

Chapter 4. Removal of Primal Ignorance

The highest goal of Bharath

For generations, Bharath (India) has been conferring lasting peace and happiness on peoples of all lands through the impact of the spiritual principles it has cherished. The ideal for which this land has striven has been, “May all the worlds be happy and prosperous (*loka-samasthaah sukhino bhavanthu*).”

This has been the highest goal of the people of Bharath. In order to foster and accomplish this holy ideal, the rulers of past ages, sages (*rishis*), founders of creeds, scholars, the learned, matrons and mothers, have suffered and sacrificed much. They have discarded honour and fame and struggled to uphold their conviction and to shape their lives in accordance with this universal vision.

Eliminating pride and egotism

Rare and costly articles might attract by their external beauty, but, to the eye illumined by spiritual light, they would appear trivial in value. Physical charm and force can never overpower the charm or force of the spirit. The quality of passion (*rajas*) breeds egotism, and it can be identified wherever selfishness and pride are displayed. Until this mode of thought and action is suppressed, the quality of purity (*sathwa*) cannot become evident. And, in the absence of the pure quality, the divine, the Siva, the supreme power, cannot be propitiated, pleased, and won.

Parvathi, the daughter of the monarch of the Himalayas, was the very acme of physical beauty. In spite of this, she had to acquire the quality of purity (*sathwa*) by destroying pride in personal beauty and her native egotism through intense asceticism. She had to shine in the beauty of the spirit! The legend relates that Manmatha, the God of love, who planned to project only Parvathi’s youthful charm to attract Siva, was burned to ashes when her pride in her beauty was destroyed. This incident symbolises the fact that divine knowledge (*vidya*) cannot be gained as long as one is caught up in the coils of the ego. When one equips oneself with spiritual knowledge, pride disappears. But these days, conceit and pride are taken as adding charm to the knowledge required.

The attraction conferred on a person by scholarship in matters relating to the objective world has to be given up; only thereafter can the genuine innate divinity manifest itself. Only then can the personality of the individual, which is the self, accept the divine. The ego in us is the Manmatha, the “agitator of the mind”, and it has to be turned into ashes through the impact of divine vision. The divine, the Iswara (Siva), will not yield Himself to physical charm, worldly authority, muscular or intellectual or financial power. This is the inner meaning of the Manmatha episode.

Parvathi underwent extreme austerities and subjected herself (i.e. her ego-consciousness) to sun, rain, cold, and hunger, and thus transformed herself. Finally, Iswara accepted her as half of Himself! This is the stage in spiritual advance called mergence (*sayujya*). It is the same as liberation and release (*moksha* and *mukthi*). In fact, spiritual learning (*vidya*) involves humility, tolerance, and discipline. It destroys arrogance, envy, and all related vices. Such knowledge is the real *Atmic* knowledge.

Develop detachment and eliminate desire

Moksha means liberation. All embodied beings long for liberation from the limitation that the embodiment connotes. Every living being is perforce an aspirant (*mumukshu*) for liberation, a practitioner of renunciation. Everyone has to be a renunciate (*thyagi*), versed in detachment. This is the final truth, the indisputable truth. When we give up our body and leave, we don't take even a handful of earth with us. When we don't learn to give up, upon death nature teaches us this great truth about the need and value of detachment and renunciation. So, it is good to learn the lesson even before this happens. The person who learns and practises this truth is indeed blessed.

Detachment is the second valuable virtue that spiritual learning (*vidya*) imparts (the first being the absence of pride and egotism). Empty a pot of the water that filled it, and the sky that one could see within the pot as an image or shadow gets lost along with the water. But the genuine sky enters the pot. So too, when that which is not *Atma* is discarded, *Atma* remains and liberation is attained.

But what has to be discarded is not an objective impediment; the renunciation has to be subjective. Many people interpret renunciation (*thyaga*) to mean either giving away money and land as charity or performing rituals or sacrifices (*yajna* or *yaga*), or giving up hearth, home, wife, and children and proceeding to the forest. But renunciation does not mean such gestures of weak mindedness. These are not as difficult to give up as they are believed to be. If so minded, one can go through these acts easily and give up what the acts prescribe. The real renunciation is the giving up of desire.

The giving up of desire is the real goal of a person's existence, the purpose of all his efforts. It involves giving up lust, anger, greed, hatred, etc. The fundamental renunciation should be that of desire. The other feelings and emotions are its attendant reactions. We say "He who has the bow in his hand (*kodanda pani*)"; but this implies that he also has the arrow in his hand. The bow implies the arrow. In the same manner, desire implies the presence of lust, anger, greed, etc. These latter are veritable gateways to hell. Envy is the bolt, and pride is the key. Unlock and lift the bolt, and you can enter in.

Humanity and animal

Anger will pollute the earned wisdom. Unbridled desire will foul all actions. Greed will destroy devotion and dedication. Anger, desire, and greed will undermine the actions, spiritual wisdom, and devotion and make one a boor. But the root cause of anger is desire, and desire is the consequence of ignorance (*a-jnana*). So, what has to be got rid of is this basic ignorance.

Ignorance is the characteristic of the animal (*pasu*). What is an animal? "That which sees is the animal (*pasyathi ithi pasuh*).” That is to say, the animal is that which has outward vision and accepts what the external vision conveys. The inward vision will lead a person to *Pasupathi*, the Lord of all living beings, the master of animals. One who has not mastered the senses is the animal. The animal has harmful qualities born along with it, qualities that cannot be eliminated so easily. The animal cannot get free of them, for it has no capacity to understand the meaning of the advice given. For example, we may bring up a tiger cub with affectionate care and train it to be gentle and obedient. But when it is hungry, it will relish only raw meat; it won't eat *puri* and potato!

But people can be educated into better ways. Hence, the statement in the scriptures, "For all animate beings, birth as a human is a rare achievement." Humans are indeed the most fortunate and most holy among animals, for their inborn qualities can be sublimated. A human born with animal qualities can elevate itself through self-effort and training into a master of the animal qualities (*pasupathi*). The beast is born "cruel" and dies "cruel".

A life lived without mastering the senses doesn't deserve the name. A human is endowed with many capabilities, and years are wasted if the senses are not controlled and directed properly. Valid education (*vidya*) helps one achieve success in this process of mastery. Education promotes humility (*vidya* confers *vinaya*). Through humility, one acquires the right to engage in professions. That authority confers prosperity. A prosperous person has the capacity for charity and right living. Right living can confer happiness here and hereafter.