

25. The garden of the heart

Man has to progress every moment; a stagnant style of living does not benefit him. How long can we tolerate a boy staying in the same class at school? He must proceed from one class to the next higher one, year after year. The spiritual aspirant too should not stagnate in one *saadhana*. From the master-servant relationship with God, he must advance to the body-limb relationship and reach the stage of merging in the All-inclusive One--that is to say, from dualism, through conditioned non-dualism to monism or non-dualism.

In the initial stages, man worships portraits or idols of God in all the sixteen forms of reverential homage. Preliminary concentration (*dhyaanam*), invocation (*aavaahanam*), offering seat (*aasanam*), washing feet (*paadhyam*), offering hospitality (*arghyam*), ablution (*snaanam*), offering vestments (*vastram*), sacredotal thread-wear (*yajnopaveetham*), sandal paste (*chandanam*), flowers (*pushpam*), incense (*dhoopam*), lamp (*deepam*), food (*naivedhyam*), paan (*thaamboolam*), camphor flame waving (*neeraanjanam*), circumambulation and prostration (*pradakshina namaskaaram*).

But, good character, good conduct and virtuous life are essential qualifications for the aspirant. Of course, floral offerings are commendable. The sixteen items are good. But, one should progress from this stage to the awareness of the *Aathma*. Flowers fade and rot soon. The effect of offering flowers may not last long. What God loves more are the flowers blossoming on the tree of man's own life, fed and fostered by his own skill and sincerity. They are the flowers of his virtues grown in the garden of his heart.

Inner peace must become one's nature

Of these, *ahimsa*, the virtue of nonviolence, is the very first. This involves much more than abstention from injuring living beings. One should desist from causing pain to any living being not only by deeds, but even by words and thoughts. One should not entertain any idea of hurting another, or humiliating another. The second flower is *indhriya nigrham* (mastery of the senses). One should not run after sensual pleasure and sensory joy. The third flower is *dhaya*. *Sarva bhootha-dhaya* (compassion towards all beings and all things), for, "All this is God." It is said, "homage paid to any god reaches the Supreme" (*Sarvadeva namaskaaram Keshavam prathigacchathi*). It can be said, with equal truth, that "humiliation caused to any living being reaches the Supreme" (*Sarva Jeeva thiraskaaram Keshavam prathigacchathi*).

The fourth flower is *kshama*, tolerance, fortitude. *Kshama* is identified by the scriptures with truth, righteousness, knowledge, sacrifice and joy. Without *kshama* man cannot be happy even for a *kshasya* (moment). It promotes divine qualities. It reveals inner Divinity. One has to perform *saadhana* to earn it and establish oneself in it. Nourish the idea that God is equally present in all, in spite of ridicule from the ignorant and sarcastic criticism from the blind-or even praise from admirers. Do not mind them.

The fifth flower is *shaanthy*---inner peace. *Shaanthy* does not mean that a person should not react at all, whatever others may say or however they may abuse him. It does not mean that he must be silent as a rock. It involves mastery of all the senses and all the passions, inner peace must become one's nature. *Shaanthy* has detachment as the basic quality. The sea, which likes to gather and possess, lies low; the cloud that likes to renounce and give up is high in the sky. *Shaanthy* endows man with an unruffled mind and steady vision.

The prayer for *shaanthy* is usually repeated thrice. "*Om, shaanthy, shaanthy, shaanthy,*" since Peace is prayed for, in the physical, mental and spiritual planes. Man should not bring his blood to boil nor he should yield to fear. Spiritual calm is exemplified by Emperor Janaka of the *Upanishadic* texts. He was known as *vidheha* (without body), not because he was disembodied, but because he lived in utter forgetfulness of the body and its needs. He saw, heard and spoke only from the *Aathmic* plane of consciousness.

Offer God the eight flowers of virtue

The sixth flower is *thapas* (austerity). *Thapas* does not mean-forsaking wife and children and escaping into the loneliness of the forest. The real austerity is the exact co-ordination between one's thought, word and deed. The evil man can never achieve this; he behaves falsely to his own self. When man succeeds in this *thapas*, the words he utters will have such power that what he says will be transformed into *manthras*.

Then, we have the seventh flower, *dhyaana* (meditation). Today, there are in vogue as many systems and methods of *dhyaana* as there are hairs on my head. Every one describes it according to his own whim and fancy. Sitting quiet and transferring their emotions and feelings to God is no *dhyaana*. They must transmute their emotions, desires, feelings with the help of God into Divine qualities. They should not bring God down to their level; they must raise themselves to the level of God.

The eighth flower is *sathyam* (truth), that which is unmodified by the passage of time. The Divine alone persists unchanged from the past, through the present into the future. When this flower blossoms in your heart it will reward you with eternal fragrance.

Worship the Lord and offer Him these flowers. Now, when other flowers are used, devotion does not last after one comes out of the *pooja* room door! When one crosses that door-step, anger, hatred and anxiety possess him and degrade him. Without developing the qualities indicated by the eight flowers how can any one win the grace of God? Engaged in *Asathya Naaraayana Vratha* (False Sathyanaraayana vow) on all 364 days, what is the good you hope to get doing true *Sathya Naaraayana Vratha* on the 365th day of the year? When you claim to be Sai devotees, justify the claim by cultivating these flowers of virtue and offering them to God.

Prashaanthy Nilayam, 6-10-1981

Death is senseless projection of matter.

From ashes emerge vegetation;

And oasis emerges in sand-dunes,

Pedestal of life stands on decaying forms

Whose roots are embedded in insensate life,

Sathya Sai Baaba