

Benefiting From Adverse Circumstances

Today, the 15th of January 2008, is Makara Sankrānti when the sun begins to move in the northern direction and inaugurates the bright half of the year. Normally this happens on the 14th of January, but this being leap year, it falls today.

The Vedic way of life speaks of a bright half of the year, a bright fortnight of the month, and auspicious times of the day for prayer—6.00 in the morning, noon, and 6.00 at night. If we are wise, we will take advantage of those periods that the sages have declared to be auspicious for our spiritual welfare. But then, the question arises, what about the dark half of the year, the dark fortnight, and those times during the day that are not auspicious? After having taken advantage of the auspicious periods, we have to try to understand the nature of the so-called less auspicious periods and know how to deal with them.

Ultimately we are meant to realize that the God that we are seeking is not the God of auspicious periods but the God that transcends both auspicious periods and inauspicious periods. That means, by inference, that as God is present everywhere, there must be valuable lessons for us to learn no matter what period of the day, month, year, or life we are in. For example, from a *sādhana* point of view, the most difficult stage of our life is usually our *gr̥hastha* period. *Brahmacarya*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsa* give us opportunities to study the scriptures and do spiritual practices. It is much more difficult under the pressures of *gr̥hastha*, and yet perhaps *gr̥hastha* can be of great spiritual benefit to us.

It takes great strength to face up to the truth of the spiritual life that we, as something separate, do not exist, because we are actually the One and One alone. It is during *gr̥hastha* that we usually face the most severe challenges in life—earning a living, raising a family, preparing ourselves for our old age. Thus in that period we have the opportunity to build great strength of character, assuming, of course, that we live our lives according to *dharma*.

Another difficult period is old age. It is very difficult to keep up our efforts during old age. But this is the sort of challenge that builds real strength in us—a determination that we will not give up. And it is only with this sort of determination that we have any chance of reaching the goal.

The scriptures constantly tell us that the spiritual life is not for the weak or the weak-hearted. It is the greatest challenge a human being can face. Therefore, inauspicious times and adverse circumstances give us the opportunity to build the sort of strength we require. Thus, by all means, we should take advantage of all the auspicious periods in the day, the month, and the year. But we should also see—and appreciate—the benefits of the adverse circumstances that we will inevitably face in the living of our life.