

The Dignity of Man in Different Stages

Om. A-sa-to ma sad ga-ma-ya. Ta-ma-so-ma jyo-tir ga-ma-ya. Mri-tyor ma-a-mri-tam ga-ma-ya. Avir avir ma e-dhi. Rudra yat te dak-shi-nam mu-kham. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Tena mam pahi nityam. Lead us from the unreal to the Real. Lead us from darkness unto Light. Lead us from death to Immortality. Reveal to us Thy Resplendent Truth, and evermore protect us O Lord, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face, by Thy Sweet and Compassionate Face.

The subject of my talk this morning is: The dignity of man – in different stages. Dignity is a special gift of man. In all men we do not find expression of this special gift, namely dignity. Dignity is a quality of character. A person may not be rich or very intellectual. He may not be a scholar. He may not be a lawyer. He need not be of any other vocation which we admire. A poor man, doing a humble profession, can reveal dignity in his character. You go to him, and at once you find that this man is different. Though he has a low vocation in life, but he has something which thousands of other people have not. He has character. And this character is made of several things so that, that character is a dignified character.

The first component of such dignity is truth. Truthfulness. Honesty. Unselfishness. Courage. Humility. These things work together, and we call that man a dignified man. He may be low in social status, but we cannot but be impressed by his manners, by his talks. We just stand near him and imbibe something for ourselves. We feel that this man, is really a man in the true sense of [the] term. He represents humanity at its best.

A man of such a type need not be religious. Religion has nothing to do [with it], but man is a truth by himself. Just as man is the repository of many qualities that may show later, similarly this dignity also lies in man – in most people, hidden-- but in some fortunate people it is manifest. Then we bow down to God. In several books and scriptures we read about the divinity of man. Usually when we speak of divinity of man, we are speaking in the religious context. But dignity need not have a religious content. A man possessing those qualities I mentioned—truthfulness, honesty, unselfishness, and courage and self-respect, these together make a very admirable man. His name may not be in history. He may not be a religious man at all. But he has shown in his character, humanity at its best.

In philosophy, we speak that all men are children of God. In Vedanta we say that all men have the latent possibility of becoming divine, of becoming god-like. But as my title says, the dignity of man can be manifest in many ways. He is giving great inspiration in life. Sometimes we are tired of life. Sometimes, seeing the fallacies of life, the cruelties, the dishonesties, the corruptions that we find around even in great – for [those] whom we call great. Great in position. We... Sometimes our heart becomes... empty. At that moment, if we are fortunate to find such a person with dignity, then we say to ourselves, “Life is not so bad.” If one is able to develop these attributes in his character, he is a remarkable man. He is a man of inspiration. He may not be a spiritual teacher. He may not be drawn to religion, but he is drawn to manhood at its best.

As Shakespeare said, “Be true to yourself.” So this man has been true to himself. Because man does not live by food, or luxury, or honor, or wealth but his greatness is

revealed in these qualities of truthfulness, honesty, courage. Such a man becomes an inspiration. He draws people towards them. They may ask him, "Speak to us about religious truths." He says, "I do not know anything of religion (laughs), but I feel that I am true to myself. If God created man with a purpose, I have a... I have the courage to say that I have fulfilled His purpose, even without going to churches, even without going to temples. Because I find myself as a man."

[In] many books, many religions, man is called the supreme creation of God. But this supreme creation is not self-evident. This supreme creation is His true dignity. His true dignity is his character. A man of character is a powerful force in our society. Now if a person be a highly intellectual person. He may be a scientist. He may be a politician. Yet, he may not have fulfilled these basic qualities of dignity. We can praise him as a professor. We can praise him as a mathematician or a scientist. But we hear somehow the inner story of his life, and we find there is so much fake in him. He is not true to himself. He may be a scholar. He may be [a] rich man. But he is not true to manhood. He is not true to the dignity of man.

In this way in any stage of life we are, there is the possibility of manifesting the...true character, which we call dignity. If we are conscious of ourselves, sometimes it strikes our conscience-- that people know me as a good man, as a learned man, as a wealthy man, as a honorable man, but am I true to myself? Am I not dishonest? Hundreds of occasions, I have to act [in ways] which I am not. So his conscience tells him that being a man he should be true to himself. And that will satisfy God, whether you believe in God or not.

When we come to religion then, we have more responsibility because when we have, when we claim to be a religious man, people examine us thoroughly. If they find me doing something evil, if they find me involved in some shameful act, behind the public appearance, then even though he is a religious man, he has insulted his manhood. He has not been true to himself.

Consider: an incident in the life of Abraham Lincoln. By that time he was a young man. He was not living at his home. He had come to a village near Springfield, called New Salem. And he was, with another person, working in a shop – groceries, miscellaneous items, like that. He was a shop ... shopkeeper. Now one day he found an old lady had come to purchase some items, and he found when the lady was gone, long after that, he found that somehow that lady overpaid six cents more. She had given for the items she had bought, six cents. Now Lincoln found out that that lady lives six miles away. So he began to walk those six miles and return to her those six cents. "Madam you... you overpaid me this six cents." That is an example of dignity. Abraham Lincoln was a different person. At all stages of his life he had shown the dignity of character. He himself had said that, "I have never been false to any person." 'Be true to yourself,' this motto of ideal manhood he followed in his life up to the last.

But when we come to our spiritual life, we should remember that spiritual life is not simple. To go to a church, or listening [to] a sermon, and pay the dues... but religion should be something uplifting. Uplifting in a tangible sense. A person who is interested in religion, should never be in the suspicion of man. This man has come to church and showing his religiosity-- but he has done this. He has done that. So in religion, in the religious life, even from the beginning of religious life we should be more careful about our ethical conduct, than what we read in religious books. If one can do that, then

religious life really is a blissful life. Faith of God, and love for God, and love for man. All these things spontaneously arise in the character of a true dignified religious seeker. To such a religious seeker, God becomes real day to day. God becomes real in my actions, whether those actions are big actions or small actions. I am honest. I am truthful. I am courageous. I am not ashamed to admit if I have done something wrong to somebody. So his life becomes a blissful life. He is really manifesting divinity in his life. And that is a great purpose, which is fulfilled. As Sri Ramakrishna said, "To realize God is the great purpose of human life."

Most of the human beings, they're carrying the potentiality of greatness, in the sense of dignity. But they may not have the opportunity or liking for God, or religious behavior like prayer. But if he is sincere, then his character opens up. In society. In family. In outside. People know him more as a man of character than they know him as a church going man.

A truly religious man, keeps his religious life very secret. But if he has been interested in religious truth, then he carries on his prayers, his meditations. As his time and energy permits, he grows in his religious life, unseen by others. Many do not understand it. A man who is dignified in his life, without religion, can be found out. By his talks, by his humility, by his truthfulness he can be found out. But a true spiritual seeker cannot be found out easily. He does all that he has to do with strict ideals of character. He works hard. He has compassion for others. We all are children of God; this is not a theoretical proposition to him. He feels in his heart the unity with all mankind. More and more his life finds that unity in others, even with people who lived in the past, he considers that they all... all belong to one family, the family of God. And they are not gone. Just as God is eternal, his creation also is eternal in this sense.

So this person, through his slow practice of devotion and prayer, grows in his comprehension of life. He is not satisfied to live a little life, a little selfish life with his relations and some friends. But he wants to live a total life, and that total life includes all humanity, all living beings, all nature. So his outlook of life changes from day to day, and he's happy and blessed to feel that God is really True, God is really Great. God is not a fiction, but God can be made our own -- by human relations. Then this man, even though a busy man, he has to do so many things, but he never feels himself distant from God. Even when he is working hard, one part of his mind is in God. He eliminates his ego as much as possible. That is a -- necessity-- in the manifestation of the dignity.

He is extremely humble, but he feels his unity with all mankind. Not only mankind-- but with anything we see, and feel, and experience in this big universe. He slowly feels his unity with the sky, with the trees, with the rivers. Inside him, a poet goes on writing poems, adoring the greatness of God in nature. God is great in nature because all nature belongs to Him. Every part of nature has been created by God, and this great fact, this man, this spiritual seeker realizes from day to day. Naturally, he has known this. He cannot be mean to anyone. In every face he sees God's face. In every action, he sees God's Hands. So his whole life is filled with God. Such a person you can call... Really in the field of religion and spiritual life he has acquired that dignity. Though he does not want to preach it, his religion is in the heart and in his heart there is this [are these?] tremendous expressions of God, because God is Love, God is Power, God is Beauty. God is Everything! God is the little flower. God is the little or big tree. So more and more in his heart he feels this great presence of God. And he cannot... Eventually in the

Vedantic scriptures we read, he feels the great God, universal God, is – has his residence in my heart. What we see outside is really inside my heart. Within my heart is all humanity, is all living creation. So this person cannot hate anything. Everything has become God for him because, though God is the producer of this multiplicity, but He Himself is One. All things and beings in this universe are part of God. God cannot be divided. The difference between great and small, far or near, beautiful or ugly. These differences are human creations, the creations of an ignorant human mind. But when the mind is illumined by the Grace of God, all the universe is inside his heart. And that heart is a great heart. You could say that, that is the Heart of God. The heart of God is everywhere and this spiritual seeker finds that Heart in his own heart. In his contemplation when his mind goes deep, he finds that everything is in his heart. The living things. The non-living things. The present objects. The past objects. Everything is the glory of God, and that glory is in his heart.

The great Vedantic philosopher, Shankaracharya, said, “The real spiritual knowledge is that experience of unity with everything. Nothing can be discarded, because everything is one with God and that God has His residence in my heart.” Other saints and sages who have experienced Truth in their own religion, they also have this similar experience. From their heart, all hate, all meanness, all egotism and selfishness disappear. It becomes a clean heart. For it is God’s heart, and he lives with God’s Heart all the time. Even when he is intensely active, he is living with God.

Such experiences are very exciting to read, but when we come to serious spiritual life we should know that they are not merely intellectual expressions, but they can be living experiences. So that such a spiritual person has attained the highest spiritual dignity. As I said, the dignity of man works in many ways. So when we have come to the field of religion, then that dignity has attained such a gigantic proportion. The vastness of the universe has converged into a point in my heart. And we find everything there. Even in the body, the human body where we live, we find this human body is the playground of God. All that is happening in this human body is nothing but the universal movement.

Things are happening outside, and things also are happening inside. Both these are one. It is God’s Heart and I am one with God’s Heart. Such experiences can be real! In the beginning we have to read and believe and pray to God to give us more faith. And patience. And courage. Then God is not a blind – not [a] deaf God. He responds to such prayers. If we pray to God for some material need, God may not always listen, but if we pray to God for spiritual fulfillment, or spiritual love, devotion, faith, then God does respond. Slowly our heart opens up, and we find that God is residing there all the time with everything that we see and feel.

So one of the Upanishads, the Kena Upanishad, makes a very brief statement, that when that stage will come, that each experience will be, to you a God experience, a spiritual experience. Then you have reached the goal. Then for you there is nothing that is not God. You have no longer identified with your own little body. On the other hand, you see that just as I am fond of my body and afraid to die, the same is true of millions of human beings. And these millions of human beings also are me. So he has reached that unity and that unity becomes a real experience to him. In Sri Ramakrishna’s words, such an experience is the goal of human life. The goal of human life is to be truly human – a

dignified human being. And that dignity, in the spiritual sense, is the experience of unity with everything.

--- *Announcements* ---

If you go to our retreat before going home, you may see the lotuses are blooming. Some lotuses are point[ing] up, and some are hidden by other leaves. But the leaves have become so big that they hide the blooming lotus. We don't... We cannot use these flowers for our worship because they close up. In the morning they open up. By ten o'clock, by nine o'clock then as the sun -- they close up. But is a joy to see them, and see the beauty and the majesty of God there-- in that lotus.

On the way to the lotus pond, there is another interesting place to go. Our book shop (laughter). And that book shop will give you a free cup of coffee. And there are big pictures. Big pictures are there. They can be framed. The Hindu gods and goddesses. And many other things. You could buy incense. You could buy books on all religions, not merely Vedanta books, but yoga books and other books. So it is a relaxation to go and see all these books. (And if you have money, you could buy one or two.) And then you go farther to the retreat and see the lotus pond.

Many people quietly come before evening. They don't care to go to the temple inside. But they feel the presence of peace, whose other name is God, in the trees, in the atmosphere, in the pond. There.., a kind of total peace is there. Many people. Many people have said this. When I see some stranger, I say, "Good evening." And that person also says, "Good evening." Then we have a little conversation. They say, "We like this place. The peace of this place." Hmm? "A peace... God's Peace, it has pervaded here. The trees, the plants, and the flowers, and the meadows. And the people who come here -- they must be of an unusual type." I say if you want to see those people you have to come in the morning to our services. (He chuckles.) Then they may see budding saints. (slight laugh)... Hmm?

[Chants in Sanskrit -- Om madhu....]

Sweet blow the winds, and the very oceans give forth blessedness. May the herbs and plants bring us health and happiness. Sweet unto me, the nights and dawns. May every particle of Mother Earth be charged with blessing and may the heavens shower us with benediction. Sweet unto us be the noble forest trees. Sweet unto us be the shining sun. Sweet unto us be all living creation. Om, sweetness, harmony, peace.