

Chapter VIII

The Avatar comes to protect the virtuous, punish the wicked, and support dharma; the four types of seeker; the reason for the caste system.

Krishna continued, “*Avatars* have no merit or demerits accumulated in former births, which, like ordinary mortals, they have to pay off in this birth. Theirs is a divine sport (*leela*), a birth taken on. The goodness of the good and the wickedness of the bad provide the reasons for the *Avatar* of the Lord. For example, take the *Avatar* of Narasimha. The merit of Prahlada and the wickedness of Hiranyakasipu combined to cause it.

“As a result of the coming of the Lord, the good will be happy and the bad will suffer. The *Avatar*, however, has no joy or grief, even when It is enveloped in the body It has assumed. The *Avatar* is not constituted of the five elements; It is spiritual or consciousness (*chinmaya*), not material (*mrinmaya*). It can never be disturbed by egotism or the sense of mine and thine; It is untouched by the delusion born of ignorance. Although people mistake an *Avatar* as just human, that does not affect the nature of the embodiment.

“The *Avatar* has come for a task, and it is bound to accomplish it. I shall tell you what that task is. It is to protect the virtuous, to punish the wicked, and to support *dharma*. By the virtuous, I do not mean the monks and ascetics who are indicated generally by that word. I mean virtuous qualities, like goodness, uprightness, virtue, and these can be possessed by animals and even insects. Really speaking, the promotion of the quality of purity (*sathwa-guna*) is the best means of fostering the virtuous. The *Avatar* is the embodiment of this sacred quality (*guna*), so It fosters this quality wherever it is found; but since renunciants (*sanyasins*) are striving to earn it, they are called good people and are supposed to be especially blessed by the attention of the Lord.

“But renunciants are not the only saints. All those who follow good conduct, who have virtue, who adhere to truth, who yearn for the presence of the Lord, who observe true *dharma*, who consider all (*sarva-jna*) as equal—all of them are virtuous. Such characteristics are even found among the animals and birds. In the *Ramayana*, Jatayu was saved as a result of these qualities. That is why the elephant was blessed and the monkeys were given a chance to serve and be blessed with His grace. The same reason prompted the Lord to bless the squirrel. A string of beads, an ochre robe, and a stick in the hand does not make a virtuous person (*sadhu*). The clothes the body wears and the language on the tongue do not decide who is virtuous and who is not; it is the characteristic (*guna*) that settles it. All animals have the potentiality to be good, so, fostering goodness in all is the best means of ensuring the welfare of the world.

“Next, punishment of the wicked. Those have to be punished who transgress the limits set for their type or genus of animals, who indulge in inaction, injustice, and improper behaviour, and who roam about caught in the coils of ego (*ahamkara*). Those have to be punished who have allowed passion (*rajoguna*) and dullness (*thamo-guna*) to predominate and purity (*sathwa-guna*) to be extinguished in them and those who have lost all trace of compassion (*daya*), *dharma*, and charity (*danam*).”

Thirdly, Krishna informed Arjuna that the fostering of *dharma* is also his work. The word virtuous (*sadhu*) has another meaning, which is important in this context. A virtuous person does not deviate from their duty, whatever the temptation and whatever the danger. The wicked revel in creating trouble for such people and indulging in acts contrary to the injunctions of the scriptures. What, then, is the establishment of *dharma*? It is acting strictly according to the *dharma* laid down in the scriptures; spreading among people the glory and splendour of a life

lived in *dharmā*; stabilizing reverence toward the *Vedas* and the scriptures, toward God, *Avatars* and high souls, and spiritual exercise that leads to liberation and a blessedness beyond this life. It is called the establishment of *dharmā*, the protection of *dharmā*, or the revival of *dharmā* (*dharmā-samsthāpana*, *dharmā-rakshana*, or *dharmā-moddharana*).

“Whatever I do, it is all for this high purpose; nothing is for My own advancement. Those who know this secret can escape birth and death,” said Krishna.

“To feel that the Lord is away, afar, separate from you —that is called indirect knowledge (*paroksha-jnana*). To feel that the Lord who is immanent in the universe is in you also as the *Atma* —that is direct knowledge. If all activity is moved by the dedicatory spirit, the mind (*chittha*) can be rendered pure. Only those who have pure consciousness can recognize the divine nature of the Lord’s birth and action (*karma*),” said Krishna. All cannot so recognize them as divine. Yet, no one should avoid contact with the Lord come in human form. Try your best and utilize every chance. There should be no lapse on your part.

This is emphasized in the tenth verse of this chapter, where the signs of the deserving candidate are given. “Arjuna! Not all can understand the divine nature of my birth and action (*karma*). Only those who are free from attachment, hatred, fear, and anger; who are immersed in the name and form of the Lord; who know of no other support than Me; who are sanctified by the knowledge of the *Atma* —only those can grasp it. Those who seek Me undeviatingly, who possess truth, *dharmā*, and love, will reach Me. This is absolutely true, take it from Me. Give up any doubt you may have.

“People render the inner consciousness impure by dwelling on the objective world, through ignorance. They take delight in mere sound, taste, form, etc. When they seek objective pleasure, they are tempted to secure the objects that give the pleasure; foiled in the attempt, they get restless, hateful, and afraid. Fear robs people of their mental resources. It creates anger that cannot be easily pacified. Thus, desire, anger, and fear are aroused one after the other, and these three have to be removed. Arjuna, revolve these facts in your mind and then act. Become reasonable. Have faith in My words.”

Arjuna heard all this and asked, “Nandakumara! Why can’t You make this sacred and high stage available for all people? You have announced Yourself as the embodiment of love and full of compassion. Why then all this partiality? I must declare it as favouritism, for you endow this stage only on the wise and deny it to the ignorant. I would even say that the ignorant person who has no discrimination, the person who swings like the pendulum of the clock from one thing to another, merits Your grace more. The wise person knows everything and is aware that the world is pervaded by God (*Vishnu-maya*). Why, then, should it be made clearer? Such a person has no more need of grace.”

Krishna replied, “Yes. People are usually overwhelmed by such doubts. You represent humanity, so your doubt is humanity’s doubt. By clearing your doubt, I can also announce My message to humanity. Listen. Those who seek Me are of four types. One is always worn out by ills that affect the body; the distressed and suffering (*artha*) are of this type. Another is worried by the struggle for prosperity, power, self, property, posterity, etc., and is seeking wealth (*artha-arthi*). A third yearns for the realization of the *Atma*, reads the scriptures and sacred texts, moves ever in the company of the spiritual seekers, acts along the lines laid down by the sages as good conduct, and is always motivated by the eagerness to reach the presence of the Lord. He is the seeker of wisdom (*jijnasu*). The fourth is the wise person (*jnani*), who is immersed in the formless God (*Brahma-thathwa*).

“The first, the suffering, worships Me only when in difficulty and suffering from grief or pain. When such people pray to Me, I hear it and satisfy them only in relation to that particular difficulty, that particular grief or pain. So too, when the person desiring wealth prays for riches, position, power, or high status, I listen and award only the particular thing craved. The seeker of wisdom is blessed with chances to do action without regard to its fruit, with a proper guru as guide, with an intellect that is sharp enough to discriminate between *Atma* and non-*Atma*; such a person is thus helped to achieve the goal. I bless such people so that they are saved from distractions and helped to concentrate on the single aim of liberation.

“I am like the wish-fulfilling tree. My task is to give each what they ask for. I have no prejudice, no favouritism. Not even the shadow of cruelty can touch Me. No fault can be imputed to Me. The rays of the sun fall equally upon all that are directly in their way; but if something is behind something else, inside a closed room for instance, how can the sun illumine? Cultivate the higher yearnings, and you receive the higher gains. The fault lies in the aspirant and their aspirations, not in the Lord’s attitude.

“Arjuna! People give up revering and seeking Me, who is their very Self. How foolish! People are not anxious to reach Me. On the other hand, they pursue lesser attainments that are temporary, untrue, and transitory. I will tell you the reason for this strange and stupid behaviour. Engagement in activity gives quick results; people seek only what is available now, in a concrete form, what is capable of being grasped by their senses. Generally, people find reality too difficult to attain, so they are carried away by the attraction of flimsy pleasures, away from the full joy derivable from transcending the senses.

“Achievement of wisdom is the inner victory; it is won after long and arduous struggle. People do not generally have the needed patience. Moreover, they attach greater importance to the gross physical body. The body can be happy only with objects that cater to the senses, so people do not seek wisdom, which will send them to paths where the senses are unwanted. They yearn for success in action, but not perfection in spiritual wisdom. Those who are caught by urges of the intellect are fewer than those who are caught by the senses and their urges. The sensual-minded are drawn by the obvious, the patent, the perceptible, and the physical. The few who are spiritually minded yearn for the imperceptible, invisible bliss of merging with the universal Absolute. Theirs is the correct path. Attachment to activity is the incorrect path. My task is to make clear to all the value of virtuous action (*dharma-karma*), which has to be adopted after due discrimination.

“But Arjuna, there is one method of reviving *dharma*, the task for which I have come. That is the organization of the four castes based on the *karma* and the qualities of the people. The caste system is essential for the functioning of the world. Its significance is not easy to grasp. Some mislead themselves into the belief that it causes unrest and divides people from one another. If the problem is reasoned out, then the real truth will become clear. To conclude that the caste system is not beneficial shows only ignorance. Such a judgement creates confusion. I have established this organization in order to promote the welfare of the world. The caste system helps people engage themselves in acts that they find congenial and fulfil them. Without it, people cannot earn happiness for a moment. For successful activity, the caste is the very breath.

“The *brahmins* are those endowed with the pure and serene quality (*sathwa-guna*), who have understood the *Brahman* principle (*Brahma-thathwa*), who foster spiritual, moral, and progressive living, who help others to earn the bliss of visualizing the reality of their nature.

“The warriors (*kshatriyas*) are those who stand by and guard the sound political system, law, and justice,

as well as the welfare and prosperity of the country and the moral order laid down for the people, and who keep under control the wicked and the immoral and come to the rescue of the weak and the distressed.

“The business people (*vaisyas*) are those who store and supply within proper limits to the people at large the wherewithal for happy physical living.

“The labourers (*sudras*) lay the foundation for human welfare by service activities; they provide the strength and sinews.

“I have laid down these four castes in this manner. If they carry out their assigned duties, humanity will attain all-round progress. As a result of this system, a division of service is brought about; the individual leads a happy harmonious social life, without any grief or fear. This caste system is an example of the grace that the Lord has bestowed on India (Bharath).”

The people of India are indeed blessed, since they look upon every act as but the execution of His order and as leading to His grace. This point has to be reflected upon. It is an important issue. The divine command is now in great danger of being set at naught. If the rulers change the face of this caste system, the world will not have the welfare they strive for. Many people argue and teach that India came to this sorry condition only because of this caste system, but these folks have to sit quietly for some little time and ponder over these questions: “Has the country survived as a result of this system? Has it come to this sorry condition because the system has weakened?” Then, on the basis of their conclusion, they can advise the discarding of the castes. When people find fault with the caste organization without such impartial investigation, their opinion can not be valued.

Of course, the system has veered from the proper path and taken to moving in wrong directions; this has been noted by many great people. But that cannot be sufficient reason to throw it overboard. Just because the leg is doing the work of the hand and the head is performing the function of the feet, it is not advisable to cut off the hands and feet. Attempts have to be made to set things right, rather than destroy the very system itself.

The caste system is not the cause of all this confusion and unrest. The fault lies more in the haphazard manner in which it has developed. It became a plaything in the hands of all types of people, so it lost its original symmetry and harmony. This system is essential not merely for India but even for the world. In countries outside India, this system is not absent. The name may be different, but the working is the same. There, there are also four classes: teacher, protector, merchant, and labourer. But in India, the castes are decided by birth; in other parts of the world, they are decided by action (*karma*), the work in which each is engaged. That is the distinction.

Now, among the *brahmins* who have been honoured by being established in the very first cadre, many can be found who have left the path and strayed into mean ways. So too, in the fourth caste, the labourers, many can be found who are moved by holy ideals and high spiritual aspirations and who are striving to attain purity of mind as a means of realization. Just because these things are possible, it is not proper to conclude that the caste organization of human society is useless.