

Mahashivaratri

On Shivaratri day in 1969, Bhagavan Shri Sathya Sai Baba explained the various aspects of the Shiva principle. He said that we were still in the listening state and had to get the stage where we had to dwell upon what we hear in the silence of meditation, and then practice it.

Stories are told in the *Shastras* [scriptures] to explain the origin and significance of the *Mahashivaratri* Festival. *Bharath* [India], the name for this land used from ancient times, means the land of those who have *rati* (love) toward *Bha* (light or *Bhagavan*). So for the people of this land all days are sacred; every moment is precious. The [River] Ganga is holy from source to sea, but there are some places on its banks associated with some sage or temple, the confluence of a tributary, or a historical incident, which are revered more by generations. Such places are Hardwar, Varanasi, Prayag, Rishikesh. Similarly, among all the days of the year, some are marked out as holier when a special effort is made by aspirants to contact the source and the sea, the reality behind all this passing show. Some moments, such as that during which the *Linga* (Shiva representation in egg-shaped stone) emerges from the *Avatar* (Divine incarnation), are held to be especially significant for the individuals witnessing it and for the world that is thereby blessed.

Some ascribe the holiness of the day to the fact of its being the birthday of Shiva, as if Shiva has birth and death like any mortal. There is a story that it commemorates the salvation attained by a hunter who sat on a *Bilva* [stone apple] tree on the lookout for animals to kill, and without any intention to worship unknowingly dropped some of its leaves on a *Linga* that lay beneath. But this does not make clear why this day is especially sacred. Another



story is that this is the day on which Shiva danced the *Tandava* (Cosmic dance) in the ecstasy of His innate nature, with all the Gods and sages sharing and witnessing that Cosmic consummation. When He consumed the *Halahala* poison that emerged from the churning of the ocean and threatened to destroy the Universe, the heat of the fumes was well-nigh unbearable, even for Him. So Ganga flowed uninterruptedly on His matted locks; but that gave Him only partial relief. The Moon was placed on the head. That was of great help. Then Shiva danced the *Tandava* with all the Gods and Sages. All this, they say, happened on the same day, and so *Shivaratri* was held in commemoration of this occasion.

Aim of all *sadhana* is to eliminate the mind

We have not only the *Mahashivaratri* once a year, but we also have a *Shivaratri* every month dedicated to the worship of Shiva. And why is the *ratri* (the night) so important? The night is dominated by the Moon. The Moon has 16 *kalas* (fractions of divine glory), and during each day or rather night during the dark fortnight one fraction is reduced, until the entire Moon is annihilated on New Moon night. From then on, each night a fraction is added until the Moon is full circle on Full Moon Night. The *Chandra* (Moon) is the presiding deity of the mind, the mind waxes and wanes like the Moon. *Chandrama-manaso-jaatah*—Out of the *manas* of the *Purusha* (Supreme Being), the Moon was born. It must be remembered that the chief aim of all *sadhana* (spiritual striving) is to eliminate the mind, to become *amanaska*. Then only can *maya* (illusion) be rent asunder and the reality revealed.

During the dark fortnight of the month, *sadhana* must be done to eliminate a fraction of the mind each day, for every day a fraction of the Moon, too, is being taken out of cognizance. On the night of *Chaturdasi*, the 14th day, the night of Shiva, only a fraction remains. If some special effort is made that night, through more intensive and vigilant *sadhana*, like *puja* or *japam* or *dhyana* (ritual worship, one-pointed repetition of holy names, and meditation), success is ensured. Shiva alone has to be meditated upon that night without the mind straying toward thoughts of sleep or food. This must be done every month. Once a year on *Mahashivaratri* a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended so that what is *shavam* (corpse) can become *Shivam* (God) by the perpetual awareness of its Divine indweller.

***Linga* is the form symbol of God**

This is a day dedicated to the Shiva that is in each of you. From the Himalayan ranges down to Cape Kanyakumari, the entire land is resounding today to the authentic declaration "*Shivoham*", "*Shivoham*", and to the adoration, "*Om Namah Shivaya*." Since thousands pray here, and elsewhere in lakhs and crores, the *Linga* is emanating from Me, so that you may derive the bliss that pervades the world through *Lingodbhava* (emergence of the *Linga*).

The manifestation of the *Linga* is a part of My nature. These *pundits* (scholars of spirituality) explain it as reminiscent of an epochal event in the past when Shiva challenged Brahma and Vishnu to gauge the height and depth of the *Linga* form He

assumed. They failed and had to accept defeat. But the *Linga* emerges as a result of prayer and grace. You have to recognize in this event a glimpse of Divinity, a sign of infinite grace. Just as *Om* is the sound symbol of God, the *Linga* is the form symbol or the visible symbol of God, the most meaningful, the simplest, and the least endowed with the appendages of attributes. *Lingam* means that in which this *jagat* (world of change) attains *laya* (mergence or dissolution), *leeyate*—all forms merge in the formless at last. Shiva is the principle of the destruction of all names and forms, of all entities and individuals. So the *Linga* is the simplest sign of emergence and mergence.

Live in the constant presence of Shiva

Every form conceived in the *Shastras* (scriptures) has a deep significance. Shiva does not ride an animal called in human language 'a bull'. The bull is the symbol of stability standing on four legs, *satya*, *dharma*, *shanti*, and *prema* (truth, virtue, peace, and love). Shiva is described as having three eyes, eyes that see the past, the present, and the future. The elephant skin that forms His cloak is a symbol of the bestial primitive traits that His grace destroys. In fact, He tears them to pieces, skins them, and they become totally ineffective. His four faces symbolize *shantam* (equanimity), *roudram* (terror), *mangalam* (grace), and *uthsaaham* (elevating energy). While adoring the *Lingam* on this *Lingodbhava* day, you must contemplate on these truths of Shiva that the *Linga* represents.

It is not this night alone that you should spend in the thought of Shiva; your whole life must be lived in the constant presence of the Lord. Endeavour that is the main thing; that is the inescapable consummation for all mortals. Even those who deny God will have to tread the pilgrim road, melting their hearts out in tears of travail. If you make the slightest effort to move along the path of your own liberation, the Lord will help you a hundredfold. That is the hope that *Mahashivaratri* conveys to you. Man is called so because he has the skill to do *manana*; *manana* means inner meditation on the meaning and significance of what one has heard.

But you have not yet emerged out of the stage of *shravanam* (listening)! All the joy you crave for is in you. But like a man who has vast riches in the iron chest, but who has no idea where the key is, you suffer. Hear properly the instructions, dwell upon them in the silence of meditation, practice what has been made clear therein; then you can secure the key, open the chest, and be rich in joy.

Visualize Shiva as the inner power of all

You have given up even the little *sadhana* [spiritual effort] that *Shivaratri* demands. In olden times, people will not put even a drop of water on their tongues on this day. Now that rigor is gone. They used to keep vigil at night, the entire night, without a wink of sleep, repeating *Om Namah Shivaya* without intermission. Now the name Shiva is on no one's tongue. But those who deny God are only denying themselves and their glory. All have love in them in some form or other, toward someone or other or their work or goal. That love is God, a spark of the God in them. They have *ananda* (bliss), however small or temporary, and that is another spark of the Divine.

They have inner peace, detachment, discrimination, sympathy, and the spirit of service. These are Divine in the mirror of their minds.

Resolve on this Holy *Shivaratri* in the presence of Shiva Sai to visualize the Shiva as the inner power of all. With each breath, you are even now asserting "*Soham*," "I am He", not only you but every being that breathes, every being that lives, everything that exists. It is a fact that you have ignored so long. Believe it from now on. When you watch your breath and meditate on that magnificent truth, slowly the I and the He (the *Sah* and the *Aham*) will draw nearer and closer until the feeling of separateness will fade away—and the *Soham* will be transformed into *Om*, the *pranava*, the Primal sound, the fundamental formula for God. That *Om* is the *Swa-swarupa*—the reality behind this "relative reality."

Source: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, Vol. 9

Anger turns a man into a drunken brute. The other impulses are equally vicious. Seek only salutary karma; eat only satwic [pure] food—food that will not disturb the equanimity you earn through your sadhana. Do not break the even tenor of your spiritual practice. Remember how Ramadas never gave up his Nama sadhana despite jeers and jail.

~**Sathya Sai Baba**

The Highest Devotion

This world is a manifestation of the mind. The world as well as the senses are manipulated by the mind alone. The senses and the world take sustenance from the mind. The entire universe is made up of the five elements. Ether, air, fire, water and earth are the five elements. Each of these elements assumes subtler forms than the other. Water, for instance, is lighter and subtler than the earth. Fire is subtler than water, and air is still subtler than fire. Of all these, ether is the subtlest. Hence the earth, water, fire and air, all emerged from ether. Because of the motion of ether, air is formed. From air is formed fire. Fire cannot sustain without air. Because of the coolness from fire, water is born. Water when solidified forms earth. All these elements take sustenance from Divinity. Mind is the root cause of all these.

Mind is present inside the body amidst the five sheaths (*pancha koshas*). The five sheaths are *annamaya kosha* (gross body sheath), *pranamaya kosha* (pertaining to the *prana*, life force), *manomaya kosha* (mind sheath), *vijnanamaya kosha* (intellect sheath), *anandamaya kosha* (bliss sheath). Where is the mind inside these five sheaths? Above the mind is *prana* (life force) and below it is discrimination power.

Both these are related to fire. Mind is related to water. The Moon is the presiding deity for the mind. Hence, coolness is the nature of the mind. Because of the presence of life force above and discrimination power below, the mind melts and gets transformed into water. The nature of water is to flow toward the lower level. It does not have the nature of flowing upward. Hence, the mind always wanders around the sensory pleasures. It is always driven into worldly activity. It can't voyage toward the pure and higher stages. To divert the mind toward the higher realms, spirituality is of utmost necessity.

Journey to the 'amanaska' state

Every human being is aspiring for happiness and is desirous of it. How can one be happy? You should understand the nature of the *atma* that gives sustenance to all the senses. The source for all the five senses is the space or ether. This ether emerges from the *atma*. If you understand the *atma* clearly, there is a possibility that your senses and the five sheaths will be under your control. Then you can enjoy happiness. Happiness is beyond comfort and sorrow. Comfort and sorrow are just manifestations of the human mind. That state that is beyond this pleasure and grief is happiness. Such a state of happiness is knowledge. This knowledge is all pervading. This is referred to as "*prajnanam Brahma*"—knowledge is Brahman.



Even though this knowledge is all pervading, certain ways must be followed to identify it. This is called *prajna* as it speaks of the equanimity present at all levels viz. body, mind, discrimination, and intelligence. This is called the inner voice. There exists no difference between this inner voice and God. God is the inner voice, and the inner voice is God. When the voice of the heart, that is the voice that comes from within you is adhered to, happiness follows. How to experience that inner voice? To experience this inner voice, you must control the activity of the external senses. When the inner and outer sense organs are completely controlled, then the inner voice can be heard. What manifests externally, the activity pertaining to the external world has been named '*manas*' (mind). That which is internal is named '*nama*'. That which is not the mind (*manas*) is *nama*. As long as he is under the influence of the mind, man treads various paths. When he gains control over this mind, he reaches the state of *amanaska* (no mind state). The voice of God is heard only in the 'no mind state'. To listen to this inner voice, you have to practice various spiritual disciplines. These are named as devotion and surrender to God.

Different types of devotion

To understand these aspects, you should have love for God. To achieve love for God, the easiest path is to worship God as having a form. There are various ways in this type of devotion. Most important of them are three: *satwic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic*. In the *tamasic* form of worship, man prays to God through violence (causing pain), anger, and pomp. That which is done for the sake of name, fame with pomp, and ego is called the *tamasic* worship. *Rajasic* worship is done for the sake of name and fame, for power, for fulfilling selfish interests, and to attain great heights in one's life. A *satwic* devotee performs all the activities to please God, with total surrender and does it as a service to God.

Beyond these there are various other forms of devotion: *nirguna bhakti* (devotion to the attributeless), *rakshasa bhakti* or *asura bhakti* (demonic type of devotion), and *moha bhakti* (devotion with attachment). Devotion with the feeling that one alone should be safe, one alone should be happy, one alone should be blessed, involves utter selfishness. Such a devotee does not aspire for the well-being of his family or the society around. One with devotion of the demonic nature leads a life of cruelty and anger, lacking mercy and compassion. A devotee of *moha bhakti* does not think as to what is real and what is unreal. He does not have the faculty of observation and discrimination. Even though he has no intention of troubling others, he causes pain to others. In such a situation, he loses the capability of understanding. All the three types of people (the ones with *rakshasa bhakti*, *asura bhakti*, and *moha bhakti*) do not have the devotion for God. They have no quality of helping others. They are devoid of compassion and pity. Such people 'preach' about devotion beyond attributes. This preaching can be said to be demonic.

There are two other kinds of devotion that are different from these: *vipraka bhakti* and *sankarshaka bhakti*. In the latter kind of devotion, the aspirant tries to get closer to the objects and persons, be friends with them, believing that what is distant from him is also his own. This pertains to the principle of love. Coming close to the objects and persons far away from oneself is this kind of devotion. The other kind is full of hatred. Losing the objects and relationships with people who are near to you, thinking that the object that is near to you is far away, are the characteristics of this kind of devotion. This can be called as devotion with hatred. In the *sankarshaka bhakti*, there are again three kinds. One form is that the person respects someone elder to him, is obedient to him, welcomes him and enjoys his company. The second kind is where the person makes friendship with others of his age and loves them and has no fear in their company. The third kind is that the aspirant has love, compassion, and pity for those who are less privileged than him and shows them a way in accordance to their status. For all these, love is primordial.

Para bhakti: the highest form of devotion

There are four goals (*purusharthas*) in the world that people aspire for: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desire), and *moksha* (liberation). They are not able to realize that there is one more thing higher than all these. God is higher than everything else in the world. When such God is realized, seen and when a close

relationship is established with God, the happiness one enjoys, that state of liberation, that principle of love has been called as *para bhakti* (devotion of the highest order). This devotion can be called as liberation itself. Liberation is merger with God. Liberation is that when there is no difference. The ability to look for unity in diverse things rather than differences is the principle of man. *Para bhakti* is reaching that state. This can't be attained by everyone. One need not be in despair that it can't be attained. One should try for it. One should not waste his time thinking that he is different from others. As long as one sees others to be different from him, man will be in doubt. So long as there is doubt, he can't realize the eternal truth.

Today man is preaching a lot of things, but he is forgetting the fact that the same things apply to him as well. He does not enquire whether he is practicing what he is preaching. This is ostentatious devotion. Such fanfare and ego fail man in his attempt to reach his goal. He moves away from God. You should not entertain such doubts that take you away from spiritual and divine thoughts. Such doubts exist for those who have selfishness and self-centered feelings. No such doubts arise in the minds of those people who aspire for God's love and devotion. Today's man exhibits his love and devotion for God only in matters related to worldly issues. But in the case of the *atmic* principle that is related to Divinity, the individual's devotion and commitment is its own witness.

Source: *My Dear Students*, Vol. 3

Chaksho Suryo Ajayata

Dr. T. Ravi Kumar came to Swami's fold as a boy in 1969. In 1981 Swami appointed him as a faculty member in His Brindavan College. Later, when Bhagavan's University came into being, Swami blessed him to be one of the earliest research scholars at the Department of Chemistry at the Prasanthi Nilayam Campus. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree from the Divine Chancellor in the year 1990. Currently, in addition to being an Associate Professor at the Department of Chemistry, he is the warden of the hostel at the Brindavan Campus.

"... and when we showed the cast to Swami, He said, 'Ask Ravi to act the role of the blind beggar boy.' How lucky you are to be remembered by Swami even in your absence! "It was my senior describing to me the events of the past few days. I had come to Parthi from Anantapur to spend my weekend, as was my wont. I was doing my Masters in Chemistry at the PG [Post Graduate] center at Anantapur, and the alumni of the Brindavan Sri Sathya Sai College had decided to stage a play depicting the life of Jesus Christ entitled, 'The Kingdom of Heaven'.

During *darshan* the next day, Swami told me that he had selected me for the role of the 'blind boy' in the drama. He asked us to go to Poornachandra Auditorium and rehearse with Christopher St. John, an actor from Hollywood, who was Swami's devotee. "I will give *darshan* to devotees and come there," He said. My scene was being rehearsed. Jesus asks the blind beggar who prays that sight be bestowed on him, "Boy, do you have the faith that I have the power to do so?" "Yes Lord, I have faith in You." Jesus rubs on the boy's eyes and bestows eyesight. Just at that moment, Swami entered the stage. He smiled at us and remarked, "Sai Baba came, and Ravi got back his eyesight."

The next day, again we went for practice. Even as we were practicing, we heard applause outside. Bhagavan was giving *darshan* to devotees. We continued with our rehearsal. Again at exactly the same juncture, Swami arrived and remarked, "Sai Baba came, and Ravi got back his eyesight." After the scene ended, I went and sat near Swami. Swami asked me, "Did you hear people clapping during *darshan*? Do you know why? I gave eyesight to an 18-year-old girl who had been born blind. I gave her eyesight just as Jesus gives it to you in the drama. I shall give you also." I laughed and took Swami's remark rather casually. This was toward the end of November 1980. I completed my M.Sc. and Bhagavan blessed me with the wonderful chance to join as a lecturer in Brindavan College in 1981. In 1982, He asked me to move over to Prasanthi Nilayam campus where I could continue to teach and do my research side by side.

It was July 1985. I had enrolled for Ph.D. and was doing my experimental work. One afternoon when I was in the lab, the lunch gong sounded. A fellow researcher asked, "Are you coming for lunch?" I said, "Not immediately. I'll just finish this experiment that I am doing." I was trying to detect steroids by thin layer chromatography.

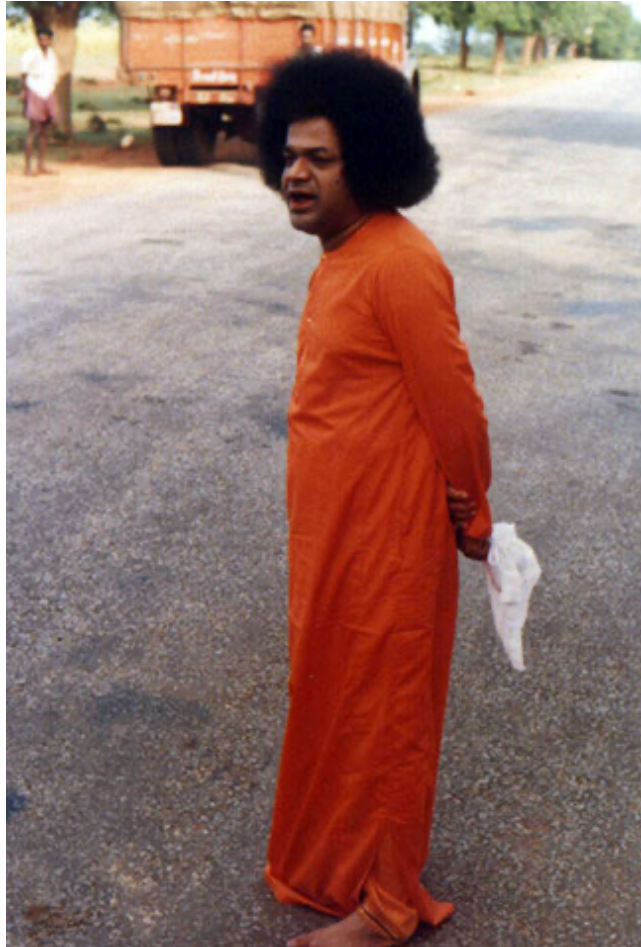
It was necessary to prepare the Leibermann Burchard spray reagent for this purpose. To prepare this reagent, one has to mix acetic anhydride with concentrated sulphuric acid. As I was doing this, there was a sudden explosion and the next thing I knew, the chemicals had splashed into both my eyes. I shouted 'Sai Ram'. Hearing this, a few students who had just left the lab came back running. They asked me what had happened. I could only tell them to take me to the nearest tap. The burning sensation was terrible. The nearest tap was dry, and so were the ones in the vicinity. (I found out later that the water line had been closed as some plumbing work was in progress for the new library building coming up alongside.)

By the time we found a tap that yielded water, the anhydride-sulphuric acid mixture must have been in the eye for 1½ to 2 minutes. We washed the eye repeatedly. I noted with rising panic that I could not see anything. "Let's quickly go to the doctor", said my colleague. There was a general hospital nearby. The route, of course, was much longer than it is today. One had to go up the University road and turn left.

As we went in, the nurse who was there said, “Oh! What a time to come! Our (only!) eye doctor, Dr. Wansa (from Sri Lanka), has gone to get her visa extended.” My heart sank as the nurse examined my eyes and tut-tutted, “I suggest you go to Bangalore”.

It was afternoon *darshan*. I had to be led by the hand as I could not see. Everything was so silent and then it was that the boy next to me whispered, “Swami has come out for *darshan* (there was no *darshan* music those days). He has turned to the left... the ladies side...He is near the *Dashavataram* gate...gents side...East Prasanthi...He is now approaching us....”

I could hear the rustle of silk as the Lord passed by me. I thought, ‘Oh! How unlucky I am to be unable to see the Beloved Face..’ I heard Swami’s loving, soothing voice, “Take this *prasadam* for three days—three times a day. Everything will be fine. I shall protect you. Start today.” He placed three packets of *vibhuti prasadam* in my palm. It was the third night after the accident... I had consumed the last ‘dose’ of *vibhuti*. As the night prayer ended, I was plunged in thought. I could not control my tears as I recalled all my hopes and aspirations. Having been brought up by Swami as I had lost my mother when I was 4½ years old, I always looked forward to the day when I could finish my studies and in some little way be of service to Swami, and here I was, blind, having to depend on others for the rest of my life. I was depressed and cried myself to sleep.



It was the next morning. There was a knock on the door. “Please come in” I said and turned to see that one of my student brothers had brought coffee. “Oh, you have brought coffee for me” I said. The boy exclaimed, “Sir, can you see!” It was then that the magnitude of what had happened struck me. I was able to see everything clearly and was speechless for some time. “Yes, I can see very, very clearly”, I said, overwhelmed.

During the morning *darshan*, Swami came straight to me and asked, “How are your eyes?” I had no words to reply. My eyes took over and answered in the language of

tears that washed His feet. As I looked up through the film of tears, Swami said, “Go to Bangalore, get yourself a pair of spectacles. Wear them always in the lab. Be careful next time.” A shudder ran through my spine. The last couple of words scared me. ‘Oh God! Would there be a next time?’ Swami’s words would always come true, I knew. But Swami’s kind smile reassured me. I got myself a pair of spectacles and diligently wore them.

Four years later one morning, the spectacles slipped and fell from my hands and broke. The experiment on hand was of great importance. If I discontinued it for a day or two, the work of a couple of months would go waste. So I decided that I’d continue to work, but very carefully. During the morning, I had prepared some hot chromic acid (the dark hot viscous liquid emitting fumes would remind one of *halahala* poison!). I had poured it in a sintered funnel, and to finish the work quickly connected it to a vacuum aspirator—a new one that had just arrived from Japan. Nothing happened for a few minutes or so it seemed. As I went to have a close look, the flask imploded and tipped 30 ml of hot chromic acid into my eyes. “Sai Ram,” I shouted. As the acid streamed down my face and fell on my shirt, the cloth was being eaten up. I was taken to the tap, and much water was liberally splashed on my eyes and face. Even after 45 minutes of washing, the burning sensation was unbearable.

This time the eye doctor was available when we went to the hospital. She removed the handkerchief that was tied around the eyes and examined. She then called the person who had accompanied me to the next room, discussed something with him, then returned and carefully dressed my ‘eye’. I asked the person who was holding my hands and leading me, “What did the doctor say?” He said, “She said everything was fine.” I knew that this was not true. I understood that this way I could not prise the facts from him. “If Swami asks me what the doctor said, I would have had to give Him the correct picture, don’t you think...” I ventured. That did the trick. He said, “The doctor after examining said, ‘There is very severe damage to the eye. I can’t do anything. Swami alone can help’”. So that was it.

As I sat in the *darshan* line with my bandaged eye, many thoughts raced through my mind. ‘Had not Swami warned me so explicitly? Why, Oh, why did I disobey His instructions? Would He be angry with me? Am I, after all, destined to be blind? Did Swami only postpone the inevitable?’ There was a hush. I knew Swami had come out to give *darshan*. I heard Swami’s sweet voice, “*Emi ayindi, Ravi?*” (What happened, Ravi?) I quickly tried to get up. Softly patting me on my cheeks, He continued, “I told you to be careful next time, didn’t I? You are careless, careless... Hold out your hand. Eat this *Vibhuti*. Swami will always protect you. Everything will be fine.” I ate the *Vibhuti* (that Swami had materialized) with relish and relief. From Swami’s own lips, I had heard ‘Everything will be fine.’ And, indeed, Swami’s words would always be true, I knew.

The next day, I went to the doctor to have the dressing changed. She removed the bandage and said, “Sai Ram! What a miracle! Your eyes are absolutely fine”.

Everything, indeed, was fine. I could see everything clearly. It is 20 years to date... I live each day grateful to Sai Ma for the boon of eyesight granted to me. Sai is the Sun around whom my life revolves... Even as I was contemplating on writing this article, Swami appeared in my dream and said, "Give the article the title '*Chaksho Suryo ajayata*.'" (It is from the Supreme Being's Eye that the Sun was born.) Swami elaborated on the title. '*Chakshu*, means 'eye'; '*Surya*' means 'Ravi'; '*ajayata*' means 'was born'. *Chaksho Suryo ajayata*—this *Vedic* declaration will forever remind me that from the Supreme Being Sai was born the sunlight of my eyes.

Source: *Sai Sparshan* (2005)

Spiritualism

It's an open door where others close,
A smiling face that says He knows,
A peacefulness that draws you near,
An open heart and a listening ear.

It's a brilliant star from a long-lost age,
That helps to turn each bright new page,
It's lovingness that comes from within,
That brings us forth when it is time to begin.

To send our Light both far and near;
To seek, to learn, to tell, to hear.
To find the peace and state of mind
We'd long thought man had left behind.

And with this knowingness inside
There's nowhere else for us to hide,
But take our worth and thank in grace,
To try and heal this earth, our place.

And should we stray along our path,
Sai's hand will guide us to the task,
So never fear—it shall be done,
In peace and love and light we pass; Amen.

~Peter Mills

Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, April 1998

Desire comes from attachment

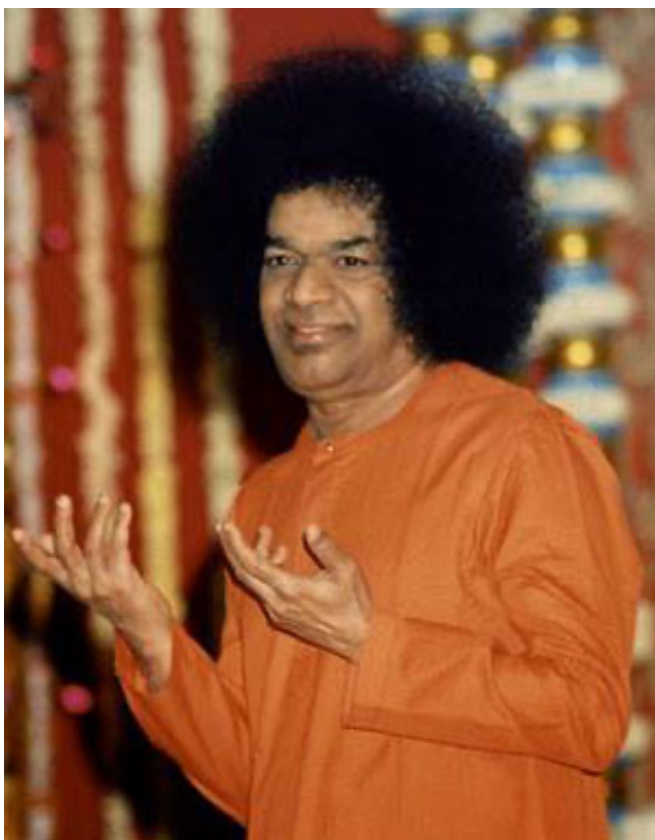
Deliverance comes from detachment

—**Baba**

What I Have Learnt from Sri Sathya Sai

Usually, it is very difficult to learn new things, especially for older people. But anyone who tries to learn a new way of life sincerely at the lotus feet of Mother Sai can do so easily.

The first and the most important lesson I have learnt in Swami's school is the observance of silence. It is a very important discipline stressed by Bhagavan. Swami says, "It is only in the depths of silence that the voice of God can be heard." It means that when we are in the innermost depths of silence and cannot hear even the slightest external sound, we can hear the Lord who is all pervading. He is always calling us, but we are not able to hear Him because we are not tuned to Him.



Another important lesson I have learnt at the lotus feet of Mother Sai is to always chant the Lord's name or sing His glory. As Swami says, we should think of Lord Ganesha before we start any work because He removes all the obstacles. Ganesha is none other than our Sai Ganesha. Before I commence any work, I always think of Swami.

It is always a unique experience to stay in the presence of Bhagavan who is Divinity in human form. Whatever He does is *dharma* and whatever He speaks is truth. His life is His message. He speaks through His actions and whatever He says in words, He puts into action. This is the glory of the Sai Avatar. He is the very embodiment of all the Holy scriptures and texts.

What a good fortune that we are in the presence of this great *Avatar*!

When I think of all the days that I have spent in the divine valley of Puttaparthi, many little but significant things come to my mind. I still remember a small yet profound incident that took place during the *Dasara* festival of 1987. During those nine days, Bhagavan blessed everyone by giving His discourses. One particular day, an elderly gentleman gave a speech that preceded Bhagavan's discourse. He gave his speech and then sat down on the stage near Bhagavan. Bhagavan rose up and His sweet voice filled the auditorium. After the discourse, as the elderly devotee got up, his shawl slipped down. Bhagavan Himself bent down, picked up the shawl and placed it on the devotee's shoulder. Swami then held his hand, helped him to get up and lead him off the stage. This simple yet significant act of our sweet Lord Sai taught me a great lesson in humility. We are staying in the presence of the Lord of Lords who is so humble that He stooped down to pick up His devotee's shawl. This one deed transformed me and gave me a glimpse of the multifaceted personality that Bhagavan is.

Bhagavan is always humble. He is the Lord of the Universe and the indweller of our hearts, but He remains humble. If only humility is practiced by the people, ego and enmity would vanish. Ego is the cause for our self-destruction. Ego kills our good qualities. In Bhagavan, there is no trace of ego. He is ever humble. It is said that God is bigger than the biggest and smaller than the smallest. But God is also greater than the greatest and the humblest.

~YS Vijay Sarathy Alumnus
Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam
Source: *Sai Nandana 1995* (70th Birthday Offering)

Q&A

WITH BHAGAVAN

The *Shastras* and *Sanyasa*

Q. Swami, you say that one has to do some things, that one should not do certain other things. How are we to know which is which? What is the authority?

A. The *Shastras* are the authority. The *Manusmriti* itself declares, for example, that *varnas* [social classes] and *ashramas* [four stages of life] are only for physical purification and that they do not affect the gaining or losing of the highest.

Q. If that is so, why all this bother of *varna* and *ashrama* and the rules and regulations binding them?

A. Ah, they are required until you become free from attachment or *raga*. Until then and for the sake of that, the regulations, limits, and rules have to be obeyed to the very letter. The medicine has to be taken so long as the illness persists. Each type of illness has a special medicine for cure, is it not? And a different course of diet and a special regimen. After one has got rid of the illness, one can partake of a feast with the rest. Without accepting this, if the well and the ill both demand the same feast, it will lead to calamitous consequences. The *varnas* and the *ashramas* are as medicine prescribed for those who suffer from this *bhavaroga*, the ills of worldliness and worldly attachment. *Raga* (attachment) is the *roga* (illness) and *roga* can disappear only by regimen strictly observed. Unless you get well, you cannot be liberated. This is the true meaning of *Vedanta*; he who knows this, whatever his *ashrama*, attains *mukti*.

Q. Swami! Have any great souls achieved *moksha* or liberation while in the *grihastha ashram*, the householder stage?

A. Janaka, Aswapathi, Dileepa—these are examples of persons who gained *moksha* as *grihasthas*.

Q. Swami! Is it not necessary to follow strictly the injunction of the *Shruti* [which is heard] that enjoins man on the duty of completing the *brahmacharya* [celibate] stage and then after passing through the next stage of the *grihastha* [householder] to enter *vaanaprastha* [recluse] and observe all the limitations and regulations of that stage, before ultimately taking on *sanyasa* [renunciant], the life of full renunciation? Or can one take *sanyasa* even without going through the other steps?

A. Yes, whenever one gets detachment from objects, one can take *sanyasa*. Unless such a chance is seized, man is bound to fall. Whatever may be the stage or *ashrama* you are in, when you get full renunciation, you can enter upon the *sanyasa* stage from that very moment. There is no iron rule that you must live through the three earlier *ashramas* or stages. This, too, is the injunction of the *Shruti*. The reason is: such a pure soul has undergone the training available in the other stages—the purification—in the crucible of life in previous births. His destructive tendencies have been rooted out and the progressive ones, the uplifting ones, have been developed in past births themselves.

Q. How are we to know that such transformation has already been earned in the past births? Are there any signs by which we can discover that such and such an *ashrama* or stage can be skipped? If there are, please tell me.

A. The fact that a person has no inclination for the three *ashramas*, that he has no attachment or attraction toward them is a clear sign. If detachment has

developed in the past birth, the inclination will be absent. Since awareness that the *atman* alone is real has dawned, the person is unattached to the three earlier stages of life. When renunciation has appeared, one can give up worldly life, even though the series must be over-stepped. This is approved by the *Shruti*. But the person who confers *sanyasa* must examine fully and convince himself that the person on whom he is conferring it is devoid of sensual impulses and attachments. *Sanyasa* should be given only to one who has no agitation in the mind, or *vrittis* as they are called; only such can be said to be unattached. The candidate, too, should examine himself and see whether his inner consciousness is free from the *gunas* [qualities], dull, active, or even progressive. If it is not so free, he will not only break the vows of *sanyasa* and be outcast, but he may even break down under the burden and meet a calamitous end.

Q. Is *sanyasa* of one kind or are there different kinds?

A. There are three types of *sanyasa*. They are *dehasanyasa*, *manosanyasa* and *atmasanyasa*.

Q. What does *dehasanyasa* mean?

A. [It means] *Sanyasa* in appearance, so far as the outer body is concerned. He wears the ochre robe, assumes the name, appears in the form, but he has no awareness of the *atma*; he wanders amidst all the objective desires clinging to external things. For all intents and purposes, He is like ordinary men.

Q. And *manosanyasa*?

A. In *manosanyasa*, he gives up all decisions and desires; he has the mind under strict control. He is not guided by impulses or agitations; he is ever calm and collected.

Q. You mentioned *atmasanyasa* as the third.

A. Here he breaks through all thoughts about things that are unrelated to the *atma*, for he is ever immersed in the contemplation of the true reality, "*Aham Brahmaasmi*—I am Brahman." He is steady in the consciousness of his being *atma*. His *ananda* [bliss] is continuous—*akhanda*. This is called *amrithasanyasa*. The thickest darkness can be destroyed only by the light that emanates from the splendid solar orb. Similarly, without the splendor of *atmasanyasa*, ignorance cannot be dispersed—the encasements that hide the heart cannot be shattered, and the *atma* cannot shine in its own glory.

Q. How are these types attained? What are the signs that they have been attained?

A. *Dehasanyasa* is attained by discrimination between the eternal and the temporary, the evanescent and the everlasting. *Manosanyasa* is reached by conquering the waywardness of speech, of the senses, and of the mind. *Atmasanyasa* is won by filling oneself with the principles of *Vedantic* thought. When these educative influences become strong and you are well established in these virtues and attitudes, then you can get liberated because of the combined effect of these stages.

Q. Who among these are really fortunate, their lives being spent in a worthwhile way?

A. Well, he who like the bee sucks in silence and in great bliss the honey in the flower, who is intent on uninterruptedly tasting the nectar of *atmic* bliss, who ignores this world as but a 'scene', a *drishya*, he indeed is the most fortunate. His life is the most worthwhile.

Q. Then, Swami, what is it that is spoken of by the elders as attaining *sathya*, *nithya*, *nirmala*, and *shanti*? How are these—truth, indestructibility, purity, and equanimity—to be attained?

A. As I said already, he who does not attach himself to the "scene", but who is engrossed in his own *atmic* bliss, it is he who attains *sathya*, *nithya*, *nirmala*, and *shanti*. Or even if he attains one of them it is enough; for one includes all.

Source: *Prasnothara Vahini*

Thought of the MONTH

The Four Important Qualities

In *Bharatiya* [Indian] culture, the four goals of human existence [*purusharthas*] are: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (earning wealth), *kama* (fulfilment of desires), and *moksha* (liberation). It may not be possible for all human beings to achieve these four goals.

There are four qualities that man must develop if he must pursue the four *purusharthas* properly. These are very necessary and the failure to understand these four requisites is the cause of many grave consequences. These four are: *maitri*, *karuna*, *muditha*, and *upeksha*. These are the important qualities for everyone and the characteristics of each of these qualities have not been understood or explained properly.

Maitri (friendship) is regarded as mere friendliness. What is friendship? Whom should you befriend? How is one to be friendly? These aspects have to be understood. One should not cultivate friendship with all and sundry. Friendship should be cultivated only toward those who are one's equals in age, status, culture, etc. Friendship with those above or below one should be avoided. This is the true meaning of friendship. When you try to befriend those above you in status, they may try to patronize you. When you do not like to be lorded over, the friendship will break. When you develop friendship with those below you, you may attempt to boss over them. When they do not acquiesce in this, the friendship will break up. Therefore, friendship will be enduring only when it is as between equals in age, wealth, status, etc.

Karuna (kindness or compassion) should be shown toward those who are in a lower position than ourselves in respect of age, wealth, health, status, education, and the like. Only then compassion becomes meaningful and valuable. Kindness justifies itself in such cases.

Muditha (appreciation) relates to the attitude shown toward those who are better off than you. You should feel happy when you see such persons. They may look wealthier than you or better placed than you in position and possessions. You should feel happy on seeing them. You should rejoice at the sight of those who hold higher positions or score higher marks. *Muditha* means freedom from envy and feeling happy over the better fortunes of others.

Upeksha: There are two terms *apeksha* (liking) and *upeksha* (dislike or disinterestedness). We should have no liking for those who indulge in bad deeds or entertain bad thoughts. They should be kept at arm's length. Keep away from all those who are filled with bad thoughts, indulge in bad talk and bad actions. This is *Upeksha*.

If you cultivate these four qualities, you do not need any other goals in life. Friendship with equals, compassion toward the lowly, rejoicing in the good fortune of those who are better off and keeping away from the wicked—these are the true objectives to be pursued in life. It is because of the failure to observe these directives that the quality of life has deteriorated.

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 22 (1989)

Contact with the external world is maintained by the senses for the sake of these experiences that yield joy or grief. In order to escape being tossed about on the waves of joy and grief, one should cultivate unconcern (*upeksha*), an attitude of welcoming either, as a sign of grace. Shri Ramakrishna said that if you must avoid

the sticky fluid in the jackfruit from contacting your fingers when you peel it, you must apply a few drops of oil on them. So, too, he said, "if you do not want the world and its reactions to stick to you, have a few drops of 'unconcern' applied on your mind." This unconcern leads to the deepest yearning for God.

Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 7 (1967)



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