

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Lord Kṛṣṇa's Explanation of the Vedic Path

There are persons who are unfit for all three of the forms of yoga — karma, jñāna and bhakti. They are inimical to Lord Kṛṣṇa, attached to sense gratification, and are dominated by fruitive activities aimed at fulfillment of material desires. This chapter describes their faults in terms of place, time, substance and beneficiary of actions.

For those who are perfect in knowledge and devotion to the Lord, there are no materially good qualities or faults. But for a candidate endeavoring on the platform of karma to achieve cessation of material life, execution of regular and special fruitive duties is good and the failure to execute such is evil. That which counteracts sinful reaction is also good for him.

For one on the platform of knowledge in the pure mode of goodness and for one on the platform of devotion, the proper actions are, respectively, cultivation of knowledge and practice of devotional service consisting of hearing, chanting and so forth. For both, everything detrimental to their proper actions is bad. But for persons who are not candidates for transcendental advancement or who are not perfected souls, namely those who are completely inimical to spiritual life and are devoted exclusively to fruitive work for fulfillment of lusty desires, there are numerous considerations of purity and impurity and auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. These are to be made in terms of one's body, the place of activity, the time, the objects utilized, the performer, the mantras chanted and the particular activity.

In actuality, virtue and fault are not absolute but are relative to one's particular platform of advancement. Remaining fixed in the type of discrimination suitable to one's level of advancement is good, and anything else is bad. This is the basic understanding of virtue and fault. Even among objects belonging to the same category, there are different considerations of their purity or impurity in relation to performance of religious duties, worldly transactions, and the maintenance of one's life. These distinctions are described in various scriptures.

The doctrine of varṇāśrama codifies precepts of bodily purity and impurity. With respect to place, purity and impurity are distinguished by such facts

as the presence of black deer. In connection with time, there are distinctions of purity and impurity either in terms of the time itself or in terms of its specific relation with various objects. In connection with physical substances, distinctions of purity and impurity are made in terms of sanctification of objects and words and by such activities as bathing, giving charity, performing austere penances and remembering the Supreme Lord. There are also distinctions of the purity and impurity of the performers of actions. When one's knowledge of mantras is received from the lips of the bona fide spiritual master, one's mantra is considered pure, and one's work is purified by offering it unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead. If the six factors of place, time and so forth are purified, then there is dharma, or virtue, but otherwise there is adharma, or fault.

Ultimately, there is no substantial basis in distinctions of virtue and fault, because they transform according to place, time, beneficiary and so on. In regard to the execution of prescribed duties for sense gratification, the actual intent of all the scriptures is the subduing of materialistic propensities; such is the actual principle of religion that destroys sorrow, confusion and fear and bestows all good fortune. Work performed for sense gratification is not actually beneficial. The descriptions of such fruitive benefits offered in various phala-śrūti are actually meant to help one gradually cultivate a taste for the highest benefit. But persons of inferior intelligence take the flowery benedictory verses of the scriptures to be the actual purport of the Vedas; this opinion, however, is never held by those in factual knowledge of the truth of the Vedas. Persons whose minds are agitated by the flowery words of the Vedas have no attraction for hearing topics about Lord Hari. It should be understood that there is no inner purport to the Vedas apart from the original Personality of Godhead. The Vedas focus exclusively upon the Supreme Absolute Truth, the Personality of Godhead. Because this material world is simply the illusory energy of the Supreme Lord, it is by refuting material existence that one gains disassociation from matter.

Text 1:

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: Those who give up these methods for achieving Me, which consist of devotional service, analytic philosophy and regulated execution of prescribed duties, and instead, being moved by the material senses, cultivate insignificant sense gratification, certainly undergo the continual cycle of material existence.

Text 2:

Steadiness in one's own position is declared to be actual piety, whereas deviation from one's position is considered impiety. In this way the two are definitely ascertained.

Text 3:

O sinless Uddhava, in order to understand what is proper in life one must evaluate a given object within its particular category. Thus, in analyzing religious principles one must consider purity and impurity. Similarly, in one's ordinary dealings one must distinguish between good and bad, and to insure one's physical survival one must recognize that which is auspicious and inauspicious.

Text 4:

I have revealed this way of life for those bearing the burden of mundane religious principles.

Text 5:

Earth, water, fire, air and ether are the five basic elements that constitute the bodies of all conditioned souls, from Lord Brahmā himself down to the nonmoving creatures. These elements all emanate from the one Personality of Godhead.

Text 6:

My dear Uddhava, although all material bodies are composed of the same five elements and are thus equal, the Vedic literatures conceive of different names and forms in relation to such bodies so that the living entities may achieve their goal of life.

Text 7:

O saintly Uddhava, in order to restrict materialistic activities, I have established that which is proper and improper among all material things, including time, space and all physical objects.

Text 8:

Among places, those bereft of the spotted antelope, those devoid of devotion to the brāhmaṇas, those possessing spotted antelopes but bereft of respectable men, provinces like Kīkaṭa and places where cleanliness and

purificatory rites are neglected, where meat-eaters are prominent or where the earth is barren, are all considered to be contaminated lands.

Text 9:

A specific time is considered pure when it is appropriate, either by its own nature or through achievement of suitable paraphernalia, for the performance of one's prescribed duty. That time which impedes the performance of one's duty is considered impure.

Text 10:

An object's purity or impurity is established by application of another object, by words, by rituals, by the effects of time or according to relative magnitude.

Text 11:

Impure things may or may not impose sinful reactions upon a person, depending on that person's strength or weakness, intelligence, wealth, location and physical condition.

Text 12:

Various objects such as grains, wooden utensils, things made of bone, thread, liquids, objects derived from fire, skins and earthy objects are all purified by time, by the wind, by fire, by earth and by water, either separately or in combination.

Text 13:

A particular purifying agent is considered appropriate when its application removes the bad odor or dirty covering of some contaminated object and makes it resume its original nature.

Text 14:

The self can be cleansed by bathing, charity, austerity, age, personal strength, purificatory rituals, prescribed duties and, above all, by remembrance of Me. The brāhmaṇa and other twice-born men should be duly purified before performing their specific activities.

Text 15:

A mantra is purified when chanted with proper knowledge, and one's work is purified when offered to Me. Thus by purification of the place,

time, substance, doer, mantras and work, one becomes religious, and by negligence of these six items one is considered irreligious.

Text 16:

Sometimes piety becomes sin, and sometimes what is ordinarily sin becomes piety on the strength of Vedic injunctions. Such special rules in effect eradicate the clear distinction between piety and sin.

Text 17:

The same activities that would degrade an elevated person do not cause falldown for those who are already fallen. Indeed, one who is lying on the ground cannot possibly fall further. The material association that is dictated by one's own nature is considered a good quality.

Text 18:

By refraining from a particular sinful or materialistic activity, one becomes freed from its bondage. Such renunciation is the basis of religious and auspicious life for human beings and drives away all suffering, illusion and fear.

Text 19:

One who accepts material sense objects as desirable certainly becomes attached to them. From such attachment lust arises, and this lust creates quarrel among men.

Text 20:

From quarrel arises intolerable anger, followed by the darkness of ignorance. This ignorance quickly overtakes a man's broad intelligence.

Text 21:

O saintly Uddhava, a person bereft of real intelligence is considered to have lost everything. Deviated from the actual purpose of his life, he becomes dull, just like a dead person.

Text 22:

Because of absorption in sense gratification, one cannot recognize himself or others. Living uselessly in ignorance like a tree, one is merely breathing just like a bellows.

Text 23:

Those statements of scripture promising fruitive rewards do not prescribe the ultimate good for men but are merely enticements for executing beneficial religious duties, like promises of candy spoken to induce a child to take beneficial medicine.

Text 24:

Simply by material birth, human beings become attached within their minds to personal sense gratification, long duration of life, sense activities, bodily strength, sexual potency and friends and family. Their minds are thus absorbed in that which defeats their actual self-interest.

Text 25:

Those ignorant of their real self-interest are wandering on the path of material existence, gradually heading toward darkness. Why would the Vedas further encourage them in sense gratification if they, although foolish, submissively pay heed to Vedic injunctions?

Text 26:

Persons with perverted intelligence do not understand this actual purpose of Vedic knowledge and instead propagate as the highest Vedic truth the flowery statements of the Vedas that promise material rewards. Those in actual knowledge of the Vedas never speak in that way.

Text 27:

Those who are full of lust, avarice and greed mistake mere flowers to be the actual fruit of life. Bewildered by the glare of fire and suffocated by its smoke, they cannot recognize their own true identity.

Text 28:

My dear Uddhava, persons dedicated to sense gratification obtained through honoring the Vedic rituals cannot understand that I am situated in everyone's heart and that the entire universe is nondifferent from Me and emanates from Me. Indeed, they are just like persons whose eyes are covered by fog.

Texts 29-30:

Those who are sworn to sense gratification cannot understand the confidential conclusion of Vedic knowledge as explained by Me. Taking

pleasure in violence, they cruelly slaughter innocent animals in sacrifice for their own sense gratification and thus worship demigods, forefathers and leaders among ghostly creatures. Such passion for violence, however, is never encouraged within the process of Vedic sacrifice.

Text 31:

Just as a foolish businessman gives up his real wealth in useless business speculation, foolish persons give up all that is actually valuable in life and instead pursue promotion to material heaven, which although pleasing to hear about is actually unreal, like a dream. Such bewildered persons imagine within their hearts that they will achieve all material blessings.

Text 32:

Those established in material passion, goodness and ignorance worship the particular demigods and other deities, headed by Indra, who manifest the same modes of passion, goodness or ignorance. They fail, however, to properly worship Me.

Texts 33-34:

The worshipers of demigods think, “We shall worship the demigods in this life, and by our sacrifices we shall go to heaven and enjoy there. When that enjoyment is finished we shall return to this world and take birth as great householders in aristocratic families.” Being excessively proud and greedy, such persons are bewildered by the flowery words of the Vedas. They are not attracted to topics about Me, the Supreme Lord.

Text 35:

The Vedas, divided into three divisions, ultimately reveal the living entity as pure spirit soul. The Vedic seers and mantras, however, deal in esoteric terms, and I also am pleased by such confidential descriptions.

Text 36:

The transcendental sound of the Vedas is very difficult to comprehend and manifests on different levels within the prāṇa, senses and mind. This Vedic sound is unlimited, very deep and unfathomable, just like the ocean.

Text 37:

As the unlimited, unchanging and omnipotent Personality of Godhead dwelling within all living beings, I personally establish the Vedic sound vibration in the form of om̐kāra within all living entities. It is thus perceived subtly, just like a single strand of fiber on a lotus stalk.

Texts 38-40:

Just as a spider brings forth from its heart its web and emits it through its mouth, the Supreme Personality of Godhead manifests Himself as the reverberating primeval vital air, comprising all sacred Vedic meters and full of transcendental pleasure. Thus the Lord, from the ethereal sky of His heart, creates the great and limitless Vedic sound by the agency of His mind, which conceives of variegated sounds such as the sparśas. The Vedic sound branches out in thousands of directions, adorned with the different letters expanded from the syllable om: the consonants, vowels, sibilants and semivowels. The Veda is then elaborated by many verbal varieties, expressed in different meters, each having four more syllables than the previous one. Ultimately the Lord again withdraws His manifestation of Vedic sound within Himself.

Text 41:

The Vedic meters are Gāyatrī, Uṣṇik, Anuṣṭup, Bṛhatī, Pañkti, Triṣṭup, Jagatī, Aticchanda, Atyaṣṭi, Atijagatī and Ativirāṭ.

Text 42:

In the entire world no one but Me actually understands the confidential purpose of Vedic knowledge. Thus people do not know what the Vedas are actually prescribing in the ritualistic injunctions of karma-kāṇḍa, or what object is actually being indicated in the formulas of worship found in the upāsanā-kāṇḍa, or that which is elaborately discussed through various hypotheses in the jñāna-kāṇḍa section of the Vedas.

Text 43:

I am the ritualistic sacrifice enjoined by the Vedas, and I am the worshipable Deity. It is I who am presented as various philosophical hypotheses, and it is I alone who am then refuted by philosophical analysis. The transcendental sound vibration thus establishes Me as the essential meaning of all Vedic knowledge. The Vedas, elaborately analyzing all material duality as nothing but My illusory potency,

ultimately completely negate this duality and achieve their own satisfaction.