

27. Devotion and self-sacrifice

*The world has had many great souls who
sacrificed their lives for Truth;
Even now there are many who have
given their lives for the good of others,
There are many who have not desired
worldly pleasures even in their dreams;
But there are few who seek to know why
this body has been given.
It has been given so that man may
realise his true Self.
Heaven does not exist in some
realm of the gods.
It is in the world of human beings.
With good qualities if one conducts
himself righteously
Why seek heaven? This itself will be Heaven.*

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love!

Men make various attempts to understand everything in the world. But no one makes any effort to understand himself. An enormous amount of time is spent on understanding other things, but man cannot find the time to know himself. Whatever one's scholarship, intelligence or position, he cannot have peace of mind and happiness if he does not know his real Self.

Narada, who had mastered the sixty-four sciences and arts, could not secure the supreme bliss that comes from peace of mind. Troubled by this *Asaanthi* (lack of peace) Narada approached the sage Sanatkumara and asked him what was the cause of his condition. Sanatkumara asked Narada what were his accomplishments. Narada told the sage that he was proficient in all the *Vedas* and *Vedantas* and had mastered the sixty-four different sciences including the training of elephants and the rearing of cows. Laughing within himself, Sanatkumara asked: "Are these your only accomplishments? Oh Narada, without knowing who you are, what is the use of knowing all other things?"

Narada, Brahma's mind-born son

Narada was no ordinary person. In his incarnation as Vamana, the dwarfish young Brahmin lad, Vishnu, came to the Emperor Bali and asked from him the gift of three feet of land as measured by His feet. Bali agreed to make the gift. Vishnu (assuming His cosmic form) covered the whole earth by one step and the entire sky by another step. When Brahma recognised the sacred and puissant form assumed by Lord Vishnu,

he wished to wash the feet of the Lord. To wash the foot of the Lord which was high up in the sky, a great amount of water was needed. To get that water, Brahma resolved in his mind how to go about it. At that very moment an individual appeared on the earth. Because he was the result of a thought in Brahma's mind, he is known as "*Brahma-maanasa putra*" (Brahma's mind-born son). He had come to provide water. Because he brought water, he got the name "Narada" (the one who provided water).

Narada was thus born during the time of Emperor Bali. Despite the fact that he was the mind-born son of Brahma himself, he had no peace of mind.

The reason for mankind's loss of peace

What was the cause of Narada's loss of peace? Narada used ceaselessly to chant the name of Vishnu. He had no worldly desires of any kind. Brahma, who had created Narada for the purpose of propagation of devotion in the world and promoting good qualities among mankind, urged Narada to get married. Narada asked: "I am perpetually in a state of bliss chanting the name of Hari. What need is there for me to get into this bondage? Revered father! I am ready to carry out any of your injunctions but I cannot agree to get involved in the bondage of family life." How is it possible for Brahma to attain the status of *Pithaamaha* (grandfather) if the son refused to obey the father's command and agree to marriage?

The human predicament is similar to this situation. Men claim that God is everything for them but they are not ready to abide by God's injunctions. And that accounts for their lack of peace. For a man who is immersed in worldly life, the chanting of God's name is undoubtedly a good medicine. But along with the medicine he has to adhere to *Pathyam* (the prescribed diet regulations). God's injunctions are the diet rules. Today's man, if he takes the medicine, he ignores the diet regulations. If he adheres to the prescribed diet, he ignores the medicine. And that is why man is afflicted with the disease of peacelessness. In this context, God is the medicine and God's command is the prescribed diet. Devotion to God without observing the Divine injunctions destroys peace of mind.

If Narada, despite his chanting of the Lord's name, suffered from lack of peace, it was because of a curse pronounced by Brahma. Brahma declared: "As you are not obeying my command, I declare that henceforth you shall have no peace."

Sanatkumara, therefore, advised Narada: "As long as you have not known who you really are, you cannot get real peace, despite all your scholarship and all your pious actions."

"Know your true Self"

Man embarks on various kinds of *sadhanas* to achieve *Mukti* (liberation).

Seeking liberation, even if man

worships three crores of gods

He will not get it as long as he

does not know who he is.

When man destroys his ego and sense

of I-ness, what need is there for Liberation?

He becomes liberation itself

Sanatkumara told Narada: "All the scriptures you study will enable you to earn a livelihood, but will not confer peace or liberation. They may secure for you name and fame, power and pelf, but not *Mukti* (liberation)."

The scriptures are like a dense jungle of words. These words are capable of different interpretations. It is not easy to determine definitely which are the correct meanings. A man who has lost his way in a forest cannot easily reach his destination. Merely by conning the scriptures the heart cannot be purified. (In this connection, Bhagavan sang the opening stanza of "Bhaja Govindam.")Worship of Govinda is the only way to save one's self at the time of death, when verbal scholarship will be of no avail.

Develop *thriпти* and spirit of *thyaga*

In ancient times, people used to revere elders, purify their hearts by getting rid of selfishness, seek the guidance and blessings of saintly teachers and put into practice their teachings. With the passage of time over the centuries men tended to grow more and more selfish and self-centred. Men steeped in selfish pursuits could find no time or *occasion* for revering elders. Even if by chance they happened to meet some wise elders, they paid no heed to the advice of the elders. The result is that men today have lost mental peace, though they have progressed in many fields. How can there be any happiness without peace?

Today there is no limit to human desires. For the disease of insatiable desires, the remedy is *thriпти* (contentment). Without contentment man can have no happiness. Along with contentment the spirit of *thyaga* (sacrifice) has to be developed. What we are witnessing today is a limitless growth of wants without any concern for reducing them.

This growth of desires was described by Adi Sankara as "*trishna*" (thirst). Drinking water quenches thirst for a time, but the thirst arises again. Likewise as long as life lasts, the thirst (for material pleasures) lasts, though it may be quenched from time to time. This thirst is a strong kind of fetters. Its strength does not diminish, but grows from day to day. Iron chains will rust in course of time but the chains of desire grow stronger every day. Therefore, Sankara declared: "The desire for more and more wealth is dangerous. Cultivate the good sense to give up your desires. Wealth is the result of past deeds. Therefore be content with what you have." (Swami recited a Telugu poem). The *Vedas* have taught that immortality can be attained only through sacrifice and not through rituals, progeny or wealth. Great men who have made supreme sacrifices and taught to mankind *thyaga* (sacrifice) itself as *yoga* have been born in Bharat time and again over many *yugas* (aeons).

Emperor Bali and Sukracharya

Although his preceptor Sukracharya appealed to Bali repeatedly not to make the promised gift of land to Vamana, the Emperor declared he was determined to make the gift. Sukracharya upbraided Bali: "The young Brahmin is no ordinary person. He is Lord Narayana Himself. You have ventured to offer a gift to him. What an ignoramus you are! How foolish of you!"

Rejoicing at the *guru's* rebuke, Emperor Bali said: "*Guruji/The* seeker of the gift is Lord Narayana. When the hand that blesses the universe, the hand that holds out the promise of freedom from fear to everyone, the hand that bears the Sri Chakra in its palm, is stretched out towards me with the *Dehi* (appeal) for a gift, what greater good fortune can I have? The hand

that seeks is underneath and my hand, that of the giver, is above it. How fortunate I am! When I am blessed in this fashion, you are coming in my way by your plea. I am not prepared to obey you." Saying this, Emperor Bali went ahead with the gift.

Which man can have such a sacred and precious opportunity? There are indeed several kinds of gifts which are commended gift of land, of gold, of food, of houses, clothes and so on. It is not any of these which Bali offered as gift. He offered himself as gift. He did not give any material gifts. He gave himself completely. This is true *Arpitham* (*offering* to the Divine). By this offering, Vishnu and Emperor Bali became one.

Sacrifice--true and false

Samartha Ramdas and Saint Tulsidas have declared that whoever comes in the way, whether he is the preceptor, father, mother, or anybody else, when a sacred offering is to be made to God, he should not be obeyed come what may.

While making the offering, Emperor Bali said: "Oh Lord! I am offering to you the heart which you gave to me. I offer to you all my wealth, my kith and kin and everything else. Protect me, who has surrendered to you.

It is because such supremely self-sacrificing, great men have existed in Bharat from times immemorial, that Bharat has shone as a *Thyaga Bhoomi* (the land of Sacrifice), *Yoga Bhoomi* (the land of *Yoga*) and *Karma Bhoomi* (the land of sacred deeds). Today sacrifice and charity have become a fashionable pastime. It has also been turned into a business. If a trivial donation is made, it must be blazoned in the press! In the old days, the great souls and rulers who gave away kingdoms and all their possessions, indulged in no fanfare, but experienced the bliss of giving in their hearts. Those great souls totally ignored those who came in the way of their acts of sacrifice.

Examples of Mira and Karna

After her marriage with Rana Kumarabhoja, Mira was given many facilities by the Rana for her worship of Krishna. Unfortunately, the Rana was killed in battle when Babar invaded his kingdom. Mira was left helpless. Her brother-in-law, Rathnasimha, ascended the throne. He harassed Mira in many ways. He hid snakes in the clothes sent to her. He mixed poison in the milk or water given to her. The people, incensed at the cruelties inflicted on Mira, rose against Rathnasimha and killed him. His younger brother, Vikramsimha, succeeded to the throne. He placed every conceivable obstacle in the way of Mira visiting her Krishna mandir. She was denied all help.

In this situation, Mira sent a long letter to Tulsidas. She asked: "What is my duty? In my present plight, should I leave my home? Should I safeguard the reputation of my family, or merge in my Lord who is the breath of my life?" Tulasidas sent her the following reply: "Mira! whoever comes between the devotee and God--whether he is the father, the mother, friend, husband or wife, or *guru--should* be given up. God is the eternal protector before birth and after death. To realise the eternal and ever-present Lord, one should be prepared to ignore the objections of transient persons." Thereupon, Mira decided to give up everything and went forth, singing *bhajans* all the way to Dawaraka (the abode of the Lord).

Many heroic men and women have been born in Bharat in the past who have been prepared, for the sake of God, to give up father, mother, husband, wife, or all their possessions. Take the

example of Karna. He was one who had been blessed by the Sun-God. Even as Bali went ahead with his gift to Vamana despite the strong plea of his preceptor, Sukracharya, Karna discarded the warnings of the Sun-God and parted with his ear ornaments and his armour (to Indra).

Even ordinary people in Bharat are filled with the spirit of sacrifice. Here is the example of Tanaji. All was set for his wedding. He was seated on the ceremonial seat. News came that invaders had entered the country. He got up in his sacred yellow wedding dress. He went straight to the battlefield, vanquished the enemy and lost his life in the battle.

It is only when the life of Bali is seen from the perspective of sacrifice for the Lord that its full meaning will be apparent. It should not be regarded simply as an instance of a gift being made to Vishnu when He came in the form of Vamana.

Welcome tests as aids to advancement

Hiranyakasipu was the avowed enemy of Hari. His son Prahlada was a devotee of Hari. Prahlada's son Virochana was a wicked person. Bali was the son of Virochana. Bali was the very reverse of his father. Prahlada and Bali were great devotees of the Lord. It is such devotees who have to face severe ordeals. Those who are not devotees do not go through such tests. You may think that this is a welcome prospect. But it is only the one who is tested that secures promotion. The sooner a boy completes various examinations, the sooner he goes up in studies. The boy who does not sit for any examination stays put in the same class. It is those who get through tests, who rise to great heights. Hence, you must welcome tests as aids to advancement.

Emperor Bali was prepared to make any sacrifice to attain God. He was a lover of his subjects. During his reign, the people experienced no hardships. Bali considered the welfare of his subjects as his own realm. Kerala was a land of prosperity, flowing with milk and honey. Even today Kerala is endowed with Nature's bounty. But unfortunately, forgetting the legacy of the ancient sages and rulers, people have gone astray in later times.

The remarkable devotion of Keralites

When Bali was about to leave the earth, he gave a pledge to the people, who were in deep distress, that once a year he would appear before them and bless them. This day of Bali's appearance is celebrated as Onam. This sacred day is observed as a festive occasion on which the people wear new clothes, prepare feasts and after offering the food to God, partake of it, remembering the great sacrifice of Emperor Bali.

Onam means that which is new. It may refer to new clothes, new thoughts, or new actions. Old clothes and old ideas have to be cast off. Good thoughts have to be developed. This is the sacred festival observed every year by the people of Kerala. It is a supremely sacred day for them. When thousands of Keralites celebrate this festival here, far away from their hearths and homes, it should be noted that they are the only people from any region who are celebrating their traditional festival here in this manner. People from no other State in India do such a thing. It is their great good fortune that they observe this sacred day here in this manner. It is a fine example of devotion. What a supreme mark of devotion is this when they celebrate their festival here away from homes! If they had stayed in their homes, they would be preparing a variety of sweet dishes and varied eatables using coconuts and bananas. The fact that they have denied themselves all these and gladly subjected themselves to various inconveniences here, living in sheds, bears testimony to their deep devotion to Swami.

Hoping that the people of Kerala will ceaselessly develop their devotion and sanctify the entire State of Kerala by their exemplary life, I bless all of them and bring my discourse to a close.

Discourse at the Poornachandra Auditorium on 3-9-1990, the day of Onam festival.

You cannot sit back, and expect the Incarnation to bring Peace and Joy into you. The incarnation comes to warn, to guide, to awaken, to lay down the path, and shed the light of Love on it. But, man has to listen, learn and obey with hope and faith.

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