THE GREATEST CONQUEST

It is an inescapable law of earthly existence that all creatures are subject to growth, decay and death. From birth to death, it is just a one-way journey and there is no way of reversing it. No wonder why Time is considered to be the devourer of the world, Kalo jagadbhaksakah. In fact Yama, the Lord of Death, is also called Kalah.

Is there anything that is an exception to this law or that defines the ravages of time and remains unaffected? Raja Bhartrihari says there is indeed one, and that is “desire” in the human heart, which not only does not attenuate with time, but remains ever fresh, even when the ageing body is afflicted by infirmities. In a verse in Vairagyasatakam, Bhartihari says:

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\text{Valibhirmukhamakrantam palitenankitam sirah}
\]
\[
\text{Gatrani sithilayante trshnaika tarunayate.}
\]

The face is all wrinkled, grey hair covers the head, limbs have grown weak, but desire alone grows even younger.

Indeed, desire springs eternally in the human breast. Sadly, this is mankind’s greatest misfortune, because as the sages have declared from very ancient times, desire is the root of all life’s problems and miseries. Desire is the first among the six internal enemies that man has to deal with and is the most formidable of them all. If only one can conquer this enemy, life is bound to be one of unbroken felicity. “Overcome this difficult-to-conquer enemy of yours lurking in your heart in the form of desire”. This was Sri Krishna’s advice to Arjuna (The Gita, 3.43).

Desire, whether it be for wealth, satisfaction of the senses, for name and fame, is nothing but the expression of the ego. Elimination of desire is possible only when the ego is totally dissolved in one’s true Self, which is all-pervading and eternal. Once that state of identity with the eternal Self is reached, even the most desirable and alluring of all things fails to hold any attraction. Acharya Shankara, in his Upadesa Sahasri says:

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\text{Iśvaratvena kim tasya brahmendra tvena va punah}
\]
\[
\text{Trśna cet sarvatachintamanyakā śarvadainyodbhava subha.}
\]

[For the knower of the Self], of what use is Lordship of the world, Indrahood or Brahmahood, if all inauspicious desires, the cause of misery, are entirely up-rooted?

Therefore sublimation of desires in one is the greatest of all conquests.

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