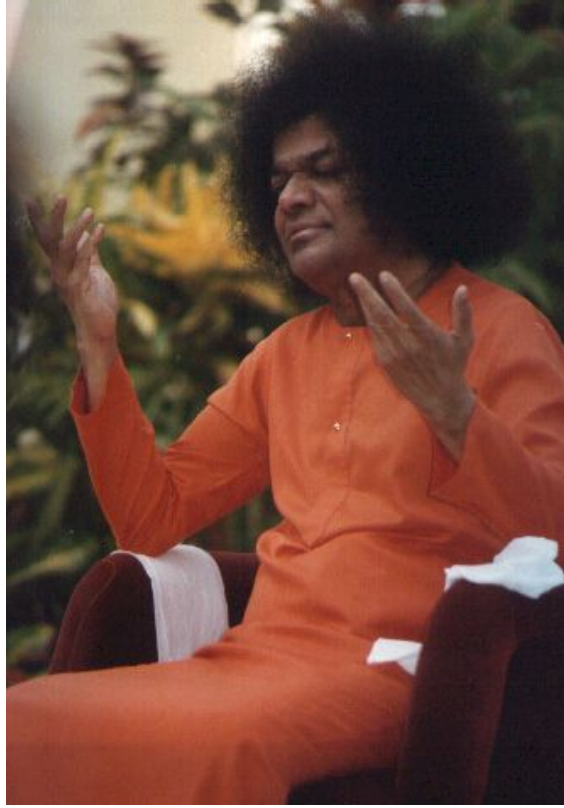


Om Sri Sai Ram

CHINNA KATHA [STORIES AND PARABLES] – PART II

By Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



"Oka Chinna Katha" - When Bhagawan intercepts the speeding current of His Discourse with these three Telugu words, meanings, "One little story" all ears are alert, all hearts are quite. For, the story that follows is a flash that illumines, a shower that cools, a joke that tickles, a "tablet" that alleviates, a peep into epic grandeur or pompous absurdity, a poetic parenthesis, an exhilarating prick, a lilt that enlightens, a sugar-coated pill of profundity, a disarming repartee, a volley of raillery on religious rigmarole! It may be a tonic tale of the past or the report of a contemporary comedy; it may be a thrust on theological disputation or a dear little dig at some egoistic dignitary.

The Chinna Katha, if only we ponder over its relevance, is an effective instrument in Bhagawan's educational process. When He is discoursing, these parables and stories, ever on the wing, hover in flocks in the firmament of His Love; He lets a few fly into our hearts and nestle there, until we fondle and foster them and make them part of our thought and behaviour patterns. Here is a charming, fragrant bouquet of these multicolored Kathas for our delectation, meditation and inspiration.

N. Kasturi

1 - Your Bhakthi is greater than my Shakti

In South India, in the Tamil country, there was a certain Adigal or Dasa, in a village, Thangalur by name. He had heard of the spiritual grandeur of Saint Appar and developed great admiration for him. So he built rest-houses in his name; named his children after him so that they might grow up in the halo of his glory; he donated lands and houses, all in the name of the Saint he had not seen. See how faith preceded experience here. There are others who require experience before they fix their faith. The first path is more thrilling and lasting.

Well, one day by chance Appar himself walked into Thangalur for he had missed his way and had to deviate. He noticed everywhere in the town Appar Rest-houses and Appar Charities, and wondered how his name had preceded him. Then Adigal ran forward to His Guru and took him home and prepared a grand feast for him. When his eldest son went to his garden to cut a few plantain leaves for a dinner, a snake bit him and he died on the spot. Adigal however, was not affected in the least; he covered up the corpse, heaping dry leaves upon it and proceeded with the formalities of hospitality for the long-sought Guru. The Guru, however, insisted on all the children of Adigal sitting around him during the meal, and he ordered the father, "Go, call every one here." Adigal did as he was commanded. He called and the dead son rose. He too came and sat for dinner with the rest. When he knew what had happened, Appar said, "Your Bhakthi is greater than my Shakti."

2 - Knowledge of Atma

Once upon a time, king Janaka sent a message to the people in his kingdom: "If there be amongst you a great scholar, a Pundit, a Mahatma, a Yogi, a Maharishi, a Sage, whoever he may be, let him come and teach me the knowledge of Atma." In his message he said that he expected to attain Atma Jnana, Self-knowledge, within a matter of a few moments of being properly instructed. Even while climbing onto his horse, before he was completely settled on to it, he should have attained Atma Jnana. He said: "If the person offering to teach me Atma Jnana is not able to accomplish this task of providing me an experience of instant illumination, then I don't want to see him, even if he is the greatest scholar, or the most learned person, or the highly educated person in the land." Well, all the Pundits and Rishis were a little frightened by this requirement. They saw that this would be a severe test on their scholarship and learning, and so none dared to come forth and offer himself to instruct the king and meet the conditions that had been posed.

It was at this point that the boy Astavakra entered the kingdom. While he was going on the road towards the capital city of Mithilapuram, he met a number of people coming from there, including scholars and Pundits; all of them had long faces, looking worried and grief-ridden. Astavakra asked them what was the cause for their worry and grief. They explained to him all the things that

had happened. But Astavakra couldn't understand why they should get frightened over such a small thing. He added: "I will gladly solve this problem for the king." So saying he directly entered the court of Janaka. He addressed the king: "My dear King, I am ready to enable you to experience the knowledge of Atma as you desire. But this sacred knowledge cannot be taught so easily. This palace is full of Rajo Guna and Tamo Guna. We must leave this place and enter an area of pure Satva." So, they left the palace and went along the road leading out of the city towards the forest. As was the custom whenever the emperor went outside his palace walls, the army followed behind; but Janaka had them remain outside the forest.

Astavakra and Janaka entered the forest. Astavakra told King Janaka: "I am not going to fulfill your wish unless you accept my conditions. I may be only a boy, but I am in the position of a preceptor; and you may be an all-powerful emperor, you are in the position of a disciple. Are you prepared to accept this relationship? If you agree then you will have to offer the traditional gift to the Guru, the Gurudakshina that is given by the Sishya to the Guru. Only after you give your offering to me will I start my instruction to you." King Janaka told Astavakra: "The attainment of God is the most important thing to me, so I am prepared to give you absolutely anything you want." But Astavakra replied: "I don't want any material things from you, all I want is your mind. You must give me your mind." The king answered: "Alright, I offer my mind to you. Up to now I thought that this was my mind, but from now onwards it will be yours."

Astavakra told Janaka to dismount from his horse and made the horse stand in front of the king and then he told the king to sit down in the middle of the road. Astavakra walked into the forest and sat quietly under a tree. The soldiers waited for a long time. Neither the king nor Astavakra returned from the forest. The soldiers wanted to find out what had happened to them, so one by one, they proceeded to look for them. When they went along the road leading into the forest, they found the king seated there, in the middle of the road. The horse was standing in front of the king. The king had his eyes closed and sat still almost immobile. Astavakra was not to be seen. The officers were afraid that Astavakra might have exercised some magic spell over the king and had made him lose consciousness. They went to look for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister came and addressed Janaka: "O King! O King! O King!" But King Janaka did not open his eyes; he did not move at all. The Prime Minister became frightened. Not only the Prime Minister but all the officials were now getting frightened, because the time when the King usually took his food and drink had passed and the king still had not stirred. In this way the day went on and evening came, but the king did not move from his position, sitting there immobile on the road. Left with no alternative, the Prime Minister sent the chariot back to the city to bring the queen thinking that if the queen spoke to the king, he would surely respond. The queen

came and addressed the king: "Rajah, Rajah, Rajah!" The king did not stir; there was absolutely no response from the king. Meanwhile the soldiers searched throughout the whole forest for Astavakra. There, under a tree, Astavakra was seated peacefully, in absolute calm and serenity.

The soldiers caught hold of him and brought him towards the place where the king was. Astavakra told them: "Why are you all so worried? The king is safe and everything is alright." But still they insisted and brought him before the King seated on the road with his eyes closed, his body completely still. The soldier said: "Here, look for yourself! See what has happened to the king!". Until that time, whether the Prime Minister, or the ministers, or the queen or any of the other court officials or common people, had called out and addressed the king, he neither opened his mouth in answer nor opened his eyes in acknowledgment. But now Astavakra came and spoke to the king. King Janaka immediately opened his eyes and replied, "Swami!" Astavakra questioned the king: "Well, the ministers have come, and the soldiers have come, and also many others have come, why did you not reply to their entreaties?" Janaka answered: "Thoughts, words and deeds are associated with the mind, and I offered my mind entirely to you. Therefore before I can use the mind for anything, I need your permission. What authority do I have to speak to anyone or use this mind in any way without your permission and command." Then Astavakra said: "You have attained the state of God-realization."

Astavakra told Janaka to put one foot in the stirrup and get up on the horse. By the time he had climbed up and seated himself on the horse and put his other foot in the stirrup, he had attained the experience of Atma. Once a person has offered his mind, and with it all his words, deeds and thoughts, then he will not have the authority or the power to perform any actions without the permission of the one to whom he has surrendered his mind.

3 - Feeling behind the act

Abdullah was sleeping in a corner of a mosque in Mecca, when he was awakened by the conversation of two angels above his head. They were preparing a list of the Blessed and one angel was telling the other that a certain Mahbub of Sikandar City deserved to be ranked first, even though he has not come on pilgrimage to the Holy City.

Hearing this, Abdullah went to Sikandar City and found out that he was a cobbler, repairing the shoes of people. He was famished and poor; for, his earnings barely sufficed to keep flesh and bone together. He had by severe sacrifice piled up a few coppers during the course of years; one day, he spent the entire treasure to prepare a special dish, which he proposed to place before his enceinte wife as a surprise gift. When he was proceeding home with the gift he heard the cry of a

starving beggar who seemed to be in the throes of extreme hunger. Mahbub could not proceed further; he gave the pot containing the costly delicacy to the man and sat by his side, enjoying the blossoming of satisfaction on his haggard face. The act gave him a place of honour in the register of the Blessed, a place which pilgrims to Mecca who had spent millions of Dinars in charity could not secure. The Lord cares for the feeling behind the act, not the fanfare and the fuss.

4 - Words of the wise

It was a king's court; the ministers, pundits and artists were all seated in their respective places. The king and his ministers had earned quite a name and fame for their wit and wisdom. One day a sage entered the court. He was given a warm welcome with all honors due to him. The king asked him: "Oh revered one! May I know what brings you here? We are very happy on account of your presence here today." The sage replied: "Oh King, your court is reputed for its wit and wisdom. I have brought three beautiful dolls and I would like to have an assessment and evaluation of these dolls done by your ministers." He presented to the king the three dolls. The king called his senior most minister and gave him the dolls for examination and evaluation. The minister just looked once at the dolls and commanded a royal messenger to fetch him a thin steel-wire.

The minister inserted the wire into the right ear of one of the dolls. The wire came out of the left ear. He kept it aside. He took up another doll and once again passed the wire into its right ear. It came out of the mouth of the doll. He kept that doll in one place. He took up the third doll and inserted the wire, it neither came out of the other ear nor from the mouth. The king and the courtiers were eagerly watching the scene. The minister paying his tributes to the sage said: "Oh revered one." Of the three dolls, the third one is the best. The three dolls actually are symbolic of three types of listening. There are three types of listeners, in the world. The first type listens to every word, only to pass it out from the other ear. The second type listens well, remember it well only to speak out all that they have heard. The third type listen, retain everything they have heard and treasure it up in their hearts. They are the best type of listeners." The sage congratulated the king and the minister on the successful evaluation of the dolls and blessing them both, left the court.

'Shravanam' is the first and the foremost among the nine types of devotion. Having heard the words of the wise, we should try to revolve their meaning and message in our minds and put them into practice to elevate our lives.

5 - A great sage called Gautama

There was a great sage called Gautama in ancient India. He had a number of disciples studying under him. One day he called all his disciples and said: "My dear children! You know that we have been experiencing severe drought in this region and there are no signs of its abatement too. I am very much worried about the cattle of our hermitage. They have already become very lean and weak. I am unable to bear the sight of suffering of these dumb creatures. I think these cows have to be driven to a distant place where there is ample pasture and plenty of water. I will be very happy if one of you could volunteer to undertake this task. You can bring them back when the calamity has rolled over."

Many pupils just hung their heads lest their master should find out their true feelings. Some tried to hide behind others in order to avoid the direct stare of the Guru.

A pupil by name Sathyakama, got up and, paying his salutations to his master, said: "Master, I shall take them, don't worry." Many students tried to dissuade him from undertaking such a hazardous task. They warned him: "Oh! You have to be all alone in the wilds away from the comforts of the hermitage. You may not even find good food. Sathyakama replied: "My dear friends, I am quite confident that the good wishes of our Guru will provide me enough safety and sustenance. I shall not be alone for I will have these cows to keep company."

The Guru was happy that at least one among the many pupils volunteered to undertake the job as service to the Guru. He blessed Sathyakama and said: "You are taking with you 400 cows; you can return when the herd multiplies into a total strength of one thousand."

Sathyakama drove the cattle to a charming valley. Everyday, he used to wake up early in the morning, finish his ablutions and bath. Then he would offer prostration to the Sun God and recite prayers. While tending the cattle and while walking or sitting he would constantly chant the name of God. He affectionately looked after the cattle. He regarded 'go-seva' (Service to cows) as Guru Seva (Service to the Master). He never felt any anxiety or worry over his life in solitude. He never bothered to count the cows too.

One morning after the morning rites, he was seated under a tree. Indra the Chief of Gods appeared before him and said: "My dear son! Have you not observed that the herd has multiplied itself to the total number of 1000? You can now return to your master's hermitage. I will be traveling with you. Come on let us go."

Sathyakama prostrated to Indra and thanked him for reminding him of the fact that it was time for returning. Sathyakama and Indra had to spend four nights in four different places. Every morning Sathyakama was taught the essence of one Veda. Thus by the time he reached his Guru's hermitage he was the master of the four

Vedas. His face shone with a strange splendour as a result of the Vedic illumination that he had been blessed with by the Lord of Heaven. Having enlightened Sathyakama, Lord Indra disappeared after showering his grace on the young boy.

Sathyakama walked into his Guru's hermitage with 1000 cows. His guru and the inmates gave him a rousing welcome. Sathyakama fell at the feet of his master. Gautama embraced him saying: "I know that you are now a great scholar of the four Vedas. You deserve it, my son." Sathyakama could please Indra, the Lord of Heaven, only because of his love and loyalty to his guru.

6 - Receive the knowledge of the Supreme

Once a disciple went to a preceptor and requested him to impart to him the Supreme knowledge of the Omni self (Brahma Thathwa). The Guru gave him a mantra and asked him to chant it continually without any selfish desire. The Guru told him that after he had done this sadhana for one whole year he could come to receive the knowledge of the Supreme (Brahma Jnana).

The disciple approached his Guru after one year and told him "Oh revered one! I have recited the mantra for one whole year". He was eagerly awaiting the preceptor's answer. He thought that his Guru would certainly impart to him the knowledge of the Supreme. Just then, unaware of the presence of the disciple, the maidservant was sweeping the ashram premises and the dust from the ground fell on the young man. The disciple flew into a rage, because he had come to the ashram after a sacred bath and the dust had sullied his body. He looked at her with anger and the maid was filled with fear. The Preceptor was watching the entire scene.

The Guru said, "You are not competent to receive the knowledge. You got angry with the maid servant who unwittingly caused some dust to fall on you. How can Brahma Jnana be imparted to one, who has not that much of endurance? Go back and practice the Sadhana for one more year".

At the end of the second year the disciple was about to enter the ashram. According to the instructions of the Guru the maidservant once again let the dust fall on the disciple in full measure. The disciple grew indignant and wanted to beat her, but somehow, refrained from doing so.

The disciple approached the Guru and paid his respect. The Guru told him: "You are still not competent to receive the knowledge. Last year you exhibited the qualities of a snake and now those of a dog. Come back after ridding yourself of these animal qualities".

At the end of the third year, the disciple entered the ashram premises after taking a sacred bath. As per the instructions of the Guru the maidservant poured some dirty water on the disciple. The disciple calmly offered his salutations to the maid and said, "Mother! I offer my salutation to you. You have helped me to acquire the

greatest virtue, forbearance. Now I am worthy enough to receive the grace of my Guru. I shall always be grateful to you".

As soon as the disciple prostrated before the Guru, the Guru endearingly said: "Son! Now you are quite competent to receive the knowledge of the Supreme".

7 - Put into practice?

One day, an old lady came to Ramakrishna Paramahansa with her 10-year-old grandson. She prostrated before him and said: "Master! I have come to seek your advice. This boy is my grandson. He lost his father and mother when he was just a child of five. I have been taking care of him. He is very fond of sweets. He eats so much that his health is deteriorating day by day. The doctors have advised him not to eat sweets but this fellow does not pay any heed to their advice. However, he has great respect and admiration for you. So I have come to request you to stop the boy from eating sweets. I am sure, you alone can do this". Ramakrishna said: "Mother, don't worry, come with your grandson after a month. In the meanwhile I shall think of a plan to convince the boy that one's health is very important, more important even than wealth". The old woman thanked him and took leave of him.

She came with her grandson exactly after a month. Both of them paid their salutations to the master. Ramakrishna made the boy sit beside him and said: "My dear boy! Remember, one's real wealth is health. Unless you take proper care of your health, you will not be able to grow into a strong and healthy young man. You will not be able to do anything great in life if you are weak. When something that we eat does not suit our constitution, we should give up eating that item. From tomorrow you should not eat sweets. After some time you may eat moderately. You are a nice boy and will listen to me, will you not?". The boy nodded his head and promised that he would not eat sweets.

The old woman sent the boy on some errand just to have confidential talk with the master. "Master! May I ask you a question?" said the old woman. "Certainly mother", replied Ramakrishna. "Master! This advice, which you have given today to my grandson, you could have given last month itself. Why did you ask me to come again after a month? I don't understand". Ramakrishna replied with an understanding smile: "Mother! I myself eat lot of sweets. How can I advise the boy to do something that I am not doing myself? One has no right to preach anything to others before practicing it himself. So I asked for some time. This one month I did not eat sweets. So I have earned the right to advise your grandson." The old woman marveled at the righteous conduct of Ramakrishna. She fell at his feet and took leave of him.

We should never advice anyone about anything, which we ourselves have not put into practice.

8 - Remember, He is Omnipresent!

Thiruppandar was a great devotee of lord Shiva. Once he happened to visit a famous pilgrim center dedicated to his favorite Lord. After the Darshan of Siva, he felt that he was too exhausted and weak to walk further, and therefore rested for the night in the temple itself.

Early in the morning, the priest entered the temple with a pot full of water to perform Abhishekam to the Lingam. To his utter consternation, he found an aged man sleeping right in front of the shrine with legs stretched towards the sanctum sanctorum. He got wild at the sight and, in indignation; he sprinkled some water on the face of the old man. But, there was no sign of any movement. So, he bent down and tried to lift the old man's legs. Immediately the old man opened his eyes and said in an appealing tone, "My dear Son! Why are you pulling my legs?" The priest shouted "Oh! For your age, is it not shameful on your part to indulge in such a sacrilegious act of stretching your legs towards God?" The old man said calmly, "My dear son, I feel a cramp in my legs and cannot get up. Will you place my two feet in a direction you like, where God is not? I shall certainly get up after a while." The priest did not want to waste time in arguing with the man. So, he held the two feet of the man, lifted them up and placed them in the opposite direction. Suddenly, there sprang out a lingam from underneath the feet! The priest tried to place the old man's feet in another position, but there again sprang up another lingam! In a minute, the place was full of lingams! The priest fell at the feet of the old man and said "Oh revered one! You must be a realised soul. Pardon me for my insulting words and actions." The old man got up and said "My dear son, have you not read in the scriptures that God is omnipresent? Can you limit God to a place and to an image or a picture or in a frame? Of course we have temples with idols and pictures of worship; but they only help devotees to direct their faith and devotion to God as embodiments of the various Divine shaktis in this vast boundless universe. The Supreme Creator, the Almighty God is only one, and remember, He is Omnipresent."

9 - I don't belong to any place

One day in the sacred shrine of lord Viswanath at Kasi, all the devotees and temple priests were immersed in singing hymns and reciting chants. All of a sudden, they heard a metallic sound. When they turned their heads in that direction they saw a shining gold plate on the floor of the shrine. It must have fallen through an open space in the center of the hall from the sky leading to the sanctum sanctorum. All of them gathered round with wonder; while the chief temple priest went close to examine it. He found some letters inscribed on it. "This belongs to my dear devotee". The priest read the inscription loudly. All the temple priests vied with one another to snatch the plate with the feeling, "Who could be a greater devotee than myself. I spend my time, talent and strength only to offer

worship to the Lord Viswanath." But the plate changed into an earthen one the moment they touched it one after another. News spread like wild fire about the golden plate. Several scholars, singers, poets and preachers came and tried their luck but in vain. Days, weeks and months rolled on but the plate remained there without a claimant.

One day, a stranger came to the temple. He stood at the entrance and tears gathered in his eyes when he saw beggars, blind, dumb and lame piteously pleading for alms. He felt ashamed of his inability to relieve them of their hunger and agony. He wanted to pray to the Lord and so stepped into the temple. He saw people gathered round and discussing something. He tried to squeeze himself into the crowd to find out why they were standing there. He saw a golden plate in the center of that enclosure. He enquired and was told about the episode of the golden plate. He was rather surprised and sad at the attitude of the people and the priests. Instead of praying to the Lord of the Universe and trying to possess Him, they were eager to possess the golden plate. Observing his non-chalant attitude, the high priest requested him to try his hand. The stranger replied: "Oh Revered one! I do not care for either gold or silver, what I long for is God's Grace." The priest's esteem for that man increased. So he once again pressed him, "At least to satisfy us, please try your hand." The stranger touched the plate without a trace of attachment. Lo! It shone forth with redoubled effulgence. All the priests gathered round and queried: "Sir, where do you come from? What are your qualifications? What are the branches of learning you have mastered? How many years did you do penance?" The stranger replied calmly: "I don't belong to any place. I just manage to earn my bread by hard labor. The only sadhana I do is Naamasmarana [repeating the name of the Lord]. This has perhaps rendered my heart pure and filled it with love and compassion. It has enabled me to control my mind and the senses. I have not read any book or mastered any science. The only art I know of is chanting the Name Divine. The only act I do is to be kind to the poor."

So, the only qualification to become dear to the Lord is to acquire a compassionate heart and sense control. These two can be acquired through Naamasmarana with full faith in the Lord.

10 - The instrument of flattery

Zebunnissa was the daughter of the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb. She was not only beautiful and charming but a great scholar and a poetess. She was an ardent lover of Indian Culture.

Once, Aurangzeb gave her a beautiful mirror as a birthday gift. Zebunnissa loved the mirror very much. One day her maid was holding the mirror to her while Zebunnissa was combing her hair after her bath. The mirror just slipped from the hand of the maid and broke into pieces. The maid was mortally afraid. She knew that the mirror was a precious gift, given to the princess and how much she

loved the mirror. The maid was prepared to accept any punishment her princess may give her. She fell at her feet. But the princess very calmly said with a smile. "Get up. I am glad the instrument of flattery is broken. Why worry over the broken mirror? Even this body to which all these articles cater is liable to damage and destruction". Is this not a lesson in detachment?

11 - Psychological fear

During the exile of the Pandavas, Krishna visited them to enquire about their welfare. He spent a night with them. The Pandavas had to undergo untold suffering during their exile. As Draupadi was also with them, they would keep vigil in turns for one hour each, every night. Krishna also volunteered to keep vigil for one hour.

Dharmaja wondered, "When You are the protector of the entire universe, what is the meaning in your standing sentry for an hour to protect us?" Yet he cautioned Krishna: "Krishna, beware of the devil - my brothers and I encounter it every night. On many occasions it has tried to attack us. Therefore, we pray to you not to do a turn in guard duty. You have come to enquire about our welfare. We should not put you in danger. Kindly take rest." Krishna replied, "Dharmaja, is this what you have understood of my divinity? On the one hand you extol me as the protector of the entire universe and on the other you are apprehensive that I cannot protect myself. You are worried that the demon will harm me. Rest assured that no demon can touch me. Therefore, permit me also to join you all in doing the security duty."

Having completed one-hour duty, Krishna sat on a rock and was smiling to himself. It was Arjuna's turn next. He rushed to Krishna, a bit worried that the demon might have attacked him. Seeing Krishna smiling, Arjuna fell at His feet and enquired whether he had vanquished the demon. Krishna replied, "Arjuna, I have never created demons and evil spirits. Then, how can the non-existent demons appear in the forest? The demon you are talking about is not a demon at all. It is just a reflection of the evil qualities within you such as hatred, anger and jealousy. The anger in you is manifesting as the demon. Its power is increasing in proportion to the intensity of anger in you." The evil qualities of man are the real demons troubling him today. Man is under the mistaken notion that demons exist and that they are responsible for his suffering. This is all nothing but imagination and psychological fear. Only man puts another man to suffering; there is no demon as such. There are no demons and evil spirits in this creation. Arjuna realised the truth of Krishna's words and thereafter did not encounter the demon. Arjuna was beholden to Krishna for the revelation. He fell at his feet and expressed his gratitude. Good and bad are man's own creations.

12 - Solutions to three problems

After Buddha gave up worldly ways, he traveled far and wide. People were wonder-struck at his brilliant, handsome form. Enamored by his effulgence, a woman named Ambashali approached him and said, "O great one, you look like a prince in ochre robes. May I know why you don ochre robes at this young age?" Buddha replied that he took to the path of renunciation in order to seek solutions to three problems. "This body which is young and handsome is bound to become old with time - will be made sick and perish ultimately. I want to know the cause for old age, sickness and death."

Impressed by his quest of truth she invited him for lunch. In no time the entire village came to know of this. The villagers started coming to Buddha one by one, and requested him not to accept her invitation, as she was a woman of bad character. Buddha listened to all their complaints patiently. Buddha smiled and asked the village head, "Do you also affirm that she is a woman of bad character?" The village head replied, "Not once, but thousand times I will vouch for the evil character of Ambashali. Please do not visit her house."

Holding the village head's right hand, Buddha asked him to clap. The village head said that he could not do so as one of his hands was in Buddha's hold and it was not possible for anyone to clap with a single hand. Buddha replied, "Likewise, Ambashali cannot be bad by herself unless there are men of bad character in this village. If all the men in this village were good, this woman would not have turned bad. Therefore, men and their money are responsible for the bad character of Ambashali."

Saying so he wanted to know if there was any individual in that gathering without any trace of bad in him so that he could visit his house for lunch. No one came forward. Then Buddha said, "When there are so many bad men in the village, it is not proper to point a finger at one woman. She turned bad due to bad company." That is why it is said, 'Tell me your company, I shall tell you what you are.' Realising their folly, the people fell at Buddha's feet and sought forgiveness. Since then they started treating Ambashali as one amongst them. Inspired by the teachings of Buddha, Ambashali also took to the path of renunciation and led a pious life. No one else is responsible for the good and bad in an individual. Each one is responsible for his own good and bad. Who is good, who is bad? First eliminate the bad in you.

13 - A spiritual aspirant should have...

A certain spiritual aspirant went to a sage and asked him to give him a mantra. The sage said that he would impart the message only if the disciple agreed to serve him for twelve years, carrying out all his injunctions. The disciple agreed and carried out his services to the preceptor with devotion for twelve years. At the end of the period, when the sage felt that his own end was approaching, he asked the disciple to bring a Palmyra leaf on which he would inscribe the mantra before his death. The disciple went in search of a Palmyra

leaf, but before he could return, the preceptor died. On enquiry from a boy who was there, he learnt that before dying, the sage had written something on a bed of sand, which a woman had copied and then wiped off the inscription. The disciple went in search of the woman, who was having some donkeys. He learnt from her that she had inscribed on the Palmyra leaf roll that she wore in her ear lobe what she found on the sand. When she learnt from the young man that the writing on the sand was a mantra intended for him and for which he had served the sage faithfully for twelve years, the woman said that she would give him the palm leaf only if he served her dutifully for twelve years. The disciple who was determined to get the mantra at any cost, agreed to serve her.

The young man looked after the donkeys and served the woman for many years, living upon the food given by her. One day, he could not get the food from her and went about in search of food. At that time, he learnt that the king of the region had been feeding the poor for a long time and that he might be able to get food if he went to the feeding place. On going there he learnt that the king had stopped the feeding from that day because it did not yield the result he was expecting from it. The king had started poor feeding on the advice of his preceptor who had told him that he would have a son if a truly godly man ate the food that he would serve to the poor. A bell was kept in the palace and when it rang by itself that would be the sign that a godly man had partaken of the king's food. As the feeding had gone on for long without the bell ringing, the king decided to stop the feeding.

That was the very day when the young disciple went to the feeding place. On learning that all the vessels used for cooking the food had been sent to the river for cleaning, the young man hastened to the river bank to find out whether some food scraped from the vessels would be available for him. He found some crumbs at the spot and started eating them. At that very moment the bell in the palace started ringing.

The king was startled to hear the bell and immediately sent out messengers to find out who was the person who had eaten the food that day which made the bell ring. After enquiries, the messengers traced the young man at the river and brought him to the king. The king was overjoyed on seeing the young man because he felt that he would soon have a son. He offered the young man half his kingdom and invited him to stay with him. The young man told the king his whole story and said that he was not interested in the kingdom or anything else, but only in the mantra from his guru, which was now in the keeping of the woman with the donkeys. The young man insisted that the Palmyra leaf earring worn by the woman should be obtained without any compulsions.

The king sent out men to trace the woman, who was brought before him. Learning that she was an acrobat, who could perform feats on a rope, the king asked her to demonstrate her skill before the queen

who was now enceinte. As she was dancing on the rope, he asked her whether she could catch two diamond earrings he would throw at her and wear them while dancing on the rope. She readily agreed. Catching them in her hands, she took out the Palmyra leaf rings from her ear lobes, cast them down and wore the diamond earrings in their place.

As the Palmyra leaf rings dropped down, the young man rushed towards them and eagerly read the message inscribed there in. Immediately after reading the mantra the young man secured instant illumination and liberation thereafter.

A spiritual aspirant should have such determination and preparedness for any kind of sacrifice to achieve his goal.

14 - A professional pickpocket

One-day goddess Parvathi asked Shiva: "Lord! I have heard that there is a sacred shrine for your worship by name Kasi and that those who visit Kasi and offer worship to you after a holy bath in the Ganges will earn the merit of coming to Kailas and stay there for ever. Is it true?" Lord Shiva replied: "All the people cannot earn that merit. Mere visiting Kasi and offering worship to my image are not enough. Presently, I shall make the point clear to you. Let us go to Kasi as an aged couple. I shall make you enact a drama!" Lord Shiva and Parvathi appeared before the entrance of the temple of Shiva, Parvathi as an old hag of eighty years and Lord Shiva a rickety old man of ninety. Shiva laid his head on the lap of Parvathi and started groaning in severe pains. The old woman was crying helplessly. She begged every pilgrim saying: "Oh ye devotees! Look here, this is my husband. He is terribly thirsty and may die any moment. Will you please fetch some water for him to drink? I cannot leave him alone and go to fetch water". The pilgrims were coming from the Ghats after their ceremonial bath in the Ganges. Their clothes were wet and they were carrying water in small bright vessels. They saw and heard the woman's lament. Some said: "Wait, we shall attend to your husband after offering the sacred Ganges water to Lord Viswanath."

Some said: "Oh what a nuisance! Why can't these beggars allow us at least to offer worship in peace." Some others said: "These beggars should not be allowed to sit here".

There was a big crowd near the temple entrance. A professional pickpocket walked along with some of these pilgrims. He also heard the old woman's lament. He could not bear the sight of the suffering old man and the bewailing old woman. He walked upto them and said: "Mother, what do you want? Who are you? Why are you here?". The old woman replied, "Son, we came here to have the Darshan of Lord Visweswara. My husband suddenly took ill and fainted out of exhaustion. He might survive if someone were to pour some water into his parching mouth. His condition is too critical for me to leave

him and go to bring water. I requested many people to help me, but nobody would spare any water though they have been carrying pitchers full of it." The thief was moved to compassion. He had brought some water in the dried gourd-pot. The woman stopped him and said: "Son, my husband may die any moment, he will not accept water unless the person who gives water speaks truth." The pickpocket could not catch the meaning. He said: "Mother, please tell me what I should do"? With a cynical laughter, he said: "Mother, I have not done any good deed so far. I am a professional pickpocket. The only good deed is that which I am going to do now, to offer water to this dying old man. This is true." He poured gently some water into the mouth of the old man. No sooner had the pickpocket done this deed than the old couple disappeared and in their place stood Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi, in all their full splendor. Shiva said: "Son, you are indeed blessed. There is no greater morality than speaking the truth, and no true worship more faithful than service to fellow human beings. You have been atoned for all the sins you have committed so far because of this one good deed."

15 - Act and live in the present

Once a poor man approached king Yudhishtra, the eldest of the Pandavas. He was also called Dharmaraja because he always followed the path of virtue. The poor man asked the king for some help. Yudhishtra said: "Come tomorrow, I will give you what you want".

Bhima, Yudhishtira's brother, overheard this promise. He at once called all the royal retinue for a sudden meeting. He announced that the next day would be celebrated as a day of victory. This sudden announcement created a great commotion. Everyone wanted to know what the victory was about and who had won it. The news reached Dharmaraja. Bhima was asked to give an explanation.

Bhima said: "We have gained a victory over death for twenty four hours. Dharmaraja had asked a certain poor man to come tomorrow for receiving help. It means that Dharmaraja is quite certain that he will be alive for the next twenty-four hours. Is this not a victory?"

Yudhishtra realised how inadvertently he was taught a lesson. He sent for the poor man and gave him what he wanted. Act and live in the present. Never postpone to tomorrow whatever good you can do today.

16 - An argumentative tendency

By reading many books and developing an argumentative tendency, it is quite common today that young people get into arguments with others. Once a young man aged 22 years went to Sankara. When Sankara was giving spiritual lessons to his disciples he interrupted and asked Sankara if all human beings in this wide world should not be regarded as equal since the same kind of blood flows in all of them. Sankara smiled at this young man and said that the blood

flowing in that youngster is hot and fast and so he was trying to push things too far. It is not possible for man to distinguish between permanent and impermanent things. One can adopt the notion of non-duality or Advaita in one's own thoughts and attitudes but it is not possible to equate everything in the world in practice. The young man insisted that this does not seem right. He stated that to him, the proper thing appeared to be to treat all living being in the same manner.

Sankara recognised that if this young man was allowed to go on in this strain, he was likely to reach some absurd conclusions. Sankara decided at once to teach him a lesson and immediately asked whether he had a mother. The young man replied that he had a mother who was alive and that he respected her very much. He again asked if the young man was married. The young man replied that he was married and that his wife also had come with him to the ashram. Sankara then asked him if he had a mother-in-law. The young man replied that the mother-in-law was quite hale and healthy. Sankara again asked if he had any sisters and the young man replied in the affirmative and said he had two sisters. Sankara asked if all these people were women. The young man asked how it should be otherwise. Sankara asked if he regarded all of them as equal and was treating all these people in the same manner and if in particular, he was treating his wife as mother and his sister as his mother.

In this world of multiplicity one has to recognize qualitative and quantitative differences. Each electric bulb is varying in power and wattage. Therefore the light radiating from the bulb is not due to electric current. The current is the same everywhere but the difference arises from the bulbs with different intensities. God's power is like electric power and our bodies are the bulbs.

17 - Three in one

There was a small kingdom in which strangely enough all people were quite happy and very healthy. In course of time both the ruler and ruled grew proud of this rare good fortune and claimed it to be a reward of their personal righteousness. Since all of them were healthy, there was no physician in the kingdom. One day, a physician came to its capital city and was happy to find that there was no other physician to compete with him in his profession in the whole kingdom. But whenever he entered into conversation with the people and enquired after their health, they would say: "Oh! We are Brahmajnanis, no illness can touch us. We are the fortunate few chosen by God and blessed by Him with health and happiness. Why do you tarry here, better go elsewhere to earn your living". The physician however did not want to leave the city and was also hopeful that this snobbery of the people will not last long.

Once the king suddenly fell ill. The physician was summoned to the royal presence. He was pleased that God had given him an

opportunity to display his talent. He treated the king with reverence and great attention. The king was slowly but steadily improving. However, he said: "Sir, I really thank you for your treatment but can you not cure me quickly? I am not used to lying down like this for days together". The physician wanted to teach the king and the people a lesson. He said: "Oh king, there is a quick cure, but I am afraid, I may not be able to get what I want for preparing the medicine". The king said: "you need not doubt the capacity either of my ministers or my people. They will be ready to procure anything you may require. They are all Brahmajnanis. They will not bother about any type of strain or sacrifice on their part to get their beloved king cured. Come, tell me what you want". The physician said: "My Lord! I am glad that you are so confident". I require 1/4 pound of flesh from the body of a Brahmajnani - that is all". "Oh! How simple!", exclaimed the king. The king immediately sent word to his minister and commanded him to get at once 1/4 pound of flesh of any Brahmajnani in the city".

The minister returned very late in the evening, very sad and dejected. The king asked eagerly "Why so late? Come on, where is the flesh?". The minister pleaded, "Oh! King, I am sorry, I could not get what you wanted. When I made the people know of what you need, everyone said: 'Oh, I am not a Brahmajnani. Do you think that Brahmajnanis will be found in cities such as this?' How can we say confidently that we are all Brahmajnanis?".

The king was surprised to hear this and looked at the physician pitifully. The physician said: "Oh king!, do not feel sad. This is the way of the world. One may claim to be anything but to actually live up to that high ideal is extremely difficult. You are now recovered. Nothing is wrong with you. I need no human flesh. I planned this little drama, only to let you know the truth. Pardon me".

Each person is "three in one", i.e. what he thinks of himself, what others think he is and finally, what he really is.

18 - God is

Once a king wanted to know answers to three questions about which he had been contemplating for a long time. One day the king raised these questions in his Court Hall. The questions were: Where is God? In what direction does He cast His look? What does He do? None could answer these questions. The King then summoned with due honour a sage to his court. He asked the sage to answer these questions.

The Sage replied: "Like butter in the milk God is everywhere". To answer the second question the sage asked for a lamp. He lit the lamp and asked the King: "In which direction does this lamp shed its light?" The lamp sheds its light in all the directions" replied the king. The sage said "Likewise God is Effulgence itself and His vision is not directed to a particular place or person. He is all seeing". The king asked: "What does He do?" The sage said: "Since I am in a way

instructing you in spiritual matters, I am in the position of a preceptor, you a disciple. So we have to exchange our places. Are you prepared for this?" The king agreed and came down from his elevated position and sat on the seat in which the sage sat. The sage said with a twinkle in his eyes: "This is what God does. He brings down the mighty and elevates the humble. He can make the poor rich and the rich poor. He can do anything. He is all pervading. He is all seeing and Omnipotent." The king was very much pleased with these answers. He expressed his gratitude to the sage and honoured him in a fitting manner.

Like the king in the story, every one of us should try to understand the true characteristics of God: God is Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent.

19 - True devotion will surely win

Sri Sailam is a great pilgrim center in Andhra Pradesh, and is famous for its temple of Siva and Parvathi atop a hill. There, Lord Siva is adored as Mallikarjuna and Goddess Parvathi as Bhramaramba. There is a legend relating to this sacred shrine and the Divinity that abides there as Siva and Shakti.

In a hamlet very near Srisailam, there lived a mother and a lad, six years old. He was called Balaram anna. He was studying in the local elementary school.

Once, on the eve of Shivaratri, all the schoolboys were returning home eagerly discussing the festival. One boy said: "My sister and brother-in-law are coming tonight for Shivaratri. Tomorrow we will all go to the temple on the hill. "Oh! What fun it is to be with my sister and brother-in-law". Another boy said: "My sister and brother-in-law have already come. They have brought me new dress to wear. We are all going to the temple tonight itself." Balaram anna heard this talk. He wondered whether he too had a sister and brother-in-law. He ran home and asked his mother: "Mother, do I have a sister?" Where is she? What is my brother-in-law doing? Why don't they visit us? My friends are all enjoying themselves in the company of their sisters. I too would like to be with my sister and brother-in-law." The mother knew the child's heart. In order to comfort him and sow the seeds of faith in him, she said: "My dear child, you too have a sister and brother-in-law. They are, "Brahmaramba and Mallikarjuna". "Is that so? Where are they? I shall go and bring them home for the festival. Tell me where they are", said the lad. The mother sent her son along with her neighbours to the temple on the hill. She told them to take care of their son and gave them some money to buy odd little things for him. Balaram said: "Mother, should I not take something for my sister?" The mother replied: "No, my son, since you are a child, they will themselves give you a lot of gifts."

Balaram was taken into the shrine. The neighbours showed him the two idols, beautifully decorated with flowers and apparel and said, "Look that is Goddess Brahmaramba, your sister and that is Lord Mallikarjuna." Balaram at once ran to the idol of Brahmaramba, caught hold of her hand and said: "Sister, please come home with me. Mother has sent me to invite you." There was no response. He ran into the other shrine and loudly said: "Brother-in-law, please come with me along with my sister. I won't leave the place without you." The temple priests took him for a mad cap and pushed him out. Balaram's agony knew no bounds. He was determined to return home with his sister and brother-in-law. He decided to end his life if his sister and brother-in-law did not appear before him. He ran and stood on the top of a peak and cried: "Listen, if you won't come with me, you my sister and you my brother-in-law, I will jump off the peak and end my life." At once, he heard someone calling: "Brother, wait!, wait! We are coming, we are coming." Both Lord Mallikarjuna and Brahmaramba ran towards him and gathered him into their arms. Balaram said: "You must come with me, mother is expecting you." The all-compassionate Lord and his consort did accompany the lad. They granted to them the vision to see them as Siva and Shakti.

**"Whatever you hold once, you have held, hold on to it, till you win.
Whatever you have asked, once you have asked, ask aloud for it, till
you win.**

**Whatever you wish, once you have wished, wish deeper for it, till
you win.**

**Whatever you have planned, once you have planned, plan firmer for
it, till you win.**

**He must grant to stop your wail. Wail, weep, pray till you win.
Don't lose heart and turn away, True devotion will surely win."**

20 - Urgent letter to Lord Narayana

In an obscure village lived a mother and her son. The boy had lost his father when he was just two years old. The mother exerted herself in many ways to earn enough money for bringing up her only son and educating him. The boy too was very smart, obedient and had a great love and regard for his mother. The boy grew up and reached seventh class. He was studying hard for the examination. One day he told his mother, "Ma, I have to pay fees Rs. 20 for the examination within four days. Please somehow get for me the amount."

The mother was panicky, she had no money with her, and it was the last week of the month. She went to the headmaster and explained her inability to pay the fees in time and requested to help her in some way or other. The headmaster replied that nothing was in his hands. The mother returned home, sat under a tree near her hut and was weeping. The boy returned from the school, found his mother weeping. He sat near her and asked: "Why are you weeping mother?" "My son, I cannot find money. You cannot go to school

from tomorrow. You better come and work with me. There is no other way." The boy said: "Why don't you ask somebody a loan of Rs. 20. After the examination, I shall work and will be able to pay back the amount." "My dear son," replied the mother, "who will give me the money? Only God if He will." The boy eagerly enquired, "Who is God, Ma? Where is He? What is His address? I shall go and get money from Him." The mother helplessly said: "Yes, there is the Lord of Vaikunta, Narayana, who is the source of all wealth."

Without a moment's hesitation, the boy ran to the post office. He had a few small coins with him. He purchased a card and wrote on it his mother's unfortunate condition, his own need and requested God to send Rs. 20 immediately by return post. He ran to the post box tied to a tree, but he was too short to reach the slit to put in the letterbox. The postmaster who had been observing the boy all the while, came out took the card from him and asked: "To whom are you writing the letter?" The Boy said: "Oh Sir! This is a very urgent letter to Lord Narayana in Vaikunta. I have to pay my examination fees within three days. I am writing to him requesting him to send Rs. 20 immediately." The postmaster stared at the address on the post card. He could not find words, tears gathered in his eyes at the innocence of that boy. "My dear boy, who gave you this address?" asked the postmaster. The boy narrated the dialogue between himself and his mother. "Sir, my mother says that God is very kind and He will certainly help the poor like us if only we pray to Him earnestly." The postmaster was very much moved. He patted the boy and said: "My dear boy, I shall see to the express delivery of this post card. You better come day after tomorrow."

The boy ran home in a joyful mode. He told his mother that he would get the money in a day. The boy went to the postmaster the day after. The postmaster said: "My dear boy, here is the cover, inside it you will find Rs. 20. Now go and pay the fees." The boy ran home with the cover and placed it in his mother's hands. The mother asked him sternly how he had got the money. The boy narrated the entire discussion with the postmaster. She would not believe him. She hurried to the postmaster and asked him whether what her son had told her was true and how it could have happened. The postmaster told her: "Mother, believe me. I have always been a hardhearted man. When I saw your son with that letter, I could not believe my own eyes. A letter written to God with such faith. It moved me. It must be God who had induced me to come to the rescue of your son. Please take the money. It must be God's will that I should give this money. Otherwise I would not have chanced to see your boy and your son's faith in God would have been shattered. I consider this an opportunity to help a good boy."

If we pray to God sincerely, God does help us. He would induce someone to act as His agent. Implicit faith in God alone would rescue everyone from all troubles and travails.

21 - Mere adulation is poor adoration

Akbar as we all know, is one of the greatest Moghal Emperors. He was a lover of mankind and respected the great and pious souls of all religions.

He had heard of Guru Nanak's reputation and his attempts to unite the Hindus and the Muslims. He desired to welcome him and honour him in his court. So he sent word to him through his minister, paying his respects and requesting him to grace his court. Guru Nanak replied to the minister: "I shall only respond to the call of God, the Emperor of Emperors and shall enter only His court."

The minister conveyed this message to the Emperor. Akbar's respect for Guru Nanak increased and so he sent word again to meet him at the mosque at least. Nanak consented and did come to the mosque at the appointed hour. Both Akbar and Nanak were welcomed by the mullah with due honour. According to the custom, the mullah should say the prayers first. So he sat on his knees and prayed loudly. Nanak laughed loudly. All the Muslims in the temple got angry but dared not say anything because of the Emperor's presence. Then Akbar sat on his knees and prayed. Nanak at once laughed even more loudly. The atmosphere in the mosque was becoming tense. The faces of the devotees became red and their lips twitched to pounce upon Nanak. Akbar controlled them by way of silent gesture. Both of them came out. Akbar questioned Nanak with all humility: "Oh revered one!, may I know why you laughed loudly during the prayer session? Does it become you?"

Guru Nanak replied: "Oh king, how could I withhold my laughter when I could see clearly that neither the mullah nor your majesty were thinking of God while praying. The mullah was thinking of his ailing son and you were thinking of the pair of beautiful Arabian horses that were gifted to you. Is it worthy of either the mullah or your majesty to call that prayer? Is it not hypocrisy? The mullah and emperor sought pardon from Nanak and thanked him for opening their eyes to their own weakness.

Remember that prayer is not just a string of words of praise to God to be recited mechanically. It is an earnest attempt to awaken and arouse the divinity in us. We should say prayers with full concentration. What matters is the feeling, not either the voice or words. "Mere adulation is poor adoration".

22 - True devotion

Once Sathyabhama and Rukmini questioned Lord Krishna: "Why do you always make much of the devotion of Draupadi? Is she that great?" The Lord replied with a smile, "I shall let you know by and by."

One day, Draupadi came to visit her dear brother Krishna and she was given a suite of rooms. Krishna called Sathyabhama and Rukmini and said: "Let us go to Draupadi's apartment." Draupadi

welcomed them with love and excitement. She had just taken oil bath; her long tresses were hanging loose. She was combing her hair. The lord looked at his queens and said: "See! my sister seems to find it difficult to comb her long tresses. Why don't you both help her?" Sathyabhama and Rukmini readily agreed. The tresses were parted; one half was taken care by Sathyabhama and the other by Rukmini. While they were combing, they heard from every hair, "Krishna", "Krishna", in a soft tone. They were surprised and looked at Krishna as if to say they had understood Draupadi's devotion. Krishna sat still enjoying the scene.

True devotion is silent and avoids display.

23 - Two minutes

There was a famous dacoit once who advised his son while initiating him into the ancestral profession, never for a moment to listen to stories of the Lord. "Do not stay to listen to any Purana or any reading of the Bhagavatha," he exhorted the young aspirant. The son scrupulously observed this injunction for years and amassed a good fortune.

One night, however, while running with his loot on his shoulder through a side lane of the city to avoid the police, a piece of glass cut his sole. He sat for a while to pull it off and stop the flow of blood. He was then behind a house, where some one was reading and explaining the Bhagavatha to a small group of listeners; he listened perforce for a short two minutes. The spark fell on the heap of cotton. During that short period, he heard the pundit explaining the nature of God. He has no ears, no eyes, no limbs: he has a thousand forms; He is without form. "Sarvathah paani paadam," as the Gita says. That description got fixed in his heart. He could not shake it off.

A few days later the police came to know of the depredations made by him as well as his associates and kinsmen. In order to know more about their activities they entered the area incognito, one constable as Kali and some others as the worshippers and priests. They shouted and yelled, cursed and terrified the dacoits and called upon them to come out of their homes and fall at the feet of Kali.

Many did so, but the son, who had heard the Bhagavatha, albeit for two minutes, knew just enough to save his skin. He was not terrified at all. He challenged the constable who was acting the role of Kali and tore off his make-up and exposed the plot and instilled courage into the hearts of the gang. Then, when the police left discomfited he argued within himself thus: "If two minutes of the forbidden fruit could help me so much, what can I not gain, if I devote myself entirely to the stories of the glories of God?" He left off the evil path and became a Sadhaka.

24 - Greatest sin

Once Jesus was walking along the streets of a city. It was a slum area. He saw a young man rolling in dirt, dead drunk. He went to him, sat by his side and woke him up. The young man opened his eyes and saw Jesus. Jesus asked him: "Son! Why are you wasting your precious youth in drinking?" The young man replied: "Master!, I was a leper. You cured me of my leprosy. What else can I do?" Jesus heaved a sigh and walked away.

In another street he saw a man madly pursuing a beautiful woman. Jesus caught hold of him and asked him: "Son! Why do you desecrate your body by indulging in such a sinful act?" The man replied: "Master! I was really blind. You gave me vision. What else can I do?"

Jesus trudged along another street. He saw an old man crying bitterly. Jesus approached him and gently touched him. The old man wiped his tears and looked at Jesus. Jesus questioned him: "Why are you weeping old man?" The old man said: "Master! I was nearly dead. You granted me life. What else can I do except weep in this old age?"

In times of difficulty and distress, we cry out for God's help. But when God, out of His boundless love and compassion, responds to our prayer, we ignore Him and fall back into our self-centered life. One must guard oneself against this greatest sin of ingratitude towards God.

25 - God does everything for the best

There was once a Minister to a King who was in the habit of declaring whatever happened was for one's good. One day the King cut his finger while slicing a piece of sugar cane. Seeing the bleeding finger the Minister said as usual "God does everything for the best". The King flew into a rage and said, "Here I am suffering with the pain of a bleeding finger and you say God does everything for the best. Enough of your philosophy. Is this the way of consoling me? How can this be for the best when the pain is intense and real? The King immediately committed the Minister to prison. Even then the Minister said calmly "Even this sentence is for my best."

A few days later, the King went alone for hunting in a forest. When the hunting expedition was over the King was resting under a tree. Just then the servants of a certain tribal chief of the forest seized the King, bound his hand and foot. The King questioned them: "Why do you bind me? What are you going to do with me?" The tribesmen replied: "We are going to sacrifice you at the altar of our goddess Kali. It is the custom to offer her a human sacrifice once a year. The time has arrived. We have been looking out for a human being. We are fortunate in having found you." The King remonstrated: "Let me go, I am the King of the realm, you cannot kill me for the sacrifice." The tribesmen laughed and said: "We are glad that this year's

sacrifice would be unique and our goddess will be highly pleased because we are going to offer as sacrifice a great personage."

The King was carried and duly placed on a sacrificial altar. Things were ready for the deathblow; the priest noticed the bandage on his left hand forefinger. They removed the bandage only to find that a portion of it was cut. The priest said: "This man is not acceptable as a sacrifice to our goddess. A man with a defect in his body is not fit for sacrifice. Set him free."

The King remembered the words of the Minister uttered when his finger was cut "God does everything for the best." He realised that the injury to his finger alone had saved him from death. He at once hurried home and went straight to the prison to set the Minister free. He said, "I seek your forgiveness for the rash and cruel treatment accorded to you." The Minister said: "Your Majesty; you have done no harm. There is nothing to forgive." The King once again questioned: "Why did you say that my sending you to prison is for your good?" The Minister replied: "If I had not been confined in prison, I would have accompanied you when you went for hunting. I would have been in your Company. When the tribesmen came to know that you were unfit for sacrifice, they would have chosen me and offered me as a sacrifice. So God does everything for the best."

26 - The Pundit and the Milkmaid

There was a pundit who led a disciplined life, sticking to a prearranged timetable. He woke up from sleep in the early hours of the morning, recited Pranava and later, after ablutions, drank a cup of milk at 7 a.m. exactly.

Sometimes the milkmaid arrived late, for she lived on the other side of a river that flowed between the area in which she lived and the area in which the pundit lived. She had to catch a ferry to cross over the river with the milk. The ferryboat either started a little earlier or a little later. So, sometimes by the time she reached the Pundit's house it used to be very late.

One day the Pundit scolded her and said, "You are upsetting my disciplined life. Don't you know that I must have my cup of milk at 7 a.m.? Why do you depend on that boat to take you across? Just repeat the name of Rama. You will be able to walk across the river. Rama will see that you do not get drowned."

The maid being very simple and unsophisticated had faith in the words of the Pundit. Next day, the maid repeated the name of Rama and she just walked across the river. The Pundit questioned her: "How could you come on time?" The milkmaid replied: "Sir, I repeated the name of Rama as you instructed yesterday, and I could just walk across." The Pundit was flabbergasted. He did not believe. He just drank the milk and said: "Let's now go to the bank of the river. Let me see you walk across the river." The maid stepped into the river repeating the name of Rama; she could just walk across.

The maid requested the Pundit to follow her. But the Pundit knew that he would not be able to walk across the river, because he did not have faith in what he himself had said - the power of the Name.

27 - Recite the sacred name

Sri Krishna Chaitanya was the pioneer of the movement of Nagarasamkirtan. He used to get himself immersed in the contemplation of the Lord while singing His glory and used to be oblivious of the external world.

Once he was conducting Nagarasamkirtan in Navadweep. Several leaders of the town too joined him in his Bhajan. They were all ecstatically singing Bhajans and walking along the streets. A thief also joined this group. He thought it would be an opportunity for him to pick the pockets of rich devotees who would be lost in singing and dancing. But when he actually participated in it he began singing with more zeal than others. All of them had come to a temple and were seated. He sat near Chaitanya, while those sitting in front were listening to his discourse. Many had left the temple precincts by then. He held Chaitanya's both feet and said: "Swami, you are giving so much advice to so many people. Kindly impart to me some sacred "mantra".

Chaitanya looked at him and said: "Tell me first of all who you are and what you do". The thief said: "Swami! How can I lie to you? I am a thief. I have been a thief all my life. My name is Rama, people call me 'Rama' - the thief."

Chaitanya said: "Oh what a pity. I shall give you a name or a message but what will you give me as guru Dakshina?" The thief at once said without any hesitation: "I shall give you a share in the booty I get from my theft." Chaitanya said: "I have no need for any money. All that I insist is that you should give up stealing." The thief said: "Swami, that is my profession, how else can I earn a living, when I do not have any other skill?" "Well," said Chaitanya, "I shall give you a sacred name on one condition, when you go for thieving, you must first recite the sacred name I give you 1008 times." Chaitanya whispered into his ear: "Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya". Transformation even by then had taken place in the thief because of the touch of the holy person. He was also freed from the sin of his past deeds because of the conversation with Chaitanya. The thief went back a refined person.

One day many wealthy householders had locked their houses and had gone for the Darshan of Sri Krishna Chaitanya. The thief did not want to lose this opportunity to break into a house. He went to the house of the richest man of the town. He broke into the house and entered the room where the iron safe was kept. He opened it and saw valuable gems and jewels of gold. He resolved not to touch anything until he had finished reciting 1008 times the mantra given to him. Before he completed the number, the master of the house

arrived along with the family. The lady of the house wanted to remove all the jewels she had worn before she left the house and keeps them back in the safe. She saw a stranger lost in the recitation of the sacred mantra "Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya." She thought he must be a great sage who had come to their house to bless them. She called her husband. The thief was lost in his meditation. The entire family sat round him with folded hands. They thought he must be a saintly soul like Chaitanya.

The thief opened his eyes after the completion of 1008 times the mantra. He was surprised to find a group of people sitting reverentially before him. The master of the house asked him, "Oh Sir! May we know who you are and may we request you to honour us by accepting to take food with us today so that we shall be redeemed of our sins." The thief said to himself: "If the mere recitation of the Lord's name, now and then can bring me such honour, what greater things cannot happen to me if I sincerely make it my daily habit of reciting the name continuously. I may certainly win the grace of the Lord." He decided to give up thieving. He prostrated before the master of the house and his wife and said, "Mother, let me tell you the truth. I am a thief. Let me go to the forest. I shall spend the rest of my life in the contemplation of God." All were surprised at his words but were very happy.

He stayed with them as their guest that night. The news of this event spread fast around in the morning. As a result, the whole neighborhood came to see him. They took him in a palanquin round the town and left him in the forest where he wanted to do his Tapas. Later, once again, he came to Chaitanya and received his blessings so that he may blossom into a real sage.

28 - A lesson

One day, when Ubhaya Bharati was going to the river for a bath with her women disciples, she saw an ascetic, who had renounced everything in life, sleeping on the wayside, resting his head on a hollow water jug, using it as a pillow and at the same time ensuring that nobody took it away. As long as you have attachment and ego, you can never understand the Atma or experience Atmic bliss.

In order to convey a lesson to the ascetic, Ubhaya Bharati spoke within his hearing the following words to one of her disciples: "Look at that ascetic, who has ostensibly renounced every kind of attachment, but he has not given up his attachment to his water jug!" On hearing these words, the ascetic got enraged. He thought: "Is a mere woman entitled to teach me as to how I should behave." While Ubhaya Bharati was returning from the river, the ascetic threw the jug at her feet and said: "Now, see what my renunciation is?" Ubhaya Bharati remarked: "Alas! You are not only filled with attachment (abhimana) but you are also filled with ego (Ahamkara)." On hearing these words, the ascetic ran up to her, fell at her feet and pleaded for forgiveness of his faults.

29 - Food and drink for you

Once Swami Vivekananda was in a certain town to give spiritual discourses. People recognised in him a great monk and profound scholar. They listened to his discourses with rapt attention for about three days. Every day, when the discourse came to an end, some people used to gather around him to ask about certain subtle points on Sadhana, Ethics and Sastras. Students were eager to know about national regeneration and the solutions he could suggest.

There was an old man sitting in a corner observing Vivekananda with avidity but could not speak one word. He was there all the three days, waiting for a chance to be near the monk. On the third day he made bold, went to him and said: "Son! Shall I bring you something to eat? These people never gave you anything nor did they give you time to relax and think about your food. I shall run and be back with food and drink for you." Vivekananda was greatly touched by the loving words spoken by the old man. He said with a beaming smile: "Come, let us go together to your place to eat and drink." Blessed indeed was the old man for he had sympathy and consideration for a fellow human being. He was ready to render loving

30 - Yes, What you said is true

One day, in the midst of conversation, Lakshmi, the Divine Consort and the Goddess of Wealth, addressed Narayana, "Lord! The entire world is adoring Me; not even one in a hundred, why, not even one in a million, is worshipping you." She teased the Lord by this statement. She put forward a plan to test the sincerity of man. She said, "Lord! It is best to discover for ourselves how true the facts are. Come, we shall both go forth into the world and find out."

Narayana agreed. He changed into a great Pandit, wearing golden bracelets on his wrists as evidence of the appreciation and admiration of famous academic bodies. He had a garland of Rudraksha beads round the neck and thick streaks of vibuthi on the forehead. He manifested himself on earth as a redoubtable scholar. He moved from village to village and began enchanting the people through his enrapturing discourses. His splendid personality and deep scholarship attracted the people; thousands gathered to hear him and followed him from place to place. Brahmins invited him to their settlements and honoured him. His arrival was celebrated as a festival, with rich feasting.

While Narayana was being feted thus, Lakshmi too appeared on earth as a great Yogini (Female Ascetic). She too proceeded from village to village enlightening the people on the Atma through her discourses. Women assembled to hear her fascinating speeches in wave after wave, in massive numbers. They prayed that she should honour their homes with a visit and partake of the feast they were most eager to offer. In reply, she informed them that she was bound by some vows, which made it difficult for her to accept their request.

She would not eat out of plates already in use in the homes. She said that she should be allowed to bring her own cups and plates with her. The women were yearning so deeply for hosting her that they accepted the condition. Whatever her vow, they were ready to respect it. Invitations came from every woman from every place.

The Yogini reached the house where she was to take food the first day and took out from the bag she had with her a gold plate, a few gold cups and a gold 'tumbler' (lota) to hold drinking water. These she spread before herself for the various items of the menu. When the meal was over, she left the place, leaving the precious golden articles to be taken by the host. She had a new set for each day, she said.

The news spread. The villages where Narayana was holding his delightful discourses also heard the wonderful happenings of the Yogini's gifts. The Brahmins who were staunch admirers of the far-famed scholar also rushed to invite the Yogini to their homes for lunch! The Yogini told them that they ought to drive the Pandit out before she could enter their settlement. She would not set foot there so long as the person continued to stay there! She was adamant on that point. Their greed for gold was so strong that they forced the Pandit, whom they had adored so long and with so much pomp, to go out of their village. Thereafter, the Yogini entered the Brahmin settlement, gave discourses, partook of feasts arranged in her honour and presented the golden plates and cups to each of her hosts. Thus, the Yogini managed to get the Pandit driven out of every place where he sought recognition and attention. Instead, she secured the worship of people everywhere. Unable to bear the universal insult, the Pandit cast off the role and Narayana disappeared from the earth. The Yogini came to know of this. She too gave up the cast she had assumed and, resuming her real Form, She joined Lord Narayana. While talking among themselves, she told the Lord, "Now, tell me! What did you discover? Who between us is honoured and worshipped more on earth?" Narayana smiled at her question. He replied, "Yes, What you said is true."

31 - The green-eyed monster

Once the organs of the body - eyes, ears and other limbs - became jealous of the tongue. They said to themselves: "It is we who make all efforts to secure food and hand it over to the tongue and it is just the tongue that enjoys the food". They struck work and stopped supplying food. But jealousy made them forget the fact that they can function only when there is supply of energy from the food passed on into the stomach by the tongue. Thus they spelt their own ruin. In fact they also did not realise that the tongue just tastes the food and passes it onto itself. The food that is passed on into the stomach is converted into energy-giving blood. But for this vital part played by the tongue, all the other organs would stop functioning. What is it

that has brought about the ruin of the organs that struck work?
Jealousy - the green-eyed monster!

32 - Beaten by a Brahmin

Once a dog came to Sri Rama bleeding from blows. Lakshmana was sent to inquire why it had to receive such blows. The dog said: "I was beaten by a Brahmin with a stick." The Brahmin was questioned. He said that the dog always was annoying him by coming across his path. Rama asked the dog: "Well, how do you want to punish the Brahmin?" The dog said: "Make him a manager of a temple." Rama replied with wonder: "That would be a reward not a punishment." The dog said: "No, I was a manager of a temple in my previous birth. It was impossible not to mishandle or misuse or misappropriate some fraction of God's money. When he is that manager, he too will get like me this canine birth and perhaps get beaten too in his subsequent birth."

In fact not only the dog or the Brahmin but every one of us are lining off the property of God, for does not all this belong to Him? What do we do in return for all benefits we derive from the property of the Lord? We should not simply eat and sit quiet. We have to render service to the poor and the helpless in a manner suitable to us.

33 - This too is the Dharma

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.

34 - The power of Naamasmarana.

Two persons by name Jnaana Dev and Naama Dev were walking through a forest. They felt very thirsty. They could not catch sight of a well or a lake anywhere. They trudged along. At last they saw a well and ran towards it. They eagerly looked into it. There was water in the well. But how could they drink? There was neither a rope nor a vessel to draw water. There was no question of somehow going into the well as the well was in a dilapidated condition.

Jnaana Dev simply closed his eyes as if in prayer. Soon he was transformed into a bird. He flew into the well and drank water to his fill. Naama Dev began chanting the name of Lord Vittal with intense devotion. The water level began to rise slowly until at last the level

of water was within the reach of Naama Dev. He just put his hands into the well and drank water to his fill. Such is the power of Naamasmarana.

35 - Think of a plan

In one village a feud was going on for long between two groups of people for one reason or another. One resident of that village who had two acres of land was growing grapes and selling them for his livelihood. He did not belong to either of these fighting groups. But both the groups opposing each other came to this individual and they started pressurizing him to join their respective party. So, under compulsion he joined the party, which contained a larger number of evil-minded people. Few months later, the police along with all the other members arrested this honest fellow. As a result there was no one to look after his grape garden. The vines having no water for weeks shriveled and began to wither away. There was no fruit and, therefore, there was no income and enough food for his wife and children at home.

In the jail, this man used to get one post card every week from his wife. The rules and regulations of the jail were such that letters received by the prisoners would not be censored while letters posted by the prisoners would be censored. Once, his wife wrote to him: "You seem to be well looked after in the prison but have you thought of our miserable condition? Since you left home our grape garden is dried up and there is no one to till the land and prepare the land for the next crop. Nor have I any money to set the land right. Even now, the children and I are half starved. So, if you suggest some method by which I can get the dried up land soil tilled, only then I and the children will have something to eat in the near future at least. Please let me know."

As soon as he read the letter, he felt very sad. But he could hit upon a plan. He wrote to his wife thus: "Do not worry, I have not ever told you about a treasure trove, a vessel containing a lot of gold coins which I had put down below in the rut in our garden. You simply have to dig it up and make use of the coins". This letter had to be censored and the jail superintendent read it. He did not post the letter. He got together all the prisoners and told them to dig up the whole grape garden with a view to find the treasure trove. In a short time the entire garden was dug up. But they did not find any treasure trove.

On the third day there was a heavy rain and that year (grapes) yield was very good. The wife was very happy. She sold the grapes and got plenty of money.

At the end of six months, the husband was released from prison. As soon as he came home she eagerly questioned: "How did you manage to send so many men to plough the land?" The wife had not received her husband's letter, so she did not know about his plan.

The husband replied: "Yes, by the grace of God I could think of a plan and make them believe about the treasure trove. Let us thank God."

What is the inner meaning of this story? This individual, this cultivator had 2 acres of land. Man has two inches of heart. In our heart there are two groups; the bad qualities and the good qualities. These two groups are clashing with each other. In between the Jiva, the householder and owner of the heart, the two parties did not seduce the first. But later he was pulled towards one group. Jiva has a wife - she is Nivritti and her children Pravirthi. Because the Jiva joined one group he had to be in jail. That is bondage. However, he realises that the field of heart had to be cleansed (ploughed) to find the wisdom - gold. To get that wisdom all the prisoners (those in bondage) have to dig the field of heart. After the process of digging and cleansing one reaps the harvest of bliss. So what is it that is essential? Purification of the field of heart by means of prescribed sadhanas.

36 - Experience is the best teacher

One day, Bhrighu, the son of Varuna approached his father and asked him: "Father! Will you enlighten me about Brahman?" Sage Varuna replied endearingly: "Son, none can enlighten anyone on Brahman. One has to experience through meditation. Go and do meditation and carry on self-enquiry. I bless you."

Bhrighu went into a forest and sat for meditation. He used to carry on self-enquiry too. He used to contemplate on several questions related to the spiritual world. One day, he thought: 'What is the most essential thing that is necessary for the existence of all living beings in general and man in particular? It must be food', he decided. Man lives, grows and works only because of food, the most essential thing for life is food, so food is Brahman." He ran to his father and said: "Father, I know what is Brahman. Food is Brahman." Varuna replied with a smile: "No, my son, food is not Brahman. Go and meditate."

Bhrighu went to the forest and continued his Tapas for some more time. One day he thought, 'food may be essential, but unless there is energy, how can the food be digested? What is that energy? It must be prana (vital air) so prana is Brahman.' So, he went to his father and said: "Father, I know what is Brahman, Prana is Brahman." Varuna replied: "No, my son, go and meditate for some more days."

Bhrighu obeyed his father's command. He continued his meditation. One day he thought, 'Food is essential, prana is essential, but what is more essential? Unless one has desire to live and to eat, of what avail is food and prana? The seat of desire is mind. So Manas is Brahman' he decided. Bhrighu reported about his discovery and said: "Father, Manas is Brahman." Varuna smiled and said: "Son, no, Manas is not Brahman. Go and do Tapas for some more days."

Bhrighu continued his meditation. One day he thought 'Food is essential, prana is essential, manas is also essential, but what is still more essential? Unless one is able to distinguish and discriminate between good and evil, of what use is this life? What is the seat of this discriminating faculty? It is intellect, Vijnana.' So Vijnana is Brahman", he decided. Bhrighu went and told his father: "Father, Vijnana is Brahman". Varuna once again said: "Son, no, Vijnana is not Brahman. Go and do Tapas for some more days."

Bhrighu once again continued to do Tapas. One day he thought, 'Food gives strength, prana energizes, manas causes desires, and Vijnana endows man with discrimination (Viveka). But, I must find out what is the ultimate goal of man's life. I have to experience it'. Having thus resolved, he went into deep meditation again.

One day, he experienced an ineffable joy and he sat utterly unconscious of the outside world. That day, Varuna came to the forest in search of his son. He was happy to see his son in Samadhi. From the effulgence, which shone on Bhrighu's face, he knew that his son had realised that 'Bliss is Brahman'. In the upanishadic age, parents and preceptors used to encourage their pupils to ask questions, yet they would not give them immediate answers. They would advise them to carry on self-enquiry and find out the answers for themselves.

Experience is the best teacher.

37 - The Accident

Students are tender hearted, full of noble feelings and love for Swami. They planned various programmes to please Me. I was very well aware of the impending danger. But the students were not receptive to My words. I felt there was no point in advising them in such a situation. Only when they face the consequences of disobeying My command do they realise the value of My words. Until this moment nobody is aware of exactly what happened on the 11th morning. They said that the sports meet was a grand success. I am also happy when you are successful. The students performed extremely well. Each contributed to the success of this event based on his or her capacities and capabilities. That morning as I entered the stadium, I spotted two lorries. Immediately I could visualise the danger lurking in the future. I saw the lorries with huge scaffoldings placed over them. The boys planned to perform a few acrobatic feats on them. I knew that one of the ropes was not fitted properly and was about to give in. If that were to happen the boy would suffer a major head injury and his spinal column would break. I willed that the boy should be saved and decided to take the future accident upon Myself.

Prior to this, one boy suffered a spinal injury and had been admitted to the Manipal Hospital in Bangalore. I willed that such an untoward incident should not recur. Once the spinal column breaks it is

impossible to set it right. Immediately I arranged for an ambulance to shift the boy to the hospital in Bangalore and gave ten thousand rupees to defray the immediate expenditure. I also ensured that our doctor accompanied him. The parents shed tears of gratitude when they came to know of the love showered by Swami on their son. The doctor said that the boy would not be able to sit or lie down as his spinal column was badly damaged. I said to him, "Do not entertain any misgivings. Do as I say!" By the time the boy reached the hospital he could miraculously sit up! He entered the hospital and sat down on the bed. He regained sensation in all his limbs, which were numb till then. No danger whatsoever. He was protected because of My infinite mercy and boundless grace. All students should be safe and secure. I have repeatedly declared that students are My property. I consider students welfare as My welfare, and their happiness, My happiness. I never think of My happiness and My comfort. My only concern was that the students should not be disappointed or put to any inconvenience. A day prior to that I had instructed four boys to surround the chariot and keep a vigil. They are also full of love and devotion for Swami. But I noticed that none of them were present at that spot. Nobody is to be blamed. No one does this deliberately. Swami is the very life-breath of the students.

I asked for the chariot to be stopped. A senior devotee was driving the chariot, with all sincerity, love and devotion. He stopped the vehicle in accordance with My command. Just when I was about to speak to the Vice-Chancellor, the driver accidentally put his foot on the clutch instead of applying the brake. That resulted in a jerk and I fell down in the chariot. I suffered injuries on My head and arm and My spinal column was badly damaged. What the boys had to face, I took it upon Myself. Many men and women were seated in the gallery, but I took care that none should notice My injuries. I pretended as though nothing had happened. The Vice-Chancellor was worried thinking that Swami was unable to get up. I knew that any further delay would cause anxiety in the minds of devotees. So I immediately got up, forgetting the excruciating pain and started blessing the devotees, waving My hands. The pain was intense, and the cut on My arm so deep that it appeared to have been caused by a knife. But the sleeve on the robe covering My hand was intact. This incident gives you a glimpse of the infinite power of Divinity.

I found Myself in an awkward situation. I had to walk to the dais without My injuries being noticed. So I willed that no one should notice My injuries, lest they become anxious. I walked up to the dais and took My seat. But in the meanwhile the dhoti below My robe was drenched in blood. Concerned that the devotees may get to know of this, I discreetly walked into the bathroom. The available towels were insufficient to wipe the oozing blood. I did not want to leave the blood stained towels in the bathroom, lest some one notice them. Though there was excruciating pain, I washed the towels Myself with soap, squeezed them and put them up for drying. Under

no circumstances do I reveal My suffering, pain and fatigue. Some boys were curious to know why I went to the bathroom repeatedly. I replied, "Why are you concerned? It is my job." Usually I go to the bathroom only twice a day, morning and evening. Since the injury was bleeding profusely, I had to go to the bathroom five or six times in that short duration. Just then two students came and prayed that the institute flag could be hoisted. When I got down from the chair it felt as if I had an electric shock. Reflecting on the incident I feel like laughing to Myself. I could not stand firmly on the ground. I thought I should not be deluded by the attachment to the body and walked forward smilingly to hoist the flag. Then I lighted the lamp. I again found Myself in an embarrassing situation. I could not sit in any posture comfortably. When I exhort all devotees to give up body attachment, I should set an example Myself. Speaking to Myself in this manner, I conducted myself accordingly.

The Primary School children performed extremely well and desired to have a photograph with Me. Acceding to their prayers I walked up to them and posed for a photograph, as I did not want to disappoint them. Subsequently I had to walk up to the playing field five more times to have photographs taken with the remaining students. In this manner I detached Myself from the body. My body was numb. There was no sensation whatsoever. My head was reeling. I resolved to make the students happy no matter what happened to the body. I decided to keep this to Myself. Concerned that the bloodstains may be visible while returning to the dais from the playground, I ascended the steps leading directly to My seat. Is it possible for human beings to conceal such a major injury from the public gaze for such a long time amidst such a huge gathering? No. I was seated on the chair for five long hours. I am relating all this so that students and devotees may comprehend the nature of Divinity. Anyone in My predicament would not have been able to sit in the chair even for a second. It would have been impossible even to put a step forward. It was as though electric shocks were piercing My body. The electric current gives shock: but when I am the current Myself, where is the question of Myself being subjected to shock? With this feeling I sat through the whole proceedings and returned to the Mandir.

The Central Trust members followed Me, but they were not aware of what had happened to Me. The senior devotee apologized for his slip. Then I told him, "Why do you worry about the past? Past is past. I am happy. Do not worry about Me." All of them had their lunch. After lunch My back started bleeding again. The students were waiting outside for photographs; again I went into the bathroom to wipe the blood. Noticing this, Indulal Shah cried out, "Swami what is this?" I told him lovingly, "Indulal Shah, whatever had to happen to the body has happened." Saying so, I showed him My injury. All of them cried out in agony. They noticed blood all over. I told them that I would not reveal anything in future if they expressed their sorrow like this.

No one knew about the injury until I reached the Mandir. Likewise, I take upon Myself the untold suffering of students and devotees many a time to protect them. No one is responsible for this mishap. You may find fault with one individual or the other, but no one is responsible for this. Whatever had to happen, happened. That's all.

38 - Fear of Death

There was once a Raja, who had transferred all responsibility of ruling to his Manthri, and who was spending his time in ease. He never worried about anything, be it big or small. He had a personal companion, whom he had always by his side, more or less as a bodyguard. This fellow was very wise, for he never did anything without deep deliberation, about the how and the why and the wherefore. The Raja took all this deliberation to be just foolishness and he nicknamed the companion, "Avivekasikhamani" or "The Crest-Jewel of Fools". He went to the length of actually engraving the title on a plate of gold and compelling him to wear it on his forehead for all to see! Many people were misled by this and they took him to be an ignoramus at court; they did not heed his words.

Meanwhile, the Raja fell ill and took to bed. The kingdom was combed for physicians who could heal the king. Messengers went to the eight corners, seeking drugs and doctors. Hundred were busy round the royal patient, but, all efforts failed; the illness worsened day by day. The Raja was at the very door of Death.

The Raja suspected that his end was near; so he hurriedly made some dispositions, spoke to all those whom he wanted to meet, and was immersed in sorrow. He had no thought of God or any other auspicious Power. He was in terrible fear of Death and could not think of anything else.

One day, he called Avivekasikhamani to his bedside and whispered feebly in his ear, "Well; I am going soon, my friend!" Then, the Fool asked without any compunction, "What? You are weak and cannot walk a few steps; I shall order a palanquin, please wait till it is ready." "No palanquin can take me there," said the Raja. "Then, I shall order a chariot," entreated the Fool. "The chariot too is of no use," replied the Raja. "Of course, then, the horse is the only means of journey," wailed the companion, who seemed eager to come to the rescue of his master, and spare him the toils of travel. The Raja said that the horse too could not enter there. The Fool was at his wit's end. Then suddenly an idea struck him, he said, "Come on master! I shall carry you there." The Raja became sad; he said, "My dear friend, one has to go alone to that place, when one's time has come. No companion can be taken." The Fool was thrown in great doubt; he asked the Raja, "It is curious, is it not? You say that the palanquin won't reach there, that the chariot can't go there, nor the horse; you say that no second person can join you! Well can't you tell me at least where that place is?" The Raja replied, "I do not know."

Immediately, the Fool unwound the Golden Plate with the engraving of the title, 'Avivekasikhamani', and tied it round the brow of the Raja, saying "Raja! You know so much about the place, even, which things cannot go there, but, you do not know where it is, and still you are going there soon. O, you deserve this title much more." The Raja was overcome with shame. "Alas," he said to himself, "I wasted my years in eating and sleeping and pursuing pleasures, never caring to inquire who I am, whence I came, what I am doing, whither I am going, and why I came. The precious time allotted to me has come very near its end. There is no time for me any more for all that inquiry. Death is knocking at the door; children have started weeping; my subjects are in great anxiety. Can I, under such conditions immerse myself in inquiry? Can a thought that I never entertained throughout my life suddenly arise now, during my last moments? It is impossible. Yes, I deserve the title, Avivekasikhamani more than anyone else, for I wasted my life in useless pursuits; without any thought of the Reality." The Raja let it be proclaimed that Inquiry is the best means of knowing the Truth, that the inquiry must be directed to separating the true from the untrue, the eternal from the temporary, that people should arrive at the conclusion that, 'God is the only true and eternal Entity' and that by their own independent investigation, his subjects must not only grasp the entity intellectually but must also attain the Grace of God, by their pure lives. Announcing this lesson to his subjects, the Raja breathed his last.

39 - The devotee was even greater

Once upon a time, sage Narada came into the presence of the Lord. The Lord asked him, "Narada, in all your travels through the world have you been able to discover the principal secret of the universe? Have you been able to understand the mystery behind this world? Everywhere you look you see the five great elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether. Which do you think occupies the first place? Of everything that is to be found in the universe what is the most important of all?"

Narada thought for a while and then answered, "Lord, of the five elements the densest, biggest and most important is surely the earth element." The Lord answered, "How can the earth element be biggest when three-fourths of the earth is covered by water and only one-fourth is land? The water is swallowing such a big earth. What is bigger, the thing that is being swallowed or that which is swallowing it?" Narada acknowledged that water must be bigger because it had swallowed the Earth.

The Lord continued his questioning. He said, "But Narada, we have the ancient tale that when the demons hid in the waters, then in order to find them, a great sage came and swallowed up the whole ocean in one gulp. Do you think the sage is greater or the ocean is greater?" Narada had to agree that without doubt the sage was

certainly greater than the water he had swallowed. "But," continued the Lord, "it is said that when he left his earthly body, this same sage became a star in the heavens. Such a great sage is now appearing only as a small star in the vast expanse of the sky. Then what do you think is bigger; is it the sage or is it the sky that is bigger?" Narada answered, "Swami, the sky is surely bigger than the sage." Then the Lord asked, "Yet we know that one time when the Lord came as avatar and incarnated in a dwarf-body, he expanded himself so hugely that he was able to cover both the earth and the sky with his one foot. Do you think God's foot is bigger or the sky?" "O, God's foot is certainly bigger," Narada, replied. But, the Lord asked, "If God's foot is so big, then what about his infinite form?"

Now, Narada felt that he had come to the final conclusion. "Yes," he said exultantly, "the Lord is the biggest of all. He is infinite beyond measure. In all the worlds there is nothing greater than he." But the Lord had still one more question. "What about the devotee who has been able to imprison this infinite Lord within his own heart? Now tell me, Narada, who is greater, the devotee who has the Lord locked up or the Lord who is locked up by the devotee?" Narada had to admit that the devotee was even greater than the Lord, and that, therefore, the devotee must rank first in importance over everything, surpassing even the Lord.

40 - Why man is considered the acme of creation

One day a clever fox began wondering, "Why man is considered the acme of creation and in what way is he superior to animals? Both man and beast have emotions and passions. Both have their own good and bad qualities. Why then this superiority? Let me go to the king lion and seek his advice." Thinking thus, the fox hurried to the lion's den. "How nice to see you after so many days! Come tell me what is it that you want?" said the lion. The fox said in all humility, "Oh, King! Man is growing all-powerful and is claiming sovereignty over the entire creation! I cannot tolerate man's arrogance and his claim of superiority over all animals. In what way are we inferior? Can we not establish our superiority? We must do something about it." The lion nodded its head and said: "True dear, what shall we do?" The lion and the fox discussed the problem for a long time and decided finally to call for a conference of all animals in the forest. They would discuss thoroughly the relative merits and demerits of man versus animals. The lion then said to the fox: "Go and make all arrangements for the conference. Invite all animals, big and small without any exception. But, who will preside over the conference?" The fox replied: "There is a sage in our forest who has been doing penance since a long time. He is a friend of both man and animals. He will certainly have no preference or prejudices. Why not request him to be the Chairman?" "Do so", replied the lion.

In a week's time the fox executed the whole plan. A vast area in the forest was cleared to hold the conference. On the appointed day the

animals began filling up towards the conference venue. Very soon, all the animals were seated in their respective places. The sage arrived in time and took his presidential seat. The lion and the elephant stood on either side of the sage, while the fox stood in front of the gathering.

The fox being the Secretary of the conference welcomed the gathering and said: "I welcome you all and thank you all for attending this conference". Referring to the Agenda of the conference, the fox said: "I am pleased to place before you four major points over which we have to deliberate. You have to think well and come forth with your opinions as these points have a vital bearing on our self-respect.

1. Man as well as the animals are born alike, of the womb of the mother. Then why should animals be called 'janthu' and man as 'Manava'? They should be addressed alike.

2. There is a fantastic notion that man is wise and animals are foolish. We cannot accept this humiliation and baseless stigma.

3. It is claimed that man has the most blessed faculty of speech. But what is the reason for pride when man is only abusing this faculty? In what way do we suffer for want of this faculty? Though we are dumb, we are able to procure food, find shelter, rear our children and live happily. So, man cannot be considered as superior to us only because of this rare faculty of which he boasts.

4. Finally, they say that we are cruel and that man is kind and compassionate. In fact, we are more kind and considerate than man. So, we have to refute this allegation, as well.

Having read out the agenda, the fox went and sat in its place. The lion stepped forward and raising his head, said in a dignified manner: "I totally approve of all the points of the agenda. I cannot consider man superior to us in any way. Let us first of all take up the point of valor and strength. Is there one among men who can excel me in strength and valor? Even though I am the sole monarch of the forest, I do not indulge in any act of injustice and corruption. I don't kill any animal unless I am hungry. Such being the case, can man claim to be superior to us?" "Never, never", roared the whole assembly.

The lion then resumed its seat beside the sage. The elephant got up and trumpeted its own glory. "In form, stature, and strength, I am far superior to man. He is a pigmy beside me. As for intelligence, I am reputed for my subtle intellect. Since time immemorial, for every important and auspicious function in the temple or in the palace my presence is considered auspicious. In fact pious men offer me fruits and flowers with deep feelings of reverence. How can man call himself superior to us?" The whole assembly roared: "He can't, he can't". The elephant went back to its seat by the side of the sage.

Then came forward the dog and saluting one and all in the assembly said aloud: "I have sound reason to claim that the animals are certainly superior to mankind. Take for example, the quality of love, faithfulness and loyalty. Can any man boast of himself being superior to the dog in these qualities? Man himself keeps us and treats us as a member of his family because of these rare qualities. But, what about men? They have no sense of gratitude even. They keep us on cheap food or on the left over bits at their meal. Man, in his relation to his own master whom he serves is ungrateful to the core. Sir, I am sure, we animals are far superior in these characteristics to man." Having spoken thus, it went and sat in its place.

It was now the turn of the President to give out his decision on the matter under dispute. The sage got up and said: "My dear friends, what the dog has said is true. Man often says one thing and does another. This inconsistency is not to be found in animals". All the animals clapped for long with joy. The sage continued: "In the matter of food, sleep and allied habits of living, there is absolutely no difference between man and animals. But, there is one fundamental difference. The animals cannot transform themselves, while man can transform himself through education, company and emulation. The animals cannot even change their food habits". The fox at once got up and questioned, "Oh Master! What you have said is true. But do you think that all men transform themselves?" The sage said: "Why, without doubt, such men who do not, are worse than animals." At once all the animals clapped and cheered the President. The sage continued: "Men have got another virtue, discrimination". The fox said: "It is true that they have discrimination, but what is the use? They put even animals to shame in their bad conduct. Oh, what a pity! Man spends all his time, talents, strength and money to earn his bread, while we animals procure food without any labour." The sage could see that the fox was trying to exceed the limits and make much of their instinctive nature. So, he said: "Oh, dear animals! You must also be told about another important distinction. Man can conquer illusion. He can realise the self or Atma and attain immortality. In fact the very word "man" indicates these attributes:

- M - means Maya;
- A - means the Atmic vision and
- N - means Nirvana.

By getting rid of illusion and attaining Atmic vision, man can become God. Why don't you own and admit your limitations?" The animals asked him: "Oh Wise one! Do you mean to say that all men make use of these three attributes?" "No, not all of them," replied the sage. "Then those who do not attain nirvana by conquering illusion and having Atmic vision must be treated as our comrades" asserted the

animals, in one voice. "Oh, Dear ones!" replied the sage; "I have come to this forest only to be your friend and prove myself a true Man".

41 - A ray of hope and light

Once Wealth and Poverty approached a merchant and introduced themselves as Goddesses. The merchant offered his salutations to both of them and said: "May I know what brings you to my humble tenement?" The Goddess of Wealth said: "We want you to judge and tell us as to who is more beautiful between us two?"

The merchant was in a fix. He knew he was between the devil and the deep sea. If he were to declare wealth as more beautiful than poverty, poverty would curse him. If he were to declare poverty as more beautiful, than wealth, wealth would forsake him. However, he regained his composure and said: "I have great respect for you both. Would you please act according to my instructions? Then only I can judge properly." The Goddesses agreed. He said: "Mother wealth, would you please go to the entrance (gates) and walk into the house? Mother, poverty! Would you please walk from here towards the gates? I can have a good look at you both, from near and far." The two Goddesses did walk as the merchant wished them to. Then the merchant happily declared: "Mother wealth! You appear very beautiful when you enter the house. Mother poverty! You look very beautiful when you leave the house!" The Goddesses appreciated the wit and wisdom of the merchant. The Goddess of wealth happily stayed in his house while the Goddess of poverty cheerfully walked away.

When a serious problem confronts us, if we look within and think calmly, a ray of hope and light will beam forth and show us the way.

42 – Faith

During the Second World War, a steamer carrying Indian Sepoys was bombed by the Japanese and was sunk. Many lost their lives. Five among them managed to row their lifeboat and hoped to have a chance of surviving in spite of the surging Ocean. They were tossed about for many hours.

One of them became desperate and cried: "The sea will swallow me. I will be a meal for the sharks". In that panic, he got drowned.

Another sepoy wept for his family: "Oh, I am dying without arranging for the future of my family." He too lost faith in his survival and breathed his last.

The third sepoy thought: "I have with me the Policy and documents of Insurance. What a pity!" I should have kept them at home. What will my wife do? I am sure to die." He also died.

The other two men reinforced each other's faith in God. They said: "We shall not yield to fear. We shall prove that however desperate the situation may be, God will certainly protect man if he has faith in

Him." Even as they were talking like this, a helicopter sent from a coastal ship which had received signals for help, caught sight of these two men and hauled them up. When they were safe on land, they said, "It is only five minutes between victory and defeat. Faith earned the victory; lack of it brought about defeat and death."

43 - Give up attachment

Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful and charming princess in Greece. She was not only beautiful but also adept in shooting, hunting and running. In fact, she had earned the title of "the fleet-footed princess." Many handsome and heroic princes desired to win her heart and hand. So, the princess hit upon a clever plan. She announced that she would marry the young man who would beat her in a foot race. Hundreds of young warriors came to race with her but she always out-ran them.

At last one young hero was bent upon outrunning her. He sought the advice of a wise man. He explained to him about the fleet-footed princess and her challenge. He also expressed his regret over the fact that the princess was putting many young warriors to shame.

The wise man said: "Don't worry, you take within your pocket several shining pieces of jewellery and gems. As you run, go on dropping one piece after another on the racing track at strategic points."

On the day fixed for the race, the young man equipped himself with fine pieces of jewellery. The young man and the princess started running. Both of them were good runners. Whenever the princess was on the point of outstripping him, the young man would softly drop a dazzling piece of jewellery. The princess spontaneously stopped to pick up the lovely piece of jewellery that was after all on the racing track. She was confident that in spite of the halts she would be able to outrun her rival. These brief but frequent halts made him reach the goal ahead of her. Thus the young man won the race as well as the heart and the hand of the princess. Why did the fleet footed princess lose this time? It is all because of her love for jewellery. Love of lucre always makes man weak and prevents him from realising his real goal in life. If we want success in life, we have to give up attachment and be prepared to sacrifice what we have as the young man did.

44 - Where did the scorpion sting

When the doctor said, apply this ointment at the place where the scorpion stung your son, the fond father asked the son, "Where did the scorpion sting?" The boy replied, "In that corner" and the father applied the ointment to that spot on the floor!

45 - The meaning of the Sloka

A learned Pundit was once giving discourses on the Geetha in the august presence of a Maharaja. One day the turn of this Sloka came:

Ananyaaschinthayantho maam
Ye janaah paryupaasathe
Theshaam nithyaabhiyukthaanaam
Yogakshemam vahamyaham.

The Pundit was explaining enthusiastically the many-sided implications of this Sloka, but the Maharaja shook his head and said: "This meaning is not correct." He continued to dispute the correctness of every one of the explanations the Pundit gave. The poor Pundit had won meritorious distinctions at the court of many a Maharaja and was honoured by them all with pompous titles. He felt as if he was stabbed when the Maharaja in the presence of the entire band of courtiers condemned his explanation of this Sloka a 'wrong'. He smarted under the insult; but plucking up courage, he again set upon his task, and marshalling all his scholarship, he plunged into an eloquent discourse on the multiple meaning of the words, "Yoga" and "Kshema." The Maharaja did not approve of even this; he ordered: "Find out the meaning of this Sloka and having understood it well, come to me again tomorrow." With this, the Maharaja rose from his throne and went into the inner apartments.

The Pundit lost even the few grains of courage left in him. He was weighed down by anxiety; he tottered under the insult; he reached home and, placing the copy of the Geetha aside, he dropped on his bed.

Surprised at this, the Pundit's wife asked, "Tell me why you came home from the palace today in such grief? What exactly did happen?" She rained one anxious question after another so that the Pundit was obliged to describe to her all that had happened, the insults heaped on his head, the command with which the Maharaja sent him home, etc. The wife listened calmly to the account of what had happened and after pondering deeply over the incident, she said, "Yes; it is true. What the Maharaja said is right. The explanation you gave for the Sloka is not the correct one. How could the Maharaja approve it? The fault is yours." At this, the Pundit rose in anger from the cot, like a cobra whose tail is trodden hard. "What do you know, you silly woman? Am I inferior in intelligence to you? Do you, who are engaged in the kitchen all the time, cooking and serving, claim to know more than I? Shut your mouth and quit my presence," he roared.

But the lady stood her ground. She replied, "Lord! Why do you fly into such a rage at a statement of mere truth? Repeat the Sloka once again to yourself and ponder over its meaning. You will then arrive at the right answer yourself." Thus by her soft words the wife brought calm into the mind of her husband.

The Pundit started analysing the meaning of each individual word in the Sloka. Ananyaaschinthayantho maam, he began, deliberately and slowly, repeating aloud the various meanings. The wife intervened and said, "What use is it to learn and expound the meanings of

words? Tell me what your intention was when you approached this Maharaja. What was the purpose?" At this, the Pundit got wild. "Should I not run this family, this home? How am I to meet the cost of food and drink, of clothes and things, for you and all the rest? It is for the sake of these that I went to him, of course; or else, what business have I with him?" he shouted.

The wife then replied. "If you had only understood what Lord Krishna has declared in this Sloka, the urge to go to this Maharaja would not have arisen! If He is worshipped without any other thought, if one but surrenders to Him, if at all times the mind is fixed on him, then the Lord has declared in this Sloka that He would provide everything for the devotee. You have not done these three; you approach the Maharaja, believing that he would provide everything! That is where you have gone against the meaning of the verse. That is the reason why he did not accept your explanation."

Hearing this, that reputed scholar sat awhile, ruminating on her remarks. He realised his mistake. He did not proceed to the palace the next day. Instead, he got immersed in the worship of Krishna at home. When the king inquired why the Pundit had not appeared, courtiers said that he was staying at home and had not started out. The king sent a messenger, but the Pundit declined to move out. He said, "There is no need for me to go to any one; my Krishna will provide me with everything; He will bear my Yogakshema Himself. I suffered insult because I did not realise this so long, being blinded by eagerness to know the manifold meanings of mere words. Surrendering to Him, if I am ceaselessly engaged in worshipping Him, He will Himself provide me with all I need."

When the messenger took this message to the palace, the Maharaja proceeded to the dwelling of the Pundit on foot; he fell at the feet of the Pundit, saying "I thank you sincerely for explaining to me this day, out of your own experience, the meaning of the Sloka which you expounded yesterday." Thus, the king taught the Pundit that any propagation of spiritual matters, which does not come out of the crucible of experience, is mere glitter and show.

When the doctor said, apply this ointment at the place where the scorpion stung your son, the fond father asked the son, "Where did the scorpion sting?" The boy replied, "In that corner" and the father applied the ointment to that spot on the floor!

46 - Why should I worry?

There was once a miser who lived in a leaky house; the rainwater poured into the house through the roof but the miser sat through it all. Neighbours laughed at him and warned him to get the roof repaired. But in the rainy season, he replied: "Let the rains subside, how can I repair it now?" And when the rains stopped, he replied, "Why should I worry about leaks now? The rains have stopped."

47 - It shone like a mirror

Once a great painter was by a king to execute a huge fresco on the wall of his Durbar Hall, a scene from the Mahabharatha battle.

Another painter came and asked for permission to execute a fresco on the opposite wall. He said he would within the same period prepare on his wall an equally grand fresco, in fact an exact replica of the other, in spite of a curtain being hung in between the walls.

On the date fixed for the opening of the frescoes to be seen by the king the curtain was removed. The king was amazed to find an exact copy of the same scene from the Mahabharatha battle down to the minutest detail of lines and curves, tints and tilts, light and shade. The king questioned the painter as to how he could do it. The artist said that he had not used any brush or paint. What he did was thoroughly polish the wall assigned to him. He polished the wall in such a way that it shone like a mirror. So the duplicate fresco was only a reflection of the original.

Similarly we have to cleanse our mind and make it pure so that God's sublime grandeur and beauty may be reflected in our heart.

48 - Practice of Dharma

Prahlada was not only a devotee of Lord Narayana but also a very righteous king. He was the most bountiful of kings. He would never say 'no' to anyone who approached him for a favour, gift or help. Once Indra intending to test Prahlada came to him in the guise of a Brahmin. Prahlada offered his respects to him and asked: "What do you seek of me. How can I make you happy? The Brahmin replied: "Oh king! I want you to gift me your Sheela (character). Prahlada said: "So be it. Your wish is fulfilled. I am gifting away my Sheela to you." The Brahmin left the court. No sooner did the Brahmin leave, and then a charming young man was seen walking away from the royal court. Prahlada questioned him: "Sir! Who are you? The young man replied: "I am fame. I cannot stay with you any longer since Sheela has left you." Prahlada permitted him to leave.

A few seconds later, yet another handsome man was seen walking away from the court. Prahlada asked, "May I know who you are?" The man replied: "I am valor. How can I be with you without Sheela and fame? I am therefore leaving." Prahlada permitted him to leave.

Soon, a charming lady was leaving the court in hurried steps. Prahlada asked her: "Mother, may I know who you are?" "I am Rajalakshmi, the presiding deity of this kingdom." She replied and added: "I can't live here without Sheela, fame and valor. Then a lady was seen moving away with tears in her eyes. Prahlada ran towards her and asked: "Mother, who are you?" She said: "Son! I am Dharma Devatha (righteousness). I don't have a place where there is no Sheela, fame and valor. Even Rajalakshmi has left you."

Prahlada fell at her feet and said: "Mother, I can live without Sheela, fame, valor and Rajyalakshmi but I cannot live without you. How can I send you anywhere? It is the duty of the king to protect Dharma.

Dharma alone is the basis of the entire world. Please stay with me. Do not forsake me."

Dharma Devatha agreed to stay. When Dharma Devatha agreed to stay, all the others also returned to the court and said: "We cannot exist without Dharma Devatha. Let us please be with you."

Lord Indra tested Prahlada only to illustrate to the world the greatness of Prahlada, which was founded only on his practice of Dharma.

49 - Remember Him

The Pandavas during the time of their exile once walked into the forest of Romarishi. Romarishi was a sage whose body was covered with hair and his beard was so long that it spread like a carpet into the entire area of the forest.

There was a sacred tree in that forest yielding a very special type of fruit which, once tasted by a person, would relieve him of hunger and thirst for years and years. But the fruit was not to be plucked, it was to be eaten only when it fell down on its own.

One day Dharmaraja and Draupadi chanced to come near the tree. Draupadi was very much tempted to taste that luscious big fruit hanging from the tree. She said: "Can we not take that fruit? We can all share it." Dharmaraja shot an arrow and the fruit fell on the ground. He went to take the fruit with his hand. It was so heavy that he could not move it. Dharmaraja tried to lift it with all his strength using both his hands but he could not lift it. Draupadi also tried but in vain. In the meantime, Arjuna arrived at that place. He tried to lift the fruit but could not succeed. All the three tried to lift the fruit but it would not move. The two younger brothers came and tried to lift the fruit but they too could not succeed.

Finally came the mighty hero, Bhima. He asked the others to keep away and said: "I will lift it. But even Bhima failed."

Meanwhile the hair of Romarishi, which had spread all over, the area, began to stir because when these six people were trampling about to lift the fruit, the strands of hair were being trodden and pulled. He realised that some one must be trying to steal the fruit. He had become furious. His long hairs started coming together and coiling round the Pandavas to tie them up.

Draupadi realised the danger and immediately prayed to Lord Krishna. Krishna appeared before them. Draupadi fell at his feet and prayed to Him for help. Krishna said: "Sister, I am helpless. Romarishi is a great sage. I reside in his heart. How can I do anything against the wishes of my devotees?" Draupadi once again pleaded: "You alone can save us, you can do anything if you wish to." Krishna said: "I will help you, but all of you should be totally silent whatever may be the situation and do exactly as I tell you." Draupadi and Pandavas promised to obey his orders. Krishna went

towards Romarishi's ashram and instructed them to follow him after sometime.

In the meantime, Romarishi was so much enraged that he had actually started to walk towards the tree to curse the poachers. Just then Krishna entered the ashram. Romarishi fell at the Lotus Feet of the Lord. He was overjoyed to see Him. He said, "How fortunate am I to have you as my guest. Oh Lord! What can I do for you?" Krishna engaged him in discussing certain spiritual matters till the Pandavas arrived.

As soon as the Pandavas along with Draupadi reached the ashram, Krishna hurried towards them and fell at their feet. The Pandavas were feeling embarrassed but remembering the Lord's command, kept quiet. Seeing Krishna fall at the feet of the Pandavas, Romarishi also fell at the feet of those visitors. Then Krishna asked them to come into the ashram. He introduced them to Romarishi. He praised the virtuous Dharmaraja, valiant Arjuna and Bhima and the intelligent Nakula and Sahadeva, and above all, the devout Draupadi. Romarishi by that time totally forgot about the fruit and the poachers. Krishna informed Romarishi that the Pandavas were the people who were tempted to taste the fruit being unaware of the unique nature of the fruit. Romarishi desired to please those who could please the Lord Himself. He said: "Let them take the fruit. I would like them to have it." By eating the fruit the Pandavas were able to live without hunger for a long time.

It is difficult to understand the ways of the Divine. All that we can do is to always remember Him with love and pray with faith for His matchless grace.

50 - A precious gem

A shepherd boy was driving his herd to a nearby wood. On his way, he caught sight of a small shining piece of stone very beautiful in shape too. He picked it up and thought: "How beautiful is this stone, how nice it would be if I tie it round the neck of my little lamb." He managed to tie it around the little lamb's neck. He loved to watch his pet lamb frisking about with the bright stone shining in the sun.

One day as usual he was resting under a big tree, keeping a watchful eye on the lamb grazing along with the flock. Just then, a person, on horseback came to rest under the same tree. He observed the lad often looking again and again at the pet lamb and shining stone too. That man being a dealer in precious gems could at once make out that it was a rare piece of gem. He decided to possess it. He entered into an informal conversation with the boy. The boy being simple-minded told him how he had chanced to find that shining piece of stone. The dealer said: "My dear boy! I shall give you fifty rupees, will you give me that stone?" The boy thought: "Oh, fifty rupees! I can buy many colorful beads and stones like this for my lamb. Why can't I give the stone to this man?" He took fifty rupees and gave away the stone to the man.

The dealer in precious gems at once left that place on his horse. He wanted to examine the gem closely and assess its value. So, he halted at a place and sat under a tree. He took the piece of stone and held it in his palm and thought: "Oh, it is really a fortune! It would sell for one lakh of rupees and I got it only for fifty." Just then the gem split itself into several pieces, which scattered in the dust. The dealer was puzzled, shocked and disappointed. He heard these words from somewhere. "Oh man! You being a dealer in precious gems and knowing its high value, have cheated the boy and got it from him at the price of a glass bead. You are mean and greedy. So you are not worthy of possessing that gem. That simple-minded shepherd boy loved the gem though he did not know its value. He considered it as a good ornament for his dear lamb." The guilty merchant frightened by what he heard got on the horseback and fled away.

Deceit and trickery may bring a fortune, but never true happiness in our life. Only honest dealings ensure a life of self-satisfaction, peace and joy.

51 - What nonsense is this?

One uneducated and simple-minded person joined a military recruiting centre. He was undergoing a few months' training course, which would make him eligible to join the army. Unfortunately, just after completing a week of this training, news reached that there would be a visit of an army officer who would interview the candidates and inspect the type of training being given by the centre.

The person in charge of training these candidates was very much worried about the newly recruited simple-minded man. However, since he happened to be an experienced army officer, he knew well the type of questions that would be put to the new recruits. So, he coached this man thoroughly to answer correctly most plausible questions. He asked him to first of all remember the sequence of the questions. The first question would be 'What is your age?' You are to say "22 years". The second question would be 'How long have you been in this centre?' You are to answer "two years". And the third may be, 'Are you happy in this centre or do you feel homesick?' You have to say "I am at home both here and in my place."

The Cadet learnt these answers by rote. On the day of inspection, he was asked to come to the interview room. The inspecting officer asked him, "How long have you been here"? The cadet just remembering the sequence of the questions said, "22 years". The officer was rather surprised. Then he asked, "What is your age"? The cadet said, "Two years". "What nonsense is this? Are you mad or am I mad", roared the officer. The cadet calmly answered, "Both" as he could only remember just that word because he had by then got scared.

It is dangerous to remember things by rote.

52 - Who is carrying the bag?

Once Iswarachandra Vidya Sagar was proceeding to a neighboring village to deliver an address. People used to gather in large numbers to listen to his lectures. A young officer, who wanted to listen to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's lecture, got down from a train with a bag to go to the Lecture-hall.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar also got down from the same train. The young officer was calling for a porter to carry his bag. Iswar Chandra went to him and said: "Why do you need a coolly to carry this small bag? Can't you carry it yourself and save the money?" He replied: "It is not in keeping with my dignity to carry my bag. I am an educated person." Iswar Chandra told him: "The hallmark of education is humility, not pride. If you cannot carry your own bag, how are you carrying your body? If, however, you cannot carry your own bag, I shall do so." And Iswar Chandra carried the officer's bag. He acted on the motto: "Plain living and high thinking." The young man wanted to offer money to his 'porter'. Iswar Chandra told him: "To serve you is my reward".

The young officer left and was later proceeding to the venue of the meeting. There people were offering garlands to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar to welcome him to the meeting. The young officer realised that the man who had offered to carry his bag at the station was none other than the respected speaker of the evening, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. He felt ashamed that he had made such a great man carry his bag. He reflected: "What is his education and what is mine? I am like a glow worm before the Sun."

Source: Chinna Katha

With Pranams at the Lotus Feet of Divine Lord Sai
Sai brother, M. Palaniswamy

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