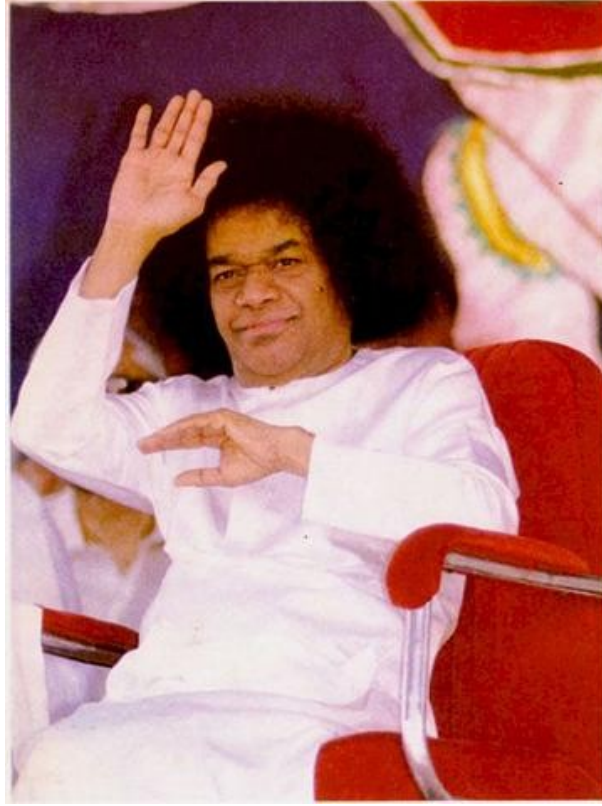


**Om Sri Sai Ram**



**DHARMA VAHINI**

**By**

**Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba**

**Preface**

This little book contains the articles written by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in the series "Dharma Vahini" for the "Sanathana Sarathi," the monthly journal published from Prashanthi Nilayam. They are given here in English, but, it must be said that the original Telugu is simpler and sweeter. It is difficult to express in English the fundamental ideas of Indian Culture, for English is strange to the translator and perhaps to many a reader; the English vocabulary does not offer satisfactory equivalents to many words that form the common currency of Indian languages. The reader will, therefore, pardon me for the alloy of abstruseness that might have come into the pure metal of Baba's Telugu clarity. This must be said of this book: It is the authentic Voice of the Divine Phenomenon, that is setting right the moral codes and behaviour of millions of men and women today. And, so, it merits careful and devoted study. The Lord has declared that when ethical standards fall and man forgets or ignores his glorious destiny, He will Himself come down among men and guide humanity along the straight and sacred path. The Lord has come; He is guiding those who accept the Guidance; He is calling on all who have strayed away to retrace their steps. Baba's Love and Wisdom know no bounds, His Grace knows no obstacle. He is no hard taskmaster; His solicitude for our welfare and real progress is overwhelming. May this book reveal to you the Mother's love which has made Baba write it, the Father's authority which backs every junction therein, the Teacher's illumination that lights up every statement, and the Lord's sublime Universality, that invites you to expand your personality into a great Instrument of Service.

**N. Kasturi,  
Editor-Sanathana Sarathi**

## Chapter I

Man must dedicate himself to Dharma and be engaged always in Dharma so that he may live in peace and the world may enjoy peace. He cannot acquire real Peace, nor can he win the Grace of the Lord through any means other than the Dharmic life. Dharma is the foundation for the welfare of humanity; it is the truth that is stable for all time. When Dharma fails to transmute human life, the world is afflicted by agony and fear, tormented by stormy revolutions. When the effulgence of Dharma fails to illumine human relationships, mankind is shrouded in the night of sorrow. God is the embodiment of Dharma; His Grace is won by Dharma. He is ever fostering Dharma, He is ever establishing Dharma, He is Dharma Itself. The Vedas, Sastras, Puranas and Ithihasa proclaim aloud the Glory of Dharma. In the scriptures of the various religions, Dharma is elaborated in the language familiar to the adherents. It is the duty of every man everywhere at all times to pay homage to the Dharma-Narayana the personification of Dharma. The stream of Dharmic activity should never run dry; when its cool waters cease to flow, disaster is certain. Humanity has reached this stage only because Dharma, like the river Saraswathi, flows unseen, below the ground, feeding the roots and filling the springs. Not only humanity, but even birds and beasts have to adhere to Dharma, so that they may be happy and survive in comfort and joy. Therefore, the waters of Dharma have to be kept flowing perpetually and full, so that the world might enjoy happiness. Disaster now dances madly on the world stage, because Right is neglected and there is disbelief in the essentials of Dharmic life. So man has to understand clearly the very heart of Dharma.

What is meant by Dharma? What is the essence of Dharma? Can Man, common man, lead a happy life and survive if he sticks to Dharma? These doubts confuse the mind of man naturally in the course of his life. Solving them is necessary, even urgent. As soon as the word Dharma is mentioned, the ordinary man takes it to mean: The giving of alms, feeding and providing lodging to pilgrims etc., the adherence to one's traditional profession or craft, law-abiding nature, the discrimination between right and wrong, the pursuit of one's innate nature or the freaks of one's own mind, the fruition of one's fondest desires, and so on. Of course, it is a long, long time since the spotless countenance of Dharma has been tarnished beyond recognition. Beautiful fields and groves run wild with neglect and soon become unrecognisable bush land and thorny jungle; greedy men hew fine trees and the shape of the landscape is changed. With the passage of time, people get accustomed to the new state of things and they do not notice the transformation, the decline. This has happened to Dharma also. Every man has to acquaint himself with the outlines of Dharma, expounded in the Vedas and the Sastras and the Puranas. Misunderstood by incompetent intelligence, unbridled emotion and impure reasoning, they have been grossly diluted and their glory has suffered grievously. Just as the rain drops from the clear blue sky get coloured and contaminated when they fall on the soil, the unsullied message of the ancient Rishis, the example of their shining deeds, the bright untarnished urges behind their actions are all turned into ugly caricatures of the original grandeur, by uncultured interpreters and scholars.

Books written for children contain illustrations to clarify the text; but they spend their time with the pictures, forgetting what they are intended to make clear; in the same way, the unwary and the uneducated mistake the rituals, designed to illustrate the grand truths, as profoundly real in themselves; they ignore the truth which they were meant to elucidate. Travelers moving along the road rest for a while in wayside shelters but during their stay, they damage by neglect or misuse the very structure that gave them rest. So, too, the dull and the perverse alter the very face of Vedic morality and deceive the world into believing that their handiwork is what the Vedas teach!

When such mauling of Dharma took place, when the face of Dharma suffered disfigurement at the hands of the enemies of God, the Lord responded to the call of the gods and the godly and

saved the world from ruin, by restoring Right and Truth in the field of Dharma and of Karma, i.e., in both Ideal and Practice.

Now, who can cure the present blindness? Man has to slay the six-fold beast of Arishadvarga, leading him on to disaster through the pulls of Lust, Anger, Greed, Delusion, Pride and Hate. Thus, only can Dharma be restored. Buddha referred to the Lord as Dharma by the Vedas and as Vijnana. For, in those days, no one liked the word "Veda", as in the times of the Asura called Somaka, when those who followed the Vedas desisted from calling them "Veda". While in mortal dread such behaviour is passable. Yet the Buddha was full of reverence for the Vedas; he was ever infused with God. The Buddha is often spoken of as an atheist, a Nasthika! Well, if the Buddha is a Nasthika, who then is the Asthika, the theist? The entire life of the Buddha is a saga of Dharma. Sankara is criticised by some people as opposed to the path of Dharma and Karma. But Sankara opposed only the Dharma and Karma, which have fulfillment of Desire in view. He was indeed the Great Teacher who taught the path of Dharma and Karma, of endeavor impelled by the understanding of the basic Truth.

The adherence of Sankara to Dharma and Karma based on Truth, only those who have the higher vision can appreciate the faith of the Buddha in the essentials of the Vedas. Without that, one will be led astray in the interpretation. In order to climb a great height, a ladder as tall as the height is needed, is it not?

Whoever subdues his egoism, conquers his selfish desires, destroys his bestial feelings and impulses and gives up the natural tendency to regard the body as the self, he is surely on the path of Dharma; he knows that the goal of Dharma is the merging of the wave in the sea, the merging of the self in the Over-self.

In all worldly activities, you should be careful not to offend propriety, or the canons of good nature; you should not play false to the promptings of the Inner Voice, you should be prepared at all times to respect the appropriate dictates of conscience; you should watch your steps to see whether you are in some one else's way; you must be ever vigilant to discover the Truth, behind all this scintillating variety. This is the entire Duty of Man, your Dharma. The blazing fire of Jnana, which convinces you that all this is Brahman (Sarvam khalvidam Brahman) will consume into ashes all traces of your egoism, and worldly attachment. You must become intoxicated with the nectar of Union with Brahman; that is the ultimate goal of Dharma, and of Karma inspired by Dharma.

"Sacrifice Ajnana and Ahamkara at the altar of Jnana, and install Dharma therein"; this is the message of the Veda. Every single unselfish act, which prepares the ground for the merging of the Soul with the Over-Soul, which broadens the vision towards the basic Brahman immanent everywhere, is a Dharmic act. Each such act is a tiny stream that swells the river of holiness rushing towards the sea of Brahmajnana. Your acts and activities are all rituals in the worship of the Paramatma that pervades the Universe. Whatever is done in an attitude of dedication and surrender is a component of the Dharma, which leads to Realisation. The strategy of the Bharathiya way of life is directed towards the sanctification of every moment and every word, thought and deed, into a step towards the realisation. You have to understand ancient Dharmakarmas by entering into their symbolic meaning. The spiritual field has many a technical term, with its own special connotation. These have to be clearly understood, so that you can grasp correctly the teaching of the Sastras. Let us take an example: People used to celebrate Yajnas in ancient times; and they sacrificed Pasus or animals in these Yajnas. But, the animal is only a symbol. It was not the dumb creature that had to be cut to pieces. The animal leads a life of sacrifice, without man completing its career at the sacrificial pole! The animal that has to be disemboweled and offered is different; in the spiritual vocabulary, animal means "the body-

consciousness", "the I-consciousness"; and it is this that has to be slaughtered. The Lord is known as Pasupathi or Govinda; Pasupathi means the Lord of all Jivas, Pasu meaning Jiva; Govinda means the Guardian of Cows or Jivas, "Go" meaning Jiva. The tending of cows is a symbolic Leela of Krishna to indicate His Mission of tending Jivas. The Sastras have profound inner meanings. The aim of Dharma is to make the Jiva give up the attachment to external nature and the illusion that it causes and to make it realise its Reality or rather, un-realise what it has now taken as real, so that it may stand revealed in its genuine identity.

These meanings must be learnt by young and old. Take for instance, the Siva Temple. Right in front of the Idol of Shiva we have the image of Nandi, the Bull. You are told that the Sacred Bull is the vehicle or Vahana of Shiva and, that is the reason for its being there. But, really speaking the Bull or the Pasu represents Jiva while the Lingam is the symbol of Shiva. "No one should pass between the Bull and the Lingam, the Jiva and the Shiva", it is said; for they are to merge in one. Shiva has to be seen through the two horns of Nandi, they say. People when asked the reason for this procedure reply, "Well, it is holier than other methods of viewing the Lingam". But the inner meaning is, "You must see the Shiva in Jiva" - Pasu and Pasupathi are one: Nandi and Iswara become Nandiswara. Both are only two ways of referring to the same entity. When in bondage, it is Nandi; it is Iswara, when the bound becomes free and Nandiswara is achieved; it is worshipped and is entitled to be so honoured. When the Pasu is offered to the Pasupathi, and its separate identity is cast away, that is the true Yajna. The significance has now been forgotten. Today, these symbolic acts have changed beyond recognition. The practices of today and the principles of yesterday are far apart. Even the smallest detail of secular life has to be inspired by the higher ideal of spiritual fulfillment. Then, even simple folk can be led step by step towards the goal. When you do not discriminate the process and the purpose of every act, but still go on doing it, it becomes a funny fossilized version. Once, even Prahlada said, "Since it is difficult to destroy egoism, man finds it easy to destroy this dumb animal as a substitute. Animal sacrifice is the manifestation of Tamo guna; it is the path of bondage. The sacrifice of the animal of egoism is the Satwic Yajna, in the Godward path of Liberation." Thus the Paramartha of those ancient days is turned into Paramartha of these days! (Paramartha means the highest goal; Paramartha means the fool's goal). Thus, every one of the ancient practices, once full of meaning, has grown wild beyond recognition. Branches have shot out in various directions. It is not now possible to pluck the tree by the roots and plant a new one. So, the existing tree has to be trimmed and trained to grow straight. The highest goal has to be constantly remembered, and not diluted into the lowest.

## **Chapter II**

Dharma cannot be restricted to any particular society or nation, for it is closely bound up with the fortunes of the entire living world. It is a flame of light that can never be extinguished. It is untrammelled in its beneficent action. Krishna taught the Gita to Arjuna. But He intended it for the whole of humanity. Arjuna was just an excuse. That very Gita is today correcting all mankind. It is not for any particular caste, religion or nation. It is the very breath for humans everywhere.

Dharma expresses itself in a variety of forms, known sometimes by the persons who codified it, like Manu dharma, sometimes by the group, which followed it like Varna dharma, sometimes by the stage of life to which it is applied, like Grahastha-dharma etc. But these are subsidiary practical details, not the Fundamental Norm. The Atma dharma, the Divine Dharma, is what I am speaking of. Practical Dharma or Achara dharma relates to temporary matters and problems and physical needs, to man's passing relationships with the objective world. The very instrument of those rules, the human body, is itself not permanent; how can these Dharmas be eternal? How can their nature be described as true? The Eternal cannot be expressed by the evanescent; Truth

cannot reveal itself in untruth; Light cannot be procured from darkness. The Eternal can emerge only from the Eternal; Truth can emanate only from Truth. Therefore, the objective codes of Dharma relating to worldly activities and daily life, though important in their own sphere, have to be followed with the full knowledge and consciousness of the Inner Basic Atma dharma; then only can the internal and external urges co-operate and yield the Bliss of harmonious progress.

If, in your daily avocations, you translate the Real Values of Eternal Dharma into love-filled acts, then your duty to the inner Reality, the Atma-Dharma is also fulfilled. Always build your living on the Atmic Plinth; then, your progress is assured.

Making God into stone - that is the effort being made today! How can such effort lead to Truth, when the real task is to see the stone as God? First, the Form of the Godhead has to be meditated upon and imprinted on the consciousness; then, that Form has to be conceived within the stone and the stone forgotten in the process, until the stone is transformed into God. In the same way, you have to imprint on your consciousness the basic Dharma, the Fundamental Fact of Atma as the only Entity; and, then, filled with that Faith and Vision, you have to deal with the manifold world of objects, its attractions and impingements. The Ideal can be realised only thus. If this is done, there is no danger of the Authentic Meaning getting diluted, or Atma dharma losing its luster.

What happens when a stone is worshipped as God? The Unlimited, the Ever-present, the All-pervading-immanent Entity, the Absolute, is visualised in the Particular, in the Concrete. Similarly, Dharma, which is Universal, Equal and Free, can be spotted and tested in a single concrete act. Do not be misled by the idea that this is not possible. Are not many things difficult accomplished by you, things that only increase your anxiety and fear? If man is wise, can he not take up instead things that are more worthwhile, which give him peace of mind?

To be free is your birthright, not to be bound. It is only when you guide your steps along the Path illumined by the Universal Unbound Dharma that you are really free; if you stray away from the light, you get bound and you are caught. Some might raise a doubt; how Dharma, which sets limits on thoughts and words, which regulates and controls can make a person free. "Freedom" is the name that you give to a certain type of bondage; genuine freedom is got only when delusion is absent, when there is no identification with the body and the senses, no servitude to the objective world. Persons who have escaped from this servitude and achieved freedom in the genuine sense are very few in number. Bondage lies in every act done with the consciousness of the body as the Self, for, man is then the plaything of the senses. Only those who have escaped this fate are free; that "freedom" is the ideal stage to which Dharma leads. With that stage constantly in mind, if one engages in the activity of living, he can become liberated, a Muktha Purusha.

It is only because you bind yourself that you become bound and stray away from the Dharmic path. It is always so; no other person can bind you; you do it yourself. If faith in God's Omnipresence is deep-rooted, then, you would be aware that He is your self and that you can never be bound! For that faith to grow, you must grasp Atmananda firmly. The reality of the Atma is the bedrock, the Jnana that is incontrovertible, the Nischithajnana. Devoid of that foundation, one becomes the target of doubt, despair and delusion. The maid of Dharma will not wed such.

Therefore, endeavor first to become Free. That is to say, as a preliminary to successful living, cultivate Faith in the Atma as the core of your personality and then learn and practice the discipline necessary to reach down to that core. With that qualification acquired, you can engage fully in worldly activities, following the Dharma prescribed for their regulation. Then you

become a moral individual, a Dharma Purusha. Those who hold the physical objective world as the all of life and the body as the Self, lead but wasted lives, as meaningless as making God into stone. Making the stone into God is the holier, more wholesome task. So, too, seeing the Atma dharma in every single act of yours transforms it into an act of worship elevates it and removes its binding characteristic. If the duties of worldly life are done with no regard to genuine Sathya dharma, it is as unholy as treating God as stone. The Achara dharma pursued apart from Sathya dharma and Sathya dharma divorced from Achara dharma is both barren of results. They are both inextricably intertwined, and should be treated as such. The senior officer needs the work of the junior official as much as the junior official needs the help of the senior officer. Who then is the bound, who, the free? Both are bound to their desire to be happy and comfortable. Until the fundamental secret of the Atma is recognised, the outer state of bondage will persist. When that is done, the burden of slavery to the senses and to the objective world will be diminished. Then, the code of behaviour towards the objective world will be merged with the code towards the inner Divinity and so, the urges will all be co-operating harmoniously.

The Vedanta, the Adhyatmic Sastras, and Dharma - all invite man to live and act as Bhagawan, and not as bondsman. Then, all acts become Dharma karma and not Kamya karma (acts done with intent to gain the fruits thereof). The shackles of bondage cannot be avoided by a mere change of the type of activity. They can be avoided only by changing the point of view from the Deha to the Deva, from the Created to the Creator. The moral qualities also will be rendered stronger, thereby. Some persons hold the opinion that being employed is bondage, while sitting at home without any specific work is freedom! This is a sign of want of intelligence. When employed in a job, one has to obey the superior officer. But, can one escape the demands and compulsions of relations even while at home? Well, even when one is amidst friends only, can he avoid the necessity of acting according to their fancy? Can one be free at least from the need to take care of one's own body and cater to one's own comfort? How then can man feel free, while in the cage of bondage? All life is a prison, whatever the difference between one type of sentence and another. It is so, as long as the attitude of identifying the Self with the body is there.

That is why once Sankara said, "the egoism based on the body is what is meant by Naraka or Hell". Egoism of this kind is just another form of the contra-Divine attitude. Who can remove all the thorns and pebbles from the face of the earth? The only way to avoid them is to move about with footwear. So too, with the Vedanta Darshana or Philosophy of Vedanta. With the vision fixed on Sathya or the Reality, with full faith in the Brahman which is your own essential nature, you can by-pass the need to transform the external world to suit your ideal of happiness and Sathya dharma can be attained. He who tramples down egoism and declares with conviction thus: "I am not the bondsman of this body, which is the repository of all types of servitude; the body is my bondsman. I am the master and the manipulator of everything, I am the embodiment of freedom", is already liberated. All codes of duties must help in this process of the destruction of the ego; they should not foster it and make it grow wild. That is the road to freedom. If a person, finding life with the son miserable goes to the daughter and lives in her house that is not winning freedom! That's only a way of feeding the ego. This search for sensual happiness cannot be elevated into "Dharma".

After all, what is a home for? For the enjoyment of the bliss derived from the contemplation of the Lord, for getting the opportunity to meditate on the Lord undisturbed. All the rest can be ignored, but not these. The True Dharma of the individual is to taste the bliss of merging with the Absolute, and attain true Liberation. A person who has reached that stage can never be bound, even if he is put in the grimmest of prisons; on the other hand, for a person who is the slave of the body, even a blade of grass can become an instrument of death. The true Dharma is to be immersed in the Atmic Bliss, the Inner Vision, the steady faith in the identity of one's real nature with the Absolute, and the realisation that all is Brahman; these four are the authentic Dharma.



In this physical existence as particular individuals, these four are named for the convenience of practice (but yet saturated with the Inner Dharma of Atmic Reality) Sathya, Santham, Prema and Ahimsa, so that particularised individuals who are only personifications of that Absolute can follow them in daily life. The mode of pursuit of Dharma, now as in the past, is to adhere to these high principles in every act and thought. The Sathya, Santham, Ahimsa and Prema of today are but the Unintermittent immersion in the Atma, the Vision fixed on the Inner Truth, the Contemplation of One's Real Nature and the Knowledge that all is Brahman, the one and the only. These, the Fundamental and the Derived, must be coordinated and harmonised. Then only can it be termed Atma dharma.

It does not matter what your activity is, or what name and form you have chosen. A chain is a chain whatever the material it binds, whether it is iron or gold, is it not? So too, whether the work is of this type or that, so long as the Atma Dharma is the base, and Atma thathwa the root, it is Dharma beyond doubt. Such work will bless one with the fruit of Shanthi. When the waves of egoist fear or greed drive one forward, either into the privacy of the home, or the loneliness of the forest, or to any other refuge, it is impossible to escape suffering. The cobra does not cease to be a cobra, when it lies coiled. Then too, it is cobra nevertheless. In daily practice, when acts are motivated by the basic Principle of the reality of the Atma, every act becomes stamped with the seal of Dharma. But when acts are motivated by convenience and selfish interest, the Dharma becomes pseudo Dharma. It is a variety of bondage, however attractive it may be. Like prisoners in a jail pushed in a single file by warders, either to the court of trial or the dining barracks, the prompting of the senses pushes the bondsman forward either to a place of sorrow or to a place of relief.

Why, even the feeling, "That is a friend" or "This is an enemy" is an error. This delusion has to be given up. The Lord, the embodiment of Prema, is the Only Constant Friend and Relative, Companion, Guide and Protector. Know this and live in that knowledge. This is Dharma built on the bedrock of Understanding, that is Life built on the bedrock of Dharma. Ignoring this fundamental basis, when attention is concentrated on external polish, the goal moves beyond reach. Attachment to the world can be destroyed only by attachment to the Lord. Why complain that the ground cannot be seen, when what you have been doing all the while is to fix your gaze on the sky? Watch the ground and look at the sheet of water that reflects the sky, - then you can see, at the same time, the sky above and the earth below. So too, if you must adhere to Sathya dharma (which after all is the practice of the Immanent Atmic Principle) you must see, in every act the reflection of the Glory of the Atma; then, attachment to the Lord will transmute the attachment to the world into a pure offering. The goal should not be altered or lowered; that is to say, the essentials should be kept intact. Dharma does not depend on the various names and forms that its application entails; they are not so basic; it depends more on the motives and the feelings that direct it and canalise it.

### **Chapter III**

One cannot escape from disquiet so long as the fundamental ignorance persists; mere change of occupation, prompted by the desire for more comfort or the need for satisfying some passing likes will not give lasting satisfaction. It is like hoping to improve matters in a dark room by a mere readjustment of furniture. If however a lamp is lit, even without that readjustment, passage across the room is rendered easier. There is no need to interfere with the furniture at all.

So too, in this benighted world, it is difficult to move about truthfully, correctly and peacefully without knocking against some obstacle or other. How then are you to succeed? Light the lamp! Let it reveal the reality; get the light of Jnana. That will solve all the difficulties. You may claim that you live according to Dharma. But, your basic flaw is that your acts are not done in the spirit

of dedication. If so done, it gets stamped with the authentic mark of Dharma. Some clever folk might raise a doubt and ask: "Can we then kill and injure, in the name of the Lord dedicating the act to Him?" Well, how can a person get the attitude of dedicating all his activities to the Lord without at the same time being pure in thought, word and deed? Love, Equanimity, Rectitude, Non-violence - these are the attendant virtues of the servant of the Lord. How can cruelty and callousness co-exist with these virtues? To have selflessness, the spirit of self-sacrifice and the spiritual eminence required for the dedicatory outlook, one must have first won the four characteristics: Sathya, Santham, Prema, Ahimsa. Devoid of these, mere naming will not make any deed a votive offering.

Acts, which are expressions of Dharma, are deathless and only those who know that they are deathless can perform them. That is the highest destiny of man. Instead of reaching it, he is intent on doing acts against Dharma. Man is everywhere degrading himself from his status as a child of eternity to the status of a child of Futility, from an Amrita puthra to an Anritha puthra! Holding nectar in the grasp, he is drinking the poison of sensual pleasure. Neglecting the joy of the contemplation of the fundamental Atmic reality of the Universe, he is entangling himself in the external trappings of this objective world or appearances. One can only bewail that this fate has overwhelmed man!

In the Gita too it is declared, "I am the bliss of Brahman, of Positive Immortality, of Timeless Dharma, and Eternal Bliss". The Sloka is in the XIV Chapter:

Brahmanohi prathishta - aham amrithasya avyayasya cha  
Saaswathasya cha dharmasya sukhasya - aikaanthikasya cha

It is this Amrita dharma that is described in the Upanishads and since the Gita is the kernel of the Upanishads, the same is emphasised in the Gita too. The Dharmic way of life is as the very breath: It is the road to self-realisation. Those who walk along it are dear to the Lord; He dwells with all who are truthful, whose deeds spring from Dharma. That is the reason why the Gita teaches Arjuna to develop certain qualities, which help the practice of Atmic Dharma. These are delineated in slokas 13 to 19 of the XII Chapter. Those who have drunk deep at the fountain of the Gita will remember these. The most important of the slokas in this context is:

Ye thu dharmyaamritham idam yathoktham Paryupaasathe  
Sraddhadhaanaa math paramaa bhakthaasthe atheeva math priyaah

What a grand idea this Sloka conveys! That is the concluding Sloka of the series, which gives the qualities one has to develop. It calls the entire group Dharmyaamritham, the Dharmic way to immortality! The Lord has declared therein that those who have these qualities, those who trust in Him as the only ultimate Goal, those who are attached to Him as the single-mindedly are dearest and nearest to Him.

Note the expression, Dharmyaamritham, used here. Ponder over it and draw inspiration from it! Only those who adhere to the Lord's Dharma deserve the Nectar of the Lord's Grace. Simple folk believe that they have Bhakthi towards the Lord, but they do not pause to inquire whether the Lord has Love towards them! People who pine to discover this are rather rare. That is really the true measure of spiritual success. The same person is king to his subjects, son to his parents, enemy to his enemies, husband to his wife, father to his son. He plays many roles. Yet, if you ask him who he is, he would be wrong if he gives any of these relationships as his distinctive marks. For, they are pertaining to physical relationship or activities. They are all terms denoting physical kinships or professional relationships, names attached to temporary statuses. Nor can he reply that he is the head, the feet, the hands, etc., for, they are but the limbs of the physical form. He is



more real than all the limbs, beyond names and forms which are all falsities hiding the basic Brahman; he is known as 'I'; reflect over that entity well, and discover who that 'I' really is.

While, it is so hard to analyse and understand your entity, how can you pronounce judgment on other entities with any definiteness? What you refer to as 'I' and as 'You' relate to the body, the appearance; they are not Sath. The Atma is One and Indivisible; Dharma based on That is genuine Dharma.

Some ask: "You go on saying 'Atma', 'Atma'; well what is the Rupa or form of this Atma?" But, wherefrom is Atma to get form? It is eternal, unchanging, and immortal. It is goodness, right, beneficence. It is immutable, unblemished. It cannot be limited by any particular name or form. The Jnana can understand it that dawn in and through the Karmadeha, i.e., the body acquired as a result of activity. The body alone has name and form, and so, in every activity of the body, you should manifest the Atma dharma, Dharma based on the Atma-consciousness.

It is said, "the Atma is neither male nor female; nor cattle nor sheep nor horse nor elephant nor bird nor tree; it is beyond such categorisations". These distinctions and differences arise on the basis of activity; the Atma is incapable of modification; only one thing can be posited about it, viz., that It *is*. The sum and substance of all this is that the Atma is the Absolute, the Paramartha. The rest is all particular, insignificant, false, unreal, denotable, and identifiable.

Take a palanquin. Before being transformed into that article, it was a tree, which got changed into timber and planks and finally into a palanquin. With every change in form, the name too changed. Sitting in a palanquin, no one would say, he is on a piece of timber or on a tree. Objects undergo change; they are not eternal. They are not Sath, real.

Objects can be distinguished only by means of name and form. They can be described only by means of their characteristics. For they are artificial and temporary.

What exactly is a chair? It is a particular modification of wood, isn't it? Remove the wood, the chair too disappears. Think of the wood which is the substance and the 'appearance' of the chair will vanish. So too, Dharma! Varna dharma, Grahastha dharma, Vanaprastha dharma, Sanyasa dharma, Brahmacharya dharma, this Dharma, that Dharma... all are modifications of the basic Dharma, like the chair, the bench, the palanquin etc. The separate varieties disappear as soon as you go deep into their nature, the corporeal Dharmas fade away and the Atma dharma alone remains. The articles of furniture vanish and the wood alone remains, so too, the objective Dharmas disappear and Atma dharma alone shines in unique glory.

Of course, for the worldly career, the corporeal Dharmas are important. I won't say they are not. As wood is turned into furniture and used, Atma dharma or Santha Dharma or Sathya dharma has to be shaped into Grahastha dharma, Vanaprastha dharma, Varna dharma, Stri dharma, Purusha dharma etc. The stuff is the same in all; the substance is identical, in every separate form. How can the substance be used up? It can only be transmuted and transformed and the various modifications named differently when used for different purposes. The Atma dharma can be viewed piecemeal and compartmentalized for different purposes, as the wood is hewn and sawn and joined, and arranged and rearranged, but, it is Atma dharma nevertheless. So long as the different systems of Dharma are derived from that "Wood", there is no harm; remember however that the furniture can never be regrouped into the original tree! Apply that Atma dharma in the fields of worldly activity but do not call the worldly Dharmas, Atma dharma! That will be playing false to the Ideal, the Absolute.

Dharma is the moral path; the moral path is the Light; the Light is Ananda. Dharma is characterised by holiness, peace, truth and fortitude. Dharma is Yoga, Union, Merger; it is

Sathya. Its attributes are justice, sense-control, sense of honour, love, dignity, goodness, meditation, sympathy, non-violence; such is Dharma that persists through the ages. It leads one on to Universal Love and Unity. It is the highest Discipline and the most profitable. All this 'unfoldment' began with Dharma; all this is stabilised by Sathya; Sathya is inseparable from Dharma. Sathya is the law of the Universe, which makes the sun and the moon revolve in their orbits. Dharma is the Vedas and the Mantras, the Jnana they convey. Dharma is the course, the path, the law. Wherever there is adherence to morality, there one can see Sathya-dharma in action. In the Bhagavatha too, it is said, "where there is Dharma, there is Krishna; where there are both Dharma and Krishna together, there is Victory". Dharma is the very embodiment of the Lord; since the world itself is the body of the Lord, the world is but another name for the Moral Order; no one can deny it now or ever.

## **Chapter IV**

People refer to various duties, rights and obligations, but these are not the basic Sathya dharma; they are only means and methods of regulating the complications of living. They are not fundamental. All these moral codes and approved behaviour are prompted by the need to cater to two types of creatures and two types of natures - viz., masculine and feminine.

They connote Prakriti and Paramatma, gross and subtle, inert and conscious, the all-pervading duet. All this creation came about by the inter-relation of the Inert and the Conscious, did it not? So too, all the various mores have emerged on account of this bifurcation. All this ramification and elaboration of Dharma is due to this: the Masculine and Feminine.

Therefore, the chief Dharma for the practical progress of the world is the moral conduct and behaviour of these two; whatever any great teacher might teach it cannot go beyond these two distinct natures.

The Purusha dharma for the male and the Stri dharma for the female are important applications of the Sathya dharma mentioned above. Other codes and disciplines are but accessories, tributaries like the streams that meet the Godavari when it is coursing forward. They are related to the various circumstances, situations and statuses that are temporary; you have to pay attention to the main river and not the tributaries. Similarly, take the major Masculine and Feminine Dharma as the chief guides of living and do not give the minor accessory Dharmas any decisive place in the scheme of living.

Stri dharma: The Feminine Principle is spoken of as the illusion imposed upon Himself by the Lord, as the Energy with which He equipped Himself out of His own will. This is the Maya, the Feminine Form. This is the reason why Woman is considered as Parashakthi Swarupa. She is the faithful companion of Man, his Fortune; since she is the concretization of the Will of the Lord, she is Mystery, Wonder, the representative of the protective Principle; the Queen of his home, his beneficence, the Illumination of the house. Women who are repositories of the Shakti Swarupa are in no way inferior; how full of fortitude, patience and prema is their nature! Men seldom equal their self-control. They are the exemplars and leaders for men to tread the spiritual path. Pure self-less love is inborn in women. Women who are full of knowledge, who are cultured, who are bound by love and who are keen on discriminating whether their words and deeds are in conformity with Dharma - such women are like the Goddess Lakshmi, bringing joy and good fortune to the home. That home, where the husband and the wife are bound together by holy love, where every day both are engaged in the reading of books that feed the soul, where the Name of the Lord is sung and His Glory remembered, that home is really the Home of the Lord, Vaikunta! The woman who is attached to her husband by means of Love is indeed a flower

radiating rare perfume; she is a precious gem, shedding luster in the family, a wife endowed with virtue is really a brilliant jewel.

Chastity is the ideal for womankind. By the strength derived from that virtue, they can achieve anything. Savitri was able, through that power, to win back the life of her husband; she actually fought with the Lord of Death. Anasuya, the wife of the Sage Athri and the mother of Dattatreya, was able to transform even the Trinity into infants. Nalayani, who was devoted to her leper husband, could by the mysterious force of her chastity stop the sun in its course! Chastity is the crown jewel of women. That is the virtue for which she has to be most extolled. Its beneficent consequences defy description. It is the very breath of life. By means of her chastity and the power it grants, she can save her husband from calamity. She saves herself by her virtue and wins, without doubt, even heaven, through her chastity. Damayanti burnt into ashes a hunter who attempted to molest her, by the power of her "word". She bore all the travails of lonely life in the jungle, when her husband, King Nala deserted her, all of a sudden becoming the victim of cruel Fate.

Modesty is essential for women; it is her priceless jewel. It is against Dharma for a woman to overstep the limits of modesty; crossing the limits brings about many calamities. Why, the very glory of womanhood will be destroyed. Without modesty, woman is devoid of beauty and culture. Humility, purity of thought and manners, meekness, surrender to high ideals, sensitivity, sweetness of temper - the peculiar blend of all these qualities is modesty. It is the most invaluable of all jewels for women.

The modest woman will ever keep within limits, through her innate sense of propriety. She becomes automatically aware which behaviour is proper and which is improper. She will stick only to virtuous deeds and behaviour. Modesty is the test of a woman's grandeur. If a woman has no modesty she is injuring the interests of womanhood itself, besides undermining her own personality. She is like a fragranceless flower, which the world does not cherish or honour, or even approve. The absence of modesty makes life, for a woman, however rich in other accomplishments, a waste and a vacuum. Modesty lifts her to the heights of sublime holiness. The modest woman wields authority in the home and outside, in the community as well as in the world.

Some might interrupt and ask: "But, women who have swallowed all the compunctions of modesty are being honoured today! They strut about with heads erect and the world honours them not a whit less." I have no need to acquaint myself with these activities of the present-day world. I do not concern myself with them. They may be receiving honour and respect of a sort, but the respect is not authorised or deserved. When honour is offered to the undeserving, it is tantamount to insult; to accept it when offered is to demean the very gift. It is not honour, but flattery that is cast on the immodest by the selfish and the greedy. It is like spittle dirty and unpleasant.

Of course, the modest woman will not crave for honour or praise. Her attention will always be on the limits, which she would not transgress. Honour and praise come to her unasked and unnoticed. The honey in the flower or lotus does not crave for bees; they do not plead with the bees to come. Since they have tasted the sweetness, they themselves search for the flowers and rush in. They come because of the attachment between themselves and sweetness. So, too, is the relationship between the woman who knows the limits and the respect she evokes.

If a frog sits on a lotus and proclaims that fact to the world, does it mean that it knows the value of the beauty or the sweetness of that flower? Has it tasted any of these? It may flatter the lotus but, has it at least recognised what it contains? The honour and respect given to woman today is

of this type, rendered by people who do not know what to appreciate and how. They do not know the standards of judgement, they have no faith in the ultimate values, they do not respect the really good and great; how can we call the thing they offer as "honour" or "respect"? It can only be called "a disease" or at best, "etiquette", that is all.

The principles of Atma dharma will not allow the term "woman" to be applied to "a woman without modesty". If respect and honour are heaped upon a person who does not follow Atma dharma, it is like heaping decorations on a body that has no life in it. The soul that has left the body cannot enjoy the respect shown to the corpse. So too, if a person who is unaware of the Reality, who has not experienced the purpose of the Atma's embodiment, is crowned with fame and glory, who derives joy therefrom?

The modest woman will not care for such meaning-less trash and tinsel; she will rather seek self-respect, which is much more satisfying. That is the characteristic, which makes her the Lakshmi of the Home. That is why the wife is referred to as Grihalakshmi. If the wife has no such mark the home becomes an abode of ugliness.

The woman is the prop of the home and of religion. She plants and fosters religious faith or dries up and up-roots it. Women have natural aptitude for faith and spiritual endeavor. Women with devotion, faith, and meekness can lead men on the Godward path and the practice of holy virtues. They will get up early, before dawn, clean the home and after finishing bath etc., sit for a while engaged in Japam and Dhyanam. They will have in their homes one small room set apart for the worship of the Lord. They will place their images of the Lord as well as pictures of holy sages and of gurus and guides. They will consider the room specially sacred and fill the atmosphere with their prayers both morning and evening, as well as on holy days and festivals. A woman who is steadfastly doing these will be able to transmute even her atheist husband, persuading him to join the prayers or engage in some good activity or some scheme of social service marked by the attitude of Dedication to the Lord. Indeed, it is the woman who maintains the home; that is her mission. She is truly the representative of Shakti.

On the other hand, if the wife tries to pull the husband away from the Godward path, from the spiritual to the level of the sensual, or if the husband treats the wife who is disposed to seek joy from her spiritual endeavor as a person following the wrong track and tries to drag her away from it, the home of such a couple is unworthy of that name; it is not a home; it is inferno, where ghosts and evil spirits revel.

Really, woman should strive to achieve the knowledge of the Soul and live every moment in the consciousness of her being only the Atman; she must evince always a desire to become one with the Divine Consciousness. The home where the woman is such and where the husband and wife are leading their lives in the shade of great ideals, where they together sing the glory of the Name of the Lord and spend themselves in good deeds, where there reigns Truth, Peace and Love, where regular reading is done of holy books, where the senses are under control and where there is equal treatment for all creation prompted by the knowledge of the basic unity of all creation, such a Home is certainly Heaven on Earth.

A wife with such a nature is a wife worth the name. She must have real love towards the husband, then only can she be called housewife or Grihini. Then only is she Dharmapathni, the Bhaarya, the Instrument and Companion for Dharma, Artha and Kama. She who knows the mind of the husband and speaks soft and sweet, is the real friend. Why, sometimes, when the wife has to point out the path of Dharma to the husband, she takes on the role even of a Father! When the husband is down with illness she is the Mother.

Woman must accord first place to the service of her husband; that is True Worship, for her. Her prayers and worship and Puja can wait. Without serving the husband she cannot attain Bliss in worship or meditation.

As a matter of fact, the Lord must be welcomed as represented by the husband and all service rendered to him must be elevated to the level of worship; that is the path of genuine duty. If every act is done as if it is for the sake of the Atma and its merger with Paramatma, then activity becomes dedicated to the Lord. All such acts save; they do not bind.

It does not matter, how bad or low the husband is, the wife must, through love, bring him round and correct him, and help him gain the blessings of the Lord. It is not correct to feel that her progress alone matters and she has no concern in his improvement or uplift. She must feel, on the other hand, that the welfare of the husband, the joy of the husband, the wishes of the husband, the salvation of the husband, these are the panacea for her also. Such a woman will receive the Grace of the Lord automatically, without special effort; it will be showered upon her; the Lord will always be by her side and be kind to her in all ways. By her virtue, she will ensure the salvation of her husband.

## **Chapter V**

Education is necessary for both men and women. But, education for women has to be in accordance with their special needs. Educated women are really the promoters of Dharma for the whole world. Parents too must co-operate in getting them equipped with proper education. Women should not be given freedom in certain matters. I will not approve of their being given such freedom. They must be made into ideal women; their education must be so shaped.

Unbridled freedom is destructive of Dharma; besides, women will, by this means, harm themselves. Mixing in society without any discrimination will produce results that are ruinous. Of course there were educated women in the past also, but they never gave up their Dharma, they never forgot the goal of Atma dharma. Vidya or education must be built on the basis of Viveka or Discrimination. Sulabha, Savitri, Anasuya, Gargi, Nalayani and other such models of chastity, devotees of the Lord like Meera, Yoginis like Choodala, all were born in this Bharatha Desa and by their adherence to Dharma, they strengthened Dharma. Once, when Sulabha was discoursing on the Atma with all her scholarship and experience, even Janaka was astounded! It is through the example of such great and holy women, with their character and conduct inspired by Bhakthi and Jnana that even today simplicity, humility and devotion shine in the hearts of the women of Bharatha Desa.

Women should draw inspiration now from them; efforts must be made by them to live as these did in the past. The Hindu woman must ever have before her as her guide the ideal of Dharma and progress in spiritual discipline. She can master any subject related to the objective world which has gained prominence today; but the welfare of the spirit should not also be forgotten; she must get interested in Vedantic study which cultivates the Inner Vision. A woman without this training is a rock without support, a danger to herself and others, a very unbalanced individual. Sulabha and others who pursued such studies became Brahmavadins of great fame. India produced several such saints and scholars, among women. Pundits and Vidwans used to approach such women for inspiration and guidance.

On what is progress based? The progress of the nation, the community and the family, depends on the proper education of women. The country can be lifted to its pristine greatness only through women mastering the Atma vidya, the science of Realisation of the Reality. If the nation must have lasting prosperity and peace, women have to be trained through an educational system, which emphasises moral conduct, moral qualities. The cause for the present fall in moral

standards and absence of social peace is the neglect of this aspect of women's education. The earth and sky are still the same; the change is in the ideal of education from Dharma to Adharma.

The education of today is spoken of as Vidya, but that is merely a way of calling it. It does not deserve that name, if you consider the present actions of the educated and their personal traits. The educated person must be capable of imbibing the inner joy of the Atman, irrespective of external circumstances; he must have grasped the purpose of existence; he must be aware of the discipline of Realisation. The Grace of the Lord was the Diploma, which every student sought to secure in the old days. That Diploma was awarded to those who were proficient in the cultivation of morality, the knowledge of the Atman, the sublimation of instincts, good conduct, pure habits, control of the senses, restraint of the mind, and the development of divine qualities. Today, however, things are different. Diplomas can now be gained by mugging up a few books! By going through modern schooling one cannot acquire moral and spiritual training.

Every woman must be given education in a well-planned manner. She must be able to understand the problems of the country. She must render such service and help as she can, within the limits of her resources and capacity, to the country, the community and the family. No nation can be built except on the culture of its women. The coming generation is shaped by the mothers of today; this generation is so full of adharma and injustice, because the mothers who brought it up were not vigilant and intelligent enough. Well, what is past is past. To save at least the next generation, women have to be warned in time and guided to take the ancients as their model.

Past, present or future, for all time, women are the backbone of progress; the heart of the nation, the very breath. They play the chief role in the dharma of life here below, a key role that is charged with holiness. Her mission is to lay down the canons of rightness and morality. She must provide children with moral and spiritual training. When the mother is imbued with Dharma, the children get the benefit and they get similarly saturated. When she is skilled in morals, the children learn to be moral. Therefore, the level of education among women decides whether a country is to prosper or decline. Her acts and conduct are crucial factors.

The responsibility of the elders and the parents is very great in this. Take the students of today; no trace of culture can be seen in them; matters of the spirit and talk of the Atma raise laughter among them! A majesty of words, a servitude to tailoring - these have become the fashion. This is not genuine culture. The educated women of today are helpless when it comes to managing a home. Home to them is but a hotel; they are so helplessly dependent on the cook and the maid. The educated woman is but a painted doll, decorating the modern home; she is a handicap to the husband, a weight around his neck. He is squeezed by her insistent demands for spending money on all kinds of objects. She does not share in the tasks of housekeeping and so by sheer idleness, and eating and sleeping without exercise, she develops illness, which leads her quickly to death.

The wanton behaviour of women has enveloped the world of today in an atmosphere of declining Dharma. Women are harming themselves by running after fleeting pleasure, regardless of the need to develop good character and elevating qualities. They are enamored of the pseudo-freedom, which feeds their conceit. To get fixed up in a job, to earn degrees, to move about with all and sundry without distinction and discrimination, to discard respect for elders and give up fear of sin and evil, to over-look the claims of the good and the holy, to force the husband to dance to one's tune, to deny the tribute of repentance to one's errors, are these the signs of education? No; they are all the monstrous shapes of Avidya, the uneducated egoist attitudes that make a person ugly and repelling.

If the wife feels that the husband's home is sacred, then that home itself will endow her with every skill and qualification. There is no place anywhere, which excels such a home for her. One

saintly poet has sung that it is her temple, her school, her playground, her political arena, her field of sacrifice, her hermitage.

Educated women can do useful service to the community around them according to their skill, taste, inclination, desire, character, educational status, mode of living, discipline or scholarship. They should avoid tarnishing the reputation of their parents, their family or themselves. A woman without a good character is as bad as 'dead'; so women must be ever vigilant when they move about in the world. They should avoid flippant talk or free mixing. The discriminating woman will engage only in such acts as will add to the luster of her husband's fame and honour, never an act which will tarnish it. That is why it is said; "Sadguna or virtue is the sign of the educated person, the thing which makes education worthwhile."

I do not declare that women should not be educated or that they should not move in society. Wherever they move, if they are endowed with good qualities, and if the good qualities are accompanied by good actions and good habits, and adherence to Sanathana dharma and Sadhana, then their study is really worth while and society is indeed benefited. Study and society are not harmful in themselves; they react with the nature of the persons who make use of them and yield good or bad results. The cat holds the kitten as well as the rat in the self-same mouth, but with what a difference? The kitten, it fondles; the rat, it kills. The bite is neutral; it is the rat or kitten that decides how it behaves.

So too, knowledge can develop discrimination, inspire the springs of service, prompt inquiry into the Reality, promote the search for the Absolute, and even pave the way for attaining Paramahamsahood. On the other hand, it might feed and strengthen the roots of falsehood, hypocrisy, cruelty and injustice; it might teach man newer means of deceit and ruin the career of man on earth. It might turn Love into poisonous hatred and Truth into a bone of contention.

Therefore, whatever subject a woman might have studied and mastered, whatever the degree she has won, whatever the status of her husband or of herself, she must hold fast to these truths; real charm consists in good character; morality is the very breath of woman; modesty, the very live force; adherence to truth is her daily duty. She must plant the seedlings of fear (fear of sin, fear of the Lord) in her heart and cultivate the charm of humility. In the religious, moral and physical fields, she must adhere to the strict dictates of Dharma, and take that as the essence of all Vidya. She must be prepared to sacrifice even her life for the sake of maintaining honour; she must nourish and preserve her chastity and her adoration of the husband. This is the Chief Dharma of woman. This is the reason for her very birth as Woman.

## **Chapter VI**

The principles of Dharma will not change to suit the convenience of man. Dharma is immutable. Dharma persists as Dharma, then, now and forever. Of course, the practices and rules of applied Dharma might change according to changing causes; but, even then, those practices have to be tested on the basis of the Sastras, not on the basis of advantage. There should be no such calculation. The Sastras may not always support rules, which yield tangible visible advantage, nor can the Vedas etc. be expected to indicate only such acts. Dharma cannot be tested on those lines; direct or ocular proof is impossible. The Mimamsakas state that Dharma can be known only through the Vedic Mantras and that the Vedas attempt to elucidate only such truths as are beyond ocular demonstration.

If Dharma is followed with an eye on the consequences, it might even be neglected when the advantage is not patent or immediate. Every one will not have the same motive; every one will not have the same standard. For example, each will have a different idea of the fruits of Snana, Sandhya, Japa and Dhyana, which are prescribed. Some persons cancel the Gayathri Japam in



the evenings and instead recite the Vishnu Sahasranama or the Sivasahasranama. "Kaale Sandhya Samaachareth": "Perform Sandhyavandanam in proper time"; that is the prescription. But, inspite of such directions, is it not a breach of Dharma when they cancel the evening Sandhya like this? Similarly there are prescriptions for every Varna.

"Chaathurvarnyam mayaa srishtam gunaa karma Vibhaagasah", says the Gita; the meaning is quite clear, "I have created the four varnas dividing them on the basis of quality and activities", that is the teaching. But relying on all kinds of paltry arguments and dry reasoning, many men follow the Dharma which appeals to them and without any fear of God or of sin, they drag the innocent, ignorant people also into the wrong path. That is the reason why the Lord comes down now and then in order to uplift the downtrodden and in order to re-establish Dharma. That causes the incarnation of the Lord; this has been said in ringing tones in the Gita.

"Dharma samsthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge". Here, one point has to be clearly grasped. Many who read the Gita take it that the Lord incarnates when Dharma is destroyed and when the forces of Adharma begin to prevail. But there is no basis to draw the conclusion that Dharma gets *destroyed*. The Gita too does not say so. The word that is used is "glaani"; that is to say, when the indications are that dharma is in danger, "I will come in order to protect it from harm". He did not say that he will come down to protect it and preserve it after Dharma itself has been destroyed! Of what use is a doctor after life has left? So too, after Dharma, which is the very life-breath of humanity, has been destroyed, what is the need for the Bhavaroga Vaidya, that is to say, the Incarnation of the Lord? What is the Lord to protect? This is why the word 'glaani' is used to indicate, not the destruction, but the decline, the weakening of Dharma. The protection of Dharma is the task of the Lord, for Dharma is the very breath of the Jivi.

Dharma is not an ordinary affair. He who does not practice Dharma is as bad as dead; if he does practice it, he is of the divine nature. Now there is need to turn men on to the Dharmic path by means of good advice, tempting them with the attractive consequences of following the path, threatening to dissociate from those who do not, and inflicting punishment as a last resort; the traditional methods of Saama, Daana, Bheda and Danda. In ancient times, people never gave up the practice of Dharma even when they were threatened with death at the point of the sword. Now, without even the slightest pressure from others, people slide down and fall into Adharma. Indeed, Dharma is interpreted in various confusing ways and those who strictly follow the real Dharma are obstructed and laughed at and treated as worse than dried up grass. Those who are anxiously adhering to Dharma are branded as cheats, hypocrites and ignoramuses. Such calumniators do not know what Dharma is or what its principles are. Unfortunate individuals! They have no capacity to grasp the meaning of that word. You can judge for yourself how it can be understood by persons who do not know even the literal meaning of the word. What can a person, born blind, know of the sun or its rays? Of course he can feel the heat, when the rays of the sun fall on his body; he cannot have an idea of the nature of the sun, its form, its shape, its brilliance, etc. So too for a person who has no conception of Dharma, who has no faith in Dharma, the joy derived by its observance is something incomprehensible. To dilate on Dharma before such a person is as useless a venture as blowing a conch before a person who is stone deaf. He can only see the conch at the lips of the person in front of him, he cannot hear the least bit of sound. So when Dharma is taught to a person or extolled, care must be taken to see that he has faith and earnestness and the eagerness to practice it. Only such must be handled and sought to be corrected. Later, by the promptings of their own experience and the joy they derive therefrom, even the ignorant will plant in their hearts the seedlings of Dharma.

Nowadays, many educated persons immersed in Vedic and Sastric knowledge, and classic scholarship have lost faith in the texts of which they are masters; they have become afraid to stick firmly to Dharma, for it is being laughed at by their cynical friends; they have yielded to the

crooked arguments of critics and sold their heritage for trivial returns; they interpret the Ekadashi fast as one of the means for regulating health, the waving of the camphor flame as a remedy for asthmatics, pranayama as helping digestion, pilgrimages as educational tours, charity as a means of self-advertisement... thus demeaning and desecrating the holy injunctions of Dharma.

Such men only deceive the world; they are barbarians who do not know or heed the principles of Dharma. They can learn something from a perusal of Manu dharma.

Aarsham dharmopadesam cha  
Vedasastra a-virodhinaa  
Yastharkenaanusandhathe  
Sa dharmam veda, netharah

Thus said Manu: "Any person who wants to know Dharma can know it only by following a system of Logic or Tarka that is not opposed to Veda and Sastra". No conclusion opposed to Veda can be logical. Dry logic is profitless and Manu does not recommend it to those who want to study the Vedas, etc. Still there are many today who stick to this logical reasoning and following Adharma themselves, drag others too with them into the wrong path. That is why Vedavyasa declared long ago:

Na yakshyanthi, na hoshyanthi, hethuvadavimohithaah  
Nimmokshyaham karishyanthi, hethuvaadavimohithaah

That is to say, those who follow the path of Causalism and logic, seeking cause-and-effect connection, will not offer sacrifices in the sacred fire; they will involve themselves in low demeaning acts. Vedavyasa has said this in Aranyaparva of Mahabharatha, while describing the conditions that are to be expected in the Kali era.

It is only by following the path of Dharma or rectitude that the sun and moon are revolving unerringly on their orbits; it is only the call of Dharma that makes all the divine powers adhere to their various duties and responsibilities; Dharma only keeps the five elements bound to the principles of their nature.

You should derive the greatest possible benefit from Dharma and avoid, while following it, causing any injury to yourselves or others. You must spread the glory of Dharma by making yourself a shining example of the peace and joy it gives. Do not follow the trail of dry logic; do not confuse your brain by cynicism and prejudice, do not get interested in what others do or believe in and try to reform them or correct their footsteps; have faith in the basic Atma which is your real truth; test all lines of conduct on that basis, whether it will hinder the process of revealing the Atma or not; and carry on, in the light of that faith and that test, your daily duties and rites. Then, you will never fall into error. You will also derive great joy.

There are some worldly maxims like "Udyogam Purusha lakshanam" or "Karmam Purusha lakshanam", which say that being engaged in a profession is the sign of man, or being engaged in a task is the sign of manhood etc. But, the real maxim is "Dharmam Purusha lakshanam", "Observance of Dharma is the sign of manhood". Every one must engage in Dharma karma, or tasks infused with Dharma, while putting into action the purusharthas of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

As Pativrata dharma is for women, Brahmacharya is for men. Just as woman should consider one person and one person only as her master and husband, man too has to be faithful to one woman and one woman only, as his mate, his wife. She has to consider the husband as God and worship him and minister to and follow his desires for the fulfillment of her duty of Pativrata; so man too

should honour his wife as the "Mistress of the Home" and act in accordance with her wishes, for she is the Griha Lakshmi. Then only can he deserve the status of "man". Name and fame, honour and dishonour, vice and wickedness, good and bad are all equal and uniform for both men and women. There is no such thing as woman alone being bound and man being free; both are equally bound by the rules of Dharma. Both will fall into Adharma if they behave without consideration of the claims of the four pairs of attributes mentioned above. Men too are bound in certain matters just as women are; men have no right to do certain things. There are some important pledges between the husband and the wife.

## Chapter VII

All that is visible shines as Gayathri, for Vaak is Gayathri and all objects or Bhuthas are Vaak, indicated by Vaak and subsumed in Vaak. Vaak is speech or sound. It is Vaak that describes them, it is Vaak that declares them and it is Vaak that denotes them. All objects are also of the World or Prithvi. Nothing can go beyond it. This world is the body of Man; he cannot leap out of his body. There is the Prana that sustains him; breath or the Prana is inside the Hridaya or "Heart". And, the Prana cannot move outside and beyond the Hridaya.

The Gayathri has four feet and six categories. The categories are: Vaak, Bhutha, Prithvi, Sariram, Prana and Hridaya - Speech, Objects, World, Body, Breath, and Heart. The Purusha that is extolled by this Gayathri is indeed exalted, sacred, and glorious. All this objective multiplicity, as has been said, is but a fraction of His Body. The number and nature, the measure and the meaning of the objects or Bhuthas are beyond understanding; yet all this is but a quarter of His Magnificence. The other three quarters are His Effulgent Immortal Form.

It is impossible to grasp the Mystery of that splendor-filled Form. This Purusha indicated by the Gayathri is indeed referred to as Brahman. He is the Aakaasa, beyond the comprehension of man; He is spoken of as, "Bahir dhapurushaakaasah." This is the mark of the Waking Stage; that Purusha is the Aakaasa, inside the personality of man. He is "Antah purushaakaasah". That is the mark of the "Dream Stage". He is the Aakaasa inside the Hridaya of man; He fills it and fulfils it; that is the "Deep-Sleep Stage". Whoever knows this Truth attains Fullness and Brahman. That is to say, he who knows the Three Avasthas of Wakefulness, Dream and Deep Sleep (Jagath, Swapna and Sushupthi) is himself Brahman. How ridiculous is it that Man known as Purusha bearing the name of this Atma Swarupa should become the repository of egoism and consequent impurity, busy in the unholy pursuit of injustice! How calamitous! At least for being known even today as a "Purusha", man should try to practice the path that will endow him with an atom of that Glory.

Then, what to speak of Purusha dharma? How can purushas who have not cared to earn even the infinitesimal glory of the Primal Purusha be expected to practice Purusha dharma? Not even the most diligent search will now reveal a fraction of it! As the ancient Rishi said:

Samdhyaa heeno suchirnithyamanathas sarva karmasu  
Yad anyath kuruthe karmo no thasya phala bhaag bhaveth

That is to say, when the twice-born gives up the Sandhya-worship, he falls into perdition; so say all the Smrithis. Those who neglect the Sandhya-worship have no right for any other type of ritual. It is because the sages of ancient times performed the Sandhya-worship for many years that they acquired long life, fame, glory, wisdom and the splendor of Divinity; Manu mentions this also. Therefore, from whatever point of view we consider, no Brahmin can deserve that status if he does not meditate on the Gayathri.

Of course what Brahmin means in this context is the man who has realised the Brahma thathva and who has purified himself by the practice of the Brahmopasana, the ceaseless contemplation of the Brahman. This has nothing to do with caste and even religion. But, those who have inherited the name Brahmin have a special responsibility in adhering to the Sandhya-worship and the Gayathri.

What exactly is Sandhya? 'Sam' means well and 'dhyā' is derived from 'Dhyana' and so Sandhya refers to the proper Dhyana or intense meditation on the Lord. It means concentration on the Godhead. To fix the mind on God, the activities have to be controlled. For, success in that process of control one should overcome the handicaps of the Gunas, the Satwa, the Rajas and the Tamas. When these faces of natural impulse predominate and try to direct along their channels, one must pray to God to negate their pull. That is the first duty of the man who strives towards God. It is the rule of nature, that the morning is the period of Satwic quality, the "noon" of Rajasic nature and the "evening" hour of dusk of Tamasic nature. At dawn, the mind is awakened from the comfort of sleep, liberated from agitations and depressions and so, the mind is calm and clear. At that time, in that mental condition, the Dhyana of the Lord is very fruitful, as everyone knows. This is the reason why the Praathah-Sandhya is prescribed. But ignorant of the significance, men continue doing the ritual in a blind mechanical way, simply because the ancients have laid down the rule. The second duty of man is to perform the Sandhya-worship, after realising the inner and deeper meaning of the same.

As day progresses, Man are infused with the Rajo guna, the active effortful nature, and he enters the field of daily work and toil. Before he takes his noonday food, he is directed to meditate on the Lord again and to dedicate the work as well as the fruit derived through it, to the Lord Himself. He can start eating only after this act of devotion and grateful remembrance. This is the meaning of the Maadhyahnika, the Noon-time worship. By observing this ritual, Rajo guna is kept in check and it is overpowered by Satwa nature. This is the third duty of all men.

Then, man is possessed by a third nature; the Tamas; when evening descends, he hurries home and eats his fill and sleep overpowers him. But, there is one duty still awaiting him. To eat and sleep is the fate of idlers and drones. When the worst of the gunas, the Tamas, threatens to rule, man must make a special effort to escape its coils by resorting to prayer, in the company of those who extol the Lord, reading about the glory of God, the cultivation of good virtues, and purposeful nursing of good rules of conduct. This is the evening Sandhya-Vandana, which is prescribed.

Therefore, the mind that emerges from the vacancy of sleep has to be properly trained and counseled; it must be made to feel that the bliss of Dhyana and the joy of being unaware of the outer world, are much grander and more lasting than the comfort one gets by means of the daily dose of physical sleep. This bliss, this joy can be felt and realised by all; discrimination will bring this home to you. This is the fourth duty of man.

The man who, so long as he has life in him, observes the thrice-a-day Sandhya, is indeed of the highest type; he is ever glorious; he attains all that he desires. Above all, he is liberated, even while alive; he is jeevanmuktha.

Care must be taken to see that the Sandhya is not taken as a routine ritual, one among many laid down for observance. This is to be carried out, aware of the significance, dwelling on the inner meaning. One should clearly grasp the sense of the Gayathri Mantra. It is necessary to feel the Identity between that Effulgent Being, the Atma Swarupa, mentioned therein and oneself. It is only those who are ignorant of its meaning that will neglect the Gayathri.

Manu lays special stress on just this: he has declared the Gayathri is the very life-breath of the Brahmin. It is not his declaration only; it is the Truth. What is more efficient for spiritual uplift than Dhyana on the Effulgence that illumines and feeds the Intellect of Man? What is more vitally fruitful than the prayer, which pleads for saving the mind from sin-ward tendencies?

For man, there is no better armour than the cultivation of virtues. Manu states that the Brahmin will not lose his status so long as he holds on to the Gayathri and is inspired by its meaning; he says that, if he is too weak to pursue the study of the Vedas, he must at least recite the Gayathri and adhere to it, till the very end. The Smriti too says that there is no treasure richer than the Gayathri.

Soul-force can accomplish all the tasks of the world; and since the Gayathri confers inner strength, to foster that force, it has to be cultivated with care at the right moment, without neglect. For the growth and development of the body pure Satwic food is very necessary, is it not? So also, the effulgence of the Sun has to be drawn, to reinforce the inner effulgence of man in the form of Bhaavana, or creative imagination.

When soul-force waxes, the senses too are activated and directed along fruitful lines. When it wanes, the senses fail and fail you. So, if the solar energy is drawn at that very juncture, it will be as seeds planted in season, the harvest is assured. Can darkness hide and confuse when the sun has risen and bathed the earth in splendor? Can sorrow prevail, when we have infused ourselves with that effulgence? How can we be devoid of strength, the strength derived from the very fountainhead of Brahman? The ancients, for the benefit of all aspirants, have laid down the technique of this process. Learn and practice it; by your own experience, you will be able to witness the Truth of their path.

Of what purpose is the Upanayana sacrament? Which is the Mantra that you are initiated into that day? Why has that Mantra alone to be taught then? Why are other mystic formulae not given equal prominence? Reflect on these matters and then you will find that the Gayathri is the Monarch of Mantras. You will also find the rituals shining with a new meaning, the rituals and restrictions full of purpose; the deeds and activities of the ancients will seem worthwhile. If you do not try to know the significance, you will interpret them as your fancy leads, and land yourselves in tricks and stratagems, to escape the obligations of life. You will be caught in injustice and negation, Anyaya and Adharma.

Well, what is the real meaning of the word Gayathri? Does any one try to know it today? The word is taken to mean either a Goddess or a formula. Gayathri is that which protects (Thra) the Gayas, or Pranas or the Indriyas, beginning with Vaak. Besides, it is said "Gaayaantham thraayathe yasmaad gayathri, thena thathyathe". That is to say that which saves those who sing it, or revere it and repeat it or meditate on it is called Gayathri. It is this sacred Manthra that transformed a Rajarshi like Vishwamitra into Brahmarshi. The Veda Matha, the mother that is the Veda, will confer all boons on all those who worship Her. That Goddess is described in glorious terms in Brahmanas and in the Dharmasutras; if you understand these clearly, you can realise it, unaided.

Dharma imbued with such deep mysteries, is today rationalised and interpreted willfully in various paltry senses that is the reason why the decline of Dharma has come about. So, it is imperative to revive Sanathana Dharma and the principles of interpretation natural to the Atmic Truth, which is the basis of Dharma. Otherwise, the meaning will be changed out of all recognition and the whims of individuals will prevail. Every act will be stamped as Dharma whatever its nature!

## Chapter VIII

The Asramas regulating man's life are four: Brahmacharya, Grahastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. They are all based on Grihasthashram. That is the chief Asrama, because the Grahastha fosters the other three. The Grahastha is the most important of all.

As all living beings depend upon air for their existence, the other three Asramas are dependent on the Grahastha. The Grahastha not only feeds and clothes the others, but he also provides facilities for the study of the Vedas. Manu, in his Dharma Sastras, has emphasised this point very clearly. He has declared that the Grahastha too attains Moksha; only he must follow strictly the Dharma laid down for his Asrama. There is no doubt that every one, to whichever Asrama he may belong, who adheres to the Dharma of that Asrama will attain Moksha.

In the Manu smriti, in the Narada parivraajakopanishad and other such texts, it is mentioned that in some instances, Grahastha who adheres to Dharma is reckoned as the highest type of man, while in some other texts it is laid down that only sages who have renounced everything deserve worship. Therefore, a doubt may arise whether one can adopt the Grihasthashram, which is the base and support of all or whether one has to take up the universally honoured Asrama of Sanyasa, the path of Nivritti. There is an intimate relation between the worship-worthy Grahastha and the saintly Paramahansa. So, to whichever Asrama you may belong you do no wrong. All the four Asramas lead you to Moksha or Liberation if you follow strictly the Dharma as laid down for each and if you devote yourselves steadfastly to your uplift. Each Asrama is important at the particular stage; the conduct of the individual, his practice, that is the essential test. If one is engaged in Sad-aachaara, every Asrama is holy, every Asrama is commendable. That is the judgement of the Sastras.

Those who are endowed with Atma Jnana, the knowledge of the Atma as their basic truth, do cross the ocean of birth and death and without doubt attain liberation. On the other hand, those who are ignorant of the vows and rites prescribed for them, as well as those who have not studied the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita, but satisfy themselves with mere external purity and show, such will surely suffer grief.

The Nithyaanushtaana, or the rites and vows prescribed for daily adherence, is very important among the disciplines. It is the highest Tapas, the highest Dharma. Have you noted what the Gita, the essence of all Upanishads, has to say on this point? Those who are ever active in the spiritual field, in whatever Asramas they may be, whatever may be their caste, they attain the Lord. That is what Manu also says. "They are endowed with Vijnana." The person who is free from all desire, who has not even the slightest inclination to possess or enjoy the sensory world, who has no trace of egoism or possessiveness, who is ever in the bliss of Brahman-consciousness, is far from any tinge of sorrow, he is established in supreme joy and peace. At least in his last moments, if a man is fixed in the knowledge of his basic nature, which is Brahman, he can successfully merge in That, beyond doubt.

The "Sthithaprajna" stage is quite natural for such persons. The constant feeling, "I am Brahman", is the panacea for all the ills of man. Liberation comes through this "Aham Brahmaasmi" idea itself. That is the real duty of man, to cultivate that feeling and enter upon that experience. The Anjani, or the ignoramus, who is moved by the inert or the Jada principle, believes that the body is himself. The Pandit who is capable of a little ratiocination and enquiry feels that the Jivi in the body is "I". But those wise men who can see the An-Atma is separate from the Atma, they know that the truth is: "Aham Brahmaasmi" and they do not stray from that conviction.

Castes like "Brahmin", colours like white and black, asramas like Brahmacharya etc. these are physical conditions; they are not characteristics of the Atma. They are conditioned by time and place. They belong to this world of bondage, and are governed by reasons related to that world. The Divine Will for the orderly functioning of the world ordains them. They have to be observed by every one who is bound by worldly limitations. For those who are untouched by the limitations and extensions, that is to say, who are beyond worldly ties, they are unimportant. That is why the persons who are ever engaged in Brahmanishta, those who have grasped the basic Reality, do not observe them so much! They are not bound to caste; they see everything as the basic Reality Itself. How then they pay attention to what is called caste? But until that stage is reached, you have to follow the rules of caste and asrama without exception. This is the Dharma for the "Deha-conscious" - the Deha dharma.

The Maharshis who grasped the Atma dharma declared that Sath, Chith and Ananda are the basic characteristics of the Self. Therefore, those great Vijnanis can be said to have attained Brahman, which is Sath-Chith-Ananda Itself. For liberation, clearness of vision to see the Atman is enough; that is the essential thing, not caste or colour. How to get that clear vision? The answer is: through the practice of Dharma, the Dharma which is conditioned by caste and asrama! Dharma enables the Atma to be realised, without any mist or fog hiding it from view. The practice of Dharma fills you with experience; through that experience, truth is established; the Truth reveals clearly and the Vision grants liberation; persons who are free from such inner encumbrances hiding the Atma, may belong to any caste or asrama; that does not matter; they do attain liberation. This Anthahkarana Suddhi is what the Sastras extol, when they speak of salvation.

Those who have attachment and hatred, even if they dwell in the forest, cannot escape harm. Those who have conquered the senses, even if they are householders, can be thapaswis. If engaged in acts, which are not harmful or condemned, then they are entitled to be called Jnanis. The home is the thapovana for attaining non-attachment. Yajna or Yoga cannot win by progeny, or by charity or by riches or liberation; what is wanted for liberation is the cleansing of the self.

In order to decide what is right action and wrong, the Sastras alone are the authority; whatever the stage of life, whatever the Asrama, if the person has the realisation of Brahman as the goal, and if he seeks to realise Swaswarupa, that is, his own real Reality, he will succeed in removing the veil of ignorance and know himself as Brahman. Attention fixed on one's Atma - that is the means of liberation.

Understanding this lesson that the Vedas teach, practicing the principles of living laid down for the particular stage of one's life, any one, whatever the caste, can attain the Parama pada, the Highest Stage. If there is the will and the strength to adhere strictly to Dharma, if there are no difficulties in acquiring Jnana, one can, without entering Sanyasa Asrama, remain as a householder and yet be liberated.

Rajarshis like Janakachakravarthi, Aswapathi, Dileepa reached the Goal while continuing in the Grahastha stage; in that stage they struggled and succeeded in removing all obstacles that hindered the winning of the Grace of the Lord; they had as goal the Godhead they wanted to reach. Therefore, do not doubt it; Grihasthashram is no hindrance.

Moved by the desire to cross this ocean of Samsara, the husband and the wife must both have harmony of mind. The resolution to reach the goal must be equally strong and steady in both. Otherwise, Sanyasa is the refuge! See even the mid-day Sun is associated with His Consort, Chhaya; the Sixteen-fractioned Moon is closely associated with cool rays of Light, acting like Nectar. The Mistress of the Home must be bright, patient, calm, good and must have all the virtues; then, the Home will shine and be a Home of victory in the spiritual field also.



There is no rule that when a person meets with difficulties in the spiritual field at home, he should take Sanyasa and flee. If a husband without the full approval of the wife takes it, it can never be fruitful. The best that he can do is to leave the home with the wife and be a Vanaprastha, adhering to the Dharma of that new stage. If there are children who need attention and care, even Vanaprastha at that stage is not favoured by the Sastras.

One has to make the children independent of one's care and then leave them to themselves. The Sastras therefore require that a person has to be in the householder stage till the age of 48, whether it is favourable or unfavorable. One has to be in it and struggle to perform the Swadharma, without hindrance. If hindrances come, dedicate them too to the Lord; take them quietly as His Leela and as His Plan; that is the way to follow the Grahastha discipline, the Path for both men and women.

## Chapter IX

High and low, rich and poor, male and female - all are affected by illness; and all have the right to seek the drugs that cure illness. So too, all persons are affected by the illness of birth and death and they all have the right to the drug, named Brahma vidya, which is its effective cure. That is the heritage of all. According to the stage reached by each and the degree of development in spiritual discipline attained, and the extent of assimilation of the drug, each person will improve in health, that is to say, in peace and equanimity. But, here, one thing has to be specially mentioned; along with the drug, the regulations regarding the mode of living have also to be strictly adhered to.

The drug, Brahma-consciousness, has to be supplemented and strengthened by the appropriate Dharma as well as the cultivation of Bhakthi, Jnana and Vairagya. Dietary and other restrictions are essential components of the treatment of illness; so also mere initiation into Brahmajnana is not enough. Without Sama, Dama and the other moral and spiritual excellences, no one, be he emperor or bondsman, highborn or low-born, can reach the goal. Though every one is entitled to the heritage of Brahma vidya, only those who equip themselves with the qualifications can receive it. One must be strong enough to undergo the treatment and to digest and assimilate the medicine, is it not? If that strength is not there, the Great Physician Himself will not certify that the patient can take the medicine. Some physicians, seeing the plight of the patient, give drugs free to those who are in dire need, when they find that they are too poor to afford them; what then, of the Lord, the Greatest Physician of all, the Source and Spring of Mercy and Grace? He takes into consideration the capacity and the need and He arranges for the supply of the drug.

Now, there is one problem; are women entitled to seek Brahma vidya? This question has been answered already. If women do not deserve this knowledge, how did Vishnumurthi teach Bhudevi the mystery of the Gita? How did Parameswara teach Parvathi the Gurugita? "Dharovaacha" "Parvathyuvaacha", such statements reveal that Dhara and Parvathi took part in the discussions and put questions to clarify the points. The Yogasastra and Manthrasastra were both taught to Parvathi by Iswara. This must therefore be correct, authorised by the Sastras, is it not? In the Brihadaranyak Upanishad, it is mentioned that Yagyavalakya taught Maitreyi, the Brahma vidya. The Vedas consist of two parts, the Karmakanda for the Ajnani, the Ignorant, and the Jnanakanda for the Vijnani. Even when the Sastras alone are taken into consideration, they have also two sections; the words of the scholars and words of the wise, coming out of their experience of Atma Jnana. Of these, the words of those who have given up all idea of Doership, as a result of their realisation of the identity of Brahman and Atma, the words of those who know and feel that the same Atma is inherent in the multiplicity of life, who have lost all distinction between Mine and Thine, who seek the welfare of all animate and inanimate creation, the words of such knowers of Atman alone are genuine and valuable.

In the Brihadaranyak, there is mention of such effulgent women-sages as Gargi and Maitreyi and in the Mahabharatha, the names of Sulabha and Yogini are found. Women should be inspired by their moral rectitude and their steadfastness and then walk in that path; then, only does the question of reaching that height arise. Choodala, Madalasa and other such women attained Brahmajnana, being in the Grihasthashram itself. Women can by Sadhana attain that unwavering unequalled auspicious Brahman; this is made clear in the Yogavasishta and also in the Puranas. Doubts will haunt only those who have not studied the Sastras properly. Novitiates, householders, recluses, all among women, have by their pure hearts and holy conduct attained the goal. All women should strive to acquire these two.

"The Acharya, or the spiritual guide, is ten times more worthy than the teacher of arts and sciences. The Father is ten times worthier than the Acharya, the Mother is a thousand times worthier than the Father". This is the declaration of Manu in the Manu smriti. That Smriti is the binding text for all Dharma Sastras; it is the very basis. See what a great honour it pays to the mother! Lakshmi, the patron of Wealth, is a female deity. When addressing letters to women, it is customary to begin, "To... equal to Lakshmi, in every way...". Women are entitled to universal respect. Causative Appearances of God-head like Rama and Krishna, religious teachers like Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa, bearers of Wisdom like Buddha, Jesus Christ and Muhammad - were they not all born of women? Their mothers were embodiments of holy glory and they gave the world sons who transformed it. Women who follow in their footsteps and lead pure consecrated lives can claim the right to Brahmajnana, and no one can deny it to them.

In fact, the Atma is devoid of all differences as between men and women. It is Nithya, Suddha, Buddha, Swayam Jyothi; i.e., it is eternal pure consciousness itself, and self illumining. Women can reach the status of those holy women only when they become aware of the nature of the Atma.

The patron deities of Vidya (Saraswathi), of Wealth (Lakshmi) and of Jnana (Parvathi) are all women! Therefore, it is unbelievable that women have no right to spiritual discipline, leading to merger with Brahman and to the final emancipation from bondage. A lion asleep is unaware of its nature. So too, man asleep in the coils of Maya is not aware of his being the Splendourful Atma. In this stage of ignorance, he elaborates more on his prejudices and he gives his likes, the stamp of Sastras! The Sastras will not declare so at any time.

Sastra is Nethra to man; it is the Eye that leads and illumines and guides. Follow its directions - that is the whole duty of man. That is the big task before the world today. If the Sastras are fully understood, no doubt will arise, no discussion will be needed.

It is not proper to select and superimpose on the Sastras things that are congenial to you, nor should you go up against the injunctions of the Sastras. Even to challenge them and talk lightly of their commands is sinful. The world has come to this sorry pass, mainly because the Sastras have been neglected in practice. This is the tragedy, the moral Fall.

Aspirants for Moksha must first practice the rules and restrictions prescribed in the Sastras for the elevation of character and the consecration of the feelings. Devoid of this liberating quantum of Brahmajnana, mere scholarship acquired by laborious study of the Sastras is just so much exhausting burden! Such scholars are like the spoons that turn round in sweets and savouries but do not taste either! The Mundakopanishad has compared scholars who have not assimilated the essence of the Sastras, but who guide others in spite of their own ignorance, to the blind leading the blind, with the result that both the leader and the led fall into the well!

Even without the knowledge of the Sastras, if you have the Jnana gained through experience and practice, you can attain the goal through that means, and lead others also along the path you have

become familiar with. The dull find no need for Sastras; so too, the holy person who is immersed, always and under all conditions, in the contemplation of Brahman and in the sweetness of that Bliss, has no need for Sastras. Of course, strict adherence to Truth and practice of Dharma may entail great hardship but, having in view the Bliss that awaits you in the end, you have to put up with all that and bear them gladly. Only the intelligent can save themselves by knowing the Truth, the rest will remain bound.

The Yugas are classified on the basis of the dominant mental role. In the Kritha Yuga, it is said Dharma walked about on four legs, happy and safe. In the Thretha Yuga, Dharma had only three legs, while in the Dwapara Yuga, it had to totter about on just two! In the present Kaliyug, Dharma has only one leg, according to this tradition. The four legs are Sathya, Daya, Thapas and Dana. If one has all these four, then he can be said to be in the Krithayuga, whatever may be the Yuga in the calendar. If Sathya is not steady in a person but, if he has the other three qualities, he is in the Threthayuga. If Sathya and Daya are both absent, but if Thapas and Dana persist, individuals who are in this predicament can be said to be in the Dwaparayuga. If however only Dana remains out of the four, it is as if Dharma is standing on one leg and the person who is sticking to Dana, in spite of everything else having disappeared, is in the Kaliyug, even if he exists in the chronological age, called Kritha. The Yugas change only with the change in Dharma, not with the mere passage of time. The wicked Hiranyakasipu and the pure hearted Prahlada both lived in the selfsame chronological Yuga; the same Yuga saw Dharmaja, the personification of Righteousness and Shanthi, as well as the arch-cheat, Duryodhana. So, Dharma is what makes the Yuga for each; one can always be in the Kritha Yuga, if only one has all the four qualities of Dharma. It is the conduct of man that makes or mars history and changes the Golden Age to the Iron Age.

## Chapter X

Next, about the House of God, the Residence of the concretised Formful Aspect of divinity (called Alaya or Mandir), the Temple and the Rules of Dharma relating to it. Rules have overgrown and overwhelmed these institutions, following the whims and prejudices of various authorities. They have led people away from Dharma and Brahman and even proper Karma; they have confounded the devotees by their variety and unreasonableness. They are insisted upon blindly and so, they have done much harm to the welfare of the world itself. In fact, these rules and formalities form the first steps in the retreat away from God. They have fostered atheism in a great measure.

Think deeply over the functions of the temple. Temples are centers of discipline, where the aspirant is guided step by step to attain a vision of the Truth, they are schools for the training of the spirit; they are academies for the promotion of Sastric studies; they are institutes of super-science; they are laboratories for the testing of the values of life; they are hospitals for the treatment and cure not only of the "birth-death-disease", which has persisted in the individual from ages, but even the much more patent "mental disorders" that trouble those who do not know the secret of acquiring Shanthi; they are gymnasia where man is reconditioned and has hesitant faith, waning conviction and upsurging egoism are all cured; they are mirrors which reflect his aesthetic standards and achievements. The purpose of the temple is to awaken the Madhavathwa in the Manavathwa, the Divinity in Humanity, inducing man to believe that the physical frame in which he lives is itself the House of God. Therefore all the temple formalities, rites and rituals emphasise and cultivate this Brahmajnana, the Truth that the Jivi is just a wave of the Sea.

The Sastras teach man that all his actions and activities must lead ultimately to non-attachment, for this is the best qualification for the development of the Brahmajnana. Of the three, Bhakthi, Jnana and Vairagya, Bhakthi is the Queen. The rules and rites are the Maids-in-waiting; the

Queen treats her maids with kind consideration and favour, no doubt, but, if the ceremonies, which are but 'servants' and 'aides', disregard the Queen, they should be mercilessly dismissed; all the formalities and rituals in the temples must therefore subserve the glorification of the Queen, Bhakthi; this is the sum and substance of the Dharma which must direct and govern all temples. It is only then that man can reach the Goal.

Bhakthi helps most easily the attainment of the Bliss of Merger with the basic Brahman, by canalising towards the Lord the mental agitations, the sensory reaching out, and the emotional urges of man. It is in this direction that all the details of the worship of the Lord in temples took shape. In the temple, all the various ceremonies from the "Awakening of God in early dawn to the Laying-in-bed' late at night, are all intended to heighten and promote the devotional trends of the mind. Each incident in its turn helps the sublimation of the appropriate emotion in a peculiarly charming manner. In the sublimity of that experience, the agitation of the lower emotions declines and disappears. The vulgar feelings of ordinary life become elevated to the status of Worship and Dedication to the Almighty Presence.

The Lord will evoke in each the emotion, which that person associates with Him; if He is conceived as a Monster or Bhutha, He will terrify as a Monster. If He is pictured and believed as Bhuthanaatha (the Master of the Five Elements), He will manifest Himself likewise. Perhaps, you might ask, how?

It has now become a fashion to distribute advice, a fashion which is indulged in by those who know, and those who don't. They do not care whether the advice is followed or not. People jump into this superior attitude of giving advice just to feel important and show off their status. They are blinded by their own conceit; these have to be pitied, more than condemned. For, no one can lay down "thus and thus only", so far as the Lord is concerned.

Moreover, though Jnana and Vairagya might have some standards of measure, Bhakthi has its own measure. It will assume many a form, adjusted to the attitude of the Bhakta. Kamsa, Jarasandha, Sisupala, Hiranyakasipu, etc., took up the attitude of hostility to the Lord, so, the Lord manifested Himself as their Enemy and finished their careers and their struggles. If the Lord is conceived as the Most Loved One, as Jayadeva, Gouranga, Tukaram, Ramdas, Surdas, Radha, Meera and Sakkubai did, He manifests Himself as the nearest and the dearest and showers Ananda. The little child takes the sun to be similar to the Kumkum Dot on its mother's forehead; but the knowing adult sees it as a sphere of effulgent heat. This shows the effect of the mental picture on the process of comprehension. In the case of Godhead as well as of the Temple, the same law applies.

It is proper that man should have an exalted attitude towards the Lord as well as the Habitation of the Lord, viz, the Temple. This attitude also yields great good. While it is quite natural and appropriate that man should picture Madhava in human form, it is not desirable to assume that He is just an ordinary individual. It is the principle of Bhakthi that He is conceived as an extraordinary Person, with a Figure of Sublime Splendour.

The feeling aroused by and during worship must be sweet and melodious and must, imperceptibly, transform the low desires and cravings of matter-bound men; they must not awaken or inflame the latent animal instincts of man. Take this example: Thyagaraja forgot that he should go to bed, in his enthusiasm to see that Rama was put to bed. Here, you should infer, not that Thyagaraja made Rama sleep in a swing; you should infer that Rama seated Thyagaraja on the swing of Bhakthi and gently swung him to sleep (or the forgetfulness of all things material). Instead of remembering your child in its cradle when you swing your Ishtadevatha in the silver or golden cradle, you must cultivate the attitude of seeing your Ishtadevatha, Rama or

Krishna, in the cradle when you swing your own child in it. So too, when you stand before the installed Ishtadevatha, you must get confirmed in the installation of Brahman in your own heart, as the real base of your existence, knowledge and bliss. It is to instill this feeling that the rites and ceremonies of temple worship have been organised. So you should not take the Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna, Lakshmi-Narayana, or Parvathi-Parameswara in the temple as 'Pitiable couples' eking out a miserable existence in the cramped sanctum sanctorum, subsisting on the food given by the archaka and slaking thirst with drinks that he offers. The archakas say "the Lord is sleeping", "the Lord is taking food" while refusing to open the door of the inner shrine. This is absurd. They sometimes even enforce silence, for "the Lord is asleep and He might be awakened too soon by the noise". There will be no chance at such times even for emergent pleadings.

Statements such as these may cause wrong conclusions in the minds of men. They raise many ridiculous queries like the problems of the Lord answering calls of nature while shut up in the niche and they promote atheism among men. The archakas and the carping unbelievers are both ignorant of the real principles of temple-worship. That is the reason for their low conduct. You should be cultured enough to avoid the lower worldly path.

The temple should not be valued on secular principle at all; only the attitude of Devotion can ennoble and beautify feelings which otherwise drag you down to the lower worldly path.

Today, on account of new fangled views, temples have become objects of derision. This is a sad state of affairs. Therefore it is necessary to reveal publicly the real objective of temple worship and elevate them to the status, which is their due. The temple must prosper once again. How stupid is it to be under the impression that the Lord sleeps as you do when a lullaby is sung or that He wakes up as you do when some one calls on Him aloud, or that He feasts when some food is placed before Him, as you want to do, or that He becomes weaker and weaker, as happens to you, when He is not given regular meals. Filling up the entire Universe down to the minutest part of the atom, unreachable by Time, effulgent beyond imagination, merciful above all expectation, the Lord has to be conceived as the Vital Energy that pervades and inheres everywhere, forever. How foolish to subject the Lord of that stature, to the carping criticisms of cynics and the false theories of the ignorant.

Can you bind the Lord to a timetable as you can do to a Bhakta? Travails do not fall upon the Bhakta during a fixed time, do they? Has the Bhakta to wait till the Lord is awakened from the sleep? Oh, the foolishness of it all! The infant can cry for its mother's milk at any time; the Mother too will rise from sleep and feed it at her breast. She won't push it off, angry that it yells when she is sleeping. Well, the Lord who is the Universal Mother must be getting disturbed and awakened at least a million times, if He really slept.

It all depends on the progress of your mental faculties; they must reach the supreme level. The Lord is immanent everywhere; He is capable of everything; He is the Universal Witness; there is nothing He does not know. These truths must be taken as axiomatic and all rituals and sadhanas must be arranged and interpreted, in conformity with those Truths. No low demeaning feeling must be associated with the worship of the Lord, or with His Name and Form. Therefore the highest Bhakthi and the rites that can supplement it are very essential. To say that the Lord's sleep will be disturbed, that one should not interrupt Him while eating, and that at such times, the doors of the temple must remain closed is, to say the least, infantile. It does not indicate a broad or correct attitude. When the emotion of Bhakthi gets ripe and blossoms more fully, these low secular feelings melt away into nothingness.

One small incident comes to mind now. Once in Calcutta, in the Kali temple constructed by Rani Rasmani, a Gopala idol fell down and its foot was broken a little. Since many elders declared

that according to the Sastras a broken image should not be worshipped, Rani Rasmani made arrangements to get a new one made by sculptors. Ramakrishna heard of this and he reproached the Rani, saying: "Maharani, if your son-in-law breaks his leg, what will you do? What is the correct thing to do? Bandaging the foot and setting it right, or discarding the son-in-law and getting another in his stead?" The Elders and Pundits were dumb-founded; the broken foot of Gopala was set right and the image was installed and worshipped as before. See, when Bhakthi is purified and is ascendant, the Lord will be patent even in a broken idol. This too is the Dharma declared in the Sastras.

When the doors are closed, the rules might say they should not be opened; but that is only a general direction. For, when persons like Sankara, Sananda, Jayadeva, Chaitanya, Gouranga etc., come, it becomes impossible to follow the rule, is it not? Lord Krishna turned round at Udupi to give Darshan to His Bhakta; Shiva yielded before the intensity of Nandanar's devotion. The reason for closing the doors is not connected with the Lord; elders for reasons unconnected have prescribed such rules with Divinity. You must have rules that do not conflict with highest conceptions of the Bhakta. If the temple servants have no fixed timings and if everything is left to their whim and fancy, the temple will not be able to instill devotion in the mind of the ordinary man; certain limitations and regulations are needed even to arouse awe and respect which are the roots of Bhakthi. That is the reason why certain hours are laid down for the entry into temples and for the opening of the shrine for the worship. Such restrictions are not repugnant to the main principle. For, the aim of the temple is to promote Dharma, to develop the inner culture and spiritual discipline. Human behaviour, actions, attitudes - all have to be subservient to the overall need to grow in the consciousness of God as the Living Presence. So, certain rules are necessary, no doubt, for the correct performance of temple rites. Otherwise, ordinary men will not learn steadfastness, faith and discipline and they will not grow in Bhakthi. The responsibility of the Archakas, the responsibility of the Dharmakarthas in charge of temples and that of the worshipping public is great indeed. Every one must be aware of the purpose of temples and the need to carry out temple rites: They promote Shraddha and Bhakthi, more than anything else. Therefore, the doors of the temple can be opened at any time for allowing worship by ardent seekers. No one should forget or ignore this fact: "Temples exist for the progress and welfare of the Man".

## **Chapter XI**

The Eras, classified according to the principles and practices of spiritual progress as laid down in the Hindu Dharma, are three:

1. The Vedic Era, during which great importance was laid on Karma or Rituals;
2. The Upanishadic Era, when Jnana was emphasised more than all else; and
3. The Puranic Era when Bhakthi was declared and described as all important.

Vedic literature consists of Samhithas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads; of these, the first three deal with Karma and are known as Karmakanda and the last, the Upanishads, are concerned with Jnana and so are called Jnanakanda.

The groups of Mantras in the Veda Samhithas are full of Stotras, glorifying Gods like Indra, Agni, Varuna, Surya and Rudra. The Aryans in ancient times earned peace and contentment and the fulfillment of their desires by sacrifices and rituals, addressed to these Gods through these Mantras. They realised that the Absolute Principle, the Paramatma, is One and one only; and they also knew that it manifests nevertheless as varied and manifold, under different Names and Forms.

In many Rig Vedic Mantras this is clearly announced:

Ekam Sath viprraa bahudaa vadanthi  
Agnim yamam maathariswaanamaahuh

"There is only just One: those who have seen the Truth praise it in many ways: Agni Yama Maathariswaan". This Brahman, the One without a Second, is designated in the Rig Veda as Hiranyagarbha, Prajapathi, and Visvakarma Purusha. The Hiranyagarbha Sukta and the Purusha Sukta are classical examples of this vision.

The way of living of the ancient Aryans is designated "Dharma". It can also be called, "Yajna". Rituals, puja and praise, surrender and dedication marked their daily disciplines. So, their life was full of Bhakthi or Devotion. The word Bhakthi might not be used, as such, in the Samhithas, but is not the word "Shraddha" found?

Sraddhayaagnih Samidhyathe Sraddhaahooyathe havih  
Sraddhaam bhagasya moordhanivachassaa Vedayaamasi

"It is only through Shraddha that the Flame of the Sacrificial Fire is lit and fed. It is through Shraddha alone that the offerings reach the Gods who are called. Let us praise Shraddha, which is the highest form of worship". See, how mighty is the power of Shraddha!

The simple spontaneous disciplines of the Vedic Age gradually became complex and confused by the overgrowth of rituals and formal rules; with the passing of time, it was declared that Dharma consists of Yajna and Homa that Heaven can be gained only by the performance of such rites! Though the Yajna was really a method of worship of the Gods, value was shifted from the Gods, to the Yajna itself. "The Gods were only the means; those who desired Heaven must do Yajna". Such was the turn the declaration took.

Meanwhile, the Upanishad Age dawned. The Upanishads rejected material objectives as devoid of permanent value; they condemned them as inferior. In fact, the Karmakanda of the Vedas was transformed and revalued in the Upanishads, as vehicles for the liberation of man from the bondage of birth and death and as vessels for crossing the ocean of Samsara. The vision of the Upanishadic Sadhaka breaks through this "external sensory objective world" and centers itself on "the inner world". The Upanishadic Rishis collectively confirm the nature of the Highest Principle thus: "In the basic depth of this Namarupa Jagath (this Name-Form World of Change) there is the One Eternal Permanent Sath. That is the Absolute, the Para-Brahman. The Highest can be grasped by means of Jnana yoga". Therefore, "Thad Vijijnaasaswa; Thad Brahma"; "Inquire into that; That is Brahma." This is the Brahma vidya that the Upanishads (the Vedanta) teach.

Besides, the Upanishads also declare: "The Vedas, though mainly concerned with the human objective of attaining Heaven, also provide the basic training for achieving Liberation, or Moksha. The attainment of the Absolute does not depend entirely or solely on mastery of this Brahma vidya. It is beyond the reach of study, scholarship, or intellectual conquest. It is only by Upasana that it can be realised". If the scholar, with all the weight of learning, also gets immersed in Upasana, his life is indeed sanctified!

Before such aspirants, the Lord will be manifest in His Real Glory. This is the meaning of the following declaration in the Brahadaaranyakopanishad about the bond between the Jivi and the Paramatma, the individual and the Universal:

Eshosya parama gathi  
Eshosya paramam sampad;



Eshosya paramo loka  
Eshosya paramaanandam

The Universal is the individual's highest goal, highest wealth, highest elevation, and deepest joy. In the Taittiriya Upanishad it has been proclaimed thus: "The Paramatma is the source of contentment, for He is the Embodiment of Rasa, of the Purest Emotion. Attaining Him, the Jivi can be immersed in joy. If the Paramatma is not shining in the firmament of the Heart, who is to taste, who is to live? He feeds all, with Ananda."

The seeds of Bhakthi, which are found scattered in the Vedasamhithas, sprout in the Upanishads, and begin to grow with many a blossom-full branch in the Puranas.

Well, many are yet confused when it comes to deciding what exactly is Bhakthi, what is the nature of the attitude called Bhakthi! It is impossible for any one to demarcate what exactly is Bhakthi and what is not. Bhakthi has infinite facets. Only pure, tender, tolerant, calm and loving souls, the very cream of Sadhus, the Hamsas sporting ever in the company of kindred Bhaktas, can understand its purity and depth. Others will find it as difficult to discover Bhakthi in a person, as discovering softness in rock or coldness in fire or sweetness in Neem. The Bhakta holds the Lord dearer to him than life; and the Lord too is attached to him in equal measure. Some great men even declare that the Bhakta is superior to Bhagawan; the ryot loves the clouds more than the ocean though the clouds only bring the ocean waters to their fields. The ocean does not come directly over their crops. This is how Tulsi Das describes the relationship between the Bhakta and Bhagawan. The clouds bring the mercy, the love, the grandeur of the ocean and the fragrance of the atmosphere and shower them over the entire land; so too, the Bhaktas carry these great traits wherever they go. Just as gold is dug out of mines, these virtues also are part of the Divinity in man.

The sage Durvasa arrived one day in the court of Ambarish, to test the efficacy of Bhakthi. For this purpose, he created out of his anger, Krithya, for his destruction. But the Lord's Chakra, which demolishes the fear in the hearts of devotees, destroyed Krithya and started pursuing Durvasa to the ends of the earth. He fled over hill and dale, lake and stream, and leaped across the seven seas; he tried to take asylum in the heavens; but, the foe of a Bhakta could get asylum nowhere. At last, he fell at the feet of Narayana in Vaikunta, an exhausted penitent; the Lord, however, declared that He was always on the side of His Bhakta, and that He will never give up the devotee who relies on Him as his only refuge. "I follow the Bhakta as the calf follows the cow, for he gives up, for Me, all that is considered desirable by the worldly-minded."

Once, Krishna told Uddhava thus: "Tapas, Jnana, Vairagya, Yoga, Dharma, Vrata, Pilgrimage, the merit acquired by these is acquired by My Bhaktas with even greater ease". Reflect how great is true devotion! By its means, a Chandala can excel even a Brahmin! A Bhakthiless Brahmin is inferior to a Chandala endowed with Bhakthi. This is elaborated in the Puranas. That which is described in the Vedas as simply, "Nethi Nethi, Not this, Not this," that which is declared as "Beyond the reach of words, far out of the grasp of the Mind," that which is un-reachable by the senses, the mind or the intellect, such an Entity is capable of being felt and experienced by those immersed in Dhyana. Bhakthi brings it into the Consciousness easily, it fills the devotee with bliss.

The Bhagawan, described in the Puranas, is not only the Nirguna-nirvikara-adwithiya Brahman, the Thing to be known, the Chith Swarupa, the Origin of the Universe. He is also the repository of all the Noble, Elevating and Attracting Qualities; He is the Reminder and refuge of all that is beautiful and loving. He lifts, energises and purifies. The sense-centered individual, without great travail and trouble, cannot grasp the Unmanifested Nirguna Brahman cognised at the climax of

the Jnanamarga. This is the reason why the Puranas dwell so much more on the Saguna aspect than on the Nirguna aspect of Godhead. First, the aspirant has to practice the Sadhana related to the Saguna aspect of God; this will endow him with concentration and, later according to the law of procedure from the gross to the subtle, he can merge his mind in the Nirguna Brahman itself. The mirage leads the thirsty man far away from the tank, he then turns away and returns to the place where water is available; reaching the tank, he becomes competent to drink and slake his thirst. This is called the Sthulasourambhikaanyaya. So too, aspirants after Moksha do get the desire for Nirgunopasana; the Lord who is attached to the Bhaktas takes up the forms which the Sadhus and Mahatmas seek. He grants, out of his bounty, the Purusharthas; all four.

## **Chapter XII**

The ancients considered temples as not only Deva Mandirs, but also as Vijnana mandirs. They knew that Service, done consciously and with full knowledge of meaning, could attain God. They felt that temples are Academies of the higher learning where man developed the real culture of the mind. They knew that the House of God in the heart of Man will be as clean and holy as the House of God was, in the hamlet where he lived. You can guess the nature of the inhabitants of a village by simply observing the village temple and its environs. "If the temple is kept clean and with holiness in the atmosphere, you can infer that the pure villagers are full of the fear of sin, that they walk along the path of Goodness" so thought the ancients.

Such Divyajnanamandirs, such Atmopadesaalayas, such Institutions of Spiritual Inspiration, have today degenerated into places where 'offerings' are distributed, and picnic parties revel. Idlers gather in the precincts and play cards or dice or such other games. Kalipurusha sports in glee when such groups gather in the temples.

This is contrary to Dharma. The temple is the heart of the village; it should therefore be preserved, nourished, and nursed as befits the heart. Believe that God walks about in the temple; it is His Residence. All have a responsibility to preserve the holiness of that atmosphere, which confers the joy of serving the Lord. Believe that the temple is the heart of all. The day this is done, the Madhavathwa in man will shine forth as a jewel. This is the Truth; this is the reason, for all the cost and pain incurred in the construction of temples. Village authorities or Government agencies or Bhaktas themselves must make all arrangements needed to develop spiritual discipline and wisdom. Then only can man shine forth in divine splendour. This is not all. There are some ultra-modern critics who condemn the Gopuras etc., as so much waste of money. This reveals a total absence of far-sightedness; no one with a high ideal or an upward vision will make such a remark. If you dwell upon the significance of the Gopuram, you can realise how holy, how mysterious, how revealing, is its purpose. The Gopuram beckons to wayfarers who have lost their way, and who wander away from truth, "O ye mortals! Blinded by the fog of physical attachments and self-aggrandizing urges, overcome by the miasma of worldly desires, which are fleeting and false, you have forgotten Me, the source and sustenance of you all. Look up to this eternal, ever pure, ever full tower of joy. Forgetting Me, you are wallowing in grief; you are pursuing the mirage in the desert sands. Come; have faith in the Ever-lasting Me. Struggle out of the darkness and enter the realm of Light, and come to the royal road of Shanthi, that is the Path of Dharma. Come, Come, O Come."

Thus does Gopala call on all, with raised hands from aloft the line of housetops in every village.

So, when seen through this more elevated insight, gopurams can be respected as conducive to the raising of human ideals and conduct. This is the principle underlying the construction of gopurams. Such high ideals inspire these structures. This is the true meaning, a meaning which can be experienced and felt. The light on top of the Gopuram is the symbol of the Light which is

the refuge of all, it is the representative of the unflickering inner lamp, lit at the self-same Flame; it is the Inner Illumination, gained by merging in Hari.

Temples are as oases in desert wastes, for those who have lost their way in the hot sands of grief and greed, they are Prashanthi mandirs, Santhoshasadans, welcoming you to cool joyous Peace. The gopurams are guides to stricken wanderers; they hold aloft the Flag of the Name of God; all should be thankful to them for the service.

Really, many dull-witted moderns are puzzled at the purpose of all the constructions and conditions, conventions and customs that revolve around the temple. They cannot grasp the significance of any reply that is beyond their limited understanding. A patient suffering from high fever will find even sweet things bitter; so too, those afflicted with the high fever of worldliness can never taste the real sweetness of truth. The fever must subside; then, they can appreciate the value of things of the spirit.

What is the goal of human life? What is the objective that man must realise? Is it just eating, drinking, sleeping, tasting a little joy and grief and finally dying, like any bird or beast? No, certainly not. A little thought will reveal that it is not so. The goal is Brahma-Sakshatkaram, the realisation of the Absolute, of Brahman! Without that, no man can attain Shanthi. He must win that Bliss of Divine Grace. However much one strives to extract happiness from the multiplicity of worldly things, the quantum of satisfaction is very little; as for Peace or Shanthi, one finds it impossible to get it through things of the world. The mind can have Shanthi only when it merges in the Absolute Consciousness, the Primal Cause, the Unchanging Existence.

Even the most comfortable house, equipped with all the luxuries man craves for, even heaps of treasure, are helpless to endow one with Shanthi. That can be won only by surrender to God, who is the very core of one's being, the very source of all life and living. Consider this: Are those lucky enough to possess wealth, gold, property and comfort having Shanthi? Nor is this all. Are men highly learned, persons of extraordinary beauty, of super-human physical strength - are these at least at peace with themselves and the world? What is the reason for the misery of even these?

The reason is: they have forgotten the Divine basis of Creation; they have ignored the one Absolute Underlying Principle. All lives, lived without Faith, and Bhakthi to the One Supreme Overlord, are despicable; lives spent without tasting the Nectar of the Divine Principle are all wasted chances.

It is really a strange turn of events...! Your Genuine basis, the Fountain of your joy, your Ultimate fundamental, the Paramartha Principle has become for you something outside and beyond, unnecessary, unsought for; the world with its tinsel tawdriness has become near and native, necessary and desirable.

Denying themselves the bliss derivable from surrender to the Lord, men madly run about in the name of Bhakthi, pursuing sacred spots, sages and sacred rivers. A modicum of genuine Bhakthi will awaken them from this delusion. It will teach them that man can obtain Shanthi only by returning to one's native home, viz., God. Until then, homesickness will haunt him.

Temples are invitations to that home, signboards directing man there. On one occasion, Sri Ramachandra spoke thus to those assembled to hear Him on the Chitrakuta Hill: "Dawn breaks and dusk falls. With dawn, greed awakens in man; with the dusk, lust gets hold of him. Is this to be your way of life? Is this to be your goal? With the passing of every single day, man has wasted one precious chance. He has taken one more step towards the Cave of Death. But does he

ever bewail his lot? Does he sorrow over the wasted day?" Note, how worthy of remembrance this message is!

It is because of such reminders that the culture of Bharathavarsha has God as its central theme. "Bha-ratha" means the land that has "rathi" or attachment to Bha-ga-vaan or God. If westerners renounce everything in their single-minded devotion to the discovery of the laws that govern the objective world, here in Bharathavarsha men renounced everything for the discovery and experience of the Absolute, which is the Prime Cause of the Universe and which, if known, confers unshakable Shanthi.

Westerners renounce for the evanescent; here, the renunciation is for the Eternal. This is for Vijnana, theirs is for Ajnana. This is Thapas, theirs is Tamas. That is why even today, the splendour of the Rishis, sages and yogis shines through the corridor of centuries on the faces of men; if sometimes the shadows of despair, despondency and discontent flit across those faces in this land, it is a forewarning of the decline of faith in Dharma itself.

Temples are intended to instruct men in the art of removing the veil of attachment that lies over their heart. That is the reason why Thyagaraja cried in the temple at Tirupathi, "Remove the veil within me, the veil of pride and hate". The fog of Maya melted away before the rays of Grace and so, he could discern and describe the image of Divine Charm in the song, "Sivudano Maadhavudano" and drink deep the sweetness of that Form. The churning of his heart by the Divine Formula produced the spark of Jnana, and it grew into the Flame of Realisation.

Not only in this Kaliyug but also even in the earlier yugas, the Kritha, the Thretha and the Dwapara, Naamasmarana has been the secret of liberation from bondage. The temple is the place where Naamasmarana is natural and automatic and undisturbed. Therefore, going to it is imperative, especially in the Kali age when the air is full of wicked and ungodly thoughts.

That is the reason why in the Gita, Krishna has declared that "Among Yajnas, I am the Namayajna" the Yajna that has the sacrificial beast offered in the sacred fire, the animal Ajnana itself. For the cure of grief, for the earning of joy, temples where the Name of God can be remembered are very essential. "For Bliss, Smarana: For Smarana, temples", that is the series. There is nothing more fruitful than this, more blissful or more charming. "Having the greatly simple Name, the ever available Tongue, and the Temple where His Enchanting Image is installed so that you can sing His Glory in an exalted Voice... why should man hasten towards the gates of hell?" wondered Vyasa. His wonder was born out of his own experience of the efficacy of the Name and its Smarana. So too, Tulsidas! He lived constantly in the temple and sang of the joy he tasted. "Alas! When men give up the name and the Temple, and seek peace and joy in other places, I am reminded of the foolishness of those who forsake the rich and tasty fare on their plates and beg with outstretched hands for the leavings on others' plates", he lamented.

Even in Vedic Discipline, the Name and the need to make the mind stay thereon are emphasised as of utmost importance. "Om ithyekaaksharam Brahman", "Om - that One Word is Brahman" declare the Aryan Rishis. Examine, if you like, whether any Saint was saved, without the Name of the Lord or the House of the Lord! For Gouranga, the Jagannatha-mandir was the inspiration and the refuge. For Jayadeva, it was the Radhakrishna Mandir. For Nandanar, it was the Temple at Chidambaram, which provided the source of Realisation. Vallabhacharya, Kabir, Nanak, Meera, Radha, Ramanuja, Madhawacharya, Shankaracharya, Namdev, Tulsidas, Thyagaraja all attained Divine Vision and what is more, Divine Wisdom itself, in and through temples. What need is there to dilate more? Even in recent times, was it not in the Kali temple built by Rani Rasmani that Ramakrishna Paramahansa tasted Divine Bliss and discovered his identity?

To misuse such temples, to spoil the sacred atmosphere of their precincts, to forget their holy mission, to decry the conventions and customs prevalent there, and to pave the way for their decline and desecration - this is undoubtedly Adharma, and not Dharma. Those who do these things have neither inner nor outer light; they are in utter darkness. Temple-worship, the company of sages, the recital of the Name, the adoration of the image or symbol - these are external sources of Light. Dhyanam, Thapas, Manana - these are the sources of inner illumination. Devoid of both, how can men experience the vision of Divine Glory?

No wonder Thulasi Das Goswami once declared: "Do you require light inside the house as well as outside? Then place the lamp on the doorstep! So too, do you desire to spread the illumination of Shanthi outside yourself as well as inside? Then place the Name of the Lord on the tongue, which is the doorstep of your personality! The lamp on the tongue will not flicker or fade or be put out by any storm. It will confer Shanthi on you, as well as on all whom you meet, the entire world".

Therefore, for the salvation of the individual evoke the Vision of the Form. The very memory of the Name will evoke the Vision of the Form. That Form, in all its enchantment and glory, is depicted in temples for the inspiration of the aspirant and so, whether the ordinary eye sees it or not, the seekers of the Atmic truth find temples indispensable.

### **Chapter XIII**

Dharma has no prejudice or partiality; it is imbued with truth and justice. So, man has to adhere to Dharma; he has to see that he never goes against it. It is wrong to deviate from it. The path of Dharma requires that man must give up hatred against others and cultivate mutual concord and amity. Through concord and amity, the world will grow, day by day, into a place of happiness. If these are well established, the world will be free from disquiet, indiscipline, disorder and injustice.

Whatever the thing you are dealing with, you must first grasp its real meaning. And, then, you have daily to cultivate it, for your benefit. By this means, wisdom grows and lasting joy is earned. The two basic things are: Dharma and Karma. The wise, who are impartial and unprejudiced, who are confirmed in Dharma, walk on the path of Sathya, as instructed in the Vedas. That is the path for all 'men' today.

The knowledge of Dharma is reached in three stages:

1. You must receive training under Vidwans, who are also imbued with Dharma.
2. You must aspire to attain Atma-suddhi, self-purification, and Sathya, Truth.
3. You must realise the value of Vedavidya, the Voice of Parameswara.

When these three are completed, then, man understands the Truth and how that Truth is to be separated from untruth. This enquiry into Truth has to be done in amity and co-operation; all must be equally eager to discover it for the benefit of all. Every one's opinion must be tested on the touchstone of Dharma, of Universal Good or Sarva-Loka Hitha. The principles that pass this test have to be specially kept apart and used and spread in the world for advancement of human welfare. By this means all will develop joy and happiness in equal measures.

"Samithih Samaani", says the Scripture. All have the same claim for Jnana and for the means of attaining it, like education. Therefore, all must do and get done, noble and pure deeds.

The renouncing of evil deeds, the giving up of desire... these two are accomplished by the same instrument name Manas or Mind. The Purusharthas or the Objectives of Human Life have to be

gained only through that. As a result of persistent training, it will learn to obey your interests. The Chiththam, on the other hand, presents before you past and present experience and invites you to see things in perspective and judge them against that background. Equanimity has to be attained in and through this process that goes on in Chiththa. That is to say, become Eka Chiththa.

Remember also that both these - the Manas and the Chiththa - have to be kept straight on the path of Sarva-Manava-Sukha or the Welfare of all mankind. Dharma will shine and illumine only in the person who serves all and confers joy on all. Such will receive not only the grace of the Lord but also the unique privilege of merging in Him. Whenever you give anything to anyone or take anything from anyone, see that you do not transgress the boundaries of Dharma. Do not go against its commands. Follow it at all times, believing this to be your bounden duty. Fill every ounce of your energy with the essence of Dharma and endeavor to progress in that path, more and more, with every passing day.

The Dharmic person will reveal decision and enthusiastic exultation in every act of his. His adherence to Dharma must be of that order. An attitude of fear that the Lord is seeing everywhere and everything, an ever-present apprehension that one might slide into sin, a natural bent towards truth, a leaning towards right conduct... the Manas is endowed with such virtues. Your task is to direct it and utilise it for the welfare of all mankind. Dependence on Dharma will ensure happiness and increase it. It can remove the spite that one develops towards others. It will not allow you to swell with pride when another suffers or grieves. Can such wickedness confer happiness on you? You can be happy only when all are happy, remember! Always, love and follow only truth; falsehood is never beneficial.

Men respect and disgrace; but, you will find no one who honours falsehood, deceit and injustice. And all will hold in respect truth, straight forwardness and justice. The Dharma as prescribed in the Vedas is tested and capable of being tested. It is impartial and just. Faith in it grows with practice. The worship of the Gods has to follow the rules prescribed in the Vedas; this means will strengthen people strengthened in Dharmic practice. This Dharma is the command of the Lord; it is the authentic voice of God and so, all can well follow it. For, who is a Devatha? It is just a name for a person who observes Sathya, as his Vrata in daily life.

Consider how much talent the Lord has given to man. With that endowment, seek the Purusharthas, and move forward on the path to the Lord, adhering strictly to the demands of Sathya. That is the use to which the talent has to be put; that is the purpose of the gift. It is only those gifted with eyesight that can see things: the blind have not that luck. So too, only those gifted with Sathya, longing for Purusharthas and adherence to Dharma, can see the Lord; all others are blind. The Lord has also given man the instruments for developing his intellect and discrimination. If he uses them well and tries to realise himself, the Lord will add unto him fresh talent and new sources of power, for He is full of Grace towards the struggling. When man seeks to follow Dharma, the Truth too will reveal itself to him.

If you are careless about the discipline of Sathya, every duty laid on you by Dharma and every Karma prompted by Dharma will hang heavy as a burden. Search for the reality behind all these phenomena and that search will make all Dharmakarmas light and pleasant. The Lord has so shaped man that he is inclined towards God and delighted at the expansion of his vision and happy when he is moral and virtuous. So man must serve his best interests by adhering to his basic nature, by concentration on Brahma, by the cultivation of Sathya and the practice of Dharma: "Sathyenaavrtha". Sathya has to be sought and tested by all the canons of reasoning.

The discipline consists of:

- Ojascha, the heroism to observe Dharma rigorously;
- Thejascha, fearless self-control;
- Sahascha, the discarding of all feelings of joy or sorrow at the ups and downs of life, the unshakable faith in Sathya and Dharma;
- Balamcha, mental and physical health of the most excellent kind earned by discipline and Brahmacharya;
- Vaakcha, the desire and the ability to speak sweet and straight, won by the practice of Sathya and Prema;
- Indriyamoha, the withdrawal of the five Jnanendriyas and the five Karmendriyas from vice and sin and the sublimation of all the Indriyas for the service of Sathya;
- Sreescha, the winning of the overlordship of all the worlds by the self-won domination of the inner world;
- Dharmascha, the destruction of one's prejudices and the pursuit of Truth at all times - the prayer man has to make, is "May all this be conferred on me" as found in the "Chamaka" (ojaschame etc.)

Dharma brings good to all; it confers Ananda here and hereafter. It is essential that all mankind today see the glory of this Universal Dharma. The Brahmin is known by his significant traits: Vidya, Virtue, Karma of the most exalted and beneficial kind, and the spread of Virtue by example. He who promotes these and cultivates these and develops these, is a Brahmin, whoever he is. That is the qualification for the authority exercisable by the Brahmin. Only the highly learned man and the man who conducts himself as befits the learning, can deserve the status. Earning these qualifications is the effort to be made by those eager to justify that position.

Now for the signs of Kshatriyas: Their efficiency in all undertakings, heroism and courage, adventure and an eagerness to punish the wicked and protect the virtuous. Those endowed with such qualities are entitled to the status of Kshatriyahood. They have to take up all tasks with that attitude and establish at home worthy rules for all, that are auspicious.

Next the Vaishyas: They have to try to make the currents of commerce flow smooth and fast, to forge communication links that tie the nations into one commonwealth, and make wealth multiply in the world. That is their task. They must ensure that the concord between peoples is unbroken and undiminished. They have to aspire for "Yasascha", (the frame of great deeds and noble achievements) and "Varchascha" (the splendour of having helped in the spread of education and health by the creation of schools, hospitals and the like). They must devote their wealth for the promotion of all worthy causes. By this means, virtue and righteousness are fostered.

Now for the Sudras and their ideal characteristics: They have to produce and gather things of value, not deviating from the path of Dharma. Always earnest to realise the objects of human existence and striving for the same, they must intelligently store and protect things produced and try to produce more and more, for the common benefit. The things thus collected have to be liberally utilised for the spread of genuine Vidya and for the sustenance and support of the virtuous.

In this way, by the co-operative effort of these four types of human endeavor, wealth will become much and manifold; man will be rendered happy. The four Varnas have to feel that the social order has been designed with the over-all aim of maintaining Loka dharma. If each Varna adheres to its duties, the welfare of the world will doubtless be assured; besides each will be able to win, what is even more important, the Bliss of the Atma. On the other hand if all feel that there

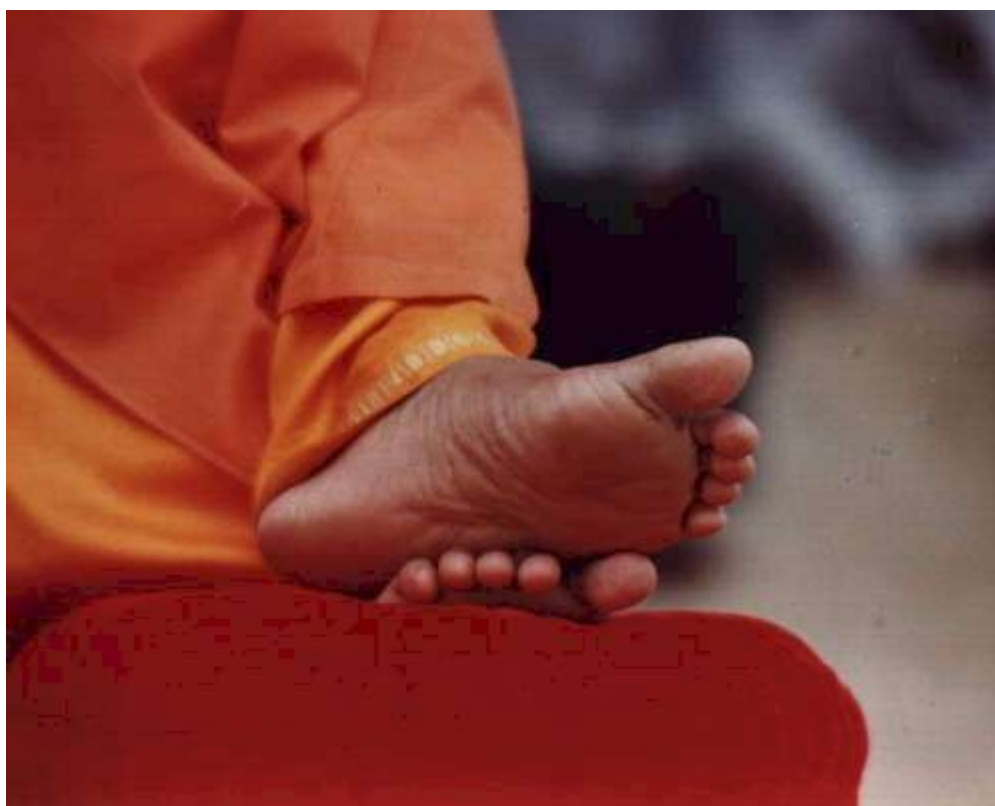


is but one Varna, one code of duties and one set of rules for all, the welfare and security of the world will be endangered.

If all enter the field of trade, who will purchase and consume the goods offered? If all start teaching, where are those who will learn and practice? If all command, who obeys? If all produce and grow, who will seek the products of their toil? It is to create the diversity that will contribute to unity, through the practice of Sathya and Dharma in every individual and social act, that the Lord has ordained the way of living according to the Varna dharma.

It is believed that Vrittis followed the Varna, that occupation was based on the Varna; no, Varnas were so named on the basis of the Vrittis only. Today, there is neither Varna nor Vrittis; one profession today, and another tomorrow - a Varna today; another tomorrow - it is this instability that lies at the root of the disturbed atmosphere of the world, of the discontent that has spread.

Infuse every profession and occupation with Inner Morality, with constant attachment to Truth, with the unperturbed equanimity of fortitude and, then, follow the duties of the Varna with its prescribed professions - that is the *summum bonum*, the supreme Blessing. If you fail to do this, the lot of man will be misery and chronic poverty. The choice is between the first, the Sriramaraksha, and the second, the Lokasiksha of Durbhiksha. Your Raksha (Savior) from that siksha (punishment) is this Dharmasikshana (learning Dharma)!



With Pranams at the Lotus Feet of the Divine Lord Sai  
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