

25. Spiritual significance of Ganesha worship

EMBODIMENTS of love! Charity is the ornament for hands. Truth is the ornament for speech. Hearing the scriptures is the ornament for ears. Where is the need for other ornaments?

There is no greater experience than the feeling that one is *Aathma-- Aham Ethath*. "Aham ("I") is defined as *Aathma*, the Self. The word *Ethath* means all these. It covers all the objects in the Universe which are physical and subtle and also the Sun, Moon, stars and planets. It signifies that you are not the physical body "You say body" which implies that you are not the body. What is this body constituted of? It is a combination of *Pancha bhuthas* (five elements), *Pancha Praanas* (five vital airs), and the *Pancha Koshas* (five sheaths). The entire universe is the body of the Supreme Lord. It consists of all the moving and static things. In *Vedhaantik* parlance, it is deemed to be *Jnaana* (superior wisdom) when you say am not the body."

One should be extremely fortunate to realise this. Whatever you see in the external world is *Dhrishya* (that which is seen). The Sun, Moon, stars, the five elements which are constituents of the universe are all *Dhrishya*. You are seeing your body too as you see other things. So the body is also *Dhrishya*, that which is seen by you. Who is then the seer? The seer is *Dhrashta*. The body is the object and you are the seer. Without a seer there is no question of anything being seen. Some people talk *about Shuunya* (emptiness or nothingness). Unless this has been seen, how can they talk about *Shuunya*?

The great message of Ganapathi

Knowledge of the seer and the seen is the great message of Ganapathi, whose advent we are celebrating today. "*Ga*" means *Buddhi* (intelligence). '*Na*' means *Vijnaana* (wisdom). 'Pathi' means master. So, Ganapathi is the master of all knowledge, intelligence and wisdom. There is also another significant meaning for the word, that He is the Leader of all the *Ganaas* who are celestial. He is also called *Vinaayaka*, which term means that he is one who has no master above Him. He is the Supreme master. He is beyond the mindless stare. One who has stilled the mind cannot have any master.

Without understanding this truth, we think of the physical form of *Vinaayaka* with the elephant head and human body. Whenever people want to commence any undertaking or start learning music or the fine arts or any branch of knowledge, they first offer worship to *Vinaayaka*.

He is also called *Lambodhara*, which means Guardian of Wealth--*Lakshmi Svarupa*. Here *Lakshmi* represents all wealth and prosperity and not only *Dhanam* (money) for which there is a separate deity called *Dhanalakshmi*, one of the eight *Lakshmis*. Here wealth means *Sukha* and *Aanandha* (pleasure and bliss). What is the use of having all other things when one has no pleasure or bliss?

Ganapathi endows us with supreme intelligence

Ganapathi is one who gives us spiritual potency and endows us with supreme intelligence. These two are termed as *Siddhi and Buddhi* respectively. *Siddhi* and *Buddhi* are described as his two consorts. As He is the *Adhipathi* (master) of *Siddhi and Buddhi*, he is regarded as their husband in mundane terms. *Vinaayaka* has no desire and hence there is no need for Him to have wife and children. He is worshipped by people in this country since very ancient times. There is historic

evidence that the worship of Vinaayaka has been in vogue even in other countries such as Thailand, Japan, Germany and U.K.

Adoration of Vinaayaka as *Prathama Vandhana* (First deity to be saluted) has been mentioned in *the Vedhas*. *Ganapathi Thathva* finds a place in the *Vedhas* and Upanishaths. Reference to Him is made in the Gaayathri also. He is one who instills purity in body, and fearlessness in the mind. It is said- "*Thanno Dhanthih Prachodayaath*," giving importance to his tusk.

Some people, out of ignorance, comment upon the big animal form of this Primal Deity and question how one with such a huge form can ride on a small *Muushika* (mouse) which is depicted as His vehicle. *Muushika* is symbolic of the darkness of ignorance, while Ganesha signifies the effulgence of Wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Significance of steam-cooked offering

Even the offering that is made to Ganesha has great significance because it is prepared with gram flour and jaggery or pepper and enclosed in an outer covering made from flour paste and then cooked in steam without using oil. This is supposed to be a healthy and delicious food item according to the Ayurvedic system. Modern doctors also recognise the importance of such steam-cooked *idlis* (rice cakes) which they recommend as post-operative diet for patients as it is easily digestible, Jaggery too has the property of controlling gas formation and this food item gives relief from eye troubles and prevents gastric disorders.

In the ancient traditional mode of observing these festivals, great emphasis was laid on good health as the pre-requisite for spiritual pursuits with a healthy mind. For achieving the four goals of human *life---Dharma, Artha, Kaama and Moksha* (Righteousness, Wealth, Desire and Liberation)-- one should have basically a healthy body. If you want to earn wealth by righteous means and cherish desires which lead to liberation, you should have sound health.

Vinaayaka is also called *Vighneshvara* as He removes all obstacles coming in the way of devotees who pray to Him sincerely. He is worshipped by students with books so that all that is contained in the books may get into their heads. Now-a-days people are only after *Dhanam* (money). Whatever scholarship one may attain, whatever power and position one may enjoy, one cannot be happy without the peace of mind that is got by pure devotion. One may have immense physical strength, one may pursue the path of meditation and penance, one may acquire profound knowledge, but all these attainments will be of no avail unless one acquires knowledge of the eternal--*Sathyam, Jnanam, Anantham Brahma*.

Symbolic significance of elephant head

The symbolic significance of Ganesha's elephant head has to be properly understood. The elephant has profound intelligence. For example, yesterday Sai Geetha, (Bhagavaan's elephant) came running when it heard the sound of Svaami's car approaching. Though many cars were following Svaami's car, Sai Geetha could unmistakably identify Svaami's car from an uncanny recognition of the sound of the car. That is why it is termed *Gaja Thelivi* (elephant intelligence). One having a sharp brain is described as having the intelligence of an elephant. It has *Medha Shakthi*.

Moreover, the elephant has large ears and it can hear even minute sounds. *Shravanam* (hearing The glory of the Lord) is the first step in spiritual *saadhana* for which ears should be sharp. After hearing one has to ruminate over this and put it into practice which are termed as *Shravana*,

Manana and Nidhidhyaasana. The elephant takes the *Dhuushana and Bhuushana* (praise and blame) equally. When it hears something bad, it moves its body this way and that way and shakes off the unwanted things while it retains goods things quietly.

Only Vinaayaka reaches the lessons that are essential for mankind. You should not stop with installing the idol and doing *puuja* for a few days. You should make efforts to become a Naayaka or Master over yourself. You have the nine-fold path of devotion. *Shravanam* (hearing), *Keerthanam* (singing His glory), *Vishnor naamasmarnam* (thinking of and chanting the name), *Paadha Sevanam* (serving at His feet), *Vandhanam* (obeisance), *archanam* (worship), *Dhaasyam* (serving Him as a servant serves the Master), *Saakhyam* (befriending God), *Aathma nivedhanam* (surrendering body, mind and soul). The elephant signifies combining of the first and the last, that is *Shravanam* and *Aathma nivedhanam*, so that all the other paths in between are covered fully.

When a man is born he does not have round his neck any necklace of pearls or gems or any possessions. But he is endowed by Brahma with the garland of the effects of his past actions, good or bad, which hangs invisibly around his neck. If you do good you will enjoy good results and if you are bad you will not escape suffering the consequences thereof.

The lessons of sacrifice that Vinaayaka taught

The teaching of Vinaayaka is one of sacrifice. You may not heed the contents of the *Puraanas*, but you should not miss the vital principles which they convey to mankind.

When Vinaayaka was writing the Mahaabhaaratha to the dictation of Sage Vyaasa, the latter laid down the condition that Vinaayaka should go on writing non-stop whatever Vyaasa said. But Vinaayaka also stipulated a condition that Vyaasa should never stop his dictation but should go on without a break. While he was writing, Vinaayaka's pen broke and he did not hesitate to break one of his tusks to use it as a pen. That is why he is called Ekadhantha or one with a single tusk. This is a shining example of the spirit of sacrifice that Vinaayaka exhibited for the welfare of humanity. That is why the *Vedhas* proclaim that it is only by sacrifice one can attain immortality

Bhakthi is greater than Jnaana

Prema and Thyaaga (Love and sacrifice) constitute *Bhakthi* (devotion to God). There is nothing superior to *this*. *Aathma Jnaana* (knowledge of the Self) is essential. This was the main teaching of Aadhi Shankara throughout his life, as he was preaching and following the *Vedhic* dictum- "*Ekaathma Sarvabhutha-Antharathma*"; "*Ekam Sath Vipraah Bahudha Vadhanthi*" (The one *Aathma* is present in all beings. The one Truth is described in many ways by the wise). He was also preaching that *Jnaana* was nothing but *Adhvaita Dharshana* (vision of Non-duality). But, during his last days, Shankara realised that *Bhakthi* was greater than *Jnaana*. In his famous Bhaja Govindham, Aadhi Shankara emphasises that only the path of devotion will help you to get over the cycle of birth and death.

There is no path superior to that of *Bhakthi*. *Bhakthi* does not mean doing *puuja*, *bhajans*, going on pilgrimage to holy shrines etc. *Bhakthi* means diverting the pure and unsullied mind towards God. People do not know the real meaning of *Prema*. The love you have for other beings is only temporal. God is the only one that is eternal. Love of God is *Bhakthi*. All other love may be termed as *Anuraaga*, which results in bondage, while love of God leads to liberation.

One may raise a question whether it is possible for everyone to realise the goal through the love of God. One may not achieve this instantaneously, but can do so, progressing step by step. By *Bhajans* and other forms of worship one may advance towards the goal of final emancipation. There is no meaning in saying that one is searching for God. It is God who is searching for a true devotee. This is as true today as it was in the past. God is neglected by people when He is easily attained. What is easily obtained at home is not relished so much as what you get outside, though it is not wholesome.

Significance of offering your hair to God

In olden days, people going on pilgrimage to Thirupathi used to climb the hills step by step chanting the name Govindha, Govindha, as they climbed each step. Thus the pilgrimage was performed with sincere devotion *and Naamasmarana*. But, these days people go by buses and cars, gossiping all the while, and indulging in unholy pursuits. The tonsure ceremony in which one shaves his head completely and offers his hair to the Lord of Thirupathi signifies your giving up your *Thamo Guna* (ignorance and lethargy) which is symbolised by the hair on the head. The hair is black. Giving up the hair indicates giving up *Thamo Guna*. You have to assimilate *Sathva Guna*.

All acts of worship have a spiritual significance. Now-a-days, people do not understand their inner significance, but give up not only their hair but also waste a lot of money and return home without being any the wiser for the trip.

You may install idols and worship them. But do not forget the inner significance of all worship. All external activities are necessary only to help you to get into the spirit of non-duality and experience unity in diversity. Love and sacrifice are very important. Where there is pure, unsullied, selfless, sacred and sublime love there is no fear at all. Giving and not getting is the underlying principle of spiritual *saadhana*. Your heart is full of love, but you are using it only for selfish purposes instead of diverting it towards God. God is in the heart and not in the head. The heart is *Prema mayam* (full of love). On these festival days, you should remember that God is one, and all religions uphold the same principle of "One God, who is omnipresent." You should not have contempt for any religion, as each is a pathway to God. Fostering love towards your fellow-beings, receive the noble love of the Divine. This is the goal of life.

Discourse in the Puurnachandhra Auditorium on 9-9-1994, Ganesh Chaturthi Day.

We are developing in each department of life, but it is a pity that we are not developing the unique qualities of human beings. Develop the Aathmik awareness, the consciousness of the Divine and the acquisition of Divine attributes. Expand love and understanding.

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