

4. Teacher of teachers

SHIVARAATHRI observed every month, on the fourteenth night of the dark half of the Moon, which is the presiding deity of the human Mind, has only just one night more to be a non-entity; with no influence on the agitations of the Mind. In the month of *Magha*, the fourteenth night is named *Malina* (Great) *Shivaraathri*, for, it is sacred for another reason too. It is the day on which Shiva (Supreme God) takes the *Linga* Form, for the benefit of seekers. Shiva is revered as the Form to be adored for the acquisition of *Jnaana* (Supreme Wisdom). *Jnaanam Maheshwaraath lccheth*, as the *Vedhas* advise.(Pray to Shiva for enlightenment, through Wisdom). So, do not treat this Day lightly, and reduce the disciplines prescribed by the sages for its celebration, such as fast and vigil and uninterrupted recital of the Name of God, into a routine ritual, or a chance for picnic, revelry, rivalry or factious fun. Contemplate this day and this night, on the *Aathma Linga* (elliptical idol which emanates from Shiva as His symbol), the *Jyothir Linga* (Symbol of the Supreme Light of Wisdom), and be convinced that Shiva is in every one of you. Let that Vision illumine your inner consciousness.

Feed the mind with good thoughts and Godly acts

A fence is necessary to protect growing crops; but, when no crop is growing, why spend time and money on a fence? The orange is covered by a find which is not very tasty, in order to protect it from too early consumption. Outer ritual is prescribed to shelter the inner message from being tampered with. *Shivaraathri* too like all other holy days in the Hindu and other religious calendars has many such outer ceremonial observances and a deep core of inner significance. But, human nature prefers the easier path of outer formality to the path of inner discipline and direct experience.

Visiting Shiva shrines, arranging for worship through priests of Shiva Lingams, pouring sanctified waters, potfuls of them over consecrated idols, fasting, vigil and such other activities are resorted to on this Day. But, these are not quite relevant to the real purpose of the festival. To fulfil these rites and vows, one need not wait one full year and consult the astrologer and his calendar of holy days. When man takes in food four times a day, in order that his body may keep functioning, efficiently, is it too much to ask him to feed the mind with good thoughts and godly acts, at least once every day? The mind too needs clean and sustaining food."

Eeshwara, a Name of Shiva, means that He has all the glory that is associated with Godhead. *Shamkara*, another name of Shiva, 'means that He causes by His Grace, *Sham*, that is, *Aanandha* (bliss) at the supremest level. Shiva is the embodiment of *Aanandha*; hence the *Thaandava* Dance, which He enjoys so much, with the Cosmos as His stage. To set apart just one day among the 365 for the worship of this Universal Omnipresence is an insult to His Majesty and Mystery.

Consider the significance of the Form that Shiva has assumed for human adoration: In His throat, He has the holocaust-producing poison, *Haalahaala*, that can destroy all life in a trice. On His head, He has the sacred Ganga river, whose waters can cure all ills, here and hereafter. On His forehead, He has the eye of Fire. On His head, He has the cool comforting Moon. On His wrists, ankles, shoulders and neck He wears deadly cobras, which live in life-giving breath of air. Shiva lives in the burial ground and the burning ghat, the *Rudhrabhumi*, as it is called---the land of Shiva or *Rudhra*. The place, is no area of dread; it is an auspicious area, for all have to end their lives there, at the close of this life or a few more lives. Shiva is teaching you that death cannot be shunned or frightened away. It has to be gladly and bravely met.

Linga is the Form in which all forms merge

Shiva, again, is said to go about with a begging bowl. He teaches that renunciation, detachment, indifference to good fortune or bad, are the paths to attain Him. Shiva is known as *Mrthyunjaya* (He who vanquishes death). And, He is also the *Kaamaari* (the destroyer of Desire). These two Names show that he who destroys desire can conquer Death, for desire breeds activity, activity breeds consequence, consequence breeds bondage, bondage results in birth and birth involves death.

Eeshwara is also symbolised in the Linga Form. *Linga* is derived from the Sanskrit root, *Li*, which means *Leeyathe*, 'merges'; it is the Form in which all forms merge. Shiva is the God who blesses beings with the most desirable gift of meaning in the Universe. That is the end, beyond death, which one should strive for, the end which Shiva can vouchsafe. Realise the God in you first; then, if you involve yourself with the material world, no harm can come to you, for you will recognise the objective world as but the body of God. But, if you try to involve yourself with the objective world first, and then try to discover God, you will see the material world only. Again, you can direct your spiritual efforts in either of two ways: Follow the commands of God, and He will be pleased to raise you up. Follow the path of inquiry and discover where He resides, and realise Him there. You can follow either means. But, reaching Him is the inescapable task of man.

Shiva is all Graciousness, ever Auspicious

Shiva means, Graciousness, Auspiciousness, *Mangalam*. He is all Graciousness, ever Auspicious, *Sarva Mangalam*. That is the reason why the epithet, Shri, which indicates these qualities, is not added to the name Shiva, Shankara, Eeshwara etc. It is added to the number of *Avathaars* (divine incarnations), for they have taken on perishable bodies for a specific purpose. They have to be distinguished from other humans, by the epithet, but Shiva is eternally gracious, auspicious, *mangala* and so the. epithet is superfluous. Shiva is adored as the Teacher of Teachers, Dakshinamurthi. The Form of Shiva is itself a great lesson in tolerance and forbearance.

The *Haalahaala* poison is hidden by Him in His throat; the beneficent Moon which all welcome, He has worn on His head. This is a lesson for man to keep away from others all harmful tendencies and to use for their benefit all useful tendencies that he can command. If one uses his skills for his own advance, and his evil propensities for putting down others, he is only taking the road to ruin.

Man is inherently Divine; he ought therefore demonstrate in thought, word and deed the Divine attributes of love, tolerance, compassion and humanity. God is Truth; man too must live in Truth. God is Love; man too must live in Love, eschewing anger. Master hatred through Love; master anger through sweet Tolerance. There are many who bargain with God, and offer Him gifts, of money or articles if He would confer Grace. If one believes that God can be mollified by the gift of a coconut or a purse of 116 rupees, I wonder what kind of God he has in his mind? Is his conception of God so mean, so contemptible? Those who plan to have their desires granted through riches can never deserve the name, Devotee. Those who encourage the payment of money for spiritual gains or for gaining Divine favour are also to be condemned. This is the reason why the Geetha lays down that God will be pleased by offering leaf, flower or fruit or even a drop of water. But even these four articles are materials.

How can men give to God what is not theirs?

The Geetha does not intend that you should pluck a leaf or flower or a fruit from some plant or tree and place it before God. Nor does it ask you to bring water from a well or river or the roadside tap. The Leaf is your own body, which like the leaf, sprouts green, fades, and finally falls off from the branch. The Flower is the heart freed from the insect pests of lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride, hate, etc. The Fruit is the mind, the consequence of its yearnings, which have to be dedicated to God. The Water is the stream of tears that flow from the eyes when one is in ecstatic Bliss at the contemplation of God's Glory. Giving these four is the real act of surrender, *Sharanaagathi* (total surrender). The offering of leaves or flowers or fruits or river water is at best a way of helping the plant or tree or river to secure a little merit.

There are some who declare glibly, "O, I have surrendered my body, mind, intellect, my everything to God." These people have no control over their minds and the emotions and passions they are filled with. They have no mastery over their reason. They are not even able to regulate their bodies. So, it is indeed ridiculous for them to claim that they have offered them to God. How can they give to God what is not theirs? What right have they? How can any one accept the gift of something which does not belong to the giver?

In fact, you need not surrender anything at all. Love all beings---that is enough. Love with no expectation of return; love for the sake of love; love because your very nature is Love; Love because that is the form of Worship you know and like. When others are happy, be happy likewise. When others are in misery, try to alleviate their lot to the best of your ability. Practise Love through *Seva* (selfless service). By this means, you will realise Unity and get rid of the ego that harms.

Brindhaavan, 5-3-1973

*We should not aspire for acclaim and praise from those around us,
but do service only to secure the grace of God and not for any
other reward from anyone.*

Sri Sathya Sai