

5. Time and the timeless

Love shines radiantly throughout the Cosmos

The Cosmos is permeated by the Lord

The Lord and the Cosmos are inextricably

united like friends.

This is the Truth declared by Sai.

Not visible in the phenomenal world,

The Atma that is immanent in it is the

Cosmic Consciousness.

That sustains the Cosmos like the string

Running through a necklace of gems.

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love! Common folk look at the visible universe as it appears to them physically. This is a common experience. To view the universe as Divine, calls for a supreme exercise in spirituality. "*Sarvam khalu idam Brahma*" (All this is *Brahmam*); "*Viswam Vishnuswaroopam*" (the Cosmos is a manifestation of the Divine); "*Easwarassarvam*" (The Lord is everything). On the basis of these *Vedic* pronouncements, the whole universe should be regarded as a manifestation of the Supreme Lord.

Strive to develop the upward vision

In the eyes of the ancient *Bharatiyas*, there was nothing in the world that was not Divine. Ignoramuses who were not aware of this truth, looked down upon *Bharatiyas* as worshippers of trees, stones, snakes, etc. Unfortunately, the awareness of this basic truth (about the immanence of the Divine in the Cosmos) is declining even among *Bharatiyas* today. Such recognition (of the divinity of everything in the universe) is not to be found in any other religion or country elsewhere.

There are three levels of potentiality in man the animal, the human and the Divine. At the lowest level is the animal nature. The animal is always looking downward, towards the ground. This means that the animal nature tends to go after what is low and trivial. The human level is in the middle stage. From here man should strive to develop, the upward vision. Only then will he be able to understand his divinity. Unfortunately, man today tends to develop the downward animal vision rather than the upward vision.

Failing to see the Reality that underlies the changing visible world and mistaking the unreal for the real, man is wasting his life. The human birth and body have been conferred on man to enable him to realise the *Atma* (his true-Self). But what has been offered for realising the *Atma* is being used for seeking *Annam* (food) and forgetting God. As a result, man, instead of advancing towards the goal, is receding from it.

The scriptures have indicated what is the path that should be esteemed and pursued. The sastras prescribe that those worthy of honour and even the unworthy should be respected. But the hallmark of the *Kali* age is to honour the dishonourable and dishonour the honourable. There is no greatness in doing good to those who do you good. The superior being is one: who returns

good for evil. It may be asked whether, doing good to the one who does you harm will not mean encouraging him to do more harm. That is not so. If you return harm for harm, how can you be called a good man? You become one like the evil-doer. Only by returning good for evil can you elevate yourself to a higher state.

There is no escape from work for anyone

Men today do not cultivate such attitudes. They treat, untruth as truth and truth as untruth. For instance, a man wants to enjoy good food and live an easy life without having to do any work. This is a wholly wrong attitude. A man is engaged in work even when he breathes, eats and moves about. There is no escape from work for anyone. Likewise, it has been said: "*Pasyannapi na pasyathi moodho*" (Even while seeing, the fool does not see). That is, even while seeing God, experiencing God and enjoying God, he says, "I want to see God "All that a man sees is a manifestation of God. Is not everything that he enjoys an expression of the Divine? Is God to be found in any distinct place? Bliss is the very form of God. Everything that is seen is Divine. The Cosmos is God. To see all this and not to experience God is sheer foolishness.

Three root causes for mental aberration

There are three causes for this aberration: *Mala*, *Vikshepa* and *Avarana*. *Mala* refers to a mental state comparable to a dust-covered mirror. The mind can see clearly only when the dust is wiped away. The heart that is naturally pure is covered by impurities created by the three *gunas*---*Satwa*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*. Instead of removing these impurities, man is adding to them. Consequently he is failing to perceive the unsullied Spirit within him.

Vikshepa refers to the vacillations and unsteadiness of the mind caused by doubts and suspicions arising from attachment and hatred. Man is perpetually haunted by doubts and apprehensions. The root cause of this is the lack of full faith even in himself. Doubts give rise to likes and dislikes, which infest him like snakes. Man, therefore, has to cultivate firm faith, if not in God, at least in himself. Faith in himself will lead to faith in God, because he and God are not different.

Avarana refers to that which envelops man. What is it that has enveloped man? The answer is Desires. Man is covered by desires all over He cannot get away from desires in any situation. He is bound by every kind of desire--for wealth, health, power, position and fame *ad lib*. Desires are not bad in themselves. But there should be a limit to all of them. Desires should be gradually reduced. Recognise the Divine in all that you do and dedicate the fruits of your actions to God.

Man today needs not the highest system of *Vedanta* (metaphysics) but the basic methods of being truly human. He has to be taught the alphabet of the good life. He is a prey to the desire for wife, children and wealth. Bound by these three desires, he cannot see anything beyond or above them. In the final reckoning, he does not have faith even in his own human estate. He does not seek to know what are human qualities. It is not the physical form that makes one a man. Without the spirit of enquiry and the practice of right conduct, one does not become a true human being. The humanness is revealed only when there is harmony in thought, word and deed. Divergence among these three reduces man to the animal level.

Fill your devotion with sweetness

The ancient *Bharatiyas* laid down some regulations as indices of right behaviour. From days of yore, *Bharatiyas* observed certain sacred days as festivals dedicated to the Divine. For instance, on these festival days, they used to make a *naivedyam* (an offering of food to the Divine). These offerings consisted only of sweet edibles. If nothing else was available, they would offer a piece

of jaggery or sugar candy or a plantain. The inner significance of offering these sweet things to God is the recognition that God is full of sweetness. Hence, devotion should be filled with sweetness. "Your words are sweet. Your looks are sweet; your heart is sweet. Oh Lord of Mathura (Krishna)! You are the personification of sweetness." (This was how a devotee addressed Krishna). In offering sweets to the Lord man today is often motivated by selfishness. He consumes himself the sweets (instead of sharing them with others).

Another significant observance on festival days is the breaking of coconuts as an offering to the Lord. The meaning of this practice has to be rightly understood. A coconut has three constituents. The outermost constituent is the hard fibrous cover. Inside it is a very hard shell. Inside the shell is the pure copra. To remove the fibre, you need a sharp knife. To break the shell, you require a stone or some other hard instrument. After breaking the shell, you get at the pure white kernel. The symbolism behind the offering of the coconut should be properly understood. Our body itself is like a coconut. The outer body made up of the three *gunas* is comparable to the fibrous covering of the coconut. It is the gross body. The subtle body, which constitutes *Avidya* or ignorance of the Real, is comparable to the hard shell of the coconut. To remove the fibre of the physical body, you need *Vairagya* or detachment. The subtle body represents the mental process. To eliminate the limitations of this mental process, you have to engage yourself in good deeds and entertain good thoughts.

Develop detachment to realise the bliss within

The gross body is *Annamaya* (made up of food). Of the five sheaths composing man's body, the sheaths of *Pranamaya* (life-breath), the *Manomaya* (mental) and the *Prajnanamaya* (intelligence or wisdom) make up the subtle body. The fifth is the *Anandamaya* (bliss-filled sheath)--the Causal Body. The causal body is comparable to the kernel inside the coconut. This represents the *Atma*. It is pure and unchanging. For the sake of the *Atma* (the Indwelling Spirit) the outer casings in the form of the gross and subtle bodies have to be nourished. But men today are more *concerned* about the physical and mental bodies than about the Spirit within.

The significance of the breaking of the coconut is that man should get rid of the attachment to the physical body and purify the mind to realise the bliss represented by the Spirit within. Thus, to experience the bliss of the Divine, you have to get rid of the shell of sensory desires. To break the shell, you have to develop detachment towards the body (symbolised by the removal of the fibrous cover of the coconut). *Vairagya* (detachment) does not mean renouncing the world but experiencing the Divine in everything you do and giving up all evil tendencies.

Although Bharatians have been observing these sacred festivals over centuries, internally there has been no significant spiritual transformation. People have been listening to Swami's discourses for years and enjoying them. But how far have their daily practices been improving? Without this transformation, of what use are all the teachings? Every object in Nature performs its specific function. The sun and the moon are ceaselessly doing their duty. God is also carrying on His duties without any rest or pause. The rivers (by flowing towards the ocean) convey the lesson that you should not give up your effort until you reach your destination.

Life is a mixture of good and bad

Man should involve himself in righteous actions in a spirit of equanimity. Life is a mixture of good and bad, of ups and downs. Ignore the bad and enjoy what is good. If you buy a basket of mangoes, there may be some overripe and rotten fruits in it. You ignore them and consume the

good ones. Likewise, in life you should forget the bad experiences and make use of the good ones. Instead, man broods over the bad experiences and spoils even the good that comes his way. This is a sign of weakness in man.

Human life is a procession of good and bad experiences, of joy and sorrow. These experiences depend on the changing conditions of time and place. The new year which begins today is called *Prajotpathi*. The name means, "creation of people." There is no impediment to the growth of the population. It goes on irrespective of the name of the year. Another name for the year is *Prajapathi*. This name refers to the form of *Brahma* (the Creator). Although the name sounds good, the prospects for the year are not so good. The name is not always an index of what might be expected from it. A man may be named Dharmaja, but in fact he might be the embodiment of *Adharma* (unrighteousness). An ugly looking person might be bearing the name *Soundararajan*.

Difficulties my be overcome with faith in God

Although this year bears a good name, it is likely to witness many calamitous events. The danger from thieves is likely to increase. Many natural calamities are likely. Political turmoil may exceed all bounds. Many drastic changes are likely. But there is no need to get panicky over these portents.

Fire accidents and earthquakes are likely to be more numerous this year. These are incidental to Nature. They have to be turned into proper account by right response. Heat and cold are natural phenomena. They should be treated according to their nature and not considered as good or bad. In the month of March, the weather will be hot in Rayalaseema; it will be cool in Ooty and Kodaikanal. These differences in climate are natural to the places concerned and should be treated on that basis. If a person has a woollen coat and a muslin shirt, he must use the coat during the cold weather and the shirt in summer. Skill is needed for adjusting oneself to the climate.

In the *Prajotpathi* year, people should know how to make proper use of impending events. Whatever difficulties or trials may occur, they can be overcome with faith in God. People may not readily accept this, but there is no surer recipe for peace than this faith. Even if they do not have full faith, a small fraction of it will be of help.

Cycle of yugas as they appear every day

This day is called *Yugadi*. It is related to the *Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali Yugas*. These *yugas* are believed to last some thousands of years. But they are continually coming in a cycle like the days of the week. Nor should they be considered as coming one after the other after long durations. If the matter is properly examined, it will be found that the *yugas* appear in a cycle every day. From 4 a.m. to 12 noon, it is *Krita Yuga*. During this period, man can devote himself to *Dharma* (envisaged as an animal with four feet). From 12 noon to evening 6.00, it is *Treta Yuga*. During this period, *Dharma* is said to have lost one of its legs. This means that a part of the powers in man has been lost. During this period, *Dharma* survives on three legs. From 6 p.m. to 12 midnight, it is *Dwapara Yuga*, during which *Dharma* has only two legs. This means that man's capacities have suffered a further decline and only the *manomaya and Vijnanamaya* capacities are present.

From midnight to 4 a.m. it is *Kali Yuga*. In this period *Dharma* has only one leg to stand on. *Dharma* in this period means to be plunged in sleep, oblivious to everything else. There are four

Purusharthas (goals) in life for man: *Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha*. In the period from 4 a.m. to 12 noon, man has the capacity to pursue all the four *Purusharthas*.

In giving the duration of the different *yugas* and estimating the life of *Brahma* (the Creator) in terms of *the yugas*, the scriptures have given the life-span of *Brahma* as extending over many crores of years. As these crores convey no meaning by themselves, the scriptures have described *Brahma* as *Anaadi* (without a beginning). Scientists today are trying to fix a date for the beginning of creation. Instead of declaring that creation began so many billions of years ago, is it not more sensible to say that it is *Anaadi* (beginningless)? If *Brahma* is described as *Anaadi*, it is treated as superstition, but if some fabulous date is given, it becomes science! This passes for knowledge today. These are futile exercises. What is relevant for man is the awareness of the changes taking place in a single day.

God presides over Time

God has been envisaged as the embodiment of Time. He is the source of the *Yugas*. He presides over Time. He is the Time-Spirit and the *Kaalagarbha* (container of Time). Time is the devourer of the physical. The Lord is the devourer of Time itself. When there is faith in God, man transcends the physical.

The New Year is an expression of the Divine, who is the Master of Time. Among the names of the Lord are *Samvatsara, Yugadi, Kaalaatheetha, Kaalaswaroopa* and the like. The New Year Day festival is therefore associated with the name of the Lord. There is no need to entertain fears about the troubles and difficulties that may occur during the year. When God Himself is coming down as the new year, anything may happen, good or bad. The Lord (Mahavishnu) may come down to protect devotees like Prahlada and Dhruva. He may also destroy demons like Hiranyakasipu and Bhasmasura. He confers bliss on some and He destroys some others. The Lord acts according to the deserts of the persons concerned--whether they should be protected or punished.

The inner meaning of Narasimha Avatar

This is the inner meaning of the story of Prahlada. "Where is God?" asked Hiranyakasipu. Prahlada replied that God is omnipresent. "You can find Him wherever you seek Him." Hiranyakasipu asked: "Is He in this pillar?" "There is no place where He is not," said Prahlada. Hiranyakasipu smote the pillar with his mace. Out came the Lord in the form of the Narasimha Avatar--half-man, half lion. It is a combination of the human and the animal. All human beings today are cast in the same mould: a combination of animal and human nature. Hiranyakasipu was a hater of Hari and hence the form of Lord Narasimha appeared dreadful to him. But Prahlada was a great devotee. Hence the Lord appeared to him as full of love. Although the form was the same, it inspired fear in one and love in another.

Wherefrom did Narasimha emerge? From a pillar. What does this pillar signify? Our body itself is like a pillar. When the body-consciousness is shattered, the Divine emerges from it. When the coconut shell is broken, the pure copra within it is seen. As long as the coconut is not broken, you cannot get at the *copra*.

You must look at the *deha* (body) as the residence of the *Dehi* (Indwelling Spirit). God does not reside at any distant place. He is within your body He is the *Hridayavaasi* (resident of your heart). Krishna responded to Draupadi's call the moment she appealed to Him as the Indweller in her heart.

To get at the Lord in the shortest possible time, it is necessary to address an appeal to the right place. Once Narada asked Vishnu which is the place to which he should address his appeal to get at the Lord soonest. The Lord said: "Wherever my devotees sing my praise, I am there." The Lord dwells in our hearts. They must be kept pure and holy. Then the heart becomes heaven itself, filled with joy. Heaven and hell are not elsewhere. When you are happy, that is heaven. When you are miserable, that is hell.

If you wish to experience joy, fill your mind with thoughts of God. Where there is God, there is bliss. This Divine bliss is described in many ways, but it is one and the same thing. Likewise, God is called by different names according to the context and the role played by the Divine. It is the one Supreme Who is worshipped in different names.

Today when you are celebrating the advent of the New Year, you have to fill your minds with the name of the Lord. There is no greater joy on earth than acting up to the injunctions of the Lord. All troubles arise when you act against the commands of the Lord.

Discourse at the Prashanthi Mandir on 17-3-1991, Yugadi Day.