

4. Idol worship and God Omnipresence

One kind word pleases everybody.

Why, then, should you be miserly in soft speech?

By pleasing words all beings are happy.

Therefore speak lovingly always

Why be chary in the use of kind words?

EMBODIMENTS of Love! Pleasing speech confers immense joy on man. There is no scarcity of pleasant words. Hence everyone should speak sweetly to all.

"There is an atomic particle subtler than the atom.

There is something vaster than

The vastest you can imagine.

The atom is in the immense and

The immense is in the atom.

The Aathma is in the atom as the Spirit"

says a Telugu Poem.

The entire phenomenal universe is a manifestation of the atom. The water you drink, the air you breathe, and the sounds you hear are all composed of atoms. The five basic elements (space, air, water, fire and earth) are all made up of atoms and pervade the universe. The Cosmos is the embodiment of the five elements. For this reason, the ancients regarded the universe as a manifestation of God.

Long before men started exploring the secrets of the atom and discovering the nature of atomic energy, even before scientists began to understand the nature of spirituality, Bhaaratheeyas worshipped the *Bhuumi* (Earth.) as divine. Because the five elements were present in the Earth, they adored the Earth as *Bhuudhevi*, the Earth Goddess.

Moreover, they worshipped water as *Ganga. Dhevi*, recognizing the divine element in water. The Fire God comes next. The fourth is *Vaayudeva* (the Lord of Wind). The fifth is *Shabdha Brahman*, the Divine as primal sound. Thus, all the five elements were considered manifestations of the Divine and worshipped as such by the Bhaaratheeyas, Outsiders who did not understand the profound significance of the worship of the elements, treated them with levity.

The worship of forms or idols

Every atom has a form. There is no object in the universe without a form. The form is *Vigraha* (an expression of the Divine Idol). Members of other faiths considered idol worship as irrational. They ridiculed idol worship as a form of superstition, but they made no attempt to explain the worship of the formless.

Every person begins to learn about all objects only in relation to their forms. People could not conceive of God as omnipresent, who is in every object and in every individual. Some were able to conceive that the atom is present in every, object and everywhere. But it was only in the seventeenth century that atomic physics came into existence. But long before this, the child

Prahlaadha realised the omnipresence of the Divine. He told his father: "Do not have any doubts that the Divine is present here and not there. He is omnipresent. You can find Him wherever you seek Him."

What Prahlaadha declared millennia ago, the scientists of today are discovering, namely, that the energy that is present in the all-pervading atom is divine.

I point my finger at the mike and tell you: "This is a mike." After you have seen the mike, you don't need the finger to point it out. I point to a flower and say: "This is a flower." After you have seen the flower, there is no need for the finger to point it. Likewise, idols were used to point out God. Until God-realisation comes, idols are essential. After God-realisation there is no need for idols.

Why worship idols?

If a girl before her marriage is asked to describe her future husband, how can she do it? She can describe the husband only after the marriage. Likewise, after worshipping an idol and gaining experience of divinity by such worship, one would be able to describe one's experience of God. Before worshipping God and gaining spiritual experience, how can anyone say anything about the nature of Divine? Hence, it is necessary to develop faith in idol worship. It should be realised that every object is a manifestation of God. Every atom is divine.

Respect for the National Flag

Some people ask whether it is not foolish to worship an inanimate inanimate figure as God. This question is born of ignorance. Today ninety crores of Bhaaratheeyas hoist the National Flag and revere it. Before the Flag could attain this status, many sacrificed their all for the freedom of the country. Many suffered long terms of imprisonment. They went through all this suffering so that they could have their own flag in a free country. On August 15th and January 26th, the National Flag is hoisted all over the country and revered as the symbol of national freedom. In the same manner people in other countries revere their respective national flags. Moreover, people respect even their party flags. Is this flag animate? Has it any vitality or power in it? When you enquire like this you discover that it is the faith in the flag that makes it adorable.

Likewise, if the question is asked whether a stone idol that is worshipped has any life or consciousness in it, they will find the answer from the example of the honour done to the national flag.

How does a square yard of cotton cloth made into a flag acquire its value? The value is derived from the fact that the flag is a symbol of the victory achieved in the freedom struggle. That victory has no form. The flag demonstrates the achievement of that victory. Without the flag how do you demonstrate the victory in the freedom struggle?

Take another example. There is a 100-rupee note. It is lifeless. But you take good care of it because it represents wealth. All people seek wealth. Money as such has no qualities like goodness. But the possessor of money has qualities. Money is a symbol of power.

The fragrance emanating from a flower has no form, but the flower has a form.

Take love, for instance. It has no form. But the mother who exhibits love for her child has a form. If there is no mother, how can there be love?

Every form deserves to be worshipped

The idols that are worshipped are the answers to those who go about asking, "Where is God?" The truth is, God is present in every atom. Every atom represents the power of the Divine. Every atom deserves to be worshipped. All objects in Creation have to be respected. Men have to cultivate this feeling of reverence for all things.

But, believing that the physical body is permanent and is all in all, men are wasting their lives in the pursuit of the ephemeral and the transient. There can be no action without the body. Without action there can be no fruits, Hence the body is at the base of everything. The body is a *Vigraha* (embodied form). The mother is a form. The preceptor is a form. All are forms. The term *Vigraha* also means an idol that is an object of worship. But these *Vigrahas* have a certain value. It is through them that we can realise the Divine. It is impossible to conceive in this world any kind of *Aaraadhana* (worship) without a form. Worship of the formless is misconceived. It is these misguided persons who preach against idol worship.

In every religion there is a distinct form for worship. For example: *Prakrithi* (Nature). Nature has the power of attraction. It contains all the five elements. It is from Nature that we get our food. Nature is the source of all minerals. Nature is the sustainer of man in ordinary life. That being the case, what is wrong in adoring Nature? Should we not be grateful to that which provides so many things for our needs? That gratitude is a form of worship.

Every man is composed of the five elements. Man cannot exist without these elements. Is there no obligation to express one's gratitude to them?

Nature has the power of attraction. This is called magnetism. Nature has immense magnetic power. Every object is affected by this magnetic power. The object also gets magnetized in the process and acquires magnetic power.

The power of idols

Today scientists are trying to understand this power of attraction in Nature. Take, for instance, a temple. Thousands of people go to the temple for worship. The magnetic power in the earth extends to the idol in the sanctum. The thoughts of the worshippers are also attracted by the idol. Thereby the power of attraction in the idol gets intensified. The rituals performed for the idol also enhance its power of attraction. This process can be noticed if a couple of nails are kept near a magnet. After two days it will be found that the nails also have been magnetised. In the same manner when worshippers go to a temple the power goes forth from thousands of worshippers, the power or a action in the idol gets immensely intensified. The idol surcharged with this power is able to energize the worshippers.

Thus, in the world there is no object without this power. Atomic energy is present everywhere. It is only when the true character of this atomic power is understood that the power of the Divine can also be understood.

"Shankara" is made up of the two words, '*Sham*' and '*kara*.' What does '*Sham*' mean? '*Sham*' is that which is all-pervading like air. The air is filled with bliss. Shankara is one who offers this bliss to all. *Nithyaanandha* (everlasting bliss), *Brahmaanandha* (Supreme Bliss) and every kind of bliss is conferred by Shankara.

"Eeshvara" is the embodiment of wealth

There is the term "Eeshvara." It refers to one who is the embodiment of *Aishvarya* (every form of wealth and prosperity). *Aishvarya* is not confined to material wealth alone. It includes also the wealth of health, of intelligence, of physical prowess. *Aishvarya* represents this omnibus opulence, including *Aanandha* (bliss). Eeshvara is the one who confers every kind of opulence.

What is the form of this *Aanandha*? Experience alone is the form of this bliss. This bliss can be experienced only by God-realisation and not by any other means. Bliss is all-pervading, but it not visible. For that reason, its existence cannot be denied.

Eeshvarathva (Divinity) is all-pervading. By losing faith in the Divine, turning into unbelievers, moving away from bliss, men are becoming a prey to worry. This is totally wrong. A life without faith is like water poured on a sieve. Bliss must be secured through faith.

The Divine is omnipresent. All of you are forms of the Divine. All of you are endowed with electromagnetic energy, atomic power, heat and other forms of energy. The magnetic energy is the most important power in man. From this magnetic energy comes electrical energy. The strength of the electrical energy is related to the strength of the magnetic energy. When the electrical and the magnetic energies come together, the divine power operates. This divine power does not come from outside. It is within human beings. Our very form is divine. That is why I address you all as "*Embodiments of the Divine Aathma*."

By failing to recognise this truth, people are going in search of God here and there. God is everywhere. Make every effort 'to recognise this fundamental truth.

Meaning of "the search for truth"

People talk about *Sathya-anveshana* (the search for truth). What is this search? Truth is everywhere. Consider this example. Your eyes see the mother, the child, the wife, the cook, and the daughter-in-law. The eyes are the same but they see different persons with different emotions. The search for truth means seeing everything in its own true, specific nature. All the persons may be feminine and the eyes that see them are one and the same. But to find out the truth one has to determine how he should view each person in relation to that person's state.

Consider, again, the role of the tongue. The same tongue may indulge in falsehood or stand for truth. The same tongue may revile at others or praise them. The tongue's role in the quest for truth is to determine when a lie may be uttered or the truth should be spoken, when blame or praise is justified.

Truth resides in you. It is the appropriate application to specific objects which determines what is true.

Hence, if you want to discover the Divine who is omnipresent there must be a change in outlook within you. When you realise your own inherent divinity, you will be able to recognise the divinity in others.

Significance of idol worship

Idol worship should not be regarded as a meaningless exercise. It is a good practice because on the basis of the idol the higher consciousness is attained. In a home, there are pictures of grandparents and great-grandparents. The present generation has not seen them. But they offer garlands to the pictures and revere the ancestors. Is there life in the pictures? Do they exhibit any

love? Do the pictures by themselves reveal any relationship? Not at all. But the pictures are revered out of the feeling that they represent one's ancestors. If such a loving feeling did not exist, the pictures will not be kept in the house. Likewise it is the attachment for an object that inspires respect and reverence. This is termed devotion. This devotion should be shown towards all objects because the Divine is in everything, in every atom. It may be difficult to cultivate such devotion. But once its rationale is properly understood, the practice of devotion will become easy.

There have been controversies and doubts about this in the past. For instance, a school of philosophers known as Charvaakas used to deride idol worship. But later on, they also recognized its value. They realised that everything in the world has a form, from the atom onwards, and that everything with a form was *Vigraham* (an idol) fit for worship. What is the form of water? Here in this tumbler is some water and its form is derived from the tumbler. Likewise air acquires the form of the balloon in which it is confined. Similarly when the body is filled with Divine energy, the Divine acquires the human form. The all-pervading Divine thus acquires the form in which it manifests itself. Perform your worship to the Divine with awareness of the truth that the Divine is omnipresent and is therefore in the idol that is worshipped. And then you are bound to have a vision of the Divine.

The truth about the omnipresence of the Divine was evident to the Gopikas who sang in praise of Krishna:

O Krishna! How can anyone know your mystery?

You are subtler than the atom and

vaster than the vastest thing in the world!

You are present in myriads of beings in this

vast universe in innumerable forms.

How can we ever know you?

"You are a thief among thieves, a good man among the good. You manifest the qualities of the object in which you dwell. You are everything."

Infinite forms of the Lord

Those who have studied the *Vibhuuthi Yoga* in the Bhagavath Geetha will know the infinity of forms which the Lord assumes. All forms are His. If one has faith that the lord is present in the atom, one will have a vision of the Lord even in the atom. But if you make a distinction between different objects, treat some as pure and others as impure, you will not get that vision. Till the realisation that everything is permeated by God comes to one, he must worship an idol as a sacred symbol. A sculptor creates an idol out of a rock. Because of the form given to it, it is installed in a temple and worshipped. In fashioning the idol, the sculptor chisels away many chips of stone. The chips may proclaim verily their kinship with the idol worshipped in the temple. They may say: "You and we are one. The only difference is, you have a form and we have none."

Thus, the Divine exists both in the form and in the "formless". It is because this concept of the Universe is not understood that faith has declined.

Faith is at the root of spirituality. If you believe that God exists, He exists. If you have no belief, so far as you are concerned God does not exist.

When you believe in God, you develop faith in the divinity of all things. Faith is the basis of worship. Worship leads to oneness with the Divine. The sense of separateness will persist as long as there is no God realisation. Separateness ends with Realisation.

Science and Vedhaantha say 'the same in substance

Scientists are tending to realise the basic unity of the energy that fills the universe. Vedhaantha describes that Unity as *Brahman* (the Supreme all-pervading Absolute Consciousness). The terms used are different, but in substance they are saying the same thing; namely that the One subsumes the many.

With regard to divinity, there is no meaning in making a distinction between the Divine with form and the formless divinity. How can you conceive of the Formless Divine? You cannot avoid idol worship until you have experience of the Divine within you. Raamakrishna Paramahansa once told a disciple--who asked why he (the disciple) was not able to see God--whether he yearned for God with the same intensity with which he sought many worldly things. If he did so, he would certainly have a vision of God. When a similar question was put to Buddha, he said that without indulging in speculation about God if one practised truth, righteousness and non-violence he would have the highest experience.

The ways of Svaami

Many people who have some questions regarding Svaami do not realise the ways of the Divine. They look at all things from the worldly point of view. They should look at things from the Divine point of view. Change the angle of your vision. When you practise seeing the world from the point of view of the omnipresence of the Divine, you will get transformed. You will experience the power of the Divine in everything in creation. You cannot hide anything from God. Many imagine that Svaami does not see what they are doing. They do not realise that Svaami has a myriad eyes. Even your eyes are divine. But you are not aware of your true nature. When you have faith in yourself, you will have faith in God. Realise that there is nothing beyond the power of God. Love God with that supreme faith. Then you will be drawn towards God. It needs purity. A magnet cannot attract a piece of iron covered with rust. Similarly God will not draw to Himself an impure person. Hence, change your feelings and thoughts and develop the conviction that God is everything. God will not give you up when you have this conviction.

Today is Shivarathri, the Night of Auspiciousness. This is the occasion for cherishing auspicious thoughts and praying for auspicious action and conduct in life. You must get rid of narrow and petty feelings.

Men today have lost the spirit of sacrifice. Three things are essential for every man love of one's country, sacrifice and following the godly path of spirituality. One is a true human being only when he has these three qualities. To know is the function of the mind. To act is the duty of the body. To remain as the Eternal Witness is the function of the *Aathma*. Mind, body and *Aathma* together constitute humanness. The Divine is present in all three.

God has provided everything for man's good in the world. But there is one condition that has to be observed. The results of your actions will be according to their nature, whether they are good or bad. Men today want to reap the fruits of good deeds without performing good deeds. This is impossible. Nor can they escape the consequences of their evil actions. God is only a witness.

At least from now on, develop good thoughts, do good actions and redeem your lives. You have to start with the *Karma Maarga* (the path of Action), and end with *Jnaana Maarga* (the path of knowledge). In between there is the *Upaasana Maarga* (the path of Worship). This is the path you have to follow today. For this you have to get the conviction that God is omnipresent. When you have that conviction, you will not indulge in falsehood or practise deception, you will not abuse others or cause harm to them, you will acquire all virtues. This is the purpose of observing Shivaraathri as a Sacred Night. The night vigil should be dedicated entirely to contemplation of God.

Develop the firm conviction that God is within you and that you are Divine. Love is God and God is Love. Live in love and make your entire life a saga of love.

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