

Chapter XIV. The Bhagavatha: the Description of Atma

Devotee: Swami, the inner meaning of the *Mahabharatha* and the *Ramayana*, which You explained, is really very interesting. If only one probes deeply, what else is there in them? That kind of *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana* is taking place in every heart, through the action and interaction of mind, subconscious mind, and intellect. You said that the *Bhagavatha* also occurs in the same manner. If you will kindly explain how that is happening, we can, after knowing its inner meaning also, start following the “subtle” *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, and *Bhagavatha*, all three. Please tell me about the *Bhagavatha*.

Swami: Well, the *Bhagavatha* is not like the other two. It has no qualities and no form! It deals with the *Atma*, which is beyond and behind the qualities (*gunas*), senses (*indriyas*), mind (*manas*), and subconscious (*chittha*); it deals with the powers and prowess of the *Atma* and Its apparent activities (*leelas*). The *Bhagavatha* contains the stories of the incarnations of that which is the Witness of everything.

Devotee: What are the forms that the Witness assumed? Why did He assume those forms?

Swami: Really speaking, He is all forms, (*sarva-swarupee*). There is no limit to the number or nature of His forms. Still, if something must be said in conformity with what has happened, Its incarnations are Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Narasimha, Rama, and Krishna. In order to transact the creation, preservation, and destruction of the world, and to punish the wicked and protect the good, He Himself assumes the form that He designs as best at the time and purpose He has set before Himself. When that purpose is realised, He is as before, the Witness, the embodiment of *Atma*.

Devotee: Rama and Krishna also punished the wicked and protected the good, didn't they, Swami? Then, how do you say that in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*, there is the embodiment of quality (*guna-swarupa*), while in the *Bhagavatha* there is no embodiment of qualities?

Swami: You see, qualities have a beginning and an end, and the *Atma* has neither. Rama and Krishna also have no qualities, essentially. They have demonstrated how, being above qualities, it is possible to keep all qualities under control. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* stories have an end, don't they? In that sense, the *Bhagavatha* has no end. It speaks of the Lord, who has no beginning or end. It tells of the forms that the Lord wore in the context of the age, time, and object. On the other hand, the other two teach the correct policies to be followed in this false, evanescent world and urge men to follow truth (*sathya*), *dharma*, peace (*santhi*), and love (*prema*). Do you understand?

Devotee: Then the *Bhagavatha* is of no practical use to us, so to say!

Swami: What! The *Bhagavatha* is of most use to the spiritual aspirants. Only it explains the real secret of the Lord. His real glory and His real path! The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* try to some extent to uplift the commoner, the ordinary person, by moral teaching and example. They show how people can deserve the Lord's grace. But those who seek to know the nature of the *Atma* and of the highest *Atma* (*Param-atma*) should study the *Bhagavatha* more than anything else,.

Devotee: Swami, what is the relation between the Lord (*Bhagavantha*), *Bhagavatha* and the devotee (*bhaktha*)?

Swami: The relationship between the great king, the crown prince, and the heir apparent! The Lord is the great king, of course; the *Bhagavatha* is second in rank because it came from the Lord as a derivative, with the status of

crown prince; the heir apparent is dependent on both of these, and so is the devotee. The status of heir apparent is not an ordinary one, in that the heir apparent merits the position of great king. The rest are inferior to these three. Those who don't rise up to the status of devotee or heir apparent have no access to the court of the great king.

Devotee: Then, Swami, *yogis*, the spiritually wise (*jnanis*), ascetics —don't they deserve that position?

Swami: Whoever one may be, without devotion (*bhakti*) and the love of the higher truth, how can they become a *yogi*, or a spiritually wise person, or an ascetic? They also have devotion in an equal measure. Take the milk-ball sweet, orange sweet, hard candy, and a number of other sweets. In each of them, as the common cause of sweetness, there must be the one article, sugar, right? How else can they be made? So also, in these three paths, the sweetness of the Lord's Name or devotion (*bhakti*) is an ingredient. Without it, the very names of these objects become absurd!

Devotee: Another point, Swami! To approach the presence of the Lord, is it necessary to have faith in the Lord and, with that faith, perform soft prayer, meditation, devotional singing, and worship? Or is it possible to attain that position through the path of truth, the path of *dharma*, the path of love (*prema*), or the path of service to others?

Swami: Well, how can the qualities you mention originate without the fear of sin and the fear of God? Are these paths and the qualifications needed for them ordinary and common? No. They are the doors to the inner apartment of the Lord. Those that follow those paths can easily reach the precincts of the Lord.

And yet, there is a difference between friends and relatives! Those who only develop these qualities are friends, but those who practise them, along with devotion to the name and form, become relatives. That is the difference. The meditation on the name and form also helps to strengthen the qualities (*gunas*). Without that foundation, the qualities cannot be strong and firm and pure. The Lord's name and form remove the dross from the qualities of people.

Devotee: But the devotee and the person with good qualities attain the same place, don't they, Swami?

Swami: Certainly. The merely good person becomes a candidate who deserves the place. The good one who has devotion has a title to the place and can't be passed over.

Devotee: Swami, many people are active, doing various things under the slogan, "Service to humanity is service to God." Do their deeds entitle them to the place?

Swami: Why do you ask so? Certainly —for those who do service with that attitude. But it is very hard to get that real feeling. Considering others as people, simply saying that "serving them is serving God" is not sincerity. The mind will then run in two channels.

Grasp the glory of *Madhava* (God) fully; understand that *Madhava* is in every human (*manava*); believe that serving people is only serving *Madhava*. Then, your actions will certainly entitle you to the place. What greater qualification is needed than that?

Instead, if "service" is done for name and honour and fame, and if the mind craves the fruits of one's actions, then the statement, "Service to humanity is service to God" has no meaning, and one won't get the expected result.

Devotee: It is very interesting, Swami! Speaking about the *Bhagavatha* evoked many holy ideas and morals today. So if one delves into It, what invaluable truths will emanate! I am indeed blessed, this day.

Swami: Have you understood it all? *Bhagavatha* is the story of the beginning-less, and ending-less *Atma*. It is in

both forms, subtle and gross. It is subtler than the subtlest, grosser than the grossest. It has no limit or measure. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha* are historical epics (*Ithihasas*). The *Bhagavatha* is different; it is the description of the *Atma*; it instructs in the path of devotion (*bhakthi*). It can never end and never has a “Finis”. This is the significance of the *Bhagavatha*.