

Ramayana for Every Man

In His discourse on the occasion of Ramanavami in 1975, Bhagavan Baba gave us an insight into the lessons taught by the great epic Ramayana.

The *Ramayana* is a guidebook, a sacred text, an inspiring scripture for every man in all lands, at all times, whatever his creed or condition might be. It imparts poise, balance, equanimity, inner strength, and peace. Peace is the best treasure, without which power, authority, fame, fortune are all dry and burdensome. Thyagaraja [ancient poet] has sung that there can be no happiness without inner peace.

To earn this peace and to be unshakably established in it, man must develop *abhyasa* (steady practice) and *vairagyam* (full detachment). From birth to death, man is the slave of habits and practices. One must examine these and rely more and more on those that lead him toward subjective joy rather than objective pleasure. Subjective joy can be acquired by harmony in the home, mutual co-operation among the members of the family and community, acts of service to others, and concern for the welfare and prosperity of the society in which one is living.

The *Ramayana* holds up the ideals to be pursued by the father, the son, the mother, the brother, the friend, the servant, the master, the teacher, the pupil, etc. The happy home is the basic cell of the national organism. It ensures a happy world, for mankind is one family, and if any one unit is sad or struggling in distress, how can the rest be safe or satisfied?

There is no object without fault or failing

Vairagyam (detachment) does not imply renunciation of family ties and fleeing into the loneliness of the jungle. It means our giving up the feeling that things are permanent and capable of yielding supreme joy. The mind plays tricks with man and believes that some things are good and some bad, some eternal and some transitory. You might have a plateful of nice eatables before you and they might appear to be delicious and fine, but if the cook announces that a lizard had fallen into the cooker when it was on fire and has been boiled alive, all the fascination for the food disappears in a trice! There is no object without fault or failing; there is no joy that is unmixed with pain; there is no act that is not tainted with egotism. So be warned and develop detachment, that will save you from grief.

The *Ramayana* instills this wise, valid, valuable detachment, or *tyaga* (sacrifice). Rama gladly journeys into the forest as an exile the moment He knows that His

father's wish was that He should do so. Remember, He was to be crowned emperor just that moment by the very same person who ordered Him to go into exile. While those who have full powers and claims renounce positions of authority in the *Ramayana*, we see today persons with no powers or claims clamoring to occupy positions of authority!

The lesson *Ramayana* teaches about Duty

Duty is God, that is the lesson the *Ramayana* teaches. The word duty is today used to indicate the methods by which one exercises his authority. No. Duty is the responsibility you have to respect and revere others and to serve them to the best of your ability. You claim to have the freedom to walk waving your walking stick around you, but the man coming behind has as much freedom to use the road as you have. To exercise your freedom so that you do not limit or harm the freedom of others—that is the duty that becomes worship.



When Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana reached the banks of the River Ganga, Sumantra, the aged Minister of the Court who had taken them so far in the Royal Chariot could not follow them; he was duty-bound to return to the Capital. So he turned back with tearful eyes. Guha rowed them across the river, they entered the forest and started walking in single file through the thick jungle—Rama, Sita in the middle, and Lakshmana following behind. Soon they reached [Sage] Valmiki's hermitage, where

the sage came forward to welcome them. Rama asked him to indicate a place where He could reside. Valmiki said, "We sages reside in You; You reside in us. Where else can I request You to reside? Though you have assumed this human form, You give yourself away by the beauty that shines in You."

Man is doomed when the evanescent overcomes him

Rama's beauty was the beauty of inner peace, the splendor that fills one when he is conscious of living in *dharma* (righteousness). *Ramayana* teaches also the need to give up the false identification with the body. When Rama saw Tara wailing over the corpse of [her husband] Vali, He gives her lessons on the evanescence of the body and the foolishness of identifying a person with that vehicle he uses for the purpose of his journey to divinity.

When desire for the evanescent overcomes man, he is doomed; he becomes distant from the goal. Consider Sita. She renounced everything that she thought would give her comfort in the palaces of her father and father-in-law and preferred to follow Rama into the forest. So she secured the proximity and presence of the Lord. But, alas, when she saw the false form of the golden deer, she yearned for it. She sent both Rama and Lakshmana after it, so that she might fondle it, feed it, and have it as a pet. What was the result of this fatal desire? She was forced to live far away from the Lord and to pine for Him in great anguish.

When Rama is installed in the heart, everything will be added unto you—fame, fortune, freedom, and fullness. Hanuman was a mere monkey leader until he met Rama. He was a minister in the court of his master. But when Rama gave him the commission to seek Sita and sent him, that is to say, when Rama was installed in his heart as guide and guardian, Hanuman became immortal as the ideal devotee.

The *Ramayana* has a deep undercurrent of significant meaning. Dasaratha means he who rides in a chariot of ten horses, that is to say *man*. He is tied up with three *gunas* (qualities), or three wives as in the *Ramayana*. He has four sons, the *purusharthas* [inherent values]—*dharma* [righteousness] (Rama), *artha* [wealth] (Lakshmana), *kama* [desires] (Bharatha), and *moksha* [liberation] (Shatrughna). These four aims of man have to be systematically realized, always with the last one, *moksha*, clearly before the eye. Lakshmana represents the *buddhi* (intellect) and Sita is truth. Hanuman is the mind, and it is the repository, if controlled and trained, of courage. Sugriva, Hanuman's master, is discrimination. With these to help him, Rama seeks truth and succeeds. That is the lesson of the epic for every man.

Ideals underlying the ancient culture of India

The culture of this land is based on the high ideals of righteousness enshrined in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (another epic), in both of which God has led mankind in the garb of man. There is a story of Alexander the Great that illustrates the glory of Indian culture. It seems Alexander used to go incognito to the villages around his camp in India to learn the habits and manners of the strange new land into which fate had brought him. One day he found a man pleading with another to accept a pot of gold, which the

other was refusing even to look at! He came to know that the pot of gold was discovered under the soil of the field purchased by one man from the other who refused to accept it. The buyer argued that he had bought only the land and was therefore not entitled to own the pot of gold. The seller said that he had no more right for anything found on or in the plot that he had sold.

Alexander watched this contest for some time; both did not yield. At last, the village elders were called in to decide the issue. Even as Alexander watched, the elders found a happy way out—the buyer's son shall marry the seller's daughter and the pot of the gold shall be given to the bride as dowry! Alexander felt elated at the heights to which human virtue could rise. He was also ashamed at his own adventurous ambition to conquer another's property by force of arms. The ideals underlying the ancient culture of India have to be studied and practiced by every Indian, so that the world might benefit from the great examples this can provide.

Turn your sight inside to purify and clarify

This day when you are celebrating the birth of Rama, you have to dedicate your activities to these ideals propounded in the life of Rama. The fact that you are alive this day is a blessing, for you can know of these ideals and also the means by which you can realize them in actual daily life. There are many who spend much time in mechanically reciting the name Rama or systematically reading the entire *Ramayana* according to a fixed timetable, or who worship the images of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman, as a daily ritual with pomp and pedantry. But like the person who puts a foot forward only to draw it back again, these persons do not progress at all though years might elapse. Without gaining purity of thoughts and intentions, compassion and the urge to serve, these outward expressions and exhibitions are but ways of cheating the society that applauds you as a great devotee. Your sight must become insight; it must be turned within and used to purify and clarify.

People talk glibly of *Sakshathkaara* (vision of the Divine), the vision that liberates. The Seer and the Seen have to merge and become One and experienced as One only, without a second. That is the *Sakshathkaara* that is worthwhile. You may earn the fruit of *tapas* (penance) in your hand. But unless you eat it, digest it, and make it part of your own nature and derive strength therefrom, you are not saved at all. Merge into the Divine that you really are; that is the consummation.

In order to reach this goal, you have to proceed far. First examine your present equipment; find out its defects, for example, whether it is damaged by egotism, greed, insincerity, waywardness, and sloth. For, with these faults it is difficult to concentrate on thoughts of God, either within or without. You must also cultivate the positive quality of *prema* (love), for the Embodiment of *Prema* can be realized only through *prema*. That is the message the *Ramayana* gives to all those who study it with a sincere desire to learn. That is the message I wish to give you today.

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Pray Intensely

The following is the transcription of a talk by Leonardo Pablo Gutter, a psychologist by profession, who has served in the Sai Organization for over three decades. He started the Latin American movement of the Sathya Sai International Organization and previously served as the Chairman of Zone 2, Latin America. Mr. Gutter is a founding member of the Sri Sathya Sai Trust of Argentina. He is a Member of the Prasanthi Council, and Co-Chairman of the Intellectual Property Committee and Co-Chair of the Community Adoption Committee of the Sathya Sai International Organization.

I offer my humble *pranams* [salutations] at the Divine lotus feet of our beloved master and Lord. As my English pronunciation is a disaster, I hope to be able to speak with the language of the heart and pray that you will listen to me with your hearts, and thus have a good communication.

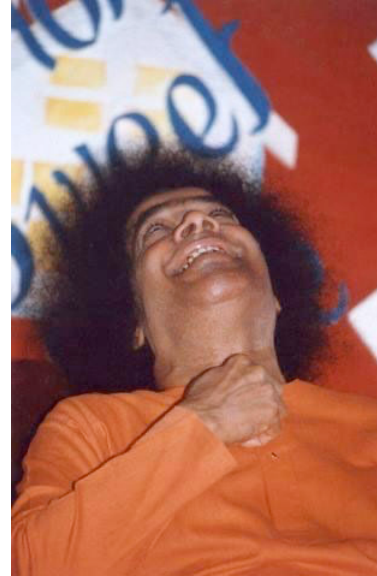
We are in the middle of this pandemic—the Covid crisis—we know when it started, we don't know when it's going to end. But we know that everything is God's will and thus it gives us an opportunity to intensify our *sadhana* (spiritual practices). They [the authorities] asked us to wash our hands more often and more intensely, but we as spiritual aspirants should also wash our hearts and minds more intensely and often. This is how we should spend time during the quarantine in our homes instead of watching TV or reading the newspapers.

We have read Swami's books and listened to His Divine discourses; through these and His life He taught us the practical way of living. We are very fortunate because we are alive when an *avatar* came to earth and incredibly fortunate because we are awakened onto the spiritual path.

I'll give you some points that I think are very important for all of us, and then I will narrate my experiences. We know that there is a *karmic* law that says that when you commit a mistake, even unknowingly, you have to pay the consequences. But if you know that the action is wrong, and you still do it, the reaction will be much stronger.

1. The first step to practical spirituality that Swami taught is—don't be angry, for anger is a sin against God.
2. The second step is to not be afraid because Swami is with us in our hearts. He always says, “I'm above you, below you, beside you, around you, and in your heart.” If Swami is with us, then why should we be afraid?
3. Third, Swami says always be smiling, spend your day smiling, and you will become a beacon of light to the world.
4. Fourth, acceptance is similar to the first point, we should gladly accept whatever happens to us. We have to understand that our lives are directed by Swami, so we have to accept whatever happens as His will.

5. Fifth, we should live with confidence and trust. There is an analogy: imagine that we are on the edge of a cliff and are falling. Quickly we pray to God and we cling to a rock, and then we pray more intensely and He throws us a rope. What must we do? We should hold the rope very tightly and have the confidence that Swami will save us, we *have* to live with faith and confidence in Swami.
6. Another important step is to change what we have to and do it right away. For example: When we had the first meeting of the Prasanthi Council, Swami invited us to His house. The five members of the Prasanthi Council were with Him and He very graciously served us coffee and biscuits. Then He spoke to us at length about the purpose of the organization and asked us to go to every corner of the world to spread His message. After the meeting we met again and we tried to summarize what Swami had told us; we made notes saying “we will try to...” Professor G. Venkataraman said, “don't put that word ‘try’; we should never say “will try”. Once we realize that something is wrong we should change it forever.”
7. Follow ABC—always be away from bad company. Always keep good company. Be careful of what you see, what you hear, what you think, and lead a disciplined life.
8. Another important point is that we should stop criticizing from this very moment both in our mind and heart. We should not criticize any human being; doesn't matter whether what he does is good or bad.
9. There are two qualities that are very important for the spiritual aspirant: forbearance and surrender. Forbearance is a very important quality where we tolerate and practice restraint no matter whatever happens to us. In spiritual aspects surrender means to adopt Swami's qualities and His point of view. In other words, we put on His glasses and try to live in such a way that we make ourselves worthy of Him.



We are all scared that we will die of this Corona Virus Pandemic, but we as spiritual aspirants should not be afraid of death. We have to remember that we all will die one day, and that is a very important tool for us.

This brings me to the story that I was asked to share: I was working for many years as a psychologist. One day a lady came to me with her daughter who was 12 years old and said that she thought her daughter was psychotic, and she asked me to check her. I asked her mother to leave and I interviewed her daughter, whom I found to be quite normal. She

said she could see spiritual beings as we see each other, she had extra sensory abilities. She remembered clearly who she was in her past life and how she had died. She also knew what was going to happen to her in this life.

Once I realized after two or three meetings that she was not psychotic at all but was a very evolved human being, I stopped treating her like a patient. I met with her family and asked for their permission to meet at their house. I started going to their house every Sunday to share tea with them, and I would carry some biscuits and spend two or three hours with them. This continued for three years and I became like a family member.

One day the girl said, “Jesus appeared to me and told me that we should meet next Thursday at 8 p.m.” So the next Thursday I went to their house and a couple of minutes before 8 my skin was tingling. The girl said, “Jesus is here.” The girl transformed into another person—she performed the mass and blessed the food. Then she wrote a sentence in a strange language on a piece of paper. I took it to a translator of old languages, and he could not understand what was written in it, but then he had the idea of putting the paper in front of a mirror and he could understand. It was Hebrew or Aramaic language, I don’t remember very well now which of the two. The message from Jesus to all the people that were in that meeting and I feel it applies to all of us too, was, “*You are not doing enough. When are you going to do enough, when will you wake up from the slumber of ages.*”

What is our *sadhana*? A service once or twice a week? Reading spiritual books? Spirituality is a way of living where we eradicate all bad qualities from our heart and our mind; we must be good and be even better day by day till we are like Swami.

Let me tell you how I came to Swami. I was the vice president of a Raja Yoga organization and I heard about Swami—there were no Sai centers in Argentina at that time. There was a lady in the organization who went to India and met Swami. She started to share with us her experiences, and so I decided to travel to India to meet with the spiritual master. A couple of days before leaving for India I had a very special dream. I was with a few people and Swami came into the room and I folded my hands. As He was near me I had the most incredible experience: suddenly a wave of energy started rising from my feet to my head, and as it rose each cell of my body exploded with happiness—I was in bliss. The energy came in waves and by the third wave even though I was fully conscious I felt like a dead body. I realized that I was pure consciousness within a dead body. At that time, Swami stopped walking through the people and started to leave us, but when He went to the door He looked back at me, saw me on the floor, came back and picked me up, and gave me three kisses in my heart.

After that I woke up and knew that He would always care for and guide me. After that dream I went to India to see the spiritual master of the Raja Yoga organization, but after three days I felt I could not stay with him any longer. I felt in my heart that I had to go and meet Swami, I found out that Swami was on a tour of South India, so I went to Madras and waited for Swami. The day He came was sunny, and I was seated in the Sundaram *ashram* with 50,000 people. I was seated in the first row. No one knew when Swami was going to arrive, but suddenly my heart started to beat very intensely and then

I saw Swami's car entering the Sundaram *ashram*. My heart recognized Him even before my mind could. At the first *darshan* He came and stood in front of me, and I looked at Him and said, "Swami I want to see You." What I meant was I want an interview. Telepathically I heard His voice over my head saying that you are seeing Me now.

I followed Him to Puttaparthi, and in those 30 days I received a lot of attention from Swami. He gave me *vibhuti* [holy ash], signed a photograph, took a letter every day—I thought that was normal till I realized my good fortune. One day in my room I decided to resign from the Raja Yoga organization as the vice president. I knew I had found the *Poornavatar* and I had to surrender to Him.

The next morning I went for *darshan* and Swami instead of doing the usual round came straight to me, stood in front of me, looked at me, and said, "Yes, this afternoon I will see you."

In the afternoon for *darshan* I was seated very far away and felt sad thinking that Swami will not be able to find me, or He will not remember that He had told me He was going to call me for an interview. Swami came out for *darshan*, and from the verandah He looked in my direction and pointing to me shouted, "You!" I stood up and ran to Him, and Swami said the most beautiful word "go." I asked Him if the Argentinian group could join and He said yes. After finishing *darshan* He invited us to the interview room and spoke to all of us. He approached me and repeated all that I was thinking since the morning that He was not going to remember, was not going to find me, etc. Then He came near me and whispered into my ear—something that I will never forget—He said, "Swami will never disappoint His devotees."

Swami will never disappoint us and it's important that we don't disappoint Him. We say 'His life is His message', but we should say, His message is the guiding point of our lives, then we will never disappoint Swami.

When I was leaving the *ashram*, I thought I will come back in September. I don't know how I thought that as I had to save enough money to buy a ticket to India and my finances were low. But I was so confident that while saying goodbye to people I told them don't miss me, I'll be back in September.

I went back to Argentina; in the middle of June a person came to my office and presented a proposal to do a live show for children in Ecuador with the characters I was representing. As part of the deal, he agreed to pay for my round-trip ticket and stay in Ecuador. I agreed and went with him for one month. The day before my ticket back to Argentina was expiring, I felt deep in my heart that no one knew about Swami in Ecuador and that I had to stay back and try to spread His message. I went to the airline office and asked them if instead of the next day I could fly on their next flight that was four days later. They would not agree.

Finally I said, "I want to stay, please tell me a way around." She said that the only way out was to convert it to an open ticket for one year and then stay as long as I wanted. So

for \$100 I changed the ticket. I realized that I had no idea how to speak about His manifestation and His message. At that time there were no Sai centers in Ecuador, and no one knew about Swami. Suddenly I remembered a brother from the Raja Yoga organization in Argentina who was living in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. I got his phone number and called him, and I explained to him what I wanted to do. He asked me to come to Quito; I finished my tour with the live show in Guayaquil, another city of Ecuador, bought a ticket and went to Quito. A couple of days later, a meeting was organized and I spoke about Swami for more than one hour. After my speech, a priest who was in charge of that organization where the talk was came up to me and asked me to write an article about Sai Baba that he would publish in his magazine along with Swami's photo.

I gave the talk on Friday, my flight back to Buenos Aires was next Tuesday, and on Saturday a friend invited me to a classical music concert where I met his friend who invited me for lunch the next day. He was a very rich man, a former ambassador of Ecuador to Israel, and he was not interested in spirituality at all. At lunch he asked me why I was in Ecuador and I started to speak about Swami. I spoke for about 10 minutes and suddenly he stopped me and said, "Would you come with me to India, I will buy your tickets also." Before I knew it, the ticket was bought, and we were in Whitefield on September 2nd.

Later I discovered that he had a malignant tumor and there was no cure for it. When he heard me speak about Swami's healing powers, he decided to take his chance to visit Swami. We rented a place and it had very few facilities and he complained but went for *darshan* daily. On Sunday they sing *bhajans* all day long; after morning *darshan* people leave, and only those who want to remain stay. He decided to stay, but I left. When I came back in the afternoon for *darshan*, I sat beside him and he was crying and sobbing. I asked him to calm down and he told me, "Swami was just here in front of me and He asked me to open my mouth. He put His hand inside my mouth, took out something and said, 'Your cancer is cancelled.' No one saw Swami, but he felt His presence.

A couple of days later we went back to Ecuador and he went to a clinic that said the cancer was not there. He penned down the story and what he had seen in the *ashram* in the form of a pamphlet, published 10,000 copies, and distributed them all over Ecuador at no cost. I wanted to be in the *ashram* in September and I wanted to spread Swami's avatarhood in Ecuador, and both my wishes were fulfilled.

In Brazil there is a spiritual movement called Spiritism—they believe in the ancestors and spirits they invoke. The priest of the church was concerned about the growth of the Sai movement and decided to send two people to India to see if Sai had spiritual powers, clairvoyance, etc. They wanted to prove that Swami was a fraud. When [one of] the gentlemen came back, at the first lecture that he gave to about 5,000 people he said that he went to India to the *ashram* and the whole place is surrounded by angels. All the negativity of the people stays outside. When Swami speaks it's like pink rain of energy falling on everybody.

On my fourth trip to Swami, as I was walking to my room after dinner, suddenly a thought came to my mind—if Swami was really the *Poornavata*r, if He was really Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu all in one. I went to my room, I felt very bad that I couldn't speak about Him being the *Poornavata*r if I was not a 100% sure. I felt that Swami would solve this doubt, and my mind wondered what proof I could ask from Him. So, an idea came to my mind. I thought that I would ask Swami to materialize a watch for me as proof that He was the *Poornavata*r of this age. I asked Him for a watch for two reasons, first I had never seen Him materialize a watch, but the most important reason was that I had a very nice watch that was never on time, sometimes it was slow and sometime fast, but as I like it I never took the decision to buy a new one.

I went to sleep and in the middle of the night I had a dream with Swami. He appeared in my dream and told me all about my watch, that I liked it, but I wanted to change it but did not change it, so He told me that He was going to solve my problem. He said, your watch has disappeared. The dream was so intense that I woke up, and the first thing I did was to try to get hold of my watch that was near my mattress. So I stretched my hand to reach for it, but the watch was not there. I stood up and switched on the lights, but the watch was nowhere in the room. The doors were locked from inside so no one could have come in and taken it. I felt that as I had challenged Swami He was punishing me, and instead of giving me a watch He took away mine.

Next morning I went for *darshan*. Swami called the Argentina group for an interview. There in the middle of the interview He created a watch and it looked as though He was giving it to me, but it was for the student who was just behind me—He has an incredible sense of humor.

I remained in the *ashram* for 20 days more and on the last morning *darshan* Swami came up to me and instead of asking me when I was going to leave, He asked at what time are you leaving. I said 'after *darshan*', Swami. He said, 'first go in for the interview'. In interview room He asked me the time. But before I was able to answer Him, He moved up the sleeve of my shirt and said, "I know, I know your watch has disappeared. He spoke exactly the same words He had used in the dream, the same expression on His face, proving that it was He who had taken the watch from my room that night. Then He asked me, "How is your mad monkey mind?" I replied, "It's very bad, Swami." He said it's not so bad and He materialized a watch and put it on my hand. He said, "I will give it a special power, whenever you have a bad thought your watch will stop." He continued speaking and after a while when I looked at my watch it had stopped. I screamed 'Swami, it has stopped!' and He said, I know, because you had these thoughts, and He quickly narrated the bad thoughts that I had had.

In Argentina some years later, even though Swami gave me full protection, some robbers took the watch. On my next trip to India I told Swami what had happened. He said, "I know, I know." I asked Him if He could give back the watch to me. He said, "First do your duty then I will give it to you." Since that moment I wondered what was my duty?

I needed a watch, and I did not know when and how I was going to perform my duty according to Swami's standards, so I decided to buy a new watch. I bought a Rolex during one of my trips for work to USA.

Some years later, I was visiting a client and when I was walking back to the car a young boy grabbed my arm from behind and took my Rolex and ran away. I ran behind him trying to get back my watch, but another boy was waiting for him on a motorcycle and they both escaped. So I went to the car and went home.

Next morning, I went to the prayer room to meditate before going to work. After I had finished my meditation but just before chanting the *Shanti mantra*, the whole scene of the robbery of my watch came to my mind. A prayer came from my heart asking Swami to give back the Rolex that was stolen the day before. I said to Him, You are omnipotent, You can give back the watch if you want! Then I realized how foolish my request was. I realized that I was asking Him to give me back the watch because it was a Rolex, and I felt ashamed. So I asked Him for forgiveness after I realized that I only have to ask Him for the most important things. I started chanting the *Shanti mantra* and just after the last *Shanti*, I heard the lady who was working in my house calling out for me saying, "Sir, sir, your watch, your watch!" She showed my Rolex watch that was stolen the day before in the city.

It was in the pot that I used to water the plants in my house. Swami, who is the master of time, materialized it just when I asked Him for it and a thought came to my mind that He was watering my *faith* in Him. When I put it back in my wrist, I felt the same vibration that I felt when Swami had materialized it for me the first time.

Our duty is twofold: our first duty is to realize our true self, and the second is to help as many people as possible to advance in their spiritual awakening. We should work with sincerity, intensity, and purity. The scripture says awake, awake, awake, and don't stop till you reach the goal.

I bought a ticket to go to India, but three days before leaving I had an accident and the bone in my nose broke into two pieces. After X-ray they found that I had a double fracture, but the doctor said I did not need surgery as the bones were aligned, so they gave me painkillers. It was very painful; but I thought since I have to suffer I might as well suffer in India. I took the flight, but it seems that my *karma* was not over because the air conditioning in the flight gave me a cold—imagine blowing your nose when you have a fractured nose.

However, I reached the *ashram*; Swami came out for *darshan* and came up to me and looked at me and called me for an interview. In the room I sat very quietly near His chair and suddenly I saw Him looking at me from the corner of His eye. He smiled and suddenly He got hold of my nose and then He started to shake my head with such intensity for 15 or 20 seconds. Then He released my nose and continued to speak to everybody as if nothing had happened. Later I realized that my nose was completely healed and my cold was gone.

On another occasion, I was on a trip to seven Latin American countries to attend Sai meetings, public meetings, and select office bearers for the organization of different countries' coordinating committees. My ticket was for the seven countries and then for a business trip to the United States. My first destination was Bogota, the capital of Colombia. I took the plane from Argentina and had a stopover in Miami for 11 hours. It is a long time; but I meditated, had breakfast, visited a store or two, and decided to check-in at 2 p.m. for the 4 p.m. flight. When I reached the counter, I realized that the travel bag from my bag—that had my passport, money, credit cards, and the ticket—was missing. I did not know what to do, I went crazy and ran to the lost and found first and then to the places I had visited. I was exhausted, so I said to Swami, "What am I going to do?" I remembered how Swami says, "Always ask with intensity." Swami gives us the secret of how to pray to Him, we have to do it with intensity, till He agrees to give us what we want or till we give up and accept what He gives us.

I needed privacy to ask Him with intensity, and I thought that the most private place would be a bathroom. So I went to the first bathroom I found in the Miami airport, I went inside, closed the door, sat on the toilet, and asked Swami with full intensity of my heart and pleaded with Him for 45 minutes non-stop. I was exhausted, I had no energy and I was ready to accept my destiny of going back to the embassy to ask for a temporary passport to be able to return to Argentina. I came out of the bathroom and as I closed the door there was a lady looking straight into my eyes, and in her hands was "the plastic folder". She said, "Sir is this yours?" I said, "Yes, yes." I looked inside the bag to check if everything was there—as per my monkey mind's suggestion—and of course everything was inside. When I looked up after hardly five seconds, the lady had vanished. There was no way anybody could have run so fast. This is how Swami taught me how to ask Him with intensity.

The most incredible experience I had with Swami was after He had left His physical body. When Swami left His physical body, I was in Mexico on a Sai Youth Conference, so I couldn't go to India. I thought of going to India for *Guru Poornima* in time for the opening of the *Maha Samadhi*. Before I left Argentina, I had a Swami dream; I saw that the floor was cemented and on top of it was a stone on which His body lying and was covered with cement. I was standing near His body and crying profusely, and I could feel a lot of pain in my heart. I touched His body. It arose, and He put one arm on my shoulder. Then He pulled my face near his mouth and He whispered in my ear (I could feel the warmth of His breath) and I woke up.

In India during the visit I was selected to speak on behalf of the overseas countries when the *Maha Samadhi* was unveiled on *Guru Poornima* day. In my speech I recounted the words Swami had whispered in my ears: "Swami said that He had not gone anywhere, He was everywhere and at all times."

I will share a story about a doctor in El Salvador whom I met when I went there for meetings and to select the office bearers. One day I was with a group of devotees and one of them was a well-known doctor who shared the following experience: After his medical

studies in America he was doing his residency in the United States and was selected to work in a hospital in a remote place. One day when he was going on a trip his jeep broke down in the middle of the jungle. As it was getting dark, he decided to leave the jeep and start walking, but soon it was completely dark and he could hardly see anything.

Suddenly he heard a lot of noise, and some drunk people holding machetes and screaming approached him. He was completely scared and thought they were going to kill him. He asked God with intensity for His help, and just then a vehicle appeared and the driver asked him to jump in. Without him saying a word the driver took him to the house where he was scheduled to stay. When doctor got off the Jeep, he asked the driver if he could give him some money. He refused the money, and when the doctor asked him his name the person said, 'call me your midnight friend' and he left. Many years later, the doctor was in a bookstore and saw a book with a photograph of the driver on the cover. That driver was none other than Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Of course, the doctor became a Sai devotee.

Swami knows everything because, as He says, He is in our hearts, we are Him, and we and He are one. He is everywhere at all times, so brothers and sisters I hope you will experience Him more and more each day. He has shown us the way to wake up and live His message in every aspect of our life. We should meditate, go to Sai Centers, do service, and be spiritual in every moment of our lives. Don't harm anyone, be helpful, and don't be afraid. If we follow His teachings, we can be excellent recipients of His Divine love and He will shine through us.

I offer to you my gratitude to let me speak with you and share the Divine experiences that Swami granted me. I hope that all of you will feel the Divine presence in your lives each day more. I give you all my love in Sai.

Poem:

From the Form to the Formless

Almost half a century ago, in the midst of my earthly life was a call,
That persisted doggedly causing an uneasiness in my monotony,
I listened, listened intently with rapt attention, an ethereal call,
That was above my mortal chains of family and entwined bond,
That set to naught the human ties of normalcy, it made me search,
Search for books that held sacred teachings of this wondrous Form.

Gazing at the Form sent shudders of thrill through my entire body,
My long-lost soul trembled with joy at this discovery, a waking,
From a slumber that human birth firmly tends to hold in its grip,
From a slumber that knows not the true goal of one's human fate,

I woke up, casting away the deep illusion gathered through births,
I decided with my consort in joy to search for that beloved Form.

I remember the day when all of us longing to see that holy Form,
With all travel plans underway smoothly achieved as we alighted,
In that sacred grounds, an oasis of serenity in a far remote valley,
Tucked away from maddening crowds and dense populous places,
The abode of peace stood rising in its majesty of supreme splendor,
Joyfully housed in its lodgings, we joined the devotees for *darshan*.

As we sat in orderly lines, bathed in the warmth of the tropical sun,
My daughters by my side while my dear consort and son opposite,
Looking around, I saw thousands thronged, varied and happy truly,
Mothers and fathers, babes and children, rich and poor, all present,
With one fixed mind, one goal, to see the glory of the Form, Lord Sai,
Lost in thoughts of the events that led us here, I stirred, saw the Form.

At the pull of my seven-year old offspring, I looked where she pointed,
And saw at a distance a sacred sight, the holy Form draped in orange,
With a head of hair that defies description, gliding forth amongst us,
With a countenance fully radiant, more than the glow of million suns,
With divine love that embraced all those present, love beyond barriers,
He came, walked, smiled, touched, blessed us all with His mystical signs.

As He approached me with a gaze so piercing that flung my soul open,
I sat transfixed, mute and empty, struck with silence, I gazed in awe,
Time stood still, space annihilated, mind fully emptied, I alone existed,
Trees around stopped blowing, babes sat fixed in their mothers' laps,
Nature was motionless, the sun in the sky marveled at the scene below,
Sitting there immersed in the energy radiating from Him, I felt peaceful.

Lord Sai in His brilliant Form had entrapped us all in His magical net,
Surrendering to His Lotus Feet, we felt in Him the source and origin,
A Divine *guru*, a compassionate *avatar*, descended to save humanity,
Lord of Lords to lead us from darkness to light, from sin to security,
Our annual trips to the sacred Abode of Peace in that far-away valley,
Filled us with a peace beyond human ken, a joy that knew no bounds.

His teachings taught us how to cleanse our inner self, free from foes,
The six enemies that gripped us firm, then to fill pure place with love,
He stressed to us, look within the divine spark that shines in one and all,
He taught us how to find unity in diversity and to find joy in serving all,
When laid low with life's blows, He gave us solace with warm wisdom,
He appeared in our dreams to draw us closer to His divine proximity.

The years rolled on, lulled in the lap of the Divine Mother, we grew,
Grew in spiritual maturity, dependent on the Sai Form, we survived,
Away or near His presence, with His Form flashing every moment,
With Sai Ram ever on our lips, we ably managed life's meanderings,
One day, rudely snatched from this pleasant Sai existence, we wept,
Sai had taken on Himself a physical ailment, so severe and alarming.

The climax reached that awful Sunday, Easter Sunday, nine years ago,
He, our Lord, our Beloved Sai, our serene Swami planning every move,
Left us all, spiritual orphans, as He left the body, the dear Form He took,
Yes, a human form to walk amongst us, to teach the path of Divine love.
Lying resplendent even in that lifeless state, nations all over mourning,
He still shone with the splendor that He carried all along, a smiling Savior.

Left alone to fend our way with assurance of His presence still firm in us,
We pondered, why did our Divine Master leave ere His promised time?
Based on His teachings, understanding the essence, go beyond the form,
With spiritual maturity it dawns on us to seek the formless within us all,
Why just the Form when it is the mere visible expression of the essence?
An essence, the supreme consciousness that took a form to be with us.

Blessed are we in an age when the Creator Himself chose to be with us,
Chose to lead us back to our native state of purity, to our own divine self,
With His teachings embedded deep in us, He said, go beyond the Form,
Don't be deluded, within you lies the essence, formless and so blissful,
The supreme energy took a Form to show us the formless, creative core,
With this spiritual truth fixed at my life's sunset, I relaxed to look within.

~ Kanaga Ranganathan, July 18, 2020

Lessons from the Ramayana

*Raghava Krishna is an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute
of Higher Learning in Prasanthi Nilayam.*

The great Indian epic *Ramayana* has been divided into *Kandas* or parts. Each *Kanda* has a great specialty, but of these *Sundara Kanda* has been given much importance. This *Kanda* describes how Hanuman was successful in finding Mother Sita. This incident holds the basis for a very important analogy on the spiritual path. Before Hanuman leaves in search of Sita, he realizes the depth of Rama's grief. Rama was facing grief due to separation from Sita. He knows Hanuman's capabilities. So before

Hanuman leaves in search of mother Sita, Sri Rama pours out all His grief. He not only wants Hanuman to find Sita but also asks him to tell Sita that He would come and rescue.

When Hanuman reaches Lanka, he assures the same to Sita. Sita, too, pours out her grief and says, “Lanka has been definitely built of gold. It has all the pleasures of the three worlds; still there is no happiness. I am surrounded by *rakshashis* [female demons]. There is no clue as to when they will attack me. I can’t stay here any longer. S, please tell Sri Rama to come and save me as soon as possible.”

The important analogy is that the relationship between Sri Rama, Hanuman, and Sita is similar to that of a relationship between the almighty God, a teacher, and the student.

God Himself has created the world but is not happy at being separated from the student. So He sends the *guru* to the pupil to assure protection. The student is in the world filled with pleasures and is a prey to the *rakshasas* (demons in the form of evil temptations). So He asks the *guru* to inform the Lord of his grief and save him from the world. The *guru* in turn comes to the Lord and prays to Him on behalf of the pupil for protection. The Lord as promised saves the pupil.

In the *Ramayana*, for Sita, Hanuman acted as the *guru*—to understand, to share, to guide, and to assure. For us we have the Lord Himself as the *guru*. We must therefore realize our good fortune. If we pray with sincerity and love, the Lord will save us. It is high time we speed up our journey toward the Lord with sincerity and love. Why to speed up? Every one of us realizes that once we lose an opportunity it cannot be regained easily.

An incident from the *Yuddha Kanda* of *Ramayana* will prove my point. Sri Rama says to Lakshmana, “O Lakshmana, let us go and meet Ravana. He is on his deathbed.” Lakshmana and the others are taken aback. Where is the need for Sri Rama to meet Ravana? Sri Rama explains to Lakshmana, “Ravana is a great scholar and had immense valor. Today he is suffering on his deathbed. Let us know what mistake has brought him to this condition.”



Lakshmana thought that Sri Rama was joking. Sita's abduction brought Ravana to his deathbed. When Sri Rama put the same question to Ravana, he, too, was surprised, but, thought a while and replied, "O Rama! I have committed two great mistakes in my life. First one was postponing the good deed and the second one is performing in advance a bad one. I always wanted to build a path to heaven from Lanka so that all who die in Lanka may go to heaven. I postponed it and today I am dying, and I will not be able to go to heaven. I knew wholeheartedly that abducting Sita was wrong, still I did it in haste. I did not pay heed to Vibhishana's words. Today it has brought about my end."

We must note the two mistakes so that we need not suffer afterwards. Let us not postpone doing good things. We say, "I will be good from tomorrow." No, let us be good from now. Let us not make the mistake of losing this opportunity. I will now share a small experience of mine.

Once in Brindavan, Swami was asking a particular question every day to the brothers working in the hospital. The question was: "How many operations have been completed?" There was no reply. One day, I said to myself, "If Swami asks me this question, what reply will I give?" I did not know the answer. Swami came and said, "It is not important to perform an operation, we have to perform an operation on ourselves, so that the bad in us is removed and the good increases." He walked a few steps and asked, "How many did you do?" I did not answer. I pray to Swami that the next time when Swami asks the same question I have an answer.

Source: *Sai Nandana 2005 (80th Birthday Offering)*

Q&A

WITH BHAGAVAN

Swami's Subtle Teaching

Hislop: What is the most subtle point of Swami's teaching, and then in the circle around that point, what are the things to do in order to realize that most subtle aspect of His teaching?

Sai: The most subtle aspect of Swami's teaching is love. The circle around that subtle point, in order to realize it, are the spiritual practices such as meditation, repetition of the name of the Lord, talking with good people, directing the mind away from harmful thoughts, and so on. In themselves, these spiritual practices are of no value. The only thing of real value is love itself. In dealing with people, Swami looks to the good and ignores the bad so as to intensify the good.

Swami's teaching in a way is like one going into a store to buy sugar. One looks at the sugar and buys the sugar and does not bother to become acquainted with all the other details present in the circumstances of the store: the history and character of the storekeeper, his personal relationship with other people, his personal looks, whether he is tall or short or old or young, and so on. The central part of Swami's teaching in regard to living in the world is to see in other people that essential quality that is God and to love that quality and not be bothered by all the other actions, qualities, misbehavior, characteristics of the person. The love of God in the person with whom one is dealing is spiritual love and not physical love.

[This does not refer to] the worldly nature of the being in whom one sees the Lord, and it does not mean that one condones or admires or does not scold the misbehavior of the worldly part of that person. Even though one sees and loves and really pays attention to God in that person; nevertheless that person should be scolded, his attention called to his failures and misbehaviors, and so on. And such is not really cruelty. The factor there is the intention; just as in a street fight amongst laborers, one man might scratch the hand of another man with a penknife and cause no wound at all, and yet the police would come and take that man to jail.

Whereas in a nearby hospital, a surgeon might take a sharp knife and cut a five-inch gap into a man's body in order to remove an appendix, and that action would be highly rewarded. So in one case the doctor is severely wounding a person and getting praise; and in the other case, a laborer merely scratching a person gets a jail sentence. The whole thing is the intention of the person. Swami sometimes finds it advisable to operate on a person, that is to wound that person, to say something to that person that may hurt him, or to reveal the bad points of that person instead of just looking at the good points. But when Swami does that, the intention behind it is to help the person and not hurt or harm the person.

Swami then turned to Hislop and speaking directly to him said: It is perfectly all right to ask all these questions and clear all your doubts; you are examining Swami and Swami is giving the answers. But when this is all finished, the next time around, Swami will be the examiner and you will be examined, and you will have to have the right answers in mind and in heart. Now, all doubts should be emptied so that tomorrow Swami can fill your being with something new, a new oil to bathe the skin, so to speak.

Hislop: One finds himself so faulty there seems to be no possibility of being of any help to others.

Sai: People often think they have to be perfect themselves before they can help anyone else, but such is not the case. If one has a fault or certain weakness, one can point out to others the same weakness that is in oneself. And if those people reply, 'Before you tell me how to behave, why don't you behave?' then one could say that he knows the pain of misbehaving in this fashion and he hopes that the other could

avoid the same trouble that oneself was experiencing. In that way it would help to overcome the difficulty in oneself, and while that was being overcome ten more people would be helped.

For example, suppose a man had walked along a road covered with thorns that had pierced and torn his feet with great pain and suffering to himself. At the other side of the thorns he sits down to rest, and then sees other people approaching the thorny area. Now, should he beckon them on to come across the thorns and endure the same suffering that he has endured? Surely that would not be a good deed. Or should he call to them and warn them that the thorns are there and they should try to find some other way of getting across and reaching their destination?

If a person has the humility to recognize the fault in himself and admit that fault, then others will be helped thereby and oneself will be helped. To pretend that one is perfect, to tell people how to behave, pretending that oneself behaves in that perfect fashion, is a great sin, not because it harms the other people, but because it seriously harms oneself.

Source: *Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

Thought of the MONTH

Overcome Four Blemishes

Man has to cleanse his mind of four blemishes before he can overcome the disaster that is fast overtaking him. They are *ashraddha*, *krodha*, *avishwasam*, and *chinta* (want of steady application in work, anger, faltering faith in oneself, and a perpetual sense of worry).

First *shraddha* (steady interest) and application in the discharge of one's duty. It is said that the person endowed with *shraddha* gains *jnana* (wisdom). How can *jnana* be won by half-hearted dedication? Youth today are very flighty; they are carried away by fantasies, whims, and fancies. They are reluctant to dive deep into the truth of themselves or the outer world. They run after the sheets of water they perceive in mirages; can glow-worms light a lamp? Frivolities and fancies cannot grant peace and happiness. What is really worthwhile has to be discovered first; then steady effort must follow to gain them.

Krodha (anger) is deadly poison. It affects others by its fumes, manifested through the eye, the tongue, and the hands. The seed of a poison tree sprouts into a poisonous plant, and when it becomes a big tree, its leaves, flowers, and fruits will

be certainly poisonous. So, too, the person addicted to anger can only emanate poison through thought, word, and deed. An angry thought is like a pebble thrown into the calm waters of the *Manasa-Sarovar* (mind-lake) inside man. It creates a circular effect that spreads through the entire lake. Anger is very injurious to the progress of youth. Strive by all means to prevent the poison entering your mental make-up. Cultivate love, kindness, the spirit of *seva* [service], and encourage all thoughts of co-operation with others. See the divinity in each one, as you must see it in your own selves.

The third handicap is *avishwasam* (weak faith in oneself). Now you have faith in the body and its appurtenances and not in the inner motivator, the charioteer. That is why faith falters when some minor calamity happens. Contemplate on the impermanence of wealth, fame, worldly friendship, etc. Youth today have faith in unreal, transient, momentary pleasures, and pastimes. They have no knowledge of the eternal, the changeless, the ever blissful. Precious years of life are thus wasted in worthless pursuits. Cultivate faith in the value of *seva*; believe that love can overcome hatred. Have faith in righteousness and the moral life. This is called *dharma* (righteousness) since *dhara* means that which is worn, that which envelops, etc. Do not stray into wrong paths enticed by sensual desires and plans for self-aggrandizement.

The next attitude to overcome is *chinta* (the habit of sliding into worry and despair). Once this weed takes root in the mind of man, it assumes many forms to assert its hold. Every stage of life is fraught with anxiety; every step in the progress of man is a cause for worry. In fact, birth, death, old age, illness, every one of these multiply worries of their own. How to get sleep is a cause for worry; how to get up from the bed is another worry; the examination causes worry. But these are matters that are not essential. They need not cause so much heart-burning as the problem of removing the fundamental error in the thought process—the ignoring of the Divine that inspires and guides you always and forever.

Jnana (knowledge) is usually associated with two ways of acquisition—the worldly or the material and the spiritual or Brahman path. The worldly path is like a pair of scissors. It cuts knowledge into pieces. The Brahman path is like a needle—it makes the separate parts into One and indivisible. The *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) must be aware of both. When you declare a person to be a *jnani* (liberated person), he has passed through these two stages.

Divine Discourse at the Brindavan Campus Hostel on December 7, 1978

To submit articles or photos, please email them to "editor@SaiSarathi.com."