

Alms and Qualms

From this day of the Tropic of Capricorn, Makara *Samkramana*, as it is called, the Sun appears to move from South to North, and so, this Summer Solstice Day is celebrated as an auspicious festival, since ages. But, you must be concerned more with your own journey which is nearing its end with every sunrise. You are engaged in an incessant struggle with the Sun, to survive the onslaught of Time, which he measures with His steps. You yearn to escape the consequences of birth and the aftermath of death. You desire peace and joy; for this, you have to cleanse the mind so effectively that it is well-nigh eliminated. This is possible only when you identify yourself with the *Aathma*, rather than with the body, which is the casket of the *Aathma*, earned as a reward for one's activities of mind and body. When you live in the consciousness of the omnipresent *Aathma*, you live in love, love flowing and flooding in and through you, and all else.

Every morning, as soon as you sit up in bed, ask yourself this question: "For what purpose have I come into this world? What is the task set for me? What is the triumph for which this struggle is preparing me? Which is the grand victory for which I have to strive?" You must have witnessed car festivals in the famous pilgrimage centres. The colossal chariots of the temple will be gorgeously decorated with flags and festoons; stalwart bands of men will draw them along the broad roads to the music of blowpipes and conches; acrobats, dancing groups, chanters, minstrels, all precede it and add to the exhilaration of the occasion. Thousands crowd around the holy cars and line the streets. Their attention is naturally drawn towards the entertainments provided, but they feel happiest only when they fold their palms and bow before the Idol, installed in the chariot. The rest is all subsidiary, even irrelevant to many. So too in the process of life, the body is the chariot, the *Aathma* is the Idol installed therein. Earning and spending, laughing and weeping, hurting and healing, and all the various acrobatics of daily life are but subsidiary to the adoration of God, the attainment of *Aathma*.

Only yearning and anguish win God's Grace

The body is the chariot; *buddhi* (intelligence) is the charioteer; desires are the roads through which it is drawn by the rope of sensual attachments; *moksha* (liberation) is the goal; *Moola-Viraat-Swaruupa* (the primal-all-pervasive-Divine) is the Master in the chariot. The car which you carry about has to be treated thus. Instead, men are wildly milling round and round, in dreary circles, from birth to death, pulled by wishes or pushed by needs. No milestones on the pilgrim road are crossed; no bridges are negotiated; no progress is registered. The very process of the journey is ignored.

You may say that progress is possible only through My Grace; but, though My Heart is soft as butter, it melts only when there is some warmth in your prayer. Unless you make some disciplined effort, some *saadhana*, Grace cannot descend on you. The yearning, the agony of unfulfilled aim melts My Heart. That is the *Aavedhana* (anguish) that wins Grace. How so many *Navaraathris* and *Shivaraathris* you may attend at this place, unless you illumine your heart and make it shine clear and pure, it will be shrouded in darkness, immersed in *raathri* (night) only.

Saadhana must make you calm, unruffled, poised, balanced. Make the mind as cool and comforting as moonlight, for the Moon is the Deity holding sway over the Mind. Be calm in speech, and in your response to malice, cavilling and praise. You complain that others are

disturbing your equanimity; but, you do not know that though your tongue does not speak, your thoughts can unsettle the equanimity of those around you.

A person fixed in detachment is ever content

Detachment, Faith and Love---these are the pillars on which *Shaanthi* rests. Of these, faith is crucial. For without it, *saadhana* is an empty rite. Detachment alone can make *saadhana* effective, and Love leads quickly to God. Faith feeds the agony of separation from God; detachment canalises it along the path of God; Love lights the way. God will grant you what you need and deserve; there is no need to ask, no reason to grumble, Be content. Nothing can happen against His will.

I am reminded of Karna. In his last moments, he asked from the Lord just one boon: "I do not mind if you condemn me to be born, to face death in an endless cycle; only, bless me that in all my many lives, I am not constrained to stand before another, with hand extended pleading, 'Give'; and, bless me also that in all my lives, I am not constrained to send away a supplicant with the word, 'No'. Let not these two words, *dehi* (give) and *naasthi* (no) emerge from my mouth." A person fixed in *thyaaga* (detachment) and *yoga* (self-control) will never said *dehi* and can never hear the reply *naasthi*, for he is ever content, ever full.

Vivekaanandha was once asked by a cynical critic why he paraded his renunciation through the ochre robe. He replied, "This is no parade; this is a protection. I am wearing this ochre, because, seeing this, no one will approach me for alms or monetary help. And, so, that word 'No' which I am averse to pronounce need not be spoken by me. At sight of this robe, only seekers of salvation will come near me; for them, I have enough to give. I am moved when distressed people come near; but, I have no money to give them. This dress helps me to escape such painful situations." You should so regulate your life that these two words are not used by you, while you live.

No bird or beast is to be despised

Do not grieve, nor be the cause of grief. The very embodiment of *Aanandha* (God) is in you, as in others, as in all else. In spite of a multiplicity of containers, the contained is the same. That is the principle of *Sath*, *Chith* and *Aanandha* (Being, Awareness, Bliss). The minutest atom, the mightiest star---both are basically one. All are, in truth, *Brahman*, Divine. You read in the sacred books that *Vishnu* (God engaged in Preservation, Protection and Fostering the Universe) has as His vehicle, the *Garuda* (Eagle); that *Shiva* (God engaged in the Mergence, the Disintegration and Destruction of the Universe) has the *Nandhi* (Bull) as His vehicle; that *Brahma* (God engaged in the Emergence, Evolution and Creation of the Universe) rides on a *Hamsa* (Swan); *Subrahmanya* (the Generalissimo of the Divine army) rides on a peacock; *Shani* (the God who directs Saturnine influences) has the crow as his vehicle. *Ganesha* (the God who helps in overcoming obstacles) rides on a mouse, though he is stupendously corpulent and has the head of an elephant! This does not mean that the Gods are helpless without these animals and birds as instruments of locomotion. It only reveals that no bird or beast is to be despised; for, the Divine is using each as His vehicle. Seen as *deha* (body) all are distinct; seen as *dehi* (the embodiment), *Brahman*, all are One.

See the unity in the teachings of all religions

Saadhana (spiritual striving) will disclose to you this identity. But be careful; *Saadhana* can foster even pride and envy, as the by-product of progress. You calculate how much or how long

you have done *saadhana* and you are tempted to look down on another, whose record is less. You are proud that you have written the name of Sai ten million times; you talk about it whenever you get the chance, so that others may admire your faith and fortitude. But, it is **not the** millions that count; it is the purity of mind that results from genuine concentration on the name. Your *saadhana* must avoid becoming like drawing water from a well in a cane basket! You get no water however often you may dip and pull the basket up. Each vice is a hole in the bucket. Keep the heart pure, keep it whole.

All religions exhort man to cleanse the heart of malice, greed, hate and anger. All religions hold out the gift of Grace as the prize for success in this cleansing process. Ideas of superiority and inferiority arise only in a heart corrupted by egoism. If some one argues that he is higher or that his religion is holier, it proves that he has missed the very core of his faith. Leaves, flowers, fruits---these may be peculiar to each species; but pay attention to the trunk, and you will find similarity emerging. *Saadhana* will reveal likewise, the unity in the fundamental teachings of all religions. It is, of course, a hard path; but, it is a path that every one has to take now or later.

The signs of success in meditation

There was a fellow who clamoured for *Moksha* (Liberation) the easy way. He approached a *Guru* and asked for the quickest means of attaining it. "Know yourself," said the *Guru*. "O, that I know. I am just now your disciple. So, have I the *moksha* I want?" he asked; but the *Guru* said, it was not so simple as all that. He was, the *Guru* told him, behind and beyond the body, manipulating the senses, the intelligence, the ego; he was the *Aathma*, in the very core of the five sheaths---the *Annamaya* (the food or physical sheath), the *Praanamaya* (the vital, the nerve-centred), the *Manomaya* (the mental, imagination-centred, symbol-dealing), the *Vijnaanamaya* (intelligence centred, reason-based, logical) and the *Aanandhamaya* (intuition-centred, experience-based, blissful). The *Guru*, however, gave him a tabloid prescription: "Repeat the Name of God, from the heart, with yearning to visualise Him." He said, "If you remind yourself continuously of God being your innermost Being, this awareness will come to you in a flash, through His Grace." The fellow shied at this; he queried whether he cannot employ any one to do the repetition for him! At this, the *Guru* asked, "Do you employ some one to eat or sleep on your behalf? When you fall ill do you get someone else to swallow the drug or take the injection?"

You sit in *Dhyaana* (meditation) for ten minutes, after the evening *Bhajan* (devotional chanting) sessions; so far, so good. But, let me ask, when you rise after the ten minutes and move about, do you see every one in a clearer light, as endowed with Divinity? If not *Dhyaana* is a waste of time. Do you love more, do you talk less, do you serve others, more earnestly? These are the signs of success in *Dhyaana*. Your progress must be authenticated by your character and behaviour. *Dhyaana* must transmute your attitude towards beings and things; else it is a hoax. Even a boulder will, through the action of sun and rain, heat and cold, disintegrate into mud and become food for a tree. Even the hardest heart can be softened so that the Divine can sprout therein.

You come to Prashanthi Nilayam, as cars come to a workshop. You must go out, with a new paint, with all the damaged and loose bolts and nuts replaced, with the engine cleaned and reconditioned, every part spick and span, beautiful, trouble free, in perfect trim, ready to speed on the journey that lies ahead. Every bad habit has to be replaced by a good one, no trace of vice must be allowed to persist, the heart must be drained of all egoism. This is the fruit of this pilgrimage that you must acquire. Let this be your resolution, on this *Uttharaayana* Festival.

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