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Develop Qualities of Humility and Obedience Besides Morality in Society

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Onam Discourse

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*Man is born out of, grows in, and finally departs from this world due to karma.
Karma is verily the embodiment of Divinity for man.
It is due only to karma that happiness and sorrow occur in this world.
(Telugu poem)*

Embodiments of Love!

Dear devotees of Kerala! Emperor Bali used to rule the state of Kerala in ancient times. He used to treat his subjects as his own family members and provide several conveniences for their happy and comfortable living. He used to develop sacred feelings among the people and create a proper environment to foster them.

In order that the people tread the right path and to set an example to them, he once started a *yajna* (ritual, sacrifice) by name '*Viswajit*'. Several people gathered to witness that event. Emperor Bali performed the *yajna* on a grand scale by donating land and money to several people and gave away gifts to a number of people on the occasion. During the *Yajna*, his family members were also seated on the *Yajna Vedika* along with him.

While everyone was watching the grand spectacle, a handsome boy entered the sacrificial hall holding a small umbrella made of *palmirah* leaves. As He was approaching the altar, Emperor Bali's daughter Ratnamala saw Him. She was captivated by the beauty and effulgence of that charming young boy. Immediately, she was lost in deep contemplation, thinking, "How fortunate it would be if I had a child like Him!" The boy went straight to the altar. While everyone present in the sacrificial hall was watching happily, Emperor Bali welcomed Him, washed His feet reverentially, offered a garland, and asked Him to sit on an ornate chair. He then asked the young boy, "Who are You? Where did You come from and why?"

The young boy replied, "I have heard that Emperor Bali is doing several acts of charity. I too have a desire to be fulfilled."

The Emperor then asked, "What is it?"

The boy replied, "I don't need much. I will be happy if small piece of land measuring three feet is given to Me in charity."

Emperor Bali wondered, "What! Such a small request! I thought You would ask for some big things. I am surprised at your small request. Is that enough? You may ask for something more."

The young boy replied that it would be enough if His request is fulfilled. He covered the entire earth with one step and the sky with the second and was waiting to take the third step. But there was no space left for the third step.

Emperor Bali then told the boy, “Dear one! You covered the entire Earth with one step and the sky with the second. Now there is no space to set the third step. Hence, put Your foot on my head, if You wish.” So saying, he bent his head before the boy, who was none other than Lord Vishnu come in the form of Vamana *Avatar*. The moment Lord Vamana set His foot on the head of Emperor Bali, Bali was pushed down under its weight to the nether world! That was how Lord Vishnu liberated Bali.

The people of Emperor Bali’s Kingdom were very sad at the developments. They expressed their feelings of forlornness thus: “Oh God! Our Emperor is no more with us. He used to rear us like his own children. He is our protector. How can you live without him?” Their helplessness and agony over the separation from their beloved King were very painful. The happy event of *Yajna* being celebrated on a grand scale came to an abrupt end. This is an example of the saying, “Pleasure is an interval between two pains.”

As the people were thus grieving, Emperor Bali declared from the nether world, “Oh my dear children! You are all very dear to me. I will always look after your welfare, wherever I am. I will see that you do not undergo any trouble. I will protect you. You need not feel that I am away from you in a different world. Every year on this day, I shall come and see you. Commemorate this day of my coming as a festival. Take a head bath, wear new clothes, and enjoy a feast with a variety of dishes on this day.”

Since then, the people of Kerala celebrate that day as ‘Onam festival’ in remembrance of their most beloved King and protector Bali.

Emperor Bali used to do a lot of good work for the benefit of people and make them happy. This is why the people could not bear separation from their beloved King. Even today, Kerala remains a land of plenty and prosperity. Nature showers its bounty on the people of Kerala. In fact, the rains start in Kerala and then spread to the entire country. There is no dearth of food grains and drinking water in Kerala, which is nature’s gift to the people of Kerala. It is customary to see people in other states worrying about the arrival of the monsoon saying, “Oh! The rains have not yet started in Kerala.” It is a land where the omnipresent God incarnated as Lord Vamana. He may incarnate in one place but is present everywhere.

God is omnipresent, though at times He incarnates in one form at one place. God is only one, not two, though people refer to Him by different names and forms. *Ekam sath viprah bahudha vadanti* (truth is one, but the wise refer to it by various names). It is only our illusion to ascribe different names to God like Rama, Krishna, Govinda, Allah, Jesus, etc. The sun is only one, and it appears in different parts of the world at different times. It is now 9.00 a.m.; but it is night in the U.S.A. Similarly, the one God dwells in different people in different forms.

Do not be under the impression that God has different forms. He is beyond names and forms. *Ekoham bahusyam* (God is one but manifests as several beings). Divinity is present everywhere and in every country and in every individual. It is

omnipresent. Since your perceptions are different, you ascribe different names and forms to the one God.

The land of Kerala is the gift of God. The people of Kerala follow the commands of the noble Emperor Bali even today. That is why the state has developed in several ways. There is no dearth of food and amenities for a happy living in Kerala. Emperor Bali provided all comforts to the people before he left for his abode. It is a small state, and densely populated. Whatever may be the size of population, people enjoy a lot of comforts, peace, and happiness in Kerala.

Of course, changes in people's aspirations and lifestyle are taking place in recent times due to the impact of *Kali Yuga*, but the core of their hearts and feelings remains the same. They still follow the *Vedic* injunctions *Sathyam vada, dharmam chara* (speak truth and follow righteousness). They respect the elders and serve them with love and affection.

What could be the reason for this? Love for God. It is a land where love for God exists even today. They have fear of sin. Those who have love for God naturally develop fear of sin. Consequently, such people will have a high degree of morality in society, which is very important for its orderly functioning. Thus, the people of Kerala scrupulously observe the three principles of *Daiva preethi; papa bheethi, and sangha neethi* (love for God, fear of sin, and morality in society). They respect elders and give due recognition to them.

One should have morality and integrity. The same principles have been enshrined in the *Vedic* injunction, *Sathyam vada, dharmam chara* (speak truth and follow righteousness). The people of Kerala follow these two principles scrupulously in their daily lives.

It is not enough to celebrate the Onam festival with a lot of religious fervour and devotion. You have to live up to the expectations of the noble emperor Bali. It is said *Matru devo bhava, pitru devo bhava, acharya devo bhava, atithi devo bhava* (revere your mother, father, preceptor, and guest as God). (Mother is God, father is God, teacher is God, and guest is God). First comes the mother in that order. She gives birth to you, brings you up, and teaches you good things in your formative years. Then begins the role of father. He is your second *guru*. Then the teacher (*guru*) teaches you education to enable you to make a living in the world. And finally God takes command. Thus, your life in this physical world begins with your mother and culminates in God.

Hence, do not under any circumstances forget your mother. Love your mother more than anyone else and show her due respect. You will find that the people of Kerala respect the elders very much, particularly their mothers. They lend a helping hand and take good care of them. They keep them happy always. How fortunate are the people of Kerala to have an Emperor like Bali, whom God Himself accompanied to *Vaikuntha* (heaven)!

What is Onam? It is a day in which people take a good bath, wear new clothes, and pray to God with a pure heart. The people of Kerala prepare a variety of tasty dishes, particularly with banana. In fact, they prepare twelve varieties of dishes with the banana fruit. It is a unique celebration. They prepare these dishes with a pure and loving heart. Hence, they will be very tasty.

2 September 2009

They offer these preparations first to God wholeheartedly and with a lot of devotion and then partake of it along with their family members and relations. They serve these dishes one after the other. Both the cooking and serving of the dishes is done with a pure and loving heart in the true spirit of Onam celebrations. They keep their houses clean and maintain a sacred atmosphere for God to manifest. They consider them not merely as houses, but temples of God. It is only in Kerala that such a sacred atmosphere prevails.

Even if some people have some misgivings about the festival of Onam, they get them cleared and celebrate the festival in its true spirit as a day on which Emperor Bali conferred blessings on his people from *Vaikuntha* (the abode of Lord Vishnu), which he ultimately reached.

It is a *tapas* (penance) for the people of Kerala to remember the words of Emperor Bali on this day and lead their lives accordingly in a spirit of love and service. "Love all and serve all"! There can be no greater penance for anyone.

Whomsoever you come across, offer your salutations. Even if you encounter your enemy, offer your salutations to him first. Surely, he will reciprocate your noble gesture. Thus, people have to conduct themselves with mutual love and unity. It is only such people that deserve to be called human beings. They are, in fact, the people with morality.

You have to develop such morality today. Love for God enjoins one to develop morality in society. Hence, you have to develop *Daiva preethi*, *papa bheethi*, and *sangha neethi* (love for God, fear of sin, and morality in society). Do not ever forget these three principles.

Those who have no morality are not human beings at all! Can a nation or race exist without morality? No! You have also to develop the qualities of humility and obedience, besides morality. This was, in fact, the message of emperor Bali to his people. If you can cultivate and develop these qualities, your life will be sanctified.