

28. Experience oneness with the Divine

EMBODIMENTS of Divine Love! Devotion means seeking unity with the Divine through purity in thought, word and deed and concentrating on the oneness of the Godhead. Devotion aims at acquiring friendship with God through this triple purity.

Devotion is of three kinds: *Saamaanya Bhakti* (Ordinary devotion); *Ekantha Bhakthi* (Devotion in Solitude) and *Ananya Bhakti* (Exclusive, one-pointed devotion).

Saamaanya Bhakti has nine forms: *Sravanam* (listening to the glories of God); *Kirthanam* (Chanting the praise of God); *Vishnu Smaranam* (ever remembering the name of the Lord); *Paada Sevanam* (Worshipping the Lord's feet); *Vandanam* (Prostration); *Archanam* (Worshipping the figure of the Lord); *Daasyam* (Service); *Sneham* (friendship); *Atmanivedanam* (*Self-surrender*).

Of these nine forms of devotional worship Parikshit exemplifies the first one, *Sravanam*. Destined to live for only one week on account of a sage's curse, the emperor Parikshit attained salvation by listening to the glories of the Lord as related by Sage Suka.

The triple process that leads to God realisation

The devotee should not be content with merely listening. He should reflect on what he has heard and put into practice the teachings. These are called *manana* and *nididhyasa*. The triple process of listening, reflection and practising leads to God realisation.

Narada is the supreme example to the world of one who realised the Divine by continuously singing the glories of God in all circumstances and at all times. Narada, who was born out of the mind of *Brahma*, demonstrated to the world the supreme spiritual efficacy of singing the Lord's glories.

Prahlada demonstrated the power of constant remembrance of the name of the Lord, whatever the ordeals one had to face. He chanted the names of Vishnu without fear or anguish when the demons thrust their javelins at him at the bidding of Hiranyakasipu (Prahlada's father). Prahlada was an unflinching devotee of Vishnu, whom his father hated as an enemy.

The Goddess Lakshmi is the supreme example of one who earned unique distinction by devoted service to the feet of the Lord. Though she was the Goddess of wealth and presided over all prosperity, she showed to the world that serving the Lord's feet was greater than all the treasures on earth. Today's devotees worship *Siri* (wealth) more than *Hari* (the Lord). They do not realise that by worshipping the Lord's feet, even wealth can be got. What foolishness is it to go after money, forgetting the lotus feet of the Lord, which are the fountain source of all prosperity!

Worshipping the Lord by constant prostration was the form of devotion exemplified by Akrura, a devotee of Krishna. *Namaskar* (the act of worshipping the Lord with folded palms) signified the total offering of the body and the senses to the Divine as a mark of complete surrender to the Divine. It signifies the elimination of the ego and seeking merger in the Lord wholeheartedly.

Anga-Archanam for worshipping the Lord

Archanam was the method adopted by the emperor Prithu to worship the Lord. By offering sixteen kinds of service to the image of the Lord every day with deep devotion, he earned the grace of the Lord. In this form of worship, Prithu demonstrated the unique significance of *Anga*

Archana, using every sense organ in worshipping the Lord. "*Netra kamalam samarpayami*" (I offer my lotus eyes to the Lord). "*Srotra kamalam samarpayami*" (I offer the lotus ears to the Lord). "*Hridaya kamalam samarpayami*" (I offer the lotus of my heart to the Lord). In this manner Prithu regarded every organ as the lotus to be offered to the Lord in worship.

Today, unfortunately, when this type of worship is performed, there is no genuine feeling of dedication of the organs to the Lord. When the mantra "*Netra kamalam samarpayami*" is uttered, the real meaning is that the eyes are dedicated entirely to having visions of the Lord and nothing else. Likewise, when the devotee says, "*Srotra pushpam samarpayami*" he should realise that he is dedicating his ears solely to the Lord and will not listen to anything bad or evil. The ears should be used only for listening to stories about the Divine and spiritual teachings. This should be the feeling with which the offering is made. This was the spirit in which emperor Prithu performed *Anga Puja* and attained God-realisation. He demonstrated thereby the efficacy of this form of worship.

Hanuman is the supreme example of a devotee who practised service as the form of worship to realise God. His great acts in the service of Rama show how he was completely free from ego and how deep was his devotion to Rama at all times.

Arjuna exemplifies how devotion can be developed by cultivating the friendship of the Lord through complete faith and loyalty. Friendship implies also love. Arjuna's love was totally concentrated on Krishna. He acquired all powers by the grace of Krishna.

Emperor Bali's *Atmanivedanam*

Emperor Bali is the example of *Atmanivedanam* complete self-surrender in the devotion to the Lord. "I offer to you, Oh Lord! all my wealth and possessions, as well as my entire self. I take refuge in you, protect me, Oh Lord!" This was the sense of abnegation with which Bali offered himself to Lord Vamana. Bali welcomed Vamana with open arms and promised to him that he would offer the young Brahmin lad whatever he desired. He offered to wash the feet of Vamana and sanctify himself by sprinkling that water on his own head. Bali's preceptor, Sukracharya was an all-knowing counsellor. Aware that Vamana was an incarnation of Vishnu, he advised Bali to go back on his offer to Vamana. But Bali's magnanimity and greatness may be seen in the fact that he refused to accept his preceptor's advice. Bali said, "When the Lord Himself has come to me with out-stretched hands asking for a gift, what greater good fortune can I have than making the gift from my humble hands? I am prepared to give away everything regardless of what happens to me."

The *Vedas* have declared that in observing *Dharma* and doing one's duty by the Divine, the opposing words of no one--father, mother, preceptor or anybody else should be heeded. Bharata, Prahlada, Meera and others are examples of those who went against the injunctions of mother, father, husband respectively in adhering to their devotion to the Lord. No one is entitled to be a barrier between the devotee and the Lord, whatever is his relationship with the devotee.

Kerala is the Land of three *Avatars*

Bali was a great devotee. He identified his well-being with the welfare of his subjects and was an exemplary ruler. He considered the people as limbs of his own body. The people also regarded him as the heart of the body of citizenry. In Bali's realm poverty and want were unknown. The country enjoyed prosperity through timely rains and good harvests. Even today Kerala is a land

of luscious vegetation enjoying the bounties of nature. Because it was such a sacred region, it witnessed three Avatars of the Divine: the *Varaha Avatar* (in which Lord took the form of a boar to destroy Hiranyaksha), the *Narasimha Avatar* (for the protection of Prahlada) and the *Vamana Avatar* (for conferring immortal glory on Bali). It is significant that all the three *avatars* were concerned with redeeming members belonging to the same lineage: Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada and Bali (Prahlada's grandson).

Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu were brothers who were originally the gate-keepers of Vishnu---Jaya and Vijaya. They were born as demons as a result of a curse by sages whom they had offended. They had been filled with pride because of their constant nearness to God and the service they were rendering' In their pride they slighted even the sages and consequently they had to take birth as demons. No room should be given to self-conceit which is an incurable disease. Because of their conceit even the great ones are made to be born as demons. This was the fate of ,Jaya and Vijaya, the guardians of the Lord's *abode--Vaikunta*.

The mystery of Lord's creation

Prahlada was the son of Hiranyakasipu. The father was the avowed enemy of Hari. The son was the steadfast devotee of Hari. Virochana was the son of Prahlada. To a great devotee like Prahlada, a wicked son like Virochana was born. Bali was the son of Virochana. Bali was a great devotee of the Lord. Such is the mystery of the Lord's creation, its inexplicable wonders. The stories of the Lord are filled with a myriad marvels, which are as indescribable as they are countless. A wicked man having a virtuous son and a virtuous person giving birth to a wicked son are phenomena which are not without reason, though the explanation may not be apparent. In the Divine plan nothing happens without

a proper reason. The universe cannot function for a moment without the impulse of the Divine. Sri Krishna declared in the Gita "Oh Arjuna! there is nothing in the world that I need. But nevertheless I am active." If the Lord is not active, the cosmos will perish. Not understanding this truth, the ignorant indulge in futile speculation and controversy.

Spiritual significance of Onam festival

The story of Bali is full of significance spiritually and otherwise. The mutual love and regard that prevailed between the ruler and the ruled made them a composite whole. Out of his love for the people Bali gave a promise to the people, after he had given away everything he had to Vamana, that: once a year he would appear amongst them to give them the joy of his presence. The *Onam* celebration marks the fulfilment of that promise. The people of Kerala believe that every year on *Onam* day, Bali appears in spirit and otherwise in their midst. It is not easy for people to understand the inner significance and sacredness of this celebration. It can be understood only by those who have full faith in the power of the omnipotent: Lord.

Although the nine forms of devotion described above have been grouped under "*Saamaanya Bhakti*" (ordinary form of devotion), they are indeed not so. They embrace every aspect of devotion. They envisage all forms of the Divine. Every devotee who achieved God-realisation has pursued one or other of these forms of devotion.

Ananya Bhakthi refers to that kind of devotion which is based on the conviction that there is nothing in the universe other than God and that everything in creation is a manifestation of God. God is immanent in the subtlest particle in the universe. The devotee sees God in everything, experiences God in every action. Nothing exists for him apart from the Divine. Wherever he

goes, it is a pilgrimage. Every action is dedicated to the Divine. Such devotees have attained God-realisation by this type of one-pointed devotion.

This form of devotion cannot be practised easily by all. It is easy to say that God is all-pervasive. But it: is not so easy to experience that truth. There are countless persons who profess to be devotees of Rama. But few can be found who have earned the love of Rama. The word "Rama" consists of the two letters "Ra" and "Ma." "Ra" means "Atma" and "Ma" means "jiva" (the individual soul). The Rama principle signifies the unity of the *Atma* and the *jiva* (the Universal Spirit: and the individual spirit). The oneness of the Supreme Omni Self and the *Jiva-Atma* (individual Self) is indicated by the term "Rama." This inner truth is not understood by many.

A true devotee is one who acts on the convictions he professes. This is what is implied in the concept of *Trikarana suddhi* (purity in thought, word and deed). The *Ananya Bhaktha* is one who continually acts on the basis of his belief that the Lord is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.

Seeing the Lord within is *Ekantha Bhakti*

Ekantha Bhakti is the form of devotion in which the devotee believes that the Lord, who pervades the external and the internal, is residing within him. He individualises the Divine that is immanent in everything. The distinction between the particular and the collective should be properly understood. One tree does not make a forest. There can be no forest without trees. This is the relationship between the *vyakti* (particular) and the *samashti* (collective). The same relationship may be seen between the *vyakti* (individual) and *sama jam* (society). The Divine in its universal cosmic form is *Paramatma* (the Omni-Self). The *Ekantha Bhaktha* individualises the Divine and worships him in a particular form. The Divine is present in myriad forms with myriad names.

There is nothing sweeter in the world than the Divine name. The Name and the Form go together. The inextricable connection between name and form has to be rightly understood. The name is a form of wealth. The form is an object to be purchased. Once you have money you can buy whatever you want. Likewise with wealth of the Lord's Name in your hands, you can obtain whatever you desire. Therefore every devotee has to acquire the wealth of the Name. This can be through *bhajans* and meditation on the Name of the Lord. In this context, devotees have to develop four types of spiritual discipline *Maitri* (friendliness), *Karuna* (compassion), *Muditha* (rejoicing) and *Upeksha* (freedom from attachment and aversion). These appear to be simple terms, but they embody all human values. Each quality has to be cultivated in a spirit of devotion and dedication to the Divine.

***Onam* at Prashaanthi Nilayam**

Today the *Onam* festival is celebrated in every part of Kerala. However, only the *Onam* that is celebrated in Prashaanthi Nilayam is the true *Onam* festival. The reason is in Kerala the festival is celebrated and enjoyed in each home privately. You cannot witness there the coming together of all Keralites in such large numbers for the celebration. The kith and kin may come together to observe the festival. Here you have a prodigious gathering of Keralites for the celebration. This is uniquely fortunate occasion because so many have gathered to celebrate it: in one home and as one family as it were. This is the greatness of this occasion. This type of mass observance cannot be seen anywhere in Kerala. This is an occasion when the Divine Presence can be experienced

and the sense of oneness with the Divine can be promoted. Cherish this celebration as a glorious event. Install in your hearts the Divine that is the Indweller in everyone.

I bless you all with the assurance that you will make the Lord's name the means for sanctifying your lives and living righteously.

Discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium, on Onam day, 12-9-1989.

Sacrifice is the highest step. One who has the true spirit of sacrifice gives to others without any hesitation or reservation, smilingly and gladly, even his dearest and highest possession. Surrendering the fruit of action to the Lord is real sacrifice.

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