

Through Self-Enquiry to Self-Realization

*The entire cosmos is governed by God
God is governed by Truth
Truth is governed by the supremely wise
Such a noble one is equally Divine*

The entire cosmos is subject to the sway of the Divine. The cosmic Divine Lord is governed by Truth. That Truth is governed by a supremely wise person ("*uttama*"). Such a noble being is the very embodiment of God ("*Uttamo para Devata*").

God is the embodiment of time. Time is eternal. It has no end. It is boundless. As against this eternal time, the life-span of man is very limited. Because of his limited time-span, man is bound by the passage of time in terms of hours, days, months, and years. All the latter are by their intrinsic nature transient. The Lord declares: "I am the Eternal Time" ("*Akshya Kaalah*"). It is indeed a pity that this eternal time should be considered as a fleeting moment. Man's actions are governed by the change in time and circumstances.

In the procession of years, the present new year is known as "*Srimukha*". The past year was known as "*Angirasa*". To bid farewell to "*Angirasa*" and to welcome "*Srimukha*" are considered a natural action among common people. Not realizing the infinite and sacred nature of time, men set bounds to time and bid farewell to one year and extend welcome to a new year. In this context, all actions of men appear to be artificial.

On this day when one person meets another, he greets the other with the words, "Happy New Year!" The other man replies, "The same to you!" These words have no meaning at all. If for one moment on one day one wishes someone happiness, will he secure happiness? People's entire lives are consumed by artificial behavior.

Time and mind

Time is moving fast like a stormy gale. Man's life is melting away every moment like a block of ice. Months and years are rolling past in the 'wheel of time'. Everything around is undergoing change, but man's mind and intellect (*buddhi*) remain unchanged. Years are passing before our very eyes. How many eras are disappearing in our own epoch!

Eras come and go, epochs roll on, but man's mind remains as before. What can the greeting "Happy New Year" mean in the context of such a human predicament? It appears to be a scene in a drama on the worldly stage.

The practice of offering worship and revering elders (on New Year's day) also appear to be artificial acts in a play on life's stage. When the source of all happiness is within you, if you go about seeking happiness from others, it is unnatural. If you desire to elevate yourself and attain a higher level, you have to adopt the appropriate means. This does not mean trying to fly like birds. What you aspire for is liberation (*mukti*). The *Vedas* declare: Liberation will not fall from the sky. Nor is it to be found in the nether world or on the earth. It can be got only by the elimination of desires that constitute knots in the heart.

To take an illustration from daily life: Bits of paper or pieces of cotton float in the air because they are lighter than air. Man is unable to go up spiritually because he allows himself to be weighed down by the heavy loads of his possessiveness and pride (*mamakara* and *ahamkara*). Man is becoming heavier every day. His desires are getting insatiable. His selfishness and self-interest are reaching the skies. How can a heavy-loaded mind and overburdened senses help man to attain liberation? This is impossible.

A man seeking liberation cannot attain it by merely revering elders or practicing meditation. These are formal acts. By these artificial means one cannot realize the sacred, subtle, and boundless experience of the Divine.



Liberation and self-realization

"*Moksha*" or liberation is not a specific place. Nor is it something that can be got from any preceptor or other person. To realize one's own true self is liberation. Obsessed with the external world, preoccupied with the acquisition of external objects, man's life is becoming more and more burdensome every day. Only by getting rid of these burdens can one hope to ascend spiritual heights.

Spirituality is associated today with exercises like attending religious discourses, reciting *shlokas*, counting beads, and conducting *bhajans*. It is imagined that by these means liberation can be secured. This is not real spirituality. At the outset, the animality in man has to be got rid of. Getting rid of the animal qualities, entering into the human estate, man should embark on the realization of the Divine.

In every man, animality, humanness, and divinity are present. Today what is happening is the growth of the animal tendencies in man. As a consequence, qualities like kindness, compassion, and sympathy are not to be seen anywhere. Selfishness and self-interest are animal qualities. An animal is only concerned with external objects. It has no internal vision or any power of discrimination. Man, however, is endowed with internal vision as well as the power of discrimination.

The spirit of enquiry

Man, unlike an animal, is endowed with a mind that confers on him the power to enquire into the how and why of things ("*vicharana shakti*"). Man, therefore, should undertake an enquiry into what is permanent and what is temporary, what is truth and what is false, what is bad and what is good. Only when man transcends the animal tendencies can he become truly human. Then his divinity will manifest itself in due course. This divinity is inherent in man. It is not got from outside from anyone. It has to manifest itself from within.

Man's inherent quality is divinity. It has to be realized by him by his own efforts. The *atmic* principle is not derived from an external "force". It is based on an internal "source".

Man should be engaged in perpetual enquiry. He has to realize his humanness. Because of the influence of the *Kali* age, humanness has declined. Wickedness, immorality, cruelty, and other vices are growing beyond all limits. Men are behaving worse than animals. They are harassing the innocent and the ignorant. They are behaving as demons.

To get rid of the demonic qualities, man has to embark on self-enquiry: "Who am I?" Scriptural scholarship is of no avail in this enquiry. *Atmic* bliss (*atma-ananda*) can be realized only by recognizing that the same spirit dwells in all beings. This realization can be got only by spiritual enquiry. Cramming the *shlokas* of the *Bhagavad Gita* will not rid a man of his sorrow. The transformation must take place within.

Kalaha Yuga

Today is celebrated as *Yugadi* because it is the first day in the first month of the new year, marking the beginning of the spring season (*Vasanta Ritu*).

Of the four *Yugas*—*Krita*, *Treta*, *Dwapara*, and *Kali*—the present *yuga* is called *Kali yuga*. In truth, it is "*Kalaha Yuga*", the Age of Discord. There is discord everywhere—between husband and wife, between preceptor and pupil, and in every other

relationship. What is the reason for this discord? The absence of mutual trust. No one trusts another. As a result, hatred and bitterness are growing in the social, ethical, political, economic, and every other field. There is discord even in the scientific field. The lack of trust has blinded people toward each other.

People have belief in things that should not be believed, but do not believe that which they ought to believe. People are ready to believe in the statements of the author of an almanac or the predictions of a parrot kept by a pavement astrologer or a roadside palmist but will not believe in the sacred pronouncements of the *Vedas*.

The Vedas have declared: "*Tat Twam Asi*", "*Aham Brahmasmi*", "*So-Ham*" ("Thou art that", "I am Brahman", "I am That"). The *Vedic* dictum "*So-Ham*" is confirmed by the inhaling and exhaling that go on in everyone. But no one believes in it. People believe in the films, in novels, and newspapers and many other sources. But one does not believe in the truth of his own self (*atma*). As a result, man is growing weaker and losing his humanness because of the lack of faith in his own self. A man without self-confidence (*atma-vishvasa*) is no man at all. Without self-confidence, how can he get self-satisfaction? Lacking self-satisfaction, how can he hope for self-realization? This is impossible.

Hence, the mansion of self-realization has to be erected on the foundation of self-confidence, with the walls of self-satisfaction and the ceiling of self-sacrifice. Confidence is at the root of it all. Live with faith and confidence.

Vishnupriya

The New Year day begins with nature shining in all her glory, decked with flowers, with the tender leaves rustling in the wind and the cuckoo calling to its mate in mellifluous notes. The spring (*Vasanta Ritu*) has come in all its beauty and freshness. It is the season when nature presents her most beautiful and glorious appearance. The beauty of the spring season has been dubbed "*Vishnupriya*" (Beloved of the Lord). Indeed, it is not merely dear to the Lord, it is the very form of the Lord. There are well-known sayings: The Lord loves adornment ("*Alankaaro Vishnupriyah*"). The sun loves salutation ("*Namaskaro Arunapriyah*") The Lord loves the advent of spring when every tree is in bloom.

Today we are welcoming this spring. But it is not enough to greet it on one day. Some people figure the position of the planets at the commencement of the New Year and try to predict the shape of things to come. The New Year should not be judged by its name, *Srimukha*. It is well known that there are many who believe their names. "*Sri*" means happiness, honor, and auspiciousness. The year makes its appearance with a happy, respectful, and auspicious face. But the prospects for the year are the very opposite of what the name suggests.

Hard times ahead

Astrologers make their predictions on the basis of the relative position of the planets. The sun is expected to confer valor ("*Shauryam*"). The moon is said to confer prosperity. *Rahu* is expected to confer inner strength. *Rohini* will confer happiness. *Shani* (Saturn) will confer physical fitness. But during this year, the results will be contrary to these beneficial effects.

One of the consequences is the thinning of the ozone layer above the earth. As a result, there is the threat of fire disasters. There are also threats from bomb blasts of the kind you have noticed in newspaper reports. The country is faced with such dangers from man-made calamities.

These dangers can be averted if men realize the sacredness of human existence. People have to ask themselves how they are using the time that is given to them. In a year there are 3,15,36,000 seconds. How is man using these precious moments? How many seconds is he devoting to respecting elders and honoring his parents? How many seconds does he spend for earning his food? And how many is he wasting on useless activities? How many is he devoting to seeing films and T. V.? How many is he spending on reading meaningless novels? And how many on studying worthwhile books? How many does he devote to God? How many to rectify his inner feelings? If this sort of enquiry is made, it will be found that the average man spends most of his time on mundane activities. Not even ten minutes or ten seconds are devoted whole-heartedly to spiritual enquiry or self-examination.

All are ostensibly engaged in the pursuit of Truth. All are devoting their time to God. They go on pilgrimages. But even in these trips, they do not concentrate their thoughts on God for a few moments. They don't make any internal enquiry.

To seek the Truth and experience God there is no need to go out anywhere. By going to a forest or visiting temples the inner being is not purified. Renouncing all worldly things, one must explore his inner life. This prescription of sacrifice is what the *Vedas* recommend for attaining immortality.

Practice and precept

Those who claim to be spiritual aspirants (*sadhakas*) are really striving for selfish ends. The Divine is omnipresent. To experience the Divine, you have to undertake an enquiry with a steady mind. People today pursue studies all their life, but hardly practice what they have learnt. Practice is more essential than the mere acquisition of knowledge. It is not accumulation of information that is important, but the transformation of himself. Of what use is all the information you have gathered? How much of it have you put to practical use? How much bliss have you derived from it? The answer will be a zero in gathering information and a zero in putting it into practice. In this way, life is being wasted rather than being purposeful.

The first step is for each one to comprehend his true self. In many cases, as they [men] grow in years and study more and more books, they develop doubts. Apart from filling their minds with bookish lumber of what use is all their studies? There is no difference between books without consciousness and minds filled with bookish knowledge. Both are equally sterile. It is a case of "living death" for both. Book knowledge without practice maybe useful for teaching others but is of no value to the man himself. A man who does not practice what he preaches is wasting other people's time. To begin with, make right use of your time. In this context, I repeatedly advise students and others to reduce their talk. Engage yourselves in spiritual enquiry and practice at least a fraction of what you learn.

Today we are supposed to bid adieu to the old year *Angirasa* and to welcome the New Year. But, in fact, we should not bid farewell to *Angirasa* because the name suggests the presence of the divine in every limb (*anga*) of our body. Welcome all the years. Don't give a send-off to any year. Develop equal-mindedness toward everything. Do not brood over the past.

Reduce Desires

The joy you experience will be in inverse proportion to your desires. The greater the desires, the less the happiness you will experience. Therefore, try constantly to reduce your desires. In the journey of life, as in a railway journey, the less luggage (desires) you carry the greater the comfort you will have.

True *moksha*

Embodiments of Love!

Recognize what holiness is associated with human life. But because of the vagaries of the senses, man develops attachments to various objects and persons entirely for selfish reasons. All the love he professes is not out of affection for others but out of self-love. If this selfishness goes, there will be real oneness. Both love and hatred will be absent. There will be equal-mindedness (*samatwam*). There will be no sense of separateness. That is true liberation (*moksha*).

Moksha does not mean attaining some divine state. Divinity is within you. All you have to do is to manifest it. That which does not exist will not come forth. That which exists will not go away. Everything is present here and now. Hence, there is no need for any search or for any *sadhana*. Whatever you do, do it as an offering to God. Do not make a distinction between "my work" and "God's work". When you make a division, you give rise to enmity because of differences. Where there is enmity, there is no room for divinity, purity, or unity. When you install God in your heart, there is no room in it for anything else. But today's aspirants treat the heart as a musical chair. They go on from one "Swami" to another and shift from one kind of *sadhana* to another. Of what avail is this kind of merry-go-round? It is a waste of time and of life itself. One heart, one thought, one God, one goal. Whether you utter the name of Allah or Jesus, Buddha or Zoroaster, or Guruji (Nanak)—it is all the

same. Today is sacred to the memory of Guru Nanak, who commenced the propagation of his teachings on a *Yugadi* day.

We celebrate *Yugadi* today. But each one can choose his own day for celebration of the new year. God is one. All names are associated with the Divine. You should have no aversion to anything. You should develop this feeling of equality. Only then you will be aware of the unity that underlies the diversity.

Purity, unity, and divinity

Today you must concentrate first on purity. For this you have to reduce gradually your desires. It is not practicable to give up all desires totally. But limit your desires to the essential minimum. Do not cherish excessive or endless desires in respect of wealth or other possessions. Promote the sense of contentment (*tripti*). The discontented man loses everything. Only the contented man can experience real joy. The man with endless desires is the poorest man. The man with no desires is the richest man. The rich man can have no sleep. You must no doubt earn enough to meet your reasonable needs. But excessive wealth is undesirable.

People have been listening to spiritual discourses. How far are they practicing the teachings? Without the cultivation of human values, all studies and spiritual exercises are of no use. If each examines himself, he will find how far he has failed in this respect. (Swami related an incident from Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life in which he slapped Rani Rasmani on the cheek at a spiritual gathering when he noticed that while appearing to follow his discourse, her mind was thinking about some legal matters. Many resented Swami Ramakrishna's action, but after his explanation the Rani admitted her lapse. Swami said that today no one could inflict punishment on erring devotees. Each had to examine his own lapses and correct himself).

It is not very important that you should rejoice over the advent of the New Year. You should develop new ideas and ideals. Feel your oneness with all because the same Divine dwells in everyone. Do not hate anyone or any religion.

Embark on self-enquiry to acquire self-knowledge. For the refinement of the heart, the first requisite is seeking the company of the good (*sat-sangam*). It is because you have assembled here that you have been able to derive the benefit of Swami's message. Along with good company, you must listen only to what is sacred.

(Bhagavan concluded His discourse with the *bhajan*, "*Bhajan bina sukha shanti nahi!*" The entire gathering, which not only filled the Sai Ramesh Hall but overflowed into the open spaces around, joined in the *bhajan*. The function concluded with *Aarati* to Bhagavan).

Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, April 1993

The Play of the Divine

On Ramanavami festival day in 1974, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba spoke about the Rama Principle. He explained the significance of the various actors, the cities, etc. He also said that the Ramayana was the journey of Rama.

*Oh mind! Ever remember
The nectar-like name of Rama,
Which is sweeter than sugar,
Pleasanter to the tongue than honey.*

The Ramayana is not merely the story of Rama. It is an epic that proclaims the greatness of three cities—Mithila, Ayodhya, and Lanka. The Rama Principle has brought out and demonstrated the significance of these three cities.

Rama is the embodiment of *dharma* (righteousness), Lakshmana is the embodiment of *shraddha* (dedication). Bharata embodies *bhakti* (devotion), Shatrughna personifies *shakti* (valor). *Dharma* is associated with *shraddha*. The protecting cover for *bhakti* is *shakti*. Hence Rama and Lakshmana were always together as a pair, and Bharata and Shatrughna as another.

Hardly had Rama reached the age of 16 when Sage Vishwamitra arrived on the scene. With his coming, the epic career of Rama (Rama-ayana [goal/direction]) began. From then on the destruction of the *rakshasas* (demons) started. Beginning with the protection of Vishwamitra's *yajna* (religious sacrifice), it is one continuous saga of ceaseless action liberating Ahalya [Gautama Maharishi's wife] from her curse, proceeding to Mithila, breaking Shiva's bow, marrying Sita (the incarnation of *maha maya* [great illusion]), humbling of Parasurama [one of the *avatars* of Shiva] on the way to Ayodhya, leaving for the forest as an exile, searching for Sita, invading Lanka, destroying Ravana [the demon], installing Vibhishana [Ravana's brother] on the throne, and triumphantly returning to Ayodhya. During all this period, Rama's career was filled with action and adventures with no respite.

Ramayana is the joint epic of Rama and Sita

The term "Rama" means one who is pleasing and lovable. "Ayana" means movement or journey. "ra" refers to *atma* and "ma" refers to mind. The Rama Principle means merging the mind in the *atma*. "Ramayana" means suffusing the world with the bliss of the Rama Principle. But it is not Sri Rama alone that is involved in this process, Sita is also an epic personality. "Rama" is another name for Sita. The *Ramayana* is thus a joint epic of Rama and Sita or Sita-Rama *Ramayanam*.

Rarely in the world do we see married couples who are identical—man and wife—in their physical features, their qualities, behavior, thoughts, and capacities. But in the case of Rama and Sita the similarity was complete in every respect. There were no differences in features, qualities, or other aspects. The truth of this is evident from

what Hanuman experienced. Once Hanuman happened to look at Sita when she was alone. He got a doubt whether Rama himself had assumed a feminine form. Looking at Sita, he thought it was Rama himself. Hence Rama and Sita should be regarded as one identical entity and not as separate beings.

Role of three cities in Ramayana

The inner significance of the Sita-Rama story will be clear when we consider the role of the three cities in the Ramayana. First comes Mithila. Emperor Janaka was its ruler. He was a *Brahmajnani* (one who possesses knowledge of identity of individual self with the cosmic being) who had renounced everything. Like water on a lotus leaf, he was completely detached, with no concern for worldly things. Having no children of his own, he brought up with great love a foundling (Sita). There were two powerful entities in his kingdom: Shiva's bow and Sita. Once while engaging in play, Sita lifted the giant bow of Shiva with astonishing ease. Struck by this feat, Janaka decided that Sita should be given in marriage only to one who could handle Shiva's bow and be worthy of Sita's hand. With this resolve, he invited princes for Sita's *swayamvara* (self-selection of a husband by the bride herself). Rama arrived and lifted Shiva's bow as lightly as Sita had done. Janaka realized that Rama and Sita were well matched in every respect—beauty, character, and strength.

Sita was no ordinary woman. She was the embodiment of *maha maya* (supreme divine illusion). Rama acquired *maha maya* as his mate. Sita, for her part, sought oneness with the *atma* principle represented by Rama. The marriage of Rama and Sita represents the association of the *atma* and the *maya*. It is in this combined form of *atma* and *maya* that Rama entered Ayodhya. "Ayodhya" means "invincible". Its ruler was Dasaratha. Dasaratha means one who has made his ten *indriyas* (sense organs) the five organs of action and the five organs of perception—his chariot. Allegorically, this means that Dasaratha represents the body with its ten organs. These sense organs are related to the three *gunas* (qualities -- *satwa* [pure], *rajas* [active], and *tamas* [ignorance]). Dasaratha's three wives—Kausalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi—symbolize these three *gunas*.

Dasaratha's four sons represent four Vedas

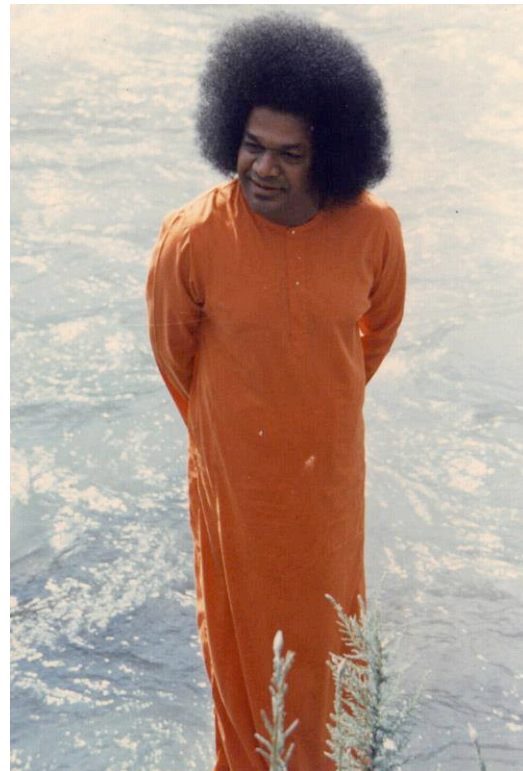
When one is influenced by *gunas*, he develops desires. The four sons of Dasaratha were the embodiments of his desires. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Shatrughna symbolize the four Vedas: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharvana*. The *Rig Veda* figures in the *Yajur* and *Sama Vedas* to varying extent. It is the embodiment of *dharma*. *Yajur-Veda* embodies *mantras* (sacred formulae). Lakshmana was continually engaged in contemplating about Rama and immersing himself in the Rama *mantra*. Bharata was one who could not bear separation from Rama and who was ever dwelling on Rama's name and form. He was the embodiment of *Sama Veda*. Shatrughna was one who had mastered all the sciences and used his powers for protecting his brothers. He was skilled in the use of all kinds of weapons. Thus, the four Vedas, taking the form of the four brothers, were sporting in Dasaratha's palace.

Symbolic meaning of characters of Ramayana

Soon after his entry into Ayodhya in the company of Sita as *maya*, Rama had to enter the jungle of life. These ordeals are the concomitants of those who are associated with *maya*. As a result, he had to embark on a search for Sita. On the way, he met Sugriva. Sugriva and Vali—the brothers... represent the qualities of *viveka* (discrimination) and *dheeratva* (valor). Rama made common cause with Sugriva to overcome Vali. He got the friendship of Anjaneya who symbolizes *dhairyam* (dauntless courage). With the help of Sugriva and Hanuman, Rama crossed the ocean of *moha* (delusion) to enter Lanka. Once again, he encountered the three *gunas*—*satwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (qualities of serenity, passion, and passivity) in Lanka in the form of Vibhishana, Ravana and Kumbhakarna. He vanquished Ravana and Kumbhakarna (*rajo* and *tamo gunas*) and crowned Vibhishana (*satwa guna*) as king. He recovered Sita who now assumed the form of *anubhavajnana* (wisdom born of experience) and reentered Ayodhya with her.

The Ramayana epic carries these significant messages when the symbolic meaning of the characters and events in it are properly understood.

Here the unique features of Lanka may be noted. Its ruler was the ten-headed Ravana. Although he was endowed with all powers, he was perpetually immersed in *moha* (infatuation for women). He had the appellation "*Dasagriva*"—the one with ten heads. In Ayodhya, Dasaratha was the ruler and in Lanka it was *Dasagriva*. Dasaratha had ten *indriyas* (sense organs) as his chariot. Ravana was the one who was enjoying the ten senses as a sensualist. Whatever one's scholarship or wealth or strength, if he has no control over his senses, he descends to the depths of degradation. Without control over his senses, a person who may have conquered the three worlds will be a slave of his impulses. The bad traits of Ravana were shared by all the people of Lanka. As is the ruler so are the subjects, says the adage. When the ruler indulges in sensual pleasures, the subjects also do likewise. Lanka was thus immersed in carnal pleasures. The people were not aware of human virtues, much less of divine qualities. Pleasures of the flesh were their sole preoccupation. But at the same time, they carried on ritualistic practices like *yagas* and *yajnas* (sacrificial rites and rituals).



Transformation of demonic nature to divinity

Witnessing the grandeur and beauty of Lanka with its huge mansions and beautiful

gardens—and seeing the sacrificial fires burning in every home, Hanuman at first wondered whether the ruler of such a paradise on earth could commit the heinous crime of abducting Sita. Later Hanuman realized that Lanka was like the fig fruit, which is very attractive on the outside but is full of worms inside. In spite of all its external beauty and grandeur, Lanka contained within it forces of evil and wickedness. The conversion of such an abode of evil into a kingdom of righteousness by the installation of Vibhishana is the climax of the *Ramayana* story.

Good exists in the midst of evil and vice versa

The epic theme of the *Ramayana* is the transformation of the demonic nature to divinity. During the war in Lanka, an arrow released by Lakshmana struck a child whom its mother was carrying. Lakshmana noticed that the mother instead of caring for the dead child was fleeing to save herself. He remarked to Rama that this callous lack of maternal affection revealed the demonic nature of the woman. Rama counselled patience and told Lakshmana that the woman's heart had been purified by seeing Rama. She had given up all desires and attachments. He asked Lakshmana to beckon her and ascertain whether she was running away for the sake of personal safety or for higher reasons. A monkey was sent to fetch her. When questioned, the woman said: "Ramachandra, it is not as if I have no love for my child. Unfortunately, for the decree of fate it has passed away, while I have survived. I wish to live so that after defeating Ravana, when Rama takes the *Rakshasas* to Ayodhya, I shall be able to serve Rama and feast my eyes on him. Someday Rama will bless the people of Lanka and take them to Ayodhya. I shall then be able to render service in Rama's palace. I am keeping alive only with this hope."

The moral of this episode is that there is good in the midst of evil and evil in the midst of good. Likewise, purity prevails amidst impurity and impurity exists in the midst of purity. That is why the answer to the question, "Where is the Lord to be found?" is "Out of unrest peace ensues; from peace results illumination; that illumination reveals the supreme effulgence of the Divine; in that effulgence is Divinity." Thus *shanti* (peace) exists within *ashanti* (restlessness). But it is said that no one who lacks peace can have happiness. This is not quite correct. Instead of bemoaning the state of peacelessness, one should strive for real peace with courage and faith. This is the difference between the optimist and the pessimist.

Looking at a glass half full of water, the pessimist says, "the glass is half-empty." The optimist says, "it is half-full". The pessimist sees only the thorn in the rose stalk, while the optimist enjoys the beauty of the rose. Everyone should develop a hopeful and optimistic outlook. Hope should be centered not on worldly things but on self-realization. Even in the *Rakshasa* dominion of Lanka there were seekers of the *atma*. In Ayodhya all persons appeared to be virtuous and pious devotees of God. But even in such a sacred land, there were some petty-minded men who were ready to cast aspersions on Divinity itself and find fault with God's ways. It was a washerman's disparaging remarks against Sita and Rama that led to her banishment to the forest.

Three persons were aware of Rama principle

There were three persons who were aware of the Rama principle. They were Hanuman, Sumitra, and Vishwamitra. Hanuman was no ordinary person. He was a high-minded, powerful figure endowed with immense knowledge and wisdom. He was well aware of the divinity of Rama. Kausalya despite her *satwic* (serene) nature, was not aware of Rama's divine power as much as Sumitra. Kausalya shed copious tears on hearing about Rama's exile to the forest. Sumitra on the contrary enjoined her son Lakshmana to accompany Rama and told him: "Wherever Rama is there is Ayodhya, where Rama is not that is the real jungle. Rama is verily Lord Narayana himself. Go and serve Rama and Sita with my blessings." Sumitra explained to Lakshmana how he was an aspect of Rama from the circumstances of his birth.

Ramayana is a guide on human relationships

Among the four brothers there was boundless love and regard for each other. When Rama went to the forest and was in Chitrakuta, Bharata came there to entreat him to return to Ayodhya and reign as the legitimate heir to the throne. Rama refused to return, saying that Bharata should rule over Ayodhya in accordance with the promise given by Dasaratha. The argument between the two was ultimately resolved by Sage Vasishtha who told Bharata, "Do not cause any pain to Rama, who is Divinity itself and who has come down to protect the good and uphold *Dharma*." Bharata pleaded for taking Rama's sandals and administering the kingdom in Rama's name till he returned to Ayodhya.

There are a series of episodes in the *Ramayana* to show how deep was the love between the four brothers and how devoted were the younger brothers to Rama. Such fraternal love is an example to the world for all time.

The *Ramayana* is a guidebook on the ideal relations between mothers and children, between husband and wife, between brothers, between the ruler and the people, between the master and the servants, and many other human relationships. Rama showed compassion to the dying eagle Jatayu, which had fought with Ravana when he was carrying Sita away to Lanka. Rama gave refuge to Vibhishana, even against the fears expressed by Lakshmana. These are examples of Rama's supreme benevolence and magnanimity toward anyone who revered him or sought his protection. Rama declared to Lakshmana, "Anyone who comes to me in a spirit of surrender, whoever he might be, is mine and I am his. I shall give him asylum. This is my vow." Rama was a man pledged to one word, to one wife, and to a single arrow.

Devotees should install Rama in their hearts and celebrate *Ramanavami* for achieving *atmic* bliss. Going through the *Ramayana* epic they should reach the state of "*atma-Rama*" (oneness with the Universal Spirit). In such a state there is no *ahamkara* (ego-sense).

Source: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, Vol. 20

Beloved Baba—Take My Hand

Beloved Baba, take my hand
As I hold it up to you;
Dispel the cloud of *Maya*
Which obscures you from view.

My haughty Self and You are One
Which in my heart I know;
I also know to reach that state
I must be pure as snow.

But on my own, I cannot weld
My human will with Thine;
So this is why I seek your help
To relinquish all of mine.

Help me, dear Baba, to let go
Of my imaginary needs
And I will try to turn from all
On which my ego feeds.

And as I reach up high to you
Please take my hand in yours
Until I'm empty of myself
And my lightened spirit soars.

But when I first catch sight of that
Which seers call the Light
I may be overwhelmed by It;
So hold me very tight.

In pouring out my heart to you
I've lost that cloud so dark
And can relax in quiet relief
Till my soul soars like a lark.

~Phyllis Krystal

Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, March 1977

From Death to Immortality

Following is an article by a student devotee, Gaurav Khanna

Death remains yet as an unsolved riddle. Where men go after death is the question many ask. Few know the answer. Lord Krishna told Arjuna, "*Jaathasyahi dhruvo mrithyu*" (For everyone who is born, death is certain). But we do not accept death as a normal occurrence. Even when an aged person dies, men wonder why. Young people should not die at all. Though we hear of death, we witness death, of course we do not accept death. We all hope to live forever. This is the reason why Krishna had to remind Arjuna that all those who suffer birth have to suffer death.

Swami subscribed to the Hindu view of death. It must be said that people everywhere will find it difficult to practice this attitude. When confronted with death, especially of one very near and dear, we react sorrowfully. Swami teaches us to be wise and brave. Swami's mother, Easwaramma, died in Brindavan during the 1972 summer course, when there were a thousand students from all over India. No one knew that this had happened; Swami sent the body to Puttaparthi for burial. The classes continued and Swami moved among the students as usual. But when devotees confront death, Swami considers and comforts them. He assures them that the person who has passed away is happy in the new place. On the death of Walter Cowan in the United States, Swami sent a telegram to Mrs. Cowan, "Walter arrived in good shape." He is the same Walter whom Swami had resurrected 19 months earlier at Madras. "Accept the inevitable," says Swami.

Swami's concern is about what we do, how we behave, in every moment of our lives rather than when and how we die. The only way to overcome the fear of death is to live in such a way that one has no time to think of the end. A life filled with selfless activity is the best solution for facing the problem of death. Swami says, "You must live with the constant thought of God as well as another fact, death." Though we appreciate the basic attitude to death determined by our philosophy, we avoid as inauspicious any mention of death in our day-to-day life. If by chance one utters the word, one immediately negates it!

Swami says, "Death is considered as something to be afraid of, something that should not be spoken about in happy circumstances. But death is neither good nor bad. You have no choice in the matter; you cannot get it sooner if you welcome it, nor can you avoid it if you condemn it. From the moment of birth, the march to the cremation ground starts. Some reach the place more quickly than others. Some may go by a roundabout route and arrive late; that is the only difference in death between one person and the other. Yet man talks about death as if it is a distant calamity." Swami encourages us to live in the constant remembrance of death. He says, "The body is the car in which you are riding to death. You may meet death at any moment while riding. Remember death."

Swami says, "Intent on a journey and having purchased a ticket for the same, if you enter a train, whether you sit quiet, lie down, read, or meditate, the train takes you willy-nilly to the destination. So, too, each living being has at its birth received a ticket to death and is on a journey. So whatever your struggles and safe-guards and precautions, the place has to be reached someday. Whatever else is uncertain, death is certain. It is impossible to change the law." We do not have to struggle hard to reach death; it is the only thing that comes to us without effort. The thought of the certainty of death and the equal uncertainty of the time of the event should give us a sense of urgency and heighten our awareness of the value of each moment as a fresh gift from God.

What man needs is a change in perspective regarding life, death, and immortality. Bhagavan declares that "Immortality does not imply that one can avoid death and continue living in the physical body for all time. It means that one's name and fame will shine in the memories of people if his character and achievements are noble and beneficial." Through this point, Swami is emphasizing the need to live a good life and the life dedicated to service.

Leading a good life is itself a *sadhana* [spiritual effort] that helps us to break the cycle of birth and rebirth. Good life rescues us from the snare of desires. Rebirth is determined by the nature of the thoughts during the last moments of our lives. But Swami reminds us that unless we have lived in the constant remembrance of the Lord, we will not be able to call on Him at the last moment. It has been said that the actions of this life are the destiny of the next.



Swami has related the story of the shopkeeper who had given his children the names of God in the belief that when he talked to them at his deathbed, he would be uttering the names of God. Swami said, the moment came at last and according to program he called the Lord by proxy six times in all. The boys came and stood around his cot. The last thought that came to the dying man's mind just before he was about to quit was, "Alas, all of you have come away. Who will look after the shop now?" Swami added, "You see, his shop was his ruling passion all

through his life and he could not switch to God at short notice. The latent tendencies will have their say, whatever you wish. The thought of God cannot survive in a climate of acts marked by pride and greed."

Swami reminds us that we are responsible for our death whenever, wherever, and however it happens. "The 'God of death' does not bring a noose when he comes to drag people to his abode. The noose is made by the victim himself and he has it round his neck, awaiting the arrival of *Yama*. He has only to take hold of the rope and pull you along! It is a three-stranded rope, the strands being: egoism, sense attachment, and desire."

Swami's advice runs thus: "Consider Kennedy! How death was lurking around him waiting for the chance! Did he not have men to guard him—soldiers, security men, body-guards? But it was all in vain. So while life persists do good, speak soft and sweet, never injure or insult another, serve those in need, and keep the image of God ever before the mind's eye."

Swami has gifted us a beautiful picture to ponder upon so that we can frame our attitude to death. "How do you know that is the last moment?" The 'God of death' does not give notice of his arrival to take you away. He is not like the photographer who says, "I am about to click. Are you ready?" If you wish that your portrait be hung on the walls of heaven, that it must be attractive, if you want your stance, your pose, and your smile to be as attractive as possible, then be ready for the click day or night with His name ever resting on the tongue."

Swami has said that the inquiry into death is actually inquiry into one's own reality. Those who have the inner urge to achieve the higher wisdom that confers liberation have, therefore, to reflect upon and investigate the phenomenon of death. Do not postpone the reflection on death, feeling that it is inappropriate and profitless. Every mystery latent in human existence is entwined with the mystery of death. The glory and majesty of the Divine are fully revealed only when death is investigated.

To sum up, Swami's recipe for facing death is as follows: 'Live every moment as if it were the last, fully, intensely, purposefully, selflessly, and joyfully, so that we are not too busy to worry about death. When death comes, welcome the click with a smile.'

Swami says, "Work as if you were to live a hundred years, pray as if you were to die tomorrow."

Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, April 1988

When the road ends and the goal is gained, the pilgrim finds that he has travelled only from himself to himself, that the way was long and lonesome, but the God that led him unto it was all the while in him, around him, with him, beside him!

~Baba

The Renaissance of Dharma (Bhagavan's Letter to Teachers)

Camp: Prasanthi Nilayam, 18-1-74

Dear Votaries of Dharma!

Receive my blessings. Ever since I came here, at Prasanthi Nilayam, I have been thinking of writing to you this important letter. Since a large number of devotees had come from very distant parts of the country and were waiting here for many days, I was engaged in granting them spiritual solace and sending them back home. Hence, this delay in sending you this message.

Embodiments of the Divine Atma!

Open your eyes and look around with some circumspection. Ponder over the heights we had attained in ancient times and the present pitiable predicament of mankind. What an abysmal descent! Isn't our situation very much like that of a man who has tumbled down from a mountain peak to the depths below? We had, by observing and upholding *Dharma* [righteousness], reached the pinnacle of perfection in every sphere, spiritual, material, scientific, economic. We followed with great veneration the principles and guidelines laid down in the sacred scriptures, the *Shruti* [what is heard] and the *Smriti* [texts containing traditional teachings], which embody the commands of God Himself, and as a result we were bound together by mutual love and affection, and our culture shone with supreme excellence.

But today we are in quite a terrible situation—the very opposite of the glory of the past. Wherever we look, we find men sunk in utterly low moral and material conditions. The *Dharmic* duties prescribed by the Lord in the *Shruti* and *Smriti* in order to save mankind from these very evils have been discarded. Infected by mutual animosity and distrust, we are spouting the fire of violence and cruelty and jeopardizing world peace. Violation of the laws ordained by God is the chief factor responsible for the absence of abiding peace in the world.

Is not the transgression of *Dharma* (which is another name for the Commands of God to man) the sole cause for the poverty, the despondency, the despair, and the lack of spiritual knowledge and effort that are so rampant at the present time throughout the world? It is heartening for us all to note that a few people, at least now, have discovered the reason for the crisis through a study of the sequence and the negation, and are striving to resuscitate *Dharma*, which alone can confer prosperity and peace on the world. If the annihilation of something is causing injury to something else, then the only method for the regeneration of the latter is the revival of the former. Isn't this principle universally acceptable and applicable? We are noticing that the decline of *Dharma* has caused the destruction of world peace. When we plan to bring about prosperity and peace to the world, isn't it our paramount duty to restore this Divine *Dharma*?

Teachers!

It is your imperative duty to wake up and strive at least now without further delay for the preservation and fostering of *Dharma*. For, today some persons are endeavoring to destroy *Bharatiya Dharma* by attacking it and plucking it by its very roots. If we fail to resist their attempts, *Dharma* is in danger of being completely uprooted.

Some persons enamored of modern civilization and bearing the respected designation of social reformers and re-constructors, are trying in manifold deceptive attractive ways to pollute society itself by depriving it of *Dharma*.

The *Dharma*, for upholding which we have been all along willing and ready to sacrifice wealth, honor, and even lives, is the *Dharma* named *Sanathana Dharma*. *Sanathana* means eternal, existing, and effective for all time. Wake up. Get ready. The moment has arrived when you have to demonstrate your indomitable valor and irrepressible heroism.

You are born in the ever-effulgent land of Bharat. You are the valiant and invincible descendants of heroic Hindu warriors, who were worthy embodiments of courage, fortitude, valor, and moral integrity. You are scions of the holy and lofty lineage of *Rishis* like Bhargava, Kausika, Vasishta, Bharadwaja, and Kasyapa who forced even the 'three worlds' to tremble in fear at their spiritual might and majesty, won through severe penance. You will be unworthy of such great ancestry if you remain indifferent, slothful, and apathetic like cowards when the *Dharma* that is as essential as the very breath to our lives is being undermined. Resolve to engage yourself in the task of promoting the welfare of the world; be assured that Bhagavan will be your unfailing support.

As days pass by, the process of reshaping and reforming affect each field. Naturally, it is being applied to the educational system also. In former times, children were initiated in the spiritual path at the proper age and their studies began thereafter under the *guru* or preceptor. In course of time, when Westerners became the rulers, many were lured to the study of their language, for thereby they could secure the 'second' of the four goals of man, namely, riches. Thus, they were transformed into supporters of the Western system of education.

In the past, teachers saw to it that the pupils were equipped with devotion to God in addition to the curricular training. So the students were well-versed in spiritual discipline and knowledge; every act of theirs was motivated by the yearning for salvation and spiritual joy.

Boys and girls were instructed by *gurus* who had full knowledge of the country—its history and traditions—and the principles of religion and culture. Now since the teachers are themselves woefully ignorant of what culture means, what spirituality consists of, and what the significance of religion is, the pupils are deprived of the wisdom that alone can confer peace and joy to their hearts.

The propaganda for atheism, the declaration that the *Vedas* [scriptures] have no historical validity, and the teaching through history that Hinduism is destroyed—these are the activities of the teachers who suffer from the mania for Western culture and civilization. Can we call such a system of instruction education? Can we call those who instruct these things *gurus*? *Vidya* or education is the communication of the knowledge of the Divine power and the inner reality of the *Atma*. This alone justifies the claim to be educated.

Since they have no spiritual awareness, students are taking part in disorders and disturbances. They become easy targets to mob violence, unworthy of the educated. They descend to levels lower than the blind reach in their ignorance and draw down upon themselves the ridicule of the observers. They disfigure the educational institutions and bring disgrace upon them.

Teachers!

We have to inculcate in our College lofty ideals and take up highly noble projects. I am now communicating to you my feelings and plans because I know that you are enthusiastic, inspired by spiritual ideals, and worthy of Sai's love and affection.

1. Mere formal teaching of the prescribed lessons in the College will not raise the students to the stature we desire. By mere planting, a sapling does not become a tree. It has to be fostered by the provision of the appropriate security, care, and periodical attention.
2. To shape the simple innocent students from the villages into votaries of the English language, devoid of the virtues of humility and fidelity, politeness and faith, which are so necessary for happy living, is not a task that will promote the welfare either of the student or of the country. By the mere acquisition of an academic qualification that will assure them a job, they cannot progress either in morality or straightforwardness. Proper activities must be devised and adopted to make them useful helps of their parents. They must be able to serve them skillfully and gladly and thus earn their blessings.
3. There are 200 students coming to our College from villages around. We should group them into batches of 20 or 30; one teacher should accept the responsibility for guiding each group. When they find a student backward in any subject, they should encourage him by special teaching in that subject. They should pay attention to the conditions and circumstances of each student and keep in touch with the parents, too. They should help the students to cultivate and develop the high ideals that they have in their minds and the noble plans to which they wish to dedicate themselves.
4. Proper steps must be undertaken to put an end to the evil habits, the evil thoughts, and evil talk that are rampant in these small villages. It is only then that the educated 'rural student' can maintain and develop his virtues. Or else, his

attainments in virtue will be evident only as long as he is studying. As soon as he returns to his village, the behavior, the way of speaking, the habits of life that the villagers practice will become natural for him also. Therefore, through each one of the students of our College belonging to a village, we must establish a Spiritual Centre in that village. the Centre must guard against the spread of parties and factions in that village and should not observe or honor any distinction between the villagers on the basis of caste, creed, or family status. This will bring about a great change in the methods and message of education.

5. One day in each week or fortnight, teachers should gather the students and instruct them in certain lofty ideals of life. They should go to the villages of those students and devote themselves to some program of welfare activity in the village. This is very advisable. If you do the spadework and make the preliminary arrangements, I shall come (I am returning to Brindavan in February), and in the months of February and March all of us can go to one village after another and establish these Spiritual Centers. We shall transform them into ideal villages. It is only then that the value of education can be demonstrated, expanded, and sanctified.

6. For each one of these objectives to be realized, it is necessary that teachers must be idealistic and enthusiastic. Then only will students follow their guidance. Our College must become the pioneer leader in translating these high ideals. This is essential not only for the individual but in equal measure for all mankind.

7. Consult the students, group by group, and find out who among them are interested in establishing such Spiritual Centers in their own villages. If they make proper arrangements in their villages, then I shall myself come and inaugurate the Centre and confer on the people of the village necessary enthusiasm and adequate facilities.

We shall start in this way, in a small measure; we can thus rescue the villages from the chaotic influence spread by politics and, make them wholly loving and helpful, filled with *Satwic* ideals. This is the fruit of real education.

8. When the students of our College coming from villages see a village or two developing on these lines, every one of them will come forward asking for the inclusion of his village, too. They will acquire along with *Vidya* or education, the virtue of *Vinaya* or humility. And with humility they can easily earn spiritual knowledge. This is very essential and very urgent work. Due to the absence of these two, people are today disgracing their humanness though they are 'educated', behaving like fools and blind men, giving up the power of discriminating between the temporary and the eternal. It is enough progress if men live as men! Man must be vigilant that he does not descend to the level of demons, that he does not pollute society and inflict 'earthquakes' on the country. If we do not take on hand these activities, we cannot remove the fear and anxiety that seem inevitable in the future for our students.

9. You must all meet together and take necessary interest in this matter. You need not compel anyone who is not interested. It is enough if we have some five or six who join with love and faith. If they have the desire, and if all share in this task, the greater the joy. There should be no trace of compulsion in organizing this. I am placing a car at your disposal for carrying out this program. On this holy *Sankranti* Day, I have given expression to the thoughts that I am having for a long time, taking into consideration your enthusiasm for this work. I wish you will take the steps necessary for implementing this program.

Read this letter with care and grasp its deeper meanings and significance.

Your Loving Sai

Source: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, April 1974

Q & A

WITH BHAGAVAN

Swami Explains the *Vedas*

Sadhaka: All those who are loyal to *Bharatiya* [Indian] culture accept the *Vedas* as authoritative sources for every aspect of life. They assert that the *Vedas* are the roots of their faith. What exactly does *Veda* mean? For what reason has the *Veda* acquired such importance?

Sai: My dear fellow! Born in India, that is *Bharat* [India], parading yourself as a *Bharatiya*, you are not aware of what *Veda* means! Well, *Veda* is the name for a mass of divine knowledge. *Veda* teaches the truth that cannot be revised or reversed by the passage of time through the three stages—past, present, and future. The *Veda* ensures welfare and happiness for the three worlds. It confers peace and security on human society. The *Veda* is the collation of words that are truth, which were visualized by sages who had attained the capacity to receive them into their enlightened awareness. In reality, the Word is the very Breath of God, the Supreme Person. The unique importance of the *Veda* rests on this fact.

Sadhaka: But in the field of worldly life, on the daily, material stage, what light can one expect from the *Vedas*?

Sai: Every being that lives in the world strives to possess what it desires and avoid what it dislikes. Know that the *Veda* instructs how to succeed in both these endeavors. That is to say, it lays down what has to be done and what should not be done. When these prescriptions and prohibitions are followed, one can earn the good and avoid the evil. *Veda* is concerned with both the material and the spiritual, both this world and the beyond. If truth must be told 'all Life is *Veda*-filled'. One cannot but observe its injunctions. '*Veda*' is derived from '*vid*' that means 'to know'.

So *Veda* means and includes all knowledge—*jnana*. Man is distinguished from other animals by the *jnana* that he is endowed with. Devoid of *jnana*, he is but a beast, a *pashu*.

Sadhaka: They say, the *Vedas* are numberless, without end (*ananta*). Are they all full repositories of *jnana*?

Sai: “*Ananto vai Vedaah*—The *Vedas* are infinite”. But note that in the beginning there was just one *Veda*. Later it was dealt with as three and subsequently as four.

Sadhaka: Why was the one divided into many? What special need was met thereby?

Sai: Since the *Veda* was vast and limitless, it was difficult for ordinary men to study it. Moreover, it would take endless time to complete the study. So those who wished to learn were overwhelmed by fear. Very few showed earnestness to study the *Veda*. For these reasons, something had to be done to make the study within reach of all who sought to learn. The *Rks* or hymns of praise in the *Veda* were therefore separated from the rest and grouped under the title, *Rk-samhitha*, the *Yajus-samhitha*, the *Saama* verses (capable of musical rendering) were grouped under the title *Saama-samhitha* and the *Atharva mantras* (formulae and spells) were collected under the title *Atharva-samhitha*.

Sadhaka: Who was the person who grouped them in these collections?

Sai: It was Vyasa [the sage], who was a partial manifestation of Narayana (God, Vishnu) Himself. He was the son of Sage Paraashara. He had mastered the scriptures and spiritual treatises. He was a great sage himself. He was a skillful coordinator. In order to promote the welfare of mankind, he compiled the *Vedas* in four parts and facilitated righteous living by all. He divided the *Vedas* into four and prepared five *samhithas*.

Sadhaka: The four *Vedas* are the four *samhithas*, as you explained now. What purpose does the fifth serve? How did the extra one arise?

Sai: The *Yajus-samhitha* (*Yajurveda*) has separated itself into two, the *Krishna-Yajurveda-samhitha* and the *Shukla-Yajurveda-samhitha*. So the total became five. The process did not stop there. Each of these *samhithas* developed three separate complementary components. These scriptural texts emerged in order to enlighten people in different states of awareness and different levels of consciousness. The purpose was to enable everyone to benefit by the guidance and cross the sea of suffering. Therefore, there is no trace of conflict in any of these texts.

Sadhaka: What are those three elaborations, those three subsidiary texts called?

Sai: *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, and *Upanishads*.

Sadhaka: What are *Brahmanas*?

Sai: They are explanatory texts dealing with *mantras* or ritual formulae. They describe clearly the sacrificial rites and the ceremonies that have to be observed while performing them. There are many texts like *Aitareya Brahmana*, *Taittiriya Brahmana*, *Sathapatha Brahmana*, and *Gopatha Brahmana*.

Sadhaka: And what are *Aranyakas*?

Sai: They are in verse and prose. They are mainly intended for the guidance of those who after passing through the stages of *Brahmacharya* (spiritual studies) and *grahasthya* (family life), assume *Vanaprastha* (life as recluse in forests). *Aranya* means 'forest'. That is to say, these are texts to be pursued and meditated upon silently in lonely hermitages. They deal with the duties and responsibilities of the final stage of active life (*karma kanda*), the stage preliminary to the totally spiritual stage (*Brahma Kanda*).

Sadhaka: Swami! I have heard the term 'Brahma Kanda' being used for some texts. What does it relate to?

Sai: Those texts are concerned with sacrificial rites as well as rules of right conduct. They deal with the special features of ceremonial rituals and special elaborations of moral codes.

Sadhaka: And Swami, what are *Upanishads*?

Sai: They can be mastered only by intelligent discrimination (*viveka*). They deserve to be so mastered. Four goals are laid down for humans in the scriptures: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (prosperity), *kama* (moral desire), and *moksha* (liberation). Vidya or learning can be classified under two heads: The *apara* (lower) and the *para* (higher). While the four *Vedas*, the earlier portion of ancient scriptures, deal with the *apara* (the first three goals), the later portion of the same, the *Upanishads*, deal with the *para* (the last among the goals).

Sadhaka: But how did the word *Vedanta* arise?

Sai: These *Upanishads* themselves form the *Vedanta*. Memorizing the *Vedas* is of no avail. *Vedanta* has to be understood and assimilated. Knowledge can never reach consummation until *Vedanta* is mastered.

Sadhaka: Swami! The *Vedas* are often referred to as *Shruti*, why?

Sai: The *Vedas* have nine names by which they are denoted. *Shruti* is one of the nine.

Sadhaka: What are those nine?

Sai: *Shruti, Anusrava, Thrayee, Aamnaaya, Naamaamnaaya, Chhandas, Swaadhyaaya, Aagama, and Nigamaagama.*

Sadhaka: Each of these names must be indicating some distinct feature. I desire to know how those names arose and what those features are. Please instruct me.

Sai: Of course, those names have inner meanings. *Shruti* means ‘that which has been heard’. The *guru* chants the *Vedic* hymn, the pupil listens with one-pointed attention, and reproduces it with the same voice modulations. This process is repeated until the pupil masters each hymn. Hence, the name *shruti* is relevant. The name *Anusrava* also means the same, ‘that which has been heard serially.’ Now, the word *Trayee* means ‘the three’. In the beginning there were three collations only in *Vedic* scriptures—the *Rg Veda*, the *Yajur*, and the *Sama Veda*. These three alone were considered important. So this word was used and it has stayed.

The word ‘*Aamnaaya*’ is derived from the root ‘*mnaa*’, which means ‘learn’. Since the *Vedas* had to be learnt continuously and in a steadfast manner, they were collectively known as “*Aamnaaya*” and also as “*Namaamnaaya*”.

‘*Chhandas*’ means a poetic meter, which can be set to music, as in *Sama Veda*. So the *Vedas* themselves were indicated by that name.

The name *Swaadhyaya* was applied to the *Vedas* since they were handed down from father to son and from generation to generation by the process of teaching and learning (*Swaadhyaya*).

Aagama means ‘that which has come or originated.’ ‘*Nigamaagama*’ is an elaboration of the same word. The *Vedas* have originated from the Breath of God; each syllable is sacred. Each word is a *mantra*. The *Vedas* are all *mantras*.

Sadhaka: *Mantra*? What does ‘*Mantra*’ mean?

Sai: *Mantra* is the exposition of the goal that is set; that is to say, it is that which prompts and promotes *manana* or probing through the mind. ‘*Man*’ syllable indicates the process of probing and the syllable ‘*tra*’ means “the capacity to take across, to liberate, to save.” In short, *mantra* is that which saves when the mind dwells upon it. While rites and ritual sacrifices are performed, the person has to remind himself constantly of their nature and significance. The formulae he has to repeat to achieve this end are *mantras*. But today those who perform these rites either recite them mechanically or allow them to roll on the tongue. They pay no attention to the meaning of the *mantra*. When *mantras* are uttered rigmarole, they yield no fruit! The person can reap full reward only when he recites them with the knowledge of the meaning and significance. Each *Veda* has many ‘*saakhas*’ and the total direction and purpose of each ‘*saakha*’ has also to be known by the *Vedic* scholar.

Source: *Leela Kaivalya Vahini*

Thought of the MONTH

The True Offering

Among *yajnas*, there are two types—the outer and the inner, the outer being a reflection of the inner. The inner *yajna* is the bird in the hand; the outer, the bird in the bush. But since the sanctified vision and urge are absent today, what is happening is, the release of the bird in the hand with the attempt to catch the bird in the bush. The value and significance of the inner *yajna* have to be understood first. It involves awareness of the Divinity that is dormant but decisive in the very center of our reality. Worship it, propitiate it, please it, become it.

The mind is the altar. Place the animal that is to be offered as oblation (the evil aspects of your character, behavior, attitude, etc.) and sacrifice it to the deity invoked. Though born as a human, man is burdened by animal instincts and impulses that have attached themselves to him during his previous lives as an animal. He has passed through many an animal existence and each has left its mark on his mental make-up, like a scar on the skin when a wound has healed. For example, man is afflicted with the disease of aggressive conceit, called *madha* in *Sanskrit*. This is not a natural trait of man, but a relic of a former elephantine life.

Man is sometimes pitifully a *moorkha* (foolish), which is a relic of his past existence as a sheep. Some have an inborn tendency to steal, which may be reminiscent of their past, of creatures such as a cat, which is also a sly poacher. Some are endowed with profuse unsteadiness and waywardness, an inheritance of their monkey existence. Man is known in *Sanskrit* as *nara* and the monkey as *vaanara*. When *vaa* (*vaalam*/ tail) is subtracted, *vaanara* is reduced to *nara*. Man has lost the tail, but he has still all the waywardness and unsteadiness of that animal. All such animal traces must be sacrificed on the altar of the mind as part of the inner *yajna*. The outer visible *yajna* is a means to convey this inner purpose and message.

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The basic *chitta* (inner consciousness) has to be freed from down-pulling impulses. Of what good is it to cook a rare and costly dish in a vessel contaminated by dirt? Of what good is it to plant a precious seed in rocky soil? *Puja* or *archana* [prayers] offered without a purified heart is sheer waste of time. But even a short sincere session of *puja* spent in divine awareness yields much fruit. ...

The material and the form are inseparable, but the seeker must dwell on the form that he desires to be manifested in all its glory, rather than on the material. He must dwell long and deep over the thought that God is found through every particle in the universe, free from any limitations of space and time.

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