

PLANTS, ANIMALS AND HUMAN BEINGS

The philosophers of the past used to say that human beings are rational animals. They used to believe that the only difference between humans and animals was that the former were endowed with rationality and that latter were not. While it is true that humans are rational beings, it is not true that animals are completely devoid of rationality. You must have noticed that domesticated dogs certainly have some sort of rationality, and that they are guided by more than just natural instinct. By coming in close contact with human beings, a dog learns a lot. It learns what to do, when to do and how to do. This is a kind of rationality. Hence, it is not proper to say that humans are rational animals. In doing so one does not do justice to human beings. Yet, the philosophers of the past argued along these lines.

Here a question crops up -- what is the difference between animals and plants? Primarily, plants are stationary, whereas animals are mobile. With the gradual evolution of the minds of plants, a time comes, a stage comes, when plants reach their highest point of evolution. But for animals, this is the lowest point. There are some well-known plants that catch their prey and kill it. They extend their branches and sub-branches, grab hold of their nearby prey, then eat it. To a great extent, these plants behave like animals. In some other plants, floral nectar is produced in the flowers. It attracts hundreds of insects, which hover around the centre of the flower and suck up the sweet honey. The flowers of some such plants gradually close around the unsuspecting insects and devour them. This kind of plant cannot ordinarily be put into the category of plants, because such behaviour resembles that of animals. Such plants are not mobile -- this is the only difference. However, there are some aquatic weeds, grasses and creepers which are also able to move. They go drifting from one place to another in lakes, rivers and the sea, stopping wherever they can to get the maximum food. Hence, it is more accurate to call these plants mobile rather than immobile.

There is a water plant called the water hyacinth which is like this. You probably know that the water hyacinth first sprouts in water, has large leaves like spinach leaves, and is spread throughout India. It can certainly be called mobile. Some eighty years ago the Commissioner of Dhaka, Mr. Lee, visited South America. There

he noticed some blue flowers in a big pond. Mrs. Lee liked these flowers very much, so she brought some back and planted them around the official residence in Dhaka. From there they spread all over India.

As plant life progresses on the path of evolution, it reaches a terminal point, and there animal life commences. Animal life also reaches a similar terminal point, and there human life begins. Until now, even with much research, the culminating point of animal evolution and the starting point of human evolution has not been discovered. Through more research, one day human beings will certainly discover this missing link. When this unknown link is discovered, enormous changes will occur in the field of genetics, and revolutionary changes will take place in the world of medicine.

There is also a great deal of difference between human beings and animals. That is, human beings are inquisitive by nature, and they want to learn and understand everything. This is a fact. While explaining the difference between plants and animals, I do not think that we would say that an animal is a moving plant. No, we would not say this. Likewise, we should not say that human beings are rational animals. Human beings are human beings. Why should we hurt human sentiments by calling human beings rational animals? One who is born a human being today, even a person who has engaged in sinful acts, will become a great person in the future if they follow disciplined habits, so why should we call human beings rational animals? Hence, the opinion of the philosophers of the past cannot be accepted because it is illogical. Moreover, rationality is not the only speciality of human beings.

There are some special common attributes of plants, animals and human beings. Inactivity, rest, the need for security, reproduction and death are common characteristics of plants, animals and human beings. The physical bodies of all three are also dependent on food and water. These are characteristics of all living beings. Wherever there is life, these characteristics will exist.

Besides this, plants have some additional attributes. For example, only plants can gather vitality from inside the earth. Neither human beings nor animals can do this. Plants can even gather food from the atmosphere and give some food to it. (Human beings can also do this, but not as much.) Because plants perform this kind of

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work, we can say that they have their own speciality called "plant dharma." Dharma means innate characteristic. This is the speciality of plants. There is also another attribute of the plants -- they drink with their 'feet'.

Likewise, animals also have some special characteristics. On the basis of these characteristics, different categories of animals exist and have been made. For example, some animals are carnivorous and others are graminivorous. Carnivorous animals eat meat, fish and eggs. According to the laws of nature, canine teeth are necessary for chewing meat properly. Carnivorous animals such as cats, dogs, tigers and lions possess canine teeth, but cows, monkeys, elephants, wild asses, etc do not possess canine teeth. Nature does not want them to eat meat.

But what do greedy human beings do? Even though they do not possess canine teeth, they cook or boil meat so that they can eat it. This is done out of greed. According to the laws of nature, human beings are not carnivorous *. So, if they eat meat they will catch numerous diseases. Vegetarians generally suffer from fewer diseases than non-vegetarians because they are more habituated to following natural laws. You must have noticed that those who violate the laws of nature and become non-vegetarian, even though they do not possess canine teeth, have peculiar eating habits. Sometimes it even seems as if non-vegetarians eat like dogs. Non-vegetarians have trouble chewing meat properly because of the absence of canine teeth.

* No human being can eat raw meat. Raw meat can only be eaten with canine teeth.

There are also other categories of animals. For instance, some animals are gregarious and others are not. The tiger is not a gregarious animal -- it prefers to move alone. Goats are not gregarious, but sheep, elephants and lambs are. Human beings are social beings. They do not like to remain in isolation.

Besides this, animals are also guided by natural instincts. I once told you about an animal called the octopus which lives under the sea. It has eight legs, therefore it is called an "octopus." In Latin "octo" means eight. Crabs are one of its favourite foods. In Sanskrit a crab is known as "karkat'a" and in Latin "cancer." The pain caused by the bite of a crab and experienced in the disease known as

cancer are very similar, therefore the disease cancer was named after the Latin word for crab. As the octopus lives beneath the sea, it is able to see other creatures near the surface. When it catches sight of a crab, it rises up from the depths and devours it. The octopus does not understand that a creature like the crab, with eight or ten legs, may enjoy playing in the sea. It only knows that crabs are delicious food. If you make some crabs unconscious and take them to the bottom of the sea so that an octopus will see them, the octopus will not be able to tell whether the crabs are edible or not because they are immobile. Hence, the octopus will not attack or eat them. These are the expressions of natural instinct.

Human beings remain under the control of natural instincts until their nature is properly developed. In infancy and childhood, human beings do everything out of natural instinct. For example, when children get hungry they start crying so that their mothers will understand that they want something to eat and drink. They suck the breasts of their mothers to get milk due to natural instinct. There is no need to teach children this.

The evolution of human beings began with the ape and then the proto-ape. Next came Australopithecine and its branches and sub-branches, followed by proto-human. One branch of proto-human was the ancestor of human beings, and another branch was the ancestor of chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans, etc. The latter group of animals do not have prominent tails. A foetus in the early stage of pregnancy from an animal in this group will have a tail, but later the tail becomes shorter rather than longer. In the hoary past, there was some resemblance amongst primitive human beings, chimpanzees and orangutans. The former group developed intellectually, but the latter group did not. Hence, the former group evolved into human beings, while the latter group remained at the animal stage.

Natural instincts did not vanish with the advent of human beings. Have you seen monkeys quarrel? They chatter and show their teeth. Human beings also behave like this when they quarrel in anger. However, monkeys are entirely dominated by instinct -- they have not lost any of their natural instincts. How did primitive apes behave? They used to live in trees. Apes used to grasp the branches of a tree, just as monkeys still do. This natural instinct is also evident in human beings when infants keep their hands closed. If monkeys

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are afraid or quarrel with other monkeys, they catch hold of a branch very tightly so that they will not fall. When human beings are gripped with fear or ready to fight against an enemy, they also clench their fists very tightly. These are examples of natural instincts.

In the course of time, instincts were less influential in human beings than in animals, so human beings evolved into a separate species. Human beings are not animals but living rational beings. In the Persian language the suffix 'dar' is used to indicate possession. One is called jandar or living in the sense that one possesses life. If 'jan' is used in the same sense and 'war' is added, it becomes janwar or animal. Janwar and jandar are not the same. The speciality of human beings is that they are endowed with rationality, which is part of human dharma (manav dharma in Sanskrit).

Plants follow plant dharma (innate characteristic) and animals follow animal dharma (innate characteristic). Thus, plants and animals follow their own particular dharma, and there is nothing wrong in this. Tigers may attack and kill human beings, but this is not their fault. However, if human beings consume beef, then they are following animal dharma. Human beings have to follow their own dharma. The speciality of human beings is rationality, and because of this rationality there are four aspects of human dharma. Human beings move ahead through these four aspects. And those who progress through these four aspects can be described as following the path of human dharma. Thus, there are three dharmas (innate characteristics) -- plant dharma, animal dharma and human dharma.

Another name for human dharma is Bhagavat Dharma. Bhagavat Dharma contains no divisions like the division between Hindus and Muslims. This dharma is for all human beings. It makes no distinctions based on isms -- it is for the entire humanity. That is why we raise the slogans, "Manava, manava eka hai" (All humans are one) and, "Manava dharma eka hai" (The dharma of humans is one.) This dharma alone is the Eternal Dharma.

Bhagavat Dharma has four aspects -- vista'ra or expansion, rasa or flow, seva' or service and tadstithi or attainment of the supreme stance.

Firstly, the fundamental aim of Bhagavat Dharma is vista'ra -- that is, psychic expansion. Now in

order for human beings to expand their minds, they have to realise that they are one with the supernatural cosmic flow.

So secondly, they have to move ahead remaining connected with the cosmic flow -- merging their pleasure and pain, hopes and aspirations with the cosmic rhythm. So human beings have to move ahead, move forward, keeping pace with the cosmic flow. This alone is known as ra'sa or the ra'sa liila or the cosmic dance of the Cosmic Consciousness. Taking part in this cosmic flow or dance, human beings have to move ahead towards their goal. An indivisible cosmic rhythm which started from beginningless time marches ahead to infinity. No creature can remain away from this internal and eternal divine flow.

The third aspect is seva' or service. In the life of animals, there is no scope for service. There is only scope for mutual transaction, or what we call commodity transaction. "Pay money and take the goods" This is the policy in such cases.

Perhaps you know the story of the crocodile. The crocodile is a carnivorous creature. Although it likes to stay in water, it is not an aquatic animal. It enters the water to catch its prey, and after devouring its prey it returns to the bank and lies quietly with its mouth open. Small birds often come and eat the pieces of meat stuck between the teeth of the crocodile. What is the result? The birds get their food and the teeth of the crocodile are cleaned. At that time the crocodile does not close its mouth, or else the birds would be killed. This is a commercial transaction.

Human beings alone have the speciality of service. At the time of doing service, the motive must be that I shall give but not take. Service is one-sided. When human beings donate something, they do not expect anything in return. For example, if you give something to a beggar, you do not expect anything in return. Furthermore, once you have donated something, you forget about it. This is the speciality of human beings. However, some people make donations for other reasons. For instance, suppose a man donates a hundred thousand rupees to a charity. At night he will not be able to sleep because he is continuously thinking that in the morning he will get up and read in the newspaper that he, Chatumal Dakuram Batpari, donated a large amount of money for the public welfare. You should not behave like this. Once you donate

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something, you should forget about it immediately. A donation is one-way.

If you offer your mental flowers to the Cosmic Consciousness, and at the same time you say mentally, "my son has just appeared in his exams, so you must see that he passes very well. Also, my daughter must get a good husband and a good house. And I should be victorious in the court case against my cousin, etc." -- this will not do. You have to offer yourself without expecting anything in return. If you offer yourself completely at that time, you will attain the highest benefit. You will become one with the Cosmic Consciousness, you will become realized. But if you keep one cent out of a dollar, you cannot get oneness with the Infinite Consciousness because of that one cent. Hence if you want to offer yourself, offer yourself cent per cent. This alone is known as service.

The fourth aspect of human dharma is tadsthiti - attainment of the supreme stance. In the long run, human beings have to become one with Cosmic Consciousness. This is not the case with animals. Hence in the Gita it is said:

"O human beings -- bear in mind that you have attained a human frame, a human mind. Hence, you have to follow human dharma. Be firmly established in it. Even if you meet death while following this dharma, even then it is well and good. But never follow para dharma (plant or animal dharma). That is very dangerous; very, very horrible. This para dharma is the dharma of plants and animals. Humans must not follow this kind of dharma."

In the Gita, Shrii Krsna said something more. He said that if human dharma causes pain and torture, and if para dharma (plant or animal dharma) is easily performed and results in a bed of roses being spread out before you, even then it is preferable to follow human dharma. Human beings should strictly avoid para dharma under all circumstances.

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Shrii Shrii Anandamurti
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