

35. Inner progress

THE New Year which you have called in today with the exit of the old year, has an auspicious name, *Subhakrith*. Your arranging this Festival in honour of Saint Thyaagaraja on this day is indeed an auspicious way of welcoming the auspiciously named New Year. I congratulate you.

I am coming often to inaugurate the Festival for I feel it is a part of the task for which I have come. I may tell you that I am coming today straight from the very region where Thyaagaraja lived out his life.

I find that you in this Holy Town Thirupathi are not all imbued with devotion to the Deity who has made it His Home, Shrinivaasa. Most of the people here live on the Lord's bounty or 'property' or 'charity'. The income from the shrine of the Lord is utilised in running colleges, hospitals and in various other ways. That is to say, it is taking the lives of many thousands happy and contented. I do not blame them for living upon the income of the Lord, for, what does He want it for, if not for the needy and the hungry? But let Me add a warning. If it is eaten in excess, calamity will intervene. Eat as much as you deserve for the toil you have put in, for the hunger you have acquired by your exertions in a good cause. What is the toil which entitles you to consume the property of this shrine? What is the exertion which the lord approves? Only spiritual toil and spiritual exertion can entitle you to the sacred share; only *dhyaana* and *Naamasmarana*, steeped in the thrill of devotion!

Idol worship is not a sign of barbarism

The true culture of India is a structure that is built on four *pillars*---*Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shaanthi* and *Prema* (Truth, Virtue, Peace and Love). Every one of you must be aware of this fact. If you are, then you will not be attracted by cultures that are built on less durable foundations. The culture that has to be protected by the bomb cannot claim *prema* as one of the pillars on which it is erected. Bhaarith is a land where since millennia people have been praying for and toiling for the peace and happiness of entire humanity. They never prayed for success in the wicked race for wholesale slaughter.

Do not swallow without discrimination the criticisms hurled against you that you are uncultured barbarians, worshipping stocks and stones. Idol-worship is not a sign of barbarism. No, it is as significant and meaningful a rite as the *kumkum* dot on the forehead of the bride. The Idol is revered as the *Swaruupa* (Living Form) of the Lord, He who pervades everything everywhere is invoked and visualised in the Idol and approached reverentially by the cleansed mind, anxious to efface itself in the Eternal and the Universal. This attitude is called *Prapatthi*—*Surrender for Fulfilment*.

Install Truth in the shrine of your heart

Without this attitude, worship becomes empty and vain. It is no use deciding just now, when you are listening to Me, that you would cultivate Faith and Fortitude; and not put that resolution into action after you leave this place. *Bhakthi* is not measured by the outward signs of tears and exhilaration. It is an inner revolution, a transformation of all values and outlook. You may have heard the story of the woman who was shedding profuse tears, apparently of exultation, during a *Puraanic* recital. The Bhaagavathar was overjoyed that day, for he had succeeded by his touching exposition in evoking response from at least one contrite soul. At the close of the day's session, he congratulated the old lady on her *bhakthi* and offered her the coveted first spoonful of

Holy *Theertha* (consecrated water) as a tribute for her *shraddha* and *saadhana* (faith and spiritual effort). But the lady denied all claims to devotion and said, "I do not know what that thing called *bhakthi* is, nor the other things named *shraddha* and *saadhana*. I shall tell you why tears fell from my eyes. That thick black string with which you have tied that palm-leaf book put me in mind of the string round the waist of my departed husband; he wore a black string, long long ago." Mere external signs mislead the observer, but they cannot mislead the Lord who is the ever-present, ever-vigilant Witness.

Bhakthi will foster *prema*, because it is born of *prema* itself. At present, this land is full of factions and rival groups; all do not pull together and to the best of their ability and capacity. That is why it has become necessary to ask the help of other countries and peoples and borrow funds and burden ourselves with interest payments, etc. There is no co-operation and willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the community or country or humanity. Every village is riven by partisan groups.

I shall tell you what happened in a village of this type. One section had specialised in acting the drama, *Lankaadhahana* (burning of Lanka); but the other section decided to enact the story of King *Harishchandra* instead. For the role of Chandramathi, the queen, they had to select a person from the *Lankaadhahana* group because they had no substitute actor at all. The scenes were following one after the other. All went well until the prince died of snake bite; then the mother refused to weep! The "son" belonged to the opposite group. So vengeance was taken on Chandramathi by Harishchandra. He rained blows on her being so callous; the drama sped along in another course, the course of hatred and faction.

Yearn for illumination of your inner world

Thereupon, the Anjaneya of the *Lankaadhahana* group brought things to a climax by jumping on the stage in his role with a tail burning at one end; and he set the theatre on fire to the delight of his henchmen and the consternation of his rival! You must put on play either *Harishchandra* or *Lankaadhahana*; it will end in a holocaust if you play both together on the same stage. Rather, prefer Harishchandra and reject the playing with fire. Install truth in the shrine of your hearts and that will engender the wholesome habit of brotherliness among all men.

Well, the electric lights have started burning again and I see you are all satisfied that the line was set right so soon. I know how greatly you yearned that the illumination of this Pandal be restored soon and you felt sorry and dejected when you had to sit under dull improvised, kerosene light. I want that you should yearn also for the illumination of your inner world, the restoration of the current to shed light on the dark recesses of your minds. That is what is called *bhakthi*, the yearning for Light, for Illumination.

People blame the Lord for all ills caused by their own extravagance or ignorance. They are themselves to blame for the sufferings they undergo. Suffering is due to ignorance only. Take the case of even physical ills and physical suffering. Most illnesses are due to overeating or faulty eating habits. *Mitha thindi*, *athi* haayi--Moderate food gives immense comfort. The food must be clean and pure and derived through pure means; and the strength derived from it must be directed towards holy ends. Then, living is worthwhile.

Food is the basis of man's character

Remember that Thyaagaraaja kept such rules rigorously in mind. He never dined outside his home or ate unconsecrated food. Many thought that he was a conceited fool who was needlessly

strict. But there are subtle influences that pass into food from the persons who prepare it and handle it and are absorbed by those who eat it. Food is the basis of character. The state of the mind is conditioned by that of the body.

I shall tell you now of an incident that happened eighty years ago. There was a great *Yogi*, Hamsaraaj by name, at Badhrinath. He was always immersed in singing the glory of the Lord. He had a disciple who was equally earnest and sincere. That young man was pestered for a few days by a dream which gave him no peace. He saw a fair young girl of sixteen weeping in great agony and calling out pathetically, "Can no one save me?" The disciple was amazed at this strange dream; he could not shake off that doleful figure and that desperate cry from his mind. He recited his woes to the Master. Hamsaraaj, I can assure you, was a true *Hamsa* (the Bird of Paradise). That bird can eschew water from milk. Hamsaraaj, by his *viveka*, analysed the situation and discovered the cause of that horrid experience.

He prodded the young man with such questions as: "What did you do the first day?" "Where did you go?" "What did you eat?" etc. It was revealed that he had gone with a friend to a feast and eaten some *puuris* and *chappathis*. It was discovered that a poor Brahmin had prepared the feast. Well, Hamsaraaj sent the disciple to find out why and with what resources that Brahmin arranged the feast for the recluses of Badrinath.

Examine the source of the food offered

The young man cursed the day when the dream started haunting him, for he was now being sent by his Master on purposeless errands to investigate irrelevant issues; he wondered how his *saadhana* could be helped by all this. Nevertheless, he went and pursued the inquiry about the feast and its origins and the wherewithal out of which it was prepared. It came to light that the funds were supplied by a sixty-year old money lender to whom a Brahmin had given his daughter in marriage and received in return a sum of ten thousand rupees. She was now appealing to the holy men for a bit of human kindness towards a forsaken child.

Hamsaraaj thus demonstrated to his disciple that one should examine the source of the food, the motives for the gift and the passions that surge and sway the giver before accepting such an intimate gift as food.

You may say that *saadhakas* alone have to bear such rules in mind, but tell Me who is not a *saadhaka*. All are pilgrims on the road; some going fast, some going slow, that is all. The goal is the same for you all, though the roads may be many.

You are all cultured and civilised according to current notions. Of course, there is a vast difference between the methods of living now and in the past. Man has travelled far from the days when he wore the barks of trees or leaf garments. Today is the day of nylons and georgettes and bush coats. Well. Admitting that all this is a sign of higher civilisation, should there not be a corresponding rise in the level of thinking and feeling and action, in the arts of living together and earning mental peace and poise? The spiritual life of man must also become more cultured and civilised is it not? There must be gratitude for the chance of life, for the blessings of the beauty and bounty of nature, and a realisation of the more durable values of life. Attachment to sensory pleasure has to be discarded in preference to the more lasting joy of inner contemplation.

Prayer can bring about the impossible

Thyaagaraja had discovered that joy. He gave expression to that joy in moving musical notes, in simple sincere words in songs that bring tears to the eye and thrills to the heart. The Raaja of

Raarnnad, who is the President of this Festival, comes from Thamil Naadu and the Thelugu language in which Thyaagaraja sang is strange to him. Yet, he is profoundly affected by the music; he loves the *Krithis* (songs) very much. Knowing the meaning of the songs and the context which begot them so spontaneously and so sweetly from the sublime devotion of Thyaagaraaja will make you imbibe the spirit better; the language in which he sang is the language of the seeker, the *saadhaka*, the stragglng *saadhak*, and very rarely, the satisfied sage. You can easily learn that language, the language of the *saadhaka*. Do not keep away from it because it is not the language to which you are accustomed. There is no place for hatred in this field, nor between State and State.

This is a sacred task on which the Committee has entered. They may sometimes feel the burden to be too heavy; they may even reel under the weight of disappointments and difficulties. But I assure them they have no reason to lose heart. Lord Shrinivaasa opens His eyes and your task is accomplished. And He *will* open His Eyes. Have patience and wait prayerfully. Prayer can bring about the impossible. Recite the glory of the Lord and repeat in the cavern of your heart His Name. That will bring success.

Tirupathi, 5-4-1962

The body is but a boat, an instrument for crossing the sea of change, that you have through the merit of many generations. When you have crossed the sea, you realize the Dweller, in the Dwelling. That is the purpose of the body.

So, even when the body is strong and skills even while the intellect is sharp and the mind alert, effort must be made to seek the dehi (dweller), in the deha (body).

Sathya Sai Baaba