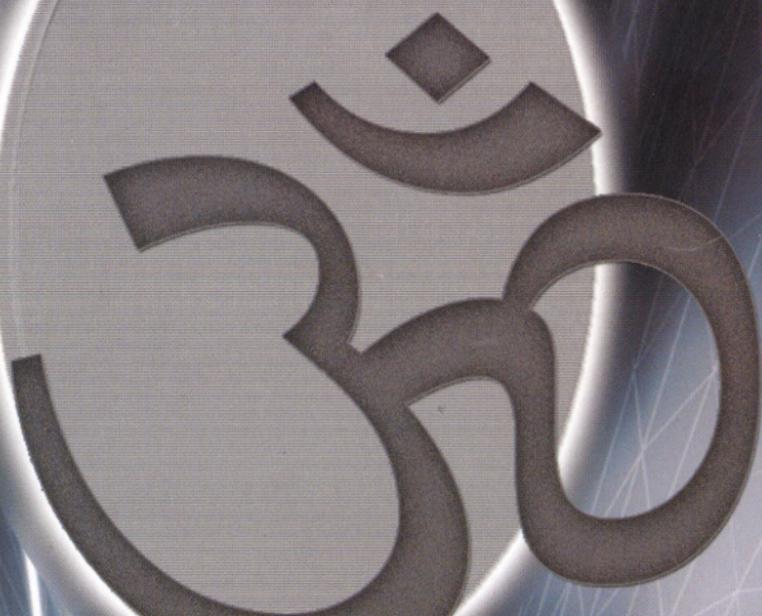


Stories for Meditation



Swami Shantananda Puri

Dedicated to the Holy Feet of

Gurudev

Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj

of Vasishtha Guha

and also to

Mrs. Lakshmi Arvind

and her son

Achal Arvind

*of Bangalore, but for whose persistent demands,
this book would never have been written.*

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Two words from the author

From the days of yore, parables and stories have been used as a medium for imparting moral, ethical and spiritual / philosophical instructions essential for leading a happy, tension and anxiety-free life. The most popular examples are the Aesop's fables, Panchatantra and Hitopadesha. Even Christ and Ramakrishna Paramahansa have freely used parables for making the noblest philosophical thoughts digestible to laymens, from the children to the old. The stories in this book have also been collected from various sources like the works of OSHO, Upanishads, The mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Kalyan, etc. Some stories had been heard from various Mahatmas in my early days. None of these stories is original. In many cases, the names and places have been changed (rural names like Kalu, Paltu have been given) to make the stories more attractive to children.

Most of the stories are not commonly known to majority of the people while they are extremely interesting and carry a definite

message for the sadhakas. They all have an entertainment value as well for all. More than that, if after reading each story, each reader were to sit quietly and meditate on the higher truths brought out in it, this will help him to grow spiritually strong and he will be better equipped to deal with the tension-generating problems of day to day life. To have the maximum benefit, one should not read all the stories at one stretch but savour them thoughtfully bit by bit, piece by piece like a rare delicacy.

To make the stories more appealing to Sanskrit lovers, the relevant and appropriate quotations from the Subhashitas (wise maxims) and relevant texts (Upanishads etc.) have also been given in most of the stories. Some of the stories are those which I have heard from my parents in my early life and their original source is not known. As all copies of this book are unpriced and distributed free, there is no profit-motive or selfish interest involved in this. The main purpose is to propagate and re-establish certain real and perennial values of life which are fast disappearing due to the lure and adoption of foreign culture and to inculcate in the children an interest to investigate more about the purpose of life and getting it achieved.

– *Swami Shantananda Puri*

ॐ

श्री गणेशाय नमः

I

**God's wisdom/compassion
is unquestionable**

1. The stupid angel
2. Ramu, the Bell-boy
3. Paltu's pilgrimage to Badrinath

1. The stupid angel

One day, God summoned the angel of death and directed him to bring the soul of a particular middle aged lady whose life on this earth was coming to a close that day, at Delhi. When the angel reached the spot, he found that the place was a dilapidated remains of an out-house and the lady was a poor beggar woman lying unconscious on the floor in a pool of blood, having given birth to triplets (three girls) an hour back. One child was lying supine on the breast of her mother, while the other two were lying on either side. The angel was unable to bear this pitiable sight. Tears were clouding his eyes. He thought within himself – ‘How cruel is our God. He is issuing orders not bothering to know the situation actually prevailing here. If I am to take away the life of this woman now, none of these three children will be able to survive. At least, if another ten years pass, these children will be able to take care of themselves by learning to beg in the streets. I cannot take away the life of this woman at this juncture. I do not care if I

were to incur the wrath of the Supreme Lord by this act of disobedience.’ He went back to the Lord empty-handed and pleaded with Him to exercise His compassion and to extend the life of that woman by ten years. God smiled and told – “You have been bestowed with the necessary wisdom, trained by me and appointed for this job of bringing the souls of people who are ordained to die. I find that you now consider yourself wiser and more compassionate than God and dare to advise me as to how I should run my administration of the world. You will be punished for your disobedience. You will forfeit all your powers of flying and invisibility and other privileges of an angel this very minute. You will go back to Delhi and remain there as an ordinary mortal till such time as you laugh at your own stupidity after committing stupid acts twice.”

The angel found himself standing stark naked in a corner in the busy streets of Connaught Circus at Delhi. It was evening and being the month of January, it was terrifically cold. The angel was shivering with cold and his teeth were chattering. A cobbler who was passing by took pity on the angel, took him to a shop of readymade garments and got him fitted with a complete set of clothes. As the angel had told him that he had no home of his own nor any friends or relatives, the cobbler invited him to stay in his own house but warned him that his wife being highly short-tempered might beat him or throw some utensils at him. Undeterred, the angel went along with him. As the cobbler had returned home empty-handed after spending all the money he had taken for purchasing clothes for his children, his wife got enraged and threw a few mud pots on the angel who got injured

slightly. The angel laughed for the first time at his own stupidity at not having heeded to the friendly warnings of the cobbler.

The angel began to assist the cobbler in his job and very soon became a master in that trade. As he remembered all the divine designs he had seen, the angel began to devise such new patterns of shoes / slippers with beautiful designs that the cobbler's shop became very famous and customers from afar used to throng the shop. Twelve years thus passed.

One day the angel was standing outside a garment shop when a big Imphala car came and stood by his side. A magnificently dressed rich old lady got down from the car along with three lovely well dressed young girls – all of almost the same age. The angel's attention was attracted by the fact that the left cheeks of all the three girls were marked distinctly by a tiny mole of the shape of a trident. He remembered the similar birthmarks of a trident which he had seen on the faces of the three children of the beggar woman twelve years back when he had gone to take away her soul at the behest of the Lord. He accosted that royal-looking lady and asked, "Madam, these children are very beautiful. Are they yours?" The lady replied with a beaming smile – "No, twelve years back, on a Friday, 6th May to be exact, I was driving my car through Connaught Place. From a dilapidated building in a corner near Plaza theatre I heard the piteous wailing sounds of some children. When I stopped the car and went inside, I found these children, just born lying by the side of their dead mother, a beggar woman. As I am a rich widow without any children, I brought those kids home and legally adopted them. I have got them educated and they are

the sole heirs to all my property. The angel was dumb founded and struck with remorse at his having disobeyed God's command due to misplaced compassion and lack of faith in the indisputable wisdom of the Lord. He laughed for a second time at his own stupidity. Had only the Lord extended the life of that beggar woman, all the three children would have also continued to be beggars remaining in rags. It is because of the death of their mother at that time, all the three children got the good fortune of being adopted by a rich lady and were living a life of luxury. In the pride of the modicum of intelligence bestowed by the Lord, we dare question the infinite compassion and the far-seeing superior wisdom of the Omniscient God. Let us rest assured that whatever happens by God's will is always for our ultimate good. Lord, Thy will alone be done.¹

1 “बलीयसी केवलमीश्वरेच्छा”

2. Ramu, the Bell-boy

Since the time Ramu was a young boy, nine years old, his only job was to ring the bell in the ancient Siva temple several times a day during pooja. His father, grandfather, etc. had all served in that temple as bell-ringers. Ramu had grown in that tradition and from childhood used to love Lord Siva as his own. Whenever he rang the bell continuously for nearly half an hour each time, he used to forget himself and became one with the resonant sound of 'OM' emanating from the bell, which he used to consider as a form of Lord Siva Himself. He was paid a decent salary and given adequate quantity of Prasad (consecrated food) to meet the needs of himself and his family.

In due course, the fame of the temple and the powers of the Lord's vibhuti (sacred ashes) to cure incurable diseases of people spread far and wide. Not only the devotees from all parts of India but a number of foreign visitors too began to throng the

temple. By that time, a new Board of Trustees took over the management of the temple. In order to cater to the increasing needs of the elite and educated visitors from various states as also the foreign visitors, they introduced various reforms in the temple. In its wake, they passed an order that all employees of the temple (irrespective of their cadre and nature of job) should be able to converse, read and write English fluently and all the old employees who could not fulfil this requirement were to be retired forthwith with an additional salary for one month as compensation in lieu of notice.

Ramu was now forty years old and had a fair-sized family. He was totally illiterate and could not read or write even his mother-tongue Hindi, not to speak of English. He pleaded hard with the authorities to exempt him from the operation of the latest order for learning English. Where else could he get an employment at this age? He did not know any other job or trade apart from ringing the temple bell. The authorities turned a deaf ear to his plea and released him from their employment after paying Rs. 100/- as an additional month's salary. Ramu, in sheer despair, went inside the temple and began to rile and rant standing before Lord Siva's statue – "With what devotion and love have I served you in all these years. I had completely surrendered myself to you. Is this the reward I get for my devoted service? Have you no compassion? Have you also imbibed the heart of the stone idol from which you have manifested? How do you deserve to be called 'Karunā Sāgara' (ocean of mercy)? Fie on me who has been foolishly depending on a God who is not capable of helping anybody." Ramu started walking aimlessly in the Mall Road, which was three kilometers or so long. He badly wanted to smoke a cigarette, but in the entire road there was not

a single shop where he could buy one. He felt frustrated. Suddenly, an idea flashed in his mind– ‘Why should I not open a cigarette shop on this road?’ He negotiated a small shop on rent and stocked it with cigarettes, bidis, pan-supari, toffees, peanut candis, notebooks, ballpens etc. (for school children). He flourished beyond expectation and within a couple of years opened three or four shops more in various parts of Meerut.

One day, the General Manager of the Bank where Ramu used to deposit his money called for him. With all deference due to a rich customer, he pointed out that several lakhs of rupees were lying in his Savings Bank Account earning a low rate of interest while if a substantial portion of it could be invested in fixed deposits, bonds etc. more interest benefits would accrue to him. Ramu confessed his ignorance about financial matters and agreed to abide by the advice of the banker. Accordingly, the General Manager himself filled up several application forms for distributing the deposits over various investments. He then handed over his Parker Pen to Ramu to enable him to sign the various forms. Poor Ramu humbly returned the pen to the officer as he did not know how to sign his name (being illiterate) and requested him to give an ink pad so that he could put his thumb-impression on all the documents. The General Manager stared at him in disbelief and exclaimed “As an illiterate you have amassed so much wealth! What would you have been, had you only learnt to read and write?” The simple Ramu replied “I would have continued to ring the bell in Lord Siva’s temple earning Rs.100/- per month.” Now Ramu knew that whatever God does is for our ultimate good and no master can ever equal Him in His generosity and kindness. Glory be to the ever loving God.

3. Paltu's pilgrimage to Badrinath

Paltu was born and grew up in a remote village near Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. From his childhood he had been hearing about the glory of Badrinath and Badrinarayan the Lord of that temple. He was never tired of hearing stories of that Lord every evening from the local village priest. By the time he was seven years old, his sole ambition was to visit Badrinath in the remote Himalayas. Even to reach Rishikesh by train would cost a sizeable amount and then one has to climb up more than 250 kms by foot in the mountainous terrain. Though Paltu was poor and earned his livelihood by carrying bricks from the kiln to building sites, he was sure that one day he would have saved enough money to enable him to visit Badrinath. Even while toiling in the brick kiln, he was always seeing and conversing with Lord Badrinarayan in his mind's vision. His tongue was always chanting "Narayan, Narayan, Mere Malik (my Master)". Every night he used to see in his dreams Badrinarayan, himself standing in his presence and reciting all

the Sanskrit Hymns in praise of the Lord, as taught by the old village priest, with his voice trembling in the cold.

At last the day came when he had money enough to venture on a pilgrimage to Badrinath. Paltu was already seventy-five years old. He was unsteady in his limbs being affected by rheumatism. The vision in his eyes had become dim due to the developing cataract. His spirits were, however, high. Undaunted, he walked by foot repeating Lord's name at every step from Rishikesh. As he wore no shoes, his feet were cracked and punctured. Higher up, the air was chill and he had no woollen clothes or blanket to cover himself with. He slept under the trees on the wayside, without any fear of wild animals. His heart was full of joy at the imminent prospect of his meeting the Lord and was not aware of the travails of the journey at all. At last he reached the much-longed-for destination – the glorious temple of Badrinath. It was the last day in October. The priests had shut the doors of the temple with Vedic chants and were locking them for the next six months to come. It was the custom every year that the temple would remain locked during the entire winter and all the priests and other inhabitants of the small Himalayan town would vacate the place en-bloc and move over to the plains down below for six months on the expiry of which they would return. Poor Paltu had never known these details. In his village, the temple never used to remain locked even for a single day. The sight of the priests locking the temple gate came as a shock to him. He ran, fell at the feet of the Head Priest (called "RĀWAL") and pleaded with them with tears flowing from his eyes – "Holy sirs, Panditji Maharaj, please open the doors for just three or four minutes and let me have the darshan of Lord

Narayan. I have come from afar and am very old. I will never be able to make one more trip. I am poor and ignorant. I never knew that the temple would remain closed in this season. Oblige me for once and Lord Narayan will surely reward you all for this act of generosity. Have some pity on this old man.” The priests were stunned to hear such unusual sacrilegious request from an ugly bearded old man in rags. They all shouted at him in anger “Get up and make way for us, you mad man. How dare you ask us to break the temple traditions which are several hundred years old? You should be mad to talk like this. Come after six months when the temple will be opened up.” Somebody pulled Paltu away from their path. The entire crowd headed by the Priests got into the waiting cars and trucks and went away leaving the broken old man lying at the temple gate. Paltu was sobbing and wailing – “Lord, in my entire life I had never asked you for anything, money or clothes or any other comfort. I only wanted to have one look at you. Why have you denied me this only desire of mine? All my life I have loved nobody but you, my beloved master. Who am I to question Thy will? Atleast I shall be able to die at your door. I surrender myself at your feet, my Lord. Do what you want.” He became almost unconscious due to hunger, the strenuous journey and the sudden shock to his emotions. Being winter in the Himalayas, the Sun had set early and snow had begun to fall.

All of a sudden, a young shepherd came over there and saw the old man lying unconscious. He woke him up saying “Baba, if you lie here you will be frozen to death by morning. Get up and follow me.” The shepherd seemed to be very familiar with that terrain. He took Paltu to a small cave sufficient for two

people to lie down. He lit up an oil lamp which he had kept in a corner. He drew some lines on the ground with a chalk and criss-crossed them. He brought some small stones and told Paltu “The night will be long. In order to pass time let us play this game of ‘Tiger–Lamb’ (something like an indigenous variety of chess) for some time. Both were playing and suddenly the shepherd exclaimed – “Oh, the dawn has come. I have work to do. See you later” and rushed out. Paltu also washed his face in a water fall nearby and slowly walked back to the temple. The sun began to shine. To his great surprise he found the same temple priests along with their followers opening the gates of the temple with Vedic chants and shouts of “Badri Narayan ki Jai”. He ran and fell at the feet of the Head Priest saying “Surely, on second thought, you have taken pity on this old man and have returned to enable me to have the darshan of my beloved Lord for a few minutes. How kind of you to have returned the very next morning in order to oblige me. May all the blessings of Lord Narayan be on you all.” The priests looked at him incredulously and remarked “Is not this fellow the same old mad cap who pleaded with us six months back on the day we were going down after closing the temple for the entire winter? How in heaven, has he managed to survive all these days for the last six months in this place? It is really strange.”

Who was there to unravel the mystery of the Lord’s Grace which, in its boundless divine compassion, enabled Paltu to spend six months in one night’s time? Paltu was never aware that Lord Himself had come to him in the form of a shepherd and made him pass through six months of winter within one single night. Prostrations to the Lord who never abandons a

devotee who loves Him unconditionally with a sincere heart and constantly thinks of Him.

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

(Bhagavad Gita IX-22)

“In respect of those people who constantly remember the Lord with one pointed devotion and are unceasingly engaged in His worship, the Lord looks after and ensures their welfare personally.”

II

Regularity of Sadhana

4. The story of Jim

5. Reward for Mrs. C's prayers

4. The story of Jim

Jim was staying with his mother in a village in England (U.K.). He had no belief in any God or religion. He used to help his neighbours in times of need to the best of his ability. He was educated but was content to live in his village looking after a small farm the income from which was sufficient for the needs of the mother and her son. His mother was very religious and used to attend the local church daily. Jim would always escort his mother to the church and back but he himself would never step inside the church.

Jim's mother became very old and one day, while lying on her death-bed called Jim to her side and said – “Jim, you have always been very good and I could never wish for a better son. At this last moment of my life, I want one favour from you. When I am gone, you should go to the local church daily at 11 a.m. when practically it will be empty of people, stand before the statue of Jesus Christ and tell him – ‘Jesus, this is Jim’. You may

come back after thus giving your attendance. Promise me that this much you will do for my sake daily without fail.” Jim mutely assented and gave his promise. He began to keep his word after this mother’s departure from this world by going to the church daily at 11 a.m. He would neither kneel nor pray but never failed to tell “Jesus, this is Jim.”

Days rolled on and fifteen years passed uneventfully. Jim never married. One day Jim had to go to the nearest city for purchasing certain parts for some farm equipment. He was caught in an accident and got crushed between two trucks. He had multi-fractures and was admitted by some passer-by in an orthopaedic hospital specially meant for multi-injuries and near-fatal cases. He was allotted bed No. 50. He was suffering from excruciating pain and untold agony inspite of injections and pain killing tablets. This was almost the state with every other patient in the other beds in that ward. Some patients were shouting with acute pain.

The next day morning, one young doctor belonging to the hospital came for inspection of the ward. The doctors used to be afraid of the inspection tour as all the patients would be shouting and complaining vociferously using all abusive terms. This doctor also entered with great trepidation but was surprised to see all his patients sitting in their beds with smiling faces. Normally the first five beds used to be reserved for those patients who were not expected to live through the previous night. On that day, patients in those five beds also were sitting in comfort. For the first time in the annals of the hospital, all the patients shouted with glee “Good morning, doctor.” The doctor stared at them all

in sheer wonder and disbelief. To his formal enquiry regarding their health, all the patients responded with 'Excellent', 'Fine', 'Superb' etc. There was no sign of any pain or even discomfort in any patient. This was unusual and nothing short of a miracle, as there was not a single case where recovery was expected within another two months' time even. The doctor went to the bed of an old patient with whom he was in quite good terms and asked him as to what had happened. The latter told him – "This is all due to the mysterious guest who visited Jim yesterday. You better ask him for further details."

The doctor was non-plussed. At the time of admission, Jim had asserted that he was alone in this world and had neither any relatives nor any friends to call his own. The doctor went and enquired Jim. The latter told him with a reminiscent smile: "Oh, Yesterday at 11 a.m. sharp a stranger came and stood by my side. He had a short beard and his hair was hanging loose over his shoulders. He wore a long brown gown. He had lustrous teeth and eyes scintillating like twin stars. Around his head there was a halo of light. The entire room was lit with a divine glow. Compassion seemed to flow from his eyes. He told me 'Jim, this is Jesus'. Then he slowly raised his eyes and cast his glance of Love and Compassion on all the patients in this room with a broad smile and left as suddenly as he came. That very minute, all the pain, agony and sufferings of each patient disappeared magically in a trice and all of us have been completely cured."

If only one were to be regular in some spiritual practice or the other, it bestows great benefits not only on him but on his neighbours too. A little meditation, a little prayer or a little

chanting of God's name will go a long way in helping us not only spiritually but also in our day to day wordly life.

“स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात्”

(Bhagavad Gita II – 40)

“Even a little duty towards God or self done regularly will save us from great calamities.”

5. Reward for Mrs. C's prayers

Ma Anandamayi was an internationally famous saint of the highest order. Once she went to a city where some rich man had lent his big spacious bungalow in the outskirts of the city for the mother to stay as long as she liked. The mother was accompanied by a number of Sannyasis (her disciples) and Brahmacharinis (female celebrities). On the fourth day of arrival, Ma called a Sannyasi disciple early in the morning and told him "For the last three days, in my morning meditation I have been seeing the vision of a young lady of fair complexion (aged about 32 years or so) with bobbed hair and of medium build. She lives somewhere within 20 kms radius from this place but it could be in any direction. I find her in my vision daily going to the third floor of her house at 3 a.m. in the morning, standing before a well-lit wick embedded in a circular plastic ring floating in a transparent jar of oil and mumbling some inaudible prayers for full three hours and then returning to her domestic chores. She has been doing this regularly for the

last fifteen years. God has commanded me to take her in my hands and shape her. You have to go out just now, find her out and bring her to me. The only other clue I can give you is that she drives a small car of blood-red colour. Go and may God be with you.”

The Sannyasi started on this unique errand even though it looked more like a wild goose chase. Till 12 in the noon he was walking looking at the occupants of every blood-red coloured car on the way. He became tired. He stood where he was and prayed to Ma – “Ma, I am sorry, I have not been successful in my errand. Please advise me what to do now.” Pat came a response in his heart – “Come back here by the same way by which you went. But at every step, repeat “Bhagawan”, “Bhagawan”. Lord will do the rest. The monk followed Ma’s advice and was returning. After walking back for half an hour, he was approaching a small nursery school from which a number of small children were coming out. Just at that moment he saw a blood-red car driven by a young lady coming out of the school gate and going ahead in the direction away from him. He ran into the school and asked some of the lady teachers who were standing as to who that lady was, who had just left the school in a red car. They told him that it was Mrs. C, a Parsi lady who was a teacher in that school. They even came out and pointed out her house which was a little ahead at the end of the same street. The monk walked up to that house. As the door opened on his touching it, he went straight inside without even knocking or ringing the bell (In the earlier days most of the monks were simple souls who did not know anything about the etiquettes of social life). The lady was sitting engrossed in the reading of

a newspaper and did not notice the arrival of the newcomer. Without any preliminaries, the monk addressed her – “Madam, my Guru Dev and a saint of great repute, Ma Anandamayi who is camping in this city desires to meet you. Will you please come along with me?” Mrs. C was righteously indignant and asked him “Who are you and how dare you come inside without knocking even. I know that you thieves just enter into big houses under some pretext with evil intentions at a time when the male members are likely to have gone out.” She began to ring up the police. The monk fell at her feet and began to tell her how Ma had seen her in a vision, going up to the third floor and praying before a light for three hours daily for the last fifteen years. Mrs. C abandoned the telephone as she was impressed by the sincerity and accuracy behind the monk’s narration. Except for her husband nobody knew about her daily prayers on the third floor. She asked him for some more details about Ma whose name she had never heard earlier. She kept a note for her husband who had gone to his office asking him to come to Ma’s place in the evening in case she was delayed and went along with the monk in her car. When they entered she saw Ma and her companions sitting on a platform and singing Bhajans (musical compositions on God) while a huge audience was sitting in her front facing her. She found herself on the backside of the platform, facing the back of Ma, where a number of Brahmacharinis of the Ashram were sitting. The inmates of the Ashram forbade her from going to the front and informed her that Ma’s Bhajan programme would last for one or two hours more. Mrs. C was vexed at the thought of waiting for an hour or so longer and was thinking of leaving for home immediately. At that moment Ma stopped her own singing, ordered her companions to carry on

the singing, got down from the platform, came straight to Mrs. C who was still standing undecided and hugged her. She took Mrs. C to her own room and conversed with her with all love. In answer to her inquiry Mrs. C told Ma that she was very happy with her life and that she used to pray to the Fire God to keep her in the same state of happiness forever. In her childhood and youth she was brought up by the Parsi priests and so she used to worship only the Fire God. Mrs. C was completely won over by the explicit and boundless love and kindness of Ma, which transcended the barriers of religion and caste. That day, both Mrs. C and her husband were initiated into meditation and they remained to be fervent admirers and followers of Ma.

If only one performs some worship or prayer or chanting of a name or japa or other spiritual practices (anushtān) regularly without fail for a few years, the Lord Himself provides a good guide in order to speed him in his quest.

III

Progress in Spiritual Life

6. Madhu Sudan Saraswati's God-Realisation

7. The glory of Gayatri Mantra

6. Madhu Sudan Saraswati's God-Realisation

Madhu Sudan Saraswati was a great Sanskrit scholar of yore well versed in the Scriptures. He had written a famous commentary on Bhagavad Gita. In his youth he was leading a life of ease and comfort. One day, a visiting monk (Sannyasi) initiated him in Krishna mantra and persuaded him that if he were to do continuous chanting (Japa) of the Mantra (some sacred syllables) for 16 hours a day for three years he would have God-realisation and could see Lord Krishna face to face. Madhu Sudanji began going to a dilapidated Krishna's temple nearby, where nobody used to come and was regularly doing his japa daily, returning home only at night. But even after four years there was no sign of any God-experience or vision of God. He got disgusted and felt that the monk had duped him. He abandoned his quest and came back home disappointed.

That day evening he went for a walk upto the bazaar (shopping area). On the way his slippers (sandals) gave way. He

took them to a cobbler who was sitting nearby under a tree and asked him to mend them. The cobbler, however, was taking his own time. He took out some tobacco from a pouch, cleaned them and crushed them. Madhu Sudanji felt annoyed and rebuked him for not attending to the job entrusted to him. The cobbler retorted – “Sir, you are always in a hurry and have no patience. That is why you fail in your attempts. See, you did Krishna japa for four years and have now abandoned it in haste.” Madhu Sudanji was astonished as he had been doing Krishna japa secretly and even his own family members never knew about it. In reply to his enquiry, the cobbler said, “Sir, I have mastered an occult mantra of a ghost (Bhoota mantra) which comes to me invisibly and tells in my ear some juicy information or other details about the personal life of the customers who come to me. This makes me popular and draws more customers to me.”

Madhu Sudanji requested the cobbler to initiate him in the Bhoota Mantra and asked him how much time it would take to get mastery (Siddhi) in it. The cobbler pleaded with him saying that having done japa of such great Mantras like Krishna’s he should not come down to practising mantras of such low beings as ghosts even though the latter would take only 5 to 6 months to master. Madhu Sudanji being adamant got his way and started doing the japa of the Bhoota Mantra. Nine months passed and no ghost came to him. He was enraged that even a cobbler had dared to dupe him. He went to the bazaar again with a stout stick in his hands. The cobbler gauged the situation and stood up with his hands folded over his head. He said, “Sir, please beat me as much as you like but not before you hear me. In three months’ time the ghost started to come to you but it could not approach

you anywhere within a mile as it found a sky-high fence of divine flame all around you as a result of the Krishna Mantra you had chanted for four years. I am an illiterate but kindly heed my advice. If only you are to continue your Krishna Japa for some more time you are sure to realise your goal.” Accordingly, Madhu Sudanji continued his Japa for another two years or so and was rewarded with the vision of Lord Krishna.

Spiritual progress which is subtle can never be assessed or known. One has to go ahead on this path with full faith that every second of his Sadhana is taking him nearer to the goal.

7. The glory of Gayatri Mantra

Ram Kishore was initiated into Gayatri Mantra, when he was a boy of twelve by a great saint. Kishore ran away from his house to Kasi (Varanasi) while yet a boy of sixteen and began to do continuous Japa on the banks of the Holy Ganga. He lived on the food offered by some devotees and was always submerged in Gayatri Japa. Twenty long years passed and Kishore did not have a single spiritual experience. Some of his Sadhak friends used to boast how they were seeing a glowing bluish pearl or a brilliant light in the middle of the brows or Lord Krishna himself playing his flute and with a mischievous smile. Kishore used to be jealous of them and feel frustrated. One of his friends even got some mystic powers and used to materialise toffees in his empty hands. One day when he was sitting in a mood of depression, a passing Sadhu told him “To get mastery over Gayatri Mantra requires a giant-like strenuous effort over a long period.

‘गायत्री आसुरी मता’

I can give you a Bhairava Mantra (Bhairava being an Ansa of Lord Siva) by which you can get mastery in less than a year and get all your desires fulfilled.” Ram Kishore got initiated into Bhairava Mantra. A year passed in meditation. One day, Kishore heard a booming voice from behind him – “Son, I am Bhairava and am pleased with you. Ask any boon from me.” Kishore asked Bhairava – “Why don’t you come in front of me and give me your darshan?” Bhairava replied – “Alas, because of the Gayatri Japa done by you for years there is such a blinding glow in your face that I am unable to come in front and face you. Further, I could see the form of Gayatri herself sitting on your shoulders. I can only give you some material boons. If you want God-Realisation or liberation (moksha), only Gayatri Mantra can bestow it on you.

‘न गायत्र्याः परो मन्त्रः’

‘There is no greater mantra than Gayatri’. So saying, he disappeared. Ram Kishore continued with his Gayatri Japa with renewed vigour and hope. On the spiritual path, one cannot see one’s own progress but has to go ahead with full faith.

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IV
Guide to Living

8. Awakening of sleeping souls
9. Akbar and Birbal

8. Awakening of sleeping souls

Guruji lived in Ghazipur – beyond Kasi. He was a great scholar well versed in philosophy and spiritually well advanced. He had a number of disciples. When he became very old, he felt that his death was near at hand. So he instructed his disciples to take him in a palanquin (as he could not walk) to Kasi so that he could leave his body in the holy city of Kasi (now Varanasi). It is prescribed in the scriptures² that anyone who dies in Kasi becomes automatically entitled to liberation (from the repeating cycle of births and deaths) and permanent happiness. While the disciples were carrying the Guruji, midway the latter felt very thirsty and the water carried by them had been exhausted. It was a very hot day in summer and his lips were parched. He ordered one of his senior disciples to go out and bring some water to drink. A disciple went far and wide and because of draught, water was not available anywhere. At last he approached a colony of Harijans (known as Candalas)

2. 'काश्यां तु मरणान्मुक्तिः।'

and requested them for water. With all deference they told him, “We are Harijans and no person of higher caste would even dream of taking water from our hands, which is considered as polluted.” The disciple convinced them – “My Guruji is a Jnani of a high order, who makes no distinction of high or low caste and looks at a dog, a low caste man and a brahmin with equality.³ Further, as my Guruji may otherwise die with thirst, eating or drinking from the hands of a low caste person in such an emergency will not entail any sin.” Finally, he took enough cool water in a Kamandalu (a vessel for holding water) and his Guruji drank it all in a gulp with great relief. He then asked his disciple casually as to wherefrom he had brought the water. The latter told the truth as it happened. His Guruji held his head in both hands in dismay and cried – “Oh my Lord, at this age I have been polluted by the water brought from the house of a candala. I have lost my caste.” Thus wailing, he breathed his last on the spot.

As his last thought was that of a low caste candala, the Guruji was re-born in the family of a low caste drummer living in a city near Kasi, ruled by a king and was named Bhola. It is told in scriptures that the thoughts at the last moment of death very much influence the next birth. If only one were to think of God even at the last moment one can attain God⁴. Further, pride of lineage, pride of character, pride of caste etc. are some of the

3. ‘शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः’ (Bhagavad Gita V-18).

4. अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम्, यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥

(Bhagavad Gita VIII-5).

eight factors⁵ resulting in bondage entailing entanglement in the cycle of births and deaths.

Bhola's father was appointed by the king for alerting the people at night against thieves and burglars by beating the drum and going into the streets every three hours. Bhola was born dumb. Due to the Grace of God, Bhola remembered all the details of his previous birth as also the knowledge accumulated. He was not really dumb but vowed to shun all society by keeping silent and posing as dull and dumb and to devote all the time in constant thoughts of God. Thus ignored by the society, relatives and parents he grew up to be twelve years old.

One day, Bhola's father had to go out of the city for a night in order to attend a marriage but he could not get the permission from the king. He called his son Bhola and instructed him in beating the drum at night exactly when each quarter of the night was over. He then quietly slipped away without the king's knowledge.

When Bhola went into the streets at the first quarter of the night with his drum and saw all people sleeping unwarily in their ignorance, he was overwhelmed with deep compassion for them. He decided to wake them up to a higher life of consciousness and bliss. After beating the drum, he recited the following couplet of awakening in loud tones in Sanskrit:

'To be born in this world is misery. Old age with its attendant white hair and wrinkles marring our youthful beauty and being afflicted with various diseases is more of a misery.

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5. घृणा लज्जा भयं शोको जुगुप्सा चेति पःामी ।
कुलं शीलं च जातिश्च अष्टौ पाशाः प्रकीर्तिताः ॥

(page 252, प्रसंग no.2 – धर्मलाप by Sri Swami Prakashanandji)

Marriage is another misery for life. The prospect of death at the last moment of our life is the greatest of all miseries. Please wake up from this life of misery.’⁶

The king sitting on his bed heard this exhortation and was highly moved. He could not sleep and was waiting anxiously to hear the instructions of the drummer in the second quarter of the night.

Again after three hours, the boy recited a second poem –

“A man is bound by his desires. In order to fulfil the desires, he does good and bad actions. For reaping the rewards for good actions and to get punished for bad actions in the next birth he gets fully entangled in the world of birth and death. In the mean time he remains blissfully unaware how life after life gets wasted in this process. Wake up and leave off all desires.”⁷

In the third quarter again Bhola recited:

“All the wealth you long for is like in a dream. Your youth is just like a flower which blooms for a while and then gets dried up. This entire life is momentary and transient. It passes very quickly. Why should you go after these elusive goals? Wake up.”⁸

6. जन्म दुःखं जरा दुःखं जाया दुःखं पुनः पुनः ।

अन्तकाले महा दुःखं तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

7. आशायां बद्धते लोको कर्मणा परिबद्धयते ।

आयुः क्षयं न जानाति तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

8. ऐश्वर्यं स्वप्नसंकाशं यौवनं कुसुमोपमम् ।

क्षणिकं चलमायुष्यं तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

In the last quarter, he sang : “Why are you bothered about thieves from outside? The greatest of thieves, Lust, Anger, Greed and Delusion are all sitting inside you with a view to deprive you of the valuable jewel of knowledge (knowledge of God/ Self). Please wake up and guard yourself against these internal enemies.”⁹

The king was entranced by the profundity of the truth and the depth of wisdom contained in the drummer’s call to wake up. Early in the morning he called for the old drummer who had returned by that time. The old man knew instinctively that something was amiss and went for the audience trembling with fear. When the king persistently demanded to know who the drummer was in the previous night, he had to admit the truth that he had sent his dumb son on that duty. The king accompanied the drummer to his hovel and prostrating at the feet of the boy Bhola entreated him for a final instruction. Bhola sang the final couplet :

“Nobody is your own– neither the father, mother, relations nor friends. What have you got to do with them? Again, who is a king and who is a subject? This life is all a nightmare of misery. Wake up from this dream and be happy.”¹⁰

Now that his greatness was known to others, Bhola slipped away during the night to an unknown destination.

9. कामक्रोधौ लोभमोहौ देहे तिष्ठन्ति तस्कराः ।
ज्ञानरत्नापहारार्थं तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

10. माता नास्ति पिता नास्ति नास्ति बन्धुः सहोदरः ।
राजा नास्ति प्रजा नास्ति, तस्माज्जाग्रत जाग्रत ॥

9. Akbar and Birbal

It was one of the birthdays of Akbar, a Moghul emperor. All his courtiers went to the Darbar to congratulate him and praised him to the sky. Birbal, the favourite minister of Akbar was renowned for his wisdom and ready wit. He congratulated Akbar and told him “Bādshah, your Highness is greater than Allah.” Akbar, though tolerant of Hindus was true to his religion, at heart, and he was aware of the injunction in Holy Kuran that no man be called as either equal or surpassing Allah the great and any blasphemer who transgresses this injunction be beheaded. Akbar was enraged and called upon Birbal to prove how he was greater than Allah failing which the latter was to be beheaded. Birbal did not deign to give any reply and was standing unperturbed. Akbar repeated his demand in a more threatening manner and it also failed to elicit any response. He decreed “Birbal, you have been my intimate friend and I do not want to kill you. You are declared *persona non grata* from

this moment and are hereby banished forever from my kingdom which you shall leave before midnight today.” Birbal laughed merrily and declared – “Your Highness, the proof you wanted has been provided by you just now.” Akbar was unable to comprehend it. Birbal explained – “Allah cannot banish anybody away from His kingdom as there is no place in heaven or earth which is not included in His kingdom. Where to can Allah the Merciful banish anybody? You have done something in banishing me, which God cannot do. I stand vindicated.” God’s mercy knows no limit.

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V

Adherence to Truth

10. Durvasa, a stickler to Truth
11. One who saw cannot speak

10. Durvasa, a stickler to Truth

The epic war of Mahabharata was over and the Kauravas headed by Duryodhana were all annihilated. The Pandavas were feeling very tired. They decided to go out on a picnic-spreed next day morning accompanied by Krishna, leaving their wife Draupadi to look after the camp in their absence. With Krishna's consent they threw away all their weapons, bows, mace (Gadā) etc., in their tent and left with some packed lunch in hand. For three to four hours they went on walking inside a jungle when from nowhere a local hunter appeared, whispered something in Krishna's ears and went away. Krishna became thoughtful and serious and signs of distress and anxiety could be seen in his face. He told the Pandavas that he had got the news that the great warrior Aswathama was coming in his chariot, equipped with all weapons in pursuit of the five Pandavas in order to wreak his vengeance on them for the death of his father Dronacharya and his beloved friend Duryodhana. There was no time left for the Pandavas to return to their camp to take up the

arms. Krishna suddenly espied that nearby there was the small Ashram of Sage Durvasa very notorious for his fierce temper and unreasonable anger resulting in his unjustified curses imposed on people. Krishna entered the cottage and after informing the sage of the situation requested him to grant temporary asylum for them for a short while. Durvasa was very respectful and reverential but protested, “Krishna, this cottage has only one room with bare walls and no almirahs, boxes or furniture. Where is the place to hide the Pandavas? I have no objection to hide them provided you tell me how.” Krishna made Durvasa to vacate his seat on the floor and made Bheema dig a deep pit on the floor sufficient to accommodate the five Pandavas. All the Pandavas huddled closely in that pit. Krishna put a mat (thick carpet – like spread) over them, then a tiger skin and a woollen seat – one over the other and asked Durvasa to sit on that seat (Āsan). Durvasa called Krishna before the latter left the place and told him – “Remember, being a Sage I shall never tell a lie. Aswathama being a good friend of mine is sure to ask me about the whereabouts of Pandavas and I shall have to tell him the truth that they are hidden below”. Unperturbed Krishna retorted – “Who asks you to tell a lie? Tell the truth by all means. I always like people who stick to the Truth. But, if asked, tell the Truth in this manner.” He told Durvasa something secretly in his ears and left. Aswathama came and knocked at the door of the cottage an hour later. He prostrated before the sage who welcomed him with a smile and enquired about his welfare. After the preliminaries were over and finding the sage in an affable mood, Aswathama casually enquired – “I am in pursuit of the Pandavas whose trail I have lost somewhere near this place. Have you any idea which way they have gone?” On hearing this, Durvasa rose

up from his seat with uncontrollable rage, his face contorted with anger and with clenched fists pointed out towards his seat and shouted with wild gestures: “Yes, I have kept them all hidden underneath this seat of mine; come on and take them.”

Aswathama flinched from his anger and said – “Holy Sir, I simply asked you a question. Why do you get so angry about it? My apologies to you and I am leaving.”

Durvasa told the exact truth but Aswathama did not believe it. The Pandavas were saved. On all occasions one should stick to the Truth but in certain tricky cases one should find out some method of telling the Truth or avoiding any reply at all so that the Truth may not harm somebody else. “Tell the Truth but never in a way as would cause unpleasantness.¹¹”

11. सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम्.

11. One who saw cannot speak

A Sadhu was sitting in meditation in his hermitage situated at the junction of four roads. He happened to see a cow running away in fear by one of the forking roads. Within twenty minutes or so a butcher also came running and asked the Sadhu by which way the cow had gone away. If the Sadhu were to tell the truth the butcher was sure to catch up with the cow and kill it in due course. Nor could he lie being a Sadhu who had vowed to tell only the truth at all times. He was in a dilemma. He told the butcher “The one who saw cannot speak. The one who speaks has never seen. The one who was controlling both of them was sitting at the feet of the Guru.” What he meant was that the eyes which saw could not speak. The tongue which spoke was not capable of seeing and so there was no authenticity in it. The person who controlled the eyes and the speech was himself meditating on his Guru. The butcher was perplexed and could not understand what the Sadhu said. He thought that the Sadhu was a mad man who was babbling meaningless words. He went away.

Even if one apprehends that telling the truth will harm someone, one can always find a way of escape without telling a lie.

VI
God-Realisation

12. Seeking God from the throne
13. See God in all
14. The Living God in the Idol
15. Suka, the young renunciate
16. Satyakama, the cowherd
17. Partial Meditation is harmful
18. Herrigel and Archery
19. Be positive in approach
20. The human heart opens from Inside
21. Swamiji and Jalebi
22. Mohan's renunciation
23. Humility, a cardinal virtue
24. Tyranny of the non-existing ego
25. Drop the ego
26. Sense of 'I' and 'Mine'
27. No reaction please
28. The non-fighting cock
29. The stolen lemon
30. Obstacles to progress
31. When I am abused
32. Where is real love?
33. Kalu, the truthful thief

12. Seeking God from the throne

Long back there was a Moghul king at Delhi which was in those days a small town with a bucolic atmosphere. The people used to refer to Delhi as “Basti” – a place where the people live as if in a colony.

One day when the king was asleep in his room at night, he heard footsteps on the top of his roof. He shouted, “Who is there? (Kaun hai?)” A very sweet voice replied “I am searching for my camel which is lost.” The king thought that the person should be either mad to look for a camel on the top of the palace roof or should be a thief. He sent his guard up to find out the intruder and to bring him to his presence. The intruder had disappeared and could not be found.

The next day while the king was sitting in all his regal splendour on his throne in his Durbar (court room) and was discussing about the means of God-Realisation with a number of priests and scholars, a Fakir (a holy man) approached the sentry at the doorway of the Durbar and in commanding tones demanded admittance on the ground that he desired to stay in that

Dharmasala (a charity house or travellers' inn) for a few days. The guard remonstrated with him and explained that this was a palace room where the king was conducting his court and was not a travellers's inn. The Fakir was adamant and said – “Look here, I came to this very place fifty years back when I saw a very old man sitting on the throne with different people. Again I visited this place some twenty years back and there was a middle aged man sitting on this throne. Now today I am seeing a younger man on the same throne. A house where the incumbents go on changing from time to time cannot but be a traveller's inn.” The king who was hearing this altercation recognised the sweet voice of the Fakir as that of the interloper who walked on the roof the previous night. He immediately called for the Fakir to come inside and asked him, “You speak now so wisely but how was it that you were foolish enough to search for a camel on my palace roof yesterday.” The Fakir squarely looked at the king and answered – “If you can be foolish enough to search for God sitting luxuriously on a throne, can I not search for a camel on the roof-top?” The king being spiritually ripe understood his folly, demitted the throne instantly, went to the banks of the Yamuna river where he began to live as a Fakir contemplating on God.

In those days there were many gates for entering into Delhi. Some people coming from villages afar used to come and enquire from the Fakir as to the way for reaching the ‘Basti’ (meaning Delhi). They used to go by the way pointed out by the Fakir reaching a cremation ground and not Delhi. They used to come back to the Fakir and rebuke him for deliberately mis-directing them. The Fakir told them with an apology, “I am

sorry. The misunderstanding was due to a different interpretation of your words. Basti means a place where people stay and live permanently. Delhi is only a transit camp where all the people are standing in a que to come to this cremation ground (Smasān) one day. When once a person is taken to the cremation ground, he lives there permanently in peace and quietude and so it is really the 'Basti'. As people do not get time to relax in their busy life in this world, God has made this device where one is made to relax thoroughly." He alone is a wise man who is awake before death and relaxes himself by annihilation of the mind (Mano-Nasa).

13. See God in all

There was a monastery (Ashram) founded by a great saint in Hoshiarpur in Punjab. Even after his attaining Samadhi, the Ashram was running very well with sixty Sannyasis (monks) and hundreds of dedicated Brahmacharis. In due course the Ashram began to deteriorate. There were parties (divisions) among the inmates. Mutual hatred, jealousy and power politics resulting in quarrels and indiscipline became rampant and finally all the Brahmacharis and the most of the Sanyasis left the fold and went away. The visiting devotees also were on the decrease. Now only about thirteen monks were left, who began to be anxious about the future of the Ashram. The Head-monk approached a reputed saint at Haridwar and requested him, “Holy Swamiji, please tell me as to what sins we have committed to have come down to this pass and what we should do to expiate the sin so that our Ashram could be rejuvenated and brought to its original status.”

The saint meditated for some time and said, “Luckily Lord Vishnu himself is born and is in disguise as one of the present inmates of your Ashram. He will see to it that your Ashram comes up again. He does not want to reveal Himself to anybody. Go back in peace and may God be with you.”

The Head-monk was considering all possibilities as to who among the thirteen was the likely incarnation of the Lord and he discarded everybody as none could fit the bill. Then he thought that as the Lord was in disguise, He would be posing as an ordinary man with all weaknesses. He called for a meeting of all the inmates and told them what all transpired with the saint of Haridwar. Now each one of the inmates was in a quandary, not knowing who among them was the Supreme Lord in disguise. From that day, each one began to treat every other inmate with love and deference as God Himself as anyone of them could easily be Lord Vishnu in disguise and nobody wanted to lose the opportunity of being in the good books of the Lord. They began to see God in each other. They never insulted, offended or quarrelled among themselves as they feared that the other one might be the incarnation of God. Harmony, love and peace was re-established, the number of inmates began to grow and the Ashram began to flourish once again.

14. The Living God in the Idol

Shivkumar had put in twenty years as a petty clerk in the Secretariat of Delhi and never got a promotion. His wife used to taunt him for his inefficiency and all his neighbours began to look down on him. He was disgusted with himself and one day approached a Punditji, a colleague of his for advice in the matter. The Punditji advised him, “You go to the bazaar, get a nice statue of SRI RAM, instal him at some airy place in your house and worship him daily. Keep burning incense sticks (agarbathis) and dhoop in front of SRI RAM, offer him 1008 flowers, each time reciting the name “Om Sri Rāmāya Namah” with each flower. Finally let there be an Arti by lighting camphor. Do it for just one year and Ram will fulfil all your desires.” Shivkumar strictly followed this advice for a little more than a year but without any result. He became unhappy and consulted

another Punditji of his office. The latter advised him : Sri Ram is a God who lived long back and has become obsolete. The latest model is Sri Krishna who belongs to more recent times. You should now discard Ram, instal a statue of Lord Krishna and do his Puja. You will get wonderful results in no time.” Shivkumar had installed Ram on a table near a window. Now he threw Ram in a recumbent position and installed Krishna’s statue in the centre. He lighted several fragrant incense-sticks (agarbathis) and started the Puja. He found that due to the wind blowing through the window, the fragrant fumes from the incense-sticks were going towards the face of Sri Ram lying below and not towards Lord Krishna. He could not bear the thought that Sri Ram was enjoying the fragrant smell of the incense-sticks while Ram had done nothing for him in the last one year. He went inside, brought some cotton and stuffed both the nostrils of Sri Ram so that not a whiff of the perfume of the incense-sticks should reach him.

Sri Ramachandra immediately appeared before Shivkumar in all his splendour as if in flesh and blood with his face wreathed in a smile. He asked Shivkumar to ask for a boon. The latter, however, asked him “Why is it that you never gave your darshan in all the past 15 months when I worshipped you and appear now when I have ceased to worship you and have transferred my allegiance to Krishna? Is it due to jealousy that you are giving me darshan?” Lord Ram replied, “My dear son, till today you only considered me as a lifeless statue. Today only you recognised me as a living force i.e. as a conscious being like yourself – when you stuffed the cotton in my nose.”

15. Suka, the young renunciate

Suka Deva was the son of Vyasa, a great sage of the Mahabharata days. For sixteen years, it is told, he refused to come out of his mother's womb. Whenever his parents entreated him to come out, he flatly refused saying : "I am afraid of the world which is full of ensnaring Māya. Inside the womb, in this solitude, I am able to meditate comfortably on the Lord. Please allow me to continue." After a lot of entreaties from his parents, he came out reluctantly. He was a fully grown up handsome young boy of sixteen. Even before his parents could have an eyefull of him he started running naked towards a forest seen at a distance. His father too ran after him shouting "My dear son, come back."

En route, Suka was passing by a lake where a number of divine nymphs were taking bath stark naked. They continued bathing even when Suka was passing by but the moment they saw his father Vyasa coming behind, they hastened to wear their clothes to cover themselves up. Sage Vyasa got annoyed at this discriminatively insulting act of those ladies and he demanded

their explanation. The nymphs answered¹²– “Your son being one with the Supreme being in the highest state of consciousness sees only Himself in all and has no sense of sex-distinctions in his mind while your mind still tends to have sexual discrimination (differentiation).”

When Vyasa continued to run behind his son being unable to bear his separation and calling him to return, Suka never looked back or spoke. As Suka had identified himself with that Supreme State of Consciousness permeating the entire world including the trees around him, all the trees on the way became one with him, i.e. became Suka in their consciousness and told¹³ Vyasa “Revered father, please go back. I will not return home.” This is called Ekatmabhava (state of identification with all souls) which is a sine qua non for God-realisation.

12. स्त्री पुंभिदा न तु सुतस्य विविक्त दुष्टेः। (Bhagavatam I-4-5)

13. पुत्रेति तन्मयतया तस्वोऽभिनेदुः
तं सर्वभूतहृदयं मुनिमानतोऽस्मि ॥ (Bhagavatam I-2-2)

16. Satyakama, the cowherd

Satyakama, a young boy, approached his Guru, the sage Gautama and requested him to initiate him in Brahmacharya (celibacy) and teach him Brahma Vidya (the ultimate science of God- realisation). Gautama saw that this boy was truthful, sincere and one-pointed in his desire to get God-realisation and had the makings of a successful aspirant. He also felt that Satyakama was too good and brilliant for a classroom teaching. He gave Satyakama four hundred lean cows and told him “You will remain on the top of the yonder mountain (taking four days to reach by foot) along with these cows, tend them carefully till they become healthy and should not come back till they become one thousand¹⁴ in number. Then I will see what can be done.” What a strange way to lead to God-realisation!

14. नासहस्रेणावर्तयेति । (Chandogya 4-4-5)

Satyakama lived on jungle fruits and roots in the company of the four hundred cows on the top of the mountain. Morning to evening he served the cows with all love and care. He was a father to all the calves which were born and a close companion and friend to all the cows. He slept with them on the grassy ground. There was nobody with whom he could talk or display any superiority of his knowledge or demonstrate his talents. He loved that silence and became one with it. By his selfless service to the cows, his heart became pure. It was full of love. There was no worldly attachment, hatred, enmity, jealousy or other vasanas (conditioning) in his mind which may not have been the case had he lived with other students in the classroom. He forgot who he was and the purpose for which he had come. He was happy and carefree and no thoughts ever passed through his mind. He became one with all nature and lost his individuality. He possessed nothing and he was nothing. All his ego had melted away. Years passed and the cows had multiplied beyond the thousand limit. The cows adored Satyakama and so took pity on him.

One of the bulls among the herd reminded Satyakama “As ordered by your Guru we are now more than thousand in number. Take us back to your Gurukulam.”

On the first day of the journey, the bull told him, “I shall reveal to you one quarter of the glory of the universal Brahman (the Supreme being in the form of the universe). This quarter consists of four digits (part or Kala) in the form of the four directions East, West, South and North where the Brahman is shining in his splendour. The one who meditates on this effulgent Supreme being pervading all the four quarters will acquire fame and will gain other worlds.”

When they camped for the night on the second lap of their journey and Satyakama was tending the fire for performing his evening ritual, the fire God told him about the second quarter of the Brahman of the universe –

“The earth, the heaven, the interim region and the ocean constitute the four digits (parts) of the second quarter of the Infinite Brahman who pervades them. The one who meditates thus will gain other worlds of enjoyment.”

The third day a swan appeared and told him “The sun, the moon, the fire and the lightning constitute the third quarter and the one who meditates on the Brahman in this way will become brilliant and will gain other worlds of enjoyment.”

Lastly an aquatic bird appeared and instructed him in the fourth quarter : “All the microcosm is also the Brahman. The life-force (Prana), the mind and the senses of cognition form the fourth quarter of the Brahman. The one who meditates thus will conquer other worlds of enjoyment.”

The Guru saw Satyakama from afar, returning with a large herd of cows and found him resplendent with knowledge. He asked¹⁵ him with wonder – “You are shining like a person who has known the Brahman. Who is it that gave you that spiritual knowledge?” Satyakama humbly narrated what all happened and requested “Revered Sir, I want to learn it all from you.”

15. ब्रह्मविदिव वै सोम्य भासि को नु त्वा अनुशशासेति ॥’ (Chandogya 4-9-2)

17. Partial Meditation is harmful

Prāchinasala, Satya Yagna, Indradyumna, Sarkarakshya and Budila were five Brahmin Gurus, well versed in scriptures and leading the life of householders teaching meditation and other spiritual practices to hundreds of disciples. Their fame spread far and wide. They were all materially prosperous too. One day they joined together and began discussing among themselves – “We all have been doing intense meditation for years and teaching others too. Frankly none of us has been able to reach the ultimate level of Supreme Consciousness where one is able to realise the Brahman the only Reality and the oneness of the Self (Atma) with the Brahman. Let us all go to Uddalaka who is universally acknowledged as one spiritually highly evolved and learn from him the path to God-Realisation. Uddalaka who saw them from a distance guessed the purpose of their visit and thought within himself : ‘Alas, I am also in the same boat as these reputed scholars. I do not know what is wrong with my process of meditation. I am neither deriving any bliss out of it

nor am I having the absolute peace of mind.’ He told the other friends “Let us all go to Aswapati the king of Kekaya and a Kshatriya (warrior race) who is well famed for his spiritual knowledge.” The king welcomed these brahmin scholars and he offered each of them a purse of golden coins in token of his respect. The party headed by Uddalaka refused the money but requested the king to teach them the proper type of meditation as practised by him. The king asked them to come next day. In the morning when all these scholars assembled before the king with all deference becoming of a disciple, the king desired that before he could instruct them, each one of them should tell him first as to what type of meditation on the Self he has been practising all along.

Satya Yagna told that he was meditating on the Sun as the Brahman or the Self. The second one said that he was meditating on the all-pervading Air (Vayu) as the Self. Similarly the rest declared the Infinite Space, Water, Earth and Fire as their objects of meditation respectively. The king said, “You have all been meditating¹⁶ on one or the other part of the Brahman. For instance Fire, Sun, Air, Space, Water and Earth can be likened to the head, eye, life-force (prana), trunk, bladder and feet of the Self. Initially this meditation on parts of the Brahman has bestowed on you plenty of grains for food, a lot of wealth, good progeny, excellent health and fame. If only you had not come to me now

16. तान्होवाच एते वै खलु यूयं पृथग्वि इमं आत्मानं वैश्वानरं विद्वान् सोऽन्नमात्य यस्त्वेतमेवं प्रादेशमात्रमभिविमानमात्मानं वैश्वानर मुपास्ते स सर्वेषु लोकेषु सर्वेषु भूतेषु सर्वेष्व्वात्मसु अन्नमत्ति ॥..... (Chandogya Upanishad 5-18-1)

but had continued with your partial meditation, great calamities¹⁷ would have befallen you. Death and diseases such as of the head, bladder, feet, blindness of the eye weakness of the body etc. would have overcome you very soon and caused untold miseries in the near future.¹⁸

Then the king taught them a method of performing a fire ritual (homa) offering oblations (आहुति) mentally (through imagination) worshipping the Brahman in his full cosmic form comprising inter alia the five elements (the basic building blocks for the world) – Fire, Eye, Life-force etc.

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17. एतमेवमात्मानं वैश्वानरमुपास्ते मूर्धा त्वेष आत्मन इति होवाच मूर्धा ते व्यापतिष्यद्यन्मां नागमिष्य इति।
18.य एतमेवमात्मानं वैश्वानरमुपास्ते बस्तिस्त्वेष आत्मन इति होवाच बस्तिस्ते व्यभेत्स्यति यन्मां नागमिष्य इति। (5-16-2)

18. Herrigel and Archery

Herrigel was a great German thinker and wanted to learn the meditation technique from some Zen masters (Masters of a type of Buddhistic School of thought of Japan and China). He went to a Zen school where they adopted archery as the method for instruction. The Master began to teach him archery and demonstrated how the bow and arrow were to be handled. Within a few days, Herrigel began to hit the bull's eye hundred out of hundred times. The Master expressed his disapproval in clear terms "Your hitting the target every time is useless because it is you who releases the arrow with a deliberate effort. Here hitting or not either way it does not matter. The target is not at all important. What is expected is that you should not release the arrow when you are shooting it." Herrigel was non-plussed as he could not understand at all how he could desist from releasing the arrow when both bow and arrow were in his hands and he was expected to shoot at the target. The logic of it was beyond his comprehension. Day after day he practised archery fully keeping in view the admonition of his Master and

became more and more tense and full of anxiety but never once he succeeded in earning the approbation of the latter. Months passed and ultimately one day in sheer disgust and frustration he decided to abandon his quest and go back to his normal life. He conveyed his decision to his Master. The next day, before leaving for his home, he went to the archery ground along with his haversack in order to take leave of his Master. He was waiting sitting on a bench as the Master was busy demonstrating to a fresher. To-day all tension had gone and he was thoroughly relaxed. He was watching his Master holding the bow on one hand without even looking at the target while the arrow suddenly flew out of his hand with an effortless ease and hit the target. Herrigel's eyes stared at this phenomenon in astonishment and he suddenly understood what the Master was stressing all along. He found the secret of the technique as to how the arrow flew to the target without being released by the Master's hand. Immediately he took a bow and an arrow lying on the ground and shot at the target. He had not released the arrow. The master patted his shoulders in approval and declared, "Yes, this is the correct way."

In this path one has to leave off the sense of doership that 'I am doing this task'. Every action is done in Totality (we may also call it as God) which only uses our hands, feet etc., as its instrument while our ego makes us think that we are the doers. When we leave¹⁹ off this ego, it is the conscious Cosmic Force of the Totality which takes over and we remain as mute witnesses. ~~Even though it looks as if one is acting in reality one does not act.~~

19. निर्ममो निरहंकारो न किःिदपि निश्चितः ।

अन्तर्गलितसर्वाशः कुर्वन्नपि करोति न ॥ (Ashtavakra Samhita XVII-19)

कृतं देहेन कर्मेदं न मया शुद्धरूपिणा ।

इति चिन्तानुरोधी यः कुर्वन्नपि करोति न ॥ (Ashtavakra Samhita XVIII-25)

19. Be positive in approach

There were two disciples Ram and Kishan. Both went to a Guru for learning meditation. The Guru made them sit for five hours in meditation daily. As both Ram and Kishan had been chain-smokers of cigarette, they were restless and found it extremely difficult to sit for hours unless they were allowed to have one or two puffs of smoke in between. After a few days, they gathered courage and decided to approach the Guru for permission to smoke in between. Ram went to his Guru and came back in a minute smiling and said, “Guruji has permitted me.” Kishan also went inside and came back with a sad face. He said: “He did not accord any permission. On the contrary, he severely reprimanded me for the audacity to ask for permission to smoke in between meditation which is a sacred operation. I only requested him that as I am accustomed to smoking continuously, whether he could permit me to smoke a few times in between while doing meditation. By the way, how did you get your permission?” Ram answered with a smile – “I requested

him that as I am a chain smoker, whether I could meditate in between while smoking cigarettes.” Guruji told me with an approving smile – “Yes, my son, you can definitely do it. It is quite good to think of meditating on the Lord in between while smoking.”

Yes, even while praying to the Lord we should have a positive approach and not a negative one and then only the prayers are likely to be answered.

20. The human heart opens from Inside

Rakesh was an internationally acclaimed painter. He was once detailed to paint a picture connected with the scriptures on the double doors of meditation hall by a Swamiji in-charge of a famous Ashram in Haridwar. Rakesh painted a human heart on the two doors with Krishna waiting outside playing the flute. The Swamiji came along with an equally famous foreign painter to inspect the work. The visiting painter told Rakesh – “The painting is excellently done but you have committed one blunder. You have not drawn a handle on the outside of the door to enable Krishna to pull the door and walk into the heart.” Rakesh replied spiritedly – “Sir, I pity your ignorance. The human heart opens from inside. When you open your heart to the Lord by praying and calling Him with real longing and intense devotion, He walks in.” Swamiji nodded his head in delight.

21. Swamiji and Jalebi

There was an old Swamiji in a lonely corner of Uttarkasi. He was very austere, meditating for long stretches of hours for years, rarely ever speaking to people, always silent and living by taking alms (Bhiksha) from the Kshetras (places run on charity for feeding the Sadhus and Brahmacharis). He was highly respected by monks, householders, students, shopkeepers and all alike. He used to live alone in a small hermitage and possessed nothing but two towels to wear, two loin cloths (langote), a vessel for receiving alms and a Kamandalu for water. He was an ideal monk and never used to eat anything from any hotels, restaurants or sweet shops.

It was a Diwali day and the entire Uttarkasi had a festive appearance. Especially, the only sweet shop of that town was decorated and various types of sweets adorned the shop. The Jalebis (a common sweet in a cyclical form) and Mysore Paks were arranged in the form of a huge pyramid with a wide base. It was the evening and a large number of customers thronged the shop. The owner of the shop was being assisted by his three grown up sons and servants.

The old Swamiji was standing near the shop by the side where the Jalebis were kept. The owner of the shop invited the Swamiji with all respect to sit down and taste any sweets he liked without any payment. Swamiji politely declined. After a little while, the owner as also his sons were flabbergasted to see the Swamiji licking with his tongue from bottom to top the entire pyramid of Jalebis kept for sale. The Jalebis were all polluted and now nobody would purchase a single piece out of it. It was all a loss. The owner's sons rushed at the Swamiji with uncontrollable rage and continued to beat him with sticks severely till he fell down unconscious and blood was flowing out from various parts of the body. The Swamiji was kicked to a corner. Late at night the Swamiji came to consciousness and his entire body was aching. With a superhuman effort, he managed to crawl slowly back to his cottage. For the next three days he never came out of his cottage but was lying down and taking the name of the Lord with a peaceful and smiling countenance. Another Sadhu who was a little close to the Swamiji called on the latter on the fourth day along with tea and some food articles. Nobody in Uttarkasi (except the eyewitnesses) could believe that this Swamiji could have committed such an outrage. The friendly Sadhu fed the Swamiji, washed his wounds and applied some ointment. Slowly he enquired – "Swamiji, how could you do such an incredulous act? Will you please explain?"

Swamiji answered – "All my life I had been abiding scrupulously by all the rules of discipline imposed on monks. I was almost perfect in my vairagya (dispassion) and have had no desires or attachments. But I had always a craving for Jalebis from my childhood. Try as I might, I was unable to get rid of his

Vasana (desire). I tried, to expostulate with the mind, threatened it, cajoled it and tried to persuade it to leave off this craving but all my efforts were in vain. In sheer desparation I decided to teach such a hard lesson which my mind could not forget throughout my life. I licked those Jalebis deliberately so that I may get beaten. I have now triumphed over the mind which now shudders at the very thought of 'Jalebi'.

'The one who has conquered taste and thus his tongue can be deemed to have conquered the entire world'²⁰ and this is a sine qua non for the spiritual quest.

20. न जयेद्रसनं यावत् जितं सर्वं जिते रसे ॥' (Bhagavatam XI-8-21)

22. Mohan's renunciation

Soon after his graduation, Mohan was assailed by an inordinate desire to renounce and join a Hindu Mission of monks. Even though he was the only son of his old parents, he managed to persuade his parents to let him go on his spiritual quest. He went and joined a religious mission as a lay volunteer Brahmachari at Trivandrum in Kerala. After about two years he was suddenly assailed by remorse at having left his old parents alone and thus having failed in his duty as a son. He became restless. He went to the Head Swamiji, narrated his state of mind and sought permission to go back to his parents for good. That Swamiji was very sympathetic and accorded the permission but advised him to take the blessings of Eswar Maharaj who was a senior monk lying in a room in the Mission being afflicted with severe cancer, before leaving the Ashram. Eswar Maharaj told Mohan : “Yes, such a dilemma comes to many Sadhaks at some stage or other of the Sadhana. Lord will certainly come to your rescue.” Mohan went back home and his parents

were delighted at his unexpected return. Some five months later he received the sad news of the departure of Eswar Maharaj who had been afflicted with cancer, to the other world. It was followed by the receipt of a biography of the late Eswar Maharaj published by the Ashram.

Mohan went through the biography of Eswar Maharaj with great interest. On one page it was written: “Within a year of Eswar Maharaj’s joining the Mission as a Brahmachari, one day he was smote with remorse at his having left his old parents helpless and alone. He almost decided to go back home for good to serve his parents. That night he heard a Divine voice which chastised him – “You were born as the first child to your parents when they were more than 45 years old. Who looked after your parents before you were born? What would have happened, if your parents remained childless? Who will look after them if you were to die tomorrow? For a keen aspirant there is no greater duty on earth except to realise his Self by constantly enquiring Who am I.” Eswar changed his mind and became a monk in due course.

Mohan was entranced by the message in that page he was reading. It was so identical with his own problem and here was a direct guidance from the Divine. He read it again and again and underlined every line in that para with a red pencil and noted on the top of the page – “Identical with my case.” This began to work on his mind and in a week’s time he left again for the Ashram with his parents’ consent. The Head Swamiji was surprised to see him and enquired “How is it that you have come back?” Mohan narrated how the anecdote in the life of Eswar

Maharaj as described in his biography influenced him and made him come back to serve the Lord forever. Swamiji replied, “The anecdote you have mentioned did occur in the life of Eswar Maharaj but I can assure you that I have not included it anywhere in his biography which was written and got printed by me.”

Mohan was aghast and reiterated his stand saying, “Sir, I read it several times and underlined each line in my copy.” He opened his bag, took out the book and went through page by page but the page with his markings, underlining and noting was no longer there. This anecdote was nowhere in that copy. Who can understand the Lila (play) of the Lord! The farewell blessings of Eswar Maharaj came true. When we start on the spiritual path, if only we are sincere, the Lord walks with us and raises us with His invisible hands whenever we seem to slip or fall.

23. Humility, a cardinal virtue

Sanathan Goswami, a close devotee of Mahaprabhu Chaitanya and his nephew and disciple, Jiva Goswami were residing at the Holy Brindavan. They were also great scholars well versed in scriptures. Once a great Pundit from Bengal, having many titles in proof of the popular recognition of his high scholarship and victories in debates with ever so many scholars in various cities and centres of learning, came to Brindavan. His very name struck terror in the assemblies of Pundits. In many cases, even without a debate, many literary institutions and associations had given him certificates of his conquests. At Brindavan, he met the local scholars and challenged them for a debate failing which they could issue a certificate of conquest accepting his superiority. They humbly told him – “Sanathan Goswami and Jiva Goswami are the leading scholars of this place and when once they sign a certificate, we shall all follow suit. When the great Punditji met Sanathan Goswami and explained his purpose, the latter prostrated to him and said:

“The brilliance in your face is enough proof of your undoubtedly superior scholarship. I accept it.” He signed the certificate and handed it over to him. On enquiry, he told the

scholar that Jiva Goswami had gone out and was not available. While the Punditji was going gloriously reclining in a palanquin, he was informed on the way that the man who was then coming from the opposite direction was Jiva Goswami. Punditji jumped out of the palanquin, introduced himself to Jiva Goswami and explained his purpose showing to him all the certificates he had earned so far including that of the latter's uncle and Guru, Sanathanji. Jiva Goswami was incensed at this challenge and said, "Sir, I am not prepared to submit to you like my uncle without a debate. Let us have a verbal duel in the temple nearby." The debate started and within less than half an hour the great Punditji was defeated badly. Jiva Goswami took away all the certificates from the Punditji, tore them into pieces except the one given by his uncle and warned the latter not to show his face again in Brindavan in future. Jiva Goswami went to his uncle, proud of his success, narrated with a gusto his own exploits and showed him the certificate signed by his uncle. Sanathanji never spoke a word but quickly packed up a few essentials in a bag and began to leave the house. Jiva Goswami was perplexed and requested him to let him know why and where his uncle was leaving for. Sanathan Goswami explained, "I am an unworthy Guru who has not been able to impart to you the value of humility and so not fit to remain in Brindavan. What did you gain by putting to shame and disgrace a great scholar? What would you have lost by signing the certificate and giving it to him? A spiritually evolved person will neither take offence nor will he give offence or openly insult any body making another unhappy. He alone is the beloved of the Lord²¹."

21. यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः।
हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैः मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः॥ (Bhagavad Gita - 12-15)

24. Tyranny of the non-existing ego

Bodhi Dharma was the earliest of the Buddhist monks (Bhikkus) to go to China. China in those days was divided into various kingdoms and King Wu was one of the biggest kings. Bodhi Dharma went to the capital of King Wu who gave him a warm reception. The king told him, “Sir, I have heard a lot about you. I am honoured by your visit. All facilities will be given to you to go and preach the path of Buddha (the Dhamma) anywhere in my kingdom. You will be our royal guest as long as you deign to remain here. But I have an urgent problem, for which I badly need your help. In all these years I have built a big empire by annexing a number of neighbouring states and I am quite prosperous and wealthy. I have obedient and well behaved wives and children. In this process, unfortunately, my Ego has also grown so high that I am extremely miserable. I have sought the advice of many a saint and wise men but except for giving month long lectures on ego they could not help me. Please help me to annihilate my Ego.”

Bodhi Dharma nodded his head in assent and told him, “Oh it is not a big affair. Your Ego will be killed tomorrow.”

The king was baffled by this answer and again enquired – “What shall I do for it?”

Bodhi Dharma said – “You come to my camp residence early in the morning at 3 a.m. But please ensure that you come alone. By the way, do not forget to bring your Ego with you.” The king was again perplexed and began to think – ‘Is this person a saint, an impostor or a mad man?’

‘If he is a saint, how can he ask me not to forget to take my ego with me. Is ego a concrete item to be kept in an almirah and forgotten? Why did he ask me to come alone? Does he have any designs to kill me and take over this kingdom. No, it is not possible. There are no signs of greed in his face and his looks are full of compassion and love just like those of Buddha.’

Early morning, the king went to Bodhi Dharma who said “Oh it is good that you have come alone. Have you brought your ego with you?” The king gathered courage and answered: “Holy Sir, my ego is not kept anywhere outside. It is only inside myself.” Bodhi Dharma told him : “Oh, the ego is only inside you! It makes our task easier as we have to search for it within a very small confined area. Now you shut your eyes, search for the ego inside yourself and as soon as you locate it, give me a sign or indication as to where it is by shaking or pointing out that part of the body. The moment you indicate the location of the ego, I shall kill it with one stroke of this stout stick which I am holding in my hand.” The king was now afraid of the stout stick and the forbidding countenance of Bhodi Dharma.

The king shut his eyes and with an one-pointed mind began to search for the ego inside with all earnestness. Slowly he lost his body – consciousness. All thoughts subsided including the ‘I’ thought (ego). He went into Samadhi (trancelike state). King Wu had lost his individuality in the Super Consciousness. Obviously the king was ripe for this stage. Six hours passed and Bodhi Dharma woke him up by shaking him rudely and asked him, “Can’t you locate your ego yet?” The king smiled peacefully and replied – “Holy Sir, the ego is not inside.” Bodhi Dharma hundered – “What do you mean by saying that it is not inside? It is not also outside. Where is it then?” The king humbly replied – “Ego does not exist at all. It was all my imagination. Thanks to you, I have come to know this.”

Bhagavan Ramana’s teachings are : This ghost of the ego has no form of its own and when sought it takes to flight. By seeking the source of ‘I’, body consciousness is lost. If you seek the ego you will find that it does not exist. That is the way to destroy it. The Self is reached by the search for the origin of the ego and by diving into the heart.

(Page 166 to 168 of ‘Absolute Consciousness’ as selected by Grace J. McMartin).

25. Drop the ego

Today a great king is coming to the great Buddha for being initiated as a monk. The entire assembly of Bhikkus sitting around Buddha was agog with excitement. The king, dressed in a simple robe and with a shaven head began to walk towards Buddha with measured steps through the long line of thousands of monks. As he had to give a Guru Dakshina (offering to the Guru) worthy of a king, he was carrying a big diamond in his right hand. As he feared that Buddha might reject such an ostentatious offering, he was keeping a beautiful white lotus in his left hand, which was next to impossible to get in that non-season. Buddha commanded in a stentorian voice – “Oh king, drop it.” The king dropped the diamond. Again the voice came – “drop it.” The king dropped the lotus too. For the third time the voice came : “Drop it also.” The king was baffled.

He had nothing more in his hands to drop. He continued to walk but was stopped in his tracks by the voice, “I say, drop

it.” Suddenly he recollected a couplet²² sung by Bhuddha in one of his lectures – “Leave that (the medium i.e. the ego or the I-thought) through which you have left everything.” He understood that he was still entertaining the thought “I have dropped the Diamond and the Lotus.” He mentally surrendered himself to Buddha and dropped his ego. Buddha smiled in approval.

22. ‘येन त्यजसि तं त्यज।’

26. Sense of 'I' and 'Mine'

Kamakshi was a miserly rich old lady and was living alone. Her main desire was to go to Heaven and enjoy, after death. She would never willingly part with even a rotten apple for a beggar.

One day a hungry old monk entered her house as the door was ajar, sat down outside her kitchen and refused to leave unless some food article was given to appease his hunger at least partly. She was helpless and finally got rid of him by donating a carrot half of which had rotted.

A few years passed and suddenly one day she saw Yama, the God of death standing before her and ready to take away her soul. Yama told her, "I have come to take you to hell as you have never done a single good deed in your life." She remonstrated "You are wrong. I am entitled to go to heaven. Check up your

ledger. Five years back, on a particular day I have done a selfless service by donating a carrot to a monk.”

Yama was able to trace the entry in her ledger account. With an apology he told her: “You wait outside your house for a few minutes. In half an hour a golden carrot will descend till it is within the reach of your hands. If you catch hold of it, it will take you to the Heaven.” The old lady quickly dressed herself up gorgeously (in a new saree) and was waiting in the street when a golden carrot descended towards her. She caught hold of it which began moving upwards like a balloon, while she was hanging from it. A vendor of vegetables who was standing by her side immediately caught hold of her feet and the carrot was carrying both of them. Another lady who was seeing this scene caught hold of the vendor’s feet. Thus a number of people hung on to each other’s feet one below the other and the carrot was taking them all upwards. Kamakshi, unaware of people hanging one below the other went on enjoying the scenery. When she was almost nearing the gates of the Heaven, she had a last look on the earth she had left behind and beheld to her horror a number of people hanging one below the other under her support. She shrieked at them – “You fellows there, get down and leave my feet. This carrot is mine and I alone am entitled to go to heaven.” In order to emphasise the words “mine” with a suitable gesture, she touched her heart with both the hands. As she had unwarily left hold of the carrot, she fell down carrying all the people hanging in that line. **I and mine are the greatest obstacles on the Godward path.**

27. No reaction please

(i) Maha Prabhu Chaitanya and the prostitute

Maha Prabhu Chaitanya is considered as an incarnation of Lord Krishna. He used to advocate chanting and singing of Lord's name as the easiest means for God-Realisation. He was himself always drowned in singing Lord's name night and day and he attracted many followers. Many people got jealous of him and used to deride him as a hypocrite. With a view to defame him publicly, they hired a beautiful prostitute to go to Chaitanya and to entice him into engaging in amorous sports with her. The young prostitute dressed in a very alluring fashion went to Chaitanya at night when he was circumambulating (going round) Lord Krishna in a temple, singing his name sweetly "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare." The prostitute requested Chaitanya to grant her the boon of spending that night with her as she had been enslaved

by his beauty and overcome by passion. Chaitanya did not refuse but requested her to wait till he could finish his Pradakshina (going round) of the Lord. The lady was waiting in expectation and while hearing the songs sung by Chaitanya she was moved to tears and her mind automatically merged in the holy names of the Lord. In due course, she lost her body consciousness too. She was not aware of the hours passing. Chaitanya was doing Pradakshina all through the night chanting Lord's name with devout fervour and great vigour. The morning came and the prostitute got up and fell at the feet of Chaitanya saying "Gurudev, please forgive me, a born sinner that I am. Please bless me that I should spend the rest of my life chanting Krishna's name and dedicating myself to the service of God."

"It is only a liberated person who remains unperturbed and self-poised both on seeing a beautiful woman before him expressing her desire for him as also while facing imminent impending death."

(ii) Sankara and the Kapalika

Adi Sankara was a saint (sannyasi) of the highest order, who founded the philosophy of non-dualism (Advaita). Once when he was in Badrinath region along with his disciples, a Kapalika (a Tantrik devotee of Siva) approached Sankara when he was alone and requested him for the boon of his head in order to complete a Tantrik ritual for acquiring supernatural powers (Siddhis), where he has to offer in sacrifice the head of a realised soul. Sankara

agreed readily but told him, “If my disciples come to know of your design to behead me they will not let you live for a moment longer. So you better come secretly at midnight and take me to the place where you want to behead me.” Sankara remained self-poised and unperturbed and at midnight accompanied the Kapalika quietly. Soon after, one of the disciples, Padmapada woke up to find his beloved master missing. He followed the footsteps of Sankara instinctively and at one peak of the mountain arrived at the ghastly scene of the Kapalika raising a sword to sever the head of Sankara. Padmapada thought of his favourite God Narasimha and his entire body got suffused with the might and power of a lion. Without losing a moment, he pounced upon the Kapalika, wrenched the sword from the hands of the intending assassin and killed him with that very sword. There was no reaction in the face of Sankara either when his life was in peril or when he was rescued.

“One who is established in God will neither be afraid nor grief-stricken when faced with even dire calamities nor will he rejoice when some good befalls him.”²³

23. न प्रहृष्येत् प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत् प्राप्य चाप्रियम्।
स्थिरबुद्धिरसंमूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः ॥ (Bhagavad Gita V-20)

28. The non-fighting cock

A king in old China was rearing a very fierce fighting cock. He wanted his cock to come first in a competition of several fighting cocks belonging to some noblemen and other courtiers. He handed it over to a trainer who was a Sufi saint. Also, after some days, when the king enquired about the fitness of his fighting cock, the trainer replied,

“Not yet, it is still full of fire and is eager for a combat. It shows that it is still afraid.”

After a few days, in reply to another enquiry, the trainer saint told the king : “Not yet, he still flares up when he hears another bird crow in the vicinity. That shows that it still considers the whole world as its enemy.”

After another ten days the saint reported to the king : “Not yet sir, he still gets that fierce look and bristles.”

A week later, he told the king that the cock was ready to participate in a fight. The king arranged for a competition between the fighting cocks on a particular day. The day came. The king's cock was standing unconcerned in the centre of the arena. The other birds were prancing around with menacing looks and were ready to pounce on the king's cock. Even when they crowed, the eyes of the king's favourite did not flicker. He stood immobile like a wooden image. It looked as if he was simply bored by the event. The other cocks stopped in their stride and looked at it first in astonishment and later with fear. They had never seen a cock which never reacted. It was standing calmly and confidently absolutely unruffled not deigning to recognise the presence of these other birds which were itching to start a fight. The other cocks took one look and ran away from the cock which was exuding peace all around. One was reminded of a saying²⁴ in Maha Bharata "One should conquer anger with calmness."

24. अक्रोधेन जयेत्क्रोधम्॥

29. The stolen lemon

Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a famous saint who lived in Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Kolkata. A devotee used to come daily to him with an offering of a lemon fruit. Ramakrishna used to accept it and use it for himself. This went on for months. One day, when the devotee offered a lemon, Ramakrishna withdrew his hand in haste and exclaimed, “Take it away. I cannot accept this stolen lemon which is impure.” The devotee was taken aback by surprise. He said “Maharaj, I have been daily bringing the lemon from the same garden and today is no exception. It is owned by one Mr. ‘X’ whose permission to pluck and take away one lemon per day had been granted to me months back.” Ramakrishna was adamant in his stand.

While returning home, the devotee went to the same garden and asked the gardener whether Mr. ‘X’ the owner was in and whether he could meet him. The gardener told him : “Mr. ‘X’ has left yesterday evening after selling this garden and the house

to one Mr. 'Y' who is now the real owner." The devotee understood that as he had not taken the permission of the new owner, the lemon was deemed to be a stolen one. Non-stealing (Astheyam) is one of the virtues (Yama) prescribed for an aspirant.

30. Obstacles to progress

Rabbia was a Sufi saint who had once been a slave. One day when she was standing near the sea, Hassan, another Sufi saint also came there. Hassan threw his prayer-mat on the ocean and sat on it. He called Rabbia “Rabbia, why don’t you also come here? This place is good for meditation.” Rabbia in turn threw her prayer-mat in the air several feet above the ground and sat on it. She then called on Hassan to come and sit there in the air. Hassan was subdued. Rabbia told him – “What you did, a fish can do. What I did a bird can do. There is no meaning in acquiring and demonstrating such mystic powers (Siddhis). These are all obstacles to our Spiritual Progress.”

31. When I am abused

- (i) A devotee got angry with Buddha and abused him. Buddha asked him what would happen if he were to refuse to accept a given parcel which was sent to him by somebody. The devotee replied “Obviously, the parcel will go back to the one who gave it.” Buddha said “I do not accept the abuses which you gave.”

- (ii) A rich man used to go to Buddha continuously for a number of years and be in his company for hours. After several years, he got frustrated as he had made no progress in all those years spiritually. One evening he went to Buddha and abused him accusing him of partiality towards the Bhikkus. He said: “I have been keeping your holy company for years and you have not done anything for me. All your monk disciples are making rapid progress and I see them sitting erect and meditating for hours on end. I have not progressed one step in my meditation all these years. It is laymen like me who spend money to feed you

and keep you all in comfort but you bestow your grace only on these monks.” After giving went to his anger he went home but throughout the night he could not sleep. He was penitent, pained and was feeling very bad that he had showered abuses on such an enlightened saint like Buddha on a foolish impulse. Early in the morning he ran to Buddha and entreated him for forgiveness for this dastardly act of insulting him. Buddha laughed and said, “Much water has flown since the event yesterday. As the consciousness is an ever moving kinetic energy, the one who insulted the Buddha is no longer now before me. Similarly, the Buddha who is standing before you is not the one who was insulted yesterday. Where is the question of your seeking forgiveness and my granting it?”

- (iii) A devotee was angry with his Guru that the latter was not able to either ameliorate or dispel his long standing financial and health problems. He began to pour abuses on his Guru. The Guru gave him a patient hearing and then said²⁵:

“I do not know whether you are abusing my body or my Soul (Self). If it is the body, I join you in abusing it. I myself do not adore this impure and dirty body full of flesh, blood etc. If you mean the Self (Soul), as there is only one Self in both of us, he who abuses me is abusing his own self.”

25. शरीरं यदि निन्दन्ति सहायस्ते जनास्तव ।
आत्मानं यदि निन्दन्ति स्वात्मानं निन्दयन्ति ते ॥

32. Where is real love?

Rahul was a young householder who used to go to a Guruji and study scriptures everyday under him. One day the Guru was explaining the following passage²⁶ from the Upanishad:

“No husband is loved by a wife for his own sake as he is the husband but it is all for the sake of the Self... No sons are loved by the father for their sake but it is all for the sake of the Self that the sons become dear to him...” At that stage the Rahul intervened and said, “Sir, I do not agree with this. In my own case both my parents and my wife love me so dearly for my own sake that if I am delayed by a few minutes in reaching home they get highly agitated and if something happens to me they

26. न वा अरे पत्युः कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति आत्मनस्तु कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति..... न वा अरे पुत्राणां कामाय पुत्राः प्रिया भवन्ति आत्मनस्तु कामाय पुत्राः प्रिया भवन्ति.....। (IV-5-6)

will die.” The Guruji said “You shall learn the truth of it tomorrow when you see the result of a test I am going to hold. Before going to bed tonight you will swallow this herbal powder. As a result you will lie as if dead tomorrow morning but you will be able to hear all that is spoken in your presence. After a few hours when the effect of this medicine wears out, you will become normal and get up. You will see the fun.”

Rahul did as instructed and in the morning his wife and parents found him dead lying motionless without any pulse or heart beat. The father thought of calling the Guruji and asking for his help in reviving his son.

The Guruji was apprised of the situation and he came over to their house. They entreated him to bring back their son to life by using his divine powers. The Guruji asked them to bring a jar full of water and said, “I shall draw out all the bad destiny (Prarabdha) responsible for your son’s death into this water. Some one of you will have to drink this water. The one who drinks will die immediately while your son will be restored to life. Tell me who among you is prepared to die for your son?”

Both the parents refused saying “We are old and are living by helping each other mutually. If one of the partners dies, the other will not have anybody to serve and help him or her and so will also have to die. So our drinking the water is out of question. Guruji looked expectantly at Rahul’s young wife. She also said, “I am very young and have not seen anything of this world yet. When such old people who have seen life in its

fullness do not want to die how can you expect me to volunteer for death in lieu of my husband who has died by God's will ?” A bright idea flashed into the mind of the father who told the Guruji. Sir, you are a renunciate and you have no relatives, wife or sons to mourn your death. Nobody will miss you when you die. Why don't you drink the water yourself ? We give our word to conduct your funeral in a grand manner and will feed hundreds of monks as also poor people on the sixteenth day (Shodasi) of your death.”

Rahul had by then been revived to normalcy and was hearing all that was said by his parents and wife. He got up and said “Thanks to my Guruji, today I have learnt how much you all love me. I have decided to take Sannyas (monkhood) from my Gurudev and serve the Lord who is the only true lover. Farewell to you all.”

33. Kalu the truthful thief

Kalu was a thief by profession. He wanted badly to learn some 'meditation'. In his town, Dharmapuri, there was a saint to whom many people used to go and learn meditation. One day he went to the saint and requested him to teach him meditation but confessed that he was a thief by profession and by this means only he could maintain his family as he had learnt no other trade or profession. The Guruji asked him "Besides thieving please let me know what other bad habits or qualities you possess." Kalu confessed "Sir, on days when my loot is a little more, I take a peg or two of some liquor. Again I play some dice also for stakes on those days when I get plenty of money. No doubt as a thief. I am forced often to utter lies. I have no other bad habits."

The Guruji was pleased with his frankness and asked him, "Which one of these bad habits you can promise to leave completely from this moment onwards ? If you can leave any one of them, come to me after one week of practice and I shall teach you meditation, which is the only way to supreme bliss."

Kalu, after some deliberation replied, “Sir, I cannot leave thieving and burglary as it is my livelihood. I cannot also forsake taking liquor as I could only occasionally indulge in drink and get a rare ‘kick’. I cannot also resist the temptation of playing dice once a while, yes, I promise to tell only the truth under any circumstances and never utter a lie.” He took the blessings of the Guruji and left.

That very night he had planned to loot the king’s treasury. At midnight he went to the palace and began to drill a hole on the side wall of the treasury. The king who was awake in his bed room which was just above the treasury came out to investigate the whirring sound he heard. He was dressed in simple night gown and the thief could not recognise him. He asked Kalu who he was and what he was doing. The latter told him “Sir, I am a thief and intend to loot this treasury. I presume that you are also a thief and have come with the same intention as mine. No matter, let us both go inside and we shall share all the loot equally.” Both of them entered the treasury room and divided between them equally all the money, necklaces, golden crowns and other valuables available there. Inside a locker they found three big diamond pieces. As the thief was puzzled as to how to divide the three pieces into two portions, the king suggested - “We have taken away everything else. Let us leave one diamond piece for the poor king and share equally the rest.” Kalu did as suggested and while he took leave, the king asked for his name and address (location of his residence). As Kalu had taken the vow of telling only the truth, he gave the correct information as desired by the king and left with the loot. The king took away

his share of the loot and hid it in his room. Next day morning he called his Dewan (minister) and asked him to go and inspect the treasury as he had been hearing some strange sounds from that place during the previous night. The Dewan went to the treasury and saw to his horror that all the valuables were missing and only a single diamond was left perhaps inadvertently by the thief. The Dewan put the diamond in his own shirt pocket as its loss will be ascribed to the same thief who had looted the treasury and nobody would suspect him.

The Dewan went back to the king and reported about the looting of the treasury. The king particularly enquired, “Do you mean to say that the thief has completely denuded the treasury of its valuables and not a single item has been left?” The Dewan confirmed it. The king called the chief of police and asked him to go to a particular address and bring Kalu the thief. Kalu was brought and produced before the king whom the former was unable to recognize as his accomplice of the previous night. The king asked him, “Are you the thief who has stolen everything from my treasury leaving nothing back?” Kalu readily confirmed it but told him “Sir, I did leave one diamond back in the locker as advised by an accomplice of mine and it should be still there.”

The Dewan hastened to interrupt him saying “Your majesty, this thief is lying. There is nothing left in the locker.” The king asked the police chief to search the pockets of the Dewan, wherefrom the missing diamond was recovered. The king told his courtiers “Here is a Dewan who is a liar and a thief and here is a thief who is a truthful gentleman. From today I am appointing

Kalu, the thief as my Dewan. Let the police chief consign the Dewan into the prison.” Kalu was stunned and could not believe his ears. He fell at the feet of the king and pleaded – “Sir, I do not want to be elevated as a Dewan. It is just only one day since I started telling the truth as advised by my Guruji and here I am rewarded by such a big post. If only I were to surrender myself to my Guruji unconditionally and do Sadhana as he directs me I do not know what unlimited benefits will accrue to me. I shall return to you all my stolen loots. Please allow me to leave and go to my Guruji.” The king said – “Let me also accompany you and have the blessings of your Guruji who has been able to accomplish such an unbelievable alchemy of changing your character in one day.”

Bhagavad Gita lists out twenty six divine qualities to be cultivated by an aspirant²⁷, which includes truthfulness. If only one could cultivate truthfulness, all other qualities will follow in its wake without any effort.

27. अभयं सत्त्वसंशुद्धिः ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः।

.....
अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधः त्यागः शान्तिरपैशुनम्। (Bhagavad Gita XVI-1 to 2)

VII

Interpretation of Scriptures

34. Interpretation of Scriptures

34. Interpretation of Scriptures

Brahma created Devas (gods), Asuras (demons) and men and sent them to inhabit the heaven, the nether regions and the earth respectively. The very next day a delegation from each of the three groups waited on the creator (Brahma) and told him, “Each one of the three groups has specific characteristic qualities thoroughly distinct and different from the other groups. Please give us one formula by adopting which we could all one day reach the ultimate bliss.” Brahma repeated three times the syllable ‘Da’ (द). All the supplicants nodded their heads in satisfaction and thanked Brahma for his instruction. Brahma took the Head of the Devas aside and asked him what he understood, he replied “By ‘Da’ you meant ‘Damadhvam’, i.e. we should exercise control over our senses from time to time. Otherwise as by nature we are all given to unlimited enjoyment of sensual objects like good food, excellent music, dance etc., if we continue to follow this path we will all go down

in the spiritual scale and never reach the Supreme Lord. Control over our senses is essential for spiritual progress.”

When Brahma put the same question to the leader of the Asuras, the latter answered – “Sir, by ‘Da’ you obviously meant ‘Dayadhvam’ (exercise compassion). By nature, we are cruel and of sadistic temperament and if we continue in that path we shall become miserable and be consigned to the Hell ultimately. If we can show some compassion to the fellow beings, we shall be uplifted. Lastly, in answer to a similar query, the leader of men answered Brahma – “Sir, we are by nature given to ‘parigraha’ i.e. accumulation of more and more worldly possessions. We do not feel like throwing away even the empty cans of tinned fruits or even an old broomstick which has become thin with use. Such a vasana (conditioning) is sure to pull us down. The only way to escape is by parting with money or other possession by giving it away to the poor and deserving people. By ‘Da’ you surely meant Datta²⁸ – “Give away in charity.” Brahma told all the three groups that they were absolutely correct in their respective interpretation of his mono-syllabled instruction. Among men themselves some have divine and godly qualities, some have demoniacal qualities and the rest have human qualities. Each group tends to interpret the divine revelation in the scriptures in terms of their own vasanas (latent tendencies) and definitely it will be suitable for respective group in order to eliminate the vasanas predominant in that group. This is why texts like Bhagavad Gita have numerous commentaries with widely differing interpretations and each one of them is correct and appropriate for a particular type of aspirants.

28. दमध्वं दयध्वं दत्त । (From ‘Maitreem Bhajata’ song sung by M.S. Subbulakshmi in the United Nations as composed by the Late Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram)

VIII

Faith

35. Tulsidas and the servant maid

36. “Vishnu Sahasra Nama” through alphabets

35. Tulsidas and the servant maid

Tulsidas was a famous poet devotee, the author of Ramayana in Hindi (Rama Charit Manas). A part-time servant maid, Kamala, was employed in his house for cleaning the house, washing the vessels etc. She was 45 years old and had no children. One day when she confided her deep misery to her neighbour, the latter told her – “You are a fool. Tulsidas, your master is a well-renowned saint of a high order and if he wills he can grant you any boon including begetting of children. His powers are unlimited.” Kamala’s hopes began to soar high. She approached her master and requested him to bless her to have a child. Tulsidas said, “I am only a servant of Lord. Ram who alone is capable of granting any boon in this world. I shall certainly request him during my Puja today.” He accordingly approached Ram on her behalf during Puja time. Ram called for her ledger account of sins and merits (*papas and punyas*) of past births and after consulting it declared, “I am sorry. Your servant maid cannot have a child for another four births to come.” When Tulsidas conveyed this message to her,

Kamala's heart broke as she had held high hopes of getting her prayer answered. She walked out weeping with tears streaming from her eyes. On the way she collided with Kinnaram a highly reputed saint. Kinnaram cut short her profuse apologies and wanted to know the cause of her grief. Kamala narrated her story and continued to sob. Kinnaram told her – “Do not worry, you take me home and feed me. You will beget as many sons this year as the number of rotis you feed me with.”

Rejoicing in this unexpected turn of events Kamala took Kinnaram to her home and fed him with three rotis as only that much atta (wheat flour) was left in her house. Kinnaram blessed her and said, “There is, however, one condition. You should not inform Tulsidas of this matter till you perform the ‘Mundan Ceremony’ (shaving the head) of your children, when you will invite him to preside over the function and bless the siblings.” Kamala gave birth to three handsome boys and as instructed by Kinnaram invited Tulsidas for the Mundan ceremony. Tulsidas chided her – “Why did you adopt three children at the same time? It will be difficult to rear them all”. Kamala confirmed to him that all the children had been born to her and narrated her encounter with Kinnaram. Tulsidas got angry at being let down by Ram, went to the Puja room and immediately demanded the latter's explanation. Ram smiled and answered, “The devotees who derive all the powers from me have a firm faith that all their actions will be unfailingly endorsed by me. So Kinnaram used his infallible powers at his own level with firm faith in me. You could also have done the same but you approached me formally and I had to go by the Rule Book. My devotees have unlimited powers which can transcend all rule books and destiny.”

36. “Vishnu Sahasra Nama” through alphabets

There was a foreigner by name Henry, who had a small farm at about ten kilometers away in the outskirts of Bangalore. He was residing in the city and used to trek daily by foot to and fro his farm where he used to toil from morning till evening. He was keenly desirous of treading the spiritual path by learning meditation. One day he approached a reputed Swamiji at Bangalore and confided to him of his desire. Swamiji told him, “After toiling from morning till late evening you will neither have the energy nor the time to sit for meditation for hours. Instead, for sometime initially, just before taking lunch make it a point to recite Vishnu Sahasra Nama (thousand sacred names of Lord Vishnu). On days you fail to recite it you should forego your lunch. You will derive immense benefits out of it and it will lead you to meditation automatically. I shall give you a book with an English transliteration and a cassette where

somebody has sung it nicely.” The foreigner used to take the book of Vishnu Sahasra Nama along with his lunch pack and recite it daily before sitting for lunch in the farm. After a week, one day when he opened his lunch bag, he found to his dismay that he had forgotten to bring his book. Without the book he could not recite a single line. He could neither afford to forego his lunch nor could trek ten kilometers home and come back again. Suddenly a bright idea crossed his mind. He got up and with folded hands repeated the entire alphabetical table (A, B, C, D, etc) twenty times over. He prayed to the Lord – “Good Lord, I have repeated all the alphabets. As God, you know the entire Vishnu Sahasra Nama by heart. Today as a special case, please arrange the Sahasra Nama yourself out of the alphabets I have recited.”

IX

The Glory of Saints

37. Lakshmi, the Dhobi's daughter
38. The philosopher's stone

37. Lakshmi, the Dhobi's daughter

Raidas, a cobbler by profession, was one of the greatest saints of his day. Many people who were suffering from incurable diseases got cured by going to him.

The king of that city where Raidas was living was very unhappy and became miserable day by day, but the cause thereof could not be found out. The doctors were unable to diagnose his disease, not to speak of curing it. One day, the Minister advised the king to seek the help of Saint Raidas, who would not visit anybody's house. The king went alone incognito to the shoe shop of Raidas and without revealing his identity sought from Raidas some remedy for his peculiar malady. In that shop, there was a wooden bowl with water which was dirty and reddish with the colour of the leather pieces remaining soaked in it. Raidas poured a little of that dirty water in a glass and gave it to the king to drink. The king who felt a revulsion, being afraid to offend the saint by refusing it, made a show of drinking it but deftly poured it all into the shirt he was wearing. He straight went to his palace, took off his shirt which was completely stained red. He called for his personal Dhobi and ordered him to

get it washed thoroughly. The dhobi took it to his house and handed it over to his young daughter Lakshmi for necessary action. Lakshmi who had gone to the bazaar that day had actually seen the king drinking something in a glass outside Raidas' shop. She put two and two together and could understand that the stain in the shirt was made by the water which was a prasad (a consecrated thing) from the Saint. She was delighted and reverentially licked with her tongue the entire stain from the shirt and by sprinkling some more water she sucked it all out with her mouth. From that day a change took place in Lakshmi. She began to exude peace and happiness. The visitors who came to give and take their clothes found a profound peace and an immense pleasure in just sitting in her presence. People suffering from depression, melancholia, anxiety neurosis etc., and other unhappy people who came and sat with her got miraculously cured. Lakshmi's fame spread even to other parts of the country. One day when the king was again consulting his minister about his depression, the latter mentioned about the miraculous powers developed by Lakshmi, the dhobi's daughter. The king was surprised and at once sent for Lakshmi. The moment Lakshmi came to his presence the king felt himself lifted out of his depression and an ineffable peace descended on him. The king saw himself bubbling with an inexpressible joy inside. He asked Lakshmi deferentially – "Can you tell me how you have acquired such mystic powers all of a sudden." Lakshmi replied – "Your majesty, I owe it to your kindness. Do you remember the day when you sent for washing a shirt stained red by some prasad given to you by Raidas, which you had poured into your shirt? Since the moment I licked and sucked in full the stain on the shirt, this change has come over me, thanks to the Prasad of Raidas who is a saint of no mean order."

38. The philosopher's stone

Saint Keshavdas was a God-realised soul but a poor householder. From morning to night he used to go to a nearby temple of Lord Shiva and be singing bhajans or reciting the names of the Lord. His wife used to beg for alms from the neighbours and feed herself and the husband. They were living in a village in Madhya Pradesh in a dilapidated cottage on the banks of the Narmada River. All the villagers respected Keshavdas as a great saint and had great reverence for him. His neighbour in the next house was also extremely poor and had no fixed job. One day, Padma the wife of Keshavdas noticed Sunita of the neighbouring house being dressed up in a gorgeous costly sari and wearing several glittering golden ornaments. As Sunita was equally poor having no means of livelihood, Padma enquired the cause of her sudden prosperity. Padma and Sunita were very close friends being comrades in adversity. With great reluctance, Sunita told her: "It is a great secret which my husband has strictly warned me not to tell anyone. How can I withhold it from you, my dear friend? A couple of days back a passing Fakir had given my husband (Mr. Arun) a philosopher's stone (Parasmani). With its help we converted a number of iron and brass vessels in my house into gold, sold them in the market and have acquired a lot of money. For heaven's sake, please do not

breathe a word of this secret to anybody.” Padma entreated her to lend her the philosopher’s stone for an hour so that she could also convert some vessels in her house to gold and out of the sale proceeds prepare some good meals for her husband who has been practically on a starvation diet. Very hesitantly Sunita brought and gave that philosopher’s stone to Padma with a stern warning to return it within an hour as her husband would kill her if he came to know of her clandestine betrayal of his trust. As Padma was not greedy, she got a few of her vessels transformed to gold and out of the sale proceeds she purchased a lot of raw materials for food and prepared a feast for her husband. Keshavdas on his return from temple sat for meals and the moment he saw various delicacies kept on the plate, he did not touch them, but demanded to know the source of this luxurious meal prepared by her. After vowing him to secrecy she narrated the story of the philosopher’s stone and showed it to him. He took it out of the house to have a better look and suddenly threw it away into the river Narmada. His wife was terror-stricken at the loss of the invaluable stone belonging to the neighbour and began to wail and weep loudly. Sunita also came rushing out of her house. On enquiry when she came to know the fate of her precious stone she also began to wail and weep in fear of her husband’s reaction. By that time, Arun, Sunita’s husband who was returning home rushed to the scene on hearing the voice of his weeping wife. On hearing from his wife as to what had happened, Arun who was very practical, told his wife - “Do not be foolish enough to believe these people. Will anybody be mad enough to throw a philosopher’s stone knowingly into a river? The couple are playing a drama to deceive us after having cached it somewhere. Do not worry. I shall report it to the Panchayat (village council)

and have the stone restored to me.” The village council called for an emergent meeting on the banks of the river and questioned Keshavdas who accepted the fact that he had thrown the stone into the river. The chairman reprimanded Keshavdas that the latter had no business to throw away his neighbour’s property and he ordered that the philosopher’s stone be immediately restored to the rightful owner. Keshavdas went into the river, picked up a handful of stones from it and told Arun to come and pick up any one of those stones. Arun was indignant and rebuked him – “Are you playing with us? These are ordinary stones. Give me back my philosopher’s stone.” Keshavdas laughed and said, “I assure you each one of these stones is a philosopher’s stone. If you doubt it, you can have it tested here and now.” Somebody produced a bunch of several iron keys. Each one of the keys was touched by a different stone and all the keys were transformed into a glittering gold.

“The devotees of the Lord who are fully satisfied with serving the Lord do not desire even Moksha (perpetual liberation) to which they become entitled. Where is the question of their hankering after worldly objects of enjoyment which are all subject to decay by time.”²⁹

29. मत्सेवया प्रतीतं च सालोक्यादिचतुष्टयम्।
नेच्छन्ति सेवया पूर्णाः कुतोऽन्यम् कालविद्रुतम्। (Srimad Bhagavatam IX-4-67)

blank

X

Miscellaneous

39. The dog in Ram's Court
40. Tiny anecdotes from the life of
Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

39. The dog in Ram's Court

One day a dog came into the Court of Ram and complained – “Ram, are you not aware how violence and injustice prevails even in Ram Rajya? I had been just lying down in a lane adjacent to this palace when a monk came and hit me with a stone. See the blood flowing from the wound on my body? The monk is still in that lane.”

On the orders of Ram, the monk was brought into the court immediately and was questioned. The monk said, “This dog was lying occupying the entire width of the narrow lane. My shoutings and clapping of hand elicited no response. As I had to go by that lane, I had to hit him with a stone to make him move.” Ram decreed sternly – “Being a monk bound to non-violence, you are doubly guilty and deserve punishment.” When Ram enquired of the wise counsellors of the court as to what punishment should be meted out to the monk, they all declared with one voice – “As this intelligent dog is the plaintiff let him

advise you in the matter.” The dog said, “Sir, a hundred miles from this place, in the East, there is a very prosperous and affluent Hindu math (monastery) whose last chief died two years back. Let this monk be posted there as the head (Mahant)”. The courtiers were all surprised as to how this could constitute a punishment. On enquiry the dog once again sneeringly replied, “I was the last chief, of that monastery, who died two years back. There was no luxury, enjoyment or vice I did not indulge in during that life and now I am born as a dog. You will now understand the wisdom of my suggestion.”

40. Tiny anecdotes from the life of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi

- (i) Once a foreign journalist came to Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai and told him “Bhagavan, we are starting a campaign on ‘birth control’. Please let me have your views on the birth control and we will be publishing them in our magazine”. Ramana kept silent. When the visitor repeatedly pestered him, he told the journalist, “Sir, you and I are already born and there is no question of controlling it at this stage. But you and I are definitely going to die one day. So should you not be more concerned with it? Please let me have your views on death control.” What a profound remark which concerns everyone of us!

- (ii) A young boy 7 years or so old came to Ramana and asked him, “Can you explain to me what is meditation? Whenever I ask my parents they tell me that I need not bother about it now. I will come to know when I grow up.”

Ramana said, "I shall tell you, but you sit quietly by my side." A little later somebody brought a carrier full of dosas (a preparation of rice and dhal - something like a pancake) and placed it before Ramana who would not eat anything unless equal quantities are distributed to all the people present. Ramana took a small piece himself, gave one full dosa to the boy by his side in a leaf and ordered the rest to be distributed to the devotees present. He told the boy, "Look here, till I raise my first finger and say 'hoon' you will go on eating and you should not finish it before I give the signal. The moment I give the signal 'hoon', no portion of the dosa should remain and you will stop eating. The boy was looking with concentration on Ramana for the signal and was eating in big pieces first and later in small bits. Suddenly the expected signal came. The boy put the entire balance dosa in the mouth and stopped eating. Ramana then said, "What you did now is the process of meditation. You were looking at me all the time but were eating the dosa. Similarly keep your mind one-pointed on God but continue with your normal duties." Let normal activities like eating, talking, walking etc., go on but your mind should be concentrated on God all the time. That is meditation."

Peace, Peace, Peace

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