

19. Light on lights

SOME days in the year are marked out as Holy days, in the calendars of all human communities. They are distinguished by greater attention being paid for worshipping deities, propitiating the deceased, praying to the forces of nature and similar elevating spiritual exercise. They are occasions to remind man of the God without and the God within. Such holy days are prescribed and observed in India also, along with other festival days. One such festival is Dheepaavali, the Festival of Lights, which people are celebrating today. Dheepaavali means a garland or festoon of lights, the most characteristic way in which the festival is observed by all.

Illumination, such as is done today, is a sign of victory, or triumph over some foe or some obstacle to happy living. It is a way of expressing one's joy and attracting the attention of others to one's achievement of unexpected happiness. Festivals of which illumination is a part are found among the Parsis, the Christians and the Muslims. They are celebrated in Malaysia, Nepal, Japan and a host of other countries.

There are countless legends which seek to explain the origins of Dheepaavali. In Northern India, it is believed to be the Day when Sri Raama was crowned Emperor after his return from exile. In Kerala, it is believed to be the day when Emperor Bali, who was allowed to visit the erstwhile kingdom just for one day in the year, is welcomed by his grateful subjects. The Lord had trampled him down into the nether regions, as a punishment for his egoistic expansive programme of conquest; but, He melted a little when he pleaded for mercy, and allowed him to return to earth for just one day out of three hundred and sixty-five days. On that day his subjects could welcome him, with illumination and fire-works.

Discard worn-out prejudices on Dheepavali Day

The most widely current among the legends refers to the demon Naraka whom Lord Krishna, accompanied by His Consort, Sathyabhaama or Sathya, destroyed in battle, this day. Naraka was the son of Mother Earth, as the story goes, of Bhoomaatha. She asked for a boon from the Lord, that the Day should be observed, in his memory, as a day of light or joy and the sharing of joy by one and all.

Therefore, hundreds of tiny lamps are lit this evening and kept in rows before and within every home in India; but, few are the lamps that are lit in the cavity of the heart to destroy the darkness that lies thick within. Deepaavali is the day when old clothes are discarded and new ones worn; when the home and its precincts are swept clean, given a new look, and made to appear fresh and fine. Flowers are arranged in lovely designs in each room and in the courtyard; festoons of green add charm to every door. But, even while doing all this, attention has to be paid to the discarding of worn-out prejudices, the adoption of new habits of love and mutual respect, the freshening of one's attitude towards one's kith and kin, brothers and sisters of all creeds and castes, the hanging of festoons of friendship and fraternity over the door sill of the heart. This will make the Festival really meaningful and fruitful; it will be saved from the calumny of being an occasion for only pomp and barren hilarity.

Profound meaning of *Narakaasura* Legend

Who exactly is this Naraka, the demon *Naraka-asura*, let us inquire. He is described as a tyrant, who had no reverence towards elders and saints, who was afflicted with a severe type of land-hunger, who looted and plundered unchecked, who carried away princesses and damsels by the

hundred and threw them into prison without any compunction, and who never repented for any of his crimes and sins. When the good men of the world appealed to Lord Krishna for succour, He invaded his kingdom, laid siege to his capital City, and overwhelming his forces, allowed His Queen, Sathya, to slay him on the battlefield.

This legend has a profound under-current of meaning, which you should not miss. Naraka is an *a-sura* (a demonic person). His City is named, *Praak-jyothhisha-pura---praak* means, the previous, *jyothi* means, light; and *sha* means, forgetting and ignoring. So the City's name means: the city of those who have laid aside the previous or ancient light. That is to say, the city of those who are ignorant of *Aathmic* splendour. No wonder they are demons. No wonder they were lustful, full of hatred, greed, envy and egotism. They had become so lost in their sins that Lord Krishna did not vouchsafe to give them the honour of being killed by his Hands. He directed *Sathya* to destroy them. Yes. Ignorance so fundamental and so deep can be destroyed only by the sword of *Sathya* (Truth).

The lamp is also the symbol of the *Aathma*

Egoism is of earth, earthy; not of heaven, heavenly. So Naraka is the son of Earth. And, he is called *Naraka*, *Nara* means, man, who knows his *manas* (mind), who practises *manana* (discrimination of reflection on what he has heard and what he has been taught). But *Naraka* which means hell, is the name appropriate to one who believes he is the body and toils to cater to its needs and its clamour. When man grows in physical strength, economic power, mental alacrity, intellectual scholarship and political authority and does not grow in spiritual riches, he becomes a danger to society and a calamity to himself. He is a Naraka to his neighbours and his kin. He sees only the many, not the One; he is drawn by the scintillating manifold into the downward path of perdition.

A-suras (demons) have another name in Samskrith *Nakthancharas---those* who move about in the dark. This is a fair description of their pathetic condition. They have no light to guide them; they do not recognise that they are in the dark; they do not call out for light; they are unaware of the light. Their intellect has become the bondslave of their passions and their senses, instead of establishing itself as their master. When at last, truth appears before them and overwhelms them, they recognise the One and merge happily in it.

The lamp is not merely the symbol of the knowledge to Truth. It is also the symbol of the One, the *Aathma* that shines in and through all this multiplicity. Just as with one lamp, a thousand lamps can be lit and the One is as bright as ever in spite of the thousands deriving light from it, so too, the *Aathma* (soul-spirit) illumines the *jeeva* (individual self) and shines in and through them, without undergoing any diminution in its splendour. The *Aathma* is the cause; all else are effects.

The lesson that Dheepavali teaches man

Naraka sought to act freely, as his emotions and passions dictated. But, the Samskrith word used for this kind of license has another and deeper meaning: *Sva-iccah*, one's desire, means, the desire, if at all, only for merger absorbing the sparks that have emanated from it, the waves that play upon its surface. The *Upanishaths* call upon man to roam about in the 'jungle of life as the King of Beasts, the Lion, and not as panic-stricken cowardly sheep ashamed to lift its head. Face the six foes that are ferociously gnawing the heart of man - lust, anger, attachment, pride, hatred,

greed---and be Man, *Nara*, not *Naraka*, who cringes before these foes and tries to propitiate them by yielding to their demands, That is the lesson that Dheepaavali teaches.

The *Vedhic* Prayer is, "*Thamaso maa jyothir Gamaya*,"---"*From* darkness lead me, O Lord, into light." Lead me from the blindness of ignorance into the vision of the truth. Cleanse the mind and the Truth will be reflected therein. This is not as difficult as some people imagine. The tiny ant can travel hundred miles, if only it puts its legs forward and starts. Faith and steadiness will achieve the rest of the journey. But, if an aeroplane that can fly faster than sound does not rise from the tarmac, it can only be where it is. Each one must first decide on what is worth living for and striving for. For this, one has to meet and converse with elders who have travelled along the same route; one has to taste the bliss of realisation that their lives express. And, inspired by their example, one must practise what they prescribe, with single-minded confidence.

Lesson taught by careers of Naraka and Bali

When man fails to use his attainments for the welfare of others he becomes a *narakaasura* (hellish demon). But, when in a competitive race for individual glory, he spends billions on getting to the Moon and bringing rocks from its crust, instead of feeding millions who starve down below and promoting the prosperity of backward nations, he is only condemning himself. Even the best of things can be misused by men. Raavana, Shisupaala, Kamsa, and other demonish persons mentioned in the Indian *puraanas* (ancient legends) and epics had vast scholarship, enormous economic and military power and even immense *yogic* and occult skills won by years of austerity, and disciplined living. But, they could not earn one skill, the skill to suppress the ego, and so, they became too obstinate, too obstructive and too dangerous to be allowed to live and prosper. The lesson taught by the careers of Naraka and of Bali is that man should be master of his ego if he is to succeed in the art of successful living.

Dheepaavali is also a Day dedicated to the Goddess of Riches, called, Dhanalakshmi. They celebrate the day as *Dhanalakshmi Puuja* day in many States of India. Newspapers highlight the celebrations with big headlines. But, riches when one comes by them, have to be revered as something given on trust, and must be used for the amelioration of the wants of society, and not for personal aggrandizement. When people use it for parading their wealth, they become ludicrous specimens of humanity. How can wealth and scholarship shine, except against the background of virtue and humility? Riches may come or riches may go; scholarship may be acquired or may not be acquired; even joy may come and go. Whatever happens, man must be unmoved, he must not swerve from the path that he has chosen towards the goal.

Sai's message on Festival of Lights

There was a merchant once, who, while walking through the streets of Benares, was suddenly confronted by two sisters who were frantically quarelling over the issue, who was fairer. They were none other than Dhanalakshmi and her famous sister Dharidhralakshmi, the Goddess of poverty. They stopped the merchant and compelled him to agree to be the judge; they pressed him to pronounce who was the fairer of the two. The merchant feared to say that Dhanalakshmi was fairer, for then, the Goddess of Poverty might inflict her boons on him; he feared to declare that Dhanalakshmi was the fairer, for then her sister, Dhanalakshmi might deprive him of her favour. So he devised a strategem, to save his skin. He asked that the sisters walk a few steps, forward and backward, in front of him; he stood silent for a while watching their slow deliberate comings and goings, and then, he asked them to come near him, in order to hear his judgement.

He said, "Dhanalakshmi is fairer when she comes towards me; Dharidhralakshmi looks fairer when she goes away from me; How then can I give a definite verdict?"

This was a clever reply, framed to escape punishment. But you should not change the face of truth to please people; utter what you have in mind, act according to the words you utter. That is the safest, the easiest and the most correct procedure. That is how a self-respecting man should behave. Nothing is more right than truth. Do not play false to the God in your being and led into evil through fear or greed. March along, straight, never deviating towards falsehood or trickery. Do not be attached by the glamour of name and form; seek the *Aathma*, with one-pointed zeal. This is the Message I give you on this festival of lights.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 25-10-1973

You should recognise the truth that man's life should consist of making the journey from the position of 'I' to the position of 'We'. If all the time you simply stay, sit in the place of 'I' you will remain where you are.

This creation is like the bridge which connects man with God. 'I' is one hill. 'God' is another hill. The bridge between the two is the aspect of creation. If you break and destroy the bridge, you can never reach the destination.

I am hoping that you plunge into society and do service to society and thereby use the bridge to reach God.

Sri Sathya Sai