

26. Devotion Is The Panacea

God is without a second. He is Infinite. It is impossible to measure Him or compare Him with anything. He is omnipresent. Comparison is possible only when there is a second object. The *Vedas* declare: "*Ekam eva Advittheeyam.*" (One alone without a second).

The Divine willed: "*Ekoham Bahusyaam.*" (I am One; I shall become many). By His Will the Divine manifested Himself in the many. All religions have accepted this truth. The Bible declares: "God created man in His own image." From the One, the manifold cosmos has emerged. Only man has been endowed with the capacity to control Nature. With the growth of knowledge, the animal nature in man has diminished and he has been able to develop culture.

God comes in human form. As the saying goes: "*Daivam maanusha ruupena*" (The Divine appears in human form). Hence man should not be regarded as a mere product of Nature, a creature of the senses and the physical elements. In terms of the corporeal body, all human beings may appear alike. But their thoughts may be different.

It is the uniqueness of the Bharathiya culture that it has maintained an unbroken and unchanging continuity through the 'ages. Bharathiya culture bears testimony to the eternal verity that is unaffected by the tides of time or history and remains unchanged during creation or dissolution. This truth is the undercurrent of *Sanathana Dharma* (the Ancient Code of Righteousness).

Pre-eminence of *Bhakti*

Bhakti (Devotion) occupies the pride of place in Bharathiya culture. Devotion cannot be confined to observances like worship, pilgrimages or going to temples. These are merely actions indicative of devotion. There is a power which provides a basic impulse for these actions. That is the love of God. *Bhakti* means *Paripurna Prema* (total love). This love is motiveless. Love based on a motive cannot be real love. As a river seeks to join the ocean by a natural impulse, as a creeper winds itself naturally around a tree to climb upwards, the devotee's love is a spontaneous expression of the yearning to realise God, free from worldly desires of any kind. The *Bhagavatham* has expounded the nature of this sacred love from days of yore.

To experience the presence of the Divine, the devotee's love flows as a pure selfless stream. It proclaims that it needs no one except God. It is oblivious to all other things. It regards the Divine as One that pervades everything. God is in every object in the cosmos. All names and forms are derived from God. But by regarding them as distinct entities, man becomes a prey to many difficulties.

Ego is the cause of man's bondage

Man's ego is the cause of this divisive attitude. The man who is wrapped up in his ego cannot recognise God. When ego goes, God appears. When the ego merges in the *Atma*, there is *mukti* (liberation). The *Aham* (ego) arises from the *Atma*. From the ego, thought emerges and thought is the source of *Vaak* (speech). All these have emerged from the *Atma*. It is only when the ego goes that the truth of the *Atma* can be realised. It is ego that is the cause of man's bondage.

The entire cosmos has emanated from the *Atma*, is sustained by the *Atma* and ultimately merges in the *Atma*. This truth is expressed in a *sutra* (aphorism) in the *Brahma Sutras*: "*Thath Ja-la-an*" (From That it is born, merges in It and is sustained by It). Man also comes from the Brahman, grows in the Brahman and merges in the Brahman. *Nara* (man) is like the water bubble that

arises in the water, grows in it and merges in it. Narayana is like the water. The aim of spiritual *sadhana* is to make man recognise the unity that subsumes creation and enable him to realise the bliss in oneness with the Divine through the means of *Karma*, *Upasana* and *Jnana* (rituals, meditation and spiritual wisdom).

Although the cosmos may appear multifarious, there is one thing that is its basis. A seed that is planted grows into a tree with numerous branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. Wherefrom did this variety come? All these exist potentially in a subtle form in the seed. That is the significance of Sri Krishna's declaration in the *Gita*: "*Beejam Maam Sarvabhoothaanaam.*" (I am the seed in all beings). Just as from a seed a tree can come, with innumerable branches, flowers and fruits, with a seed in each fruit, from the single seed of the Divine the infinite variety of *Prakruthi* (Nature) has emerged. The relations between beings in the cosmos can be compared to the relations between the branches in a tree. Our feelings may be compared to flowers and life itself may be compared to a fruit. In each being there is a seed of the Divine.

Mark of Parama Bhakti

The cowherdesses of Brindavan exemplified, in their devotion, the devotee's quest for oneness with the Divine. They saw Krishna in every manifestation in Nature and welcomed association with it, whether it was a tree, or a mountain or the ocean. They wished to be always near Krishna, to sport with Him, listen to the music of His flute and end their lives with Him. This is the mark of *Parama Bhakti* (Supreme Devotion). Everyone should strive through *sadhana* to develop such devotion. One should not adore God when he is happy and blame when he is in trouble.

Apart from the Gopis in the *Bhagavatham*, it is the eldest of the Pandavas, Dharmaraja, who is an exemplar of *Parama Bhakti* (Supreme Devotion). Whatever ordeals he was subjected to, or humiliations he had to experience, Dharmaraja never allowed his faith in Krishna to weaken. He adhered steadfastly to the belief: "Oh Krishna! Whether I am in a city or a forest, whether I am high or low, whether in happiness or sorrow, you are my sole refuge." It was because of this unflinching and single-minded faith in Krishna that Dharmaraja could achieve glory and stand out as an ideal to the world.

There are various reasons for the advent of the Divine in human form. For the human being, his past *karma* is the cause of birth. The circumstances of each one's birth depend on his past actions. "*Karmaanu bandheeni manushya loke*" (Man is bound by the consequences of his actions). It may be asked what is the *karma* that accounts for the advent of *Avatars*. For Divine incarnations *karma* is not the cause. The evil deeds of the wicked and the good deeds and yearning of the righteous are responsible for the advent of *Avatars*. The Narasimha *Avatar* (the Divine incarnating as half-man and half-lion) was due to the great devotion of Prahlada and the bad qualities of Hiranyakasipu (Prahlada's father).

Why Avatars come

The descent of the Divine is in response to the yearnings and actions of people and not because of any *karma* of the Divine. This may be understood from a simple illustration. Crops grown on the ground look up to the skies for rain. They cannot reach up to the clouds. The clouds come down in the form of rain to provide water to the crops. To cite another example: There is a child on the floor. It wants its mother. It cannot jump up to the mother. The mother has to bend down, take the child and fondle it. In the same manner, to offer relief to devotees, to protect them and

foster them, the Divine comes in the human form. This is described as *Avatarana* (the descent of God as an incarnation). God comes down from His high level to give joy to His devotees. Man does not try to understand the inner significance of such incarnations.

Devotion is the panacea for all ills

There is nothing greater in the world than *Bhakti* (devotion). Once the sage Narada demonstrated to his disciples how devotion is greater than anything in the world, including the Divine. While the Divine was greater than the cosmos, which the Lord as Vamana could measure in two steps, the Lord Himself is held in his heart by the devotion of the devotee. "Devotion bestows the highest benefits. Devotion alone is the means to Realisation. Devotion alone confers Supreme peace." Devotion is the panacea for all ills. There is no *Veda* or *Sastra* superior to devotion. Divine love encompasses all sacred acts. To achieve oneness with the Divine, one will have to be prepared to sacrifice everything.

All the sacred festivals celebrated by the Bharathiyas are full of significance spiritually and socially. Every festival is regarded as a holy event surcharged with divinity. On such a holy day, each house is cleaned up, everybody takes a sacred bath to purify the body, special *pujas* are performed, coconut is offered to the deity and prayers are offered during the day.

The significance of today's festival (Vinayaka Chaturthi) is explained by different persons in different ways. Is it possible to transplant an elephant's head on a human body? The esoteric significance of the Ganesa image is: Ganapathi has been given the head of an elephant because he is known for his extraordinary intelligence.

The elephant is symbolic of extreme intelligence. In common parlance reference is made to the elephant's intelligence. "*Gaja thelivi*" (The elephant is a highly intelligent animal). Ganapathi is described as "Buddhi Vinayaka" and "Siddhi Vinayaka" (Vinayaka the Wise and Vinayaka the Accomplished). Vinayaka itself means an unexcelled leader. V

Exceptional; *Nayaka--leader*. For whom is he the leader? He is the chief of the *ganas* (Divine spirits) and hence is known as Ganapathi. He is the chief of *Rudra Ganas*, *Bhadra Ganas* and other *Ganas*.

Vinayaka acted as a scribe to Vyasa

Vinayaka is the embodiment of intelligence. When Vyasa wanted to write the *Mahabharata* he prayed to Vinayaka for help. Vinayaka agreed to act as scribe on one condition: While dictating his verses, Vyasa should not pause at any stage. As Vyasa was reciting the verses, Ganesa was inscribing them on the palm leaf at a great speed. There was a race, as it were, between the two as to how fast Vyasa could dictate the stanzas and how quickly Ganapathi could inscribe them.

When the *Mahabharata* was completed, it ran into 100 crores of verses. It was a colossal compendium of all knowledge and ranked as the fifth *Veda*. It contained countless subtle truths. Human beings, the Devas (celestials) and the Asuras (demons), all three groups desired to have a share in the sacred work and prayed to Vyasa. When the 100 crores of verses were divided equally among the three claimants, one stanza of thirty-two syllables remained. How were they to be distributed? After distributing ten syllables to each of the three, two syllables remained. How were they to be distributed? Ganapathi said these two syllables should be given to the world in the names of Hari, Hara, Rama, Krishna, Saayi---all the phonetic two-letter names of the Lord.

Vighneswara is the remover of obstacles

What is the significance of Ganesa worship? Man is confronted with many *Vighnas* (obstacles) in the journey of life. Prayers are offered to Ganapathi--who is better known as Vighneswara--- for removing such obstacles and minimising impediments. Ganapathi is an important deity for people of all sects. He is the deity to whom worship is offered first in any ritual. Why is the pre-eminence accorded to Ganapathi?

Once upon a time Parvati (Divine Mother) and Parmeswara (Divine Father) wanted to decide between Vinayaka and Subrahmanya (their two sons) who was superior. They called the two lads and set them a task. They were told they should go round the cosmos. Whoever came first would be entrusted with a high office. Subrahmanya immediately got onto the back of his peacock and started flying on its wings. But Ganapathi stayed put. Parvati and Parmeswara thought Ganapathi was out of the race. But on seeing Subrahmanya at a distance, Ganapathi got up, circumambulated his parents and sat down. Ganapathi claimed that he had won the race. When Parmeswara questioned him, Ganapathi replied: "The whole cosmos is a projection of the Lord. The Lord is immanent in the universe. When I have gone round my Divine parents, I have gone round the universe." Ganapathi also asked them: "Show me any place where you are not present. You are omnipresent. You are in everything."

Because of the acute intelligence he displayed, Vinayaka was made the head of the *Ganas* by Parmeswara.

There is thus an inner significance for every name and form. Normally an elephant's head on a human body should present an ugly image. But anyone can see that Ganesa's elephant head has an attraction all its own. There is no trace of ugliness in it. It is symbolic of extraordinary intelligence and intellectual ability.

To Unity through Love

We celebrate festivals like the Ganesa Chaturthi as holidays. But they are not holidays but holy days. It is not easy for anyone to recognise the truth about the Divine. His *leelas* (miraculous sportive activities) are beyond the grasp of the mind and speech. Hence, one should make the best use of whatever one is able to get from the Divine. One should avoid getting into unnecessary and purposeless controversies, which may cause more confusion.

Love is the most important element in everything. Through love alone you can unify the world. It is the absence of love that is the cause of hatred. It is this hatred that is undermining human nature. Despite the fact that it is difficult to nourish hatred, while it is easy to foster love, men are engaged in doing what is difficult.

Truth is beyond Time and Space

Uttering the truth is easy. But indulging in falsehood is a tortuous process. One has to take a lot of trouble to cover up one lie with more lies. That is why it has been said: "*Sathyam brooyath; Priyam brooyath; na brooyath Sathyam Apriyam*" (Speak the truth, speak what is pleasing. Do not utter truth that is unpleasant). God is the embodiment of truth. Truth is the foundation of the universe. This truth transcends the mind and speech and is beyond the categories of Time and Space. *Vedanta* has described it as *Ritam*. It is also called Transcendental Truth. Truth is that which remains unchanged over time. You must live up to this truth. You must realise that the Divine is present in everything. Only when you can recognise the omnipresence of the Divine will you be able to experience the Divine.

Develop faith in God. All names are His--Rama, Krishna, Christ or any other name. Every man is the embodiment of the Divine. True human relations can grow only when this truth is recognised. The first stage is where you recognise "I am in the Light." Next when you realise, "The Light is in me," and finally you realise, "I am the Light." "I" represents love and light represents *Jnana* (Supreme Wisdom). When love and light become one, there is Realisation. The *Bhakti Marga* (path of devotion) is easier than *Jnana Marga* (the path of knowledge). The *Gita* has extolled the *Bhakti Marga*. Love should come from within, not enforced from outside. You should develop disinterested and spontaneous love. The attitude of petitioning to God for favours should be given up. Love of God should not be based on *quid pro quo*, seeking favours in exchange for prayers and offerings to God. The object of celebrating holy festivals is to devote the day to meditation on God.

From today give up *swaartha* (selfishness), turn your mind towards the *Parartha* (Supreme), lead a life of *Yadaartha* (Truth) and sanctify your lives. Place your faith in God and do your duty to the best of your ability. Saturate yourself with love and share it with all. If you earn the love of God even to the slightest extent, you will experience infinite joy.

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