

## 27. Yajnas and the human predicament

THE *Dheha* (body), the *Indhriyas* (senses), the *Manas* (mind) and the *Buddhi* (intellect) are the instruments through which man functions. The true nature of man can be understood only when the secret of each of these is understood. What is the real character of the body, the mind, the senses and the intellect? Once this is known we can discover the means to bring them under control.

The first *upaadhi* (instrument) of man is the body. "The etymological meaning of the word *Dheha* is "Dhahyathi-ithi *Dhehah*" ("that which is burnt"). The burning does not refer only to the cremation of the body after death. In fact, the body is all the time burning on account of worries.

The body is also called *Shareera*, which means "that which is subject to change and decay." From childhood to youth, from youth to old age the body undergoes many changes. The body is like a rented house. It is also described as the Tabernacle of God. This means that it is a sacred dwelling. Constant efforts are made to drive the tenant out of the house. Ultimately death evicts the tenant. Another name for the body is *Kshethra* (as mentioned in the Bhagavath Geetha). The word *Kshethra* has many meanings. It may be regarded as a *Kavacham* (armour) which protects the indwelling spirit. *Kshethra* also means that which is liable to destruction. It also means a field (of action).

### Make the body a fitting shrine for the Divine

If the body is considered as a field its owner can reap only crops he cultivates in it. If he sows sacred seeds he will reap a harvest of merit. If he sows sinful seeds he will reap a harvest of sins. When the body is regarded as a shrine, it must be revered as the sacred abode of the Divine. Religious *Kshethras* are places of pilgrimage because they are associated with Divinity. Because the body is also the abode of the Divine it must be regarded as a *Kshethra*.

In the temple of the body the Divine Spirit is installed. It can acquire purity and holiness only when it is purified internally and externally. By bathing in water the body can be purified externally. By speaking the Truth, the tongue is purified. Through study and penance, the spirit is rendered pure. The intellect acquires purity through *Jnaana* (spiritual wisdom). In these ways the body has to be made a fitting shrine for the Divine by pure thoughts, pure deeds and by meditation. Purity of mind, speech and body has been described as "*Trikarana Shuddhi*" (the triple purity.)

The body should not be regarded as a mere conglomeration of the five elements. Looking at it externally, it may appear as a structure of bones, flesh, blood and nerves. But just as a temple is not a mere edifice consisting of brick and mortar but is the Abode of the Divine, the body should also be regarded as the dwelling of the Divine Spirit. It is, therefore, the primary duty of man to ensure that the body does not indulge in wrongful practices, and fall a prey to falsehood and unrighteousness. He should use the body to promote his higher human qualities and pursue the divine path. It is for this purpose that *Yajnas*, *Yaagas* and other religious rites have been prescribed.

### Some organs are not easily subject to control

Next there are *Indhriyas* the sense organs. These senses pursue their own courses. They are not easily subject to control or regulation. They tend to go astray to any extent. The senses are called *Maathras*. *Maathra* means that which measures or determines the quality. The tongue, for

instance, tastes something and declares whether it is sweet, sour or so on. The eye likewise determines whether something is beautiful and attractive or not. In this manner every sense organ in the human body judges the quality of the objects it experiences. Another meaning of *Maathra* is that it has to observe certain bounds or limits.

The *Indhriyas* have thus got both a judging quality and a limitation. The nose, for instance, can only smell but cannot take up any other function. The purpose of the limitation is that the nose should confine itself to the specific function of smelling what is pure or fragrant and rejecting what is impure. The ears, for instance, should listen to pure and holy matters and receive what delights the heart. They should not indulge in listening to words which cause pain to the heart or affect its purity. If the ears are used in violation of this rule and give heed to irrelevant matters and to evil gossip they become instruments for the commission of sin.

The tongue, again, is intended to proclaim the glory of God and to speak the truth. Instead of being used for this sacred purpose it is employed for abusing others or causing pain to them. It is a perversion of the divine purpose for which it is given.

### **Sorrows are the result of abuse of sense organs**

Because the *Indhriyas* (the sense organs) are not used for the pure and sacred purposes for which the Divine has endowed man with them, they become the instruments for doing many evil things. All the sorrows and troubles man experiences are the result of abuse of sense organs. It is for this reason that in the spiritual journey one is enjoined *Indhriya nigraham* (to control the senses) as the very first discipline.

However-wealthy, powerful or knowledgeable one may be, if he fails to bring his senses under control he will not be able to make purposeful and worthy use of his power or position. One who is a slave of his senses is displaying his animal qualities. One who controls his senses demonstrates the sacredness of the human birth. It is to develop the divine qualities in man and promote his purity in thought, word and deed that *Yaagas* and *Yajnas* have to be performed.

Among the good qualities which man has to cultivate, the most important is *thyaaga* (sacrifice). *Thyaaga* is ordinarily equated with charity or generosity.

There is a great difference between charity and real sacrifice. Giving away things like land, cows, gold, food or knowledge represents only an attempt to share with others what you have. By gifts of these kind one does not lose much. In fact many of those who are born in poverty and misery in this life are suffering the consequences of not exercising charity in previous lives. The *Shaasthras* (moral sciences) have laid down that the affluent should share their wealth with the have-nots. This kind of sharing is an inherent obligation of man, according to the *Shaasthras*. *Samarasya* (compassion) and *Samanvaya* (one-ness) towards all being have been regarded as two eyes for a man.

### **Significance of *Anga-puuja* in ritual worship**

*Thyaaga*, however, transcends charity and compassion. It is the readiness to part with a smile the things which one loves, including one's life itself. This is true sacrifice and it is that kind of sacrifice that has been regarded as the means to realise *Amruthathvam* (immortality). The *Vedhas* have also declared that peace comes from *thyaaga*. Those who seek peace of mind, peace of the spirit and peace for the world or the calmness of the senses have to cultivate the spirit of sacrifice. One must try continually to see how one's wealth or talents, knowledge or qualities can be utilised to promote happiness among others.

In the daily religious routine, persons are in the habit of performing what is called '*Anga Puuja*'--*offering* the various limbs of the body to the Divine. But while uttering the *Manthra*, '*Nethram Samarpayaami*' (I am offering my eye), if you merely offer a flower, you are missing the real significance of this *Manthra*. It means that you are offering your eye for seeing the Divine. Similarly, in the *Homa* (sacrificial offering in the fire) the *Manthra* is uttered, '*Hridhayam Samarpayaami*' (I offer my heart). The real significance of this *manthra* is: "O Lord, this is not my heart. It is yours. There is only one seat in this heart and this is reserved for you. There is no place in it for anybody else, neither for father or mother, husband or wife, or teacher. You are the only one who can occupy my heart. Accept this heart as yours." Instead of uttering the *manthras* in this faith, nowadays the ritual is converted into a mechanical offering of a flower or something else. Hence the worship becomes a hypocritical formality.

### ***Yajnas* are intended for people in all the worlds**

We speak of the heart as the throne of the Lord. But we seat on it all and sundry. The throne becomes ultimately a musical chair. How can the Divine be expected to come, and dwell in such a heart? The first thing one has to do is to 'rid the heart of all the evil elements residing in it. The heart is compared to a lotus. But the lotus of our heart is infested with evil insects such as hatred, lust, greed, pride, attachment and envy. Until these pestilential creatures are removed and the lotus is cleaned by the water of Prema (Divine love) the heart is not fit to be offered to the Divine. During worship, we say '*Suddhodhaka Snaanam Samarpayaami*' (I am offering you a bath in pure water). What is the pure water that is implied here? It is pure unselfish love. Any offering made to the divine should be done not in expectation of any reward or for any selfish purpose but only to please the Divine.

*Thyaaga* must be regarded as a *Yajna* (great sacrifice). What you offer should be within your capability. The person to whom it is offered should be deserving and should be capable of making proper use of what is offered. To make offerings beyond one's capacity to undeserving persons or to persons incapable of putting them to proper use is like offering a golden toy to a child or presenting a knife to a lunatic. It may have many undesirable consequences.

The *Rishis* (sages) who prescribed *Yajnas* and *Yaagas* did not intend them for the use of a particular country, community or time. They are valid for any country, for any people, at anytime. The benediction at the end of the *Yajna* is "*Lokaah Samasthaah Sukhino Bhavanthu*" (May all the worlds be happy).

These *Yajnas* and *Yaagas* must be preserved by us with appropriate adaptations for differences in place and time. What is essential is to adhere to the spirit and deeper purpose of the *manthras* which are employed in the *yajnas*. When the *yajnas* are performed in this way they will result in the purification of the spirit and lead us to the realisation of the Divine.

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*Man being divine must have the divine all around him, all the time, in order to be alive; like fish, he must have the water of divine joy all around him. Instead, he is now seeking to keep himself alive by artificial respiration and borrowed blood. He is himself Amritha-swaruupa, and Aanandha-swaruupa (Immortal and Bliss*

*personified). So, why should he strive to get Aanandha from outside?*

*Sri Sathya Sai*