

1. Climb The Right Tree

I know that your hunger has not been fully appeased, even after listening to two excellent discourses, radiating bliss (*ananda*), given by these scholars (pandits). Both of them said that they had no claims to scholarship and that all that they were able to see and speak about was due to My grace. Well, that is but a way they have cultivated to curb conceit. Hanuman was not aware of his vast strength; he had cultivated that much self-effacement. Someone had to remind him of his skill and prowess and then, Hanuman would rise to the occasion, with his powers fully awake.

It was also pleaded on your behalf that I should speak to you today, for it is a long time since I spoke to you at this place. I feel I must satisfy this desire of yours. You call yourselves devotees, so I shall talk to you about the *dharma* of people who seek to acquire devotion. No one can become a devotee by naming themselves so, nor by others calling them so.

Devotion involves dedication, with nothing held back; not even a wisp of ego should remain. His command alone counts; His will prevails. Like a drunkard, the devotee has no sense of honour or decency, pride or conceit. The devotee is a drunkard (*matta*), a mad person (*unmatta*), unconcerned with all that is unrelated to the ideal. The devotee is deaf to the call of hunger and thirst, misses steps in logic, and calculates wrongly while dealing in the market place. Narada says that those full of the liquor of ignorance stumble after the shadows of the world, while those drunk with nectar of wisdom never move away from the Highest, which they have discovered as themselves.

Devotion must soften the mind

You saw this in the case of this Sastry a few days ago when he came and sat in this Hall for the first time, after 30 years of intense study of the *Srimath Bhagavatham*. He felt that he had won the fruit of years of study and worshipful exposition. He lost all awareness, and some of you thought he had an attack of epilepsy or something akin to it. I knew that he was in the realm of bliss (*ananda*). That is why I did not encourage you to take him to the hospital. Even today, you noticed how, when he started to describe the depth of divine grace, he was overcome with joy.

The Lord broke His own plighted word in order to give the devotee the credit for making Him do so, Bhishma had said that he would force Krishna to wield a weapon on the battlefield, contrary to His declared intention. Bhishma would accept defeat only from the Lord! So Krishna strode toward Bhishma, brandishing the disk (*chakra*) in order to win. This Sastry was describing this, when he broke down. Devotion must soften the mind and keep it receptive to the higher emotions, the purifying impulses.

Every being is a pilgrim to reach God

Bhishma was a devotee and, by winning the Lord's grace, he was clothed with more majesty and splendour than any earthly emperor. What majesty have these petty sceptre-holders? They cannot claim to have inner peace, inner joy; they know not the joy of sharing love with all. Bhishma surrendered to the Lord when He challenged him with good vision (*su-darshana*). That is to say, when the Lord offers *su* (good) *darshana* (vision), one must be wise enough to surrender, to give up all; that is what Bhishma did.

Like the kitten calling the mother to where it sits, by mere mewling, the devotee has only to yearn, to mew with the pain of separation. The growing crop in the fields thirsts for rain. It sees the heavy rain clouds sail across the sky, but it cannot rise up to that altitude and drink the life-giving rain; nor can it bring the clouds down to the ground. Humanity too sizzles in the hot sun, the unbearable heat of ego and greed. It needs the rain of grace; it knows it can flourish only then in peace and joy.

Just as the clouds form droplets and fall upon the fields that they choose to foster, the Formless Absolute individualises Itself, assumes form, and comes down in the midst of humanity to save and sustain, That is the secret of God (Madhava) coming down as man (*manava*), the cloud taking pity on the crop parching in the sun. Once the rains come, the sun has its uses! So too, when the grace of the Lord is gained, ego and greed can be put to profit by being made to flow into useful channels.

In past ages, *Avatars* (divine incarnations) rid the world of evil by destroying the few fanatics and ogres who wrought it. But now, fanaticism and felony reign in every heart. The number of evil people is legion. No one is free from that taint; all are wicked to some extent or other. Therefore, everyone needs correction; everyone has to be educated and guided into the right path. Every being is a pilgrim destined to reach God and merge in Him; but most people have forgotten the road; they wander like lost children, wasting precious time in bypaths.

You can win the Lord's Grace only by dharma

Man (*manava*) has to become God (Madhava); that is one's destiny, the plan and purpose of one's being armed, as no other animal is, with the sword of discrimination and the shield of renunciation. The human being is the only animal that can picture a previous existence and existences in a series, with impressions accumulating from one to the other. What you see and feel in a dream has some basis on what you have seen and felt in the waking state; so too, what you see and feel in the present life has, as its basis, what you have seen and felt in other lives, previous lives.

You can win the grace of the Lord only by right action (*dharma*). *Dharma* induces and develops the spirit of self-surrender. Without the training that the practice of *dharma* gives to your senses, feelings, and emotions, you cannot have steady faith and steady detachment. The Lord is *Dharma* conceived as a personality. Rama is known as Righteousness Personified (*Vigrahavan Dharmah*). If you step across the bounds of *dharma* and play foul, you cannot win the game of life.

Pursue your task with one-pointed effort

When Hanuman was speeding along the sky like an arrow from Rama's bow, many temptations attempted to halt him. He did not delay or turn back. He sped on, intent only on the task his Lord has set for him. When the Mynaka mountain rose up to offer him a little rest, he trampled it down into the depths of the sea. The mountain rose again and pleaded for the chance to serve him for a while. It had decked itself with green orchards and fragrant flower gardens for his recreation and recoupment, for when Indra slashed off the wings of all the mountains in past ages, Mynaka had fled with the help of Vayu, Hanuman's father, and he wanted to express his gratitude by granting hospitality to the son. But Hanuman pleaded that his master's task brooked no delay. A few moments later, Hanuman was confronted by a terrible monstress, Surasa by name. Hanuman overcame her by skilful tactics and avoided further delay.

You should pursue your path to liberation with such one-pointed effort.

Sastry said that the Lord wishes that His devotee should shine over non-believers; that His devotee should be happier, more contented, more courageous than the rest. Devotion ought to make a person so, but devotees do not cultivate these traits deep enough. They let the chance go to waste. If Sastry gives his sons a hundred acres each, one son may tend it well and reap golden harvests from it: another may allow it to lie fallow and himself sink into misery. The equipment each has brought from previous lives may be different, and you cannot blame the father for this state of affairs. Even the blood of one son may be fatal when transfused into another son. Spiritual strength will be less in one, more in another, in proportion to the efforts of each, now and in the past.

Let the light within shine

The pity is that people are not eating the most relishing, the most nourishing fruit, from this garden of nature. People are climbing the wrong tree and seeking to pluck the wrong fruits, so their appetite is ruined, their taste is vulgarised, their health is destroyed. Only the glory of the Lord can satisfy the hunger of a person, for that person is part of that glory.

Only experience can reveal the sweetness, the sublimity, the purpose of that glory of the Lord. Parasurama came across Rama and challenged him when he was returning to Ayodhya after his marriage. Rama had won Sita by bending and breaking Siva's bow and thereby humbled the pride of all the crowned heads that had come seeking Sita's hand. But Parasurama was intoxicated with his own achievement in defeating the *kshatriya* rulers in twenty-one campaigns. That pride lowered the divine status of Parasurama, so he could be felled in a moment by Rama, who was to all appearance just a stripling!

The Lord, it was said, punishes some and favours others. Let Me tell you, the Lord does neither. He is like the current in this electric wire. It rotates the fan and makes one's life cooled; it operates the electric chair and makes one's life shorter. It has no wish to allay the warmth of the atmosphere; it has no eagerness to kill. The Lord's grace is like the wind that blows. Roll up your sails, and the boat lies limp and lame; unfurl them, and it moves faster and faster. It is like light: One person does good using the illumination; another executes an evil plan with its help.

Have an "inner day" but an "outer night". Let the light within shine. When you are unaware of the world, though in it, heedless of its call for participation, you are having an outer night and an inner day. The *Vedas* teach you this truth and impart the discipline needed to attain this fortune.

The Lord is the Father of all in the world

The Sastry spoke of the value of *vedic* discipline. The *Vedas* declare that if an act (*karma*) is done in a definite way, a definite result will accrue. They give you a pen filled with ink, they teach you how to write and what to write. They are so kind. The Mother that is the *Veda* (*Veda-matha*) is so full of maternal love. She repeats an injunction over and over again, just as I go on reminding you of the disciplinary rules of the Nilayam on every possible occasion. Therefore, do not set aside the commands of the *Vedas*: they are the authentic voice of the Lord Himself, as heard and recorded by purified intellects.

A father gives his wealth to the son who respects his wishes and obeys his orders, not to the rebel son who flouts him. The Lord is the Father of All. If you are an *asthika* (a person who accepts that there is God and shapes

his life accordingly), then you will get the *asthi* (wealth or property). A person who is an idiot, ignorant of their true interests, unaware of their own downfall, is not entrusted with their own wealth or property, and a guardian has to take care of his affairs until he proves himself able to manage it with care.

Dwell always on the glory of God

It may take many lives for a man (or woman) to prove that he knows what is best for him, that he is able to chalk out his own future without harming himself or others, that he is aware of the pitfalls on the way. So, it is best to trust to the experience of sages, who were filled with compassion and who were moved by that compassion to illumine the path of liberation. This experience is enshrined in the *Vedas*. Faith in the *Vedas* irrigates the heart and makes it yield the harvest of universal love.

The *Sastras* warn you of false steps; they console you in times of stress; they strengthen you in distress; they give correct interpretations of moral dilemmas. They prescribe the dress, the food, the manner of speech, the methods of social conduct, the mode of mutual behaviour, the lines of onward march. They are the conscience of society.

In this Prasanthi Nilayam, too, certain limits are laid down, certain modes of spending time usefully are recommended by Me. All who come here, whether long-time residents or new arrivals, have to observe them. You have seen Me, stayed here, and heard these discourses. Let Me ask what is the gain? Are you going back unchanged, unaffected? Dogs do not chew sugar cane; they seek a bone instead. Ill-fated mortals recoil when the talk is about God, goodness, spiritual effort, and a vision of the divine. But you must pull yourselves up into the purer air of spiritual life, draw yourselves away from slums and by-lanes, and travel on the highway to God. Dwell always on the glory of God; then, you will shine in that glory. Adhere to truth, that is the surest means of removing fear from your heart. Love (*Prema*) can grow only in the heart watered by truth.

What is devotion and who are devotees?

Nagaya, even while he plays the role of Thyagaya, is always conscious that he is Nagaya. “Thyagaya is the role I am playing,” he would say. Now go one step further. When asked who you are, say that you are the embodiment of God (*Narayana-swarupa*) playing the role of Pullaya or Thimaya or Mallaya or whatever your name is. So too, every other person is a role played by Narayana (God). Narayana washed clothes as the washer man, shaped wood as the carpenter, forged iron as the blacksmith, prepared pots at the wheel as a potter. He is all this—and more. His glory is inexhaustible.

The *Avatar* (divine incarnate) is another role He takes up for another purpose. The Lord comes as *Avatar* when He is anxiously awaited by saints and sages. The pious (*sadhus*) prayed, and I have come. My tasks are three, or rather two, since protection of virtue and protection of *vedic* culture are both practically the same. The two are, therefore: fostering of the *Vedas* and fostering of devotees.

Now, what is devotion? Who are devotees? Devotion is faith, steadiness, virtue, fearlessness, surrender, absence of egoism. Worship done however elaborately and pompously is sheer waste of time and energy. Why pluck flowers and hasten their death? Some of you go round this Nilayam and satisfy yourselves that you have done so many circumambulations, but they can be called so only when your mind circles this place along with your feet.

Talk less, talk low if you must

I notice that while your feet are taking you round by force of habit, your tongues blabber about the faults of others, or the price of vegetables, or the dishes you propose to cook for lunch. Before you start on your rounds, which you call *pra-dakshina*, give your mind as *dakshina* (thanksgiving offering) to the Resident of the temple, the Lord. That is the first thing to do, and perhaps the only thing to do. Making the rounds is not to be taken as prescribed, for loosening the limbs or giving them some exercise.

This Nilayam should not be treated with scant reverence. Make the best use of your stay here. Do not treat this chance lightly. You come spending much money and put yourselves to much trouble to reach here, but you do not bloom as fragrant offerings at the Lord's feet by learning the spiritual path. The senses have to be curbed into obedient servants of the spirit. For example, I insist on silence. Talk less, and talk low when you must talk.

Do not thrust your sorrows, your needs, your problems into the ears of those who have come here with their own bundle of such things. They are not interested in adding to their troubles. I am here to listen to you, to console you. Do not by loudness of voice disturb those who are meditating or reading or writing the name of God.

All ills are traceable to faulty living

Meditate if possible, by yourselves, alone; read spiritual books if you can; write the name of the Lord in the quiet of your corner. If you cannot do these, at least do not disturb others who are doing these. Encourage one another to march along the path to God.

Become entitled to the honoured title of devotee. My glory is spread daily through those who call themselves My devotees. Your virtue, your self-control, your detachment, your faith, your steadfastness — these are the signs by which people read of My glory. Not that I want any such prop.

But it just happens so, in this world, where people estimate others indirectly rather than directly. Let Me tell you, such devotees are very rare. That is the why I do not address your gathering as, "Dear devotees!" You can lay claim to that title only when you have placed yourself in My hands, fully, completely, with no trace of ego kept back to cater to your vanity.

All ills are traceable to faulty living. And what is that traceable to? To ignorance of one's real nature, ignorance so deep-rooted that it affects thoughts, words, and deeds. The drug that can cure it is patented under different names: spiritual wisdom (*jnana*), action (*karma*), contemplation (*upasana*), devotion (*bhakthi*). They are all the same in potency and curative power. The difference lies only in the method of administration either as mixture or as tablet or injection.

Be confident that you will be liberated; Know that you are saved. Go and tell all that you went to Puttaparthi and that you got there the secret of liberation.

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The mind must become the servant of the intellect, not the slave of the senses. It must discriminate and detach itself from the body. Like the ripe tamarind fruit, which becomes loose inside the shell, it must be unattached to this shell, this case-ment called body.

Strike a green tamarind fruit with a stone and you cause harm to the pulp inside, but strike the ripe fruit and see what happens. It is the dry rind that falls off. Nothing affects the pulp or the seed.

The ripe aspirant does not feel the blows of fate or fortune, it is the unripe man who is wounded by every blow.

Sathya Sai Baba