

BABAJI

WHO IS THE BETTER MAN?

Intent of the Story:

Be aware! Be cautious!

1. *Unexamined religious traditions blind us to abuses and injustices,*
2. *The poor, the suffering and those in need are an easy prey to religious exploitation.*
3. *Those who benefit from religious privileges end by believing themselves justified.*
4. *Religious professionals should be extremely careful to avoid anything smacking of religious exploitation the credulity.*
5. *eligion should not be used for any ulterior means except to praise thank and worship God*

The Story

Narrator It had been a long, long morning for Babaji. He had sat still and silent under the Banyan tree for hours on end in prayer. Now, he said to himself:

Babaji: "What will I have to eat today? I am so hungry! Oh, God, I know you will provide me with a meal. You always do. Oh what I see there!, a little poor hut close by. There I go. My God, touch the heart of those simple people to provide for my meal today.

Narrator: Babaji knocked at Ramdhan's hut. He was one of the many poor herdsmen in that countryside.

Babaji: "My son, I bless you. Be kind to me. I am your humble Sadhu. I am hungry. I am tired. I need some food to eat and a little place to rest."

Narrator: Ramdhan went inside his hut, and told his wife: "There is a holy man at our door. He is hungry. Is there anything we can give him?"

Wife: "You know there is nothing, nothing at all. You saw me scrape the last grains. We have nothing at all!"

Ramdhan "Come on! Search, my dear, there has to be something somewhere. God will punish us if we send this holy man away with empty hands."

Narrator Ramdhan's wife thought and thought. At last she remembered. Yes! Yes! There was a little grain set aside for the puja - as a sacrifice offering. She ran to Ramdhan and said:

Wife "Take this little flour we had kept for our puja-offering This is all we have at home, give it to the holy man."

Narrator: Ramdhan gave it to Babaji saying: "Take, Babaji, this is all we have at home, Cook it yourself and have a meal." Ramdhan was thoroughly perplexed. Full of scruples, he dialogued with himself: "Have I done the right thing? Will not the gods be angry and punish me for depriving them of their share? What else could I do? This holy man asks and I must give." A few minutes later, Babaji called again:

Babaji: "My son, with flour alone, I cannot prepare myself a meal. Kindly give me a little dhal, salt and ghee that I may sanctify this meal for the gods."

Ramdhan "But, Babaji, we are poor, we have nothing at all with us, we are-hungry, we starve."

Babaji: "Don't dare say that my son, God is great, God never runs out of stock. Ask your wife, and she will find something."

Narrtor: Ramdhan's wife said:

Wife: "Dhal? Salt? Ghee? Oh, my God, where shall we get them from? I can't even borrow them from my neighbors. I have not yet given back what I took earlier. How can I face them now?"

Narrator" Ramdhan ordered his wife:

Ramdhan: "Do what you wish, but you get them! Got this? Hurry up!"

Narraor: Basbaji, finally, got all he had asked for. With ritual religiosity he went about preparing his meal, then, with gusto relished it. He ate and ate, gobbling everything till the last bit After he had his fill, Babaji praised God:

Babaji: "Oh, my God! I thank you for this meal you provided. You make these poor people very generous. I can see that you never forget those who love you and serve you. Thank you!"

Narrator His prayer over, Babaji made several circular motions wit his hand on his belly and snoozed off at the doorstep of Ramdhan's hut. That day, no meal was cooked in Ramadan's place. For all meal they drank the water the Sadhu left over after boiling his dhal. That's all they had. Tired and hungry, Ramdhan went to sleep also. Before lying down, he said:

Ramdhan: "It's alright, my God! It doesn't matter. After all, Babaji, is a better man."

Personal Work. Reflection Questionnaire

Reflect and answer in writing to the following points:'

1. Can you discover some mistaken assumptions imbedded in the credulity and piety of simple people like Babaji? Mention some of them.
2. Should we challenge those assumptions to purify the practice of our faith? How? Suggest means.
3. Can you discover in many holy and religious people a tendency to use God and, religion for personal gains and to further their interests? Give examples. Why should it be so?
4. Is there such thing as "religious exploitation" of others in many parts of the world? Give instances. Who are the most affected? Why?
5. Do religious authorities some times, justify or connive at injustices and at exploitative practices? Give instances. Why is it so?
6. Are the so called "religious exploiters" in good or in bad faith? Are they guilty of dishonesty? Explain. What are their assumptions?
7. Was our good Babaji of the story, aware of what was he doing? Why?
8. Should professional religious people like sadhus, priests, mullahs and the like expect or demand privileges? Why?
9. Before God, who actually was a better man – Babaji or Ramdhan? Why?
10. Why did Ramdhan, like many other poor people, have such poor self-image?
11. How could religious people help the poor and illiterate to improve their self-image?

Group Work

- ✓ Participants will share their reflections to the questions above.
- ✓ The Moderator will initiate a discussion on the most relevant points brought up by the participants in their sharing.
- ✓ He will encourage interaction.

4. Teaching or Input

The Moderator may round up the event with a Teaching Hour or Input.

Thoughts helpful for an Input

- Religion is good and beneficial, yet, some religious traditions and popular beliefs may connive at many abuses, injustices and even sort of "religious exploitation..
- All of us are prone to invoke the name of God to justify ourselves even when we are wrong
- With the passage of time – even without our noticing it - many religious practices and popular beliefs degenerate. From time to time, we have to re-examine them and purify them.
- It's unfortunate that in some holy places, such as temples, ashrams, mosques, shrines, churches, etc. the simple and popular credulity of the people is being taken advantage of for ulterior motives, such as financial gains, political dominance, defending the "status quo", reinforcing the cast system, brain-washing, indoctrination, etc.

- A shameful misuse of the Religious sentiments of the people goes on promoted by some politicians to further up their political ambitions
- Good religious practices and exercises often enough smack superstition for instance: the miraculous effects attributed to some prayers, novenas, mantras, etc, the power ascribed to holy places, shrines, devotions, pilgrimage sites, holy men, etc.
- Professional religious people – Sadhus , Priests, Mullahs. Nuns, Monks, etc. are meant to serve the people, not to be served by them. They should not claim privileges and honors beyond those given to any other human being.