, nonviolence (*sathya, santhi, prema, ahimsa*). Devoid of these, mere naming will not make any deed a votive offering.

Acts that are expressions of *dharma* are deathless, and only those who know that they are deathless can perform them. That is the highest destiny of humanity. Instead of reaching it, people are intent on doing acts against *dharma*. People everywhere degrade themselves from their status as children of eternity (*amritha-putra*) to that of children of futility (*anritha-putra*)! Holding nectar in their grasp, they are drinking the poison of sensual pleasure. Neglecting the joy of contemplation of the fundamental *Atmic* reality of the universe, they are entangling themselves in the external trappings of this objective world of appearances. One can only bewail that this fate has overwhelmed mankind!

Dharma and the Gita

The *Gita* also declares in a verse in Chapter 14,

I am the bliss of Brahman, of positive immortality, of timeless *dharma*, and of eternal bliss.

Brahmano hi prathishtha aham amrithasya avyayasya cha. Shaashvathasya cha dharmasya sukhasya aikaanthikasya cha.

This immortal *dharma* (*amritha-dharma*) is described in the *Upanishads*, and since the *Gita* is the kernel of the *Upanishads*, the same is emphasized in the *Gita* also. The *dharmic* way of life is as the very breath; it is the road to self-realization. Those who walk along it are dear to the Lord.

He dwells with all who are truthful, whose deeds spring from *dharma*. That is why the *Gita* teaches Arjuna to develop certain qualities that help the practice of the *Atmic dharma*. These are delineated in verses 13 to 20 of

Chap. 12. Those who have drunk deep at the fountain of the *Gita* will remember them. The most important of the verses in this context is:

But those who revere this *dharmic* way to immortality and who completely engage themselves with faith, making Me the ultimate goal, are exceedingly dear to me.

Ye thu dharmyaamritham idham yathoktham paryupaasathe. Shraddhadhaanaa Math parama bhakthaasthe atheeva me priyah.

What a grand idea this verse conveys! This is the concluding verse of the series that gives the qualities one has to develop. It calls the entire group the *dharmic* way to immortality (*dharmya-amritham*)! The Lord has declared therein that those who have these qualities, those who trust in Him as the only ultimate goal, those who are attached to Him single-mindedly —those are dearest and nearest to Him.

Note the expression “*dharmic* way to immortality (*dharmya-amritham*)” used here. Ponder it and draw inspiration from it. The nectar of the Lord’s grace is deserved only by those who adhere to the Lord’s *dharma*. Simple folk believe they have devotion toward the Lord, but they do not pause to inquire whether the Lord has love toward them. People who pine to discover this are rather rare. That is really the true measure of spiritual success.

The same person is king to his subjects, son to his parents, enemy to his enemies, husband to his wife, and father to his son. He plays many roles. Yet, if you ask him who he is, he would be wrong if he gave any of these relationships as his distinctive mark, for these marks pertain to physical relationship or activities. They denote physical kinships or professional relationships, names attached to temporary statuses. Nor can he reply that he is the head, the feet, the hands, etc., for they are but the limbs of the physical form. He is more real than all the limbs, beyond names and forms, which are all falsities that hide the basic Brahman; he is known as “I”. Reflect over that entity well and discover who that “I” really is.

The Atma has no form

When it is so hard to analyse and understand your entity, how can you pronounce judgement on other entities with any definiteness? What you refer to as “I” and as “You” relate to the body, the appearance; they are not real (*sat*). The *Atma* is one and indivisible; *dharma* based on That is genuine *dharma*.

Some ask, “You go on saying *Atma, Atma*. Well, what is the form of this *Atma*?” But wherefrom is *Atma* to get form? It is eternal, unchanging, immortal. It is goodness, right, beneficence. It is immutable, unblemished. It cannot be limited by any particular name or form. It can be understood by the spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) that dawns in and through the body, i.e. as acquired as the result of activity (*karma-deha*). The body alone has name and form, so, in every activity of the body, you should manifest the *dharma* based on *Atma*-consciousness (*Atma-dharma*).

It is said, “the *Atma* is neither male nor female; neither cattle nor sheep nor horse nor elephant nor bird nor tree; it is beyond such categorizations.” These distinctions and differences arise on the basis of activity; the *Atma* is incapable of modification; only one thing can be posited about it, viz., that It is. The sum and substance of all this is that the *Atma* is the Absolute, the highest goal (*paramaartha*). The rest is all particular, insignificant, false, unreal, denotable, and identifiable.

Take a palanquin. Before being transformed into that article, it was a tree, which was changed into timber and planks and finally into a palanquin. With every change in form, the name is also changed. Sitting in a palanquin,

no one would claim to be on a piece of timber or on a tree. Objects undergo change; they are not eternal. They are not real.

Objects can be distinguished only by means of name and form; they can be described only by means of their characteristics. For they are artificial and temporary.

What exactly is a chair? It is a particular modification of wood, isn't it? Remove the wood, and the chair also disappears. Think of the wood, which is the substance, and the "appearance" of the chair will vanish. So too, *dharma*! *Dharma* based on caste (*varna*), *dharma* for a householder (*grihastha*), *dharma* for a forest dweller (*vanaprastha*), *dharma* for a renunciate (*sanyasa*), *dharma* for a student (*brahmacharya*), this *dharma*, that *dharma*—all are modifications of the basic *dharma*, like the chair, the bench, the palanquin, etc. The separate varieties disappear as soon as you go deep into their nature; the corporeal *dharmas* fade away, and only *dharma* according to the *Atmic* consciousness (*Atma-dharma*) remains. The articles of furniture vanish and the wood alone remains; so too, the objective *dharmas* disappear and *Atmic* consciousness alone shines in unique glory.

Of course, for the worldly career, the corporeal *dharmas* are important. I won't say they are not. Just as wood is turned into furniture and used, so *dharma* based on the *Atmic* consciousness, or *dharma* based on peace (*santhi*), or the law of truth (*sathya*) has to be shaped into *dharma* for a householder, *dharma* for the forest dweller, *dharma* based on caste, *dharma* for women, *dharma* for men, etc. The stuff is the same in all; the substance is identical, in every separate form. How can the substance be used up? It can only be transmuted and transformed and the various modifications named differently when used for different purposes.

Dharma based on the *Atmic* consciousness can be viewed piecemeal and compartmentalized for different purposes, just as wood is hewn, sawed, joined, arranged, and rearranged. But it is *dharma* based on the *Atmic* consciousness nevertheless. As long as the different systems of *dharma* are derived from that "wood", there is no harm; remember, however, that the furniture can never be regrouped into the original tree! Apply the *Atma-dharma* in the fields of worldly activity, but don't call the worldly *dharma* *Atma-dharma*! That would be playing false to the Ideal, the Absolute.

Dharma is ...

Dharma is the moral path; the moral path is the light; the light is bliss (*ananda*). *Dharma* is characterized by holiness, peace, truth, and fortitude. *Dharma* is *yoga*, union, merger; it is truth (*sathya*). Its attributes are justice, sense control, sense of honour, love, dignity, goodness, meditation, sympathy, nonviolence; such is the *dharma* that persists through the ages. It leads one on to universal love and unity. It is the highest discipline and the most profitable.

All this "unfoldment" began with *dharma*; all this is stabilized by truth (*sathya*); truth is inseparable from *dharma*. Truth is the law of the universe, which makes the sun and moon revolve in their orbits. *Dharma* is the *Vedas* and the *mantras*, the spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) they convey. *Dharma* is the course, the path, the law. Wherever there is adherence to morality, there one can see the law of truth (*sathya-dharma*) in action. In the *Bhagavatha* too, it is said, "where there is *dharma*, there is Krishna; where there are both *dharma* and Krishna together, there is victory." *Dharma* is the very embodiment of the Lord; since the world itself is the body of the Lord, the world is but another name for the moral order; no one can deny it, now or ever.