

27. Significance Of Vinayaka Worship

The stream of man's life is marked by different stages. In each stage man falls a prey to vices like egoism, jealousy and falsehood instead of cultivating truth, righteousness and humility. A life, which should be holy and pure, is turned into poison. What should be a meaningful and divinised human existence is converted into a worthless and evil life. The first stage in human life is that of boyhood. At this stage he leads an innocent life, without being aware of the *Preya* or *Sreya Marga* (worldly or the sacred path). But as he advances in age, he takes to the worldly path rather than to the sublime path. Endowed with the vigour of youth and in full possession of his mental and other powers, he forgets his basic human qualities and leads a worldly life devoid of any meaning. He loses the power of discrimination between good and bad and forgets what is high and what is low. He forgets even his essential human nature. He is unaware of the Divine. He descends to the level of the animal. At the end, he ceases to be human.

The necessity to have *Sathsangam*

Plunging into the river of Desire, tossed by the waves of Delusion, getting immersed in the waters of Family life, and submerged by peacelessness and strife, man is swallowed by the whale of Discontentment. To turn human life from this mundane existence towards the Divine it is essential to have association with *Sath--Sathsangam*. The term *Sath* refers to that which is not subject to change over time. It is the Truth which remains the same regardless of time, place or circumstance. Man should associate himself with this Truth. Merging one's consciousness with this Truth he should experience the bliss of such association. *Sathsangam* (association with truth) means experiencing *Sath-chith-ananda* (Truth-Awareness-Bliss).

The *Sathsangam* has three facets as indicated in the *Manu Dharma Shastra--"Bhadram pashyanthu, Bhadram srun-vanthu, Bhadram kurvanthu"* (See only what is good, hear what is good and do what is good). Unfortunately, in the stage of manhood, these qualities are absent in man. At this stage, he may appear to have devotion but it is neither sincere nor constant. Spirituality is viewed more as a formal observance than an inner experience.

What really constitutes spirituality? Do *bhajans* constitute spirituality? Or repeating the words "*Sai Ram*" or making pilgrimages to Shrines? All these are signs of human weakness. True spirituality consists in the elimination of all animal instincts in man and manifesting the Divine light within him. This is the true meaning of spirituality.

Today, man practices meditation and performs *japa*, but along with them the animal qualities are also allowed to grow. As long as these qualities remain, the observance of religious practices is worthless. All such spiritual practices amount to practising deception on the Divine itself. Therefore, true *Sadhana* (spiritual practice) means getting rid of all of one's animal qualities such as cruelty, wickedness, etc. Two qualities make a man alien to God: *Asuuya* and *Ahamkara* (envy and egoism). Envy and Egoism are two pests which destroy the tree of life. They deprive man of his essential human nature. With these bad qualities, people get divorced from the company of the good.

Significance of the Ganesha festival

The essential purpose of the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival is to teach a person to avoid the company of bad people and cultivate the company of the good. What does the term Ganapathi signify? "*Ga*" means *Buddhi* (intellect). "*Na*" means *Vijnaana* (Wisdom). "Ganapathi" means

one who is the Lord of the intellect and of wisdom. He is also the Lord of all *Ganas* (spiritual entities). *Ganas* also symbolise the senses. Ganapathi is thus the Lord of the senses. "*Vigatho Nayakah Ithi Vinayakah*" (Vinayaka is one who is without a Master above him).

All festivals of Bharathiyas are full of transcendental significance and are not related to worldly phenomena. The first thing which is done on a festival day is to hang a festoon of green leaves on the front doors of the house. A festoon of green leaves is a sign of auspiciousness. By having such a festoon, the householder indicates that he seeks auspicious happenings. This custom has also scientific significance. The green leaves hung at the door serve to absorb the Carbon dioxide exhaled by people and they release Oxygen which is inhaled by them. Thus scientifically the green leaves serve a vital purpose.

Importance of inner and outer purity

On a festival day every person in the house takes an oil bath early in the morning. Personal cleanliness is conducive to good health. Moreover, as the Divine dwells both inside and outside the body, external purity is also important. To achieve inner purity one has to get rid of all bad qualities and cultivate good qualities. The significance of wearing new clothes on festival days is to replace the dirty linen in the mind by good thoughts. The heart is called *Vastra*, which is the term used for cloth. Hence, inner purity has to be achieved by purifying the heart. The wearing of new clothes is intended to serve as a prelude to purifying the heart within. Thus the different festival practices have an inner significance, apart from the external observances.

In connection with the Ganesha festival, *Prasadam* (food offering) is dedicated to the deity in the form of *Kudumulu* and *Undrallu*. What are the kinds of edibles that should be offered to the deity? The preparations should not involve the use of oil or fire. They have to be cooked by the use of steam. Using rice flour and some pulses and *thil*, one kind of offering is made for Ganesha. In this preparation no oil or fire is used. The significance of this offering is: During the month of Bhaadrapada, the farmers bring home the harvest of *thil* seeds. *Thil* seeds have medicinal properties for curing lung and eye diseases. When the *thil* seeds and pulses are cooked by steam, the preparation becomes easily digestible. In offering such food to the deity two purposes are served. The offerings are tasty and wholesome (giving pleasure and promoting good health). These were the reasons for the observance of various festivals by our ancients.

It is only when a man is pure that the intelligence blossoms. It is only with the blossoming of intelligence that *Siddhi* (the spiritual goal) is attained. Vinayaka presides over *Buddhi and Siddhi* (the intellect and spiritual realisation). *Siddhi* signifies the realisation of Wisdom. The scriptures say that *Siddhi* and *Buddhi* are the consorts of Vinayaka and *Kshema* and *Ananda* are his two sons. *Siddhi* and *Buddhi* symbolise the powers of attraction of Ganapathi.

First correct your own faults

The Ganapathi festival is an occasion for people to purify their minds. People generally tend to see in others the faults which they themselves have. Thereby they try to cover up their own defects by attributing the same defects to others. This is a bad quality. A man can improve only by recognising his faults and not by seeing the same faults in others. You must see what is good in others and look at your own defects. Only such a person can improve. Man does violence to his human nature by ignoring his defects and magnifying the faults in others. This trait is widely prevalent among students today. Students should aim at achieving harmony in thought, word and deed.

Harmony in the Lord's family

Men today are too much immersed in selfish pursuits. Animals and birds display less selfishness than man. The purpose of festivals like Ganesha Chaturthi is to remind men of their inherent divinity and awakening in them the sense of oneness of all mankind.

Easwara's family consists of Shiva, Parvathi, Ganapathi and Subrahmanya. When you consider the vehicles of the four, you find that by nature they are antagonistic to each other. Shiva's vehicle is Nandi (the Bull). Parvathi's vehicle is the lion. By nature the bull and the lion are inimical towards each other. On Easwara's head there is Ganga. In His forehead He has fire. There is natural antagonism between water (in the Ganga) and fire in the Lord's forehead. Ganapathi has the elephant's face and His vehicle is a rat. There is a natural antagonism between Parvathi's lion and Ganapathi's elephant-head. Likewise there is natural enmity between the serpent around Easwara's neck and Ganapathi's vehicle, the rat. There is also enmity between Shiva's serpent and Subrahmanya's peacock. In spite of the natural enmity of these different vehicles of Easwara's family, there is no discord at all among them. Perfect harmony prevails among the members of the family and their different vehicles. This harmony and unity is an example to the world.

Unity is essential for achieving good things. There should be no unity for evil purposes. Whether a person achieves eminence or goes down depends on the kind of people with whom he associates. However, students should not associate with fair-weather friends. The only true friend is God. All others are friends only for their own selfish purposes. God is always with you, in you and around you. He will not give you up in any circumstance. But if your heart is polluted, God will leave you. There is no room in a polluted heart for God.

The inner significance of the elephant head

Vinayaka has the head of an elephant. What is its significance? No human being has an elephant's head. It is against the order of nature. How then did Vinayaka acquire an elephant's head? This has an inner significance. Vinayaka is known for His supreme intelligence. The elephant is also known for its high intelligence (Gajathelivi). The elephant will not trust anybody except its master. Because Vinayaka is endowed with exceptional intelligence, His elephant face is symbolic of supreme intelligence.

Those of you who are staying in the hostel notice cars going up and down the road. On the other side of the hostel is Sai Gita (Bhagavan's elephant). Sai Gita takes no notice of the innumerable cars going on the road. But, without any notice, it smells, as it were, the passing of Swami's car and immediately comes out with a roar to greet Swami. That is the devotion of Sai Gita to its Lord. The faith of the elephant is as strong as its intelligence. His love for the master is equally strong. It is steadfast love. These qualities of devotion, faith and intelligence are associated with the elephant. Whoever has these qualities can be regarded as endowed with the head of an elephant.

Students who may be inclined to entertain doubts regarding the reasons for Ganesha having the head of an elephant, should understand the inner meaning of this appearance, apart from what is seen on the surface.

Sacred ritual reduced to ludicrous practices

Unfortunately, people attach more importance to external forms than to the inner meanings of these festivals. As a result, meaningful festivals are often reduced to superstitious practices. And

often sacred rituals are reduced to ludicrous observances. In olden days there was a practice of confining the cat in the house in a basket during the performance of the Sathyanarayana Vratha so that the cat would not go after the various offerings kept for the deity. The cat was maintained in olden days when there was the fear of rats eating up the grains stored in the house. Even though there are no rats any longer in houses today and there is no need to keep a cat, the practice of confining a cat in a basket is being observed as a part of the religious ceremony. This is how a practice, which was relevant in the past, is observed though it serves no purpose.

Students! You should realise that for every action there is a consequence. The results of each action depend on the nature of the action, just as the nature of the tree depends on the seed which is sowed. The consequences of one's actions are inescapable and it was for this reason that the Emperor Manu laid down that all should observe *Dharma*. The consequences of actions may appear sooner or later but they are bound to occur. Students like to worship Ganapathi. They pray to Ganesha to confer on them *Buddhi* (intelligence) and *Siddhi* (the capacity to realise their aspirations).

In the name Ganapathi, "*Ga*" stands for *Guna* (virtue) and "*Na*" for *Vijnaana* (wisdom). When *Ga* and *Na* are joined we have the combination of *Vijnaana* (worldly wisdom) and *Prajnaana* (Spiritual wisdom). It is out of the combination of *Vijnaana* and *Prajnaana* that *Sujnaana* (Supreme knowledge) emerges. *Sujnaana* is the distinguishing mark of a true man. *Ajnaana* is the sign of ignorance. Ganapathi is the Lord of

Vijnaana and *Prajnaana* (worldly knowledge and spiritual wisdom). Therefore, when a devotee prays to Ganesha, he asks for the conferment of *Vijnaana*, *Prajnaana* and *Sujnaana*.

Education today lacks all the three types of knowledge (*Vijnaana*, *Prajnaana* and *Sujnaana*). You have only bookish knowledge and superficial knowledge. They are of temporary value, perhaps no farther than the examinations! If the value of education is to last all through life, students have to cultivate faith in God. They should realise that when they constantly think of God and perform all actions with Divine feelings, they will experience the full blossoming of their human qualities. Consider every action as dedicated to God. You cannot avoid actions. You must transform work into worship. You have to perform work in this spirit. You cannot substitute prayer for work. You have to combine both work and worship.

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