

34. Significance of *Yajnas*

*Neither Charity, nor the performance of sacrifices,
Neither penance, nor the highest knowledge,
Nor any other thing can be equal
To the power of control of the senses,
Whatever enquiry or investigation one may make.*

FEW men in the world are able to recognise what is the primary goal of life. Many are not even worried about this inability.

What is life? What is its highest goal? Man has to enquire into these basic questions. Man's highest aim, however, appears to be to obtain food, clothing, shelter and progeny. All these are, no doubt, necessary to some extent. But these are related to mere living and have no relation to the supreme goal of life. Along with leading one's ordinary life, one has to take note of the great aim of life. Man must recognise the immense preciousness of human life. Every householder has to consider not only his duties as a householder living in the *Grihasthaaranyam* (forest of family life) but also about *Brihadhaaranyam* (the message of the *Upanishath* of that name). Those living in the jungle of the family, need to know about the life envisaged in *Brihadha-aranyaka*.

Brihadhaaranyaka Upanishath

What is this *Brihadhaaranya*? It is the Immense (*Brihath*) hermitage. This *aashram* is the combined expression of the mind, speech, and life. *Thejas* (effulgence), symbolises *vaak* (speech). Mind is represented by food *Annamaya*. *Praana* (the Life-Principle) is *Rasamaya* (essential sweetness). The effulgent speech, in association with the mind as food becomes the essence of the Life-Principle. This truth was proclaimed by the sages in the Upanishathik declaration: "*Raso vai Sah*" (He, the Divine, is all sweetness) the form of *Brahman*.

The Rasa principle is present only in *Praana* (the Life Principle). The cosmos is based on life. There is, however, the *aathma*, which transcends the Life Principle.

The Brihadhaaranyaka Upanishath is the unified form of *Vaak, Manas and Prajna*. As the sages in the forest contemplated on this form and realised the bliss of experiencing the Divine, this got the appellation *Aaranyaka* (Forest). As fire arises in forests, *Agni* (Fire) got the name *Aaranya*. Man's life originates in fire, grows on fire and ends in *Agni*. Born from the warm womb of the mother, sustained by the fire of his digestive organ, man ultimately ends on the funeral pyre. Fire is thus the basic cause of human birth and death.

Agni is an embodiment of the Divine. Fire is effulgent. It nourishes the whole world. But it needs to be kept under control. "There is nothing great without restraint."

Rationale behind sacrifices

The ancients started performing *Yajnas and Yaagas* (sacrifices) to propitiate the Divine in the form of Fire. The sacrifices were performed not to secure personal benefits or to get desires fulfilled, or to get over difficulties. They embarked on sacrifices only to secure *Aathmaanandham* the (Bliss of the Spirit).

Once, Emperor Janaka performed a big *Yajna*. Many scholars participated in the sacrifice, including scholarly women. Among such women were Maithreyi, Gargi and others. At that *Yajna* a *pandith* called Ashvala started putting questions to the sage Yaajnavalkya. "How many deities are there?" he asked. Yaajnavalkya, being a very shrewd person, took the cue from the word "here." He answered "There are 3306." The entire assembly was taken by surprise at this figure. They wondered whether there could be 3306 deities present at the *Yajna*.

What lay behind Yaajnavalkya's reply? He considered everyone present at the *Yajna* as divine. "God appears in human form." Hence, in those days, men were not regarded as mere human beings at *Yajnas and Yaagas*. Every individual was considered as a manifestation of the Divine.

Ashvala then posed another question to Yaajnavalkya. He asked: "Is it possible to reduce this number of deities?" "Yes, it is possible," said Yaajnavalkya. There was no mention of "here" in the second question. Yaajnavalkya answered: "Thirty three deities." Asked whether he could state who these deities were, Yaajnavalkya said: "There are eight *Vasus*, eleven *Rudhras*, twelve *Aadhithyas*, *Indhra* and *Prajaapathi*. All these together make 33."

Yaajnavalkya reduces the number of deities to one

The assembly was satisfied with the answer. Then, Gargi got up and asked: "Venerable sage! Is it possible to reduce this number further?" "Certainly *yes*," declared Yaajnavalkya. "There are six: *Agni* (Fire), *Bhuumi* (earth), *Vaayu* (the Wind-God), *Aadhithya* (the Sun God) *Amarathvam* (Immortality), and *Adhvara*." These six are the true deities, he said.

Ashvala got up and asked whether the number could be reduced further, Yaajnavalkya said the number could be reduced to three: The Past, the Present, and the Future. The answer was accepted by the assembly.

In answer to further questions whether the number could be further reduced to the most important deities, Yaajnavalkya said; "They are two: Food and *Praana* (Life)."

Asked whether the number could be further reduced, he said that it could be reduced to one-and-a-half and he explained that the all-pervasive *Vaayu* (the Wind God) is known as *Adhyartha* (one and a half). Asked whether a further reduction was possible he said it could be reduced to one, namely, *Praana* (Life).

When enquiries from the scientific, the spiritual and other points of view are carried out to find out the ultimate divine entity, *Praana*, the presiding deity of Life, emerged as the only one.

Where does this Life Principle dwell? The answer is' it has no specific place or time. It is everywhere. The purpose of the *Yajna* is to propitiate this all-pervading Life-Force.

Yajna means acquiring the highest wisdom

What is *Yajna*? It is not merely offering oblations to the sacred fire, *homam*. *Yajna* means acquiring the highest wisdom by *Yama and Niyama* (control of the senses and practice of spiritual discipline). This wisdom is not related to worldly knowledge. All the knowledge acquired through the intellect is illusory. It is based on dualism and is tantamount to ignorance. It may serve to score debating points; such debates also promote discord.

The knowledge that transcends all controversies and is related to the eternal verities is the *Aathma-Jnaanam* (Knowledge of the Self). It is for acquiring this supreme knowledge that the ancient *Rishis* performed *Yajnas and Yaagas*.

Practices like reciting the *Lalitha Sahasranaama* cannot be considered *Yajna* in the true sense. Only when one embarks on the internal quest for the realisation of the Self within can he acquire *Aathma Jnaana* (Knowledge of the Self).

For this purpose there is no need to study any books. Only by direct experience and one's own spiritual *Saadhana* can this awareness of the Self be realised. Man has to understand that he is the cause of his own happiness or misery and that all that he seeks or loves are not for their sake, but for his own sake. Hence, he has to understand his own true nature. Realising the ephemerality of all worldly objects, man should recognise that enduring happiness can be got only by developing love for God.

A great sage like Yaajnavalkya declared that the whole cosmos is a manifestation of the Divine. The Divine is omnipresent. This awareness of the Divine has to be experienced by everyone.

Sense of oneness is the message of *Pranava*

The Brihadhaarnyaka Upanishath pointed out that this oneness is proclaimed by the all-pervading sacred *Pranava "OM"*. This pervasiveness can be experienced in a myriad ways, above all, in the sound that can be heard when one is alone and closes his ears. Man has to realise the redemptive power of *Pranava Manthra*. It is the means to overcome the vicissitudes of life and realise union with the Divine. The body is like a water bubble that originates in water, grows in water and merges in water. The body is the water bubble and Naaraayana is the water. It has come from Naaraayana and has to merge in Him.

The Yajnas and Yaagas are designed to teach such spiritual truths. But human beings, caught up in the coils of worldly life, are a prey to all kinds of troubles and tribulations. Some of them are always prone to doing harm to others. They convert even the good to evil. For such persons there is no end but utter destruction. Everyone, therefore, has to know something about human life and the Divine life. There are many who cannot see anything good, but see only what is bad. There are others who always see what is bad, but consider it as good. Both these ways of looking at things are false. The man with a godly outlook sees the good always.

In human life, one should not have any kind of bad thoughts. Even when someone reviles you, you should practise self-restraint and remain calm. There is no power equal to such self-restraint. Everyone should develop such tranquillity (or peace). The more peaceful you are, the greater your longevity. People today easily lose their peace. They get enraged on the slightest provocation. There are four types of men who view the good and the bad in different ways. Of these, worse than demons are those who deride all that is good and picture it as evil. These perversions are a reflection of the bad times confronting mankind. Such attitudes are indications of impending disaster.

Portents of the *Kali* age even before its dawn

Once Krishna and Balaraama were engaged in a lively conversation. Balaraama asked Krishna: "How is it many untoward things are happening today? Apart from the differences between the Paandavas and the Kauravas, discord is rearing its head even among our own Yaadhavas. There are growing conflicts amongst them. Bitterness is rampant. Enmity is growing." Krishna smilingly replied: "This is a manifestation of the power of *Kali*. *The Kali* Age is dawning. These are its portents. These evil tendencies are an indication of the disasters to come.

All the evil tendencies that are manifest today are indication of the impending disasters. The future is in your hands. To avert disaster, all evil thoughts have to be eschewed. You have to develop always peaceful thoughts. When any thought of doing harm to somebody arises in your mind, examine whether it is right or wrong. If you wish to make any public statement examine whether it is true or false. Don't broadcast any kind of bazaar gossip. Investigate the truth. Do not be in a hurry. Wait till you have got all the facts. To draw conclusions in haste on the basis of imperfect information is a sign of stupidity.

A lesson to be learnt from the Mahaabhaaratha

Why do untoward events happen? Only to promote what is good. They have a cleaning effect. Rise and fall are 'natural events. When any such thing takes place in relation to the Divine, it must be regarded as the prelude to something elevating and sublime.

Here is an illustration from the Mahaabhaaratha. The battle between the Paandavas and Kauravas had gone on for nine days. On all the nine days, the Paandavas were the losers. Yudhishtira and Arjuna were dejected.

At that time Krishna told them: "Why are you getting so impatient? Unrighteousness score some victories in the beginning. Gradually; it declines and the forces of righteousness, peace and truth gain the upper hand. Therefore, do not have any worry. Get up, Dhananjaya (Arjuna). *Dharma* is bound to win. Selfishness will be destroyed. Alas! the parents of a hundred sons will ultimately have not' even one to perform their obsequies. What a fate! What is the reason? It is the result of the crooked stratagems of evil-minded men. They are full of low cunning. They have the worst traits in men, Such persons bring ruin on great royal dynasties. Only a rain of arrows can bring about peace." Krishna thus roused the drooping spirits of Dharmaja and Arjuna.

The Kauravas were unable to tolerate the popularity and good name of the Paandavas. The Paandavas were the very embodiments of Righteousness. They were totally wedded to truth. Were it otherwise, would valiant heroes like Bheema and Arjuna remain inactive when Dhraupadhi was sought to be disrobed? They allowed events to take their inevitable course.

Hence, mishaps in life should be regarded as happenings which serve to further one's spiritual progress.

Uniqueness of Sai Seva activities

Today when the Sai Seva organisations are rendering glorious service all over the world, there are some persons who, like the Kauravas, are consumed by envy. They have their abettors and accomplices like Shakuni, Dhuryodhana's uncle. Such men cannot be considered as educated or intelligent persons, If they were really educated, they would not indulge in such mean tactics. But what is the outcome of all this? The maligners will be defeated by their own weapons.

Very soon the glory of Sai will spread to every part of the world. It will increase a thousand-fold. The reason is the essential goodness of the Sai Mission. It is totally free from any taint. Every act is done out of the purest of motives. Everything that is said is based on truth. All activities are conducted without depending on any outsider. Hence, there is no room for fear.

After the harvest when the sheaves of grains are winnowed, the wind blows away all the chaff, leaving only the grains behind. Through this process, the true devotees will remain steadfast. The wavering puppets will drift away. This is the process of winnowing.

Hence, adhere firmly to the truth of your convictions. Be prepared to meet any challenges. Life is a challenge, meet it. Be ready to face any situation. How is this to be done? Not by tit-for-tat or blow-for-blow. You have always to be truthful. Do not accuse anyone. You have no need to harm anyone. Adhere to the truth and esteem it as the life-breath of a true devotee. Strengthen your faith in God. Envious people invent all kinds of stories. They feed the flame of hatred in others. All these belong to the evil breed of Shakuni. And where do they find their moorings? In the company of evil-minded men like Dhuryodhana and Dhussasana. They will never go near righteous men like Dharmaja (the eldest of the Paandavas). There is only a bad end for such persons. The good will never come to grief. Good causes are bound to flourish. Hence establish your life in truth.

Carry on the good work

Embodiments of love! Good opportunities come rarely. Once lost, they may not recur. Making good use of the present opportunity, see that the Sai organisations grow from day to day. Every street must reverberate with the name of Sai. Every heart should be purified. Every mind should be full of happiness. Love even your enemies. Treat even the one who hates you as friend. Then, there will be no need to accuse anyone. When you adhere to your truth and live upto it, you are bound to be successful. Truth is one. That is the truth which should be the sheet-anchor of your life.

As many are gathered here, I wish to inform you that the programme for the Seventieth Birthday is being drawn up. Whatever may happen, these celebrations will go on. Sai's resolve will be fulfilled. Even if the heavens fall, Sai's resolve will not alter. We do not speak about these resolves, nor are they broadcast among the public. In the world only goods that are not easily sold, are advertised. Goods that have a ready market are not advertised.

Important events for Seventieth Birthday

During the next two years, many important events are going to happen. Programmes are afoot to help the poor and the needy. On November 18th, 70 marriages will be performed. People often talk about mass marriages. They are rather simple affairs. The marriages we intend to perform will be different. The weddings will be such that the married couples will say: "We never imagined that such a thing could happen in our lives!" Each bride will be given a wedding medallion (*bottu*) in a gold chain. The bridegroom will receive a gold ring. A set of cooking utensils will be presented along with some provisions. The brides will be given valuable Kanjeevaram saris. The couples will also be given houses in due course.

It is also intended to provide sewing machines to women who are confined to their houses and cannot support themselves by working outside.

All are our people. The Divine is in all. But owing to their past actions, and their misfortunes, some of them entertain silly ideas. They are transient and not lasting. Even Dhuryodhana and Dhussasana praised Krishna .in the end. Therefore, do not have ill-will towards anyone. Love everyone and pray for everybody's well-being. To the extent possible, take part in the work of Sai Organisations. Today there is no nobler work in the world.

I shall not speak about the numerous other organisations in the world. But the purity that obtains in the Sai Organisations cannot be found anywhere else. Gossip mongers may talk as they please. But so far as our organisations are concerned their watchword always is "Help! Help! Help! Serve! Serve! Serve!" This is their primary aim.

I do not have any differences based on race, caste, or creed. The weddings will be performed without regard to any of these considerations. Every couple will be blessed with happiness and inducted into the right code of conduct for householders. Those seeking to get married should abide by the laws of the country.

Valedictory Discourse at the Vedha Purusha Sapthaaha Jnaana Yajna, on Vijayadhashami Day, in the Puurnachandhra Auditorium on 24-10-1993.

Those who seek to know God, must steel themselves to bear insult, injury and torture, with a smile.

BABA