

4. Bhagavan and Bhakti

THE Upanishads are the outcome of the explorations into the nature of the Divine made by the ancient sages. They declare, "*Isaa Vaasyamidam Jagath*" - *Jagath* (the world) is permeated by Easwara. *Jagath* is the place wherein all beings are born, grow and disappear.

Ceaselessly the air blows over the earth everywhere, but we do not see it. Time passes through a procession of days and night filled with activity and sleep. Continuously, somewhere or the other, births and deaths, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain are occurring. The year is filled with varying, seasons, blazing heat or freezing cold, heavy rains or temperate weather. It is not easy to overcome these changing phenomena.

Man's primary need is food. The production of food involves cultivation of land to grow food crops. Without the production of grains hunger cannot be appeased by *mantras* or money. Hence agriculture is the basic occupation for man. With the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing satisfied and with rearing a family, man is content. But with the growth of knowledge and skills, huts develop into mansions, villages turn into towns and cities; population grows and man is proud of what he has accomplished. But he is not aware of the things which are outside his ken and beyond his capacity.

Although births and deaths have been occurring from the beginning of time, men have not been able to understand the reasons for these happenings or their inner significance.

Ancients enquiries in search of God

Recognising that despite all man's intellectual achievements, there were many things beyond his understanding and control, the ancients concluded that there was some super-human power behind and beyond the phenomena. They felt that they should enquire into the nature of the power without which man could not exist, no plant could grow and no living being could survive. These enquiries were not based on blind faith. Nor were they products of wild imagination. They sought to find the truth by austere penance. They regarded it as a search for God.

The earliest finding of the seekers was that the Sun was the most important factor in determining the daily life of man and providing the basic requirements for living. Life would be impossible without the Sun for man, beast, bird or plant. The Sun was regarded as the source of all energy and responsible for birth, growth and destruction of all things in creation. It was for this reason that Sage Viswamitra glorified the Sun God (*Savitr*) in the *Gayathri mantra*.

The sages believed that the Divine principle was present in and outside of everything and that it could be experienced directly as well as indirectly. They pursued their penances further, for the benefit of mankind. They realised the Truth that the Divine Effulgent Person was beyond the outer darkness and, experiencing this Reality, they called upon all to seek and experience it. This Effulgent Purusha is utterly selfless, full of light, the embodiment of all auspicious qualities and free from attributes. He was described as "Siva" meaning one who is beyond the three *Gunas* (*Sathwa, Rajas, Thamas*) and hence absolutely pure and untainted. He was regarded as eternal, omnipotent, all-pervading and the possessor of all that is great and glorious--the six indices of the Divine: Wealth, Righteousness, Fame, Sacrifice, Wisdom and Reputation. And for this reason, He was given another *appellation--Easwara*. *Easwara* is one who is endowed with all conceivable kinds of wealth.

Siva's Will and Grace have no bounds

The sages found that Siva is also the protector of those who seek refuge in Him. Hence, He was called Sankara--one who confers protection and grace. His *Sankalpa* (Will) and grace have no bounds and are not dependent on any person, condition or qualification. Hence He was described as *Swayambhu* (self-created). The sages conceived of Him as one who could incarnate at will for the protection and rescue of man and the safeguarding of *Dharma*. In view of this transcendental power, He was described as *Sambhavah*--the one who incarnates whenever *Dharma* (the reign of Righteousness) is in danger and the good need protection.

The Sun's reflection is seen in innumerable objects. The sages considered the human body as a vessel in the water (the lake of the mind) of which the effulgence of the Sun is reflected. Likewise, recognising that the divine is present in all living things, they gave Him the name, *Aditya*.

Knowing the nature of the omnipotent entity

They realised that it is not possible to know this all-pervading, all-knowing, omnipotent entity. There are three bases for knowing anything: Direct perception, inference and *Vedic sabda* (testimony). The Divine is beyond *prathyaksha* (direct perception) because He has no form. The Divine may appear in the form one contemplates, but that is not the reality. Proof by inference may not be valid in the case of the Absolute. You may know that a seed has the potential to become a tree, but you cannot know what kind of tree it will actually become. Hence there are obvious limitations in seeking to know the nature of the Divine by means of direct perception or by inference.

We have, then, the *Sabda* (testimony) of the *Vedas*. *The Vedas* can only describe the Absolute, but cannot demonstrate it. It has, therefore, been declared: "Not by rituals, or wealth or progeny can you attain the Eternal. Only through sacrifice can you realise the immortal". The Vedanta explored the process of elimination--"Not this", "Not this"---to arrive at the Absolute. Having found that the Divine cannot be known by any of the three methods of knowing, the sages gave the name, *Aprameyah*--the indescribable, the immeasurable.

The sages also found that the Supreme Person was not only the creator and the protector, but also the destroyer and--that he combined in himself all the powers required for these three functions. In fact, he was all these and more, that he could confer joy or sorrow, affluence or privation, and that there was nothing beyond his Power. They wanted to choose a name which would be all-comprehensive and appeal to one and all and so gave him the name *Bhagavan* a name which expressed all the glories and powers of the Supreme Person.

Control of senses should be practised regularly

The significance of Sivarathri is that it is a time when one can get closest to Bhagavan, because the moon, which represents the mind, has shed fifteen of its aspects (*kalas*) and is about to shed the last (sixteenth) aspect. The ancient sages, who explored the link between numbers and the Divine, found that the letters in the name of Siva Rathri amounted to a total of eleven, which was the number of the dark forces called *Rudras* (those who make people cry). The *Rudras* enter the intellects of people and turn their desires towards worldly things, thereby giving rise to attachments and hatreds and pursuit of sensuous pleasures. As they turn the minds of people away from God and towards evil, they were called *Rudras*. The sages declared that whoever is able to keep the *Rudras* in check on the sacred day of Sivarathri will be able to experience

Divinity. This means that control of the senses is the primary requisite for realising the Divine and attaining liberation.

Control of the senses is not easy. Even an evolved person like Arjuna confessed to Sri Krishna that sense-control was extremely difficult. The sages knew this well from their own experience. Hence, they suggested that even if control of the senses was not possible all the time, it should be practised at least on sacred days like Sivarathri. If one has nothing to do, the mind wanders in all directions. Hence the sages prescribed continuous absorption in thoughts of God on Sivarathri night. Repetition of the name of God and meditation on His glories would keep the mind away from other trivialities and promote control of the senses.

The proper way to observe Sivarathri

Sophisticated intellectuals of today look upon Sivarathri only as a night when they should try to keep awake. They do not see the need to observe it as a pure and holy day to be dedicated to thoughts of God. As keeping awake the whole night is their sole idea of Sivarathri, they try to spend it seeing three film shows or playing cards with their friends or playing with dice with their kith and kin the whole night. Keeping awake in this manner, they come home in the morning to have a hearty meal. Is this the way to observe Sivarathri? Not at all. It is a caricature of what should be a sacred occasion for contemplating on God. What kind of vigil is it in which there is no purity of mind and no meditation on God? The stork that stands on one leg waiting to catch a fish cannot be regarded as doing penance. The drunken sot who is oblivious to the world cannot be equated with one who is absorbed in the divine. The man who gives up eating after a tiff with the wife cannot be described as observing a fast.

The unique value of Bharatiya Culture

The vigil on Sivarathri night means concentrating one's thoughts on the sacred, the pure, the beautiful and glorious form of the Divine. The ancient sages experienced the unique value of Bharatiya culture and bequeathed it as a precious legacy to the world. Today many are not aware of what is Bharatiya culture. What is our culture, what are our traditions and what is *Sanathana Dharma*? One who is not aware of the three cannot call himself a child of Bharat. Bharatiya culture is one that is ageless. It has withstood the vicissitudes of time. The soul of this culture is *Sanathana Dharma*.

It is the bounteous nectar that has emerged from the dedicated efforts and severe penances of the rishis. Those sages did not embark upon these exercises out of blind faith or ignorance and lack of knowledge. They were profound seers, free from attachment and self-interest. After discovering the basic truth through disinterested enquiry and personal experience, they gave it to the world.

In the world today, knowledge and skills have grown immensely, but human qualities have not developed at all. Every subject is riddled with controversy. The reasoning process is invoked, without understanding what exactly is reason. It must be clearly understood that the Divine cannot be known by ordinary perception or through rules of logic and reasoning.

The power of Faith--a true incident

Faith is only one. There is nothing like blind faith. For faith there can be no reason and no season. Faith and spirituality are beyond reason. It is foolish to search for the grounds of faith.

There is a sacred pilgrim centre called Srisailam near Anantapur. In a small village adjacent to it, a widow was trying to give her seven-year old son, Ramanna, a schooling with great difficulty. The Sivarathri festival was drawing near. In the Rayalaseema areas, it was customary to invite home the son-in-law and the daughter for the occasion. Ramanna heard from his friends that they were expecting their sisters and brothers-in-law for Sivarathri. He asked his mother whether he had any sister and brother-in-law, where they were living and whether they would come for Sivarathri. His mother had borne a daughter prior to the son, but she had died in infancy.

Memory of that girl's death brought tears to the mother. Suppressing her grief, however, she told her son "Darling, you have a sister." The son implored his mother to let him know where she was so that he could bring her and her husband for Sivarathri. Yielding to his importunities, the mother sought to satisfy him by saying; "In Srisailam you have a sister named Bhramaramba and her husband's name is Mallikarjuna."

The boy then said: "Mother, let us both go to Srisailam and bring sister and brother-in-law and celebrate Sivarathri." He had complete faith in his mother's words; he was determined somehow to bring the sister and brother-in-law to their home. The mother was in a fix. She used various arguments to avoid the journey and ultimately said that she would have to stay at home to make the arrangements for the daughter and son-in-law. The boy said he would go alone and bring his sister and brother-in-law.

To please the son, the mother sent him to Srisailam with some villagers who were going there. They reached Srisailam. The villagers had been instructed in advance by the mother that at Srisailam they should take the boy to the shrines of Mallikarjuna and Bhramaramba, and bring him back. The villagers took him to the temple of Mallikarjuna. They showed him the temple and said Mallikarjuna was inside.

The boy cried out "*Bhava, Bhava*" (brother-in-law) and rushed into the temple. As he entered, the priests stopped him. The boy cried: "*Bhava!* please speak to me." The 'brother-in-law' was silent. The boy thought that as his brother-in-law had not seen him, he could not recognise him now. Meanwhile, the priests thought, the boy was out of his mind and pushed him out of the temple. Ramanna was certain that his 'sister' would recognise him. He went to the shrine of Bhramaramba and cried aloud, "*Akka, Akka*" (Sister, Sister). He rolled on the ground and wailed; "Sister, speak to me." The priests in that temple too thought the boy was demented and cast him out. Ramanna was plunged in grief at the thought of returning home without his sister and brother-in-law. The villagers who had escorted him to Srisailam were inside the temple engaged in their *puja*. Ramanna was alone outside the temple. He saw a big boulder. Climbing on it, he cried: "My mother will not excuse me if I go without sister and brother-in-law. Even my friends will laugh at me. I shall not go home. If my sister and brother-in-law do not come with me, I shall end my life here." Such was his firm faith in his mother's words. Faith of this kind never fails one. Crying aloud, "*Akka, Akka*" he jumped from the precipitous boulder.

At that very moment, a voice spoke: "*Maridi Ramanna, Maridi Ramanna*" (young brother-in-law, Ramanna). From another direction, a loving feminine voice was heard: "*Thammudu, Thammudu*" (young brother, young brother). When the boy jumped, he was held from both sides by God Mallikarjuna and Goddess Bhramaramba. This spectacle was witnessed by all the pilgrims present there. Mallikarjuna and Bhramaramba appearing in human form, carried the boy to his home in his native village, partook of all the special delicacies prepared by the mother, and then vanished.

Faith can achieve anything

Note how the Divine responded to the simple faith of an innocent lad. Faith can achieve anything. Who is entitled to make a distinction between "genuine" faith and "blind" faith? Some may look upon the boy Ramanna as a naive, ingenuous child, who could believe anything in his innocence. The boy's faith was a firm, unwavering faith emanating from a pure heart. A big shrine has been erected on the spot where the divine couple rescued Ramanna. This is known as the shrine of "*Maridi Ramanna*" (coming to be called later as *Mythili Ramanna* shrine). It is wrong to think that such miracles do not happen *in Kali Yuga*. The manifestation of divinity transcends the bounds of time, space and circumstance.

Hence, the first requisite is cultivation of faith. One who has no faith can accomplish nothing. With faith, he can achieve everything. Faith is the foundation for the realisation of God. I have often said: Where there is confidence, there is love; where there is love, there is peace; where there is peace, there is truth; where there is truth, there is Bliss; where there is bliss, there is God.

Realise God through Love

If you want to realise God, you must be immersed in Bliss. To experience Bliss, you have to follow Truth. To pursue Truth, you have to install Peace in your heart. To achieve Peace, you have to cultivate Love. It is confidence that begets love.

Today, faith works like a see-saw which goes up and down. It is one continuous process of birth and death, faith at one moment turning into disbelief the next, and so on. With a faith which comes and goes, you cannot discover the unchanging, eternal Reality.

*The Atma shines eternally,
With no birth and no death,
With no beginning, middle or end
Ever remaining the All-Seeing Witness.*

You may give God any name or form. The Divine has been given various names. Even the *Rishis* have called God by many names-- Siva, Sankara, Adithya, Sambhava and Bhagavan. These names were given to Him; He did not give Himself any name. So, all that you see may be called God. Nature is God. Energy is God. Nothing is God. But, it is really not nothing; it is everything. In what you call everything, there is nothing. What you call Nothing has everything. Everything is Nothing and Nothing is Everything. Some say "There is no God", but everything is in God. The atheist denies the existence of what *is*. In saying "There is no God", "There is" comes first. This means that he is denying what is. He is blind.

Divinity is all-pervading

The truth is, Divinity is all-pervading. After profound enquiry, the *rishis* discovered that God is the source of everything in creation. The *rishis* compared *jagath* (the cosmos) to a seed. Every seed is covered by husk. It is only when the grain and the husk are together that the seed can germinate. Likewise, in the cosmos, the inner grain is God, the outer husk is *Prakriti* (Nature). The cosmos demonstrates the unity of God and Nature. Nature is dependent on God and God is the basis for Nature. Likewise, when we seek refuge in God, He provides the protecting cover for us. *Daasatvam* (Dependence of the Devotee) and *Daivatvam* (protection by God) together

constitute Divinity at work. This is also described as *Siva-Sakthi-Atmaka-Swaroopam--the union of Siva and Sakthi*.

The Cosmos, thus, is not apart from God. It is one with God. The scientists are saying the same thing in their own language when they say matter is energy and energy is matter. The relationship between matter and energy indicated the *Prakriti-Paramatma* (Nature-God) relationship. Energy is, in fact, one of the names of God. *Prakriti* is another name.

It is not possible for any one to describe the greatness or the qualities of God. The scriptures have declared "*Avaang-maanasa Gocharah*" (He is beyond the reach of mind and speech). "From where speech returns, together with the mind, unable to grasp it," says the Upanishad. Devote yourselves to the contemplation of the glories of God on this sacred night and sanctify your lives by turning your thoughts away from mundane concerns.

Discourse on Sivarathri day, 8-3,1986.

True knowledge consists in understanding the unity that underlies the Cosmos. All the sufferings and problems in life arise from the sere of duality. Once the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' is got rid of, consciousness of all-pervading Divinity will be realised.

BABA