



Life-long Bhajan

In this divine discourse delivered on a sacred Mahashivarathri day, Bhagawan Baba reminds devotees to transform the exercise of all-night bhajan into a life-long bhajan of adoration and pilgrimage to the Lord within.

Throughout last night, you have sung *bhajans* (holy music) and kept vigil, as part of the *Shivarathri* celebrations. This *arati* (waving lights before an image) marks the end of that *bhajan* sessions; but, this ending is only of the outer, congregational, vocal part, and does not indicate the inner solitary silent *bhajan* that must be the very breath of your existence. The *Vedanta* (*Hindu philosophy*) persuades you to investigate the function of the senses, and use the mind to reflect the *atman* [soul] within. All the inner instruments of knowledge and the inner witness in man are promoters of the highest wisdom, though they are misused, in ignorance, to confound and ruin man's progress. Those who are aware that they are the indestructible *atman*, encased in temporary sheaths, in a ramshackle dwelling bearing a name and form, are unaffected by anything that happens to the sheath or house. Prahlada (a foremost devotee) was one such. Regardless of the inhuman tortures inflicted upon him, he remained calm and unruffled as he was established in the Narayana (God), his genuine truth.

It took Arjuna (a princely devotee and compatriot of Lord Krishna) a long time to realize this. In fact, it was only after the ascension of Lord Krishna that it was brought home to him, in a dramatic way. As Krishna prepared to end his incarnation, He asked Arjuna to take the women, children, and some old men of the Yadava clan to the safety of Hastinapura, away from Dwaraka which had been swallowed by the sea.

The mind hides the Prompter and the Power within

Arjuna led the disconsolate community through lands infested by wild tribes, confident that the bow that had won him the Kurukshetra battle against the array of gigantic heroes will ensure safety and success. But, when some barbarian hordes fell upon the Yadavas, Arjuna sought to string his bow and fix the arrow upon them in vain! He could not recall the formula that could send the arrow on its mortal mission! He had to witness the debacle, the kidnapping of the women whom he had vowed to guard! When Krishna had finished His Mission, Arjuna's mission had ended too; there was no more breath in him. . Krishna was his life, might, archery, mastery, heroism, and his all. That truth became evident to Arjuna when he faced the shame of defeat.

The mind plays many tricks with you, the chief of which is to foster the ego, and hide the prompter and the power within. You must have heard of an accountant in the court of the King of death, Chitragupta. He maintains a register of the good and the bad done by each living being, and on death, he brings the books to the court and strikes the balance between debit and credit. Yama, the king, then metes out the punishment that can expiate and educate. This Chitragupta has his office in the mind of man, awake and alert all the time. The word Chitragupta means 'the secret picture;' what he does is to 'picture' all the secret promptings that blossom into activity; he notes the warning signals as well as the occasions when those signals were ignored or wantonly disregarded. You must see that the warning of the Divine against the human, or even the bestial inclinations, is heeded.

***Bhajan* encourages man to dive into himself**

Bhajan is one of the processes by which you can train the mind to expand into eternal values. Teach the mind to revel in the glory and majesty of God; wean it away from petty horizons of pleasure. That is all that *bhajan* or *puja* (worship) or *vrata* (fasting) can do. *Bhajan* induces in you a desire for experiencing the truth, to glimpse the beauty that is God, and to taste the bliss that is the Self. It encourages man to dive into himself and be genuinely his real Self. Once that search is desired, the path is easy. One has only to be reminded that he is divine.

Chaithanya (a Hindu saint) once had very high fever.. He refused to take any drugs other than what the *Shastras* (Hindu scriptures) had prescribed; he asked for the dust of the feet of a *brahmana* (a priest), and water consecrated by washing his feet! People around him could only get hold of a *brahmana* who did not strictly follow the disciplines laid down for that high caste. But, Chaithanya told them not to be very strict in scrutinising his credentials, for, a *brahmana* is holy, however fallen he may be. He belonged to a lineage that had soaked itself through many generations in *Vedic* lore and *sadhana* (*spiritual practices*).

However rickety a cow has become, milk can be got only from her; she has to be fed, fostered, fondled, and revered. Thus, Chaithanya reminded the *brahmana* of his great role in society and encouraged him to live up to the high expectations. Man too has come for a great destiny, on a sacred mission, endowed with special skills and tendencies to help him on; but, he fritters these precious gifts and crawls on earth from birth to death worse than any animal. Exercises like *bhajan* elevate the mind and exhort the individual to seek and find the source of eternal joy that lies within him.

Grace is not something that is given or taken

When I directed that groups of people belonging to our *samithi* (organization) should go around the streets in the early hours of the morning, singing the glory of God, some asked me, "Is this also *bhakti*? Should we sing aloud in company while walking along the streets?" The question arises from false conceit. *Bhajan*, which is part of *Nagarsankirtan* (singing along the streets), gladdens the singer and showers

joy on those who listen; it cleanses and purifies the atmosphere by its vital vibrations. It inspires and instructs; it calls and comforts.

Hold fast to the God you believe in, despite trials and tests, and the ups and downs of life. This day is the New Moon Day when the moon starts growing into fullness, but, as soon as it has come a full circle, it starts waning until it almost disappears and the earth is plunged into darkness; Yet, all is not lost; the thin curve grows steadily into the full moon again. Fortune too is like the moon. Nothing can be fixed or fragile forever in this fickle world, born out of the fancy of the Lord. The Lord is eternal, absolute, and unchanging. My Name is truth, I am the truth, and since I am in every one of you, you too are everlasting truth. Do not doubt this and descend into distress. Strive to be endowed with the unwavering eye, the unhesitating mind.

Call out the Lord who is within your heart

Now, you will all be given *prasadam* (edibles offered to God) and so, sit silently in rows. Of course, I mean by *pasadam* the cooked offerings that are given this day at the conclusion of the *bhajan*. *Prasadam* also means grace, which flows from God when He is propitiated. My grace is ever with you; it is not something that is given or taken; it is given always and accepted by the consciousness that is aware of its significance. Win the grace of your own subconscious so that it may accept the grace of God that is ever available.

God does not deny any one; it is only you who deny God. When the gift is proffered, you have to do only one little act so that you may earn it—you have to extend your hand to receive it. That is the grace or the subconscious; win it by teaching it the value of the grace of God. My grace is showered wherever you are through My infinite love, without even calculating or measuring the readiness of your subconscious to receive it and benefit by it. The grace itself will confer on you the faith and strength, wisdom, and joy. I am in your heart all the time, whether you know it or not. Droupadi (the Pandava queen) called out for the Lord of Dwaraka, Sri Krishna, when the wicked cousins of her husbands cruelly insulted her, and so, the Lord responded after a little delay. He had to go to Dwaraka and come from there to Hastinapura where she was! He told her that she could have gotten Him in a fraction of a second had she called out, 'O the dweller in my heart,' for He dwells there too, as everywhere else!

The *Mahashivarathri* festival is over; but the message of the day is yet to fructify in your behaviour, conduct, thinking, and activity. Do not rest content with a night-long *bhajan*. Make it a life-long *bhajan* of adoration, and pilgrimage to the Lord within.

Source: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, Vo. 11

The poor are rich in devotion to God; Kunti (the mother of the Pandavas) prayed that her difficulties may continue for they keep the Lord ever in her mind. Riches are a great handicap in the path of spiritual progress. So, though you may be rich, do not cultivate attachment to the bank account or to the mansions, cars, and comforts you command. Have them as if they are given to you on trust by the Lord.

~Sri Sathya Sai~

I Am God, I Am God, I Am No Different From God

Berniece Mead gave the following talk on the weekend of September 26-27, 1998 at the San Diego Sai Conference.

I would like to offer *pranams* (salutations) at the feet of our sweet and loving Lord, the indweller of my heart, as well as yours. I would like to ask Him to use me as an instrument—that I may be a hollow flute with divine melody coming from it.

A familiar *bhajan* (devotional song) says, "I am God. I am God. I am no different from God." Do you believe it? What does it mean? So many times when we make mistakes, we go around with sad faces, harboring resentment, jealousy, anger or hatred. And as an excuse we say, "I am only human." What does it mean to be human? We are human beings with human bodies, but our next step is divinity. That isn't exactly true either because we are already divine. Swami says, "Yes, I am God. But so are you. The only difference is that I know I am God and you do not." Having human bodies is a very special privilege.

Swami has said that when righteousness declines, He comes back. Apparently, we have reached a very low ebb in our evolution. Thus, the Lord of the Universe has descended to earth. Those of us here have done something special in the past, because we heard about the *Avatar* (Sai Baba) and decided we would do something about it. Many others heard of Him, but did not pay heed. What made us pay attention? My personal belief is that we truly have done something good in the past to be here today. And I hope that we will not lose sight of the fact that we are special.

Swami is telling us that we have to become ideal human beings. To do this, we have to follow a *dharma*. We have gotten into a lot of trouble by behaving as less than human. Sometimes we act like animals. Anger and jealousy—and all the things that take away peace—are not human. They are animal qualities that can even become demonic. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands because I would be the first one to raise my hand and I hate to do that. We have all had moments when we acted like demons.

In an interview Swami asked a young woman, "Where is your husband?" She told Swami she did not have a husband. He looked at her and said, "Yes, you do. You have

many boyfriends. You are acting like an animal. Why are you acting like an animal? You are a human being." Then He said, "I can't believe it. Right here in front of me, you are thinking about your last boyfriend." I talked to her later and she admitted she had been and she did not know where the thought came from. But we know where the thoughts come from. Swami was teaching all of us a lesson. As He turned to me to say something, the young woman began to cry. Swami made her a ring and told her that He loved her, but that He had used her to show all of us how to be human beings.

He has told us about the value of truth, righteousness, peace, love and nonviolence. In 1993, when Swami talked with the boys at Kodaikanal, He told them about these values and how they were a part of the sheaths (*koshas*)—the layers that make us what we are. Human beings are not their bodies, He pointed out. Bodies are disease-ridden and impermanent. They come and go.

Five layers make up the body. It is kept alive with food. In fact, the first layer is called the food sheath—the *annamaya kosha*. This sheath is connected with the value of right action, or *dharma*. Swami tells us it is our *dharma* to practice this value. This is our true nature as human beings. We are human beings for a short while in this lifetime. We come from God and we go back to God. We cannot get away from Him. He is always with us.

Why do our minds wander from the path? I think it is all a game. Probably we all helped make the rules way back when we were one with Baba. Isn't it funny that we get bodies, then we form attachments, and our senses work overtime? We think that the world is what it is all about. The one who dies with the most toys wins. We are taught that throughout our lifetime and die so unhappy. What miserable creatures we are! And we are all so afraid of dying. Even in our Sai family, rumors come up about what Swami says. Why do we get involved in rumors? We cannot waste time worrying about dying. We have to think about living—and living in a *dharmic* way. We experience peace when we live that way because jealousy, hatred, envy and all the things that make us miserable, go away with right action.

The breath, or *pranamayu kosha*, and Swami's love keeps our bodies going. We are walking love. Why can't we experience that? Why can't we turn on the switch, as we do for electricity, and find love? It permeates the entire world. God never leaves us alone. Love and God are synonymous. And both are what we are. When we sing together, we experience the unity of oneness. We cannot argue. We may be jealous of someone leading a *bhajan* when it sounds particularly good. But if we can just enjoy the moment and breathe together, the breath will show us that we are one.

We've been given the *manomaya kosha* (mind), which is like a stumbling block, in a sense. Swami says this *kosha* is equated with the value of peace, but to attain peace is up to us. The mind is a special gift that can set us free when we see that God is all there is, when we see that the person tearing us down and making us feel small is God, too. We can move toward freedom when we begin to use our minds to control

the senses and to use the discrimination that makes us different from animals. The *koshas* are all related, like the values—they all fit into each other.

We have something else inside—an intelligence that is even greater than the all-seeing eye called the *vijnanumaya kosha* (intelligence sheath). It knows everything. Our entire life must be a continual inquiry. Where did I come from? Where am I going? Who am I? Swami tells us we are God. All of us can repeat, "I am God." But do we really believe these words? Can belief in our divinity become our experience? Swami says it can. We are born with this belief. It is our gift.

Next, we have the *anandamaya kosha* (bliss sheath), the part of us that is the causal body. The mind, breath, and intelligence are the subtle bodies. The causal body is bliss. Once in a while, we reach a state that we recognize as our true nature. These five layers are the essence of what we are as human beings. But we don't want to get trapped in that. The causal body is an easy trap. Like the moonlight, it is a reflection of the sun, not the real thing. We have to go beyond it to God—to the bright light from which we came and where we will return.

Swami says, "Don't try, and do." We are God! We are no different from God. See God in others, and see what the experience does for us. Let's really give it a try. "I am God I am no different from God." And so is everyone that I see. If everything is God and everyone is God, what about the people who are acting like animals and demons? Swami says they are God, but don't get close to them, because they will steer you away from your path. We need to use discrimination. We can love them and leave them. Keeping company with the good is very important.

Swami uses all of us in strange and mysterious ways. I am a retired teacher. For many years, I worked in the public realm. I used the human values in my classroom. When we began the Education in Human Values (EHV) foundation in 1983, we went into some school districts ready to save the world. We felt it was our duty to do so. Then we began to hear the organization say, "Wait." We became cautious. We did not use Swami's name, feeling that the organization would not let us do our work if we used it. In 1983, at a Teacher Training workshop in Prasanthi Nilayam, I represented the United States. Every night we met with the Chairman of the World Council and representatives from other countries. We decided we would begin training teachers in the principles of human values, but without using Swami's name. Our belief was that more doors would open this way.

During the training, Swami was very loving to us. He came and asked why we did not want to use His name. He said there would be many educational programs in human values—all different from His program. "You must use my name," He said. Just after his comment, the college boys passed out what we had said the night before, including the decision not to use His name. We were cornered, so I told the organization that we would have to use Swami's name. I am telling you these things because it describes a dilemma that all of us seem to have continually. Why do we fear the name? Why do we feel we will be crucified if we talk about Swami? Our

children deny Him. They hide materialized medallions. Is something horrible going to happen to us if people at work find out we visit a *guru* in India? We do the same in education. One principal in Reno thought ours was such a wonderful program that she wanted to be a teacher trainer. But we were told not to let her attend the Sai meeting because she would be turned off. She would see us sitting on the floor in front of a picture of a wonderful God, saying, "Om." We would be doing things that would make her think "cult." Everyone was scared. But we shouldn't have to hide our Sai meetings from people who might become involved.

That was twelve years ago. Little has changed since. For my part, I was straightforward with my principal. I told her who Swami was. She thought it was great and wanted to participate. I went into classrooms once a week to talk about religion and values. The principal wanted to apply for a grant because she felt the program was too good to be limited to just one school. In the grant proposal, I wrote that this was from Sri Sathya Sai Baba in India. The Board asked questions, but not too many about Sai Baba. Mostly, they asked about the lessons. Two very fundamental Christians sat on the Board, so I wasn't surprised when I was turned down. Another principal, a good friend, asked why I included His name. She felt I would have gotten the grant if I had not. I replied, "I used His name because that is where the program is from. Someday someone would have found out that it comes from a guy named Sathya Sai Baba in India. What would you have said about me?" She understood.

We cannot try to hide Sathya Sai Baba. When all of us begin to live the principles and the community sees us as truly dedicated people doing good—our thoughts, words and actions in alignment—then people will take notice. When they see our lives, they will listen. We are dealing with God. We have absolutely nothing to fear.

In 1985, at Swami's 60th birthday, He gave us ten principles to live by. The first is "Love your motherland." Our motherland is suffering because of her leaders and the lives they are leading. But they are simply a reflection of us. Do you see why God has come to rescue us? We have reached a low point in our evolution. Don't worry about the things that are happening. They must happen to help us overcome our bad tendencies. We should all love our motherland and take pride in it.

Second, Swami tells us to accept all religions. I used to be judgmental of Jehovah's Witnesses. I had a tough time with them because I saw their children suffer, isolated. I felt their pain. I said that if I ever heard of a Jehovah's Witness becoming a Sai devotee, I would know that He is God. One night a new man came to the center who had cancer. I talked with him. Sometimes, all of a sudden you know that this is God; the tears flow and you feel absolutely wonderful. The man told me it had been difficult for his family, who are Jehovah Witnesses, because he and his wife had chosen to follow Swami. His family left him. Friends of twenty years left them. We must respect all religions. I, too, had to step back and take a new look at that. Whatever path a person takes is the one he or she needs to follow at the time.

No other organization is like the Sai organization. When we go to Prasanthi Nilayam (Sai Baba's main *ashram*), we see a macrocosm of the world, from ditch diggers to brain surgeons. We see every religion and every race—all looking at one Lord. This is God. He has put us all in strategic places. Each one of us must follow the path we are on. We will all wind up in the same place. I am so happy to be a part of His plan. Swami tells us that we should not leave the organization. What we have is the world. He tells us to be in the world, but not of the world. So we have the wonderful chance to take Sai into the community.

Dharma, or righteousness, means "the way we act." Each inanimate object, person and animal has a *dharma*. Swami says that animals have claws, fangs, and horns. They have come into the world to protect themselves. What do we have to protect ourselves? We did not come with guns. We were given the sweetness of speech. Sweetness of speech is our *dharma*. Swami says, when you have peace within you, there will be peace in the family. When there is peace in the family, there will be peace in the community. When there is peace in the community, there will be peace in the nation. When there is peace in the nation, there will be peace in the world. Confucius expressed the same idea thousands of years ago. Now Swami has used it again. We have a wonderful opportunity to learn and to grow—to disarm all modes of harm and anger with sweetness of speech. Think about it.

I want to end with a story about my nephew, who is a fundamentalist. I am the favorite aunt of my nieces and nephews. They are concerned about Aunt Berniece going to India. My nephew asked me about my trips. I told him I would tell him if he did not try to save my soul. My soul has already been saved. He told me I'd been with Swami for 12 years, which is correct. He said, "I thought that maybe you would change and you did—and it is all for the good. I want to know what this is all about." He said he had been reading about Eastern religions because of my life. I want to tell all of you how important the way we all live is. Swami told us recently, "Your life is My message." We must all think about that. Your family and friends are watching you. I had no idea my nephew was watching me. I never talked about Sai Baba to him. I hope each one of us will take Sai into the community. We will have to do that with our EHV—be willing to say what it is. Do not put your head down and your tail between your legs and Walk away. A door may close, but another door will open, and we will enter. We must remember that we are not running the show. Swami is the doer.

~Berniece Mead, Tustin, CA
Source: *Sai Sarathi*, Feb. 1999

Sarathi means "charioteer" or "companion" and reflects our yearning as devotees to have Sai as our constant charioteer in this lifetime. "The individual must install himself in a chariot with the wheels of detachment and truth; the Lord will then accept the position of charioteer; He will hold the reins (mind) and direct the horses (senses) straight and safe over the road (the path of salvation through self-realization).

~Baba

All Living Beings are Brahman Alone

This article is based largely on comments Sathya Sai Baba has made in His discourses about the eighth-century saint/poet Shankaracharya.

In the early centuries of the *Kali Age* (Iron Age), *Buddhism* and *Jainism* were the predominant religions of India. Kings of that time fought each other for territorial rights. Hatred flared skill, between the peoples of different regions, making national unity impossible. Untruth and injustice prevailed. Even the eternal scriptures—the *Vedas*—were being misinterpreted. As a result people were losing faith in the scriptures. At this time, a baby, Shankara, was born in the village of Kaladi, in Kerala, India.

Early Years

When Shankara was barely three years old, his father passed away. Ten days before his passing, the father had a vision. It conveyed the message that he was to perform the thread ceremony (an initiation ceremony normally performed for a child of seven) for his young son. Hurriedly, the father did as he was instructed by the vision. As a result, Shankara started reciting the *Gayatri Mantra* at the age of three.

After her husband died, Shankara's mother devoted herself to bringing up the little boy. She took him to a *guru*, Govinda, who taught him the scriptural texts. A child prodigy, Shankara completed the study of the texts by the time he was sixteen. Normally 50 years is not enough for such study. But Shankara could grasp any subject very soon after its first mention. Even his *guru* was astonished by the boy's genius.

One day, to test Shankara's mastery of the scriptures, Govinda engaged Shankara in a philosophical debate. It was a debate between preceptor and disciple. Shankara was full of humility and reverence for the guru. Hence, before entering into the debate, he prostrated himself before his teacher and prayed for permission to argue with him. With the guru's sanction, he began to argue with amazing skill, demolishing the propositions of the guru. His arguments demonstrated that he not only understood the *Vedas*, but he saw application in worldly life.

Shankara's mother was anxious for him to marry. Shankara, on the other hand, was totally opposed to marriage. He wanted to be a *sanyasi* (renunciate) and dedicate his body, mind, and all else to God. He wanted to surrender himself to God. His mother was greatly distressed over this difference of opinion. One day, as she was going to the river to fetch water, young Shankara followed her, earnestly pleading, "Mother, please permit me to take *sanyasa*." But she refused. Later, when his mother went into the river for her bath, Shankara jumped into the water, too. He slid under water, then raised one hand and shouted, "Mother, a crocodile has hold of me.

At least now—permit me to become a *sanyasi*." The mother, desiring to save her son, said, "If you can be saved from the crocodile by taking *sanyasa*, then do so, so that

you may live." As soon as she said this, the crocodile released its grip on Shankara's leg. Having received the permission he wanted from his mother, Shankara came out of the river and said, "In the ocean of *samsara* (the world), I was about to be drowned by a crocodile—in the form of a wife. When you agreed to let me become a *sanyasi*, I was freed from the hold of the crocodile. No one can marry a *sanyasi*."

Swami says, "*Sanyasa* does not mean a mere change in the color of the robe. It is really a change in one's qualities." Shankara prostrated himself before his mother, and then took leave of her to start his life as an ascetic. She bade him go, but asked him to promise that in her last moments of life, he would be at her side. He promised that it would be so.

The teenaged Shankara was disturbed by the conduct of *Vedic* scholars, who were using their scriptural knowledge to make money.

They had forgotten that knowledge should not be used for commercial purposes. Shankara's teachers saw that, with his understanding of the scriptures, Shankara was the right person to correct this unhealthy trend. They told him to leave for Kashi (the original name for Benares, at that time the seat of religion and philosophy in India) to propagate the true doctrine of the *Vedas* to the whole world. That was the mission that the 16-year-old Shankara set out to accomplish.

Journey to Kashi

Walking to Kashi, the young lad saw a pundit sitting under a tree, memorizing rules of grammar. Suddenly, Shankara was struck by the futility of the man's effort. He composed a famous hymn, *Bhaja Govindam*. The opening stanza says, "You foolish fellow. Why do you immerse yourself in the rules of grammar? They will not save you when death knocks at the door. Instead worship Govinda." Shankara advised the pundit to immerse himself in feeling God rather than in chanting the rules of grammar.

Once in Kashi, Shankara set forth his teaching of non-dualism (*advaita*) with tremendous conviction and clarity. Hearing about him, scholars in the holy city arranged for a grand assembly of learned people. Many came in all their regalia. The assembly did not lack for ostentation. Shankara, on the other hand, surprised the gathering with his simple attire, without even a *rudraaksha-mala* (a garland of beads, generally worn by *pundits*) around his neck. When his turn came, Shankara spoke with simplicity and clarity, pointing out the transitory nature of material wealth. He then urged them all to give up worldly desire. He declared that a true pundit is equal-minded, gives up the desire for wealth, and develops a thirst for God.

Those at the assembly realized that Shankara was not only a great teacher, but one who practiced what he taught. Swami says, "The unity of thought, word and deed is the mark of greatness. Shankara was the very embodiment of unity and purity in thought, speech and action."

The Three Sins

Once while praying in Kashi, Shankara repented before the image of the Lord, asking for forgiveness for three sins he had committed. The first, he said, was his description of God as Isha, as Giresha, as Naresha, and the like. "Though I know you are beyond thought and word," he said, "I tried to describe you in words. The second sin occurred when, though I declare that God is everywhere, I came all the way to Kashi to have your *darshan*, as if You are present only in Kashi. I have committed the sin of saying one thing and doing another. The third sin I have committed is that of praying for the atonement of my sins, even though I have clearly said that there is no merit, no sin, no joy, and no sorrow." The significance of Shankara's statements lies in the recognition that disharmony of thought, word and deed is itself a sin.

Last Rites of the Mother

One day, during his stay in Kashi, Shankara closed his eyes While in an assembly and experienced a vision of his mother in great distress. Immediately, he started on his journey to Kaladi. He reached his mother in her last moments as he had promised to do, thus discharging his duties toward her. The people of Kaladi disapproved of Shankara's action because, in their view, a person who had taken *sanyasa* cannot attend to the activities of a householder and perform rituals. Performing the last rites for a parent is the duty of a householder. On the other hand, once someone has taken *sanyasa*, he has died, as it were, to worldly commitments and entered a new life. Shankara, however, had promised his mother that he would fulfill the duties of a son in her moment of death even though he was a sanyasi.

No one in the village was willing to help Sankara perform the last rites. Utterly helpless, he carried the body himself to the backyard of the house and cremated it. In this manner, he fulfilled the promise he had made to his mother.

An Encounter

Once Sankara—a Brahmin—was walking through a forest when he saw a low caste person (chundala) about to cross his path. In those days, when Brahmins were walking, people from lower castes were expected to give them right of way. Sankara exclaimed, "Get out of my way." The figure in front heard the command, but instead of moving away, he asked, "Which one would you like to move—the body or the soul?" Sankara instantly realized His mistake and prostrated himself before the person, as if he was his own guru. After this incident, Sankara composed a verse, the refrain of which is, "He who has learned to look upon all as Brahman, is really my guru—be he a chandala or a Brahmin."

Other Achievements

Sankara went all over the country spreading his message of advaita. It did not matter to him whether he was talking to a scholar or a common person, to someone young or old. His message was always that of the oneness of all. Sankara visited all the sacred shrines in India, traveling on foot. He attended many assemblies of scholars and shared the message of Vedanta. His conviction in the truth of the message—and above all, in the unity of thought, word and deed that he displayed in

his life—transformed the face of religion in the country forever. His works are studied with reverence even to this day.

Sankara went all over the country, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, several times. He passed away at the early age of 32, but by that time he had completed the mission for which he had come. Before his passing, he collected five lingas and installed them in five different centers—Puri, Dwarka, Sringeri, Benares and Kanchi. By establishing these centers and promoting the sense of spiritual oneness among the people, Sankara promoted harmony in the country.

Sankara's Teachings

Sankara's primary message was that of non-dualism. Swami says, "Non-dualism is a state of consciousness that can only be experienced and not described in words. In this regard, the advaitin (one who has experienced non-dualism) is like a dumb man who has enjoyed a delightful dinner but cannot describe the taste of the dishes he has consumed. There are two kinds of proof for the existence of anything—direct proof and indirect proof. The bliss derived from the non-dual consciousness is beyond words. It can only be experienced, it cannot be described or explained. Direct perception [in a worldly sense] is out of the question in this matter. Unfortunately, today people attach value to direct perception alone and have scant regard for indirect evidence.

This is not the right attitude. For instance, one sees a block of ice. It appears solid, but it is entirely made up of water, which is a liquid. Thus water, whose presence is inferred indirectly, is the basis for the solid block of ice that is seen by direct perception. Likewise, for this visible phenomenal universe, the invisible basis is the divine."

Sankara taught that bodies are different and forms are different, but the inner self is one. The divine is present in all, like sugar cane juice, which is the same regardless of the cane it comes from. In Swami's words, "Clay is one substance. But out of it, a variety of products with different names and shapes can be made. Likewise, out of gold, a variety of ornaments can be made. The same white milk comes out of cows of different colors. The Supreme is one, but dwells in innumerable bodies, with different names and forms."

Sankara pointed out that we are all actors on the stage of life. The Worldly life is like the scenes on a screen. The scenes come and go, but the screen remains the same. He declared, the Self is real; the world is illusory. In Swami's words, "The creator is the instrumental cause of creation. The bodies are like pots. They are used for various purposes and are a source of enjoyment. But like pots, bodies are perishable. When their time is up, they fall away. But the creator is permanent. The elements out of which the bodies were made remain. Only the bodies have gone."

He also declared that God permeates the universe. When scholars pointed out the contradiction between the two statements (that the world is illusory and the

universe is permeated by God), Sankara said, "Worldly life is illusory because it is continually coming and going. At the same time, this worldly life is lived like the moving scenes on a permanent screen. In this process, the world and the Divine become one, as it were, like the oneness of the screen and the pictures on it. This is the basis for the statement that the whole cosmos is God's abode."

Sankara demonstrated that underlying all forms, names and qualities is one basic reality that alone is real and changeless. Out of a mango seed comes a tree with branches, leaves, flowers and fruit, each with distinct forms and uses. But all the myriad things that have come from the seed owe their existence to the seed from which the tree arose. Just as Krishna stated in the Bhagavad Gita, "I am the seed that is the origin of all beings. All things in the universe are manifestations of the one Divine."

Swami says, "Sankara related the experiences of daily life to the doctrine of spiritual oneness. The divine is one, but is adored under different names and forms-Allah, Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster, Rama, Hari or Hara. All are the same. Sankara did not approve of God being described as mother, father and so on. The relationship between God and man is oneness. 'You and I are one.'...This experience does not come easily. You have to undertake intensive inquiry and also practice spiritual discipline. When that discipline leads to the refinement of the spirit, the experience of oneness with the Divine comes.... The person who gets this experience is the Lord of the universe. The *atma* is present in every cell of the human body. When this nectarine truth is realized, man will not seek the ephemeral."

Source: *Sai Sarathi*, Feb. 1999

Q & A with Bhagavan

Bhakta: *Namaskaram* [greeting], Swami.

Swami: Happy to see you. You seem very tired and in this summer, travel is even more exhausting. Take rest for a little while we can converse thereafter.

Bhakta: When there is no peace of mind where can rest be got?

Swami: Well my boy, rest is for the sake of peace of mind. Once you have that peace, where is the need for rest? There is need for a bandage until the wound heals; after that, what is its use?

Bhakta: Swami, just now my mind is restless. I cannot decide upon anything. I do not know what the reason is. What shall I do?

Swami: Well, no effect can take place without a cause. You do certainly know the cause of your present condition...Well, nothing else need be done: At such times of mental pain, do *namasmarana* [chanting the name] for a while sitting in a lonely place; or sing *bhajan* songs loudly in a raised voice; or, if that is not possible, spread the bed and sleep for some time. Thereafter you can think about all this.

Bhakta: You have told us that in this world, each one has some dearly loved thing or other, and that if any harm comes upon that thing, peace of mind cannot be had...How then can I have peace of mind, when something happens like this...another person either disrespecting my dearly loved thing, or finding fault with it? What am I to do then?

Swami: Well. A good person who has understood what is *atmavichara* [Self-inquiry] will not blame like this the things that others love. Nor will he even associate with such men. For he would argue within himself, that when he blames another's *Ishtam* [God], he would feel as much pain as he himself feels when his own *Ishtam* is blamed. Therefore, be at peace with yourself, realizing that those who abuse like this are people ignorant of *atmavichara*. Engaged as you are in *atmavichara*, you have nothing to do with ignorant persons who do not know *atmavichara*... Well. Let it go. What has really happened to cause all this? The whole trouble will end, if what is inside comes out.

Bhakta: The world knows well how You are vouchsafing courage and daring and guiding men to do good spiritually, physically, and mentally; how You have rendered educational and medical help. You have never done any harm; nor caused harm to any one in any form...How to suppress the persons who invent and spread all kinds of silly stories about such as You? Do they gain any thing by this?

Swami: Oh. So, this is the story! Well don't you know that good and bad are of the very nature of the world? If all are engaged in selling, who will be the buyers? With regard to God, faultfinding has come down from the beginning of time; it is not new; only, present day persons might manufacture some new tales. Well, why should you take to heart such abuse? Take it that they are only remembering Swami by this means. *Premasmarana* [remembering with love] and *dweshasmarana* [remembering with hate] are two types. Of these, *dweshasmarana* is *avidyamaya*; it is related to *rajoguna*. *Premasmarana* is *vidyamaya*; it is related to *satwaguna*. *Avidyamaya* results in *dukha* [sorrow]; *Vidyamaya* results in *ananda* [joy]. Their results are indicated there itself. Now, why should you suppress? You asked about the gain isn't it? They don't need any gain; finding fault with others has become their habit; they do it as their duty. As the saying goes, 'What does the moth care or gain, whether the sari costs a hundred *takkas* [money] or is cheap? To gnaw and tear is its nature'. The moth tears equally a costly sari or a rag. Does it know the value of things? Its work is such. So be at peace, realizing that the work of these faultfinders is the same as the work of these moths.

Bhakta: Swami! What You said is the truth. We can take it that ignorant persons, when they behave like this, are of the brood of moths. But, when people who are well educated, who are great, who know, when these are devoting themselves, to spreading such stories, how can it be endured?

Swami: Learning means *atmajnana* [self knowledge]; it is not the knowledge of things related to the world, which trains for a living, and is useful as basis for a living. To compare *atmajnana* with such *vidyas* is a great mistake. Great men are those who do not abuse others, who search for the reality with good intentions. Spiritual matters cannot be understood by those without the power of discrimination, who are puffed up with the authority they have; or by those who are unaware of any *atmajnana*. So consider those whom you described as educated and great as belonging to the brood mentioned above and, without yielding place to such ideas and worries, engage yourself in strengthening your belief.

Bhakta: Many *asthikas* [believers] in this world are changing into *nasthikas* [non-believers] on account of such people, isn't it Swami? Is there no weapon to put down these persons, who without any regard for their own learning and without any effort to know the reality abuse the *Mahapurushas*?

Swami: Why? There is. "A load of rags is placed on a ragged saddle," is the saying. Only such persons will listen to the words of such persons; no real *asthika* will associate with them. Even if they do, they will move far away as soon as they understand that those stories are fictitious. So, the weapon to put down these persons is in their own hands. Haven't you heard the story of Bhasmasura? Placing his hand on every one's head, he reduced them to ashes; finally, placing it on his own head, he himself was reduced to ashes! Similarly, accusing others, they themselves will be finally accused by their own words.

Those who find fault with the Lord are of four types:

1. Persons who have no interest at all in matters related to God.
2. Persons who on account of individual spite cannot endure another's greatness.
3. Those who have neither personal experience nor contact nor knowledge of anything and so merely manufacture stories based on hearsay to which they have become enslaved.
4. Persons who come with some worldly desire, and who accuse the Lord, as an excuse for the failure caused by their own destiny.

Only these four types of people clamor as you say; the others will not shout or jump about like puppets. Even if they do not have personal experience, when they hear such stories, they will just analyze them within themselves and arrive at conclusions, for their own satisfaction. They won't abuse others.

It is not the correct path—to disbelieve one's own mind and give room therein to another's words. Besides, there is no profit in discussing with those who do not

know the Reality. As a matter of fact, Reality does not admit of any discussion at all. To argue with those who do not know either but who are in the intermediate stage is like seeing the trunk and believing it to be the entire body, as in the story of the Blind Men and the Elephant.

Well. Note this: It is not good to spend time in this type of conversation. Abuse and faultfinding are natural and common. Knowing this, those who aspire to become true *bhaktas* should search only for bases on which to build their *ananda*. All the available time should be used for holy purposes it should not be wasted. You have nothing to do with the good and the bad in others. Instead of wasting the time, it should be utilized to discard the bad and develop the good in you.

Ask me about some *sadhana* or *sandesh* which you need and seek something that is worthwhile. Hereafter do not bring near me such stories of faultfinding indulged in by others. You too should not take in such things.

Bhakta: All this happened because we too have the same human nature. But now that I understand the subject from your answers, courage and joy have entered into me, driving away the doubt and sorrow I had. Through the talk of such men, even the little faith, devotion and earnestness that men have, are being reduced. That was the reason for my asking you these questions. Otherwise, I have also nothing to do with such topics. Pardon me, hereafter I won't talk on these lines to you.

Swami: Very good! During the little time available, if you don't think of some good subject, but merely recollect the ignorant prattle of others, it is as if you too joined in blaming those persons. That is harmful to *bhaktas*. Whatever others may say, you should not give up your faith. Once you are firmly established in that, you will not be in want any day. One word following another produces anger and pain. *Bhakti Marga* [path of devotion] is designed for suppressing, not developing these qualities

You tell me that devotion and faith disappear because people listen to such accusers...but for how long? As soon as the truth is discovered, wilt they be trusted again? Will their words be valued again?

The talk of those faultfinders is as the sound of bronze. Cheap metals make more sound; gold which does not make sound is very valuable. True *bhaktas* will be mute. They will follow the path of silence. Their tongues will be fully engaged in the repetition of the essential greatness of the Lord. It is best they have no respite for any other word. So, do not permit the words of the bronze voiced persons to enter your ears; but fill them with the name of the Lord, which is the *Pranavanada* Itself.

Next month, if you get any problems regarding such useful topics as *sadhana* or *anushtana*, come here and have them solved. But do not bring with you bundles of such doubts!

Bhakta: I am indeed blessed this day. On account of them, You have vouchsafed to me the light of wisdom. Seeing all this, I feel that the saying, 'All is for our good' is true. Hence forward, whatever any one may say, I will be patient and won't take it in because 'All is for our good'. *Namaskaram*. Allow me to take leave.

Source: *Sandeha Nivarini*

Thought of the Month

Ten Types of Purity

To develop one's moral and mental strength, one should practice *sadhana* (spiritual exercises) for disciplining the mind. For this purpose, one has to promote ten kinds of purity (*satwa*).

First: The first is purity of the place in which one lives. It is necessary to fill the room in which one resides or studies with a *satwic* atmosphere. The pictures or other objects you see should fill you with peace and pure thoughts. Objects that arouse agitation and bad thoughts should have no place. The room should be clean and free from anything that is impure.

Second: In the family in which you live, there should be mutual understanding and cooperation, and a sense of harmony. There should be no discord in the family that will create a bad atmosphere. A harmonious atmosphere will give you true peace of mind.

Third: The third need is *satwic* food. This means that none of the edible items should be excessively sour, bitter or hot. You should eschew *rajasic* food like fish or meat. It is only *satwic* when you sit for the meal with a light stomach and get up from it with a light stomach! If you sit with a light stomach and get up with a weighty stomach, it becomes *tamasic*.

Fourth: Whatever fluids you take should also be *satwic*. You should not drink whatever water is available. It should be pure water. Alcoholic spirits should be eschewed.

Fifth: *Satwic* thoughts and feelings are of great importance. Students tend to neglect this factor. Only if your thoughts and feelings are pure, can you get the full benefit of a clean room, a good family and pure food.

Sixth: If you want to develop *satwic* feelings and thoughts, your vision must be pure. All *srishti* (creation) is based upon *drishti* (sight). It is only when you have wrong vision that you have wrong thoughts. You must look upon every elderly woman as

your mother and all women who are younger as your sisters. When you are filled with such pure thoughts, you will have pure feelings. Imagine how offended you will feel if someone looks at your mother or sister with an evil eye. Realizing this, you have to entertain pure feelings towards other women. You should not commit the sort of offences that you will not tolerate in others.

Seventh: Whatever books you read or write should be pure. This is the *sadhana* (spiritual practice) relating to study. If you read or write that which is not pure, it warps your mind. A good book makes for a good mind. Any book you may study about Physics or Chemistry or other subjects, does not affect your character. But books that are literary, are not always good literature. If improper books are prescribed for study, treat them as mere textbooks and do not attach any high value to them as guides for life.

Eighth: Pure *satwic* service. The kind of service that we do should give real happiness to people. Any person whom you wish to serve, you should regard as an embodiment of the Divine. Going to the help of the destitute and the neglected is rendering service to God.

Narayana has two forms: one is 'Lakshmi Narayana', the other is 'Daridra Narayana'. This 'Lakshmi-Narayana' is full of wealth. He is able to help any number of people. He will be able to get many persons to serve him. But, for 'Daridra Narayana' there is nobody to serve him. It is to such persons that we should do *satwic* service.

Ninth: *Sadhana*, or spiritual discipline. This must be *satwic*. Some people do *Hatha Yoga*; some strive to develop the *Kundalini Shakti*; others invoke evil spirits to do harm to others. These forms of *sadhana* are not *sadhana* at all. The individual is *chit* (consciousness), God is *sat* (the eternal absolute). When *sat* and *chit* combine, you have *ananda* [bliss]—*sath-chith-ananda* (pure bliss). Only the *sadhana* undertaken to realize *satchidananda* is true *sadhana*.

This *sat*, the Divine, is in everybody. So, you must be prepared to serve everybody, regarding everyone as the Divine. You may have normal relationship with your kith and kin; there is nothing wrong in this. You must perform *sadhana* in the spirit that the One pervades the many. In this process, you must cultivate the feeling of Love. There is no higher *sadhana* than the cultivation of Love!

Tenth: Your occupation or profession. What is the kind of work you should take up? It should be work that can benefit the nation, the community. The nation enables you to earn a living. You must see what you can give to the nation, in return. You must ask yourself: "What is the service, what is the help I can do for the community?" You must see that there is no untruth in any work you do, no unfairness, no fraud, and no evil motive.

Sathya Sai Speaks, Radiosai.org