

RESPECT FOR PARENTS – THE GREATEST VIRTUE

The sun shines serene and gentle. The brief daylight is softly wafting the cool wind. The fields are ripe with golden crops. Marigold flowers are blossoming like garlands of pearls on the banks of rivers. The farmers are rejoicing and singing. The ripened chillies are colouring fields with vestments of bright red. The sweet festival of Sankranti has come, filling our homes with the freshly harvested grains of cereals and pulses.

(Telugu Poem)

Of all the festivals, the imminent Sankranti is the most important. It is the day on which the farmers bring home the harvested crop, feed the poor and rejoice. On this day, the Vedic scholars get up during the sacred Brahmanuhurtha time and chant the Vedic Mantras, purifying the hearts of one and all. This festival has a special significance even for the householders. They invite their newly married sons-in-law to their house, present them with new clothes and the entire house abounds with joy. In this context, there is a folk song in Telugu:

As Sankranti is the festival of festivals,

Oh newly married bridegroom, visit your in-laws' house,

Come spend your time in fun and frolic with your brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law,

The entire household and the neighbourhood will honour you with love and affection.

It is also an occasion when the bullocks are decorated elaborately and taken to various houses in the village. The bullocks are worshipped and fed sumptuously as an expression of gratitude for all the hard work they do in the fields. Even the bovine members of the household are feted, a symbolic marriage is performed between a pair of bull and cow, naming them as Rama and Sita. They are taken along the streets and made to dance to the delight of everyone. In this manner, the festival of Sankranti bestows great joy and auspiciousness on farmers, householders, priests and children. Not only the human beings, even the birds and animals rejoice with the arrival of the sacred Sankranti festival. At sunset, it is a wonderful sight to see the birds flying back to their nests chatting merrily loudly in their own language filling the air with a joyous hum. It is an equally delightful sight to see the cows rushing back from the grazing fields to feed their young ones and the young ones craving for the caresses of their mothers, mooing loudly to their mothers. Sankranti festival is so sweet and endearing to one and all. Cool winds, mellifluous bird songs and the sweet sugarcane crops herald the arrival of Sankranti. People celebrate this festival by distributing sweets and rice puddings. This festival drives away all disappointments and despair and fills our hearts with hope and enthusiasm. People get up early in the morning, have a sacred bath and worship their chosen deities such as Ganapati, Subrahmanya and Lord Easwara. The divine form of Lord Siva is described thus:

The Lord of Kailasa has manifested his Divine form with the crescent moon adorning his head, the cool water of the Ganga flowing between the matted locks, with his radiant eye in the middle of the forehead and the purple neck gleaming like the sheen of a blackberry. He wears serpent bracelets and a snake belt, his entire body is smeared with Vibhuti, his forehead is adorned with a kumkum dot, his ruddy lips glow with the juice of the betel, diamond-studded gold earrings dangle from his ears and his whole swarthy body glows with divine effulgence.

(Telugu Poem)

However, nowadays people are not celebrating Sankranti in its true spirit. Their celebration is confined to mere performance of rituals. They lack purity and sanctity. They are unable to enjoy the bliss of Sankranti because of hatred, jealousy and conflicts.

On this auspicious occasion of Sankranti, children aged 5 years are initiated into the process of learning with the chanting of sacred Vedic Mantras. Our ancient sages declared, *Vedahametham Purusham*

Mahantham Adityavarnam Thamasah Parasthath (I have visualised the Supreme Being who shines with the effulgence of a billion suns and who is beyond Thamas - the darkness of ignorance). The Vedas have extolled the Supreme Being in manifold ways. The Rig Veda contains Mantras extolling God and His blissful form which attracts one and all.

People address their bullocks with names such as Ramudu, Bhimudu, etc. Similarly, cows are named after Sita, Gowri, Lakshmi, etc. The inner meaning of this is that even animals are treated with the same concern and care as human beings. They decorate the cows and bullocks with Saris and Dhotis and take them out in a procession.

These days even birds and animals lead their lives in accordance with their natural qualities. So, they are able to enjoy happiness. On the other hand, man has forgotten his true nature and is behaving like an animal. Consequently, he is leading a miserable life. Birds and animals are better than men in the sense they live in unity and harmony. But due to the impact of modern education, man has degenerated to the level of a beast. He has lost the virtues of honesty and integrity. Birds and animals have a reason and a season, but man has no reason or season. In every house and in every human endeavour, money is given utmost priority. People are ready to stoop down to any level for the sake of money. Animals are satisfied once their hunger is satiated, but man has no sense of satisfaction. The more he earns, the greedier he becomes.

When a dog is sick, it does not eat food. If you have a pet dog, you might have observed this. Even if you pour milk into its mouth by force, it refuses to drink. It likes to remain on empty stomach. But man observes no such restraint with regard to diet when he is sick. He wants to take complete rest even if there is mild rise in his temperature. He covers himself from head to foot and lies down on his bed. However, he gives no rest to his stomach nor does he observe proper diet restrictions even when he runs high temperature. He likes to eat sweets like Mysorepak, Burfi, Gulab Jamoon, etc., which will only aggravate his sickness. Man is behaving like an animal and animals are behaving like humans! When a person misbehaves, the elders reprimand him saying, "Why do you behave like an animal?" Due to the impact of modern education, man has lost morality and integrity and has become worse than an animal. He is acquiring high academic qualifications like B.A. and M.A. But what is the use? He is adding the letter 'D' (dirty qualities) to his qualification and becoming 'BAD' and 'MAD'. This type of perverted behaviour is unbecoming of a human being. Man should develop good thoughts, good qualities and good character. On the contrary, he is taking to wrong ways to earn money. *Money comes and goes, morality comes and grows.* But man is selling morality in the market for the sake of money.

Embodiments of Love!

At least from this Sankranti day, make efforts to cultivate good qualities. Let there be a change in your behaviour for the better. The festivals of Bharatiyas are meant to impart sacred teachings and transform human behaviour. They are not meant to merely eat, drink and make merry. First of all, there should be transformation at the individual level. There should be unity in the family. In olden days, people used to live in joint families. The young couples would live with their parents, in-laws and other elders of the family in harmony. Whenever there was any difference of opinion between the couple, the elders in the family would give proper guidance and pacify them. The daughters-in-law would implicitly follow the advice of their in-laws. As a result, there never used to be any scope for conflicts in the family. But the modern trend is such that the daughter-in-law does not want to live in the house of her in-laws. She wants the family to be divided. Because of such divisive mentality, conflicts in the family are on the rise. Consequently, Kali Yuga has become Kalaha Yuga (age of conflicts) and Kalmasha Yuga (age of pollution). People in those days talked always in a pleasing manner. They would welcome the guests

wholeheartedly by exchanging pleasant feelings like “How are you? Please have your food with us, etc.” More than the food, it was the warmth and affection of the host that appeased the hunger of the guest. But nowadays, even on a festival day, people do not like to entertain guests. When they find a guest entering their house, they greet him with the remark, “Please come, hope you have already had your lunch; please be seated.” Man has become so narrow-minded that he does not want to offer even a morsel of food to the guests. Such being the sorry state of affairs, how can you expect the children to be ideal citizens? Due to the influence of parents, even children are becoming narrow-minded. Parents want them to acquire modern education and earn a lot of money. In order to get the children educated in expensive prestigious schools, even the mother has to take up a job. The children are left to the care of Ayas (female attendants). Consequently, the children are unable to experience the love of the mother. They shed tears when the Aya dies, but not when the mother passes away. The children should be brought up under the loving care of the mother. They should listen to her sacred teachings. Otherwise, how can they come up in life? Modern education cannot redeem man’s life.

One may have acquired high academic qualifications such as B.A. and M.A. and attained name and fame,

One may have all the wealth and one may do acts of charity and earn merit and good reputation,

One may have all the physical strength and lead a long and healthy life,

One may be a Vipra (Brahmin) who teaches the Vedas and performs spiritual practices such as penance and meditation,

But none of them can be equal to the devotee of the Lord. (Telugu Poem)

What is this education? It is only leading to agitation. People are only acquiring degrees, but are not broadening their mind. True education is that which brings about transformation of the heart. There should be expansion of love. But, the present-day education system is leading to narrow-mindedness. People are highly egoistic of their academic qualifications. They have given up morality and integrity, the very essence of Indian culture. Without the virtue of honesty, how can one attain Ananda (bliss)? How can education bereft of morality redeem your life? Today the students are going to countries like America, Japan, Germany, etc., as soon as they complete their studies. When the parents go all the way to spend their time with their children, they are asked to have their food in restaurants. Modern educated people are not so fortunate as to serve food to their parents with their own hands. They do not show gratitude to their parents who have brought them up with love and care. This is the worst sin. You should look after your parents well. You should take care of their needs in their advanced age and protect them with love and concern. Today, when parents become old, the children demand a share of their property. They are interested in property but not in developing a proper mind. They do not hesitate to go even to the Supreme Court to settle their property disputes. Instead, one should strive to attain the Supreme State by cultivating virtues. The more one is educated, the more virtuous one should become.

Dear Students!

Just now you have seen Me calling an American boy. This boy is studying in our Institution. Simultaneously, he is also learning Veda. In whichever portion of the Veda you question him, he will be able to chant the concerned Mantra beautifully. In fact, it is the good fortune of the parents to have such children. It is only because of such parents, children are able to cultivate good qualities. This boy’s parents are living in America, yet they have admitted him in our Institute which is far away from their native place to enable him to learn good qualities and good behaviour. In fact, they have all the facilities available in America to educate their son there itself. But, they did not want to educate their son in America. They love our country and the noble qualities that the children imbibe here. Here the children

learn education coupled with love. The children prostrate before their parents with respect and reverence. Such noble qualities have impressed these parents and therefore they have brought their son to pursue his education in our Institution.

Here is a small example. Once upon a time, there lived a Hindi Pandit who was reputed for his literary skills. His two sons were studying in Allahabad, while he and his wife lived in a small town. One day he and his wife had to go by train on a visit to another town and they had to pass through Allahabad. He wrote to his sons to come and meet them at the station on that particular date.

The train halted at the station and the parents stood at the door of the carriage. They saw their sons hurrying towards them. The elder one touched the feet of both the parents before talking to them, while the younger son did not show such respect and reverence. The parents enquired about their health and studies. The elder son said, "We are fine here. Please take care of your health. Your happiness is our happiness." On the other hand, the younger son did not enquire about their health at all. He asked for more money. As the train was about to start, once again the elder one bent and touched the feet of his parents while the younger one just waved his hand. As the train was leaving the platform, the parents were watching their sons through the window. The elder one was offering his Namaskar till the end, whereas the younger son was keeping his hands in the pocket and looking somewhere with a callous attitude.

The mother became worried seeing the behaviour of the younger son. She blamed her husband for the reckless behaviour of the younger son. She said, "You have kept him away from us for the sake of his education. He is behaving like an animal as there is no one to guide him properly." The father pacified her saying, "After all, he is young, he will learn and improve in course of time." But, the mother could not come to a compromise and said, "He is already doing his degree course, if not now when will he learn?" Unable to control her feelings, she shed tears.

The mother's words proved to be true. In course of time the elder son, by virtue of his diligence and good behaviour, attained a high position in society. He was very much respected for his manners and sense of courtesy. He prostrated before his parents and said, "It is because of your blessings that I have come up in life." The parents shed tears of joy and blessed him profusely, "Son, it is because of your virtues that you have attained an exalted position in life." What happened to the younger son? He could not fare well in the examinations and ultimately had to be contented with a clerical job. While the elder one received salutations from everyone, the younger son had to salute everyone. How can one who does not respect his parents be respected by others? *Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavati (as is the feeling, so is the result)*. Our future depends upon our present behaviour. In Western countries today, they give respect and take respect. But this quality is becoming extinct in our country. When you do not respect your own parents, even dogs would not care to look at you. Therefore, wherever you go, you should never forget to respect your parents. The Vedas in our country have also exhorted, *Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava, Acharya Devo Bhava, Atithi Devo Bhava* (revere your mother, father, preceptor and guest as God). Thus, they promoted noble qualities by their exhortation. Whoever respects his parents and obeys their commands will certainly reach high positions in life. In fact, the festival of Sankranti exhorts us to cultivate such noble qualities. 'Kranti' means transformation. Therefore, Sankranti is supposed to bring about a transformation in our lives. But, how are we reacting to this? Are we able to achieve transformation in our life? No. The purpose of our education is to remove the bad qualities and cultivate good qualities and good behaviour. This is what the festivals in India are meant for. But nobody realises the inner meanings of these festivals.

Embodiments of Love! Students!

Your parents are struggling hard to feed you, educate you and bring you up in life. Even if they have to starve, they would somehow try to feed you and look after your welfare. They always struggle to keep you in good mood and good condition. They give you good food, good clothing and good education. If you do not respect such parents, how do you expect to be respected by society?

You all know about Abraham Lincoln. He used to go to school in the company of wealthy boys, in his childhood. Those boys were wearing costly clothes and ornaments. Lincoln, however, had to go to school with worn-out clothes that were mended by his mother. One day, his friends made fun of his poor dress. He could not control himself. He went straight to his mother crying and told her, "Mother! I will not attend school hereafter. My classmates are making fun of me. They are looking down upon me as a poor boy unable to wear decent dress." Then, the mother took him into her arms lovingly and consoled him saying, "My dear son! You need not have to feel sorry for such a trivial issue. All this is going to help you in your future life. You must keep our family condition in view. Do not give attention to what others say. Lead a life of self-confidence and self-respect. Respect every individual and be respected by every individual." From that day onwards, Lincoln put his mother's advice into practice and started respecting everybody. Gradually, Abraham Lincoln could command respect from all people by his good behaviour. He earned a very good name for himself. After sometime, elections were held in America. He was persuaded by his friends and well-wishers to contest the elections. At last, he bowed to the wishes of his friends and well-wishers and contested the elections. He won the elections with a thumping margin and was elected President of the United States of America in due course of time. He attained such an exalted position because he implicitly followed the advice of his mother and respected everybody. Truly speaking, he did not have much money, but he had the wealth of virtues. He was happy at the prosperity of others. He was contented with what he had and did not crave for money and material possessions. Because of such noble qualities, he rose to become the President of America. During his tenure, he passed a decree for abolishing slavery of black Africans in America thereby putting an end to their inhuman suffering.

It is self-respect that protects man and takes him to an exalted position. You may be poor financially, but if you uphold your self-respect, you will be respected by all. Do not look down upon the poor. Respect them and treat them with love. That is the true human nature. Lincoln's mother inculcated such noble qualities in her son. That is why Lincoln considered his mother as God and revered her. Whoever inculcates sacred qualities in you is your God. He is not to be sought after somewhere else. When you develop self-respect, He will manifest right in front of you.

Dear Students!

You must respect your parents, whoever they may be and in whatever condition they may be. You must respect their words and obey their commands, without any reservation. Then only you will be able to command respect from society. All the great people in yesteryears did obey and respect their parents and set an example to the world. Do you know the underlying meaning of the ancient customs and traditions of Bharat? For example, they used to build big mansions with small doors. Do you know why? We think that these small doors were to prevent thieves from entering the houses and escaping with ease. No, that was not the reason. These doors were purposely kept low to enable the visitors to observe the custom of entering the houses with their heads bent in reverence to the inmates. Thus, every custom and tradition of Bharat were meant to promote mutual respect and goodwill among people. It was established with great care and wisdom. But, even the Bharatiyas have forgotten such noble traditions. Nowadays you will not find even a 'gadapa' (threshold) to the door frame of the main entrance to the house. They think that the threshold is an unnecessary hindrance to enter the house. No,

it is not a hindrance at all! The ancient traditions and customs of Bharat are meant to promote humility, respect and reverence among people.

Dear Students!

You must learn and observe such great traditions and command the respect of people. You must bring joy to your parents, by your behaviour. The parents must feel happy that their children are obeying them. It is enough if you earn such a good name. God's grace cannot be obtained by performing mere rituals like worship. However highly qualified you are, it will only promote ego, but not humility and respect towards parents and elders. Therefore, **you must cultivate the qualities of humility, respect and reverence**. Then only you will become good citizens of the country. It is not necessary that you should become great. It is enough if you become good citizens. Name and fame come today, but may be lost tomorrow. But, the good name acquired will last forever. Therefore, earn a good name. We must earn the 'grace' of God. But, contrary to this, people are craving for the 'grass' of worldly desires. Grass is something that is consumed by the cattle. You should not become cattle by developing a taste for grass. You must strive to earn God's grace and thus become good individuals.

Dear Students!

These are the sacred days of the festival of Sankranti. On this occasion, we must cultivate the quality of giving respect to others and taking respect. I am giving you a small example here. (Swami called the American boy, a student of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, and said), "This boy is securing first class not only in studies but also in the study of Vedas. He has given immense joy to his parents with his good behaviour. His father is very happy that his son has earned a very good name and is appreciated by one and all." (Swami called his father to the dais and showered His blessings on him.) This boy's mother is working in our Primary School and spending her time blissfully. The boy's parents have earned the love and respect of all because of his exemplary behaviour. In this manner, every one of you should strive to bring good name to your parents. Only then will your parents experience the real joy of begetting you as their son. You may earn a lot of money and build big mansions, but they cannot bring you good name. They are temporary. Once you earn good reputation, it will remain with you forever. Bring good name to the institution in which you have studied. Observing your noble qualities, people should be able to recognise you as Sathya Sai students. You are aware that we are not charging even a paisa from our students. Further, I am also providing books and other facilities for the needy and deserving students. The students have immense love for Swami and Swami also showers His love and grace on them. Even while leaving their parents and coming here, they do not shed tears. But when I go to Brindavan and return to Puttaparthi, the students in Brindavan start shedding tears unable to bear the separation from Me. How did they acquire such intense love? It is Swami's love that is responsible for this. It is only the love that I disseminate to all. My property does not comprise mansions and palatial buildings. **Love is My biggest property**. I am giving My love and receiving your love in return. I often tell the students, "Give Me your love, I will give you whatever you want." That is why the students have such intense love for Me. Develop love more and more. Love your parents. Obey their command. Your lives will certainly be sanctified.

Think of God always. Wherever you are, in the forest or in the sky, in the village or in the city, on the hilltop or in the middle of the deep sea, love alone can come to your rescue. It is always with you, in you, around you, above you and below you.

Chaala Santhosham (very happy).

(Bhagavan concluded His Discourse with the Bhajan, "*Hari Bhajan Bina Sukha Santhi Nahin ...*")