

18. Clean Food Enables One To Develop Good Qualities

How can a dog realise the value of fasting during the day? How can an ox realise the taste of parched rice? How can one who cannot smell appreciate any fragrance? How can a blind man realise the beauty of moonshine?

Students:

The great *rishis* of ancient times have handed over sacred ideals to us. From the culture and traditions of Bharath, we should pick out some aspects which are applicable in our daily life. The statements made by such great *rishis* were the result of their own personal experience in a life full of happiness and bliss. The path that was taken by them can be described as a golden path. The words they gave to us were words of truth. Their experience was such that whatever they did was only promoting the prosperity of the world and the happiness of the people. Unfortunately, it appears that man today has taken a path which is quite the opposite. We think that all the injunctions that are given to us by our ancestors are full of superstitions, and that they are based on foolish and weak ideas. If there is truly a blind faith or a superstition and if one can establish it to be so by proper reasoning, everyone will agree to that. Contrary to this, if people give a name, blind faith or superstition, to everything which they do not like and which they cannot understand, this is simply to be traced to the excitement in their own minds and such statements can be only selfish words uttered with a selfish motive.

Students:

Today I am only going to tell you what the proper conduct in your daily life should be and how your manner of eating and living should be regulated. Many people, particularly those who are believers in God, think that at the time of their food, they should repeat the 15th Chapter of the *Gita* and by so repeat-ing, they think that they will be first offering the food to the Lord and then partake of the food that has been offered to the Lord. The students who have come to participate in the Summer Classes know that in our hostel, prior to taking food, the students usually repeat some verses and make an offering of that food to the Lord and then eat the remaining food. We should not dismiss this as a foolish faith. We must try and experience the meaning and the contents of the verses.

In the old days, one of the kings was performing a *yagna* and he assembled a number of *pundits* during that *yagna*. Amongst *pundits* assembled by the king, there were two people who were accustomed to observing certain traditions. In the ancient days, the traditions were such that while travelling they would not agree to take their food in some house or other. In the early hours of the morning, they used to collect some food and used to carry the same in a bundle, and they would eat this food during the journey. When it became midday during their journey, they reached a river and found out a tree with a good shade. They sat under the tree for their afternoon meal. It was their habit that everyday they would think of God and they would offer the food to God and then, only, partake of the food. On that day, too, they started reading the twenty-fifth verse in the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita* which commences by saying, “*Brahmarpanam*,” (I offer this food to Brahma). When this verse was repeated by them, they heard some noise from the Banyan tree under which they were sitting. They thought

that on account of the breeze, one branch may have rubbed against another branch and noise may thus have been produced. They were not disturbed by the noise. They were continuing their prayer. They started repeating the 14th verse in the 15th Chapter of the *Gita*. While repeating that verse, they were totally lost and completely absorbed in the thought of God and they were thus repeating their prayer. When this verse was repeated in that manner, they found that a *Mahapurusha*, (a great saint) came and stood in their presence. They got up and paid homage to that great saintly personality and asked him who he was. He revealed his identity and said that he was a *Gandharva* and that he was subjected to a curse by a *rishi* several years ago and he was living on that Banyan tree. He was now liberated from that curse by the prayers uttered under the tree.

This *Gandharva* then paid homage to these two *pundits* and said, "I know where you are going and I am fully aware of your mission. You are going to participate in a meeting which the king is convening. I have to repay my debt to you for having relieved me of my curse. I will enter into the mind of the king and I will see that you are benefited in many ways." The scholars entered the congregation arranged by the king, but they found that the place was packed with many people, and they could not reach the king. So they were sitting in some corner and were looking at the king. The words uttered by great saints can never become untrue. Because of the promise made by the *Gandharva*, the king, of his own accord, looked at these two scholars. The king came to them and made obeisance to them and requested them to come to the front row and be seated. He also asked them to exhibit their scholarship. The congregation came to a close on that day and the king was immensely pleased with the scholarship exhibited by them and gifted them with several villages and saw to it that they lived

happily for the rest of their lives. Here we notice that this great saint taught these two persons how to get over many worldly troubles and obstacles which they came across and also showed them how to acquire spiritual blessings. Thus, if one wants to take the path of spirituality, one will find that many worldly troubles and obstacles come in the way. It is only when we can overcome these worldly obstacles that are in our way, can we take the opportunity to benefit from the spiritual path.

Because the *pundits* could get over the troubles and take to the spiritual path, they returned to their own village and were experiencing happiness through the gifts they received. The purpose of our thinking of this particular verse in the 15th Chapter of the *Gita* is to get success in worldly matters and to get over the obstacles in the matter of pursuing a spiritual path. Here, the food we eat determines in many ways what we are going to get in future for ourselves. The food we eat will determine the type of ideas that sprout in us.

While taking our food, if we use exciting words, such ideas which are related to these exciting words will sprout in us also. The lesson that we should learn is that when we take our bath, when we sit for *dhyana* or when we take our food, we should not think of other activities and other ideas. Too much talk, while we take our food, will also cause harm to us. We should not give room to any kind of talk when we take our food. With a happy heart and with a sacred word, we must undertake to utter this particular verse and then take our food. In this way, whatever has been offered to *Brahman* will become the *prasad* which comes to us as a gift of *Brahman*.

The meaning of the verse is that God Himself, who is in a human form in you, is taking the food. Therefore, this

changes our food into food for God. While taking food, we should not be excited, and we should not get into passion, but we should eat very peacefully. Even if we cannot perform *japa*, *thapa* or *yagas*, at least if we take care to see that we eat in this manner, we will develop good ideas. The nature of the fire will determine the type of smoke that comes out. The kind of smoke that comes out will determine the type of cloud that it forms. The type of cloud that is formed will determine the type of rain which the cloud yields. The type of rain determines the harvest. The kind of harvest determines the food that we get out of it. The kind of food we eat will determine our ideas. For all our ideas, it is our food that is responsible. If we eat *sathwik* food, sitting in a clean place, we will have clean ideas by eating that food. There will thus be a good possibility of our getting spiritual ideas.

In the matter of food, there are three aspects regarding the cleanliness of which we should take great care. One is the cleanliness of the material which we use for cooking the food. The second is the cleanliness of the pot in which we want to cook the food. We can certainly clean the materials which constitute the food and also clean the pot in which it is cooked. The third aspect relates to the cleanliness of the process of cooking. This is not easily possible. Until the material gets cooked to its final stage, our ideas should be good for this to be achieved.

Even if there are lapses in these aspects of cleanliness, namely the pot, the materials used for cooking and the process of cooking, if we offer the food to the *Paramatma* before we eat, then the food will become clean. By thus offering to the Lord the food that we eat, we introduce these different kinds of cleanliness; and so our ancestors have told that these are the steps which we must observe regarding our food.

Unfortunately, today when one is hungry, one does not care about what he eats, in what hotel he eats nor what kind of food he eats. He will eat anything.

We do not see the *rishis* of the ancient times any longer. We see people who only pretend to be sacred. This is the reason why their condition is going down, day after day, to the very depths of degradation. It is only when we can follow the path that was laid down by the ancestors and accept the *Vedic dharma* that there will be no doubt whatsoever for us to rise high. All the gifts of villages, which were given by the king to people in return for specific services rendered, are disappearing these days. What is the reason for this? The reason is the change that has come about in the mode of life. Civilisation and borrowed traditions which we have accepted are showing their consequences and results. Selfishness is growing while selflessness and help to others is diminishing. The heart is becoming harsher and harsher. Intelligence is on the rise but good qualities are diminishing. Thus all the agitation and lack of peace in the world may be traced to our own food habits.

You may be hungry. In spite of your hunger, you must make an attempt to get a clean place and clean food to eat. When such clean food is available, you must first offer it to God and then eat it. Not only here, wherever you may go, when you take your food, you should remember these three verses, utter them, offer the food to God and then take the food. If there are some amongst you who do not know these three verses, you can write them down so that you will be able to recite them and become worthy citizens of Bharath.