

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION:

Q. 289, FAITHFULNESS

Om Sri Sai Ram

Prasanthi Sandesh, Question and Answer session

Q. 289:

I received a question with a request that I should say something on faithfulness. Good! Let me share with you some of the points on this subject, ***faithfulness.***

Well, in the spiritual context, what is the meaning of a faithful seeker? What is the difference between trust and faithfulness?

We usually use the words 'trust' and 'faithfulness' in the same sense. But the meaning of faithfulness is that the spiritual search is an arduous one. It's not going to be fulfilled in one day. Many, many failures are inevitable in this search. Many times you'll have to experience defeat. Many times you will have to fall apart. Many times you'll feel that nothing is happening or changing. You may think, "Let me stop! Let me drop this whole thing!"

So, the meaning of faithfulness is to keep your efforts going in the face of all failure. Not to waver even an inch in your efforts, in the face of all your failures, is what is meant by faithfulness.

When you are succeeding, then there is no need for any determination or for any faithfulness. The success itself will keep you going. When a man is successful in any area, no faithfulness is needed from him, because the success itself pushes him and makes him take the next step.

But when there is failure, the legs will not move. The failure becomes heavy. One feels as if rocks are tied to one's own feet and they refuse to go any further. In such a situation, it is only determination and faithfulness which will keep your feet moving.

The meaning of faithfulness is that you don't accept failure as failure or defeat as defeat. You go on taking steps forward, always forward. You confirm to yourself, "No matter how many defeats come, I need not accept them as defeats." This is what faithfulness is.

You must have heard of Thomas Edison. Edison was doing an experiment in his laboratory and he had a young man as his assistant for the project. The young man was very thoughtful, very rational, a scientific genius. They would carry out the experiment that they were working on every day. They would work on it up to eighteen hours a day and at night old Edison and that young man would go back home unsuccessful.

This continued for three months, every day. After three months the young man gave up. He had wanted to give up for many days. But, because of the flame of faithfulness which burned in old Edison's eyes, he did not dare to say anything.

Every morning Edison would arrive fresh like a child, almost running to the laboratory. The young man would come with this decision: "Today I will say, please excuse me. This is beyond me. This task will never be accomplished. It seems we have chosen something totally wrong. This experiment is never going to succeed. We have seen so many failures, so many times. We have tried from so many different directions and nothing comes of it. Yet you keep going on with it like a mad man. Let's drop it. Let's do something else where some success can come our way."

But, seeing the flame in Edison's eyes he would lose the courage to say something or to say anything. He would feel, "This old man is so young and I'm a young man talking like an old man. This is not fitting! "

But three months was enough time. They did not sleep in the night nor rest in the day. The experiment was not coming to any successful conclusion and Edison was not dropping it either. Every day they would fail and the next day they would begin again with a new approach.

After three months of keeping his eyes downcast and not looking into Edison's eyes, the young man said, "Excuse me."

Edison replied, "Look up at me".

The young man said, "No! Because looking straight into your eyes has kept me in this mess. No more! Today I am not going to look into your eyes. This experiment is not going to succeed."

Edison said, "Have you gone mad or something? Now, when we are coming so close to success?"

The young man said, "Close to success? We are not even as close to success as we were on the first day when we began! For three months we have explored all the avenues from all sides and everything has failed!"

Edison replied, "It seems you don't know the mathematics of it! We have tried so many ways and we have been unsuccessful. What does it mean? It means that the dead end paths are now fewer! They are now fewer! If there were three hundred paths in all, and we have tried two hundred, so then only one hundred are left. This means that we are coming closer to success! If not today, then tomorrow! Through defeat upon defeat we'll be victorious! Because there must finally be a path which is the right one! We are moving ahead and eliminating the wrong paths so victory is coming close. What kind of a mad man you must be! You are thinking of giving up after only three months of hard work? Just now when we are very close!?"

This is faithfulness! Faithfulness means that you trust in victory, even in the face of defeat and failure.

Suppose there is a rock in front of me on the path. If I want to, I can consider it as an obstacle. So for me, the path will come to an end there. This is a sign of an unfaithful person. Or if I want to, I can consider that I have come to a stepping-stone, a ladder. Now I'll climb the rock and my path will begin at some higher point.

So, a rock on the path can become either a ladder or an obstacle. In itself, it is neither a ladder nor an obstacle. It becomes an obstacle if I don't have faithfulness. It becomes a ladder if I have faithfulness. Please understand this.

The ultimate reality is the next nectar, which is hidden deep in the inner cave, in the depths of the heart. This is the realm of the ultimate reality, which is beyond heaven. It happens through the success that comes out of an endless number of failures. One will know the victory only after many defeats. One will reach integration, crystallisation, only after falling apart many times.

This meeting will happen only after missing it many times. Many times you'll pass close to it. So close, that you start to feel, "Now I'll give up. I'll never be able to make it!" And whenever this feeling comes, that is when faithfulness is needed. Faithfulness is needed at this point.

Without trust nobody can begin. Without faithfulness nobody can arrive. Trust makes it possible to begin. Faithfulness allows the completion to happen.

So that's why the *Upanishadic* scholars always say that only a faithful seeker will be able to experience the ultimate reality. That's what I can say on this subject of faithfulness.

Of course we all know that determination is associated with this process. When you are succeeding, then there's no need for any determination, any faithfulness. Success itself will keep you going. When a man is successful in any area, no faithfulness is needed from him, because success itself pushes him and makes him take the next step. But when there is failure, the legs will not move.

Therefore, as I said at the beginning, we may feel that determination is not necessary. That happens only when we are successful but not otherwise.

So that's what I can say on faithfulness. Hope you are satisfied with this answer.

Now, here is a short question which I would like to answer. A very short question indeed, and yet we have come to this conclusion only after going through the process of deep study. What does this study say? Well, let me just refer to my notes.

The essence of devotion is meditation. So it is the devotion which comes first, and that takes you to meditation.

Simple example: Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of West Bengal had come to know that an expert in the art of meditation arrived there in the city. Chaitanya wanted to learn meditation from him, having heard about his name and fame.

When Chaitanya arrived there, that expert saw Chaitanya from a distance and fell at the feet of Chaitanya. Chaitanya was surprised. He said, "No Sir, I have come here to learn meditation from you. Why do you fall at my feet?"

That expert said, "You should have come to me before you developed devotion. You should have come to me earlier. Now you have crossed that state of devotion and you have come to the level of meditation. You don't need me. You don't need me anymore."

Therefore, devotion takes you to meditation automatically. This feeling in the heart of love and intimacy, of oneness with the whole existence, is what devotion is. We get confused that devotion is an expression in a temple or a place of worship. No! Please understand this.

Oneness with the whole of existence is what devotion is. The awareness that you are one with the whole, one with the whole existence in this moment, is meditation. That's the difference.

So the awareness of meditation is absolutely necessary when you have a feeling of oneness with the whole.

This is what I would say on devotion and meditation. More in the next session. Thank you.