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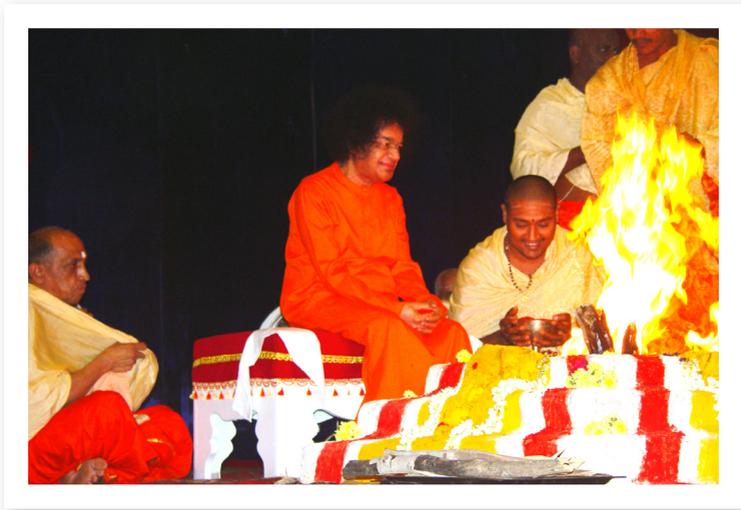


PRASANTHI

Vidwan Mahasabha



2014



Dedicated with Love to our Beloved
Revered Founder Chancellor

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba



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Vidyagiri, Prasanthi Nilayam – 515134, Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, India

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PRASANTHI VIDWAN MAHASABHA

27 September-3 October 2014 | Prasanthi Nilayam



Preface

Dasara or Navaratri is a ten day festival, usually falling in the month of October, and is celebrated all over India in the worship of the Divine as the Mother principle. Bhagawan Baba has explained that the festival of Dasara is a celebration of the triumph of good over evil, signifying the vanquishing of the ‘six demons’ of lust, anger, attachment, greed, pride and jealousy within us.

Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna

Since the early sixties, the festival of Dasara in Prasanthi Nilayam has been closely associated with the ‘Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna’. This yagnam is a week-long worship conducted in the Divine Presence at the Poornachandra Auditorium each year for the welfare of the whole world. The Yagnam commences on the fourth day of Dasara and concludes with the ‘Poornahuti’ – the final oblation that is offered on Vijayadashami, the tenth day.

The most important component of the Yagnam is the Rudra Yagam where the oblations are made in the Yagna Kunda to Lord Shiva while chanting hymns from the Sri Rudram. In addition to this, other rituals like Surya Namaskara, Sahasralinga Archana, Srimad Bhagavatha Parayana, Ramayana Parayana and the Devi Mahatmyam are simultaneously performed.

The students of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning take active part in the Yagnam by chanting the vedas, reading the scriptures and performing other parts of the worship along with the learned pundits.

Prasanthi Vidwan Mahasabha

The evening programmes during the seven days of the Yagnam are held in Sai Kulwant Hall, under the auspices of the ‘Prasanthi Vidwan Mahasabha’, where many speakers—primarily students and functionaries of Bhagawan’s

institutions—address the gathering on topics concerning spirituality and philosophy, Bhagawan’s teachings and experiences of devotees.

This book is a compilation of all the talks delivered during the Prasanthi Vidwan Mahasabha in 2014, that took place from 27 September to 3 October 2014. Relevant transcripts of excerpts from Bhagawan Baba’s Divine Discourses are also included.





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Bhagawan Baba on Dasara

On several other occasions of the Dasara festival celebrated in Prasanthi Nilayam, Bhagawan Baba has given Discourses, clarifying the purpose and importance of the festival, and highlighting the inner meaning of the celebration and of the worship of the Divine Mother. Following are some excerpts from these Discourses.

Purpose of Dasara

Festivals like Dasara are designed to make man aware of his divinity, to endow him with purity, to become aware of its holiness, and to imprint on his heart the wisdom won by sages after years of yearning. The sages who have decided on these festivals have a high purpose. They want us to imbibe the inner meaning and use each day as a step in *sadhana*, as a reminder of the journey, which each person has to undertake alone to the Feet of the Lord. Dasara is the festival that celebrates the victory of the forces of the good over the foes that resist the progress of man towards light. The forces of good (Devas) are combating with the forces of evil (Asuras) in every living being and if only they rely on Mahashakti, the great Divine Force that fosters and fends the Universe, they can easily win and reach goal. Festivals like Dasara at Prasanthi Nilayam bring together *sadhakas* from all the continents, irrespective of religion, caste, creed, and colour. They are motivated by the same urge, to involve themselves more and more in attempts to realise their innate divinity. They have met here to enjoy the supreme delight in the holy presence of the Lord and to recognise the unity of all in the Divine atmic splendour. It is to give *ananda* (bliss) to the *bhaktas* (devotees) that I arrange this festival. I have no other wish. Do not muddy the pellucid waters of your faith by the slightest trace of doubt.

Importance of Dasara

During the Dasara festival, the three Goddesses—Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati—are worshipped according to certain traditional practices. The

tenth day of the festival is celebrated as the victory. The celebration has its roots deep in the ancient history of Bharat. In the Dwapara Yuga, when the Pandavas had to spend one year incognito, they hid their weapons (on the advice of Krishna) in a Jammi tree which is thick in foliage and whose branches are filled with latent fire. Vijayadasami was the day on which they retrieved their weapons from the tree and used them to win victory over the Kauravas. In the Treta Yuga, Sri Rama's coronation, after his victorious return to Ayodhya from Lanka, was also performed on Vijayadasami day.

Inner Meaning of Dasara

The term 'Devi' represents the Divine power that has taken a *rajasic* form to suppress the forces of evil and protect the *satvic* qualities. When the forces of injustice, immorality and untruth have grown to monstrous proportions and are indulging in a death-dance, when selfishness and self-interest are rampant, when men have lost all sense of kindness and compassion; the Atmic principle, assuming the form of Shakti, and taking on the *rajasic* quality, seeks to destroy the evil elements. This is the inner meaning of the Dasara festival.

Inner Meaning of Devi Worship on Dasara

When the Divine Goddess is in a dreadful rage to destroy the wicked elements, she assumes a fearful form. To pacify the dreaded Goddess, Her feminine children offer worship to her with red *kumkum* (sacred red powder). The Goddess, seeing the blood-red *kumkum* at her feet, feels assured that the wicked have been vanquished and assumes her benign form. The inner meaning of the worship of 'Devi' with red *kumkum* is that thereby the Goddess is appeased. During the ten days of Dasara, the demons (*rakshasas*) in the form of wicked qualities have been routed. *Rakshasas* do not mean demonic beings. The bad qualities in men are the demons. Arrogance is a demon. Bad thoughts are demons.





Trusting Sai's Presence Within

Dr. Sanjay Mahalingam

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Management Studies, SSSIHL

Wisdom blossoms always from within. Outside events can at best be possibilities, can at best be pointers. Our scriptures say- *Shabd jaalam maharanyam chitta bhramana kaarnam* (Words are like a dense thick forest which is responsible for the distraction and delusion of the mind).

Having said that, the show must go on. In today's talk, kindly allow me to share three experiences and the lessons I learnt thereof. The experiences might appear trivial, but to me in my life, they were subtle and profound; and they left an everlasting impression on me.

It was September 2010. I had finished my Ph.D. and was living on a meagre financial subsistence. We used to get along quite comfortably for about Rs. 5000 per month in Puttaparthi. But that month I had an unexpected expense, very early in the month: by the 4th of September and I was left with just Rs. 2000 in my bank account. The entire month had to be lived and I was quite worried.

It was time for my evening prayers. I had a wash and sat in front of the altar. The mind was agitated; there were streaks of anger and resentment. You will all will agree that it is not the best space to be in when we are trying to connect to the divine within. I just offered my inner state to Bhagawan and told Him, "Swami, this is my state, you are the supreme light, I offer you my troubles, do what you wish." It is my confirmed experience that Bhagawan is such a merciful master that if we ask Him anything from our heart, He always responds. There is no exception. As I was sitting, I realized that my mind was calming down and it was becoming silent. In that silence, an interview with Bhagawan manifested in my consciousness, which took place many years ago before that time. In that interview, Bhagawan told me one sentence that kept cropping up in my mind. Swami said, "A problem is a problem if you think it is a problem. Delete it from your consciousness. Completely delete it. What

remains is only consciousness. Whatever the problem, consciousness will find a way.” I had a wonderful session of connection to Bhagawan. I got up very happy, divinely touched and healed, loved and embraced, and completely forgot about my ‘problem’. That night I slept like a child; what concern does a child have in the hands of the Divine Mother?

The following morning, I noticed the ATM slip for the money I had withdrawn from the ATM the day before. It showed my account balance as Rs. 2,000. Just to amuse myself, I added a zero to it with my pen and made it Rs. 20,000. I said to myself, I have Rs. 20,000 and that should be enough to live more than comfortably. During that day, for some reason, I had this irresistible urge to clean my cupboard.

Let me digress a bit here. Swami, the loving Mother used to give some money to His children as a blessing. With Bhagawan, everything was profound. Nothing which He ever did was just material. His actions had many implications and lessons at so many levels and dimensions. Once in 2007, when He was giving me money, He told me, “Keep it in your cupboard.” He added, “Keep it right under all the other things in the cupboard.” I thought, “He might be telling me so that the money remains safe.” He read my thoughts and said, “It is not because it has to be safe but because you have to always remind yourself that money is the least important thing in life. Therefore, keep it right at the bottom of the shelf.” We should not give any importance to money either in prosperity or in poverty. It should never be heavy on our consciousness. Hence to keep the money at the bottom had become a habit over the years.

I was cleaning my cupboard on September 5th, 2010. Unusually, taking out everything that was there, and at an obscure corner there was a crumpled envelope. When I opened the envelope, there was money in it. I took out the money and started counting it. There was exactly—to the last note—Rs. 18,000. I had written an extra zero in the ATM slip. How I wish, I would have put two or three more zeros! I had no clue from where the money came. When I racked my brain, and I recalled that around one-and-a-half years prior to that time, I had liquidated some savings and for some reason that I

could not recollect, instead of keeping it in the bank, I had kept it in my shelf and as was my habit, right beneath all my clothes. The lesson of the story is not that whenever we are in need and we offer our need to Bhagawan, He will come running and solve all our problems! Because even after that incident, I looked inside my cupboard a few times but never found a single penny! But the point of the story is that when we allow God to work, He works miracles. When we allow the Divine energy to flow within us, through us, amazing things can happen. They happen all the time. We block the flow of divine love with our troubles, anxieties and thought structures with the edifice of ego that we have built over countless lifetimes. All we need to do is to get out of the way and He will work wonders.

Another lesson that I learnt was that come what may, whatever happens outside us, it is always possible to make ourselves in such a way that we can remain in a calm, peaceful and joyful state. It won't come easy, it takes effort-but it is possible. All it takes is a very subtle shift of perception.

In one interview, Swami told me, "You know, people think ignorance ends and wisdom begins. There is nothing like a beginning or an end. Just like wisdom is timeless, infinite and endless, ignorance too is endless and timeless. Both are like railway tracks that are all the while running parallel to each other." It is our choice as to what track we want to hop onto. We could hop on to the track of ignorance and live a life of misery or we could choose to hop on to the track of wisdom and live a life of joy and peace.

The next incident, that I would like to narrate, happened in 2007. I had to go to Bangalore on a personal errand. I had to go on a Sunday morning and come back on the same evening. In those days, we had the privilege of informing Bhagawan about our movements. I sat with a letter; Bhagawan came and took my letter. I told Him, "Swami, I have to go to Bangalore for some personal work. If you permit, I will go and come back on a Sunday." Swami said, "Go and come." It was all decided. I booked my tickets, made all the required appointments. But somehow when the day approached, I started feeling very uncomfortable. I brushed aside all those feelings and told myself, 'Swami has permitted me to go, and hence I must go.'

I had to catch the 5:30 a.m. bus to Bangalore and the previous night when I was trying to sleep, I became deeply uncomfortable. I felt so uncomfortable as if I am being choked and suffocated. Whenever I thought of going to Bangalore, something in my system revolted. I could not fathom any reason for such a reaction within me because it was a trivial matter: just a day trip to Bangalore! I jostled with my thoughts all night and went to Bangalore in the morning. I had an uneventful trip, everything went as per plan; the work got over and I came back.

Three days later, I had a chance to be in the interview room with Bhagawan and Swami as always asked me, "What news?" I told Him that I went to Bangalore and narrated the events of the day. Swami said, a little irritated, "You went to Bangalore even when I told you not to go." I was silent but I said to myself, "What! I gave you a letter and you gave me permission." Swami repeated, "I told you clearly not to go." I respectfully submitted, "Swami, I gave you the letter and heard you clearly telling me to go and come." Swami said, "That I just joked. The night previous to your departure, I repeatedly came and told you not to go, you still went. It was a test and you got zero marks and failed." I was deeply dismayed as it is hurtful when Swami says that you have failed. But I was also very grateful to have been blessed with an insightful experience.

The lesson learnt was that it is of primary and fundamental importance to try and connect to Swami within. Spirituality means that which pertains to the spirit. We can be called spiritual if, and only if, we develop the inner connection with Bhagawan. There is only one purpose to all our *sadhana*, whatever we do, be it *japa*, *dhyana*, *seva* or study of Sai literature. It is to establish an unbreakable connection with the inner Lord. This is so important that it is impossible to overemphasize this aspect. If we have developed this inner connection with Bhagawan, we are alive; if not we are just walking dead.

Recently, forty of us friends went to the Himalayas during the vacations. There we found a beautiful temple dedicated to a great being known as Sri Haidakhan Baba. He is considered an Avatar in that region. All of us

went there, sat and meditated. One brother shared with me a very profound and sublime experience of his. This brother went there in the morning at 5 a.m., and as soon as the temple doors opened and he sat for meditation, his mind was silenced immediately. He told me that he has never ever seen a temple with such an intense presence of the Divine Mother. He sat there in meditation completely oblivious of everything. When he finally opened his teary eyes, he thought that just twenty minutes had elapsed, but two-and-a-half hours had passed. He was so touched by the divine light of the Mother that he could not say or do anything. He was not able to even move his lips. He just sat there and shed tears of joy. In that silence, he just said, 'mother, mother, mother' and actually heard a sweet, mellow, motherly voice reverberate in his heart which said, "Seek me in wordless silence." This was The Mother's message.

Sisters and brothers, all our *sadhana* is only meant to silence the mind. When the mind becomes silent, we connect to something deeper within, which is so beautiful that there is no fear or tension. The word 'ashram' literally means a place where there is no effort. There is no strain, no *shrama*. Where there is tension or anxiety, that is not *ashrama* but *shrama*. True *ashrama* is within us, where there is no tension or stress- only relaxation. Having been touched by such a special being, having been guided by His life, His words, by His love-life calls upon us to raise our spiritual consciousness. It is our bounden duty not a choice. As Bhagawan once said, "Students! You have only two options- either you let me into your heart or I will break open and enter your heart."

With these few words, I conclude my talk and pray to Bhagawan that He gives us the strength to seal our lips, open our hearts, silence our minds and dive deep within to find the beautiful gem of Divine Love and Sai's presence.





The Love of the Divine Mother

Dr. T Ravikumar

Associate Professor, Dept. of Chemistry, SSSIHL
Warden, Brindavan Campus, SSSIHL

When the Prasanthi Nilayam building came up in the 1950's, the old devotees who were there felt that there was a transition. They felt that the intimacy of the *Paata Mandiram* days were over as the numbers (of devotees) were increasing. One of them put this question to Swami, "Swami, you are saying that in future, tens of thousands, in fact lakhs of people are going to come to Prasanthi Nilayam. How will they feel close to you?" Swami replied, "Sitting in the precincts of Prasanthi Nilayam, they will narrate to each other the stories and leelas of Swami and that is how they will feel close to Me."

Dasara is a very beautiful festival where all of us are drawn to the feet of the Mother. We sit at Her feet and remember all the wonderful things she means to us. The *Lalita Sahasranamam* starts with '*Sri Mata, Sri Mabragni, Srimatsimhasaneshwari*'. There are so many attributes of God but the beginning is always the mother- *Sri Mata*. Once in Trayee Brindavan a great scholar remarked, "Swami, I am not able to understand you." Swami replied, "Why do you try such a futile thing? Don't try to understand Me, experience Me and enjoy Me." Swami added, "If someone gives you a *Mysore pak*, why should you waste time in finding out its length, breadth, weight and smell. Why don't you put it on the tongue and enjoy it." Hence let me narrate to you the taste of this *Mysore pak*.

A mother is very close to you, one to whom you can take all your problems without feeling hesitant, shy or worried. When the Divine Mother is our mother, we know that she is already aware of our problems and what we are placing before her is just a carbon copy of the prayer. When I was a student in Brindavan in I year Intermediate, there was a tradition that everybody would stand and have Darshan of Bhagawan. Students would stand and as Swami moved, we would move with Him. If somebody was found sitting, Swami would notice and ask, "What happened, is he not well?" But a small

problem that developed as a result of having tall boys in front of you when you walk with Swami was that Swami would be hidden from view. Once, I prayed silently to Swami, “Swami, please increase my height a few inches.” A few days after this, Swami came out in the morning and told all the short boys to come to the front. We were quite astonished to find so many boys in this category! Swami said, “I have brought a medicine for all of you to grow tall.” He took out a box, called the warden and said, “Take these boys to your office today and measure their heights. Every morning, give them this medicine. This is a medicine for them to grow tall.” Every morning when others drank plain milk, we had milk with a green *pista* type sweet added to it. Fifteen day later, that particular medicine got over and warden went to Swami and said, “Swami that dose is over, they need the next dose.” Swami said, “It’s not needed, go and measure their heights now.” When the measurement was taken, every single boy had added anywhere between half to three and half inches!

Twenty-five year later, I had come with a batch of final year Brindavan students to Prasanthi Nilayam to put up a drama. During darshan, He called me for an interview and asked me, “*Emi samacharam?* What is the programme the boys have prepared?” I explained the whole drama to Swami. He said, “This evening we will have the drama at 4 p.m. Go and tell the boys to be ready, I will come beforehand at 3:45 p.m.” When I was getting up, Swami remarked with a smile, “ Ravi, you have not grown much, isn’t it?” I immediately recalled that twenty-five years back, He had given that medicine for all of us to grow tall. I replied, “Swami, bless me that I grow in my devotion to your feet.” Swami said, “Is it so? Come here.” And He placed His boon bestowing hand on my head and added, standing next to me, “See, both of us are same height!” as if consoling me. The Divine Mother is so sweet and loving, she satisfies all our desires.

It was the year 1979. I had applied to the Postgraduate Center at Anantapur, as instructed by Bhagawan, to do my Masters in Chemistry. There was no postgraduate course at our Institute at that time. I got selected and was given a date to join but the unlucky thing was that the date of joining also happened to be my birthday. A week before that, I started telling Swami, “Swami, on the

first day, nothing much happens in terms of classes.” Swami said, “Who told you, the classes start from the first day onwards.” I tried a slightly different strategy. I told Swami, “Swami, the first day being a Saturday, the second day will be *Dwitiya Vighnam* as it falls on a Sunday.” (Whenever one starts anything new, it is believed that there should not be a break on the second day as that would create obstacles in the successful completion of the task). Swami said, “Nothing like that exists, the college works on Saturday and then on Monday so there is no *Dwitiya Vighnam*.” I gathered courage and said, “That also happens to be my birthday.” Swami said, “Oh! Tell that, but how lucky you are, your birthday and your postgraduate birthday are falling on the same day. So you have to go to class on the first day.” I gave up further attempts but decided to at least touch the soil of Prasanthi Nilayam on that day. I decided to start off at 6 a.m. in a bus. At 5:30 a.m. somebody came running and told me that Swami had sent for me. Swami was upstairs in the Prasanthi Nilayam mandir. I went and Swami said, “Ravi, you told me it is your birthday today. Come, take paadanamaskar. As I was getting up, Swami put an envelope in my pocket and said, “This is your birthday gift.” These might be very small instances but because they are small, they are as profound, because the Empress of the Universe has time for each one of us.

In the mid-nineties, Swami had once given Darshan on the golden chariot. Swami sat on it from the Poornachandra Auditorium and had come to the Sai Kulwant Hall. It was such a glorious sight. Our examinations had started the preceding day. Hence, we were unable to come to Prasanthi Nilayam. But Swami sent word that if anyone did not have an exam, they could come for this function. A few of us somehow managed to come just a few minutes before this grand event. We quickly got ready and became part of the procession, chanting Vedam. This was a grand event even foretold in the *nadis* and scriptures of yore. One incident that happened at that time touched me the most. As *arati* was being given to Swami, He climbed down from the golden chariot, walked up to me and asked, “Ravi, how is your father?” I replied, “I don’t know Swami, I have not met him lately.” He said, “He was very serious yesterday, I had sent *prasadam*, he is fine now.” One more evidence to prove that Swami- the supreme and omnipresent Mother has time for each one of us.

There was a time when Swami used to come for morning Darshan at 6:30 a.m. and grant interviews to devotees. Many of those present used to rush for breakfast after Swami would take a group inside for interview (so as to be present in time when Swami returned). On one such day, after darshan, I was sitting with many empty mats around me. A book 'The Gospel of Ramakrishna' by Master M was lying on one of the mats. I started reading it randomly and read an incident where Narendra comes to Ramakrishna Paramahansa and says, "Master, there is so much of poverty at home, please pray to Mother that she should provide." The master says, "Why should I tell her, you go and tell her yourself." Swami has always taught us to have a direct link with God. Narendra beholds the bewitching form of Mother and was unable to think of any worldly things and prays to Her, "Mother give me bliss and peace." Ramakrishna asked Narendra, whether he had asked Mother about his desires. Narendra said that he was unable to ask anything worldly from Mother. Ramakrishna asks Narendra to try again. Narendra attempts again and the same episode is repeated again.

I closed the book at this time and kept it aside and my thoughts went like this, "If at this moment Swami comes out and talks to me, what will I ask?" I thought of asking about my sister who met with an accident or about my father who was not keeping good health. But I rebuked myself as I had just now read that one has to ask for higher things from God. I thought, "While Swami is always taking care of all our needs, does anyone think of asking Swami, "Why have you pulled down so much? Are you keeping well..." And so I decided that I will ask Swami this question if He comes out.

Two minutes later, Swami opens the interview door and comes out. Swami looks at me, smiles and walks straight to where I am seated, looks into my eyes and asks, "Ravi, do you think, I have reduced?" I was dumbstruck and overwhelmed at this- yet another evidence of omniscience! Even though I was convinced that He is the all-knowing one, I was speechless. I quickly managed to say, "Swami, I was about to ask you that. Why are you not eating properly?" Swami replied, "I am perfectly fine, 108 pounds," and walked away, leaving me immersed in bliss.

A roommate of mine in Brindavan campus was a very dynamic personality. One day, suddenly we saw a change come over him. He decided to write a letter to Swami describing all the mischief he had done. He prayed to Swami, "I am sending this letter to you, I want to turn a new leaf in my life." He posted this letter to Swami who was that time in Prasanthi Nilayam. As he was posting this letter, he thought to himself that if Swami eyes fell on the contents of this letter, all his past would be wiped out. He thought that Swami should give him an indication that He had read the letter.

A few days later, quite unexpectedly, the boy's father turned up in Brindavan and sent for him. Surprised the boy asked his father, "Father, how come you are here?" The father said, "It is a surprise for me also that I am here." Father continued, "I came to have Darshan at Prasanthi Nilayam and was blessed with an interview." The boy was surprised to find the excitement and joy of having received an interview missing in his father's voice. "Swami told me about the letter you have written to him and asked me to come to Brindavan and warn you about this." The boy's heart sank listening to his father. The father said to the boy, "Don't you have some sense, is this what you write to the Avatar of the age...In the hostel chutney salt is less!" "What else did Swami say?" enquired the boy, cautiously. The father replied, "Swami told me to tell you firmly not to write such trivial things to Him. He also told me to tell you that if salt is not there in the chutney, the warden is there to take care of it." This is how Swami added salt to this brother's life!

This is the Mother- Sai Maa, who is the *simbasaneswhari* that occupies the throne of our hearts. How can we describe Her beauty, Her love and Her kindness?





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

It is possible to chant vedas and its other limbs. Similarly, it is possible to write poetry and prose. But for understanding the Vedas, the very life breath is purity of heart. This is the spring of Samaveda, which is the word of Sai.

Embodiments of Divine Atma!

In this world, many don't understand the real purpose of life. But they don't even bother why they have not been able to understand this. One in a crore tries to understand the purpose of this life. This effort is the first step in understanding the true purpose of life. Most of the people feel happy to have sufficient food to eat, sufficient sleep, have clothes to wear and have a house full of children. This is not the supreme goal of life. Of course, this is also necessary for life. Unfortunately, man is only looking outward and gaining worldly knowledge but he is not turning inward and making an attempt to gain the knowledge of the Self. When one stands on a bridge and watches the sea, he will be able to have a glimpse of only the waves but not the precious gems deep within the sea. Only that fearless and courageous person who dives deep into the ocean and reaches the bottom can find the most precious gems and pearls. It cannot be achieved by others. We will be able to understand the *atma jnana* only when we give up the physical search and enter the inner world. Knowledge of the Self is not so easy to attain. It is necessary to understand as to why from ancient times when so many people are making an effort (like chanting Vedas) and trying to understand the Self, they have not got appropriate results. This includes the seers of the mantras who are only mechanically chanting the Vedas without trying to understand the inner meaning, the power or the sacredness of these mantras.

If we understand the sacredness of these Vedas even without understanding the Vedas by merely listening to it, it develops virtues in us. The power of these mantras carry the divine power with them and just by mere listening confers benefits on the listeners. This is the reason why listening is considered very special. God commands eight types of wealth out of which the first one is *sravanam* (listening), which leads to *mananam* (reflection) and *nidhidhyasanam* (intense meditation). This is the proof that is expounded in the Vedas. Hearing occupies a primary place even with reference to devotion



as a practice.

Shabd Brahmamayi, Characharamayi, Jyotirmayi, Vangmayi, Nityanandamayi, Paratparamayi, Mayamayi, Srimayi- these are the eight glorious forms of the Vedas. It was felt that ordinary people wouldn't be able to understand these eight types of wealth which God commands. Hence in the nine types of devotion: *Sravanam* (listening), *Keertanam* (singing), *Vishnu smaranam* (chanting), *Padasevanam* (service), *Vandanam* (salutation), *Archanam* (worship), *Dasyam* (servitude), *Sneham* (friendship), *Atma nivedanam* (Self surrender). Of these, *sravanam* or listening has been given primary importance. Unfortunately, there are people in Bharat who don't have the good fortune of hearing the glories of the Lord. In Bharat, there are people who in spite of getting an opportunity to listen to sacred things, escape and miss this chance. There are also people in Bharat who don't listen to sacred sounds but listen to unwanted sounds. What is the reason for such state of affairs?

Realizing the difficulties of the common man in understanding the Vedas, the Vedas have shown an easier path. The body can suffer from three types of deficiencies of Vata (wind), Pitta (bile) and Kapha (phlegm). There are 40 types of diseases due to the deficiency of Vata. Due to Pitta, human beings get 42 types of diseases and due to Kapha, human beings suffer 242 types of diseases. The human body is subjected to 386 diseases.

This body is a house of diseases, a dirty basket of ailments, and exudes bad smell. Why should one have excessive attachment to such a body? Forgetting the indweller and considering that the physical pleasures and comforts are real, man is forgetting the inner world.



The Glory of Dasara

Dr. Nori Surya Narayana Murthy

Sankrit & Telugu Scholar, Guntur, A.P.

This is the holy, pure, joyful and Divine time of Navaratri. Yama- the Lord of death is believed to have two sharp canines which he uses to crushes the evil doers. To protect oneself from those fearsome teeth, we have to earn the Grace of God. To achieve this, our maharishis allotted two times of the year for worship. One, during March-April known as Vasant Navaratri, and the second during September-October known as Sharad Navaratri. This is a very auspicious time that comes after the Mahalaya Amavasya (New moon of the great dissolution) in the month of *Asweyuja* (September-October), signifying auspicious beginnings. This is the time of the great light, wisdom and illumination. In these nine auspicious nights, the light of wisdom shines forth from the realm of Divine Mother like the unsullied moonlight. Navaratri means nine nights or also 'New' nights, which signifies the commencement of a new wisdom. In this time, the nights are adorned with pure and soothing moonlight after the rainy season. The sun also moves to the zodiac sign of Virgo- the Virgin, which signifies purity. The great poet Pothana extols goddess Saraswati, who is adorned with auspicious white clothes, and beseeches her to confer the divine wisdom. We see the same white coloured clothes being worn by the devotees of Bhagawan Baba.

On the ninth day of Navaratri, the Divine Mother annihilates evil in the form of Mahishasura. She is thus extolled as Mahishasura Mardini. Bhagawan Baba has said that the same Mahishasura is now in everyone's hearts in the form of all the demonic traits. In the celebrated Mahishasura Mardini stotram, the devotee prays to the Mother to remove his demonic qualities, increase the divine qualities and confer Divine wisdom. During this holy time of Navaratri, there is a tradition of worshipping a small girl of nine years as Divine Mother. She is adorned with a saree, different types of jewels and a vermilion dot.

The tenth day is known as Vijayadasami. This is the day when the Divine

mother Rajarajeshwari- sovereign of all the universes, sits and relaxes in all her splendor, majesty and effulgence on her throne in her abode known as *Manidweepa*. We have two aspects of Lakshmi, one is Jayalakshmi and the other Vijayalakshmi.

Vishnu's abode also has gatekeepers named *jaya* and *vijaya*. Jaya means vanquishing the foes like the demon Hiranyakashyapu. Prahlada vanquished the six inner enemies of desire, anger, avarice, attachment, ego and jealousy and achieved *vijaya*. This *vijaya* can be achieved only by the Grace of the Divine mother. Vijayadasami is a very auspicious time. It was when Lord Rama chose to kill Ravana. Arjuna was the one who got the epithet of Vijay. Before going incognito for a period of one year and hiding their weapons, Arjuna worshipped the Divine Mother Durga. Durga is believed to remove *durgati*- inauspiciousness. The Pandavas got victory due to their worship of Mother Durga. When Krishna goes as an emissary of the Pandavas to Hastinapura, he declares after witnessing the evil propensities of Kauravas, "Remember O! Dhritarastra, victory will be in the favour of the Pandavas if war happens. Arjuna stands for *vijayam*, no one can vanquish him." Why did Krishna declare this? It is because on the flag of the chariot of Arjuna, Anjaneya or Hanuman established himself. Who is Anjaneya? 'A' means *ananda* (bliss), 'N' means *natrutwam* (leadership), 'J' means jayam (victory) and 'Ya' means yashas (fame). That is why it is said that whoever listens to His glory and sings his praises will be conferred with eight type of siddhis- *buddhi* (intellect), *balam* (strength), *yash* (fame), *dhairyam* (courage), *nirbhayatwam* (fearlessness), *arogyatam* (good health), *ajadyam* (lack of laziness) and *vaakpatutwam* (excellent oratory skills).

In our legendary stalwarts who achieved victory, Lord Hanuman in one of the foremost. When he was sent to Lanka to find out the whereabouts of Mother Sita by Sri Rama, he searched each and every nook and corner. By Rama's Grace, he found Mother Sita sitting in the Ashoka Vana; gave her the ring of Rama; destroyed the Ashoka Vana and killed nearly 80,000 demons. When Hanuman annihilated Aksha Kumar- the son of Ravana; Ravana, was surprised and said "This is not an ordinary monkey, let me send Meghanada, my brave son to fight him." Meghanada was also known as Indrajit as he

vanquished all the *devatas*, including Lord Indra. But this same, Indrajit was killed by Lakshmana. Bhagawan Baba beautifully explains the reason for this. He says, “Indrajit was only Indrajit (vanquisher of Indra) but Lakshmana was *Indriyajit*, i.e. vanquisher of senses.” Hence, however much one may achieve, if he has not got victory over his senses, he will eventually have a downfall. If one is doesn’t have high learning, doesn’t follow rituals scrupulously, but has the senses under his control; he is the real sovereign of the world. This is known as Dama.

Meghanada took blessings from his father and went to fight with Hanuman. Hanuman is described by sage Valmiki as the one possessed with great beauty of valour. Beauty is not physical appearance and characteristics, as this gets destroyed with the passage of time. One who has a pure heart, speaks kind words, has a burning desire for liberation, does meritorious deeds, has reverence towards, father, mother, preceptor and God is a man of real beauty. Hanuman possessed all these qualities. Hence, he was known as *sundara*- one with beauty.

Meghanada came out and chanted *Aum Namaha Shivaya* and a divine chariot manifested in front of him. It was pulled by four ferocious lions. Hanuman saw Meghanada coming in that effulgent chariot. Hanuman was singing the glories of Lord Rama. Hanuman chanted victory to Lord Rama, Lakshmana and his King Sugriva. He then introduced himself as a humble servant of Lord Rama without even a trace of ego. He said- *Dasoham Kosalendrasya*. One should have learning, wisdom and humility like Lord Anjaneya.

To show the exemplary traits of Hanuman to all the students, Swami put the statue of Lord Hanuman on top of the Vidyagiri Hill. When Indrajit heard it, he understood that they are not ordinary songs but very powerful and potent mantras. Indrajit thought to himself that any type of weapon or missile will not affect him. Hence, he decided to use the Brahmastra. Seeing the Brahmastra coming towards him, Hanuman thought to himself, “Showing disrespect to this weapon is like insulting Brahma himself, who is the embodiment of the Vedas.” He then bowed down in front of the weapon and meditated on Lord Brahma. The Brahmastra came, encircled him and

Hanuman fell on the ground. But after some time, due to the grace of Lord Brahma, the Brahmastra vanished. The demons fell into an illusion that Hanuman has fallen down and tied him in ropes.

The demons took him to the durbar of Ravana. It was a glittering assembly full of splendor and pomp, which astounded Hanuman. Ravana, sitting on his majestic throne, ordered his men to kill Hanuman. No one dared to come forward and attack him. Anjaneya put his right foot down and roared- Jai Sri Ram. The ropes tied to him snapped immediately. The humble servant of Rama looked at Ravana and said chastising him, “You have done a great sin by abducting Sita. Each tear falling from her eyes will turn into fire and destroy this golden Lanka. Don’t forget that Sri Rama at a tender age of sixteen killed Tataka, who has the strength of a thousand elephants and annihilated the all-powerful Khara and Dushana and their entire army.” Ravana got irritated listening to the eulogy of Rama and ordered his army, “Kill this monkey.” Immediately Vibhishana got up from his seat and pleaded with Ravana, “O brother, he has come as an emissary and killing an emissary is not *rajdharma* for a valorous king like you.” Hanuman thought to himself, “Vibhishana, though born in the clan of demons, doesn’t exhibit the qualities of demons. He is a man of dharma.”

Vibhishana suggested to Ravana, “We can inflict any injury or any ignominy but should not kill him.” Ravana went into a deep thought and saw Anjaneya playing with his tail and singing the glories of Lord Rama. Ravana smiled and thought to himself, “Monkeys have a lot of liking for their tail.”

At this juncture, I recollect an interesting incident that happened during Bhagawan Baba’s childhood. Once, when He went with a few of His friends Hanuman temple in the village, all his friends asked Him to accompany them for circumambulating the temple. When Swami started the *pradakshina* (circumambulation), a big monkey came from nowhere and caught the feet of young Sathya and pleaded, “You are my Ramachandra; you are the same Ramachandra who has come to Puttaparthi in the form of Sairama. Please don’t do my *pradakshina*.”

When Ravana ordered Hanuman’s tail to be put on fire, Hanuman used the

same fire to burn Lanka in its entirety. After extinguishing his tail, Anjaneya went to the presence of Lord Rama with one leap across the ocean and said, "I saw Janaki in deep sorrow, held in captivity in the Ashoka Vana by the vile Ravana. She is sitting with a downward gaze, continuously lost in chanting your name and remembering you. She is counting her days, expecting you to come and release her." Rama felt relieved when Hanuman showed him the *choodamani* given by Mother Sita. Rama said, "There is nothing which I can give you in return for the favour you have done to me." Saying this, Rama embraced Hanuman.

Subsequently when Rama attacked Lanka, Hanuman had the good fortune of helping Rama in many ways. He was instrumental in getting the *sanjivani* herb that revived Lakshmana from the fatal swoon. He was also instrumental to fetch the news of Rama's return to Ayodhya to Bharata and gave him a new lease of life.

When Rama reached Ayodhya, there were grand celebrations to mark his return. All witnessed the auspicious ceremony of coronation of Lord Rama and sanctified their lives. Rama was seated in the middle with mother Sita, flanked by Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughana. Hanuman sits at the Lotus feet of Rama, serving him. This is the culmination of the victory achieved by Rama during Vijayadasami.





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

Embodiments of Divine Atma!

Just as wind, bile and phlegm are three sources of disease of the body; for the mind, *Mala* (impurities), *Avarana* (veiling or concealment), and *Vikshepa* (fickleness) are the diseases. These three diseases are making it difficult for man to introvert his mind and aspire, search or think of *atman*. He thinks that the external world is the real world. This is the root cause of ignorance in man. Another name for *mala* is *avidya*. This *mala* can be destroyed only by action. *Avarana* can be removed by *upasana* or worship. *Vikshepa* is destroyed by discrimination power. Therefore, the vedas declare that action, devotion and wisdom are the ways to destroy the three diseases of *mala*, *avarana* and *vikshepa* of the mind. The purity of the mind is attained by action, one-pointedness by devotion and through knowledge, final emancipation is attained. Bharatiyas feel that *moksha* or liberation means going to a particular place, merging in God or attaining God. They are not enquiring- what is the root cause of sorrow in this life?

The root cause of sorrow is birth and the root cause of birth is karma- action. The root cause for action is *raga* or desire and this desire is due to attachment. Attachment is caused due to *aviveka* or ignorance. For ignorance, ego is responsible. For this ego, ajnana or ignorance is responsible. When ignorance is destroyed, ego is annihilated. When ego is annihilated, discrimination is developed and desire is removed. When desire goes, karma is given up. When karma is destroyed, birth gets sanctified. From this it is very clear that the main cause of birth is ignorance. *Avarana* or the veiling or concealment of Brahman by the six inner enemies is mainly responsible for ignorance. Before *avarana* comes *mala*. What is *mala*? *Mala* means to wrongly identify with the mind that enjoys the external world with the five sheaths, five elements and five senses and considers it as real. On account of this *mala*, man is forgetting his real nature. He is deluding himself that he is this physical body comprising blood, pus, bone, faecal matter, etc. This is contrary to truth and sacredness, which is untruth and unholy. Those who understand the *mala* in Vedanta can also understand it in daily occurrence.

Every human being says that he is doing *mala visarjana*- meaning excreting



unwanted matter. The basis of this unsacred thing is also sacredness. We take sacred fruits and pure food like curd and milk. But in the end, this pure food is changed into waste matter. *Mala* is the opposite of purity. Untruth, which is the opposite of truth is *mala*. Bliss is our true nature whereas sorrow is not our true nature. Sukha or happiness is our true nature whereas sorrow is not our true nature. Considering untruth as truth is *mala*. Hence, *mala* is to consider the ephemeral and temporary *antabkarana* as real.

How to annihilate this wrong understanding? The vedas have expounded a number of ways. Do meritorious deeds. What are these meritorious deeds? Performing yagna and other rituals and give charity. All those actions that are offered to God can be considered as meritorious actions. Through such sacred deeds we get purity of mind. *Chitta shuddhi* means removing the dirt that is there in the heart. The heart gets impure due to many actions, experiences and illusions. The good acts done by man result in *chitta shuddhi*. *Chittasya shuddhaye karmaha-* action should be done to purify the heart. The specialty of *karma kanda* is that it exhorts us to do good deeds to purify the heart.

The second mental disease is *Avarana*. What is *Avarana*? That which envelops is *Avarana*. The six inner enemies of *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada* and *matsarya* have enveloped man and obscure him from beholding his real nature. *Raaga* and *dvesha* (likes and dislikes) have also enveloped man. On account of this, man forgets himself and is puffed up with pride. On basis of different strengths like money, physical strength, intellect and people, man is becoming arrogant. Due to this excessive arrogance, man is forgetting himself. Due to the lack of discrimination, he doesn't know the difference between good and bad, disrespects elders, insults them, criticizes them, mocks at them, etc. These very bad qualities make him forget his true nature. The vedas declare that to remove such negative traits, worship is very essential. In a place with bad smell, if one puts an incense stick, it removes the bad smell. Similarly, if man chants God's name, the negative traits in his heart will be removed.

What is devotion? Devotion means friendship with God. Close relationship with the Lord is true devotion. Love for God and service to Him is bhakti.



Hence Narada has said that serving *Hrishikeshha* (The Lord) is true devotion. Bhakti means repeating the name of the Lord incessantly with the tongue and day after day developing and stabilizing our friendship with Him. Due to this *maitri* (friendship) *karuna* or compassion also comes into our being. Compassion helps in developing *upeksha* or equal-mindedness. One would be able to enjoy divine bliss without *raaga*, *moha*, *dwesha*. *Satsanga* or company of the good is very essential for developing bhakti.



Demystifying the Five Myths

Dr. Deepak Anand

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Management Studies, SSSIHL

Today is the third day of the Navaratri celebrations that symbolizes the victory of good over evil, right over wrong. On this day, we need to think about the goal of our lives and the path we have to take to achieve it. On this path, we encounter certain aspects that we need to imbibe and certain things which we need to drop, such as notions we need to leave behind or certain myths that we need to overcome. This will make the journey towards the goal of our lives much easier. We are fortunate that at this point of time, the doors of awakening are wide open but we need to move forward quickly and with a sense of readiness. The question is- what are these myths that we need to drop to make our spiritual journey smooth and quick?

The first myth that we have to drop is that this world is the ultimate reality. It is not. Bhagawan on many occasions has described the true reality of this world. Swami says that the world that is perceived by the five senses is like the shadow of an object, it is like the rainbow in the sky or like the reflection of moon in a pot of water. It is not the ultimate reality that will stand the test of time, like the existence of wrinkles on my shirt. It is like the dream world. The mind creates dreams, sustains them (during the sleeping state) and destroys them after waking up in the morning. Similarly, God creates this world, sustains it for the four *kalpas* (eons) and destroys it at the end of time.

The second myth that all of us have to overcome is that Bhagawan is not with us anymore- that Love which we used to see sitting here is no more there. Once in Kodaikanal, we all were sitting with Swami when a devotee asked Him, "Swami, it is certain that I love you, but how am I to be certain that you also love me?" "The fact that you love me is by itself the proof that I love you a thousandfold more," came the reply from Swami.

Sometimes we stand in the shadow and blame the Sun. The Sun of love, compassion, mercy and grace is still shining within us. Perhaps the waves

in the ocean are too many to fathom the depth of that love; maybe the disturbances of the mind are too many and make us forget the eternal presence of that Love.

The third myth that some devotees talk about is that the number of people coming to Prasanthi Nilayam has reduced. There is also talk that some have seemingly gone away from Sai fold. Can anyone go away from Swami? The answer is no. It so happened that one devotee who was very close to Bhagawan was overcome by His illusionary power. Swami would come and ask him, "Tell me what happened today, I have no idea. Please explain to me, how you are going to do this." This devotee thought to himself, "Swami is just 6th Class Telugu medium pass, He is asking me everything, who says He is God?" Consequently, he left Swami. A professor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning asked Swami, "Swami, deluded by your *maya*, this devotee has left you, so will you also forsake him?" Bhagawan became serious, glared at him and said, "Any person, even once, even by mistake, even in his thoughts, even casually or by a slip of tongue, even in his dream, even claiming later that he really didn't mean that, says to me, "I belong to You", I will not let go of his welfare till he merges in Me or till the end of time." Who can ever leave Swami?

And where can one go where Swami is not? Once, Swami asked His chair to be put outside the interview room as he listened to the gratitude songs of the girl students of Sri Sathya Sai Primary School. He was so pleased with the love infused in their presentation that He sounded displeased with us in the interview room, comparing our devotion to be insignificant compared to theirs! We were thinking that we are great devotees as Bhagawan used to speak to us often, but that day He decided to crush our egos. He said, "I don't speak to the girl students as often I speak to you all, but their devotion is much greater than yours. Though I speak to you every day, you don't have an iota of devotion." I held on to Swami's hand and said, "Swami please give me also that devotion, at least now." Swami pulled His hand out of my grip, went behind my back and gave a blow on my head which opened a window of reality in front of my eyes for few moments and I saw that God not only permeates the entire Universe, He even constitutes it. Thus, if the entire

universe—both the animate and inanimate—is permeated by Bhagawan alone, who can leave Swami and go away? A fish can leave one part of the waters but not the entire ocean, a bird can move from one side of the sky to another, but cannot leave the air that encompasses it. Hence somebody leaving God is impossible, as He has taken a vow that once we say that we belong to Him, He will pursue us until the end of time, when we merge back into Him. Anyone who has seemingly gone away will certainly come back to the organization, it is just an incubation period.

The fourth myth that we need to drop is that we cannot experience Swami's Love and Grace, except through His Loving physical frame. We feel apprehensive in transcending that loving name and form of that Lord who to us is our mother, father, guru, guide and benefactor. The answer is we need not be apprehensive of losing Him when we transcend to His Cosmic form. Let us realize that anything in the world that has a form also has a formless aspect behind it. What is the value of a rose flower without the formless fragrance? Can we understand the value of the mother without the formless love in her heart? Can we really understand the vastness of the ocean until we gauge its depths (which has no form)? Do we understand the value of the sky until we look at its formless expansiveness? Similarly if we transcend the name and form of Bhagawan, we will realize the true nature, love and value of our Bhagawan, our Mother Sai.

The fifth and last myth is that now that Bhagawan is omnipresent, Prasanthi Nilayam has no great value. Swami always used to say- Do what Rama did and follow the words of Krishna, and don't reverse this order. When an Avatar like Sai Avatar—where there is absolute unity of thought, word and deed—comes at a particular point in time, gauging the level of consciousness of the devotees whom He wants to transform and awaken; He chooses a place, a time and a methodology which is best suited for their awakening. Let us be sure in no uncertain terms that Bhagawan chose Prasanthi Nilayam alone as the place conducive for the awakening for His devotees. Let us never forget that every speck of space in Prasanthi Nilayam and Puttaparthi has been touched by the Divine Feet. Every whiff of air has been touched by His Divine Breath. Everything here has been touched by His Divine sight.

One day I asked Swami, “Swami, please give me devotion.” Swami said, “It is not my responsibility- it is the responsibility of one devotee to give devotion to another devotee.” Similarly, when we come together in Prasanthi Nilayam, we must try and make an effort that when we go back to our hometowns, we must awaken in the people around us the true understanding and significance of Prasanthi Nilayam.

This window of opportunity, this door of awakening is not open for all time. The responsibility to walk on the sacred path lies with each one of us. Let us pray to our most beloved Bhagawan to give us *sraddha* and *saburi*- determination and perseverance to walk on the sacred path and ultimately merge with Him forever and ever. Bhagawan says that He only creates conducive circumstances where we can be awakened. But the desire to be awakened has to come from our heart. We have to jump out of our sleeping bags when the alarm bells ring in the form of downfall of relationships, money, power and position in the world. When we see disease, sickness, senility and death, we must realize that it is a time to awaken to our true realities. When we see manifestations and materializations, we must realize that God is ringing the alarm bells for our own awakening. The two wheels of life are God’s Grace and self-effort. Without the self-effort, Grace doesn’t work in completeness.

Swami always used to say that He will always guide us but not do anything for us; and that the responsibility to be guided and helped is ours. I pray to Bhagawan to open our eyes to clearly view and understand the significance of this rare window of opportunity before us. Let us drop the above five myths and overcome the barricade of name and form in Prasanthi Nilayam. This will enable us to walk through the open doors of Prasanthi Nilayam to reach the goal of eternal peace, bliss and love.





Heart-to-heart

Sri Ruchir Desai

Associate Professor, Dept. of Commerce, SSSIHL

I am going to make an attempt to describe the indescribable. Kabir said in one of his *dohas*:

*Sab dharti kagaj karu, lekhnī sab banray
Saat samunder ki masi karu, harigun likha na jaaye*

Even if the whole earth is transformed into a sheet of paper with all the big trees made into quills, and the entire water in the seven oceans are transformed into writing ink, yet I won't be able to write the glories of God.

It may seem very easy to speak about someone whom you have seen, heard and experienced for years together. But when the realization sinks in that the being that you thought you knew, whom you interacted with was as vast as or perhaps vaster than the ocean, you realize how difficult your predicament is. But if you look at the journey of a devotee, perhaps the journey of every devotee, it starts with a *chamatkar* (miracle). A *chamatkar* that he has experienced or he has seen or heard about in someone's life, in most cases, draws the devotee to Bhagawan. This quest for a *chamatkar* is an endless one because we all the while wait to listen and watch Bhagawan's miracles as if we have not enough for a lifetime or more.

Swami always used to remind us that we are divine and exhorted us to know the divinity within. Not understanding this, we always want to reassure ourselves that He is Divine. This reassurance will come in our mind when we hear of the latest miracle. This search seems to continue on even when He has shed His mortal coil and is not with us. But if the journey has to begin with a *chamatkar*, it will, as He has said be the first step. I am reminded of a story of a lady from Mumbai in the early 1970s. Once I went to her house and saw a statue that was the centerpiece of the *chamatkar* that had changed this lady's life.

The Brindavan of yesteryears was quite different from the Brindavan of today. There was a huge tree even before the Sai Ram shed which later became the Sai Ramesh Hall of today. The devotees, including this lady, were sitting under the tree. She was going through troubled times- her husband had lost his job, he was sick, the family's savings were evaporating and they were a childless couple. Hence she thought of having Swami's Darshan. Just before Swami's Darshan, she thought of getting something for Swami to bless. She went out and got a small statue of Krishna made of brass, which she thought she would keep for Swami to bless. She also bought a plate, kept the statue wrapped in a cloth, put some flowers and sat for Swami's Darshan. As she waited, the thought that the statue of Krishna is not a good one didn't leave her mind. A fleeting thought went past her mind- if only her husband would have had a job, if only they were going through better times and had money in her purse, she would have definitely bought a better statue.

Her thoughts were stilled by the start of Darshan. Swami glided and came next to her, stopped and spoke to one person and paid no attention to her whatsoever while passing her. He took letters from someone behind her, spoke to someone on her right, paid attention to someone on her left but she didn't seem to exist. She seemed more and more desperate. Swami took His time to pay attention to everyone except her and seemed to move on. But as Shakespeare put it- when the world is treacherous, even God seems callous. This lady tried to raise the plate up to catch the attention of Bhagawan, who was two steps ahead of her, talking to some devotees. Without her realizing it, Swami casually picked up the statue and started to move away. She cried out to Swami (as one would) as Swami was taking the statue away. We expect God to bless us in the manner that we want Him to bless. The same script was being repeated here too. Now Swami seemed to respond and very casually tossed the statue wrapped in the cloth back into the plate. The lady was overjoyed and scrambled to take *padanamaskar* and didn't even look at the statue. Swami finished Darshan and bhajans and when He was going back towards His residence, the lady opened the cloth to look at the statue and what does she find? She finds a glowing Krishna statue in place of that dull brass one. It was glowing as it was made of gold.

Were her prayers answered? Yes and No. Her prayers were answered as she had something blessed by Bhagawan, and she had something to cling on to. Through our difficult times, we hope that they will end as we are Sai devotees. Being a Sai devotee is not a passport to a trouble-free life. Being a Sai devotee gives us the strength that takes us through a trouble-filled life. Being a Sai devotee is the right attitude to face life. As the popular saying goes- what one faces in life is destiny but how one faces life takes man across the ocean of life.

When Swami touches our lives, He lifts our consciousness a few notches above. His touch makes us grow. This hall is full of high school and university students who look forward to Grama Seva in the morning and to listening to Swami's discourses and other talks delivered in the evening, two weeks away from University exams. Can we imagine a bunch of teenagers or early twentysomethings in any part of the world spending their time like this? This applies to all others also. He has tried to lift us, but have we allowed His touch to impart wisdom to us?

A few months later, when I saw the statue in her house, various types of thoughts kept coming. Much later, when I thought about this incident again, after coming in Swami's fold, I felt that transforming copper into gold was not the miracle. We consider it as a miracle as gold has a monetary value attached to it. Nature transforms itself all the time in front of our eyes. When we see a fruit ripening and becoming sweeter; when we see a child growing in size and also thinking; when we see so many things around us that tell us that it is the Divine hand of our creator bringing about the transformation- it is a miracle. Hence the transformation of this devotee is the real miracle and not the change of the statue from copper to gold.

She realized that Swami is not only omnipresent but knows her innermost thoughts. She had not expressed her fleeting desire of having a gold statue to anybody and here was Swami telling her that He knows every little fleeting thought of hers.

At one level it is very frightening, but at another level it is purifying and ennobling. Because it is this that enables us to cleanse and purify our thoughts, enables us to move ahead from the first step of *chamatkar* to the next step of

samskar, moving on to *paropkar* and finally *sakshatkar*.

Brothers and sisters- we are Divine, we are not far from Him. I remember another occasion when I was a young student, and naturally not very mature in thinking. I was standing a little away from the place where Swami was sitting. Swami asked me, "What is the distance between where you are standing and me?" I was little puzzled by the question as I felt that there was a catch in the question. He again repeated the question, "What is the distance between there and here?" I replied, "Swami, three feet." He asked, "What is the distance between here and there?" I again replied, "Swami, three feet." Swami said, "If the distance between you and Me is three feet then the distance between Me and you is also three feet." A very profound message given in very simple terms. It was given in simple terms because the person receiving would not have understood if the message was been given in scholarly or philosophical terms. The distance between us and Him is the same as the distance between Him and us. Even today, when He is physically no longer with us, we need not think He is far away. He has told us several times that He is with us, in us, around us. It is for us to decide how far He is. It is for us to decide how we are going to connect to Him.

During His lifetime, He always had a direct connection with His devotees, with nothing and no one in between. It was heart-to-heart as He likes to call it. It is the same heart-to-heart connect that we need to strive for and achieve for our own benefit and not for anyone else.

I can go on and on, but as I speak more and more about Swami, I am reminded of the words of Khalil Gibran- I could tell you more of Him, but how shall I, when Love grows boundless, Love becomes wordless. When memories are overlaid, it seeks the depths of silence.

In that depth of silence, I pray that we, in our own ways, be able to connect to Him and draw guidance, inspiration and wisdom.





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

Embodiments of Divine Atma!

Good company is essential for devotion. The seed of love will grow day by day in us due to this good company. As we develop the four qualities of *maitri* (friendship), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (joy), and *upeksha* (indifference), our mind becomes one-pointed. Selfless actions result in the purity of mind and devotion results in one-pointedness of the mind. The third one is *jnana*. What is *jnana*? There are many types of *jnana* like worldly knowledge, physical knowledge and general knowledge. But *jnana* doesn't mean such knowledge, but knowledge of the Atma. This *jnana* is not enquiry into the physical body, senses, sense objects or nature. But applying this in the enquiry to the Self in place of these physical aspects, one can understand to some extent the knowledge of Atma. This knowledge of the Atma can't be taught by a guru or by books. This knowledge is not something that can be given or received. This has to spontaneously spring from within. The books and the masters can teach to some extent but if a person wants to experience it, he has to enquire himself. He has to enquire deeply and critically, and do deep research and get established in it.

The mother when teaching a child utters 'amma' and 'appa' (mother and father) from her mouth. The child observing the lips of the mother learns to utter 'amma' and 'appa'. It is not possible for the mother to put her mouth in the mouth of the child to make the child utter these words. In the same way, a preceptor can utter different spiritual truths found in books, Vedas and Upanishads but a *jnana* has to get the wisdom on his own.

What is Atma Jnana? *Advaita darshanam Jnanam*- meaning experience of non-duality is wisdom. Perceiving unity in diversity is *jnana*. There are thousands of people in this assembly having different names and forms, but we have to recognize the truth that the principle of Atman is the same in all. We have to understand that the consciousness is one. By merely uttering these things, we cannot gain anything, it has to be brought to the realm of experience. Only such a person who has gained this knowledge will experience eternal bliss and can be called a Jnani.



If one wants to attain this Jnana, one has to follow the path of action. Without gaining victory in the path of action one cannot enter the path of knowledge. How is this so? We call someone as a student of B.A. This means that he has cleared his school final and also intermediate? It is impossible for a person to come to B.A. without clearing school and intermediate. When we say that someone is a youth; that means he has crossed childhood and boyhood. Without crossing the stages of childhood and boyhood, one cannot reach the stage of a youth. When we call one as a fruit, it has crossed the stage of unripe fruit. Without being a flower and an unripe fruit, it cannot become a ripe fruit. In the same way, if someone says he is a Jnani, it is merely hollow words but not the truth. A Jnani is always blissful. Does this person have the trait of always being in bliss? Has this person crossed the path of action and worship? How can he become a Jnani without passing through these two stages? It is impossible. Hence the Vedas have first expounded the Karma kanda, then the Upasana kanda and finally the Jnana kanda. By expounding these three kandas. it laid down three different paths, only to recognize the oneness of divinity.

What is the proof that it has rained? The ground must be wet otherwise how can one say that it has rained at all. Someone says that he has fever. If this is true, his body should be warm. It should at least show some high reading in the thermometer. Without the thermometer revealing it or the body being hot, it can be called just a stunt. These days, many people keep propagating that they are Jnanis. Such people are growing in number these days. Not even one in a crore is a true Jnani among these people.

If you want to become a Jnani, you have to undertake the path of action and perform meritorious actions. Perform all actions as an offering and happiness to God. On the contrary, if one performs actions that are to his own liking, it will not serve the purpose. The likes and dislikes have to be kept aside. Perform actions prescribed by the scriptures, discriminate between good and bad. First, understand the actions expounded by the Vedas. If not, perform an action with the heart as a witness and with a feeling that you are performing a sacred action, it will become a sacred action. There is no need of studying



the Vedas, Puranas or Upanishads. Every word uttered with purity of mind becomes a mantra.

What is the meaning of a mantra? Mantra is the one that is reflected continuously in the mind. Stabilizing the one that is reflected is known as prana. What you have thought about, get conviction about it- i.e. known as a mantra. This will be known as a mantra only when it is done in the Godward path. Man is verily the embodiment of mantra, tantra and yantra. The human body is the living example of this mantra, yantra and tantra. Body is the yantra (machine), the breath (SoHam) is mantra. The heart, which is the basis for this body and breath, is the tantra. How are we losing a golden opportunity after getting this human body? We are losing this Divinity due to the *mala*, *avarana* and *vikshepa*. There are three types of vasanas that are befriending these three. One is the desire for the world, second is the love for the physical body and the third is the love for the scriptures.



Timeless Lessons from Swami's Physical Presence

Prof. A Anantha Raman

Professor (Hon.), Dept. of Management Studies, SSSIHL

This is the time of Navaratri.

A time when the cosmic energy of Devi, as represented by Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati is most vibrant. During this week, workmen clean their tools of trade, children begin their quest for learning and legend has it that it was during this week that the Pandavas became battle-ready for the battle of Kurukshetra.

Thus, this is a very significant period in our calendar. Prasanthi Nilayam used to reach the height of grandeur, when on the tenth day, the Veda Purusha Himself accepted the *Poornahuti*. This is the fourth year, when we are performing the Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagnam in the absence of that Veda Purusha, who presided over this from 1961 onwards.

When I look back at the last three years, since Bhagwan left his mortal coil, I see several changes- both positive and negative, in action and in perception.

It has been four decades since I came to the feet of Sai. I came as a non-believer seeking to unravel what I thought was a myth. I came to him as an agnostic curious to know about His reported miracles. I came to Him as a young man seeking advice on my career; I came to Him demanding a cure from illnesses and relief from distress. And I also came to Him with a total surrender in my heart. I came to see Him from nearby Bangalore, from distant Mumbai and during my twenty years abroad, I maintained my annual two-week pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam.

During those twenty years, I was a visitor from abroad and my focus was different. The emphasis then was to get as many Darshans as possible under my belt. During one such occasion, Swami—after ignoring me completely

during my stay—told me on the day of my departure, “Stay back and teach.” And I stayed back, severing all my connections—both social and professional—by telephone from here.

Then my emphasis changed. I was able to watch Swami at close quarters and observe this many-faceted gem shed several colors of the rainbow, each hue more resplendent than the other. But all my attention was focused on the five feet two inch figure in the red robe on the stage, on Swami’s persona, on Darshan and Bhajans...not so much on the Mission or the Message. But after the Mahasamadhi, particularly after I took the responsibility of communicating with the media, which gave me a ringside seat and enabled me to observe all the happenings around the world, both the Mission and the Message took on a new meaning.

Frankly, I was wonderstruck at its size and vista. When Bhagawan walked the earth, He didn’t merely transform people, He also created a network of institutions- hospitals, schools, university campuses and sevadal units. When the rest of the world was puzzled at this strange outreach of spirituality, Swami saw the relevance. While the world was wondering why He created these disparate institutions, He was quietly sitting somewhere and connecting the dots. Through a powerful connecting force- Love, He created an institutional framework that connected, consolidated and integrated these activities.

Today, Sai spiritual organizations operate in around 121 countries with around two hundred thousand Sevadal volunteers and around six hundred thousand concerned citizens, helping in all kinds of community activity- from washing a leper’s wound to sweeping a slum, all done without any recompense and with complete love.

Only now, in the physical absence of Swami, I have realized its reach and might. It was as if I was sitting inside a mountain unaware of its majesty. It is as if the Mahasamadhi has released Swami from the limitations of His physical form. Previously, we tended to restrict Him to His physical frame. Today, we see His all-pervasiveness through the institutions that He has created.

This was my first perception in these last three years.

The second perception was this- Suddenly I found new meaning to His messages, a new dimension to His oft-repeated phrases. I was always aware that every word that Swami spoke had a lot of relevance. Once, several years ago in an interview He asked me, "What do you want?" Not yet literate with anything lofty at that moment, I said, "Swami, give me a ring." Swami replied, "Go outside, pay one rupee and buy a ring." Annoyed (with myself), I decided that day that even if Swami offered me a ring, I would decline it. One day, thirty years later, He saw me in Darshan line and asked me, "Where is your one rupee ring?"

Swami often said, 'My life is my message'. Many of us didn't understand it but kept repeating it like a parrot; as if it was a cliché. As I look back- every action, every nuance of Swami is an education and His life and living is truly a message. I ask my students of Management to evaluate Swami as a manager, as an entrepreneur and as a leader. The results are amazing. The largest qualities to succeed in these areas are empathy, alertness and awareness. If you analyze Swami's life and draw an inference, in addition to empathy, you will find these two qualities of alertness and awareness in abundance.

There is a story of a Zen master who was conducting a class on a hilltop, when a disciple rushes to catch him before the closing time, which was fifteen minutes away. He scattered his footwear, went inside and prostrated before the master. The master surprised the disciple with his next question, "Where have you left your footwear before coming in? Did you leave it on the right side or left side of the entrance?" Confused, the disciple replied, "I don't remember, I was more interested in coming in and seeing you, Master." The Master replied, "If you can't bring awareness to where you have kept your footwear, you are not ready to come in yet. You need to bring awareness to every single aspect of your life." The quintessence of Swami's life is that living focuses on alertness and awareness. He always says, "past is history, the future is mystery, only thing that matters is the present." For Swami, nothing ever existed outside the present and whatever happened in the past no longer mattered. "Everything happens in the now," He said, and He lived

this concept.

A few years ago, as Swami was coming for Darshan, a student observed some rubbish on the veranda. We then saw the student slowly getting up to remove it, but again pulling back. He was not sure whether he would be able to dart in, remove the rubbish and dart out before Swami comes to that spot. He was in a dilemma. He gets up, sits down and gets up again. As these were going on in his mind, Swami arrived at the spot, picked up the rubbish, called a *sevadal* volunteer and dropped the rubbish in a basket brought in by him. There was no hesitation, and no doubting. This was a simple illustration, but it epitomizes Swami's instantaneous reaction to events. His life was a continuous stream of such discontinuous moments.

On 23 November 1990, Swami dramatically announced that there would be a Super Speciality Hospital at Prasanthi Gram in a year's time. When Col. Joga Rao (normally responsible for all the construction activity at that time) heard it, he was wondering as to where the resources were going to come from.

A few years ago, Swami made another dramatic announcement at the Sai Kulwant Hall. He said that there will be a new SSSIHL campus at Muddenahalli and it will start functioning the following year. Even the Vice-chancellor didn't have a clue about it. When Swami was making these dramatic announcements, He was burning up the past and future and challenging time. The basic driver to such action is- if not now, when?

But that kind of 'now' action has to be taken with total awareness, which Swami exhibited every moment. Some time ago, we had designed an Enterprise Planning System so that all the operations of the University, right from admissions to examinations, can be monitored in real time. We wanted Swami to launch this program. This was during the penultimate part of Swami's physical presence on this Earth, when He appeared to be unwell for several days.

With great difficulty, we managed to get a slot of five minutes when Swami would be invited into the Mandir, and we would make a presentation and

ask Swami to launch the program. The appointed day came. We had set up all the paraphernalia and Swami was wheeled in. I hastily turned on the PowerPoint presentation and started to explain to Swami what it was all about. As expected, Swami seemed to be totally disinterested and listless; but we didn't want to give up our privilege of losing our prime time slot in the immediate presence of the Lord.

And so we continued. Twenty minutes passed and Swami didn't even try to indicate that He wanted to move away from there. He appeared as if He was not present there. We were talking and He was just sitting there. I was certain that Swami was not listening to a single word of my prattle. He had perfected this art in the last few years; you could directly speak to Him, He would be completely turned off and just look through you. One hour and ten minutes elapsed and I was projecting on the screen a screenshot of one of Swami's quotation and said "Swami this is from your Convocation speech." At this, Swami suddenly shot up and corrected me in a firm tone, "That is not from the convocation speech. That was from my talk to the Anantapur College girls."

We all learnt our lesson- not to second guess Swami and assume that His attention was not with us.

On another occasion, Swami had asked a student to give a talk in Sai Kulwant Hall. Suddenly, just before the talk, Swami asked Him to recite the Purusha Suktam. The student was very nervous. Swami said, "Don't worry, I will prompt, in case you forget the words." After a few verses, the student came to a grinding halt, as he could not remember. He looked pathetically at Swami but Bhagawan kept quiet. He did not even seem to be there mentally. The student thought that Swami had forgotten His promise and had gone away on a mental trip. Somehow the boy finished his recitation and as he moved away, Swami called him and told him, "You thought I had forgotten to prompt you. Certainly not. I was only training you not to have stage fright. For if I forget, the entire Universe will come to a standstill." And just to prove His point, Swami called Him aside and narrated to the boy his whole life story; right from the time he was born.

The lesson that He was trying to teach us through all these episodes was that contrary to what we had concluded; He was intensely aware, alert and conscious of the present moment in every minute. In the absence of time, all problems dissolve and Swami was the perfect exponent of this power of 'now'.

Try this- every time you walk up and down the stairs of the building you stay or the place you work, pay attention to every step you take, including your breathing. When you wash your hands, watch all the preparatory steps- the sound and feel of water, the movement of water. When you get into a bus or car, observe the flow of breath. Be aware of the silent power of the present, you will then able to replicate how Swami behaved every moment of His life.

Some years ago, brother Ajit Papat had got a team from London which presented a play. As a backdrop and welcome to Swami, the entire Sai Kulwant Hall was festooned with buntings and streamers. A group of young men dressed in the uniform of the Queen's guards were made to stand in rigid attention to welcome Swami as He was coming out of his living quarters. Some of us were shaking our heads in the veranda thinking that Swami would not like this display, which to some of us seemed childish and garish.

Swami came out of Yajur mandir and as He came out, I was watching His face anxiously. There was an expression of childlike wonder. Slowly, He took in everything, the coloured balloons fluttering in the air, the multi-cultured streamers and the air of festivity all around. Without a trace of self-consciousness, in spite of the eyes of all the devotees on Him, God looked at Man's creation with love, delight and wonder. He was in fact, reveling in the present.

When someone asked Swami, "How are you always happy?" He replied, "I am not bothered about the future, I don't brood over the past, I always live in the present."

When Swami had a fall for the second time, He did not come for Darshan for several days. One day, we were told that He would come out for Darshan that evening. We were all waiting in Sai Kulwant Hall with bated breath-

how will He come- in a car, in a golf cart or will He walk?

Suddenly, there was Swami in a wheelchair. We were feeling self-conscious. We thought, "The other day, Swami told us that nothing would ever happen to Him, why did He not cure Himself?" I craned my neck to see how Swami was feeling. He was totally unconcerned. He was just living the moment. He was taking a letter here, taking a letter there, chiding a student, and patting a student on his back- absolute equipoise. The rest of us were feeling self-conscious but not Swami. He was enjoying the ride.

Swami could have cured Himself with a flick of His little finger, but He did not. He was only trying to demonstrate that whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you have chosen it. Always work with it and not against it. Make it your friend and ally and not your enemy. Accept and then act- this will instantaneously give you great happiness and comfort. He was also trying to demonstrate to us that all the negativity that you experience is caused by the accumulation of psychological time and denial of the present. Avoid thinking too much about the future and also the past; be always in the present. As soon as you respect the present moment, all unhappiness melts away.

Unease, anxiety, tension, worry and all forms of fear are caused by too much of the future and not enough of the present.

Guilt, regret, resentment, grievance, sadness, bitterness are all caused by too much of the past and too little of the present.

Swami operated from the present moment every instant of His life. When He passed by you and looked at you, the only thing that mattered to Him was the moment. His whole cosmic attention was focused on you. You longed for that look, you wept for that look, you got transformed by that look because that look was meant for you, not at 'yesterday's you' or 'tomorrow's you' but at 'today's you' sitting before Him, in that very moment.

Even the simplest of acts that Swami performed, He did it with a sense of quality, love and care, because He acted from the awareness of the present moment. Zen masters call this flash of insight, this state of intuitive

consciousness, this state of 'no mind' and 'total presence' as *satori*. Swami was constantly in that state.

Awareness of the moment is necessary to become aware of the world around you. Have any one of you ever gazed into the infinity of space on a clear night? When you gazed, were you not awe struck by the stillness and absolute graciousness of the sky? Have you listened—truly listened—to the sound of a mountain stream or the song of a black bird on a quiet summer evening? To become aware of this, you need full attention on the present.

In that environment of the present, search for the Soul. Look within, find the real you, the droplet of the omnipresent God.

This is exactly the truth that Swami was trying to tell us. We did not understand Him. We were seeking God in Him. He told us that God is within each one of us. When He was asked, "Who are you, are you God?" He replied, "Find out who you are, you too are God."

We didn't believe Him. We preferred our Gods to be living in the skies, a very handsome Being, preferably blue in color, wearing a crown-- but essentially someone living outside us who will grant us boons, rather like children receiving a candy.

We were seeking Liberation without understanding the word.

Swami once asked a woman devotee, "What do you want?"

She replied, "Liberation. Swami "

Swami asked, "What, right now?"

The lady got frightened and said, "No Swami, not now, later when I become much older. Now I will accept enlightenment."

In fact, Swami had this mischievous sense of humour. It was a Divine attribute. It was the same mischievousness that made Swami tell a boy in the interview room as he was watching with great amazement the different materializations of Swami, "Shall I change you also into a little girl?"

It is the same sense of Divine humor, which made Swami retort to a devotee

who once suggested to Him that He could solve the country's problems if He changes all the waters of Indian Ocean into oil. Replied Swami "If I do that, somebody like you would throw a lighted match stick into it."

Once Kastruriji requested Swami to give Him a Mantra. Swami wanted to know as to why he needed this mantra. Kasturi replied, "Swami, to get closer to God." In response, Swami moved towards Kasturi with His body almost touching Kasturi's body and asked Him with a twinkle in His eyes, "How much closer do you want to get to God?"

Liberation is not something that can be plucked out of a tree and granted to you. All of us are liberated to the extent that we can be liberated at that moment. No one person is more liberated than another.

And enlightenment conjures up a vision of some outstanding achievement. Enlightenment is a state of connectedness to something that is immeasurable and beyond, but is paradoxically and essentially you. It is your true nature beyond name and form. It is this inability to see this connectedness that gives rise to the illusion of Separation.

Rama once asked Hanuman, "Who are you?"

Hanuman replied, "When I think I am the Body, I am the Servant; when I identify with the Mind, I am your Devotee; at the *Atmic* level, I and you are one." And to reach that *Atmic* level, one must go inward and realize your own value.

Swami tells the story of a beggar who was sitting by the side of a road for thirty years. One day a stranger passed by, "Spare me some change," said the beggar, mechanically holding his cap.

"I have nothing to give you," says the stranger, but asks, "What are you sitting on?"

"Why, an old box that I have been sitting on it for the last thirty years?" says the beggar.

"Ever looked inside?" asks the stranger.

“Oh! What is the point, it is an old box?” says the beggar.
“Have a look inside” insisted the stranger.

The beggar managed to pry open the box and to his amazement, he found a pot filled with gold. When each one of us go deeply into ourselves, we too will discover that Gold. We will go into the realms of “No Mind” and realize the true state of our consciousness. In that state, you will feel your presence with such intensity, such joy, that all thinking, emotion, external world and body would become insignificant. At this point there comes an overwhelming sense of peace, love, joy and an experience of Oneness with God.

This reflects the words of Kabir who once said:

Don't go outside your house to see flowers, My friend.

Don't bother with that excursion.

Inside your body there are flowers.

And each flower has a thousand petals.”

A devotee once asked Swami, “Bhagawan, during moments of extreme anguish, I pray to you for guidance but I do not hear you voice.” Swami replied, “If you are fully attuned to me, your voice is My voice.”

But such surrender requires not just devotion, but action too. When we pray to Him to take us from Untruth to Truth, from Darkness to Light and from Death to Immortality, we must remember that it involves a long journey. Without taking even the first step and sitting in a corner, if we keep repeating ‘Lead me, lead me’, we will stay exactly where we are. If we have to be led, we should have the capacity to follow.

Devoid of His overwhelming physical presence these last three years, somehow many of us have become lesser followers. One of the frequent questions asked these days particularly by people coming from abroad are:

Why have we become devoid of love?

Why have we become less caring?

Why does this have to happen even in a place, which was once a citadel of

love?

Swami used to tell the Chinna Katha of a boy who accidentally picked up a precious gem, bright and round. Not knowing its value, he was using it as a marble, rolling it on the ground and playing with his friends. One day a merchant passed by, realized the value of the stone and offered fifty rupees to his mother in exchange. The mother refused as she now felt that there was some value for the gem. The mother told the child that henceforth he to play with the gem not outside, but inside the house, in the garden. The merchant returned the next day and offered five hundred rupees. On hearing this, the mother told the child, "You will not play with this in the garden also, play with it inside the house." Not to be undone, the merchant upped the offer to five thousand rupees. The mother now took the stone to a nearby bank and put it in a safe deposit vault.

Swami was that gem. Not knowing its value, we played with in on the streets. Instead of keeping it safely in our heart and protecting it as the apple of our eye, instead of using it as a key to illumination and liberation, we were seeking from it toys and trinkets, promotions and safe conduct.

Today, three years after Mahasamadhi, particularly during Navaratri which signifies the end of Darkness and beginning of Knowledge, where the theme of Vedas are entirely reflected, where it is a period to transcend all limitations; we need to ask ourselves some questions.

Have we been true to the memory of Sai?

Have we acted, post Mahasamadhi, consistent with our master's teachings?

Is our mind led forward into ever widening thoughts and actions?

Have we narrowed our divisiveness?

Have we acted without ego, envy, jealousy and hatred?

Have we eschewed hypocrisy and sham?

Have we preached unity of thought, word and deed?

Do our words come out from the depth of truth?

Above all, have we loved our fellowmen?

To find answers to these questions, we should not look at our neighbor, but look within us, deep within us, tug our heartstrings and then find the answer.

That is the imperative of the hour.

Our greatest privilege was that God came as Man limiting all His powers to accommodate a human form. *Daivam manusha roopam*. What greater love can a Creator show to the Creation?

For generations to come, people will hardly believe that such a one as this ever walked the Earth.





Prakriti & Purusha- Practical Lessons of Spirituality

Dr. (Miss) U Suma

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Commerce, SSSIHL

Bhagawan always tells us that Indian culture and tradition is a veritable gold mine and we must delve deep into it, pick some noble truths and ideals, follow them, and sanctify our lives. Truly, Indian culture and tradition is like a vast ocean. It has in itself multiple schools of thought. It ranges from *Advaita* (Non duality) to *Shakta* traditions, from orthodox schools of philosophy to some unorthodox schools of philosophy; and each one of them are distinct and developed in terms of their metaphysics, epistemology and axiology. In terms of depth; persons coming from any background, with any inclination or any kind of mindset, will find something of value that will help them to scale higher heights in their noble pursuits. It is suitable for all forms of consciousness and it is in this expansiveness that the beauty of our culture lies. This wide variety and depth can sometimes be dizzying and intimidating to us. We luckily have Swami who demystifies philosophy, pulls out its essence, and makes it into palatable doses that allow us to taste this culture and practice it. Therefore, for us Swami is the be all and end all of everything.

I thought that on these sacred days of Dasara, we should ruminate on some thoughts which are enshrined in our culture. One such concept is that of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. Swami has spoken extensively about this, in the books *Summer Showers in Brindavan* 1972 and 1979. Swami says that the *Purusha* is the essence who is indestructible and pervades the matrix of the universe, while the visible Universe, made out of the five sheaths and five elements, is *Prakriti*. Swami says that the entire creation is feminine, only God is *Purusha*. He also says that this essence is latent in man and hence *Jivatma* is the *Purusha*. When we realize this truth, we become *Purushottama*.

Another amazing aspect of Indian culture is that it is strewn with small

clues in the form of myths and stories, off of which help us to understand these truths and practice them. We have the stories of the demons, who are vanquished by the mother who is known as *Mabishasura Mardini*. These stories can be found in the Shiv Purana and other texts of Shakti where the demons always worship Shiva or Shakti with a lot of focus and get boons. After receiving boons, they promptly misuse those very boons. They use it to harm others, disregarding Divinity. When this reaches the crescendo, the Goddess who is always benign, beautiful and giving, takes a terrifying form and annihilates and decimates these demons. Once she takes that form, she is a raging tempest of destruction and it requires Shiva to remind her of her essence and she calms down.

If it is true that essence and energy are within us, this pattern probably happens within us too. We have God-given energy like spiritual energy, mental energy, psychic energy and physical energy; and if we—in the pursuit of external purposes—misuse them, we create agitation. The only way this agitation subsides is when we center and turn within towards the Soul.

Swami has built this into our everyday life and culture. I will give an example to prove my point- a practice which is probably followed in all institutions of Swami, but is surely followed at the Anantapur campus of SSSIHL. The students have a practice of keeping a box of thoughts/words of Bhagawan in every room and altar in the college. Anytime, anybody wants an answer, is slightly agitated or wants a confirmation, they go sit in front of Bhagawan, pray for a few seconds and pick up a chit from the box. I have rarely heard people saying that they have not got an answer. Many a time, I have heard them telling that they got answers which are precise and identical to the letter of what they were thinking in their minds. I once read that one of the disciples of Sri Aurobindo used to get his answers from his master's books. He asked Sri Aurobindo if it was correct to follow this method. Sri Aurobindo explained, "The entire creation has consciousness, the book has consciousness, the word has consciousness; hence when you pray and keep that prayer or thought aloft, it vibrates in a particular frequency and pulls the answer towards itself and that is the reason you get your answers."

The essence and energy are within us and they are related and hence *centering* is one lesson that we can learn from the concept of *Prakruti* and *Purusha*.

There is one more popular story of Brahma, where he covets his own creation and hence Shiva beheads him. Brahma symbolizes the mind and when the mind (with its compulsive thinking and its interpretation of sensory data) decides to control events, then it is on the wrong path. That is when God interferes. This is precisely what we do. We separate ourselves from the essence and that creates fear and because we want to handle this fear, we use our mind in making constructs to protect ourselves. Like spider webs we spin ideas, beliefs and situations, trying to handle what happens to us. If God decides, He can put His finger through this cobweb and completely remove it. But He doesn't do that. He is so kind and compassionate that He doesn't want to destroy our cobwebs. He coaxes us, tells us sweetly and softly that we are more than this fearful little self and asks us to give up this fear, and turn towards the God in us so that we slowly realize who we *really* are.

I would like to quote two personal examples to show how Swami helps us to handle the tendency to protect ourselves through mental convolutions. On one occasion, in an interview, Bhagawan suddenly asked me, "What do you want?" I replied, "Swami, I want bhakti." Swami asked me, "Why do you want devotion?" I replied, "All the time in life, we have to make choices between You and 'me', between You and something not so worthy; therefore, I need devotion to focus and choose correctly." He shook His head and said "No". He said, "You have already chosen the path in this life, what more needs to be chosen? There is nothing to choose, so this is the wrong thing to ask for." Since, I didn't know what to ask for, I told Him, "Swami, you tell me what to ask for?" He said, "Ask for obedience." Obedience to what should be the next question. However, there are some preliminaries to be achieved before we are able to obey God. The stories of the scriptures show us that we have this great sense of fear as we are separated and use our mental powers to complicate our lives. The first thing to be addressed is fear. He reminds us, loves us so that we overcome that fear. Then we are ready to learn to obey. Obedience is that we have to bend other parts of our self to the essence. Have I done that? I am not sure, but this was an important lesson I learnt.

On another occasion, I was in the interview room with a desperate prayer in my heart. I told Him with closed eyes, “Swami whatever I am with all my incompleteness, heavy with the mental baggage of countless lifetimes, my many, big faults...I wish to offer it to you.” When I opened my eyes, I saw Bhagawan outstretch His hand asking me to give what I wanted to give. I couldn't believe my eyes! Slowly I put my fingers in His hands in a symbolic gesture of giving away whatever was 'me'. “Have you given it?” He asked. He knows every thought that passes through our head, every intention behind every activity, He is God. I just nodded as I was overcome with tears. Swami said, “Then do not ask the question ‘why?’” We always want to know the reasons for the things that happen to us. We constantly question- Why me? Why not this? Why not that? As if those meanings and those answers give us security. Swami challenged this concept of personal preoccupation. What I think He meant is that if I wanted to get into this path I had to stop asking the question ‘why’ and shed self-centered viewing.

Today in the newspaper I read about a particular passage written about the Dasara festival. The writer says that Mahishasura used to change forms continuously so killing him was a difficult task. This is symbolic of our ego, which is a slippery thing. The ego keeps on changing form and so pinpointing it to attack it is difficult. We need an ally in this journey and we are fortunate that for us it is none other than God because only God can help us through this difficult battle with ourselves.

The second lesson that we learn in the episode of Prakriti and Purusha is that of alignment. The need to remove our egoistic self so that Shakti (energy) and Purusha (essence) become a unified whole. This perhaps is the principle of *Ardhanarishwara*. We haven't reached that state but we have seen this all the time in Bhagawan. Bhagawan embodied this complete perfection. He was totally involved in action all the time and still there was a part of Him which was totally detached- a witness to all the happenings. He is Shiva and Shakti. We engage in mundane tasks like making cards for Bhagawan and distributing *prasadam*, but when they are related to Him they gain meaning because God is the essence and anything that surrounds Him gains that essence.

If we look back and think of the moments when we were intensely alive, those moments would be in presence of God. When Swami is there, everybody has to be present; His aura is so strong that it will force all of us to 'be'. Whatever type of fatigue- be it mental, emotional or physical, the moment you see Him, it vanishes. Energy flows into us. He is verily the embodiment of both energy and essence. Hence the third lesson is awakening.

To recap, the three lessons that we can learn from the concept of Prakruti and Purusha are- centering, aligning and awakening. All the three are possible with Bhagawan.

I would like to end with a small prayer, which I wrote a year ago. I have tried to describe what we learn each time we come back to the memories of Swami at different stages in our journey.

I reopen the creaking door
The sudden light reveals
Amid fine dust and silken cobwebs,
The familiarity of my forgotten home...
My lingering glance embraces
Recollections of old joys
But I know- these are new meanings
Changed with wisdom of journeying
My home of love is different.

The touch of your robe is more than refuge
It is a symbol of sacrifice
Your smile is more than reassurance
It is a reminder of self acceptance
Your look is more than a source of strength
It is a reminder to look within...

Now Your silence doesn't mean abandonment
It is just quiet acknowledgement
Now the world is not scary
It's a background, You are its essence
Now I need not struggle to reach
I have to just be
Knowing I am draped in Your Love...

I reopen the creaking door
The sudden light reveals
The richness of what was always there.





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

There are three types of vasanas – one is associated with the world, second is the attachment to the physical body and third one is attachment to the scriptures. What is the meaning of infatuation of the world? It is the desire for good name and prestige in this world. A desire to be greater than everyone else and get respect from everyone. Also the desire to enjoy all luxuries of life, and command all the wealth in life. These are all narrow-minded feelings. How long will this physical world last?

Those mansions that you see in the dream won't be visible once you open your eyes. Whatever pleasures and comforts that we are enjoying in the waking state become nullified in the dream state. How can you call such things as permanent, which are not permanent in all states of existence? These are all untruth. Truth is that which doesn't change with time. Hence the name and fame of this physical world are temporary and ephemeral. You have to give up these worldly desires.

Infatuation with the body comprises that one should have perfect health and strength, handsomeness. Whatever powder, cosmetics or creams one applies, the colour given by God will not change. All the things applied by you are temporary; these will last only for five minutes but the colour given by the lord alone is permanent. Hence you should take your natural complexion as the correct one. This physical body consists of all useless and unwanted matter. You should as much attention as required because to attain divinity, this is the basis. But we should not waste our time increasing our attachment to the body and thinking that it is permanent. Whatever decoration you do to the body, remember it is imperfect. Your real form never changes.

People take nearly two hours to get ready. This is utter waste of time. For this body, which is like a water bubble, health is very important. Therefore, it is said- Health is wealth. Till divinity is attained, till we stay in this world, it is our duty to care that this body doesn't become sick and weak. Having excessive attachment to this body is a type of misery.

Next is the attachment to scriptures. However much one learns, studies and repeats the scriptures, getting a name as a great scholar, one will not have



peace of mind. What is the reason? Because even if he forgets a bit of this scriptures, it will be a source of sorrow to him. If he loses to his opponent, it will be a source of sorrow. To prevent this, he has to continuously repeat the scriptures. The grief of the attachment to scriptures is very painful. Sastra means following the path laid down by the scriptures. Acquaintance of the text can't be sastra. Following what is given in the book is real sastra or scripture. For mala (impurities), avarana (veiling), and vikshepa (fickleness), the above three vasanas are the root causes. Due to these three attachments, human beings are becoming even more foolish.

We have not got anything while coming into this world and will not take anything from this world. What have you got with you when you are born, what will you take from here when you die? Where will money go and where will he go? All these things are the ropes of delusion that bind man. We have to make efforts to break free these bonds. Therefore, in this impermanent world, in order to reach a permanent goal, the Vedas have laid down the path. The Vedas have not taught things which have transcended these limits. They have shown the path to lead an ideal life until we live in this world. The Vedas have not declared that it can confer ananda. It has only said when we will attain this bliss.

Na karmana na prajaya dhanena tygenaike amruthatwa manashuhu

The Vedas have said that only by tyaga (sacrifice) one can attain bliss; it has not told anything beyond this. Meanwhile, it has told about many forms of temporary joys to be experienced by man. When food is partaken when in hunger, it confers happiness. But this joy is temporary, only for two hours. Again you will feel hungry and there will be a thought of food. The Vedas tell us what type of food has to be partaken and in what way it has to be eaten and what time it has to be eaten. This is expounded in *Chamakam*. *Namakam* has only expounded how to sacrifice things.

The real meaning of *namaskara* is not having *mamakar-* attachment. There is a difference between *mama-* mine and *namama-* not mine. This mama is a type of disease. The Vedas say *neti neti*, i.e. not this, not this. This is the



essence of Vedanta. I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the intellect, I am not the chitta, I am not the *antahkarana*. When we say- this is my body- it means that there is a difference between me and my body. When I say, this is my handkerchief, then I am different from my handkerchief.

When you go on denying like this, whatever is left is Atma. There is only One, because of whose existence, the body, mind, intellect, senses, the inner mind are working, and that is Atma. We have to make efforts to understand such an atmic principle. This is the principle of Vedanta, which transcends the Vedas. We have to make efforts, at least in a small measure, towards the principles of Vedanta. Do good deeds as far as possible. Serve others, participate in social service, chant the name of the Lord and do everything with love. Don't do anything mechanically. Do the service with all the source, i.e. from the heart. External is force but internal is source.



From Fear to Fearlessness

Dr. (Miss) Deepa Seetharaman

Asst. Professor, Dept. of Physics, SSSIHL

Today is the 8th lunar day of the Navaratri festival – the Durgashtami, which is dedicated to the worship of the Divine Mother in the form of Goddess Durga. Let us visualize this powerful and majestic form of the Mother, seated on a lion in the fearless pose of ‘Abhaya Mudra’, but with the benign expression of compassion in her eyes, assuring all mankind of protection and freedom from fear. Her form evokes the opposite emotions of fear and love at the same time. On this Durgashtami day, it would therefore be apt to share our thoughts on *bhaya* or fear and how God helps us to travel our journey of life from fear to fearlessness.

All of us experience fear in small things or in big ways in our life. Consider the following- when examinations are around the corner, students are constantly faced with the fear of an unsatisfactory performance. Parents are continuously consumed by the fear and worry of the future of their children. We often live in the fear of loss of our loved ones. All these examples show that fear is an unending emotion that continuously dictates our decisions and actions.

A famous verse of Bhartrhari, who was one of the original philosophers of language and religion in ancient India, describes nine different fears that control human lives:

1. *Bhoge rogabhayam*- in enjoyment, there is the fear of disease
2. *Kule chyutibhayam*- in lineage, the fear of decline
3. *Vitte nrupaalaad-bhayam*- in wealth, the fear of a hostile ruler
4. *Maane dainyabhayam*- in honour, the fear of humiliation
5. *Bale ripubhayam*- in power, the fear of foes
6. *Roope jaraayaa bhayam*- in beauty, the fear of old age
7. *Shaastre vaadibhayam*- in scriptural erudition, the fear of opponents

8. *Gune khalabbhayam*- in virtue, the fear of the wicked
9. *Kaaye krtaantaad-bhayam*- in the body, the fear of death

Sarvam vastu bhayaanvitam bhuvi nrnaam- all things of this world pertaining to man are indeed attended with fear!

We have also heard Bhagawan singing a Telugu verse 'Bhayam, Bhayam Bhratuku Bhayam' in His beautiful expressive style.

Fear is therefore a part of the human condition. Sadly it is true that our fears do not allow us to be what we are capable of. As children we read or hear epic stories or fairy tales with characters who were absolutely fearless and fantasize being like one of them. But later in our lives, as we get limited by our fears, we only imagine how we would be or what we would achieve if we were really fearless. Conquering fear is therefore an important part of our struggle to better ourselves.

Let us therefore try to analyze as to what this emotion of fear is grounded in. What do we really fear? Some may say that we fear some form of harm happening to us. It could be physical harm like not having good health to fulfill our duties or the fear of mental harm like having to face a challenge which we feel is beyond our ability or an emotional harm- like the fear of loss of a loved one or fear of death itself.

In all the above examples, it seems that *bhaya* is connected with a feeling of loss. We often go through these mental narratives unconsciously- If I lose my health, I will be less than if I had good health. If we lose a loved one, we don't feel their love anymore and so we may become incomplete in some way. In short we believe that 'With such and such a loss, I will be in some sense less than I was before'.

We can therefore infer that perhaps one fears becoming incomplete in some way. Adi Shankaracharya says about fear- *Atmanasha rupam bhayam*... Losing one's identity is *bhaya*. It is the fear of losing what we perceive as ourselves.

Our religious texts talk of the concept of *Bhavabhaya*. We are familiar with

this word as it often occurs in many of our bhajans as *bhava bhaya harana*, *bhava bhaya nasha*, *bhava sagara taranam*, and so on. The word Bhava is understood to be 'existence', 'a state of being', 'or a state of becoming'. So the term *bhavabhaya* really represents the fear of being, fear of existence- in short fear of living itself. This is analogous to the concept of 'existential angst' in current psychology- which in loose terms means 'the pain of living'.

I feel however that this emotion of fear has been created and placed in human life by the Creator Himself. In Vibhuti Yoga, 10th chapter, verses 4 and 5 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declares, "*Bhayam cha Abhayam bhutanam matta eva bhavanti*"- both fear (bhaya) and fearlessness (abhaya) in beings emanate from the Supreme Lord alone. The Mother Goddess is described as both *bhayankari* and *bhayaapaha*. Even in the Vishnu Sahasranama stotram, the Lord is described as 'Bhayakrit Bhayanashanah'. The word *bhayakrit* means the one who creates fear. This name of the Lord is many a time narrowly interpreted as 'the one who creates fear in the minds of the evildoers'. This seems to suggest that others escape fear or never experience fear, which we surely know is far from the truth. All beings experience fear. Hence, there is reason to believe that God has created and instilled fear in all-alike for a purpose.

But what could this purpose be? Consider this analogy- A mother who does not want her child to stray away from home instills the fear of a beggar or a kidnapper who will take the child away if he goes too far from home. We do not question the mother on why is scaring her child, because we realize that this fear is for the ultimate good of the child. It makes him conscious of his limits and to do what is good for him. It also ensures that the child always seeks the security of the mother's lap. In the same way, fear placed by God in our hearts is in fact a blessing in disguise.

Let us recollect that Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas prayed to Lord Krishna to give her only sorrows so that she constantly remembers him. Similarly, fear makes us experience our own powerlessness and incapacity and thus forces us to seek God, who is all powerful and limitless.

If we enquire deeply about the relationship with fear in our lives, there seem

to be three stages:

First, Bhaya – or the stage of fear

Second, Nirbhaya – or the stage of courage, when one tries to overcome fear

Third, Abhaya – the opposite of Nirbhaya, a state of complete absence of fear

The first state of bhaya is that of the experience of fear. If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we are indeed being troubled by fear. If not, we may spend our life avoiding facing our fears or its associated pain and live on the surface. While in this state, we try our best to overcome our fears by facing them squarely, or rationalizing them, or by performing some action that we feel will remove the fear.

But often, situations seem beyond our limited power. We are then forced to give up, depending on our strengths and call out to God, seeking refuge in His infinite power. God uses these situations to enter our lives. He comes to our rescue and saves us from the fearful situation. Many of us agree that Swami came into their lives when they had reached such a dead end. We know of innumerable instances in which Swami has saved His devotees from inevitable accidents when the devotee called out to Him in his anguish. We also know how Swami has dismissed the many fears of his devotees by the words – ‘Your cancer is cancelled’ or just a ‘*Nenu Chuskuntanu*’ (I will take care). By this, He not only saves us from difficult situations, but gives us the confidence that He is there with us, guarding us at all times with His reassurance- Why fear when I am here? We have now got promoted to the stage of Nirbhaya, or not being afraid of fear anymore. We become courageous in the feeling that we can always take our fears to God who will make it melt like snow in the sun and give us happiness again. Everything seems perfect, now that we have a stronger power- God on our side. It might be very tempting to remain in this second state of Nirbhaya itself. But God is not going to let us be dependent and still be threatened by fear. He will push us to go ahead to the next state, the final stage of Abhaya.

To understand the state of Abhaya- the complete absence of bhaya, we first need to know the primal cause of bhaya. Unlike the modern personality

training programmes, which suggest superficial or cosmetic solutions, our scriptures address the very reason for fear. Our scriptures say that fear is experienced when one is clouded by *avidya* or ignorance. Swami Vivekananda said, “If there is one word that you find coming out from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness or *abhaya*. It is fear that brings misery, and fear that breeds evil. And what causes this fear? It is ignorance of our own nature.”

What is this ignorance that causes fear? A shloka from the Atma Bodha by Adi Sankaracharya explains it as follows:

*rajju-sarpavad atmanam jivam jnatva bhayam vahet
naham jivah paratmeti jnatashcet abhaya bhavet*

As one mistakes a rope for a snake, the one who considers himself to be only a jiva, is overcome by fear. If one understands that I am not the jiva, but the Supreme Self, fearlessness automatically results. So this ignorance or *avidya* is just our mistaken idea about ourselves.

Swami explains this by means of a story of a king who fell asleep and dreamt that he was poor and cried out loudly for just a penny. When he woke up, he realized that it was just a dream and he was in reality a king with his treasury full of gold. Swami says, “Just like the king who dreamt that he was utterly poor, we are dreaming the nightmarish dreams of fear, suffering, disease, and pain, unaware that we are actually the Supreme Brahman itself.”

The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says- *dviteeyad vai bhayam bhavati*- Fear arises out of duality- a sense of two entities.

Chapter 7 of the Taittiriya Upanishad, which falls under Brahmanandavalli, contains a small section called *Abhayapratishtha*, that explains what is this duality that is the cause of fear. The verses go as follows:

*Yadaa hyevaisha etasminnadrshye anaatmaye anirukte anilayane abhayam
pratishtaam vindate. Atha so abhayam gato bhavati.*

Yadaa hyevaisha etasminudaramantaram kurute. Atha tasya bhayam bhavati.

When one feels oneness with the Brahman who is invisible, incorporeal, undefined and abodeless, then one transcends *bhaya*. However, when one feels a differentiated existence of his own being as apart from the universal Brahman, then by the very fact of its self imposed limitations and assumed separateness, fear arises in him.

What is fear after all? It is the feeling of apprehension of the possible extinction of life or of its limitation by an external entity. So when the individual jiva realizes the truth that my being is not separate from that Universal Transcendental reality, the supreme *atman*, then it finds no cause of fear, as there is no 'external' or a 'second entity' to harm it. Everything we see around us- people, situations, our environment, everything then becomes a part of this extended all pervasive 'me'. We consider our hands to be a part of our body. Do we ever fear that our hands or our feet or any other part of our own body is going to harm us? So too, when we identify ourselves completely with the universal consciousness, there is no sense of 'another'. We all know how the Buddha walked calmly and lovingly towards Angulimala who was armed with a knife, ready to harm him. There was complete absence of fear in the Buddha because he did not see Angulimala as another person capable of harming him but as the same supreme Brahman that He himself was. The state of *abhaya* arises not because of a change in external circumstances but because of a change in our belief about ourselves.

We have falsely identified ourselves with the limited self- the body-mind-ego complex. When we transfer our sense of identity to our true being- the immortal soul, we will discover that all fear and pain is unreal.

Bhagawan gives an extremely simple and beautiful analogy to exhort us to shift our misplaced identity. He says, "When we walk on the road, our shadow falls on dirt, mud, thorns, sand and wet and dry patches. But we are unaffected by the fate of our shadow. We do not worry in the least where it falls or what it wades through. We know that the shadow and its experience are not true. Similarly, Swami says we must get convinced that the entity that we are identifying ourselves with—this body and mind complex—is but a shadow of the absolute Brahman which is the true us.

So going back to our original line of thought, how do we go from the Nirbhaya, the state of not being afraid of fear to the state of Abhaya, or absence of fear? One of the ways is through bhakti. A devotee through his intense bhakti, loses his individual identity in the Lord, and thus ends his sense of separation. We see the example of Prahlada who was completely fearless and unperturbed even when his father Hiranyakashpu tried his cruel and inhuman ways of killing him. Prahlada not only fully relied on his Lord Hari but had realized that the Lord pervades the entire universe and there is nowhere in this Universe where He is not.

The transition from Nirbhayatvam to Abhayatvam is also possible through Jnana, in which the seeker enquires deeply into his true nature and realises himself as the Absolute Atman.

Our compassionate Bhagawan tries all means to make us take this jump from Nirbhaya to Abhaya state. He came amidst us and loved us unconditionally so that we too may love Him so intensely that through this intense feeling of Bhakti or *prema*, we lose our small self, and realize that we are indeed the *Premaswarupas* (Embodiments of Love), as He always addressed us.

Bhagawan, through His beautiful discourses also shone the light of Jnana on us, repeatedly telling us that we are not jivas, whose fate is to wallow in fear and suffering, but that we are indeed God Himself. In this context, an incident narrated by Sri Kasturi Garu in one of his speeches comes to my mind. Once, Sri Kasturi Garu accompanied Swami to some places in Andhra Pradesh. At each place, Swami gave a discourse and each time, He was speaking of the Atman, of our being not the body or the senses, or the mind or the intellect. The audience was different at each place, but Sri Kasturi Garu, who was then the editor of Sanathana Sarathi, got the same message everywhere. One day, he hesitatingly approached Swami and requested Him to speak on the Bhagavad Gita on the next occasion. When Bhagawan asked him the reason for his request, Kasturi Garu explained that he was worried about how he would fill Sanathana Sarathi with the same theme of Atman that Bhagawan was speaking on everyday.

Swami then said, “No. I must tell about the unreality of this world and this

existence. People everywhere are deluded and are straying from the purpose for which they got this human life. Even if they don't understand it now, the tonic will be useful to them sometime or the other and they will realize that they are the Atman and that is what really matters. This is the first lesson I have come to teach.”

So let us pray to the Divine Mother Durga who is verily our Swami to help us attain the state of Abhaya. Let us all pray to our Bhagawan to help us realize our true identity as Divyatmaswarupas (embodiments of the Divine Atman) as He always called us.





Qualities of the Divine

Sri Sanjay Sahni

Associate Professor, Dept. of Commerce, SSSIHL

Director, Brindavan Campus, SSSIHL

Y*atho vacho nivratante aprapya manasa saba-* The vedas describe that He is beyond the measure of words and beyond the grasp of the mind and yet in this Prasanthi Vidwan Maha Sabha, if there is one subject worth deliberating upon, it is none other than Veda Purusha Himself. Nothing in relation to the Lord is ordinary. Every word He uttered is a mantra, every piece of land He tread upon became a *punyabhoomi*.

Two episodes come to my mind. One happened many decades ago and the other just a few days ago. One of the great Vedic scholars of yesteryears who would participate in the Prasanthi Yagnam and the Prasanthi Vidwan Maha Sabha was a person by name Gandikota Subramanya Sastry. He gifted to humanity the glorious Sai Gayatri mantra. When Swami used to see students, He would ask, “What did you have for breakfast?” When He would look at Gandikota Subramanya Sastry, He would ask, “What is Brahman?,” as he was an eminent scholar. His son Sri G V Subba Rao is a modern, educated gentleman who went on to head the energy division of the United Nations organization.

Once, the son was visiting the father in their native village. In course of the conversation, the father told his son, “Every word that Bhagawan utters is a *vedavakya*. Educated on modern lines and a rationalist that he was, the son refused to accept his father’s statement and said that he wants proof. The father asked, “What proof do you want?” That day morning, the Telugu Sanathana Sarathi had arrived in their house. He picked up the Sanathana Sarathi, browsed through the pages, came to Bhagawan’s discourse and challenged his father and said, “I will read out this discourse of Bhagawan, for every passage that I read, you have to give a Vedic equivalent.” So the worthy dual started. The son reading out sentence after sentence from Swami’s discourse and the scholarship and devotion of the father rattling out *stotras* and *slokas* from the Vedas. The entire discourse was completed and the father had given sentence

by sentence equivalent from the Vedas. At the end of the entire discussion, the son said, “Father, I believe.”

Swami said, “There is none who can understand my reality, maybe someone who has studied Vedas can get a glimpse into my nature.”

The second episode took place a few days ago during the first day of the Yagna and the evening music programme. The students from Muddenahalli campus were rendering the Durga *stotram*. One student sitting in the hall closed his eyes and had an opportunity to see a wonderful sight. From the Mahasamadhi emerged Mother Durga seated on her throne, walked up to him riding on her lion and merged into his heart. For the next twenty minutes, his whole body was heated up and he was undergoing the experience of being one with the Lord. No inch of land that has been tread by Avatar is unsacred. Let us all remind ourselves that we are sitting on hallowed land where God walked on Earth.

If a man were to go to Tirupati, how will we know that he has visited that place? If we get a *ladoo* as *prasadam* and relish it, we know for sure that he has visited Tirupati. If a person has fever, how will one know? You will use a thermometer, measure his temperature and if it is more than required amount, you will know that he has fever. Suppose someone comes into your house and it is raining outside, how will you know that it has been raining? When you find someone wet all over and water dripping from his face, you know that it has been raining. If you have gone to Kanyakumari and someone has to assess whether you have really gone there, how will he assess you? If you ask about the colour of the ocean at Kanyakumari and the man replies, “It is not one colour but three hues of Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea.” Then you know for sure that this man has gone to Kanyakumari. What shall we say of someone who came face to face with God? If he comes back and tells you, “I have seen God, I have touched Him, I have spoken to Him, I have experienced Him.” How will you gauge whether this man is authentic or not?

If we have seen God, if we have seen the Avatar of the age, then the surest sign of our having met Him, our having interacted with Him, is that some of His qualities have come into us. If some of the qualities of the Divine have

got transmitted into the individual and He manifested them in his own life then perhaps what this man says is true. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves, 'What is the quality of Divine? What is the nature of the Divine? This is something that we cannot say. The only person who can authenticate the quality of the Divine is the Lord Himself.

One day in a discourse, Swami said, "Purity + Patience + Perseverance = Divinity." In the 1993 birthday discourse, Bhagawan clarified this and said, "If there is anyone who wants to be one with Sai, he must embody these three qualities- Purity, Patience and Perseverance. All these three qualities are there in me and therefore, I can vouchsafe for it." Let us contemplate on these three divine qualities that Swami used to call the 3 P's of spiritual life.

What does purity signify? Purity signifies selflessness. Any person who interacted with Bhagawan could not but resist this understanding that whatever Bhagawan said or did was absolutely selfless. More than a decade ago, the hostel where Brindavan boys stay was renovated. Prior to this, in a hall where hundred boys would reside, there were four bathrooms on each floor. Suddenly, Bhagawan got it renovated. The warden expressed to Bhagawan, "Swami, we are grateful to you to have given us the new bathrooms in the hostel." Bhagawan said, "I didn't do it for them, I have done it for Myself." This is the oneness that Bhagawan has with His creation.

When the water project was started in Anantapur district and became operational, some villagers came from there to express their gratitude to Bhagawan. When they expressed their gratitude, Bhagawan said, "I should be grateful to you as you have given me this opportunity to do *seva* to you." If the Sri Sathya Sai Organization, an international organization is a *seva* organization, the foremost servant was Bhagawan Himself. He was a silent worker. In 1999, when we were accompanying Bhagawan to Kodaikanal, en route we stopped for lunch just before the climb on the hills. For a brief moment, I came out of the dining hall and saw Bhagawan making sure all the snacks packets were properly being distributed to all the vehicles in the convoy. When everybody was happily busy taking their lunch, Bhagawan's servitor Brother Sathyajit was employed to make sure adequate number of snacks reach all the vehicles so that when the students travel, they have

enough to munch upon. He was all the time thinking about others, never thinking about Himself. This is true selflessness.

The second facet of purity is adherence to truth. Bhagawan said that His name itself is Sathya. When you speak the truth, due to the pure inner life, a day comes when what you speak becomes the truth. I recall one day in the early 1990's when Bhagawan was coming for Darshan among students, He picked up an 8th class student whose grandfather belonged to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. A few days prior to that, this gentleman had a very interesting conversation with Bhagawan. He said, "Swami, I am going to *Ramjanmabhoomi*, Ayodhya, the birth place of Lord Sri Rama, please give me your blessings." Swami quipped, "For killing and getting killed, what blessings you want." Swami continued, "Shall I tell you where Sri Rama was born?" All of us became very alert because now the Avatar is going to reveal the truth behind Rama's birth. Swami said very casually, "Where else Rama is born, but from Kousalya's womb." The conversation ended and the grandfather went on his journey.

A few days later when Swami was coming for Darshan, he saw the grandson sitting there and asked him, "Where is your grandfather?" the grandson replied, "Swami, my grandfather has gone to *Ramajanmabhoomi*." Swami said very casually, "He will go to Krishna *janmabhoomi* also." The grandson was little surprised as the grandfather had not told him about this trip. A few days later, the grandson got information that there was a lot of commotion in Ayodhya and many got arrested and were put in jail and his grandfather was also part of the group that went to jail. Krishna was born in a jail. A very casual statement that seemed like a joke actually became the truth. When you are the embodiment of purity, whatever you utter becomes the truth.

The third facet of purity is desirelessness. Kasturi ji, Swami's first biographer, quoting Swami said, "I have only one desire and that is to make each one of you desireless." We come across this episode in the Ramayana. One day, a friend was talking to Ravana and he came up with a suggestion. He said, "Ravana all this while you are trying to persuade Sita to become your wife, I give you a suggestion- She is so obsessed with the form of Sri Rama, you approach Sita in the form of Rama, I promise you, she will accept you as

her husband.” What Ravana says at that point of time is amazing, He says, “I can’t do that because the moment I assume the form of Sri Rama, I will not have any desire to make Sita my wife.” This is the certificate for the Lord Rama from his archenemy. The state of the Lord is desirelessness. Bhagawan gave humanity the wonderful notion and practice of ‘ceiling on desires’. He knew our limitations and asked us to do it in stages.

I am reminded of a personal experience. It was a couple of years before Swami’s 60th birthday. One day in the evening, He came out and said, “Students, tomorrow onwards don’t come to the mandir for Darshan.” When I heard those words my heart leapt up in fear because elders used to say that Swami will go far and He will not be accessible. In the next sentence, He allayed our fears, He said, “After college everyday, go to the stadium and do service there, I will come and give you Darshan there.” So every day after the evening classes were over, we would rush to the stadium. The most beautiful part was, when you do the service in the stadium and look up, you can see Swami sitting in the middle and giving Darshan. Students would be very interested not merely in Swami’s car but also the car following it because it would be loaded with goodies and *prasadam*. Every day at the end of the *seva*, we would get *prasadam* from Bhagawan. On one such day, I got my duty not in the grounds proper but just behind the dining hall of the hostel and there was no way in which we could see Swami from there. I was grumbling to myself- why did I get a spot like this? The next thought was, “Why is He giving us only sweets, why not apples?” I myself realized that it was a very foolish thought and I tried to correct myself. In a couple of minutes, a student comes running and says that Swami is calling all the students. We rushed to Swami’s presence. The joy of having His darshan was immense but what was most stunning was- He was distributing apples to all the students.

You have not told anybody what you want but He caught the strand of your thought and instantaneously He satisfied it. I received the apple. He asked me, “Did you receive the apple?” I nodded that I got the apple. Once, when I was sharing this experience with a group of devotees, one elder said, “Once, when apples were being distributed in the mandir, I got a thought- An apple a day keeps the doctor away. Swami came and asked me whether what I

was thinking is correct. I was quite puzzled and kept quiet. Swami asked the same question again. I told Him, “Swami, I was thinking, an apple a day keeps the doctor away.” Swami said, “Yes, is it correct?” I said, “No Swami, it is not correct, because otherwise everyone will eat an apple and will remain healthy.” Swami said, “It is correct because the apple which I give is not merely an apple but a symbol of my Grace.” One day, I shared this experience in the Divine presence but Swami kept quiet. More than ten years later, I repeated the same experience in His Divine presence when He cut me short and said, “Why should you think that you want an apple? Be happy with whatever God has given you.” Ten years ago, He accepted that without a murmur. Ten years later, He prodded you to rise a notch higher. Bhagawan prods us to that path of curbing our desires.

In my final year, Bhagawan gave us His final interview, which He generally gave a class before the class graduates. In that interview, He said, “Life is like a beam balance. On one pan of the beam is God and the other pan of the beam is the world. If the God pan has to go up, the other pan will automatically go down and if you want the world pan to go up, the God pan will automatically come down. The choice is yours, make the choice.” This is the nature of the world and Bhagawan prods us to reduce and sublimate our desires. Every desire you entertain in life, dedicate it to God. This is the philosophy that Bhagawan came to teach us. There is nothing like a worldly desire and a spiritual desire. Every desire becomes spiritual, if you align it with the Divine. To make us walk this path, Bhagawan came amidst us.

The next quality that Bhagawan said is essentially Divine is patience. Many years ago, I read this episode in Sanathana Sarathi. A devotee was seated in the Darshan lines waiting for an interview with Bhagawan for two weeks. Finally, after two weeks, Swami called him inside. The devotee complained to Swami, “Swami, two weeks I have been waiting for you and finally today you have called me for the interview.” Swami replied, “What about the two thousand years I have been waiting for you.” This patience and equanimity is something that we saw in Bhagawan in a very prominent fashion.

When the Super Speciality Hospital was constructed in Prasanthigram, the

new academic year had started. The construction was not going anywhere; by May it had not come above ground level. There were hardly any funds in the bank account. Every evening, Swami would quietly walk into the Bhajan hall and the moment He would walk in, the students who were sitting outside were allowed to slip in. It would be a huge gathering inside the Bhajan hall and for almost an hour, Swami would be joking with the students in such a way that it would be difficult to control our laughter. None of the students ever had an idea that Bhagawan had such a heavy burden on His head regarding the completion of the project. That equanimity was what defined Bhagawan.

On another occasion, we were with Swami in Kodaikanal in Swami's residence called as Sai Sruthi. The evening bhajans got over and all the devotees were going back home. Suddenly, there was a heavy downpour and everybody was getting wet. Swami was sitting on the sofa and was feeling sad that the devotees are so distressed. He kept on telling three to four times, "How much difficulty these devotees are facing!" To our utter surprise, it started pouring in the living room of Sai Sruthi. People who were sitting in the end got up as it was like a waterfall. The moment we saw it, we teachers want to rush to that spot. I was sitting just next to Swami and was trying to get up when He sternly said, "Sit down." There is a crisis, there is a waterfall in the drawing room, and nobody has a clue of what is happening and Swami said, 'Sit down.' He kept talking to everybody as if nothing has happened. One elder came and requested Swami to permit me to go and have a look at it and clearing up the water. Only then, Swami allowed me to get up from my seat and attend to the problem. Everything was going haywire around Him, but He was a picture of equanimity. This patience that we saw in Bhagawan reminds us- Patience is all the strength that a man needs in life. That patience He exhibited both in worldly affairs and the evolution of the each soul.

The final virtue that Swami identifies with the Divine nature is perseverance. Once you decide to do something, don't lose focus, come what may- this we saw in Him. He decided that in one year's time there would be a Super Speciality Hospital in Prasanthi Nilayam. On 23rd of November He announced (the project) and on the 22nd of November of the following year, the first surgery was performed. He said it will be done and it was done.

When we went to Chennai, He saw a few urchins taking water from a few puddles on the road due to scarcity of water. He saw that sight with His own eyes but didn't tell anybody. He resolved to Himself, "Till I solve the water problem of Chennai, I will not step foot on Chennai again." This was His determination. On the first anniversary of the Bangalore Super Specialty Hospital, unknown to anybody, He made this announcement to providing drinking water to Chennai. A project that governments failed to execute, Bhagawan willed and executed.

Our Sri Sathya Sai International Centre for Sports (Indoor stadium) was completed in around 120 days. I spoke to one of our M.B.A. students who had completed his civil engineering. This is what he expressed: "This building has come up in front of my eyes in a few months, this itself is a proof of His Divinity. I don't need any other proof." Some international agencies came to Swami and posed this question, "Swami, we also fund projects but they take years to get completed, how you are able to do them in a matter of few months?" Swami said, "In my entire creation, the most complex unit which I have ever created is the human body. I don't take more than nine months to create it, then what are all these projects in front of the human body."

Purity, patience and perseverance are the qualities of the Divine. The advent of Bhagawan is to usher us into our own divine nature. He came to prod us to take the baby steps and walk the path and at the end of the path to give us emancipation, which is to merge in Him. If little bit of that purity, patience and perseverance comes into our being, Bhagawan's advent amidst us would not have been in vain.

One of our faculty brothers shared a beautiful insight. He was showing us a photograph of Shivaratri celebrations where the *hiranyagarbha lingam* created by Swami is seen. His face is not visible in the photo but only the lingam lying on His lap is seen. Swami is looking at the lingam, as His face is being reflected in the lingam. The insight was, "When will the goldsmith know that his creation is perfect? When he can see his own image in his creation." For that moment, Bhagawan is waiting. His delight is to give that to each one of us.





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

Embodiments of Love!

One should never pray to God asking for this or that. This is because no one knows what extraordinarily valuable and Divine things are in the mine of the Grace of God. No one knows what God has willed to give or confer upon devotees. Not knowing this extraordinary aspect of God, man is asking for trifles and losing his Divine attributes. No one can understand what sacred and Divine things God confers on a devotee who has earned His Grace. Hence, man should never ask for small and little things from God. Love is most precious and most valuable. If at all one has to desire something from God, it should be, "O! God, I desire only you and nothing else." If we have Him, we can get everything else.

Hence Meera sang- *Prem ratan dhan payo, payo re maine prem dhan payo*, meaning I got the precious gem of God's Love. Asking for trinkets from God is like going to *Kalpavruksha* (wish fulfilling tree) and asking for coffee powder. If you have to ask something from God, ask Him alone and not any small, petty desires. Even when you ask Him, there is no need of praising, flattering or extolling Him. When you describe and praise God as *karunasagara* (ocean of compassion), *apadbandhava* (succor in difficulties), *anatharakshaka* (protector of the forlorn) it irritates Him. All such praises are a type of business. Whatever fruits you receive after praising Him thus are not proper fruits. Great saints, sages and Maharishis were not able to attain God even after undertaking penance for hundreds of years due to this trait of praising God. God takes a human form- *Daivam manusha roopena*. Only when you treat Him as an intimate friend of yours, He is pleased. You can make Him joy and win His Grace by addressing Him as *mitra* (friend), *brudaya ratna* (jewel of my heart) or *priyatama* (beloved).

If you praise Him in various ways- the one who helped Draupadi, who can't be understood by even Brahma, who helped Kuchela, who annihilated desire...these kind of praises may bring about a feeling of jealousy in you. All our desires will be fulfilled if we treat the Lord as our intimate friend and beloved of our heart. Whom do we praise? We praise someone to make him our friend. When we invite someone for the first time to our house we



treat them with lot of respect, like come Sir, kindly be seated Sir and such other courtesies. But when you receive an old friend, you treat him with lot of intimacy and not respect. Saint Tyagaraja did intense penance and *sadhana* to get a vision of the Lord Rama. With these spiritual practices, he was able to make God very intimate. He never used the words of flattery for Rama. When Tyagaraja asked Rama to come to his house, how did he invite Rama?

He called Rama- *Ra ra ma inti daka, ra ra dasaratha kumara sukumara.*

Tyagaraja called Rama without any respect like how we call a close friend.

How to recognize the basic truths relating to God on the occasion of *poornahuti* of Dasara celebrations? Reduce your desires, don't desire small and trivial things, do not waste your time going to God for insignificant desires. Unfortunately, in this Kali age, people are going on pilgrimages only for the fulfillment of petty desires. If only we can win the Lord Himself, what shortage or deficiency can there be? Tyagaraja said, "Rama if your *anugraha* or Grace is there, the *navagraha* or the nine planets can't do anything to me." It is essential to satisfy and treat the Lord as an intimate friend rather than praising Him.

For all this, the sacred love is the basis. There may be difficulties, problems or sorrow, but we should make sure not to have wavering love. This was the primary trait of the Pandavas. They never wavered and chanted the name of Lord Krishna incessantly even when Draupadi was insulted, when Abhimanyu was mercilessly killed, when Aswathama cut the throats of the *upa-pandavas*, when Rajasuya Yagnam was performed and Pandavas achieved all the wealth and luxury and even during the days of exile. The Pandavas were not afraid or shaken. They repeated the name of the Lord with full faith.

Joy and sorrow are like passing clouds. All the relationships like son, father, brother, sister, husband and wife; how many births have they been continuing and for how many more births will it continue? All these worldly relationships keep on changing; we have to develop love for God, which is eternal and unchanging. *Yagna* (sacrifice) is intended to bring such sacred relationship with God. *Yagna* is made up of, *Yat* and *jna*. *Yat* means 'He,



who is the substratum of this creation; *jna* refers to searching for such a substratum. To search for the being for the basis of this entire creation is the true meaning of *Yagna*.

The Vedas declare- *antarbahischa tat sarvam vyapya narayanaha sthitaha*- God is inside, outside and everywhere. Wherever you go, God is there. For such a God, where is the need for searching?



Important Aspects of Bhagawan's Teachings

Dr. N Gopalkrishnan

Director, Indian Institute of Indian Heritage, Trivandrum, Kerala

Devi or Mother Goddess is worshipped in Dasara in nine forms- *Shailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skanda Mata, Katyayani, Kalratri, Maha Gauri, Siddhidatri.*

The Markandeya Purana describes Devi as present in all beings in the form of motherly feeling, wisdom, forbearance, power, desire, motion and memory. I bow down to that goddess.

God is the one who guides, observes and directs all of us. I came once before during the Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam and gave a talk from this dais. I was fortunate to keep my head on His lap when Swami asked me, "When did you come, did you have your food, Why you did not come until now?" Swami then asked something which is very significant, "What do you want?" I replied, "I don't want anything." He repeated His question again, "What do you want?" I again replied, "I don't want anything." This happened for the third time. I asked Him, "I want *pada namaskar.*" He said, "Do whatever you want." I touched His feet and after that I don't remember anything until a person adjacent to me told me to get up.

One day Swami came in my dream and said, "Gopalkrishnan, you should spread my message in a scientific way because you have seven postgraduate degrees, you are a senior scientist in the Prime Minister's department, you are a visiting professor in seventeen American universities." I said that I would do. Immediately He said, "But you have got a problem because you have got *ahamkaram*- ego and anger. Remove these two things. You are not telling anything from your knowledge, you have inherited them from your forefathers. Try to become zero to hero not hero to zero." I am trying my best to follow these teachings of Bhagawan.

We have to remember that we are not permanent in this world. The day of coming, the day of going and ups and downs in the life- all are fixed. Profit and loss, laughing and weeping, birth and death are inevitable in life. In the time between birth and death, how long we live is not important but how we live is important. Bhagawan in His 85 years transformed millions of people, residing in our minds and reminding us that we are not permanent in this world. How long you live, nobody bothers, how you live- only the world will bother. Adi Sankara lived for 32 years and did all his work travelling the length and breadth of India three times. Swami Vivekananda informed to the world about the rich cultural heritage of India within 39 years. Bhagawan touched six points- body, mind, family, culture, society and Bharat, the nation. For someone who stays outside Bharat, the whole world also can be included in this list. Our ultimate aim is to keep Swami as our God and ideal model. We have to march forward using the messages of Swami through watching, listening, thinking, discussing and then practicing.

*Asato ma sadgamaya
Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya
Mrutyor ma amruthamgamaya*

This is a prayer to go from untruth to truth, darkness to light and death to immortality.

Elevate the mind- First we have to elevate the mind as Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita in the 6th Chapter, 5th line-

*uddharet atmanatmanam natmanam avasadayet
atmaiva hy atmano bandhur atmaiva ripur atmanah*

Elevate yourself with the help of the mind by filling the mind with the thoughts of Bhagawan and positive thoughts given by our forefathers. But never denigrate the mind with negative thoughts. Swami always says, "Fill your heart with love, live in love, don't be a useless man or also don't become a used less man. Your mind is demonstration of my love, so elevate the mind." Lord Krishna told Arjuna in the battlefield in 3,140 B.C.- *Idam shareeram kaunteya kshetramityabhidheeyate- This body is a kshetra or field, never make*

it impure by feeding it with forbidden foods or intoxicating drinks. Keep the body pure, only then the mind will become pure. The mind and the body are complementary to each other, if mind has to be good, the body should be pure. When you listen to the Vedas, a neurolinguistic effect is produced in the brain. At NASA, many American scientists are listening to Vedic mantras from their computers while doing their work. For the last eight years, the American Parliament used to start with a Vedic chanting for half an hour. The assemblies of the fourteen territories of the United States used to start their session with the chanting of Vedic mantras. Swami told us to learn Vedas and spread them. Therefore, UNESCO declared the Vedas as a world heritage because they can model the mind and it can increase the positive qualities of the body.

We live on this earth for approximately 85 years, which is equal to 28,000 days, 1 billion seconds. We breathe 23,080 times every day and every breath is taking us closer to the graveyard. T S Eliot, one of the greatest poet of America said- Every breath is taking you nearer to the graveyard. The starting point is the date of birth and the ending point is date of death. How long you lived can be answered in numerical values but how you lived cannot be answered in numerical value. We have to say, "I lived a life which was useful, purposeful, fruitful and meaningful."

Take care of your mother till her last breath. We say first *Matru Devo Bhava* and then *Pitru Devo Bhava*. Even the mantras of offering to the manes starts with mother first, and only then father and others. Swami says that you are here only because of your parents. Swami says that one should take care of mother, father and then make his family the most ideal family in the society. We need not wait for another heaven above the sky and another hell before the earth. For every good action, there is an equal and opposite good reaction and in the same way, for every bad action there is an equal and opposite bad reaction. Keep the body healthy, keep the mind at an elevated level and take care of the family. Get the blessings of your mother; it is the most important blessing in life. If the mother says, '*ayushyman bhava*' (have a long life) or '*vijaye bhava*' (victory be yours), that is the greatest blessing from the mother. If blessings of mother are not there, even if one is staying next to mother

Ganges, he will not get a glass of water when he is thirsty. When mother's blessing are there, even if you are in Sahara desert, you will get water. Look after your mother as *matru bhava*- motherly feeling is the greatest feeling. Sai Mata is the Divine Mother who can continuously confer love and affection on her children. Mother always prays, "Whatever problems are there in the world, let them come to me and not to my children." Those protective words of the mother we Bharatiyas always cherish. That is why we call everyone as *mata*- *Go mata, Bharat mata, Prakruti mata, Ganga mata* and so on.

Another important aspect is giving Bhagwan's teaching to one's own children. Listening, watching, thinking, discussing and practicing is not only for oneself but has to be told to others also. This will result in *Samasta Lokaha Sukhino Bhavantu*.

*Sarve janaha sukhino bhavantu sarve santu niramaya
sarve bhadrani pashyantu maa kaschitt dukhabhagbhavat*

Let all be happy, let all be healthy, let all see what is good, let there be no suffering. Do yoga, pranayama, eat good food for the body, elevate the mind from bad to good, from darkness to light and from tension to a tension-free level. Then comes family and subsequently culture.

Culture. This Prasanthi Nilayam is becoming a cultural centre for the world. Our Bharatiya culture was not erased even after 900 years of foreign rule.

*Yada Yada Hi Dharmasya Glanirva Bhavathi Bharatha,
Abhyuthanam Adharmasya Tadatmanam Srijami Aham*

Whenever there is decay of righteousness and a rise of unrighteousness, then aa Avatar like Bhagawan manifests in every age. Bhisma says in Mahabharata- *Dharmo rakshati rakshitaha, dharme va hato hanti*- Dharma protects the one who protects the dharma and dharma only destroys the one who tries to destroy dharma. Our duty as Bhisma said is:

*udyamam, saahasam, dhairyam, buddhi, shakti, paramkramou
shadete yatra vartante daivam tatra prakasht*

Wherever the traits of hardwork, courage, valour, intelligence, strength and power are there, divinity manifests itself there. Life is expansion and death is stagnation.

Society. Then comes the aspect of society. *Nara Seva is Narayana Seva, Jana Seva is Janardhan Seva*. Serve the old people, sick people, hungry people and orphan children. Don't take photographs of *seva* activities. When I was working in Edmonton, Canada near the Arctic ocean in 1993-94, the temperatures during winter time would touch -65⁰ Centigrade without any sun for all the twenty-four hours of the day. Many Red Indians would drink liquor and lie on the snow. Only Sai devotees used to care for them and give them food. The Sai *seva* vehicle used to roam around Edmonton to search for such people and help them. The government of Canada extended its full support to the local Sai Samithis. The only condition put by the Edmonton Sai Samiti members was that there should not be any photograph taken of the *seva* activities. They never wanted any publicity. Lord Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita:

*yajnarthat karmano nyatra loko yam karma-bandhanah
tad-artham karma kaunteya mukta-sangah samacara*

Work should be done as a sacrifice to God, otherwise work binds one to this material world. Therefore, O! son of Kunti, perform your prescribed duties for His satisfaction, and in that way you will always remain unattached and free from bondage. I am not standing here and trying to teach you something. I am just sharing with you the joy which is derived when His teachings are put into practice and service is done silently without any publicity. If such service is done to society, society will bless you making your life a glorious life. Remember, we are here for a limited time. Any day we may go back; at the last moment thinking about lost opportunities will not work.

Finally comes the nation. Remove the 'y' from 'your' and it will become 'our'. The Prime Minister of India has given the call of 'Swacch Bharat' i.e. Clean India Campaign. The cleaning should also be internal. Once the cleaning is done, we can proudly say that this is our motherland land of Bharat. Despite

modernization and the state of the world today, Bharatiya culture is still alive.

Having human birth is a great fortune. In addition to that, we got the fortune of working with Swami. Thirdly, you were able to spread this message of the Lord, were able to make your life happy and others life also happy. Listen to the stories, messages and experiences of Swami, and the mind will automatically get elevated and you will become one of the happiest persons in the world.





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

Embodiments of Divine Atma!

A person who has love in his heart will have a peaceful, steady and sacred mind. His mind will not waver due to any defeat, insult and troubles. The greatest strength of such a mind is the love of God. Self-confidence is what makes a man beautiful. Self-confidence gives immense inner strength. Every man has to make an effort to develop this Self-confidence and then get the Divine bliss. Love should not have expectation of the fruits of actions and should develop into pure selfless love, which is true love. Love that develops depending upon any cause is not true love. Develop love, which is beyond any causes. This is the natural duty of every human being.

When one is full from head to toe in ignorance, how can one develop this love? There is no sense of sacrifice in man today. He fills his heart with mountains of desire and goes to a temple to break a coconut to God. Praying to God filling your head with desire is not a proper prayer, devotion or love.

A selfless man alone can participate in social service. Such a man who does selfless service gets the deservedness to serve God. First of all, develop this sense of sacrifice. This sacrifice can be attained only through love. A person with sacrifice is ready to sacrifice anything that a selfish person can't do. If you want to understand God, try to understand the essence behind God. God is not limited to a particular place. You are yourself God. Remove body consciousness, and you will have God realization that very instant.

In the waking state, we experience many things. We enjoy the created world. We see the world with our nineteen limbs. What are these nineteen limbs? They are five *karmendriyas*, five *gnanendriyas*, five *pranas*, *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. Only when we are in the waking state, we experience the world with these nineteen limbs. God in this waking state is known to have a *virat swaroopa* as this Universe is that *virat swaroopa*. He is known as *vishwudu* and hence the name vishwa for the Universe is derived from the *vishwudu*. When you examine this from a different angle, we call Him *viraja putrudu*- this means someone who can be an ideal to the world, who can give bliss to the world and stand for truth, beingness and bliss. In the dream state,



you lose contact with the waking state. When you get dreams, these nineteen limbs are still present. How are they present? They are present in a subtle form. Where have they originated from? They have come on their own. Man creates all these things and then experiences them. In this dream state, God is known as *tejasudu*; one with brilliance. He is also known as *Hiranyagarbha*, meaning keeping everything inside him and creating them by his mere will. The third state is *sushupti*, meaning good and deep sleep. What does he enjoy in this deep sleep? He loses himself and derives only bliss in this state. There is only *pragna*- wisdom is present in that state. There he is called *pragnam brahma*. The vishwudu in the *jagruta*, the tejasudu in the *swapna* and *pragna* in *sushupti* are one at the same. If these three states are removed, only One remains. The experiencer in the waking state, dream state and in the deep sleep state is the same one. Once these three states are removed, only that remains- *Tat Twam Asi*. Every man has this *Tat Twam Asi*.

There is no need to search for Him anywhere. His hands and feet are everywhere, His head and face are everywhere, and He is everywhere. Although we are the substratum of everything, we are forgetting our real nature and searching for Him in the waking state. Even in such efforts, we have to develop only pure and unsullied love. Chant the name of the Lord with that sacred Love. God loves the human form and hence He descends in human form. We can make an effort to have God's Darshan in the path of action. Hence, the Bhagavad Gita declares- *Karmanyavedhikaraste*- you have a right only to do action; *shareera madhyam khalu dharma sadhakam*- the body has been given to you only to do action; *Karmanu bandhena manushya loke*- the whole world is bound by action. Such a God, we are trying to find in artificial pictures and forms by doing all decorations to Him. This is not the correct path. Enjoy the natural form in a natural way. Different types of decorations can be pleasing to devotees but not to God. This can melt the heart of devotees but God's heart doesn't move. A devotee has the power through love to melt the heart of God. Therefore, without undertaking to extoll Him in excessive ways, without asking for trivial desires, if we desire Him alone, all else will be added unto you. Chant the name of the Lord and put in the effort to make him an intimate friend.



Prayer for Enlightenment

Sri Hari Shankar Bhatt

Senior Manager, Accounts & Purchase Section, Medical Care Div., SSSCT

In the last nine days, we have worshipped God in the form of mother Durga, the mother Goddess. This is very unique to Bharatiya culture- where we worship God with a form that naturally evokes in us such feelings of pure love in us. There are seven billion people and out of that there are a shrinking number of people who believe in God- a belief in fear of a vengeful God who doles us punishment and strikes us down at our smallest transgressions. But it is the fortune of us Sai devotees that we have feasted our eyes on the beautiful form of the Lord as He walked on earth. We basked in His love and we could say that God is nothing but pure love. When that love descends upon us in torrents, words fail us and the only way to describe that experience is to say- this is the love of a thousand mothers. This love is something which not only humans responded to, but also some chosen denizens from the animal kingdom.

Many of us have watched Swami's playful interactions with His pet elephant Sai Geeta. There is one incident that I want to narrate today as I witnessed it at close hand during one of the Sri Krishna Janamashtami celebrations at Prasanthi Nilayam. On that day, the students of the University bring cows of the Gokulam in a procession to the Sai Kulwant Hall. On this day, we can find an assortment of animals like rabbits, peacocks, pigeons, etc. On this occasion, someone brought a cute little fawn. This deer was fidgeting and squirming because from the point of view of the deer, it was feeling uncomfortable in a totally new atmosphere with so many animals and people around it. It was frightened, as there were so many unfamiliar sounds- Vedas on one side, and Bhajans on the other. The deer handler was holding it in his hands trying to prevent it from darting away into the crowd. Soon, Swami came in for Darshan and went up to where the students were standing with the cows. His eyes fell upon the deer and He did something unexpected. He asked for the deer to be placed in His hands. When the deer was placed in His hands, suddenly, it became so calm as if all its fears had vanished away. It

looked very peaceful, perhaps it realized that it is in the hands of none other than the mother of the Universe itself. After some time, it started nuzzling against Swami's neck as all its anxieties and fears had vanished.

Swami always stresses the importance of the Gayatri mantra. It confers many benefits on the person who chants the Gayatri mantra. Swami says- *Sarva dukha nivarini Gayatri*- those who chant the Gayatri, all their fears, sorrows and anxieties melt away. Swami is none other than the embodiment of the Gayatri mantra and it is nothing but natural that in His presence, all our fears and sorrows melt away.

One of my associates narrated this incident to me. His father was diagnosed with multiple blockages in the heart and Swami mercifully had arranged for the surgery to be conducted in our Super Specialty hospital in Puttaparthi. Swami assembled an expert team of cardiac surgeons for this purpose. The evening prior to the surgery, He went to meet the patient and supervised all the arrangements. When He came back to Sai Kulwant Hall, He called this boy for an interview. Though Swami made all the arrangements, still this boy had a tinge of fear lurking within him. In the interview room, Swami asked him, "Are you still scared?" The boy confessed, "Yes Swami, I am still a little scared." Then Swami did something very beautiful. He placed this boy's head on His lap and started gently stroking his hair. As my friend described, "I felt a peace descending upon my being." With Bhagawan taking care, he had nothing to fear because Bhagawan is '*Sarva dukha nivarini Gayatri*'.

There is one more facet to the Gayatri mantra that Swami describes. He says, "*Gayantam Trayete iti Gayatri*," meaning, the Gayatri protects those who chant it. I have seen that when this prayer touches His heart, He rushes to protect His devotee. This is an incident that I witnessed when I was a student at Bhagawan's University. It was a practice that time to carry a tray having items which the students wanted to get blessed to Swami for blessings on any important occasion like one's birthday or any other event. They would be seated right in front for Darshan and Swami would come during Darshan and bless those items. That day, Darshan was at 3:00 p.m. During Darshan, Swami blessed these students and retired into the interview room. An hour

later at 4:00 p.m., one more student walked in with a tray and took his place among those students. I was intrigued. I was wondering how he fancied his chances of getting blessed as he had walked in very late. This student's family had gone through some tragic times. His father had a very violent end and his mother was trying to do all she could so that her two sons receive the best education. They were studying at Bhagawan's University here. A stage came when the mother was not able to afford even the nominal fees (hostel and food) that are charged here. So this student was facing a prospect of leaving Bhagawan's University to take up a job to fend for his family. That day, he came to Bhagawan with a prayer to continue his studies at the university. He had come with this letter to Bhagawan expressing his predicament and prayer. No sooner he sat down, a sharp sound rent the air. It was the sound of the interview room flung open. Swami came out of the interview room, rushed to this student with anguish writ large on His face. Swami said to Him in a loud voice, "Why so much time?" What an irony! We devotees chide the Lord in our suffering, "O! Lord how long will you keep us in this agony?" On that day, the Lord turned the tables on His devotee and asked Him, "What took you so long?" That boy rushed to Swami but before he could give the letter to Swami, Swami called the Registrar and instructed him then and there to make arrangements for this boy to continue his studies at the University. Then Swami declared in a ringing voice, "I will take care of this boy from head to toe." The Gayatri mantra protects those who submit themselves at her Lotus feet.

What is it that this Mother expects from all of us? What does she aspire for? Let me recall an incident that was narrated by Kasturi garu to take it forward. This was in those days when Swami used to take devotees to the sands of the Chitravati river. For a prolonged period of time, Swami was not intending to go to the Chitravati sands. After this long hiatus, the devotees thought that it was time to do something about this. They asked Kasturi garu to represent their prayers to Bhagawan to resume the Chitravati sessions. Kasturi garu went over to Swami's room with a few devotees to submit this prayer and Swami would not relent. Kasturi garu said, "You don't need the sands of Chitravati for these miracles, the sands lying outside for construction can also be used for this purpose." At that moment, Swami turned to those devotee

and said, “Miracles and miracles you clamour, but do you know what is my greatest miracle?” As the devotee looked at Swami, Bhagawan said, “You are my greatest miracle.”

Swami would be seated here for Darshan and from that vantage point, He can see the face of each person sitting in the Sai Kulwant Hall very clearly. He knew what each one of us were going through, what our concerns and worries were. He would know that we were worried about the examinations impending in a few weeks’ time. Some of us had concerns about our health, or perhaps had some issues back home. Swami got moved by our plight. But sometimes I wonder when Swami looked at each one of us with His waving in air, was He wondering when one of us would come up to Him and ask Him for that one thing which is our true inheritance- our own Divine nature. I assert that this is the miracle that Swami wants us to create in our own lives. In the mantras which they chant in the last one week of Dasara, they intone- *Tat Twam Asi*- You are that. When we are seated in front of Bhagawan, how many of us will go up to Him and ask Him for our true legacy?

These were the times when Swami would come for Darshan in a golf cart. One day after Darshan, Swami went out into Prasanthi Nilayam after giving Darshan. Crowds would throng because this was the time where you could see Swami from close quarters. Once such day, Swami spotted a student standing a little behind in the crowd. Swami beckoned to Him to come and join Him. This boy started walking next to the golf cart. After a little while, Swami was again indicating to the student and we realized that Swami wanted him to sit beside Bhagawan in the golf cart. This boy was little embarrassed and he respectfully declined. Later when I thought about this incident, it struck me that it happens with each one of us. Swami beckons us to come near Him. We even walk along the path Swami has indicated; but what Swami aspires from each one of us is that can we take our place beside Him and shine with our own divinity.

The Gayatri mantra dispels the sorrows of those who chant it and also protects those devotees who chant it. But the most important facet about the Gayatri, which Swami describes is- Prayer for enlightenment. *Dheeyo yonah*

prachodayat- Lord, grant me that intellect which illumines.

Many decades ago, Swami would tour the length and breadth of this state to grant Darshan and Divine discourses to the devotees. In one such photo (of these tours), Swami is standing on the hood of a car and giving His divine discourse to all the devotees. It is a very poignant picture. Can you just imagine that the Lord of the Universe was willing to take that pains to climb atop a car to make it His Shanti Vedika. It moved me so much that Swami had such compassion and drive to raise the consciousness of His devotees. When we listen to the discourse of Bhagawan, let us be aware of the intention of Bhagawan. Let us pray to Bhagawan to pray for that which we He wants to give us- i.e., enlightenment.





Excerpts from Bhagawan's Discourse

What is the flower that God likes? What is it that has to be offered at the altar of this Yagna (Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna)? It is the sensual pleasure that has to be sacrificed. It is forbearance that grants peace to the mind. This is the word of truth.

Embodiments of love!

The sages and Maharishis of the Sathya Yuga and Treta Yuga performed sacred rituals. Vishwamitra used to perform sacrifices in the Dwapara Yuga. This Yagna came to conclusion after annihilating the wickedness, cruelty and the demonic nature. The Yagna came to a conclusion after repeating shanti, shanti, shanti only after destroying the wicked qualities and wild nature of man. Today is the concluding day of the Yagna. We have to put an effort to understand the inner significance of the concluding day of the *Saptashati Yagna*. We find in every man agitations due to seeking sensual pleasures. All these are imaginary, external and worldly. These are qualities of this ephemeral world.

What is the inner significance of Yagna? God teaches us the *Pravrutti* (outward) and *Nivruutti* (inward) path. *Pravrutti* represents the wicked, cruel and bad qualities in man. *Nivruutti* represents the path of truth, love, forbearance and empathy. Those qualities that come out of the heart remain eternal. *Pravrutti*, which comes out of the head is temporary and makes you suffer. To whom are these to be offered? It is said that these have to be offered to God.

What is the meaning of Bhagawan? *Bha* means the one who sheds light, illumination and effulgence; *Ga* means the expansive nature of light and illumination; *Van* means the one who is capable to do this. God is the one who has the capability to spread the illumination and light. The light within us has a lot of brilliance. This is known as *Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*. The ignorance of darkness has to be dispelled and the light of wisdom has to be spread. This principle is essential every human being. The path of *Pravrutti* requires indulgence of the senses. But there is a difference between senses and elements. These five elements are equivalent to God. First of the five



is earth which is called a *Bhoo devi*; second one is water which is called as Ganga devi; third one is fire which is called as *Agni deva*; wind is the fourth one which is called as *Vayu deva*; fifth one is *akasa* or ether which is known as *Sabda brahma*. Hence these five elements were considered and worshipped as Divine. God is represented by five elements. The five elements are in everyone, and are located in every place, move about everywhere and are equal to people of all nations. They have no differences or considerations as it is beyond time and space. These five elements are present in all the countries. No nation or individual can deny the presence of these five elements. No scientist can separate these five elements. These five elements constitute life. These five elements support the basic life. Bharatiyas call them as Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana and Samana. These are the various forms of God. As it is not possible for ordinary ones to imagine God and His form, they have assumed the forms of their own choice and derive happiness by worshipping those forms. There are no faults in the five elements. It is only in the expression of these five elements that you find these faults. These are the traits of *Pravrutti*- the outward path. Whatever we acquire is external knowledge. Whatever we practice is external knowledge. Whatever we see with the eyes, hear with the ears or experience with the mind are the traits of the five elements. The qualities of *Nivrutti*- the inner path are attributeless, formless, permanent and pure. The inward path has been described as pure, unsullied, eternal, nectarine, immortal, stable and changeless. We have to develop such permanent traits, distance ourselves from the temporary traits and earn mental peace.

Who is man? Man is the combination of body, mind and spirit. Body acts, mind enquires and *atma* stands as an eternal witness. Therefore, for every activity, body is essential. Body is the one which does the action, mind is the one which discriminates between good and bad and for all this *atma* is a witness. Man is complete when he has body, mind and spirit. If man ignores mind and *atma* and experiences only through the body, then he comes down to the level of an animal. When the body and the mind together give up the spirit, it is called as a demonic nature. On the contrary, if body and mind are given up for *atman*, it is known as Divinity. The Divine path exhorts man to



always have a connection with the *atman* within. The attachment to the body is responsible for bestiality in man. If the mind follows the body, it makes a man demonic. Giving up attachment to body and mind and attachment to the Self is very important. This attachment to Self is full of brilliance. These three given to man have to be utilized properly, put in a right path, basing on the circumstances and time. We have to make use of them in the right way. Mind should not be used in an indiscriminate way. It should also have some limits. Mind has to properly enquire what is good, what is bad, what should be done, and what should not be done.



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