

5. Experience

IN spiritual matters, it is experience alone that is the deciding factor. Reason is rendered dumb before the testimony of actual experience. All the arguments of logic, all the tricks of dialectics are powerless to nullify the direct effect of that inner evidence. For example, take the question of image worship. Many people laugh at those who practise it and condemn it as superstition. But, those who do worship idols have the faith that the Omnipresent Almighty is present in the symbol before them. For them, it is not a mere external adjunct or apparatus or object. It is a part of the inner mechanism of devotion and faith. Of course, all the 'Worship' carried out with the idea that the idol is life-less wood or stone or bronze, is so much waste of time. But if it is done in the full confidence that the image or idol is alive, saturated with consciousness and power, then, image worship can bestow the Realisation of God-head itself.

Saadhaka should see the power inherent in the idol

There was once a *saadhaka* (spiritual seeker) who approached a guru for guidance. The guru gave him an idol of Vishnu and also necessary instructions for daily worship. But the *saadhaka* found that, even after some months of meticulous *puuja*, he did not get any spiritual reward or elation. So, he reported his dissatisfaction and the *guru* gave him another idol, this time of Shiva and asked him to have another try. The disciple came after another six months demanding another idol, because even Shiva had failed him.

This time, he got a Durga idol, which he duly installed in his domestic shrine. The two previous idols were standing, dust-ridden and neglected, on the window sill. One day, while *Durga-puuja* (ritual worship of Goddess Durga) was going on, the disciple found that the perfumed smoke from the incense-stick was being wafted by the breeze towards the idol of Shiva on the window sill. He got wild that the ungrateful stone-hearted God who was deaf to his powerful entreaties should get the perfume intended for his latest idol! So, he took a piece of cloth and tied it round the face of Shiva, closing up the nostrils that were inhaling the perfume.

Just at that moment, to his immense surprise Shiva appeared in His splendour and Glory before the *saadhaka* ! The man was dumb-founded. He did not know how the ill-treatment had induced Shiva to give him *darshan*. But, what had really happened? The *saadhaka* for the first time believed that the Shiva idol was alive, conscious, *chaitanya*-full (full of life) and it was that belief which forced him to tie the bandage to the nose. The moment he realised that the idol was full of *Chith* (consciousness), he got the Realisation he was struggling for.

Therefore, the *saadhaka* should see, not the stone which is the material stuff of the idol, but the Power that is inherent in it, that is symbolised by it, the same Power that is inherent in his own heart and that pervades and transcends all creation.

Discourse at Thirupathi, 6-4-1961

When Dharmaraaja, the eldest of the Paandavas, had to make the difficult choice of whom to save, when the Yaksha said he could select one among his four brokers, who lay dead on the ground, he struck to the Highest Principle, Dharma. He did not select Bheema or Arjuna, though war was imminent and they were indispensable. He selected Nakul, because he was the son of his stepmother and

*he did not want her to feel that she had no son left. That is the way
in which people in the past upheld Dharma.*

Sathya Sai Baaba