52. Four steps to freedom

THE culture of this ancient land is as deep as it is vast, it is built on strong and sustaining principles of human development. But, Indians at the present time are neglecting its lessons and entangling themselves in the search for material joys and pleasures. They ignore the true and eternal values. They turn a deaf ear to the call of the Divine; they respond to the siren voice of the worldly. This is the twentieth century, the Age of Science and Technology. There is plenty of material comforts and sensual pleasure easily available. So driven by an insane urge for the temporal and the trivial, man rushes into rain, and loses the precious heritage of *Aathmic* (pure spiritual) treasure which the culture promises him. In fact, if only man knew the purpose and plan of Life, he would not waste his years and his skills in the pursuit of mere time-bound joys. That he is everywhere engrossed in these endeavours is a pitiable fact, which can be attributed to his misfortune or his ignorance. Of course, man has lost faith in himself; so, there is no wonder that he has lost faith in God also. Only those who know themselves and have confidence in themselves can acquire knowledge of God and confidence in God. Know thyself, first; then, your attempt to know the world will be rendered simple.

Wisdom can come only through work as worship

Indian Culture has laid emphasis on four *aashramas* (stages of life) for individual development in order to assure everyone with the education needed to know himself. For *Aathma vichaarana* (enquiry into the Self), *Aashrama dhanam* (code of duty) is very essential. Through adherence to the regulations and prescriptions of conduct and study-assigned to each stage or *Aashram,* the earning of knowledge and wisdom is made easy and automatic. Wisdom can come only through work as worship; the *Aashrams guide* man to sublimate all activity into worship.

Just as we have four stages: childhood, youth, middle age and old age, we have four corresponding *Aashramas: Brahmacharya, Grahasthya, Vaanaprastha* and *Sanyaas*-- studentship, householdership, recluseship and monk-ship. During the years of childhood and teenage, man has to equip himself with the information necessary to share in the work of society and to derive health and happiness thereby, and acquaint himself with the tools of knowledge and the paths along which wisdom can be garnered. As a-householder, raising a family and sustaining a society, he has also to uphold the ideals of justice and truth, and promote them by his actions. He must feel the innate majesty of mankind and live in *accordance* with that high status. As a recluse and monk, in old age, he has to be the guide and teacher of the people around him, imparting to them the fund of wisdom he has won through his experience.

The *Shaasthras* (spiritual sciences) lay down the lines along which man has to direct his thoughts and activities. Sincere adherence to these laws and limitations alone can guarantee *jnaana* (spiritual wisdom). Otherwise, man drifts aimlessly along the crosscurrents and whirlpools of life and ends up ignorant, both of the nature of *loka* (world) and the glory of *Lokeshwara* (God).

Forces of atheism have gained strength now

The higher paths must be trodden from childhood; it cannot be adopted at an advanced age. The child must learn to be truthful in word and deed, and avoid the cowardly habit of falsehood. Later, boys and girls have to become conscious directors of their senses, instead of being automatic slaves. Heads of families have to adhere to the schedules of rites and worship prescribed for them; they have to supervise the behaviour and conduct of the members of the household; they have to render hospitality to guests and deal charity to the poor; they have also

to equip their sons and daughters with processes by which they can have mental peace and equanimity, under all conditions. Because these obligations have been neglected for some generations, the forces of atheism have earned strength now.

When the seeds are ridden with defects, how can the tree yield richly? When parents and elders do not provide good examples to the children growing under their shade, how can the country prosper and be free from anxiety and fear? You cannot separate the rind, the pulp and the seed that a tamarind fruit has, when it is still green. But, once it has ripened, the separation is quite easy. So too, until a person becomes ripe in experience and can be pronounced wise, he cannot discard his identification with the body, the senses and the mind. He will not be able to differentiate between *Aathma* (spiritual Self) and *non-aathma, kshethra* (the body) and *Kshethrajna* (the controller of the body). *Prakrithi* (Nature) and *Paramaathma* (Supreme Self), *Guna* (impelling characteristic quality) and Trans-guna, and such other entities.

Man's restlessness affects society too

Let me tell you a small example: Krishna killed the Kaaliya serpent that was poisoning the Kalinidi river and destroying all trace of life for miles around, by means of deadly fumes. No sooner was Kaaliya killed than the 'wives' (serpents) of his harem, prayed to Krishna for succour and surrendered to Him. This story is according to the Bhaagavatha. Now, what does this signify? In the Mind-lake (the *Maanasa-sarovar)* of man, there lurks a poisonous serpent, desire. When that is destroyed, the various frailities and frivolities, triumphs, trials and failures, pains and pleasures, that desire brings in its train, surrender to God.

Desire can be killed, only when faith in the *Aathma* as the very core of being is firmly established. Since all efforts are now directed to the accumulation of material goods and the satisfaction of sensual desires, man is tossed about on the waves of fight and faction, falsehood and greed. The individual is intimately related to society and so, his restlessness affects society too.

The individual Will is ultimately responsible for the welfare and well-being of the world. The world is but a mental image of the individual. How this happens is a mystery. One can only say, that just as sleep is the cause of dreams, *maaya* (Worldly illusion due to basic ignorance) is the cause of Creation. Doctors ascribe dreams to various reasons: indigestion, the compulsions of thought, the confusions of mental pictures, etc. But, we can be certain only of one reason, namely sleep! Dreams are nullified when the person becomes a *jnaani* (one aware of the Truth). At that stage, one gets rid of the night-dream as well as the day-dream.

The four *Aashramas* have been devised in order to awaken man into the *jnaani* stage. Education today, in all grades, is a process of packing information in the brain and skills in the hands. It is useful only for parading scholarship, dialectical controversies and mutual recrimination. It does not instil humility, a sense of balance and equanimity. Of course, spiritual training is totally absent. Perhaps, the feeling is that spirituality is a solitary pursuit, which can be undertaken only in the silence of the forest. No! True spirituality is the awareness of the fundamental unity of man in God.

The main mission of man is the march towards Unity

People celebrate the birth of a child; they are happy when the child grows tall and strong. But, the fittest event for such celebration is when the child justifies its birth, by achieving good fame as a benefactor of man or a servant of manking. Emperor Dhritharaashtra had hundred sons! He

must have celebrated their birthdays, too. But, no one of them did any one good; they were all arrogant, greedy and full of spite. Therefore, they accomplished only the extinction of the entire dynasty and all who were attached to it!

Sons and daughters are now keen to share the properties of their parents and spend their portion as quickly as possible. They do not care for the much more precious wealth of experience that their forefathers have earned for their sake. They waste their years in fallow efforts so much that even their health is destroyed; children wear glasses when barely ten; they dye their hair when barely fourteen; they age fast and show signs of senility when barely sixteen! To praise the habits that people adopt today as *'modern,'* or 'conducive to progress' is ridiculous to say the least.

As the ancients emphasised, food habits and recreation habits have to become *Saathwik* (conducive to health of body and mind), that is to say, such as cannot arouse and feed the passions of man, or make him dull and stupid, idle and listless.

Above all, everyone must realise, (and guide himself accordingly), that the main mission of man here below is the march towards the ideal of Unity and Peace.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 23-*11-1974*

If you can fill your heart with love, then peace will come into you from outside. Through bad qualities, to some extent, we lose peace. With truthful thoughts, a man will have peace.

If you can get rid of all thoughts, you will become a saint. It is only when you can be free from all thoughts that you can have peace.

Your own bad thoughts are responsible for all your pain and sorrow.

Sri Sathya Sai