

3. How To Be Near and Dear To God

Of what avail is it to be

A scholar or clever intellectual

If one does not practice even a

Fraction of what one knows ?

Not all the luxuries and pleasures of the world

Will give a man contentment and peace.

Only when he realises the truth of the Spirit

Will he experience true peace and contentment.

Dear Students! Embodiments of Divine Love! Whatever a man sees in the world rouses fear in him. Detachment alone can free him from fear. Failing to grasp this profound truth, man is allowing his desires to multiply. As long as man is attached to the body, he cannot get over the desire to possess the objects that attract him. A man afflicted with *mamatva* (the acquisitive impulse) can never get rid of worries. To overcome this attachment and possessiveness, the ancient sages, from Vedic times, pursued their studies. The sages believed that self-control promoted humility and that humility was the true index of right education.

System of education promoted by ancients

Control of the senses is essential for realising humility. Education should be pursued for achieving control of the senses. The ancients esteemed only that system of education which promoted *Indhriyanigraha* (control of the senses).

Control of the senses is called *Dhama* (in metaphysical parlance). The vicissitudes of time, place and circumstances have resulted in the term *Dhama* getting reversed in today's student community into the term *Madha* (arrogance). The reason is the disappearance of humility and reverence from the students. Indulgence in sensory pleasures has become their primary concern.

Students should regard control of the senses as their foremost guiding principle. In the old days, students who achieved self-control received a diploma in true education called *Saakshara*. The inner significance of this title is that the recipient is one who has mastered his senses and recognised his inherent Divinity. When *Dhama* (self-control) turns into *Madha* (conceit), *Saakshara* gets reversed and we have *Rakshasa* in its place. Consequently the student who practised *Dhama* and displayed humility and reverence was regarded as *Saakshara* and the student who was filled with arrogance and egoism was characterised as *Rakshasa* (a demon).

Scholarship without humility and reverence

It is not enough if one becomes a mere scholar. Even if one has mastered all the scriptures, if he lacks humility and reverence and has no self-control, the ancients regarded such learning as *Rakshasa Vidya* (demonic knowledge). During Vedic times, the people believed in human values, had faith in God and led pure and sacred lives. The advance of science and technology has enabled man to produce weapons of mass annihilation. Scientists who can manufacture such destructive weapons are unable to secure peace of mind. A scientist who has acquired mastery

over the elements is unable to get rid of the fear that haunts him. The scientists do not enjoy the sense of peace and security experienced by common people and are wasting their lives.

The educational process is more concerned with imparting bookish knowledge, while education itself is sought only as a means for earning a living. This link between education and employment should be severed. Education should be the means for acquiring *Vijnana* (wisdom).

The world today consists of two types of persons: those who are consumed by excessive desires and those who have no desires. The desireless person treats with indifference all worldly things. The desire-filled man will not be satisfied even if he is offered a mountain of gold (the Meru mountain). In the *Ramayana* there was a demonic character named Kabandha, who had his head in his stomach and who used his long arms to catch whatever object he could to fill his stomach. Most students seem like Kabandha to be concerned only about earning a living.

The primary object of education is not to ensure how one can fill his stomach. The Lord, who gave a stomach, will not fail to provide the necessary sustenance. Man, who should seek the *Aatma* or God, is searching for *Annam* (food). In the world today, three-fourths of the people appear to be Kabandhas and not truly educated persons. In all their actions--whether in sports or other fields--they are concerned with only selfish interests.

Recognise your duties and responsibilities

There are today two aspects relating to man which have to be considered. One relates to a person's rights. The other relates to one's duties. Most people are concerned only about their rights and engage themselves in struggles to secure them. But they do not recognise their responsibilities. In all the different fields---social, political, economic and even spiritual--men do not recognise their responsibilities and duties. They want high positions and emoluments. The entire life is wasted in the pursuit of such desires. No one considers whether he is performing the quantum of work for the salary he receives, whether he is discharging his duties properly and fulfilling his responsibilities.

Such an attitude is prevalent not only in mundane affairs, but also in the spiritual field. Everyone says, "I want God. I want *Moksha* (Liberation). I want to ensure my *Yogakshemam* (well-being here and hereafter)." But he does not make the necessary effort to achieve these desires. "I have no time for *bhajans* (devotional chants). I can't do any *sadhana* (spiritual practice). I have no time to think of God"--this is his attitude. But still he wants God. With such a narrow outlook, how can a man know what his rights are? To get anything you want from a shop, you have to pay the price. But is man, who wants God to ensure his well-being, prepared to pay the price for getting it? Is he prepared to offer to God the sacrifice he has to make to secure his *Yogakshema*? Does he offer the love that has to be given to secure peace, prosperity and security?

Man today seeks to get something without paying the price for it. But the Lord cannot be deceived. He offers the appropriate reward for each action according to its nature--whether it be gain or loss, good or bad. We will be entitled to expect what we desire from God only if we make the appropriate offering to God. No one is prepared to offer anything to God, but everyone is eager to get something from God.

Be grateful to those who help you

People go about preaching to others. How far are they practising what they preach? Many call upon others to make sacrifices. What sacrifices are they making? People expect others to be grateful to them for what they have received. How far are they themselves grateful to those from

whom they have received benefits? There is no point in investigating all kinds of things in the world. The first thing one should do is to enquire into the truth about himself. Only then will he be competent to enquire into the conduct of others.

The devotion and faith of devotees today can be compared to a dried leaf which can be blown away by a slight breeze. A true devotee, on the contrary, will remain unshaken like a ball of iron whatever the trials or tribulations he may have to face. Many devotees, who are voluble in their speech, ostentatious in their display of devotion, are swept off their feet when they encounter any adversity. When their expectations are not realised, they develop all kinds of aversions. They make no efforts to recognise their own faults.

Students, for instance, nourish a grievance that Swami is not smiling at them, that Swami does not talk to them, but they do not enquire within themselves why Swami is acting in this manner and in what way they have violated Bhagavan's injunctions. If they examine their own conduct in this manner, there would be no room for them to entertain such thoughts about Swami.

It is not truly human to commit mistakes

Many feel that it is human to err and that Bhagavan should forgive their lapses. In fact, if they are truly human, they should not commit mistakes at all. Even if sometimes a mistake is committed, wittingly or unwittingly, it should not be repeated again. It is a grievous error to think that it is natural for a human being to err. Such feeling should not be entertained at all by anyone. Every man should realise, "I am not weak. I am not an animal. I am not a demon. I am a man." When a man has this conviction he will not commit mistakes.

When a man is described as *Nara*, it means that he is the very embodiment of the *Aatma* (Spirit). The *Aatma* cannot be affected by any taint. It is the attachment to the body which is the cause of bad thoughts, bad desires and bad actions. It is the one who is a slave to his senses, who is a prey to such impulses. To follow the directives of the senses is a mark of the animal. To be guided by the *Aatma* is the sign of the human. No one should attempt to justify his weaknesses and lapses as natural to a human being. They should be regarded as signs of mental debility. You should continually strive to master your senses. When you have truly acquired sense-control, you will experience the power of the Divine within you.

Become the captor and not captive of the senses

There is a story which illustrates what happens when the agency intended for control of the senses becomes itself a victim of the senses. Once upon a time the government of a country set up a border force to prevent the entry of hostile foreign elements. A camp was set up on the border. A soldier who was keeping vigil caught an enemy intruder entering the country. After catching him, he shouted aloud that he had caught an enemy. The captain, who heard his shout from his tent, asked the soldier to bring the captive to his tent. The soldier said that the man was refusing to come. Then the captain asked the soldier himself to come. The soldier said that the intruder would not let him go! This illustrates the plight of educated students today. Education, which should enable them to acquire mastery over the senses, has made them captives of the senses.

Students should not give way to such weakness. They must develop spiritual strength. They must keep out the bad qualities which afflict them. Those who cannot do this can never become good students.

Men should regard the senses as potential enemies. They should not be allowed to have their own way. They should be subject to one's control and direction. What is the easiest way to achieve this mastery? Only the spiritual path.

Let conscience prevail

If there is real faith and devotion in a man, the senses will be powerless against him. It is the decline in faith and devotion which has led to man becoming a slave of the senses. Students should, therefore, examine before they do anything whether it is good or bad, right or wrong, and act according to the dictates of their conscience. Even in respect of the conscience, certain facts should be borne in mind. The promptings of intellectual reasoning should not be identified with the dictates of the conscience. The directives should come from the heart.

When you dive deep into a problem and enquire whether what you should do is in the interest of your friends and society in general, your conscience will give you the right answer. You should not be guided by intellectual reasoning which has a selfish element in it. You should be guided by a concern for the collective interests of society at large. That alone is the true voice of conscience. This kind of broad social conscience should be developed through education.

Students! You have performed a variety of gymnastic feats. You have distinguished yourselves in a variety of games and sports. Although these games have a value of their own in the physical field, there is something greater than all of them. Life is a game, play it! Treat life itself as a big game. To achieve a good name and success in this game, you have to cultivate good habits. Good thoughts, good speech and good actions are the disciplines required in this game. When so much practice and effort are required to achieve success in games like tennis, how much more effort is needed to succeed in the game of life! In this game, if you wish to achieve a good name, uphold your ideals, and realise the Divine. You have to observe in your daily life, right thinking, right conduct and right attitudes.

Longevity and the good life

Students! You have to take a resolve today to restore the ancient culture and tradition of Bharath. Life is wasting away every moment. People are growing older every minute, forgetting their duties. In this situation, what is it that you have to achieve? All that you wish to accomplish, you must set out to achieve now when you are in the vigour of youth. Man's lifespan, which should be a hundred years, is shortened by the misuse of the body. The length of man's life is determined by his own actions. A man's bad thoughts, his hatreds, his jealousy and bitterness are shearing his life into bits every moment.

Anger shortens a man's life. This can be seen from everyday experience. When a man gets angry, his temperature rises. The blood gets heated up. In the process the nerves get weaker and as a consequence all organs in the body also get weaker. This weakness may last for six months. One moment of anger will deprive a man of the energy got from six months of food. Every fit of anger shortens a man's life span. Regardless of the temporary satisfaction a man may derive by the display of anger, it causes greater damage to the individual concerned than to others. Likewise, hatred and envy are equally debilitating in their effect. Egoism and attachment also have similar deleterious effects on man's life.

Transcend the body and mind to attain the Divine

Man is made up of three constituents---the body, the mind and the *Aatma*. Man needs the body for performing actions. But if the actions are done without using the discriminating power of the

mind, man will be behaving like an animal, which acts on impulse. Moreover, if the mind, without relying on the eternal and ever-pure *Aatma*, follows the demands of the body and the senses, the actions will be demonic. The combination of mind and body leads to demonic qualities. When one is installed in the *Aatmic* principle, transcending the body and the mind, he attains the Divine.

The ancient sages divinised their lives by control of the senses, by observing spiritual discipline and by successfully carrying on their daily avocations. These are the means by which men can transform themselves into sages. For effecting this transformation, students will have to cultivate faith and devotion. Spiritual education is greater than all other types of education. This was declared by Krishna in the Gita. Rivers are distinct in their names and forms, but when they merge in the ocean, they become one. Likewise, all kinds of studies and practices, when they are merged in the ocean of spiritual knowledge, become one.

The Lord's offer to man

Make your heart pure so that it becomes a worthy abode of the Divine. What should be a *Ksheerasaagara* (an ocean of milk) has been turned by man's misdeeds into an ocean of brine. Sanctify all your thoughts, words and deeds. Only then you will deserve the title *Saakshara* (truly educated).

The Lord made three declarations: "Son! I shall give you what you ask. If you search for Me, you shall find Me. When you knock at My door, I shall open it." But man today asks for favours not from God but from Nature. He searches not for God but for worldly pleasures. He knocks not at the doors of Liberation but at the gates of Hell.

What you should ask for is the grace of the Divine. What you should search for is God. And you should knock at the doors of the gate to Liberation. Man is acting contrary to God's injunctions. If only man followed God's commands he would be divinising his life.

Man's frailties have made him distant from God. A student (in his speech earlier) said that to be away from God was a "living death." Man should strive to be "near and dear" to God. Many who are "near" to God are not "dear" to God. For instance, here in Prashanthi Nilayam you see devotees who have come from distant countries like Argentina, Australia and America out of their love for God. Many who are near Swami may meditate on God but they do not dedicate their lives to God. Only by dedication can they become "dear" to God. Students should strive to be both near and dear to God.

Outsiders coming to Prashanthi Nilayam, on seeing the students, feel: "How lucky are these students! Swami is always talking to them and moving with them." But they are not aware who are really "near" to Swami.

Saint Thyagaraja's confession

The saint Thyagaraja's experiences provide an illustration of the dilemma confronting devotees. Once while experiencing troubles and undergoing indignities from others, Thyagaraja wondered whether the troubles he had to go through were due to deficiencies in his devotion or whether Sri Rama was not potent enough to help him. Convinced about his own devotion, he attributed his troubles to Rama's inability to relieve him. Such doubts often arise in the minds of devotees. After meditating over this matter, he realised that Rama's power was limitless and that the defect lay in his own devotion. He composed a song which described how devotion to Rama had enabled Hanuman to leap over the ocean and how it had enabled Lakshmana and Bharatha to

perform heroic deeds. Thyagaraja confessed that in doubting Rama's powers he had been guilty of weakness in his devotion.

If Swami did not possess such power, is it conceivable that people would come seeking Swami's grace from distant countries like Argentina and Australia? No one issued any invitation to them. Are they less intelligent than any of you? The fact that they have come here at great expense, prepared to put up with many inconveniences, shows the depth of their devotion.

Therefore, you should not entertain complaints against God or blame Him for your difficulties. If Swami did not have the power, would people of different faiths and from different countries come to Him and experience their oneness? What is the Will that is able to accomplish this? If you enquire along these lines, you will discover the jejuneness of your attitudes. It is your small-mindedness, which accounts for such reactions. Therefore, develop a broad outlook and a wide vision.

All the students of our Institute of Higher Learning should prove themselves to be ideal men wherever they go. You should earn a good name from everyone.

Students who have won prizes in sports should realise that by their conduct they should earn the esteem and love of Swami. All kinds of titles are conferred on people today. But the title which all of you should aim at is that you are *Amruthasya Puthraah* (Children of Immortality).

Install God in your hearts and make Him the basis for all your actions. Then all your actions will become sacred. Bring a good name to your parents, to your society and to the land of your birth.

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