

9. PRACTISE AND PROPAGATE OUR SACRED CULTURE

Date: 15 April 2003 Occasion: Vishu celebrations Place: Brindavan

The sun appears serene and peaceful.
The fields are ripe with golden crops.
Marigold flowers are blossoming
 like garlands of pearls on the banks of rivers.
The farmers are rejoicing and singing.
The chillies have ripened and are looking red.
The sweet festival of Sri Vishu has come,
 filling our homes with the newly harvested grain.
(Telugu Poem)

Today is the day of great happiness for the people of Kerala. The farmers reap the harvest, bring the grains to the home, and rejoice. Food is very essential for the nation. It is the farmers who feed to the nation and bring peace and prosperity to it. It is their good fortune to be able to render such joyful service to the nation. Only when the farmers who give us food are happy and contented can the nation be peaceful and prosperous. Right from dawn to dusk, they toil in the fields and render great service to the nation.

Embodiments of Love!

This land of Bharat is very sacred and meritorious. Since time immemorial, Bharat has been imparting spiritual education to all nations of the world and thus bestowing peace and happiness on all. This is the eternal glory of Bharat. The motto of the Bharatiyas (Indians) has been Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu (May all the people of the world be happy!) Sarvam khalvidam Brahma (verily all this is Brahman). As Brahma pervades the entire world, dharma should permeate all actions of man. Karma (action) will be sanctified only when it is based on dharma and Brahma. It is said, Karmanubandheeni manushya loke (human society is bound by action). Nobody should waste time. Right from the time he wakes up in the morning, man should utilise his time and energy for the welfare of society. This is his main duty. He should realise that his welfare lies in the welfare of society. I have seen that the people of Kerala are always engaged in some activity or the other. They work very hard. They are not interested in comforts and pleasures. They derive happiness in working hard and serving society. They strive for peace and security of one and all. That is their most sacred virtue.

Embodiments of Love!

Kerala is the seat of education. It is the land which stands as testimony to the profound truths enunciated in the Vedas, Sastras, Puranas, and Itihasas. In such a land of peace and sacredness, today people are unable to experience the unsullied happiness that their ancestors were able to enjoy in the past. However, there is no cause for worry. A time will come, when Kerala will regain its past glory. Time plays an important role. We have to discharge the duties ordained on us by God and thus sanctify our time. Whatever actions we perform are the reflections of our inner feelings only. You should undertake such actions that will provide internal as well as external happiness. Nobody can remain without performing action.

Man is born from action, is sustained by action, and ultimately merges in action.

Action is the cause for pleasure and pain.

Truly speaking, action is God for man.

(Telugu Poem)

Man's life is bound by kala, karma, karana, kartavya (time, action, cause, duty). Due to the effect of Kali age, man does not work hard. Both the educated and the uneducated have become lethargic. You have to sanctify your life by doing righteous actions. Action is the cause for everything. Action is life. It is very unfortunate that man has not understood the importance of action. He wants to lead an easy life. Even students want to pass the examinations without putting much effort. They want to secure jobs without working hard. After securing jobs, they want salaries without discharging their duties. This type of conduct is not good. It is said, kashte phali (hard work yields rich rewards). The rewards that one gets will be commensurate with the efforts one puts in. One should recognise this truth and work hard accordingly. Unfortunately, such a spirit of work is not seen these days. There are people who go to office only to give attendance. Each one has to question oneself whether one is discharging one's duty properly or not. It is most essential that man becomes duty conscious.

Embodiments of Love!

You have to bend your body and work. Discharge your duty with the sweat of your brow. Only then can you get the right reward. Today, people are suffering for want of food and drinking water. What is the reason? Man is not undertaking righteous actions. When man does his duty sincerely, there will be no shortage of food and drinking water. Without working hard, one cannot lead a happy life. Na sukhat labhyate sukham (one cannot derive happiness out of happiness). We can get happiness only when we work hard. For every action of ours, there is

bound to be reaction. For every sound that we make there will be resound. When we undertake righteous action and utter sacred words, the same will come back to us in the form of reaction, reflection and resound.

Embodiments of Love!

Our actions should be such that they bring happiness to ourselves as well as others. First of all, we have to enquire what true happiness is and what sorrow is. People think that happiness lies in eating to the fill and having a sound sleep. That is no happiness at all. Happiness lies in working hard and serving society. We can experience peace and happiness only when we help the poor and needy. After our daily prayer, we utter the word peace thrice: santhi santhi santhihi. Where is peace? It is inside, not outside. Outside there are only pieces! You are the embodiment of peace, you are the embodiment of truth, you are the embodiment of love, you are the embodiment of God. How foolish it is to look for peace outside when it is present within! You have to put in proper effort to experience the peace within. You have to turn your vision inward. When two branches rub against each other repeatedly, fire is produced. Similarly, continuous hard work will produce jnanagni (fire of wisdom).

Embodiments of Love!

Today, nobody wants difficulties. Everybody aspires for happiness. Where is happiness? It is everywhere. We should earn the deservedness to experience it. Our Judge (who spoke earlier) mentioned in his speech that he was disappointed when Swami did not speak to him in spite of having worked hard. He did a lot of self-introspection. As a result, he got a good chance today. Without working hard, you cannot get any reward. But today, man is not prepared to work hard.

During Upanishadic times, people would offer their salutations to the karma (action) before undertaking it --thasmai namah karmane (salutations to action). We have to offer our salutations to the karma in the first instance so that it gives us good result.

In Bharat, some people follow this sacred tradition even today. A cricket player pays his respects to the ball before starting to bowl. A dancer salutes the anklets before tying them to her feet. Even an uneducated driver offers his obeisance to the steering wheel before driving the vehicle. But most of the educated people have forgotten such an ancient tradition and culture. That is why accidents are on the rise. There is a sense of fear and insecurity among people.

First of all, we have to offer our respects and express our gratitude to karma before undertaking it. Every one has to understand his duty and perform it to the best of his ability. Before the commencement of any

music programme, musicians pray to Vinayaka, the remover of obstacles. One who has no nayaka (master) above him is Vinayaka. He is the master of all. Hence, we have to offer our prayers to him before the commencement of any activity. Since ancient times, Bharatiyas (Indians) adhered to such sacred traditions implicitly. People decorate their houses with buntings of green leaves on festival days. Big pandals of mango leaves and plantain leaves are erected at the time of marriages. Green leaves are given place of prominence in such decorations. What is so special about them? Can't we have a shamiana instead?

No, that is not in accordance with our ancient tradition. What is the logic behind this tradition? As you are aware, we inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, which pollutes the atmosphere. At the time of marriages, many people gather at one place. As a result, more and more carbon dioxide is released into the air and the atmosphere gets polluted. The green leaves of the pandal inhale the carbon dioxide and release oxygen and thus purify the atmosphere. In this manner, they bestow health and happiness on us.

Thus, every tradition of Bharat has a profound inner meaning. Such sacred traditions are ignored today. Wherever a marriage is performed or a big meeting is held, people prefer decorative shamianas to pandals, plastic festoons to green leaf festoons. Can you get oxygen from plastic festoons? Can they absorb carbon dioxide? The shamianas and plastic festoons may be aesthetically pleasing but they serve no purpose in keeping the atmosphere pure. We should never forget our ancient traditions.

In Kerala, even today ancient traditions are followed. On festival days, they place a lamp on rice, with beautiful decorations around. It is very auspicious for the house. Onam and Vishu are the sacred festivals that the Keralites celebrate. You must understand the tradition and significance associated with the celebration of Vishu. It is not merely meant to wish each other 'hello' and shake hands. Vishu is that day when your house has grains in plenty and the State attains prosperity. This is how the festival was celebrated in ancient times. Today Vishu celebration is confined to wishing each other. This is not the way to celebrate Vishu. You have to aspire and work for the happiness of others. True celebration of Vishu lies in each sharing the happiness of the other. Give and take. It is not 'one way traffic'. You have to give happiness to others. Only then will you have the right to receive it from others.

Kerala has plantain trees and coconut groves in abundance. You find greenery all around. Keralites prepare various types of puddings with plantains. There is a special type of plantain called nendra pazham, which they distribute to others.

The Gayatri Mantra begins with the syllables Om, Bhur, Bhuvah Suvaha. Om is the primordial sound, Pranava. Bhur represents bhuloka, the world of materials (materialisation). Bhuvah is related to the mind (vibration). Suvaha represents prajna (radiation). When you understand these three principles, your life will be sanctified. But today man is not interested in such divine principles. He craves for worldly gains. How long can he enjoy physical pleasures? They are momentary. They do not give true happiness. This is what Adi Sankara said in his famous Bhaja Govindam song thus:

Ma Kuru Dhana Jana Yauvana Garvam,
Harathi Nimeshath Kalah Sarvam

Do not be proud of your wealth, progeny, and youth;
the tide of time may destroy them in a moment.

Hence, you should not crave for worldly happiness. You should strive for eternal peace and everlasting happiness. You should not be caught up in the endless cycle of birth and death. You should transcend birth and death and attain immortality.

Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam
Punarapi Janani Jathare Sayanam
Iha Samsare Bahu Dustare
Kripayapare Pahi Murare.

Oh Lord! I am caught up in this cycle of birth and death.
Time and again, I am experiencing the agony of staying in the
mother's womb.
It is very difficult to cross this ocean of worldly life.
Please take me across this ocean and grant me liberation.

Once a person was sitting under a tree on the bank of river Ganga and trying to master the nuances of Panini grammar. He was repeating Dukrun karane, Dukrun karane. Sankara was going to the river with his disciples for a sacred bath. He took pity on the person, went up to him and said, "My dear one, by learning the rules of grammar, you may become a great scholar. But it is not going to save you from death. Hence, chant the name of Govinda, who alone is your saviour." It was then that Adi Sankara sang the famous Bhaja Govindam song.

Bhaja Govindam, Bhaja Govindam
Govindam Bhaja Moodha Mathe
Samprapthe Sannihithe Kale
Nahi Nahi Rakshati Dukrun Karane.

Oh foolish man, chant the name of Govinda;
he rules of grammar will not come to your rescue when the
end approaches.

Some of the other verses of this song were composed by the disciples of Sankara. It is said, Yatha raja, thatha praja (as the king, so are the subjects). The same can be said of guru-sishya (teacher-student) relationship. Yatha guru thatha sishya (as the preceptor, so are the disciples). The preceptors of those days were highly noble. They set great ideals, which their disciples emulated. We don't find such masters and disciples today.

One should not crave for scholarship or name and fame. They come and go. When there is plenty of water in the pond, frogs make their way into it. When the water dries to a trickle, you do not find a single frog there. In the same manner, when your pocket is full, many people swarm around you. But when your pocket is empty, no one will look at your face. This is the way of the world. Do not get deluded by the loka (world). Contemplate on Lokeshha (Lord of the world) incessantly. Sankara made a great contribution to the spiritual wealth of this country. We should express our gratitude to him by following his teachings. We should never forget our cultural heritage. Each State has its own traditions. They have to be followed in letter and spirit. Today, fashions have displaced traditions. Do not be carried away by fashions. Let the ancient traditions be imprinted on your heart.

In villages, people sprinkle cow dung mixed with water in front of their homes. It is considered to be auspicious. What is the reason? Cow dung destroys disease-causing germs and thus helps maintain good health. It can cure many diseases. Today people of other countries have recognised this truth and are taking full advantage of it. But the Bharatiyas (Indians) are not making efforts in this direction.

In earlier days, cow dung was used as a remedy for wounds. People used to bandage the wound with cow dung. In modern times, people have a wrong notion that the wound becomes septic if cow dung is bandaged over it. It may become gangrenous also, they argue. It is a baseless argument. If cow dung is applied, the wound will be healed in three days. Cow dung has such sacred power. Even cow urine has medicinal properties. It is mixed in water and sprinkled on people infected with the pox. But the modern trend is against such natural remedies, which are in fact, beneficial to one and all.

The Bharatiyas have to revive such ancient traditions. Let people say what they want, we have to follow our sacred traditions.

On the day of Vishu, people have a sacred bath and put on new clothes. Mere external cleanliness is not enough, you have to cleanse your mind and develop inner purity. Antarbahischa tatsarvam vyapya Narayana sthita (That all-pervasive God is present within and without). We have to offer obeisance to our elders and seek their blessings. We have to develop good relationship with all. Therein lies the true celebration of Vishu. Today, even among the Keralites, many do not know the true significance of Vishu. It is a symbol of our great cultural heritage. Today people are not aware of the greatness of Bharat. It is said, Yenna Bharate thanna Bharata (what is not found in Bharat is not found anywhere else). Bharatiyas are those who sing the glory of God with bhava, raga, and thala (feeling, tune, and rhythm). Music will be pleasing to the ears only when these three are in harmony.

Right from young age, the children should be taught the greatness of our ancient culture. They should be moulded into ideal citizens. They should be made to practise our traditional values. For anything, practise is very important. The responsibility lies with the parents and teachers to make the children adhere to our ancient tradition. Then society will certainly progress and enjoy peace and prosperity. If you practise our ancient values, society will attain kshemam (welfare), otherwise, it will be afflicted with kshamam (famine). Do not think about the welfare of you and your family alone. Strive for the welfare of everyone. Loka samasta sukhino bhavantu (May all the people of the world be happy!)

Students!

Make efforts to understand the greatness of our ancient culture and traditions. Respect everyone. Do not be rude to elders and guests who visit your house. Whether your parents are at home or not, offer them a seat and give them a glass of cold water or buttermilk. Speak to them with love. However, such noble practices are not to be found among students of the present times. If somebody rings up asking for father, even if he is at home, the son keeps down the phone saying he is not there. Even over the phone, you should talk in a respectful manner. You can earn the respect of others only when you respect them. Respect does not mean merely saying, 'hello'. You should offer your namaskara with humility and reverence. Na-maskara means offering your respects without a trace of ahamkara and mamakara (ego and attachment).

Matru Devo bhava, pitru Devo bhava, acharya Devo bhava, atithi Devo bhava (revere your mother, father, preceptor, and guest as God). Since our ancients adhered to such sacred principles, our nation earned the respect of the entire world. We should develop humility, love, and reverence toward elders like the ancient Bharatiyas. We should practise and propagate our sacred culture. That is the true sign of education.

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Bhagawan concluded His discourse with the bhajans, "Prema mudita manase kaho", "Govinda Krishna jai Gopala Krishna jai", and "Om Sivaya Om Sivaya".

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