

## 22. The perennial quest

THAT which eyes cannot see, but which enables the eyes to see--That is God. The divine cannot be grasped by the mind or described by speech. The Divine transcends all proof. It is One. "I am One, let Me become Many." The myriad forms in the Cosmos emerged from this *Sankalpa* (inner thought) of the One. To discover the one in many, the sages prescribed for mankind the *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Upaasana* paths and indicated in pronouncements like "*Tat-Twam-Asi*" (That Thou Art) that the process is one of Self-realisation.

They declared that the individual should realise that the phenomenal world is in fact a reflected image of himself. But, man, forgetting his true Self, identifies himself with the sense organs and indulges in many wrong actions for the sake of pleasures and pains experienced by the senses.

Every man seeks to achieve *Ananda* (unalloyed happiness) through some means or the other and engages himself in ceaseless efforts for this purpose. But pure happiness eludes him because he does not know its real nature and where to find it. *Ananda* (bliss) cannot be found in the phenomenal world or in material objects like houses, wealth and vehicles, or got from kith and kin. When the bliss that he is seeking is his own true nature, what is the use in seeking it elsewhere? True happiness consists in realising one's Reality.

### **Desires only lead to misery and frustration**

Men today are keen to know all about everything except themselves. They are able to see everything except their own true selves. They are caught in the delusion that the world is different from the One that sustains it. Although what they are seeing is the manifestation of God, they declare that they cannot see God. This is the result of ignorance. All that is seen, the act of seeing and the seer are all Divine. When the unity of these three aspects of Divinity is understood, real bliss will be experienced.

Man today is prey to endless desires. They do not confer happiness, because desires multiply even when they are satisfied. Far from bringing happiness, desires only lead to misery and frustration. Desires are born out of delusion. It is only when the delusion is destroyed that the Self can be realised.

Even a sage like Narada, who had mastered all the *sastras*, was subject to delusions and went to Sanatkumara to find out how he could experience *Brahmananda* (supreme bliss). He said to Sanat-kumara: "Master! I wish to know all about *Brahman* and how I can have vision of the *Brahman*. Confer this benediction on me." When Sanatkumara asked Narada how he was qualified to receive this message, the sage recounted his mastery of the *Vedas* and the scriptures and proclaimed his ability to expound them.

Sanatkumara smiled and asked if he knew anything else. Narada replied: "When I have mastered all the scriptures and recognised that the Divine is the basis for all of them, what else is there to be known? What is the unknown mystery about the *Brahman*?" Sanatkumara said: "Dear Child! If with all this knowledge, you have not been able to experience the Divine, you must enquire into the reason for your failure." Sanatkumara explained: "God cannot be realised by intellectual enquiries or study of the scriptures. *Bhakti* (devotion) alone is the means. Pray to God with deep devotion. You will have the vision of the Divine."

### **Develop the feeling of total surrender**

Man today has achieved eminence in the intellectual sphere and in scientific and technical knowledge. But he cannot realise God through these accomplishments. 'The Divine is attained only by those who have pure, selfless devotion. The Lord responds only to such pure one-pointed love and total devotion. What is to be cultivated by seekers is such total devotion. Today people tend to remember God when they are in distress and forget Him when they are happy and comfortable. Indulging in such part-time devotion men aspire for the fruits of full-time devotion. How can they get those fruits? They have to develop the feeling of total surrender to the Divine and dedicate every action to the Divine.

What is the inner significance of the *yagas* and *yajnas* we are performing now? The purpose of performing these ceremonies is to realise the omnipresent Divine through various activities, rituals and media. The devotional part of *Bhakti* has nine forms of worshipping the Lord. *Sravanam* (listening to the stories of God), *Keerthanam* (singing His glories), *Vishnusmaranam* (remembering His names), *Paadasevanam* (service to the Lord's feet), *Vandanam* (prostration), *Archanam* (offering worship to the Lord), *Daasyam* (Service), *Sneham* (cultivating friendship), *Atmanivedanam* (self-surrender). If any one of these forms of worship is done in full faith, the Divine can be experienced. The primary requisite for realising God is pure and intense love.

### **Ego is the bar to experience Divinity**

What is happening today is excessive growth of *Ahamkara* (egoism) and *Abhimana* (attachment) among the people. As long as egoism exists, experience of divinity is impossible. Egoism and envy have to be totally uprooted. Those who cannot bear to see others happy have nothing good in store for them. It is in deriving joy from the happiness of others that pure devotion manifests itself. We have to preserve and promote what is beneficial in our hoary culture, while adapting the ancient traditions to contemporary conditions. This is one of the primary obligations of Sai Institutions.

In the 18th canto of the Bhagavad Gita the Lord has declared: "*Eashwara* dwells in the heart region of all living things." This means that one must see the Divine in every being. When you speak about anyone, or love anyone, you must consider you are speaking about God and loving God. Develop this sacred attitude. If, on the contrary, you regard Divinity as different from yourself and lead a life based on differences, you will be wasting your life. Pujas, Japas and *Dhyana* have their place in worship. But you should not confine yourself to them. You must go beyond them to the stage of God-realisation. You must progress from the rituals to *upaasana* (meditation), and from *upasana* to *Jnana* (Self-knowledge). That is you have to proceed from *Dwaita* (dualism) to *Visishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualism) and to *Advaita* (non-dualism). Without having the *Advaitic* experience you cannot understand the true nature of the *Atma*.

### **Attempt to understand spiritual Life**

You have been listening for years to discourses about the *Atma* and the *Brahman*. But no attempt has been made to understand the spiritual life. Of what avail is it to immerse yourself in material pursuits and sensuous pleasures which are trivial and transient? You must strive gradually to bring the senses under control without which neither real peace nor enduring bliss can be got. Love of God is the sure means for achieving perennial, Divine bliss. The essence of the study of *sastras*, *puranas* and *Vedas* is to develop love of God. If that love is not there, all these studies are worth nothing. Spiritual exercises lacking in love of God are like fruit without juice.

The Divine is totally free from *Anugraham* or *Aagraham* (likes or dislikes). All that the *Avatar* (incarnate Divinity) thinks, speaks or does is entirely for the well-being of the world and for giving joy to mankind. The ways of the Divine have to be understood properly. Sometimes people may feel that Swami is angry and harsh. This is totally wrong. Swami appears to keep aloof from some persons when He feels they are pursuing wrong paths which may adversely affect their future. This is intended solely to correct the erring devotees. Not realising this, people subject themselves to various worries or doubts.

### **Every act should be done with pure mind**

Only a clean mirror can reflect a correct image. If the mirror is not clean, the reflection will be likewise. Similarly, to experience the Divine, a pure heart is necessary. Purity of the heart results from purity in thought, word and deed. Whatever is done, whether it is a bhajan or any other act, should be done with a pure mind and with complete concentration.

Today the terms *Daana* (charity), *Dharma* (righteousness) and *Thyaaga* (sacrifice) are freely bandied about. But there is a grave misconception about what constitutes charity or sacrifice. When one parts with some money to someone who has come to him seeking assistance, the money that is given should not be regarded as charity or sacrifice, but as discharging of a pre-existing obligation. No one will come seeking help unless he has a claim derived from the past. The person offering "help" is really discharging an old debt. If help is denied, it amounts to backing out of an undischarged obligation. Likewise, the wealth of *Jnana* which we have got is a gift of the Divine. It has to be offered to Him in the form of service.

A great devotee once prayed: "Oh Lord, I am offering to You the heart which You have given to me. I cannot run to your shrine to offer worship. Please accept my prayerful offerings from where I am. All that I have has come from you. There is nothing I can call my own."

### **Strive ceaselessly to reduce desires**

Students! Young people today are taking to wrong paths and corrupting the sacred and precious life that has been given to them. Of the 84 lakhs of species of living beings, no species is afflicted with the disease of insatiable desires as much as man. There is a limit even to the wants of birds and beasts. But man, who is regarded as the highest being in creation, behaves worse than demons. Man, who ought to enjoy the greatest bliss and peace, is the victim of sorrow and worry, because of limitless desires. Everyone must ceaselessly strive to reduce desires.

*Vairagya* (renunciation) does not mean merely giving up attachment to house and other forms of wealth. Real renunciation consists in giving up all bad thoughts. It amounts to *Yoga*. There is no need to leave hearth and home and betake oneself to the forest, to get rid of bad thoughts. Self-examination and Self-punishment are as important as Self-realisation. If bad thoughts arise in the mind, you have to declare to yourself: "Alas, these thoughts have come because of the wrong kinds of food I have been consuming. Let me observe a fast so that I may get rid of these bad thoughts." This is the best way to punish the mind. This is the process of self-correction one must adopt to bring the mind under control.

### **Dharmaja punished for violating Dharma**

Here is a story to illustrate how no one can avoid punishment for violating Dharma, for whatever reason. Dharmaja, the eldest of the Pandavas, was the very embodiment of *Dharma*. But, on the suggestion of Krishna, while making the statement, "*Aswathaama hathah kunjarah*," (*Aswathaama* is killed the elephant), he lowered his voice while uttering the word "*kunjarah*". It

was a piece of trickery. (The intention was to make Drona, the father of Aswathaama, give up the fight on hearing the words "*Aswathaama hathah*" from the mouth of Dharmaja, while the addition of the word "kunjara" was intended to make Dharmaja's statement appear truthful, viz., an elephant named Aswathaama had been killed in the battle. The word coming after announcing the death of "Aswathaama" would not be audible to Drona as it was said in a low voice). For this offense on his part, Dharmaja had to spend a brief spell in *Naraka* (hell). This shows that *Adharma* should not be mixed even to the slightest extent with *Dharma*. Otherwise there is no escape from the consequential punishment.

Merely by praising Rama as the embodiment of *Dharma* one does not become righteous. Righteousness should be shown in action. One should rejoice in following *Dharma* and should not feel weighed down by it. Today many who call themselves devotees do not manifest any of the marks of true devotion. They profess that they are offering everything to the Swami. If that is the case, where is the place for ill-will among devotees? You retain all your bad feelings and offer to me your sweet words. Offer to me all your bad thoughts and take from me my good thoughts. When those bad thoughts are surrendered to me, they will not lead you to wrong actions. When they are with you, they will harass you. In a circus, the lion will do no harm when it is with the Ring Master. But it will be dangerous to others when they are near it.

Everyone should understand how he should conduct himself in daily life, what he should do and what he should avoid and try to live accordingly. One should not cause any displeasure to others or hurt their feelings. As far as possible, you must practise self-restraint and feel satisfied with what you have. You must try to give satisfaction to others and make them feel happy. It is wrong to indulge in gossip or comment about other person's actions or affairs.

### **Try to know the truth about yourself**

Once a devotee approached me with a question regarding Adi Sankara's statement: "*Brahma Sathyam Jaganmithya*" (*Brahman* alone is true; the world is a deception). The devotee wanted to know how the world that was so real to him and in which he had all his experiences could be called *Mithya* (delusion). He asked me: "Swami! There is the pronouncement '*Brahma Sathyam Jaganmithya* I want to know what is real and what is unreal?" I told him: "Leave *Brahman* to *Brahman* and the world of delusion to itself. First of all try to find the truth about yourself. Why bother about *Brahman* and *jagat* when you do not know what you are. Find out whether you are real or not.

You are real unto the moment of death. You need not go as far as that. Just consider what happens when you are fast asleep. In that state, are you real or unreal? You are not aware of your existence in sleep. In that state, are you real or unreal? You are not aware whether you are alive or dead. It is neither real nor *unreal*. *Mithya* applies to this state of *Sat-Asat* (Real-Unreal). When you know yourself and recognise the *Mithya* that you are, you will view the *Jagat* as *Mithya* (a myth)."

Another devotee came with him, who said to me: "Rather than lead the kind of life I am leading, I would prefer to commit *Atma-hatya* (end myself). He said he was being oppressed by many doubts. I told him: "What is it that suffers from doubts? It is the mind. You want to commit *Atma-hatya*, put an end to your life, for the faults of the mind. This means you are punishing the body for the offences of the mind. You will be committing a grievous wrong if you punish the innocent body for the crimes of the errant mind." The devotee felt sorry and prayed to be forgiven.

These are the kinds of mistaken attitudes prevalent today. The true spirit of enquiry is absent.' The intellect is being developed, but not good qualities. Realising one's inherent divinity, one should strive to nourish divine virtues. For this, the start must be made by getting rid of bad qualities. Then there will be room in the heart for good thoughts. God will not reside in a heart filled with fraud and falsehood. These must be expelled from the heart. Purifying the heart is the highest form of worship. Only then can the Divine be experienced and the bliss of that experience can be shared with others.

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