

## A:cha:rya Abhima:nam

- by Mohan Sagar

(inspired by the writings of Professor M. S. Rangacharya)

As followers of Ve:dic Culture, we are taught how having a guru or a:cha:rya is of vital importance to our spiritual progress. Indeed, to revere and serve the a:cha:rya is considered as being more important than serving God. It is a widely-held belief that if anything can be considered as a guaranteed way to achieve God, it is serving the ach:arya with utmost faith. We call this kind of faithful service as A:cha:rya Abhima:nam, or deep regard for the Teacher, which motivates us to serve him and to follow his teachings. But, despite the seeming good intentions of this ideal, two problems arise.

The first is a question of grammar. The term "abhima:nam", in its literal sense, suggests the deep compassion that someone who is in a position to help someone has for someone who requires help. This is clearly not the case in the relationship of a student to a Teacher. In fact, if the idea was to suggest that we serve the A:cha:rya out of concern for him, the word "bahumathi" - which suggests one's reverence for a person in a higher position out of servitude - would have probably been used.

The other problem is that, if seen only in the light of a student's blind dedication to a Teacher, this kind of faith can tend to become very ritualistic after awhile, and can actually hinder our spiritual progress. Many of us have probably gone through those moments when our incomplete understanding of the connection

between a sishya and the A:charya causes us to feel we are doing some great sacrifice, and therefore we begin to think and act as though we are deserving of some special recognition by him and the world around us. After a time, when things do not seem to go our way, we suddenly find ourselves doubting him, wondering why, after all our service to him, he does not make the effort to remove the obstacles that stand in our way. Later, we begin to blame ourselves, thinking that we are somehow undeserving of our Acha:rya's attention.

Our pu:rva:cha:ryas, such as Swa:my Pillai Lo:kacha:rya and Sri Manava:lama:muni, who were sishyas to their own respective gurus, as well as being great scholars in their own right, have clearly recognized the great psychological turmoil that this incorrect understanding can have on us, and therefore, have shared a far more lucid and meaningful interpretation of Acha:rya Abhima:nam that will clear things up for us. Through the vast understanding of our Ve:dic culture, as well as their expertise in the nuances of Sa:nskrit, our pu:rva:cha:ryas realized that a:cha:rya abhima:nam as a means to spiritual progress is not our servitude to the Teacher, but rather, involves our awareness and reliance on the A:cha:rya's deep concern and regard for us.

Our great a:cha:ryas, through their vast knowledge, have reached a stage in which they have realized their true nature and purpose as being



instruments to God. So, the minds and hearts of our a:cha:ryas are so pure, so much absorbed in God, that they have become humble instruments to Him to utilize for the good of His world. So, their very desire to teach us good things, to show us the way to live a good life and reach a level of spiritual fulfillment, is an expression of God's Boundless and Unconditional Love for all of us. This Love is so overwhelming for the A:cha:ryas that they cannot bear the thought of other living beings experiencing even a moment of suffering. As a result, they are always reaching out to us; they are always striving to teach us the proper way to live life such that we can be of some benefit to this world, and always praying that God will awaken within us the knowledge that He is Always There for us, so that we can rid ourselves of fear and worry. They do this not to gain anything for themselves, but to know the joy of bringing good to others, a reflection of God's Desire to bring His Unconditional Love to all of us. And, like God, they see each of us as having the potential to cultivate good, irrespective of our human foibles.

It was this overwhelming, intense Love that was the motivation for Bhagavad Sri Ramanuja to break with the custom of the day, and climb to the top of the temple at Thiruko:shtiyu:r to bring the wisdom of the Charama Slo:kam to anyone who was interested. To Sri Ramanuja, being able to see even one good person achieve liberation from their suffering was far greater than achieving Vai:kuntam for himself.

But, why go so far back in history, when we have our own Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji as the very example of God's Love in human form? He has spent a quarter of a century dedicated

to innumerable service activities for the benefit of the world. He has shared his vast wisdom with an uncountable number of people, bringing peace and purpose to the thousands in his message of "Service to All Beings as Service to God". He does all this with no expectation other than to see us live a good life, and no desire for anything in return. He shares his wisdom with us in a way that is uniquely designed for each of us. And, his soft speech and compassionate eyes are clear indication of just how much he loves each and every one of us.

When we know that someone loves us in this way, boundlessly and unconditionally, our natural response is to relish this gift, since it gives us a genuine feeling of self-worth, much in the way that a child feels inspired when she knows that her parents believe in her and are there for her, unconditionally. And with the knowledge of God's Boundless and Unconditional Love that our A:cha:rya imparts to us, we have an added awareness that relieves us from fear and worry about the uncertainties of this life. Knowing that he gives us so much without any expectation, how can we not love him in return? Through this communion with him, we begin to understand his overwhelming desire to bring solace to the lives of others. So, we begin to care for and serve our A:cha:rya such that he can bring his message to all humanity. This is the true meaning of "A:cha:rya Abhima:nam" as is taught to us by our pu:rva:cha:ryas. Let us revel in the wonder of it and let it enhance our life.

Jai Srimannarayana !

