

1. Ask the right question

THIS is a twice-blessed day, for it is a Thursday; otherwise called *Guruvaar* (the day of the preceptor, the guide to spiritual Liberation); it is also the day on which, centuries ago, the Geetha was taught to Arjuna by Krishna, the day when man got from God the key for his progress from falsehood and delusion into the light of his own inner reality. Arjuna was directed to engage in battle, win back his share of the Kingdom, and ensure for the people righteous administration and atmosphere wherein they can strive successfully to attain salvation. This he had to do in a spirit of dedication and surrender to the will of God, irrespective of his own likes and dislikes and the consequences that might flow from his unselfish activities. Therefore the Geetha advises that service to the *sangha* (society) is the highest *seva* (service), as well as the most beneficial *saadhana* (spiritual discipline). You cannot run away from this obligation; you have to use the community of men wherein you are born for sublimating your egoism and saving yourself.

Seva taken up as *saadhana* teaches *sahana* (fortitude). Even *Avathaars* (divine advents) demonstrate, in their lives, the supreme importance of *seva*. When Dharmaraaja performed the great Raajasuuya sacrifice, on the advice of the sage Naaradha, in order to propitiate his deceased father, Lord Krishna attended the sacrifice and asked to be allotted some service; He preferred the service of removing the leaves on which food was served for the thousands who were fed every day! Since service was so dear to Him, He was revered as the King-maker of the Age, the Law-giver for all.

Turn your sight upwards to avoid lower desires

Today being Vaikuntha Ekaadhashi, many of you are yearning to get *Amrith* (nectar) from Me. But, of what benefit is it merely to swallow a few drops of nectar created by Me? It is when the *saathwik* (good) quality wins and subdues the *raajasik* and the *thaamasik* (passionate and ignorant) qualities in the battles between them that go on in every heart, that *amrith* arises therein! The *amrith* that confers immortality is the *amrith* which one wins through one's own *saadhana*. One word that is used in *dhyaana* (meditation) is *uurdhwa-dhrishti* (upward vision) to indicate an exercise in which the two eyes are directed together upwards, to a point between the eyebrows. *Uurdhwa* means upward and *dhrishti* means look; so, the word means, not a physical exercise, but a general wholtime effort of the mind to avoid lower desires, and to uplift itself to higher values. Such an effort will win *Amrith*; it will flow from the spring of the heart!

Amrith means immortal; it does not follow that he who takes in *amrith* will live eternally; even *Avathaars* (Divine incarnations) cast off the body when their task is accomplished. It means fixing the mind on the Reality, becoming aware of the imperishable entity that one is and merging the consciousness in it. Look at the *Raakshasas* (demons)! Raavana and Kumbhakarna went through extreme austerities for thousands of years. God manifested Himself before them and granted them the boons they prayed for. But, since the austerity did not win for them purity and cleanliness, virtue and humility, they continued as ever, monsters of violence and wickedness. They had no trace of the *Saathwik* (poised state) in their make-up. They had the Grace of God in such a large measure; God appeared, inquired and granted. But, they behaved even worse than before! They denied by their lives the Grace they won.

Eschew evil and be fixed in Faith

So too, if *amrith* is given, one has to live up to that status, the status of having acquired the Grace of God. Vashishta commissioned Raghu, the Emperor, to tend his cow, the celestial *Kamadhenu*.

Since it was an order that emanated from his spiritual preceptor, Raghu himself took up that task and led the cow into the pastures. One day, when a lion threatened to pounce upon Kaamadhenu, and insisted that she must be given to him for his lunch, as he was hungry, Raghu offered his own body instead. That is how one has to live up to the status assigned to him.

When you are raised to the status of *amrith* receivers, you must eschew evil and be fixed in faith. I have no intention to create and give *amrith* on this Vaikuntha Ekadhashi day. For no one walks on the path I have chalked out, no one feels bound by the advice I give. Your enthusiasm is short lived; your resolution to follow My instructions evaporate quickly. As boiling milk rises, overflows and becomes still, devotion develops and dies soon. It does not stay unshaken.

Today, in certain Vishnu temples, a special door called the *Vaikuntha-dhwaara* is opened, and people can pass through it into the presence. *Vaikuntha-dhwaara* is the Gate to Heaven, that is to say, the gateway to self-realisation. The gateway to that heaven is not to be found only there; it will open, right in front of you, wherever you are. Knock and it will open.

Fill your heart with sympathy for the distressed

Vishnu means, *sarva vyaapi* (He who is everywhere). So, his residence *Vaikuntha* (heaven) must be every where. You can gain entry, by knocking with the correct password on your lips. Your heart can become *Vaikuntha*, if you but cleanse it and purify it and allow God to manifest in it. *Vaikuntha* means "the place where there is no shadow of grief." When God manifests in your heart, all is full and free.

The cow transforms grass and gruel into sweet strength-giving milk and gives it away in plenty to its master. Develop that quality, that power to transform the food you consume into sweet thoughts, words and deeds of sympathy for all. The child Krishna wept for permission to go along with the cows to the fields of pasture. Yasodha said, "Dear child! your tiny silken soles cannot walk along those thorny, pebble-filled tracks. I shall get nice little sandals for you. You can go, after the sandals are ready." But Krishna prattled back. "The cows whom we serve are not shod. Why should we, who are their servants, avoid the thorns and stones which they cannot avoid?" No wonder the cows and calves of Gokul were immobilised and wept, when Krishna left for Mathura!

When you have filled your heart with sympathy for the distressed, the Lord will shower His Grace. Dhroupadhi had earned the Grace, through her devotion and virtues. Seetha, too, stuck to the highest ideal of life, inspite of the severe sufferings she underwent. Hanumaan who discovered her in the grove where she was kept as a prisoner by her abductor, offered to recross the ocean, with her on his shoulders, and take her safe to her Lord, Raama; But, she replied that she would not allow herself to be abducted back from the custody of Raavana, since that would deprive Raama of the chance to punish him for his crime and retrieve her through his own heroism! Splendid words, these! Quite in consonance with the dictates of *Dharma!* No wonder, the Lord's Grace saved her in good time! If you have no steadfastness and no depth of faith, you can have no Grace.

Serve all as brothers and sisters

This warning itself is the *Amritham* for you today; for, harsh words provoke bitterness. Endeavour to earn Grace by observing the discipline that I am keen you should follow. Give up the old worldly ways of earning and spending, saving and accumulating, with greed, lust, malice and pride. So rearrange your lives that I will be pleased with you. Do not waste time in idle

gossip; talk softly; talk as little as possible: talk sweet; serve all as brothers and sisters, with adoration to the Sai in them; engage in *saadhana*; move forward step by step as befits persons striving to realise their own liberation. Ask Me about steps in spiritual discipline, not petty, trivial, binding desires. The time is fast coming when the whole world will gather here, and you will have to struggle from miles afar to get even my *dharshan*.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 11-1-1968