

34. The broken bow

VEERABHADHRAM read and explained the traditional legend connected with *Mahaa-Shivaraathri*; the legend is but a vehicle to teach you the path of *dharma*. The deers beseeching the hunter not to kill them, promising to return later when they could be killed and telling him that if they break their word they know they would incur the penalty for many a heinous sin---the story is only to propagate the principles of *dharma*. Every story illustrates a moral, and this *Shivaraathri Mahaathmya Katha* (story of the Greatness of Shivaraathri) is no exception. When it comes to describing the merits of *dharma*, even animals become eloquent---"Mookam *karothi vaachaalam*." Their speech is veritably the Voice of God. They are not deers, they are the tongues of the Lord.

The deers, one after another, declare that they will come back to be killed; they have to go, each one, because it has some dear one to tend or feed or obey. They then say that truth is their vow and they dare not break it, for it is indeed a heinous sin to play 'false.' They say that the sin is equal to a number of other sins they list. The hunter lets them go on their plighted word. He has himself committed the sins they list and he knows by experience during many births that they are heinous and that they bring about dire tragedy in a remorseless manner. There is an iron law of cause and effect operating in this field.

Every experience is a lesson, every loss a gain

The saddest part of the story is that man, though he sees and hears, suffers and falls, does not get quite convinced that sin is a dangerous experiment; that it unmistakably brings on its harvest of tears. The *thamoguna* of ignorance and delusion draws a veil over the truth and hides the mouth of the pit into which the unwary sinner falls again. Of course, when grief overtakes you, and pain has you in its grip, the Lord does not always announce the exact sin for which that particular experience is the punishment. You are left to deduce in a general way that every experience is a lesson and every loss is a gain.

You have got to learn that you bind yourself and you liberate yourself. You entangle yourself in the three *gunas* and by your struggles, you only pull the world and tighten it round yourself. You are endowed with *viveka*, even the most illiterate among you; you have a conscience, whispering *dharma* into your ear; so you yourselves must choose and select.

A great painter once came to a king and he was asked to execute a huge fresco on the wall of the Durbar Hall, a scene from the Mahaabhaaratha battle. A painter, till then unrecognised, rose up and asked for permission to execute a fresco on the opposite wall. He said that he would, within the same period prepare on his wall an equally grand fresco; in fact, an exact replica of the other, in spite of a thick curtain between the two walls! When at last the King came and drawing the curtain to the very end looked on the opposite wall, he was amazed to find an exact copy, down to the minutest detail of line, curve, tint and tilt, the same Mahaabhaaratha scene! For the local artist had, throughout the intervening period of time when the painting was being done by the other man, only been polishing the wall assigned to him. He had used no brush or paint; he had just polished the wall into a mirror. Polish your mind and the Lord, and His sublime grandeur will be reflected in your heart.

Set apart a "feeding time" for the Spirit daily

Just as you feed the body, and care for its upkeep and repair, the *manas*, *chittham* and *buddhi* (mind, thought and intellect) have also to be fed with good nourishing food. When the morning cup of coffee is missed, you get a headache; what do you get when the morning dose of *japam* is missed? Or perhaps you have not made it into a habit. At noon, your hunger drags you from the shades of these trees to where food is waiting; nothing so powerful drags you to your shrine-room. Perhaps, you have no shrine room at all. When you enter a house, even if it has been unoccupied for months, you can declare, "This is the kitchen," from the sooty walls and the smell of condiments. Similarly, you say, "This is *the puuja* room" from the aroma of incense-sticks and flowers that still hovers in the air. Have a separate *puuja* room or at least, set apart a small corner for *dhyaanam* (meditation), *japam* (repetition of Lord's Name) and *puuja* (ritual worship). Retire there, at least twice a day for some short time; that will be "feeding time" for the spirit.

Sarveshwara Chinthana---allowing the mind to rest on the tree of the Glory of God---will give the tired bird some rest to fly again, beating its wings in search of food and happiness. *Sathsanga* (company of the pious) also acts like a tonic. Try the prescription for some time; it will be rather unpleasant at first. Due to weakness, the mind, like the body, cannot behave steadily and remain firm. That is why I addressed you today not as usual as *Prema swaruupulaara* (embodiments of love), or *Aathma swaruupulaara* (embodiments of Self), but, as you will have noticed with some dismay, as "*Shaantha swaruupulaara! Chanchala swabhaavulaara*," that is to say, though your nature is steadiness, your behaviour is ever unsteady.

Remove all blemishes that tarnish you

I did not say so to discourage you, but just to reveal the absurdity to you. Do not keep the *manas*, *buddhi* and *chittham* (mind, intellect and thought) hungry or underfed; then they will run after all kinds of foul food. Give them proper nourishment and they will perform their functions well. Their function is to illumine the *Aathma* within and help you to discover that the *Aathma* is all. Until the auspicious moment, everything will be in disarray; do not worry. Go to a house where a marriage is to take place; it will be in a huge mess; noise, confusion, dust and din. But when the moment of marriage arrives, it is all spick and span, clean and charming. The Grace of the Lord will overwhelm all obstacles and fruit of *saadhana* will be vouchsafed. Once you secure the grace, you can fulfil all your wishes with it; if you have the cloth, you can have any type of clothes: bush-coat, coat or pants.

It is the grace that gives value to life, authenticity to the *Shaasthras* (scriptures), authority to the recipient. A piece of white paper has no value at all; but send it to the Security Press and let them convert it into a hundred-rupee note; you value it, though it is printed all over and there is no blank space for writing anything. Become impressed with the stamp of God; carry His signature; that invests you with value and authority. But first you should become white, tough and strong. Remove all the blemishes that tarnish you.

The deer referred to the "cow that is honoured during the *yaaga*." Now why is the cow so selected? Because it feeds on *Saathwik* (pure vegetarian) food; it has a quiet disposition; it yields milk without any desire for recompense or seeking even gratitude.

There is no short-cut to earn God's Grace

A man once sold an old cow to the butcher and when he went to his fields after the transaction, he was confronted by a snake. He shouted, "Oh kill the poisonous reptile;" then the snake said, "I

am no reptile, you deserve the name better" When he protested, the snake said, "Go and ask the calf." The calf gave a pathetic story of his greed and cruelty: how he dragged it away from the mother, tied it at the end of a rope and starved it of its mother's milk; and how he beat it and twisted its tail to force it to draw heavy loads. The calf said that that man is an ungrateful beast; he derides other men as *pashu* (cow), when he is himself far worse. As a matter of fact, do not cast a bad word on man or beast; for He is in all Beings and your harsh abuse strikes the Dweller within.

Follow the rules of *dharma*, which these deers describe; they are not deers, they are the representatives of the *Vedhas*; yes, there are four in all. The *Shaasthras* are the authority for the *dharma*, and the *karma* (activities) based on *dharma* (righteousness). It is only when you are blessed with the Grace of the Lord, which is earned by *dharma*, that you can have *shaanthi* (peace). A fish can have *shaanthi* only when it has water above and below and on all sides; so too, you must have Grace all around you. There is no short-cut to this Grace; *Naamasmarana* is the safest route. Do not believe others who prescribe shorter routes; they may talk of *Praanaayaama* (breath control) and *Hatha Yoga* (Yogic exercise). Be warned; they are fraught with danger. Do not lend ear to such, or read and believe the books on physical *yoga* and start practising the exercises. I know of many cases of madness and other dislocations happening by practice from the printed page.

Follow the *Shaasthraic* injunctions and you will not go wrong. They lay down a set of rules for all stages and all professions. See how the panic spread by astrologers regarding the conjunction of eight planets in space has driven men to seek refuge in the *Shaasthras*; yes, specifics have to be taken just when the disease catches you. You must pray more intensely when danger threatens. There is nothing wrong in that.

Desire can never be destroyed by fulfilment

It is better than doing some stupid thing or other. *Naamasmarana* is the best means. Only, you do not really believe that it can cure you or save you, that is the tragedy. People believe in the efficacy of only costly, brightly packed, widely published drugs: the simple easily available remedy which is in everybody's backyard is ignored as useless.

Really, if only you have this faith in the Name, you need not struggle to secure the chance to detail to Me your desires and wants. I will fulfil them even without your telling Me. Why? Did Raamadaas take his seat in the varandah like you and await his chance for an interview? The Lord carried to his very door the things that would fulfil his innermost wish! *Korika* (desire) can never be destroyed by fulfilment; the desire multiplies like a weed; one seed sprouts and produces a tree, which in its turn scatters a thousand seeds which grow into a forest of trees with millions of seeds growing again into a thicker jungle.

Place yourself fully at the Lord's disposal

The only *hai* ('comfort' in Telugu) is in *Sai*. The name of the Lord is the *Narasimha* (Man-Lion) incarnation to the *Raakshasas* of the *Kali* Age. Have the Name bright and clear on your tongue, in your mind; and the Form symbolised by it before your eye and mental vision---nothing can harm you. Train children from their infancy to repeat and rely on the Name. Let them imbibe it with the mother's milk. Train them yourselves, practising it and demonstrating before them the *shaanthi* that you win by it. Do not step back; move forward. Do not hesitate or doubt. Do not

deny joy that you have derived, the courage that you have felt. If you so doubt, your only gain will be suffering.

Every letter is a *Beeja Akshara* (seed-letter of a sacred word); so I do not whisper secretly any *Manthra* in your ear. I am giving it in every word .I speak. Listen to Me. When you wake up, feel that you are entering the stage to play the role assigned to you by the Lord; pray that you may act it well and earn His approbation. At night, when you retire to sleep, feel that you are entering the green-room after the scene, but with the dress of your role on; for perhaps the role is not yet over and you have not yet been permitted to take the dress off. Perhaps, you have to make another entrance the next morning. Do not worry about that. Place yourself fully at His disposal; He knows. He has written the Play and He knows how it will end and how it will go on. Yours is but to act and retire.

SECOND DAY

The deers which stray into the forest where the hunter is waiting for game, and which promise to come later and be his prey on pain of incurring the penalty for various heinous sins are teaching a *Dharma Geetha*; and if you practise those virtues and avoid those sins you can attain the *Aanandha swarupa*, (bliss-form) which you really are.

The deers speak of sin, but remember, there is no sin as such; there are only errors due to ignorance or greed or envy or hatred. The principles of dharma enunciated in this story have to be adhered to; it is not the hunter alone who nods approval, every listener of the Puraana must have approval. Even the slightest error has to be avoided by those who possess a developed conscience. It is unpardonable for a wise man to fall into error. But the error of an ignoramus, however dire the consequences, has to be passed over. Some people dismiss the *Dharma Shaasthras* as the fabrications of *Brahmins* and they refuse to attach value to the rules and restrictions prescribed by them. But that is a false argument. The *Shaasthras* have the authority of *Maadhava*, of the Lord Himself. It is not *Maanava-Dharma Shaasthra*, it is *Maadhava-Dharma Shaasthra*---not man-made but God-made.

Light meal is the surest guarantee of health

The *Dharmic* way of life is dependent on the *guna* (quality) of the individual. In the 18th Chapter of the *Geetha*, the *gunas* and their characteristics are mentioned, as also the relationship between the type of food taken and the character that emanates. The food decides the *guna*, the *guna* seeks the food congenial to it; thus the vicious cycle moves on.

In the *Upanishads*, there is a story where a man and a cow approach the Lord and pray that they may be allotted their daily duties. The cow was told to serve the master who feeds and fosters her. The man was asked to practise *dharma*. He shuddered at the responsibility and wanted more freedom than such a life would impose. The Lord told him in answer that he is free to choose the path through which he could attain Him. He gave the cow as food the things that grow on the ground and to Man He assigned a morsel of food in the early hours of the day and another at the end of the day. He prescribed *mithaahaara* (moderation in eating). Both came down to earth and the cow now eats, and eats the eaten thing again, but man finds that a light meal is the surest guarantee of health.

Face the Truth and proceed towards Truth

Arjuna was affected by *thamoguna* (quality of inertia and doubt), which made him fall into the delusion of "mine" and "my family." Faith in the Lord one moment, doubt about the consequence

another moment---that was his condition. Well, you are also in the same predicament. One day you tell "I must follow Baaba's Commands;" the next day, you start doubting, "Is it possible?" That is why I am adjusting the conditions of your lives so that you can pull yourselves up according to My Orders; that is why I am granting you courage to develop Faith, unshakable Faith. But I find many of you do not yet walk along the path laid down in spite of the confidence I impart and the favourable environment I provide and the favours I bestow. This is, of course, deplorable.

God has given man a hundred years of life and plenty of work to fill the years with; but you fritter the time away in playful games, in founding and fostering a family; and awake to the fact of preparing for death only when Death knocks at the door. Then, you feverishly pray for a little more extension of the span of life in order to fulfil the task for which you have been sent.

You have no time for reciting the Name of the Lord or meditating on His Form, which is within you! Alas! You have time for the club, for a game of cards, for the film show, for wayside chats, for all kinds of trivialities but no time for a little quiet, for a simple item like worship. It is a false excuse this, the want of time. No. Face the truth and proceed towards the Truth. When you tread the path of *dharma*, imperceptibly you will be drawn towards the Truth, gently and steadily.

The Geetha is for granting Liberation to all

See how the wicked hunter was transformed into a sympathetic listener by the appeals to conscience made by the first two deers; he is eager to hear what the third deer has to say about the disciplines laid down by *Shaasthras* and the penalties imposed for the breach. He is also being slowly changed by the sound of the distant bells of the Shiva temple, where the *Mahaa Shivaraathri Puuja* is being done. As a matter of fact, both deer and deer-slayer are fiction; they represent the instruments for the teaching. It is all in the Lord's Plan. Consider, for example, how, long before the Geetha was spoken, the Lord had got-ready a Sanjaya, who could see and hear whatever was done or spoken at a distance; his mission was to preserve the Geetha for humanity. Arjuna was just an excuse to bring the Geetha forth. The Geetha is for saving all, and granting all Liberation. *Geetha*, in Telugu, means "a line;" it draws a line across and cancels the series of births and deaths; it teaches you to stand erect, unafraid, along the straight path of *dharma*, along the line laid down.

You should gradually get rid of the attachments that lead you astray. Then only can you stand erect, without bending under the load. But, nowadays, instead of the elimination of *Chiththavritthi* (mental agitations), every effort is made to multiply them. It is like giving a monkey a drink of toddy; it will behave even more monkeyishly, that is all. I refer to the grant of spiritual titles to *saadhakas*, extolling their attainments! They are intoxicated by these titles, conferred by over-enthusiastic or pompous *Gurus*; they become *Jyothis* or *Stars* or *Rishis* or *Paramapurushas* (highest persons). They are thereby rendered more liable to spiritual disaster, through bloated egoism.

Those doctors who are expected to administer drugs to patients afflicted with poison are now administering poison to persons in perfect health! The giver of the title and the recipient are both blameworthy. One aggravates the egoism he pretends to cure; the other revels in tawdry jewellery.

Do not decry ancient scriptures

The Varnaashrama discipline is also intended for the gradual fixation of the mind on ultimate merger with the Infinite. At each stage of life and for each social group, patterns of behaviour have been laid down, modes of livelihood recommended social rights and obligations have been prescribed---all with a view to the sublimation of the instincts and the elevation of endeavour. *Varnaashrama* is a deep-rooted tree, the shade of which affords shelter to all the various communities of man.

Do not decry that discipline or the ancient scriptures. They are your authority to confirm My Truth; it is through the study of those Scriptures that you can picture the grandeur of Divinity. Do not decry Vishnu or Shiva for the reason that your devotion is towards some other Name and Form you seek to honour. Why, even if you dishonour a man, be warned you are dishonouring Me; for I am in him. Honour the Aathma of which he is an encasement; honour the imperishable *Aathma* which you are and do not commit any act which will insult that Basic Reality.

The deers in this story only show the hunter that the path to self-realisation consists of four stages: *Shaasthras*, *Dharma*, *Bhakthi* and *Sathya* (scriptures, virtue, devotion and truth).

"I shall fulfil your wishes at your own place"

One word more: Perhaps many of you are worried that I have not yet started calling you individually and granting you interviews in which you could tell Me your troubles and where I could bless you personally and send you home. But you are so many in number; I would like to see first the old and the sick and those who will find it difficult to come again. Surely the others will approve of that.

Besides, it is enough if you call Me from wherever you are; in My ease, there is no need for you to travel long distances and spend hard-earned money. I shall fulfil your wishes, at your own place.

I shall, from tomorrow, grant you this privilege of a personal talk in the room and I shall come down four: times a day for the purpose, spending almost the whole day with the devotees.

Let Me tell you one thing: Of course, I can bear any thing for your sake; I have come to save you and guide you. But, somehow, I cannot tolerate the smell of tobacco, of beedis and cigarettes. Can you not postpone the disgusting practice for an hour and come to me without that insufferable smell? Besides, I have laid down certain disciplines and codes of conduct for you here. I would ask you to study the list and practise them not only within this compound, but in your own places, wherever you happen to live.

THIRD DAY

Veerabhadhran read the last part of the *Shivaraathri* katha now; the deers return and insist that they be killed. Their hunter, chastened by their truthfulness, their teachings and by the holy vigil that he unknowingly went through on the auspicious night, refuses to kill. He breaks his bow and with tears of repentance, he is overwhelmed by the animals adherence to the promise made. The deers try to persuade him to kill them, but the hunter wriggles out. He argues that he had to kill them under the tree where he had spent the night, waiting for prey, and not near his cottage to which the deers had come in the morning!

Dharma-Karma is the best discipline

The wicked heart was transformed by the *shravana* (hearing) of good words and of the temple rites and bells. That is the subtle alchemy of the surroundings and the company. Some places have a tremendous impact on the mind. The atmosphere is surcharged with the Name of God on account of the generations of *bhakthas* who assemble there. That is why I say *dharma-karma* (virtuous action) is the best discipline. That means, action surcharged with devotion. That will itself lead to *jnaana* (spiritual wisdom), where the world is found to be a dream and the only reality is the All-pervading Grace or Power.

The Naasthika (atheist) is blind, ignorant and afflicted with a fever that spoils his sense of taste; he finds everything bitter. The *aasthika* (believer in God) on the other hand is able to feel the true taste of everything: bitter as bitter sour as sour, sweet as sweet. But the *Yaasthika* (the man of realisation) tastes all things and all experiences as sweet, filled with the sweetness of God. Prahlada was a *Yaasthika*; he was beaten, trampled upon, cast into fire and water, but he tasted only sweetness at all times. He overcame every calamity with the reinforcement derived from the Name of Naaraayana in the heart. There is a secret spring in the heart that will well up when the name is uttered and that will slake your thirst.

Speak without malice, speak to transmit joy

The ordeals which Prahlada had to endure only demonstrated his attainment. Once the Lord entered the house of a *jnaani* (liberated person) as a thief and when the master of the house caught Him and argued, "You are a thief; I have caught you," the Lord said in reply, "So long as the ideas, you and I inhere, there can be no *Jnaana*," and disappeared. It is easy to mug up *slokas* and texts and quote them profusely, but it is useless unless you act in accordance with what you say. *Anushtaanam* (practice of austerities) brings about *Anugraham* (God's Grace). Act and earn Grace. By the belch, you can judge the food; as the flour so the roti. Vivekananda was able to declare at Chicago the worth of *Sanaathana Dharma* (eternal universal religion) in an unmistakably lionine tone, because he had the strength of *anushtaanam* behind him.

The driver of a car should be alert at driving it along a rough road infested with pot-holes not merely along smooth concrete highways. So too, you must know how to amid the temptations of falsehood and how to sail along the smooth road of Truth. You may say that very often you are caught in a dilemma by the conflicting demands of truth and falsehood. Remember the Geetha-saying: "*Anudhvega karam vaakyam, sathyam, Preethikaram*"---"*Speak without malice or hatred or envy; speak the truth; speak to comfort, to console, to transmit joy.*"

When in difficulty, pray for guidance before jumping in any direction. Men will give you advice only as far as their cleverness can reach; but the Lord who transforms dullness into intelligence will reveal to you the way out of the dilemma. Ask the Lord and He will answer. The Lord revealed the proper course to the hunter. Finally, he broke the bow and arrows and other deadly weapons as a result of that inspiration. The arrows are the symbols of vice and wickedness. He realised his Self that way.

Those who come to Puttaparthi come by many ways: from Bombay via Guntakal, from Bangalore via Chikballapur, from Nellore via Paakaala, from Madras via Jolarpet; but all have but one goal and one joy on arrival. Whether it is four four-anna coins or two half-rupee coins or a one rupee coin, the value is the same. *Saakshaathkaara* (Realisation) attained by any one of the means is of the same Truth, of the same Grandeur; it means the same Spiritual Victory.

Shed tears of thankfulness at the Lord's Feet

The Lord will manifest where and when you yearn for Him; if you yearn that He should come before you in flesh and blood, He will respond. He is ever ready to respond; only, you are not ready to invite or welcome or receive Him into your heart. You have not purified the heart and removed therefrom the thorns of lust and greed, of envy and hatred. The baby that has been fed on milk may start crying; do not be worried, It is very helpful for digestion. Cry, so that you can digest the joy of knowing God; cry and shed tears of joy. The tear glands have been allotted to you not for weeping helplessly before others with hands extended for alms, but to shed tears of joy, of thankfulness, at the Feet of the Lord.

Do not get dejected. Really, you are all lucky, eminently fortunate that you are here now in the Presence listening to these words. Take your fill of this *Aanandharasa* (essence of Bliss) and having digested it, come again with a sharpened appetite.

Mahaa Shivaraathri Katha, Prashaanthi Nilayam, 8, 9 and 10, March, 1962