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THE CHARIOTEER & THE PRODIGAL SON

R. In the West we have mostly been brought up in the Christian Tradition so that Christ's stories in the Gospels are very familiar, and we recognise some of them as happening within ourselves. These stories surely are contained in His Holiness' Tradition also.

It would help us to understand the terminology of the chariot, the horses and charioteer in this particular story I would like to retell:

The Prodigal Son

A man had two sons. The younger asked for his portion of the inheritance and went to a far country where he 'wasted his substance in riotous living.' Now there came a great famine in the land, and being reduced to the condition of a swineherd he would even desire to eat the pigs' food; but when 'he came to himSelf he said, "How many hired servants of my father have food enough and to spare, and yet I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my Father"' When he was yet a great way off, his Father met him and kissed him, and made the servants put the best robe on him and prepare a feast.

But the elder son was working in the fields, and when he was told what was happening, he complained that though he was always faithful, his father never made a feast for him. But the Father said, 'Son, you are always with me and all I have is yours, but this, your brother, was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

If the Father was the Pure Consciousness or the Self, who are the sons, and who receives the 'good impulse'?

S. The Father is the universal Self or Absolute. Of the two sons – on the ordinary level – the younger is the newly evolved human mind, and the older is the primitive, half-animal – the lower part of the mind beset by desires.

The two states of the younger son (the charioteer) are the state of ignorance and the state of understanding. Without understanding, the charioteer associates with the body and its claims, so he asks the father to give him his portion. In doing so, he establishes a personal boundary between himSelf and liberation.

He then goes out to search for pleasure far removed from the centre of happiness – into the realm of the material world. This 'far country' is the country where the physical laws prevail, and when the physical body has spent its substance, there comes a famine due to lack of rest and real Bliss. He knows the misery of utter confusion; then, not being able to see further, he looks back or looks within. He remembers to look within because he is so miserable. He remembers the wealth and abundance of his father's house where everyone is happy, and compares his situation with that of the others.

He is then met by his Father midway and is given the robe. The giving of the robe is the dawn of discrimination of True Knowledge; then all becomes happy and they have a feast. He starts a new life because a transformation has taken place due to discrimination and True Knowledge.

When the other son asks why he was never given a feast, he is told that feasts are given to those who have been separated. Those who are united with the Father are always celebrating – there is not a moment when there is no happiness in the company

of the Father. The outer celebration is only for the separated ones, and since the younger son was separated from Wisdom, he was being given special treatment to start afresh.

One who is with the Father is without blemish, and one who is without blemish is indeed the Absolute. In the Absolute (Brahman) there is fullness and completeness, and in fullness there is no blemish.

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R. then asked:

These two sons in the Gospel story seem to represent two states of the charioteer, one where it is misled by worldly things, and the other as remembering and being faithful to the Owner.

S. Yes, both states of the charioteer, but one with discrimination and True Knowledge; and the other without it.

R. How does the 'good impulse' arise?

S. ... When a person is subjected to misery, then at the climax of great misery the charioteer (or Buddhi) looks back. The people in the world simply go on chasing sensual pursuits without realising how miserable they are. But when they come to the end of their resources, they look back and discrimination starts.

R. We also see in the story the influence of the three Gunas on the charioteer; going away and spending all his money in Rajas, then reduced to Tamas, and when Sattva – the Energy of Being – collects again, he turns towards his Father.

S. That is right.

(Record, 1 November 1967)

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