

# **The Parable of the Three Robbers- From the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

**By Dr. Ramesh Pai**

Great teachers who serve as our guides in the path of spirituality have made their profound teaching easy of understanding by taking examples from ordinary household life and the use of parables. When narrated in this manner it appeals to people who are not highly intellectual. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one such teacher who used this method most effectively in the course of his conversations and meetings with persons who approached him for guidance.

A study and review of some of the parables bringing out the essential underlying instruction will be of immense benefit. Among them one of the most striking one is the parable of the three robbers.

The Bhagavad Gita is the most popular of the Hindu Scriptures, available in every Indian home and used for study as a practical guide for day to day life. The fourteenth chapter of the Gita is the Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga which deals with the three gunas in detail in twenty seven verses. The Gunas are the inherent traits which form the distinctive make up of every individual. They are three in number. The first is Sattva which reflects purity and goodness such as kindness, compassion and charity. The second is Rajas which reflects incessant relentless activity devoid of rest and relaxation. The third is Tamas which reflects laziness, inertia, excessive sleep, idleness, etc. One of the traits of Tamas not ordinarily emphasized is pramaada, which is acting on impulse without any thought of consequences. This recklessness or heedlessness is clearly pointed out in the Gita chapter.

All human beings are constituted by the three Gunas, mixed up in different degrees in various combinations which determine their conduct and behavior. In the Ramayana, the conduct and character of the three brothers born of the same parents serves as a fitting example. Ravana was the embodiment of Rajas, Kumbhakarna of Tamas and Vibhishana of Sattva.

Sri Ramakrishna has dealt with this concept of the three Gunas in his inimitable manner summarizing the whole Gita chapter as a story of the three robbers which follows.

A merchant with some valuables travelling alone had to pass through a forest to his home in the city. He was waylaid by three robbers who took away all his

possessions. Then the first robber said, "Let us kill him! ". The second robber argued, "Why incur the sin of killing him? Let us tie him up firmly to a tree". The second robber's advice was followed and they went away leaving him to his fate. After sometime the third robber returned, unbound him and took him to the edge of the forest along a road leading to the city which could be seen at a distance. The merchant thanked the robber profusely for his kindness and earnestly requested him to accompany him so that he could suitably reward him on reaching home. However the third robber said, "I cannot come with you to the city as I will be recognized as a robber by the police".

Sri Ramakrishna himself offers the explanation for the story. The first robber was Tamas showing the quality of pramaada, acting on impulse. The second robber was Rajas exhibiting the quality of binding to the pleasures of the sensory world. The third robber was Sattva who showed the qualities of kindness and compassion. Nevertheless he was still a robber illustrating the main and central theme of the Gita chapter, that in order to achieve spiritual liberation, Mukti, one has to transcend the Guna of Sattva also and become Trai guna atita. Be established in Sattva without EGO (Ahankara). One must be constant in purity, virtue and goodness but not be conscious of one's Sattvic activity.