

MADHURAMANA MAHANEYAR

We live at a time when the entire world is gripped by the fear of the Corona pandemic. Healthcare professionals and the State and Central Government machinery are doing their best to prevent the spread of this virus and lockdown has been implemented in India and several countries across the world. Educational institutions, shops and many other services have been shut down. Our bustling streets, now wear a deserted look. A sense of fear and anxiety is palpable in the air. Across the world, there are just two questions that are ringing in the minds of all -

- When will this virus spread be contained?
- When will life return to normalcy?

A little boy from our satsang asked these questions to our Sri Swamiji. The elaborate reply given by Sri Swamiji is as follows:

When we flip through the annals of world history, we find that humankind has faced, and successfully overcome several challenges. God has never forsaken us. Human beings, using their intellect and efforts, have successfully surpassed every hurdle that came in the way. Time and again we have seen how Divine Grace has ensured that human efforts bear fruit. In circumstances such as these, God, and Mahatmas (saints) who are the hands of God, are our sole refuge.

There is an incident that happened in the Divine Life of Sri Bhagavannama Bodendra Swami of Govindapuram, a few centuries ago. Back then, the Arcot region was afflicted by an epidemic of plague and numerous people were affected. The epidemic did not spare even the ruler, The Nawab of Arcot. The people sought refuge at the Holy Feet of Sri Bodendra Swami. An ocean of compassion, Sri Bodendra Swami did japa of Rama Nama and saved the people from the peril they faced. It has been recorded in the life history of Sri Bodendra Swami, that the Nawab of Arcot, as an expression of gratitude, made an offering of land to Swami.

A similar incident took place in the life of Shirdi Baba. There was an outbreak of cholera in Shirdi. The administration tried everything they could to alleviate the sufferings of the people. Shirdi Baba was moved to tears seeing infants, toddlers and poor families in so much agony. One morning, he did something unusual. He picked up a grinding stone and began to make preparations for grinding wheat. He spread a sack on the floor; and set a grinding stone on it, and started grinding the wheat. The devotees were curious to know why Shirdi Baba was grinding wheat, but none had the courage to ask him directly. Some women from the crowd, asked Shirdi Baba if they could also grind the wheat. Seeing the women's love

and devotion, Shirdi Baba agreed. While they were grinding, they began to think 'Baba lives on alms. What would he possibly do with such a big quantity of flour? Perhaps, he will distribute the flour amongst us'. Thinking thus, they finished the grinding and after putting the hand-mill aside, they asked Shirdi Baba, "Can we now take this flour to our homes?" Shirdi Baba replied in a very stern voice, "None of you is allowed to take this flour. If you can, discard the entire flour past the village borders." On hearing this, the devotees instantly ran to the outskirts of the village and threw the flour away. In the days that followed, the cholera outbreak subsided gradually and everyone understood the purport of Shirdi Baba's actions.

Bhagavan Yogiramsurathkumar of Thiruvannamalai performed a similar leela around four decades ago. Those were times when he wandered in the streets of Thiruvannamalai, like a mendicant. The entire region was affected by a cholera-like epidemic. Despite the best efforts of the authorities, the disease did not subside. Yogiramsurathkumar stood near the place where the temple car was stationed (thermutti). The torment that people were undergoing, melted the heart of Yogiramsurathkumar. At that time, a fruitseller with a cart full of Indian jujubes (elanthai pazham), happened to pass by. Yogiramsurathkumar asked the person standing next to him, to buy all the fruit from the vendor. He then asked him to spread the fruits on the steps leading to the temple car. Yogiramsurathkumar then began to crush every single fruit with his feet, as he was mumbling some prayer. Following this leela of Bhagavan Yogiramsurathkumar, much to the astonishment of all the people, the epidemic began to wane the very next day.

When devotees submitted their prayers for relief from the impact of Corona Virus to Paranur Mahatma Sri Sri Anna, he blessed everyone by saying 'We need not panic regarding the Corona Virus; we need not fear. Sri Bhaktakolahala Swami will protect us all'.

God and Mahatmas have never forsaken us. We may follow different faiths. We may come from different cultural backgrounds. We may reside in different countries. Now is the time to unite in prayer. As our hearts melt, and voices unite in prayer, it will definitely reach God's ears. By His Grace, this world will be redeemed from this threat very soon. Let us not lose confidence. Let us face this situation courageously, and emerge successfully.

I am incessantly praying in solitude for all my brothers and sisters across the world. Let us not get disheartened. Let us not get confused, or confuse others with misinformation. Our state and central Government machinery, healthcare professionals, sanitation workers, police personnel, armed forces and many other selfless souls are working relentlessly for our safety and wellbeing. We are indebted to them for their service. Let us pray for the brave Air India team that is safely bringing back fellow countrymen from different parts of the world to their homeland, risking their own lives.

Such a lockdown is certainly essential to prevent the spread of this disease. In such a situation, middle class and upper middle-class families may be able to sustain with difficulty for 3-4 weeks without stepping out for work. But those who rely on daily wages for their livelihood, will immensely suffer. It is our duty to take care of them in compliance with the government restrictions.

God will never forsake us!

lokAh samastAh sukhinO bhavantu

(May all beings in the entire world be happy)

Dr A Bhagyanathan

Personal Secretary to Sri Sri Swamiji