



NEW YEAR MESSAGE 2021

During the year 2020, human civilization experienced a shock that it had never anticipated. The pandemic COVID-19 virus took the entire world by complete surprise. Our daily routine and affairs were completely disturbed and a new lifestyle was forced on us as individuals and communities. We had no choice but to accept this massive disruption. Later, it became the new normal. This Pandemic is too wide and too critical a subject for it to be discussed fully in a single message. Hence, I am only venturing to put forward a few effects of this Pandemic that directly or indirectly, have taught the human civilization novel lessons on survivability and growth.

- The human civilization can ill-afford to take for granted its capabilities to combat such sudden and unforeseen happenings of such dimensions. It has to re-examine its capabilities with humility and create new capabilities after examining the causes of its failure.
- If countries don't share timely information among themselves about catastrophes such as COVID-19, the problem may escalate and become a pandemic. This will have global ramifications with massive loss of lives, livelihoods and property and thereby cause immense suffering.
- Even after receiving information about COVID-19 some countries did not take the desirable and urgent steps to combat the disease and considered it to be a routine issue which resulted in the loss of so many human lives and created severe loss and suffering not only to them but also to others who were connected with them. Those countries that took timely preventive measures, like India, faced fewer deaths and lesser problems.

- The disease affected all the perceivable components of society. Different Governments, private organizations, groups and individuals joined in the fight against this as a problem for the entire human race.
- It taught us that we can work online from home or wherever we are. The future trend of communications and various types of human activities is going to be online-based, in a major way. It saves time, energy and cost.
- It has taught us to realize the risks and difficulties faced by people working in Health, Police, Municipality, Supply departments and other such groups known as the 'Corona Fighter group'. We have learnt to value their work. We must be sympathetic to them and help them where necessary.
- The UN (WHO) and many countries issued laws, rules, regulations and advisories to combat COVID-19 and bring about medical awareness in public places, etc.
- It has taught us to live frugally when confined to our homes and to maintain social distancing.
- The nonessential areas of life like malls, pubs, hotels, restaurants, movie halls, theatres and other recreation centres were closed.
- As people remain confined within the home, understanding among the family members became better in most cases. They learnt how to share work and emotional stress. The family members learnt to understand and ease stress through more meaningful conversations, both face to face and online.
- Even in matters of religion and belief, people learnt how to worship God at home without visiting temples, churches and other places of worship.
 - It has taught the school authorities, teachers, students and parents to create and get adjusted to a system of online education. It saves cost, energy and time. In future, it may set common international standards of educational system. It also made us aware that children who could not afford mobile phones or laptops were being deprived of online education. Efforts must be made to bridge this digital divide.
- It has taught the Governmental, corporates and private business organisations and other groups to perform their jobs using the online communication system. There

was minimal use of office space. We can perform many such jobs even from our homes, thereby improving time and cost management.

- It has taught us to support each other in society. There are many examples of how many people have helped others at considerable cost to themselves.
- It also taught us to revisit our lost values, culture/heritage. This is essential in order to protect our society during times of distress.
- It has taught us not to exploit the various gifts of nature like the plants, animal kingdom and the five elements of nature more than we essentially need for our survival.
- It has taught us to live with other species with empathy and strive to maintain the ecological balance on earth. It has also taught us to desist from degrading the environment around us. It is not at all easy to list out what we learnt from the impact of COVID-19. However, humanity can survive and grow only if it learns its lessons rapidly and brings about the necessary changes in time. Let us pray God, the Almighty, and our spiritual masters like Shri Shirdi Sai Baba to give us the intelligence to take proper and timely actions to save the human race from such unforeseen challenges.

May Shri Sai bless us all.

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