

ASCENT OF MAN

It is God's greatness, grandeur and majesty that you see in the sky-scraping peaks of the high mountains.

It is His sublime silence and His supreme peace that you find in the remote forests and the vast deserts;

It is His glorious effulgence and beautiful splendour that you witness in the sun, the moon, and the countless galaxies in the sky;

It is His love and creativity that you find reflected in the inhabitants of villages, towns and cities that adorn the earth.

Whatever thing of beauty you come across in this universe is a reminder of, and a tribute to the "Source of All Beauty"—the Divine Lord!

Mallamma of Karnataka State gave a simple but charming description of God's omnipresent beauty in the following words: "Lotus flower is the ornament for the lake. Houses are the ornaments for a village. Waves are the ornaments for the ocean. Moon is the ornament for the sky." Whatever things of beauty you see in the world are but the reflections of the one source of all beauty—the divine Lord. That is why the *Upanishads* have described God as *Sathyam*, *Sivam*, and *Sundaram* (Truth, Goodness and Beauty). The ornament for mankind is "*mana-vatvam*". This "*mana-vatvam*" is indispensable for human society. Whether one is a reputed scholar, an eminent scientist, or a great administrator, the development of human qualities is most essential for everyone. The development of society, the state, and the nation is proportionate to the development of *mana-vatvam* or the human state. If human qualities are lost, the honour of society and the nation will be lost.

The honour of mankind depends on its morality and integrity. It is essential for the students of today to foster the human qualities. The human values can progress and thrive only in a spiritual environment. It is only when seeds are sown in the soil and watered regularly that they will sprout and develop into big trees that yield good fruits. Instead of this, if the seeds are kept in a tin and watered, they will only rot and perish. Likewise, morality and integrity can thrive only in the human heart. Morality is the fulfillment of character and conduct. Morality elevates man to a higher level. Since time immemorial, India has been sharing her spiritual wealth with the other nations of the world and spreading among them the message of morality and integrity. Morality and integrity alone are the real and eternal temples of God. In the absence of morality, the human race will go to rack and ruin. Today, the supreme need of this country and the world is morality. It is extremely necessary to observe morality in all places and in all situations. Marshal Pope taught that morality should not be violated even in times of war or any crises including risk to one's life. William Gladstone, Prime Minister to Queen Victoria, strained every nerve to safeguard morality at all times, so people respected him more than even the queen.

Morality is achieved through the control of the senses. He alone can control others who can control himself. How can one who has no self-discipline enforce discipline on others? Only when there is harmony between one's words and actions can a man achieve great things in his life.

If a man practises what he preaches,
He is not an ordinary man, but a *mahatma* (great man).
If a man says one thing and does another thing,
He is only a beast, not a man.

In modern society, there is no concord between words and deeds. If there is harmony between one's words and action, it is *sathyam*. If there is harmony between one's thought, word, and deed, it is *ritam*.

Today's students do not know what is sense-control. This is called *samyama* (self-restraint). Only man is capable of this *samyama*. Man is forfeiting his divinity by giving a free reign to his senses. The control of sense organs is called *damam* in Sanskrit. One who has achieved *damam* is called a *daanta*. What we need in today's world are *daantulu* (people with control over their sense organs), but not *Vedaantulu* (people well versed in *Vedanta*). Today, *Vedanta* is confined to oratory and ostentation; the practising of *Vedanta* is on the decline. No wonder, therefore, that there is scarcity of *Ananda* or bliss.

Every student should become a *daanta*. Even before acquiring knowledge, today's student is becoming saturated with egoism, pride, and ostentation and is running amuck in society. Students are not even aware of discipline and obedience. They do not know how to talk and behave with elders. Of course, the students are not to be blamed entirely for this state of affairs. The parents and the teachers are neither setting a proper example to them, nor encouraging them in such matters. That is why the condition of students is deteriorating day by day. Students should try to behave properly, to control their senses, and thereby to foster peace in society. The youth of today are fond of frivolous talk. This has become a hobby for them. They are allergic to good and gentle words. Spirituality is a matter of ridicule for them. Such deplorably bad atmosphere among the students is ever on the increase; so much so they are not in a position to understand even the purpose of education. They should, first of all, disabuse their minds of the wrong notion that the purpose of education is for securing jobs and earning money. They should not forget the fact that education is intended to help them to reach the goal of life. Of course, they need to take up some jobs for earning their livelihood. But they should scrupulously adhere to morality and integrity in performing their duties, without stooping to indulge in immoral practices like corruption and cheating etc. Knowledge and money are not bad in themselves. Goodness or badness depends upon how you make use of them.

Students! The air that we inhale has to be exhaled. Otherwise the lungs will be damaged. Likewise, the knowledge you learn and money you earn should be used for the good of the society. Otherwise they are as worthless as the dust under your feet. You should repay your debt to society, which has contributed to your education and earnings. This is real *seva* or Service. This kind of spirit of sacrifice is conspicuous by its absence among the present-day students. Earning and hoarding—this sort of one-way traffic seems to be their ideal in life! Many of you know how to swim. You must be aware that unless you push back the water, you cannot move forward in the process of swimming. This shows that without sacrifice, you cannot achieve progress in life. You have to sacri-

fice not only your money, but also your bad qualities. Giving up bad qualities is the true sacrifice or renunciation. Renouncing your wife and children, or wealth and property, is not a great sacrifice. It is easier than giving up your evil propensities. And the latter alone will lead to the full blossoming of the human personality.

Students! To live as a true human being is the great task of man. It is a blot on the human state for a man to live like an animal. The humanness in man is being crushed to extinction by the *arishadvarga* (the gang of the six internal foes), namely, *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, and *matsarya* (desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and jealousy). The moon can shed her cool, bright light on the earth in full measure only when she has developed all her sixteen *kalaas* (attributes in full). Man, on the other hand, can shed his effulgence on society only when he gets rid of the sixteen bad qualities, namely the six internal enemies (*arishadvarga*), eight kinds of *mada* (pride), and the two qualities of *rajas* (restlessness) and *thamas* (inertia). He must also give up *kartrithva* and *bhoktrithva* (the sense of doership and enjoyership). With the faith that all is Brahman (*Sarvam Brahman*) if one engages oneself in good actions and dedicates them to the Divine, one will receive God's grace and the help needed by Him. Potana, the great devotee and poet who wrote the Telugu *Bhagavatam*, dedicated his work to Lord Rama at the outset, by saying that Rama was the real writer and he (Potana) was a mere instrument in Rama's hands. There is a great spiritual significance to Potana's verse of dedication, which is a restatement of the famous *mahavakya*, viz. *Thath-thwam-asi* (that-thou-art). In the present instance, *Thath* or *That* is represented by the divine Lord Rama, *Thwam* or *Thou* by the poet-devotee Potana, and *Asi* or *Art* by the book *Bhagavatham*. In other words, *Bhagavan*, *Bhaktha*, and *Bhagavatha*—God, the devotee, and the scripture—are three in one. Moreover the five letters, “*Bha-ga-va-ta-mu*” have their own spiritual significance. These five letters may be considered as the five elements, five senses, five sheaths or *pancha koshas* and five life-breaths or *pancha pranas*. The letter *bha* stands for *bhakthi* or devotion, *ga* for *gyan* or *jnana* or wisdom, *va* for *vairagya* or renunciation, *ta* for *thathwam* or realisation, and *mu* for *mukthi* or liberation. Thus, these five letters represent the progressive steps for man's liberation from bondage or ignorance.

Students! You celibates or *brahmacharis* are the foundation for the mansion of life. The life of a householder may be compared to the walls and that of the recluse or *vanaprastha* to the roof. If the foundation is not secure, the whole mansion will collapse. Hence you have to develop good qualities without which there can be no peace for you or for society. Unfortunately, today's man thinks only about himself and his family, ignoring society. Without society, where are you and where is your family? This kind of narrow selfishness is prevalent among the so-called devotees also. The devotee thinks about himself and his work first, and about God and His work next, if at all. It is because of this kind of self-centredness that man is unable to enjoy peace or bliss. The Kauravas' formula for life was: “First I, next world, and last God. That is why they lost everything, including their lives. On the contrary, the Pandavas' formula was “First God, next world and last I.” Hence they came out victorious. There are a number of such instances in our history, which illustrate the prime need to kill the ego.

Students! It is natural for you at your young age to be proud and hasty or impetuous. But true education should result in humility. Sanctify your life, your body, your youth, your time and your actions. Study well and pass with distinction. Make use of your knowledge for the benefit of the society. Recognise that pride and spirituality are the opposite sides of a see-saw. If pride goes up, spirituality goes down and vice versa. It is due

to *ahamkara* only that man forgets himself. The greatest and the real bondage is to forget one's own reality. To recognise one's own reality is the true *sakshatkara* or realisation. If there is no change in your attitude, all your spiritual practices like *japa*, meditation, *yoga*, *karma*, *seva* or service will serve no purpose. It is not the man but the mind that should change. The change of character is more important than the change of clothes.

There are three things you should never forget, "*sathya*, *dharma*, and *nyaya*" (truth, righteousness, and justice). Our ancestors were staunch followers of these three principles in their daily lives. But nowadays these values are being neglected in India itself, not to speak of the other nations. As future guardians of Indian culture and tradition, you have to restore these values, by actually putting into practice what you have learnt here during this fortnight. Cultivate love for your country, your culture, and your religion. But on no account should you hate or criticise other countries, other cultures, other religions, and other persons. Give up narrow-mindedness and cultivate broad-mindedness. Always pray for the welfare of the entire world in accordance with the *Vedic* chanting: "*Lokaasamastah Sukhino Bhavantu*" (Let all the world be happy).

Develop love for God. Don't give up your devotion to God even if others ridicule you on that account. Don't lose faith in Him when you are in difficulties. Consider everything—pain and pleasure, loss and gain, joy and sorrow—as God's Prasad (divine gift or grace.) Don't forget to chant His Name under any circumstances. God's Name is the only reliable boat to ferry you across the river of life.