

Chapter VI. Meditation Reveals the Eternal and the Non-Eternal

The seen is transitory; this is seen through meditation. When people wander helter-skelter in a strange land, not knowing the road, and when someone comes to direct them along the right path, it is not right to laugh at and dishonour them —it brings about only ruin and confusion! But today, it has become the habit of people to curdle the love (*prema*), these embodiments of love, into poison through ignorance of the role of helpfulness that these guides have come to play.

Note this! Love and destruction arise from the same native spot. The same sea that yielded gems, the moon, nectar, and the goddess of wealth also brought forth the world-destroying *halahala* poison. Under these conditions, one must, like Sri Narayana, accept the good and the auspicious; otherwise, one cannot have nectar and Lakshmi. The heroic and the adventurous, like Siva, can have the poison as their need.

The Lord's grace is needed to cross the sea

This sea of life (*samsara*), turbulent with the waves of joy and misery, can be crossed only by those who have an unflinching desire for the essence of bliss; the rest will be submerged.

The capacity to overcome the qualities (*gunas*) of nature (*prakriti*) is not inherent in everyone; it comes to one with the grace of the Lord. And that grace is to be won by repetition of the divine name and meditation. This must first be clearly understood: it is impossible for everyone to control the tendencies of nature; the power is possessed only by those who have nature in their grip and whose commands nature obeys.

Nature (*prakriti*) is the basis of everything in the universe. It is the basis of creation and existence. All this is nature: men and women, beasts and birds, trees and plants. In fact, all that can be seen is inseparable from nature. In this endless creation, the active element is the Lord (*Purusha*). This truth has to be experienced, so that it will not slip away from consciousness, and the discipline needed for this is also repetition of the divine name and meditation. This nature is like an ocean; even if it is agitated a little, millions of living beings will be destroyed. When the sea becomes slightly ruffled, ships turn into hollow reeds. You can never cross this sea by your own effort, alone. The Lord's grace is essential. So pray for that raft, and when you secure it, you can reach the shore in a trice.

Why worry over short-lived attachments?

Everything in this world is ephemeral, transitory; it is here today but may not be here tomorrow. So, if you want to crave something with a full heart, seek the Lord, who has no decline. Instead, if you crave progeny, wealth, and all comforts, you will suffer untold misery when you are called upon to leave everything and depart. At that moment, you would lament, "oh, did I love so deep that I may weep so loud?" In this transitory life, joy and pain are also perforce transitory. So, it is indeed humiliating to get immersed in the search for the evanescent and to forget the Supreme and the Everlasting. Ignoring God (*Madhava*), who is free from illusion (*maya*), and spending time in things immersed in illusion is fruitless; sorrow alone is the final gain. Nothing here is fit to be worshipped as eternal. Whomever you love, that love has to come to an end.

The self-same Lord gives and takes! He gives and takes as and when He wishes. Everything is His, so how foolish it is to lament when things belonging to Him are taken back by Him! Therefore, the wise person doesn't pine over anyone or feel undue attachment to anything. Let all the pining and all the attachment be for the Lord; He alone is eternal, the source of all joy. For the rest, love a thing as a thing, not more. Love a person as a person, not more. If you love them more, it is a sign that you have been deceived about their real nature. You can behave only for a short time as if the house you have rented is your own! For as soon as the period is over, it passes on to another.

If you think on these lines, you will know that spouse, children, possessions, and relatives are not yours for long, but only for a short time. So why waste away, worrying over these impermanent things? A millionaire can eat only one bellyful, not more. You have to come to this world like the traveller taking refuge at nightfall in a caravanserai; he departs when dawn breaks! You go toward your goal, from caravanserai to caravanserai, stage by stage. It is good to take life in this light.

Animals with many legs creep along the ground. People have only two legs, so they can move freely about. The larger the number of legs, the greater the bondage, the tighter the restriction. When one marries, one has four legs, one has become a quadruped. Later, when one gets sons, daughters, in-laws, and grandchildren, one is transformed into a regular centipede, capable of moving only by crawling along the ground! One cannot stand erect; one loses freedom of movement; one has to creep slowly along the mire of material objects; one has no time or inclination to secure the Lord's grace.

The attachments of the world are short-lived. People have been born many times before and have lived out their lives, loving and getting immersed in love and attaching themselves to others. But does anyone now have a trace of all that? Does anyone know where all that has gone? Does anyone worry about those they loved then? Does anyone remember them at least now and then? No. The same type of love and attachment were there then also, but with the passage of time, it has been forgotten.

So too, when one departs from this world, the love one had for others and the joy, pain, and happiness one had through that love will be forgotten. Like the playgrounds of children, the senses of action of man will also change, from here to there and from there to somewhere else! Fixing their minds on the insecure changing love, how tragic it is that people forget the cultivation of the disciplines that will give them the permanent bliss of the Lord!

Everywhere, people are plunged in worry, all twenty-four hours a day. Is it right to increase their burden? Who can be so cruel as to torture instead of lessening the suffering of a dying person? Already, the sea is rough; dare we blow a typhoon over it? Therefore learn to spread a smile on the faces of the desperate. Keep smiling yourself and make others smile. Why make a sad world sadder by your desperate counsel, your lamentation, and your suffering? Adopt repetition of the name and meditation to assuage your own grief, to overcome your own sorrow, and to plunge in the cool waves of the sea of the grace of the Lord.

Why should travellers wrangle through the night over useless things, instead of getting ready to leave the caravanserai at dawn and starting out on the next stage of their pilgrimage? By wrangling, they lose sleep and deprive themselves of rest; they will not have the energy to continue the journey. So do not worry too much about things of the world. Worry ends in meaningless hurry and waste of time. That time is better used in meditating on God.

We are actors in the Lord's play

All living beings are actors on this stage. They take their exit when the curtain is rung down or when their part is over. On that stage, one may play the part of a thief, another may be cast as a king, a third may be a clown, and another a beggar. For all these characters in the play, there is ONE who gives the cue!

Here, some points have to be understood clearly. The prompter will not come upon the stage and give the cue, in full view of all. If He does so, the drama will lose interest. Therefore, standing behind a screen at the back of the stage, He gives the cue to all the actors, regardless of their role — be it dialogue, speech, or song— just when each is in most need of help. In the same way, the Lord is behind the screen on the stage of creation (*prakriti*), giving the cue to all the actors for their various parts.

So, each actor must be conscious of His presence behind the screen of illusion (*maya*); each must be anxious to catch the faintest suggestion He might give, keeping a corner of the eye always on Him and having the ear pitched to catch His voice. Instead of this, if a person forgets the plot and the story (that is to say, the work for which one has come and the duties that appertain thereto), neglects to watch the presence behind the screen, and simply stands dumb on the stage, the audience will laugh at their folly and charge the person with spoiling the show.

For these reasons, every actor who has to play the role of a person on the world stage must first learn the lines well and then, remembering the Lord behind the screen, await His orders. The attention must be on both: the lines one learned for the role and the stage manager's directions. Meditation alone gives one this concentration and this awareness.