

31. Moving Temples

I AM talking to the men and women I choose to be volunteers, before every festival, and advising them about their duties and the spirit in which they should execute them. But, those who act according to that advice are very few! Each is engaged in his own selfish schemes! Each helps himself, and not those who need help. This badge is a sign to indicate that you are unselfish, that you are willing and eager to serve. It is no decoration or prize gift. To have this, and to wander about, lolling in the street, indulging in loose talk and evil habits is treason to those who expect to be helped by you; it is also sacrilege. You bow, fall at the feet, circumambulate the Prayer Hall, and perform all the exercises which proclaim that you are a *Bhaktha* (devotee possessing intense love to God); you declare before these very visitors that you are *Bhakthas*; but, your behaviour gives you up; they reveal that you do not deserve the name.

Sick people must be given immediate medical attention; old people must be seated in the shade; children must be fondled and consoled. Since there will be a gathering of many thousands for about twelve days and nights, some people interested in making quick money, by transferring to themselves the properties of others, may also be present. It is, of course, a sin, wherever it is done; here, in this atmosphere of *Sathya*, it becomes doubly so. So, the visitors who come have to be protected from their attentions; you have to be vigilant, discover such characters and prevent their manoeuvres. This badge is a call for help from the thousands of devotees who are coming here, in full faith, that they have the Lord to tend them.

Serve people with no thought of high or low

To be present here is itself a gift of Grace, won by accumulated merit; to be endowed with the badge is a rarer gift. Make the best of this grand chance. This badge is a 'sapling' that has broken through the soil, from the seed of merit that you have sown in the past. See that the sapling is watered and fostered by your honest *Seva* (service), not dried up in the dust of insincerity and hesitation. It provides you a valuable opportunity to cast off bad habits and assume good ones. You will have to discard self-conceit and the craving for display, so that you may win Grace. Serve people with no thought of high or low; no service is high, no service is low, each act of service is equal in the eye of the Lord; it is the readiness, the joy, the efficiency, the skill with which you rush to do it that matters.

If you do not serve man, who is your kith and kin, with the same feelings, impulses and instincts as you, who is before you, alive and gladly accepting with a smile of gratitude, how can you serve *Maadhava* (God), who is so far above and beyond you, so different and distant, so potent and mysterious? Train yourselves to serve God by serving man, in whom there is God installed in the heart. Convince yourselves that the service of man is worship of God. If you send away some one who runs towards your house for shelter from the rain back into the open street, you are inhuman, to say the least; if you do not do all that lies within your power to alleviate the pain that you find another is suffering from, you are unfit to be called human. Be at least human, even if you do not aspire to become divine! Being human is at least better than the status of beasts, for they do not remember the past, nor plan for the future. Cattle do not know that they are ploughing for the sake of sowing, nor bringing home the harvest, when the mowing is finished. Man piles upon his head the past and the future, and since he is not quite sure, he goes to the additional bother of 'insurance!' Man is burdened with desires; he plans to brighten the future, and wipe out the past. The tiny seed of desire grows soon into a mighty tree; so you have to fry the seed in the fire of *thapas* (penance), so that it may not sprout.

A volunteer is expected to be an example to all

The fire of detachment will fry the seed of desire, down to the last trace of life in it. Mere transitory fits of renunciation will not succeed in preventing sprouting. Detachment has to be supplemented by the knowledge of the hollowness of the objective world. Else, humility and reverence are but clothes you put on, while wearing the badge. When you take leave and move out from the gates of Prashaanthi Nilayam, the clothes are changed and the old tatters of arrogant egoism are worn! When some one uses harsh words against you, do not allow your pride to persuade you to retaliate with harsh words of your own. When one of your fingers pricks your eye, you do not turn against it and retaliate, do you? The person who was harsh is as much you as your own finger.

You tell people not to speak aloud, nor smoke. If, you yourself commit these lapses how can you insist on others to obey your instructions? Control these tendencies that you have developed; they are recent habits. If you do not master these little evils, how can you ever hope to suppress deeper evils, like greed, pride, hate, malice and other vicious tendencies? This badge is a sign of My Love, of My Compassion. It is an inspiration, a lesson, a blessing! It expects you to be virtuous, an example to all, in devotion and enthusiasm.

It is an inspiration, not just for these ten or twelve days. Or, in this limited area, named Prashaanthi Nilayam. Wherever you are, at whatever time, do the duty that this badge demands, whether you have it on, or not. Help others as much as lies in your power; if you cannot give them adequately, at least, feel the agony. "Alas! How much is the suffering they undergo! Lord, relieve it soon," pray thus with all your heart.

Shankaraachaarya used to live on alms. In the old days, Imperial Princes, who studied in the hermitages had to seek alms and live on what they collected thus. This is for the removal of silly egoism. As pilgrims yourselves to the holy temple of *sath-karma* (righteous action), keep away your luggage (egoism) and enter the shrine, to purify the heart. Deposit your luggage in the vaults of "surrender" (*sharanaagathi*). Remember the persons whom you serve are temples, where God is installed. Worship them with the flowers of good words, timely help, and vigilant care.

Prashaanthi Nilayam, 4-10-196 7