

## Counsellors and Kings- Classic Examples\*

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Counsel is always beneficial to each and every one of us at every stage of life. Most people discuss their problems with those close to them. Thus, counsels pre-suppose prior knowledge about the person who needs advice and existence of inviolable trust. Frank deliberation at appropriate times would help anyone to attain success in any venture—*Mantra moolam cha vijayam pravadanti manasvina:*. For a King, counsel not only equips him with a clear understanding of different aspects of an issue to be resolved, but also enables him to take requisite steps. The importance of advice cannot be overstated. As a human being, everybody possesses intelligence, keen intellectual insights into a given issue. And above all, everybody is governed by their instincts. Thus, there is a caveat. A man is always imperceptibly guided by his views, prejudices and predilections, which have been acquired over a period of time. As taught by Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, everyone is governed to differing extents by the qualities of soberness, clear thinking, gentleness and compassion towards one and all, by the qualities of passion, perseverance and power and by the qualities of inertia, indolence ignorance, muddled thinking etc.

Let us take the classic case of Ravana who had the benefit of the council of learned ministers, but refused to accept their considered counsel. Maharshi Valmiki mentions the capabilities of these ministers who were Ravana's well wishers, possessed vast experience in the governance of a kingdom and stood as a strong rampart in guarding him. He underlined their ability to provide informed opinions depending on the situation, if Ravana was willing to hear them with an open mind:

*Mantribhi: mantra tatvajnai: anyaischa subha buddhibhi:  
Aasvaasyamaanam sachivai: surai: iva Suresvaram|.*

Ravana himself was a versatile scholar and a capable leader in warfare. Of course, he was cruel, arrogant, adamant, unreceptive to any suggestions, lustful, immoral, and had scant respect for human beings, to say the least. Driven by inexorable fate, he executed the ignominious act of abducting Seetha Devi through deceit, overriding the sane advice of Maricha. Maricha had advised him that he should definitely consult Vibhishana and his ministers. He warned Ravana that it is easy to find advisors in hundreds who would tell him what he liked to listen, but very difficult to find one who would guide him on the righteous path:

*Sulabhaa: purushaa Rajan! Satatam priyavaadina:  
Apriyasya cha pathyasya vaktaa shrotaa cha durlabha:*

Ravana called for a meeting of his council of ministers to discuss the alarming situation of imminent war with Sri Rama. He outlined the categorisation of persons and that of counsel into three groups, based on how the person goes about his undertakings, and how a conclusion or decision is arrived at."A person, declared to belong to the foremost category, consults counsellors, friends, superiors and relatives who all are capable of analysing the situation and tendering advice. After such deliberation, the person embarks on action, exerting himself and taking recourse to Providence. The second category, termed as mediocre, consist of one who goes about his tasks by himself without seeking any help from others. In the third category are those who fail to understand the gravity of the situation - do not ascertain merits and demerits of the issue, leave aside dependence upon Providence, but merely boast of their ability to face the problems at any time and neglect their duty."

Similarly, “An advice arrived at by the counsellors, in keeping with the sanctity of scriptures as a base with broad consensus, is deemed the best. At the second position lies the consensus arrived at after taking proper precautions to attend to the contrary views expressed on the issue. The third, the worst, is the one in which unending arguments are allowed to be made without finally arriving at any worthwhile consensus on the advice ultimately tendered on a given matter.”

Due to Ravana’s overbearing attitude and arrogant nature, all his ministers only praised his past glory and valour and assured him their unstinted support, predicting a victory over Sri Rama. In that august assembly, only fearless Vibhishana could come up with salutary advice. His counsel falls exactly into the first category in both the groups as outlined by their king. He suggested that the best course of action was to avert war and restore Seetha Devi with full honour to Sri Rama. However, his advice was ignored by Ravana, who abruptly left the assembly. Vibhishana went to Ravana’s palace in the early morning and humbly reiterated his advice corroborating it with disturbing portents seen subsequent to the abduction of Seetha Devi. Ravana ridiculed him and did not foresee any threat to his kingdom from Rama, Lakshmana and the monkeys. Ultimately, he dishonoured and disgraced Vibhishana in the open assembly with the most despicable remarks, which led to latter’s exit from his own country to the fold of Rama. Thus, we see an absence of harmony between speech and action in the lives of adamant persons like Ravana, who speak loftily of the value of counsel, but refuse to accept it when tendered to them, considering themselves omniscient and in no need of advice.

There are a lot of instances, subsequently, of various people, his trusted lieutenants and the foremost spies, advising Ravana against war with Sri Rama. Last but not the least, was the advice given by Malyavan, his maternal grandfather, in the assembly convened to plan for the ensuing battle. Malyavan was known for his strong animosity towards Lord Vishnu and had waged innumerable battles against the Devas. He gave Ravana a meaningful insight about righteousness, with valid suggestions.

“ In the world created by Lord Brahma, virtue is the basic element of Devas. Evil tendency is the predominant, inborn element in the Demon race. When virtue has a strong hold over evil, people call it Satya Yuga. When evil takes the lead over virtue, it is construed as Kali Yuga. However, with the blessings of Lord Narayana, virtue gains strength through performance of yajnas, pujas or by chanting of Vedas by Brahmins, sages and by practising holy and socially-conducive activities. Because of the vibrant energy and congenial ambience created by these activities, demons as well as bad elements practically search for shelter here and there and generally refrain from inflicting torture on others. Therefore, through regular conduct of such performances, Devas survive and sustain for aeons, while the demons get destroyed time and again.”

“Ravana, you were always doing cruel deeds. Responsible kings always resort to the prudent course of seeking peace when confronted by stronger opponents. You were the aggressor by taking away Seetha Devi through stealthy means and Sri Rama is the aggrieved party. Sri Rama is no less than an incarnation of Vishnu. The boon conferred on you by Brahma excludes protection from human beings and monkeys. Therefore, kindly restore Seetha Devi with due honour to Sri Rama, since defeat stares you in the face.”

The sane advice fell on deaf ears like seeds planted on barren soil. Ravana, driven by destiny (dushtaatma kaalasya vasam agata:), found Malyavan’s advice at the most crucial juncture, immature, useless and timid. Incurable persons like Ravana are loathe to reform himself even at their own peril.

Now we come to the next example of Kamsa, as portrayed in Srimad Bhagavatam. He was cruel by nature, diabolical, vacillating between good and bad thoughts. Upon hearing the saying from the sky about his eventual death at the hands of the eighth child to be born to Devaki, Kamsa immediately jumped from the chariot driven by him carrying Vasudeva and Devaki. He wanted to kill Devaki instantaneously. However, due to the timely proposal by Vasudeva to hand over their

children to him as soon as they were born, he relented and agreed to let them live. Vasudeva handed over the first newborn baby to Kamsa when he was in the company of his friends. Kamsa immediately told Vasudeva that he didn't envisage any threat to his life from his first child and happily returned the child to him. Vasudeva didn't feel happy as he knew the words of persons having no character or self control could not be believed.

*Tatheti sutam aadaaya yayaa Aanakadundubhi:*

*Naabhyanandata tat vaakyam asata: avijitaatmana:*

True to the assessment of Vasudeva, Kamsa changed his mind after the visit of Sage Narada.

Once again, after his unsuccessful attempt to kill the eighth-born girl baby and hearing admonishing words from that girl child, Durga Devi, Kamsa fell at the feet of Vasudeva and Devaki. He pleaded guilty for his demonic activity of having killed their previous six children based on the prophecy that the eighth child would cause his death. The Bhagavatam clearly portrays a reformed and truly regretful Kamsa pleading for forgiveness.

Next day, he met his council of ministers who were his friends of cruel nature. He himself was the notorious asura Kalanemi in his previous birth. Birds of the same feather flock together is the apt way of describing his assembly. He narrated to them the turn of events overnight. They ridiculed Lord Vishnu and boasted that Indra and other gods including Vishnu were afraid to face the mighty Kamsa. Interestingly, they advised Kamsa that they should curb the influence of Lord Vishnu and prevent him from gaining strength in their kingdom. They informed him that Lord Vishnu always finds strength due to various sacrificial performances, penances conducted by Brahmins, chanting of Vedas and rearing and protecting cows, etc. The brahmins, cows, Vedic knowledge, austerity, truthfulness, control of the mind and senses, faith, mercy, tolerance and yajnas are considered to be different parts of the body of Lord Vishnu.

*Vipraa gaavacha Vedaascha tapa: satyam dama: sama:*

*Sraddhaa dayaa titikshaa cha kratavascha Hare: tanoo:*

They suggested stopping these people from their deeds by killing them and all infants. Kamsa agreed to their plan. Vyasa Muni remarks that Kamsa, passionate, ignorant and in the firm grip of the shadow of death, ordered persecution of truthful devotees.

At this juncture, we can discern from the arguments of Malyavan and the friends of Kamsa that both underlined the glory of Lord Vishnu and the significance of pious activities. Malyavan chastised Ravana and advised him to surrender to Sri Rama. On the other hand, Kamsa's friends requested permission to go on a killing spree. Ravana dismissed the advice and continued his enmity with Sri Rama, while, Kamsa agreed to the plan to antagonise Vishnu.

In this connection, Srimad Bhagavatam tells us that just like a disease, which, if left ignored in the initial stage, progresses to its logical acute stage, senses such as lust, anger, greed and arrogance, if not nipped in the bud, would later become uncontrollable enemies

The above two classic examples underscore the well known fact that human beings are governed by inherent qualities. Tendencies predominant in a person, nurtured over a period of time, unconsciously propel person's mind to a particular type of decision.

Kumbhakarna was one more example. He initially talked in harsh terms and condemned Ravana's conduct. But, in the course of his talks, in the same breath, the demoniac character took over and he supported Ravana. Ravana, despite erudition, luxurious living and unchallenged sovereignty, chose a perilous path leading to the destruction of himself and his clan.

We have also plenty of examples of the kings considering and acting upon the advice

tendered by their council of ministers.

Emperor Dasaratha listened to the sane advice of his minister Sumantra. He went to the Angadha Kingdom and personally solicited the assistance of sage Rishyasringa to conduct Putrakaamesti **sacrifice**. He was blessed with divine children in his old age.

On another occasion, Dasaratha was torn between his extreme obsession with Sri Rama and the request of sage Viswamitra to send the young child alone to protect his yajna from the onslaught of terrible, unconquerable demons, Maricha and Subahu. He flatly refused the request and was about to go back on his promise of rendering any help to the sage. He was even ready to incur the ire of the irascible Viswamitra. At that time, Sage Vasishtha, intervened and advised him to accede to the request of the sage, Dasaratha immediately complied with, though with reluctance. He later told King Janaka that Vasishtha was a god-like person for the Ikshvaku dynasty and their spokesperson in all matters.

Similarly, Bharata was firm in his decision that Sri Rama alone should take over the reins of the kingdom. But he relented, humbly bowed to the sane advice of his guru Vasishta and restrained himself from insisting on Sri Rama's immediate return to Ayodhya. He ruled the kingdom as Sri Rama's servant, keeping Sri Rama's Padukas on the throne.

These episodes underline the fact that sane advice should be given impartial consideration; otherwise, the benefit of seeking good counsel would be lost. The person should think it over and arrive at a proper course of action. He should be willing to mend himself if any deficiencies are pointed out in the course of discussions. Everybody should guard against false notions of prestige, power and position and failing to listen to their inner voice or agitation in the subconscious mind. Human beings being violently struck continuously by the tempest of lust, anger, malice, jealousy, non-contentment, greed etc, fail to learn that life is too precious to fritter away in such vicious ways. Maya's grip on human beings cannot be got rid of without surrender to God. The redeeming point is that cultivation of true devotion to Lord Narayana would surely and slowly lead one to a sensible thinking.

If we come to think of it, we too have been provided extremely sane counsel by the Lord, through Shastras and Acharyas. If we choose to accept and follow such sterling counsel, we succeed in all aspects of life, especially spiritually. If we do not and break away from the counselled path of righteousness, we continue to wallow interminably in this mundane morass, plagued by an unending cycle of births and deaths and weighed down by the huge baggage of Karma which we have accumulated over innumerable births.

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