

Anugraha bhāṣyam 2005 ¹

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Tsunami is a devastating experience for all of us. Not only the people who are bereaved, but all human beings who have come to know about the devastation would feel the helplessness that every human being is subject to. Indians have one more thing to deal with.

There is another tragic event that happened before Tsunami that deeply hurt the Hindus in India and elsewhere—the arrest of an *ācāryā*. It is not an arrest of just another *ācāryā* but a *pīṭādīpati*, the head of a *maṭh*. Hindu *dharma* is not centered on a given person, or *maṭh*, or a given *avatāra*, but on every Hindu. It is not controlled by an organization or an individual. There is no equivalent of a papacy, diocese, parish or congregation. Congregations of religions are too often political. The clergy can, and do, influence the congregation to vote for a party and create a vote bank. Thus, they can manipulate a government. In congregational religions, the clergy have the power to control politics. We don't have that, but still, a head of a *maṭh* is to be given due respect, even though nobody is above the law. There is a certain decorum, and we feel that has not been honored. Therefore, there is a certain anguish. The problem is not yet solved; there is a 'hangover'.

We are starting the year with some anguish. But the human heart is very resilient. We find some strength from our own reserves, and we have to draw from those reserves. Though the gas tank meter indicates that the tank is almost empty, still, we can go twenty miles. There is always something in reserve. We have to draw from the reserve of inner strength.

This inner strength is called *ātma-bala*. A human being is helpless, *balahīna*, in this world. In winter, for instance, especially in Pennsylvania, when a person is walking outside, you can't even see who it is. All you see is some shape walking that looks like it could be a bear. Everything is covered. Even when I come nobody knows that the swami is coming. Everybody is covered and grizzly, because of the helplessness against the cold of winter. Come summer, everybody is scratching, which is why they call it buggy, muggy Pennsylvania. *bhagavān* has created all kinds of bugs, even unknown bugs that we can't even see. He seems to have created them to give us good company, as though we have no company. I think it is a part of a big plan, for they seem to have a place in the scheme of things. Just as, in the scheme of things, you have a place, otherwise you wouldn't be here. The job of a bug is to bug and the lot of a human being is to get bugged. This is the situation. You always feel that you are persecuted by bugs and bugging people— and even planets. If you have consulted an astrologer you'll know that Saturn, Venus, Jupiter seem to conspire against you. So there is constant helplessness.

The helplessness, the *dainyam*, is very obvious. You need not consult anybody to find out whether one is helpless. That is why when you meet someone you ask, "How are you?" You ask because you expect something to be wrong. When they meet me, invariably they ask me, "How is your health?" I am sitting here, I have come all the way from India for one week, so I must be okay. Even though we ask each other, "How do you do?" we don't expect anyone to answer in detail, relating all his or her problems. But still, we need to ask. This indicates that there is a common acceptance of helplessness.

Yet, in spite of this helplessness, there is a certain *bala*, strength. We call it *ātma-bala*. What is this strength and where does it come from? The human heart is able to hope for a brighter morrow. It always looks for a better day. Spring will come. Winter will go. There is always a hope. How does this happen? This is a very important fact to know.

Really speaking, the strength comes from inside. We need to face situations for which we don't have immediate answers, solutions and explanations. Death, for instance. People die; in fact, the dead form the majority. In English there is an expression for this. If one says, "He has joined the majority," it means he is no more—not that he has jumped from one political party to another. Generations have gone, so death is not anything new. The *Upaniṣad* says, *mṛtuḥ bhavati pañcama iti*, "Death, the fifth, runs." Lord Death does not move systematically from person to person, one after another as though they are in a queue. He jumps around from one to another, now an old person, and now a young person. As long as it happens this way, we seem to have the capacity to accept it, but when it happens like it has with this tsunami, with so many people going together, we ask for an explanation. We want to know why all these people die for no reason. In fact, death only happens for no reason. They say that a person dies of heart failure, as though others die without heart failure. In every death there is heart failure. If you give an explanation, you may say that there was a heart attack, and therefore he died. Then the next question is, "Why did he have a heart attack?" One more question and you have no answer. It is always illogical.

It is logical, however, when we look at the nature of situations. This happens all the time; new things are born and old things are gone. That is the process. The time machine keeps moving. Time is a great leveler; it has leveled empires and cultures. And not merely time; it is also thanks to the concerted efforts of some zealous people that cultures, religious traditions and peoples have disappeared. Time itself is a great leveler and with some enthusiastic people it becomes a greater leveler. Here, at least, for this calamity, no particular person or groups of people are responsible. But things have disappeared. They keep changing and are changing even now.

In this there is a certain hope which lies in the freshness of the moment. The human heart cannot afford to live in the past much less it can live in the future. It has to live between the 'lub' and 'dub' of the heartbeat, because that is content of time. It has to be alive to what is going on now. That is the reserve, honestly. It is not that there is some other reserve that we draw from. It is the very freshness of the moment that gives the innocent freshness of a growing child asking 'how come, how come?' So there is a freshness behind the eyes and that never dies. It is always with you. Even the oldest man available has this freshness behind the eyes, in spite of the fact that he removes his glasses and tries to see by closing one eye. What is happening now is freshness. When I open my eyes and see the green trees, that is freshness. Afterwards comes all the baggage. It is that freshness which gives hope. In that fresh moment there is no death, no change or complaint, there is only perception. There is the certain cognition that life unfolds itself from moment to moment. All our baggage is brought from our own lot, the past, the situation, and unresolved anguish. We bring these to bear upon the moment and stifle the moment. But that takes place later.

When I was a young boy—why a young boy? When I was a boy. These days boys are old also. I met a 73 old woman who asked me to meet her boyfriend. The man was 85 years old.

What word do you have for that? We don't have this in Indian culture, but then, how else will she introduce her friend? There is freshness, I say. There is hope and joy. When I was a boy I saw a bereaved woman, crying constantly; crying she lights the stove, crying she boils water, crying she makes a decoction for coffee, crying she waits for it, crying she heats up the milk, crying she makes coffee and mixes it up, crying she tastes it and adds a little more sugar. That was very revealing to me. In between crying she saw that there was not enough sugar. That is possible only when you are purely cognitive. At that moment there is freshness. Crying she offered it to another person also. That is a human heart. It is alive to the moment. The moment calls for action. However unpleasant it is, it is only a fact that calls for action. The calamitous fact calls for action.

We can learn from all this. When calamity strikes we can feel devastated, we do feel devastated. Then there should be a time, a moment when I can ask a fresh question. When I am alive to the moment I can ask a question. That is what the fresh mind does. A question—"What do I learn from this?" However calamitous it is, however tragic it is, we should ask a question in the fresh moment—"What do I learn from it?"

When I ask a question I will discover something. There need not be a final answer. Maybe today I will learn something from this, or maybe I will not even find an answer. What do I learn from it? That question is more important than finding an answer. What do I learn from it? If I don't see anything that I can learn from it, then what do I learn from that? We learn one thing—we need to ask the question "What do I learn from this situation?" When it is a happy situation, then we need not ask a question, but even then it is good to ask the question, "What do I learn from it?" That is discrimination, *viveka*. In a sad situation I definitely need to ask the question, "What do I learn from this?"

In the vastness of the universe, a lot of adjustments take place. Systems and planets adjust themselves. Within a given planet some adjustments are always taking place. At the core of this planet there is activity going on. Certain things happen; certain people are there at the wrong place, or right place at the wrong time. The beach is a right place, but this was the wrong time to be there. Maybe for somebody who is very old, living with a painful body, this was a great relief. It is God-sent relief. God took him away in one sweep, painlessly. For somebody it was good.

What we learn from this is that there is constant change taking place. As human beings we see ourselves as helpless. It is wrong to think that we call all the shots; it is more wrong to think that we call none of the shots. It is not true that somebody else is calling all the shots. At this moment what I can do is what I need to do. A situation like this calls for action. Humanity responded, countries responded, people responded. In fact the community that needed help can't even make use of the help that is available now. Now the direction is turning towards rehabilitation.

Aim for Seva went into action and was able to do some really good work. We are very proud of those people who did this work. In the beginning the people who were affected needed shelter and food, so thousands of meals were cooked and served. Afterwards clothes were given. Now family relief packages are being given—cooking pots, plates, rice, dhal, clothes and milk powder, all in one package.

We sent truck loads to Tuttukudi and Nagapatnam, and now the people are saying, “Keep it, we will take it later. We have no shelter now.” So we are working on rehabilitation, building houses. Whole villages have been swept away. And we have to work with the government, which is good; they tell us exactly where and what to build. The residents want to build on the same beach, but the government does not want that; they want the homes a mile away. These people are fisher folk and they want to be on the beach, but now they have to learn that it is better to be a little away. So we are working on this. There is a need for action and we are doing what we need to do. We have to care for each other; this is what is important.

At the moment what is necessary is caring. We can sit and ruminate and cry, or we can keep doing what needs to be done. That’s what happens every day as you breathe in and breathe out. The breath in your nostrils tells you how you should live. The sunrise and sunset tell you how you should live. The seasons tell you how you should live. All the reserve is in the freshness, and the freshness is there when you are with what is. What is, is God. What is, is *īsvara*. What you make out of it, is you. As long as you don’t make anything out of it, you don’t distort it, but just take it as it is, you have freshness, you are alive to what is. What is, is *īsvara*. The more you are with what is, the more you have strength, you have is freshness, you have *ātma-bala*. If you miss what is, then you have no *ātma-bala*. You become *dīna*, weak or helpless. What is, is God. Without God you become rudderless; you become an orphan.

Caitanya Mahā Prabhu said that all men and women are females. I don’t know why he said that. He had a concept, which women may not accept, that all females are clinging on to males. On the basis of that concept he said that there is only one *puruṣa* and that is Kṛṣṇa the Lord. All others are after that one *puruṣa* the Lord. It is true.

There is only one *puruṣa*, only one *īsvara*, and everything else is *prakṛti*. That is more acceptable. The idea is that all that is here is *īsvara*. If that *īsvara* is missing, then you are an orphan. If *īsvara* is there in your life, then there is no possibility of being an orphan. There cannot be a better support, a more secure support. That is what freshness is. It is being alive to *īsvara* that makes you fresh.

It is a New Year. Let it be new all the way. May you be fresh all the way. May you fulfill all the caring jobs and actions that each moment demands. As the moments unfold, as the days unfold, then what is to be done becomes very evident. If you keep doing what is to be done, then you are alive, you are fresh and you are strong. Nobody can shake you. When you come back next year for the New Year and I talk to you, I will say the same thing. What is the fresh message? The fresh message is to be alive to what this new moment is calling upon you for.

Thank you. Happy New Year!

1 Delivered at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorburg, January 1, 2005.