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Acharya Prashant | Updated: Sunday, February 09, 2020, 08:00 PM IST



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*"Lord, if you are sandalwood, I am water;
with the fragrance in all parts of my body.
Lord, if you are a cloud, I am a peacock;
looking for you like the Chakor bird for the moon.*

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*Lord, if you are a lamp, I am the wick;
with the light burning day and night.
Lord, if you are a pearl, I am the thread;
together like gold and suhaga.
Lord, you are the master and I servant;
thus is the devotion of Ravidas."*

"The company I keep is wretched and low,

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and I am anxious day and night;

my actions are crooked,

and I am of lowly birth"

~ **Saint Ravidas**

Isn't it strange? Saints and Gurus have, on the one hand, called themselves as inseparable from the Lord, the Truth. On the other hand, they have called themselves as reckless, stupid, impetuous, unfortunate and lowly. Obviously their lives are so pure and serene that there is no one as fortunate, supreme and enlightened like them, yet they often refer to themselves in a totally opposite way. Why?

Well, they are saints, that is why. They know that man exists at two levels: on one hand man is the venerable urge to merge in the Ultimate, on the other hand man is the completely conditioned system of bodily tendencies. The saints clearly see the mechanism of the body and mind, and they honestly accept that at the level of the body, all are lowly.

When Saint Ravidas says that he is crooked and of lowly birth, he isn't really referring to his caste. Saints are above all class and caste distinctions. They do not take the born body as their Truth. So, in calling birth as lowly, he is referring to the bodily condition of the entire mankind. He is saying that only those who clearly see the tendency of the body to stick to its old rut will be able to get away from the rut. The one who takes great pride in his self and knowledge, and is full of erudition, won't be able to walk towards the Truth. The one with humility, the one who is ready to sit at the lowermost level, the one who is ready to stand the last in the line, can get there.

Humility is the hallmark of sainthood. It comes with the honesty to accept one's flaws. However, the common man is very afraid to accept his flaws. It is such an inverted and amusing situation. The common man likes to portray that he is quite surrendered, respectful, devotee, compliant towards Truth. Instead, the fact is that he is in utter opposition of Truth. His life is the proof of his immense opposition – the daily life built around limitations, fear, greed and compulsions. The one who is actually opposing the Truth will loudly proclaim, to others as well as himself, that he is a big devotee, utterly surrendered. On the contrary, the one who is actually surrendered would clearly see that there are big forces sitting inside him, in the form of his own physical system, committed against the Truth. Each and every drop of blood, every small and big wave of thought is a movement against the Truth. So, he will remain grounded, fully conscious of his vulnerabilities and fallibilities.

Look at the physical organism. See how we ordinarily believe in the monism of bodily materiality: Blood is saying, flesh is saying, mind is saying, "I am! Only I am. There is no Truth other than I!" And thoughts are saying, feelings are saying, "We are! There is not Truth other than us!"

Only a saint can see that an organism is born, and the organism is fully convinced of only his truthfulness. For the organism, the truth is its being, its body, its world. And if this is what is truth for the organism then why is there a need for any other Truth?

So, the saint speaks both ways – and these ways may appear mutually contradictory, but they are not. The saint will be very eager and loving in expressing his oneness with the Ultimate, the Beloved. At the same time, the saint will be truthful in expressing the

the ultimate, the beloved. At the same time, the saint will be ruthless in accepting the littleness inherent in the bodily tendencies. It would be a befitting tribute to Saint Ravidas if we could understand that affirmation of the Truth will always come along with a negation of the false. Truth is light, and the function of light is to expose the reality of the stuff it falls on. There is no divine aspiration or spiritual progress possible without an honest acknowledgement of the falseness and the limitations one is trapped in. Those who like to aver that they are already alright will be able to make no progress in the spiritual realm. Deep inner advancement is only for those who acknowledge their discontentment with the way man is born, lives and dies.

(The author is a spiritual teacher and author, IIT-IIM alumnus and ex-civil servant)

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