

## 18. Face the challenges of life

MAN undertakes numerous good acts and devotes his thought, word and deed to various forms of discipline to realise God. But all these efforts are not bearing the desired fruit, because man has not understood what is true spiritual *sadhana* (discipline). Those who try to follow the nine forms of worship (*Sravanam, Kirthanam, etc.*) are also failing to attain their objective because they have not grasped the inner meaning of these forms of worship.

What is meant by *sadhana*? Can *japa, dhyana, bhajans* and pious actions be called *sadhana* (spiritual effort)? Real *sadhana* consists in transforming bad into good, converting sorrow into joy. There can be no happiness without sorrow, no good without the bad. There is a continuous conflict between good and evil, between happiness and sorrow.

Happiness and misery are inseparable twins which are inextricably linked to each other. One is the beginning and the other is the culmination. Beginning and end go together. Only the Divine is free from a beginning, a middle or an end, but in worldly affairs, everything that has a beginning, has an end. Grief is not something which someone thrusts on you from outside. Troubles and difficulties are not imposed on you from outside. Grief and trouble arise in the natural course of things.

### ***Sadhana* elevates one's life to the sublime**

The refinement of life calls for continual *sadhana* (spiritual practice). Without such practice, life gets degraded. For instance, a diamond gets enhanced in value when it goes through the process of cutting and faceting. Likewise, gold, taken out as ore from the earth, becomes pure and valuable after refinement. In the same manner, *sadhana* is necessary to elevate life from the trivial to the sublime. No one is a scholar or a man of virtue at the moment of birth. It is only through various endeavours that he becomes a scholar and a righteous person.

In creation there are many things which are naturally bad. Out of these bad things, good emerges. When one desires something, the desire is associated with aversion to something else. Man's life is bound up with likes and dislikes, with good and bad thoughts, with union and separation. Hence *samsara* (worldly life) has been compared to a vast ocean on which the waves are constantly bringing about union and separation. The same ocean contains pearls and gems. Therefore, we have to face and overcome the trials and tribulations of life. If we fail in this, our life becomes a waste. Life is full of trials. If these difficulties are not there, life will have little value.

### **Powers of the mind are indescribable**

There is a saying: "Anything can be achieved by *Sadhana*." *Sadhana* means converting bad into good, transforming evil into virtue. This calls for the right use of the mind. Man is not aware of the potentialities of the mind. The mind is the cause of all our sorrows and joys. The powers of the mind are indescribable. In one moment it can encompass the universe. In another moment it can be a total blank. It can blossom in a moment and wither in a moment. The mind is the cause of both good and bad.

When we take food, we think that this food is digested by us and that the food sustains the body. But it is not food that gives us strength and energy. It is the mind that is responsible. When food is consumed, if the mind is not calm and happy, the food may get toxic. It is the mind that raises

man from the human to the Divine. Hence, it is essential to ensure purity in thoughts, words and deeds.

Man can achieve nothing without the motive power of the mind. Man gets puffed up with pride on the basis of his wealth, physical strength, scholarship and position. But very few realise whither *Ahamkara* (egoism) which kindles this pride, will lead man?

Men often receive the benediction from elders that they may be blessed with a hundred years of life. But actual experience shows that many die in the middle age or earlier. No one knows the truth about the length of one's life. The promise of a hundred years of life should not be taken on trust. Life may come to an end at any time, in boyhood, manhood or old age, and anywhere, in water, on the ground or in the sky, in a forest or in a city (Swami recited a poem in this context). No one is competent to determine the length of anyone's life. Why, then, is there mention of a hundred-year span for man in the scriptures? This is not a mere fancy of the authors of the scriptures. It is the truth. Every man should live for a hundred years. What is the reason for premature death? The wicked tendencies in man, such as arrogance, envy, bad thoughts and misdeeds, go on shearing the life of man into pieces. His bad qualities shorten the life of man. When a man's life is filled with good thoughts and good actions, he can live for a hundred years. The secret of the longevity enjoyed by the ancient sages is precisely this. Man today wastes his life in bad thoughts and bad actions and ends his life in a bad way.

### **Egoism dims a man's vision**

*Students!* Foster good thoughts and good actions with zeal. Develop devotion to God. Today faith in God has declined and respect for righteousness has diminished. Devotion is at a discount. In such a situation how can the promise of a life of hundred years be fulfilled?

People must develop faith in the Self. Without faith in himself, how can a man inspire confidence in others? He must realise his Divinity. A blind man cannot see the sun. A man filled with ego cannot know his *Atma*. Egoism dims a man's vision like a film. Get rid of egoism. All wealth, position and power are transient like passing clouds. Does a man, who devotes half his time to earning money, spend even a fraction of it on thoughts of God or on activities dedicated to helping others? His entire life is devoted to selfish pursuits. His attachment to every object is rooted in selfishness. His love for others is also based on self-interest. The slightest enquiry will reveal how deep-rooted is this selfishness. In a totally meaningless preoccupation with selfish concerns, man is sacrificing the enduring and the eternal Spirit.

It is only when man sheds his selfishness that he would be able to turn away from bad deeds. The fear of sin has gone. In fact, what are essential for man are fear of sin, love of God and morality in society. When there is no fear of sin, men will have no scruples about doing anything. When fear of sin and love of God are absent, there can be no peace in the world.

*Students!* You are the prospective redeemers of the nation. You will determine the future of this country. Hence, purify your hearts, fill your minds with sacred thoughts and consider that your bodies have been given for service to the nation. I want you to dedicate yourselves to the service of your fellowmen, with faith in the saying: "*Lokaas-samasthaas-sukhino bhavanthu!*" (Let all the worlds be happy).

### **Self-interest is the reason for all problems**

*Students!* Human life today is riddled with many problems. People are confused as to what they should believe and what they should reject, what they should do and what they should eschew. Man has lost the capacity to discriminate between the enduring and the ephemeral. He believes in the unreal and has no belief in that which should be believed. The reason for this is self-interest.

It is only when human behaviour is reformed that the world will get transformed. The process of change has to begin in men's minds. The mind is a bundle of thoughts. Thoughts lead to action. And actions account for the state of the world. When the thoughts go astray, the actions also are improper. The state of the world, good or ill, depends on the behaviour of individuals. There is nothing wrong with the world in itself. It is man's wrong desires which are the cause of his misery. Hence, keep your minds ever pure and unsullied. Keep out rigorously all bad thoughts by reciting the name of the Lord.

### **Develop the capacity for adjustment**

Man is beset with joys and sorrows and has to bear with them as with heat and cold. To live in the world completely free from troubles is not possible. Recognising the difference between good and bad, you have to lead a balanced life. Students sorely need such understanding and capacity for adjustment. Once they develop right understanding, adjustment will be easy to accomplish.

Whenever you enquire, whether it is a millionaire or a beggar, a child or a man, or a woman, every person announces himself as "I am so-and-so." This "I" that is common to everyone is the *Atma-principle*. It is common to all irrespective of moods and conditions. The *Vedantic* method of arriving at Oneness by the process of *Neti* ("not this, not this") also leads to the same *Atmic* truth. The "I" exists in everyone. Once you have cultivated this "*Ekaatma bhaava*"--the spiritual oneness of all there will be no room for differences and discord. You will then feel that when you hurt or blame others, you are hurting or blaming yourself.

### **Siva teaches a lesson to Sankaracharya**

Here is an illustration from the life of Adi Sankaracharya. When Sankaracharya was in Kasi (Varanasi), at the approach of an untouchable, he said: "You fellow! keep away, keep away!" The other man asked: "Whom do you want to keep away from you? Is it the body? The body is inert. What right has your inert body to ask my inert body to keep away from it? Both are inert. How can one inert object talk to another? Or, is it the case that you want the *Atma* in me to keep away from you? The *Atma* in me is the same as the *Atma* in you. What is it that you want to go away from you?" There was an argument between the two over the body and the *Atma* at the end of which Sankaracharya realised that the person who had recognised the *Atma-principle* could be none other than the Lord Himself and prostrated before the man in front of him. At that moment Siva revealed Himself and told Sankaracharya-"It is to remove from your mind your mistaken notions that I had assumed the form of the untouchable."

Hence, you should realise that it is not possible for anyone to know in what form, in what situation, at what time and in what circumstances the Lord appears to man to teach him how to get rid of his bad thoughts, bad qualities and bad actions. Therefore, you must make every effort to keep out bad thoughts and bad qualities and try to sanctify your life by good thoughts and

good actions. This is true *sadhana* (spiritual discipline). Sitting in so-called meditation without getting rid of your bad qualities is utterly valueless. It is an "artificial" exercise. What you should do must come from the heart. A great deal of what passes for *japa*, *dhyana*, *yajna* and *yaga* is artificial and has nothing to do with the heart. The result is that the fruits of such exercises are also artificial. These are not fruits coming from God. They are the products of one's own actions. Hence, do not blame God for anything. For all your difficulties and joys, your actions alone are responsible. Keeping this truth in mind, you have to follow the path of righteousness.

### **What is the day that is really sacred?**

*Students!* During the past twelve days, you have enjoyed discourses on various matters relating to the Spirit, the bliss divine, worldly problems and have tried to understand the underlying truth. Days spent in this way are the greatest moments in life. Hence I have often reminded you'

*The day when good devotees gather together and pray: "Oh Lord!"  
in sweet tones;*

*The day when you mix with the poor like brothers in fraternal  
union;*

*The day when you offer to the devotees of God delicious food;*

*The day when a high-souled devotee comes to you and relates  
stories of the Divine;*

*Only that day is a really sacred day.*

*All others are days of mourning for the dead.*

This means that only that day is a real day (in your life) when you help people in need and make them happy. I cannot say that the penance on which we embarked in this Summer Course will now come to an end. There is nothing like a completion for this exercise. It is an endless spiritual undertaking.

Consider what constitutes *tapas* (penance). It is the performance of duties assigned to you. Today, because people have forgotten their duties and responsibilities, what should be *Tapas* has turned into *Tamas* (the darkness of ignorance). Hence, you have to carry out all through this *tapas* relating to your duties. Discharge of your duty is the daily *yajna* (spiritual offering) you have to perform. That is the primary spiritual exercise. That is the penance you have to do and that is the goal you have to keep in mind.

I desire that our students should dedicate their entire lives to the service of others, harmonising their personal interests with their concern for others, and lead exemplary lives.

*Discourse at the Institute Auditorium at Brindavan, on 1-6-1991.*

*One should have a mind filled with Samarasa, a vision of equality,  
the conviction that fundamentally all are same. The spiritual life is  
not a matter of meaningless talk; it is really life lived in the Atman;  
it is the experience of Pure Ananda; it is just another name for the  
Full Life.*

*BABA*