



How to Cultivate Friendship with God

In August of 1978, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba spoke to the Brindavan hostel boys about friendship. Following is an excerpt from that discourse.

Sneha [affection] is the eighth of the nine stages of *bhakti* (devotion) described in the *Bhagavata* [scriptures] and other texts. It is usually translated as 'friendship', a term that has been understandably vulgarized by application to certain transitory relationships between living beings. Friends come together as a result of a variety of reasons and circumstances that are mostly of worldly and temporary interest. People who have ample resources gain friends quickly, as do those who have a great deal of patronage in their hands or who can distribute favors. Those in authority also gather friends who, of course, stay on during fair weather but disappear when influence fades. Most friendships are based on selfish considerations and last only as long as those selfish interests are promoted. As the proverb goes, "When the lake is full there are frogs a plenty, but when it runs dry not a single croak is heard."

Friendship ought to be a spiritual bond, a heart to heart kinship based on a full understanding of and a pure dedication to one another. Students should be vigilant against false and fleeting friendships and not be simply led away by hellos and handshakes. Do not cultivate close friendship with anybody unless you know that the motives on the other side are pure, unselfish, and spiritual.

Unique friendship between Krishna and Arjuna

Genuine friendship can only be possible between one *atma* [soul] and another, that is to say between two persons who have each realized that *atma* is the core of their being. Nowhere among the trivial, transitory friendships of mortals on the mundane plane can you get the genuine *sneha* that is declared as the penultimate stage of *sharanagati* or *atma nivedana* (total surrender and dedication to God).

Arjuna and Krishna had this genuine *sneha* between them. Arjuna saw Krishna as his *sakha* (friend), and therefore had the temerity to use words of jesting irreverence during play, or while in repose, or when seated by him, or at meals (*Vihaara Shayyaasana Bhojaneshu*). The two often ate meals from the same plate and were ready to help each other under all circumstances. Do not be under the impression that Arjuna was insidiously overpowered by Krishna. He was mature in character,

well-versed in the *Vedic* lore, a redoubtable warrior, and bowman full of courage and heroism.

Krishna was the *Purushottama* (Supreme Being), while Arjuna was the *narottama* (best human). It was a friendship between the embodiment of the highest and the embodiment of the best. Krishna was the *avataric* (incarnated) person; Arjuna was the *anandic* (blissful) person; it was a coming together of the *avatara murti* and the *ananda murti*. Arjuna was often addressed by Krishna as *Kuru Nandana*. This name has a deep significance. *Kuru* means 'act, activity, *karma*'. *Nandana* means 'happy, delighted'. *Kuru Nandana*, therefore, means he who is delighted while engaged in activity. Throughout the 18 chapters of the *Gita* [song of God], Arjuna is alert and active, participating vigilantly in every turn of argument.

Krishna's assurance to all who offer their self

Ramakrishna Paramahansa was fascinated by the *sneha* that was exemplified by the Krishna-Arjuna relationship. He learned from the *Bhagavata* and the *Bhagavad Gita* how the *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) can go through all the nine stages of *bhakti* (devotion). He was also determined to emulate the *gopis* (cowherd girls) and earn for himself the *viraha* (passionate) type of *bhakti*, *madhura bhakti* (sweet devotion), that the *gopis* had. When he read the *Ramayana*, he decided to emulate Hanuman and practice his *dasa bhakti* (devotion of servitude). Of all the *shlokas* (verses) in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Ramakrishna was especially impressed by the one that emphasized the attitude of *atma nivedana* [self-surrender] or *sharanagati* (absolute surrender).

*Manmana bhava madbhaktho, madyaaji maam namaskuru
Maamevaisbyasiyuktvaltvam aatmaanam matparasyanaah*

"Become One with Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; bow down to Me; unifying thus Yourself, you will surely come to Me."

One day, while Ramakrishna was going to Kamarpukur, night overtook him, and he was caught in heavy rain right in the center of a burial ground. Of course, he was in such an ecstatic mood that the time, place, or weather mattered little to him. When he awoke, Ramakrishna called upon God by various names—Rama, Shiva, Krishna, Kali, Hanuman. Then he suddenly realized that the names all referred to the One, and he repeated to himself the verse from the *Gita* that reminded him of *sharanagati* to the One.

What happened to Ramakrishna reminds me of a little story. The master of the household called the errand boy and giving him a five-rupee note asked him to bring vegetables from the market. While going toward the market, the boy took the note and placed it in his pocket, saying, "Brinjals for one rupee", "Cabbage for one rupee". Thus, he assigned the note to fish, to carrots, etc. He started with a fiver and concluded with a fiver. Ramakrishna, too, started with the One and concluded with the One. The One becomes the many and the many is recognized as One.

Surrender absolutely to God to get peace

Many interesting incidents took place at Dakshineswar. When Ramakrishna was once asked to go to the temple office to receive his monthly salary, he was very upset, for he never wanted any wages for being given the chance of worshipping His Mother. At another time, thieves broke into the Krishna temple. When Ramakrishna and Mathuranath came by there and discovered that Krishna's idol was absolutely bare and that every jewel had been stolen, Mathuranath fell into a rage and began blaming Krishna Himself. "You are adored as the Guardian of the '14 worlds,' but You cannot guard even the jewels on Your own body," he said. Ramakrishna reprimanded him soundly for this sacrilege, saying, "Krishna has Lakshmi as His consort, and for Him your gold and gems are as cheap as dust. As a matter of fact, what is gold but dust in another form?" He made Mathuranath repent for his silly outburst, making him aware of the true nature of Godhead.

If only you surrender your wish and will, your fancies and fantasies to God, He will lead you aright and give you peace and joy. You must not run after diverse ends and fleeting pleasures. Leave everything to God; accept whatever happens as His will. Ambareesha was a king who stuck to all the *Vedic* injunctions and observed all the rites and rituals laid down in these texts. He was noble, sincere, and very devoted to Vishnu, the form that embodies the fostering and sustaining aspect of God.

True devotion of King Ambareesha

Fasting on *Ekadashi* day and breaking the fast as soon as *Dwaadashi* came in was one of the important rites that Ambareesha observed meticulously every fortnight. *Ekadashi* is the 11th day of the Lunar cycle and *Dwaadashi*, the 12th day. The fast has to be broken with prayers to Vishnu and the partaking of the offering made to Him as soon as, according to the lunar calendar, the 12th lunar day has started. On one occasion, a few hours before the approach of *Dwaadashi*, the great sage Durvasa, reputed for his frequent fits of fury and burst of uncontrollable temper, arrived at Ambareesha's palace. He was heartily welcomed by the King. Ambareesha pleaded with him to proceed to the Ganges, finish his ablutions and return in time for the breaking of the *Ekadashi* fast. But the sage took his own time and was nowhere evident when the crucial moment arrived.

Ambareesha was in a fix. He consulted his preceptor, who advised him to sip a few drops of sanctified water since that could be considered as breaking of the fast. On *Ekadashi* day, even drinking water is taboo during the period of fasting. He said that Durvasa had no reason to get angry since the drops of water were taken by him only as a token to keep the vow. But when the sage came and learnt about it all, he became so wild that he cursed Ambareesha for having broken the fast in his absence and started the meal. As the curse took form, the *Chakra* (discus) of Vishnu appeared on the scene and confronted Durvasa.

A devotee takes the curse as a gift from God

Ambareesha took the curse as a gift from God; he submitted himself to it in the spirit of *sharanagati*, for he had no will of his own. Thus, God came to his rescue. Ambareesha did not call upon Vishnu and pray that he may be saved from Durvasa's anger. He accepted that too as the will of Vishnu. The *Chakra* pursued the terrified sage over all the three worlds, and when Durvasa fell at the feet of Vishnu, He directed him to approach Ambareesha himself for pardon. The attitude of surrender or *nivedana* (offering the self to God) makes a person dedicate his entire personality at the feet of the Lord.

In the Ramayana, too, we have an episode that illustrates this. Rama and Lakshmana were combing the forests to discover where Sita was. They were tired and thirsty. Suddenly, they came upon a clear pool and while placing their bows on the ground they dropped their arrows that partially sank into the wet bank. After slaking their thirst, they put the bows on their shoulders and pulled the arrows out from the bank. Rama noticed a stain of blood at the tip of his arrow and was curious to find out how it came there. Lakshmana discovered a little frog had been hit by Rama's arrow when he dropped it on the ground.

Rama told the wounded frog, "Poor thing! Why did you not cry out when you were hit?" The frog replied, "Whenever in trouble, I cry out to you Rama. But when Rama Himself inflicts pain whom am I to cry out to? I accepted it as His grace." Bheesma adored Krishna even when He was rushing toward him with His *Chakra* to take his life. His sense of *sharanagati* (total surrender to Divinity) did not desert him at the point of death at the hands of the very person whom he revered as God: "Kill me or save me, I shall not falter in my loyalty," he said.

See God in every being, *sneha* will blossom

Ramakrishna had the same sense of total dedication. He was in great pain as the result of a cancer, and his disciples asked him to pray to the Mother for alleviation of the pain. Vivekananda was desperate when his master refused to ask this little favor from the Mother with whom he was literally on speaking terms. But Ramakrishna replied that if it was the Mother's will that he must suffer, he was not going to pray for palliatives. But his disciples were adamant. They bothered Ramakrishna so much that one day he prayed to the Mother that he may be helped to take a little food in spite of the cancer in his throat. Ramakrishna told his disciples that at that time he heard the Mother admonishing him for his ignorance: "Are you not eating through all these billion throats? Why regret that one throat is incapable of taking down food?" (*Vaasudeva sarvaam idam*—Vasudeva is in all). This truth was brought home to the disciples by this revelation.

The *sneha* (friendship) stage of Arjuna is the stage when all distinctions between the devotee and God disappear and the two friends are one. When this stage of utter trust, unshakeable faith, and complete absence of doubt, fear, and anxiety is reached, the next stage of *atma nivedan* is natural and easy to achieve. This is the real

friendship to which the youth must aspire. See God in every being and then true *sneha* will blossom. This type of true *sneha* can come only when you follow the advice of Krishna.

*Adveshtaa sarva bhoothaanaam maitrah karuna eva cha
nirmamo nirahamkaarah sama dukha sukha kshami*

“He who has no trace of hatred toward any creature, who is friendly and compassionate toward all, who is free from the bondage of 'I' and 'mine,' who takes pain and pleasure as equally welcome, and who is forbearing in spite of provocation....”

Develop these qualities in you, for they are the signs of true *sneha*, for it is only when you are proceeding on the Godward journey along the nine stages of *bhakti* (devotion) that you can attain this divine ideal of true friendship.

Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, Sept. 1978

Sai—My Everything

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It is beyond my ability to write about Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, since words fail miserably to portray His glory. Sai -- the name itself fills our heart with immense joy, confidence, and happiness. Surrendering my ego and knowledge at His lotus feet, let me pen down the story of my journey to Sai.

It was in the year 1998 when I came to know about Shirdi Sai Baba. We were staying in Sambalpur, a town in the western part of Odisha. On every Thursday, my mother used to make *prasadam* [blessed food] at home, and she would ask me to offer it in a Sai Baba temple that was two kilometers away from my house. With great difficulty, managing the *prasadam* box on one side of the cycle's handle and pushing the cycle pedal I used to go on a road full of pits and stones. It continued for years for something in the temple made me happy and comfortable.

A few years later we moved our house near that temple, and on every other day I used to go and spend my time there, while my classmates would be playing outside in the fields and on the playground. I read *Shri Sai Satcharitra* in the year 2007, during my undergraduate studies, when I was staying at a hostel in Visakhapatnam. Whenever I read it, I was filled with sadness and grief. I used to consider myself

unlucky in comparison with those people who moved and lived with Sai Baba of Shirdi at Dwarakamayi.

Meanwhile my parents moved to Vishakhapatnam. One day my sister told me about a *satsang* [spiritual gathering] near our house where Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba used to show His presence by performing many *leelas* [divine acts]. I went there to see the *leelas* of Bhagavan. I was told that we could keep *prasadam* or anything for blessings there. During those days I was preparing for my chartered accountancy examinations; so I went with my admission card and placed it at the altar for blessings. *Vibhuti* [holy ash] appeared on my card and the devotees told me that Swami had blessed it.

I felt good about it and came back. I thought that since Swami had blessed it I would pass the examination with flying colors. But the reverse happened. So this center to me was just another place for *bhajans* and service activities. My mother was a regular participant in *bhajans* and service activities there. Every morning she used to wake me up singing some *bhajan* that irritated me a lot. But I would keep quiet and never said anything to her. I had a big gang of friends in the year 2009. We used to go to every movie in the city and roam around aimlessly. Since my parents were very particular about how I spent my time, I used to do all this during my college schedule, i.e. from 8.00 am to 2.00 pm.

It was in the very same year I secured top marks in the university accountancy examination. I still wonder today at this. My so-called best friends doubted that I had manipulated something in the examination and obtained high marks. I started keeping distance from them because of differences of opinion that made them doubt me more.

It was during that period after finishing my UG final examinations that I used to participate in *satsang* and *Narayan seva* [feeding the poor] that was conducted in a Sai center. I felt very happy and thought of continuing these *seva* activities. One day I felt deeply disgusted with the scandals propagated by my friends. So I went to attend the *satsang* conducted in the Sai Center and prayed to Swami that He should help me. I also prayed to Bhagavan to keep me away from my friends. I further prayed that Swami should become my only friend. The very next day, I got calls from my friends one after another telling me that they did not want to continue their friendship with me.

Even to this day I wonder what made my friends discontinue their friendship with me overnight. From that day till today, Swami has been helping me in many ways, day-in and day-out. I slowly started developing a bond with Swami. Since I had no friends, Bhagavan became everything for me. His name was always in my heart, mind, and on my lips. He would also respond and reciprocate in numerous ways. Whenever I thought of Him, a big picture of His would appear on a hoarding [billboard], or on an auto-rickshaw.

At times I would feel His touch on my shoulder while riding a bike. At times I would see Him on a branch of a tree and He would suddenly disappear. For some time, I thought that I was imagining or hallucinating. Either way I was happy.

On introspection, I learned many things about Swami. Swami says, "Test is My taste." Initially, He encourages us to get closer to Him and He tests us. We learn many things during this period, and we become wiser. We can pass Bhagavan's test if we cultivate the spirit of surrender. The feeling of *anyatha sharanam nasthi* [other than You, there is no refuge] is a source of immense strength and peace. Renouncing the feeling of the doer-ship and resigning oneself to His will cements our bond with Him.

Being with Swami, I have learned not to question Him. When we do not know what is going to happen in the next moment, how can we question the One who knows the past, the present, and the future of everyone and everything? We can ask but not question. Acceptance of His *sankalpa* [will] and abiding by it is a source of infinite strength. He is not interested in our failure or success. He is not interested in what failure or success does to us. He is interested in our progress. His love for us is unique. I always pray to Him that till the last breath of my life His name alone should be on my tongue, His thoughts alone should be in my mind, His image alone should be in my eyes, and His words alone should be in my ears. If coming to Swami is an achievement, then to continuously be with Him and in Him is the real achievement. His grace alone can help us in achieving this. Let us all live in Sai. Let us all live for Sai.

~K. J. Srinivas

Source: Sai Nandana 2015 (90th Birthday Offering)

*Always find a quiet corner after my darshan, where you may enter
the stillness and receive the completion of My blessings.
My energy goes out from Me as I pass by you. If you proceed to talk
with others immediately, this precious energy is dissipated and
returned to Me, unused by you. Rest assured that whatever
My eyes sees becomes vitalized and transmuted.
You are changed day by day.*

~Sathya Sai Baba~

"Here He is"

God's World of Happiness,
Is on the Verge of Tears;
For all His Love and Workmanship,
Has been devalued through the years.

So now the time has come,
For God to come on Earth,
To save His dying creation,
From the devil's wretched curse.

Here He is before you
In brilliant orange robes,
To save ALL mankind,
In many different roles.

His face is full of beauty.
His eyes are full of Love.
His voice is soft and sweet
Like the grace of a dove.

We bow to His Lotus Feet,
And pray to Him everyday
That He will save our Hearts and Souls
For He is almighty God in the Human Way.

~Anita Saxena, California, Age 11 years
Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, Sept. 1978

Darshan: Meaning and Significance

Darshan is the moment when our eyes get the blessed opportunity to see the Lord. Somebody said, "Man walking on the moon is not so important when God walks on earth." God, whom the saints and seers described as beyond the perception of the mind and whose glory the Vedas (Hindu scriptures) declare as beyond the description of words, walks amidst us. Those few minutes when winds waft the melodious music and eager expectant eyes try to catch a glimpse of the glorious form, the Lord walks amidst us. With measured steps and majestic gait, He gives *darshan*. The Lord goes with equally eager eyes to give *darshan* to those blessed ones who are waiting for Him.

People who are sitting there waiting for Him are of different kinds: some are waiting under the agony of incurable disease; some are immersed in round-the-clock business matters and earning millions but finding a vacuum that squeezes their heart; some who have come just for Him, just to see Him, drink the beauty with their eyes.

For Him, it is the same routine. It has been years since He started giving *darshan*, taking letters, wiping tears, allaying fears, curing the diseased, despondent, and desperate. The law of diminishing marginal utility doesn't exist with respect to Him. He gives every *darshan* with the same love, the same interest, the same concern, and the same compassion as He did years ago.

He walks slowly, majestically, as if floating in the air, His feet hardly touching the ground. He walks between the rows of ladies and gents one after the other. He starts taking their letters, which represent their fears, cares, worries, and problems, He being the universal recipient of problems and the universal donor of solutions. There sits a man dying due to cancer. The onslaught of the disease has reduced him to a bag of bones. He has lost all hope and is like a raft without a rudder on a stormy sea. The Lord goes near him, gives a smile of assurance and materializes *vibhuti* (holy ash) that will do what advanced radiotherapy cannot. The Lord moves on. There sits a young man, a victim of the ills of the society, which has made him doubt the very existence of God. The Lord goes near him with a smile and pats him on his head. The man, for the first time in his life, feels what love is. Tears trickle down his cheeks and with his hands held in prayer he lays down his heart at the lotus feet of the Lord. The Lord moves on. There sits another man with a sarcastic smile across his face and a defying look. The Lord goes near him, gives the same smile and moves on. After all He is the consummate actor who plays the role of the Lord and the role of His own creation who doubts Him. With a gesture of His hand, He invites a few for private interview. Their faces express delight at the rare opportunity.

Then He turns toward the students. The way He walks, the way He talks, everything changes. An air of informality, familiarity, and belongingness prevails. With a quip here, a pun there, the Lord moves on. He sees a boy sitting with a bandaged hand. The mother in Him, overflowing with love, asks "What happened?" The boy starts, "Swami, during games..." Now the stern father takes over, "Careless! careless! Always in a hurry." To another boy He gives an understanding smile that says, "I am always with you." To yet another boy He gives a penetrating look that reaches the core of his heart, churns it, and conveys, "I know what you did. I know, I know." Somewhere He looks at the dream world that He wants to establish—the world full of love and fraternity, without discord and hatred. He has a vision, and He being the Supreme One takes the world there. He looks at His students, to whom He wants to give a significant part in [the play of] His grand mission. He looks at them as future torchbearers, who, wherever they are, will be shining ideals and will follow His commands and principles. With that vision, He moves on.

Every *darshan* is a revolution—a silent revolution. With every *darshan*, the Lord takes the world one step toward Himself. He transforms many hearts, cures many diseases, gives hope to the forlorn and the forsaken. These five minutes that look so simple are crowded with events—significant events that have a bearing on so many lives. But for us students every *darshan* is an opportunity to transform our lives under the watchful eyes of Sai, who is our mother, father, teacher, friend and the Supreme Lord of our hearts. We can only pray to Him: "Beloved Lord, give us a clear and unclouded mind so that we may discern Your majesty. When You try to mold us into ideal ones, make us respond to Your will. When You shower Your Love on us, give us the proper frame of mind to receive it."

~Ashok Sundareshan,
Sanathana Sarathi, September 1998

Q&A with Bhagavan:

Sai's Jewels to Beautify

Bhakta: Swami, tell me how we should, generally, conduct ourselves. What are the qualities we should possess? Which type of subjects should we try to understand? To receive the Divine grace and to attain Your holy presence, what acts should we perform? Please tell me the more important of these, the essential things, the chosen jewels.

Swami: Oh! It seems, Parvati once asked Eashwara [Shiva], "It is difficult to retain in memory the *Sahasranama*, the 1000 names of God. It takes a long time to learn them and repeat them; so please tell me one single name that is the essence of all the 1000." Similarly you, too, perhaps find it difficult to grasp all that I write and explain, and so you are also asking me to tell you about the *most* important, is it? But you see, names have their essence, the subjects you ask about are different. Though their objective and final result are one, the practices, the paths of activity, cannot be one. They cannot all be summarized in one word! Still, I am giving you now some selected jewels, maxims of conduct, that are very important. Collect and treasure them well. Experience them well, put them into practice, and derive joy therefrom. Wear these jewels and beautify yourself

Bhakta: Exactly what I wanted; how lucky I am!

Swami: Then listen carefully, I shall tell you.

1. *Prema*, love, should be considered as the very breath of life.
2. The love that is manifest in all things equally, believe that the same *prema* is *Paramatma* [the Lord].
3. The one *Paramatma* is in everyone, in the form of *prema*.
4. More than all other forms of *prema*, man's first effort should be to fix his love on the Lord.
5. Such love directed toward God is *bhakti* [worship or devotion]; that is the fundamental test, the acquisition of *bhakti*.
6. Those who seek the bliss of the *atma* [soul] should not run after the joys of sense objects.
7. *Satya*, truth, must be treated as life-giving as breathing itself.
8. Just as a body that has no breath is useless and begins to rot and stink within a few minutes, similarly life without truth is useless and becomes the stinking abode of strife and grief.
9. Believe that there is nothing greater than truth, nothing more precious, nothing sweeter, and nothing more lasting.
10. Truth is the all-protecting God. There is no mightier guardian than truth.
11. The Lord who is *Satyaswarupa* [embodiment of truth] grants His *darshan* [seeing the Lord] to those of truthful speech and loving heart.
12. Have undiminished kindness toward all beings and also the spirit of self-sacrifice.
13. You must also possess control of the senses, an unruffled character, and non-attachment.
14. Be always on the alert against the four sins that the tongue is prone to commit: (1) Speaking falsehood (2) Speaking ill of others (3) Back-biting and (4) Talking too much. It is best to attempt to control these tendencies.
15. Try to prevent the five sins that the body commits: killing, adultery, theft, drinking intoxicants, and the eating of flesh. It is a great help for the highest life if these also are kept as far away as possible.
16. One must be always vigilant, without a moment's carelessness, against the eight sins that the mind perpetrates: *kamam* or craving; *krodham* or anger; *lobham* or greed; *moham* or attachment; impatience; hatred, egoism, and pride. Man's primary duty is to keep all these things at a safe distance from himself.
17. Man's mind speeds fast, pursuing wrong actions. Without letting it hurry like that remember the name of the Lord at that time or attempt to do some good deed or other. Those who do thus will certainly become fit for the Lord's grace.
18. First give up the evil tendency to feel envious at the prosperity of others and the desire to harm them. Be happy that others are happy. Sympathize with those who are in adversity and wish for their prosperity. That is the means of cultivating love for God.
19. Patience is all the strength that man needs.
20. Those anxious to live in joy must always be doing good.
21. It is easy to conquer anger through love, attachment through reasoning, falsehood through truth, bad through good, and greed through charity.

22. No reply should be given to the words of the wicked. Be at a great distance from them; that is for your good. Break off all relations with such people.
23. Seek the company of good men, even at the sacrifice of your honor and life. But be praying to God to bless you with the discrimination need to distinguish between the good men and the bad. You must also endeavor with the intellect given to you.
24. Those who conquer states and earn fame in the world are hailed as heroes, no doubt, but those who have conquered the senses are heroes who must be acclaimed as the conquerors of the universe.
25. Whatever acts a good or bad man may do, the fruits thereof follow him and will never stop pursuing him.
26. Greed yields only sorrow; contentment is best. There is no happiness greater than contentment.
27. The mischief-mongering tendency should be plucked out by the roots and thrown off. If allowed to exist, it will undermine life itself.
28. Bear with fortitude both loss and grief; try and search for plans to achieve joy and gain.
29. When you are invaded by anger, practice silence or remember the name of the Lord. Do not remind yourself of things that will inflame the anger more. That will do incalculable harm.
30. From this moment avoid all bad habits. Do not delay or postpone. They do not contribute the slightest joy.
31. Try as far as possible within your means to satisfy the needs of the poor, who are really *Daridra-Narayana* [service to the poor is equivalent to service to God]. Share with them whatever food you have and make them happy at least at that moment.
32. Whatever you feel should not be done to you by others, avoid doing such things to others.
33. For faults and sins committed in ignorance, repent sincerely; try not to repeat the faults and sins again; pray to God to bless you with the strength and the courage needed to stick to the right path.
34. Do not allow anything to come near you that will destroy your eagerness and enthusiasm for God. Want of eagerness will cause the decay of the strength of man.
35. Yield not to cowardice; do not give up *ananda* [bliss].
36. Do not get swelled up when people praise you; do not feel dejected when people blame you.
37. If among your friends any one hates another and starts a quarrel, do not attempt to inflame them more and make them hate each other more. Try, on the other hand, with love and sympathy, to restore their former friendship.
38. Instead of searching for others' faults, search for your own faults yourself; uproot them, throw them off. It is enough if you search and discover one fault of yours; that is better than discovering tens of hundreds of faults in others.
39. Even if you cannot or will not do any *punya* or good deed, do not conceive or carry out any *papam* or bad deed.

40. Whatever people may say about the faults that you know are not in you, do not feel for it; as for the faults that are in you, try to correct them yourself, even before others point them out to you. Do not harbor anger or bitterness against people who point out your faults; do not retort pointing out the faults of those persons themselves but show your gratitude to them. Trying to discover their faults is a greater mistake on your part. It is good for you to know your faults; it is no good your knowing others' faults.
41. Whenever you get a little leisure, do not spend it in talking about all and sundry, but utilize it in meditating on God or in doing service to others.
42. The Lord is understood only by the *bhakta*; the *bhakta* is understood only by the Lord. Others cannot understand them. So do not discuss matters relating to the Lord with those who have no *bhakti* [devotion]. On account of such discussion, your devotion will diminish.
43. If anyone speaks to you on any subject having understood it wrongly, do not think of other wrong notions that will support that stand but grasp only the good and the sweet in what he says. True meaning is to be appreciated as desirable, not wrong meaning or many meanings that give no meaning at all and cause only the hampering of *ananda*.
44. If you desire to cultivate one-pointedness, do not when in a crowd or *bazaar* scatter your vision to the four corners and on everything, but see only the road in front of you, just enough to avoid accidents to yourself. One-pointedness will become firmer if one moves about without taking one's attention off the road, avoiding dangers, and not casting eyes on others' forms.
45. Give up all doubts regarding the *guru* and God. If your worldly desires do not get fulfilled, do not blame it on your devotion; there is no relationship between such desires and devotion to God. These worldly desires have to be given up some day or other; *bhakti* feelings have to be acquired some day or other. Be firmly convinced of this.
46. If your *dhyanam* [meditation] or *japam* [repeating the Lord's name] does not progress properly or if the desires you have entertained do not come to fruition, do not get dispirited with God. It will dispirit you even more and you will lose the peace, however small or big, that you might have earned. During *dhyanam* and *japam* you should not be dispirited, desperate, or discouraged. When such feelings come, take it that it is the fault of your *sadhana* [spiritual effort] and endeavor to do them correctly.

It is only when in your daily conduct and in all actions you automatically behave and act in this manner and along these lines that you can attain the Divine principle very easily. Therefore, hold on to these maxims firmly. Chew and digest these spoken sweets distributed on the Birthday festival of your Swami and be happy! Have you understood?

Bhakta: Your words are like *amrita* [Divine nectar], Swami. Yes! *Amrita*! In all these ordinary dealings of life, man does not know the road; he follows the wrong track. There are no books also to tell him the means of a happy journey; for all such

strugglers like me, what you have said is *prana* [life breath], the very breath! We are indeed blessed! Bless me, that these words get imprinted on my heart and are realized in practice every day. There is no good in simply listening or reading them. It is only when Your grace accompanies them that we get strength. I shall take leave, Swami!

Swami: All right! Go and come for the Birthday festival. There are just seven days more, isn't it? Today is 16th; the Birthday is on 23rd; so there are seven days left. Till that time let this sweetness fill and overflow your heart!

Source: *Sandeha Nivarini*

Thought of the Month:

God is All-encompassing

God is the echo of the hills, the flutter of the leaves, the whisper of men, the babble of children, the *Om* (primordial sound) that is wafted everywhere. God is present at all places, but to recognize Him, saints have had to prescribe a thousand methods! He is in everyone, yet he evades discovery by all but a few. Being all-powerful, He is the giver of all gifts, the providence bestowing upon us the entire wherewithal. He remains All-encompassing.

...Since the *jeeva* (individual being) limits his viewpoint to the physical frame he occupies, and confines his attention and interest, love and attachment to a small circle of relations and friends. He limits God also to a certain name and form, and sees His compassion and grace, blessings and benediction, limited to a small circle of devotees who adore that specific name and form. Human desires are narrow, so He who grants fulfilment is also imagined to be narrow in His grace. Ideally, therefore, when one prays, one should, in complete resignation say, "Thy will be done," and ought not to ask for this or that, for he has neither the wisdom nor the foresight to know what is best for him.

When man neglects the divine aspect of his nature and fails to pursue the *saadhana* (spiritual discipline) that ensures the awareness of the Omnipresent and Omnipotent *Om*, he falls prey to the impulses and instincts dominated by the ego and develops faith in material gains. ...

The divine aspect of your personality will encourage humility, adherence to truth, love and eagerness to serve, fortitude and detachment. Cherish the first manifestation of these qualities in your life and practice them whenever you get a chance. The innate brotherhood that sanctifies the human race is destroyed by the

weeds of envy that grow in the mind. These weeds ruin one's personality. They grow so rank that they strangle the individual himself.

March on with your eyes on the goal. Do not worry about the past, its mistakes and its failures. Do not follow the whims and fancies of the mind any longer. They will fill the ear with praise or blame and drag you away from the *adhyaatmik* (spiritual) path. Follow the call of the divine arising from the hearts of all living beings. Serve them in an attitude of worship, not expecting something in return. Do not accept even gratitude, having dedicated all your acts to the indwelling God. This will purify you so that you shall be able to listen to the '*Soham* [That I am]' that your breath repeats every moment. *Soham* transmutes itself into *Om* when the distinction between He and I has dissolved in the process of *samadhi* [intense concentration achieved through meditation.]

Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 14, 'Music of the Spirit'

