

## **SOCIAL SERVICE**

One day some young men came to the Paramhansa and said to him : “ We have decided to engage ourselves in social service.”

Sri Ramakrishna addressed these enthusiasts thus : “ Your decision is indeed laudable. It is good to engage in social service. But first worship God, meditate on Him and purify your heart and then take to social work. If you think of God, you will get an access of strength. If you pray to God with devotion, you will acquire the capacity to do good. Through God’s grace you will get the skill and the facilities to do work well. Pray to God constantly. Sing the songs His lovers have sung in His praise. Then you will know how to do social work well.”

Every patriot who wishes to do social service must take note of this important teaching of Sri Ramakrishna : “ Do not, from an excess of desire to work for social welfare, wander about in search of things to do, saying to yourselves, ‘Well shall do this, we shall do that.’ Engage yourselves in the work that is at hand. Seeking for fame and name, do not go about saying this work is superior to that. Working for society means giving up all thought of fame or profit and doing your duties. Pray single- mindedly to God for devotion and for the sense to serve with a pure heart.

“ Service to the country may be rendered in many ways. Though serving society is good, it should not be begun with a craving society for fame. The desire for fame will pervert the efforts of social workers in times of crisis. If a desire for fame or any other selfish attachment is patent or concealed in the heart, even the most noble efforts will be rendered futile.

“ Don’t we hear many patriots complaining, ‘ I strove so much for other and I have got nothing’? What is the cause of this regret and bitterness of mind ? It is the result of working with a motive and not seeing it accomplished. If one starts serving his country or his society to earn fame and name, he will come to grief. This unholy desire will spoil and kind of good work. Whatever good we may do to benefit another or to serve society, we must dedicate it to God and resign ourselves to His grace. If we do so, we shall not be elated by success or depressed by failure.

“ It will not be true service if we engage in work with the purpose of benefiting ourselves and with the desire for fame in our minds. It will be a kind of ‘business’. If is true that great patriots who served their country have obtained fame and name. But such famous men did not seek fame. The secret of their renown and victory lies in their working without expectation of fame. And we have frequently seen that people who, forgetting this truth, began to work with the hope of similar renown, got sadly disappointed.”

Some may ask how one can engage in social work without desire for fame or reward. If such doubters confine themselves to their domestic duties and lead lives of

rectitude, they will have served society well enough that way. They need not enter the field of social service and feel regret or vexation.

If the difficult to do social service without attachment and desire. That is why Sri Ramakrishna said, “ Before you engage yourselves in social service, obtain God’s grace. First pray to God : ‘ Lord ! Fill my heart with devotion.’”

To those who get lost in social work, this warning of Sri Ramakrishna is very important. Many are filled with regret that all the labour that they did and all the money that they spent have been in vain. The secret of this lies in the initial mistake in mental attitude. That mistake has its effect like the drop of buttermilk that falls into the milk pot and turns it into curds. What else will be the fate of the edifice reared on the foundation of the desire for fame and name ? It will surely tumble down and cause grief. That is why Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said : “ Before you enter on social service, pray to God. Make your minds pure with the waters of devotion ; then being to work. If the foundation is strong and stable, then the building, however raised, will be secure.”

What do surgeons do before they begin an operation ? They wash their hands and knives with disinfectants and than begin to apply the knife. Similarly, those who plan social work should fist make their minds clean. Then, by God’s grace, all will be well. There is no other means to success in work and peace of mind. Muttering some mantras will not suffice of produce the attitude of utter surrender to God and the consciousness of His supremacy. There is no use of mere dry ritual. One must feel devotion in the heart. It is only after that one should begun social work of any kind. Work begun without invoking God’s aid will be false and deceitful and will breed sorrow, anger and jealousy.

Not only should we, as Bhagavan Ramakrishna taught us, think of God and worship Him before we began social work, but all the time that we engage in it, we must continue to work with the thought of God firmly implanted in our minds.

It is wrong to think that service to society and the worship of God are different things. All work must be done as worship of God. The thought of God will not be a hindrance to work. The practice of doing our work with devotion to God will give us great joy. It will give us skill and zest in our work. I can affirm without a doubt that this was the secret of Mahatma Gandhi’s success. In everything that he did, in every plan that he made, in every step that he took he carried in his heart the thought of God which ever went with him as a man’s shadow goes with him when he walks. This thought never hindered his work. On the contrary, it was the source of his success. In all the little tasks that we do, this thought of God will likewise stand by us like shadow and help us in silence. It is essential for a servant of society to labour with the thought of God unceasingly in one’s mind. It is as indispensable to effective work as asepsis to surgery. A pure mind is a great asset and an unfailing *sadhana*. Devotion is the only way to get it.