

3. Be happy when tested

Bhaarath means the land where there is *rathi* (attachment to *Bha* (Bhagavan or God)); and so, all days are sacred for the people born here, all rivers are sacred, all hills are sacred. The Ganga is sacred from source to sea, but yet, there are some spots associated with some holy event or sage or seer or temple which are treated with extra reverence; such places are Risheekesh, Varaanasi, Prayaag, Haridhwar, etc. So too, among the days of the year, some are treated as holier, when a special effort is made by the devotees to approach God through special *puuja* (ritual worship) or *japa* (pious repetition of holy names or sacred formula) or *dhyaana* (meditation). Shivarathri is such a day.

And for you assembled here, this is a day which you will treasure in your memory for a lifetime. Meeting with fellow-pilgrims and kindred aspirants is a piece of rare good fortune. Every one of you is a temple, with the Lord

installed in your heart, whether you are aware of it or not. The Lord is described in the *Purusha Shuktha* scripture as thousand headed; it does not mean that He has just thousand heads, no more, no less. It means that "the thousands of heads before Me now have just one heart, which gives life and energy to all, and that heart is the Lord. No one is separate from his neighbour; all are bound by the one life-blood that flows through the countless bodies. This is the special teaching of *Sanaathana Dharma* (Eternal Religion), which the world needs. And this one precious message, the children of Bhaarath have unfortunately forgotten.

The body has been given for a grand purpose

The Lord has endowed man with the body and so, every limb and every sense is worthy of reverent attention. Each must be used for His Glory. The ear must exult when it gets a chance to hear the wonderful tales of God. The tongue must exult when it can praise Him. Or else, the tongue of man is ineffective as that of frogs which croak day and night, sitting on the marshy bank. Krishna told Duryodhana, when he said that he was not afraid of God and man, that he was indeed pitiable. The *pasu* (animal) fears; the *mriga* (beast) terrifies. Man should be neither. He should neither terrify nor get terrorised. He must be neither a coward nor a bully. If he is a coward he is an animal; if he is a bully he is a *daanava*, an ogre.

It is because you feel the urge to use the body with which you have been endowed, for this higher purpose that you are here in Prashaanthi Nilayam. The kinship among you and of all of you with Me is ageless; it is eternal. It is not based on worldly relationship; it is based on the aspirations of the heart. It is *Prashaanthinilaya sambandham* the bond of the abode of Supreme Peace.

The human body has been given to you for a grand purpose - realising the Lord within. If you have a fully equipped car in good running condition, would you keep it in the garage? The car is primarily for going on a journey; get into it and go. Then only is it worthwhile to own it. So too, with the body. Proceed, go forward to the goal. Learn how to use the faculties of the body, the senses, the intellect, the mind, for achieving the goal and march on.

Present tragedy of our country

Brihaspathi, the teacher of the Gods, was one day asked by his son whether he had no means of liberation from the recurring pain of birth and death. He replied that he had; only, he must earn and practise and win it himself. Many begin with a weakening want of faith: Will I, can I,

succeed? How long will I have to spend in the task? But, *sathya*, *dharma* and *prema* (truth, virtue and love), if practised, will give the strength needed to win the *shaanthee* that comes of liberation. Then, the son asked what he has to do. The father told him that complete renunciation of all worldly attachments (*sarvasanga-parithyaaga*) alone can endow him with freedom. He was happy that he had a son who sought these higher things of life. He was quite different from the fathers today, who invite their sons to play cards with them and waste the precious hours in trivial games. If such a question is asked by a son today, the father will conclude that the son has gone mad and he will become prey to all kinds of wild fears; he will start thinking of frantic remedies. That is the tragedy of our country.

The son went, far from hearth and home, and after eight years of ascetic practice, he returned with a victory over hunger and thirst. The father put him to test. Tests must be welcomed, for they alone can give confidence. When you drive a nail into the wall, you try to shake it a little, to ascertain whether it has been driven firm. Tests are essential everywhere and more so, in the spiritual field, where success is often deceptive and short-lived. The son admitted that he had not earned peace of mind, unshaken fortitude. The father said he ought to acquire *sarva-sanga-parithyaaga*. The son went again into the forest and spent one full year there, without caring whether it was shade or sun, hot or cold. When he came back, the father was still not happy, for he had not discarded the one fundamental attachment, the attachment to the ego. He was still involved in the mesh of I and mine. Once the ego is suppressed, that very moment two consequences follow: freedom from grief, acquisition of joy.

To achieve this great consummation, you must take one step after another. Good deeds like ritual worship, repetition of holy names, meditation, observance of vows, etc., are the 'steps'; good thoughts like prayer for greater discrimination, more chance to serve others also help. Slowly, steadily cleanse the mind; sharpen the intellect; purify the senses; and win grace. You have come here, prompted by *prema* (Love); cultivate that *prema*, move about with that *prema*. Treat the old and the sick that are here with some special care; give them the chance to be in the shade, inside the auditorium, and those of you who are young and sturdy, give them room. Observe the disciplinary rules that are prescribed for your sake and be benefited by the *darshan* of the *abhishekam* (Ceremony of pouring water) at 11.00 a.m. and the *Lin-godbhavam* (the emergence of Shiva formless form) at night.

Prashaanthe Nilayam: Shivarathri, 18-2-1966