

Happy new year to all of you.

We are beginning this new year like previous year with the covid spread all around us and therefore there is an environment of uncertainty, anxiety, fear which is spread among many people. Since we are not familiar with this virus, we do not know how it is going to act out. So lot of uncertainty and anxiety is there in our mind which is understandable. The immediate means available is of course, prayer.

भयेभ्यस्त्राहि नो देवि दुर्गे देवि नमोऽस्तुते

*bhayebhyastrhi no devi durge devi namo'stute.*

O Durge Devi, O mother goddess Durga! please protect us from this fear. So if we have this type of concern and fear in our mind, which is quite likely, then prayer is the means available to us. At same time it is possible to see also or recognise a ray of hope of something positive in this life, which is there and it is Ishwara and Ishwara's grace. Although looking at what is happening to human beings on this earth, it is hard to see the grace and benevolence of Ishwara. But if we leave aside the human society and look at the rest of the creation, look at the rest of the nature, then we will find that Ishwara's grace is very evident, as to how he is benevolent and how he cares every creature that is created, how the natural instincts of *āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunam*, how there is provision for fulfilling all these needs but we find that the nature also seems to be antagonistic to us. We know that is also due to the abuse of human free will. So what I wish to point out is, the pain and suffering in our life is also built into the nature.

Of course, *jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyuah*. Death is certain for the one who is born. *Janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi* – birth, death, old age, diseases all these are part of the creation and that is unavoidable. So this pain is also unavoidable. Perhaps lot of pain is also created by the abuse of free will on the part of human being, like global warming exc. and its consequences in terms of the floods and famine and many other natural calamities. Unfortunately, human being does have a contribution to the suffering of the human beings and as a consequence, other living beings are also going through that suffering. If we see the fact that Ishwara's benevolence still exists even when these viruses come, there is still some solution there, either in terms of technology or in terms of the virus also in course of time lying down on its own. While we are anxious, fearful and there may be a set of mind in which we are disappointed, we have resentment and anger towards what is happening to us and may be some disillusion with Ishwara. I would like to point out that in spite of all of these, Ishwara is benevolent. Ishwara is of the nature of grace and therefore grace is always prevalent everywhere including our own life. Let us also take that into consideration.

As our Pujya Swamiji used to point out, 'our breathing is grace, we wake up in the morning after going to sleep that is grace and then if you perhaps investigate what all we are eating we will be surprised that in spite of eating all types of stuff we are still alive and moving about'. In the midst of this environment which causes uncertainty and anxiety, there is also a scope for recognising and thinking about the grace that we are enjoying from Ishwara and from nature. Let that give us a hope and enthusiasm and a positive, proper and right thinking. 'I am enjoying grace even though I may also be in one of those who have had to suffer and who is suffering from the consequences of this virus or its derivatives. Despite that we still have grace in our lives, in every life which is alive and breathing.'

Therefore, let me recognise that, while determining about my life, what reactions and state of my mind I have, let me have hope and be grateful to Ishwara. Let there be a sense of gratitude in me, regardless of what the situation is and that gratitude enables me to faithfully and positively continue with hope for the future, with also motivation to do what is required in order to make this life better. So that I become a contributor to the improvement to the life of others. There is always scope for this type of right, positive thinking, which is the source of happiness. In my own small way, I can remain a contributor with the spirit of being able to do something for others. That is the harmony or the law that is existing in this universe, that every element contributes to the universe.

Human being of course has to use the freewill in order to adopt that spirit of contribution, that I am being helped all the time. So to help is also my duty and my pleasure. As a human being I am given this freewill and also many other abilities. It is my privilege and pleasure to contribute not only for myself but also for others, up to extent I can. That is the true source of happiness. In any circumstances it is always possible that we can have the right attitude, arising from the right understanding. We have the right kind of act or behaviour, which is conducive to and contributes to the happiness in our mind. I wish you and pray to Ishwara that may all of us get this ability and tranquillity in our minds, that composure of the mind, because of which we can see the positive that is existing, the grace that is existing, the benevolence that is existing in our lives, despite this evident suffering. We may make a note of that and we may have that spirit of gratitude, prayer and the contribution up to the extent we can. In that way we derive happiness for our lives and contribute to the happiness of others.

May Ishwara give us the composure, understanding, insight, inspiration and action through which we can still maintain composure of our minds and derive peace tranquillity in our lives in the coming year, despite whatever happens and may happen. *Om Tat Sat.*