

35. Inner Progress

The New Year, which you have called in today with the exit of the old year, has an auspicious name, *Subhakrith*. Your arranging this festival in honour of Saint Thyagaraja on this day is indeed an auspicious way of welcoming the auspiciously named New Year. I congratulate you.

I am coming often to inaugurate the festival, for I feel it is part of the task for which I have come. I may tell you that I am coming today straight from the very region where Thyagaraja lived out his life.

I find that you in this holy town of Tirupathi are not all imbued with devotion to the deity who has made it His home, Srinivasa. Most of the people here live on the Lord's bounty or 'property' or 'charity'. The income from the shrine of the Lord is utilised in running colleges and hospitals and in various other ways. That is to say, it is making the lives of many thousands happy and contented. I do not blame them for living upon the income of the Lord, for what does He want it for, if not for the needy and the hungry? But let Me add a warning. If it is eaten in excess, calamity will intervene. Eat as much as you deserve for the toil you have put in, for the hunger you have acquired by your exertions in a good cause. What is the toil that entitles you to consume the property of this shrine? What is the exertion that the Lord approves? Only spiritual toil and spiritual exertion can entitle you to the sacred share; only meditation and remembrance of God's name, steeped in the thrill of devotion!

Idol worship is not a sign of barbarism

The true culture of India is a structure that is built on four pillars: truth, virtue, peace, and love (*sathya*, *dharma*, *santhi*, and *prema*). Every one of you must be aware of this fact. If you are, then you will not be attracted by cultures that are built on less durable foundations. The culture that has to be protected by the bomb cannot claim love as one of the pillars on which it is erected. Bharath (India) is a land where since millennia people have been praying for and toiling for the peace and happiness of entire humanity. They never prayed for success in the wicked race for wholesale slaughter.

Do not swallow without discrimination the criticisms hurled against you that you are uncultured barbarians, worshipping sticks and stones. Idol worship is not a sign of barbarism. No, it is as significant and meaningful a rite as the *kumkum* dot on the forehead of the bride. The idol is revered as the living form of the Lord, He who pervades everything, everywhere, is invoked and visualised in the idol and approached reverentially by the cleansed mind, anxious to efface itself in the Eternal and the Universal. This attitude is called *surrender for fulfillment* (*prapatthi*).

Install Truth in the shrine of your heart

Without this attitude of surrender, worship becomes empty and vain. It is no use deciding just now, when you are listening to Me, that you will cultivate faith and fortitude and then not put that resolution into action after you leave this place. Devotion is not measured by the outward signs of tears and exhilaration. It is an inner revolution, a transformation of all values and outlook.

You may have heard the story of the woman who was shedding profuse tears, apparently of exultation, during a *Puranic* recital. The recitalist was overjoyed that day, for he had succeeded by his touching exposition in

evoking response from at least one contrite soul. At the close of the day's session, he congratulated the old lady on her devotion and offered her the coveted first spoonful of consecrated water (holy *theertha*) as a tribute for her faith and spiritual effort. But the lady denied all claims to devotion and said, "I do not know what that thing called devotion is, nor the other things named faith and spiritual effort. I shall tell you why tears fell from my eyes. That thick black string with which you have tied that palm-leaf book put me in mind of the string round the waist of my departed husband; he wore a black string long long ago."

Mere external signs mislead the observer, but they cannot mislead the Lord who is the ever-present, ever-vigilant Witness.

Devotion will foster love, because it is born of love itself. At present, this land is full of factions and rival groups; all do not pull together and to the best of their ability and capacity. That is why it has become necessary to ask the help of other countries and peoples and borrow funds and burden ourselves with interest payments, etc. There is no cooperation and willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the community or country or humanity. Every village is riven by partisan groups.

I shall tell you what happened in a village of this type. One section had specialised in acting the drama, *Burning of Lanka*, but the other section decided to enact the story of King Harischandra instead. For the role of Chandramathi, the queen, they had to select a person from the *Burning-of-Lanka* group because they had no substitute actor at all. The scenes followed one after the other. All went well until the scene in which the prince died of a snake bite—and the queen refused to weep! The "son" belonged to the opposite group.

So, vengeance was taken on Chandramathi by Harischandra. He rained blows on her being so callous, and the drama sped along in another course, the course of hatred and faction.

Thereupon, the Anjaneya of the *Burning-of-Lanka* group brought things to a climax by jumping on the stage in his role with a tail burning at one end, and he set the theatre on fire to the delight of his henchmen and the consternation of his rival!

You must put on one play, either *Harischandra* or *Burning of Lanka*; if you play both together on the same stage, it will end in a holocaust. Rather, prefer *Harischandra* and reject playing with fire. Install truth in the shrine of your hearts, for that will engender the wholesome habit of brotherliness among all men.

Yearn for illumination of your inner world

Well, the electric lights have started burning again, and I see you are all satisfied that the line was set right soon. I know how greatly you yearned for the illumination of this stage to be restored soon, and you felt sorry and dejected when you had to sit under dull improvised, kerosene light. I want you to yearn also for the illumination of your inner world, the restoration of the current to shed light on the dark recesses of your minds. That is what is called devotion, the yearning for light, for illumination.

People blame the Lord for all ills caused by their own extravagance or ignorance. They are themselves to blame for the sufferings they undergo. Suffering is due only to ignorance. Take the case of even physical ills and physical suffering. Most illnesses are due to overeating or faulty eating habits. "Moderate food gives immense comfort (*Mitha thindi, athi haayi*)."

The food must be clean and pure and derived through pure means, and the strength derived from it must be directed toward holy ends. Then, living is worthwhile.

Food is the basis of man's character

Remember that Thyagaraja kept such rules rigorously in mind. He never dined outside his home or ate unconsecrated food. Many thought that he was a conceited fool who was needlessly strict. But subtle influences pass into food from the persons who prepare it and handle it and are absorbed by those who eat it. Food is the basis of character. The state of the mind is conditioned by that of the body.

I shall tell you now of an incident that happened eighty years ago. There was a great *yogi*, Hamsaraj by name, at Badrinath. He was always immersed in singing the glory of the Lord. He had a disciple who was equally earnest and sincere. That young man was pestered for a few days by a dream, which gave him no peace. He saw a fair young girl of sixteen weeping in great agony and calling out pathetically, "Can no one save me?" The disciple was amazed at this strange dream; he could not shake off that doleful figure and that desperate cry from his mind. He recited his woes to the master. Hamsaraj, I can assure you, was a true *hamsa* (the bird of paradise). That bird can eschew water from milk. Hamsaraj, using his discrimination, analysed the situation and discovered the cause of that horrid experience.

He prodded the young man with such questions as: "What did you do the first day?" "Where did you go?" "What did you eat?" etc. It was revealed that he had gone with a friend to a feast and had eaten some puris and chapatis. It was discovered that a poor *brahmin* had prepared the feast. Well, Hamsaraj sent the disciple to find out why and with what resources that *brahmin* arranged the feast for the recluses of Badrinath.

Examine the source of the food offered

The young man cursed the day when the dream started haunting him, for he was now being sent by his master on purposeless errands to investigate irrelevant issues. He wondered how his spiritual practices could be helped by all this. Nevertheless, he pursued the inquiry about the feast and its origins and the wherewithal out of which it was prepared. It came to light that the funds were supplied by a sixty-year old money lender to whom a *brahmin* had given his daughter in marriage and received in return a sum of ten thousand rupees. She was now appealing to the holy men for a bit of human kindness toward a forsaken child.

Hamsaraj thus demonstrated to his disciple that one should examine the source of the food, the motives for the gift, and the passions that surge and sway the giver before accepting such an intimate gift as food.

You may say that only spiritual aspirants have to bear such rules in mind, but tell Me who is not a spiritual aspirant. All are pilgrims on the road — some going fast, some going slow, that is all. The goal is the same for you all, though the roads may be many.

You are all cultured and civilised according to current notions. Of course, there is a vast difference between the methods of living now and in the past. Man has traveled far from the days when he wore the barks of trees or leaf garments. Today is the day of nylons and georgettes and bush coats. Well, admitting that all this is a sign of higher civilisation, should there not be a corresponding rise in the level of thinking and feeling and action, in the arts of living together and earning mental peace and poise? Spiritual life must also become more cultured and civilised, is it not? There must be gratitude for the chance of life, for the blessings of the beauty and bounty of nature, and a realisation of the more durable values of life. Attachment to sensory pleasure has to be discarded in preference to the more lasting joy of inner contemplation.

Prayer can bring about the impossible

Thyagaraja had discovered that joy of inner contemplation. He gave expression to that joy in moving musical notes, in simple sincere words in songs that bring tears to the eye and thrills to the heart.

The Raja of Rarnnad, who is the president of this Festival, comes from Tamil Nadu, and the Telugu language in which Thyagaraja sang is strange to him. Yet, he is profoundly affected by the music; he loves the songs very much. Knowing the meaning of the songs and the context that begot them so spontaneously and so sweetly from the sublime devotion of Thyagaraja will make you imbibe the spirit better; the language in which he sang is the language of the seeker, the spiritual aspirant, the stragglng aspirant, and, very rarely, the satisfied sage. You can easily learn that language, the language of the spiritual aspirant. Do not keep away from it because it is not the language to which you are accustomed. There is no place for hatred in this field, nor between state and state.

The Committee has entered on a sacred task. They may sometimes feel the burden to be too heavy; they may even reel under the weight of disappointments and difficulties. But I assure them they have no reason to lose heart. Lord Srinivasa opens His eyes, and your task is accomplished. And He will open His eyes. Have patience and wait prayerfully. Prayer can bring about the impossible. Recite the glory of the Lord and repeat His name in the cavern of your heart. That will bring success.

Tirupathi, 1962-04-05

The body is but a boat, an instrument for crossing the sea of change, that you have received through the merit of many generations. When you have crossed the sea, you realize the dweller in the dwelling. That is the purpose of the body.

So, even when the body is strong and skilled, even while the intellect is sharp and the mind alert, effort must be made to seek the dweller, in the body.

Sathya Sai Baba