

4. Thieves or Masters?

MAN is wasting precious time, ignoring his status among all living beings, his equipment for the grand spiritual pilgrimage to Divinity, and his one fundamental task' achieving liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The sages of the past have realised the value and dignity, the worth and responsibility, of human life and they have laid down disciplines like the vigil and fast on *Shivaraathri* Day, in order to inspire man and instruct him, on the upward path to God. *Shivaraathri* is a word that connotes the dual nature of man and his duty to discriminate between the higher and the lower. *Shiva* means *Jnaana* (the Higher Wisdom, the Unifying Universal Vision); it also means, the lasting, the timeless, and the beneficial, the holy, the auspicious. And the second word, *raathri*, means darkness of ignorance, the blind pursuit of tawdry pleasures, the bewildering will-o'-the-wisp of sensory joys. It also means the transitory, the fleeting; it connotes the maleficent, the inauspicious, the sacrilegious. So, the message of *Shivaraathri* is: discriminate between *Shiva* and *raathri*---the *Praana* (life energy) and the *Body*, the *dehi* (indwelling of spirit) and the *deha* (body), the spiritual and the material, the *Kshethrajna* and *Kshethra*, called in the *Geetha* as *Vibhaaga-yoga* (the *yoga* of discrimination between matter & spirit).

Relying on the merely literal meaning of the words, people wait a whole year for this particular holy day to come, in order to miss a meal and call it a fast, to miss a night's sleep and call it a vigil! The fast is called in Sanskrit as *Upavaasa* and it means something far more significant than missing a meal! It means (*Upa-near; Vaasa-living*) Living with, or Living near. With whom? Near whom? Near and with God. *Upavaasa* means living in the unbroken constant presence of the Lord, by *Naamansmarana* (remembrance of Divinity); that is the real fast, holding fast to Him.

Understand the main purpose of holy days

And, Jaagarana (Vigil) ! It means keeping awake, shaking off the sleep of the senses and being fully aware of the Light of Love, that is the Divine essence, in all. It means, shaking off the drowsiness and laziness, and deep concentration in meditation and *saadhana*. Look at the word for heart in Sanskrit: *hrudhayam*. It means, *Hrudhi-ayam*, that is to say, "the divine heart"; the place where He resides, where He is installed. By vigilance and the practise of the constant presence of God, you must install Him in your heart and see Him as installed in all other beings as well. That is the main purpose of these holy days and the regulations laid down for their observance.

Truth is basic principle of the God-ward life. It is emphasised in all the scriptures of man. Raama suffered exile in the forest for 14 years, in order to maintain the spoken word of his father; Dharmaraaja suffered exile for 12 years, in order to keep up the word he gave during the game of dice; Harischandra sold his queen and son into slavery, and himself became the watchman of a burning ghat so that he might keep the truth. These are the shining examples of the lesson of Truth, which the mother teaches her every child in this land. These holy days must be set apart for the contemplation of these great ideals.

Do not be false to yourself

The Sages addressed all human beings as "Children of Immortality, *Amrthasya-puthraah*." But, in spite of this definite assurance and the inexhaustible joy that can be experienced therefrom, man degrades himself into an *Anrtha-puthra* (child of falsehood) and starts wailing that he lacks

this, that or some other comfort or contraption! Thieves who rob him of valuable treasures, like peace and contentment, equipoise and courage, are being honoured as masters and masters who ensure peace and happiness are treated with irreverence and disgust. You can bolt your doors and windows against thieves, but, who can bolt the door against Death? The thieves---lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and hate---are honoured as welcome guests and the real well-wishers like tranquillity and humility are shown the door!

You desire to drink a sweet drink, but instead of sugar, you drop salt into the cup, imagining salt to be sugar. That is the state of man,-today. He craves for peace, but, does not know how to attain it. The means he adopts do not lead him to the anticipated end. A large percentage of people who come to me ask for *Moksha* (Self-Realisation or Liberation) from the bondage of grief and joy, birth and death. But, when I offer to bless them with the consummation of their wish, they do not come forward; they would rather have it, ten years or five years later. So, all the thirst and craving are just a pose; it is a fashionable slogan, and nothing more. Man must be sincere; his word must be in conformity with his feeling, his action must be in conformity with his word. Resolve on this practice, at least from today. Do not be false to yourself.

According to the practice on such holy days, the Prashaanthi Flag will now be hoisted by Me on this building. The Flag represents the spiritual victory of the *Saadhaka* who conquers the passions and emotions that drag him down and cultivates Love and Equanimity that elevate him. So, when the Flag goes up and unfurls on the Prashaanthi Nilayam you too must hoist It on your hearts and unfurl It there, so that It may announce your spiritual Victory.

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Do not calculate the length of time you have spent in the company of the Lord's Name, and exult. Calculate rather the length of time you have wasted, away from that contact, and repent. Have that name ever in your thoughts and you can brave any calamity.

Sathya Sai Baba