

# *Sparks from a Sacred Anvil*

Dialogues with

Śri Chandraśekhara Bharati Swami (1892-1954),  
34th Pontiff (1912-1954) of the Sri Sharada Peetam, Sringeri.

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## **Foreword**

The several aspects of our religion and practice have' been so exhaustively dealt with by a succession of brilliant authors from time immemorial that' it would seem impossible to throw further light upon them. It is only when the aspirant earnestly seeks to realize the goal of life and determinedly place his foot on the path to it he comes to know that, however helpful books might be, there is still need for a guide to lead him on.

The Guru does not attempt at thrusting ideals into the brain of his pupil but helps him to think for himself. The

homely dialogue is found to be more useful and of more permanent effect than mere books however 'interestingly written.' That is why the Upanishads and our Purānas and Itihāsas and other literature are mostly couched in the form of dialogues. Great souls who have lived and are living the true life do not ordinarily care to stoop to the level of authorship, even if they do, their personal example and their occasional words of guidance will be found more potent to help the world than any book of theirs. Even their stray sayings embodying in the simplest language the highest teachings appeal directly to the heart and the intellect of even the dullest of men.

It is my purpose here to give a free rendering of some of such valuable words which fell from the lips of His Holiness Śrī Chandraśekhara Bharati Swami, the saintly Āchārya who till recently presided over the Śringeri Mutt. That he occupied the foremost of the seats of learning founded by the great Śrī Śankarāchārya was the least among his qualifications.

That he realized the truth and lived it is sufficient to endow his sayings with incalculable value to all. I have elsewhere given samples of His method of exposition; conversational and otherwise; I confine myself here to a few scintillating thoughts which found expression when some fortunate disciples casually contacted Him.

R. K. A

## *Sparks from a Sacred Anvil*

### **1. Lessons from Life**

A Government officer who had served at many a place in South India went to Śringeri for the first time in his life and was introduced to His Holiness.

*H.H.* Is this your first visit to Śringeri?

G. Yes, though I have been wanting to come here for several years past.

*H.H.* What prevented you from coming here earlier ?

G. In my younger days I was employed in the Cuddappah District. I was told then that Śringeri was not very far from there and I immediately longed to come here. But my friends and relations told me that, though the distance was not much, the journey was a very perilous one as there were no proper means of communication, many a dense forest had to be crossed and many a steep hill ascended and they were infested with wild animals and robbers and that after all Śringeri was a small village among the mountains with no amenities of modern life and further that a dip in the waters of the River Tunga might easily infect one with malaria. This description discouraged me to such an extent that it not only damped my enthusiasm but it made me drop the idea altogether. Then I was transferred to a distant place and from there to several other places successively. Years

rolled on. But somehow my innate longing to see Śringeri persisted, though whenever I tried to carry it out some inconvenience or discouragement would always rear its head successfully against me.

*H.H.* How did you manage to come now ?

*G.* Oh, this year I felt very keenly that much time had been allowed to pass and that, whatever might be the obstacle, I ought not to mind it. So I resolved upon coming here and I have come.

*H.H.* I am very glad to see you here. But how do you feel after coming there ?

*G.* Oh, it is wonderful. The moment that I made the resolve to come here, I felt so jubilant that I felt that I could very easily face any obstacles. Strange to say, I had not the slightest inconvenience either in the train or in the motor bus journey. On the other hand, everybody that I met, on hearing that I was on my way to Śringeri, was very kind and respectful towards me and volunteered to attend to my wants throughout the journey. The forests and hills which were said to contain wild beasts and robbers offered such an enchanting and pleasant and invigorating scenery as I have not seen elsewhere. Having come here I find the waters of the Tunga very pure and healthy and certainly not malarial. The town itself is a very nice one, having all the advantages of a city and lacking only in its disadvantages. The

Temple of Śri Śarada and the Mutt are superb and soul-inspiring. I feel so much at home and so happy here that I very much regret that my holidays will soon be over and I would have to be back at my drudgery again.

*H.H.* The recital of your experience is very interesting. But did you note the parallelism ?

*G.* With what ?

*H.H.* Why, with our life itself ! When in our younger days we feel an inexplicable longing to grasp at the truth of things and think of taking up seriously the study of our Vedānta, many of our sincere friends, relations and well-wishers would be shocked at our “premature” and “ill-advised” attempt to explore the philosophical lore of our ancient sages, would assure us in threatening tones how foolhardy such an attempt was, would point out to us what dire consequences would follow such foolish inroads into forbidden ground where far greater men were still groping without knowing how to find their way in or out of it, and would cite to us, as warning examples the cases of those who had perished in their foolishness and had been lost to the world for ever. Necessarily we would be very much discouraged by such disinterested advice and would drop the attempt altogether. But when the innate longing is strong and persistent, we will come at a stage of life when we make up our mind to have that longing satisfied at any risk. Once we start with this determination we will feel before long that the road be-

fore us is really smooth and not at all thorny. Where we expected dangerous pitfalls, there will be stepping-stones. Instead of “wild beasts and robbers” on the way, we will find very kind and helping hands. When actually on the road, you will feel a joy and an exhilaration which no earthly thing can ever offer you. When you do enter into the heart and spirit of the Vedānta, you will find it so pure, clean and healthy and giving you the bliss beyond compare. The only factor in which the parallelism fails is this: after the close of your holidays, you have to return to your job though reluctantly; the holiday of the earnest aspirant who realizes the truth of the Vedānta never ends and so he has not the need any more to return to his state of bondage.

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A gentleman high placed in life once expressed to His Holiness his delight at seeing Śringeri.

G. What a glorious sight ! Such a nice spot nestling in the heart of the woods and hills ! How pure and sparkling are the waters of the Tunga ! In these days of railways and motor cars, we somehow manage to come here to enjoy the beauty of this lovely spot. In the days of Śrī Śankarāchārya there were no such facilities. He walked throughout the country only on foot. How did he find out that such a beautiful spot was just here ? When I think of it, I am lost in wonder and admiration at him.

H.H. Does the Creator of the world need any process of searching for finding out the objects of his own creation? Does He not know as a matter of course where everything is, for He Himself placed it there ? There is nothing at all, therefore, to be wondered at in the great Āchārya choosing this place as an ideal one, unless you forget that He was the Lord Himself incarnate and unless you consider Him just such a human being as we ourselves are. It is only in the latter view that any wonder or admiration can arise at any of his actions.

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One hot evening when His Holiness was seated in a spacious hall giving interviews to disciples, one of them noticed an electric table-fan nearby and turned the switch. But it refused to work as the main current had been cut off. His Holiness smiled and said:

“It is our traditional practice to seek the pardon of Mother Earth when we set foot on Her on your awaking from sleep every morning. It is well known also that all the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara dug the earth and were soon after reduced to ashes. While so, in these days we have not only ceased to look upon Earth as a Goddess, but we dig Her deep to get at the oil required for the daily consumption of our lamps. Varuna, the lord of the waters, has now been made to run our mills and supply our household with water just by the turning of a tap. Agni, the foremost of the gods, through whom we

have access to the other gods and to our fathers, is at our beck and all and gives us heat and light at the pressing of a button. Vāyu, the life of the universe, is our servant ready to respond to our needs at the turn of a switch. Ākāśa, the subtlest of elements, has been harnessed to cater to our pleasure by bringing us sounds from ever so far off. We have thus gained mastery over all the five elements, just as Ravana is said to have done. The only thing that remains for us to happen is his fate. Is it not time we take a lesson from his ultimate end and learn that all such mastery will not avail us at all ? Of what avail are sturdy muscles, perfect organs, keen intellect and enormous wealth and power, if Dharma, the life-principle, is ignored ? Of what avail is anything if the “main current” is off, that is, If we forget and ignore the Grace of God, which alone makes such mastery possible ?

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A Sannyāsi who was staying for some time continuously in the Mutt led a very quiet and secluded life and earned the hearty blessings of His Holiness. As his continued stay made him a familiar figure, the Mutt servants unconsciously fell into the habit of being familiar with him. One day, his food was not properly salted and he pointed it out to the cook. The cook without intending any offence immediately said, “What, Swamiji ? You have not yet learned to curb your tongue; for it is still after tasty



food.” This remark hurt the Swamiji somewhat. He did not reply but finished the meal that day without further remark. Next day and the day after he did not go to the dining hall at all. The servants in their preoccupations did not notice this. On the third day when he prostrated before His Holiness, His Holiness asked: “What is the matter ? You look jaded. Any mental worry?”

S. None.

*H.H.* Then, have you had your meals regularly ?

Then the Swamiji had to tell His Holiness that he had not dined for two days and on being questioned further confessed to being put out at the cook’s remark.

*H.H.* Your object in staying here is not food. Anything to appease the hunger is and must be sufficient. The cook was certainly impertinent in making that remark to you; but can you not view it as a healthy advice to you not to mind the taste of the food if only it is sufficient to appease your hunger ? It was really your remark that it was not salted properly that evoked his remark. If you had restrained yourself and eaten what was given to you, the very same cook when he tasted that food himself later would have seen that it was not salted properly, would have immediately regretted having served such a food to you and would have run to you with apologies for his neglect and would thereafter be more careful. in preparing the food. All this could have and would have

resulted from your silence. On the other hand, your impulsive remark provoked him and his reply provoked you still further and resulted in upsetting your mental equilibrium, in disturbing the smoothness of your meditations and in your fasting for two days.

S. I quite realize my mistake.

*H.H.* This incident has occurred just to help you on in your spiritual endeavours. View it in that light.

It may be added that the Swamiji punctiliously carried out the advice of His Holiness, never indulged in any secular talk and before long began to command the deep respect of all, including those who presumed to be familiar with him before.

## **2. Truth Devotion**

A disciple took his Pūjā box with him and showed it to His Holiness. The latter after carefully scanning the several Lingas and Śalagramas there picked out one Śalagrama and put it aside. It was later learnt that it was a broken one and unfit for Pūjā. While returning the box to the disciple, His Holiness asked:—

*H.H.* I suppose you are performing the daily Pūjā yourself ?

D. Yes. I do -not know much of Vedic Mantras. I know *Purusa-Sukta* and *Śri Rudra-Astādhyāyi* somewhat and with my scanty equipment I am doing the Pūjā myself, not in strict

accordance with the Śāstras' requirements but only so so.

*H.H.* I am very glad to hear it. If we are hungry, it will not do at all to ask a man who can eat well to eat; we must ourselves eat though we may not be conversant with the rules of eating. I know that some rich people think it beneath their dignity to perform their daily Pūjā themselves but engage Vaidika Śāstris to do it for them for a small monthly remuneration. As the Śāstri performs the Pūjā in return for that remuneration, no spiritual merit can possibly accrue to him from the Pūjā. As the rich man does not perform the Pūjā at all, he also cannot get any spiritual benefit. Thus such kind of Pūjā helps neither spiritually. At the best, it is but a harmless way of getting his money distributed to the poor. There are certainly some complex religious ceremonies which require the assistance of others and where it is permitted to have substitutes. But the daily Pūjā is not of that sort. It must be done by the person desiring to benefit by it, even though by reason of his scanty equipment he may have to do it only so so.

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One evening a disciple brought a big green Mahalinga and placed it before His Holiness.

*H.H.* What is the matter ?

*D.* This Mahalinga has been in my family for generations together. But we are now unable to offer proper worship to it

owing to our present straitened circumstances. So I have brought it here for Your Holiness acceptance.

*H.H.* What do you mean by “unable to offer proper worship” ? Have you all stopped eating anything ?

*D.* No.

*H.H.* Then where is the difficulty in worshipping it ? God never eats anything nor is He ever hungry. You cook your food; but before taking it yourself you just offer it to Him in grateful remembrance of His gracious blessings and then take the food yourself sanctified as it now is by having been offered to Him. He does not want anything from you. Except in the case of very special Murtis, anything that you eat and is not prohibited by the Śāstras is just the thing you have to offer to God. It involves no special labour nor any special expense at all. Why then do you feel that you are “unable to worship” ? However impoverished you may be, you cannot possibly pronounce yourself “unable” unless you give up eating altogether. Let it be a fruit, a cup of milk or even a cup of water. If you are taking it, it is equally enough for your God. Unless you have other reasons, you must take the Mahalinga back with you home.”

*D.* I have been feeling for some time past that the presence of this Mahalinga in my house is responsible for my increasing troubles.

*H.H.* Is it even so? I suppose the Mahalinga was in the

house during the time of your father and his ancestors when they were all in affluent circumstances ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.* They then thought they were so affluent because of the presence of this sacred Murti in their house ?

*D.* It was so.

*H.H.* Now you think it responsible for your woes ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.* The Mahalinga remains the same. When it was considered a blessing, blessings followed; when it is considered a curse, curses follow. The fault is not therefore attributable to it at all. But when you have once got such an absurd idea into your head that it is the cause of your ills, you will be committing sacrilege every moment you have it in your custody. You may leave it, therefore, here. But have you any other Murti at home ?

*D.* Yes, I have.

*H.H.* Offer your daily food at least to it before sitting down to dine. Do not think that now that you are rid of this Mahalinga you can have your food immediately without the need to remember God at all. That is a daily duty which you can never neglect to do, however poor you may be. After all, we are not giving Him anything; we only offer Him what is already His. It comes

back to us quite undiminished but laden with His gracious blessings.

X X X X X

A disciple went to Śringeri and paid his respects to His Holiness.

*H.H.* Are you coming here straight from your place or after breaking your journey somewhere on the way ?

*D.* I am coming straight.

*H.H.* You must have started from your home the day before yesterday after your morning breakfast; you might have foregone your night meal that day. But what did you do yesterday ?

*D.* I had just two hours' interval yesterday morning at Jalarpet Junction. I took a very hasty bath at the station water-tap, had my daily Japam done in an abbreviated form and had time just to take two or three plantains.

*H.H.* I am glad to hear that you did not find it necessary to give up your daily ablutions. But what about your Pūjā ?

*D.* I am sorry. It is a more cumbrous affair and the railway platform is hardly the place for spreading out my Pūjā.

*H.H.* I quite agree, But did you perform the Pūjā also in an abbreviated form ?

D. Where had I time for it ?

H.H. Why, you found time to take plantains ?

D. But the Pūjā cannot be done so easily.

H.H. Why not? Just when you are taking the plantains in your hand for putting them into your mouth, you may offer them to the God in the Pūjā before you do so. Did you do it?

D. I did not. But how can I do it when the Murti is in the box and the box is in my bundle ? Before can offer it to the Murti, I shall have to take it out.

H.H. That is, in your opinion, if the Murti is inside the box or the bundle, it cannot hear your words of offering and will be quite unable to accept it bundled up as it is itself. Is that your conception of your Deity ?

D. I now realize that I was certainly foolish in thinking that, as I cannot see the Murti inside the bundle, the God in it cannot see beyond the bundle.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Although, from the point of view. of Vedānta, which emphasizes the omnipresence of the Deity, it is permissible to offer food to the Deity in such emergent oases even without taking out the Archavighraha,—believing that the Deity has hands and feet, eyes and head, mouth and cars everywhere (vide Gita XIII. 13 ), rather than not offer it at all before taking it himself, a devotee would go further and would not be contented with offering food to the Deity mentally without taking out the Archiivighraha. He would rather go without food if he does not find it possible to feed the Deity in the proper way as one would feed a living relation or friend. For, in the eyes of a devotee, the Deity, though spiritually present everywhere. is physically present in the image in a fuller degree than elsewhere. He regards the image not only a symbol or representation of the Deity but as the Deity Himself particularly

H.H. I only want you to bear in mind that, however adverse our surroundings may become, there is still opportunity open to us to remember and worship the ever-present God; though not with elaborate rituals but with a heart full of gratitude for His gracious blessings which we have ever in abundance.

X X X X X

An old gentleman came to His Holiness for His blessings.

H.H. How are you managing to earn your livelihood ?

G. I am neither rich in the world's goods nor in the Vedic lore. I have learned some catches of devotional songs which enable me to join Bhajana parties. As Bhajana parties are found almost in every village, I meet with a good welcome wherever I go. Thus I find it possible to get my livelihood by means of this Bhajana.

H.H. I am glad to know that you have hit upon such a

present in the image out of love for the devotee. He is of the belief that the Deity not only accepts the food offered by the devotee for the latter's satisfaction but actually eats it.

This is borne out by the Lord Himself when He says:—

patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyaṁ yo me bhaktyā prayacchati |  
tadahaṁ bhaktyupahṛtamaśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ || (Gita IX. 26 )

*“Whosoever offers to Me with love a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water, I partake of ( and not merely accept) that article offered with love by that devotee of purified intellect.”*

Instances can be multiplied to show that the Achavighraha has actually behaved as a living image before devotees and partaken of the food offered by them with love.--Editor



Sattvika mode of getting your livelihood and that you are quite content with it. But it will be well for you if you will just revise your mental attitude.

G. How ?

*H.H.* You know that, when a man traverses the street pronouncing the name of the Lord loudly, women and children go to him with handfuls of rice which fill his pot before long and are more than sufficient for that day's meal. The pronouncing of the name of the Lord is certainly a very meritorious act but ceases to be so when it is done only with a view to getting a few handfuls of rice. If there is some delay in the rice coming to him and if the man pronounces the Lord's name in a louder key so that it may be heard well by the inmates of the houses in the street, it is proof positive that the name is not pronounced for the Lord to hear but only as a substitute, a paraphrase, for the words "Bring me rice". Not being intended for the Lord, the Lord will certainly not listen to it. It is not proper at all to use such a valuable thing as the name of God to get at such a low object. It is tantamount even to an abuse of the name of God. I want you, therefore, to give up the idea that you are getting your livelihood by means of Bhajana. and to substitute in its stead the idea "I am doing Bhajana, and God is taking care of me" without connecting these two factors as cause and effect. Otherwise the effect of the Bhajana conceived of as the cause of your livelihood

will exhaust itself as soon as that livelihood is provided for and will not leave behind any spiritual benefit.

Further, this cause-and-effect conception will easily make you lose faith in Bhajana if you do not get your livelihood as comfortable as you want it. In fact, you will subconsciously feel that God must be thankful to you for worshipping Him and must out of sheer gratitude provide you with your wants. You may sometimes feel even that God is not sufficiently grateful to you for your chanting His praises. Such thoughts will necessarily bring you down in the scale of spirituality. So go on with your Bhajana quite disinterestedly, secure in the firm faith that whatever happens is the best for you in the view of God. Do not make a bargain of it. Do not reduce God or His Bhajana to the level being the means of securing you your livelihood.

X X X X X

A disciple who had not seen Śringeri or His Holiness before went there and paid his respects to Him.

*H.H.* Your name?

*D.* Bhujanga.

*H.H.* Bhujanga-Bhusana ( One who has serpents for His ornaments – Lord Śiva ) ? Or Bhujanga-Sayana ( One who has a serpent for His bed – Lord Visnu ) ?

*D.* My name is neither. It is simply Bhujanga.

*H.H.* Is that so ? It is usual to give us the names of the Lord, Śiva or Visnu, or of any of their Avatāras. Evidently your parents thought it better to give you the name of Bhujanga without committing themselves to any partiality for either Śiva or Visnu. It may also be that they had another more potent reason.

*D.* What might that be ?

*H.H.* It is well-known that, when robbers attack a rich man's house, catch him up and try all means, fair and foul, to make him disclose the place where he has secreted his valuables, the man, if he is really attached to them, will bear any amount of suffering —physical and mental— rather than give them up. He knows that if he gets wounded, the wounds will get healed in due time and that if the valuables are lost they are lost for ever. So he will allow his own body to be injured rather than forgo the valuables. The Lord, who is certainly rich, being the owner of the entire universe, may well be ascribed the same mentality; he would rather bear any injury to Himself than expose His possessions to injury. Your parents thought therefore that, for ensuring better protection for you at the hands of the Lord, it was more advisable to give you the name of a thing worn or used by Him rather than the name of the Lord Himself. Even at the risk to Himself, He would be prepared to protect you, who bear the name of a valuable possession of His. I see now the wisdom of your parents.

D. I do not know if such ideas ever occurred to my parents when they gave me this name. But I am glad to have Your Holiness assurance that it has secured me the special protection of the Lord.

H.H. So it has, if you remember always that you bear the name of a sacred object prized highly by the Lord as His own. With this constant thought in your mind, you will before long come to realize that even yourself are His.

X X X X X

A Swamiji who was greatly devoted to His Holiness was given a room on the north bank of the Tunga, where he could have his Pūjā and meditations and studies quite undisturbed. Every morning, however, soon after his ablutions, he used to cross the river, prostrate at the shrine of the previous Āchārya and pay his respects to His Holiness also. One day His Holiness asked:

H.H. You are coming here every day. What for ?

S. Just to pay my respects.

H.H. You have the Āchārya's sacred sandals in your room ?

S. Yes.

H.H. You prostrate before them every morning ?

S. Yes, certainly.

*H.H.* Then, you are afraid that your prostrations will not reach your Āchārya on this side of the river ?

*S.* It is not so. When I can prostrate at the feet of the Āchārya Himself, I do not want to miss it.

*H.H.* Then your prostration before the sandals is not prostration to the Āchārya ?

*S.* I do not mean to say so. But the sandals are only substitutes. Why should I forgo the merit of prostrating before the original itself ?

*H.H.* Then suppose, whenever you think of coming this side of the river, you do not prostrate before the sandals in your room.

*S.* No, no. I do prostrate there also.

*H.H.* Why do you do so when the sandals are but substitutes ?

*S.* They have a spiritual efficacy of their own.

*H.H.* Equal to that of the Āchārya ?

*S.* Certainly.

*H.H.* But that efficacy becomes reduced when the Āchārya is nearby in person ?

*S.* How can that be? They are ever equally efficient.

*H.H.* If so, you may remain in your room itself and not

take the trouble of crossing the river to come this side.

S. I quite realize this logic of Your Holiness' words; but I am not yet above making a distinction between the Āchārya and His sandals.

*H.H.* As you say that you are not yet above that stage, you seem to admit that such a transcendent stage must be attained one day or another in the course of your spiritual progress.

S. Yes. It must be attained sooner or later.

*H.H.* But nothing is ever attained without persistent effort. How do you hope to attain that stage and what is the effort you are making to attain it ?

S. I do not think I am, making any effort in that direction.

*H.H.* Why don't you begin it then ?

S. By doing what ?

*H.H.* By remaining in your room, sitting before the sandals, trying to visualize the Āchārya as standing on them. If you constantly meditate in this way you will be able to visualize the Āchārya wherever you may be, merging the sandals in His personality and forgetting them altogether as any independent adjuncts of His. Begin this practice from tomorrow onwards.

I must mention that for a few days from this, the Swami

found it very difficult to restrain himself from crossing over to the other side but, thanks to the blessings of His Holiness, began soon to feel the Divine Person even where he was.

### **3. Sacredness of Vows**

A disciple who was suffering from some acute skin trouble approached His Holiness for relief. His Holiness prescribed that for full one year he must go to the Temple of God Subrahmanya at Tiruchendur in the Tirunelveli District every Sasthi ( 6<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar fortnight ), perform Archana to the deity if convenient and in any case do so many prostrations before the deity. He accordingly went to the Temple for some Sasthis; but after the lapse of a few months he found it necessary to go to Madras on some urgent business and feared that he might have to miss a Sasthi at Tiruchendur. In this dilemma he again sought His Holiness.

*D.* As ordained by Your Holiness, I have been going to the Tiruchendur Temple all these months. Now I find I have to go to Madras and may not be back in time for the next Sasthi. May I know what I am to do ?

*H.H.* Is the matter so urgent ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.*-Then start from Tiruchendur on the night of the Sasthi, go to Madras and return to Tiruchendur before

the next Sasthi. You have a fortnight's interval to transact your business at Madras.

*D.* I fear my business at Madras may require my presence there for a longer time.

*H.H.* Is that so ? In that case, you may start from Tiruchendur the night of the next Sasthi also, go to Madras, finish your business and then return in time for the Sasthi next after that.

*D.* I fear my continuous presence at Madras will be necessary and it will not be possible for me to go from there to Tiruchendur in the interval.

*H.H.* Then what do you want me to do ?

*D.* I desire to know whether the Sasthi left out by my stay at Madras cannot be compensated by extending the period of vow by one more Sasthi so that the total number of twenty-four Sasthis may have been fully observed.

*H.H.* There is certainly no harm in your observing a Sasthi after the termination of the year of vow, but it cannot certainly be counted as included in that period.

*D.* Then Your Holiness means that all the twenty-four Sasthis must be within the year of vow ?

*H.H.* Was not that exactly your vow ?

*D.* It was.



*H.H.* Why, then, any doubt in the matter ?

*D.* If it is imperative that I must observe all the twenty-four Sasthis within that year and if I find it impossible to observe one of them owing to the urgency of the business that takes me to Madras, I am placed in a very difficult position. I crave Your Holiness to find me a way out.

*H.H.* I have asked you to take two trips to Madras.

*D.* But that again is not possible.

*H. H.* Then what else can I do ?

*D.* I have heard that there is a famous shrine of God Subrahmanya at Tiruttani ( Dhanikachala ) near Madras. May I go to that Temple on the Sasthi I have to be at Madras ?

*H.H.* Certainly. But with what purpose ?

*D.* As an alternative to my going to Tiruchendur on that day.

*H.H.* We are quite incompetent to discuss about the relative merits of the sacred images of God Subrahmanya at Tiruchendur and at Tiruttani. Much less are we competent to decide on such matters. It is quite sufficient for our purpose that going to Tiruttani is not included in your vow. In cases of vows where definite benefit is expected, no alternative or substitute is permissible.

*D.* If my going to Tiruttani as an alternative is not to be thought of, what am I to do for that Sasthi ?

*H.H.* That is for you to decide.

*D.* Your Holiness will not allow me to add another Sasthi at the end. Your Holiness will not allow me either to go to another shrine of God Subrahmanya. What am I to do?

*H.H.* I am very sorry. But remember that it is not I that will not allow you to do those things but only the terms of your vow.

*D.* But, if the terms are so inviolable, what am I to do when I find myself compelled by circumstances beyond my control, to violate them ?

*H.H.* I quite agree, if the circumstances are so beyond your control, you can certainly do nothing. You must tamely submit to Fate, which places such insurmountable obstacles in your way.

*D.* But if I submit to that Fate as inevitable, what becomes of my vow ?

*H.H.* It is no longer kept. That is all.

*D.* If so, what is to become of my disease ?

*H.H.* It will run its due course as there is nothing now to restrain it.

*D.* Does Your Holiness mean that, if the vow is not punc-

tiliously performed in all its details, it will be ineffective altogether ?

*H.H.* That is just the case with all vows.

*D.* God forbid. Then I shall take Your Holiness' first suggestion and go up to Madras twice, if necessary, without detriment to the Tiruchendur Sasthi.

*H.H.* Do so.

I may add that at the end of the year's course the disciple was completely cured of the skin trouble and also that the prescription of His Holiness was given at a time long anterior to his own visiting the Tiruchendur Temple.

X X X X X

A disciple who was on a visit to His Holiness desired to leave for his home on a Friday afternoon. As it was well-known that His Holiness used to perform special Pūjās on Fridays to Śri Rājarajeśwari in the Śri-Chakra, the disciple wanted to take with him a small quantity of Kumkuma used for the worship and asked the Pūjā attendant to give it to him. The attendant, however, declined to do so and said that it could be got only after the completion of the Pūjā at night. The disciple said, "I do not want you to touch the Śri-Chakra now at all. It will be quite sufficient if you give me the Kumkuma which is sprinkled on the floor on all sides of the Śri-Chakra-

Pitha.” The attendant still declined saying “Nothing can be disturbed till after the night Pūjā. Even if I take the Kumkuma from, the floor only, His Holiness will know it.” The disciple said, “Then I shall ask His Holiness himself. I suppose you will give it if He asks I you to do it.” The attendant replied “Certainly. But He will never ask me to do it.” The disciple was somewhat vexed at the persistence ( unreasonable to him ) in declining to take the Kumkuma which was after all not on the Śri-Chakra, but only sprinkled on the floor below the seat. He went to His Holiness.

*D.* I shall be very thankful if Your Holiness will ask the attendant to give me some Śri-Chakra Kumkuma.

*H.H.* If I remember right, you intend starting for home this afternoon itself.

*D.* Yes. That is why I make this special request now.

*H.H.* All right. I shall see that the Kumkuma is despatched to you by tomorrow’s post.

*D.* Having come here personally, I prefer to take it myself.

*H.H.* So much the better, as you can attend the night Pūjā also.

The disciple had necessarily to stay on for the night before he could have the Kumkuma.

X X X X X

A lawyer disciple once approached His Holiness for initiation into Śiva-Pañchaksari Mantra.

*H.H.* Are you not a lawyer ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.* I have heard that lawyers have no time even to perform their daily Sandhyā. Why do you want another Mantra?

*D.* That is not correct. We have certainly ample time for our daily ablutions.

*H.H.* But certainly there are lawyers who plead want of time as an excuse for neglecting their Sandhyā.

*D.* It is really a vain excuse.

*H.H.* Whatever it be, when your profession does not allow you much time for even necessary religious observances, why do you want to multiply them ? You will be only increasing the risk of not performing them.

*D.* I promise not to neglect the Mantra if Your Holiness is pleased to initiate me into it.

*H.H.* It will be easy to make a promise; but will your exacting profession allow you to keep it ?

*D.* I shall take care to repeat the Mantra daily without fail.

*H.H.* This is no doubt your resolve now. But can you stick to it successfully ?

*D.* I sincerely and solemnly promise to do so.

*H.H.* Please do not think that I am exacting any promise from you as a condition of your initiation. The Śāstras say in unmistakable terms that, if an initiated disciple neglects the Mantra given to him by a Guru, the resultant sin devolves on the Guru himself for giving the initiation to a disciple unable to respect it. That is why I have to be very careful before I initiate anybody.

*D.* I quite realize the responsibility. I shall take care to see that no such contingency ever arises,

X X X X X

His Holiness was once approached by a disciple for initiation into a Devi-Mantra.

*H.H.* Devi-Mantra ? What for ? Are you performing your daily Sandhyā properly ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.* Have you, then, more time at your disposal for more Mantras ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.* If so, why don't you spend that time in repeating the Gāyatri a thousand times ?

D. I occasionally do that also.

H.H. It is curious. You perform your Sandhyā properly, you repeat the Gāyatri a thousand times occasionally. And yet you want some other Mantra. Don't you know that Gāyatri is Herself a Devi ?

D. Yes.

H.H. Then why do you want another Devi-Mantra ?

D. I thought it was only proper to have it.

H.H. Evidently you feel that the Gāyatri, being so familiar, is not enough and you want some variety. But you must know that the Gāyatri is the Mother of all Mantras and that no other Mantra can ever equal Her in efficacy.

D. There is a Bija Devi Yantra in my house; my father was daily worshipping it with a Devi-Mantra. I thought it was necessary that I should also have some Devi-Mantra to carry on the worship properly.

H.H. You can equally efficaciously carry on the worship using the Gāyatri Itself. But as the idea that some other Mantra was necessary has entered your mind, I have no objection to give it to you.

D. I am immensely beholden to Your Holiness.

H.H. But tomorrow is Pūrṇima; the day after is Prati-pada; the next day the Naksatra is not auspicious. I see that there is no auspicious date at all nearer than ten

days from now. I do not think it proper to detain you here till then. You may return home tomorrow as already decided and come here again at your leisure for the initiation.

*D.* I do not mind the delay. I shall stay on here till Your Holiness is pleased to initiate me.

*H.H.* Even if it is more than ten days ?

*D.* Yes.

*H.H.* You are determined, then, to stay on ?

*D.* Yes. I do not want to miss this sacred opportunity of getting the blessings of Your Holiness.

*H.H.* If so, I shall somehow find time tomorrow morning itself; for after all the initiation may not take more than a few minutes. Come, then, tomorrow morning. You need not disturb your original programme of starting for home tomorrow.

X X X X X

A disciple who had some knowledge of our Śāstras approached His Holiness for clearing a doubt.

*D.* The daily Sandhyā is a Nitya Karma, an obligatory rite, and its non-performance leads to sin. But the daily Pārāyana of the *Rāmāyana* is not a Nitya Karma. So, I suppose, the omission to read it on any day cannot be sinful ?



*H.H.* You are quite right. Not being an obligatory religious duty, you are not bound to do it. You may even deliberately refrain from it; for its non-performance cannot be sinful.

*D.* Is it even so ? My doubt was really in relation to accidental omissions by forgetfulness or other pre-occupations. Your Holiness now tells me that even a deliberate omission is not sinful.

*H.H.* Certainly; for it is only a Kāmya Karma. On the day you had the initiation, were you not told that the daily reading was undertaken to secure you the grace of Śrī Rāmachandra and are you not daily repeating the formula that you are doing it for securing the grace of Śrī Rāmachandra ? So it must be clear to you that your object in doing so is to secure that grace and that your action is therefore only Kāmya ( desireful ). It is not therefore an obligatory duty at all.

*D.* Is that so, then ?

*H.H.* Certainly. You are at perfect liberty to drop reading the *Rāmāyana* on any day in which you think you do not need that grace and may well get on without it.

*D.* How can I on any day be bold enough to say that I can do without that Grace ?

*H.H.* If you cannot do so, you cannot certainly omit the reading at any time.

D. It seems to me now that it is as much obligatory as the daily Sandhyā.

H.H. Unless you are prepared to dispense with the grace of Śri Rāmachandra.

D. How can I at any time dispense with it ?

H H. It is for you to decide. If you cannot dispense with and do want that grace, you are bound by your initiation and must have the daily Pārāyana.

#### **4. LIVE THE LIFE SPIRITUAL**

In addressing a modern “educated” audience in a town, His Holiness began with saying that He would just remind the people that there was a God who was not only above but ever with us. “It may seem strange to you when I ask you to remember God. You occupy high positions in life and are learned in our sacred lore. Is it not improper on my part to ask you to remember that there is a God ? It will certainly be improper if I ask you to do so when you are actually feeling presence of God. Does not the existence of so many courts in your town, of so many documents to evidence transaction, of so many offices to register those documents, and in fact every other dealing of yours proclaim not only that you do not remember God but that you have completely forgotten His existence ? This may seem a very elementary teaching; but people require it the most now.”

X X X X X

His Holiness was himself an adept in the intricacies of Hindu logic and philosophy and a very keen dialectician; but he did not like that anybody should engage himself in any wordy fight merely for the sake of the pleasure of it.

“If you have any doubt about the truth or if you want to support it by your intellectual skill or learned lore, by all means study the several books. But if you have no doubt about the truth and only want to realize it in actual experience, all that trouble is unnecessary.

If a cook wants to serve a tasty dish to another, he has to know what things and how much of each thing go into its composition and how they have to be prepared and mixed and in what proportion and so on. The person who is only asked to relish it need not have that knowledge. So leave the dialectics of our philosophy to the ‘learned’ among us; for they have to prepare the dish for others. You may confine yourself to the practical enjoyment of the peace and joy of the Self.”

X X X X X

A disciple fresh from attending a gathering of learned Pandits approached His Holiness and said “It is not only that I felt very small in that brilliant company of scholars but I despair of ever approaching their proficiency in our sacred lore to qualify myself to tread the path of spir-

itual advancement.” His Holiness said “It is now ordinarily thought that for a modern Advaitin it is indispensable that he must study the commentaries of our great Master Śrī Sankarāchārya. He was certainly a seer. Did he become one after studying his own commentaries ? Even if we are prepared to say that he became one only after writing them and cogitating over the thoughts contained therein, what about his predecessors, Gaudapada, Śukha and Vyāsa himself ? Did they study the commentaries of Śrī Sankara to become seers ? This clearly shows that a study of these commentaries is not indispensable for a genuine aspirant for Self-Realization. Further we are seeing every day very many persons who are very proficient in their exposition of these commentaries and other allied literature. Can we say with any truth that they are in any way nearer to Self-Realization than others ? Catch hold of a single truth enunciated by the Vedas and stressed by our ancients. Our ancient teachers have out of pure mercy for us condensed the teachings of all the Vedas together in a few pregnant sentences or a few pithy stanzas and very often even in a single stanza or half of it. If one could grasp, understand and realize in its fullest significance the truths embodied in any such passage, that would be quite enough to help him to salvation. It is quite unnecessary to read books, all and sundry. If you but make an honest effort to live the truth, God will certainly reward you and guide you aright to the goal of life.”

X X X X X

His Holiness felt that it was futile to talk and discuss about the nature of Brahma when people were not able to give up even falsehood or did not care to perform even their daily religious duties properly.

He once asked a Pundit “I suppose you are expounding the Bhāsyas as usual ?” the Pundit replied, “Yes, with Your Holiness’ blessings.” He was confounded by the next immediate question of His Holiness, namely, “I suppose you are performing regularly your daily Aupasana ( offering oblations to the sacred fire ) ?” The Pundit said “I am sorry I am not”, but foolishly trying to excuse himself added “As I am living in a big town, it is not possible for me to get proper cow-dung for preparing cakes to preserve the fire in.” His Holiness with some severity said “The cows in your town evidently give only milk for your coffee but no cow-dung for your Aupasana !”

X X X X X

An ardent disciple had taken the trouble to write out a detailed answer to the several objections by the head of a Madhva Mutt to the doctrine of Adwaita and went to His Holiness with a view to getting His approval. But His Holiness declined to look into it saying “Has our Āchārya anywhere laid down that such as these are any means to a realization of the goal of life ? Why have you wasted your time and energy in this endeavour ? It is really a

work of hatred and bound to provoke more hatred. While our Āchārya has asked us to give up Rāga ( passion) and Dvesha ( hatred ) completely, you are trying to give them a place even in the field of religion.”

X X X X X

“What does it matter to us in the stage in which we are at present situated whether the highest truth is absolute non-dualism, qualified non-dualism, or dualism ? Why should we quarrel about the nature of the Absolute Being, whether it is Personal or Impersonal, whether it can be called Śiva or Visnu? If we are content to believe that the Being has a form, we are at present far far away even from His feet, and the path to reach those feet is yet to be trodden by us all. When we are at the end of that path and if, by the grace of that Being, we are enabled to have a vision of His glorious face, it will be time enough then to look Him in the face and ascertain whether He is wearing on His forehead holy ashes or the trident mark or anything at all and whether He can be called Śiva, Narāyana or by any other name. Why should we wrangle over it now ? The path of Dharma ordained by Him is broad enough for all of us to travel along without jostling any other, each according to the Dharma prescribed for him. When we have advanced far enough on this long and arduous road and are on the threshold of the final goal, there will be time enough to consider the true nature of the Absolute Being.”

X X X X X

“If you honestly believe in the Law of Karma and honestly believe that pain and pleasure are both the results of antecedent Karma, and if you do actually get one of them, namely, pain, without the least attempt or intention on your part to get it, why do you long for and work for the other, pleasure, alone? Will it not come of its own accord if you have merited it by your past Karma and will it ever come to you in spite of your most earnest efforts now, if you have not merited it already? Why do you waste your time and energy in this futile endeavour? Spend them in accumulating the store of virtue to enable you to lead a higher and better life in other regions or in future births or, better still, spend them in trying to eliminate birth altogether; for, if you happen to take birth again, I feel sure that you will not find then even the few facilities which you now have for spiritual uplift.”

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