

Part 22

The Dreadful Elephant in The Forest of Saṃsāra

Last time...

We discussed the sixth and seventh of the seven states or planes of wisdom. We also briefly reviewed all seven states or planes of wisdom.

1. Śubhecchā or a noble wish.
2. Vicāraṇā or direct and steady observation of the mind.
3. Tanumānasi or the thinned and weakened mind.
4. Satvāpatti or natural turning away from sense pleasure and dwelling in truth.
5. Asamśakti or natural and total non-attachment or freedom.
6. Padārthābhavanī or natural cessation of objectivity.
7. Turīya or liberated while living.

Today...

We are coming to the end of this series on the important teachings of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. This wonderful scripture expounds very subtle truths with the help of stories which make it easier to grasp. So far, we have only covered the teachings these stories point towards. Today, we will follow one of the very short but important stories as we gradually wrap-up this series.

The Dreadful Elephant in The Forest of Saṃsāra

From the scripture...

There is a dreadful elephant in the forest of saṃsāra, which is terribly destructive. If this elephant has not been conquered, there is no hope of self-knowledge. *The elephant is desire and her form is the wish “May I attain this” or, “May this happen”.*

It roams in the forest known as this body and plays havoc in various ways. Its young ones are the agitated senses, especially the sense of taste. Actions are its tusks. Mental conditioning is its rut. This elephant destroys everyone who is ignorant and conditioned. The entire saṃsāra is the battlefield in which it operates.

It's others names are vāsanā or mental conditioning, saṅkalpa or concepts and mental images, mōhā or attachment, bhāvanā or mental attitude or feeling, and, and the mind itself.

Destroy this deadly elephant with the help of the supreme weapon such as courage, persistence and endurance. As long as this elephant roams in the forest of the body, saṁsāra or world-appearance persists.

Some thoughts...

I picked this very short story among all the many stories in the scripture as having covered the many teachings from them—this one brings it all together. The story of the mad elephant is our story and the madness is the conditioning we harbour though it destroys peace and prevents realization of our true nature. This madness can be let go when we clearly see this to be true and wholeheartedly want peace and serenity now—not tomorrow. If you constantly throw pebbles in a placid pond, you will never see the bottom. Blaming the wind for the ripples you cause is vanity. Now, let us go over some of the poignant lessons briefly.

The only dread which makes up this samsara is desire. Desire has wide connotations and includes all kinds of hoping for or hoping against including its milder forms of preference. 'What I want (*or prefer*) is not happening and what I don't want or don't prefer is happening". Isn't this at the heart of all turmoil? Is wanting and rejecting necessary to live a joyful and productive life? Can we not do our very best in every situation as it unfolds and get satisfaction and happiness from 'doing everything well' rather than 'what comes' or 'what should not come' —as these are mostly not in our control? Let come what comes—you need not run after result. Just do everything wholeheartedly and let go while doing (*I would say that you can only do your very best if you let go while doing wholeheartedly too*) and when it's done.

Desire in all its forms is itself mental agitation. Why agitate the mind if we want peace? Instead of wanting a certain outcome, why not value the peace that comes from 'not wanting'?

Inner agitation leads to outer agitation and this vicious cycle feeds on itself. Agitation increases conditioning and besides making meaningful meditation difficult or impossible—destroys even simple joys that come naturally. We have to make this very fundamental choice in how we want to live: do we want to live with agitation or live in peace? A meaningful spiritual life is not possible is there is agitation within. Inner peace however, can lead to a wonderful spiritual harvest.

So, just what are the major agitations that we have to avoid? Vāsiṣṭha has a short list includes:

- 1. Vāsanā or mental conditioning:** all notions that have gathered in the mind.
- 2. Saṅkalpa or concepts and mental images:** each time we revisit an image and entertain certain notions about the image—the notions fuse with the image.

3. Mōhā or attachment: this includes infatuation of any kind. The stronger the notions entertained, the more we are infatuated or attached—not to the object but to the object infused with the notions we have about them.

4. Bhāvanā or mental attitude or feeling: Repeated visiting images and entertaining the notions we have about them makes it very difficult to separate images from how we feel about them. They fuse together and form our mental attitude.

5. The mind itself: the mind is not only a receptacle of notions but has energy on which it acts. Seeming intelligent, the mind is not able to comprehend anything really. The mind borrows its light from the inner intelligence and when the mind is watched without remission—it is weakened. Even though the mind may still hold images, unrelenting vigilance renders the mind powerless over time.

In a few short verses, Vāsiṣṭha has outlined the root cause of all our problems. It all comes down to an out of control mind which acts based on unexamined notions and convictions that have been held close for a long time. As long as this elephant roams in the forest of the body, saṃsāra or world-appearance persists and our lives will be chaotic, a struggle at best and we will miss the purpose of life which is to know our true nature.

All that we do is in time process but if we do all that we do while watching and weakening the mind—action which is in time process provides a window into our true nature or eternity. The great sage advises us to destroy this deadly elephant with the help of the supreme weapon of courage, persistence and endurance for our highest good.

We are not here to do this and that but to through doing, restore our feeling of ‘being’ to its natural state.

Next time...

We will conclude this series with focus on: (1) what liberated sages conclude, (2) attitudes conducive to liberation, (3) overcoming saṃsāra and some sorrow, (4) a noble person, and, (5) Vāsiṣṭha concluding instructions.

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