

ROAD TO DIVINITY

In the worthless mens' hearts devoid of purity,
Do abide the vices of anger and envy.
Don't bats abound in dens of darkness?
Never should you forget this wise saying.

He alone is a man who seeks the One
Who blest his ears with the power to hear
And endowed his eyes with the glow of sight.

Embodiments of Divine Love!

Control of the senses must be the primary aim of students, but not the fleeting pleasures of the sense objects, which give but a little momentary joy followed by endless misery. The sensory perceptions, namely, hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling, are more powerful than the sense organs. The most important among the sense organs is the tongue. If the tongue is conquered, it virtually amounts to mastering all the senses. The tongue has two important functions: eating and talking. Whoever is able to conquer these two faculties of the tongue can merge himself in the divine Self. When the tongue stops talking, the mind starts chatting. To control the mind's prattling, the intellect has to be awakened. Then one should gently persuade the intellect to turn gradually toward the *Atma*.

True *sadhana* (spiritual practice) consists in the technique of merging the *vaak* (faculty of speech) in the mind, the mind in the intellect, and finally the intellect in the *Atma*. Forgetting this sacred and royal road available to man, it is sad that he chooses to indulge in sensual pleasures, which ultimately drown him in deep sorrow. No one tries to find out what the ultimate source of animation for the insentient senses is, nor does one seek to know who the real enjoyer is of all the pleasures derived through the senses. Students should recognise that there is an intimate relationship between the external world and the internal world within oneself. Is it the body or the senses or the *Atma* that experiences the pleasures of eating delicious food or seeing a beautiful sight, or smelling a fragrant object? It is not the body, much less the sense organs. The real experiencer in all these cases is the *Atma*, which is the causeless cause of all that exists and which fosters, sustains, presides, and rules over all the things in the universe. *Atma* is the basis for the manifested world and the original source of motivation for the internal world. Only when we recognise the cardinal role of the *Atma* as the root cause of everything will the deceptive and transient sense organs cease to have dominance over us.

Of all the sense organs, the tongue has an overriding importance and influence. Mastery over this one sense organ will enable one to master easily all the other sense organs. The *Kathopanishad* has compared the senses to horses. A horse can run fast; but once a bridle is put in its mouth and held tight, its entire movement can be easily controlled. How can a small bridle control such a large, strong and fast-running animal? Because, the mouth is the most important and vulnerable part of the horse from the standpoint of keeping it under control. Once the mouth is bridled, the entire animal comes under control. Likewise in the case of man also, the mouth is the most important among the five

sense organs. With the help of a small rudder, we can save a big boat from a fierce cyclone. With a small spark we can kindle a bonfire. The power of speech is like a spark of fire. By controlling the tongue, one can virtually acquire control over the world itself. The power of speech can be used either for a noble and sublime purpose or misused in a mean and mischievous manner. It can be utilised for blessing people or for blaming others. Bilwamangal, alias Jayadeva, sings thus addressing the tongue in words that combine compliments with counseling: “Oh my dear tongue! You are sweet. You have the capacity to discriminate between good and bad taste. So I am telling you the supremely benevolent truth. Do not indulge in idle talk; instead of it make yourself busy by singing the sweet and glorious names of the Lord—Govinda! Damodara! Madhava! etc.” There is a familiar saying “A slip of the foot may not cause much harm, but a slip of the tongue will land you in hell.” A reckless use of your tongue can grievously hurt others’ hearts. And no doctor on earth can heal the wound caused by a harsh word.

When the senses come in contact with sense objects, they can give rise to immense pleasure as well as endless pain. For instance, someone outside is abusing you; as long as the abuse is beyond the range of your sense organs, you are not in any way affected by it. But once the abusive words reach your ears, you become enraged and excited beyond control. What is the reason for your being upset like that? As long as there was no contact between the sound waves and your ears, you were unruffled. It was the subsequent contact between the two that provoked the strong reaction in you. To take a contrasting example: someone outside is praising you, extolling your admirable qualities. As long as you have not heard his words of praise, you derive no joy nor do you entertain a feeling of endearment toward him. But once his words of praise have reached your ears, you rejoice in them and develop great love for the speaker. What is the reason for the hatred in the first example and for the love in the second one? It is only the contact between the senses and their objects. Thus it becomes clear that the senses can enjoy peace only when they do not come in contact with sense objects. In the alternative, one should be able to maintain a feeling of equanimity without giving way either to elation or agitation in spite of a contact between his senses and their objects and irrespective of whether the outcome of such a contact is pleasant or otherwise.

It should, however, be recognised that it is neither easy nor always possible to prevent the senses and their objects from coming into mutual contact. On the contrary, it is possible, with some effort, to develop an attitude of equipoise, notwithstanding such contacts, which are more often unavoidable. To foster such an attitude, you should resort to the path of enquiry and thereby develop the firm conviction, “I am neither the body nor the sense organs. I am the ever-blissful *Atma*.” Only when you are unshakeably established in this conviction will the sense organs cease to trouble you. It is only through the pursuit of the path of enquiry accompanied by the constant contemplation on the idea that you are nothing other than the *Atma* that you can transcend the human limitations and experience your divine Self under all circumstances.

You may have heard about the great philosopher, Philip Sydney. As a boy, while he was staying away from his parents to attend school in another town, his father wrote him a letter giving some words of advice as follows. “My dear son! Every day offer your heartfelt prayer to God. Always strive to turn your mind toward God. Conduct yourself with respect and humility toward your teachers and fellow students. Do not give room for anger, disappointment, or discontentment. Don’t get distressed when others criticise and abuse you or get elated when they praise you. Never criticise others.” The father con-

cluded his letter with the following important caution to his son, “If ever you have to make a promise, make it only to God and to none else. Speech is God’s gift. Hence you have no right to give a pledge to any one else. The plighted word should be offered only to God. If you follow this rule, you will grow in wisdom and your glory will shine. Always exercise control over your tongue and never allow it to run amuck. Thus you will stand forth as an ideal student in society.” Philip Sydney scrupulously followed his father’s advice and achieved great eminence as a philosopher.

Students should note that too much talking is harmful to their mind. They should not concern themselves with any matters other than their studies. They must remember that they are seekers of knowledge and not seekers of extraneous things. Only after finishing your studies can you engage yourselves in other activities. Even then, you should be guided by the rule of moderation; never exceed the limits either of talking or in other matters relating to your daily life. The tongue is prone to four types of lapses: (1) Uttering lies, (2) Carrying tales against others, (3) Criticising or scandalising others, and (4) Excessive talking. It is these four tendencies that deprive man of his peace of mind. One should speak only the truth. Of course, in some rare cases, it may be dangerous to speak the truth. Under such circumstances, you should be discreet enough to avoid speaking either truth or untruth. Only thus can you be a success in society.

The senses are extremely powerful. They are the root cause for all the joys and sorrows of mankind. You should, therefore, try to understand thoroughly the nature and role of the senses and harness them to your best advantage. An eminent poet sang thus about the havoc that the senses are capable of: “If the head harbours wicked thoughts, if the tongue indulges in calumny, if the eyes are keen to observe others’ lapses, if the ears are alert to overhear others, if the mind and heart are bent upon deceiving others—at the very sight of these monstrosities, justice and fair play will not survive at all.”

Man’s stronghold should be to adhere to the path of truth, rectitude, and justice. But man’s tragedy is that he becomes a helpless victim of his five senses, which lead him astray and land him in endless problems. We have the classic examples of each kind of animal or insect being trapped and even losing its life on account of its weakness for one sense alone—the deer for the sense of sound, the elephant for the sense of touch, the moth for the sense of sight, the fish for the sense of taste, and the bee for the sense of smell. Hence, one can easily imagine the plight of man who is the unfortunate victim of all the five senses. In this context, the students should follow the shining example of the young devotee Prahlada. Despite all the tempting allurements designed by his father, despite all the ingenuous tutoring by his teachers at the insistence of his father, and despite all the intimidations and tortures as well as all the cruel attempts to kill him outright, Prahlada never succumbed to the sensual ways of worldly life but stuck tenaciously to the spiritual path, with the Lord’s name ever dancing on his tongue. He even used to lead his fellow-students also on the spiritual path, inspiring them with his melodious devotional songs and stories. Here is a sample of an interesting story that he had learnt from the Sage Narada and that he narrated to his young friends:

There was a king who had many wives. He had no peace of mind because of them. One day he wanted to find out whether there was any man in his entire kingdom who was free from worries due to a nagging wife. So after giving wide publicity, he arranged two big tents (pandals), the first one for those who were under their wives’ control and the second one for those who had control over their wives. By sunset, the first tent was filled to capacity, whereas there was not a single man in the second tent. At last, one man came

suddenly and sat in the second tent. The king felt happy that there was at least one man who had control over his wife. He met him inside the tent and asked him courteously to speak the truth as to whether he had control over his wife. The man replied that he would never speak a lie and that the truth was that he was squarely under his wife's control. The king then told him about the impropriety of his sitting in the wrong tent and ordered him to go and stand in the other tent. That henpecked husband replied in agony, "Your Majesty! I have strict orders from my wife to sit in this tent only at any cost. I dare not disobey her and go to the other tent, whatever punishment you may give me or even if you take my life." The lesson of this story is: the mind, which is supposed to be the husband of his wives, namely the senses, is in the pitiable plight of being a helpless slave to them. In fact, the order of control based on the increasing order of subtlety ought to be as follows: the body, the sense organs, the mind, the intellect, and the *Atma*, each of them controlling the preceding one. This means that the *Atma*, being the subtlest of all, should hold sway over the rest of them.

Since the sense organs are highly potent, the first and foremost task for man is to bring them under his control for leading an ideal life. Because young people today have lost control over their senses, all their actions and behaviour are devious. They do not know how to sit properly in the classroom, how to walk about, how to read, how to sleep, and how to behave towards their parents, teachers, elders, and friends. They betray lack of concentration even while talking to somebody, by casting their looks hither and thither. They make unnecessary gestures and odd movements of all their limbs as if they are dancing while engaged in conversation or speech making. While walking on the road, students should have their eyes on their feet so as to avoid distractions and prevent accidents. While sleeping they should stretch their body straight and not curl themselves like a coil of wire, which is bundled. By constant practice of the right way of doing things they will develop good habits and acquire mastery over all their senses.

Students should avoid unnecessary curiosity in respect of matters that do not directly concern them. If they indulge in excessive talk with all and sundry or if they go on interfering in others' affairs, they will make themselves unpopular and unwanted by others. Everybody will try to avoid such people and thus they will lose the respect of all. It is a very bad habit for students to be standing and talking in the bazaar. If at all talking is necessary, they should do it in their hostel rooms but never in the market place. The observance of discipline in all these matters is of paramount importance to the students.

Today young people do not know how to sit properly while reading or writing, etc. They sit with their backs bent and drooping like 80-year old people. This causes various ailments and leads to premature old age. While walking or sitting, you must be straight like a rod, keeping the spine erect. There is a physiological reason for this. A very important nerve called the *sushumna naadi*, runs through the spinal column, from its base in the *mooladhara* to the *sahasraara* at top of the head. If this gets bent, serious results will follow. The importance of the *sushumna naadi* is known only to those engaged in the practice of *kundalini yoga*.

When the situation requires, we should not hesitate to carry our footwear. For instance, when we have to cross a rivulet on foot, or if it rains heavily when we are walking, it is convenient to carry our shoes. Although the worth of the footwear is very little, we should give due respect to it, because it protects our feet when required. Here is a story about how and why Sri Krishna carried the shoes of a woman. On the ninth day of the Kurukshetra war, Bhishma, the Commander of the Kaurava Army, took a serious vow

that he would kill all the Pandava brothers in the next day's battle. Droupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, came to know about this. In her great anxiety and worry, she ran to Sri Krishna, fell at His feet, and prayed to Him to save the lives of her five husbands. It was 10 p.m. Sri Krishna hit upon a strategy. He asked Droupadi to hasten to the tent of Bhishma and prostrate before him making sure that there is jingling of her bangles in the process of prostration. Further he asked her to leave her footwear with him and go to Bhishma with bare feet, because if she went with her footwear, Bhishma would be alerted by the sound of her footwear and might recognise her, in which case, His strategy of getting her blessed by Bhishma would not succeed.

According to Krishna's advice, Droupadi, with her head veil, went softly barefooted to Bhishma's tent. At that time, Bhishma was restlessly walking to and fro in his tent. He was upset by a strong feeling of remorse about the vow he had taken on the battlefield that day to kill all the Pandavas in the next day's battle. He could not eat or sleep that night because his conscience told him that the Pandavas were the very embodiment of *sathya* and *dharma* (truth and righteousness) and that it was, therefore, a great sin on his part to kill them mercilessly without any justification. Engrossed in these thoughts he was pacing up and down when Droupadi entered the tent and swiftly prostrated before him, making a jingling sound with her bangles, as suggested by Krishna. Since the sound of bangles indicated that a woman was a "sumangali", i.e. a woman whose husband was alive, Bhishma in accordance with the Hindu tradition and custom blessed her, saying, "Deergha sumangali bhava," which means "May you live long together with your husband(s)," not knowing the identity of the woman who was prostrating before him. Now Droupadi knew for certain that Bhishma's blessing would never go in vain. So, no sooner did she hear Bhishma's blessings than she joyously sprang to her feet and removing her head veil, thanked Bhishma profusely, and told him that it was for the sake of this very blessing that she came to his tent at that odd hour. Bhishma was highly surprised when he discovered that it was Droupadi whom he had blessed in a manner that ran counter to the vow he had taken. He began questioning her, "Who has designed this strategy for you? Who has shown you the way to my tent? Has anybody accompanied you?"

As he was questioning her thus, Krishna made His dramatic appearance before Bhishma and Droupadi. It did not take Bhishma long to guess that Sri Krishna, the Master Strategist of the whole universe, was behind the entire plot and the scene being enacted in his tent. Beside himself with joyous excitement, Bhishma exclaimed, "O Lord Krishna! It is quite evident now that this is all your divine plan and your impeccably perfect game!" Bhishma now felt relieved of his sense of remorse, and, in fact, he even felt glad about the whole affair, because it served the dual purpose of saving the lives of Pandavas on the one hand and saving himself on the other hand from the ignominy and sin of slaying the virtuous Pandavas.

Now that Bhishma was relieved of his tension and anxiety and became his normal self, he felt the pangs of hunger; because due to the worried state of his mind till a little while ago, he did not feel hungry and hence he had not eaten anything that night after that day's fierce fighting in the battlefield. He then noticed some packet that Krishna was carrying in his armpit. Thinking that it might be a packet of some eatables that could relieve his hunger, he eagerly asked Krishna about the contents of the packet. The playful Krishna suddenly let go the packet from his armpit, and when it got ripped while falling on the ground, what did Bhishma as well as Droupadi see to their utter amazement? Lo and behold, a pair of shoes! With a mischievous smile Krishna pointed His finger toward

them saying, “They are Droupadi’s slippers.” Both Bhishma and Droupadi could not contain themselves, because, leave alone Bhishma, even Droupadi never expected or suspected that Krishna would carry her slippers. Both of them began shedding profuse tears of ecstasy at what the Lord did. Choked with emotion, Bhishma exclaimed, “O Lord Krishna! Who can understand Your divine *leelas*? There is no limit to the troubles You undergo in order to protect Your devotees who have surrendered themselves at Your Lotus Feet. In order to save Your devotees, You never hesitate to do even such things which others would consider as demeaning, degrading, or debasing. What a Merciful Lord You are!”

The lesson that students should learn from this story is that they should not consider anything as mean and beneath their dignity, as long as it serves the purpose of helping the needy, without deviating however from the path of rectitude. Our ancient scriptures like the *Vedas*, *Sastras*, *Puranas* —mythological books— and *Ithihasas* —Epics— provide plenty of shining examples of people who led such noble and ideal lives. But the students of today are so ignorant about our scriptures that they do not know what is meant by *Sastras* or *Ramayana* or *Parayana* —recital of scriptures. Thus, they are forfeiting the rich heritage of their glorious culture and tradition. Students of the Sai Educational system should, therefore, become pioneers in imbibing a judicious and harmonious combination of both secular and sacred learning i.e. acquiring both scientific and spiritual knowledge.

You hear people talking about “culture” and “spirituality” as if they are two different things. In My view, culture is only the essence derived from spirituality. Just as sugar is common to all the varieties of sweets, which are seemingly different from one another, spirituality is common to the seemingly different cultures of all lands and nations. In short, you should recognise that culture is a part of the all-inclusive spirituality. You must cultivate and develop this all-inclusive unitary vision. The various organs and limbs of the body are not different from the body. *Viswam* (the universe) is not separate from Vishnu (God). Likewise, you have to recognise that what you call “secular” and “sacred” or “worldly” and “spiritual” are not two discrete and unrelated things but only two facets of one indivisible Reality or Truth. You can easily grasp this fact if you consider the example of a bean seed, which consists of two cotyledons covered by a common seed-coat. When the bean seed is sown in the field and when it germinates, you can see the sapling consisting of the two thick cotyledons with the plumule in between them. The seedling grows, deriving its nourishment from both the cotyledons. So also, the seedling called human being requires for his growth and full development both the secular and sacred aspects of life. These two aspects of life neither exist nor can they thrive independently in isolation from each other. They are both intimately and inextricably related. The sum total of these two aspects is what you call “culture”. People lacking in such broad-minded unitary vision see the apparent and even imaginary differences between the culture of one nation and another. True wisdom lies in discerning and discovering the fundamental unity behind the superficial differences in the world culture. The same thing applies to the concept of religions too. To say that Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc. are different religions betrays not only narrow-mindedness but also the lack of understanding about the meaning of “religion”. “Religion” means “Realisation”. Since realisation is one and the same, irrespective of whatever religion is professed by different men, it logically follows that basically all religions are one; or to be more accurate, there is only one religion.

In this connection, there is a small story. When Krishna went to Dhritharashtra as an ambassador on behalf of the Pandavas, Dhritharashtra asked Him, “O Krishna, the Pandavas and Kauravas are the sons of two brothers. Being divine, why are you partial to the Pandavas? Why don’t you love the Kauravas, too? Krishna replied, “O King, I am sorry to say that you are blind not only physically but also spiritually. You should understand that I cannot but support and help those who take refuge in Me and who surrender to Me without any reservation. The celestial Sage Narada once asked Narayana about His correct address, since He had many “branch offices”. Narayana answered Narada saying that His “Head Office” or permanent address, where He stayed always, was the heart of the devotee who constantly remembered Him with supreme love and devotion. Apart from this, let me tell you the nature of the relationship between the Pandavas and Myself. Dharmaja is My head, Arjuna My shoulder, Bheema My stomach, Nakula and Sahadeva My legs. I am the heart, so we are all inseparable parts of one and the same body.”

The implication of the above reply of Krishna, in answer to Dhritharashtra, is that the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, and the *Atma* together constitute the integral human personality, illustrating the truth of the *Vedic* declaration “*Ekam Sath,*” i.e. “Existence is One.” Just as the body has several parts, the one Lord has also several names.

Students! Till now, in the Summer Course, you have been told about the body and the senses and their relationship. From tomorrow, we shall consider the interrelationship between the mind and the senses, between the intellect and the senses, as well as the *Atomic* Principle that runs as the common undercurrent that integrates and animates the entire human system.