



## Climb the Right Tree

*In the following discourse, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba enumerates the various qualities required of a devotee and explains what real devotion is.*

**K**now that your hunger has not been fully appeased even after listening to two excellent discourses from these *Pundits* (religious scholars) that radiate *ananda* (bliss). Both of them said that they had no claims to scholarship and that all that they were able to see and speak about were due to My grace. That is the way they have curbed conceit. Hanuman (foremost devotee of Rama in the monkey form) was unaware of his vast strength; he had cultivated that level of self-effacement. Someone had to remind him of his enormous skill and prowess, and that elevated Hanuman to step up to the occasion.

It was also pleaded on your behalf that I should speak to you today as it has been a long time since I spoke to you at this place. I feel I must satisfy that desire of yours. You call yourselves *bhaktas* (devotees), so I shall talk to you about the *dharma* (righteousness) of persons who seek to acquire *bhakti* (devotion). No one can become a *bhakta* by calling himself so, or by others calling him so.

*Bhakti* involves dedication, with nothing held back; not even a wisp of ego should remain. His (Lord's) command alone counts; His will prevails. Like a drunkard, the *bhakta* has no sense of honor, decency, pride, or conceit. He acts clueless, unconcerned with all that is unrelated to his ideal. He is deaf to the call of hunger and thirst; he misses steps in logic and miscalculates commercial dealings. Narada (a celestial devotee) says that those drunk with ignorance stumble when following the shadows of the world, while those drunk with nectar of wisdom never move away from the highest, discovering it as themselves.

### ***Bhakti* must soften the mind**

You saw this in the case of this Shastry [the speaker] a few days ago when he came and sat in this hall for the first time, after 30 years of intense study of the *Srimad Bhagavatha* (Hindu scriptures). He felt that he had won the fruit of years of study and worshipful exposition. He lost all awareness, while some of you thought he had an attack of epilepsy or something akin to it. I knew that he was in the realm of *ananda* (bliss). That is why I did not encourage you to take him to the hospital. Even today, you must have noticed that as he started to describe the depth of Divine grace, he was overcome with joy.

The Lord broke His own plighted word in order to give the *bhakta* the credit for making Him do so! Bhishma (the elder in the Pandava/Kaurava clan) had said that he would force (Lord) Krishna to wield a weapon on the battlefield, contrary to His declared intention. Bhishma had said he would accept defeat only from the Lord! So Krishna strode toward Bhishma brandishing the *chakra* (discus). The Shastry was describing this when he broke down. *Bhakti* must soften the mind and keep it receptive to the higher emotions, the purifying impulses.

### **Every being is a pilgrim to reach God**

Bhishma was a *bhakta*, and by winning the Lord's grace he was clothed with more majesty and splendor than any earthly emperor. What majesty do these petty scepter-holders have? They cannot claim to have inner peace and inner joy. They know not the joy of sharing love with all. Bhishma surrendered to the Lord when He challenged him with the *Su-darshana* (*auspicious divine vision*). In other words, when He offers *Su* (good) *darshan* (vision), one must be wise enough to surrender and give up everything, and that is what Bhishma did.

Just like the kitten seeks the attention of its mother by mere mewing, *bhaktas* have to merely yearn and mew with the pain of separation to draw the Divine unto them. The fledgling crop in the fields thirsts for rain; it sees the heavy rain-clouds sail across the sky but it cannot rise up to that altitude and drink the life-giving rain; nor can it bring the clouds down to the ground. Humanity, too, sizzles in the hot sun, the unbearable heat of ego and greed. It needs the rain of grace; only then can it flourish in peace and joy.

As the clouds form droplets and fall upon the fields that they choose to foster, the Formless Absolute individualizes Itself, assumes Form, and comes down in the midst of humanity to save and sustain. That is the secret of Madhava (God) coming down as *manava* (man), the cloud taking pity on the crop parching in the sun. Once the rains come, the sun has its uses! So, too, when the grace of the Lord is gained, then ego and greed can be directed via useful channels to be used profitably.

In past ages, *Avatars* (divine incarnations) rid the world of evil by destroying the few fanatics and ogres who wrought it. But now fanaticism and felony reign in every heart. The number of *asuras* (evil men) is legion; no one is free from that taint; all are wicked to some extent or other. Therefore, everyone needs correction; everyone has to be educated and guided onto the right path. Every being is a pilgrim destined to reach Madhava and merge in Him; but most people have forgotten the road. They wander like lost children, wasting precious time in the by-paths. You can win Lord's grace only by *dharma*.

*Manava* has to become Madhava. That is his destiny, the plan and purpose of his being armed, as no other animal is, with the sword of *viveka* (discrimination) and the shield of *vairagya* (renunciation). Man is the only animal that can picture a previous existence and existences in a series, with impressions accumulating from one to the other. What you see and feel in a dream has some basis on what you have

seen and felt in the waking state. So, too, what you see and feel in the present life has as its basis what you have seen and felt in previous lives.

You can win the grace of the Lord only by *dharma*. *Dharma* induces the spirit of self-surrender and develops it. Without the training that the practice of *dharma* gives to your senses, feelings, and emotions, you cannot have steady faith and detachment. The Lord is *dharma* personified. Rama is known as *vigrahavan dharmah* (righteousness personified). If you step across the bounds of *dharma* and play foul, you cannot win the game of life.

### **Pursue your task with one-pointed effort**

When Hanuman was speeding along the sky like an arrow from Rama's bow, many temptations attempted to halt him. He did not delay or turn back. He sped on, intent solely on the task his Lord has set for him. When the Mynaka Mountain rose up to offer him a little rest, he trampled it down into the depths of the sea. The mountain rose again and pleaded for the chance of serving him for a while. It had decked itself with green orchards and fragrant flower gardens for his recreation and recoupment. When Indra (head of celestial beings) slashed off the wings of all the mountains in past ages, Mynaka had fled with the help of *Vayu*, Hanuman's father, and it wanted to express its gratitude by granting hospitality to the son. But Hanuman pleaded that his master's task brooked no delay.

A few moments later, a terrible monstress, Surasa by name, confronted Hanuman. Hanuman overcame her by skilful tactics and avoided further delay. Likewise, you should pursue your path to liberation with one-pointed effort.

The Shastry said that the Lord wishes that His *bhakta* should shine over non-believers; that he should be happier, more contented, and courageous than the rest; *Bhakti* ought to make a man so. But the *bhakta* does not cultivate these traits deep enough. He lets the chance go to waste. If Shastry gives his sons a hundred acres each, one son may tend it well and reap golden harvests from it; another may allow it to lie fallow and himself sink into misery. The equipment each has brought from previous lives may be different; you cannot blame the father for this state of affairs. Even the blood of one son may be fatal when transfused into another son. Spiritual strength will be less in one, more in another, in proportion to the efforts of each, now and in the past.

### **Let the light within shine**

The pity is that man is not eating the most relishing, nourishing fruit from this garden of nature. He is climbing the wrong tree and seeking to pluck the wrong fruits; so his appetite is ruined, his taste is vulgarized, and his health is destroyed. Only the glory of the Lord can satisfy the hunger of man for he is part of that glory.

Only experience can reveal the sweetness, sublimity, and purpose of that glory. Parashurama (a divine incarnation) came across (Lord) Rama and challenged him when he was returning to Ayodhya (capital of Rama's kingdom) after his marriage.

He had won Sita by bending and breaking Shiva's bow, and thereby humbled the pride of all the royal heads that had come seeking Sita's hand. But Parashurama was intoxicated with his own achievement in defeating the *kshatriya* [warrior class] rulers in 21 campaigns. That pride lowered the divine status of Parashurama and as a result Rama, who was to all appearance just a stripling, could fell him in a moment!

The Lord, it was said, punishes some and favors others. Let Me tell you: The Lord does neither. He is like the current in this electric wire. It rotates the fan and cools the environment; it operates the electric chair and makes one's life shorter. It has no wish to allay the warmth of the atmosphere, nor is it eager to kill. The Lord's grace is like the wind that blows. Roll up your sails and the boat lies limp and lame, unfurl them, it moves faster and faster. It is like light: one person does good using the illumination, another executes an evil plan with its help. Have an "inner day," though an "outer night." Let the light within shine. When you are unaware of the world though in it, heedless of its call for participation, you are having an outer night and an inner day. The *Vedas* [Hindu scriptures] teach you this truth and impart the discipline needed to attain this fortune.

### **The Lord is the Father of all in the world**

The Shastry spoke of the value of the *Vedic* discipline. The *Vedas* declare that if a *karma* (act) is done in a definite way, a definite result will accrue. They give you a pen filled with ink, teach you how to write, and what to write. They are so kind. *Vedamata* [Veda as the mother] is full of maternal love (*vatsalya* as they call it). She repeats an injunction over and over again, just as I go on reminding you of the disciplinary rules of the Nilayam [Swami's residence in India], on every possible occasion. So do not set aside the commands of the *Vedas*; they are the authentic voice of the Lord Himself as heard and recorded by purified intellects.

A father gives his wealth to the son who respects his wishes and obeys his orders, and not to the rebellious son who flouts him. The Lord is *Loka Pita* (Father of all). If you are an *astika* (a person who believes that there is a God and lives accordingly), then you will get the *asti* (wealth or property). If a person is an idiot, ignorant of his true interests, and unaware of his own downfall, then he is not entrusted with his own *asti*. Meantime, a guardian has to take care of his affairs until he is able to manage it with care.

### **Dwell always on the glory of God**

It may take many lives for a man to prove that he knows what is best for him, that he is able to chalk out his own future without harming himself or others, and that he is aware of the pitfalls on the way. So it is best to trust the experience of sages who were filled with compassion and were moved by that compassion to illumine the path of liberation. This experience is enshrined in the *Vedas*. Faith in the *Vedas* irrigates the heart and makes it yield the harvest of Universal Love.

The *Shastras* warn you about false steps; they console you in times of stress; they strengthen you in distress, and they give correct interpretations of moral dilemmas.

They prescribe the dress, food, manner of speech, social conduct, mode of mutual behavior, and lines of onward march. They are the conscience of society.

In this Prasanthi Nilayam, too, there are certain guidelines and modes of behavior as recommended by Me. All who come here, whether longtime residents or new arrivals, have to observe them. You have seen Me, and stayed here, and heard these discourses. Let Me ask, what is the gain? Are you going back unchanged and unaffected? Dogs do not chew sugarcane; they seek a bone instead. Ill-fated mortals recoil when the talk is about God, goodness, *sadhana* (spiritual effort), and *sakshatkara* (vision of the divine). But you must pull yourselves up into the purer air of *adhyatmik* (spiritual) life, draw yourselves away from slums and by lanes, and travel on the highway to God. Dwell always on the glory of God, then you will shine in that glory. Adhere to truth as it is the surest means to remove fear from your heart. *Prema* (love) can grow only in the heart that is watered by truth.

### **What is *Bhakti* and who are *Bhaktas*?**

Nagayya, even while he plays the role of Thyagayya, is always conscious that he is Nagayya. "Thyagayya is the role I am playing," he would say. Now, let us go one step further. When asked who you are, you say that you are *narayana-swarupa* playing the role of Pullayya or Thimmayya or Mallayya, or whatever your name is. So, too, every other person is a role played by Narayana (the Lord). Narayana washes clothes as the *dhobi* (washer man), shapes wood as the carpenter, forges iron as the blacksmith, and builds pots at the wheel as a potter. He is all this and more. His glory is inexhaustible. The *Avatar* (Divine incarnate) is another role He takes up for yet another purpose.

The Lord comes as the *Avatar* when saints and sages anxiously await him. *Sadhus* (the pious) prayed, and I have come. My tasks are three, or rather two, since *dharmarakshana* (protection of virtue) and *Vedarakshana* (protection of Vedic culture) are both practically the same. The two are, therefore, *Vedarakshana* and *Bhaktarakshana* (fostering of the *Vedas* and fostering of *bhaktas* (devotees). Now, what is *bhakti* (devotion)? Who are *bhaktas*? It [*bhakti*] is faith, steadiness, virtue, fearlessness, surrender, and absence of egoism. *Puja* (worship) done however elaborately and pompously is sheer waste of time and energy. Why pluck flowers and hasten their death? Some of you go around this Nilayam and satisfy yourselves that you have done so many *pradakshinas* (circumambulations), but, they can be called so only when your mind circles this place along with your feet.

### **Talk less and talk low if you must**

I notice that while your feet are taking you around by force of habit, your tongues blabber about the faults of others, or the price of vegetables, or the dishes you propose to cook for lunch. Before you start on your rounds, which you call *pradakshina*, give your mind as *dakshina* (thanksgiving offering) to the resident of the temple, the Lord. That is the first thing to do, and perhaps the only thing to do. *Pradakshina* is not to be taken as prescribed for loosening the limbs or giving them some exercise.

This Prashanthi Nilayam should not be treated with scant reverence. Make the best use of your stay here. Do not treat this chance lightly. You come spending much money and put yourselves to much trouble to reach here; but you do not bloom as fragrant offerings at the Lord's feet by learning the *sadhana* path. The senses have to be curbed into obedient servants of the spirit. For example, I insist on silence. Talk less, and talk low when you must talk.

Do not thrust your sorrows, needs, and problems on to the ears of those who have come here with their own bundle of such things. They are not interested in adding to their troubles. I am here to listen to you and console you. Do not by loudness of voice disturb those who are meditating, reading, or writing the name of God.

**All ills are traceable to faulty living**

Meditate, if possible, alone; read spiritual books if you can; write the name of the Lord in the quiet of your corner. If you cannot do these, at least do not disturb others who are doing these. Encourage one another to march along the path to God.

Become entitled to the honored title of *bhakta*. My glory is spread daily through those who call themselves My *bhaktas*. Your virtue, self-control, detachment, your faith, and steadfastness—these are the signs by which people see My glory. Not that I want any such props, but it just happens so in this world where men estimate others indirectly rather than directly. Let Me tell you, such *bhaktas* are very rare. That is the reason why I do not address your gathering as, "*Bhaktulara!* (dear devotees)". You can lay claim to that name only when you have placed yourself in My hands fully and completely with no trace of ego that boosts your vanity.

All ills are traceable to faulty living. It is traceable to the ignorance of one's real nature, ignorance so deep-rooted that it affects thoughts, words, and deeds. The drug that can cure it is patented under different names: *jnana* (wisdom), *karma* (good action), *upasana* (contemplation), and *bhakti*. They all have the same potency and curative powers. The difference lies only in the method of administration either as a fluid mixture, tablet, or injection.

Be confident that you will be liberated. Know that you are saved. Go and tell everyone that you had gone to Puttaparthi where you got the secret of liberation.

Source: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, Vol. 3

*The mind must become the servant of the intellect, not the slave of the senses. It must discriminate and detach itself from the body. Like the ripe tamarind fruit, which becomes loose inside the shell, it must be unattached to this shell - this casement - called body.*

*Strike a green tamarind fruit with a stone and you cause harm to the pulp inside, but strike the ripe fruit and see what happens. It is the dry rind that falls off; nothing affects the pulp or the seed.*

*The ripe aspirant does not feel the blows of fate or fortune; it is the unripe man who is wounded by every blow.*

**~Sathya Sai Baba**

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### **Sri Sathya Sai: My Constant Companion**

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The *Vedas* declared centuries ago that God is beyond the reach of words, beyond the reach of the mind, and that he who says he has known Him does not know even his own self! Bhagavan says, "Even if humanity endeavors for thousands of years to unravel His mystery, they will still not succeed." Still, I can't restrain my little self from sharing a few of my very personal experiences with our most beloved Divine mother Sai, as His grace encourages me.

After completing my degree in law at Chandigarh, I developed a yearning to join the Sri Sathya Sai Institute, and Bhagavan 'created' a way for me by starting the MBA program. Needless to say, a lot of *sadhana* [spiritual effort] was required to get admission into Sai 's University. However, with His grace I joined the Institute in 1986. The 'legal' background initially proved to be a hurdle in the way of my completely grasping the mission and teachings of Bhagavan. I did not easily understand that 'faith', based in experience, and 'logic', resulting in doubt, are poles apart, like Customary Law [based upon practices and beliefs] and Coded Law [as enacted by the Legislature].

The few appealing things during my initial days at the Sai Institute were so superficial that my narrow mind accepted the 'finer and deeper aspects' of Sri Sathya Sai Education only at face value, for example, the free education facility, perfect discipline, harmony, and co-operation among students and staff, and the integrated personality development approach at the Sai University. In addition, there was a unique communal amity and national integration at the campus. But very soon, I slowly began to notice the 'hidden thread' behind all the deeper things

that existed at the campus was that Sai had started this unique educational program not merely to bestow a decent living upon the pupils, but to bestow upon them a wonderful gift of 'life' itself.

One of my seniors at the hostel once told me that I would be merely wasting my time if I did not make genuine efforts to build an internal kingdom of love with Sai. It was from then onward that Bhagavan in all His mercy and love started drawing me internally toward Him. He wanted us to be careful and caring in life because according to Him, 'Action is Perfection'.

Once a very senior Air Force Officer was sitting by His side. Bhagavan asked the students if they would do anything at His command. All, including the Officer, raised their hands enthusiastically. Bhagavan looked quizzically into the eyes of the Officer and asked Him, "Resign from Air Force, now!" The Officer immediately borrowed a paper from one of the students and addressed a resignation letter to the President of India. Bhagavan accepted the letter and said, "Your resignation has been accepted. Now onward you will work in Air Force as an instrument of the Lord!" Bhagavan then asked the officer, "Have you ever thought the work in Air Force to be God's work?" The Officer's answer was in the negative as he treated only service to humanity as God's work till that day. "Spirituality is not a uniform to be worn on certain days and occasions. Rather, every task should be done on behalf of the Lord and offered unto Him," was Bhagavan's command.

In another instance He demonstrated that He is with us at all times, provided we allow the echo of His words to ring in our ears. After graduating from the Institute, I applied for a job in the corporate sector in Chandigarh. As a fresh recruit, I was pitted against about 40 well-experienced candidates for the post. The interview went on quite well for a good 35 minutes, and all the time the Managing Director (MD) asked me details about the teaching pattern of the Sathya Sai University. Thereafter, arrived a bombshell. The MD passed a curt remark at me when he said that my learning at the Sai University might be ideally suited for a life to be spent in temples, forests, or monasteries, but not for the corporate sector, because there was no place for 'values' in business dealings. I was totally shaken by his observation, and prayed to Sai to help me.

Bhagavan took over at that very instant. I began my counter offensive with a question posed to the MD, "Sir, if you were a manufacturer of tires, where would you test the roadworthiness of the product? On smooth roads or on bumpy roads which are full of potholes?" The MD replied, "On bumpy roads, of course." I immediately told him, that he had himself answered his query put to me and that we were also Bhagavan's tires, and were to be tested in the tough situations of the corporate sector and not in the calmness of monasteries and temples.

After I had completed my MBA program, Bhagavan blessed me with work in rural areas, setting up a hospital, a vocational training center, and a school among other projects. As per His divine guidance, I began working, but the progress was quite



slow. Once I came to Bhagavan and informed Him that until we could acquire some land, we would not be in a position to commence the project, and that acquiring land was very expensive in North India. Bhagavan, however, told me that it was not the land that would help us, but 'His hand.'

As I was returning to Chandigarh, a few devotees told me that a piece of land could be arranged in a village in Yamuna Nagar, and within the next few days the villagers donated a 27-acre piece of land for this project. That day happened to be *Guru Pournima*. The name of the village where the land was donated was Darwa. This word has the same meaning as the word 'Puttaparthi', a place infested with snake holes. Likewise, He also arranged a doctor couple who had returned from U.K. to manage the hospital wing. Slowly but steadily, a school, a hospital, and a vocational wing have sprung up in a remote village in Haryana on the lines of Bhagavan's teachings.

Once on January 1, 1997, the doctor-in-charge of the hospital came to me at Chandigarh and said that the patients visiting our hospital wanted *vibhuti* [blessed ash], instead of medicine. The stocks of *vibhuti* were virtually depleted. He asked me to procure about 100 packets weighing 200 grams each. I told him that such a large quantity of *vibhuti* could be arranged only from Parthi, and that we would request someone going to Parthi to fetch it for us. Thereafter, I left for the court, and as I was parking my car outside the court complex, I noticed some mustard yellow paper packets - appearing like *vibhuti* packets - spread beside the road. I parked my car and was walking to the court in uniform, when abruptly I looked back on the road again. The packets were looking exactly like *vibhuti* packets. I quickly went there and was wonderstruck to notice that *vibhuti* packets weighing 200 grams were spread over the turf in large quantities. One of the packets was open. I tasted its contents. It was definitely *vibhuti*! I now began collecting them in full public gaze—a lawyer picking up something from the ground. The packets were exactly one hundred, but one had been opened, just to strengthen my faith further. I quickly drove back home, rang up the doctor-in-charge and handed over the *vibhuti* packets to him. Of course, I retained a few of them as divine *prasadam* [sacred offering].

How they came to be on the roadside remained a mystery that took quite some days to unravel. An ardent devotee of Bhagavan was returning from Parthi and on his way to Shimla he changed his bus at Chandigarh. He was carrying a carton containing 100 *vibhuti* packets for his *Samiti* [association]. According to him, someone 'stole' the carton. But this 'thief' not only opened the carton after stealing it, but he even spread the 100 packets outside the court complex at just the same spot where I was to park my car! Who else could the 'miscreant' possibly be? Undoubtedly, He was Bhagavan, who answered the prayers of the poor villagers by providing them His *vibhuti*.

Sai is the most wonderful experience that could ever dawn in our lives. Bhagavan has been demonstrating for the past 80 years that, "His life is His message." But the

time is now ripe when we should respond to the call of our beloved Divine Master and make our lives His message! Only then can we be true Sai students.

Source: Students with Sai Experiences

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### **Of Whom All Scriptures Speak**

With fiery tremor, my heart sighs His Name.  
Silent, scarcely with breath, in profound rapture,  
He appears ...All the sweetness of the world  
in one tiny Form!  
Graceful as a dancer, He approaches.

No. My Lord!  
Look not into my eyes  
for, I am unprepared  
for such beatitude.  
Today,  
I'm too full.  
You've filled my being,  
with your Divine presence.

Ah! But, near me, He stands, He—  
around whom my very Soul revolves.  
His feet press the rose petals strewn  
in tribute along His path.  
Tears of joy trace rivulets  
down my cheeks;  
suppressed sobs  
knock at my lungs.  
I gaze  
at His face;  
every caress of my gaze  
a fervent prayer  
"Sathya Sai Baba"  
"Sathya Sai Baba."  
What prayer, more sublime, could I utter?

Small is His form,  
yet, mighty in manner is this  
unassuming Lord.  
Serenely He walks,  
among the adoring, the doubtful,  
the sincere, the skeptic, bestowing

His grace, like sunlight, on all.

Upturned faces—  
demanding, imploring, weeping, expectant,  
complacent, desperate,  
from all directions, they come,  
across the globe, to see, to earn, to learn.  
What?  
Most do not know; some think they know;  
who knows?

This Radiant Font of Goodness and Beauty  
is God in human form.  
This is He, surely, of whom all scriptures speak.  
He moves among the people; tender as a mother's is that face,  
He pinches the chubby cheek of a child; He holds an old man's  
hand,  
sacred ashes appear in His palm to heal the old woman there.  
Each heart is known to Him  
Every wish finds its answer through Him.  
In Him, all journeys end; all destinations merge!  
And, *peace is known.*

*~Denise Eversole, Santa Barbara*  
Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, Feb. 1974

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## Q&A with Bhagavan:

### **MANTRA AND JAPA**

- Q. Is there any *mantra* [spiritual formula] or *japa* [recitation of the name] that will give us this *shanti* [peace] state that you spoke about just now? If there is any *mantra*, which is the important one?
- A. *Mantra* and *Japa* are essential for all types of men. What is a *mantra*? *Ma* means *manana* and *tra* means saving, so *mantra* means that which can save you if you meditate on it. *Mantra* will save you from being caught up in the coils of this worldly life that is infested with death, grief, and pain. Of all *mantras*, the *pranava* [the primordial sound *Om*] is the highest and the best. It is the very head and crown of all of them.
- Q. Suppose each one does the *japam* of the name of the *Ishtadevata* [personal preferred deity] according to his own light, I believe it is not wrong. Or is it?

- A. You mean that however savage or foolish a man may be, he cannot but call on the Lord! Well, if the name is recited along with the *pranava*, it is bound to be beneficial. Just as the waters of the ocean are raised into the sky by the rays of the sun, and then falling as rain they form rills [small streams] and rivers and rush toward the ocean to become once again the waters of the ocean, all sounds and *mantras* that were once only *pranava*, reach the *pranava* through the *japa* and other disciplines and rites. They all get merged in the *pranava*, their source.
- Q. Swami! Some elders have said that the more *bija aksharas* [seed words] a *mantra* has, the more effective it is. Are such *mantras* to be preferred to others that have only a few *bija-aksharas*?
- A. I don't agree with the view that when the number of *bija-aksharas* diminishes, there is less chance for concentration in *dhyana* [meditation]. *Sadhakas* [spiritual aspirants] would be benefitted more if they repeat the *Panchakshari* [five lettered] or *Ashtakshari* [eight lettered] with the *pranava* added in the beginning. When they have proceeded some distance thus, they can give up even the words and concentrate on the Form depicted through the sound and transform the *mantra* into the *Devata* [Lord] Himself. That is why the *Shruti* [scriptures] says, "Nissabdo Brahma Uchyathe—Brahma is silence, absence of sound."
- Q. How are we to create a vacuum of sound? How can that be *Brahmam*?
- A. The *Shrutis* declare that this objective world, this *prakriti*, is *maya* [illusion]; they also say that He who has all this *maya* under His control is *Eashwara*. So try to have all this creation under control and become *Eashwara* yourself. The stage when, so far as you are concerned, the objective world has come to naught, is the stage when you attain *Brahmam*. Until that is set at naught, you cannot attain *Brahmam*; that is certain. Like the snake that discards its skin and assumes a new skin, the *sadhaka* discards the old skin and puts on the skin of the deity indicated by the *mantra* that he concentrates upon.
- Q. Pardon me, Swami! I cannot understand all this. Make it clear through some more examples.
- A. You have seen an egg, is it not? When the bird sits on the egg for some time, the chick grows inside it to its full stature, and then when the shell of the egg is broken it emerges and assumes its real form. In the same way, when the *sadhaka* with purified consciousness dwells on the *mantra* and its meaning, and revolves its significance in his mind without break, the vision grows in his mind without break, the shell of *ajnana* [ignorance] breaks and he shines in the splendor of the Divinity that he has formed in his consciousness.

Q. All things originate from *pranava* and all things finally merge in *pranava*, they say. Then why is it that the very elders who say this declare that some can pronounce this and some cannot?

A. What is *prakriti* (nature) except the commingling of the five elements? The *pranava* is the very life of all the elements and so it is the life-breath of *prakriti* itself. The roar of waters falling down a cliff, the beating of waves on a promontory of the shore, both repeat the *pranava* only. The sound of inhaling and exhaling breath is itself the *pranava*, is it not? Whether they know it or not, the heigh-ho of the men who carry along a palanquin on their shoulders, the heave of those who lift weights, the heehoy of those who beat clothes on slabs by the riverside, all resound with the *pranava*. Repeat it with a full knowledge of its inner significance and you will soon be relieved of the burden of this world's worry.

The *pranava* of the breathing process is also the savior from grief. It is meaningless to argue that some have the right to utter the *pranava* and some don't. Those who do not breathe may not have the authority to utter it; but all who breathe are reciting it already in the process and so there is no sense in denying it to anyone. When Arjuna [a Pandava of *Mahabharatha*] asked how one should remember the Lord at the point of death, do you not know the reply that Krishna gave? He said that he should recall to his mind the *pranava* that is un-differentiated from Him. Such a *bhakta* [devotee] will, He said, attain the highest goal. So everyone has the right to this great *mantra*, the *pranava*.

Q. How can the goal be reached through the *upasana* of *pranava*? How can the person who meditates become transformed into the thing meditated upon? Please make this unequalled *mantra* and the way it helps us clearer to me by means of easy illustrations.

A. Very good. *Pranava* is the bow; the *atma* [soul] is the arrow; *Parabrahmam* is the target. So the *sadhaka* must, like the practitioner of the art of archery, be unaffected by things that agitate the mind. He should pay one-pointed attention to the target; then the bowman is filled with the target; he becomes the thing meditated on. In the *Kaivalyopanishad*, the *Mundakopanishad*, and in various parts of the *Shruti*, the *pranava* is extolled in various ways. Therefore, this *mantra* that liberates man can be recited and meditated upon by all. All can practice the *pranava upasana*; you need have no doubts on this point.

Source: *Prasnottara Vahini*

## Thought of the Month *Sadhaka*

Every person is apt to commit mistakes, without being aware of it. However bright the fire or light, some smoke will emanate from it. So also, whatever good deed a man might do, there will be mixed with it a minute trace of evil. But efforts should be made to ensure that the evil is minimized, that the good is more and bad, less. Of course, in the present atmosphere, you may not succeed in the very first attempt. You must carefully think over the consequences of whatever you do, talk, or execute. In whatever way you want others to honor you, or to love you, or to behave with you, in the same way you should first behave with others and love and honor them. Then only will those honor you. Instead, without yourself honoring and loving others, if you complain that they are not treating you properly, it is surely a wrong conclusion. Besides, if only those who advise others about, "Which principles are right, which are true and good, which conduct is best, etc.?" themselves follow the advice they give, there would then be no need for giving that advice at all. They will learn the lesson simply by observing their actual behavior. On the other hand, if *Vedanta* is spoken parrot-like to others, without any attempt to put it into practice in one's own conduct, it is not only deceiving others; it is even worse. It is deceiving oneself. Therefore, you must be as you want others to be. It is not the nature of a *sadhaka* or *bhakta* to search for faults in others and hide one's own. If your faults are pointed out to you by anyone, do not argue and try to prove that it is right, or do not bear a grudge against him for it. Reason out within yourself how it is a fault and set right your own behavior. Instead, rationalizing it for your own satisfaction or wreaking vengeance on the person who pointed it out, these are certainly not the traits of a *sadhaka*.

*Prema Vahini, "The equipment that a Sadhaka should collect"*

It is necessary to analyze and discriminate every act of man, for the spirit of renunciation is born out of such analysis. Without it, renunciation is difficult to get. Miserliness is like the behavior of a dog it has to be transformed. Anger is enemy no.1 of the *sadhaka*, it is like spittle and has to be treated as such. And untruth? It is even more disgusting. Through untruth, the vital powers of all are destroyed. It should be treated as scavenging itself. Theft ruins life. It makes the priceless human life cheaper than a pie. It is like rotten foul-smelling flesh. Moderate food, moderate sleep, *prema* [love], and fortitude these will help in the upkeep of the health of both body and mind. Whoever he may be, if he gives no room for dispiritedness, if he has no fear at all, and if he remembers the Lord with unshaken faith and without any ulterior motive, all suffering and sorrow will fall away from him...With a pure *antahkarana* (inner consciousness), uninterruptedly (whatever one may be doing) contemplating on God, feeling that everything is the Lord's creation and therefore One, unattached to sense-objects, embracing all in equal love, dedicated to true speech, this is, indeed, the characteristic of *bhakti* [devotion].

*Prema Vahini, "The harvest of a Sadhaka"*