

4 December 1972

READING 9

To continue with the Shankaracharya's answers to our questions. On only one occasion during our eight sessions with the Swami, could His Holiness himself make his voice heard, as follows:

Q.9. R.A. Last Wednesday (2nd audience) His Holiness referred to the search for spirituality through the medium of action and the medium of renunciation. Could he say more about the medium of action?

S. As said before, there are two fundamental ways of approaching the liberation of mankind from human limitations. One is through *activity* directed towards liberation, and the other is by *renunciation* – complete renunciation of the worldly life, and withdrawing oneself into such retreats where one is not obliged to attend to any activity of the world. Such a man would not be idle; of course he will concern himself with activities related to liberation, but not to those related to the world.

There are certain examples of great leaders who did not renounce the world – such as Rama, Vasishtha and King Janaka; who were householders though also famous Realized men.

(Record, 8 October 1972)

COMMENT

Rama, the hero of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, was described as the incarnation of Vishnu – the second person (or Preserver) of the Hindu Trinity. King Janaka you have heard of through the stories His Holiness tells of him. Vasishtha we know little about, but the following words by Sri Ramakrishna refer to him:

You should hear about Benares only from a man who has been to Benares. Mere book-learning will not do... One such pundit remarked that God was dry. Think of anyone speaking like that of Him who is the essence of sweetness! It sounds like the remark, 'My uncle's cowshed is full of horses.' (all laugh)

Yes, a worldly person is in a state of intoxication. He is always saying to himself: 'It is I who am doing everything. All these – the house and family – are mine.' Gritting his teeth he says: 'What will happen to my wife and children without me? How will they get along? Who will look after them?'

He who has Knowledge has ignorance also. 'How amazing!' said Lakshman to his brother Rama, 'Even a sage like Vasishtha is stricken with grief at the death of his sons!' 'My brother,' replied Rama, 'he who has knowledge has ignorance also. Therefore go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.'

Suppose a thorn has pierced a man's foot. He picks another thorn to dig out the first one. After extracting the first thorn with the help of the second, he throws both away. One should use the thorn of knowledge to dig out the thorn of ignorance. Then one throws away both the thorns, knowledge and ignorance, and attains the Eternal Knowledge (Vijnana) of the Absolute. What is that? It is to know God as distinct from creation [by realizing His existence through an intuitive experience], and to speak with Him intimately. That is why Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Go beyond the three Gunas.'

(*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 780–781)

(Pause for discussion before proceeding with His Holiness's answer.)

S. (answer to R.A.'s Q.9 cont.): One of the main facets of worldly anxiety is the fear and pressure attached to birth and death. By themselves they have nothing to do with any sort of prison – it's only when one takes them very seriously and treats them as real, that one gets into prison, and trouble starts. A man of activity should learn to discern what is the Reality behind the appearance, and although he must act out the appearance, he should always hold on to the Reality, and thus avoid the conflict of pleasure and displeasure that seems to appear through birth and death.

For example one knows, and indeed everybody knows, that one is a human being; and this human being, neither in his daytime state, nor in his sleeping state, nor in any other state, would ever imagine that he was not a man – he would never regard himself as an animal. In the same way, if one knew precisely and decisively that one is the Atman (or Absolute) then there would be no reason to bypass any worldly activities. One can sail through them by virtue of reason and discernment, acting as the situation demands, yet hold no attachment to it.

It is the birthright of all human beings to walk on the earth; it is not necessary for them also to swim in the water. But they can learn to swim, and if they once learn to swim, then they can walk or swim, according to circumstances; they will be able to do their job and cross the land or a river whenever it is necessary. In exactly this way the human being can learn to swim through the world into the liberated realm and act whenever action is required of him. This is the householder's way.

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This is all we have time for this year, but we hope to conclude the quotations when our meetings re-start in January 1973.

In wishing each other a happy Christmas and New Year, it's worth recording that all True Knowledge has to be seen as true for the three levels, physical, psychological (subtle) and unchanging (causal). Thus the whole Gospel Drama can be taken by children as describing an event around two thousand years ago in Palestine. Also it can be felt psychologically by any sincere Christian as a new birth within himSelf; and finally, as the inherent possibility provided for the self-evolving Being – man – at any time and in any place.

Not only this, but each scene in the Drama and any separate simile or parable, is to be understood on these same three levels simultaneously. The familiar stories our children are told at an early age like the Sower or the Prodigal Son, could be used by them when they grow up as text books of psychology, and later as true of the whole human situation.

Happy are the people who have taken the Shankaracharya's words and stories quoted at our meetings in this threefold way.

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