

Chapter XX. The Primal Purpose

The very first step to ensure peace and harmony to mankind is for each one to observe the code of conduct (*dharma*) laid down for them in their own religion. If one holds one's own faith and its essential principles mandatory, one can serve oneself best and also serve others well. *Dharma* in this context means action in accordance with the traditions of the culture of the land. In every facet of the *dharma* of this country, the ideal of world peace and world prosperity is immanent.

“Now, for the inquiry into activity (*athaatho karma jijnasa*)” —thus begins the intellectual probe into the mystery of activity (*karma*), which in our scriptures extends over vast fields. For example, to give away in charity and as a gift is a very proper type of activity, but one must be aware that egotism can pollute it and make it improper. It is laid down that plentiful charity now will ensure happiness in a future life, so that consideration of this advantage for oneself might well lead one to good activity. Even if many have no eye on the future, it can be asserted that most charity flows from egotistic motives. This fact is all too evident.

People feel proud that they have helped others. They are eager to be praised as beneficent and munificent. This attitude reveals their ignorance (*a-jnana*); it springs from nonawareness of actuality (*maya*). In the *Vedas* and spiritual texts (*sastras*), the sages (*rishis*), while elaborating on do's and don'ts, stress nonviolence, compassion, service to the world, charity, etc. as virtues to be acquired. Saint Vidyananya named these as the very essence of Indian (*Bharathiya*) wisdom.

Virtue: the measuring rod of wisdom

Wisdom (*jnana*) is the precious ambrosia gathered from all sources of knowledge and all the arts of earning it. It is the sweet, sustaining butter churned and collected from the scriptures. Wisdom is not to be defined as the capacity to discriminate and declare, “This is flat”, “this is round”, “this is a hill”, “this is a house”, or “this is a thorn”. That is the common belief. This is only knowledge.

Next, we have what may be called good knowledge (*sujnana*), when one is able to distinguish between right and wrong or good and bad, when one can discover, “This activity is for my betterment and the betterment of others”. Both wisdom and good knowledge are confined to one's intellect.

There is a higher wisdom, when the heart is transformed by loyalty to truth, nonviolence, and compassion. A person with this higher wisdom can understand themselves and their kinship with the cosmos and its Creator. The person lives in accordance with that understanding, without doubt or disharmony. Ignorance (*a-jnana*) breeds sorrow; higher wisdom (*vijnana*) confers joy. If one hesitates to call any experience the higher truth (*vijnana*), let that person examine whether it is material or spiritual on the touchstone “Does it give me unalloyed joy?” and then classify it as such. The yardstick for higher wisdom is *dharma*. The more *dharma* is put into practice, the more one gets rooted in the higher wisdom.

Eras differentiated by righteousness

Action through higher wisdom is evidenced by the peace and prosperity of the nation. The decline of *dharma* reveals the disappearance of higher wisdom. Eras are differentiated on the basis of adherence or aversion to

dharmā. When *dharmā*, justice, and harmony prevail fully and fearlessly, it is said to walk securely over the land on four legs. The times when it is so observed are also referred to as the *Kritha* Era (*Yuga*). When justice and harmony prevail less and less, people feel that *dharmā* has to limp its way on three legs! The times that suffer from this handicap are referred to as the *Thretha* Era. When justice and harmony prevail only a quarter as much as in the *Kritha* Era, *dharmā* has to struggle on two legs. That is the *Dwapara* Era. When they have no respect paid to them and when they are largely nonexistent, *dharmā* stands on one leg, as it were. This is the *Kali* Era, the scriptures tell us.

Liberation is the prime goal

The wisdom of the Indians (*Bharathiyas*) is nourished by *dharmā*. Though Indian thought asserts that the “objective world” is basically untrue and though it teaches us that our involvement with life and its problems is an illusive adventure that cannot affect our reality, the scriptures (*sastras*) that are the roots of that thought do not advise us to discard *dharmā*. For, to grasp the highest and ultimate truth, *dharmā* is indispensable. The four traditional goals of human endeavour (the *purusharthas*: righteousness, wealth, desire, liberation (*dharmā*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*)) are laid down to cater to those who live in the belief that the objective world is “true”.

It can be seen that even among the four goals, *dharmā* has been placed first and foremost. The state to be earned by the first three achievements is *moksha*, which is mentioned last. The person who seeks riches and the fulfillment of desires along the path laid down by *dharmā* can alone win victory; that way lies liberation, which gives people the highest bliss.

Nevertheless, since the individualized, limited self (*jivi*) is caught in the net of desire (*kama*), the goals of *dharmā* and *moksha* do not enter its vision or arouse any interest. It takes delight in sinking and floating on the waves of material pleasures (wealth and desire, *artha* and *kama*). This is not strange in persons of that nature.

The search for food, the avoidance of fear, and the enjoyment of sloth and sleep—in these, people and animals are equally eager and equally involved. The search for *moksha* and the observance of *dharmā*—these promote people to a level of existence higher than the animal level. If that yearning is absent, one cannot claim to be human.

India is acclaimed by her own people as well as by people of other countries for holding forth the ideal of the highest wisdom (*vijñāna*). Here, there is faith that God exists in all lands. Here, there is constant effort to discriminate between *dharmā* and what is not *dharmā*. Value is attached to justice and virtue. Compassion toward living beings and nonviolence are also held high as guides to conduct. Efforts are made to distinguish truth and untruth. Temples still flourish and are still replete with spiritual vibrations. Other countries have many houses of God constructed by people, such as churches and mosques, but they are not so ancient and charged so long and so deep with divinity.

Religions vary, not their essence

All religions are one, declares this land of India (*Bharath*). There may be a difference in the number and nature of the limbs, but the message each conveys is the same as all the rest. This is the discovery of India and her announcement to mankind.

For directing their prayers to God, one person uses a stone as a symbol; another, a piece of metal; a third,

wood. But all attach great importance to prayer and believe in its beneficent effects. One person turns to the east while praying; another regards the west as really sacred. The prayer of both concerns the same wants and inadequacies. This is the conclusion arrived at by Indian (*Bharathiya*) sages and thinkers. Each faith has its own scriptures and doctrines, but one must pay attention to the special features too. For example, God is so intimately felt as one's own that prayers are often addressed to God in the singular: "Can't you do this?" or "Are you incapable of protecting me?" or "Have you become weak of hearing?" This is a peculiar trait among Indians.

However one feels or thinks, one transforms oneself into the embodiment of those feelings and thoughts. If one is immersed in the truth that one is God, one can become divine. However, if one is immersed in the falsehood that one is the king of the land, one will be deemed mad or traitorous. One might even be beheaded for treason. God will not treat you as insane or insubordinate. Every being is divine; this is the final judgement of the wisdom of India (Bharath).

Logic and intellectual investigation can give only partial accounts of the truth. Everything in creation has many phases and many angles. Reason can observe only from one angle; it can see only one phase. The intellect that has been purified and clarified through the activities (*karma*) laid down in the *Vedas* can succeed in observing both phases. Without undergoing the process of purification and clarification, reason can work only within the bounds of the materialist world, so the conclusions that it presents before us can be only partially true. But the intellect subjected to the processes of cleansing and sharpening in the *Vedic* way can serve us by presenting a picture of the full truth of the objective world. Most of the other faiths rely on principles reached by reason, not subjected to these disciplines taught by the *Vedas*. Indians (*Bharathiyas*) have the scriptures (*sastras*), which illumine far beyond the bounds and limits of the temporary and the temporal.

God, people, and creation

The universe is the macrocosmos (*Brahmanda*); the individual being is the microcosmos (*pindanda*). But the basic truth of both is One, the same. That One is independent and unrelated to any other fact or thing. When that One is realized in this manner, it can be called *Brahman*. When it enters the awareness as the universe, it is referred to as the Universal Absolute *Brahman* (*Parabrahman*). The basic truth of the universe is *Atma*. The basic truth of the individual is also *Atma*. All that appear different from *Atma* are of the region of delusion (*mithya*). Delusion implies a condition that until inquiry appears real but on inquiry is known to be unreal. It is only an appearance, this universe and its supposed basis—an appearance caused by ignorance (*maya*). The power that deludes us into believing that the created cosmos is true and real is also an emanation from the *Atma*. When this power operates and the *Atma* is clothed with it, it is referred to as the Supreme Self (*Paramatma*).

Trifold primal qualities or energies

Atma is the truth-knowledge-bliss (*satchidananda*), treated as one inseparable composite. Illusion is also a composite of the three natural modes or qualities (*gunas*)—dull, passionate, and pure (*thamasic*, *rajasic*, *sathwic*). They express themselves in desire, deed, and wisdom. The quality called dullness (*thamas*) creates the appearance of diversity, hiding the basic ONE and Only. The quality called passion (*rajas*) explores the truth and pleasures of wisdom. The quality called purity (*sathwa*) is a clear mirror, giving a correct picture of things and events that happen before it. It reflects the highest *Brahman* and reveals God (Iswara). God thus manifested becomes the universe (*jagath*) created by His will. The reflected God does not have the capacity of delusion. Just as

the clear lake water has froth and bubbles on its surface, so the *Atma*'s essential nature seems to be tarnished by the deluding appearance of illusion (*maya*) and its product —the universe, with varied names and forms.

When the three modes of delusion (*maya*) are in balance and in a state of unruffled equipoise, the universe is termed unmanifest (*a-vyaktha*). This is termed the “seed state” since all subsequent variations are subsumed and latent in it. When dullness (*thamas*) and passion (*rajas*) have their impact, creation is caused and the cosmos comes about. They agitate living beings into activity. The deluding force is conditioned by the three modes, as and when each expresses itself and asserts its influence over the rest. When purity (*sathwa*) predominates, it is called *Atma-maya*; when passion (*rajas*) is ascendent, it becomes ignorance (*a-vidya*); when dullness (*thamas*) holds sway, it becomes dullness (*thamas*). When the *Atma* is reflected in the pure mode, the image becomes God (Isvara); when reflected in passion (*rajas*), it becomes individual being (*jiva*); and when reflected in dullness (*thamas*), it becomes matter.

It is the mould or container that causes the distinction between God (Isvara), the individual being (*jiva*), and matter; when there is no mould or container, all these are *Atma*. Since the universe is God, individual soul, and matter, it can be truly described as the composite of the three modes. The universe has manifested in order to serve the highest interests of living beings and of mankind, the most intelligent of them all.

While affirming that the *Atma* is reflected in the pure, passionate, and dull (*sathwic*, *rajasic*, and *thamasic*) modes, producing impressions of God, the individual and matter, one point has to be emphasized. The mirror that conditions the image has only limited capacity. It can reflect only objects that are opposite to it. But when the mirror is either convex or concave in surface or when its plain surface is soiled with dirt, the image will suffer contortion or fail in clarity. However, this does not affect the object; only the image is distorted or defaced. But the object itself is usually condemned on the basis of its reflection or image.

Cosmic spirit and individual Self

Brahman also appears distorted on account of illusion and ignorance, and this distortion, which is a super-imposed characteristic, is wrongly supposed to adhere to *Brahman* itself! The image of the Supreme Godhead (*Parameswara*) is also a reflection in the mirror of illusion. Just as milk turns into curds, *Brahman* has turned into the universe (*jagath*). This transformation is the handiwork of illusion. *Brahman* is the master of illusion and not its subordinate. It releases the power of illusion and directs it. So, the personalized *Brahman* or Supreme Godhead is known as omnipotent and omniscient. The individual being (*jiva*), God (Isvara), and the elements or matter (*bhutha*) all contribute to the progress of the individual, each in its own way.

The Lord is the fulfilment of all desires; all objects of enjoyment in the universe emanate from His will, so He has no desire at all. He has manifested the universe not for the realization of any desire of His or filling any vacuity from which He suffers but entirely for the benefit of living beings. “There is no duty binding on me, Partha, in the three worlds (*na me, Partha asthi karthavyam, thrishu lokeshu kinchana*),” says Krishna. Creation, manifestation, or emanation is His very nature. Hence, the description “Reveling in play (*leela vinodhi*)” is often ascribed to Him. It is His will power that is filling all living beings with consciousness and helping them to be alert and active. He grants to each the consequence of thought, word, and deed and is therefore described as the Giver of the Fruit of Activity.

Without the intercession of the Lord, activity cannot result in consequence; nor can certainty arise that a

particular act will result in an identifiable manner. Besides, the sages declare that activity (*karma*) is momentary. The thought arises and the act is done. The act is followed by the fruit. It is not possible to predict when the fruit will be available or what its nature will be. Hence, we have to admit that it all depends on the Lord's command. What cannot be interpreted by our limited intellect has to be ascribed to His command.

God, the eternal, universal witness

However long the interval, however many lives elapse, one cannot escape the obligation of suffering from the consequences of one's actions. There can be no place for inquiry into the origins of the act or when it happened, for one has to trace from the beginning of time itself. One cannot discover the beginnings of the Lord, the universe, the living being, activity, and ignorance; they are all beyond the beginning. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna declares, "The way of action is elusively subtle and difficult to discover (*gahanaa karmano gathih*)". The consequence might confront the person even after the passage of many lives.

The Lord is the eternal Witness, the Power that presides over every act. Looked at from this point of view, one has to realize and declare that the Lord and the individual are bound inextricably together. In the absence of living beings, there can be no Lord. When there are no children, how can the word "father" be meaningful? So it can be said that the Lord manifested the universe in order to provide living beings with fields of activity and to grant them the consequences of those actions. The five elements serve the same purpose; they also help constitute the physical vehicles of life, in accordance with the quality and quantity of those consequences. There are also regions (*lokas*) where beings that have accumulated great merit or gathered terrible sins have to be in the hereafter. These have no relation to the regions or bodies that are visible to us.

Truth veiled by deluding tendencies

Life principle and individual principle mean the same. Both indicate that they have emerged from the absence of the awareness of the truth (*a-vidya*). This again is due to bondage to tendencies (*gunas*). The individual is marked by the presence of the active, work-prone, passionate mode (*rajoguna*), though it also has the seeds of the other two modes in its makeup. Creation (*jagath*) itself originated when truth veiled itself in delusion (*a-vidya*). The modes manifested at that same moment, and individuals differentiated according to the predominance of one or other of the three chief modes, caused by the total effect of the activities (*karmas*) gone through in life after life. One endowed more with the pure (*sathwic*) mode becomes God's own, inspired by devotion to God and engaging mostly in adoring and praising divine glory. Preponderance of active, passionate (*rajasic*) traits renders one strong, intelligent, and content, with no higher aspirations toward divinity. One ruled by the dull mode (*thamasic guna*) becomes as bound to the body and its needs as birds and beasts.

The living being (*jivi*), on account of an intellect caught in the coils of delusion, imagines that it is an "effect" and therefore bound to some "cause". This nonawareness of truth has to be conquered by *Atmic* wisdom, which urges toward this adventure and ensures success. It will destroy the distinction, now believed in, between the subject and the object, man and the cosmos (*jiva* and *jagath*).

To help people in this heroic duel and make them aware of the truth, the *Vedas*, in what is referred to as *Karma-kanda*, prescribe desirable activities (*karmas*). As long as one is caught in ignorance, the concepts of man and cosmos, the upper and lower worlds, *dharma* and injustice (*a-dharma*), *karma*, devotion, and wisdom have to be respected and one's life has to be shaped accordingly. As long as one is established in the validity of the

“diversity” apparent in the universe, one acts according to the limits imposed by the personalized God (Isvara).

For each individual soul (*jivi*), the universe is its own mental picture and nothing else, fundamentally. So unless one unravels the mind and its processes, the Brahma principle is difficult to understand. Those who have not understood the real nature of the sky will mistake it as a dome of smoke and dust; so too, the *Atma* is mistaken, through nonawareness of reality, to be enclosed in and embodied as intellect (*buddhi*), to be involved in activity and enjoyment of the results of activity, to be caught up in the twin bonds of joy and sorrow, and to be embroiled in happiness and misery and also in bondage and liberation. From the angle of change, the higher truth will naturally appear as different, though they are inextricably interrelated.

Space is one, but as a result of the diversity of vessels, it seems to be enclosed in the home, the pot, the building, and the canvas. There is no truth in this sectionalized existence; the One space exists in all these “containers” —houses, lakes, hills, etc.— which are shapes and forms, with distinct names attached to them and different modes of behaviour and use. So too, individual beings (*jivas*) have different names and forms, peculiarities, and specialities of use and behaviour. But, like the string that holds the beads, passing in and through each and holding them together, the Super-consciousness in all individuals is ONE.

Know thyself: Realize unity in diversity

That ONE is the *Atma*, which through ignorance is mistaken as I. As long as this truth is not won, one cannot release oneself from the hold of multiplicity and change. The scriptures communicate to us this reality and exhort us to realize it. What is it that, if known, everything else can be known? When the *Atma* is known, declare the revealed scriptures (*sruthi*), everything can be known. The cosmos (*jagath*) is only relatively real; it is partly false. Knowing it is unprofitable and unnecessary. It is not a legitimate purpose of life. Life is best spent and human effort best directed when awareness of the *Atma* principle is sought to be attained.

The revealed scriptures warn people against other vain pursuits. The revealed texts and allied sacred literature, like the law texts (*smrithis*), historical legends (*ithihasas*) and *Puranas*, don’t teach us how the cosmos was created or advise us to study and understand its origins and the process. They don’t declare the absence of that knowledge as calamitous; they even assert that the task is impossible.

“Why worry how the cosmos was born or when it will die? Worry rather about yourself.” That is the lesson emphasized by the scriptures. “Know Thyself.” Once you know yourself, everything else will automatically be clear. You are a microcosm in the macrocosm (*pindanda* in the *Brahmanda*). Just as the knowledge of one single clay pot is enough to know all about all clay pots, when you know yourself, all else can be known.

Supreme reality is nondual

To persuade a child to stop weeping and regain joy, the nursemaid relates a pleasant fairy tale. The nursemaid’s sole purpose is to calm the child; the fairy tale is only a means modeled on its intellectual level. In the same manner, the individual soul (*jivi*), fascinated by the beginningless attraction of illusion (*maya*) and bound by tendencies cultivated during many lives in the past, can’t avoid inquiring into the origins of the universe that it encounters. The revealed scripture (*sruthi*) answers such inquiry in words that give temporary relief. For the question “how was the universe created” is on a par with the question “how is a dream created?” The dream originates from sleep (*nidra*); the universe through illusion (*maya*). Just as the dream has no order or law, the universe also

is too full of mystery and illusion. There is only ONE, not two as often happens in a dream. This is the doctrine of nondualism (*a-dwaita*).

Very much like the question of the origin of creation, another problem that generally worries people is: how did this ignorance happen? The solution was provided by the sage-preceptor Vasishta to Sri Ramachandra. “Rama!” he said, “rather than entangling yourselves in the inquiry regarding how ignorance entered people, I would exhort you to be engaged in efforts to get rid of it.” This lesson is directed not only to Rama but to all mankind. It helps all who do not possess the realization of the truth behind the objective world. Ignorance is the name given to ignoring what is one’s own inner experience: the universe is an ever-changing phenomenon.

Why then are you troubled by this question? Be convinced that you have this ignorance; give up the struggle to get rid of attachment to this changing world, with its concomitant birth-death cycle. It is only another evidence of this ignorance to argue whether this ignorance adheres to *Brahman* or emanates from the individual soul (*jivi*). Surely it is much more essential to concentrate on the methods by which the ignorance can be discarded. For it will certainly yield to wisdom (*jnana*). Wisdom is light; ignorance is darkness. Darkness can persist only until light shines.