

9. Chaithanya and the 'Outcast'

ONCE, a mendicant with tattered clothes, unkempt hair and dirty body, came and stood at the threshold of Chaithanya's room and was meditating with closed eyes. On seeing him Chaithanya came out and asked him, "Who are you? You can come inside." On hearing these soft and sweet words, the mendicant opened his eyes and replied in all humility, "Svaami, I don't deserve to step into your room. I am a despicable person belonging to the caste of Chandalas (Untouchables). I am unfit to defile your sacred residence." Full of smiles, Chaithanya went closer to him and said endearingly: "My son, never say that you are mean, despicable or unworthy. Who is mean and who is sacred on this earth? All are sacred because the same God shines in every one's heart. So, please come inside without any hesitation."

Power of the Lord's name erases all fears

When the mendicant was still hesitating to go inside, Chaithanya questioned him about the purpose of his visit. The visitor replied, "Svaami, I am repeatedly, chanting God's name but I feel it lacks *chaithanya* (spiritual power) just as a person in a state of coma has mere life without any consciousness. I seem to be mechanically chanting the Lord's name without experiencing the power of the Divine. I have come to you with the hope that if you initiate me in one of the Lord's names, it will be charged with spiritual potency and I will be benefitted by chanting such a name."

Chaithanya replied, "All the names of God are full of *chaithanya* (divine power). God's name is omnipotent and self-effulgent. Hence it is not proper for you to underrate the efficacy of any of the Lord's names. However, for your satisfaction, I will give you *Manthropadesha* (initiation into the sacred formula) as desired by you. Please step into the room." The visitor responded by slowly entering the room, full of humility, hesitation, nervousness and fear, and sat in one corner of the room. Noticing his plight, Chaithanya gently told him, "*My* son, why are you so full of fear? Freedom and fearlessness are the birth-right of every man. Freedom being your real nature, why do you give room for fear? You must recognise that the *Aathmik* power is behind all thoughts, and give up fear."

Saying this, Chaithanya came closer and closer to the mendicant. Seeing this, the mendicant cried out apprehensively: "Svaami, please don't touch me. If you touch me, both of us will be guilty of breach of the traditional norms of our society. I say so particularly because it is winter now, and if you touch me, you will have to take a cold water bath again and that will tell upon your health. I have accepted you as my *Guru* (preceptor) and since, according to the scriptures, *the Guru* is verily God, I shall be sinning against God by hurting you in any way. I have come to obey your commands and receive help from you, but not to hurt you in the process. Because of my sins in my past life, I am now born as an untouchable. I don't want to add to my load of sins by allowing you to touch me now'.

There is no caste for any of the five elements

On hearing this, Chaithanya remonstrated- "What a simpleton you are. You are only betraying your ignorance by observing untouchability, ignoring the divinity inherent in every being. God has no distinctions of caste and creed. There is no caste for any of the five elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air and sky, all of which have emanated from God. Irrespective of the castes, and creeds professed by men, all are equally sharing the bounties of Nature offered by the five

elements. Therefore, there is no need to observe such differences of caste and creed. Come closer to me."

However, the mendicant could not shed his fear, because he had been nurturing this fear from his childhood. This shows that feelings such as fear, love, hatred etc., become ingrained in a person if he nurtures them for a long time from an early age in his life. Chaithanya told the mendicant, "God never endows man with fear. It is one's own weakness that fosters fear, because of some short-comings in one's self. 'One who has not committed any wrong or evil act will have no fear and hence will not need any protection or security. Fearlessness is the hall-mark of divinity. One can become fearless through *thyaaga* (renunciation or sacrifice). For example, if you have some valuables with you, there is room for fear. But if you give up those valuables, you will be free from fear wherever you may be, even in a jungle infested with robbers. My dear child, realise that your very nature is absolute fearlessness in all circumstances. Remain true to your nature."

Lord's name sanctifies and transforms

Saying this, Chaithanya hugged the mendicant. But the latter began shaking with mixed feelings of bliss and fear, bliss because of the embrace of such a holy saint like Chaithanya, and fear because of the misapprehension that Chaithanya would be polluted by physical contact with him. He cried out, "O Svaami, let not my sins pollute you." Laughing at this statement, Chaithanya told him assuringly: "O innocent one, you and I have now become one. We are no longer separate." So saying, Chaithanya hugged him in a warm embrace and whispered the Lord's name into his ear. The name went straight into the old man's heart, and so transformed him that he exclaimed in ecstasy, "Svaami there is no one as lucky as myself. I have now become sanctified, sacred and pure. I have got rid of my wrong notion that I am only the body made up of the five elements and have realised my true nature, because of your grace and the grace of the Lord's name which you gave me.

One's life becomes sanctified by treasuring the Lord's name in one's heart with a feeling of intense love. In the absence of such love, all so-called spiritual practices will prove futile. Various spiritual disciplines are necessary only for the purification of the heart. Once the heart becomes pure, there is no further need for study of the scriptures or spiritual practices. Explaining thus, Chaithanya exhorted his new disciple to give up fear henceforth. From then onwards, the mendicant became known as Haridhasa.

The moral of this story is that we should give up all differences based on one's birth and position in life and chant or sing the Lord's names with intense love and devotion. First, the Name should melt the devotee's heart; then only it can melt God's heart and draw His Grace upon the devotee. God does not care for how long and in what ways you have practised *Saadhana* (spiritual discipline). What He wants is sincere, wholehearted and intense love for Him.

Discourse on 16-3-1993,' when Bhagavaan chose for His theme a significant episode from the life of Chaithanya Mahaaprabhu to underline the truth that the Godly man should rise above differences of caste and creed.

Love is the vital force. Love is the governing principle. It is only when the precious diamond of love is shining in one's heart that sacred and divine thoughts about God will arise in the mind.

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