

9. Step by step

I AM glad your resolution to walk the 400 miles from your village, on the other side of the Western Ghats, to this place, in time for Shivarathri, has been fulfilled, a day earlier than expected. This was due to the bond of faith and *prema* (love) that made all the 25 of you into a well-knit group of pilgrim. It is also due to the rigorous discipline you imposed on yourselves, about food and sleep and rest. It was good that you decided to cook your own food all along; for the spiritual yearning and strength will be endangered by consuming all kinds of *raajasik* food (food which inflames emotions), or food prepared by *raajasik* (passionate) persons, or eaten in *raajasik* company (which arouses attachments)! You offered the food you prepared, to God before you ate and so, what you ate during the journey was consecrated

I was with you throughout, from the very first step to the last. Some of you argued at Holenarasipur that the push cart in which you were bringing the provisions, vessels and personal luggage broke down only by coincidence, right in front of a workshop! But, that gave you a day of rest, which you badly needed. Fourteen days have been spent by you on the road, one was spent in rest while the cart was undergoing repairs. To cover 400 miles in 13 days, is indeed good going!

The Name of God is a great tonic

Your schedule of activity every day must have charged you with stamina. Perhaps you thought that you were only adhering to the Prashaanthi Nilayam time-table, when you had *bhajan* twice a day *Omkaaram* recitation at 4-30 A.M., and *Nagarasankeerthan*, as you walked through the streets (singing the glories of the Lord) of the village where you spent the night! But, the Name of God is a great tonic. Vitamin G gives strength to the legs to cover thirty miles a day! And, imagine how the villages through which you passed were not only thrilled, but also instructed by your *bhajans* and discourses to the groups that gathered round your camp! I was with you when some one turned you on to a new but longer route. I knew that some villages, lying away from the highway, could get to know of Me through the *bhajans* and talks.

Your manner of journey is nothing new. This was the style which your great grandfathers adopted, albeit helplessly, when they went to Kaashi, Badhri, Thirupathi or Pandharpur. They moved along, as a *Sathsang* (good company), as a family, a brotherhood, showering along the pilgrim route inspiration, instruction, compassion, and charity. They went through the different linguistic regions of the land and they were welcomed and feted wherever they went. There were no provincial and linguistic barriers then. From Raameshwaram to Kedhaarnaath, it was a land of One God with different Names. They ascended the peaks on which the temples were situated, shouting for their own encouragement, *Hari bol*, or Govindha.

Over the seven hills of Thirupathi, it was Govindha, Govindha for every step, but, now, motorable roads have been laid to reach most of the shrines, and people ride up to the very doorstep, with scarcely any Govindha emerging from their lips; while getting down from the cars right in front of the shrine, they throw away the stump of the cigarette that they were smoking till then! I am glad, you came walking, with the name of God on your lips, even in these days, when you could have come in cars or omnibuses, right up to the Prashaanthi Nilayam.

Activity is the very *sine qua non* of life

Shankaraachaarya, in the fifth century A.D., went on foot from Kaanthe to Kaashi, Badhri, Kaashmir, Kedhaarnaath, Kailaash or Puri, Shringeri and Kaaladi! And, he lived only until the age of thirty-two! Imagine the tremendous amount of work that he did, writing, expounding, propagating, establishing, organising, inspiring, teaching--all in about fourteen or fifteen years of active life! When you trudge towards a holy shrine, when your legs ache, you pray to the God who is leading you forward; your thoughts do not deviate from that high endeavour! You came, I know, reciting or reminding yourself of the Name, Sai Raam. I know that you spent 75 per cent of the time in Divine thoughts; 25 per cent you spent---didn't you?---on your personal worries---your homes, people there and their problems,, discussion on the distance yet to cover and. the distance already covered! Also, some suggestions about smoother and quicker movement!

Be active, welcome activity, that is the message that God gives man, at birth. The breath teaches you *Soham* all the time, '*so*' when it goes in and '*ham*,' when it is exhaled. Activity is the very *sine qua non* of life. You will have to select that activity which is conducive to your spiritual progress, judging the stage in which you are at present. There is no high and low, in the activity. The eye sees stars that are billions of miles away, but, they do not see the ears, which are a few finger-breadths afar! The eye must see, the ear must hear, the hand must hold. That is their *Dharma* (duty). Each must manage its own, his own *Dharma*.

Use your limbs as God willed them to be used

A plantain tree has a number of uses; the leaf is used to eat one's meal from; the flower is used to prepare a few dishes; the outer covers of the trunk can be used for binding and packing things as a good string-yielding substance; but, the main use of the tree is in the bunch of bananas! You take all the trouble of planting and growing the tree for the sake of the bananas, not the leaves, the strings, the inner soft core, or the flower. So too, the main use of this human body is the realisation of the reality! The rest is all incidental.

Prahlaadha prayed, "Lord! I desire to adore you and offer flowers with both my hands!" You may say, O, the hands have so much else to do! But, though they may be used for a variety of operations, the chief purpose for which man has been endowed with them is to pray, to do *puuja* (ritualistic worship), to hold the Feet of the Lord. The ears are designed to hear the glory of God, the eyes to stand witness to its manifestations! The tongue may be used to talk scandal, or to flatter those in authority, but that is really misuse! Use it as God willed it to be used, for singing hymns of Divine Glory.

Like Seetha under the Ashoka tree, surrounded by ghastly demonesses who terrified her and held out threats of torture, but all the while immersed in the bliss derived from contemplation of Raama, the tongue moves about, with sharp teeth around, waiting for a chance to hurt and wound! The tongue has to speak out testimony for the majesty and mystery that is God; all other tasks are subordinate. The legs must take you to the temple of God; of what benefit is it if they take you to houses of vulgar entertainment or places where money is earned and lost, as in the race course?

Obstacles alone can toughen your character

You have put your legs to their legitimate use! Do you feel any pain now? Any tension in the muscles? No; you are filled with *Aanandha* (bliss). All that bother was to get this *Aanandha*. Is it for My sake that you underwent this *Paadhayaathra* (pilgrimage on foot)? No. It is for your own

sake, for this chance of sitting around Me and listening to My words! Outside this room now, there are thousands waiting for a few words from Me; but, you have earned the chance, by the proper use of your limbs!

You told Me yesterday, "Swaami! We have been coming to you since ten years; you have spoken to us often; but, why is it we have not progressed a bit in our *saadhana* (spiritual practice) to earn peace and joy? Well. It is not enough if nice dishes are cooked and arranged in the kitchen. They have to be served on your plates, you have to eat them and more than all, digest them. So too, it is not enough if I speak and you hear! You have to recollect what I have said and treasure them in the cavity of your heart and ruminate over them and put them into daily practice! Some of you feel neglected by Me, when some disappointment or trouble comes upon you. You must welcome such obstacles, for, they alone can toughen your character and make your faith firmer.

When you hang a picture on the nail driven into the wall, you shake the nail and find out whether it is firm enough, to bear the weight of the picture, don't you? So too, in order to prevent the picture of God from falling and getting broken into bits, the nail (Name of God) driven into the wall of the heart has to be shaken by means of a disaster or two! Suppose I ask one of you now to jump from the first floor, you should not hesitate and weigh the pros and cons, and slide away, for fear of injuring your feet! It is a method of shaking the nail to ascertain whether it is firm and steady. You must take it as a *Leela* (Divine sport) of Mine and jump; if you do so, no injury will happen! Or else, I would not ask you to do it!

Married life will not bar your way to Realisation-

When you travel towards God, whoever objects has to be bypassed; Prahlaadha went against his father, Vibheeshana went against his brother, Jamadhagni had to harm his own mother, Meera could not obey her husband; because, they stuck to the path of God and broke through all those who opposed them. Young men like you have the problem, I know, of being forced to marry against your will by parents who seek to hasten you into marital security. You have to win them over and get their approval as Shankara did when he wanted to enter the monastic order!

But, let Me tell you that married life and being a *grihastha* (householder) will not bar your way to Realisation. Look upon the wife and the children as a sacred trust, and serve them in that spirit. Prepare yourselves for a celibate and spiritual discipline from the age of fifty; the five senses have to be mastered, by the time five decades of your life are over. The conclusion of six decades means that you have conquered the six foes of man: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and hate. When you are seventy, you must have become ready to merge with the seven sages, the seven seas and the seven colours of the solar ray; that is to say, you must be far, far above mundane desires and ideals, and as near the point of mergence as possible, through *saadhana*.

God is the Power behind the wheel of life

Eighty must see you in line with the deities that preside over the eight cardinal points, more or less Divine, in attributes and characteristics. Ninety takes you, or rather should take you to the realm of the Nine Planets, into the realm of the Super. When man reaches the hundred mark, living out the ten decades, he must have mastered the ten senses, the five senses of action and the five senses of knowledge and become Wisdom incarnate, with no trace of action or the consequence thereof or the desire for it. He and the Absolute are One and Indivisible!

But, all this is about the *paahayaathra* of the pilgrimage of life. Let Me tell you now about your 400 mile *yaathra* (journey)! Arjuna had the privilege of having Krishna as his charioteer during

the battle of Kurukshethra. But, he did not realise that Krishna was his charioteer every moment of his life! You also must have thought that I was with you all through the 400 mile route! As if I have not been with you, before and since! Krishna commissioned the great bowman Arjuna to escort the women of the Yaadhava clan to a safe place of refuge, when He decided to end His earthly career; on the way, some wild tribals attacked the convoy, and Arjuna rose to destroy them, with the *Gaandiva* (his famous bow and the divine arrow) he had won by severe austerity. But, the charioteer had gone; the strength had ebbed away! He had forgotten even the formulae for invoking the deities who directed the arrows! He could not even string the *Gaandiva* bow, he had wielded in a hundred encounters with the mightiest heroes of the age] Then, he realised that Krishna was the power behind the wheel of His life, that without Him, he was a spent force. The tribals overpowered the group and kidnapped the women whose wailings pierced the heart of Arjuna!

So, be convinced that whatever achievement you make, is caused by the Grace of the Lord. Pray to the Lord for strength, wisdom, humility, detachment, light and love. With each step in the pilgrimage of life approach Divinity steadily and surely.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 21-2-1971

The plan and purpose of the ancient religions of India are to plant the seeds of Love in the human heart so that they may sprout into saplings of endurance, and blossom into tolerance, yielding ultimately the fruits of peace.

Sri Sathya Sai