

22. Honour the plighted word

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love! In the world today, the number of intellectuals who are engaged in breaking up the One into the many and fostering divisive forces is on the increase. On the other hand, the number of those who recognise unity in diversity is on the decline. In a world bristling with disunity, disorder and chaos, it is only the sense of unity underlying the multiplicity that can bring about peace. The world sorely needs today people imbued with this feeling.

The unity that subsumes the multiplicity will become apparent if an objective, pure and selfless enquiry is made. Historically, socially, biologically and scientifically it is evident that food and drink are common to all human beings. "Food may vary but hunger is the same for all" is a Telugu adage. A rich man may appease his hunger by a wide range of delicious dishes. A beggar satisfies his hunger by whatever he can get. Hunger, however, is common to a millionaire and a pauper.

Equally common are sleep and fear, for all human beings. A rich man may sleep in comfort on a luxurious couch. A beggar may sleep soundly on hard ground. The place of sleep may vary, but sleep itself is common to both. More than all these, the most important experiences that are common to all equally are birth and death. This is an index of the unifying principle for humanity. The millionaire does not descend from the sky. The pauper does not emerge from the bowels of the earth. Both are born from their mother's wombs. This process of birth is common to all human beings. Likewise, death comes to everyone, whether in a forest or a town, whether one is on the top of a mountain or the bottom of a valley, wherever one may be. Birth and death thus point to what is common in what is diverse.

Human existence is a journey

This principle of unity in diversity is clearly expounded in the *Kathopanishad*. This Upanishad has compared the human body to a chariot and the *Atma* (Indwelling Spirit) to the charioteer and pointed out that human existence is a journey in this chariot. The body and the Spirit are integrally related to each other. But man in his ignorance has separated the one from the other and developed divisive tendencies.

For all man's joys and sorrows, difficulties and enjoyments, his own thoughts are responsible. His happiness and distress are related to his actions. As he thinks, so he becomes. When the thoughts are misconceived, the results also go astray. Hence, the primary goal of man should be to develop right thinking.

Two forces are operating within man One is the demonic impulse. The other is the Divine impulse. Man, by misusing his God-given capacities (mind, status, wealth and position) and falling a prey to evil tendencies like desire, hatred, greed, etc., reduces himself to the level of the animal. The one who strives to make the right use of his endowments manifests his Divine nature.

The secret of real happiness

Unfortunately men today misuse the God-given gifts and thereby ruin themselves and cause harm to the world. The reason for this is the encouragement of divisive forces in the place of unity, and the growth of the acquisitive tendency. "*Mamethi paramam duhkham; na mamethi*

paramam sukham" (The feeling of 'mine' is the cause of great sorrow; absence of possessiveness is the cause of supreme happiness). Real happiness lies in giving up acquisitiveness, surrendering to God and experiencing *Atma-ananda*. (the bliss of the Spirit).

Men should strive to achieve this kind of happiness by shedding narrow ideas, developing a broad outlook and realising the Divinity that sustains everything. Contemplation on the Divine is the key to all happiness and prosperity. Man should dedicate all thoughts and actions to God at all times and in all situations. "Whether one is immersed in *yoga* or physical enjoyment, in society or in solitude, if he devotes his mind to the Supreme, he experiences ecstasy alone" (Swami recited a stanza from Adi Sankara's "Bhaja Govindam")

When one enquires into the Reality earnestly and objectively, he will realise that Divinity pervades everything. God is eternal and bliss incarnate. Among the myriad names of the Lord, the most significant is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. This means that the cosmos is the embodiment of *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Awareness-Bliss) and vice versa. They are inextricably united.

Divine is unified form of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*

Everything in the universe, from an ant to the Absolute, is a manifestation of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. *Sat* is that which transcends the three categories of Time Past, Present, and Future. *Chit* refers to *Paripurna-jnana* (total awareness). Where these two are shining in unison, there is the Bliss Divine. Hence, *Ananda* (Bliss) is not something separate from the other two. They cannot be trisected. The One is radiant in the three as an integral expression. For instance, fire has three qualities: heat, light and redness. These are not separate from each other. Likewise, the Divine is the unified form of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*.

Today men, who have read the scriptures or listened to the discourses of scholars, imagine that *Sat-Chit-Ananda* abides in some special place. This is the root cause of their ignorance of the Real. You are the embodiment of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. Everything around you is a manifestation of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. Forgetting his own true nature and separating himself from the Divine, man becomes a prey to numerous troubles.

A blind man knows that the world exists, but is unable to see it. Likewise, people believe from the teachings of the scriptures and of the learned ones that *Sat-Chit-Ananda* exists, but very few have direct experience of the Divine. They must strive for such direct experience. This is the primary goal of man. The *Upanishads* have declared that what does not exist cannot be made to exist. What exists cannot be wished away. Hence, man has to accept what exists and base his life on it. *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is the essential nature of everyone. Realisation of this calls for spiritual endeavour.

True devotion is recognition of God within

Most people today have no real idea of what is devotion and what is spiritual discipline. Different forms of worship, pilgrimages, meditation and the like are equated with devotion. These are not the indices of *Bhakti* (devotion). They are all actions which can confer some mental satisfaction. To realise your inner nature, your efforts must be directed internally. As long as you think God is somewhere outside you, you cannot qualify for Divine Grace. The true mark of devotion is to recognise that God is within you and around you, everywhere. You must develop the faith that you are a manifestation of God. The scriptures call upon everyone to find out, "Who are you?"

There is no other path than the path of dedication to God and complete surrender to the Will of the Divine. The emperor Bali was an exemplar of this doctrine of *Saranagathi* (complete surrender) to God. Despite the protestations of his preceptor Sukracharya, Bali felt that it was his duty to offer everything to the Lord and, acting against the advice of his *guru*, he made a gift of all he had to the Lord who had come in the form of Vamana (the young celibate). In making an offering to God there is no need to abide by the instructions of the preceptor. The Lord is the supreme preceptor manifest in every Divine form.

Emperor Bali adhered to two resolutions. First: to give to anyone whatever he sought. Second' never to go back on the plighted word. Bali held that there was no greater sin than going back on one's word. He firmly declared that whatever might happen to him, even if it cost him his life, he would not go back on his promise. Thereby, Bali became a glorious upholder of truth.

Who is a real emperor? Not the one who has conquered many countries and ruled over a vast empire. Once, Adi Sankara summoned his disciples and put them the question: "*Who* is a real conqueror?" The disciples gave various answers. Sankara told them that the real conqueror is the one who has subdued his mind. Of what use is it to accomplish many things without mastering the mind? This was precisely the question which Prahlada put to his father, Hiranyakasipu, who had acquired control over even the elements but had not acquired mastery over his senses.

Truth is the life-breath of the spoken word

Men should learn to honour their promises. They should never go back on their word. Truth is the lifebreath of the spoken word. Many ancient rulers were prepared even to give up their lives for honouring their plighted word.

Emperor Bali was Truth incarnate. Always devoted to the well-being of his subjects, he constantly strove to lead them in the path of truth and to ensure prosperity in his realm. Bali's grandfather, Prahlada, had the same noble qualities.

Once there was an argument between Prahlada's son Virochana and the son of the sage Angirasa. Angirasa's son said that the debate should be conducted before a judge who should decide who was the winner in the argument. He said Virochana's father, Prahlada, should be the judge. Both went to Prahlada. They agreed that whoever lost in the debate should forfeit his life to the winner. Prahlada listened to the arguments impartially and declared that Virochana, his son, has lost and that Angirasa's son has won. Recognising Prahlada's total commitment to justice, without any concern for his relationship with his son, and admiring his sense of justice, Angirasa's son told Prahlada that he was giving back Virochana's life that had been forfeited to him.

This is an illustration of the supreme value attached to truth in ancient times. Truth was esteemed as the very form of God. It is the foremost duty of man to uphold truth, lead the good life and share his joys with others.

Bali's reaction to his preceptor's warning

Embodiments of Divine Love! Uphold truth even at the cost of your lives. That was what Emperor Bali did when he had to honour the word he had given to Vamana. His preceptor Sukracharya warned Bali that the dwarfish Brahman lad was none other than the Lord Vishnu Himself, and that it would be disastrous for Bali to make the girl; sought from him by Vamana. You must note how Bali reacted to the preceptor's warning. He declared that when the Lord of

the universe had Himself come to him with an outstretched hand, seeking a gift, what greater good fortune could befall him (Bali) than to make the gift? "The palm that showers its grace on the whole world, the palm which can rid men of all their griefs and pains, which holds within it the entire process of creation and dissolution, the palm that holds out freedom from fear to every devotee, is now held out before me seeking a gift. My hand has been giving generously to all. How fortunate am I that it is now held over the palm of the Lord! The coming together of the two hands signifies the union of the individual soul with the Omni-Self. *Guruji*, this is a supremely auspicious occasion. Hence, I will not go back on my word, despite anyone's opposition."

Emperor Bali was the embodiment of sacrifice. He was the repository of all good and noble qualities. He explained the significance of the advent of the *Avatar* on earth "Out of love for the people, God descends to their level on earth. Together with his Divine Consciousness, He maintains His human consciousness." Bali declared that he had discovered that day this sacred truth.

Bali was supremely happy when the Lord sought a gift from him. Today people would turn the other way if the Divine sought anything from them. God needs nothing from this world. Krishna declared in the *Gita*: "There is nothing that I need from the three worlds. Nevertheless, I do my duty."

Avatars duty is to promote devotees' welfare

Why am I engaged in various activities? Why am I concerned so much about the devotees? Why have I established so many institutions? This is my duty (as Krishna declared to Arjuna). To promote the welfare of devotees is the duty the Lord has taken upon Himself. I am undertaking so many activities for their sake. But people do not recognise this fact. And owing to this failure, they are missing their good fortune. The reason is their selfishness. At least in the days ahead, they should try to experience happiness and prosperity by leading meaningful lives. They should sanctify their thoughts, because "as they think so they become."

Bali's daughter Ratnavali developed a maternal feeling towards Vamana on seeing his beautiful form as a boy. Later when she recovered from a trance and found the foot of the Lord---as Trivikrama--on Bali's head, she was seized with rage and rushed to kill Him. Bali warded her off. Ratnavali was reborn as Puthana, the ogress, during the Krishna *avatar*, when she first fondled Krishna and then sought to kill him. The moral from this episode is that one's thoughts have their consequences sooner or later.

Hence, it is essential to have good thoughts and do good deeds to escape from the cycle of birth and death. This was what Emperor Bali sought from the Lord.

Insane violence is prevalent at present

Everyone should be prepared to offer all his actions to God. The cosmos should be regarded as the all-pervading form of God. Only by realising the feeling of unity in diversity can the individual and the nation be redeemed. Today divisive tendencies are rampant. There is discord between man and man. The world is turning into a kind of mad-house. All nations seem to be afflicted with some kind of lunacy. To kill one man they are prepared to sacrifice a hundred lives. They have no regard for life.

Men desire the fruits of good deeds, but do not perform good deeds. Men want to avoid the consequences of sinful actions, but are engaged in sinful deeds. How is this possible? It is not

easy to escape from the consequences of one's actions. But there is no need for despair. If one earns even a grain of grace from the Divine, a mountain of sins can be reduced to ashes. If one feels genuinely penitent, seeks God's forgiveness and takes refuge in God, all one's actions will get transformed. But without heart-felt penitence, this will not happen.

Follow Emperor Bali's example

The glorious qualities of Emperor Bali are rightly praised. But how many are cultivating even a few of these qualities? Bali promised to his subjects that once a year he would appear before them. The Onam celebration is intended to rejoice in the appearance of Bali in their midst by observing this day as a festive occasion. Sweet dishes are prepared on this day. But it is not Bali who consumes them. What should be offered to him is the sweet feelings in your heart. That is the right way to celebrate Onam. You have to manifest your genuine love for Bali. You must practise the ideals for which he stood. Look at the many ways in which he served the Lord. He was utterly dedicated to the well-being of his people. Develop the quality of love. Eschew differences of caste, creed and nationality. Promote unity among all people. Regard all as the children of one God.

Having been born in the sacred land of Bharat, if you do not practise at least some of Bharat's ideals, you have no right to call yourselves as *Bharatiyas*. The greatest need today is for all people to cultivate unity. Only then will the nation be rid of its troubles and experience prosperity.

The people of Kerala are extremely fortunate in many respects. Despite various political changes, the Keralites have adhered to their cultural heritage and observed festivals like Onam with scrupulous regard for tradition. Devotion to God is deeply entrenched in their hearts. Even if some of them do not exhibit their devotion openly, for various reasons, it is imprinted in their hearts. It is because of this, they observe the sacred festival of Onam with enthusiasm and joy year after year. You can realise the depth of their devotion from this single fact.

Among the score of States in India, the people of Kerala are the only people who celebrate their unique festival in Prashaanthi Nilayam with boundless fervour and devotion. People from none of the other States have held any such celebration in Puttaparthi. The manner in which Keralites, with all their women and children, celebrate the festival here testifies to their devotion to Swami which transcends regional attachments. "Swami" is everything for them. The devotion to the Lord is expressed in Kerala today in many forms. Their enthusiasm and devotion are highly commendable. The Chief Justice of Kerala, Sri Jagannadha Rao, and the Transport Minister of Kerala have expressed the desire on behalf of the people of Kerala that Swami should visit their State and bless the people.

To confer joy on all of you on this sacred Onam day, I am giving this assurance that I shall be visiting Kerala very soon. I give you My promise that I shall share My joy with you and enjoy the bliss you feel in My company and shower My blessings to all the people of Kerala!

Discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium on 24-8-1991, Onam Day.