

1. The Godward march

The Uttaraayana Punyakaala or the *Makara Shank-raanthi* is a holy occasion to pray to the Lord, as the *Vedhas* instruct you to pray: *Asatho maa sath gamaya* (Lead me from unreal to Real); *Thamaso maa jyothir gamaya* (Lead me from darkness to Light); *mruthyormaa amritham gamaya* (Lead me from death to Immortality). Use this day to address this prayer, sincerely to your *Ishta devatha* (chosen deity), your *Aaraadhya-devatha* (the Form of the Lord you like most). Festivals connected with the Moon and the Sun are celebrated in our country, in order to drive into the minds of men the importance of mind control (*Chandra* or moon is the Deity of the Mind) and of clarifying the intelligence. (*Suurya* or the Sun is the Deity of the Intelligence). When the Sun moves North-ward---that is 'Godward'---the Intelligence too must proceed Godward. That is the significance of the *Uttaraayana*. Putting your faith in the machines and machine-made things, faith in power of the controlled mind and in the potentialities of the clarified and purified intelligence has declined. *Yanthra* (machine) has eclipsed the *manthra* (sacred formula); but, this is a passing phase.

Manthra alone can guarantee *shaanthi* or peace. A king became insane; he imagined he was a beggar, that he was ill, that he had become decrepit, and he wept. Now, how is he to realise that he is a king? You have to restore his reason; that is the only way. So too, the Immortal, Blissful, Invincible imagines himself to be limited, and little. He blames himself and calls himself a sinner, born in sin and revelling in sin, praying on his knees to be saved. Of course, if he knows he is divine, he will never stoop to sin or vice or weakness.

Transmute every act into sacred worship

The tree of life is a tree of delusion, with all its branches and leaves and flowers of *maaya*. You can realise it as such, when you do all acts as dedicated offerings for God. See him as the sap through every cell as the Sun warming and building every part. See Him in all, worship Him through all, for He is all. Engage in activity, but, fill the activity with devotion: it is the devotion that sanctifies. A piece of paper is almost trash; but, if a certificate is written on it, you value it and treasure it; it becomes passport for promotion in life. It is the *bhaava* (thought behind) that matters, not the *baahya* (outward pomp); the feeling, not the activity that is performed. At Thirupathi or at Bhadrachalam, you find only a stone shaped as an idol; as stone, it is of little value. But, when feeling permeates it, when devotion transmutes it, the stone becomes the Supreme Treasure of the human mind. Man does not know this secret of transmuting every act of his into sacred worship and so, he suffers from disappointment and grief.

There is a lot of wasteful discussion as to the superiority of one *maarga* or path over another, especially between the partisans of *karma*, *bhakthi* and *jnaana maargas*. But these three paths---Work, Worship and Wisdom---are supplementary, not contradictory. Work is like the feet, Worship, the hands, and Wisdom, the head. The three must co-operate and complete life.

Worship or *Upaasana* or *Bhakthi maarga* is the name given to the path of *sharanaagathi* or surrender to the Lord's Will, the merging of the individual Will in the Will: of the Universal. Lakshmana is the classic example of this spirit of surrender that saves. Once during his exile in the forest, Raama asked Lakshmana to put up a leaf-hut on a site of his choice. Lakshmana was shocked; he was struck down with grief. He pleaded with Raama: "Why do you ask me to select the site? Have I any individuality left? Can I choose? Will I select? Don't you know that I have

no will of my own. You decide and I obey; you command, I carry out the order." That is real *sharanaagathi*, real *bhakti*. This can be acquired by constant practice of detachment.

Make every act God-worthy to win His grace

The Lord is so full of Grace that he will willingly guide and guard all who surrender to Him. When the battle with Raavana was over, one glance from His merciful Eye was enough to revive the *vaanara* hordes which had fallen on the ground and to heal the wounds they had earned during the fight. There were some *Raakshasas* who had penetrated into the camp in *vaanara* disguise; when they were brought before Raama for summary punishment, Raama smiled and pardoned them, for they had assumed the monkey form so dear to Him; He sent them away, unharmed to the enemy's camp. That was the measure of His mercy.

To win that Grace, you must become permeated with *dharma* so that every act is God-worthy. With the sharp chisel of intellect (*buddhi*), shape the mind (*manas*) into a perfect image of *Dharmamurthi*, the embodiment of *dharma*. Then, the rough-hewn idol of humanity that you now are, will shine with the splendour of Divinity itself. That is the task to which you should dedicate yourself today.

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The tongue must be sanctified by the repetition of the Lord's Name. It has also to use sweet expressions which will spread contentment and joy. Be very careful about your speech.

Man's biggest weapon of offence is his tongue. The wounds that his tongue inflicts can scarce be healed; they fester in the heart for long. They are capable of more damage than even an atom bomb.

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