

ATMA MATHANA, A PROCESS OF ARRIVING AT INSIGHT

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Today afternoon there was a letter from our workshop participant sharing his struggles during and after the workshop. He shared the sleepless nights that he had spent during the workshop and thought over the differences that had emerged in the value-profile instrument. Sometimes, his inner voice had grudgingly agreed the truths while he was throwing up enough defences to justify...there was that struggle...The difficulty...also the joy when a ray of hope about being better person emerges, a feeling of infusion of energy to do lot more things in life... I just read the letter and let my hands take over to send a mail to him and I was stunned at what had emerged. Given the space and freedom my thoughts had knitted together a mythology story I had heard several times in my life from the toddler days to what happens when this struggle to find the truth is on. I am referring to the process of Samudra-Mathana, which comes in the story of the 10 avatars of Lord Maha Vishnu. The 2nd avatara is Kurma Avatara where MahaVishnu assumes the form of a Turtle to save the Good from the Evil.

The story goes like this...The devas feel they are loosing their strength and number since the Asuras are always physically powerful than them. The Asuras seemed to be endowed with more the physical strength while the Devas are good at thinking and analysing ability. But, over a period of time though being on the Good side the Devas felt they were on the looser end and the only solution was to go to the facilitator to solve this problem who was none other than MahaVishnu. The facilitator understanding the problem directed them to undergo an exercise of churning the milky ocean. From this activity is going to emerge the amrut, the nectar which when consumed would give immortality to the Devas. The idea seemed fine but it needed people with good strength to do it and for that the help of Asuras was needed too.

There are two parts in each of us. The Devas, The constructive side and the Asuras' the destructive side. When there has just the activities going on and the environmental pressures have been building up, the good and the just feels more and more weak, and the other side takes over in order to survive in the short run. Yes, there comes a point of time in one's life that many things do not seem to be going as what one intended. Many a time, all the niceties that the one had seem to be becoming oblivious and dormant in this rat race, to live and to survive. Then the real success becomes questionable. At this time, similar to the Samudramathana, an Atma Mathana (Soul searching) is required. This can be done just not by exploring the constructive/positive parts but also the destructive parts. Both need to be parties of the Atma Mathana. What emerges in this endeavour is the 'satya', the truth that alone is the nectar of immortality to sustain the constructive qualities of one.

Having agreed, the Devas go and request the Asuras to be a party to this churning of the ocean and two objects are chosen to do this job. The big Mandara Mountain is brought to the middle of the ocean using the help of Mahavishnu and Vasuki, the serpent is used as chord to churn the mountain.

The self needs to be as strong as the huge mountain. It also means we need to have the perseverance and the strong determination to stand unshaken by what emerges in the process. This churning is done using two important values of Sensitivity and Openness, which is depicted by the snake in the story. The snake being an animal without external ears, feeling the world through its entire body, depicts extreme sensitivity. It is open since the minute it feels its skin has grown thick, it sheds it's very covering to become sensitive again. Therefore, the chord that we have to use to churn ourselves has be sensitivity and openness, which will make the self move from one side to the other and back. The churning is nothing but examining the truth objectively on both the sides of oneself - the deva and the asura with equal emphasis on both.

When the process on....

Well, when the devas and Asuras churn the mountain, they do it with so much of a vigour that the mountain collapses and gets drowned since it has no base to hold it. Then Maha Vishnu comes in the form of Turtle to hold the mountain in place for the churning.

We can get overwhelmed by the force of thoughts and feelings that we just drown into incidents in life unable to stand upright and examine it objectively. So, a base is essential. The facilitator is very important. The facilitator could be varied, from a trusted group, a session which gives us the space to share and think, a Guru, a



close companion, a friend, philosopher and guide, or the most powerful, THE CONSCIENCE, an awakened alive conscience.... But yes, this facilitator has to take a 'form' ... a 'turtle form' i.e. a turtle has a hard shell, but is soft inside. It does not put its head out unnecessarily and just lies there supporting the mountain. Which means, the facilitator has his soft side, but it gets covered by the harder shell, empathy is needed, not sympathy. The

facilitator listens more than giving judgements; directs the churning but does not churn; is a point of reference but is not the solution; provides space and strength to the mountain to churn the ocean.

As the churning goes on, there are various things that emerge and goes, there are stages, when, lot of treasures, white elephants, and yakshas, emerge and vanish into the sky.

Yes, there have been a number of achievements, laurels, generous giving that emerges from our lives that we have done. Feels good.

At the same time, the Vasuki, who has been used as the chord starts to emanate poison from his mouth and this has tremendous amount of ill-effects on both the devas and the Asuras. They start losing their vision, hearing capabilities, feel suffocated, get into an anxiety, and feel near death. Not knowing what to do, they again beseech Mahavishnu who directs them to pray to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva comes and collects all the poison and puts it into his mouth. Before he could swallow it, his consort Goddess Parvathi stops him by holding his neck. The poison remains in his throat giving him the name Neelakanta / Vishakanta.

When the self does the churning, the sensitivity and openness will bring out a lot of misgivings. The heart will overflow with emotions and bitterness may come forth. But the one should not let all these blind oneself, getting overwhelmed by the emotions. Succumbing to emotions would mean a sure death of the self and then there would be no process. Therefore the facilitator has an important role to play. To understand the difficulties and clearly separate the poison, the emotional turmoil and retain the objectivity. This will have to be done by keeping the emotions just at the throat level but not swallow it; i.e. let it go to the heart. This will hamper the search of truth and the process will be stopped midway, merely leaving a lot of bitterness. The defence, the fights, the condemning is all the poison that sensitivity pours out when it is rubbed hard.

Then, after a lot of churning, finally the amrut emerges in a golden kalasha (pot) brought by the angel. Immediately, the amrut is so exciting for both the devas and Asuras that they forget about everything and leaving the Vasuki they run towards the angel. Each of them wants to have it first and so each is grabbing at the pot. The pot reaches the asura's hands first, they being more powerful and devas are left in the lurch wondering what to do. Then they seek Maha Vishnu's help. He understanding the weakness of the Asuras, assumes the form of a beautiful lady (Mohini) appears near them. She offers to solve their problem. Lured by the grace and beauty of Mohini, the Asuras agree willingly and give the pot to her to distribute. She makes the Asuras and Devas to stand in two rows by starting the distribution of the amrut first to devas ensures that all amrut is empty by the time the last of the deva is served, leaving the Asuras powerless.

When the churning reaches the peak, many truths emerge leading to the **Insight, the ultimate Truth.** But still the destructive values are so powerful that they want to grab the truth and give its perspective. The well-practised and seemingly secure and safe path is very difficult to be rejected and for a part of self to admit it's been wrong all through. Many a time in the excitement and fear the Sensitivity and Openness used to churn the truth is left behind. By letting it do so, the constructive side faces a permanent death. But to escape this danger, one will have to work on stronger beliefs, a more attractive one, which will ensure life and immortality to the constructive/ positive side permanently, and let the negative side die. Many a time understanding and accepting the destructive side as true itself paves the way for the positive side to remain alive and strong.

In all this, the Insight, the nectar of immortality is the one, which gives further strength to let the self grow and emerge stronger and powerful.