

14. Live Up To The Expectations Of Emperor Bali

Man is born out of, grows in, and finally departs from this world due to *karma*.
Karma is verily the embodiment of Divinity for humanity.
It is only due to *karma* that happiness and sorrow occur in this world.
(Telugu poem)

Embodiments of Love!

DEAR devotees of Kerala! Emperor Bali used to rule the state of Kerala in ancient times. He used to treat his subjects as his own family members and provide several conveniences for their happy and comfortable living. He used to develop sacred feelings among the people and create a proper environment to foster them. In order that the people tread the right path and to set an example to them, he started a ritual-sacrifice (*yajna*) by name ‘Viswajit’ once. Several people gathered to witness the event. Emperor Bali performed the *yajna* on a grand scale by donating land and money to several people and gave away gifts to a number of people on the occasion.

During the *yajna*, his family members were also seated on the *yajna* stage along with him. While everyone was watching the grand spectacle, a handsome boy entered the sacrificial hall holding a small umbrella made of palmirah leaves. As He was approaching the altar, Emperor Bali’s daughter Ratnamala saw Him. She was captivated by the beauty and effulgence of that charming young boy. Immediately, she was lost in deep contemplation, thinking, “How fortunate it would be if I had a child like Him!” The boy went straight to the altar.

The dialogue between the emperor and the divine boy

While everyone present in the *yajna* room was watching Him happily, Emperor Bali welcomed Him, washed His feet reverentially, offered a garland, and made Him sit on an ornate chair. He then asked the young boy, “Who are You? Where did You come from, and for what purpose?”

The young boy replied, “I have heard that Emperor Bali is doing several acts of charity. I too have a desire to be fulfilled.” The Emperor then asked, “What is it?” The boy replied, “I don’t need anything much. I will be happy if a small piece of land measuring three feet is given to Me in charity.” Emperor Bali wondered, “What! Such a small request! I thought You would ask for some big things. I am surprised at your small request. Is that enough? You may ask for something more.” The young boy replied that it would be enough if His request was fulfilled.

He covered the entire earth with one step, the sky with the second, and was waiting to take the third step. But there was no space left for the third step. Emperor Bali then told the boy, “Dear one! You covered the entire earth with one step and the sky with the second. Now, there is no space to keep the third step. Hence, please keep Your foot on my head, if You wish.” So saying, he bent his head before the boy, who was none other than Lord Vishnu come in the form of Vamana *Avatar*. The moment Vamana set His foot on the head of Emperor Bali, Bali was pushed down under its weight to the nether world! That was how he was liberated by Lord Vishnu.

The origin of Onam festival

The people of Emperor Bali’s Kingdom were very sad at the developments. They expressed their forlorn

feelings thus: “Oh God! Our Emperor is no more with us. He used to rear us like his own children. He is our protector. How can we live without him?” Their helplessness and agony over the separation from their beloved King were very painful. The happy event of *yajna* that was being celebrated on a grand scale came to an abrupt end. This is an example of the saying “Pleasure is an interval between two pains.”

As the people were thus grieving, Emperor Bali declared from the nether world, “Oh, my dear children! You are all very dear to me. I will always look after your welfare, wherever I am. I will see that you do not undergo any trouble. I will protect you. You need not feel that I am away from you in a different world. Every year on this day, I shall come and see you. Commemorate this day of my coming as a festival. Take a bath, wear new clothes, and enjoy a feast with a variety of dishes on this day.” From then on, the people of Kerala celebrate that day as ‘Onam festival’ in remembrance of their most beloved King and protector Bali.

Kerala, the land of nature’s bounty

Emperor Bali used to do a lot of good work for the benefit of people and make them happy. This is why the people could not bear the separation from their beloved King.

Even today, Kerala remains a land of plenty and prosperity. Nature showers its bounty on the people of Kerala. In fact, the rains start in Kerala and then spread to the entire country. There is no dearth of food grains and drinking water in Kerala, which is nature’s gift to the people of Kerala. It is customary to see people in other states worrying about arrival of the monsoon saying, “Oh! The rains have not yet started in Kerala.” It is a land where the omnipresent God had incarnated as Lord Vamana. He may incarnate in one place but is present everywhere.

God is omnipresent, though at times He incarnates in a place with a form. God is only one, not two, though people refer to Him by different names and forms. “Truth is one, but the wise refer to it by various names (*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*).” It is only our illusion to ascribe different names to God like Rama, Krishna, Govinda, Allah, Jesus, etc. The sun is only one and it appears in different parts of the world at different times. It is now 9.00 a.m.; but it is night in the U.S.A. Similarly, the one God dwells in different people in different forms. Do not be under the impression that God has different forms. He is beyond names and forms. “God is one but manifests as several beings (*Ekoham bahusyam*). Divinity is present everywhere — in every country and every individual. It is omnipresent. Since your perceptions are different, you ascribe different names and forms to the one God.

Good qualities of the people of Kerala

The land of Kerala is the gift of God. The people of Kerala follow the commands of the noble Emperor Bali even today. That is why the state has developed in several ways. There is no dearth of food and amenities for a happy living in Kerala. Emperor Bali provided all comforts to the people before he left for his abode. It is a small state and densely populated. Whatever may be the size of population, people enjoy a lot of comforts, peace, and happiness in Kerala.

Of course, changes in people’s aspirations and lifestyle are taking place in recent times due to the impact of the *Kali Yuga* (the present era). But the core of their hearts and feelings remains the same. They still follow the *vedic* injunctions “Speak truth and follow righteousness (*Sathyam vada, dharmam chara*).” They respect the elders and serve them with love and affection. What could be the reason for this? Love for God. It is a land where love for God exists even today. They have fear of sin. Those who have love for God naturally develop fear of sin.

Consequently, such people will have a high degree of morality in society, which is very important for its orderly functioning. Thus, the people of Kerala scrupulously observe the three principles of love for God, fear of sin, and morality in society. They respect elders and give due recognition to them.

One should have morality and integrity. The same principles have been enshrined in the *vedic* injunction, “Speak truth and follow righteousness.” The people of Kerala follow these two principles scrupulously in their daily lives.

Love your mother and show due respect to her

It is not enough to celebrate the Onam festival with a lot of religious fervour and devotion. You have to live up to the expectations of the noble emperor Bali. It is said, “Revere your mother, father, preceptor, and guest as God (*Matrudevo bhava, pitrudevo bhava, acharyadevo bhava, atithidevo bhava*).” First comes the mother in that order. She gives birth to you, brings you up, and teaches you good things in your formative years. Then begins the role of father. He is your second guru. Then the teacher (guru) educates you to enable you to make a living in the world. And finally God takes command. Thus, your life in this physical world begins with your mother and culminates in God.

Hence, do not under any circumstances forget your mother. Love your mother more than anyone else and show her due respect. You will find that the people of Kerala respect the elders very much, particularly their mothers. They lend a helping hand and take good care of the elders. They keep the elders happy always. How fortunate are the people of Kerala to have an emperor like Bali, whom God Himself accompanied to Vaikunta (Vishnu’s heaven)!

The celebration of Onam

What is Onam? It is a day on which people take a good bath, wear new clothes, and pray to God with a pure heart. The people of Kerala prepare a variety of tasty dishes, particularly with banana. They in fact prepare twelve varieties of dishes with the banana fruit. It is a unique celebration. They prepare these dishes with a pure and loving heart. Hence, they will be very tasty. They offer these preparations first to God wholeheartedly, with a lot of devotion, and then partake of it along with their family members and relations. They serve these dishes one after the other. Both the cooking and serving the dishes is done with a pure and loving heart in the true spirit of Onam celebrations. They keep their houses clean and maintain a sacred atmosphere for God to manifest. They consider them not merely as houses but temples of God.

Only in Kerala does such a sacred atmosphere prevail. Even if some people have some misgivings about the festival of Onam, they got them cleared and the festival is celebrated in its true spirit as a day on which Emperor Bali conferred blessings on his people from Vaikunta (the abode of Lord Vishnu), where he reached ultimately. It is a penance (*tapas*) for the people of Kerala to remember the words of Emperor Bali on this day and lead their lives accordingly in a spirit of love and service. “Love all and serve all”! There can be no greater penance for anyone.

Whomsoever you come across, offer your salutations. Even if you encounter enemies, offer your salutations to them first. Surely, they will reciprocate your noble gesture. Thus, people have to conduct themselves with mutual love and unity. It is only such people that deserve to be called human beings. They are, in fact, the people

with morality. You have to develop such morality today. Love for God enjoins one to develop morality in society.

Hence, you have to develop love for God, fear of sin, and morality in society. Do not ever forget these three principles. Those who have no morality are not human beings at all! Can a nation or race exist without morality? No! You also must develop the qualities of humility and obedience, besides morality. This was in fact, the message of emperor Bali to his people. If you can cultivate and develop these qualities, your life will be sanctified.

Onam, Prasanthi Nilayam. 2009-09-02

The *Atmarama* (Divinity) in every one prompts one to stick to truth and to the moral code; you have only to listen and obey and get saved. Some hear even its whisperings; some listen only when it protests loudly; some are deaf; some are determined not to hear. But all have to be guided by it, sooner or later. Some may ascend a plane, others may travel by car or board a bus, some may prefer a train journey, others may like to trudge along – but all must reach the goal some day or other.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

To get angry is but the effort of a moment, but to get peace, to become unaffected by the ups and downs of life, is the result of years of training in *Vedanta*. It can be well established only on the basis of the belief that all material things that fall within the range of sensuous experience are fundamentally non-existent. They are products of illusion (*maya*), of the tendency to see many where only 'One' exists. You see corpses proceeding one after the other to the graveyard, but you move about unconcerned. You feel you are eternal. In fact, you are. That is the real you, I mean. Just as the water you drink is eliminated as perspiration, the *karma* that you accumulate is eliminated through *karma*, gladly borne. So, bear both 'mirth and moan' with equal calm. Like the space in the pot merging with the space outside the pot, silently, fully, with no trace of separation or distinctness, merge with the Universal. That is real surrender, salvation, liberation (*saranagathi*).

Sri Sathya Sai Baba