

The Humbling of Banasura

A concentrated mind, good or bad, gains power, but when it evolves further, evil desires are destroyed.

Swami Jyotirmayananda

Banasura, a descendent of Prahlada, was a mighty demon with a thousand arms and had immense strength and power. He was a great devotee of Siva. Pleased with his intense austerity, Siva offered him a boon. Banasura sought protection from any attack. Siva granted it.

Banasura became exceedingly egotistic. One day he bowed before Lord Siva and said, “O Lord, because I have been endowed with immense strength, I do not find anyone equal to me. Please find someone with whom I can fight and display my strength.” Siva was annoyed by his arrogance and said, “Someday someone whose strength will be equal to mine is going to fight you and then your pride will be humbled.” The dull-witted Banasura was overjoyed and was looking forward to this opportunity to exhibit his might.

Daughter’s desire

Banasura had an unmarried daughter named Usha. One night she saw a handsome young man in a dream. After that her mind was consumed by the desire to find that man and marry him. She confided in her friend, Chitrlekha, who was an artist and had magic powers also.

Chitrlekha showed her drawings of all the handsome young men in the kingdom. The moment Usha saw the sketch of Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna, she exclaimed, “That’s the one.”

Chitrlekha, with her special powers, quickly brought Aniruddha to Usha. Months passed and the two lived happily together, secretly hidden away in the maidens’ quarters.

When Banasura found out about the secret liaison, he became angry and went to Usha’s quarters with some soldiers to fight Aniruddha. Aniruddha, however, fought valiantly and injured many soldiers. The angry Banasura had Aniruddha bound and imprisoned.

Only after some months Krishna came to know where his grandson was and launched an attack on Banasura with a big army. When the army laid siege to his city, Banasura staged a fierce counter-attack.

At this point, Lord Siva joined the battle against Krishna because he had promised protection to Banasura. The fight was intense in all directions, and Siva (also known as Mahesvara) caused a mighty fever with three heads and three legs (*Mahesvari jvara*). But Krishna generated a counter-fever.

Ultimately Krishna's forces were close to victory and Krishna himself was vigorously cutting off the myriad arms of Banasura. Siva again intervened because of his promise to Banasura.

Krishna, however, assured Siva that he had no intention of killing Banasura, but would leave him with only four arms so that his power would be limited. However, in honour of the demon's boon from Siva, Krishna promised that Banasura would have nothing to fear from anybody in the future.

Gratefully, Banasura prostrated before Krishna and then had Aniruddha and his bride, Usha, brought to Krishna in a regal chariot. All then returned to Dvarka, where Krishna's victory in the combat with Siva was celebrated with festivity.

The Impure Mind

Banasura represents the impure mind with thousands of distractions. His daughter, Usha, the Goddess of Dawn, represents the desire for intuitional knowledge which arises in the midst of mental distraction. As distractions are destroyed and the mind becomes pure, it is filled with the light of knowledge. Usha is thus wedded to the pure mind, represented by Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna.

Chitralkha represents the imaginative aspect of the mind. In the process of meditation, one imagines what knowledge of God would be. Imagination (*bhavana*) goes on presenting its pictures, but at some point a higher level of purity is attained and the imaginative aspect is no longer needed. One is actually glimpsing the reality, the beauty of the dawn of knowledge.

The Siva-Vishnu Battle

There are two stages in spiritual evolution. In the first, you are driven by the laws of the universe, evolving blindly, slowly, sluggishly. As you pursue desires due to ignorance and create *karmas*, you are born again and again and experience situations and circumstances according to that *karmic* fructification.

This stage of evolution is symbolised by Lord Siva granting whatever you desire, positive or negative. God in the Siva aspect is the granter of every wish indiscriminately.

You have continued wishing from life to life, and whatever desire you have maintained in your mind through mental concentration Siva has granted.

Universal Principle

The universal law is that where there is mental concentration, there will be power, no matter whether it is positive or negative. All the demoniac personalities have power because they work for it. The same universal principle is helping them.

The sun allows whatever seeds you sow in your garden to sprout and grow. If the seed is that of a poisonous tree, then a poisonous tree grows. The sun does not discriminate. Siva plays a similar role. He grants everything you strive to attain with intense mental concentration.

In the second stage of spiritual evolution, you are more aware of your essential divinity and inclined towards God-realisation. You begin to receive the grace of the Divine Self in a specialised way. In this stage, Vishnu (here in the form of Krishna, his incarnation) asserts himself and interferes, so to speak, with the universal process symbolised by Siva.

In the language of devotion, as you increasingly surrender to God, God will begin to watch over you more and more. When you have positive desires, God will grant them and your negative desires will be thwarted. Vishnu will not grant your desire if what you seek is not good for you. If you want to sow a poisonous seed in your garden, Vishnu will send some raccoons or rats to dig it up and throw it away. Each time you try to sow poison, Vishnu will destroy it.

A battle begins to rage between Vishnu (Krishna), the specialised aspect of God, and Siva, his universal aspect, to help the soul move away from mental distractions (Banasura). Vishnu draws you away from distraction until your mind becomes one-pointed.

At this point, most of the arms of the distracted mind are destroyed, *samkalpas* (egoistic desires) are removed and your mind is firmly fixed on the goal of Self-realisation.

Destruction of Distraction

Why did Krishna not destroy Banasura? In the spiritual process, the objective is not to destroy the mind, but to destroy the distraction within it. The same mind that causes bondage will also lead you to liberation.

Krishna destroys all of Banasura's arms except four. This is also symbolic. Two arms symbolise human consciousness. Four denote the emergence of divine consciousness, which encompasses the four directions.

The Fever Aspect

An interesting aspect of the battle is that Siva sent forth a fever called *Mahesvari Jvara*, which had three legs and three heads. To combat it, Krishna created another fever which destroyed that generated by Siva.

In the cycles of birth and death that constitute the world-process, *Mahesvari Jvara* afflicts everyone. Anyone who is born, anyone who is in a process of embodiment, suffers from that fever. Any living being who struggles to fulfil his restless desires finds his body and mind heated up by that struggle. He has no choice but to suffer from Siva's fever.

Siva's fever or *Mahesvari Jvara* does not give you any direction. You simply go on moving from one embodiment to another, and in every embodiment you suffer. For the majority of people, fever is endured for very little constructive gain.

A spiritual aspirant, on the other hand, adopts a feverish process of spiritual discipline (*sadhana*) by choice for attaining enlightenment. This process is symbolised by Krishna's fever (*Vaishnavi Jvara*), which has power to defeat Siva's fever.

If you follow the spiritual path, your trouble will be infinitesimal compared to that you have already encountered or would have continued to encounter in the future. This is an important point. People think that adopting the spiritual path will be painful because they will have to renounce the glitter and glamour of the world, give up the things they like most, and no longer do things according to whim.

From an advanced point of view, however, when you adopt a disciplined process, you are in a much better position to enjoy your life.

Benefits of Regulation

People who practise *japa* (repetition of *mantra*) and meditate every day, who introspect about their thoughts and emotions, who regulate what they eat and how they act, enjoy the great luxury of being free from the worries and anxieties of the distracted mind.

Those who lack spiritual discipline think they are enjoying life, but in the pursuit of purposeless pleasure they are actually being driven by Siva's fever. They struggle throughout their lives and, in due course, they are burdened with stress and tension.

The three heads of *Mahesvari Jvara* refer to the three *gunas* or modes of nature--*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* produces harmony and peace, *rajas* keeps your mind distracted and *tamas* keeps your mind dull and negative. When all these *gunas* continue to alternate in your mind, *rajas* and *tamas* predominating, you experience lots of fever, lots of suffering.

On the other hand, when you are handled by Krishna's fever, *sattva* or purity begins to dominate *rajas* and *tamas*. When you increase *sattva* to such an extent that the distraction and dullness of mind are overcome, you transcend the three *gunas* and abide in a cool, refreshed and peaceful state.

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