

10. Escape from entanglement

This day is a sacred Day which has to be spent in sacred thoughts and deeds and not in cheap debilitating sensual pleasures and pastimes, like feasting and film-going. Of course, people in their ignorance resort to these hollow hilarities, urged by the innate and inescapable urge for *aanandha*. The *aanandha* (Bliss Supreme) within seeks *aanandha* pure and undefiled. It can be secured only through the satisfaction of higher and more sublime desires like the yearning for freedom, for expanding ourselves to the utmost limit, for escaping from bondage, for realising the Ultimate and the Universal Each such festival has been designed by the sages as a step in the progress of man towards this Goal. Nevertheless, we are casting many a New Year Day behind us unmindful of its significance. Year after year is wasted in misdirected effort at attaining *aanandha*, and in the consequent misery and despair.

Just consider! The second is the very basic unit of Time, which we measure in what we designate as a Year. Sixty of them make up a minute; sixty of these form an hour; twenty four hours constitute a day; about thirty of these make a month; twelve months pass and we say a year has passed! When twelve months are over, when we come back again to the first in the list of months, we call it the New Year Day and go on a spree to mark the occasion.

Learn how to acquire bliss and peace

Really speaking, nothing new has happened today. It is not the year that is new; it is the second that follows this present second that is really new. Do not wait for the celebration of something new in Time until the minutes, the hours, the days, the months add up to a year. Celebrate the immediately succeeding second by an honest effort to get lasting joy. There is no touch of meanness in trying to get joy or *aanandha*. It is only the means that make it unworthy and futile. As a matter of fact, it is to fill himself with *aanandha* that man has come to this world, equipped with mind and intelligence, memory and speech, courage and conscience. Only man has the chance and the capacity among all living beings. But man has forgotten the errand and is wandering in the wilderness, trailing behind trivial pleasures, which he assumes to be honourable and beneficial.

Man's determination to acquire *aanandha* and *shaanthi* should not flicker like the flame of a lamp placed on a gusty, windowsill. He must learn how to acquire them from the scriptures composed by saints or from the wise who have won them. Then he must adhere to the Path, however sharp the criticism, whoever callously condemns it cynically. Cynical laughter cannot harm the *saadhaka*. Can a storm shake the Himalayan range? Let not your faith in the goal or the road quake before trouble or trial, toil or travail, distress or despair. They are but passing clouds, casting temporary shadows, hiding for a little time the glory of the sun or moon. Do not get distracted by doubt or despondency. Build the mansion of your life on four firm pillars: *dharma*, *artha*, *kaama* and *moksha* (virtue, wealth, desire and liberation), the *Purushaarthaas* (goals of human effort) laid down by the ancient sages, each pillar bound strong and safe with every other. Do not allow the pillars to slant or tumble as many individuals, communities and nations are doing now.

Qualifications of a true devotee

Contemplate on Raama, the Ideal lived by God for man. Raama is virtue personified (*Vigrahavaan Dharmah*). Raama is the supreme exemplar of the virtues that man must cultivate so that he might live as a master, as a husband, son, brother, friend, or even as a foe. The other

three brothers of Raama personify the other three ideals: Bharatha is the embodiment of *sathya*, Sathrughna of *shaanthy* and Lakshmana of *prema*. Study the Raamaayana with the aim of imbibing from it the ideals for happy living, for making this life worth while, and you will be amply rewarded. Then you can deservedly style yourselves devotees of the Lord.

You have now multitudes of claimants for the status and for the appurtenant benefits of "devotion." You can see them being carried along the roads to holy rivers or cities by buses or railway coaches; you can see them singing spiritual songs wearing all the paraphernalia of devotion. But the claim to be a Devotee of the Lord, a Votary of the Highest, can be admitted only if the passions and emotions are pure and the character virtuous.

The tongue may utter the Name of the Lord, the ear may be open when the glory of the Lord is recited, the hand may scatter flowers on the image of God; but the tongue may not know or relish the taste, the ear may not yearn, the hand may not hanker. These can happen only when the heart is aware of the Supreme, when the mind is thrilled when the glory of God is recollected. Otherwise one is like the spoon which dips into sour and sweet with equal alacrity and insensitivity. It does not refuse or relish any of the tastes. *The Vedhaantha* which such men read is just a few pages of matter, though spiritual matter. It is not a text that is practised, that becomes part of the daily conduct and character of the person.

The first step in *Dharma* is gratitude

The lives of divine personages, sages and seers that men read, if not taken as tonics to improve mental health as signposts for life's tortuous journey, are mere tales that fickle the fancy. The wise man finds in them beacons in the darkness. Bheeshma, for example, has to be revered and accepted as an inspiration, even more potent than Raama so far as homage to the father is concerned. In order to cater to the carnal cravings of his senile father, craving which he could have ordinarily condemned, he denied himself gladly, spontaneously, without demur and for the entire period of his life, both wedded life and royal status. The Vedhic injunction *pithru devo bhava* (revere father as God), was honoured by him in the fullest manner.

This moral code, the product of centuries of selfless pursuit of individual and social contentment, is now thrown to the winds by the present generation. Sons clamour for a share in the property of the father, but not for a share in his love. They close their ears to their needs and commands. Parents have conferred this physical equipment called body, with which we can attain the Absolute, to serve God in all living beings, to glorify Him in and through Beauty and Truth; this equipment which is essential for liberating ourselves from the direst of bondages. So gratitude and honour are due to them from children. An iron box is essential to keep safe precious stones; so too, the body is essential to keep safe the precious gifts of virtue, faith, love and discrimination. The parents gave it and so they have to be respected by speech, action and behaviour. How can you expect the Heavenly Father to respond to your prayers if you do not respond to the demands of the earthly father? The first step in *Dharma* is gratitude; the first duty of the child is reverence to the parents. When the first step is absent, ascent is impossible

God can be found by diligent *Saadhana*

Another irreverence that is harming progress is the cynical sneer with which the younger generation has been taught to welcome all reference to God and religion, Who is this God? Where is He to be found? What does He do there? they ask in derision. When a wandering monk was accosted thus by a gang of villagers, he asked them casually to bring him a basin of milk. He

looked long at it, stirred it with his finger, shook it around and was silent all the time. The villagers asked him why and he replied, I am trying to locate the butter which they say is in milk. I do not see any in this basinful of milk. The gang laughed at his colossal ignorance. They told him the butter was there, in every drop of the milk, though he could not see it with his eyes or take it out with his finger; it had to be curdled, churned and collected, that was all. The monk declared, So too, God is immanent in the Universe; He is in the most distant star as well as in the blade of grass under your feet. You can see Him provided you curdle this Universe with *viveka* (discrimination), churn it with *vairaagya* (detachment) and collect it with *sraddha* (earnestness). In the grain of sand as well as in the grandest galaxy, God can be found by diligent *saadhana*. He is the core of every being, as butter is in every drop of the milk.

Like a lighted lamp, God's Grace spreads all round, on all who approach Him and love to be near Him; but if you interpose a shade which shuts out the light from you, you have only yourself to blame if Grace does not shine. Open the doors of your heart, so that the Sun may shine through and disinfect the vices therein and illumine its corners. You must initiate that little effort, at least. The Sun will not open the doors and enter. To get the programme right and pleasantly, you have to switch on and tune in the receiver. That is an inescapable effort.

Adopt the sacred texts as guides for daily life

Believe---strive---succeed; that is the message of the sacred texts. But the texts are not put to these uses by those who handle them. They are read for disputative ends, for pedantic display of intricate scholarship; or as some people do, they are worshipped as holy relics of the past. They are seldom adopted as guides for daily life, as life-belts during the perilous sea voyage called life. The Raamaayana, the Mahaabhaaratha, the Bhaagavatha are mastered, but not allowed to become master. You go through them without allowing them to go through you! The volumes are bound in silk and incense sticks are burnt before them, while man prostrates before them in reverence. But no attention is paid to what the pages proclaim. The frills and fringes attract the mind, more than the kernel provided by the text.

I am reminded of an old widow who shed tears for hours on end listening to a *Pandith* who was expounding the Geetha. At the end of the series of discourses, when the *Pandith* had finished the Valedictory *Puuja*, he called the old widow near the altar and publicly acclaimed her as a sincere seeker of the Godly Path, for she was the most punctual, the most earnest and the most devoted among the hundreds of listeners, as was evidenced by the tears she shed whenever the words of the Lord were referred to. The old lady was surprised at all this. She said she had understood not a word; she did not know what the Geetha was or said; she shed tears because the black string with which the palm leaf text of the Geetha in the hands of the *Pandith* was tied reminded her of the cord round the waist of her departed husband!

Concentration needs faith

Thousands may attend a Geetha discourse and sit through it in pin-drop silence, which gives one an impression of deep concentration and undivided attention; but who knows how few are really being transmuted by the Message of the Lord? The eyes see, but the ears wander; the ears hear, but the mind is meandering; faith is a slow-growing plant; concentration needs faith. You know. the story of Shri Raamakrishna Paramahansa, how he slapped Raani Raasmani in the face when she stood before the shrine at Dakshinesh-war with folded hands and half-closed eyes, to all appearance praying to Motter. He knew that she was not praying but actually involving herself with plans for a civil suit in a court of law and so he reminded her of the sanctity of the place and

the need to pray for higher objectives, by that slap. The Raani acknowledged the act of service and prevented the servants from admonishing the Parama-hamsa. He had done her good, she said.

The scriptures convey a living message; the idols of God convey a living lesson. They are not wood or stone. That is why Shri Raamakrishna did not support those who directed that a broken idol be discarded; he asked whether Raani Raasmani would discard Mathur Babu, her son-in-law, if he happened to break his leg. He recommended that

the idol be mended and used for worship. Act according to your profession. Do not play false to yourself and to your ideals. To deny by your acts the truth of what you preach is a sign of cowardice and moral suicide. You say that Baaba knows and sees everywhere, but you do something wrong, in the belief that Baaba is somewhere else. You pray to *Kaali* in the idol, believing it to be alive; you hide something behind the idol, imagining that no one would know about it.

The law of *Karma* holds out hope for man

The most valuable message the scriptures convey is this: Carry on your legitimate duties; discharge your obligations; live up to your rights; but do not allow attachment to grow. Be like a trustee so far as family, riches, reputation, knowledge and skills are concerned. Leave them gladly aside, when the call of death comes.

Death is pictured by some as a terror-striking God who rides a monster-buffalo, and pounces on you with a noose. No, the noose is of your own making. He does not pounce; he gives advance notice of his arrival to take you---notice in the form of intimations like grey hair, falling teeth, failing vision, deafness of hearing, folding of the skin, etc. He does not ride any beast; he is only another name for Time. It is Time that creeps steadily towards you and shears the cord of life. So, utilise the capacity for *karma* (action) with which you are endowed, to liberate yourself from the clutches of Time. The Law of *karma* holds out hope for you; as the *karma*, so the consequence. Do not bind yourself further by seeking the fruit of *karma*; offer the *karma* at the Feet of God; let it glorify Him, let it further His splendour. Be unconcerned with the success or failure of the endeavour. Then, death can have no noose to bind you with. Death will come as a liberator, not a jailor.

These great teachings of the ancient texts are the heritage of the human community; they must be handed down to the growing generation, in homes and schools. The people, as well as the leaders and rulers whom they have chosen, have to take up this task. I would ask the Minister, the Speaker and the Chairman of the Legislative Council who are here to remind themselves of this duty. The seed of devotion, detachment and duty has to be implanted early, so that the harvest of peace, contentment; co-operation and love may be gleaned. That is the task for which I have come. If they share in that task, they are certain to succeed.

Plant the seed of devotion early in life

I have been in Bombay for ten days now and I must say that the people here have been very disciplined and they have evinced great thirst for spiritual sustenance. I shall certainly come here more often. Today is Gudi Padua and that has brought such a large number of you here, in lakhs, to this place, The *Seva Samithi* Volunteers have done very good work today as well as on all these days and I bless them specially. From tomorrow, you need not trek to the Gwalior Palace for *bhajan* or *darshan* (audience). I would advise you to treasure in your heart the *aanandha* that

you earned there for ten days; recapitulate in the silence of your hearts your *prema* and My *prema* and dwell gladly in the *prashaanthi*, that is the fruit of that *saadhana*.

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A car is for going on a journey, not for merely decorating the garage, washed, oiled and painted. Man too must journey towards God, not simply feed and have fun.

Sathya Sai Baaba