

## 25. The triple debt

EVERY man, irrespective of the country, race or period of time in which he is born, comes into the world burdened with three debts. The first debt is owed to the Divine. The second is to the *Rishis* (sages). The third is to one's parents.

A debt is an obligation arising out of what one has received from others. We can easily identify these debts in the human body different divine forces are present nourishing and protecting it. This divine energy permeates the entire body; it is called the *Rasa* (Divine Essence). We owe a debt of gratitude to the Divine which has not only endowed us with this precious human body but which also sustains it. We shall be able to enjoy these gifts of the Divine only if we discharge this debt to the Divine. How is this to be done? It is by rendering service to other bodies saturated with the same Divine, by doing righteous deeds and consecrating all actions in the service of society. The debt to the Divine has to be discharged in full in this life itself or during many future lives. The earlier we repay this debt, the sooner we shall realise Divinity.

### **Our sages have laid down guidelines for right action**

Next, the debt to the *Rishis*: By selfless investigations and experiments the sages discovered for mankind the paths to be followed for bettering our lives here and attaining merger. They have laid down the types of right action that will help man to lead a good and worthy life and successfully strive for Self-realisation. These guidelines and codes of conduct have come down to us in the form of *Shaasthras* (spiritual sciences). The *Shaasthras* also deal with rituals and forms of worship for propitiating the Divine. The sages have taught how man can proceed from the human to the Divine. Such codes have other names elsewhere. But, whatever the name, these are essential for human survival.

When man strays from these codes, he is subject to many calamities. Man will have to pay the price now or later for violating these codes. Because the sages of yore have given man these precious guidelines for a righteous and sacred life, we repay the debt by respecting these codes and observing the injunctions laid down by them.

Today, instead of honouring and following the *shaasthras*, people are dishonouring and violating them and committing many wanton sins in the process. When we follow the path laid down by the sages, we can lead exemplary lives and reach the full height of human potentialities.

The third debt we have to pay is to the *Pithru-runam* (debt to the parents). A person desires to have a son and feels that without a son he cannot escape hell. This is not a correct interpretation of the debt to the parents. The ancients desired to have sons who would lead righteous lives and help the parents in discharging the debt to the *Dhaiva-runa* (debt to the Divine). Many of them performed *yajnas* (sacrifices) to secure such noble sons. They desired not only to acquire merit for themselves by having such sons, but also to ensure that the sacred traditions of the family were maintained and continued untarnished. In the old days, a father did not feel happy when a son was born; he was delighted only when the son earned name and fame by good conduct and righteous living.

### **A child grows by following the examples of parents**

When a child is born, no one can know how it will turn out, whether into a good and noble person or a wicked and evil person. The father too should set a good example to the son and try to keep him on the straight path. It is by following the example of the parents that a child grows

in life.

It was to discharge his three-fold debt that Emperor Dhasaratha performed *yaagas* and *yajnas* (ceremonial sacrifices) and ensured the presence of his sons on those occasions. He sent them to great *gurus* so that they may learn the sacred heritage of the past, before they confronted the challenges of the world. He did not calculate that his sons should serve him in his old age. He had no selfish interest in rearing them. He desired sons for the sake of his spiritual well-being. The son owes a deep debt to the parents for the trouble and expense they underwent to bring him up on right lines. This is the primary duty of a son.

The son is entitled not merely to a share in the father's worldly property. He is entitled also to a share in the godly life lived by the father. He must follow the high ideals of the father. If the father is given to evil ways, the son can acquire merit himself and reduce to some extent the effects of the sins of the father by cultivating good company, entertaining good thoughts and doing good deeds. The sage Vasishtha assured Dhasharatha that many of the sins committed by him had been wiped out by the numerous *Dharmic* deeds of Sri Raama, such as destruction of the *Raakshasas* and protection guaranteed to the *Rishis*.

### **Two kinds of *yajnas* to redeem the three debts**

It is to discharge the debt to one's parents that rites like *Shraaddha* and *Tharpanam* (ritual offerings to the manes) are done. Only a few perform these ceremonies now. The ancients felt that it was sinful for children to be ungrateful to parents to whom they owed their bodies and their achievements.

*Yajnas* and *Yaagas* (*Vedhic* rituals of sacrifice) are symbolic rituals designed to redeem these three debts. *Yajnas* are of two kinds: *Antaryajna* (internal) and *Bahir-yajna* (external). The internal *yajna* is the striving to realise the Divinity within. The Divine is in every one and it can be realised only through *Dhyaana* (meditation). The mind is the sacrificial altar. One has to offer as sacrifice on this altar all one's bad qualities. It may be asked how any bad quality can pollute the body-mind-complex when the Divine is the in-dwelling Spirit. But, it must be realised that this is not one's first birth in a body; many lives have preceded this. Man in Samskrit is called *Maanava* which means, *Maa* (not), *nava* (new)---"not new".

Birth as man is the final stage in the upward evolution of the 840 thousand species of living beings. In previous lives, one might have been an insect, a worm, a bird or an animal. It is as a result of this that, despite the presence of the Divine, man displays now many animal qualities. For example, pride is not an innate human quality. It is the natural trait of a buffalo. If one displays pride, it means he has been a buffalo in previous lives and this buffalo 'quality inheres in the human. Some persons exhibit stupid stubbornness. This is not a human trait. It is the quality of a sheep.

### **Reasons for man's display of animal qualities**

Sometimes some persons tend to indulge in petty thefts. This is derived from previous lives spent as a cat. Similarly, the vacillating and fickle nature displayed by a person may be attributed to a previous life as a monkey. Fickle mindedness is characteristic of the monkey. Some persons are incurably ungrateful. They indulge even in harming those who help them. This is not a human trait. How, then, is it present in a man? It is because he must have been a serpent in a previous birth. The serpent is notorious, for emitting poison even when fed on milk. So, an ungrateful person must have been a serpent in some previous life.

One should offer, therefore, at the altar of his mind as a sacrifice his stubbornness, thieving propensity, ingratitude and pride. This is the Inner *Yajna*. Unfortunately, instead of performing sacrifices of this kind people treat goats and fowl as offerings. As a result the bad qualities continue to grow in man. It is to eliminate this evil sense of ingratitude that external sacrifices like *Yajnas* and *Yaagas* have been recommended to man. *Yajnas* enable us to promote and refine the beneficent qualities in man.

*In the yajna* Indhra is the principal deity generally invoked. Indhra is the presiding deity of the mind, which is the master of the senses. It is because the senses tend to dominate the mind, instead of being subservient to it, that Indhra is invoked in this *yajna*. Indhra has another name *Puruhutha*, that is, one who is invoked frequently. *Rudhra* is defined as the Supreme Lord, the *Eeshwara* of all the *Indhriyas* (sense organs). When a man has mastered all his sense organs, he becomes *Eeshwara*! When we wish to progress from the human to the Divine state, the state of *Rudhra*, it has to be sought through *Saadhana* (spiritual discipline).

### **The sole purpose of internal *Yajna***

The sole purpose of the *Anthar-yajna* (internal sacrifice) is to see that the mind does not run after the whims and fancies of the senses, like a master pathetically carrying out the dictates of his servants. The man who is a slave of sensual desire is the world's bond-slave. One who has conquered desire is master of this world and the next. It is desire that makes one dependent on others. When there is no control over the senses, desire grows wild.

*Yajnas and yaagas are* not undertaken to promote self-interest. They are performed for promoting the welfare of the world. Instead of emphasising the inner meaning and significance, of *yajnas*, most people pay attention to the external features. Pre-occupied with external forms of the *yajna*, people ignore the basic need to win sense-control, without which spiritual *saadhana* has no meaning.

### **Evil desires should be mercilessly scotched**

One must constantly strive to get rid of evil tendencies. Inherited evil traits rooted in the mind must be given up at the sacrificial altar. Of these traits, the worst are hatred and envy. They arise from intense selfishness. They are qualities of the leopard and should not find place in a human being. Some people try to pretend that they have overcome anger, hatred, jealousy and pride.

The devices adopted by such persons are only the cunning tricks of the fox. As these traits make their appearance from time to time, they should be immediately cast off. This calls for continuous internal *yajna*, as against the external *yajna* which is performed only once a year at one particular place.

The internal *yajna* has to be performed at all times, in all places and under all circumstances. The sacrificial altar for this *yajna* is within each one of us. Whenever an evil thought or desire occurs, it should be mercilessly scotched. It is only by constant vigilance and continuous endeavour that Divine grace can be earned. Only when evil traits are banished can Divinity manifest itself in all its glory. This is the real purpose of *yajnas* ----to enable man to achieve purity in order to realise Divinity.

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