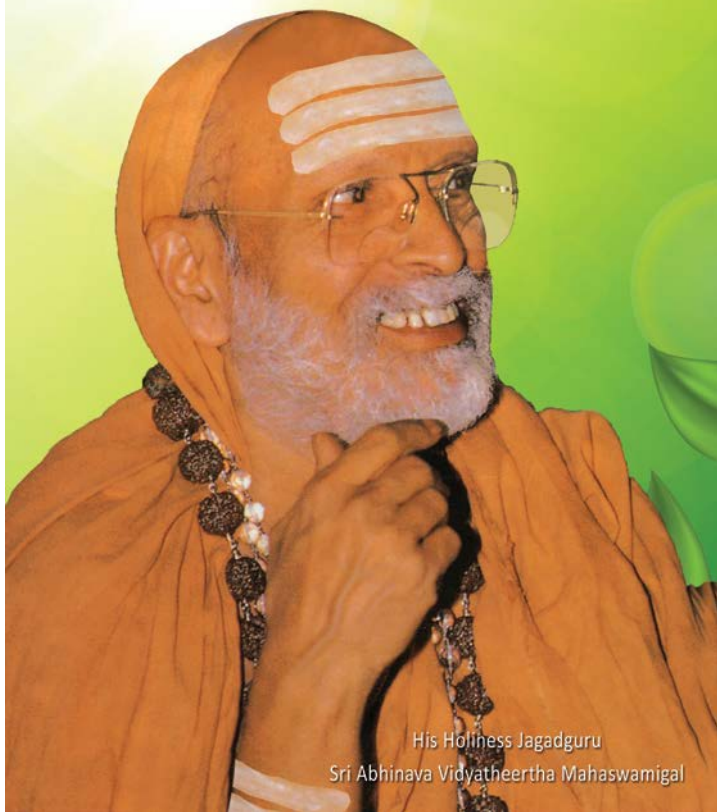


EDIFYING PARABLES



His Holiness Jagadguru
Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamikal

Edifying Parables

of
His Holiness Jagadguru
Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal

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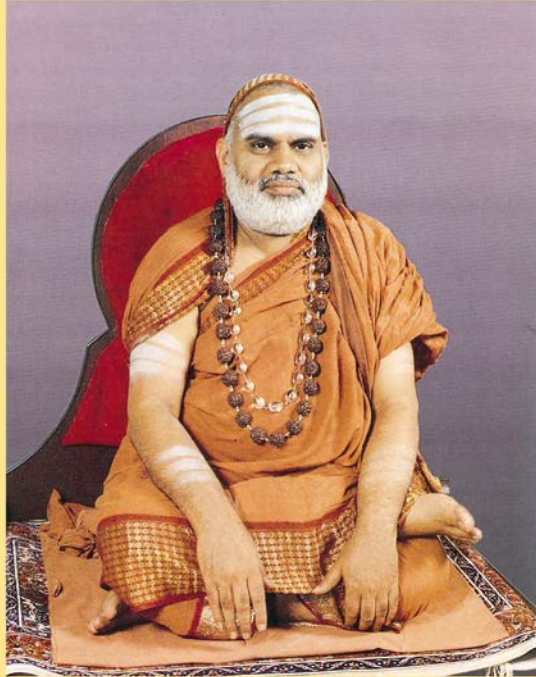
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Dedication



(His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamikal,
the 35th Pontiff of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetham)

*“We submit this garland of Your stories
at Your Lotus Feet with prostrations.”*



Jagadguru
Sri Bharathi Theertha Mahaswamigal,
the present pontiff of Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetham

Preface

His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal, reverentially referred to as 'Acharyal' in this book, had an innate ability to explain even complex topics in a simple manner through stories composed by Him on the spot or based on texts such as the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. This book contains well over a hundred edifying parables of our Acharyal compiled by a disciple and grouped over 97 heads. The sources of the parables are Acharyal's benedictory addresses and His private conversations with the disciple. Following are the minor liberties that have been taken in the preparation of the text:

1. Parables narrated by Acharyal in more than one benedictory address have been grouped under a single head.
2. In rare cases, names have been given to the characters of a story even when Acharyal did not do so during His talk with the disciple.
3. Where Acharyal has narrated more than one version of a story, information from all the versions have been utilised.

We are glad in publishing the digital version of this book and offering it to all for free-download in commemoration of the birth-centenary of His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal. We humbly dedicate this effort at His Lotus Feet.

Trustees
Sri Vidyatheertha Foundation
Place : Chennai
Date : 29th October 2016

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Striking Traits

A tree uprooted by a gale fell across a road. Consequently, all vehicles plying on that route were forced to decelerate to a crawl and swerve to beyond the edge of the road in order to get past the obstruction. The car in which Acharyal (His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal) was travelling had just crossed the tree when He told the person at the wheel to stop the vehicle. "If we move on, as many others before us have done, motorists will continue to be put to inconvenience at this spot. So, we should move the tree to the side of the road", declared Acharyal. In deference to His command, the Math staff applied themselves to the task of shifting the tree. Though old and unwell at that time, Acharyal did not remain a mute spectator. He gave suggestions and contributed physically too. In a short while, the road became unobstructed. The good deed done, Acharyal resumed His journey.

During His first tour of Andhra Pradesh in 1960, Acharyal had one day travelled for about an hour when He espied from afar, a partially overturned automobile lying off the road. Some motorists passed on without even pausing. Acharyal had His car halted near the accident spot and rushed to the badly-damaged vehicle. He saw a motionless, blood-splattered man trapped within it. In a trice, He discerned that the mishap had occurred only minutes earlier and that the man was unconscious, not dead. He instructed

a responsible employee of the Math to proceed speedily in a Math vehicle to arrange for an ambulance.

Having determined that the accident victim could be freed only after setting his car upright, Acharyal laboured, along with those who were with Him, to do the needful. He was then in His forties and His well-exercised muscles were hard and powerful. Nevertheless, as the vehicle was heavy, He had to put in much effort before it finally stood on its wheels. Acharyal then cautiously examined the wounded man and came to the conclusion that it would be safe to extricate him without waiting for the arrival of an ambulance. Using an improvised stretcher, Acharyal gently transferred him to a spacious Math vehicle and ordered the driver to proceed smoothly in the direction from which an ambulance was expected. His actions ensured that the accident victim received medical attention at the earliest. The man survived and recovered; he owed his life to Acharyal.

During a visit to Coimbatore in the early 1970's, Acharyal was requested to deliver a benedictory address at a venue. He acquiesced. At the place concerned, He noticed that the public address system that had been temporarily installed for His speech reproduced sound faithfully. Always easily pleased, He publicly appreciated the efforts of the organisers. From His seat, He saw that loud speakers had been mounted not only within the hall but also on the sides of the road. His keen power of observation led Him to realize that it would be possible to decouple the speakers outside the venue of the talk without difficulty.

He said, "Please disconnect the loud speakers on the road. It is sufficient and in fact appropriate that My speech

be heard only here and not outside. This is because people who are interested are already seated inside. It is not right that people on the road should be subjected to the nuisance of having a speech they are not interested in dinned into their ears. Often, during marriages, loud speakers are connected in such a way that music blares into the ears of those on the road. They wonder, 'What a pain this function is!' Instead of receiving the good wishes of everyone, the bride and the bridegroom unnecessarily earn the ill will of some whom they do not even know. Functions, be they weddings or ones such as this, ought not to cause noise pollution."

The organisers were able to easily implement what Acharyal had suggested; after all, Acharyal had already discerned that the external speakers could be readily decoupled. Acharyal's consideration for the public and His keenness on avoiding noise pollution, a problem that was largely overlooked in India in the early 70's, unlike now, are noteworthy.

Keen Observer and Lover of Nature

Not just pleasant scenery, trees, flowers, and crops but also animals, birds, fishes and even insects interested Acharyal. One day, when He was nearing 16 years of age, He beheld a wasp in the course of His walk. It was bringing a motionless grasshopper to the mouth of a hole prepared by it. Acharyal's keen power of observation and knowledge of insects led Him to know that the grasshopper was not dead; it had been paralyzed by a sting of the wasp. The wasp entered the hole, emerged and then dragged the grasshopper in.

Thereafter, it closed up the hole and went away. Acharyal had heard that the wasp lays an egg and provides a grasshopper as food for the larvae that emerge from the egg.

He desired to see the developments within the hole but did not want to partially uncover it. Nature, however, favoured Him. The next time He came to the spot, He found that, for reasons unknown to Him, the mud cover of the hole had a small opening. He brought His face close to it and peeped in. He saw the larvae that looked different from an adult wasp. Acharyal decided to examine the larvae and the grasshopper in greater detail. For this purpose, He required a magnifying glass but had not brought one. He did not want to put off His study to another day. Being resourceful, He picked up a dried leaf, poked a small hole into it and put a droplet of rain water on the hole He had made. Suitably holding the leaf, He used the water drop as a magnifying glass and conducted His studies.

On another occasion, He beheld a monkey sitting seemingly pensively with its hand in the small gap between two very low-lying, horizontal branches of neighbouring trees. Acharyal placed His head close to the ground to see what was in the monkey's hand. He noticed that it held an apple which, apparently, someone had dropped there. As the monkey was unwilling to let go of the fruit, it was unable to extricate its hand and leave. "In spite of its intelligence, this simian does not choose to let go of the fruit, withdraw its hand and then pick up the same fruit by grasping it from below the gap", thought Acharyal.

He felt pity for the monkey. So, with a plan to free it from the bondage of its own making, He peeled a banana and took the fruit near its mouth. The monkey leaned forward and began

to eat the fruit but continued to hold on to the apple. Acharyal peeled a second fruit. This time, He kept it at some distance from the monkey. The simian had no choice but to release the apple in order to get the banana it wanted. As it was eating the banana, Acharyal pulled out the apple and presented the same back to the monkey.

Acharyal has said, “God’s creation is so fascinating. Nature reminds us of God and is, in fact, His manifestation before all. When one looks at the sky at night or watches the ocean, one is overcome with a sense of peace and also realizes how very miniscule one is in the cosmos. Sun-rays playing on the ripples in the river, green fields, the pranks of monkeys, the affection of cows etc., are delightful. Even insects that many tend to despise have so much to teach us. Nature is a free, lovely show available for all to experience. Strangely, many ignore it and, spending much money and time, corrupt their minds by watching vulgar movies and listening to music with cheap lyrics.”

Discernment of the Basis of What May Seem to be Miraculous

When Acharyal was around 21 years of age, a magician came to Sringeri and had Acharyal’s Darshan. He then demonstrated to Him in private what he called, “My power of Indrajala”. He showed Acharyal the front and back of his open palm. Then, he quickly waved his hand and closed his fist. When he opened his fist, Acharyal saw a golden ring there. The magician went on to demonstrate several such tricks. Finally, he prepared a paper cone, showed it to be empty and then poured some water into it. After a few

moments, he jerked the cone as if he were about to throw the water on Acharyal. But what fell near Acharyal was a variety of small flowers. Acharyal liked the performance and told the man so. He, however, did not ask the magician how exactly he had performed the tricks because He felt, "Let Me not embarrass him with questions about the secrets of his trade."

In the 1980's, one day when I went to Acharyal's presence, He stretched out His right hand and told me, "Examine My palm." I did so. "Is it not empty?" He asked. "Yes, it is", I replied. He waved His hands swiftly and while doing so closed His fist. Then He burst out laughing and opened His fist. It contained Kumkumam (turmeric powder reddened by adding lime juice). Giving some to me, He said, "This Kumkum did not materialize from thin air. It is from Sharadambal's temple."

Then He told me, "Fetch a bowl of oil without telling anyone." When I returned with a vessel containing oil, He instructed me to heat it on a small electric heater. The oil was soon boiling. Even as I watched, He dipped His right hand into the oil and pulled it out, all smiles. It was then that Acharyal told me about the magician who had come to Him when He was around 21 years of age.

"Though I did not ask the magician how he performed his tricks, I deduced them Myself on the basis of what I had seen. Just as that man produced a ring, I manifested the Kumkumam purely by sleight of hand. He who is not discerning is likely to think that articles such as rings and Kumkumam can be so manifested only through supernatural

powers. I did not get burnt when I dipped My hand in the oil because, prior to My doing so, I had wet My hand without your knowledge. Because of the water, the temperature on the surface of My hand was far below that of the oil. I have read that a foreigner dips his hand briefly in molten metal. Unfortunately, molten metal is not accessible to Me right now or else I would have duplicated his feat for you”, elaborated Acharyal.

“Feel My pulse”, He continued. As I did so, He closed His eyes. Soon, I was unable to detect any pulse in His left wrist. A little later, the pulse was again detectable and He opened His eyes. “You might have imagined that because I went into a state of deep meditation, My pulse ceased to be detected by you. Actually, I did not meditate. Instead, it was through a strictly physical means that I briefly inhibited the blood flow to the hand. My heart continued to beat normally.”

He then closed His eyes once more and began to speak in a variety of markedly-dissimilar voices. Had I merely been given a recorded version of the sounds, I am certain I would not have been able to identify them as emanating from a single source; in fact, some of the sounds clearly seemed to be those of females with high-pitched voices. Acharyal opened His eyes and said, “What passes off as possession by a spirit is normally not so. It is easy for a person to consciously speak like different people. So, a deceitful man can pretend to be possessed by some divine being and earn name, fame and money.

“People often do not realize that their faces and, in particular, their eyes betray far more about the workings of their minds than they imagine. This and information gathered

through assistants can help a fraud to pass off as a mind-reader. The behaviour of a person in the grip of hysteria may give rise to the impression that he has been possessed by some spirit. True possession is, I believe, rare.”

Acharyal explained that, when young, He had once secretly arranged for some live coal to be spread on the ground and, in imitation of fire-walkers, crossed it without experiencing any discomfort. He said that He had slightly wet His soles before undertaking the fire-walk. His deer Hari had unexpectedly appeared on the scene and followed Him across the fire without any problem. He had noticed it only when He was more than half way across and so was not in a position to dissuade it from coming with Him.

“Obviously, there is nothing supernatural about fire-walking”, remarked Acharyal. He then went on to explain how it was possible for a charlatan to make some Vibhuti-like powder form gradually on his photograph. Finally, He told me that day, “Till today, I have not demonstrated these tricks to anyone. I just wanted to show you some of the means people employ to fool the gullible and to pass off as persons endowed with special powers. I am, of course, not saying that genuine miracles do not occur. Yoga Siddhis do manifest, as you know, but saints do not care for them.”

Extraordinary Insight and Blessings

Acharyal was camping at Kotekar, near Mangalore. The time was about 2.30 pm and He was seated in His private room. He was telling me about an event when He abruptly got up, walked to the door leading to the open veranda in the front of the building and opened it. In moments, a man

came rushing there. He was sweating, his shirt and trousers were dirty and His forehead was bandaged. Acharyal gently asked him who he was and what he wanted. The man blurted out, in Kannada, "Please save" but could not proceed further as he began to sob. Even without his having said anything more, Acharyal told him, "Your son will be alright soon. Do not worry." Then, gesturing to him to wait, Acharyal went inside and brought two big packets of cashews and one large pack of almonds. He gave them to him, saying, "Give some of these to your son daily, after some days." Having respectfully taken the dry fruits, he told Acharyal, "My son is in hospital. The doctor told me today that my child is suffering from cancer." "No, he does not have cancer. He will come home soon from hospital and be well", Acharyal stated emphatically. The man joined his palms, thanked Acharyal and left. Acharyal shut the door, resumed His seat and continued to talk to me from where He had left off.

The next evening, when Acharyal was completing His evening walk, He saw the man standing at a distance, with palms joined. Acharyal smiled at Him and entered the building. The man remained where he stood. After Acharyal had gone for His evening bath, when I came out, the man walked up to me and said, "Yesterday evening, after I had returned to the hospital from here, the doctor came and said, 'There was a mistake; reports had got mixed up. Your son does not have cancer. We can discharge him in two days. After taking him home, give him good nourishment.' Please convey this to Swami. I am very thankful to Him. As I did not wish to disturb Him today, I stayed afar." I replied that I

would submit his information to Acharyal. As I was starting to leave, he added, "I am a Christian. When I was shell-shocked on hearing that my child has cancer, a Hindu friend told me to approach Swami for blessings. That is why I rushed here yesterday. I am glad that I did so." Later, when I reported the matter to Acharyal, He just heard me in silence.

A couple came to Sringeri in 1963 to settle down there. During the Caturmasya that year, Acharyal expounded, in chaste Sanskrit, the Vedanta Paribhasha (an authoritative, technical primer on Advaita Vedanta) to the couple and to several scholars. After the first day's class, the lady approached Acharyal in the evening and said, "I am blessed to attend Acharyal's class. However, unlike all the others, I am not knowledgeable in Sanskrit and, so, unable to understand Acharyal's exposition." Blessing her, Acharyal compassionately responded, "You will be able to comprehend the text." The lady found, much to her own amazement, that from the next day onwards, she was able to follow Acharyal's exposition and, that too, without any difficulty. Even the portion of the text that had been covered in the first class became clear to her. Later, Acharyal started expounding the Vedanta Panchadashi to the couple. Though He did so in Sanskrit; she was able to clearly follow His teaching. After covering a portion of this text, He told them that they could read the book by themselves and it would be clear to them and that is what happened. I was given this information, decades later, by the lady herself .She even demonstrated to me that she had understood the texts concerned by telling

me correctly, in Tamil, the import of some portions that I read out.

Concentration and Punctiliousness

One day, Acharyal sat down in a coconut grove and asked me to read the first 50 verses of Vidura Neeti (comprising Vidura's moral advice to Dhritarashtra) and select compositions of Bhagavatpada. As I began chanting verses from the Vidura Neeti, Acharyal partially closed His eyes. When I came to the 22nd verse, I heard a swishing sound. Before I could react, a big leaf-stalk and a coconut fell from a tree in the vicinity and landed on the ground with a big thud less than a metre from Acharyal. So concentrated was He on the import of the verses that He was totally oblivious of what had happened.

After reading from the Vidura Neeti, I passed on to the compositions of Bhagavatpada, such as Manisha Panchakam and Brahmanuchintanam. Acharyal listened motionless, with a light smile. He opened His eyes only a few moments after I had finished. Suddenly, He winced in pain. Unseen by me, and unfelt by Him, an army of ants had been biting Him on His legs and hands. His feet were red and swollen.

He knew by rote the verses that He had asked me to read out and had Himself mentally recited them on hundreds of occasions. Yet, He concentrated upon them with such intensity that He remained totally unaware of even loud extraneous sounds and injury to His body. He was never inattentive to anything taken up by Him.

Acharyal has said, "One should perform all one's actions in a meticulous manner. Even a minor task ought not to be

performed carelessly. The time allocated to it may be small and other tasks may receive priority over it but, when one is engaged in it, one must treat it as important.”

Acharyal normally utilised an ochre handkerchief made of cotton. It used to get crumpled now and then. However, Acharyal had the habit of refolding it in such a way that it then appeared as if it were a freshly ironed cloth, with the edges forming perfect straight lines. It was not as if Acharyal did the folding to the exclusion of other activities. He has folded His handkerchief impeccably even while giving a serious discourse or reading a book.

In the course of His evening Ahnikam, as prescribed for Sannyasis, He used to take up water in a spoon from a vessel, chant ‘Om’ and put the water into another vessel, repeating this act over a hundred times. He performed all this in such a beautiful way that not a single drop of water spilt on the ground. His hand movement was the minimum possible and the speed perfectly suited His rhythmic chant of ‘Om’. The public had no access to His Ahnikam room and so it was not as though His optimal performance was meant as a lesson for another.

Acharyal once remarked, “People say that thoughts keep coming to their minds. They can hardly conceive of a situation where the mind is quiet. However, this surprises Me. As I see it, the mind should be quiet and just rest on the Self, unless a thought is needed for any task. When the necessity ends, the mind should revert to the state of tranquillity. Even when a task is at hand, active thinking is generally not needed all the time. For instance, when reading a book, the mind ought to become quiet when a page is being

turned.” Such was the tranquil nature of His mind even when it was not absorbed in meditation.

Ideal Disciple to Accomplished Guru

Shortly after Paramacharyal (His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal) had attained Mahasamadhi in 1954, a lady from North India came to Sringeri and had Acharyal’s Darshan. She expressed some of her religious doubts to Him and also said that she had been unable to get satisfactory replies to them. Acharyal gave His clarifications in His inimitable style. The lady joyfully stated that her doubts had been fully resolved.

Prompted by His innate lack of ego and very great regard for His Guru, Acharyal said, “Had you come sometime earlier, you could have had the holy Darshan of My Guru. You had to express your doubts to Me and hear My replies. But if you had just beheld My Guru, that would have been sufficient for the answers to have become known to you. Such was His greatness.”

What He spoke about His Guru was perfectly applicable to Him too. The year was 1984. Acharyal was scheduled to leave Sringeri for Kalady, via Bangalore. A Brahmachari from Rishikesh came a little after noon for Acharyal’s Darshan. Acharyal had already left for His afternoon bath. The Brahmachari told me, “I have seven questions pertaining to Yoga and Vedanta which I wish to pose to His Holiness. They are very important to me. I contacted numerous scholars, practitioners of Yoga and Sannyasis at Rishikesh, Uttarkashi, Haridwar and Kashi but none was able to satisfy me. A scholar at Kashi directed me to

Sringeri saying, 'If the Jagadguru of Sringeri cannot satisfactorily answer you, then there is none in the world who can.' That is why I have come most eagerly to Sringeri."

I told him, "Acharyal will be starting on a tour today. If you wait here, you can have His Darshan just prior to His departure. However, there is no time today for you to have a lengthy private session with Him." He said, "I will gladly wait to behold Him even if it be for just a moment." He then told me one of the questions that he had in mind and requested me to tell Acharyal about him. I fulfilled his request shortly after Acharyal completed His Bhiksha.

Acharyal said, "The question that he conveyed to you is good and pertinent. As there is no time to spare today, he could, if he wishes, meet Me at Bangalore and pose his queries to Me there. If I happen to know the answers, I shall tell him. Else, I shall readily admit that I am not in a position to help him." In about half an hour, Acharyal came out to the front veranda of Sacchidananda Vilas, His abode. Some devotees, inclusive of the Brahmachari, were there.

The Brahmachari prostrated before Acharyal. Acharyal looked at him with compassion, raised His right hand in a gesture of blessing and said, in Hindi, "May you be happy." He then moved on. I quickly conveyed to him what Acharyal had told me. Almost before I finished, he said, "The answers to all my questions became fully known to me the moment His Holiness blessed me." In the car, of His own accord, Acharyal informed me, "When I saw that Brahmachari, I was struck with his sincerity. So, I requested Ambal, 'Please provide him the answers he desires now itself.' The kind of sincerity that this spiritual aspirant has deserves to be rewarded." When I

submitted to Acharyal what the Brahmachari had said, Acharyal joined His palms and said, "Ambal is so gracious."

Acharyal was initiated into Sannyasa by Paramacharyal on 22nd May 1931. That evening, in keeping with the Math tradition, Paramacharyal and Acharyal were to be taken in golden and silver palanquins through the streets of Sringeri. They were attired in royal robes. Paramacharyal held out His finger and Acharyal gently grasped it. Paramacharyal led the way till they reached the silver palanquin. Unexpectedly, He withdrew His finger and occupied it. Then, He asked Acharyal to sit in the golden palanquin ahead. This was most unusual.

The scripture says that a disciple must follow his Guru and not go ahead of him. Paramacharyal's command required Acharyal to break this rule. The seat of the Guru is supposed to be respected and not occupied by a disciple. The golden palanquin was the one Paramacharyal had used for years. People could not be expected to know the reason for Acharyal occupying the golden palanquin. They could have censured Acharyal, at least mentally, for this extreme breach of propriety. Notwithstanding such considerations and though He had not even completed 14 years of age, Acharyal experienced no confusion whatsoever. As far as He was concerned, the command of the Guru had to be obeyed without the least hesitation. He sat that day in the golden palanquin. Such was His obedience to His Guru even on the very day of His Sannyasa.

In the early 1970's, I referred to this incident and asked Him, "What did Acharyal feel on receiving such a difficult instruction from Paramacharyal?" "What was there to feel? 'My

Guru's command is inviolable. As a disciple, it is My duty to carry it out.' That was My only thought then", replied Acharyal, without attaching any significance whatsoever to His great demonstration of unconditional obedience to the Guru.

Well before dawn, an erudite Sannyasi, who was an ardent disciple of Paramacharyal and Acharyal, happened to see Acharyal seated outside the room where Paramacharyal was resting. It was clear to him that Acharyal had spent the whole night there, awake. On his making enquiries, Acharyal told him, "Our Guru's attendant was not available last night. So, I decided to sit here to attend to His requirements, if any." Acharyal could have arranged for someone else to serve as an attendant and could, like the Math attendants, have slept and woken up only if called. But His dedication to the cause of Guru-Seva induced Him to do what He did.

Even in many a trying circumstance, Acharyal served His Guru to perfection; any other, no matter what the extent of his devotion or dedication, would have faltered, at least occasionally. For His part, Paramacharyal held Acharyal in the highest esteem. He declared to a devotee about Acharyal, "Do not think He is just a Swamigal. He is God. He is My Guru." Paramacharyal even composed, in the cyclical year Subhaanu (1943-44), verses on Acharyal and gave them to Him. Two of the seven verses are:

*dayā-sāndraṃ bālaṃ nikhila-jagatī-rakṣaṇa-caṇaṃ
harantaṃ vighnādrim̐ vimala-vimalair-vīkṣaṇa-cayaiḥ |
para-brahmākāraṃ praṇava-viditaṃ śānta-manasaṃ
guruṃ vidyātīrthaṃ kalayata budhās-citta-kamale ||*

“O Wise people! Hold in the heart-lotus the Guru, Vidyatheertha, the young one with tranquil mind, who is exceedingly compassionate, who destroys the mountain of impediments by His extremely pure glances, who is skilled in protecting the whole world, who is known by the means of the Pranava , Om, and who is the manifestation of the Supreme Brahman.”

*śarīrendriya-cittānām śuddhaye kalpitā mahāḥ |
bahavo guru-devānām tat-plaṅgaḥ bhavatām tanuḥ //*

“Numerous festivals relating to the Gurus and the Divinities have been conceived to purify the body, senses and mind. Your body is their fruit.”

Paramacharyal then told Acharyal, “I have written only what I definitely know to be true about You. There is no encomium here.” Acharyal, for His part, felt that it was His Guru’s extreme love for Him that caused Paramacharyal to view Him thus. A unique Guru-Sishya relationship!

The special blessings and guidance of Paramacharyal from even a year prior to Acharyal’s Sannyasa in May 1931 and several remarkable divine intercessions marked Acharyal’s intense and dedicated practice of spiritual disciplines and their culmination in His enlightenment and Jivanmukti (liberation while living) in December 1935. In the course of His spiritual practice, He thoroughly mastered Hatha-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Kundalini-Yoga, Nada-Anusandhana, Contemplation on the Atma and Dhyana and Samadhi on Divine forms. Then, with the teaching of the scripture about the Atma as basis and through intense reflection thereon, He attained a clear understanding of and

certitude about the non-dual Truth. Neutralising notions of the non-Self, He unswervingly focussed on the Reality, within oneself and outside, with such intensity that He attained Savikalpa Samadhi on the Truth. Having repeatedly abided in Savikalpa Samadhi, He became absorbed in Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the acme of Yoga. As He effortlessly abided in Nirvikalpa Samadhi again and again, with the eradication of all impediments to His realization of the non-dual Truth made known by the Upanishads, He became fully enlightened and steadfastly established in the Supreme. Immediately and of His own accord, Paramacharyal decisively identified Acharyal's realization of the Truth and establishment in Jivanmukti and ecstatically embraced and lauded Acharyal.

Strange as it may seem, Acharyal's formal lessons in Vedanta under Paramacharyal commenced years after He had already realized the Truth. Paramacharyal was universally recognised by traditional pundits to be a scholar par excellence and masterly exponent of Vedanta. Personally taught by Paramacharyal, Acharyal attained thorough proficiency in the Upanishads, Bhagavadgita and the Brahmasutras, with the Bhashyas of Shankara Bhagavatpada. About Paramacharyal's way of teaching, Acharyal has said, "He took into consideration every word of Bhagavatpada and, having analysed it, spelt out its actual purport. He expounded the scripture strictly in accordance with the commentary of Bhagavatpada. He effortlessly integrated into His teaching of Vedanta pertinent points from Nyaya, Mimamsa and Yoga" and, "When the Vedanta

Shastra is taught, one way is to explain a text line by line. Another is to expound the lines along with one's experience. The latter characterised His teaching; it gave great joy.”

Not only had Acharyal engaged in and reached the zenith of each of the whole gamut of spiritual disciplines and attained complete enlightenment and Jivanmukti and not only was He a master of the Vedanta, Nyaya and Yoga Shastras, He was proficient in the Dharma Shastra, Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas too. He was innately full of compassion, had a deep understanding of people and was competent to confer unfailing blessings. No wonder, He was a consummate Guru. -Compiler

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Beware of Desire, Anger and
Rashness



1. The Snare of Longing

A group of boys wanted to write a story for a competition. After much discussion, they completed it and one of them narrated it in its final form to the others. As he was doing so, three people who were passing that way paused to hear that story. They did not mistake it to be a factual account but liked what they heard. As they moved on, they discussed the story among themselves. A teenager happened to overhear them when they talked about a pot of gold hidden under a banyan tree in a forest situated about 500 kilometres away.

The lad immediately developed a strong desire to somehow possess that gold. Without telling anybody, he proceeded to the forest concerned. There, he saw a man place a fruit in a small-mouthed vessel and then tie the vessel to a tree by means of a long rope. Moved by curiosity, he initiated a conversation with that man.

Teenager : What are you doing?

Man : I am setting a trap for a monkey. I intend to train a simian to perform tricks.

Teenager : How will your contraption serve your purpose?

Man : This place is infested with monkeys. One of them will certainly notice this vessel and the fruit in it. So, it will put its hand into the vessel and grab the fruit. The vessel's mouth is too small for the monkey to take out its hand while gripping the fruit. The vessel has been tied to the tree and so the monkey cannot carry it away.

The animal will thus be forced to remain here and I shall catch it.

Teenager : Are you joking? The monkey will release the fruit, extricate its hand and escape.

Man : No, it will not. It will simply refuse to discard the fruit.

Teenager : I cannot imagine a simian behaving so foolishly because of its desire for fruit.

Man : Remain by my side and watch.

Both hid themselves a short distance away. Soon, a monkey came and behaved exactly the way the man had predicted. The lad said, "How stupid and crazy this monkey is!" and went his way.

After some time, he beheld a frog shooting out its tongue and catching a fly with it. Amused, he turned his attention to another frog that was nearby. As it was about to trap a fly, a snake stealthily came up to it and swiftly caught it in its mouth. The frog's tongue shot out and the fly stuck to it. Meanwhile, the snake proceeded to swallow the frog. The lad thought to himself, "What a strange sight! Even at its moment of death, this silly frog was busy catching a fly!"

He walked on and encountered a forester. The latter said, "Do not go much further in this direction. There is a wild tusker there and it may attack you." However, so intense was the lad's desire for the gold he hoped to find that he disregarded the advice. In about half an hour, he was deep within the forest. He was looking around for the banyan tree that he had heard was located somewhere

there when he heard the trumpeting of an elephant.

In a few moments, he saw a rutting tusker charging at him. He immediately took to his heels, with the elephant in hot pursuit. Though he ran as fast as he could, the pachyderm steadily gained on him. To his chagrin, he slipped and began to fall into a pit that he had not noticed. Flailing his arms, he providentially managed to catch a creeper and arrest his fall. The elephant reached the top of the pit and gazed at him.

The lad looked down and saw that the pit was deep. Further, he espied a cobra with upraised hood at the bottom. He realized that he was in very deep trouble, without the option of climbing up or down the creeper. As if his problems were not adequate, the creeper began to give way; some insects were busy at work on it.

Unexpectedly, a drop of honey from a beehive on the tree overhead, fell on his nose and began to slowly flow down towards his lips. The boy stretched out his tongue and licked it. The honey seemed like ambrosia to him. He then heard the roar of a distant lion. The tusker felt terrified and swiftly left the place. The boy began to climb up the creeper. As he neared the top of the pit, the creeper gave way. But, somehow, he managed to hold on to the pit's edge.

In moments, he felt his hands slipping. However, to his surprise, he found himself being lifted up by the woodman who had advised him not to venture into this region. "When I heard the trumpeting of the elephant, I knew that you were likely to be in danger. I am far more familiar with this forest than people like you are. So, I rushed in the direction you had proceeded, to help you. I see that I have arrived just in time."

The lad thanked him profusely. Still possessed by the longing for gold, he explained the reason for his coming there and sought the forester's help to locate the banyan tree in that region. His saviour told him that he was not going to find any gold and tried to persuade him to return before the tusker chose to come back. However, finding the boy adamant, he led him to the banyan tree. They searched there for the gold but did not succeed in finding any.

Finally, the boy returned to his native place. He described his misadventure in detail to an elder. The elder laughed and informed him that what he had overheard was only a portion of the tale authored by a group of boys for a competition. He then proceeded to tell the lad, "You felt that the monkey and the frog had behaved thoroughly foolishly because of their longing. Your behaviour was far worse. The poor monkey refused to let go of the fruit that was in its hand. You, on the other hand, were led on by intense longing for gold that was actually non-existent. The frog stretched out its tongue at the moment of its death but possibly did so purely by instinct. You, on the other hand, are a human being endowed with discrimination. Yet, when you were about to perish, you savoured the drop of honey that fell on your nose. See the power of longing." The boy realized the devastating force of longing and hung his head in shame.



2. Danger of Fascination with Sense-Objects

When chasing a deer, a hunter blows a conch. The sound allures the deer and it tarries a while. That opportunity is made use of by the hunter to kill it. Thus, the deer loses its life because of its attachment to sound. To trap an elephant, people first lure it into a pit dug and camouflaged by them. Then, they tie it. The elephant continues to remain untamed. To tame and train it, they send a well-trained female to it. When the female comes into contact with the male, the latter feels delighted and becomes docile. Having rendered it docile, people train it and make it work for them. An elephant thus loses its freedom because of its yielding to the touch of a female.

When a lamp is lit, moths get attracted to the form of the flame. They rush into the flame and get burnt to death. Moths, thus suffer destruction because they are charmed by a form. An angler attaches a worm to the hook of his fishing line and tosses it into the water. A fish, attracted by the imagined taste of the worm, bites the hook and gets stuck. As a consequence, it loses its life.

A bee sat on a lotus and began to suck up nectar. At dusk, the lotus began to close its petals. Captivated by the fragrance of the lotus, the bee did not fly out. "The lotus fades at night. But this night is bound to pass and the sun shall rise again. At dawn, the lotus will bloom. I can escape then", thought the bee. Unfortunately, that night, a herd of elephants came to the lake where the

lotus was and began to play in the water. They caught and hurled the lotuses with their trunks. The effect was that the bee met its doom.

Each one of these creatures perished due to its being carried away by a particular sense-object. Man, on the other hand, is attracted by pleasing sounds, pleasant touch, beautiful forms, tasty dishes and fragrant odours. So, he should be very vigilant and should keep his senses under control. Else, he would be inviting trouble.

Bhartrihari has said, “Let a moth enter a flame by virtue of its unawareness of the power of fire to burn. Let a fish bite the baited hook because of its ignorance. We, however, refuse to part with objects of sensual enjoyment even though we know them to be the causes of much trouble. Alas! How inscrutable is the impact of delusion!”



3. Lust Ruins

Two Rakshasa brothers named Sunda and Upasunda performed severe penance. As a result thereof, Lord Brahma appeared before them and asked them what boon they wanted. The Rakshasas replied, “We both want to live forever.” Brahma told them, “It is impossible for a person to be totally immune to death.” “If at all we are to die, we alone should bring about our deaths”, they asked. Their request was granted. Sunda and Upasunda thought, “Both of us are very fond of each another. We will never quarrel and so death cannot approach us.”

The brothers soon started terrorizing people. Indra, accompanied by others, went to Brahma and requested him to get rid of these Rakshasas. Brahma instructed the celestial architect Viswakarma to create a bewitching damsel. Then, the Creator sent the belle, the Apsara Tilottama, to Sunda and Upasunda.

On beholding her, they were gripped by an extreme desire for her. Sunda said, “She belongs to me as I saw her first.” “No, No”, shouted Upasunda, “I touched her first. She deserves to be exclusively mine.” Observing the two demons engaged in a wordy duel, Tilottama said, “I will marry the stronger brother.” So blinded were they by lust that Sunda and Upasunda promptly pounced upon each other. A bloody battle ensued. At the end of it, both of them lay dead.

No matter how powerful a person may be and regardless of how much austerity he may have

practised, he is sure to have a fall if he is lustful and arrogant.



4. Insidious Attack of Desire

A Brahmachari lived as a disciple in the hermitage of a great enlightened Yogi. His intention was to become an adept at Yoga and spend most of his time in the bliss of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. One day the Yogi went out, telling his disciple that he would be back after a few days. That evening, the Brahmachari proceeded to the river to fetch water. There, he beheld a teenaged girl sobbing. He asked her what her trouble was.

She said, "I belong to a village situated a couple of miles away, on the other side of the river. My friends and I set out early this morning to attend a function at a village on this side. On our way back, we stopped at a grove nearby. A butterfly caught my attention. I felt a desire to hold it in my hand and so went to the flower where it was perched. It took off and eluded my grasp. I followed it till it sat on another plant. Again, I tried to catch it but failed. Chasing it unsuccessfully in this fashion, I was soon out of the range of sight of my friends. After some time, I gave up and, feeling tired, sat down.

"Without intending to, I fell asleep. I must have slept for over an hour. When I woke up, I found that the sun had set. I ran to where my friends had been sitting but found none there. I searched the region but could not locate them. My guess is that after waiting for some time, they called out to me. They were unaware that I had gone after a butterfly. But they knew that I easily get homesick. So, presuming that I must have proceeded on my own to reach home early, they continued on their return journey.

This is what, I conjecture, must have happened. For my part, the thought of having been left behind frightened me. I realised that it was too late for me to proceed towards home. Further, when I rushed back to the river, the boatman was nowhere to be seen. He must have gone home. It is now getting dark and obviously, I cannot spend the night here. I cannot go home either. Hence, I am feeling helpless and miserable.”

The Brahmachari felt pity for her. He told her, “You can spend the night at the hermitage where I live and leave early tomorrow morning.” The girl appeared thankful but wary. “Who all stay at the hermitage?” she asked. “My Guru and myself”, replied the Brahmachari. “But at present, my Guru has gone elsewhere and shall be back only after a few days.” The girl said, “In that case, will it be proper for me to come there? I have my doubts.” The Brahmachari laughed and declared, “Have no fear. I have vowed to be a life-long celibate. Carnal desires have no place in my mind and my dispassion is unshakeable. Even the Apsara Urvashi cannot tempt me. So, you can come with me without any hesitation.” “Thank you very much for offering to help me”, responded the girl and readily accompanied him.

At the hermitage, he offered her fruits. He then told her, “Spend the night in the sole room available, while I sleep outside, in the open.” She expressed her gratitude to him again and closed the door behind her. The Brahmachari spread his mat of straw on the ground and lay down to sleep. In half an hour, it started to drizzle. The Brahmachari woke up and knocked at the door. The girl opened it. He informed her that as it was drizzling, he wished to sleep inside. He told her to move her straw

bed to one side of the room and set up his mat on the other side. He lay down facing away from her.

In minutes, the drizzle turned into a downpour. The frequent flashes of lightning clearly visible through the window near the Brahmachari prevented him from falling asleep. So, he turned his face away from the window. He could now see the girl and noticed that she was shivering. "Poor girl, she has had a bad day and now cannot even get a good night's sleep. Let me help her", he thought. He tapped her on her shoulder and said, "I have a blanket. Let us share it." He did not give her the blanket and remain without one because he felt, "It is getting increasingly cold. Without a blanket, I cannot sleep. If I remain awake tonight, I will feel sleepy in the morning and my meditation will suffer. Surely, tomorrow's meditation is more important than the inconvenience of sleeping by the side of this girl. In any case, her body is no more tempting to me than a log of wood." The girl appeared surprised at the Brahmachari's offer but raised no objection. So, they were soon sharing a blanket.

After some time of contact with the girl's body, the Brahmachari felt the stirring of lustful thoughts. He was, however, not perturbed. He told himself, "Many are the occasions when I have felt hungry and desired to eat the fruit next to me but have comfortably abstained from doing so. Likewise, there have been times when anger has arisen in my mind. Yet, I have not only abstained from speaking harshly but have also remained silent. Surely, these sexual thoughts cannot impel me to do anything improper." However, in minutes, the carnal thoughts became intense. Impelled by a powerful longing to cohabit with the girl, he put his arm

around her.

The moment he did so, he had the shock of his life. In her place, he found his Guru. For a few seconds, the Brahmachari remained too dazed to move a muscle. He then hurriedly got up and prostrated at the feet of his Guru, his face red with embarrassment. The Yogi told him, "I repeatedly told you that as you have not become a Jivanmukta, you should not take your Brahmacharyam for granted. However, my words did not sink into you. This is because you were sure that you could not be tempted. Trying a different track, I cautioned you by telling you the tale of a group of monkeys who decided to observe a fast on Ekadashi. Do you remember?" On hearing his Guru's words, the story that the Yogi had told him readily came to the Brahmachari's mind.

A group of monkeys dwelt in a forest. One day, the leader declared, "Humans fast on Ekadashi days and thereby obtain Punyam. We too shall fast on Ekadashi." So, on the next Ekadashi, all of them assembled and sat on the ground, with their eyes closed. After some time, one of them said, "We are unsafe sitting motionless on the ground. A herd of elephants passing by may trample us. It is also possible that a passing tiger may maul us. Further, as we are tree-dwellers, remaining continuously on the ground is uncomfortable for us. So, why not we climb the trunks of trees and remain at the start of the branches? We will be safer and yet will not be close to the fruits at the end of the branches." His suggestion was appreciated by them and they implemented it.

Some time passed. Another monkey said, "A cheetah can attack us here. Were we to go to the end of the branches, we will be better off. Cheetahs cannot

come there because the portions concerned will not support their weight. Further, we can easily save ourselves by jumping to the next tree. We can also save ourselves easily from snakes. We could sit facing away from the fruits, keeping a watch on the ground and the tree trunks.” This idea too was liked by all and immediately implemented.

Some more time passed. Then, one monkey said, “Continuously watching the ground is terribly boring. Why not we take turns to spot danger? The rest of us can then feel free to look around and thereby avert boredom. Surely, no fast will get broken even if our eyes were to momentarily fall on a fruit.” “He is right”, felt the others. Soon, they were frequently eying the fruits.

It was not long before a monkey opined, “While we are seated here, we might as well feel the fruits to identify the ripe and juicy ones. That will make our task of foraging easier tomorrow. After all, we will be hungry then and would not like to spend much time picking the right fruits to eat.” There was no voice of dissent. Soon, the monkeys got busy feeling the fruit, with their hands lingering for a while on the good ones.

An aged monkey then said, “Not only will we be hungry tomorrow morning but also weak. Setting out for forage will be difficult. So, let us pluck the good fruits now and keep them ready for eating tomorrow.” “A wise suggestion”, thought the others and began to pluck fruits.

A little later, another aged monkey said, “One cannot pick good fruits merely by feeling them. Smelling them is also necessary. After all, a fruit may be nice to feel but

may smell bad. Definitely, we would not like to eat any foul-smelling fruit.” The others agreed. So, all of them began to smell the fruits plucked and to throw away those whose smell was unsatisfactory.

Some time passed. Another aged monkey said, “From experience, I know that even a fruit that is nice to look at, good to feel and pleasant to smell can have a rotten core or worms. Thus, tasting fruits by biting each of them is necessary to confirm that the fruits we will be eating tomorrow morning are truly nice. Surely, we would not want to get a stomach-ache by eating bad fruits in the morning. Our Ekadashi fast will remain unbroken even if each of us were to taste a piece of fruit but take care not to swallow it.” The suggestion was regarded wise and implemented.

In but a few minutes, the monkeys began swallowing the delicious pieces of fruits in their mouths. That was the end of their fast.

Having got his disciple to recall the tale, the Yogi said, “I realised that the story too did not have any effect on you. Finally, to make you see the light, I used my Yogic powers to appear before you as a girl. What happened after that is well known to you.” He continued, “Underestimation of the power of the senses to unsettle the mind, flawed self-justification for one’s actions, overconfidence and making of compromises where one should not are among the factors that cause a person to have a moral or spiritual fall.” The Brahmachari learnt his lesson.



5. Harmfulness of Anger

Shankara and Hari were resident students of Sanskrit literature at a Patashala. They shared a room along with two others. It was Pournami. There were no classes that day and the students were in their rooms. Shankara was seated in his corner reading the portion of Kalidasa's Raghuvamsam that his preceptor had taught a couple of days earlier. Hari and his two room-mates were chatting.

Hari : Have you heard of any elephant that is terrified of rats and which jumps, runs and creates an earthquake on seeing one.

Companions : No.

Hari : I know of one. Shankara is that elephant. He is so fat that he weighs as much as a pachyderm. He is mortally scared of rats. Yesterday evening, when he was seated under the Ashwattha tree, a rat passed by. Our elephant jumped up and ran. He tripped on a banana peel and fell. There was a minor earthquake. Poor Mother Earth! What a blow she received!

Hari burst out laughing and so did his friends. Shankara, who heard all that was said, lost his temper. His face red and his breathing shallow, he vituperated Hari and called him names. Hari turned and walked out of the room. After a few minutes, Shankara's other two room-mates went out to attend to some work.

The moment they left, Shankara tiptoed to Hari's corner, picked up Hari's Raghuvamsam book, hid it and resumed his seat. Hari entered. He appeared upset on not

finding his book but did not say anything. He automatically assumed that Shankara was the culprit. So, when Shankara went to answer the call of nature, Hari brought a vessel of water and threw it on Shankara's bedding. Shankara did not realize what had happened when he returned.

A teacher who taught Hari and Shankara had observed from the hall all that had transpired. He entered the room. The two boys prostrated before him. He sat down and asked them also to do so. Then, he told them a story.

Teacher : On a wintry night, a person was sleeping with a blanket pulled over him for warmth. He woke up when he felt something moving on the blanket, near his ankles. In the dim light, he was able to make out the figure of a rat. Without a second thought, he picked up a bottle containing water that was by his side and hurled it towards the rodent. The bottle grazed the rat's tail, struck the man's feet and broke. He yelled in pain; his bedding became wet. He cursed the rat and looked around for it. He found that it was hiding in a corner, not far from him. Wanting to terminate the rat's life, he swung his arm swiftly and succeeded in catching the rodent by its tail. Desperate to escape, the rat bit him. Feeling sharp pain, he relaxed his grip. The rat scurried away. Well, Shankara, what do you think of the man?

Shankara : He was a thorough fool.

Teacher : Why do you say so?

Shankara : The man tried to kill the rat with a bottle, which was certainly not appropriate for the purpose. He did not realize that he would be hurting himself by his action and that he would be unable to sleep comfortably thereafter because his bedding would get wet. Catching the rat by its tail was a

stupid thing to do, for he virtually forced the rat to bite him.

Teacher : When Hari made fun of you, you could have laughed at yourself. Alternatively, you could have let the matter rest, thinking, “I am fat. It is also true that I am scared of rats and that, yesterday on seeing a rat, I jumped up, ran and fell. Sarcastic embellishments apart, Hari’s narrative is not false.” Instead, you lost your temper. Just as the rat disturbed the man of the story, Hari’s ridicule disturbed you. The bottle hurt the man and wet his bedding. Your anger too affected you in two ways.

Shankara : How?

Teacher : Did you mean all the things that you told Hari in anger?

Shankara : No, I was so excited that I could not think rationally and choose my words then.

Teacher : The ability to think logically and act sensibly is a very valuable asset of humans. You temporarily lost that ability. Did you not?

Shankara : I admit I did.

Teacher : That was a major, immediate setback for you just as the blow on the feet was for the man. After you snapped at Hari, you tried to continue with your studies. Were you able to concentrate as before?

Shankara : For some time, I could not. My mind was agitated and the thought that Hari had humiliated me in the presence of my friends kept recurring.

Teacher : Just as the man was unable to sleep in comfort that night because of the wetness of his bed, you were unable to

attend to your studies for some time because of your mental agitation. The man did not realize the consequences of his hurling the bottle. He only thought he was going to get rid of the rat. You did not think of the consequences of your anger. You only thought of putting Hari in his place. Do you agree?

Shankara : Yes.

Teacher : Hari, tell Shankara what you did to his bedding and why.

Hari : Shankara, you hid my book. In retaliation, I threw water on your bedding.

Teacher : Irritated with the rat, the man caught it by its tail and it bit him. To punish Hari for having teased you, you hid his book. Because you did so, you have a wet bedding.

Shankara : I now clearly see that there is much in common between the foolish man and myself.

Teacher : I know that you have a quick temper. Try to change yourself. Remember that anger harms the very person who gives room to it. It temporarily deprives him of his precious God-given gift of rational thinking and sensible behaviour. It agitates the mind and destroys peace. It does not give the least happiness; no man feels jolly when he is in the grip of wrath. Lord Krishna has spoken of anger as one of the gateways to hell.

Shankara : If I give up anger, will not people take advantage of my resulting docility?

Teacher : A person should be patient and should not give room to anger. This does not mean that he must allow people to ride roughshod over him. He can be firm and even give a strong

verbal response when the situation necessitates it. A boss may have to reprimand an indolent subordinate who is not amenable to soft words. In such situations, anger may be feigned but mental composure must be retained.

Shankara : I understand the importance of conquering anger and shall do my best to reform myself.

Teacher : Hari, there was no need for you to tease or provoke Shankara. People normally resent censure and humiliation. Because of what you did, Shankara gave you a good dressing down. His rebuke hurt you, did it not?

Hari : Yes, that is why I left the room. For some time, I continued to feel ill at ease.

Teacher : Shankara foolishly hid your book but your retaliation too was unwise. Had Shankara found out later that you had wet his bedding, he would have hurt you for what you did. You are familiar with the Mahabharatha. You know that when Drona sought help from Drupada, the latter insulted him. So, after training the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Drona got Arjuna to capture Drupada and took possession of half of Drupada's kingdom. Drupada, for his part, performed a sacrifice and obtained a son who would slay Drona. Dhristadyumna killed Drona during the Mahabharatha war when the latter lay down arms on being told by Yudhishtira that Ashwatthama had died. Later, Ashwatthama avenged his father's death by slaying Dhristadyumna. What a chain of reactions!

Hari : In future, I shall try to keep the feelings of others in mind and abstain from unwisely initiating retaliatory measures.

Teacher : Both of you should apologize to each other and be friends as before.

The boys did as told. Then, Shankara returned Hari's book; Hari put Shankara's bedding in the sun to dry.

Anger harms the one who gives room to it in more ways than one. It is, as declared by the Lord Himself, a gateway to hell. Hence, it is in the interest of everyone to give no quarter to anger. A person should be patient. However, if the situation necessitates it, he may simulate anger; even then, he should not become mentally agitated.



6. Look Before You Leap

Centuries ago, a young merchant lived with his wife in a town in South India. He had been married for four years but had no children. His income from his shop was not large but was, nonetheless, sufficient for them to lead a comfortable life. One day, a smart-looking man whom he had not seen before came to his shop and engaged him in a conversation. The stranger asked, "How is your business?"

Merchant : It is faring, reasonably well.

Stranger : Why don't you trade in diamonds?

Merchant : It is true that there is a great demand for diamonds in the capital of our kingdom, but I neither have a stock of diamonds nor know of anyone anywhere from whom I can procure them at a price that will enable me to make much of a profit.

The stranger took out a diamond from his pouch and showed it to the merchant. The merchant found the diamond to be bright, well-cut and impressive.

Stranger : How much do you think this diamond will fetch?

Merchant : It will fetch you 100 silver pieces in the capital.

Stranger : Suppose you could purchase diamonds like this for 20 silver pieces each. Would you be interested?

Merchant : Of course, but where, indeed, can I get them

at that price?

Stranger : I know of a person who sells this kind of diamonds for 20 silver pieces each.

Merchant : Please tell me where he lives.

The stranger mentioned the name of a place but it was not familiar to the merchant.

Merchant : Where is this place?

Stranger : In Kashmir.

Part of the enthusiasm of the merchant faded, for Kashmir was at a great distance and he did not know how to proceed there. "The person who has these diamonds does not deal with those whom he is unfamiliar with", continued the stranger. The merchant's hopes were dashed.

Sensing his disappointment, the stranger smiled and said, "You seem to be a good person. I would like to help you. I am planning to go to meet this merchant in two days. Why don't you join me? You can purchase as many diamonds as you wish from this person, to whom I shall introduce you. We can come back together after a fortnight's stay there." The proposal greatly interested the merchant and he straightaway agreed to it.

He came home and told his wife, agog with excitement, "We are going to be rich!" He then went on to explain the proposal of the stranger. He stated that he intended to sell his shop and the silver vessels that he possessed. Taking the sale proceeds, he would leave for Kashmir in two days. He added that he wanted her to proceed to his father's house in the village and wait for him there. He assured her that he would be back in a few

months. His wife, however, did not share his enthusiasm. She said, "That man is unknown to you. You do not know whether he is trustworthy at all. The offer seems too good to be genuine. So, why take a risk? Further, our income is sufficient for us." The man was in no mood to listen and he quickly executed his plan. The merchant and the stranger set out on horses, for Kashmir. They rode on for several days. One day, as they were passing through a forest, they stopped because the merchant was feeling thirsty and wanted to quench his thirst in a brook that was flowing nearby. He also wanted to wash himself in the stream. He returned in a short while but was thoroughly shocked to find his horse, money and the stranger missing. He searched for them but in vain. It was then that it dawned on him that he had been taken for a ride. Thoroughly dejected, he sat down at the base of a tree. He was at a loss as to what he should do.

After a while, as he was absent-mindedly looking around, he noticed a hollow in the trunk of the tree below which he was seated. His eyes fell on a metallic object there. He put his hand in and pulled out a key. Twirling it about in his hand, he got up and walked about aimlessly. He soon came across an old, small building with a lock on its door. Without giving the matter a second thought, he tried the key on the lock and found that it fitted. He entered.

The place was modestly furnished. He found some eatables on a table and immediately appeased his hunger. As he was examining the house, he heard some sounds coming from outside. He proceeded to the window and looked out. He saw a man with a dagger running rapidly, chased by two armed persons, who

appeared to be soldiers. Not wanting to provide an opportunity for the man to enter the house, he bolted the door. A few moments later, he heard a loud scream, followed by silence. He did not want to take any risk and hence remained quiet and motionless.

After a few minutes passed uneventfully, he decided to rest and lay down with his head on a big soft pillow that was lying on the ground. He had just begun to doze when he was rudely awakened by the sound of the door of the house being broken. The two soldiers rushed inside and grabbed him. He was taken aback and demanded an explanation from them. They just guffawed.

While one of the soldiers held him tight, the other started to inspect every nook and corner of the place. He happened to pick up the pillow. Finding it to be unduly heavy, he cut it open with his sword. Some jewels fell out. The soldier slapped the merchant and thundered, "You thief! We will deliver you to our king for punishment." The merchant pleaded innocence. "Shut up", said a soldier angrily. "Whatever you have to say, say it to our king." As he was dragged out of the house by the soldiers, he noticed the man he had earlier seen running, lying dead at some distance. He was forcibly taken to the king. There, the soldiers presented the case against him.

The merchant learnt that a gang of robbers had been committing numerous thefts in the kingdom and had even stolen some ornaments belonging to the queen. One of the thieves had been detected by the soldiers and chased. Finally, when trapped in the forest, he had put up a fight and then, in desperation, stabbed himself. The soldiers

had explored the region under the assumption that the thief had been scampering in the direction of his hideout. They had then located the building which the merchant had temporarily occupied. Wanting to surprise the occupants, they had broken open the door. They had found a man resting inside. The pillow used by him had yielded the jewellery stolen from the queen. Convinced that he belonged to the gang of thieves, they had brought him to the king.

The merchant pleaded that he was not at all guilty and narrated his story. But nobody was willing to believe him. After all, he had been found in the den of the robbers; the lock and the key were by his side; he had been resting his head on the very pillow in which the jewellery of the queen was found. The evidence being strongly against him, the king sentenced him to imprisonment for life. The man pleaded in a heartrending manner and to the best of his ability but to no avail. He was incarcerated with hardened criminals and made to toil for many hours a day.

Sixteen years passed. One day, some guards came into his cell. They told him that the king had summoned him and that he was being set free. The merchant was bewildered but overjoyed. When he presented himself before the king, the monarch said, "I am very sorry that I punished you. I know now that you are innocent." He then explained that on that very day a robber had confessed that he had been committing many thefts in the kingdom over the years and that he and his companions had stolen the queen's jewellery about 16 years ago. He had even led the guards to their former hideout, which was the place where the merchant had

been resting, when arrested. As a token of his remorse, the king gave the merchant much gold, daggers for self-defence and a horse.

The merchant rode swiftly and, in due course, returned to his own kingdom. He proceeded to the house of his parents. Having tied the horse in the stable, he walked towards the front door. As he did so, in the moonlight, he was able to look into the house through a side window. He saw his wife lying on the floor, near the window, facing in his direction. He also saw the figure of a male sleeping at a short distance from her. The man's face was not visible to him. He immediately concluded, "Here I am returning after so much suffering to a woman who has been unfaithful to me! How shameless she is that she is openly living with her paramour in my own parents' house!" Burning with anger, he took out his two daggers and got ready to hurl one of them into the chest of his wife and the other into the back of her paramour, who was facing away from the window.

He, however, paused thinking, "Let me not act rashly. Without planning, I rushed into the deal with the stranger and lost my horse and money in the bargain. Again acting out of impetuosity, I entered the house in the forest and had to pay for it by being imprisoned for sixteen years. Twice, I have been ruined by my rashness. Must I be reckless now also?" Cogitating thus, he calmed down slightly, went to the door and knocked. In a few moments, his wife opened the door. She stood speechless with joy on seeing her husband. Turning to the person who had been sleeping near her and was now standing behind her, she said, "Hari, this is your father. Seek his blessings." The merchant was now totally nonplussed. "My son?" he

asked. His wife explained, “Yes, a few weeks after you had left, I learnt that I was in the family way. This is our son.” Taking a close look at the person whom he had mistaken for his wife’s paramour, the merchant saw that he was just a teenager.

As the boy touched his feet, the merchant thanked his stars that he had not foolishly killed his wife and his own son. Embracing his son, he told him, “I have a piece of valuable advice for you. Never make the mistake of acting in haste, without considering the consequences of your actions. I have paid dearly for my impetuosity. That is why I am giving you this advice at the very first meeting between us.”



7. Never Too Late to Reform

There were two friends who were lazy and uneducated. They moved from village to village and sustained themselves by begging and stealing. They spent the night wherever they could find some shelter. One day, when they were emerging from a house after stealing some money, they heard a shout, "Thieves, thieves!" They immediately took to their heels, scurrying in different directions.

One of them ran on and on till he came to a banyan tree situated at the outskirts of a village which he had not visited before. As it was a hot afternoon and as he was thoroughly exhausted, he sat down in the shade of the tree, propping his back against its trunk. Soon, he fell asleep. When he woke up, he noticed in front of him a plantain leaf bearing a variety of fruits. He was surprised but, being famished, started devouring the fruits without delay. While doing so, he began to think about why someone had chosen to make him a delicious offering.

He conjectured, "It so happened that by virtue of the support provided by the tree, my back and neck remained erect even while I was asleep. Consequently, someone must have mistaken me to be a person engrossed in meditation and reverentially placed these fruits before me." It then struck him that if one person could make this mistake, surely some others too could do so. He soon made up his mind to pretend to be a Yogi.

He realised that it would be impossible for him to

sleep all day long and that too with his back and neck held vertical. Further, he knew that he lacked the capacity to sit motionless for hours on end with his eyes closed, while being wide awake. So, he chose to capitalize on his observation that not many people came that way. He began to keep a careful watch on the path leading to his tree and the moment he saw someone approaching, he closed his eyes and sat still pretending to meditate. To his joy, a few people misjudged him to be a Yogi, touched his feet, placed eatables and money in front of him and then moved on.

However, he reckoned that most of the people ignored him. He cogitated on the possible cause and decided, "To most, I must appear to be not a man seated in meditation but a lazy day-dreamer or one who is fast asleep. I must do something to force the impression that I am a Yogi." As luck would have it, someone left a rosary and a pouch for it in front of him. That night, moving to the woods nearby, he fashioned a Brahmadaṇḍa, a rest for his arm. The next day onwards, he not only closed his eyes when he espied a passer-by but also supported his right arm on the Brahmadaṇḍa and rolled the rosary beads held by him within the pouch. As expected by him, the number of people who showed him respect increased greatly. He made it a point not to converse with people and to go to sleep at night only after the last of the passers-by had left. Though the number of people who venerated him had gone up, he could see that there were still some who did not care for him. He thought, "May be, to a few, I appear to be a man attempting to meditate rather than an adept in Yoga who has realized the Truth." He hit upon an idea. From the next day onwards,

apart from closing his eyes and rolling the rosary, he occasionally said, as if voicing to himself his experience, "Om. Everything is Brahman." His scheme proved to be highly successful. After its implementation, hardly anyone went by him without prostrating before him and placing some offering. He was quite happy and lived in this fashion for a couple of months.

One evening, he felt bored. For long, he had had neither vigorous exercise nor an occasion to chat freely with anyone. He knew that he could not engage in conversation with the local villagers without exposing his ignorance. So, after the last of the passers-by had left, he sprinted to a wooded hill nearby and, with much effort, crossed it. He found himself in a crematorium. In the light of the full moon, he was able to perceive a temple at some distance. He walked to it, and who should he see there resting but his old friend. They were very happy to see each other and began to talk the hind legs off a mule.

In the course of their conversation, the friend told the pseudo-Yogi about his experiences. He said, "When I fled from the village where our theft was detected, I did not have any specific destination in mind. Having run for long, I finally found myself in the crematorium nearby. I was thoroughly fatigued and so lay down there myself and went to sleep. By the time I awakened, it was past dusk. As I rose, I noticed some people at a distance, looking in my direction. Suddenly, they screamed in terror and sped away as fast as their legs could take them. I thought to myself that perhaps they had mistaken me for a ghost.

"I decided to exploit the situation. For the next few days, I pretended to be a ghost haunting the crematorium

and terrified the people who happened to pass at some distance. Having established in the minds of the people that the crematorium was haunted by a powerful, malevolent ghost, I matted my locks and presented myself to the villagers as a Tantrik versed in the Mantra Shastra. I told them that I would perform a rite that would get rid of the ghost. On an Amavasya night, I performed what passed off for a sacrifice and, at the end of it, declared to the assembled villagers that the ghost would no more be able to frequent the crematorium. Thereafter, the villagers did not encounter any ghost in the crematorium and I became a respected figure.

“I realised that I could not sustain myself comfortably with the limited offerings I was getting. Therefore, I decided to play a new version of my ghost-trick. I climbed on to the roof of one of the houses and removed a couple of tiles. Then, I dropped down some stones as also a ball of cotton that I had set fire to. There was pandemonium within the house. Nobody could see me because it was late in the night and the moon was hidden by the clouds. I did the same thing in that house on the successive night. The inmates finally came to me during the subsequent day, for I was supposedly a Tantrik capable of exorcising ghosts.

“They pleaded with me to do something. I readily consented. Going to their house, I performed a ritual of sorts and assured them that the ghost would trouble them no more. It obviously did not and I received a substantial reward and much thanks. After some days had passed, I performed my ghost-act, with minor variations, in another house. Again, I was showered with gratitude, gifts and cash. I continue to indulge in my naughty game but only

infrequently.

“To keep up my presence of being a dedicated Tantrik, I dwell in this dilapidated Kali temple and make it a point to spend some time every night at the nearby crematorium, seated with a human skull in my hand, drinking wine and mumbling what can pass off as Mantras.”

The pseudo-Yogi was pleasantly surprised on hearing his friend’s story and congratulated him. He then asked the pseudo-Tantrik, “You know nothing about Mantras. So, have you ever come close to being exposed as a fraud when you went to perform an exorcism?” “Yes”, replied the pseudo-Tantrik. “On one occasion, I came close to being revealed as a pretender. The inmates of the house to which I went were simpletons. However, a person who was passing through the village happened to stop by when I was in the midst of my ritual. I could see that that person was knowledgeable. He was about to expose me when I managed to make him hold his peace.

“I judged from his looks that he was basically an avaricious man. So, pretending to chant a long Mantra, I conveyed a sentence to him interspersed with a few nonsense syllables by which I made it clear that I was willing to share with him the Dakshina I would be getting. He not only understood me but also came forward to help me with my ritual. He highly eulogized me and my knowledge to the inmates of the house. That night, he came to this temple and I shared part of what I had got with him. Since he was only a passer-by who belonged to another village, he left and did not come back. On no other occasion have I encountered any problem of significance. I am doing very well here.”

Having spent a few hours in the company of his friend, the pseudo-Yogi remembered that he had to be at his place under the banyan tree by dawn. Hence, he took leave of his friend and returned to his village.

One day, a holy person came near the banyan tree where the pseudo-Yogi was seated. As was his wont, the pseudo-Yogi began rolling his rosary and said, "Om. Everything is Brahman." The holy man just smiled and sat down by his side. The pseudo-Yogi began to feel uncomfortable. Setting him at ease, the holy man said, "I know that you are no Yogi. So, please feel free to open your eyes. I am not here to expose you." The words were spoken with such kindness that the pseudo-Yogi had no hesitation in opening his eyes and beginning a conversation with the holy man.

The holy man queried, "Is it not wrong on your part to deceive people like this? Why don't you take up an honest means of livelihood?" The pseudo-Yogi replied, "I am uneducated and, by temperament, lazy. I am very prosperous here and highly respected too. Hence, I wish to continue to stay under this banyan tree." The holy man asked him, "You are sitting here for so long doing virtually nothing. Do you not feel very bored?" "Yes, I do", answered the pseudo-Yogi. "But what choice do I have?" The holy man said, "You do have a very nice choice. You have been initiated into the Gayatri Mantra. You are seated here rolling the rosary most of the time. Why not chant the Gayatri Mantra once every time you move a bead? Thereby, you will be able to keep yourself mentally occupied."

The pseudo-Yogi found the suggestion impressive. After all, he had nothing to lose and boredom was troubling him a great deal. So thereafter, every time he

moved a bead, he chanted the Gayatri Mantra. Initially, the chanting was mechanical. But with the passage of time, he began to find it pleasant.

By the power of the most sacred Gayatri Mantra and by the blessings of the holy man, his mind gradually became calm and joyful. He ceased looking around to identify the arrival of people and also stopped occasionally saying, "Om. Everything is Brahman", when he sensed the presence of someone. He just maintained his chant of the Gayatri Mantra, for it gave him very great joy and completely engrossed his attention. People continued to cater to his needs. What they did not know was that the one they venerated was now not a pseudo-Yogi but a true Yogi.

After some months, the holy man happened to come that way again. The Yogi thanked him profusely and also told him about the pseudo-Tantrik. He pleaded with the holy man to uplift his old friend. The holy man proceeded to the village where the pseudo-Tantrik lived in the dilapidated Kali temple. He spoke to him with kind words and won his trust.

Then the holy man said to him, "I know that you have been prospering by deceiving people. Do you not realise that someday or the other, you could get caught? Once exposed, you will be in serious trouble." The pseudo-Tantrik responded, "Yes, I have been living with the fear of exposure. What, indeed, can I do about it? I do not know any honest means of earning my livelihood here." The holy man said, "I shall teach you how to perform worship of Kali. You can then have the villagers to perform the Kumbabhishekam of this temple and become the priest here." The idea appealed to the pseudo-Tantrik. He stated

that he was ready to learn, subject to the condition that the lessons be conducted late in the night so that the people would not suspect anything. The holy man agreed. In a fortnight, the pseudo-Tantrik learnt the rudiments of temple worship.

A couple of days later, he went to a wealthy man in the village and said, "Our Kali temple is very old. Unfortunately, worship is not being performed there and it is in a dilapidated condition. You could take the lead and arrange for its Kumbabhishekam. Worship of the Goddess will, after all, fetch Her grace for everybody." The affluent man held the pseudo-Tantrik in great respect and also liked the suggestion very much. So, he arranged for the renovation of the temple. Soon, its Kumbabhishekam was performed in a grand manner with the aid of learned pundits from a nearby village.

The pseudo-Tantrik announced his desire to be the temple priest. The villagers, who venerated him, readily agreed. Thereafter, the pseudo-Tantrik began to worship the Goddess. Initially, the worship hardly interested him. But, soon, he began to revel in it. People continued to cater to his needs. However, his worship was not motivated by what he got but by his ever-increasing love for the Goddess. He became a great Bhakta.

It is never too late for a man to mend his ways. Many are the cases in which holy men have been instrumental in reforming people.





The Path of Dharma

The section, "Beware of Desire, Anger and Rashness" highlighted the pitfalls to be avoided. It ended with the assurance that it is never too late for one to turn from Adharma to Dharma. This section expounds the path of Dharma, which one should tread.



8. The Veda Determines What is Dharma

A lawyer argued, “Your Honour, my client should not be treated as guilty. It is true that he stole. But there is a reason for that. He was forced to commit the theft because his family was starving. With the stolen money, he not only helped himself but also his family. While stealing, he did not destroy any property. In fact, he did not even damage the lock as he used a duplicate key. The money that he took away was meagre compared to the rich man’s hoard of black money. My client performed a service to the Government by unearthing black money. This apart, the wealthy man has so much cash that this little depreciation ought to mean nothing to him.”

How would the judge respond to such an argument? He would presumably declare, “I am not interested in such arguments that ignore the law of the land. Stealing is an offence under the Indian Penal Code. Even you admit that your client did steal. So, I am duty-bound to punish him.” Then he would hold the lawyer’s client guilty and send the thief to jail.

Judges determine whether an act is a punishable offence or not by relying on the penal code and not on fanciful arguments that disregard the penal code. Likewise, to determine what is Dharma and what is Adharma, a person must turn to the Veda and not to mere reasoning that is independent of the scriptures. The penal

code, having been formulated by humans, may require occasional revision. However, the Vedas, which emerged from Ishwara, are ever flawless.



9. Knowledge of Tradition

A man went to a temple and received the Theertha Prasada given by the priest. Not in the habit of going to temples, he first thought that the water was meant for washing the hands. On ascertaining that it was meant to be sipped, he did so. He noticed something solid in his mouth. On taking out the offending substance, he found it to be a Tulasi leaf. He was unaware that Tulasi leaves are often found in the Theertha Prasada given in some shrines. Assuming that the priest had given it to him by mistake, he spat out the leaf. The priest who saw this cried out, "What is it you are doing? Do not spit inside the temple and mar the sanctity of the place."

Bewildered and noticing that he had become the centre of attraction, the man hurriedly picked up the leaf. Desiring to get rid of it, he placed it on top of an idol nearby him. The priest's patience was shattered by this sacrilegious act. Seething in anger, he shouted, "You fool! How dare you place the leaf on the Lord after putting it into your mouth? Go away." Poor fellow! He again picked up the leaf and, fearing more insult, thrust it into his pocket. Then he hurried away; as he did so, the people present in the temple could not help laughing at his ignorance.

There are people who have forgotten their Gotram. On the day of the Upanayanam of his son, a man asked the Purohit, "What is my Gotram?" "I do not know; it is you who should inform me of it", replied the priest. The man protested, "You are supposed to be a learned priest. How can you be so ignorant?" Realizing that it would be

futile to respond, the Purohit talked to an elderly relative of the man and found out the man's Gotram. Then, he proceeded with the Upanayanam ceremony of the man's son.

It is in a person's interest to be fully familiar with his Sampradayam or tradition. Else, situations such as those that arose in the temple and at the Upanayanam ceremony will be unavoidable.



10. Spotlight on Speaking the Truth

A person stole some goods. He was accosted and made to take an oath that he would answer truthfully. He said, "As long as there is life, I shall speak the truth." He was then cross-examined. He flatly denied that he had stolen anything. On the basis of his testimony, he was let off. A friend of his, who had participated in the vile act, asked him, "Why did you utter falsehood so brazenly in spite of the oath that you took?" The man nonchalantly replied, "I did not lie. All that I had said was true. I agreed to spell out the truth as long as there was life. I had an insect in my hand. Before I started answering, I crushed the insect to death. Hence my statement, 'I shall speak the truth as long as there is life', continued to hold."

This is an example of sophistry. When a person has something in mind but makes equivocal or confusing statements so as to cause the listener understand something else, he is guilty of having deviated from the truth. To speak the truth, as insisted upon by the scriptures, one's words should accord with one's thoughts. The next point to be noted with regard to veracity is that one should speak what is pleasant. But uttering what is pleasant does not imply speaking what is not factual.

A mischievous person decided to fool a friend of his. He went to his friend and said in an excited voice, "Are you not aware that you have won ten lakhs in a lottery? How can you sit here so calmly?" The friend was

dumbfounded. When his amazement decreased a little, he began to build castles in the air. In the meantime, the prankster left. Finally, the man took up a newspaper to have the pleasure of seeing his lottery-ticket number there. When he could not find it, his exultation gave way to total dejection. This is an example of a pleasant untruth.

One should not verbalize a distressing truth. Following a massive heart-attack, a person was convalescing in a hospital. One day, his son was involved in a road accident and died. A person who had witnessed the accident rushed to the hospital and exclaimed to the heart-patient, "Do you know what has happened? Your son has died!" The patient, who was very fond of his son, could not bear the terrible news. As his heart was already weak, he breathed his last. The conduct of the person who conveyed the bad news was blameworthy.

To sum up, one should speak the truth. Further, one's words should be pleasant and beneficial to others. Distressing truths ought not to be verbalized and words should not be chosen so as to mislead others.



11. Truth and Silence

Once, three persons were proceeding to heaven in a celestial vehicle which had come to collect them. On their way, they chanced to behold a snake that was just about to swallow its prey, a frog. One of the three commented, "O serpent! Do you not have any compassion for the frog? For heaven's sake, spare its life." The irritated snake cursed, "How dare you deny me my food? May you go to hell." Sad to say, the man went to hell.

The second man, who was bewildered on seeing this, supported the snake's stance and said, "The frog is but your natural food. You can surely eat it." Now, the frog became wild and retorted, "How dare you suggest that I be eaten! You have no kindness. May you suffer the tortures of hell." The man fell from the celestial vehicle. The third man, who remained silent, reached heaven.

This story illustrates that, on certain occasions, remaining silent is even better than speaking the truth.



12. Subtle Aspects of Truthfulness

After the death of Drona, Karna became the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava forces. In an encounter with Karna, Yudhishtira, Nakula and Sahadeva were worsted and injured. Humiliated and in much pain, Yudhishtira withdrew from the battlefield to his tent to take some rest. The battle raged on. After a while, being anxious about Yudhishtira, Arjuna wanted to see him. So, leaving the Pandava forces under the control of Bheema, he asked Krishna to take him to Yudhishtira's tent.

When Krishna and Arjuna came to pay their respects, Yudhishtira wrongly assumed that Karna had been killed by Arjuna. He sought to know the details. Arjuna explained to him that till that point of time, he had not been successful in putting an end to Karna's life. He averred that he would definitely do so.

On hearing Arjuna's words, Yudhishtira felt greatly dissatisfied and gave way to wrath. He severely censured Arjuna saying, "Unable to defeat Karna, and moved by fear, you have left Bheema in command of the forces and come away here. Had you told me long ago that you would not fight Karna, I would have taken my decisions in a different manner. You promised that you would kill Karna but have not fulfilled your promise. Your chariot has been fashioned by Vishwakarma and on it, there is a flag with the symbol of Hanuman. You have the Gandeeva bow with you. Sri Krishna Himself is your charioteer. Still, out of fear of Karna, you have run away and come here. Give away your Gandeeva to Krishna.

Let Him do the needful by killing Karna. Alternatively, give your Gandeeva to somebody else. You are unfit to have it. Shame on you! Shame on your prowess! Shame on your Gandeeva!”

Yudhishtira’s rebuff stung Arjuna enough to make him lose his temper. He started to pull out his sword. Seeing this, Krishna asked him, “What is it that you are trying to do? There are no foes here. Why do you want to pull out your sword?” Arjuna said, “I am going to kill Yudhishtira. I had secretly vowed that if anyone were to tell me, ‘Give away your Gandeeva’, I would certainly slay him. Now, in fulfilment of my promise, I am going to murder Yudhishtira, for he has insulted me by asking me to give away the Gandeeva to another and regarded me as unfit for wielding it.”

Krishna said, “Shame on you, Arjuna! Nobody who knows the true nature of Dharma would behave the way you intend to. Upholding the truth is most exalted. However, the nature of truth, as upheld by noble persons, is not readily comprehensible. There are occasions when a person may tell a lie without incurring sin. For instance, one can utter a falsehood to save one’s life or to protect oneself from complete ruin or for the well-being of a holy one. By doing so, one does not become guilty of unrighteousness. There are also occasions when, by bluntly speaking the truth, one incurs not merit but sin.”

Krishna then narrated the story of a man named Kaushika who was not very learned but who wanted to be truthful. He was well-known as a speaker of the truth. One day, when he was seated, certain people ran past him. A short while later, he saw a gang of dacoits. They

approached him and asked him about the whereabouts of the persons they were following. Deeming utterance of truth to be priceless, Kaushika indicated where the people had gone. The dacoits resumed their pursuit and finally massacred them. Krishna then explained that by virtue of his factual speech, Kaushika not only did not acquire merit, he incurred sin. The Lord said that in the circumstances, Kaushika should have remained silent. Alternatively, if his silence itself would have been a hint to the effect that the persons had run in that direction, he could have misled the dacoits.

Krishna clarified to Arjuna that Yudhishtira was in great pain and had been humiliated by Karna. Karna had attacked Yudhishtira even after the latter had stopped fighting. Thus, Yudhishtira was in a sad plight when he censured Arjuna. Further, by his sharp words, he sought to exhort Arjuna to bring about the death of Karna, for he knew that Arjuna had the requisite capacity. The Lord explained that since Yudhishtira was a noble person who deserved to be venerated by Arjuna and since his words could be satisfactorily justified, it would be thoroughly improper for Arjuna to slay him; such an act would be a gross violation of Ahimsa, which is paramount.

Arjuna requested Krishna to unequivocally specify what he should do, for, on the one hand, it was wrong for him to assassinate Yudhishtira and, on the other, he had to fulfil his vow. The Lord said, "When extreme opprobrium is inflicted on a great, highly-respected person, he dies, as it were. The Atharva Veda teaches that speaking disrespectfully to an august leader is tantamount to slaying him without extinguishing his life.

Taking recourse to this scriptural pronouncement, fulfil your vow by insulting Yudhishtira. Thereafter, fall at his feet and seek his forgiveness. Being pious and understanding, he will excuse you.”

As instructed by Krishna, Arjuna began to rudely reproach Yudhishtira. “You have escaped to this place that is far removed from the battlefield and are fully dependent for your safety on the prowess of your well-wishers. What a contrast there is between you and the heroic and powerful Bheema! Unlike him, you are quite unfit to find fault with me. You are addicted to gambling. It is because of you that we lost our kingdom and had to face severe hardships”, said Arjuna.

As he finished his tirade, he was overcome with remorse. He again drew out his sword. Seemingly surprised, Krishna queried, “What is the problem now?” Arjuna said that he intended to get rid of his body with which he had behaved in an unbecoming manner towards his elder brother who was truly worthy of being worshipped by him.

The Lord stopped him saying, “Think of how terrible it would have been if you had slain Yudhishtira. It was only to avoid that unrighteous act that you spoke rudely to him. Why, then, are you drowned in grief? You want to commit suicide but that is something that wise men never do. If you kill yourself, the sin you shall incur will be more than the sin that would have accrued to you had you assassinated your brother; you will experience overwhelming agony in hell. Self-glorification is on par with suicide. So, eulogize yourself and thereby commit the equivalent of the self-killing you intended to indulge in.”

Arjuna then began to boast, "With the sole exception of Lord Shiva, the wielder of the bow Pinaka, there is none who is a match for me in archery. I can single-handedly destroy the entire world with its inhabitants. I was the one who earlier defeated the kings ruling in the various directions and made them subservient to you, O Yudhishtira. I have now destroyed half the Kaurava forces." Having been saved by the Lord from the sins of breaking his vow, slaying Yudhishtira and committing suicide, Arjuna paid obeisance to his brother and begged to be forgiven.

Having propitiated Yudhishtira, Arjuna readied himself to return to battlefield. "My life is for doing what is pleasing to you", he asserted. In the meantime, Yudhishtira, who had earlier listened silently to Arjuna's stinging rebuke, became dejected and felt that he was despicable. He said, "I am a vile sinner who has caused all of you so much trouble. I deserve to be killed. Bheema is fit to rule and should become the monarch, not I who am impotent. I shall depart for the forest."

Yudhishtira got up from his cot to leave but Krishna fell at his feet and pleaded, "Arjuna could not falsify his vow to kill anyone who asked him to give the Gandeeva to another. Hence, in keeping with My advice, he spoke disrespectfully to you and thereby fulfilled his promise. We seek refuge in you. Prostrating before you, I beseech you to kindly forgive our transgressions. You desired the death of Karna. Today, he shall be slain and the earth shall drink his blood."

Thoroughly appeased, Yudhishtira lifted Krishna up and said to Him, "Arjuna and I were deluded and would have drowned in the ocean of calamity and sorrow. You

saved us. Your wisdom is the boat that enabled us to safely reach the shore.”

This episode of the Mahabharata shows that while one must ever adhere to the truth, truthfulness has several subtle aspects. When issues are complex, one should rely upon the conduct and the advice of great people.



13. Vedic Chanting Should be Error-Free

A poor pundit had unmarried daughters. He was at a loss as to how he could find the money to get them married. A friend told him, "Musicians get handsome rewards." Consequently, the desire to learn singing sprouted in his mind. He found out that to train his voice, he would have to practise singing for long. Hence, he sat under a tree at the outskirts of his village and practised singing. But what emerged from him was mere cacophony.

A ghost that had earlier been a musician inhabited that tree. It was not able to bear the pundit's murder of music. So, it told him, "I am a music-knowing ghost. This tree is my home. Your cacophony is making it impossible for me to stay here. Go elsewhere." The pundit replied, "Why should I go? I want to earn money and for that I want to become a songster by ardent practice. This is my chosen place for practice."

The ghost said, "Since it is money that you want, I will tell you how you can get it. I shall possess the princess. The king will have his physicians attend to her. However, they will be unable to cure her. You seek the king's audience. Tell him that the princess is possessed by a ghost and that you can exorcize it and cure her. With the king's permission, go to the princess and sing there as you are doing now. I, who cannot bear your atrocious singing, will immediately leave the princess. She will get cured. The king will handsomely reward you. Thereafter, there will be no need for you to come here

and kill music.”

The man agreed and the ghost’s plan was successfully executed by them. As a consequence, the man was able to get more than enough money to get his daughters married, while the ghost was able to live in peace on its tree. Just as the music-knowing ghost of the story was put off by the poor man’s cacophony, Vedic scholars feel ill at ease when someone chants the holy Vedic Mantras incorrectly in their presence.

While bad singing might exceptionally fetch rewards as illustrated in the tale, incorrect chanting of the Veda invariably results in sin accruing to the person who chants. Care must be taken to learn and chant the Veda correctly, without errors in either the words or the intonations. While there is no rule that a person should learn music, it is obligatory on a qualified man to learn Vedic Mantras from a teacher and to chant them correctly. By fulfilling this duty, the chanter acquires Punyam; by neglecting it, he incurs sin.



14. Potency of Vedic Mantras

Once, most of India's inhabitants were committing many sinful acts and going to hell. Ishwara, out of compassion, taught them the sacred Sri Rudra Mantra to enable all to escape the tortures of hell. Everyone began bathing in holy rivers and worshipping Lord Shiva through it.

Meanwhile, Yama, the god of death, began to worry. "Now-a-days, nobody comes to hell. What is the use of my being the king of hell without any person to rule over?" he lamented. He went to Lord Brahma and complained, "I have no subjects. So, I would like to retire." Lord Brahma replied, "It is true that people perform Sri Rudra Japa and thereby escape from your clutches. However, I will give you two messengers, Ashraddha (absence of faith) and Durmedha (perverted thinking). On account of these, people will feel that Sri Rudra Japa is not as efficacious as it is said to be. So, they will not do it properly. Obviously, they will not be liberated from sin." The story reveals that it is not enough to merely chant a Mantra. Faith and proper attitude are also necessary. If these are there, the full fruit of the chant will accrue to the chanter.



15. Parents and Children

There was a beautiful child whose parents were poor. A wealthy childless couple lived nearby. They approached the child's parents and requested, "Please allow us to adopt your child." The mother was hesitant. However, the father said, "We are poor and cannot afford to give our dear one good food, clothing or comforts. Our child will, after all, be living in the next house and so we can see it everyday. It would be in the child's interest for us to part with it." Reluctantly, the mother agreed.

The child was given all comforts in its new home. However, with the passage of time, the rich couple forbade the child's parents from coming to see it. The mother was taken aback and wept copiously. But what could the poor lady do except reconcile herself? One day, the rich man's servant told her, "The child has small-pox and nobody is willing to go near it." "Oh, my child!", cried the mother, and rushing to the affluent man's house, took her dear one in her arms.

The story shows that a mother's love for her child is intense and unconditional. Parents strive for the welfare of their children. They put up with innumerable sufferings and inconveniences for the sake of their offspring. So, it is not surprising that the Veda declares, "Revere your mother as a god. Revere your father as a god." Manu states that the mother is ten times more venerable than the father. In any case, it is impossible for a person to repay his debt of gratitude to either of his parents. Were he to be ungrateful to them, he would be committing a

heinous sin for which there is no expiation.

The scriptures speak of the duties of a son towards his parents. When his parents are alive, he should obey them. After they have passed away, he should perform the Shraddham ceremony every year. The performance of Shraddham at least once at Gaya is deemed laudable.

A person wished to send some money to a relative living in another town. So, he went to the post-office and obtained a money-order form. Having filled it, he submitted it at the pertinent counter along with the money he wanted to give his relative. His money remained at the post-office but an equivalent amount of cash was delivered to his relative.

In a similar manner, by the power of God, what is offered by a man with faith at a properly-performed Shraddham ceremony reaches those for whom the offering is intended in a form beneficial to them, regardless of whether they dwell in the world of manes or have been reborn on the earth. The Shraddham ceremony benefits the performer too, for he obtains much Punyam and the blessings of the manes. Were he to abstain from performing Shraddham, he would be guilty of giving up his scripturally-ordained duty and would incur sin.

Parents, for their part, should try to inculcate good habits and righteousness in their children. They are advised by the scriptures to be indulgent to their child till it is five years of age. Then, till their dear one reaches the age of 16, they should enforce strict discipline. After that, they should treat their wards almost as friends.



16. Thankfulness

A man threatened to file a criminal complaint against a rich businessman for defrauding him and also causing injury to his subordinates due to negligence. The affluent man felt perturbed and discussed his problem in depth with a law-knowing friend. The friend told him that he was in for great trouble. He advised him to immediately engage a leading lawyer and also suggested the name of an advocate. The rich man promptly rang up the lawyer concerned and sought an appointment. He also briefly mentioned his problem. The lawyer told him that as he was leaving on a vacation in a couple of days, he was not in a position to take up the case. The affluent man pleaded but the lawyer was firm.

That evening, the advocate was surprised to find the rich man waiting at his house. The potential client pleaded so much that the lawyer finally told him, "Send the case details to my office tomorrow morning. I shall read the papers and then convey my decision about accepting or not accepting the case to you over the phone." The next morning, when the advocate went to his office, he found the rich man there in person. After hearing the details of the problem and reading the pertinent documents, the advocate said, "Your position is pretty weak. Much preparatory work and reading need to be done to defend you. I am hard pressed for time and also plan to leave tomorrow on a holiday. So, I suggest that you contact some other lawyer." "Please do not refuse me", begged the rich man. "I have come to you for succour as did Vibheeshana to Rama. I am

counting on you. Kindly do not let me down. No matter what your fees and other expenses in connection with the case may be, I am ready to pay. Money is no criterion." Moved by the entreaties of the man, the advocate decided to cancel his vacation and take up the man's case.

Soon, a warrant of arrest was issued against the rich man. He immediately rang up his lawyer and, breaking into sobs, stuttered, "Help me! I will die of misery if I have to spend even 24 hours in confinement." The lawyer effectively rebutted the points raised by the prosecution against his release and persuaded the judge to grant him bail. After his release, his friend told him that his lawyer had been very forceful. However, the man was not particularly thankful and said, "Perhaps, getting me out on bail was, in any case, a simple task."

The main case soon came up for hearing. The lawyer conducted the defence in a brilliant manner. Further, for reasons unknown to the prosecution, its main witness went back on what he had told the police. So, the man was acquitted. He perfunctorily thanked his lawyer and, full of joy, went out to celebrate. That evening, when he was relaxing at his house, his servant received a phone call and informed him that his lawyer wished to speak to him. He, however, asked his servant to convey that he had gone out. The lawyer left a message asking him to call back. The rich man did not bother to do so. Instead, the next day, he left on a month-long holiday.

When he returned, he received a bill from the lawyer. Summoning his secretary, he told the man to meet the lawyer and to somehow get the fees reduced

to the extent possible. The secretary did as he was told. Disgusted with the haggling of the secretary, the lawyer said, "I am sick with him. I should never have taken up his case. Let him pay what he wants or nothing at all." The rich man then paid only about 50 percent of what he was required to.

His friend, who had recommended the lawyer to him, said, "Earlier, you waited at his house and office and pleaded with him to help you. You even said that you had come to him for succour as Vibheeshana had approached Rama. Yet, having won the case, you not only did not go to see him but even avoided his phone call. You earlier said that money is no criterion. Now, you are unwilling to pay even the modest bill received by you. Are you not ashamed of yourself?" The rich man nonchalantly replied, "There is nothing for me to be ashamed of. Actually, the case against me was weak. The lawyer's role was inconsequential. So, why should I pay him much? Do not refer to Vibheeshana and Rama in the present context for, unlike this lawyer, Rama did not present Vibheeshana a bill for granting him protection. It is only because of his love of money that this advocate cancelled his vacation and took up my case. He has done me no favour whatsoever."

There are people who behave even with regard to God the way the rich man did towards his lawyer.

Once, a villager had climbed to the top of a palm tree situated at some distance from his village when he heard the growl of a tiger. He then saw the tiger walking up to the base of the tree, sitting down there and looking up. He was feeling quite uncomfortable on the tree and knew that he could not remain there for long. So, in an

attempt to drive away the tiger, he waved his hand and shouted at it. The tiger growled in response.

Fearful of life, the man prayed to his favourite deity, Mariamman, "O goddess, if I emerge from this ordeal unhurt and reach home safe, I shall sacrifice a goat to You." After this, the man saw the tiger slowly rise and begin to walk away from him. Gaining some courage, he climbed down a little. He looked down again and found that the tiger was no longer nearby and was continuing to move further away. His fear came down. He thought, "I will have to spend hundreds of rupees to purchase a goat to sacrifice. People offer the Goddess not only goats but also hens. A hen is far cheaper than a goat. So, why not I immolate one?" Hence, he mentally conveyed to the Goddess, "I shall offer You a hen instead of a goat." He then began to move down further.

When his descent was more than half complete, he took a look around and noticed that the tiger was not visible. His fear decreased even further. He reflected, "Even a hen is costly. So, why not I sacrifice another animal that is somewhat of the same size as a hen?" Consequently, he told Mariamman that he would immolate a bandicoot. He soon reached the ground. He looked around and found the tiger to be nowhere around.

He thought, "It is true that it doesn't cost me anything to trap a bandicoot and kill it. However, it is difficult to catch a bandicoot. Mariamman has saved my life. In keeping with my prayer, as a quid pro quo, I should offer Her a life. It is not necessary that I sacrifice only a bandicoot; any living creature will do." Concluding thus, he picked up a small crab that was on the ground and crushed it. He felt satisfied that he had fulfilled his

promise to Mariamman and went home, quite happy with what he had done and glad to be safe.

People normally seek human or divine help when in trouble. The tendency to ignore or forget a benefactor once one's problem has ceased is wrong and must be countered. Ingratitude is a sin that has no expiation. A true devotee's mind is centred on God regardless of whether everything is fine or whether he is in deep trouble. Kunti, it is said in the Bhagavatam, went to the extent of requesting Krishna, "O Teacher of the world, let calamity always befall us for, when You come to our aid, we will have Your transmigration-effacing vision." In the Ramayana, it is said, "By virtue of His self-control, Rama does not recall even a century of wrongs done to Him but is satiated even with a single favour done to Him."



17. Doing Good to Others

Vishnu abided in the state of absolute freedom. Once, He sought to know what constitutes the heaviest or most exalted object in the world. So, He took up a balance and placed the state of absolute freedom in which He abided on one pan. On the other pan, He loaded one after the other, the different objects of creation; He placed on it heaven, other worlds, wealth, etc. Yet, no matter what He placed on that pan, the pan with absolute freedom on it continued to remain low. It did not show any signs of rising. The Lord wondered, "What! Is there nothing at all to match absolute freedom?" Finally, He took 'doing good to others' and placed it on the balance. The pan that was on the top came down while the pan that was below went up. The Lord decided that 'doing good to others' is the truly heavy or the most exalted object. The Lord then thought, "So, what should I do? I shall incarnate and do good to people."

Having first incarnated as a fish, the Lord gradually manifested as a man. In His incarnation as a fish, He uplifted the Vedas. However, there was scope for people to object, "Is it possible for us to become a fish? Can we uplift the Vedas? No. So, how can this incarnation serve as an ideal for us to emulate?" The Lord then appeared as a tortoise and lifted a big mountain. Here also, people had occasion to think, "We have neither the ability to incarnate as a tortoise nor the power to lift a mountain. So, what is the point in our concerning ourselves with the tortoise incarnation?"

With the passage of time, the Lord discarded animal

forms and manifested as Narasimha, the man-lion. Yet, people had the opportunity to object, "There is no Hiranyakasipu before us to slay. Further, we do not have the strength of Narasimha. So, how can we imitate Narasimha and lead our lives?" In due course, the Lord incarnated as Rama, the ideal person. People then felt, "Ah! He is just like us. He too has a father, a mother, brothers and a wife. He has what we have. We have experienced some suffering. But He has experienced it much more than us. He dwelt in a forest for 14 years. We, on the other hand, find even our petty problems too much to bear. So, it seems that the path He has shown us is appropriate for us to follow."

There is much to be learnt about helping others by considering the lives of animals such as the cow. God created milk for the calf. However, people too are able to obtain and drink the milk of a cow. They use cow-dung as a fertilizer in their fields. Even cow's urine is treated as pure and a little of it is consumed by people for self-purification as Panchagavya, a mixture of cow-dung, cow's urine, clarified butter, curd and milk. In every way, the cow is beneficial. People use the skins of all sorts of animals. On seeing a belt made of animal skin, they say, "First class!" Thus, even a dead animal is beneficial to others. On the other hand, if a belt were to be made of human skin, none would touch it. People would regard it as disgusting.

Being useless after death, if a man is to do good to others, he should do it while he is alive. Hence, it has been said, "Fie on the life of a man who does no good to others! May animals live long; even after death, they continue, through their skins, to serve others." Such is

the important place that has been assigned in the scriptures to doing good to others.



18. Joy at the Expense of Others

Two friends went to a museum. While going around, they came across an idol of Anjaneya. One of the boys noticed that the length of Anjaneya's tail was a little bit longer than usual. He went closer and found a bell tied to the tip of the tail. With curiosity getting the better of him, he put his hand inside the bell. The next moment, he yelled and quickly withdrew his hand. When the other boy asked him the reason for his shouting, he replied, "Oh! I shouted in delight. Put your finger into the bell. You will find the experience very interesting." The second boy probed the bell with his finger. He too screamed and withdrew his hand fast. There was a scorpion within the bell. The boys had shouted and drawn back their hands because it had stung them.

The first boy deliberately made his friend experience pain. He derived pleasure on seeing the suffering of his companion. Such is the despicable nature of a sadist. On the other hand, noble persons seek to alleviate the miseries of others and to make them happy. They are ready to put up with even great inconvenience to do good to others.



19. The Nature of the Great

Once, the Devas and the Asuras churned the ocean of milk to obtain ambrosia. The Meru Mountain was the churning rod; Vishnu, in the form of a tortoise, supported it. Vasuki, the serpent king, lent his services as a rope. His tail was grasped by the Devas and his head by the Asuras. The churning began. Unfortunately, a terrible poison, Halahala, emerged first. The poison was fiery and induced dread in all the worlds. The destruction of the cosmos seemed to be at hand. At this juncture, Lord Shiva appeared on the scene. Dauntlessly, He gathered the poison in His palm and sipped it as if it were a delicious drink. So great was His compassion that He did not swallow it lest it harm the creatures which abided within His body.

Such is the nature of the great. They are even ready to sacrifice their personal ends for the well-being of others.



20. Religious Practices and Helping Others

A person seated on the bank of a river was performing his evening Sandhyavandanam. His attention was distracted by a cry for help. He turned and noticed a boy being dragged by the current. Unfamiliar with swimming and despairing for life, the lad was screaming for help. The man on the bank thought, "I am performing my Sandhyavandanam. How can I get up?" In moments, the boy was close to death. Still, this man cogitated, "It is inappropriate for me to rise now. This boy is drowning but, unfortunately, I cannot help him." He did not budge from his seat and the boy entered his watery grave.

It is proper to help others when we are in a position to do so. No doubt, the performance of Sandhyavandanam is very important and, in normal circumstances, it should not be interrupted. But, in the present emergency situation, the man ought to have saved the boy and then performed his Sandhyavandanam.



21. Benefits of Charity

People think that wealth will give them great happiness and the fulfilment of desires. For the sake of wealth, a person goes to the extent of doing what is improper. He does not feel inclined to give the Government what is due to it. So, it becomes necessary for him to prepare a false account. On getting caught, he pays a bribe to save his skin. He feels that, somehow, he must amass more and more money. But then, there crops up the problem of where he is to keep it. There would be a tax problem if he were to deposit in a bank. Therefore, he is forced to keep it in a box, lock it and ensure that the box remains in a safe place.

When he performs Sandhyavandanam, the thought of the box comes to his mind. When he sits for the worship of God, again, the thought of the box crops up in his mind. When does he finally become freed from this thought? Only on the day he dies and departs. His zealously-guarded wealth then completely passes to others without his knowledge.

Such a man would have loved to take his wealth with him to the next world. He might have thought, "I have somehow earned money and so far kept it with me. I do not at all want to part with it even after death. If possible, I would like to place it on my head and carry it with me." To such a person, Neelakanta Dikshitar has given a humorous but valuable advice. He has said, "If you desire to take your wealth with you after death, then donate it, while you are alive, to a good, deserving person. What will happen if that is done? The wealth will

get transformed into Punyam. Regardless of whether or not you have a head after death, it is certain that the wealth will accompany you in the form of Punyam.”

The scriptures prescribe the giving of gifts to the deserving as an antidote for greed. So, charity, apart from bringing about happiness in others, greatly conduces to the spiritual well-being of the donor. A person who loses some money feels unhappy. But he feels happy, not sad, when he voluntarily gives the same amount to a poor student who is not in a position to pay examination fees. Charity can thus make not only the donee but also the donor happy.



22. Farcical Offers of Gifts

A poet went to a king's court in order to exhibit his talent and receive gifts. He sang quite a number of good songs and pleased the monarch and the other people in the court. At the end of his performance, the king praised him highly and ordered the treasurer, "Give him fifty thousand rupees." The poet almost fainted on hearing the sum. With happiness and satisfaction writ all over his face, he went to the treasurer but the latter did not give him anything. The songster reminded him, "Sir, will you please give me the amount?" "Why should I?" retorted the treasurer. "Such is the king's instruction", pressed the singer. The treasurer merely laughed and said, "Go and inform the king that I am refusing to give you the money. You have got a surprise waiting for you."

The poet returned to the ruler and complained. "O Sovereign! The treasurer refused to hand over the amount specified by you to me." The king said, "Is it so? Well, why should he give you money?" "What!" exclaimed the musician, "Did you not ask him to give me fifty thousand rupees?" "Of course I did", clarified the king. "Now let me ask you a question. How did you feel when I announced the gift?" "Highly elated", said the poet. "That does it", said the amused monarch. "You made me happy by your songs and I brought you joy by my announcement of a gift. Perfectly fair, is it not? Why do you expect money also?" The poet fainted on hearing the curious explanation.

A valuable teaching is, "An intelligent person should strive and make people happy; doing so constitutes the

worship of God.” When a person announces a gift, the prospective recipient feels elated. The joy of the latter is much greater when he actually receives the gift. It is definitely insufficient, and even deceitful, for a person to stop, like the king, with mere words. Unfortunately, some affluent and influential people announce donations at public meetings to earn a good name but do not subsequently send cheques for the amounts concerned.

Not only should a person actually perform charity, he should not try to give, in the name of charity, precisely what he finds worthless. A boy obtained a banana. Finding it to be very overripe and unsuitable for his consumption, he gave it to his father. The father passed it on to his wife. She handed it to her maid. The maid wanted to give it to a cow but was told by the milkman that the fruit was unsuitable for his cow. Finally, the master of the house told his spouse, “Let us give it to a deserving Vaidika.” Such charity is neither worthy of praise nor generative of significant Punyam.



23. Charity in Keeping with Capacity

A person was advised by a holy man to gift a vegetable a day and told that he would attain great merit by doing so. The poor man strictly followed the advice. After death, he was reborn in a royal family and grew up to become a king. He was able to recall what he had done in his past birth. So, he continued to gift a vegetable a day. Surprisingly, after death, he was reborn as a beggar. The man was unable to comprehend the reason and so sought the advice of the holy man who had earlier blessed him.

From the sage, he learnt that prior to becoming a king, he had been very poor and so a gift of a vegetable a day was sufficient to give him a lot of virtue. On the other hand, as a king, he was endowed with affluence. So, thereafter, the gift of just a vegetable a day was quite insufficient to earn him merit of any consequence. The person realized that the extent of charity needed to earn a certain degree of merit depends upon one's financial capacity to give.



24. Hospitality Then and Now

The Shastras ordain that one must not eat without feeding another and, at the same time, emphasize that one should avoid partaking of food at the house of another. Earlier, the householder thought, "Which great one will I have the honour of feeding today?" The guest, on the other hand, felt, "I should not eat at another's place. But I have travelled for long and am famished. If some great one gives me food, I will be able to reach home before evening." While people sought the hospitality of others only in times of need and then too with great hesitation, householders deemed it a great fortune and bounden duty to serve and feed people. Such was the state of affairs.

But what is the situation now? Householders shut their doors tight and refuse to feed anyone. For their part, the guests are ready to force their way in! What a degeneration in attitudes!



25. Norms and Exceptions

There are norms relating to the attires of a policeman, a soldier, an office-goer and a Purohit. When the norms are observed, there is an elegance. On the other hand, if an official were to go to his office with a Panchakaccha Dhoti for a lower garment and a Brahmavastram for an upper garment and with a bundle of Darbha grass in his hand, people at his place of work would wonder where they should send him, to a lunatic asylum or to a place where religious rites are conducted. Alternatively, if a Purohit were to put on trousers, a shirt and a cap and enter a house to perform religious rites, the inmates would not know where to seat him.

Suppose a policeman were to wear a Dhoti, don a tie, put on a cap and stand on the road, what would people say? “Everything seems topsy turvy. Below and above this man’s waist, we see products of different cultures. Is he mad?” they would wonder. On the other hand, if he were to come wearing the appropriate uniform, people would think, “Oh! A policeman has come. Let us be careful.”

Normally, women wear Sarees and men, Dhoties. Suppose a lady dons a Dhoti and a shirt and goes about with her hair cut short. The following situation might arise. From a distance, a person is unsure about her sex and so looks at her for a few moments to make up his mind. This irritates her and she scowls.

Woman : Why are you staring at me?

Man : I was trying to find out whether you are a man or

a woman.

Woman : That is none of your business. Stop staring.

This situation is easily avoidable.

Though dress regulations are normally applicable, there do exist justifiable exceptions. A man belonging to the C.I.D. may disguise himself as a woman and go about in a Saree. Alternatively, though having not studied the Vedas, he may disguise himself as an orthodox Purohit. A member of a drama troupe may, while performing on stage, don on attire that is totally unsuitable for his normal, day-to-day life. There is the rule that only a person who has duly got a degree in law and registered himself as a lawyer can defend in the High Court, a person accused of a crime. Nevertheless, there is an exception. A person who is accused of having committed a murder can conduct his own defence. It is a major offence for a person to cut open the abdomen of another with a knife. However, this rule too has an exception. A qualified surgeon is permitted to not only cut open the abdomen of a patient but to also take out a piece of the patient's intestines. Thus, even with regard to activities, there are rules and exceptions.

As in the case of worldly matters, there are norms and exceptions with regard to what is ordained by the scriptures. The rule is that a Brahmachari must bathe in the morning before sunrise, don Vibhuthi, a Namam or Gopi Chandanam in accordance with his tradition and only then perform Sandhyavandanam. Suppose that a Brahmachari has fever and the doctor tells him, "Do not bathe today. If you do so, your ailment can turn serious." Should he still bathe and only then perform

Sandhyavandanam? No. He can apply Vibhuthi or whatever else is dictated by his tradition and thereafter perform Sandhyavandanam without taking a bath.

Suppose the situation is worse and even Vibhuthi and sufficient water are not available. It is said, "He who remembers God becomes externally and internally pure, regardless of whether he was impure or pure or in any state earlier." In keeping with this, he should think of God and pray, "O Lord, I am unable to access even water. How then am I to bathe? Further, I do not even have the strength to do so right now. But it is said that any good activity should be done while being pure. For me to become pure, there is just You, the purest of the pure. So, I think of You." If after such a sincere prayer, he were to perform Sandhyavandanam, God would accept it.

The rule is that Sandhyavandanam should be performed after properly sitting down cross-legged. Suppose the Brahmachari in question were so sick that he cannot even sit up. Then, it is permissible for him to perform his Sandhyavandanam mentally while lying down in his bed, without bathing or donning Vibhuthi.

On hearing of this position of the Shastras, a boy perversely decided, "In winter, there is no need for me to take bath. I can just do Sandhyavandanam straightaway, while in bed. On the other hand, in summer, I can bathe thrice and perform Sandhyavandanam." This is not a conclusion based on the scripture; it is dictated merely by the desire for comfort.

The rule is that one must fast for specified hours

before an eclipse. After the onset of the eclipse, one must bathe and perform Japa and Tarpana to the manes. However, children and persons who are aged and sick are exempted.

The rules prescribed by the Shastras must be adhered to; deviation from the norms is permissible only in exceptional circumstances. Unlike the Shastraic exceptions of the kind mentioned, some are so extraordinary that common people should never resort to them. Two examples can be considered.

Renuka was the spouse of Sage Jamadagni. They had five sons, Rumanva, Sushena, Vasu, Vishwvasu and Parashurama. One day, when her sons had gone to the forest to collect fruits, Renuka, who was punctilious in her religious observances, went to the river to bathe. As she started to return, she perchance beheld Chitraratha, the king of Martikavat, who was sporting in the water with his queen. She experienced strong sexual feelings towards him. Then, she fainted.

On her regaining consciousness, she returned fearfully to her abode. Seeing her shorn of spiritual splendour, Jamadagni immediately found out that his wife had entertained highly immoral thoughts. He became furious and severely censured her. His eldest son Rumanva returned just then, followed by Sushena, Vasu and Vishwvasu. Jamadagni ordered his sons one after the other to slay their mother but they just remained motionless, stunned and silent. Burning with anger, Jamadagni cursed them. They promptly lost their power of cogitating and became like beasts.

When Parashurama returned, his father commanded

him, "Kill this sinful mother of yours. Do not give room to grief." Parashurama picked up his axe and chopped off his mother's head. Jamadagni's wrath vanished and, pleased with his son, he said, "Obeying me, you did that act which is most difficult for another. Ask for whatever you desire."

Parashurama requested, "O father, please restore my mother to life. Let her not recollect her death and may she be completely freed from her mental sin. Kindly make my brothers normal. May I become invincible in battle and live long." The sage, endowed with the wealth of Tapas, granted all his son's wishes.

A person should revere and obey his mother. Never should he even think of hurting her. Yet, actually slaying his mother was what Parashurama did. He knew that Jamadagni had the power to restore her to life. He was also aware that if he did not obey his father, the sage would curse him and thereby deprive him of his intelligence and make him on par with a beast. He further knew that Jamadagni would most probably pronounce a curse of death on his mother, who was the primary target of his father's wrath. He saved his mother, brothers and himself by obeying his father and thereby doing what others should not even think of.

Bhagavatpada's transcending the norms of Sannyasis and performing the obsequies of His mother is also an instance of an extraordinary exception. The circumstances leading to Bhagavatpada's action are pertinent and worth considering.

Bhagavatpada's father Shivaguru passed away before he could perform his divine son's Upanayanam.

His mother, Aryamba, arranged for Bhagavatpada's thread ceremony to be performed by a relative, after the impurity period was over. Bhagavatpada was then five years of age. He left for the house of a preceptor, as is enjoined in the scriptures, and very quickly learnt the scriptures there. He completed His studies and returned from His teacher's home in His seventh year. Thereafter, He served His mother with great sincerity.

One day, as Aryamba was going to the river for a bath, she was unable to withstand the heat of the scorching sun and fainted. Finding that His mother did not return on time, Bhagavatpada searched for her. On seeing her unconscious, He revived her by sprinkling water on her and brought her home. The river was at some distance from His house. Out of love for Aryamba, Bhagavatpada felt that she should not have to endure the strain of covering that distance each day. So, He went to the river and prayed to it, treating it as God. He beseeched the river to change course and flow near His home. Could the divine boy's sincere prayers go unanswered? The next morning, Aryamba found that she just had to step out of her house to bathe in the flowing waters.

Though Bhagavatpada attended to all the needs of His mother without any laxity, in His heart of hearts, He decided to renounce the world. He was dispassionate to the core. One day, some sages came to His house. In response to the mother's query, a sage predicted that Bhagavatpada would have only a short life. This made Aryamba feel upset. However, Bhagavatpada gradually consoled her. He took this opportunity to point out that parting in a family is inevitable and that there is not

even an iota of pleasure in worldly life. He said that He would like to transcend life and death by taking to Sannyasa. On hearing these words of Bhagavatpada, Aryamba protested. She said, "You are my only son. How can I bear separation from You? I want You to get married." Bhagavatpada pacified His mother and let the matter rest there.

He thought to Himself, "My mind is not inclined towards marriage. Yet, I cannot disregard My mother and act against her wishes. So, I should get her consent to realize My desire. Even if I am not able to get it wholeheartedly, I should at least get it in a measure. I can hope only for that much."

One day, when He was eight years old, He went to the river to bathe. The river was in floods. As He was bathing, a crocodile caught His leg. Bhagavatpada shouted out. On hearing His words, Aryamba came to the river and wailed. "When my husband was alive, he was my refuge. After him, it is now my son. Even that son of mine is now caught by a crocodile and is about to perish. O God, why is this?" she began to sob.

Bhagavatpada said, "O Mother, if I have your permission to renounce everything in the world, this crocodile will release Me. If you permit Me, I will take to Sannyasa." Bhagavatpada chose this kind of appeal to get her permission. Willing to do anything to save her son's life, she gave Him her consent. At once, Bhagavatpada mentally took to asceticism.

Thereafter, technically, He was free to go and take formal Sannyasa. However, He felt that He should console His mother. He told her that she need not worry

about Him or about herself. Her relatives would take care of her; after all, His father's property was there. They would tend to her even if her health deteriorated.

He informed her that though He might be far away from her, by being a Sannyasi, He would be benefitting her much more than if He were to be physically with her. Aryamba told Him, "I gave You permission to become a Sannyasi since it was my wish that You should live. However, You are my only son. If I die, You should come and perform my obsequies. Otherwise, what is the use of my having begotten You as my son?"

Unwilling to disappoint His mother, Bhagavatpada declared, "I shall fulfil your desire. Wherever I may be and in whatever condition, I shall come to you in the hour of need and personally perform your last rites." No promise should be allowed to turn out into an empty one and Bhagavatpada certainly valued His promise.

Years later, when Bhagavatpada was at Sringeri, He visioned the approaching end of His mother. Amongst His supernatural powers born of Yoga and Mantras, one was Paduka Siddhi by which a person can reach the place of his choice in an extremely short time by his mere wish. Normally, supernatural powers should not be used. Yet, if one were to abstain from invoking them even in the exceptional circumstances in which they should be, one would be behaving foolishly. Bhagavatpada used Paduka Siddhi rightly for the sake of His mother and reached Kalady prior to her death. There, He caused her mind to focus on God and ensured that she attained an exalted realm. He then requested His former relatives to help Him to perform her last rites. Unfortunately, they did not realize His greatness. They were firm that, being

a Sannyasi, He was totally ineligible to cremate Aryamba. They went to the extent of chiding Him. Finally, He personally collected dried sticks and cremated her.

Bhagavatpada's action was guided solely by the consideration that the assurance given by Him to His mother prior to His departure from Kalady had to be carried out at any cost. He did not act out of attachment nor was He motivated by the desire to fulfil some personal ends. It is true that Sannyasis are prohibited from performing funeral rites. But Bhagavatpada was a knower of the Truth and such knowers are beyond restrictions. It is said, "No injunction or prohibition is there for one who treads the path beyond Sattva, Rajas and Tamas."

The case of a knower of the Truth is markedly different from that of an unenlightened man; if an unenlightened man were to transgress scripturally-prescribed rules, he would incur sin. No virtue or vice accrued to Bhagavatpada because of His unswerving establishment in the non-dual Truth; He was free from the sense of doership.

There is a humorous tale contrasting the physical act of a knower of the Truth, performed without attachment and without a sense of doership, from the same act carried out by an unenlightened person, with attachment and with a sense of doership. An enlightened Mahatma and an unenlightened preacher were walking together on a very hot day. They felt quite thirsty and stopped at the sole place of habitation that was in sight. At that place, only toddy was available. The enlightened sage took it and gulped it down, as he just wanted some liquid to assuage his thirst. Though dissuaded by the

Mahatma, the unenlightened preacher also asked for toddy and drank it saying, “When you can take it, why not I?”

After this, they proceeded to cover some distance by foot. Again, they were overcome with thirst. They entered the sole building there; it was a smelting factory. As only molten iron was available, the Mahatma took some of it and drank it. He then asked the unenlightened preacher if he wanted to follow suit. The latter protested that he could not take molten iron as it would scorch his throat. At this, the enlightened sage told him, “In that case, you should purify yourself for the toddy that you drank a little while ago.”

To sum up, worldly and scriptural rules of conduct should be carefully observed. Deviation from Shastraic norms is permissible only in exceptional circumstances. What such circumstances are, are explained by the Shastras themselves and by great ones well-acquainted with tradition. There are some extraordinary exceptions too that those who have not realized the Truth should never resort to.



26. Profundity of Dharma

The Shastras declare that one must obey one's parents. However, a complex situation arises when the instructions of one's father and mother are antithetical. Then, obedience to the father entails disobedience to the mother and vice versa. Lord Rama Himself had to face such a situation. His resolution of the moral dilemma is instructive.

On learning of Dasharatha's intention to install Rama as prince regent, Kaikeyi's maid Manthara poisoned the queen's mind against Rama. So, when Dasharatha went to see her, Kaikeyi asked him to make a solemn vow to the effect that he would fulfil her keen desire. The unsuspecting emperor obliged. Kaikeyi then called upon the Devas to bear witness to her husband's oath. Invoking the two boons that Dasharatha had offered her on an earlier occasion, she demanded that Bharatha be installed as prince regent and that Rama be sent away to the forest for 14 years. Shocked, Dasharatha pleaded with her to change her mind and even fell at her feet. But she refused to relent. Though he loved Rama very dearly, being a man of his word, Dasharatha was unable to turn down Kaikeyi's demand. So he sent for Rama.

When Rama came to His father's chamber, He found the king grief-stricken. When He sought to know the reason, Kaikeyi told Him about the emperor's promise and of the boons that she had sought from him. Rama assured her that He would definitely proceed to the forest and spend 14 years there. He said that even if He

had been commanded just by her, He would have gladly parted with the kingdom in favour of Bharatha.

when commanded by My father and that too with the intention of pleasing you and for honouring the pledge given by him.” Such being the case, stated Rama, He felt upset that instead of personally telling Him about Bharatha’s installation, the emperor gently shed tears, with his eyes rivetted on the ground. He told Kaikeyi that as His mother, she had greater authority over Him than His father. He presumed that she did not see any trace of virtue in Him and hence felt the need to approach His father instead of commanding Him on her own. He assured her that He would leave for the forest on that very day after taking leave of Kausalya.

He then proceeded to see His mother. She was, at that time, engaged in her morning worship. On seeing Him, she warmly embraced Him. As gently as possible, He told her what had transpired. But she immediately fell down unconscious. On regaining her senses, she expressed her anger at the turn of events. She told Him, “Just as Your father is venerable to You, so am I, Your mother. Further, I have been diligently discharging my duties as a mother and am extremely fond of You. You should not go to the forest. I refuse to grant You leave. Remain here and practise Dharma by serving me. Attending upon the mother is deemed to be most virtuous.

“A son of the Sage Kashyapa stayed on at home, engaged in the service of his mother. As a consequence, the disciplined Tapasvi ascended, after death, to heaven and attained the position of Prajapati, the Lord of creation. Emulate this example. A single hour in Your

company means more to me than mastery over all living beings. On the other hand, if You leave me and go, I shall be plunged into unbearable sorrow. In fact, I shall take a vow of fasting unto death. Were You to depart, the responsibility for my suffering and death shall be upon You and You shall incur great sin. Samudra inflicted suffering upon his own mother. Hence, he had to suffer hellish tortures. Do not go his way.” Since Kausalya explicitly forbade Rama from going to the forest, the Lord was forced to deal with contradictory commands from His mother and father.

Rama told her that Dasharatha had offered Kaikeyi two boons and so had to grant them. Though what Kaikeyi had asked Dasharatha hurt him intensely, and though he loved Rama extremely, still it was because he was an unswerving adherent of the truth that he had acquiesced to Kaikeyi. Thus, Dasharatha’s act was in conformity with Dharma.

A son was duty-bound to obey his father. There were instances of great persons acting in accordance with the instructions of their father even when the directives were inappropriate. For example, Sage Kandu killed a cow in deference to his father’s command even though he knew it to be a sin. Likewise, in obedience to the order of his father Jamadagni, Parashurama killed his own mother Renuka who had entertained lustful thoughts on seeing king Chitraratha. In the present case, the command of Dasharatha was righteous and so there was all the more reason for Him, as a son, to obey it.

Rama went on to explain to Kausalya that her directive was not correct. As Dasharatha’s wife, she ought to be his companion in the path of righteousness.

It was wrong for her to thwart her husband's adherence to Dharma. Further, Dasharatha was the emperor. His subjects were duty-bound to obey him. So, his directives had to be respected not only by Him but also by her.

Rama thus explained that while His father's command conformed to Dharma, His mother's directive did not, and that in the present case, the right course of action for Him was to obey His father and go to the forest. He requested Kausalya to await His return. On hearing Rama's explanation, she agreed with Him. She, however, wished to accompany Him to the forest. He told her that it was not right for her to disregard her righteous, aged husband and live with Him, her son. Further, Dasharatha was already suffering much because of His impending departure and was feeling miserable at being betrayed by Kaikeyi. It would be downright cruel for her to leave him at this stage because his grief would then be too much for him to endure.

Kausalya appreciated what Rama had to say and finally gave Him her complete blessings. She said, "My son, depart with an unswerving mind. May Dharma, which You scrupulously observe, protect You. May You live long protected by Your truthfulness. And by virtue of the service You have done to Your father and mother, may the Devas ever bestow happiness on You as You roam about in the forest. I shall happily behold Your return to Ayodhya." Having received His mother's blessings, Rama prostrated before her and took leave of her.

Ahimsa is highly eulogized. A person is advised not to harm even one who is inimical. Obviously, he ought not to injure one who bears no ill-will towards him. Does

that mean that a strong man should be a passive spectator to violence perpetuated by evil persons against those who are harmless and unprotected? Rama had to tackle a question of this kind.

After Rama's departure to the forest from Ayodhya, on an occasion, He visited the Ashram of Sharabhanga. The sage honoured Him and then ascended to the realm of Brahma. The hosts of sages assembled there approached Rama. They told Him that Rakshasas were obstructing their rituals and austerities and were also killing many of them. They did not want to curse the ogres to save themselves, as they would be thereby wasting their Tapas. They beseeched Rama to protect them from their tormentors. Rama told them that they ought to command Him rather than make a request to Him. He assured them that He would slay the troublesome Rakshasas.

Thereafter, as had been suggested by Sage Sharabhanga, Rama went to the hermitage of Sage Suthikshna and spent the night there. Then, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana headed towards the Dandaka forest. Sita expressed to Rama Her misgivings about His resolve to kill the Rakshasas. She told Him that it was terrible for a man to be cruel to one who bears no enmity towards him. She stated that the ogres had done Him no harm and so He was not justified in attacking them. Further, wielding of weapons was incompatible with forest-life. If He wished, He could don the role of a warrior after His return to Ayodhya.

She told Him that by His taking up arms, there was a possibility of His misusing them. She cited the story of a truthful and pious ascetic who dwelt in a forest. Indra

wanted to obstruct the sage's Tapas. So, he assumed the guise of a warrior with a sword. The warrior came to the sage and, depositing his sword with the ascetic, requested him to take care of it. The warrior then went away. The sage felt it was his duty to pay attention to the sword and see that it was not stolen. So, he began to take it with him even when he went to pluck fruits. In the course of time, he began to use the sword that he was carrying. Gradually, he became cruel and turned away from austerities. As a consequence of his cruelty, he went to hell.

Sita emphasized that Rama was so well-acquainted with Dharma that none was really capable of teaching Him. Because of Her holding Him in high esteem, She was not making any effort whatsoever to instruct Him. However, because of Her great affection for Him, She did not want that He should ever err in any way. Hence, She was reminding Him about the Dharma that He already knew.

Rama appreciated Her concern. He told Her that it was the duty of a Kshatriya to protect those who were suffering and that it was for that purpose that they wielded weapons. Harmless sages were being troubled and killed by the Rakshasas. So, it was His duty to save them by combating the ogres. Moreover, the sages had sought His protection. It was incumbent upon Him to provide succour to those who sought refuge in Him. Also, in response to their appeal, He had promised them full protection. Truth being extremely dear to Him, He could give up His life but not a promise, especially one made to the holy sages. Having heard Rama's explanation, Sita's misgivings ceased.

A related episode pertains to the killing of Vali. In the course of their search for Sita who had been abducted by Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana encountered a demon named Kabandha. From Kabandha, they learnt that, to find Sita, they should first approach Sugreeva, the monkey-chief who lived on Rishyamukha, the mountain adorned with the catchment of Pampa Lake. So, the brothers proceeded there. They were met by Hanuman who enquired about the details of their life. He then reported the arrival of Rama and Lakshmana to Sugreeva. Sugreeva gladly approached them and offered his hand of friendship to Rama. Rama and Sugreeva solemnized their bond of friendship in the presence of fire. Sugreeva lamented that he was suffering much because of his brother Vali. He explained that when his father died, his brother, the valorous Vali, was crowned king. Thereafter, Sugreeva lived with Vali, respecting and obeying his brother.

One night, a demon named Mayavi came to the outskirts of the town and challenged Vali to a fight. Vali immediately rushed out, accompanied by Sugreeva. When Mayavi saw both the brothers standing boldly, he took to his heels. Vali and Sugreeva chased him. After some time, he ran into a hole in the ground. Vali decided to follow him. Sugreeva wished to accompany Vali but was ordered by his brother to stand guard at the entrance of the hole till he returned. Vali went inside and Sugreeva heard the roar of his brother. He waited there for one full year but Vali did not come out. Sugreeva then observed a stream of blood flowing out. He heard the sound of the demon but not the roar of his brother. Presuming his brother dead, he blocked the entrance of

the hole with a big rock and returned to Kishkinda. There, the ministers crowned him king.

After some time, to his delight, Vali returned. Sugreeva explained the situation to him and readily offered the throne back to his brother. However, Vali was very furious with Sugreeva and accused him of betraying him. He drove him out of the capital and also usurped Sugreeva's wife for his own enjoyment. Sugreeva escaped to the Rishyamukha Mountain, which Vali could not approach because of a curse that he had received. Sugreeva implored Rama to kill Vali and save him. Rama readily agreed to do so. Sugreeva then tested Rama's might by subjecting Him to two tests. Thereafter, he gained full confidence in Rama.

Rama told him to fight with Vali, adding that He would do the needful. However, when Rama saw Vali and Sugreeva engaged in combat, He found that they looked so much alike that He was unable to identify Sugreeva. He did not discharge an arrow to kill Vali, lest the one He strike down be Sugreeva. Injured, Sugreeva ran away. Rama explained to him the reason why He had not acted and asked him to again challenge Vali. Lakshmana put a garland of flowers upon him to serve as a mark of identification. Sugreeva returned to Vali's fort and roared out a challenge.

Vali was about to rush out when his wife Tara restrained him. She told him that the very fact that Sugreeva had returned so quickly after having been severely mauled implied that he had found an ally. She had learnt from the spies who had reported to their son Angada that two Ikshvaku princes named Rama and Lakshmana were in the region. She suspected that

Sugreeva must have sought the friendship of Rama. She told Vali that as per the data she had received, Rama was equal in might to Indra, the Lord of Gods, and was extremely righteous. She advised Vali to desist from fighting with Sugreeva and to patchup with him.

Vali did not pay heed to her advice and said that if Rama was so righteous, He would have no occasion to attack him. He emerged from his palace to fight with Sugreeva. The two brothers engaged in a very severe combat. Gradually, Sugreeva began to lose ground and was about to be overpowered. At that juncture, Rama shot an arrow and severely wounded Vali. Vali, however, did not die immediately by virtue of the power of a gold chain gifted by Indra that he wore. He lay mortally wounded on the ground.

Addressing Rama, he said, "I have done You no harm, nor have I committed any offence in Your kingdom. So, You did wrong in striking me. If You had wanted to attack me, You should have challenged me to a duel and fought with me. Instead, You injured me while I was engaged in combat with another. From what I have heard about You, I believed that You are fully endowed with virtues such as forgiveness, righteousness, valour and meting out punishment only to evil-doers. I also took into consideration Your excellent pedigree. That is why, though I was warned by Tara, I came out to fight Sugreeva with the full confidence that You would never stoop so low as to strike me while I battled my brother. Now, I realize that though putting on an appearance of being virtuous, You are quite sinful.

"Monkeys such as I dwell in forests and subsist on fruits and roots, while men such as You dwell in towns and

require different kinds of cooked food. So, what ground is there for any animosity between us? Men hunt animals for their flesh and skin. However, it is forbidden for a Kshatriya to eat the flesh of a monkey. Further, it is not permissible for noble people to wear the skin of a simian or use its skin and bones. Hence, there is no justification for You even to hunt me as an animal.

“Instead of obliging Sugreeva in the hope of recovering Your wife, You could have approached me. Regardless of whether Your wife has been held captive on an island or below the ground, I would have brought Her back to You in a single day. I would have also tied Ravana and delivered him to You.

“It would have been appropriate for Sugreeva to ascend the throne only after my death in the normal course. Now, however, for his sake, You have unrighteously inflicted a mortal wound on me. What justification do You have for Your action?”

Rama gave a detailed reply to the objections. He said, “This land too falls under the jurisdiction of the kings of Ikshvaku dynasty, for their ancestor Manu bequeathed it to them. The country is now ruled by emperor Bharatha who is extremely virtuous. He and his representatives are dedicated to upholding the paramount kingly duty of duly chastising evil-doers.

“As per the dictates of Dharma, a younger brother and a virtuous pupil are like one’s own son. Sugreeva is your younger brother. Yet, though he was blameless, you behaved very unfairly with him and drove him out of Kishkinda. His wedded wife Ruma is your virtual daughter-in-law. Yet, you took possession of her and, blinded by lust,

have been cohabiting with her. Hence, you are guilty of a heinous crime. Death is the punishment ordained for a man who lustfully associates with his daughter, sister or his younger brother's wife. Acting as a royal Kshatriya who is a representative of king Bharatha here, I have awarded you that very punishment.

“At the time when My indissolvable friendship with Sugreeva was solemnized, I gave My word, in the presence of other monkeys, that I would get back for him his wife and his sovereignty. How could a man like Me ever allow a promise to remain unhonoured? This too is a reason for My striking you.

“You complained that you were struck when engaged in combat with your brother. Remember that you are only a monkey. It is not a practice of men to challenge an animal to a fight and only then to kill it. A hunter, for example, kills a deer regardless of whether it is attentive or careless and regardless of whether it faces him or away from him. You being a monkey, it is irrelevant whether you were fighting someone or not when you were pierced by My arrow.

“In a pair of verses accepted as authoritative by those versed in Dharma, Manu has declared, ‘Men who have perpetuated sins become free from faults on being punished by kings and ascend to heaven like those who have performed virtuous deeds. A thief gets absolutely freed from sins either through punishment or by being pardoned and allowed to go free. However, a king who does not punish a sinner incurs that man's sin.’ You had committed a terrible sin. By punishing you, I have freed you from that sin. Now you can ascend to heaven.”

Vali was fully satisfied with Rama's explanation. With joined palms, he told Rama, "What You have said is absolutely correct. Forgive me for the unbecoming and harsh words I uttered by mistake." He then beseeched Rama to protect his young son Angada and to establish the best of relationships between Sugreeva and Angada. Rama granted his request.



27. Conversion, an Absurdity

Once, a proselytiser told a man that he had changed the latter's religion and caste. A few days later, the "converted" person invited the proselytiser to dinner. The convert served pork to his guest. The guest asked, "What is this?" The host replied, "It is pork, sir." "What! Pork!" exclaimed the guest, "Take it away from my plate. I do not eat such things." The host was not to be put off. "You told me that you had converted me. Why should you not accept what I give you?" he objected. "Pork is impure", replied the proselytiser. "Just as you changed my religion and caste by sprinkling water on me, I have also changed pork into mutton by sprinkling water on it. So, from your standpoint, it should be mutton, and not pork. It is surprising that you are not prepared to eat it", argued the host. The proselytiser had no reply.

The Shastras do not accept that a Hindu can be genuinely converted to any religion by some process, such as sprinkling of water. If a person ceases to follow Sanatana Dharma, he becomes a Bhrashta, a fallen one. For various sins, expiations are prescribed. One can expiate for having discarded one's scripturally-prescribed duties and carry on as if the "conversion" had never taken place.





God, the Refuge of All

The greatest help a person can get to eschew Adharma and to tread the path of Dharma is from God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and the ultimate upholder and expounder of Dharma. God and devotion to Him form the subject matter of this section.



28. Though Unseen, God Exists

A boy refused to believe the existence of anything that he could not see, inclusive of air. His father pointed to the fluttering leaves of a tree and said, “See the role of air, which you deny.” “You are showing me the leaves, not the air. Where is air?” retorted the boy. The father quickly pressed shut the boy’s nostrils and mouth. Experiencing suffocation, the boy struggled to free himself. In less than a minute, the father released him. “You blocked my breathing. It hurt”, protested the boy. The father queried, “What is it you wanted to breathe in?” “Air”, said the boy, conceding its existence.

Imperceptibility does not always imply non-existence. God, like air, cannot be grasped by the eye but certainly exists. It is He who originates, sustains and annihilates the cosmos.



29. Atheist in a Quandary

A minister, who was an atheist but had great regard for Me, came to see Me. During his conversation with Me, he commented, “Our ancients were very wise indeed. Long ago, people were discharging their duties properly. Though some of them might have erred, generally speaking, policemen were not required in large numbers to maintain law and order. The reason was that people had faith in Ishwara and the Shastras. Consequently, they feared His punishment.

“Nowadays, people like me proclaim that God does not exist and that Dharma is meaningless. We thought that people would be captivated by such rhetoric and that they would be guided by us. However, our scheme backfired. People fear none now and heedlessly violate the law of the land. They give very little importance to ethics. We eliminated God from the scene but could not get a suitable replacement to ensure discipline. I feel that the ancients wisely conceived a God and propagated what they had imagined.”

As can be seen, even an atheist will do well not to deny God!



30. God, The Greatest Magician

A magician performed the famous 'Indian rope trick' before some people. He threw up a rope, climbed it and vanished into thin air. Though they could not see him, the spectators heard sounds of a combat. Then, they saw his body falling down in pieces. A short while later, he appeared before them, unhurt and vivacious. "All this was due to my power of Indrajala. Only I was actually present", clarified the magician to the stunned audience.

Some atheists opined, "To make a pot, a potter requires mud, a place for him to sit and accessories, such as his wheel. It is held that God created the cosmos. He could not have done so. After all, prior to the origin of the universe, He lacked the materials to fashion the cosmos, instruments to process the materials and even a place for Him to sit."

This objection is untenable. The magician considered never budged from his position on the ground. Yet, perhaps because the magician hypnotized them, the spectators beheld a show that amazed them. In like manner, God, the greatest magician, projects the world by His power of Maya without the need for materials, tools and space. Even an ordinary person is able to manifest a dream-world with houses and roads without taking recourse to bricks and tar. What then is surprising in God's ability to project a cosmos without materials extraneous to Him?



31. Impeccable Ways of God

As a person was walking along a road, he saw a slender pumpkin creeper. He thought, "How cruel God must be to burden this slender creeper with a massive fruit?" He walked on and came to a massive margosa tree. Beholding its tiny fruit, he felt, "Indeed, God must be mad. He has given this big tree such a small fruit." Hardly had he finished contemplating thus, when a fruit fell on his eyelid. Being tiny, it caused him only slight pain. Immediately, he realized, "I blamed God without adequate thought. Had God burdened this tree with a massive pumpkin, what would have been my fate? It is only because of His giving this tree a small fruit and the slender pumpkin creeper a large fruit that I was able to escape with a minor injury."

There was a king. He had a very pious minister who constantly held, "Whatever Ishwara wills is for our good." One day, the king severed a finger of his and was in agony. He summoned his minister and asked him, "Do you say this also is for my good?" The minister answered in the affirmative. Enraged, the king had the minister thrown into gaol.

On the next day, the king went on a hunt. He got separated from his retinue and lost his way in the forest. Some fierce tribesmen who desired to sacrifice a human to a deity they worshipped saw the king and captured him. They took him to their priest. The priest examined the ruler and remarked, "This man is unfit to be sacrificed. He has a missing finger and we can immolate only one who is whole." The king was left free. He

returned to his palace, thankful to be alive. It dawned on him that he had unfairly punished his minister; but for his losing his finger, which, his minister had regarded as being in his interests, he would have perished. He released his minister from jail and apologized. His curiosity a bit aroused, the king asked him, "Do you hold that your being imprisoned was also ordained for your good by God?" "Yes", replied the minister. "Had I not been imprisoned, I would have been at your side in the forest and would have been sacrificed."

If one analyses with faith, one will realize that what God has created is flawless and whatever He ordains is for one's good.



32. God Punishes When Due

In a certain village, there lived a couple who had no issues. On account of her motherly instincts, the wife was more eager than the husband that a child be born to them. She kept on consulting various persons as to what expiation or means she could resort to, to beget progeny. The man almost gave up hope. One day, a person told the wife that if she sacrificed a child and bathed in its blood, a baby would be born to her. She spoke about this to her husband. He chided her for even entertaining such a thought.

A year passed and she became pregnant. In due course, a child was born to her and became the apple of the couple's eye. Her husband told her, "Well, did I not warn you not to resort to any foul means? That would have never pleased the Lord. You followed my advice and now He has blessed us with a bonny baby." The wife blushed. Sensing that something was wrong, he told her, "Speak up. You seem to have something in mind." In a trembling voice, she replied, "Do you remember that nearly a year ago, our neighbour's child died?" The husband felt ill at ease because of the thought that cropped up in his mind. However, he kept a straight face and answered, "Yes, I do." The wife's voice dropped to a whisper as she said, "That child did not die naturally. It was I who killed it and bathed in its blood. That is why this child has been born to us."

The husband was nearly driven mad by his wife's confession. His mind reeled and he railed at Ishwara, "O God! There is only darkness in Your realm and no

justice.” He was so disgusted with God’s ways of granting favours and not punishing a faulty deed that he left home and wandered aimlessly for months. Slowly, his mind became a little composed and he returned to his village. He found that he was unable to locate his house and so sought the help of some villagers. They informed him, ‘Shortly after you had left, an earthquake struck this village. A few houses were damaged. But, unfortunately, your house collapsed completely and your wife and child were crushed to death.’ Instead of being overpowered by shock and misery, the man lifted his eyes upwards and said, “Oh God! I was wrong. In Your kingdom, there is not darkness but delay.” He felt convinced that divine punishment had been meted out.

Manu, the sacred law-giver, has stated that he who treads the path of Adharma flourishes for a while, beholds prosperity and even goes to the extent of getting the better of those who oppose him. However, in the long run, he is totally destroyed. The wheel of God’s justice grinds slowly but surely. A sinner is given time to make amends for his sins.



33. God's Merciful Justice

One day, when Rama and Sita were dwelling on the north-eastern base of the Chitrakoota Mountain, not far from the Ganges, a crow pecked at Sita. The vicious crow was actually Indra's son. She sought to drive the bird away by hurling a clod of mud at it but it defiantly remained in Her vicinity. Sometime later, while Rama slept on Her lap, the wicked bird sharply attacked Her breast. Again and again, it tore at Her bosom. Her blood wet Rama. She woke up Rama and, on seeing Her injured chest, He demanded to know who was responsible for it. He then Himself beheld the crow closely in front of Sita, with its talons stained with blood. The bird quickly hid itself in the ground.

Angry, Rama invoked the Brahma-Astra in a blade of Dharba grass and hurled it at the hidden son of Indra. The bird flew as swiftly as it could all over the world but was unable to shake off the missile. Indra, the Devas and the sages refused succour. So, finally, it sought refuge in Rama. Though the crow deserved to be killed, Rama compassionately offered it protection. He told the bird, which had arrived helpless, "The Brahma-Astra cannot be rendered futile. Hence, you yourself suggest a way out." The crow replied, "Let Your arrow destroy my right eye." Rama acceded to its plea and hence the Astra blinded its right eye but spared its life.

Rama thus meted out justice and yet exhibited great compassion. It is noteworthy that mercy did not cause Rama to reduce the death penalty to some unjustly minuscule punishment such as the loss of a single

feather. The heinous act of Indra's son is an example of the saying, "He who is in the grip of lust neither feels ashamed of himself nor fears the consequences of his behaviour. Such is the ruinous nature of lust.

There was a judge whose misguided compassion caused him to pardon even hardened criminals. He felt that as a votary of Ahimsa, he ought not to subject even murderers and rapists to the prolonged suffering of life imprisonment or deprive them of their lives. On an occasion, a man who was guilty of repeated, armed robbery and murder was brought before him. The prosecution's case against the man was iron clad. Yet, the judge ruled that the prosecution had not established its case beyond reasonable doubt and set the man free with a warning. The unrepentant criminal did not waste much time before commencing his despicable acts.

A few days later, he broke into the judge's house itself. He managed to open the safe containing valuables. As he was getting ready to decamp with his loot, the judge's wife, who had been awakened by sounds, saw him and tried to raise an alarm. Without a moment's hesitation, the dacoit strangled her to death and escaped. All this would not have happened if the judge had not discarded justice in favour of his thoroughly misguided compassion.

No physical, verbal or mental sin committed by a person either in this or an earlier birth fails to fructify in the form of suffering experienced by the doer. Scripturally-prohibited behaviour indulged in this birth often yields its consequence only in a future birth and so some mistakenly imagine that God lets off wrong-doers. The current prosperity of a debased individual

stems from his Punyam of an earlier birth and is like the inherited property of a wastrel. God, being just, awards punishment to a sinner but, being compassionate, mitigates the suffering awarded to a penitent man to the maximum extent possible without making a travesty of justice. His functioning is not foolish like that of the judge of the example considered. Just as repentant first-time wrong-doers are looked upon leniently by judges but unrepentant, habitual offenders are severely punished by them, God is lenient towards those who unknowingly commit a misdeed on multiple occasions or knowingly commit it once but comes down hard on those who knowingly and repeatedly sin.

It is said, "The sin of an earlier birth troubles the doer in the form of disease in the present birth. It is neutralized by recourse to medicines, gifts, sacred recitation, Homas and worship of God." Further, "There is expiation for a sin committed unknowingly or once with knowledge. However, what remedy is there for a misdeed repeatedly performed with attention?" While a person may be able to escape the arm of the law of the land, he cannot ever escape God's law of Karma. Justice and compassion find perfect consummation in God.



34. Success and Glory Due to God

By His supreme power and grace, God granted the Devas victory and its benefits in their battle with Asuras, the transgressors of divine rules. However, the Devas became conceited in respect of their success. They thought, "Ours indeed is this victory! Ours indeed is this glory!" Deciding to favour them by removing their presumptuousness, God manifested before them as a Yaksha, a venerable great entity.

The Devas were unable to discern who that being might be. So they asked Fire, "You are powerful. Go and find out thoroughly about this being." Fire agreed and approached the Yaksha. However, in Its presence, he did not feel bold enough to speak to It and so remained silent. The Yaksha asked him, "Who are you?" Fire said, "I am Agni, the forerunner, and am also known as Jataveda, the knower of all that is created." He thereby boasted that he was well-known through his two names.

The Yaksha queried, "What ability is there in you who are possessed of such famous names and attributes?" Fire said, "I can burn up everything that is upon the earth." The Yaksha kept a straw in front of Fire and said, "Burn up this mere straw that I have placed. If you are not able to burn it, then give up your vanity of being a consumer of objects everywhere." Fire approached the straw with the speed generated by great enthusiasm. No matter how much he tried, he just could not burn the piece of straw. Failing to make good his claim and overcome with shame, he returned silently to the Devas. He told them, "I was unable to succeed in

finding out what this Yaksha is.”

The Devas then turned to Air and told him, “Go and find about this Yaksha.” Air agreed and came to the Yaksha. The Yaksha asked him, “Who are you?” Air said, “I am Vayu, the carrier of smell, and am also known as Matarishwa, the one who travels through space.” The Yaksha asked him, “What power is there in you who have these famous names and attributes?” Air said, “I can blow anything that is there upon the earth.” The Yaksha placed a straw before him and said, “Take it up.” Air approached the straw with great enthusiasm and force. However, he was unable to move the straw. Feeling ashamed of himself, he returned to the gods and confessed that he could not succeed in finding out who the Yaksha actually happened to be.

Finally, the gods turned to Indra, their king, and said, “O Maghavan, you find out everything about this Yaksha.” He said, “So be it”, and approached It. However, the Yaksha vanished from his sight. God did not so much as grant him an interview so as to quell his pride about his status. Thoroughly humbled, Indra stood where he was. Unlike the other gods, he did not return. He contemplated, “What is this Yaksha?” Pleased with his focus on the Yaksha, in the very place where the Yaksha had been, there manifested the supremely-charming Uma, the daughter of the Himalayas. Knowing Her to be ever associated with Ishwara, Indra asked Her about the Yaksha.

She told him, “It was Brahman.” She further explained, “The Asuras were conquered only by God, and you Devas were merely His instruments. The victory was really His. However, all of you vaingloriously felt that the

victory and glory were yours.” Because the deities Fire, Air and Indra were the first among the gods to approach the Yaksha through conversation and visualization, they excelled the other gods. Amongst them, Indra excelled Fire and Air since he was the first one to realize, through the words of Uma, that the Yaksha was God.

When, as seen from this story of the Kena Upanishad, the victory and glory of even Devas is only because of God, what need be said about the success and glory of humans?



35. Dweller in the Heart

Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, agreed to play a game of dice with Duryodana, the Kaurava. As the gambling progressed, he staked and lost not only his kingdom but also his brothers. Finally, he pledged Draupadi. Again, he suffered defeat. At the evil instance of Duryodana, Draupadi was brought to the court. Dushshasana began disrobing her to put her to shame. She turned towards the Pandavas and cried out for help. They yearned to intervene on her behalf but were not in a position to do so.

Realizing that God alone could save her, she prayed, "Krishna! Dwarakavasin (Resident of Dwaraka)! Where are You? Do come and save my honour!" The Lord took a few moments before coming to her aid. Draupadi successfully emerged from the ordeal. Later, she asked Sri Krishna why His arrival had not been instantaneous. The Lord explained, "You addressed Me as the resident of Dwaraka. That is why I took some time to appear before you; I had to come from Dwaraka. Had you summoned me as 'Hrudaya Nivasin' (Dweller in the heart), I would have surely come to your aid immediately."

This story, containing some additions to the account in Vyasa's Mahabharatha, illustrates that God is immediate and that it is disadvantageous to forget this fact. People sometimes think of God as just dwelling in some distant realm, such as Vaikunta or Kailasa. He is, in fact, the one who impels beings from within.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad teaches, “He, who inhabits the intellect, who is inside the intellect, whom the intellect does not know, whose body is the intellect and who controls the intellect from within, is the Antaryamin or Internal Ruler; He is your imperishable Atma.”



36. Jiva, the Reflection, and God, the Prototype

A foolish person looked at a mirror and saw a clear reflection of his face. He found it to be ugly. He mused over the possible reason. He noticed that the reflection had a blank forehead; there was no Tilakam on it. His aesthetic sense induced him to apply vermilion on the reflection's forehead. But when doing so, he moved his face slightly. Consequently, the vermilion spot went out of alignment. He tried to reposition the vermilion over the reflection's forehead but again failed. After several such failures, the foolish man realized that it was impossible to directly beautify the image. He then applied Tilakam on his own forehead and was pleasantly surprised that it immediately appeared on the image at the right place.

To improve the reflection, it is necessary to adorn the original face. Likewise, if we seek happiness, we should worship God. This is because a relation between God and the Jiva, the individual soul, as postulated by the scriptures, is that between a face and its reflection. The mind is a servant of the Jiva. A serf's duty is to please his master. How is the mind to please its master, the Jiva? If it directly strives for the welfare of its lord, its efforts will be futile; they would be on par with the fool's attempt to directly beautify his reflection. However, if it were to direct itself towards Ishwara, joy would accrue to its master. Bhagavatpada has charmingly elucidated this point in a verse addressed to Lord Narasimha.



37. Anyone Can Tread the Path of Devotion

In order to tread the path of devotion, is any special qualification a sine-qua-non? This is an oft-raised query. A popular verse supplies the reply in the form of rhetorical questions.

The verse commences with the rhetorical query, "What was Dharmavyadha's profession?" Dharmavyadha was a butcher. He carried on his duties without any attachment and dutifully served his parents. As a result of this, he was recognized as a great follower of Dharma. The Mahabharatha contains a story about him.

A certain Brahmachari, by virtue of his penance, acquired some powers. A bird innocently put its droppings on his head. The celibate looked up enraged and the bird was reduced to ashes. Puffed with conceit at the spontaneous manifestation of his supernatural ability, he proceeded for Bhiksha. He went to a house and begged for food. The lady of the house asked him to tarry a while as she was serving her husband. This infuriated the Brahmachari. But the lady calmly replied, "I am no bird to be burnt up by you."

The continent one was amazed that the lady knew about the incident. Humbled, he sought her guidance. She directed him to Dharmavyadha who gave him detailed instructions about service to parents. The teaching was particularly pertinent to the Brahmachari, for he had completely ignored his obligation to his father and mother. Dharmavyadha was greatly blessed by the

Lord, though his profession was deprecated by many. Thus, one's profession poses no restriction for treading the path of devotion.

The next consideration is age. Should one be of a prescribed age to be a devotee? The verse under consideration asks, "What was Dhruva's age?" Dhruva's father Uttanapada had two wives. Dhruva's stepmother Suruchi did not like him. Once, when he wished to sit on his father's lap, his desire was frustrated because Suruchi wanted Uttanapada to fondle her child. Weeping, he went to his mother Suneeti. Unfortunately, Suneeti was not in a position to help him. She asked him to pray to the Lord.

With determination in his heart, Dhruva retired to a forest. Sage Narada saw the boy and, being immensely pleased with him, initiated him into the worship of Lord Narayana. Dhruva sat absorbed in meditation. So pleased was the Lord with his love that He manifested before him and declared that he would earn the love of his father, and later become a great king. The Lord continued that after his death, he would constantly abide in the firmament as the pole star. Since Dhruva was a young boy when he obtained a vision of the Lord, it is clear that there are no age restrictions for treading the path of devotion.

Is great scholarliness needed? The verse asks, "What was the learning of Gajendra?" Gajendra was an elephant who lived with his wives. He was a great devotee of the Lord. One day, a crocodile grasped his foot with its jaws. A great struggle ensued between the two. The crocodile gradually gained the upper hand. Despairing for life, Gajendra called out to the Lord to

save him. Lord Vishnu rushed to the spot, slayed the crocodile and liberated Gajendra. Gajendra, an uneducated elephant, was thus able to acquire the grace of the Lord. Hence, absence of learning is no bar for devotion.

Should one be high-born? Is it necessary that one should only be a Brahmin in order to gain the grace of the Lord? The verse asks, "What was Vidura's caste?" Vidura was born to a servant-maid. As such, he was not a high-caste individual. When Lord Krishna came to Hastinapura as an envoy of the Pandavas, He chose to stay, not in the royal palaces offered to Him by the Kaurava princes, but in Vidura's house. This shows that the Lord does not regard low caste as any bar for resorting to and succeeding in the path of devotion.

Maybe factors such as profession, age, learning and caste do not matter. But could it be that great grit and manliness are essential? The verse asks, "What was Ugrasena's manliness?" Ugrasena was Kamsa's father. The demon Kamsa had imprisoned his father and usurped power. Kamsa's nephew was none other than Lord Krishna. When He was brought to Mathura, He killed Kamsa in a duel and restored Ugrasena to the throne. Thus, even one who was lacking in prowess was graced by the Lord.

Is physical charm something that captivates the Lord's attention? "Was Kubja a bewitching damsel?" is the counter-query contained in the verse. When Lord Krishna arrived at Mathura, a hunchbacked woman, who was certainly no belle, offered scents to Him. The Lord was satisfied and blessed her. Her deformity gave way to beauty. Thus, absence of a delightful appearance does

not preclude the reception of Ishwara's grace.

People are often pleased by affluence. Is the Lord too like that? The counter-question in the verse is, "Did Sudama have great wealth?" Sudama was a boyhood friend of Lord Krishna. They studied together and later parted, Krishna becoming a royal prince and Sudama a devoted Brahmin householder. Sudama suffered intensely on account of his poverty. However, he bore it with great fortitude. Unable to withstand the problems of penury, his wife requested him to go and see his friend, Lord Krishna. Overjoyed at the thought of meeting his beloved friend, he consented.

His wife gave him some puffed rice. Sudama went and met Lord Krishna. The Lord received him with due honour. Sudama felt ashamed to offer the puffed rice he had brought. But Lord Krishna was quick to notice it and asked for it. The Lord began eating it. After some time, His consort Rukmini stopped Him. When Sudama returned, he found a palatial mansion at the location of his old, dilapidated house. He saw that his wife and children were expensively clad. He realized that it was the Lord who had made him affluent. It is clear that the Lord ignores factors such as richness.

What is He concerned with? He considers only devotion. Where there is devotion, He is satisfied. It follows that there are no specific qualifications needed for treading the path of devotion.



38. God Graces Anyone Who Thinks of Him

The divine music emanating from the flute played by Lord Krishna in Vrindavan enthralled the Gopis. Their hearts swelled with love for Him and they spoke to each other about His doings. Subsequently, they decided to propitiate Katyayani, the consort of Lord Shiva, to obtain Krishna as their spouse by Her grace.

In the cold month of Margasheersha, they rose early everyday and bathed in the Yamuna. Then, they formed a sand image of Goddess Katyayani and worshipped it with scents, flowers, incense, lamps and offerings of eatables. Each of them repeatedly entreated Her, "Vouchsafe me the joy of having Nanda's son as my husband. I offer my obeisance to You." They partook the remnants of oblations made in sacrifices.

A month passed without their enthusiasm slackening. The Lord decided that it was time for Him to bless them. They used to bathe naked in the river. This constituted a lacuna in their religious observances and a slight to the gods. Krishna, who was yet to enter His teens, came with His young friends to where they were bathing. He took possession of their clothes lying on the bank and, by this means, soon enabled them to make amends for their mistake.

He told them, "I know of your resolve to adore Me. I approve of it. It deserves to be fulfilled. The longing for Me of those who have dedicated their minds to Me is not meant for sensual pleasure; grains that have been

roasted or boiled are normally not intended for sprouting. Return to Vraja. Success is yours. In keeping with the purpose for which you have observed this vow of worship of Katyayani, you shall sport with Me in the nights to come.”

Years after the Mahabharatha war, when the destruction of the Yadavas was at hand, the Lord extensively instructed Uddhava. In the course of His teaching, the Lord said, as recorded in the Bhagavatam, that the Gopis lacked mental sharpness, were not conversant with the Vedas, had not served great saints and had not performed Tapas. Nevertheless, they attained Him purely through love. The Lord added, “Ignorant of My true nature, the Gopis desired Me as their delightful sweetheart. Yet, because of their association with Me, they attained Me, the Supreme Brahman, in hundreds and thousands.”

Kamsa was warned by a voice from the skies that Devaki’s eighth son would slay him. So, he set about killing, at birth, each of Devaki’s children. After Krishna’s birth, acting in accordance with the Lord’s directive, Vasudeva took Krishna to Gokula and left Him near Yashodha. Then, he brought with him the female babe which Yashodha had given birth to. When Kamsa tried to kill her, who was none other than Yoga Maya, she flew into the air and assuming an eight-armed form, declared, “You fool! Your foe, who shall terminate your life, has taken birth and is elsewhere.”

Thereafter, Kamsa repeatedly tried to have Krishna killed but failed each time. So great was his fear of Krishna that he constantly thought of the Lord day and night, regardless of whether he was drinking, eating,

speaking, walking or dreaming. Finally, when Krishna killed him, he merged into the Lord. While the Gopis attained the Lord through desire, Kamsa did so because of fear.

Shishupala wanted to wed Rukmini but, in keeping with her wish, Krishna took her with Him. Shishupala and his allies engaged Krishna in combat but were worsted. Thereafter, Shishupala thoroughly despised the Lord. So intense was his abhorrence of Krishna that he could not help thinking of the Lord all the time. Finally, when Krishna slew him on the occasion of Yudhishtira's Rajasuya sacrifice, he merged with the Lord. Shishupala thus attained the Lord by virtue of his hatred for Him.

To Arjuna, Krishna was his dearest friend and well-wisher. When Krishna revealed to him His universal form on the eve of the Mahabharatha war, he was filled with amazement and fear. He prayed, "Ignorant of this greatness of Yours and regarding You as just my friend, I have addressed You discourteously out of love or inadvertence as, 'O Krishna, O Yadava, O friend.' In jest, I have slighted You in private and in public, while walking, resting, sitting and eating. I beseech You, O boundless One, to forgive all this." Arjuna and the other Pandavas reached the Lord through friendship.

The Vrishnis approached Krishna as a member of their clan. He graced them by living with them and protecting them. As for Yogis, to this day, they have been uniting with the Lord through pure devotion. There is a verse which says that the Gopis attained the Lord through desire, Kamsa by virtue of fear, Shishupala on account of hatred, the Pandavas by means of friendship, the Vrishnis owing to clannishness and the Yogis through

devotion.

The idea is that regardless of how one fixates on the Lord, one becomes a recipient of His grace. Nevertheless, the despicable attitudes of Kamsa and Shishupala towards the Lord must never be adopted by people. Instead, the Lord should be approached through devotion. How indeed can one feel terrorized by Him or hate Him, for He is an ocean of mercy and is most lovable.

Egoism stands between a devotee and God. Won over by their love for Him and their lack of ego, Krishna performed Rasakrida with the Gopis. However, the moment they felt proud of their beauty and thought themselves to be superior to other women because of the attention Krishna was bestowing upon them, He disappeared from their midst. He took with Him a single Gopi as she did not give room to pride. On His spending some time with her in private, she thought of herself as special. Straightaway, the Lord deserted her. It was only when the Gopis realized their folly and yearned for Him that He joined them.

Thus, the right course for a person is to constantly think of God, give no quarter to egoism and to surrender himself completely to Him.



39. God Will Accept Us

If we turn to God, will He accept us, for we cannot truly claim to be leading a life much different from that of any animal? We spend much of our energy and time earning our bread and a large chunk of the remaining time in sleep. How then can we claim to be far different from animals unless we are strongly devoted to God and lead a spiritual life?

In His Shiva Bhujanga Stotra, Bhagavatpada poses this query to Shiva and then tells the Lord to accept him even if he be on par with an animal. Why? Is not Nandi the vehicle of Shiva? Surely, if Shiva can accept Nandi, a bull, there should be no problem in His accepting an animal-like devotee. How indeed could Shiva complain about the devotee being animal-like when He has made an animal itself His own?

It is one thing to be on par with an animal and another to be sinful. What if the devotee be full of faults? Would the Lord then accept him? Bhagavatpada tells Shiva in the verse under consideration that even in such a case, Shiva should extend His love. Why? Has not Shiva placed Chandra on His head even though the latter had committed a heinous sin? He had impregnated Tara, his preceptor Brihaspati's wife, and had a child by her. Decidedly, if Shiva can place on His head one who has such faults, He should have no reason to reject a devotee merely because of the devotee's blemishes.

Let a devotee be on par with an animal and be sinful too and yet be qualified to be accepted by God. But then,

should not the devotee's supplication be free from all traces of hypocrisy? Should not the devotee be free at least from double standards? Here again, Bhagavatpada disagrees, for He tells Shiva, "If You are opposed to 'two-tongued' ones, then how is it that You keep a fork-tongued snake as a neck ornament? If You can adopt a snake, then why not me?"

In conclusion, Bhagavatpada reminds Shiva that no matter what a person's condition might have been, he inevitably becomes blessed on being received by the Lord. The implication of the prayer is that God's compassion is limitless and so He will accept us, all our faults and limitations notwithstanding, if we offer ourselves to Him.



40. God Never Abandons His True Devotee

Prahlada, the son of the demon king Hiranyakasipu, was very much devoted to God. His father resented this and threatened him with dire consequences. Undaunted, the boy continued to pin his faith only on God. Hiranyakasipu made many attempts on Prahlada's life but, by God's intervention, all the efforts were in vain. Roaring with rage, Hiranyakasipu questioned his son, "You keep on saying that your Lord is the Supreme Power. Where is that God about whom you brag so much?" "He exists everywhere", replied the son. "Is He present in this pillar?" asked the king, showing a nearby structure. "Certainly father", Prahlada answered. "Well, call Him out then. Let me see whether He emerges and saves your honour", challenged Hiranyakasipu. Prahlada mentally prayed to the Lord. Suddenly, the pillar broke into two and out came Lord Narasimha. The Lord killed the arrogant demon and blessed His young devotee.

God is extremely concerned about the welfare of His devotees. He goes to any extent to aid one who loves Him truly. Did He not manifest as Narasimha to vindicate young Prahlada's position?



41. Stages of Devotion

In Shivanandalahari, Bhagavatpada has described the various stages of devotion and illustrated them. Initially, the devotee forcibly turns his mind towards God and holds on to His feet. The seed of an Ankola tree sticking to its parent tree serves as an example. When the devotee has turned his mind towards the Lord, the latter becomes intensely favourable towards the devotee and graces him. It is as if Ishwara is pulling the devotee towards Him and preventing any departure from Him. An illustration for this is a needle being drawn towards a magnet. This marks the second stage.

The third stage accrues when the devotee's heart is completely concentrated on God and the Lord, in turn, is extremely affectionate towards the devotee. The situation is comparable to that of a chaste wife serving her husband with love and the husband reciprocating her feelings of affection. The devotee gradually becomes an ornament of the Lord. In fact, but for Prahlada, the Lord might not have manifested as Narasimha and graced the world. So, in a way, the devotee adds to the glory of the Lord. An analogy is a creeper entwining a tree and beautifying it. On transcending this fourth stage, the devotee attains total union with the Lord. An example for this is the merger of a river with an ocean. Once the river has joined the ocean, it cannot be distinguished from the ocean. The devotee too becomes inseparable from the Lord.



42. Divine Mother Graces Without Delay

A devotee wanted to pray, 'O Bhavani, please bestow on me, Your serf, a compassionate glance.' So, he began with the words "Bhavani tvam". So eager was the Goddess to fulfil Her devotee's wish that She did not realize that the devotee's pause after "tvam", meaning "you", was only the interval between successive words. Taking the request as complete, She immediately granted him "Bhavani-tvam" or the state of being Bhavani; that is, She made him one with Herself. Bhagavatpada has stated this in His Soundaryalahari.



43. The All-Pervading Lord's Sport

Once, a river went into spate and breached the bund on its bank. The king of that land ordered all the people to stop the overflow by dumping sand into the bund. Each person was allotted a portion of the breached area. Among the people was a poor woman who eked out her livelihood by preparing and selling Pittu (a sweet dish). Being too weak for manual labour, she kept worrying about her inability to carry out the royal order.

Meanwhile, Lord Shiva thought of enacting a divine play. So, He assumed a human form, that of a coolie, and approached the old woman. With innocence writ large over His face, He asked, "While all the other people are toiling at the river bank, you are seated here. Do you not intend to carry out the task given by the monarch?" In a choked voice, the old lady replied, "My son! What am I to do? Being decrepit, I am not in a position to perform hard labour. Further, if I do the allotted work, I will be losing my business and, hence, will have to starve. However, I cannot transgress the royal command. I am, therefore, caught up in a dilemma."

Reacting to this, the Lord said, "Do not worry, old lady. I will take care of your portion of the bund. What will you give Me in return?" "I am not even able to pay for the work You are offering to do. How unfortunate I am!" lamented the old lady.

The Lord responded, "Ah! It is alright. You seem to be having some Pittu that is not prepared well and which none will buy. It is enough if you give that to Me in lieu

of My wages.” Speaking thus, Shiva playfully ate all the Pittu. Lunch time passed. After appeasing His hunger, He whiled away the time chatting with the passers-by.

Sometime later, people found water flowing out of a particular portion of the bund. This was obviously the portion allotted to the old woman. News reached the monarch and he immediately rushed to the spot. The people around complained to him about the carelessness of the coolie. The king thrashed the coolie with a cane. No sooner did he do so than everyone felt pain. All wondered whether the emperor had beaten them instead of the culprit. In fact, even the sovereign too felt the pain of his own chastisement! It was only then that the king realized that the labourer was none other than the Lord.

This story reveals that Ishwara resides as the inner essence of all beings. Though formless, He can and does assume forms for the sake of His devotees. His divine play is most delightful. A poet remarks, “O Lord! You did not exhibit Your all-pervasiveness till You had finished consuming the Pittu!”



44. Forms of God

A person was on his way to his place of work, wearing a shirt, trousers and a tie. A friend tapped him on the shoulder and said, "I am really glad to see that you are dressy. This is the type of dress that is needed for you to be successful as a sales representative." The man came home in the evening, changed into a Dhoti and sat down to chant the Vishnu Sahasranamam. A friend who dropped in just then remarked, "It is true that while going to work, you have to dress like an Englishman. But it is this dress that suits you. I prefer to see you like this."

The story reveals that a person, when attired differently, pleases different people. God is formless but, for the sake of His devotees, He assumes different forms. The Puranas describe numerous manifestations of the Lord. The scripturally-described forms of Shiva, Vishnu, etc., do have implicit meanings.

For instance, Shiva has ten hands. The ten hands denote the ten directions, inclusive of top and bottom, and convey the omnipresence of God. Shiva is well-known as the three-eyed one. The sun, moon and fire constitute these eyes. He has the crescent moon in His crest. This moon stands for knowledge. Shiva's wearing it in His matted locks is a pointer to the Lord being endowed with pure knowledge. "God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent and there is naught but Him", is a common inner meaning of the Puranic descriptions.



45. Devotee's Offering

A devotee decided to offer something to the Lord. "What should I give?" was the query that perturbed him. He cogitated, "God is known by the name Pashupathi, the Lord of creatures. Hence it would be proper to gift Him an animal. What is the animal that I shall submit unto Him?" After due thought, he told Shiva, "I have with me a cow which is none other than my devotion towards You." He assumed that Shiva would ask, "What is the characteristic of your cow?" So, he clarified, "It gives unlimited joy as its milk."

"How often does it give milk?" Shiva might wonder. Hence, the man said, "It gives milk again and again." Taking, "Where will it dwell?" to be the Lord's next query, he stated, "It will dwell in the cow-shed that is Your feet." He felt that the Lord would desire the answer to the question, "Does it have a calf?" Therefore, he pointed out, "It has a calf, 'Virtue'." "O Lord! You are Pashupathi. This is the sole cow that I possess. Please take it and protect it", concluded the devotee.

In reality, God needs nothing whatsoever from a devotee. However, whatever the devotee offers with love, He accepts and bestows grace. Lord Krishna has said, "When anyone offers Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or some water, I accept that devotionally-presented gift of the pure-hearted person."



46. Light on Idol Worship

A person purchased a mud idol of Vinayaka and began worshipping it on Vinayaka Chaturthi. At the end of three days of Puja, he carried the idol and immersed it in a river. This was seen by a friend of his who had hardly any knowledge of idol worship and was puzzled by what he saw.

Friend : You were worshipping the idol with great faith. Yet, now, you have thrown it into the river. Why?

Worshipper : Originally, the idol had no sanctity and was just a beautifully-shaped piece of mud. Then, at the commencement of worship on Vinayaka Chaturthi day, I duly invoked Lord Ganesha into it. Thereafter, it became sacred. Treating it as the Lord Himself, I performed Puja to it. At the end of the stipulated period of worship, I requested the Lord to withdraw His special presence in it. The idol lost its sanctity and became just a piece of mud. It was that mud piece which I immersed into the river.

Friend : How is it possible for a mere piece of mud to become holy and to then revert to its original state? Further, how can a devotee have the capacity to effect such transformations?

Worshipper : Consider an example. There is an ordinary man with whom we are all familiar. We are able to meet him whenever we wish. If he desires to see a high-ranking government official, he has to struggle to get an appointment. At the suggestion of people like us, he contests an election and, because of our votes, wins.

He then gets appointed as a minister. Thereafter, if

we want to see him, we have to fix up an appointment. The very officials whom he had difficulty in meeting, now come to him and carry out his orders. He is provided with security and good accommodation. After his tenure as minister, he contests an election again. This time, the people do not vote for him as before and hence he loses. Thereafter, as before, he becomes a common man. The special privileges and the authority of a minister are not his any longer.

People like us, by our votes, cause this ordinary man to become a minister and then we revert him to his earlier state. Likewise, in response to the devotee's Aavahana, invocation, the Lord specially graces an idol and the idol then becomes holy. Having accepted the devotee's worship, the Lord withdraws His special presence in response to the devotee's request; the idol loses its sanctity.

An idol in a temple may have originally been a part of a rock on a hill; people might have walked over that rock and may have even urinated on it. A sculptor fashions what is an ordinary rock into a beautiful idol by chiselling it. Even then, it does not become holy. It, however, becomes sanctified when it is duly consecrated in a temple. Thereafter, people worship it. The very sculptor, who earlier delivered hammer blows to it, prostrates before it and does not so much as touch it.

Friend : Why did you make reverential offerings to the idol during your worship? After all, it did not even move a millimetre to accept anything.

Worshipper : When a venerable guest comes to our house, it is in our holy tradition to receive him with honour. He is offered a seat and his feet are washed. He

is fed. Devotees see in the idol not just mud or stone but the living presence of God. They hold that God does accept what is offered to Him, though the idol itself does not stretch out its hand to take what is given. That is why, in the course of my worship, I offered God a seat, just as I would, to a holy one who comes to my house. Then, I offered Padyam, water, to wash His feet. Subsequently, I fed Him; this was my offering of Naivedyam.

Suppose a guest proves unworthy of the respect that is shown to him by misbehaving with a female in the host's house or by pilfering costly items. It is likely that the host will hand him over to the police. In the case of God, there is no possibility of His ever proving unworthy of the devotee's worship. Hence, devotees never discard the idol they worship in the middle of the Puja.

Friend : On Vinayaka Chaturthi day, Ganesha is worshipped in many places at the same time. Which idol does He choose to specially abide in? What influences His choice?

Worshipper : All idols wherein God is properly invoked become sanctified. Wherever there is a drop in pressure, air rushes there. Likewise, God, who is everywhere, specially occupies all the idols where He is worshipped, regardless of the number and the location of such idols.

Friend : In some places, the food that is offered is very small in quantity and in others, it is very large. Is not the former insufficient for a deity and the latter excessive?

Worshipper : No. In the Vedas, it is said that the offering gets modified in accordance with the wishes of the

Devata to whom it is offered. What is important is that if a devotee were to resolve to offer a certain number of Modakas, say 1000, in a Ganapathy Homa, that is the number he must offer. He should not think, "This is too much for Ganesha to eat", and offer less. Actually, the Lord needs nothing but accepts and becomes sated with whatever is offered by a worshipper with devotion.



47. Combined Influence of Many

A Somayaji bought some goats for sacrificing in a Soma Yaga that he was about to perform. While he was taking them to his house, three persons saw the fat, healthy goats and wanted to eat them for lunch. In order to deceive the Somayaji, they devised a plan. Then they hid in different places along the road.

After some time, one of them met the Somayaji and exclaimed, "O Somayaji! What is this? You seem to be pious and are wearing sacred ash on your forehead. At the same time, you are accompanied by dogs." The Somayaji was perplexed. However, his doubt was set at rest when he glanced at the goats. Dismissively, he told the man, "Go away! Can you not see that I am taking home only goats and not dogs? Do not try to play the fool with me."

After a while, the second rogue approached him and remarked, "O Somayaji! What has happened to you? Are you out of your mind? It is shocking that you, a highly-orthodox man who should bathe on even accidentally coming into contact with a dog, are now pulling dogs along. Fie on you!" This time, the Somayaji was thoroughly confused since two persons had mentioned that he was taking dogs. Still, brushing the matter aside, he continued on his way.

The third cheat made his appearance. Putting on a show of respect for the Somayaji, he prostrated before him and said, "Kindly excuse me for what I have to say. I fail to understand you. You have a holy water-pot in

one hand but with the other, you are holding a rope to which three dogs are tethered. Quite a contrast indeed!" This time, the Somayaji had no vacillation. He was convinced beyond doubt that he was taking only dogs for his sacrifice.

He mused, "Three persons have said the same thing at three different places. The shop-keeper must have deceived me, taking advantage of my failing sight and gullibility. That I should be burdened with dogs rather than goats is definitely the effect of my past sins. What a shame!" Thinking thus, he requested his apparent well-wisher, "Please take these dogs away. What indeed would have happened if I had taken them to the Yagashala! I shudder to even think of the likely comments. Thanks to you, I have been saved from censure and embarrassment. You need not pay me anything for these dogs. I am only too happy to be rid of them." He then handed over the goats gratefully.

Thus, the Somayaji's mind underwent a metamorphosis when the three persons said the same thing. If such is the effect of even deceitful words, what need be said about the influence of the heartfelt supplications of numerous devotees? Such prayers are one of the factors causing God to impart sanctity to temple idols.



48. Gopurams Induce Humility

Two friends were walking along a road. One of them was a braggart and an egoist to the core. He told his friend, “Who else can achieve as much as I? I am indispensable at my place of work and earn a fat sum.” He carried on in this fashion, listing his various achievements. The two happened to pass by a temple with a massive Gopuram. The braggart’s friend told him, “Just have a look at this Gopuram.” The egoist turned around and beheld it. Being an architectural wonder of gigantic proportions, it filled him with awe. As he stood gazing at the Gopuram, he felt insignificant. He realized that compared to the huge structure, he was but an insect-like creature. It was an ego-shattering experience for him.

Our ancients built massive Gopurams to induce humility in people.



49. Significance of Shivarathri

Once, Brahma and Vishnu were quarrelling as to who was the greatest of all. Shiva appeared before them in the form of a Lingam. Vishnu sought to locate the foot of Lord Shiva and for that purpose, took up the form of a boar. Assuming the form of a swan, Brahma went in search of the Lord's head. Neither of Them were able to locate what They intended to. Hence, Their pride was crushed. They realized that the Supreme Being, the Omnipresent Lord, is the greatest of all.

This story is not meant to differentiate the Trinity, nor is it meant to induce the feeling that Vishnu is inferior to Shiva. Its primary purpose is to show that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Lord of the cosmos is the greatest. The manifestation spoken of in the narration is said to have occurred on Shivarathri, which falls on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Magha. One should observe a fast that day and keep awake throughout the night, engaged in the worship of Shiva. It is meaningless to forego sleep but not spend the night thinking of God.

What is the fruit of performing Puja throughout the night? A reply to this query is found in a verse which means, "O Eyes! It behoves you to carefully keep awake this night which is most auspicious and sacred. If you do so, a companion resembling you shall manifest between both of you." The idea is that one becomes akin to Shiva Himself if one offers worship on Shivarathri.



50. To Which Deity Should a Person Pray

A Brahmin stood hesitant on the banks of a river in spate, waiting to cross over. He enquired of a Muslim who happened to come that way about the means to reach the farther shore. "Trust in God and jump in, my friend", said the latter. "He will take you across." But the Brahmin was shrewd. He did not want to take unnecessary risks. So he told the Muslim, "You dive in first. Then I will follow." "Very well", said the Muslim. Catching hold of his beard and saying, "Allah-Ho-Akbar", he took off. Somehow, he managed to ferry himself across.

Now, the Brahmin mustered a little courage. He prayed to Ganesha, the destroyer of obstacles. No sooner did he jump than the thought struck him that he would have a greater chance of survival if he prayed to Shiva, Ganesha's father. He, therefore, sought refuge in Shiva as he plunged. Ganesha thought that His great father would protect the Brahmin. Shiva, on the other hand, expected Ganesha, who had jurisdiction over obstacles, to save the man. Neither offered help. The doubting Brahmin had his fatal trip.

A person should realize that it is the same Lord who has manifested as Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, etc. Hence, he should not imagine that one deity is less potent to help him than another. It is, however, perfectly legitimate for a person to have an Ishta-Devata, a preferred deity, such as Shiva. He ought to think, "It is

my beloved Shiva who has taken the forms of all the other divinities, such as Vishnu”, rather than, “Vishnu is different from and inferior to Shiva.” A person with such an outlook will be fully at ease in any duly-consecrated temple and will not be troubled by thoughts, such as, “If I pray to Vishnu, will Shiva be displeased with me?”



51. Characteristic of a Great Devotee

Once, Narada went to Lord Sri Vishnu and asked Him, "Who is Your greatest devotee?" The Lord said, "There is a farmer who is truly devoted to Me." Narada grew angry at this and exclaimed, "What! Am I not Your foremost devotee? How can that poor despicable farmer be as devoted as I am?" The Lord told Narada to go and see the man for himself. Narada scrutinised the activities of the farmer. Every mornin, the farmer got up, prayed to God and then attended to his domestic tasks. Thereafter, he went to the fields and sat in silence for a while absorbed in the thought of God. He then attended to his agricultural duties. His next prayer was reserved for the evening.

Narada returned to Lord Vishnu and protested, "What is this? The farmer does not even repeat Your name often. How is he great?" Lord Vishnu said, "Before I answer, I shall give you a task. Please take this cup that is full of water and go round the streets. Then return to Me. Please ensure that not a drop of water spills." Grasping the cup, Narada set out. No sooner had he walked a few paces than the fear that a drop or two might spill gripped him. It possessed him to such an extent that his mind failed to think of anything other than the water in the cup. On the completion of his task, he returned to the Lord.

Lord Vishnu asked him, "How many times did you recite My name while you were on the streets?" Narada

was taken aback and said, “How could I chant Your name? I was too busy to do that; I had, after all, to ensure that no water spilt.” The Lord said, “The farmer was also busy like you. Despite that, he thought of Me. That is what made him great.”

One morning, Yudhishtira came to behold Lord Krishna. He found Him seated motionless, in deep meditation. When Krishna opened His eyes, Yudhishtira respectfully asked Him, “You are the creator and destroyer of the cosmos and are without a beginning and an end. Yet, You were in deep meditation. Could You kindly tell me the significance of Your meditation?”

Krishna replied, “Lying on a bed of arrows, Bheeshma has fixated his mind on Me. Hence, My mind locked onto him.” Though pierced by numerous arrows and in deep pain, Bheeshma thought of Krishna with such intensity that he completely drew the Lord’s mind to himself.



52. Concentration

Dronacharya impartially expounded the nuances of archery to both the Pandavas and the Kauravas. At the end of their course, he gave them a test. “See that small bird sitting on the tree”, said the Guru. “You will have to shoot it down with an arrow.” He called his disciples, one by one, and asked, “What do you see now?” Each of the disciples replied, “Sir, I see the bird, the tree and also the surroundings.” The Guru told them, “You have not mastered archery.” Finally, Arjuna’s turn came. Drona asked him the same question. Arjuna answered, “Revered sir, I see only the bird and nothing else.” The master asked him to release the arrow. The disciple obeyed and the bird fell.

This story brings out the praiseworthiness of intense concentration on one’s target or the task on hand. Focussing the mind on God during meditation is certainly very important, particularly for a spiritual aspirant. However, many say that they are unable to meditate because their minds keep wandering. Quite often, a major reason for their poor concentration is the inadequacy of their interest in meditation.

A person was given a packet of hundred-rupee notes to count. As he was busy counting, a friend called him. He, however, did not hear the call and so did not look up. Only after he had finished his task, he noticed the presence of his friend. He told him, “My whole attention was on the notes because I knew that any error in my counting would have proved costly for me.”

This man regarded his task as important and so was able to suitably direct his attention. In like manner, if a man regards meditation as extremely important and feels that he stands to lose greatly by inattention during meditation, it is likely that he will succeed in focussing his mind on God.





Scope of Destiny and Human Endeavour

When it is said that a person should eschew Adharma, adhere to Dharma and develop devotion to God, an implicit assumption made is that man can control the course of his life. Is man really free or are all the events of his life predestined? Is it possible to overcome destiny and, if so, how? These questions are dealt with in this section.



53. Fate and Free Will

The fields of two farmers were identical in size and had similar kinds of soil. They worked equally hard, tilled their lands well and sowed seeds of uniform quality. The rainfall over the fields was neither excessive nor scanty and so the crops grew well. At the appropriate time, they commenced their harvesting. Before they left for their homes on an evening, they were able to behold with joy large heaps of grains, the result of their efforts. There was hardly any difference in the yields obtained by them.

That night, while they slept, there was a very heavy downpour on one land and only a light drizzle on the other. The next morning, when they went to their lands, one was dismayed to find that the rain had ruined his grains while the other felt relieved that his heaps of grain were intact.

Thus, notwithstanding the similarity in their efforts, the results they obtained were markedly dissimilar. It was the unfavourable destiny of one farmer and the favourable fate of the other that led to the loss of the former and the gain of the latter. Those who have faith in the Vedas and Shastras and are logical do not regard the experiences of humans as just fortuitous.

Two students wrote an examination. The boy who had studied better answered all except two questions well. The other managed to answer just two questions correctly. The examiner was an impartial but a lazy man. He scrutinized two of the first boy's answers. They happened to be the incorrect ones. Assuming the other

answers too to be incorrect, he awarded the boy low marks.

Then, he took up the second boy's answer book. The answers he selected for checking happened to be the correct ones. Taking it for granted that the remaining answers were also correct, he awarded the boy concerned high marks. On seeing the results, the boy who had studied better grieved, while the other rejoiced. Thus, hard work fetched a poor result and poor preparation yielded good marks. Here too, the hand of destiny is seen.

There was a poor man who was a wastrel and a drunkard. His wife gave birth to twins. Gazing lovingly at her children, she told her spouse, "They look regal." The husband laughed and announced that he would name them Chakravarthy and Raja, ironical names for the members of a poverty-stricken family. To make ends meet, the wife used to work as a domestic servant in the house of a very affluent couple. After becoming a mother, she started taking her children with her to her place of work as there was no one at her hut to take care of them. Being good, understanding people, her employers did not mind in the least.

Unlike the twins' father, their mother was very keen that they be sent to school. So, when they were five years of age, she admitted them into a government school that provided free education. The twins took to their school as a fish to water. Chakravarthy was particularly fond of his mother and hence insisted on helping her for some time at her employer's house everyday before going to school. Raja, for his part, swept the hut and washed the utensils used by his mother for

cooking. Thereafter, he proceeded to school and joined his brother.

The affluent couple had a son who was almost the same age as the twins. He had been born five years after their marriage. They doted on him. Just before the woman had conceived, they had sought the blessings of a holy man for begetting progeny. That man used to wander from place to place and sustained himself on food obtained by begging. So, he was commonly known as Akinchana; the word means, "he who has nothing". Believing that his wife had conceived because of the holy man's blessings, the husband named their son, the heir to an immense fortune, Akinchana. Akinchana made friends with Chakravarthy and the two spent some time with each other every morning.

When Chakravarthy was nine years old, his beloved mother died. His alcohol-loving, good-for-nothing father had the habit of scolding and beating his children on the flimsiest grounds. Because of his wife's demise, he had to make do with less money than before and this made him highly irascible. To ease the financial situation, Chakravarthy started to work at Akinchana's house in the mornings and in the evenings, before and after his school timings. His brother Raja decided to do the cooking, cleaning and washing at their hut.

Akinchana and Chakravarthy became quite close. One day, Akinchana asked his mother, "Can I take Chakravarthy with me by car everyday and leave him at his school? After all, his school is almost on the way to mine." "Certainly", said his mother, "I myself wanted to suggest this." Akinchana and Chakravarthy thereafter left for school together.

One day, the car in which they were travelling was involved in a major accident. The driver died on the spot. Akinchana's legs were pinned in the wreckage and soon a minor fire broke out. By the time he was pulled out by some good Samaritans, he sustained significant burn injuries; his legs were badly damaged. Chakravarthy phoned Akinchana's parents and they summoned an ambulance. Akinchana was rushed to the hospital, screaming in pain. There, the doctors were forced to amputate his legs. The amputation and the extensive burns caused Akinchana agony. After a month of intense suffering, he appeared to be on the road to recovery. Unexpectedly, he contracted pneumonia. The doctors did their best to cure him but he did not respond to their treatment and died.

Akinchana's parents were devastated. Their sorrow declined with the passage of time but every time they passed or entered Akinchana's room, they felt miserable and nearly broke down. After six months had passed, they paid a visit to the holy man, Akinchana. He advised them, "Sell your house and shift to another town; also adopt a son." The advice appealed to them and they decided to act according to it.

Akinchana's mother told her husband, "We have known Chakravarthy for a long time and he is, undoubtedly, a well-behaved boy. Akinchana was so fond of him. Why not we adopt him instead of some unknown boy?" He readily agreed, for he too had a good opinion of Chakravarthy. They talked to Chakravarthy about their intention and, finding his response favourable, approached his father. They expressed their wish to adopt Chakravarthy and offered the man a substantial

sum of money. The wastrel had no hesitation in parting with his son; as far as he was concerned, Raja was there to attend to his house.

Chakravarthy had been sickly since childhood but he quickly acquired robustness because of the good food and excellent medical care he received in his new home located in an unpolluted hill-station. His adoptive parents developed deep affection for him; they sent him to an excellent school and eagerly satisfied his every wish. They never spoke to him harshly; the question of their giving him corporal punishment did not arise at all.

Everything was going right for Akinchana. Then, for no major fault committed by him since birth, the good boy lost his legs, suffered terribly for weeks and finally passed away. As for Chakravarthy, he suffered because of sickness, poverty, the death of his beloved mother and the bad treatment meted out to him by his father. He had not done anything wrong since birth to merit so much suffering. After Akinchana's parents adopted him, the picture changed completely for him. The road accident about whose occurrence the boys had no inkling and over which they had no control, radically altered the course of their lives. Destiny that had been smiling at Akinchana began to frown at him. On the other hand, fate, which had been scowling at Chakravarthy, began to smile at him.

Many examples such as these can be given to highlight the power of destiny, which is actually nothing but actions performed by a person in an earlier life that have begun to fructify and are responsible for the present birth. Likewise, there is no dearth of instances in favour of the power of effort stemming from the

exercise of free will.

Ashwapathi, the pious and just ruler of Madra, was desirous of progeny. So, chanting the Gayathri Mantra, he offered thousands of oblations into fire every day. Pleased with him, Goddess Savithri manifested before him and told him that his longing would find fulfilment. In due course, a daughter was born to him. The king named her Savithri, in honour of the Goddess who had graced him. When she came of age, he sent her along with his minister on a tour to enable her to identify a prospective husband. When she returned, the celestial Sage Narada was with Ashwapathi. She said that she wished to marry Satyavan, the son of Dyumatsena.

Dyumatsena was a firm adherent of Dharma and had ruled Shalva. He always spoke the truth and so did his wife. Hence, they named their sole son Satyavan. When Satyavan was still a child, Dyumatsena lost his eyesight. Taking advantage of the situation, a neighbouring king successfully invaded Shalva. As a result, Dyumatsena was forced to leave for the forest with his son and wife. On seeing Satyavan in the forest, Savithri felt that he was the ideal husband for her.

Narada said that Satyavan was very handsome, valorous like Indra, forbearing like the earth and self-controlled. But, added the sage, he had one great shortcoming and this was that he was destined to die in one year. On hearing the sage's words, Ashwapathi asked Savithri to choose another man. She, however, said, "I have once desired him as my husband. Regardless of whether he is long-lived or short-lived, I cannot choose anybody other than him." Narada told the king, "She cannot be swayed from her righteous decision.

Satyavan has unmatched good qualities. My opinion is that you should give your daughter to him.”

Ashwapathi then approached Dyumatsena, obtained his approval and, thereafter, gave Satyavan the hand of his daughter. After marriage, Savithri removed her jewels and donned a simple ochre dress appropriate for her life in the forest. She proved to be an ideal wife to Satyavan and a perfect daughter-in-law to Dyumatsena and his wife. They were very happy with her.

Sage Narada had specified to her the exact moment at which Satyavan was scheduled to breathe his last. She did not disclose this information to her husband but constantly worried about what was to come to pass. Four days before the specified day, she commenced a fast and stood motionless. On being questioned by Dyumatsena, she replied that she was observing a vow. She did not eat a morsel and remained where she was till the final day. That morning, she formally ended her religious observance but announced that she did not wish to eat till evening.

She expressed to Satyavan her desire to accompany him to the forest when he went to fetch sacrificial faggots, flowers and fruit. He asked her, “You have not ventured into the forest in the past. The path is tough to tread. You have become enfeebled on account of your fast. How will you be able to walk far?” “I am enthusiastic and am unexhausted by my fast. So, please do not forbid me from accompanying you”, requested Savithri. He acceded to her wish but wanted her to get the approval of his parents. She obtained their consent and left with Satyavan.

Deep inside the forest, both of them gathered flowers. Then, taking up his axe, Satyavan proceeded to chop wood. After some time, he experienced fatigue. His head and limbs ached severely and he felt too weak to stand. He explained his condition to Savithri. She rushed to him and, as he lay down, rested his head on her lap. Satyavan closed his eyes.

At that time, Savithri beheld an effulgent, dark person holding a noose. She stood up reverentially and asked him, "Your body is not like that of humans. I think that you are a Deva. Kindly tell me who you are." The effulgent one said, "I am Yama. It is because of your chastity and Tapas that you are able to see and converse with me. The life-span of your husband has come to an end. I have arrived to take his life." "O Lord, I have heard that your emissaries carry out the task of taking the souls of humans. Why is it that you yourself have come?" queried Savithri. Yama replied, "The reason for my coming is that Satyavan is an ocean of good qualities and is established in righteousness." Then, at the precise moment specified by Sage Narada, Yama withdrew Satyavan's soul; Satyavan's breathing ceased.

By virtue of her devotion to her husband and her religious observances, Savithri was able to follow Yama and did so. He told her to return. She, however, said, "Wherever my husband goes or is taken, I shall accompany him; that is in keeping with Dharma. The learned persons who have realized the Truth have declared that when a person walks with another, they become connected by friendship. I seek to speak to you on the strength of the bond that has arisen between us by my accompanying you." Then she spoke words that

appealed to Yama.

Yama : I am pleased with you. Ask for any boon other than the life of Satyavan.

Savithri : Let the eyesight and strength of my father-in-law be restored.

Yama : I grant you that. Now return. Do not strain yourself.

Savithri : In being near my husband, I feel no strain. I shall accompany you wherever you take him. It is said that proximity with holy men on even one occasion is most desirable. Friendship with them is even more valuable. Thus, one should always keep the company of the holy.

On hearing her extol the company of the holy and express her desire to be in his and her husband's presence, Yama felt happy.

Yama : Ask for another boon but not for your husband's life.

Savithri : Please let my father-in-law regain his kingdom and may he never deviate from the path of Dharma.

Yama : So be it. Now you go back.

Savithri Great ones such as you forgive even foes who seek refuge. Please show mercy on people like me.

Yama : Ask for any boon other than your husband's life.

Savithri : My father, king Ashwapathi, has no son. Please bless him with male progeny.

Yama : It shall be as you wish. You have come a great

distance. Go back now.

Savithri then glorified Yama and made him happy with her words.

Yama : I am highly gratified by you. Ask for any fourth boon other than the restoration of your husband's life.

Savithri : May my husband and I have strong, valorous sons who will propagate our line of progeny.

Yama promised her what she desired. Savithri then told him that, unlike the first three boons, the fourth could not find fulfilment without her husband being restored to life. She, being a chaste woman, could not have a son by any man other than Satyavan. Yama saw her point and released Satyavan's soul.

Then he told her, "You have given me full satisfaction by your righteous words. Satyavan shall be restored to health and shall be fit to be taken back by you. He shall live with you for long and shall, by his adherence to Dharma, attain great fame. Both of you shall have sons who shall become kings." After bestowing this blessing, Yama left. Savithri returned to where her husband's body was and sat down, placing his head on her lap. Satyavan opened his eyes. He thought that he had slept for long and wondered why she had not awakened him earlier. He said that he had beheld a dark-coloured person and wanted to know where that person was. Savithri assured him that she would tell him later. Then, she led him back to their abode.

Some Rishis were with Dyumatsena when the couple returned. They asked Satyavan, "Why did both of you not come back much earlier instead of so late in the night? Your parents were worried." Satyavan responded that he had

fallen asleep. A sage announced, "Your father's sight was suddenly restored. Perhaps Savithri can give the reason." She described all that had transpired. The next morning, the former subjects of Dyumatsena came to the forest and met him. They told him, "O King, your foe and also his family have been killed by his own ministers." They requested him to again take over the reins of the Shalva kingdom. All that Yama had promised came to pass.

Dyumatsena was destined to be blind and live in a forest. By Savithri's efforts, he regained his sight and his kingdom. Ashwapathi was not destined to have sons. But obtained them. Satyavan was to die young, but he lived long; he sired sons and ruled the Shalva kingdom for many years. This story is a striking example of how what is destined to happen can be markedly changed by human effort.

Markandeya was fated to die at the age of 16 but lived on because of his devout worship of Lord Shiva. Shuka, the son of Vyasa, was such a great Yogi that he attained disembodied liberation at the time of his choice. Numerous instances of the alteration of the course of fate by personal effort and by the grace of God can easily be cited.

Neither destiny nor personal effort singly determines the course of human life; there is great interaction between the two. Destiny or actions of the past that have begun to fructify, human effort and divine grace together govern what happens. Manu has compared destiny and personal effort to the two wheels of a chariot; a chariot cannot move on a single wheel.

After the Mahabharatha war, Krishna took the Pandavas to Bheeshma who lay on a bed of arrows but intensely meditated upon the Lord. The Lord relieved

Bheeshma of pain and imparted to him unimpeded and complete Knowledge. He then asked Bheeshma to answer the questions posed to him. One of the questions asked by Yudhishtira was, "Is destiny more powerful or human effort?" In the course of his elaborate reply, Bheeshma cited the answer given by Brahma to Vasishta when the latter had posed a similar question.

He said, "Destiny is comparable to a seed and individual exertion to the soil. Seedless soil does not yield a harvest nor does an unsown seed. Crops grow from the combination of seeds and the soil. It is by the combined influence of destiny and effort that people rise to heaven.

"The doer reaps the fruit of his deeds; happiness and unhappiness result from good and bad deeds respectively. A deed done always has a consequence. If one's action were to bear no fruit, then all actions would be puerile; relying on destiny alone, men would become idlers.

"Everything can be secured by effort but nothing can be got through destiny alone by a man who remains idle. By well-directed human efforts, a person attains heaven, objects of enjoyment and the fulfilment of his wishes. The celestials attained their high status from that of a human being, through dint of effort. Just as a small fire becomes big when fanned by the wind, weak, favourable destiny increases greatly in potentiality when it is associated with individual exertion. A noble man who is diligent in his efforts can acquire the wealth that is hidden and guarded by unfavourable destiny.

"A sinner soon loses his precious gains; destiny does not help the man steeped in delusion and greed. A man may have obtained, through favourable destiny, vast wealth,

women and objects of enjoyment but if he is inactive, he cannot enjoy them. When oil is used up, a lamp gets extinguished. Likewise, favourable destiny loses its influence in the absence of human perseverance. Favourable destiny cannot uplift a man who treads the path of evil; there is no inherent power in it.

“Just as a disciple follows his Guru, so does one’s action, guided by fate, follow one’s own individual effort. One’s own self is one’s friend and one’s enemy. Virtue is the refuge of the Devas and by it, everything is attained. Destiny cannot thwart one who is established in virtue.”



54. An Inadvisable Attempt to Avert Fate

A person who had committed robbery was caught by the police and produced in court. The judge found him guilty and sentenced him to five years of rigorous punishment. The man was jailed and made to work every day. He found the prison food insipid compared to the meal of delicacies he was used to. He was basically a lazy man and despised being made to labour daily for hours. He loved to roam about but now had no opportunity to do so. Depressed and thoroughly disgusted with prison life, he made up his mind to escape.

He drew up a plan and bided his time for a suitable opportunity. When he got a chance, he severely attacked two guards and made good his escape. He fled far from the prison to another town and began to live there in disguise. He had hardly begun to enjoy his freedom when a police party came there in search of him. He tried to escape but was caught. Because of his jail-break, he not only lost the chance of getting released earlier than scheduled because of good behaviour but also received an additional jail term.

Some people, oppressed with the conditions they find themselves in, contemplate suicide as a means of escape. However, the scriptures warn that suicide is highly sinful. By committing it, one does not succeed in averting misery, for one is made to undergo much more suffering after death. The present life is brought about by actions of previous lives that have begun to fructify.

If one were to try to avoid the consequence of past misdeeds by ending one's life, one would be on par with the man in the story who sought to terminate his unhappy life in jail by escaping. Trying to run away from one's fate is an erroneous exercise of free will and is certain to end in failure.



55. The Way to Deal with Adverse Destiny

A man pilfered some money for the first time in his life. He was beset with doubts. His conscience took him to task; he also wondered, "Will it come to light that I am a thief?" The experience of having made a quick buck, however, spurred him to steal once more. This time, he felt less fear than before and also faced less trouble from his conscience. With the passage of time, he developed into a full-fledged burglar; his conscience ceased to trouble him and he experienced no fear or nervousness.

Actions produce two types of results. The first is the obvious fruit. For instance, when a person eats a full meal, his hunger is appeased. The second result is not readily apparent; it is the engendering of a tendency to perform that act again. For example, he who has tasted a sweet desires to eat it on another occasion.

Tendencies develop regardless of the kind of the action performed. Hence, he who wishes to lead a good life will do well to engender virtuous tendencies. Adverse fate leads one astray by bringing about situations that stimulate one's bad tendencies. By putting in effort and developing strong good tendencies, one can curb the evil tendencies. When one succeeds in doing so, adverse fate ceases to be able to impel one to the path of Adharma.

In the Yoga Vasishta, it is said, "If you are carried away by a flood of good tendencies, you will attain the

supreme state. If a bad tendency impels you towards danger, you must overcome it by your own effort. The river of tendencies flows along the auspicious and inauspicious paths. By manly effort, it must be channelled to the auspicious path.”





Towards Mental Purity and
Dispassion



56. Mental Cleanliness Necessary

There were two friends. One of them used to spend his time in religious practices. The other had a weakness for women and visited prostitutes. He repeatedly tried to reform himself but temptation kept getting the better of him. He felt ashamed of himself and envied his friend. Even when with a harlot, he thought of the holy acts his friend was involved in and cursed himself for not being pious. On the other hand, while performing Japa or Puja, the religious man dwelt on what his companion was indulging in.

After their deaths, the religious man found himself in hell while his friend landed up in heaven. The pious man complained that great injustice had been done to him while his companion had been unduly rewarded. He was told, "Even when yielding to sensual pleasures, your friend pondered on your worship of God. His good thoughts earned him heaven. You reflected on sinful activities even while worshipping God. Hell is where your filthy thoughts have led you."

The moral of this tale is that merely engaging in religious practices is insufficient and that it is necessary to give no quarter to bad thoughts. It would be erroneous to infer from the story that vices are not ruinous, provided one has good thoughts.

(Physical factors do affect the mind. For instance, a bath in the Ganga with full faith purifies

a person not only physically but also spiritually. Food does have a marked influence on the mind. These aspects are considered in the next three parables.)



57. Ganga, the Great Purifier

Once, Shiva and Parvathi were flying over Kashi. Parvathi observed numerous people vying with each other to have a bath in the Ganga. She asked the Lord, "So many people are bathing in the Ganga. They believe that their bath rids them of their sins. Is it true that Ganga washes off their sins? If so, will not people deliberately sin and then bathe in the Ganga in order to be free from the consequences of their misdeeds?" The Lord replied, "I shall explain to you. But, first, assume the form of an old woman. I shall appear as a helpless man who is Your husband and is drowning in the water. We shall scream for help." He then gave Her some further instructions.

Thereafter, She stood near the Ganga and, pointing to Her drowning spouse, wailed, "Will nobody save My husband?" Immediately, a large number of people rushed into the waters. As instructed, She warned them, "None but a sinless one can touch My husband. Therefore, sinful ones need not proceed." All but one withdrew. That man jumped into the Ganga and pulled out Her husband.

Parvathi thanked him profusely but hastened to ask, "I had said that only a sinless one can touch My husband. How did you touch Him? Are you sinless?" The man replied, "Yes, I am. I jumped into the Ganga and only then saved Your husband. Once I came into contact with Ganga, all my sins were washed off." Parvathi and Shiva took to the skies. Addressing Her, Shiva said, "If a man has such intense faith, Ganga will certainly wash away

his sins.”

Ganga does purify people. When the faith of the person who resorts to her is intense, he is greatly benefitted by her. This, however, does not mean that one will be redeemed if one commits sins deliberately and then bathes in the Ganga.



58. Influence of Food on the Mind

A Yogi lived in a small Ashram. Daily, he used to beg for food and partake it. He was thus leading a calm and peaceful life. The king of the land had a great regard for the sage. One day, he invited the ascetic to his palace for Bhiksha. The Sannyasi said, "O Sovereign! I have been eating only food procured by begging. I do not know how my mind will be affected if I consume anything in your palace. Hence, I feel that it is best for me to decline your invitation."

However, in response to the ruler's repeated requests, he relented. When the ascetic was washing his hands after his meal, his eyes fell on a necklace of pearls. Noting that nobody was watching him, he picked it up and put it in his Kamandalu. Then, he went to the main hall, blessed the king and returned to his hermitage. Only after some time, he began to ponder over what he had done.

Meanwhile, the queen complained to the king about the loss of the necklace she had left in the bathroom. The king analysed the situation and concluded that one of the servants must have pilfered it. In order to extract the truth from them, he applied third degree methods. They kept on pleading innocence. When one of them suggested that the hermit might be the thief, the monarch became infuriated.

At the Ashram, the ascetic was thoroughly ill at ease. "What a foul deed I have committed today! For whose sake did I steal the necklace? If I wear this and

go for Bhiksha, certainly no one will offer me food. If I leave it here itself, someone may steal it. Why did I become a kleptomaniac? I have beheld many necklaces but have never been affected by desire for them. The fact that a longing has arisen today implies that my mind has become impure. What could be the cause?" he pondered. It dawned on him that the food he had eaten that day must have been the reason for his mental defilement.

He induced vomiting and then went to the king. On seeing the commotion in the palace, he asked for the reason. The king replied that no one had admitted to stealing a missing necklace. The Yogi said, "How will these innocent ones plead guilty?" "Here, take the necklace", continued the remorseful ascetic. "I, the thief, have brought it for you."

The shocked king asked the Sannyasi, "You are a great sage. Is it proper for you to have taken the necklace? Further, what made you bring it back? I am thoroughly confused. Please elucidate." The sage replied, "In the beginning, I refused your invitation to have Bhiksha in your palace. However, I finally gave in to your request. The result is that so many people have got unnecessary beatings and I have also earned a bad name. O King! You have stored so much rice in your granary. I wonder whether you have rightfully collected it." "I am sorry to say that unfair means have been employed to collect so much rice", the monarch replied truthfully. "I ate this rice for only one day and even that was enough to spoil my mind", sighed the Yogi. "Such being the case, I shudder to even think of its effect on all of you who take it daily. So, please do not invite me

for food hereafter. I will get my food by begging as I have been doing hitherto.” “Cannot begged food also be impure?” queried the sovereign. “The food may be impure but it is so only till it is put into my begging bowl. Such is the verdict of the Shastras”, clarified the sage.

This story illustrates that food does influence the mind. Eatables are classified as Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. Sattvic food is pure and confers strength and good health; curd is an instance of a Sattvic product. Rajasic food stimulates desire and anger; an example is a pungent item. Tamasic food leads to sloth, sleepiness, etc. Putrid food and ort are instances of Tamasic eatables. The mentality of the cook and the presence of defiling factors, such as a strand of hair, also have a bearing on the purity of food. Care should be taken to consume only properly-prepared, Sattvic food.



59. Impure Food Must Be Eschewed Except to Save Life

Once, the crops in the land of Kuru were destroyed by a thunderstorm. A famine then broke out. Being in very strained circumstances, the Vedic scholar Ushasti Chakrayana sought shelter and took up residence in a house at a certain village. In the course of his wandering for food, he came across a mahout who dwelt in that village. The mahout was consuming black pulses of poor quality. Tormented by starvation, Chakrayana begged him for some pulses to eat. The mahout replied, "I do not have any pulses other than those that are there in this vessel from which I am eating. What do you say I should do?"

Chakrayana replied, "Give them to me." Receiving them from him, he ate the mahout's remnants. The mahout then offered Chakrayana water. However, Chakrayana refused to accept it saying, "Were I to drink this, I would be acting wrongly, for I would be taking water that has been partially drunk by another." The mahout asked, "Were not the pulses you ate the remnants of my meal?" Chakrayana clarified, "If I had not eaten them, I would have perished for want of food. However, I can get pure water elsewhere."

Chakrayana took part of the pulses given to him to his wife. She had already eaten some good food that she had managed to get by begging. But not wanting to show disrespect to Chakrayana, she accepted what he presented her. Then, she stored the pulses. The next

morning, Chakrayana told her, “If only I can procure some food, I will acquire strength by eating it. I will then be in a position to go to a sacrifice that is going to be performed by the king. Perceiving me to be qualified, he will choose me for performing the priestly duties and will reward me.” His wife brought the pulses that she had stored and said, “Here are the black pulses you had given me.” Chakrayana ate them and went to the sacrifice. There, his knowledge of rites and associated meditation was highly appreciated. He was rewarded.

Normally, a person should only eat pure Sattvic food. From this story of the Chandogya Upanishad, it can be inferred that it is permissible, but not compulsory, for a noble person to eat forbidden food such as ort in order to prevent himself from starving to death. No sin would accrue if he were to do so. However, he would be acting censurably if he were to consume what is forbidden in spite of proper means of livelihood being available; hence, Chakrayana refused to drink defiled water.



60. How a Householder Should Conduct Himself

A district collector was distraught. A friend who dropped in at his office to pay him a casual visit, sensed his discomposure and asked, "What is your problem?" The collector replied, "My wife and children are all laid up with fever. My son first fell ill and his infection spread to the others."

Friend : Did you not call a doctor?

Collector : Of course, I did. He prescribed medicines and said that they would recover in a few days.

Friend : You are so upset at the illness of just four people living in a house situated in a quarter of an acre. How then do you deal with problems in your jurisdiction which covers thousands of acres and is populated by lakhs of people? What indeed would be your condition if there were to be an epidemic in your region?

Collector : I would inform the health department. Investigations would be carried out and the disease identified as cholera, plague or something else. Treatment and preventive measures including sanitation would be taken up on a war footing. I would handle such a situation efficiently, with a cool head.

Friend : If such a major, widespread problem can be dealt with by you without getting ruffled, why are you so distraught about a minor problem confined to four members of a single house?

Collector : Unlike the others, those who are ill now are my very own.

Such is the deleterious influence of strong attachment and of the feeling, "This person or thing is my own", that the collector who worked hard and efficiently discharged his official duties without losing his composure became inefficient and beset with worry when it came to his wife and children.

A pilgrim, on the way back to his town, halted at a Dharmashala. He appeased his hunger there with the free meal offered to him. Then, desirous of doing good and acquiring Punyam, he joined the inmates in serving food to the pilgrims who had come there. Thereafter, he helped in cleaning up the place. Before retiring for the night, he engaged in conversation with the others, expressed his sympathy to those who voiced their personal problems and also gave them beneficial suggestions.

He behaved as if the choultry was his home and the persons there were his family members. Yet, his mind was fully at peace and he left the next morning without the least hesitation or regret. After he had returned to his home, a person asked him, "Where did you spend last night?" "At the Dharmashala", he replied. "What transpired there?" asked his relative. "Nothing of consequence. I ate there, slept and left. That is all."

A married man has many duties and responsibilities and has to face many a problem affecting his family. The scriptures and Bhagavatpada graciously advise him to lead his family life without attachment. He ought to be like the collector when engaged in the discharge of his

official duties and like the pilgrim during his stay at the Dharmashala. He will then perform his duties and face family problems effectively and efficiently but without any mental agitation.



61. Sameness in Conduct and in Mental Responses

A man invited several people for lunch. One of his guests was a well-built adult who was a voracious eater. Another was a child with a meagre requirement of food. A guest loved sweets while another disliked them. The host thought, "I should not discriminate between my guests. So, I should serve every one of them the same quantity of food." As a consequence, by the end of the meal, the voracious eater was left wondering, "Why was I invited and then made to go hungry?" The child, who had been taught by his parents not to waste food, ended up with a bloated abdomen and a severe stomach-ache. The man who disliked sweets grumbled, "Why were sweets served to me not once but thrice in spite of my indicating that I did not want them?" None of the guests was happy. On the other hand, another host served his guests in accordance with their requirements and tastes. His course of action ensured that the hunger and taste of each and every one of his guests were appeased. All left happy.

People go to a dance hall for entertainment but not all of them have similar tastes. One feels happy on watching a performer enact the part of Karna; another revels in the portrayal of Bheeshma. The former is disposed towards the 'Veera-rasa' or sentiment of valour, while the latter inclines to the 'Shanta-rasa' or the sentiment of tranquility. Though such is the case, there is a sameness in the joy of the different persons.

The Shastras instruct a person to consistently

adhere to his Dharma and to eschew Adharma. For instance, Krishna tells Arjuna, "Being intent upon his own duty, man attains perfection." There is certainly a sameness in the conduct of a person who consistently abstains from what he ought not to do and does what he should with respect to different persons and in different circumstances. A person with such sameness in behaviour is like the dance drama which uniformly entertains the different members of the audience and like the host who uniformly satisfies the appetite and tongue of all his guests.

Commonly, a person's mind is full of likes and dislikes. Being swayed by attachment and aversion, people stray to the path of Adharma. Blinded by attachment to Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra did not follow the beneficial advices of Vidura. Aversion led Duryodhana to make an attempt on Bheema's life even when the two were but lads. Thus, likes and dislikes are impediments to true sameness in conduct.

If a person gets rid of likes and dislikes, a sameness characterizes his mental responses to the world; he does not feel attachment to one who is friendly and aversion towards one who is hostile. When a person is free from attachment and aversion, he consistently conducts himself in a righteous manner; he has a sameness in conduct. Uniformity in conduct is an important step towards developing sameness at a mental level. Thus, sameness in mental reactions and sameness in conduct are linked.



62. Karma Yoga

Three brothers went on a vacation to a hill station and stayed there in a cottage booked by them. One night, when they were fast asleep, a powerful earthquake wreaked havoc in the region. The roof of the cottage fell and would have crushed them to death had not a portion of the roof-beam come to rest on a piece of wooden furniture in the bedroom. From the creaking sounds the brothers heard, they realized that in moments the roof would descend on them. There was simply no question of their remaining where they were till help arrived.

They turned towards the two doors that led out of the room. Due to an electric short-circuit, a fire had started near one of them. The flames were spreading. The way to the other door was strewn with glass pieces from the shattered window panes. One of the brothers ran towards the door where the fire was. He managed to escape through it but suffered severe burns and had to be hospitalized for weeks. The second brother recognized the danger of passing through the flames and so moved as swiftly as he could to the second door. His soles were pierced at several spots by the glass pieces on the way. He had to be hospitalized for two days.

The third brother thought, "It is madness to remain here. Heading towards the spreading flames is foolish, for severe burns will be inevitable. So, I must escape through the other door. But, first, I must do something to protect my feet from the glass pieces." He tore his bed-sheet and wrapped a piece of cloth on each foot. He

worked fast and so the whole process took only seconds. Then he headed for the door chosen by him. He escaped unhurt.

A person cannot remain without performing some action or the other just as the brothers were not in a position to remain where they lay in the bedroom. All his acts do have consequences. If he engages in Adharma, he will experience much suffering in future, in hell or on earth. His behaviour would be on par with that of the brother who headed towards the door engulfed by fire. He who performs meritorious deeds experiences happiness for some time in heaven or acquires a good birth on the earth. In any case, he has to be reborn. Thus, even the acquirer of Punyam does suffer the bondage of transmigration. His conduct is comparable to that of the second brother. The path to the fiery door was easy to tread like the path of evil; the other door had to be reached with difficulty like the path of Dharma, to go along which one has to restrain the mind and the senses.

The Lord has explained how a person may perform actions but avoid being bound by them. The person should dedicate all his actions and their fruits to God and discharge his duties without hankering for the results. This means of performing actions but escaping bondage is called Karma Yoga. The performer of Karma Yoga is like the third brother, who escaped through the very door through which the second brother had left but without suffering any injury. The most intelligent of the brothers protected his feet with bandages; the Karma Yogi protects himself by dedicating his actions and their fruits to God.

A person had the practice of performing Puja to God, and offering Him fruits and other eatables. After the worship, he used to partake of an offered fruit as God's Prasada. An agnostic friend of his mockingly told him, "Your practice of performing Naivedyam is silly. The fruit that you place before your God remains exactly at the same spot where it was kept. It undergoes no physical change either. Further, it is not the God you worship but you who consumes it."

The devotee responded with a smile, "I submit a fruit to God with the firm conviction that, in keeping with His statement in the Gita, He will accept it. Having received it, He is free to do with it whatever He pleases. Since He is omnipotent, He is perfectly capable of making it vanish or leaving it behind in its entirety after having consumed it. I believe that it is He who leaves behind the fruit for me after partaking of it in a humanly-inconceivable way. As far as I am concerned, what I consume after Naivedyam is the remnant of what God has eaten.

"Recently, when your political leader came to town, you and numerous others received him and offered him garlands. He certainly did not and could not wear all of them. He even gave you one of the garlands that he had received and you accepted it joyfully. As he walked through the large crowd of his supporters, he tossed some garlands to them and the crowd cheered. It is possible that a supporter got back the very garland that he had given. Just because your leader does not retain garlands presented to him, you people do not abstain from the practice of garlanding him; you derive joy in honouring him and do not tell him what he should do with

the garlands you give him. Why then are you uncomfortable with my sincerely offering God fruits and feeling happy? Further, when your leader can return a garland to you, why should God not be free to give me back the submitted fruits with His blessings? A Karma Yogi, in fact, offers to God not just eatables but all his thoughts, words and deeds.”

A man had two servants. One of them was particular about eulogising his employer but not in executing his master’s instructions. The other sincerely carried out the tasks assigned to him; he also held his master in high esteem. The employer obviously preferred the second servant to the first. A devotee, who, like the second servant, sincerely performs the duties ordained for him by God and specified in the scriptures and, further, does so in a spirit of dedication, pleases God greatly and receives His grace in abundance. By the Lord’s grace, his mind becomes very pure. In due course, he realizes the Truth and gets liberated.

A woman doted on her young son and took great care of him. One day, she woke up with a splitting headache, fever and nausea. Nevertheless, she attended to her child’s morning requirements without any laxity. That day, she found the rice prepared by her to be slightly overcooked. Promptly, she started to cook some more. Her husband noticed this and told her, “You are sick and in pain. Why do you want to strain yourself? The rice that is ready is quite eatable.” “I want to give my son only the kind of rice he is used to and likes. As for the overcooked rice, I shall consume it”, replied the wife. Out of deep love for her child, the woman did her very best for him. Likewise, a Karma Yogi, by virtue of

his devotion to God, performs his duties to the very best of his ability and refrains from Adharma.

Two students appeared for an examination. In spite of having prepared well, they fared badly because the questions were very tough and some of them fell outside the scope of the prescribed syllabus. One of them, who did not practise Karma Yoga, became highly dejected because of his inept performance. When he went home and sat down to prepare for the next day's subject, his mind kept reverting to that day's question paper. His worry greatly hampered his preparation. The other boy, being a practitioner of Karma Yoga, did not experience the least anxiety. This is because, in the examination hall itself, he had dedicated his performance and its fruit to God. After returning home, undistracted by worry, he focussed his attention on the next day's subject.

On the following day, the first boy became flabbergasted on encountering a tough question. The Karma Yogi read the question carefully and answered it to the best of his ability without getting perturbed in the least. It is hardly surprising that the first boy secured a lower rank than his friend. This example shows that the efficiency of a Karma Yogi exceeds that of a person who acts with a longing for the fruits of his actions.

The Lord has declared in the Gita, "Perform your prescribed duties, for action is superior to inaction. Moreover, even the maintenance of your body will not be possible by inaction. Man becomes bound by all his actions except those done by him for the sake of God. O, son of Kunti! Perform actions for the sake of God without being attached... By performing his duty without attachment, a

person attains liberation (through the purification of his mind).”



63. Fitness for Knowledge of the Supreme

Desirous of heaven, Vajasravasa performed the Vishvajit sacrifice in which one gives away everything. He had a son named Nachiketa. Being full of faith, the boy was dismayed to find that the cows his father was gifting to the priests were decrepit and barren. He felt that as a son, he should do something to compensate this shortcoming in his father's sacrifice. He decided to allow himself to be gifted. So, he asked his father, "To whom will you offer me?" Vajasravasa ignored him. When Nachiketa asked for the third time, Vajasravasa angrily told him, "I hereby offer you to Yama."

"My father has spoken these words in wrath without any consideration of purpose. Nevertheless, they must not be allowed to get falsified", thought Nachiketa. The boy left for Yama's abode. As the latter had gone out, Nachiketa patiently waited for him for three days. When Yama came back, he offered the boy three boons to expiate for his sin of not attending to a guest for three days.

As his third boon, Nachiketa wanted to know whether or not there is an Atma, distinct from the body, senses and the mind, that survives the death of the body. With a view to testing Nachiketa and determining whether he was truly fit to be taught about the Atma, Yama tried to dissuade him and to tempt him in various ways.

Yama said, "Ask for sons and grandsons who will be

centenarians. Ask for many cows, horses, elephants and gold and a vast expanse of land. Live for as many years as you wish. If you desire some other equivalent boon, do ask for it. Ask for wealth and a long life. Become the king of a huge region. I shall make you fit to enjoy all pleasurable objects.

“Ask, according to your choice, for desirable things that are difficult to obtain. Here are celestial nymphs with chariots and musical instruments; they cannot be had by mortals. Get yourself served by them. But do not enquire whether anything exists after the fall of the body.”

Although Yama did his best to tempt the boy, Nachiketa remained unperturbed like a still, vast lake. He said, “O Yama! All these enjoyable things enumerated by you are ephemeral. Moreover, they waste the vigour of man’s senses. All life, without exception, is short indeed. Therefore, let all these remain yours.” He insisted that he only wanted the boon he had sought. Extremely pleased with Nachiketa’s dispassion and firmness, Yama taught him about the Atma. The boy became enlightened.

This story of the Katha Upanishad reveals that unwavering dispassion characterizes the person who is fit for the knowledge of the Supreme.



64. Contentment

Desirous of progeny, a man prayed to God to bless him with an offspring. Soon, he became the father of a male child. It refused to suckle. Hence, the devotee again sought the Lord and said, "You gave me a child but it does not consume milk. I fear that it will not survive. So, please do something." "I see", said the Lord, "From tomorrow, it will start taking milk. Do not worry." That problem got solved but the child gradually became intolerably mischievous.

Once again, the devotee turned to the Lord. He prayed to Him to make the child behave better. "So be it", blessed the Lord. From that moment, the child stopped its misconduct. It became so subdued that it remained silent. Unable to tolerate this, the devotee requested the Lord to come to his aid. Thereafter, the child conversed normally. After many such prayers, the devotee got his son married. A few years passed but his daughter-in-law did not conceive. So, the devotee beseeched the Lord, "I feel I would have been happier if You had not given me a child. My mind is fraught with sorrow at the thought of my son not having any progeny."

Quite obviously, such prayers have no end at all. People are normally not contented with what they have. Our ancients have declared, "A man with a rupee longs for a hundred. He who has a hundred wants a thousand. He who has acquired a thousand desires to possess a lakh. The owner of a lakh seeks to become a king. A king yearns to become a Kubera, the god of riches. Kubera

wishes to become Indra, the king of the gods. Indra hankers after the rank of Brahma. Brahma pines for the position of Vishnu. Vishnu covets the state of Shiva. Who, indeed, has attained the limit of desires?"

There is a humorous verse to the effect, "A mountain is huge. The ocean is larger than a mountain. Akasha is more expansive than the ocean. God is bigger than Akasha. More extensive than even God is desire!" While discontentment makes a man miserable, contentment confers steady joy. A dispassionate man is contented; contentment favours dispassion.



65. Rise and Fall of Envy

Decades ago, when cars were uncommon in India, there was a rich man who owned a huge car. Every morning, he went to his office in it and, in the evening, drove along the beach. Pedestrians saw the affluent man in the car and envied him. They thought, "It must be really joyful to have that car." One day, the car ran into a lorry and was badly damaged. The owner was pinned down. It was with great difficulty that he was pulled out but his legs were severely injured. They had to be amputated at the knees. As a result of the radical surgery, he could not walk and had to be carried everywhere. The pedestrians who saw him in such a pitiable state said to themselves, "How awful! Thank God, we do not have a car. It is safer to walk."

The story reveals the rise of envy and its consequent decay. Just because a person possesses a thing, it does not necessarily mean that he is going to be happy. Such a thought helps in getting rid of envy.



66. Problem Due to Possession of a Valuable

There was a Bairagi who was constantly accompanied by a disciple. In the course of his wanderings, when he reached a place, he used to light a fire, sit by its side for some time and practise contemplation. Wherever he went, he used to ask, "Is there some cause for fear here?" The disciple wondered, "Why does my teacher keep talking of fear wherever he goes?" One day, the disciple noticed that his master's Kamandalu produced a "Kada Kada" sound when moved. He reasoned, "There should be just water here and not something that rolls about." He put his hand inside the Kamandalu and found a cloth packet there. Thinking, "This must be the cause of my teacher's fear", he threw the packet away. When the Bairagi reached the next place, he asked, as usual, "Is there any fear here?"

Disciple : It has been left behind.

Bairagi : What do you mean?

Disciple : There is no fear. It has gone into the river.

Bairagi : What! Gone into the river!

Disciple : I examined your Kamandalu and threw away the packet inside. What is the purpose of your clinging to that source of fear? What do we have to do with such worldly things? There is no need for fear and so I threw it away.

The packet had contained a costly pearl and so the Bairagi had been worried that it might be stolen. Hence,

wherever he went, he used to ask whether the place was safe. On learning of what his disciple had done, he appreciated his student's action and became free from fear.



67. Wealth Yields Comforts Not Happiness

A beggar's hut was situated close to the palatial residence of an affluent man. The beggar used to come to the mansion every morning and pray for alms. The wealthy man made it a practice to offer him a fixed quantity of food grains each time. Having expressed his gratitude, the beggar used to proceed on his long rounds.

He normally obtained more food than needed by him and his small family. Not being a man who worried about the morrow, he did not preserve the excess amount. Instead, he fed a starving person or two with it. He had no savings but was quite contented and happy. Never did he have any difficulty in falling asleep at night and he consistently woke up fresh and cheerful.

The opulent one had all the luxuries money could fetch. Nevertheless, financial thoughts constantly swarmed his mind. He feared that his competitors or even his family might do him a bad turn. He experienced much difficulty in falling asleep and seldom woke up fresh.

One day, a member of his family asked him, "See the beggar who lives over there. He has nothing and yet sleeps peacefully. You are so moneyed and have everything but suffer from insomnia. Why?" The affluent man said, "Oh! I can easily make that man lose sleep. Watch." The next morning, he gave the beggar a significant amount of money instead of food grains. The beggar was overjoyed.

However, as he left, he thought, "If only I can acquire a hundred rupees more today, I will have an impressive amount of Rs.1000 with me." The thought spurred him to seek alms for several more hours than the usual. Still, he did not get the amount of cash he desired. Hence, he sold much of the cooked food and food grains he had obtained. Finally, the targeted amount was his.

He returned home thoroughly exhausted. His wife complained, "The food you have brought today is insufficient even for us. Where is the possibility of feeding a starving person or two as has been our wont?" The beggar felt irritated and expressed his displeasure. The scanty meal that he received that night failed to appease his hunger.

Though tired and hungry, he began to worry about the money with him. He thought, "Never have I had so much money. Someone may steal it. So, I must find some place to hide it." There simply was no secure place in his hut. So, he came out of it, dug a hole nearby in the ground and buried his money. He still did not feel at ease. "What if someone has seen me hiding my money and steals it at night while I am fast asleep in my hut?" he ruminated. He decided that he would spread a cloth over the spot concerned and sleep in the open. That night, thoughts of the money and how it should be safeguarded in future kept agitating his mind. He did not sleep a wink.

The next morning, he turned up at the mansion, his eyes red and bleary. The rich man asked him why he looked terrible. The beggar said, "Sir, you have safes and security guards to safeguard your money. My money, on the other hand, can be easily stolen. Being worried about

its protection, I could not sleep.”

This conversation was heard by the members of the affluent man’s family. They realized, “Possession of money does not confer serenity. Instead, thoughts pertaining to it agitate the mind. They can even spoil sleep.” They understood that the beggar had been carefree earlier notwithstanding his poverty and so had been sleeping at ease, while the affluent man, being careworn by virtue of his wealth, had spent sleepless nights.

Money can fetch comforts, not happiness. Hence, it is said, “There is trouble involved in acquiring wealth; so also in safeguarding it; should it be lost or spent away, there is anguish. Fie on wealth which causes misery!”



68. Life is Transient

Sage Vasishtha, who was richly endowed with Tapas, had a cow named Nandini. It was capable of providing whatever one desired from it. Sage Vishwamitra, who was then a king, passed by Vasishtha's Ashram. The sage welcomed him and, with Nandini's aid, provided him and his retinue a sumptuous meal. When the king learnt of the miraculous power of the cow, he wanted to possess it. So, he asked Vasishtha to part with Nandini. The Rishi refused. Vishwamitra tried to capture the cow but all his efforts were futile. Humiliated, the king left and performed penance. As its fruit, he was granted various Astras, missiles with special powers. Puffed with vanity, he challenged Vasishtha for a duel. The sage remained unruffled. The king directed various Astras at Vasishtha in order to kill him and take away his cow. Vasishtha simply kept his Brahmada in front of himself. This Danda neutralized even the most powerful weapons; the sage remained unscathed. On seeing this, Vishwamitra realized the greatness of Vasishtha, renounced worldly pleasures and, in due course, himself became a great sage.

Trishanku expressed to Vishwamitra his great desire to ascend to heaven with his body and entreated the sage to help him. By his powers of penance, Vishwamitra caused Trishanku to rise to heaven. However, the celestials denied him entry there and turned him out. As he fell towards the earth, he cried out to the sage to save him. Vishwamitra arrested his fall. Then, the sage created a new heaven for Trishanku.

He was so very powerful.

The Devas were unable to attack the evil Kaleyas, for the latter had hidden themselves in the ocean. So, the celestials requested Sage Agastya to favour them by emptying the ocean, a task beyond their capacity. The sage casually drank up all the water in the ocean. The Asuras stood exposed and were killed by the Devas.

Even unimaginably mighty sages such as Agastya, Vishwamitra and Vasishtha have become the victims of death. Death is inevitable for one who has taken birth.

One day, when the Pandavas were living in the forest, they felt thirsty. Nakula climbed a tree to locate a source of water. He noticed some cranes flying over a spot as also some water plants. Yudhishtira instructed him to fetch water. Nakula reached the area concerned and found a lake there. He was about to quench his thirst when he heard a voice declaring, "Do not drink this water without first answering my queries." He ignored the warning. He drank a little of the water of the lake and immediately fell down dead.

Sahadeva came next to the lake. He too did not heed the warning and paid the price. Subsequently, Arjuna and Bheema fell dead when they behaved the way Nakula and Sahadeva had done. Finally, Yudhishtira reached the lake. What he saw there shocked him. All his strong and valiant brothers were sprawled on the ground, dead.

Overcome by grief, Yudhishtira felt more thirsty than before. He moved towards the lake. When he was about to quench his thirst, he heard the warning, "Stop! You should not drink this water. It is my property. If you

desire to drink it, you will have to answer my questions. These four persons transgressed my command and that is why they have been punished with death.” Yudhishtira replied, “If such is the case, I will not drink without your permission. Pose your queries and I will try to answer them to the best of my ability.” Then ensued a question-answer session in which numerous topics were covered.

One of the questions asked was, “What is the greatest wonder in the whole world?” To this, Yudhishtira replied, “Every day, many are proceeding to the world of Yama. But, though seeing this, people think and behave as if they will live for ever. Can there be anything more surprising than this?”

A decrepit woman was poverty-stricken and had none to help her. Though her health was poor, she struggled to eke out her living by hard work. Her condition was so pathetic that she often prayed to Yama to provide her relief by bringing her life to an end.

One day, as she struggled to lift a bundle of sticks and place it on her head, she felt that she had had enough of misery. She pleaded, “Yama, please take me away now.” Yama was moved by her prayer and appeared before her on his mount, a buffalo, with a noose in his hand. Shocked and terrified, she stuttered, “Who are you?” “I am Yama”, replied the Deva. “I have come in response to your supplication to take your life with me.” “Please don’t do that”, cried the woman. “I called you only to help me by placing this heavy load on my head.” Such is the intense attachment of most people to life.

An aged affluent man fell seriously ill. He got himself admitted in a costly, reputed hospital at Bombay and treated by a leading physician. After conducting extensive investigations, his doctor told him that his condition was incurable. At his insistence, several specialists from different parts of the country were called to attend on him. However, they too informed him that there was nothing that could be done to save him. He chose to fly to London and sought the best treatment there. Again, he was told that his condition was hopeless. Unwilling to accept the verdict, he proceeded to the United States. He died there. Had the man accepted the inevitability of death and reconciled to it, he could have spent his last days thinking of God and died in our holy land at sacred Kashi.

There are those who, when faced with a prospect of death, feel, "If only I could live for a few days, I would settle my affairs and pass away willingly and in peace." However, if they happen to live for the period specified by them, they want another extension.

It is said that Yama does not tarry even a moment for a person to finish his task before carrying him away at the scheduled time. Worldly people either fail to give serious thought to the inevitability of death or, when faced with it, do their best to cling to life. The discriminating man, however, ponders on death and its possible arrival at any instant and develops dispassion. He directs his efforts towards attaining that which is eternal, the Supreme.



69. The Feeling, “Mine”, Kills Peace

A man pondered for long about the kind of house that would be ideal for him and also sought the views of several knowledgeable persons. Finally, he framed a clear conception of it. He entrusted the construction to a competent and reputed engineer. But so concerned was he that there should be no shortcoming or deviation from what he had in mind that he spent almost all his time at the site. He proffered suggestions and comments to the extent of making a nuisance of himself. Finally, the house of his dreams was ready and he joyously moved into it with his family.

He swelled with pride whenever anyone expressed even the slightest appreciation of his home. One day, his son who wished to hang a picture started to hammer a nail into a wall. No sooner had the boy struck a single blow than his father came running into the room. His face crimson with anger, the man ordered his son to immediately stop the hammering. “How dare you do something that might mar the smoothness and beauty of the wall?” he asked. “If you want the picture, then keep it on your desk.” The boy was taken aback by the intensity of his reaction, for he was usually soft-spoken and indulgent.

Years passed. In the interest of his health, which had begun to deteriorate, he decided to shift to a hill-station with good medical facilities. He sold his house for a large sum and received much of the payment in the form of a bank draft. As his bank had closed for the day, he locked the draft in his cupboard with the intention of

presenting it at the bank the next day. That night, as he tossed and turned unable to fall asleep, he heard a sound. Without making the least attempt to determine what might have caused it, he phoned the police. A few policemen soon arrived. On investigating, they found that the culprit was not a thief but a rat.

After they left, his wife asked him, "Why did you panic so easily?" "I was so apprehensive about the safety of the draft that I did not fall asleep. The moment I heard a sound, I felt that my fears had come true and that a burglar had entered, who would steal the draft. Hence, I phoned for help. Now I realize that I overreacted", he said sheepishly. He spent a sleepless night and arrived at his bank the next morning even before it opened. It was only after duly presenting the draft that he relaxed. Shortly after he left, a strange event transpired at the bank.

Some cheques and drafts, including the one given by him, were found to be missing. Tension gripped the manager and the concerned staff and they began to frantically search for the missing items. A sigh of relief escaped them when a peon announced the solution of the mystery. The manager's five-year-old son who had come to the bank to see his father had picked up the cheques and drafts lying on a table and entered the toilet. After filling a bucket there with water, he had been about to make paper boats with them when the peon had seen and stopped him.

The man who had deposited the draft was unaware of all this. The next day, he finalised the purchase of a house of his choice located at the hill-station where he had made up his mind to live. Soon, he shifted lock, stock

and barrel to his new residence. His old house was demolished and a shopping complex came up in its place. When he saw the shopping complex for the first time, he remarked to his friend, "It looks nice."

The man of the story first had a strong idea, "This is my house", and was deeply attached to the building concerned. Hence, a nail partly driven into a wall seemed to him to be a spear thrust into his heart. After selling the house and receiving a bank draft in return, he firmly felt, "This draft is mine", and deemed it important. Consequently, he spent a sleepless night worrying about it. Once he presented it at his bank, he ceased to view it as his precious possession. So, he relaxed. On the other hand, the bank officials, who became its temporary custodians, lost their peace when they found it to be missing.

After the protagonist had shifted his residence to the hill-station, when he first saw a shopping complex in the place of his former house, he did not feel perturbed; he was even able to appreciate the new construction. It was because he no longer had the notion 'mine' with respect to his former house that its demolition did not affect him. Had his feeling towards it been as strong as before, he would have been rendered senseless by grief; after all, he had earlier been unable to bear even the hammering of a nail into its wall.

Janaka, the great king of Videha, was once informed that his capital Mithila was on fire. He remained thoroughly unruffled and averred, "Though Mithila is ablaze, nothing of mine is burning." He was completely free from the notion 'mine' with respect to his kingdom and so, though he sincerely shouldered the massive

burden of rulership, he was always peaceful.

When a person has the notion 'mine' with respect to an object, he is affected by what happens or what, he thinks, might happen to that object. On his giving up that idea, the article ceases to be a trigger for his mental disquiet. Abandonment of the feeling "mine" with reference to persons, places and things makes a man calm and blissful, without compromising his efficiency.



70. The Source of Happiness

“Sweets give me great joy. Hence, I do not hesitate to accept them whenever they are offered. Further, I always make it a point to eat some everyday”, remarked a man to his friend. Some days passed. He fell ill and was laid up in bed. His doctor informed him that he was suffering from diabetes and infection. His friend, who was unaware of all this, dropped in one day and said, “I have brought you a bag of sweets.” Almost in despair, the bed-ridden patient replied, “Oh! Take it away from me. I do not desire it at all. Sweets are like poison to me.”

The story shows that what is considered pleasurable at one time is deemed to be a source of suffering at another. Were sweets to be intrinsically a source of happiness, the man would never have despised them; his sickness definitely did not impair his basic desire for happiness and his dislike for misery. In fact, a little analysis would readily reveal that there is no sense object that is intrinsically a source of happiness. Such analysis engenders dispassion.

A father fondled his child. As he kissed it, his rough beard and moustache pricked its tender face, causing sharp pain. The child bawled. Keen on pacifying it, the father repeatedly kissed it. As a result, the baby began to wail all the more.

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad teaches, “It is only for the sake of the Atma that everything is dear.” A husband loves his wife not purely for her sake but because he regards her as his spouse and associates his

happiness with hers. In the example considered, the father wished to calm down the child because he regarded it as his own baby and associated his happiness with its pacification and joy.

Bhagavatpada has taught in His Shatashloki, "An object continues to be dear as long as one derives pleasure from it and it is detested for the duration that it causes pain. The same object cannot be always liked or disliked. Sometimes, that which is not dear may become dear. Moreover, that which was loveable can turn unpleasant. The Atma, towards which affection never wanes, is always the most beloved."

The Atma is ever the dearest because it is always the source of joy. In fact, the Upanishads are emphatic that it is of the nature of unalloyed bliss. Because one fails to realize one's intrinsic nature of being pure bliss, one turns towards sense-objects, mistakenly imagining them to be sources of one's happiness. The happiness that one seems to derive from sense-objects actually has for its basis the bliss of the Atma. Thus, there is just one source of joy and that is the Atma.





Guru, the Visible God



71. Entrapment in Eddies

A worm fell into a river. It was dragged along by the current and soon got trapped in an eddy. Round and round it went. Despairing for life, it struggled to escape but in vain. After some time, primarily because of the very dynamics of the flow, it found itself out of the eddy. Alas! Even before it could savour its respite, it was trapped in the watery grip of another eddy. Again, it was spun around in circles. Its freedom from this eddy too was short-lived, for it got caught yet again in churning waters.

Its life would surely have ended but for the fact that a kind-hearted man beheld its plight. He reached the spot where it was spinning in an eddy and gently rescued it. He carried it to the bank and finally left it on dry land. The worm realized that if the water level were to rise with the passage of time, it would be in trouble. So, it moved away from the river and soon reached a safe spot under a tree in the vicinity.

Man's plight in the cycle of transmigratory existence is akin to that of the worm. People strive to obtain pleasure. The enjoyment they obtain motivates them to endeavour further to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. Thus, a vicious cycle comprising activity and enjoyment sets in from which there is virtually no respite. This cycle is like an eddy in the river of life. After death, a man moves on to another birth just as the worm passed on from one eddy to another. Like the kind man of the example, the Sadguru provides succour to the helpless man trapped in the cycle of work and enjoyment and the

cycle of birth and death. Having received the grace and guidance of a Guru, it behoves a person to put in effort, like the worm placed on the shore, and become a Jivanmukta, one liberated while alive.



72. Ignoring the Knock of Opportunity

Lord Shiva and His consort, Goddess Parvathi, were once coursing through the sky. They beheld a beggar clad in rags. Parvathi said, “O Lord! It is heart-rending that this man is so poor that he has to solicit alms and that too by walking for hours in the oppressive heat of midday. Can You not do something for him?” The Lord replied, “It is no problem for Me to bestow some wealth upon him. But he does not have the good sense to receive it.” Parvathi insisted that the vagrant be given a chance. Acquiescing to Her wish, the Lord created a box laden with gold and placed it in the beggar’s path.

When the beggar was nearing the spot where the box lay, he thought, “Now I am able to go about without difficulty as I am endowed with unimpaired vision. When I grow old, I may lose my eyesight completely. How will I then be able to walk? It is better that I practise now itself and ready myself to deal with blindness.” Deciding thus, he closed his eyes and started to walk like a blind man. Consequently, he moved past the box without noticing it. With a wry smile, the Lord asked Parvathi, “Now, do you realize what I meant?” By God’s grace, we have obtained a human birth, the power of discrimination and a Guru to teach us about the Truth. If we still remain complacent, we will, like the beggar in the story, be failing to utilize a marvellous opportunity.



73. Need for a Guru

A customer approached a jeweller. He had a diamond with him and wanted to ascertain its value. He was under the impression that the diamond was flawless and that it would fetch him a good price. The jeweller examined it and said, "This diamond is not very worthy as it has a defect in the form of a black dot." The customer examined the diamond thoroughly but could not locate the dot. So, he told the jeweller, "I see no dot." The jeweller asked him to inspect it carefully. Still, the customer failed to perceive the dot. The jeweller then gave several directions as to how the spot could be identified. After some time, the customer was able to apprehend the dot.

Even in a matter like examining a diamond, guidance is necessary. What then need be said about the importance of guidance in comprehending the Truth, which is most subtle? The Katha Upanishad declares, "As the Atma is subtler than the subtlest, It is beyond the scope of arguments."

A person may peruse the Upanishads, which expound the Truth, and reflect deeply on the import of the scriptures. But this much is insufficient for him to get direct realization of the Supreme and, hence, liberation. The grace and instructions of a Guru are vital for the dawn of enlightenment. It is said in the Chandogya Upanishad, "Knowledge acquired from the Guru is what definitely becomes most beneficial."



74. No Analogue for a Guru

If some object is to be indicated, an effective way to do so is to present a familiar article that is akin to it and declare, "This is what that object is like." However, nothing, inclusive of a Sparsha gem, can serve as the analogue of a Guru.

If a piece of iron were to come into contact with a Sparsha gem, it would get transformed into gold. How low is the worth of iron as compared to that of gold! A Sparsha gem thus has the power of converting iron, whose worth is low, into gold which is valuable. A Guru too converts an ignorant, worthless person into a valuable epitome of wisdom. It thus seems at the first blush that a Guru is well-illustrated by the Sparsha gem.

However, an attempt to describe the Guru in terms of the Sparsha will not be worthwhile. While a piece of iron is transformed by a Sparsha into a piece of gold, if that piece of gold were to be brought into contact with a piece of iron, both the gold and the iron would remain as they are. There would be no metamorphosis. On the other hand, a disciple who is endowed with faith and devotion is not only transformed by the Guru into a knower, but is also rendered capable of changing a disciple into a person on par with himself. In other words, a Guru not only transforms his disciple into a knower but also confers on the disciple the power to convert another into a knower. Thus, the Sparsha hardly serves as an analogue. Actually, there is simply no analogue for the Guru.



75. The Sadguru Graces All Immaculately

An enlightened sage lived in a forest spending most of his time oblivious of his body and surroundings, in Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the acme of Yoga. One day, two youths came to his divine presence and reverentially waited, standing motionless with joined palms, till his mind emerged from Samadhi. When, on his opening his half-closed eyes, his glance fell on them, they prostrated for long. Thereafter, they humbly beseeched him to grace them by accepting them as his disciples. By virtue of his realization of the non-dual Truth, he had transcended all duties and wants. However, being an ocean of mercy, he acquiesced to their request.

To provide them an opportunity to perform Guru-Seva, which is invaluable for a disciple, he assigned them tasks to be performed on a daily basis, such as washing his ochre robes, cleaning the place where he performed penance and obtaining food by begging in the villages at the edge of the forest. He initiated both of them into a Mantra and taught them how to meditate.

One of the disciples soon became an adept at meditation who sat for hours with a rock-steady, concentrated mind, without awareness of even the body. The other wholeheartedly and regularly attempted to meditate but found his efforts consistently thwarted by

distracting thoughts that kept on arising and disappearing like the waves of the ocean. The first disciple readily grasped, in its entirety, what the sage taught. The second lad sincerely attended the classes and read for long the portions taught. But as he was not bright, he comprehended far less than his companion. Both the disciples efficiently carried out the tasks assigned to them with thoroughness.

Five years passed. One day, the Guru told his disciples, "Your studies are now complete and it is time for you to return to your homes." They loved their Guru dearly and the mere thought of being separated from him was very painful. However, they had the firm conviction that at no time should any command of the Guru be transgressed, even to the slightest extent, for any reason whatsoever. So, in deference to their Guru's directive, they got ready to leave. The first disciple prostrated before his Guru. The sage blessed him with Abhaya-Mudra, upraised palm. When the second disciple prostrated, the sage placed his divine hand on the disciple's head and stated with certainty, "May you become fully enlightened, right now." His grace was so potent that the disciple instantaneously became an enlightened Mahatma.

The first disciple felt unhappy that, unlike his friend, he had not received the special blessing. Not one to hide his feelings or thoughts from his Guru, he asked with joined palms, "O Lord, a doubt has arisen in my mind. I seek your permission to express it to you. By your grace,

my meditation has been far superior to his and I have grasped much more during your classes than him. Such being the case, O Master, why did you specially grace him rather than me? In case, my query is inappropriate, kindly forgive me.”

Guru : Prior to my answering your question, let me pose some queries to you. What do you think of me?

First disciple : You are my revered Guru. You are a great sage who has realized the Supreme and achieved all that is to be achieved.

Guru : Do I appear to be a man given to transacting business with his disciples?

First disciple : Certainly not.

Guru : My child, you referred to your superior meditation and your greater grasp of Vedanta. You aver that I am not a trader. Why, then, do you expect me to dispense grace proportional to a disciple’s service, success in absorbing my teaching and progress in meditation practised according to my instructions? You further say that I have achieved all that is to be achieved. If so, I stand to gain nothing by your service or by producing a scholar adept at meditation, through whom my name shall spread.

First disciple : Are not meditation and Vichara means to getting knowledge of the Truth, which is what my companion has now got?

Guru : Of course, they are. If properly practised,

meditation and Vichara eradicate the ego. You, my child, feel, "I meditate well. I am a scholar." You should not be egoistic like this. Your companion, on the other hand, feels, "I am nothing. Whatever state my Guru places me in, that is all that I want. Let my Guru do whatever he wishes to do with me."

First disciple : If there be the possibility of a disciple who has not progressed in the spiritual path straightaway getting enlightened by the grace of the Guru, then does not spiritual effort become something that is dispensable?

Guru : Not at all. A disciple should carry out his Guru's instructions to the very best of his ability and then leave everything in the hands of his Guru or God; that ability of his may be great or insignificant. If, thinking, "I need not personally take steps in the direction shown by my Guru. May he himself deliver me to the goal", a disciple were to be indolent or careless, he will certainly not attain the highest. Undoubtedly, your companion did do his best. It is true that you, whose capacity is far greater than his, were also sincere.

My child, I love both of you equally. A mother attends more to a babe that is a few days old than to her ten-year-old child. This is not because she loves the latter less but because the former is in greater need of care. You are very intelligent, learned and meditate well. Combat your ego and realization of the Supreme shall be yours. For that, you have my complete blessings. Your companion is helpless like a new-born babe. He is neither intelligent,

nor learned and his mind wanders like the wind. If I had not uplifted him myself, he would have been lost. So, I gave him special blessings. As for you, you too shall become enlightened. Have no doubt or apprehension regarding this. Numerous are the persons who shall be uplifted by you.

The Guru then called out to the second disciple, who was standing at some distance to allow his companion to converse in private.

Guru : If I had ignored you when you prostrated, what would you have thought?

Second disciple : Lord, you are everything to me. You know best. So, I would have remained quiet and fully satisfied if you had ignored or even cursed me.

Turning to the first disciple, the Guru said, "See how profound his devotion is. He spoke truthfully when he said that he would have been satiated even if I had cursed him. I blessed you and yet you felt dissatisfied. What a difference there is between his devotion and yours!" The first disciple hung his head in shame. Looking at him with compassion, the Guru unequivocally declared, "I questioned your companion for the sole purpose of creating a situation conducive to eradicate your ego, the obstacle in your path. Now that humility has pervaded your heart, you deserve the highest and shall have it." Saying so, he released a flood of grace. Submerged in it, the first disciple promptly attained the most-exalted state of the sage.

Regardless of the differences between disciples, the ideal Sadguru knows and does what is best for each of them. His mode of gracing is ever immaculate.



76. Where Censure is a Blessing

Devadatta was a bright, dexterous lad who studied his Veda and the Shastras at the hermitage of an extremely erudite sage. Five other Brahmacharis were his classmates. The Guru was strict and ensured that his pupils, who venerated as also feared him, led disciplined lives conforming to the rules of their Brahmacharya-Ashrama.

One day, at the commencement of his Shashtra lesson, the Guru asked a question to a disciple. As the question was simple and pertained to the portion covered the preceding day, the not-very-bright disciple gave a satisfactory answer. The Guru merely nodded. Turning to another Brahmachari, he asked a simple question, again relating to the previous day's lesson. The Brahmachari hesitated for some time and then gave a completely wrong answer. The Guru spelt out the correct answer and asked the boy to repeat what he had said. On the lad doing so, the Guru told him, "Pay more attention. If you do not understand anything that I say, feel free to ask me."

Then, turning to Devadatta, he posed a tough question pertaining to a portion that had been covered over a month ago. Nevertheless, Devadatta thought over the matter and began his answer. He proceeded correctly for some time and then got struck. The Guru waited for a moment, and, with a frown on his face, shouted, "You fool! Your answer is unsatisfactory. Have you come here to study or to while away your time? After this class, do not show me your face again, unless and until you are able to give me the correct answer." Devadatta thought to himself, "My companion did not answer a simple question pertaining to yesterday's

lesson correctly, but my Guru was soft with him. I, however, answered a tough question partly. Yet, he has given me a strong rebuke. To avoid such censure, I shall study harder and thereby ensure that I do not ever get caught inadequately prepared.”

The Guru continued with the lesson. At the end of it, Devadatta did not go out like the other Brahmacharis but continued to sit in the same room, pouring over his books. After a couple of hours, he approached his Guru. The Guru asked him, “I told you not to come to me unless you are ready with the correct reply. Can you give me the answer now?” Devadatta said, “Yes, master” and gave a flawless reply. The Guru did not express either approval or disapproval. He merely went on to ask a few more questions. Devadatta provided the correct answers. The Guru nodded and moved on. Time passed on with Devadatta never failing to answer correctly when questioned by his Guru during the classes.

One afternoon, he was fanning his Guru in his master’s hut when another Brahmachari came there and announced that a person who seemed to be a reputed scholar had come to the Ashram. The Guru asked that Brahmachari to receive the visitor with due honour and to usher him to his hut. The Brahmachari obeyed. The scholar who entered exchanged pleasantries with the Guru and then said that he had come for a Shastraic discussion. He expounded a point and then posed a query. The Guru unexpectedly turned to Devadatta and said, “Answer!” Devadatta was taken aback, for he thought that the question was addressed to the Guru. Nevertheless, in obedience to his Guru’s command, he began to give a reasoned reply. The visitor raised another point and a further question. Again, Devadatta responded

and soon a full-fledged discussion of great depth ensued. After about an hour of discussion, the visiting pundit posed a complex question. Devadatta rapidly called to mind all that he had read and heard from his Guru on the issue concerned. But he was unable to think of a satisfactory response. So, he remained silent.

Noticing this, his Guru gave out a cogent answer that fully satisfied the visitor. Then, turning to Devadatta, his Guru shouted, "You are a disgrace. Can you not think beyond what is given in the books? Do you have to be told everything? If you are going to reproduce what is in the books and whatever I tell you, then, what is the difference between you and a parrot. I might as well keep a parrot here as a student instead of you." As the Guru was scolding Devadatta, the visitor was all smiles. Devadatta felt thoroughly humiliated.

He wondered, "Why is my Guru humiliating me like this in front of this reputed scholar? After all, I was not in the least expecting this discussion and yet managed reasonably well. I have been faring much better than my classmates. Yet, my Guru sharply censures me and also has a low opinion of me. Perhaps, he does not like me." Never one to lose hope, he resolved, "No matter how much effort I have to put in and regardless of the scoldings and humiliations I receive, I shall somehow master the Shastras to such an extent that he will be forced to be proud of me." Thereafter, Devadatta not only studied what he had been taught but also pondered on the implications of the passages. He considered possible unstated objections and thought up powerful replies to them.

One day, during his Guru's Shastra class, Devadatta

abruptly began to feel dizzy and nauseated. He tried to control himself so that he could continue to attend the class. His Guru, however, discerned what was happening. In a kindly voice, he said, "My child, you are unwell. Do not strain yourself. Go to the hut, lie down and rest." Devadatta was surprised at the extreme softness in his Guru's voice. He tried to get up but as he did so, because of the dizziness, he nearly fell. His Guru quickly got up and held him. Then, lifting Devadatta in his arms, the Guru personally carried him to the hut and made him lie down on a straw bed. He prepared a medical potion and administered it to Devadatta. When the other Brahmacharis came there, he told them that he was cancelling his class for that day.

Taking a disciple with him, he went out of the Ashram after instructing another Brahmachari to tend to Devadatta. He returned a couple of hours later. He had cuts on several portions of his body and was bleeding profusely. Worried, Devadatta asked him about what had happened. The Guru merely said, "Let us not talk about me", and proceeded to prepare a special medicine, a little of which he administered to Devadatta. He then spent the whole night by Devadatta's side, giving him a Kashayam every one hour. Devadatta was deeply touched by his Guru's affection. The next morning, he felt reasonably well.

As he was about to go for his bath, a co-student of his came to the hut. He said, "Last night, I heard you ask our Guru about the injuries on his body. But you got no answer. I know what happened." He continued, "Yesterday, our Guru took me and went out of the Ashram. He moved into the forest for some distance and gathered few herbs. He gave them to me and said, 'Wait here for me in the safety of

some tree. But do not tarry for more than an hour. If I do not return by then, return to the Ashram, prepare a medicine with these herbs and administer it to Devadatta.’ He explained in depth how I should prepare a potion using the herbs that he had given me.

“He then walked deeper into the forest, leaving me behind. I climbed a tree and from my perch could see him moving swiftly. He encountered a dense, thorny bush on the way. To cross it, he had to plunge through it. As he did so, his body was badly injured. But he did not seem to mind. He just picked himself up and continued to walk. I was shocked to see that he was proceeding towards a cave, at the mouth of which a tigress was seated along with her cubs. She was nursing her cubs. You will recall that our Guru had told us that tigers do not normally harm human beings and that if we encounter a tiger during our walks in the forest, we should remain perfectly still till the tiger passes. You will also remember that he warned us to take special care to avoid a tigress nursing her cubs because, apprehending danger, she might maul us.

“As our Guru headed towards the cave, I watched helplessly. I felt like screaming out to caution him but knew that he would not approve. So, I just sat where I was, petrified. The tigress sensed his arrival and growled. He ignored the warning and did not slacken his pace. Surprisingly, the tigress relaxed and continued to nurse her cubs. Our Guru soon reached the entrance of the cave and began to gather some herbs. I realized that he had gone there because the herbs concerned were found only at that spot. Having collected the herbs, he headed back. Again, he had no choice but to plunge

through the bush on the way. He injured himself further. As he came up to the tree where I was perched, I descended.

“Seeing me stare at his wounds, he merely said, ‘Oh, these are nothing. Let us move on.’ We returned to the Ashram and it was with the herbs that he had gathered at the spot where I waited and at the entrance of the cave that he prepared the medicine that he administered you. He risked his life for you.” Devadatta was deeply moved and tears came to his eyes. He thought to himself, “What a blunder I have committed. I thought that he does not like me. Indeed, he loves me very dearly.”

One day, when Devadatta was busy cleaning his Guru’s hut, a Brahmachari came there and announced the arrival of two visitors to the Ashram. The Guru asked the Brahmachari to usher them in. Devadatta moved to leave the room. But his Guru ordered him to continue with his work. One of the visitors was obviously a pundit, while the other appeared to be his quiet, submissive attendant. The Guru asked the visitors to sit down and they exchanged pleasantries. The scholar said that he had come to have a debate. He then initiated it. The Guru instructed Devadatta to respond and the latter did so.

Soon, the discussion reached great heights. Arguments sallied forth from one side to the other. About two hours passed in this way without the visiting scholar being able to gain the least upper hand. After some time, the scholar advanced what appeared to be an invincible argument in favour of his proposition. However, Devadatta beautifully demolished it. The scholar had no choice but to keep silent. Devadatta thought that the scholar would feel upset or annoyed.

However, he was surprised to find the visitor in high spirits. The Guru then turned to Devadatta and said, "You can leave now." Devadatta obeyed. Thereafter, the visitors and the Guru engaged in conversation for a while after which, the visitors left the Ashram.

Two days later, the king of the land came to the Ashram and met the Guru. On being summoned, Devadatta went to the meeting place, prostrated and stood reverentially at some distance from his Guru. His Guru ordered him to sit down. He obeyed. The king turned to Devadatta and, rising from his seat, respectfully said, "I have built a big Ashram in the woods near the capital. Please accept it as a humble offering from me. I would be deeply honoured if you will agree to be my adviser in religious matters. I would be much obliged to you if you will also agree to gauge the scholarship of visiting pundits so that I can suitably honour and reward them. Please think over my requests and let me know whether you will grant them. I am eagerly hoping that you will give me an affirmative answer."

Devadatta was perplexed to hear the king address him thus. He asked, "Why is it that Your Highness is making such an offer to me? You do not know me at all." "I do", said the king. "Your Guru has told me much about you. He is extremely proud of you and has unequivocally asserted that you are a thoroughly disciplined scholar par excellence." "My Guru said that!" exclaimed Devadatta, his jaw dropping in amazement. The Guru said, "My child, I have always been proud of you. Because I rebuked you, you thought that I have a low opinion of you and do not like you. Is it not?" On hearing this precise description of his earlier state of mind, Devadatta felt ashamed of himself.

The Guru continued, "You will recall that I had posed a

tough question to you during a class and when you had given a partially correct answer, I had shouted at you. I knew you to be a priceless diamond that would dazzle the eyes of beholders on being properly cut and polished. You were head and shoulders above all the other Brahmacharis but I wanted you to rise higher and have all the lessons at your finger-tips. To make you drive yourself harder, I rebuked you. I was glad to find that the aim of my harsh words was amply fulfilled.

“You will also recall the discussion in which, after responding brilliantly for some time, you were unable to proceed further. The scholar with whom you held that discussion was a classmate of mine. I was the one who had asked him to come here and that too at a time when only you would be with me in my hut. Further, the question that stumped you was asked by him in accordance with my earlier arrangement with him. As you know, after you were at a loss for an answer, I scolded you with extreme severity. My words broke my heart far more than they did yours. Nevertheless, I continued because my intention was to provoke you so much as to make you firmly resolve to prove yourself to me by becoming a scholar par excellence. I was overjoyed to find my efforts fully rewarded.

“My child, I did not praise you all these days not because I was not appreciative of you but to avoid any possibility of your becoming complacent. A Guru should keep in mind the risk of his eulogy serving as clarified butter to the fire of his disciple’s ego. Now that your studies are complete, I feel free to open my heart to you. You are the very best of the disciples I have ever had. Right from the time when you first came to me, you have been very close to my heart.” With joined palms, Devadatta said, “O Lord! How much I misunderstood you. I have been a thorough fool. Please

forgive me.” The Guru said, “My child, there is nothing to forgive. Be at ease.”

The king who had been silently hearing the dialogue between the Guru and the disciple told Devadatta, “I should tell you at this stage that the scholar whom you debated a couple of days ago studied with your Guru at the hermitage of your master’s master. He has been my adviser in religious matters but has now decided to retire to the Himalayas. The quiet man who accompanied him that day was myself, in disguise. Your Guru invited us to witness a display of your superb erudition and debating skills. Needless to say, we were enthralled. Now you can see that I did not make my request to you without knowing about you.”

After seeking his Guru’s directive, Devadatta acceded to the king’s wishes.

When a Mahatma censures a person, it is not because of inadequate control over the tongue or out of malice or on account of a desire to humiliate or to derive sadistic pleasure. The purpose is to correct or uplift that person. That is why it is said, “Persons who are rebuked by the Guru with harsh words attain greatness.” Condemnation by a sage is truly a great blessing in disguise.



77. The Sadguru Rewards Unstinted Guru Seva

Upamanyu was a disciple of the great Sage Dhaumya. In accordance with his Guru's instruction, he took the cows of the Ashram every day for grazing. In keeping with the rules to be observed by a Brahmachari, he obtained food by begging and submitted the same to his Guru. Desirous of testing Upamanyu, Dhaumya kept all the food that was brought by his disciple with himself and gave nothing to Upamanyu. However, the Guru found that even with the passage of days, his disciple remained quite strong and healthy. So, he asked Upamanyu about how he had been able to maintain his strength. Upamanyu said that he had been fetching Bhiksha a second time. The preceptor said that his practice was wrong and forbade him from indulging in it.

Surprisingly, the disciple continued to remain sturdy. On his Guru asking him the reason, Upamanyu said, "Nowadays, when I take the cows for grazing, I drink some of their milk." The Guru told him, "Henceforth, you must not do so. If you consume the milk, which is my property, it only amounts to your stealing it." The disciple stopped imbibing milk. However, he continued to be robust. This was because he began to subsist on the foam that remained on the mouths of the calves after they had suckled their mothers. On learning of this practice of the disciple, the Guru commanded that he should desist from consuming foam. The disciple obeyed. But overcome by hunger, he started eating the leaves of an Arka plant. As a consequence, his system became poisoned and he lost his vision. Blinded, he staggered

and fell into a disused well.

At dusk, the cows returned home without him. The Guru began to worry about the non-arrival of Upamanyu. "I wanted to test his devotion. But he is in some trouble. Why has he not returned?" he thought. Calling out the pupil's name, he began to search for him. When he approached the vicinity of the well into which Upamanyu had fallen, a feeble voice responded to his call. Observing the sad state of affairs, Dhaumya asked him, "How did you fall into this well?" "Overcome by hunger, I tasted Arka leaves. Consequently, I became blind and stumbled into this well", replied Upamanyu.

Compassionately gazing at the disciple, Dhaumya said, "Recite this particular portion of the Veda which is a hymn eulogizing the Ashwini Kumaras." As commanded by his Guru, Upamanyu chanted the said Rig-Vedic hymn. Pleased with him, the Ashwini Kumaras, the physicians of the gods, appeared before him. They offered him a cake of flour and asked him to eat it. Though extremely hungry, Upamanyu told them that he could not do so without submitting the same to his Guru. The Ashwini Kumaras tried their best to persuade him to consume it without offering it to his Guru, but Upamanyu did not budge from his stance. Extremely pleased with his devotion to his Guru, the Ashwini Kumaras restored his eyesight.

Upamanyu climbed out of the well, approached his Guru and prostrated before Dhaumya. Then, he told his preceptor about what had transpired between him and the Ashwini Kumaras. Thoroughly satiated with Upamanyu's Guru-Bhakti, Dhaumya said to him, "You are intensely devoted to me. Hence I bless you that even without further studies and

service, all the 14 Vidyas will spontaneously accrue to you.” His words came to pass. In the course of time, Upamanyu became a great and revered sage.

Aruni of Panchala was another very devoted disciple of the Sage Dhaumya. He served his Guru with diligence. One day, Dhaumya sent him to the fields to attend to the dyke there. Aruni tried his level best to plug an opening through which water was leaking. However, he was unable to succeed. Finally, he blocked the flow with his own body. Time passed. At the Ashram, Dhaumya asked, “Where is Aruni?” His other disciples told him, “O Lord, you had sent him to attend to the dyke.”

Dhaumya immediately set out with his disciples in search of Aruni. He called out, “My child, where are you? Come to me.” On hearing the words of his Guru, Aruni stood up, quickly plugged the opening as best as he could and rushed to the presence of Dhaumya. Having prostrated before him, he explained what had happened. Then, he asked, “Master, what is your further instruction for me?” Dhaumya said, “In view of the task done by you, you shall become famous with the name Uddalaka. You have fulfilled my command. Let all the Vedas and the Dharma Shastras become known to you.” Uddalaka Aruni instantaneously became thoroughly erudite.

He who is extremely devoted to his Sadguru can, by the grace of the Mahatma, become learned and wise even without formal lessons.



78. God and the Devas Favour a True Guru Bhakta

Uttanka was an extremely elevated disciple of the Sage Gautama. Flawless in his observance of Brahmacharyam, with restrained mind and senses, he served his master with enthusiasm and diligence. Numerous lads came to Gautama and learnt from him for years. At the end of their studies, the sage asked them to return to their homes. However, the sage was so very fond of Uttanka that he continued to keep Uttanka with him. Many years rolled on without the disciple being aware of the passage of time. So engrossed was he in the service of his Guru.

One day, as he returned home from the forest carrying on his head a heavy load of sacrificial faggots for his Guru, he felt hungry, weak and exhausted. When he dropped the bundle to the ground, a strand of hair on his head that had got entangled in the faggots fell with them. He was shocked to notice that the lock was white in colour. It was only then that he realized that he had grown old and decrepit. It also dawned on him that while many had come to the Ashram, studied and left to set up their own Gurukulas, he continued to be a student. His heart felt heavy and tears came to his eyes.

Gautama noticed this and kindly told him, "Because of my deep love for you engendered by your dedicated service, I have for long failed to realize that I should have declared your studies complete and given you permission to take leave of me." By his Guru's grace, Uttanka then changed from an old man into a healthy

and energetic youth. Gautama offered his own daughter in marriage to Uttanka as he felt that she would be the ideal companion for his disciple in the path of Dharma. Uttanka requested his Guru to kindly let him know what Gurudakshina he would like. Gautama said, "The wise say that gratification of the Guru is the final Dakshina. Without doubt, I have been exceedingly satisfied with you and your conduct. There is nothing that I want from you."

Uttanka then approached his preceptor's wife and said to her, "O Mother, I desire to accomplish, even at the cost of my life, what is agreeable and beneficial to you. So, please let me know what I can get you." Ahalya said, "I am fully satisfied with you by virtue of your unremitting devotion. That is enough. You have my full blessings. Feel free to go wherever you wish." Uttanka, however, once more pleaded with her. "Do command me, mother, for it is but proper that I procure you something that is pleasing to you." In response to his entreaty, Ahalya said, "If that be the case, then bring me the celestial ear-rings that are with Saudasa's queen." Uttanka immediately agreed to do so and set out in search of Saudasa.

Gautama was not at the Ashram at that time. When he returned, he wanted to know where Uttanka was. Ahalya described what had transpired. He told her, "You have acted unwisely. On account of a curse, king Saudasa is now wandering about as a cannibal. If Uttanka goes to him, he will slay Uttanka." Ahalya said, "I acted without knowing what had happened. But, please ensure by your grace that no danger befalls Uttanka." Gautama said, "So be it." Meanwhile, Uttanka proceeded

on his journey and finally encountered Saudasa in a deserted forest.

Having been transformed into a cannibal, the king wore a long beard smeared with the blood of the human beings he had eaten. He had a frightful visage and inspired terror in every beast. However, Uttanka felt no trepidation. On seeing him, Saudasa said, "I am glad that you have arrived here at this time when I am in search of food." "I have come here on a mission for my preceptor", responded Uttanka. "The great say that it is forbidden to slay a person when he is engaged in a task for the sake of his Guru." The cannibal declared, "This is my time for eating. I am hungry and will not allow you to escape."

Uttanka pacified him and said, "Let us come to a compromise. After I have finished the assignment that I have undertaken, I shall come back to you. I have never spoken a lie even in jest. So, where is the question of my uttering falsehood to you? I sought you because something that I require is in your custody." "What is it you want from me?" queried Saudasa. "I beg you to bestow on me the celestial ear-rings", requested Uttanka. Saudasa tried to persuade him to seek something else, but failed. So he told him, "Go to my queen and tell her that I have asked her to give you the jewelled ear-rings. She will oblige you." Uttanka asked, "O King, where can I find the queen? Why don't you take me to her?" The king-turned-cannibal responded, "This is the time when I slay and eat humans and so cannot meet her. You will find her at the spring in the forest."

As directed, Uttanka met Madayanti, Saudasa's queen, and informed her the purpose of his visit. She said that she was agreeable to give him the ear-rings

but required some sign from her husband to establish that Uttanka had been sent by him. She explained, “These ear-rings of mine are made of costly gems and they have special powers. They are able to produce gold and at night, they shine very brightly. The person donning them becomes freed from hunger and thirst and fear of every kind. They protect the wearer from poison and other kinds of dangers. They change in size to suit the person who wears them. Endowed as they are with such qualities, the Devas, Yakshas and the Nagas are all keen to take possession of them. If, at any time, the jewelled-ear-rings be casually placed upon the earth, the Nagas will steal them. They will be carried away by the Yakshas from a person who wears them but becomes defiled by eating impure food. If the person donning them were to fall asleep, without taking care of them, the Devas will take them away.” Since many were eager to steal her ear-rings, she wished to be sure that Uttanka had been sent by her husband.

Uttanka returned to the king and asked him for a sign. Saudasa instructed Uttanka to give her the message, “This, my present condition, is intolerable. I do not behold any other refuge. Knowing it to be my wish, give away the jewelled-ear-rings.” The implied meaning of the king’s words was, “Because of a curse, I have become a cannibal. My present condition is totally unbearable. If you gift the ear-rings to a deserving Brahmin, much Punyam will accrue and that may provide me relief.”

Saudasa then reminded Uttanka of his promise to come back on the accomplishment of his task. Uttanka said to him, “O King, we have now become friends. As a

friend, advise me about the course of action that I should follow.” The king, who was knowledgeable in Dharma, gave his counsel as a friend. He said, “You should never come back to me, for to do so would mean certain death.” Thus, by the use of his intelligence, Uttanka succeeded in making the king release him from his commitment by instructing him not to return. With his life secure, he went to the queen and narrated the king’s message. Now sure that Uttanka had been sent by her husband, she readily gave him the ear-rings. She also told him how he should protect them.

In accordance with her instructions, he secured them within the folds of his deer-skin and commenced his return journey. On the way, he felt hungry. So, he climbed a Bilva tree and, having hung his deer-skin on a branch, began to pluck fruit. Some of the fruit fell on to the deer-skin. As a consequence, the deer-skin became untied and the ear-rings fell to the ground. Immediately, a Naga took possession of them and darted into an ant-hill. Uttanka quickly descended from the tree and, rushing to the ant-hill, began to strike it with his wooden staff. He sought to dig a hole to reach the spot where the snake had gone. He kept on toiling for 35 days but without success. Though tired, he remained undaunted.

Taking pity on him, Indra came to him in the garb of a Brahmin. He told Uttanka, “What you are trying to accomplish is impossible. The region where the Nagas dwell is very far from here. I do not think that it is possible for you to make that deep a tunnel with your staff.” Uttanka, however, said, “I shall regain the ear-rings or shall perish.” Amazed at Uttanka’s total dedication to the cause of his preceptor’s wife, Indra

infused into his wooden staff, the power of the thunderbolt. Thereafter, each stroke of Uttanka caused the earth to yield much and he soon reached the region of the Nagas.

It was so very extensive that he unhappily wondered whether at all he would be able to locate the ear-rings there. Suddenly, there appeared before him a black stallion with a white tail. The steed told him, "You know me. Blow into my rear and I will help you." Uttanka was unable to recognize the horse and asked it who it actually was. The equine replied, "I am Agni who was tended by you with great devotion while you were serving your Guru." Uttanka followed Agni's advice and blew into the rear of the horse. Immediately, smoke began to issue from every pore of the stallion.

In but a short while, the entire land of the Nagas was filled with dense smoke. The Nagas became extremely frightened and approached him with Vasuki, their king, in the lead. Having duly venerated him, they returned the jewelled-ear-rings to him. He took them and presented them to Ahalya.

Years passed. After the completion of the great war between Pandavas and the Kauravas and the ascension of Yudhishtira on the throne of Hastinapura, Krishna set out for Dwaraka. On the way, He met Uttanka who was unaware of what had transpired at Kurukshetra. Uttanka asked Him, "Do You come after uniting the sons of Pandu and Dhritarashtra in peace?" Krishna told him that in spite of His efforts to bring about an amicable settlement, He had not succeeded. The Kauravas had refused to heed His counsel as also the advices of Bheeshma and Vidura. So, all of them had perished. The

Lord said that while the five Pandavas were alive, their children and kinsmen had been slain. Uttanka became filled with wrath and thundered, "Krishna, though capable of doing so, You did not rescue the members of the Kuru race. So, I am going to curse You."

Krishna told him, "Strictly observing the rules of Brahmacharyam, you served and satiated your Guru. As a consequence, you have acquired tremendous Tapas, sufficient even to punish Me. However, I do not desire that your Tapas diminish as a consequence of your pronouncing a curse. So, please listen to My explanation first. Then, you may do what you deem fit." Krishna explained that He was indeed all that exists. He added that when He incarnated as a man for the good of the world, He had to act as a human being. In His role as a human, He had appealed to the Kauravas most earnestly to compromise with the Pandavas. He had even frightened them. But, because of their unrighteousness and because the time had come for them to die, they had chosen to engage in a battle. Nevertheless, having died fighting as courageous Kshatriyas, they had ascended to heaven. The Pandavas, for their part, had acquired great fame.

On hearing Krishna's words, Uttanka said, "My heart has become tranquil and I no longer have any inclination to curse You." He continued, "If You think that I deserve that least grace from You, then kindly show me Your universal form." At the commencement of the Mahabharatha war, Krishna had shown His universal form to Arjuna. On that occasion, He had asserted, "It is most difficult to obtain a vision of this form of Mine which you have seen. Even the Devas always yearn to

behold it.” Notwithstanding the preciousness and rarity of a vision of the universal form and in spite of the fact that Uttanka had, a little earlier, been ready to even curse Krishna, the Lord, in His infinite mercy, granted the great Guru-Bhakta’s wish. Uttanka beheld everything in Vasudeva and filled with wonder, eulogized Him.

Unswerving Guru-Bhakti and unstinted Guru-Seva fetched Uttanka wonderful rewards; Indra and Agni helped him unasked while the gracious Lord vouchsafed him the exceptional vision of His universal form. God and the Devas favour a person who sincerely serves and is deeply devoted to his Sadguru.



79. Teaching Through Silence

Baskali was desirous of knowing Brahman. So, he approached the enlightened Sage Badhva and requested, "Please teach me about Brahman." Badhva remained silent. Baskali repeated his appeal but again, the sage did not respond. Being earnest, Baskali asked for the third time, "Please teach me about Brahman." The sage said, "I have already taught you, but you have failed to comprehend. The Atma is quiescence." This is a Vedic tale that has been recounted by Bhagavatpada in His Brahma Sutra Bhashyam.

Four mind-born sons of the creator Brahma such as Sanaka and Sanantana were thoroughly disinterested in getting married and begetting progeny. They were extremely dispassionate and wished to free themselves from the cycle of transmigratory existence. Out of compassion, Lord Shiva manifested as a four-armed figure, Dakshinamurthy, and sat at the foot of a banyan tree in the Himalayas, silent and lost in the bliss of the Supreme. The sages approached Him with the intention of asking Him how to get rid of the cycle of transmigratory existence and of getting their doubts set at rest. The Lord, as Dakshinamurthy, did not speak. Yet, so potent was His silence and grace that the sages immediately became enlightened; their doubts vanished.

There is darkness on the night of the full moon as also on the night of the new moon; there is no night without darkness. In the darkness of the night of the full moon, people are able to move about on the roads and are also able to perform their routine activities. They,

however, have to strain to read a book; that is all. In the darkness of the night of the new moon, if the sky happens to be overcast too, it is not possible for people to walk on the road or to engage in their activities; the question of reading a book does not arise at all. The ignorance of the sages such as Sanaka was like the darkness of the night of the full moon. On the other hand, the ignorance of almost all the others is like the darkness of the night of the new moon. The silence of an enlightened sage is adequate to dispel the mild ignorance of an extremely pure-minded disciple who is akin to the holy ones who approached Dakshinamurthy. However, disciples of a lower calibre, whose ignorance is denser, require to be taught the Truth by their Guru.



80. Brahma's Advice: "Da, Da, Da"

Brahma, once instructed Devas, men and Asuras. He rendered the same advice, "Da, Da, Da", to all of them. The Devas, as a rule, are given to enjoyment of sense objects. Hence, they thought that Brahma wanted them to be self-controlled. That is, they interpreted 'Da' as connoting 'Damyata' (Control yourselves). Human beings are selfish by nature and hoard wealth for future use. They comprehended the word 'Da' to mean 'Datta' (Perform charity). Asuras are cruel by nature. So, they understood the utterance 'Da' to mean 'Dayadhvam' (Be compassionate).

Bhagavatpada, in His commentary on the relevant portion of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, has clarified that the story does not necessarily refer to Devas, men and Asuras considered separately. 'Deva' here means a man with a predominantly Sattvic nature, tainted by tendencies of enjoyment and conceit. 'Asuras' are stone-hearted men with fierce instincts. All men should therefore cultivate sense-control, charity and compassion. To this day, the Creator declares "Da, Da, Da" through the sound of thunder.

A Guru instructs his disciples bearing in mind their competence. It is perfectly possible for a common teaching to have different implications for different disciples; the instruction of Brahma is an example.



81. Essentiality of Humility

A lad approached a sage and requested, "Please instruct me about the Supreme." The Guru said, "First live here as a Brahmachari for six months." The disciple did so, duly observing the rules for a Brahmachari such as serving the Guru.

At the end of the stipulated period, the disciple decided to approach his Guru for initiation. He first had his bath in the river. As he was about to start, a man appeared on the scene and dumped a basket of filth on him. The disciple flew into a wild rage and gave the man a beating. Having bathed again, he went to his Guru. The Guru asked, "Tell me what you did today." The disciple said, "Everything was fine till just prior to my coming here after a bath, when a rogue defiled me with filth. How dare he do that to me! So, I beat him. Having purified myself, I have come here to receive holy instruction from you about the Truth." The Guru said, "The time for instruction is not yet ripe. Observe Brahmacharyam here for three more months."

The disciple obeyed. Again, on the day he was scheduled to be initiated, he took a bath and emerged from the river. The man who had dumped filth on him on an earlier occasion came there and repeated his act. The disciple felt irritated but far less than on the previous occasion. He scolded the man, bathed again and went to his Guru. The Guru asked him about what had transpired that day. The disciple narrated what had happened. The Guru said, "The time is still not ripe. Observe Brahmacharyam here for three more months."

The disciple obeyed. At the end of three months, on the scheduled day, he bathed prior to approaching his Guru for instruction. When he had finished his bath, the man who had troubled him on the earlier two occasions again came there and dirtied him. This time, the disciple felt no anger. He saluted the man and said, "I am indebted to you. Thank you for helping me remedy the defects of arrogance and wrath." Then, he took a fresh bath and proceeded to his Guru's abode. This time, the Guru told him, "Now you are fit to be instructed", and duly initiated him into the Truth.

The Guru was actually the one who had arranged for the disciple to be defiled on all the occasions so as to make the disciple shed his sense of self-importance and become humble. A disciple who is proud and short-tempered fails to realize the Truth expounded by his Guru.



82. Self-control and Fructification of Guru's Teaching

Ashwatthama, the very dear son of Drona, studied as a disciple under his father along with the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Drona gave all his disciples a vessel each. They were required to go to the river daily, fill their vessels with water and return. The vessel given to Ashwatthama had a bigger mouth than the other vessels. Consequently, Ashwatthama was able to return first. In the interval between the arrival of Ashwatthama and the others, Drona used to impart additional information to his son. Arjuna noticed this. Thereafter, he began to invoke the Varuna Astra to fill his vessel rapidly. So, he was able to return at the same time as Ashwatthama and, unlike the Kauravas and his brothers, did not lose out on the special instructions.

As a student, Arjuna's Brahmacharyam was flawless and he maintained complete mastery over his senses. Ashwatthama's Brahmacharyam and conquest of the senses were not a match for Arjuna's. This difference did make a major impact on their mastery of divine Astras even though both received the same lessons from Drona.

In the Mahabharatha war, Ashwatthama fought on the side of the Kauravas. On Duryodhana being worsted by Bheema, the Pandavas emerged victorious. Ashwatthama decided to please Duryodhana and also avenge his father's death in the battle by decimating the Pandava army in its entirety at night, while all the

warriors lay asleep. He largely succeeded in his evil design and killed all the sons of Draupadi as also her brothers, Drishtadyumna and Shikhandi, apart from innumerable soldiers. The Pandavas and Satyaki remained safe and sound as they spent the night away from their army, in the company of Krishna.

They subsequently learnt the details of the havoc wrought by Ashwatthama, with the aid of Kripacharya and Kreethavarma, from Drishtadyumna's charioteer who had managed to escape. The most-affected by the news of the carnage was Draupadi. Overcome with sorrow and anger, she demanded that Ashwatthama be slain and the special gem that was on his head be brought to her. Bheema immediately set out to locate Ashwatthama by following the track of Ashwatthama's chariot. Krishna told Yudhishtira that Bheema could be in great danger, for Ashwatthama had acquired from Drona the Brahmashira weapon which was capable of destroying the whole world; though Drona had warned Ashwatthama not to use the weapon against humans even when overcome by great danger, there was the possibility of Ashwatthama invoking it.

Krishna then mounted His chariot followed by the Pandavas. They quickly caught up with Bheema. Though they tried to restrain him, he pressed forward, burning with anger. Finally, he encountered Ashwatthama on the bank of Ganga, seated near Vyasa and the other Rishis.

On seeing the Pandavas, Ashwatthama, who was covered with dust and attired in a single garment of Kusha grass, became agitated. He infused the Brahmashira Astra into a blade of grass and released it for the destruction of the Pandavas. In response to

Krishna's command, Arjuna also dispatched a Brahmashira Astra to neutralize Ashwatthama's weapon. From both the weapons, huge spheres of fire emerged and the earth shook.

Vyasa and Narada placed themselves between the Astras to avert the widespread destruction and prolonged drought that were imminent. They asked Arjuna and Ashwatthama to withdraw the celestial Astras they had released. Unlike Arjuna, Ashwatthama found that he was unable to take back his weapon.

Vyasa severely censured Ashwatthama and ordered him to at least divert the weapon from its intended targets, the Pandavas. The sage also told him, "Give the gem on your head to the Pandavas. They will spare your life." Ashwatthama redirected his weapon towards the child in the womb of Uttara, Abhimanyu's widow. Then, he handed over his gem which had the power of warding off danger, disease and hunger.

Krishna proclaimed that though a dead child would be born to Uttara, He would restore it to life and thus undo Ashwatthama's heinous act. He censured Ashwatthama and told him that he would wander on the earth for long, without a companion and unable to talk to anyone. Further, he would be constantly tormented by diseases and the stench of pus and blood would continuously emanate from him. Having punished Drona's son but spared his life, Krishna returned with the Pandavas and appeased Draupadi. Later, as promised by Him, Krishna revived Arjuna's stillborn grandson. Interestingly, He did so by swearing, "Never have I uttered a lie even in jest. Never have I fled from a battle. By the merit of such righteous conduct, let this child revive."

Why is it that while Arjuna was able to withdraw his celestial weapon, Ashwatthama failed? The answer given in the Mahabharatha is that when Arjuna was a student, his Brahmacharyam and control of senses were impeccable but such was not the case with Ashwatthama.

This story illustrates that even though a Guru may impart knowledge equally to his disciples, the pupil with better self-control derives far greater benefit.



83. Price of Inadequate Faith

On His way back to Dwaraka after the Mahabharatha war, Krishna met with Sage Uttanka. He rewarded Uttanka's extreme Guru-Bhakti and unstinted Guru-Seva as a Brahmachari by fulfilling the sage's desire to behold His universal form. Then, Krishna told him, "Ask for some boon." Uttanka said, "It is sufficient for me now that I have had a vision of Your cosmic form." Krishna told him not to hesitate about asking for anything. Extraordinary is the influence of Maya! Uttanka could well have asked for liberation or perfect devotion. Instead, he said that water was scarce in the desert regions in which he wandered and so he wished to get water whenever he desired it. The Lord assured him, "Whenever you want water, think of Me and you will have it." Krishna then continued His journey to Dwaraka.

One day, while traversing a desert, Uttanka felt extremely thirsty and could not see any source of water. So, he thought of Krishna. Immediately, he beheld a fierce-looking, naked hunter, besmirched with dirt and accompanied by a pack of dogs. A copious stream of water was issuing forth from the hunter's penis. He smiled at Uttanka and said, "Please accept this water from me. I can see that you are afflicted by thirst and feel pity for you."

Uttanka declined the offer; he could not even conceive of quenching his thirst with a dirty man's urine. He even began to mentally revile Krishna for offering him an infructuous boon. The hunter repeatedly pressed Uttanka to drink but the sage remained steadfast in his

refusal to do so. Tormented by hunger and thirst, Uttanka snapped at him in anger. The insulted hunter disappeared all of a sudden, together with his dogs. Uttanka was amazed. In a short while, Krishna came to him. Uttanka complained, "It was improper for You to have offered me water in the form of a hunter's urine."

The Lord said, "For your sake, I requested Indra to give you ambrosia. He objected saying that a mortal ought not to be given nectar and transformed into an immortal. On My insisting repeatedly, he agreed to do as I wished. He, however, said that he would offer ambrosia to you in the guise of a hunter. If you dismissed him with disdain, he would leave without giving you the ambrosia then or later. This is what you have done." The Lord continued that, in future, whenever Uttanka desired water to assuage his thirst, moisture-laden clouds would appear and pour down water which he could drink to his heart's content. The clouds would be called Uttanka clouds. Saying so, the Lord left.

Uttanka lost the rare opportunity to quaff nectar because of his inadequate faith in Krishna's words. Krishna had revealed His universal form to the sage and so there was no reason at all for Uttanka to doubt His divinity and the infallibility of His words. When tormented by thirst, Uttanka had not seen anyone around nor any source of water. Yet, no sooner had he thought of the Lord than a hunter had appeared on the scene and offered him water. No Chandala hunter would have dared to press Uttanka, a renowned Tapasvi, to drink his urine. Such considerations too should have made Uttanka realize that the Lord was gracing him as promised. Nevertheless, because of his inadequate faith in the

Lord's words and his misconception that the fluid he saw was urine, he suffered an irremediable loss.

A person, particularly a spiritual aspirant, should have total faith in the Lord and his Guru. Were he to entertain doubts about their wisdom or the potency of their words, his loss will be great.



84. Some Errors of Disciples

A cow had fallen ill and its owner was worried about it. He took the animal to a veterinary doctor who prescribed a certain medicine with the instruction that it should be given after mixing with ghee. The owner of the cow reasoned, "The cow yields milk. From that we get curd, butter and finally ghee. So, the essence of ghee is already present in the cow. Such being the case, why should I mix ghee with the medicine?" Having analysed thus, he administered the medicine without ghee. The indiscretion of the milkman aggravated the disease instead of bringing it down.

A disciple should carry out the instructions of his Guru to the last letter, without deviating from them in the least. Were he to introduce innovations of his own, he would be on par with the milkman.

A teacher had two foolish disciples. One day, he summoned them and said, "I am feeling some discomfort in my legs. Give them a good massage." The disciples grasped a leg each and commenced their massage. Soon, for relaxation, the teacher rested his right leg on the left.

The student who was massaging the left leg thought, "What is this? Something has fallen on my teacher's sacred foot. How can I, a devoted disciple, allow such a thing to happen?" He roughly pushed the right leg aside without realizing that it also belonged to his master. Seeing this, the other disciple shouted, "What do you think you are doing? How dare you shove my teacher's leg?" Then, he wrathfully pushed the left leg. The other disciple retaliated.

The disciples quarrelled thus at the cost of their teacher's comforts. When this went on for some time, the master sat up and said, "What are you two up to? I asked you to massage my legs to relieve my pain but you have only worsened it. Get lost."

Service of the Guru is essential but it should be done with due care, after obtaining permission. Improper service will only be a hindrance to the Guru.

Four students learnt the Mantra Shastra from a Guru. After the completion of their studies, they started for their homes. As they were passing through a forest, they came across a dead tiger. Three of them opined, "We are conversant with the Sanjeevini Mantra which can restore the dead to life. Should we not test its efficacy? Let us revive this feline with it." The fourth student saw the foolishness of their proposed course of action. He did his best to dissuade them but failed. So, he climbed a tree nearby and sat on a branch. His companions utilized the Sanjeevini Mantra to give the tiger a fresh lease of life. The carnivore rose. Feeling the pangs of hunger, it struck its saviours dead.

Notwithstanding scholarliness in the Mantra Shastra, lack of common sense caused the trio to perish. A person's mind is like a blunt knife that is unfit for cutting unless it is sharpened by the knowledge acquired from a teacher. Erudition without common sense is like a sharp knife in the hands of a monkey. Thus, learning and common sense are both essential; bereft of these, one would be mentally blind though physically sighted.



85. Teachers to Avoid

A patient suffering from a bronchial ailment approached a doctor and narrated his tale of woe. “Do not worry”, said the doctor. “I have the right medicine for you. I am also suffering from this very disease for a long time and have been taking this medicine. It does not seem to have much effect on me. Now that you have come, I have an opportunity to test its potency. I feel that it will cure your disease”, he explained.

How can a patient have faith in such a doctor? Similarly, a teacher who himself is not sure of what he teaches will neither inspire confidence in his pupils nor expound well.

A boy's orthodox father took him to Kashi and enrolled him there in a Vedanta Patashala with the hope that he would become an erudite, renowned scholar. He attended the classes because he was required to but as he was neither hard-working nor intelligent, the understanding of the Vedanta texts that he acquired was meagre. After a few years, he dropped out of the Patashala and returned to his home in South India. He claimed that he had completed his course successfully. As he was the son of a wealthy, respected man and he was supposedly a pundit, several Vaidikas in his town had no hesitation in offering their daughters to him in marriage. He soon got married and set himself up as a teacher of Vedanta. He was more than ready to accept anyone who came to him as a pupil, regardless of whether that person was a Brahmachari or a Grihastha.

Being lazy and ignorant, he did not bother to prepare for any class. His mode of teaching was to read or to ask a student to read a few lines, restate the contents in different words without elaboration, and pass on to the next few lines. Now and then, he cracked some jokes and gave worldly examples that were more irrelevant than pertinent. He handled questions to which he did not know the answers in three ways.

Sometimes, he said, "This issue is not of significance. There is no need for us to waste time on it. Read on." When what was asked was obviously important, he looked at the watch. If the class was scheduled to end in a few minutes, he said, "There is no time for this today. We shall see sometime later." Were there much time left, he nonchalantly stated, "This very point has been discussed and clarified in our text itself in a portion that we will be covering in future. So, there is no need to consider it at this juncture."

He was fortunate that his six students had great faith in him and felt that they had no one but him to make them Vedanta Pandits. Further, they felt fully satisfied with the semblance of knowledge they were receiving. The teacher was happy and so were the students but the latter did not know that they were great losers.

One day, a bearded young man clad in a silken ochre Dhoti and shirt turned up at a town. When some people met him, he said that he had descended from the Himalayas after spending seven years there absorbed in meditation. He claimed that his Guru was an omniscient celestial who had suddenly materialized before him years ago. His Guru had vouchsafed to him a hitherto-

unknown, simple and quick method for people to get peace, fulfilment of desires and finally, freedom from rebirth.

His Guru had then transformed him, by touching select spots on his body, into a knower of Truth and endowed him with special powers. "Remain here in meditation for seven years. Then, travel to various places and teach the potent method that I have made known to you, to others", the Guru had said before disappearing. The people were impressed with his account. A person asked him about his life prior to his encountering his Guru. He responded, "That is a closed chapter. Having taken a new spiritual birth, I should not and shall not say anything about it."

He was given some rooms for his use in the mansion of an affluent man who had begun to think much of him. That evening, he gave a talk to a modest audience. Being a good orator, he comfortably held the attention of his listeners. In the course of his discourse, he said, "There is no need to renounce the world or even desires to attain peace and liberation. I am ready to teach those who approach me with full faith. The new method that I have received from my Guru is most efficacious and simple but not time-consuming."

His disciples were basically required to generate a sound like the braying of an ass synchronized with the outgoing breath. After doing so for five minutes, they were to breathe in and breathe out as fast as possible, while mentally chanting a monosyllabic Mantra received from him. He assured them that on chanting the Mantra for some time, they would feel light-headed. They were to then stop the Mantra, breathe normally and enjoy the

unusual feeling till it vanished. The process was to be carried out in a dark room.

Prior to initiating a disciple into a Mantra, he said, "Make a complete confession to me. By my power, I will free you from the consequences of your weaknesses and faults. Once I do so, it will be immaterial whether you change your ways or not." After hearing out the disciple, he placed his right hand on his disciple's chest and intoned, "I free you from sins", thrice. Then, he began a complex process of initiation in a dark room, in the course of which the disciple was required to sit motionless, with eyes closed.

After initiation, he presented every disciple with a framed photograph of himself. Then, by waving his hand in the air, he produced some Kumkum which he gave his disciple. He was very particular that no disciple of his should divulge the Mantra or the meditation procedure to another. Any violation of secrecy would, he severely warned, render the process infructuous for the disciple. Further, the erring disciple would fall seriously ill within six months.

Every disciple experienced tingling sensations in the body during initiation; some had a variety of experiences that filled them with wonder and joy. During the meditation procedure, the disciples did get an uncommon feeling after chanting the Mantra for a short time; some had visions and felt ecstatic. Each disciple noticed a white powder forming automatically for a day on the photograph he received from his Guru.

The Guru frequently went on long tours and soon acquired a large following and much fame. Many gave

him large donations or costly articles, out of a sense of gratitude. What his disciples did not realize was that they were losing, not gaining, by coming into contact with him.

It was by sleight of hand that he brought Kumkum to the palm of his right hand. The gradual formation of ash on his photograph was simply the consequence of his having applied suitable chemicals on the glass part of the frame. Hyperventilation caused by the rapid breathing was responsible for the disciples experiencing an unusual feeling during meditation. During initiation, he used a device to administer very mild electric shocks and also gently manipulated a disciple's body hairs to produce tingling sensations that seemed to spread. The disciple who sat full of faith with his eyes closed and that too in a dark, quiet room did not suspect or identify foul play.

The Guru knew the power of belief, expectations, auto-suggestions and hypnotic suggestions and exploited them to the hilt. Thus, the special experiences had by some disciples during initiation were the consequences of their Guru having successfully hypnotized them; they were highly susceptible to hypnosis and the Guru put them into a trance by appropriate, repeated suggestions given in a flat tone. The unusual experiences had by some during meditation was a consequence of factors such as their belief in what he had told them might happen and their high expectations.

The Guru had no scruples about taking advantage of the confessions made to him by his disciples and about sexually exploiting females during initiation if he found them to be gullible. He knew that they would heed

his warning never to divulge the details of the initiation and of his imparting 'special Shakti' to them by physical contact with them.

People stand to lose greatly by being the disciples of fraudulent Gurus such as this man and by studying under teachers like the ignorant Vedantic pundit. Unfortunately, persons who expound Vedanta without a deep knowledge of it and unenlightened or downright bogus Gurus are commonplace now-a-days. It is said, "Many are the preceptors who take possession of the wealth of their disciples but rare is he who takes away the sorrow of his disciples." The Shastras say, "One should give up even a Guru who is tainted, who does not take cognizance of right and wrong and treads the wrong path."

Bhagavatpada has described a true Sadguru as, "He who has realized the Truth and is ever intent on the welfare of his disciple." It is to such a Guru that one should resort. To avoid the risk of being misled by a charlatan, it is advisable to go only to a Guru who belongs to a line of great preceptors, is conversant with the scriptures, teaches in accordance with the scriptures, does not propagate a self-discovered path, is a master of his mind and senses, is dispassionate, whose conduct is spotless, who is clearly interested in the welfare of the disciple and who does not expect anything in return from the disciple.



86. The Hypocrisy of Pseudo-Advaitins

A Sannyasi was not observing any regulations with regard to food and spiritual practices. A householder approached him and asked, "You do not seem to be observing any regulations whatsoever. You eat as you wish, spend your time loitering and do acts that are unbecoming of a Sannyasi. Is it proper for you to be like this?" The Sannyasi replied, "Everything is Brahman. The body and mind perform actions whereas I am the pure, conscious Atma which is unstained. As such, it matters little to me what the body and mind do. Indeed, everything is Brahman."

The householder queried, "Will you come to my house for Bhiksha?" "Yes", replied the Sannyasi. "I have no objections. To me, who revels in the Atma, nothing matters. I shall come." That afternoon, the Sannyasi went to the householder's place and sat down to have a meal. However, his host did not offer him even a drop of water. As minutes passed, he became restless. His host deliberately ignored his uneasiness. Finally, unable to withstand the delay any longer, he shouted, "What do you mean by keeping me waiting? I am quite hungry. Serve me fast."

The householder came up to him and said, "I fail to realize how hunger and thirst could arise in you who are totally immersed in the bliss of the Atma. You are all-pervasive, for such is the nature of the Atma. I am unable to offer you water, for, being omnipresent, you

already pervade it from within and without.” The Sannyasi got up saying, “Do not speak like that. I am unable to bear my hunger.” He then left in search of food.

This Sannyasi lacked self-control and dispassion. Hence, he did not adhere to the rules meant for unenlightened mendicants. He misused Advaita philosophy merely to explain away his misconduct. His unrestrained behaviour fetched him much sin; his Advaitic declarations offered him no protection from demerits.

During an eclipse, a pundit went to the sea for a bath. He had a copper vessel with him. He thought, “If I leave this vessel on the shore while I bathe, someone may steal it. On the other hand, if I take it with me, it may slip from my hand and get lost in the waters. What should I do?” He dug a hole in the beach, put the vessel in it and topped the vessel with sand. To be able to locate the spot, he made a sand Lingam there. Heaving a sigh of relief, he proceeded for his bath.

Some persons saw the Lingam on the shore and the pundit bathing in the sea. They assumed that everyone should make a Lingam before taking a sea-bath. Sometime later, the pundit went to the place where he had hidden his vessel. What did he see there? Not one or two but numerous Lingams made of sand. “My God!” wailed the pundit, “What happened? How did all these Lingams crop up? How am I to find out the Lingam that I had made?” He searched for his vessel under some Lingams but failed to find it. Finally, he returned home without it.

The above story gives a glimpse of the fact that many have the tendency to follow others without a second thought. Blindly following others is inadvisable. Further, the tendency of people to follow those whom they revere makes it imperative for teachers and religious personalities to set good standards.

A person was expounding Advaita philosophy to a group of students and, in the course of his discourse, pointed out that the world is unreal. Suddenly, a wild elephant chanced to come running that way. The disciples ran helter-skelter; the teacher was no exception. Unfortunately, the teacher slipped and fell into a pit. After the elephant went away, the students discovered their teacher in the pit, shouting for help. They approached him and asked, "Sir, you were just telling us that the world is unreal. Why then did you run, gripped by fear, when the elephant charged? Further, why are you now shouting for help?" The helpless teacher thought for a moment, and said, "Please help me to come out and I shall explain." Accordingly, he was pulled out.

He resumed his seat at the place where he was teaching and, without batting an eyelid, declared, "I stand by what I had said. The world is unreal. The elephant that charged was unreal. You noticed that I had fallen into a pit and was screaming for help. All that was unreal. Finally, your helping me out too was unreal." The explanation shows that the so-called teacher was shrewd but it does not alter the fact that he was being hypocritical.

One should be true to one's conscience. One may deceive others by high-sounding talk on Advaita but it

will not be of any use if one does not mend one's ways. It is said, "He who is attached to worldly comforts but still says that everything is Brahman is actually one who has fallen from Karma and also from Brahman. Such a person must be discarded like a lowly one." Because such a man fails to realize the Truth and procure liberation, it is said that he has fallen from Brahman. Because of his putting up a show that he is realized, such a man does not perform the ordained duties sincerely. Hence, there is the declaration of his having fallen from Karma.





Realization of the Supreme

By eschewing Adharma and discharging his duties in a spirit of dedication to the Lord, a devotee attains great purity of the mind. Full of dispassion, he turns away from the world and, seeking refuge in a Guru, strives to attain liberation from transmigratory existence. This section deals with the final phase of the spiritual aspirant's journey that ends with his becoming a Jivanmukta.



87. Search Without Dismantlement

A person had a harmonium. When he played it, melodious music flowed out of it. Hearing the enchanting tunes, another man thought, "How does such sweet music come out of this? Probably, these sounds are present inside this instrument." Getting very curious, he dismantled the harmonium and searched for the sounds in every nook and corner. However much he toyed with the internal parts, he could not get the original music out of them. "Ah, what a wonder! This instrument produces music out of nowhere", he concluded.

While there are certain occasions when one should dismantle and analyse, there are numerous other situations where this technique will not be of any help. Analysis of the Atma falls under the latter category. The Atma has to be discerned without actually taking apart the body which It enlivens.



88. Superficial Knowledge

A certain philanthropist offered a sum of rupees fifty thousand to anyone who knew well all the four Vedas. After a couple of days, a young man approached him and asked for the award. “Are you familiar with the four Vedas?” queried the philanthropist. The seeker of the prize answered, “I am aware of the fact that there are four Vedas.” The donor was stunned by the reply and asked, “Is that all?” The young man said, “Sir, I know that the Vedas are four in number. Is that not sufficient?” Well, what was the philanthropist to do? He just sent away the young man.

Just as the man’s superficial knowledge was inadequate to fetch him the prize, superficial or indirect knowledge of the Truth cannot bring about emancipation. Direct realization of the non-dual Supreme is what annihilates ignorance and results in liberation from transmigratory existence.



89. Overlooking What is Immediate

Once, ten fools forded a river. After reaching the opposite bank, they wished to ascertain whether all of them had crossed. One of them started to count. He listed all except himself and so concluded that one of them had drowned. This caused him much grief. Another fool made the same error and confirmed that one person was missing. Consequently, all of them began to weep.

A well-wisher happened to pass that way and sought to know what their problem was. One of the fools said, "Ten of us set out to cross the river but now we are only nine." The well-wisher was amused. He told the leader, "Please count and let me know how many of you are here." As the others had done before him, he arrived at the answer, "Nine". The well-wisher announced, "No. The tenth man is not dead." The fools experienced some relief. Quickly pointing at the man who had counted, he continued, "You are the tenth man." The significance of the well-wisher's words dawned on the fools. Exultation replaced their grief.

Each fool forgot to count himself; we have forgotten our true nature of being the non-dual Supreme. Playing a role like that of the well-wisher of the story, the Sadguru tells his disciple, "You are not the limited, miserable person you imagine yourself to be. You are the Supreme that is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss." A very pure-minded disciple promptly becomes enlightened. A disciple of a lower calibre has to serve his Guru for long and sincerely practise spiritual disciplines to rid himself of defects

such as uncertainty and misapprehension. Thereafter, he obtains direct realization of the Truth.



90. Upanishads are a Flawless Means of Knowledge

A man named Bharju was the favourite of a king. This was resented by the other courtiers who were highly jealous of him. So, they drew up a plan and arranged for him to be kidnapped. With his hands tied and eyes covered, Bharju was taken far away from the kingdom and abandoned deep inside a forest. He began to shout for help.

Fortunately for him, a forester heard his cry. Coming up to him, he removed the bandage from his eyes and untied his hands. Then, he pointed out the direction in which Bharju ought to proceed to reach his kingdom. Bharju moved on for some time in the prescribed direction and encountered another woodman. He took further instructions from him. Thus, seeking directions from different people in the course of his journey, he reached the boundary of his kingdom. However, because of the precautions they had taken, the courtiers who had arranged to have him kidnapped got wind of his arrival. They threatened him and precluded his entry into the kingdom. Much earlier, they had informed the king that Bharju had died and gradually convinced him to the extent that the king had no doubt whatsoever in this regard.

One day, the king went out from the capital towards the forest. By chance, he happened to see Bharju. The king ought to have been overjoyed to meet Bharju. However, what he experienced was not happiness but

fright. The reason was that he was quite convinced that the entity before him was Bharju's ghost, for Bharju, the man, was dead. He immediately turned and quickly rode away, leaving Bharju quite perplexed and sad.

The king's organ of sight was faultless and presented him a clear image of Bharju. However, because of the defect of miscomprehension, he did not arrive at the right conclusion. The Upanishads, too, are flawless like the eyes of the king in the story. They produce correct knowledge. However, in spite of this, many people who study the Upanishads do not immediately get enlightened. The reason is the defect that lies in their minds. They are beset with faults such as extreme attachment to sense objects, doubts about what has been taught, as also miscomprehension. Due to flaws such as these, an individual fails to get correct knowledge though the means of knowledge, the Upanishads, are flawless.



91. Unreal Can Point to the Real

A person went to sleep. He soon had a dream in which he beheld himself being chased by a ferocious tiger. Since the tiger was by far swifter than him, the distance between them shrank rapidly. He was overcome with fear. So terrified was he that he abruptly woke up, his forehead wet with perspiration. The tiger seen by him in the dream was undoubtedly unreal. However, it was instrumental in bringing about a real effect, awakening.

Some object, "According to the Advaitins, the world is illusory and Brahman alone is real. If so, the teachings of the Vedas, which are included in the cosmos, should be unreal. Hence, they cannot produce true knowledge. Consequently, Advaita philosophy, which is based on the Vedas, should be worthless." This objection is invalid.

Advaitins speak of the unreality of the world only from the standpoint of the Absolute. From an empirical standpoint, the world and the Vedas do exist. Another reply of the Advaitins is that an unreal object can, as in the example considered earlier, lead to the real. Hence, though being illusory, the Vedas can bring about enlightenment and, thereby, establishment in the Supreme.



92. Recognition of Identity

A prince was kidnapped when he was a child. He was taken to a forest and left there to die. Fortunately for him, some foresters took care of him. Brought up by them, he began to live, work and behave as a woodman. Years passed. In the capital, the king passed away. So, the search for the prince was intensified. Certain persons who had known him as a child chanced to see him in the forest and even managed to recognize him. They informed him of his royal birth. Then they told him that as his father was dead, it behoved him to accept the throne. At first, he did not believe them. Gradually, he became convinced that they had spoken the truth to him. He returned to the capital and soon began to conduct himself in a manner befitting a king.

We are, in reality, the Supreme that is bereft of all bondage. On account of ignorance, we presume that we are subject to birth and death and that we are given to suffering. When, through the words of the Guru, we realize our true nature, we snap our imaginary shackles and remain as the blissful Supreme. No actual transformation takes place. False beliefs are discarded, as in the case of the prince.



93. Mind, the Cause of Bondage and Liberation

A three-year-old boy asked for an apple. As there was none at home, his mother offered him other fruits instead. He refused them and insisted that he be given only an apple. His mother told him that she would procure one for him in the evening. He, however, began to cry and continued wailing till his indulgent mother took him to a shop and allowed him to pick an apple of his choice. It was when his desire was gratified that he smiled joyfully.

His seven-year-old sister, who had witnessed all this, desired to have some fun at his expense. She informed him with assumed gravity, "Without realizing it, you ate a seed. I saw you do so. Do you know what will happen? An apple tree will start growing in your stomach. It will cause you great pain and, emerging from your nose and mouth, make you look funny." He swallowed her tale hook, line and sinker and turned pale with fright. Seeing him petrified, his mother ascertained the cause and did her best to pacify him. She emphasized more than once that his sister had been pulling his leg. But her explanation fell on deaf ears. He continued to remain terror-stricken and did not take even a drop of water for hours. His mother started to worry about him. So, the moment her husband returned from work, she informed him about what had happened.

He held his son in his arms and said in a gentle reassuring voice, "Normally, no tree grows inside the

stomach when an apple seed is swallowed. Even when it does, it is small. In fact, it is so tiny that it does not cause any pain and cannot be seen by others. So, even if a tree develops within you, you will neither suffer nor become the butt of ridicule. You like apples. Once there is a tree within you, you will have a constant supply of apples. You can put your fingers inside your mouth and pluck out a small fruit which you can then chew and swallow. It would be wonderful to be able to get delicious apples any time you desire them. Is it not?"

The boy nodded, with the traces of a smile forming on his face. "Do you want the tree to grow or not?" queried the father. "Definitely I do", responded the boy. "The seed may not sprout. But if it does, then, to help it develop into a tree, you will have to eat food and drink water. If you starve yourself, the tree will die", declared the father. Promptly, the boy ran to his mother and asked for his meal and a glass of water. His terror was completely replaced by joy and enthusiasm.

The boy was initially unhappy because of his unfulfilled desire for an apple. Thereafter, he was overcome with trepidation owing to his foolishly-imagined future danger to the body he was intensely fond of. His mind was thus the cause of his unhappiness before and after he obtained an apple.

Bharatha, the eldest son of Rishabha was anointed king by his father who then renounced every possession. Bharatha and his wife Panchajani had five sons. Erudite and steadfast in the observance of Dharma, he ruled justly and looked upon his subjects with affection. They, for their part, adhered to their duties and held him in high esteem. Bharatha performed

numerous sacrifices, such as the Darshapurnamasa, and worshipped Vishnu with deep devotion. Having ruled well for long, he handed over his kingdom and possessions to his sons and retired to holy Saligrama on the bank of the river Gandaki. There, he lived as a recluse. He bathed thrice a day, unfailingly performed his Sandhyavandanam and spent much time in Puja and meditation on the Lord.

One day, after he had bathed in the river and completed his Sandhyavandanam, he beheld a pregnant doe approach the river to quench its thirst. As it was drinking avidly, it heard the roar of a lion. Stricken with fright, it leapt across the stream. As it did so, the foetus in its womb emerged and fell into the water. Owing to exhaustion and because of having prematurely delivered a young one, the mother died. Moved by compassion, Bharatha rescued the orphaned and helpless fawn. He assumed the responsibility of rearing it.

He took great care of it and grew increasingly fond of it. Consequently, he was smitten with anxiety whenever it went to roam in the forest and took time to return; he feared it might have been attacked by a carnivore. Even when it was in the hermitage, he interrupted his religious observances to confirm that it was safe and sound. Time passed. Finally, he lay dying. The thought about what would happen to the deer pervaded his mind. Focussed on the deer rather than on God, whom he had nearly attained prior to rescuing the animal, he breathed his last.

As a consequence of his intense attachment, he was reborn as a deer. Fortunately for him, the memory of his

past birth did not desert him. He wended his way back to Saligrama and lived there, patiently waiting for his life as a deer to terminate. After death, he was reborn as the sole son of the second spouse of a pious Brahmin. Retaining as he did the recollection of his past lives, Bharatha was terribly afraid of getting attached to the world. Eschewing attachment in its entirety, he focussed his attention on the Lord and realized the Truth. He conducted himself like a dull-witted person. His father invested him with the sacred thread and taught him. However, Bharatha's mind was disinclined towards even scriptural activity. So, his father's efforts to educate him were unsuccessful. With the passage of time, Bharatha's parents died.

Holding him to be a dunce, his step-brothers gave up all ideas of instructing him. They were unaware that he was a Jivanmukta, constantly reposing in the Supreme. Bharatha wore no more than a rag around his loins and slept on the bare ground. His brothers employed him in their fields. He raised no objections but worked disinterestedly. Whatever his brothers gave him to eat, he consumed regardless of whether it was well-cooked or ill-cooked.

One day, a bandit chieftain desirous of a son made arrangements to offer a human sacrifice to Goddess Kali. His servants had searched in vain for long for a victim when they espied Bharatha, who was stout and flawless in every limb. They bound him with a rope, unopposed by him, and took him to the place of sacrifice. There, they bathed and decorated him. When he was about to be killed, the Goddess intervened to save the life of the saint and brought about the death of those

wanting to shed his blood.

One day, the ruler of Sindhu–Sowveera territory set out on a palanquin to meet Sage Kapila. The captain of his palanquin-bearers, who was on the lookout for recruits, spotted Bharatha. He drafted the sage to bear the king’s palanquin.

Bharatha did not utter a murmur of protest. But he walked with his eyes rivetted to the ground and his pace did not match that of the others. So, the palanquin jolted. The king instructed his palanquin-bearers to walk at a uniform pace. The palanquin continued to jerk. Finding that his instructions were not having the desired effect, the ruler identified Bharatha as the one responsible and reprimanded him. Sarcastically, he told Bharatha, “Oh, you have carried the palanquin a long way all by yourself; you are not well-built and age has made you feeble.”

Taking pity on the king, Bharatha taught him the Truth. He said, “Stoutness pertains to the body, not to me. Your body is a modification of Prithvi. It is borne by the palanquin which again is a modification of Prithvi. The body of the bearer too is made of Prithvi. The palanquin rests on the shoulder which is held up by the trunk; the trunk transfers weight to the feet; the feet rest on the ground. Where then is the question of my supporting any load? Notions such as distance to be traversed or a destination to be reached are not based on reality. Consciousness alone is real. All else is a mere appearance.” The king realized the greatness of Bharatha and profitted greatly from the sage’s didactical, poignant discourse. Bharatha lived his life without giving least room to attachment and, on death, attained disembodied liberation.

Bharatha's mind was the cause of his rebirths and also of his getting the knowledge of Truth and, hence, liberation. The Maitrayani Upanishad declares, "The mind is of two kinds, pure and impure. It is impure when with desire; it is pure when devoid of desire... The mind indeed is responsible for the bondage and liberation of humans. When attached to objects, it brings about bondage. When devoid of the thoughts of objects, it leads to liberation... Just as fire subsides into its basis on the exhaustion of fuel, the mind subsides in its source, the Atma, on the cessation of thoughts... The mind must be restrained in the heart, on the Atma, till it is destroyed... The bliss that accrues for the mind that has been cleansed of dirt by Samadhi and which is fixed on the Atma cannot be described in words."



94. Renunciation of Everything

In the Dwapara Yuga, there lived a king named Shikhidhwaja who ruled over Malawa. He was learned and endowed with good qualities such as generosity, kindness and bravery. His queen was Choodala, the daughter of the king of Saurashtra. She was thoroughly chaste and an ideal mate for her husband. They loved each other dearly and their mutual affection waxed with the passage of time. They lived together in great joy.

Years rolled on. Their youth passed and they became old. In due course, they realized that all worldly objects and joys are transient and that there is no worldly object on acquiring which the mind gets permanent relief from sorrow. Cogitating deeply, they concluded that knowledge of the Atma alone can confer complete freedom from the virulent disease of transmigratory existence. So, with all their being, they strived to acquire such knowledge.

Choodala listened to the import of the scriptures from wise people and then reflected on what she had heard. She thought, "Who am I? The body is inert. I, who am conscious, cannot be the body. The senses that are associated with the body are inert like it, impelled as they are by the mind, just as a stone is moved by a stick that strikes it. So, I am not the senses. Nor am I the mind, which too is basically devoid of consciousness; it is, after all, moved by the intellect just as any inert object is. The intellect, activated by egoism, is certainly inert and I cannot be the intellect."

Thinking deeply in this fashion, she came to the conclusion that she was non-dual consciousness, the Supreme Brahman. Focussing on the Truth, her intrinsic nature, she acquired enlightenment. She became dispassionate and untroubled by the pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain and heat and cold.

Shikhidhwaja noted that Choodala looked glorious. He asked her, "How is it that you look as if you have regained your youth?" She replied, "I have abandoned the cosmos that is neither real nor totally non-existent. I am contented without worldly enjoyments and neither rejoice nor feel irritated. I revel in my Self that is absolute and infinite. Hence, I am radiant."

The king, however, did not comprehend the significance of her words. Hence, he derisively told her, "You prattle like a child. You are in the midst of royal pleasures. Where is the question of your having abandoned anything? You are confused. O beautiful one, you are sporting with words. Enjoy yourself." He laughed and left for his afternoon bath.

Choodala felt sorry for Shikhidhwaja but recognized that he would not heed advice from her about self-realization. Though she had transcended desires and was constantly contented, one day, she casually decided to acquire supernatural powers. Observing the requisite restrictions, she practised Pranayama and meditation. She awakened her Kundalini. Finally, she acquired all the eight renowned Yoga Siddhis, such as the power to become minute or large. Spiritual practitioners should not be enamoured with Siddhis and should view them as distractions and obstacles in their Yogic path. However, as Choodala was already enlightened, she had nothing to

gain or lose by them and their acquisition did not in the least cause her to deviate from her establishment in the Supreme.

Though she tried hard to awaken her husband from his slumber of ignorance, he did not concern himself with her words, taking her to be just his very loving but unenlightened wife. He performed much charity, undertook pilgrimages and also practised austerity marked by severe dietary restrictions and fasting. Nevertheless, he continued to remain ignorant of the Truth and troubled by afflictions. He began to strongly feel that his enjoyments, power and duties were impediments in his quest. So, he decided to renounce them.

He told Choodala in private, "I have ruled this kingdom for long and experienced various enjoyments. Now, prompted by dispassion, I propose to proceed to the forest. Joys, sorrows, prosperity and adversity do not torment a man who has renounced and lives in a forest. Dwelling there, I shall be happy and free from all concerns. You should not thwart my noble course of action and, instead, ought to attend to the kingdom." Choodala conveyed to him that giving up the kingdom at that time was inadvisable. But he remained firm in his resolve. At night, when Choodala was asleep, he moved out of her presence. He told his attendants that he was going alone on a patrol.

He proceeded to a distant forest and built a hut of leaves. He dwelt there performing Japa and worship. Choodala located him with her Yogic powers but, deciding that the time was not ripe for her to help him, left him alone and attended to the kingdom. Time

passed. Desirous of uplifting him and knowing that he would not take her advice seriously, she transformed herself at the appropriate time into a young Brahmin boy, radiant with Tapas and approached him in this form. Shikhidhwaja rose and duly venerated her. She told him that her name was Kumbha and that she was the son of the celestial Sage Narada. He felt greatly impressed with her.

She told him that to attain realization, he should renounce everything. Shikhidhwaja responded that he had renounced his kingdom, his palace, wealth and even his dear wife. He then asked, "Does this not constitute total renunciation?" Choodala as Kumbha, responded, "Though you have renounced your kingdom and the like, that does not constitute total renunciation. You still have attachment." At this, the king said, "I, at present, am fond just of this forest. Therefore, I shall now give up attachment to it." He succeeded in what he proposed to do. Then he remarked, "I have completely renounced." Choodala continued to object and said, "Even by abandoning your fondness for trees, streams and mountains, you have not accomplished renunciation of everything." The king then gave up his utensils and the hut in which he was dwelling. Again Choodala was dissatisfied. So, Shikhidhwaja discarded his deer-skin, Rudraksha beads, bowls, etc., and stood naked.

Once more, Choodala objected that he had not renounced everything. The king thought that as he had only his body left, to achieve complete renunciation, he ought to discard it. He readied himself to commit suicide but was stopped by his wife. She told him, "Even if you give up this body, you would not have achieved complete

renunciation. On the other hand, if you give up that which is the activator of this body and which is the seed of all births and activities, only then you would have renounced everything.” The king asked for clarification. Choodala explained that it was the renunciation of the mind that was most important. It was the mind that manifested as everything. The mind comprised Vasanas or tendencies and the seed of the tree of the mind was egoism. “Investigation into the nature of one’s own Atma is indeed what annihilates the seed of the mind”, emphasized Choodala.

Guided by her, the king succeeded in implementing her advice and became enlightened. She left him and came back to him after a while. She tested him severely but he remained firmly rooted in the non-dual reality. Having accomplished her purpose as Kumbha, she revealed her identity to him and successfully persuaded him to return to the kingdom. He then began to rule but without any attachment and without being affected in the least by adversity and prosperity. He and his wife remained totally rooted in the Supreme.



95. Illusoriness of the World

Vidyanidhi was a Brahmachari who studied Vedanta under an aged Mahatma. His Guru and he were the only occupants of the Guru's small cottage situated at a secluded, scenic spot on a hill, close to a stream. One night, Vidyanidhi lay down as usual just outside the entrance of his Guru's room. His Guru had retired for the night a little earlier. In a few minutes, Vidyanidhi fell asleep. Shortly thereafter, he was awakened by the sound of his Guru moaning softly. He opened the door and entered to see if his Guru was in need of anything. He found his preceptor clutching his abdomen and obviously in great pain.

Vidyanidhi : O Lord, may I fetch the Vaidya from the village?

Guru : No. Why trouble him by making him travel five kilometres at night? In any case, pain is only for the body-mind complex. I am the unchanging and unaffected witness.

Vidyanidhi : I know that you are unmoved by pleasure and pain, but I am unable to bear your suffering. I beseech you to at least let me fetch some medicines for you.

The Guru could see that Vidyanidhi was highly worried and on the verge of tears. So, he specified an Ayurvedic preparation and permitted Vidyanidhi to meet the Vaidya and fetch it. Immediately, Vidyanidhi set out. The moon was clearly visible and the village could be reached by just walking along the side of the stream. Hence, Vidyanidhi did not take any source of light with him. He walked briskly.

After he had journeyed for half an hour, he felt a sharp pain in his right foot. He found that a cluster of thorns had penetrated his sole. He sat down and carefully pulled them out. The pain started to decrease. However, owing to the continuing discomfort, he remained seated for a few minutes. Then, he got up thinking, "My master is unwell. It is wrong on my part to delay procuring the medicine for him. In any case, the moon will set in three hours and I must be back before that to avoid having to travel in the dark. How I wish I could fly like a bird. I would then be able to reach the village and return in minutes."

He arrived at the Vaidya's house in the village in half an hour. In response to his knock, the Vaidya's teenaged son opened the door. Vidyanidhi told him that he had come to fetch a particular medicine for his Guru. The boy and his father were devotees of the Guru. So, the boy immediately woke up his father. Vidyanidhi described his Guru's condition and named the medicine he had come to fetch. The Vaidya said, "I do not have any of it left. But I shall prepare it now. Wait for about half an hour." The Vaidya then started his work. Vidyanidhi sat down. As he felt sleepy, he closed his eyes.

He found himself back on the path. As he walked, he felt himself rising from the ground. In moments, he was coursing through the air. As he effortlessly descended to reach the ground near the cottage, he realized how different the hermitage looked when viewed from above. He went to his Guru. At that moment, he felt a tap on his shoulder. Abruptly, he found himself seated at the Vaidya's house. The Vaidya's son told him, "You had fallen asleep. Father told me not to wake you up until he had finished preparing

the medicine. It is ready now.”

Vidyanidhi collected the medicine, thanked the Vaidya and his son and left. From the position of the moon, he inferred that he must have spent an hour at the village. He increased his pace. As he moved on, he mused, “My dream at the Vaidya’s place was clearly based on my waking-state experience of the recent past. I had wistfully thought of being able to fly back to my Guru with the Ayurvedic preparation and fly is what I did in my dream.” He returned to the hermitage a little before the moonset. When he approached his Guru, he found that his master was still in great pain. He administered the medicine. In a few minutes, his Guru told him, “The pain is almost gone. You have put up with much inconvenience for my sake. Now go and lie down.” Vidyanidhi returned to his mat and quickly fell asleep.

He woke up well before dawn as was his wont. He peeped into his Guru’s room and found his master peacefully asleep. In a short while, the Guru came out. Vidyanidhi respectfully asked him, “O Lord, please may I know how your health is today?” “It is good”, replied the Guru with a smile and moved on.

That afternoon, the Vaidya came to pay his respects to the Guru. On seeing him, Vidyanidhi said, “The medicine acted quickly on our Guru.” “What medicine are you talking about?” asked the Vaidya, looking perplexed. “I am referring to the medicine you prepared and gave me last night when I came to your place”, explained Vidyanidhi, wondering how the Vaidya could have forgotten. “It is impossible for you to have met me last night. I have not been in my village for the past one week. I returned only a couple of hours ago”, stated the

Vaidya. "Are you unwell?" he continued. Vidyanidhi remained silent, feeling thoroughly confused.

At the earliest opportunity, he asked his Guru, "O Master, as you know, with your permission, I went last night to fetch a medicine from the Vaidya to relieve you of your abdominal pain. The Vaidya, however, now says that he was not at his house last night." "My child, I had no abdominal pain and did not ask you to meet the Vaidya", said the Guru. "Tell me in detail what you think happened." Vidyanidhi obeyed and described everything. The Guru burst out laughing.

Then, he explained, "My child, yesterday I was teaching you the Vedantic position suitable to advanced spiritual aspirants that the world of the waking state is on par with the world of dreams. You had several doubts and I told you that I would provide you clarifications today. By God's grace, you have had a dream that makes my task easy.

"You went to sleep. Now, you think that you woke up on hearing me moan in pain. But that was just the starting point of your dream. Your dream ended with your returning to your bed. Such were the unusual commencement and termination of your dream that, even after waking up, you have been unable to differentiate your dream from your waking state. As you can see, you have had a first-hand experience that the world of the waking state is akin to the world of a dream.

"In your dream, you did not feel pain before coming into contact with the thorns but felt it when the thorns penetrated the sole of your right foot. You grasped and pulled out the thorns. Thereafter, the pain gradually

subsided. Similar is the experience you have when awake. Why then should you not regard the thorns of the waking state to be false like those of the dream state?

“In your dream, a moon in the sky provided you the light for your journey. Further, in the course of your forward and return trips, you saw that moon in different positions. You even estimated the passage of time on the basis of the moon’s movement. You found yourself advancing along the stream when you walked but not when you sat down. You can encounter all this in an identical fashion in the waking state. Why then should you not regard the moon, passage of time, space and the effect of movement in the waking state to be on par with those in a dream?

“You believe that dreams are based on real experiences of the waking state and that when you wake up from a dream, you revert from a false world to a real one. Now, in the course of your dream last night, you had a second dream that apparently had for its basis your experiences of the main dream. Further, when you woke up from the second dream, you regressed to the main dream. Is not the relationship between your waking state and your main dream on par with the relationship between your main dream and the second dream? Why then should you not regard your waking state to be false like the main dream?

“In the course of your dream last night, the Vaidya and his son apparently saw you sleeping in their house when you had your second dream. They could have certified that you had not flown back to your cottage as experienced by you in your second dream. Why then, should you not regard the people of the waking state who can observe you when you sleep and dream to be on par with the Vaidya and his son of the main dream?”

Finally, the Guru asked Vidyanidhi, “Have the doubts that you expressed yesterday evening at the end of the Vedanta class now got resolved?” “My doubts have vanished. I am now in a position to accept that the world of the waking state is as unreal as the world seen in dream”, responded Vidyanidhi.

The Guru said, “My child, it is only when you realize the non-dual Truth that you will have the unshakeable experience that the states of waking, dream and deep sleep are illusory and that their substratum, pure consciousness, alone is real. Your present understanding is only a step in this direction. Unless a person is free from desires, he cannot cognize the waking state to be on par with the dream state. Strive on in the spiritual path. By God’s grace, success shall be yours.”

In His Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhashyam, Bhagavatpada has explained, “The Veda deems the experience of the waking state to be but a dream”, and, “In dreams, worlds that do not exist are falsely superimposed as being a part of the Atma. One must understand the worlds in the waking state too to be like that... Since, in the waking as also the dream state, the gross and subtle worlds, comprising actions, its factors and its results, are merely objects apprehended by the perceiver, therefore, that perceiver, the Atma characterized by consciousness, is distinct from its objects, the worlds seen in those states, and is spotless.”



96. Non-Recognition of Falsity

A young lad said to his mother, "Please entertain me with a story." His mother agreed to do so and narrated the following thoroughly fanciful tale.

Three handsome princes lived in a city that was totally non-existent. They were courageous and righteous. Two of them had not been born, while the third had not even reached the womb of his mother. With good thoughts, they set out to acquire the best. On the way, they came across fruit-bearing trees suspended in space. They plucked and ate a variety of tasty fruits.

Moving on, they beheld three rivers prettified by ripples. Two of the rivers never had a drop of water, while the third was fully dry. The princes bathed and sported in the dried-up river. Having drunk its sweet water to their heart's content, they reached a city that was yet to come into existence and where people were conversing and enjoying themselves.

In that city, they saw three lovely mansions, two of which had not at all been built, while the third had neither walls nor pillars. They entered the third mansion and, there, obtained three golden vessels. Two of the vessels had been shattered, while the third was completely pulverized. They took the pulverized vessel and put into it a quantity of rice that was hundred handfals less than a hundred handfals. They cooked the rice in that vessel and, with it, fed numerous Brahmins who had no mouths, but were voracious eaters. Thereafter, they ate the food that remained.

Delighting themselves with hunting and other pursuits, they dwelt happily in that city that was yet to come into being.

The boy listened to his mother with rapt attention. He enjoyed the story and found nothing incongruous in it. As far as he was concerned, his mother had given him a completely factual account of what had once transpired. Just as the indiscriminating child regarded the story as factual, unenlightened people mistake the world they see and think of to be real. They do not realize that the universe is illusory; it appears and disappears with the onset and cessation of mental activity and has no existence apart from the non-dual Supreme that is of the nature of pure consciousness.



97. Vision of Unity

Sage Ribhu was a mind-born son of Brahma, the Creator. By his very nature, he was firmly rooted in the non-dual Supreme and was a repository of scriptural knowledge. He had a disciple named Nidhagha. Taught by Ribhu, Nidhagha mastered the Shastras. He, however, did not attain steady repose in the non-dual Truth. At the end of his studies, he took leave of his Guru and settled down at Veeranagara, on the banks of the river Devika, as a householder. He led a pious, charitable life, firmly observing Grihastha-Dharma. Years passed.

Ribhu was sure that Nidhagha, whom he had not met for long, continued to be unenlightened. The sage felt great compassion for his learned, dear disciple and made up his mind to personally go to Veeranagara to uplift Nidhagha. Nidhagha had completed his rituals and was standing at the door of his house, eagerly hoping that some guest would arrive whom he could honour and feed, when he espied Ribhu. As the sage had disguised his identity, Nidhagha did not recognize him. However, he respectfully invited Ribhu to his house and washed his guest's feet.

Having duly honoured Ribhu, Nidhagha requested him to have food. Ribhu agreed but asked, "Tell me first, what items of food you will serve me?" Nidhagha gave him an impressive list. However, Ribhu responded that he did not find the items appropriate for his consumption. He then specified what he wished to be given; his list primarily comprised sweet items such as Payasam and Halwa. Nidhagha instructed his wife to

prepare the dishes concerned with the best of ingredients available. Soon, Ribhu was served a meal consisting of all that he had asked for.

After Ribhu had finished eating, Nidhagha asked him with great humility, "O holy one, has the meal sated you? Are you feeling at ease?" He also respectfully expressed his desire to know where his guest dwelled, where he was coming from and where he was headed.

Ribhu said, "He who experiences hunger attains satisfaction after a meal. Never have I been hungry. So, how can there be satiation for me? When the fire of digestion consumes the food ingested, hunger crops up. Likewise, when the water available in the body gets depleted, thirst arises. Hunger and thirst are thus bodily attributes. They do not pertain to me, who is not the body. Peacefulness and satisfaction belong to the mind and not to me, who is not the mind. Thus, your questions about satity and tranquility are inapplicable to me.

"I am the Atma that is omnipresent, being all-pervasive like Akasha. So, there is no question of my dwelling at a specific place, coming from somewhere, or proceeding towards some destination. By virtue of differences in bodies, you, I and others appear disparate, but are really not so. You and I are not the limited, distinct beings we seem to be; we are only the non-dual Atma.

"What is considered delicious becomes inedible with the passage of time and causes displeasure. What is tasteless can change into something tasty. Thus, no object is intrinsically delicious or unpalatable. There is no eatable that continues to be delicious in the past,

present and the future. Further, the various items of food such as rice, wheat, jaggery, milk and fruits are all only modifications of Prithvi.

“Thinking in the manner mentioned by me, you should make your mind same-sighted. Being ever same-sighted is the means to get the knowledge of the non-dual Truth and become liberated from the cycle of transmigratory existence.”

Hearing Ribhu’s words of wisdom, Nidhagha said, ‘O Lord, be propitious to me. You have come for doing good to me. Kindly tell me who you are.’ Ribhu said, “I am Ribhu, your Guru. I came here to teach you the Truth. Know that all that is there in the universe is intrinsically the Supreme. In reality, there is no diversity whatsoever; there is just the non-dual Atma.” Nidhagha prostrated before Ribhu and worshipped his Guru. Having blessed his disciple, the sage departed.

Years later, motivated by his overflowing mercy, Ribhu came once again to Veeranagara to grace his disciple; he knew that Nidhagha had still not attained steady abidance in the Supreme. Ribhu observed that the king of the region was entering the town with great pomp. Nidhagha was standing aloof, holding Darbha grass and sacrificial faggots obtained from the forest in his hands. The sage approached Nidhagha in the guise of an ignorant person and prostrated. Then, Ribhu asked, “O holy one, why are you standing here alone?”

Nidhagha : The king is entering. The streets being crowded, I am waiting here.

Ribhu : You appear to be well-informed about the

happenings here. Kindly tell me who among the people seen here is the king and who are the rest?

Nidhagha : The one riding the huge elephant is the monarch. The rest are his attendants and followers.

Ribhu : You simultaneously indicated the king and the elephant. Please explain clearly which among the two is the elephant and which one is the king.

Nidhagha : The elephant is below and the king is the one above. Who indeed is not familiar with the relation of the rider and the mount?

Ribhu : You spoke of below and above. Kindly clarify what is meant by the words below and above.

Nidhagha felt exasperated. He quickly mounted Ribhu's shoulders and sat with his legs astride them. Then, he said, "Now, like the king, I am above, while you, like the elephant, are below." Without the least irritation or hesitation, Ribhu asked, "O great Brahmin, you stated that you are like the king and that I am like the elephant. If so, who, intrinsically, are you and who, intrinsically, am I?"

Ribhu thus turned Nidhagha's mind to the instruction that he had given years earlier that, intrinsically, everything is the Supreme and that there is actually no diversity whatsoever. Nidhagha jumped down, fell at Ribhu's feet and held them in his hands. He said, "O Lord, you are undoubtedly my revered Guru, Sage Ribhu."

Ribhu compassionately said to him, "As a student, you served me with great sincerity. Out of love for you, I have come here to instruct you about the Truth. In

everything, realize the non-dual Atma.” Nidhagha became enlightened and Ribhu left.



98. Lessons from Shuka's Life

Maharishi Veda Vyasa once performed intense austerities and worshipped Lord Shiva with all his heart. He prayed to the Lord to grace him with a son endowed with the firmness of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and Akasha. Pleased with him, Shiva manifested before him and said, "You shall have a son of the kind you desire. Possessed by greatness, he will be as spotless as Akasha and the other elements. He will be firmly rooted in the Supreme and will attain great fame."

After obtaining the boon of his choice, Vyasa took up a pair of sticks of the Shami tree and rubbed them against each other to produce fire. As he was doing so, he beheld the Apsara Grithachi who quickly assumed the form of a parrot and came near him. A spark of life from the sage came into contact with the sticks in his hand and from them emerged Shuka, ablaze with spiritual splendour. Goddess Ganga personally bathed him with her waters. From the sky, there fell a staff and a deer-skin for the divine boy's use. Subsequently, Lord Shiva came there with Goddess Uma and performed Shuka's Upanayanam.

By the grace of the Lord, right from his birth, Shuka was endowed with wisdom and was conversant with the Vedas. However, the Vedas must necessarily be learnt from a preceptor. Hence, after his Upanayanam, Shuka approached Brihaspathi as a student. Having quickly learnt the Vedas and the Shastras at the feet of the Guru of the Devas, he returned to his father.

Shuka's Brahmacharyam and control of the mind and

senses were impeccable and he was dispassionate to the core. He had direct knowledge of the non-dual Truth but mistakenly imagined that there was still much to be learnt and done by him to attain the highest. He requested his father to teach him about how he could attain liberation.

Vyasa instructed his son in depth. Nonetheless, he found that his enlightened son, who had become an adept at Yoga, continued to feel that he was ignorant. Hence, Vyasa told him, "Go to king Janaka. He shall make known everything about Moksha to you." As Shuka readied himself to leave for Mithila, Vyasa said, "Do not use your Yogic powers and transport yourself there by air. Walk and approach Janaka with humility.

Accordingly, Shuka trekked the long distance on foot. He was not distracted in the least by the numerous beautiful sights he encountered on the way. Finally, he reached Janaka's palace in Mithila. The guards at the gate, however, rudely denied him permission to enter. Without a murmur of protest, Shuka stood silently near the entrance. Seeing that the boy was free from anger and indifferent to the hot sun, one of the guards appreciated his greatness and escorted him reverentially to a chamber within the palace.

Janaka's minister received Shuka there with joined palms and led him, through another chamber, to a delightful garden with ponds, many plants prettified by flowers and numerous fruit-bearing trees. Several exquisitely-beautiful damsels were there. The minister ordered them to attend to Shuka and left. The belles washed his feet, duly honoured him and offered him tasty articles of food. After Shuka had eaten, they showed him everything of interest in the garden. They were skilled in

music, dance and dalliance and did all they could to entertain him.

However, Shuka's mind-control and dispassion were so great that just as the disrespect he was shown at the palace gate did not irritate him, the garden and the efforts of the belles did not elate him. Even-minded, he sat on a seat offered to him and began his evening Sandhyavandanam. Then, he went into deep meditation. By the time he emerged from it, a third of the night had passed. He slept for the second third of the night. Thereafter, he got up and again absorbed himself in Yoga till dawn. A little later, Janaka approached Shuka accompanied by his priest, minister and the members of his family. The king offered the holy boy a jewelled seat and then worshipped him. Shuka experienced neither joy nor discomfiture. He paid his respects to the king and explained the purpose of his visit. Among the questions he posed were, "How is emancipation from transmigratory existence obtained? Is knowledge or penance the means? If a Brahmachari obtains knowledge and freedom from the pairs of opposites such as likes and dislikes, is it necessary for him to get married?"

Janaka, in the course of his sagacious reply, said, "It is only by means of knowledge and direct realization of the Truth that one becomes liberated. Such understanding and realization cannot be acquired without the guidance of a Guru. Knowledge is the boat that carries one across the ocean of Samsara and the Guru is the boatman. He, whose mind has become immaculate by virtue of the cleansing of his senses and recourse to righteousness in many births, procures liberation in his Brahmacharya-Ashrama itself. Having become

enlightened and liberated in the Brahmacharya-Ashrama, he has no use at all for married life.

“Beholding one’s Atma in all beings and all beings in the Atma, one should live without being attached to anything. He who views all beings, praise and censure, pleasure and pain, gold and iron and life and death with equanimity reaches the Supreme.”

Janaka added, “I see that all this knowledge that I am communicating to you is already there in you. You are fully conversant with all that needs to be known about liberation. Your knowledge, attainment and power are far superior to what you imagine them to be. In spite of directly realizing the Truth, a person does not attain the highest if he doubts his experience or entertains a fear that he will not become emancipated. When such misconceptions are dispelled, he promptly attains the Supreme. You have already apprehended the Truth. Your mind is steady and tranquil. You are free from desires and are truly same-sighted. I and others like me behold you to be established in indestructible freedom.” On hearing Janaka’s words, Shuka’s doubts and vacillations ceased; he became a Jivanmukta.

He took leave of the king and flew to where his father was in the Himalayas. Out of compassion for people, Vyasa codified the unified Veda into four. He entrusted the spreading of the Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas to Sumantha, Vaishampayana, Jaimini and Paila. The four great disciples of Vyasa left for the plains and became householders; Shuka, who had been taught by Vyasa along with them, remained a celibate and stayed on with his father, reciting the Vedas. To Shuka is attributed the narration of the Bhagavatam to Parikshit.

One day, the celestial Sage Narada met Shuka when the latter was alone and spoke to him at length about Moksha. In the course of his advice, Narada said, "Abandon Dharma characterized by the performance of scripturally-ordained actions, such as sacrifices, and give up Adharma, typified by the performance of scripturally-prohibited actions, such as killing. Discard truth and falsehood. Having dispensed with these, renounce the mind by means of which you relinquish all these. Give up Dharma by ceasing to make any Sankalpa, resolve. Abstain from Adharma by dispassion. Restraining speech by the mind, desist from uttering either verity or untruth. Renounce the mind by ceasing to identify with it and by realizing that you are pure, non-dual consciousness."

Shuka reflected on what Narada had told him. He decided that he would display his Yogic powers to the world and then cast off his body through Yoga and attain disembodied liberation. Narada expressed his approval. Shuka proceeded to where his father was. On learning his son's intention, Vyasa said, "My dear son, stay with me today so that I may gratify my eyes by beholding you for some more time." However, Shuka was so dispassionate and keen on disembodied liberation that he did not tarry.

He ascended the summit of a mountain and sat there for some time in Samadhi, revelling in the Supreme bliss of Brahman. After emerging from that state, he walked round Narada and took leave of the celestial sage. Then, he rose into the sky. As he flew, Rishis and the celestials gazed at him in wonder. He requested the presiding deities of nature, "If my father were to follow me and repeatedly call after me by name, please respond on my behalf." The deities who presided over the seas,

mountains, rivers, etc., loved him so much that they promptly agreed to do what he desired.

As he coursed through the sky, he beheld a pair of contiguous mountains in his path. Without slowing down, he smashed his way through them. Many bewitching Apsaras were sporting unclad in the Ganga when he flew over them. However, his desirelessness and absorption in the Atma were so obvious to them that they felt no shame and did not make any move to cover their nudity. Shuka rose higher in the direction of the sun and, terminating his astounding Yogic show, cast off his body and attained absolute disembodied union with the non-dual Supreme.

Meanwhile, impelled by his love for Shuka, Vyasa supernaturally transported himself to the spot from where his son had taken off. The Maharishi retraced Shuka's aerial path and soon reached the mountains split by Shuka. On encountering him, the Rishis described to him the wonderful feats of Shuka. Vyasa missed his son so badly that he began to lament and loudly called out to Shuka. From everywhere, there came the response, "Bho!"

Having witnessed the evidence of the glory of his son who had now truly become the soul of all, Vyasa sat down. When the naked Apsaras sporting in the Ganga espied him, they became agitated. Filled with shame, some plunged deep into the waters. Some ran into the groves while some quickly covered themselves with their clothes. Recalling that the belles had not minded remaining undressed in Shuka's presence, Vyasa felt proud of his son but ashamed of himself.

Lord Shiva manifested before Vyasa who was burning with grief at the loss of his son. Consoling the sage, He said, "You had prayed to Me for a son who would be like the elements. You obtained, by your penance, the son you wanted. By My grace, he was mentally spotless and spiritually glorious. He has attained the highest state. Why then do you grieve? His fame will remain undiminished till this world lasts. By My grace, you will henceforth be constantly accompanied by a Shuka-like shadow that will be visible to you." The Lord then vanished. Vyasa beheld a shadow of his son and this filled him with joy.

Shuka was born with the knowledge of the Truth. Such a birth is possible but is extremely rare. A person who passes away while on the verge of getting enlightened may effortlessly become a Jivanmukta in his next birth. The Upanishads speak of Sage Vamadeva obtaining, by virtue of his past, direct experience of the Truth even while he lay in his mother's womb.

Shuka knew the Vedas without being taught. Nevertheless, he went to Brihaspathi as a disciple to learn them. This is because it is imperative that the Vedas be learnt from a preceptor. Children who are regularly exposed to Vedic chanting may be in a position to recite Vedic Mantras without being formally taught. They do not, however, become exempt from the rule regarding Vedic chanting.

When approaching a Mahatma for guidance, one must do so with humility and respect. Though Shuka had the power to quickly transport himself to Janaka's presence by air, he undertook, in accordance with Vyasa's advice, a strenuous journey by foot to Mithila and waited there

patiently for an opportunity to meet with Janaka.

Doubts and misconceptions can prevent a person from benefitting from his first-hand experience. The following two examples emphasize this.

When a person was reorganizing and cleaning his house, he accidentally came across a pouch. His father was the one who had concealed it years ago. Though his father had wanted to inform his son about it, he had fallen seriously ill before actually doing so and died without recovering from the ailment. The son opened the bag and found 50 glittering diamonds in it. They would have fetched him a good price and, with the amount, he could have lived in reasonable comfort.

However, he thought, "My father did not speak to me about them. So, they are unlikely to be diamonds. Presumably, they are pieces of glass. If I take them to a diamond merchant, he is likely to make fun of me for being unable to differentiate between precious diamonds and worthless pieces of glass." Because of his doubts and misapprehension, he put the pouch back where he had found it and continued to struggle to make ends meet.

A boy wanted to turn on a light in his room and so moved his hand to the pertinent switch. The moment he touched it, he got an electric shock. As he jerked back his hand reflexively, he banged his elbow against an article on his desk. He, who had never received an electric shock before, thought, "My friends have told me that they have experienced a tingling sensation on being struck on the funny bone of the elbow and that the cause is pressure on a nerve passing over it. Almost certainly, the sharp sensation in my arm was caused by the blow I received

on my elbow.” Failing to identify what he had directly experienced, he touched the switch again. This time, the consequence was disastrous.

Not only in worldly but also in religious and spiritual matters, doubts and misconceptions can cause great harm. Lord Krishna told Arjuna, “Neither this world nor the next nor happiness is there for one who has a doubting mind.” A man who is beset with doubt about the existence of life after death is unenthusiastic about acting according to the scriptural injunctions and securing an exalted realm. Because he is not certain that there is no life after death, he is unable to unhesitatingly revel in a materialistic life. Thus, he suffers a double loss.

Shuka’s life reveals how doubts and misconceptions about the Atma can block spiritual success. Though Shuka had realized the non-dual Truth, he failed to have a conviction regarding it and so did not become a Jivanmukta. It was only when Janaka set his uncertainties and misunderstanding at rest that he attained the highest.

Dispassion, equanimity and mind-control are vital for a spiritual aspirant. Marriage is not only not obligatory but also thoroughly useless for a Brahmachari who is pure-minded, dispassionate and keen on liberation from transmigratory existence. These points can be gleaned from the life of Shuka.

A person must conduct himself reverentially towards his Guru even after becoming a Jivanmukta. Narada gave detailed spiritual advice to Shuka and thus played the role of a Guru. Hence, Shuka, a Jivanmukta par excellence, worshipped Narada and took leave of the celestial sage before casting off his body and attaining disembodied

liberation.

Attachment unsettles the mind of even the great. Vyasa was undoubtedly a very great sage and a knower of the Truth. Yet, because of his intense attachment to Shuka, he was plunged into grief when Shuka left him for good. As for Shuka, he was an epitome of dispassion and did not have the least hesitation to renounce everything, including his body. True detachment does not make a person callous. It is only out of consideration for his father's feelings that the dispassionate Shuka requested the presiding deities of nature to respond on his behalf to his father's call.



A rare sage, who renounced the world before completing 14 years of age and who attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the highest state of Yoga, before He was 20, His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatheertha Mahaswamigal was a renowned Jivanmukta and a scholar par excellence in Tarka and Vedanta. He adorned the sacred Sri Sringeri Sharada Peetham and brought great glory to it in the 35 years of His pontificate as its 35th Shankaracharya. The very embodiment of compassion, the Acharya graced innumerable devotees in many a way. He had the innate ability to effortlessly render even highly complex scriptural topics easily and thoroughly intelligible by means of stories conceived by Him on the spot or based on the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas and other works. This book contains over a hundred of His edifying parables culled from His public discourses and personal conversations.

