

## Spiritual Significance of Ganesha Worship

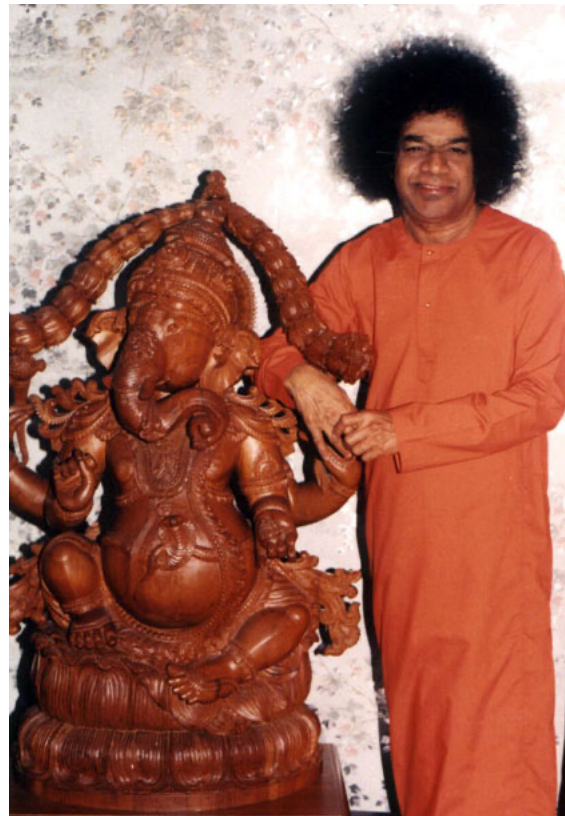
*On Ganesha Chaturthi, Bhagavan Baba said in His discourse that we should not have contempt for any religion, as each religion is a pathway to God. We should foster love toward our fellow-beings, and thus receive the noble love of the Divine.*

*This should be our goal of life.*

**E**mbodiments of love! Charity is the ornament for hands. Truth is the ornament for speech. Hearing the scriptures is the ornament for ears. Where is the need for other ornaments?

There is no greater experience than the feeling that one is *atma—aham ethath*. *Aham* ("I") is defined as *atma*, the Self. The word *ethath* means all these. It covers all the objects in the Universe that are physical and subtle, and the Sun, Moon, stars, and planets. It signifies that you are not the physical body. You say "body" that implies that you are not the body. What is this body constituted of? It is a combination of *pancha bhutas* (five elements), *pancha pranas* (five vital airs), and the *pancha kosas* (five sheaths). The entire universe is the body of the Supreme Lord. It consists of all the moving and static things. In *Vedantic* parlance, it is deemed to be *jnana* (superior wisdom) when you say, "I am not the body."

One should be extremely fortunate to realize this. Whatever you see in the external world is *drishya* (that which is seen). The Sun, Moon, stars, the five elements that are constituents of the Universe are all *drishya*. You are seeing your body, too, as you see other things. So, the body is also *drishya*, that which is seen by you. Who is then the seer? The seer is *drashta*. The body is the object, and you are the seer. Without a seer there is no question of anything being seen. Some people



talk about *shoonya* (emptiness or nothingness). Unless this has been seen, how can they talk about *shoonya*?

### **The great message of Ganapati**

Knowledge of the seer and the seen is the great message of Ganapati, whose advent we are celebrating today. "Ga" means *buddhi* (intelligence). 'Na' means *vijnana* (wisdom). 'Pati' means master. So, Ganapati is the master of all knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom. There is also another significant meaning for the word, that He is the Leader of all the *ganas* —the celestial beings. He is also called Vinayaka, which means that he is one who has no master above Him. He is the supreme master. He is beyond the mindless stare. One who has stilled the mind cannot have any master.

Without understanding this truth, we think of the physical form of Vinayaka with the elephant head and human body. Whenever people want to commence any undertaking or start learning music or the fine arts or any branch of knowledge, they first offer worship to Vinayaka.

He is also called Lambodhara, which means Guardian of Wealth—Lakshmi Swarooma. Here Lakshmi represents all wealth and prosperity and not only *dhanam* (money), for which there is a separate deity called Dhanalakshmi, one of the eight Lakshmis. Here wealth means *sukha* and *ananda* (pleasure and bliss). What is the use of having all other things when one has no pleasure or bliss?

### **Ganapati endows us with supreme intelligence**

Ganapati is one who gives us spiritual potency and endows us with supreme intelligence. These two are termed as *Siddhi* and *Buddhi*, respectively. *Siddhi* and *Buddhi* are described as his two consorts. As He is the *Adhipati* (master) of *Siddhi* and *Buddhi*, he is regarded as their husband in mundane terms. Vinayaka has no desire and hence there is no need for Him to have wife and children. He is worshipped by people in this country since very ancient times. There is historic evidence that the worship of Vinayaka has been in vogue even in other countries such as Thailand, Japan, Germany, and U. K.

Adoration of Vinayaka as *prathama vandana* (first deity to be saluted) has been mentioned in the *Vedas*. Ganapati *Tattwa* finds a place in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. Reference to Him is made in the *Gayatri* also. He is one who instills purity in body, and fearlessness in the mind. It is said, "*Tanno Dhanthih Prachodayaat*," giving importance to His tusk.

Some people, out of ignorance, comment upon the big animal form of this Primal Deity and question how one with such a huge form can ride on a small *mushika* (mouse), which is depicted as His vehicle. *Mushika* is symbolic of the darkness of ignorance, while Ganesha signifies the effulgence of wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

### **Significance of steam-cooked offering**

Even the offering that is made to Ganesha has great significance because it is prepared with gram flour and jaggery or pepper and enclosed in an outer covering made from flour paste and then cooked in steam without using oil. This is supposed to be a healthy and delicious food item according to the *Ayurvedic* system. Modern doctors also recognize the importance of such steam-cooked *idlis* (rice cakes) that they recommend as post-operative diet for patients as it is easily digestible. Jaggery, too, has the property of controlling gas formation, and this food item gives relief from eye troubles and prevents gastric disorders.

In the ancient traditional mode of observing these festivals, great emphasis was laid on good health as the pre-requisite for spiritual pursuits with a healthy mind. For achieving the four goals of human life—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* (righteousness, wealth, desire, and liberation)—one should have basically a healthy body. If you want to earn wealth by righteous means and cherish desires that lead to liberation, you should have sound health.

Vinayaka is also called Vighneshwara as He removes all obstacles coming in the way of devotees who pray to Him sincerely. He is worshipped by students with books so that all that is contained in the books may get into their heads. Now-a-days people are only after *dhanam* (money). Whatever scholarship one may attain, whatever power and position one may enjoy, one cannot be happy without the peace of mind that is got by pure devotion. One may have immense physical strength, one may pursue the path of meditation and penance, one may acquire profound knowledge, but all these attainments will be of no avail unless one acquires knowledge of the eternal—*sathyam, jnanam, anantham Brahma*.



### **Symbolic significance of elephant head**

The symbolic significance of Ganesha's elephant head must be properly understood. The elephant has profound intelligence. For example, yesterday Sai Geeta (Bhagavan's elephant) came running when it heard the sound of Swami's car approaching. Though many cars were following Swami's car, Sai Geeta could unmistakably identify Swami's car from an uncanny recognition of the sound of the car. That is why it is termed *Gaja Thehivi* (elephant intelligence). One having a sharp brain is described as having the intelligence of an elephant. It has *Medha Shakti*.

Moreover, the elephant has large ears and it can hear even minute sounds. *Shravanam* (hearing the glory of the Lord) is the first step in spiritual *sadhana*, for that ears should be sharp. After hearing one has to ruminate over this and put it into practice; these are termed as *shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhidhyasana*. The elephant takes the *dushana* and *bhushana* (praise and blame) equally. When it hears something bad, it moves its body this way and that way and shakes off the unwanted things while it retains goods things quietly.

Only Vinayaka teaches the lessons that are essential for mankind. You should not stop with installing the idol and doing *puja* for a few days. You should make efforts to become a *Nayaka* or Master over yourself. You have the nine-fold path of devotion. *Shravanam* (hearing), *kirtanam* (singing His glory), *Vishnusmaranam* (thinking of and chanting the name), *padasevanam* (serving at His feet), *vandanam* (obeisance), *archanam* (worship), *dasyam* (serving Him as a servant serves the Master), *sakhyam* (befriending God), *atmanivedanam* (surrendering body, mind, and soul). The elephant signifies combining of the first and the last, that is *shravanam* and *atmanivedanam*, so that all the other paths in between are covered fully.

When a man is born, he does not have around his neck any necklace of pearls or gems or any possessions. But he is endowed by Brahma with the garland of the effects of his past actions, good or bad, which hangs invisibly around his neck. If you do good, you will enjoy good results, and if you are bad you will not escape suffering the consequences thereof.

### **The lessons of sacrifice that Vinayaka taught**

The teaching of Vinayaka is one of sacrifice. You may not heed the contents of the *Puranas*, but you should not miss the vital principles that they convey to mankind. When Vinayaka was writing the *Mahabharata* to the dictation of Sage Vyasa, the latter laid down the condition that Vinayaka should go on writing non-stop whatever Vyasa said. But Vinayaka also stipulated a condition that Vyasa should never stop his dictation but should go on without a break. While he was writing, Vinayaka's pen broke, and he did not hesitate to break one of his tusks to use it as a pen. That is why he is called *Ekadanta* or one with a single tusk. This is a shining example of the spirit of sacrifice that Vinayaka exhibited for the welfare of humanity. That is why the *Vedas* proclaim that it is only by sacrifice one can attain immortality

### ***Bhakti is greater than Jnana***

*Prema* and *tyaga* (love and sacrifice) constitute *bhakti* (devotion to God). There is nothing superior to this. *Atma jnana* (knowledge of the Self) is essential. This was the main teaching of Adi Shankara throughout his life, as he was preaching and following the Vedic dictum "*Ekatma Sarvabhutha-Antarathma*;" "*Ekam Sath Viprah Bahudha Vadanthi*"—The one *Atma* is present in all beings; The one Truth is described in many ways by the wise. He was also preaching that *Jnana* was nothing but *Advaita darshana* (vision of non-duality). But, during his last days, Shankara realized that *bhakti* was greater than *jnana*. In his famous 'Bhaja Govindam', Adi Shankara emphasizes that only the path of devotion will help you to get over the cycle of birth and death.

There is no path superior to that of *bhakti*. *Bhakti* does not mean doing *puja*, *bhajans*, going on pilgrimage to holy shrines, etc. *Bhakti* means diverting the pure and unsullied mind toward God. People do not know the real meaning of *prema* [love]. The love you have for other beings is only temporal. God is the only one that is eternal. Love of God is *bhakti*. All other love may be termed as *anuraga* (affection, attachment), which results in bondage, while love of God leads to liberation.

One may raise a question whether it is possible for everyone to realize the goal through the love of God. One may not achieve this instantaneously but can do so progressing step by step. By *bhajans* (devotional singing) and other forms of worship one may advance toward the goal of final emancipation. There is no meaning in saying that one is searching for God. It is God who is searching for a true devotee. This is as true today as it was in the past. God is neglected by people when He is easily attained. What is easily obtained at home is not relished so much as what you get outside, though it is not wholesome.

### **Significance of offering your hair to God**

In olden days, people going on pilgrimage to Thirupati used to climb the hills step by step chanting the name Govinda, Govinda, as they climbed. Thus, the pilgrimage was performed with sincere devotion and *Namasmarana* [repeating the Lord's name]. But these days people go by buses and cars, gossiping all the while, and indulging in unholy pursuits. The tonsure ceremony in which one shaves his head completely and offers his hair to the Lord of Thirupati signifies your giving up your *tamoguna* (ignorance and lethargy) that is symbolized by the hair on the head. The hair is black. Giving up the hair indicates giving up *tamoguna*. You must assimilate *satwaguna*.

All acts of worship have a spiritual significance. Now-a-days, people do not understand their inner significance, they give up not only their hair but also waste a lot of money and return home without being any the wiser for the trip.

You may install idols and worship them. But do not forget the inner significance of all worship. All external activities are necessary only to help you to get into the spirit of non-duality and experience unity in diversity. Love and sacrifice are very

important. Where there is pure, unsullied, selfless, sacred, and sublime love there is no fear at all. Giving and not getting is the underlying principle of spiritual *sadhana*. Your heart is full of love, but you are using it only for selfish purposes instead of diverting it toward God. God is in the heart and not in the head. The heart is *prema mayam* (full of love). On these festival days, you should remember that God is one, and all religions uphold the same principle of "One God, who is omnipresent." You should not have contempt for any religion, as each is a pathway to God. Fostering love toward your fellow-beings, receive the noble love of the Divine. This is the goal of life.

**Source:** Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. 27

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*We are developing in each department of life, but it is a pity that we are not developing the unique qualities of human beings. Develop the atmic awareness, the consciousness of the Divine and the acquisition of Divine attributes. Expand love and understanding.*

~Baba

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## **Redemption Through Renunciation**

*The day when devotees hail the Lord with adoration;  
The day when people fraternize with the poor and the distressed;  
When servants of the Lord are treated to a pleasing feast;  
When the great ones come and relate the glories of the Lord;  
That day alone is a sacred and memorable day;  
All others are days of mourning.*

The mind is ever in quest of peace, without which there is no happiness. From time immemorial man has been engaged in striving for peace. But peace has eluded him because he has pursued wrong paths to achieving it. He has considered the satisfactions derived through the sense organs seeing, hearing, etc.—as the source of mental peace. He has taken the wrong road by surrendering to the demands of the senses. For the sake of enjoying sensuous pleasures man has been ready to adopt wrongful, unfair, and unrighteous means. In seeking his individual happiness and pleasure, he has not hesitated to destroy the peace and pleasure of others. In this process both the individual and society have lost peace and happiness.

As a result of the growth of the self-centered desires, selfishness and egoistic conceit have developed in society. Consequently, the basic human relationship that should exist between man and man has been totally undermined.

### **Without discipline man will ruin himself**

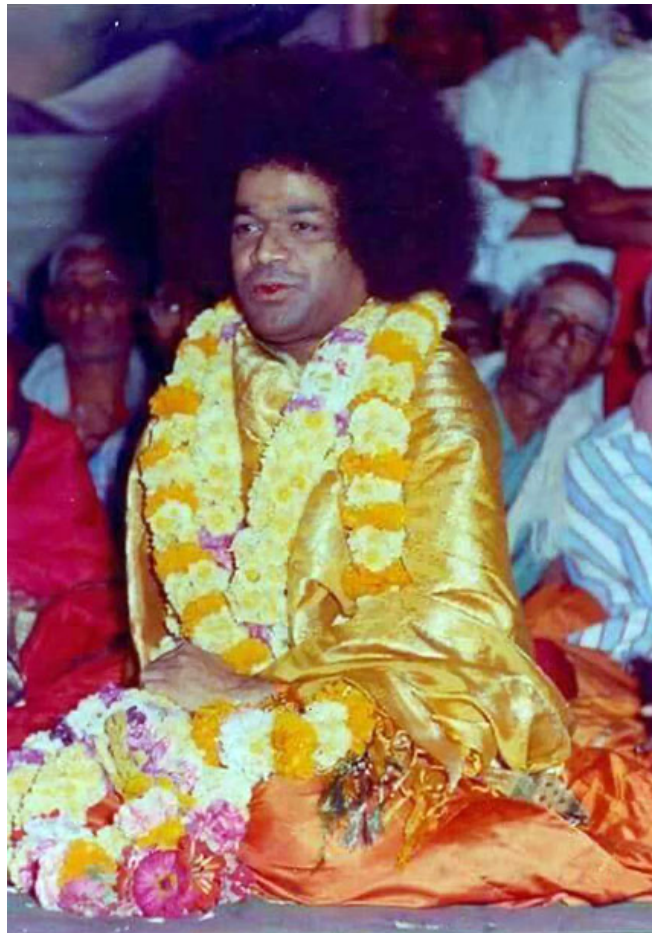
The human heart is essentially like the milky ocean. The *Puranas* [scriptures] have declared that it is such an ocean that the Lord has as His abode. The human heart that should be an ocean of milk has been turned today into an ocean of brine. The quality of milk is whiteness. White symbolizes the *satwic* nature (purity). In a *satwic* heart, qualities like love, compassion, forbearance, and peace will be enshrined. In salty water dangerous creatures like whales and crocodiles will roam freely. Likewise, in a heart that is not pure qualities like selfishness and pride will be dominant.

In the heart of man today, selfishness and conceit have grown to inconceivable heights. Everything in the world should be governed by certain bounds. *Nassreyo Niysmam Vinaa* (There can be nothing great without restraint). Without discipline and restraint man will ruin himself. The sun and the moon, the stars and the planets, wind and weather are all subject to certain laws. Nature itself observes certain divine laws in its functioning...

### **Man can change his nature from bad to good**

Animals live and die without change in their original nature. Man is different. By practice and discipline, man can change his nature—from bad to good or good to bad. All man's thoughts, feelings and actions are determined by habit and perseverance. Even a person who is cruel in early years can turn into a votary of peace and love. Ratnakara, who was a highwayman, became the Sage Valmiki.

Through association with good people, through good conduct and good thoughts, one can cultivate virtue and goodness. Above everything, man needs today *satsangam* (the company of good). For physical health one needs to get rid of impurities inside the body and take in pure things. Likewise, for mental health man needs to eliminate all impure thoughts and desires from the mind and acquire good thoughts and good feelings by association with good people. Everyone must send out a prayer: "Oh deities, come and dwell within me! Oh demons, flee from me!"



### **Prahlada and Bali were great devotees**

Prahlada was a great devotee of God. Hiranyakashipu did not believe in God. He asked his son, "Where is your Narayana?" Prahlada replied, "There is no place where He is not. You can find Him wherever you search for Him." Hiranyakashipu pointed to a pillar and asked Prahlada, "Is your God in this pillar?" Prahlada replied unhesitatingly, "Yes. He is in it." Hiranyakashipu shattered the pillar with a club. Immediately Lord Narasimha emerged from it. What is the inner meaning of this episode? Our body is like a pillar. It is only when delusion pertaining to the body is destroyed that the Divine will manifest Himself. Today, everyone is promoting body consciousness by fostering the desires prompted by the senses.

Prahlada, who was an ardent devotee of Hari, had a son, Virochana, who was an atheist. Virochana's son, the Emperor Bali, was a great devotee of God. The Onam celebration is in commemoration of the greatness of Bali. Emperor Bali was a highly righteous ruler. A great devotee, he was dedicated to the welfare of his subjects. He identified the well-being of the people with his own good. This was the characteristic of rulers in ancient times. During Bali's rule the land was prosperous, and the people lived happily and harmoniously. Bali was popular throughout the realm. When his fame and reputation were growing, Bali was affected by a tinge of ego. Egoism brings in its train the downfall of the individual.

### **King Bali was an ideal ruler**

There is no real ground for any man to feel inflated about himself. When the Lord's feet, eyes, head, and hands are everywhere, and everything in the Cosmos is permeated by the Divine, how can any man feel proud about his possessions or achievements? He is only an instrument of the Divine. Man should strive to recognize the unity that underlies the apparent diversity that he sees everywhere. Prahlada saw divinity in everything. He realized that the Divine pervades everything inside and outside.

The Onam celebration is an occasion for the people to remind themselves of the all-pervasive nature of the Divine. Keralites celebrate Onam by wearing new clothes after a ceremonial bath and partaking the delicacies prepared for the festival. But the Onam celebration should not be confined to these activities alone. It should be remembered that Emperor Bali was an ideal ruler whose sole concern was the welfare and happiness of his subjects.

When Bali gave away his entire kingdom to Vamana as a gift, the people felt intensely unhappy over the absence of such a beloved ruler. It was to make them happy that Bali got permission from Vamana to return to the world once every year to see the people and rejoice in their happiness. Onam is the day when Bali is believed to honor his pledge to the people and when people show their love and reverence to a great, benevolent, and righteous ruler.



### **Growth of selfishness among rulers and public**

In ancient days, there was immense mutual love and regard between the rulers and the people. Today such relations do not exist. The people are wasting their lives in selfish pursuits. The rulers, for their part, are also occupied with their own selfish ambitions and desires and are concerned only about achieving or retaining power and position. Selfishness has grown extensively both among rulers and the public. Unless this process is reversed, man cannot find peace or happiness. There should be control over desires. Peace will grow in proportion to the limitation on desires. All man's worries, difficulties, and problems increase with the growth of desires.

Man is the architect of his own happiness or misery. Only good actions can produce good results. When the individual is good, the family is good. When families are good, the society is reformed. When society improves, the nation improves. When the nations improve, the world is transformed. Hence, the transformation must begin with the individual. How can this transformation be brought about? There are two impurities in man that must be cast out: Selfishness and Conceit. But that is not enough. Pure qualities like love, forbearance, and compassion have to be imbibed. Life must be divinized.

What is the kind of existence people lead today? They are engaged in talking ill of others. They indulge in carping criticism. They are filled with envy. They gloat over trivial achievements. They speak one thing and act in a contrary way. This type of behavior dehumanizes them. There should be unity in thought, word, and deed.

Today we are witnessing the unchecked growth of selfishness all around. This evil has struck deep roots, growing from generation to generation. There must be total eradication of this selfishness. Real peace can be secured only by renunciation and sacrifice. There is supreme joy in giving. In renunciation lies the elimination of fear. As long as desires remain, fear and insecurity will dog us. Enquire into the joy that is to be derived from sacrifice and the grief that is the ultimate outcome of sensuous pleasures.

### **Bali's example of the spirit of sacrifice**

Whatever you enjoy through renunciation will become a kind of *yoga*. Self-conceit in the performance of actions and attachment to the fruits of one's actions have both to be given up. There should be no sense of egoism in doing one's work. "This is my work. I alone am entitled to its fruits" - this attitude should be given up. If you plant a tree, what guarantee do you have that you will live to enjoy its fruits? Your progeny may enjoy the fruits. Your duty is to do your allotted work. *Karthavyam Yogam Uchyathe* ("Doing one's duty is *yoga*").

Emperor Bali stands out as an example of purity and sacrifice. He rejected the advice of his preceptor, Sukracharya, when the latter opposed the grant of three feet of land to Vamana on the ground that Vamana was Lord Vishnu Himself and that offering the gift that He sought would result in Bali's ruin. Bali declared, "When the Lord Himself has come seeking a gift from me, what greater good can happen to me than that of being the donor, with the Lord as the recipient?"

Realizing that Bali would not heed his advice, Sukracharya resorted to a device to block the gift Bali was about to make, by turning into an insect and filling the mouth of the vessel through which water was to be poured by Bali while making the gift. Vamana, who was aware of this stratagem, cleared the block by pricking the mouth of the vessel with a poker. As a result, Sukracharya lost one of his eyes.

One must be prepared to make any offering to God, including one's life itself. Such was the greatness of Emperor Bali. He was prepared to make any kind of sacrifice for God. He lacked nothing in the world—wealth, power, position. But all these he was ready to give up to honor his word. It is rare to find persons who have everything and still have the spirit of sacrifice. The affluent are seldom generous. Often, they are mean and greedy.

### **Ideal relations between the ruler and people**

Because Bali stood out as an ideal renunciant, he achieved undying fame. Prahlada and Bali belonged to the lineage of the *Asuras* [demons]. But both were great devotees of God. Their lives are an example to all mankind.

There is a story to illustrate the ideal relations between the ruler and the ruled. There was a king who was being anointed by the queen before he took an oil bath. While the queen was applying oil to the king's head, the king noticed in the mirror that the queen was in tears. He asked her the reason for her shedding tears. The queen said that while applying oil she had noticed some grey hairs on the king's head, and the thought that the king was getting old had made her sad.

That very moment the king also felt that he had enjoyed royal pleasures long enough and it was high time he repaired to a forest to devote himself to the matters of the Spirit. The king and queen summoned the ministers, entrusted the reins of the government to them, and betook themselves to a forest to lead the life of ascetics. When the people heard about the decision of the royal couple, they felt that they could not live away from such noble rulers and decided to go to the forest en masse.

They approached the king and prayed to him, "Why have you given up the kingdom? Is it because of any lapses on our part?" The king told them, "I have ruled the kingdom long enough. Now that I am old, I wish to devote the rest of my life to the thoughts of God." On hearing these words, the entire people wailed in anguish. They decided to perform penance in the forest.

### **Queen's selfless concern for the people**

Brahma appeared before them and asked them what they wanted. As they were utterly unselfish, they prayed to Brahma to give their king a long life. Brahma granted their prayer. The people went in joy to the king and said that Brahma had granted him a long life and therefore he should return to the kingdom to rule over it for many years.

The king started to go back to the capital. But the queen declined to accompany him. She said she would continue to stay in the forest. The people mistook the reason for the queen's decision. They thought perhaps the queen was angry because they had prayed only for the long life of the king and not for the queen. The queen was cast in a different mold. She was not concerned about herself. She performed a severe penance. Brahma appeared before her and asked what she wanted. She asked, "Is it true that you have granted the king a long life? Of what use is it, if the king alone has a long life, while the subjects are short-lived? I pray you should grant a long life to the people also." Brahma was so pleased with her selfless concern for the people that he granted long life to the people and the queen also.

### **Kerala's spiritual heritage**

Kerala is a very sacred region. It is a land of great natural beauty. Its luscious vegetation endows it with a charm all its own. This beauty is a divine gift. God is beauty. Beauty is God. Keralites must revere their land as one sanctified by three avatars—Narasimha, Vamana and Parasurama. Kerala has been known for its unbroken tradition of devotion to God. While the vicissitudes of politics may have caused some changes, essentially Keralites have been adhering to the spiritual way of life. Even those who appear externally to be atheists are believers of the Divine deep in their being. Keralites should try to preserve their spiritual heritage whatever challenges they may have to face. This is a great treasure that they have to guard and cherish. They must live up to their ancient ideals and promote faith in them by precept and practice.

**Source:** *Sathya Sai Speaks*, Vol. 27

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### **His Children**

Our wonderful Lord is so great  
There is none whom He will hate  
By following Him, we His children  
Shall surely prosper in life's long run.

His powers are so great  
His word makes our fate  
In difficulties, He gives us a foothold  
And our faith increases a thousandfold.

As a token of love, He gives us many things  
From small sweets to large rings

These we accept with a lot of joy,  
All of us, each and every boy.

It is Him we adore forever,  
Our faith in Him shall never waver  
This is the promise we shall take  
And prove that it is not a fake.

~Gopi Krishna, IX Class, Prasanthi Nilayam

**Source:** Sanathana Sarathi, Oct. 1987

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## Blessings

Guru in Hinduism means a personal spiritual teacher or guide. The syllable 'Gu' means darkness or ignorance and the syllable 'Ru' stands for repeller of darkness. So a Guru is the light of awareness that removes the darkness of ignorance and reveals the ultimate truth of the Supreme Self. Guru is also a guide who ensures that the disciple is sailing toward the right direction.

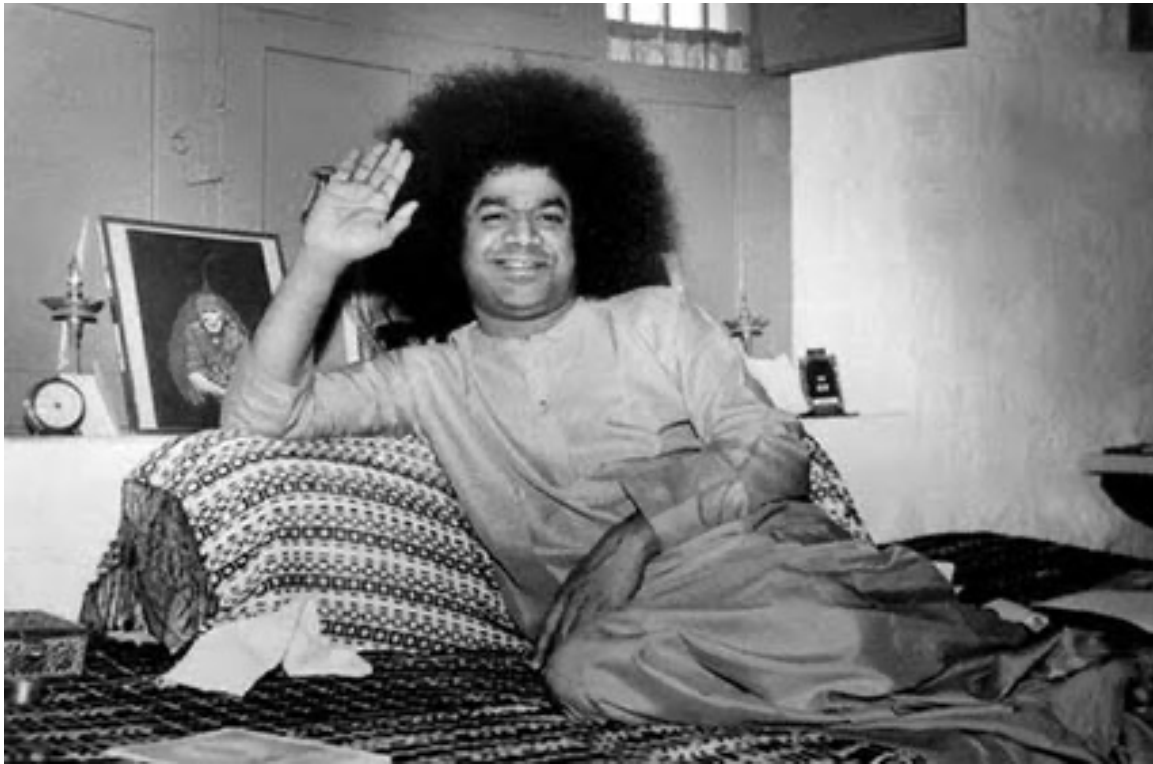
*"Guru bin gyan na upje, guru bin mile na moksha  
Guru bin likhe na satya ko, guru bin mite na dosh"*

Meaning: "Without Guru, no one obtains spiritual knowledge or achieves salvation. Without Guru, no one can see truth or have his doubts removed."

I am a humble devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba. Now let me share one of my experiences.

When I was staying temporarily in Koramangala area of Bangalore [now Bengaluru, India], I used to visit various temples nearby, like temples of Ganapati, Raghavendraswami, Hanuman, Yellammadevi, Nagdevta, etc. I wanted to visit a Sai Baba temple but could not find any at walkable distance. Then I thought that I will request my husband to take me to a Sai temple by car someday.

It was on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018, that I had this strange experience. After visiting the temples, as I was walking back home I realized that I had gone one lane ahead of my house. But I did not turn back. I kept on walking on as if in a trance. Then finally my steps stopped, I reached a building with a signboard "*Sai Sparshan*" where there were photos of both Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba. I was really surprised to be there. I could hear devotional songs and *Aarti* songs about Sai Baba. *Puja* (prayers) and '*Havan*' (fire rituals) were going on there outside the building. After attending the *puja* for some time, I came back home.



The next day morning I again went to the building. I was glad to see that it was a small temple of Sai Baba. There were idols of Ganapati, Sathya Sai Baba, and Shirdi Sai Baba. Inside the temple there was nobody—just God and me! So I prayed to my heart's content and thanked God for bringing me there. Then an old man came and gave me 'laddu' as 'prasadam' [consecrated food] saying that yesterday (23<sup>rd</sup> November) was the birthday celebration of Shri Sathya Sai Baba who is believed to be the incarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba!

Then I realized that I was guided by my Guru Sai Baba to reach there on that auspicious day. This strange experience changed my life. I trust in Sai Baba and strongly believe that Sai Baba is always there with me. Whenever I had to face obstacles, painful experiences, or trials in life, I believe that Baba will take care of me. When I write about Sai Baba, or when I sing Sai *bhajans* on stages or temples, I could see the affectionate smile on my Baba's face! And when I am blessed with awards and recognitions, I can feel Baba's blessing hand on my head! Sai Baba is like a father to a humble devotee like me. Definitely, Sai Baba is the Guru in my life who teaches and guides me and inspires me to achieve more and more!

OM SAI RAM!

~Dr Nalini Janardhanan

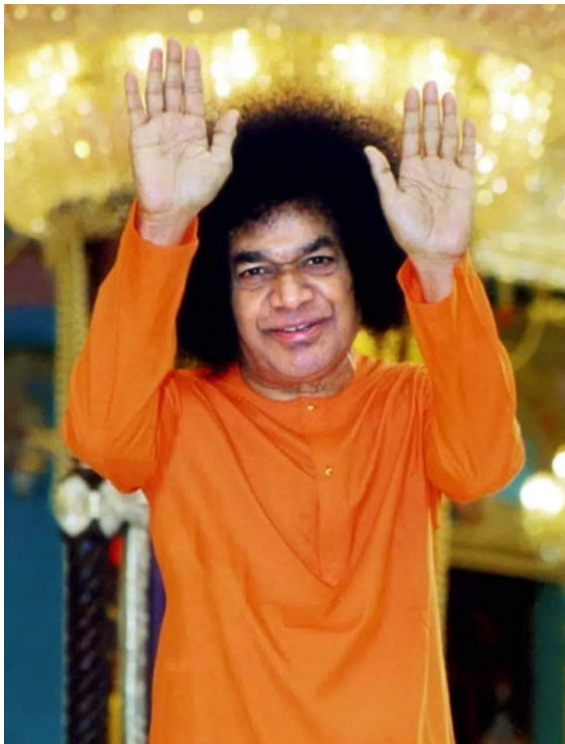
## Doctors and the Divine

A devotee from the Far East who had been confined to the wheel-chair for a number of years, is wheeled into the "interview room" at Trayee Brindavan [Swami's *ashram* in Bangalore]. Half an hour later he comes out walking, pushing the wheel-chair in front of him.

It was a Gurupoornima day. A mother carrying a 12-year-old boy who had never walked since birth is called in for interview at Prasanthi Nilayam. Swami gives the boy a big pat on his back, and he goes into and comes out of the room walking.

Crowds gather around these patients and express their amazement and share their happiness. Some people in the *darshan* line start giving their own interpretation of the event.

Doctors in the gathering stand in awe unable to find words to explain the phenomenon. What is their reaction? How can they reconcile their scientific knowledge with all this? They will no doubt accept that the divine force had effected a miraculous cure in these cases. But, perhaps, hardly any of them tries to think about and analyze the great possibilities that lie behind this phenomenon.



Swami Himself has explained these miraculous cures. When His love and the faith of the patient click the cure is effected. Is it possible for doctors consciously to take the help of this divinity in their healing mission at least to strengthen the healing process if not to effect miraculous cures? The answer to this question will depend on the doctors' understanding of the inherent divinity of man himself.

### **The whole and the parts**

The bane of modern medicine is that it neglects to treat the patient as a whole person, and because of this physicians are unable to understand and cure many diseases that afflict man today. By reducing the whole human organism to its parts and trying to treat the parts, doctors have lost their ability to

understand the coordinating activities of the whole. This whole includes the Self of man, the divinity within him. Because of this fragmented approach, the traditional wisdom of the faith healer, who views his patient as an integral whole, involving

besides the body, the person's relationship to the cosmos and the divine powers in it, is often a subject for mockery for modern medical practitioners.

They are completely ignorant of the fact that even rituals and ceremonies, however crude they may appear to be, have a place in stimulating the natural healing powers that every living being possesses. While it may be unwise to suggest that the modern physician should adopt these methods to supplement his drug therapy, it will at least be useful to go deeper into these practices and investigate how exactly they assist in the healing process.

### **Healing and divinity**

Indifference to spirituality has become characteristic of modern medical practice, as is the case with most other professions. The modern physician tends to avoid philosophical and spiritual aspects connected with illness and healing. From ancient times, healing in our country has been associated with divinity as exemplified by the Ashwini Devas and Dhanvantri, the God of Medicine. This is true of ancient Greek medicine also wherein they conceived of healing deities like Hygieia (Goddess of Health) and Aesculapius (God of Medicine). Similar concepts were held in ancient Chinese medicine, which was greatly influenced by Taoism and Confucianism. All these methods of healing were directed toward treating the patients at a more fundamental level than at the level of the body-mind complex.

The validity of this approach has been demonstrated in recent years by scientific studies. Once feelings of hope, anticipation, and faith are generated at the deeper level, the body starts combating the illness more effectively, with or even without the assistance of drugs, and heals itself. In these circumstances there is no doubt that the Divine takes charge of the physical body and does the needful. When such a self-healing process is initiated, it is impossible to describe exactly in scientific terms what happens in the organism, and it will not be wrong to characterize it as divine intervention. The modern physician hardly pays any thought to this aspect of his practice and comes to rely more and more on his own treatment. From the patient's side also, the evolutionary state of man now is such that instead of taking the assistance of the unlimited healing potential within himself he almost entirely relies on outside intervention by doctors and drugs.

### **Disease and the spirit**

An obvious flaw in modern medicine is the narrow view it has taken about the origin of diseases, always trying to find a single cause for each ailment, forgetting the contributory factors, especially those concerning the victim's psyche. Though "stress" has been recognized as an important cause of many diseases, its varied psychological and spiritual aspects have hardly received any attention from the practicing physician. Nor is there any recognition that spirituality and spiritual practices can have a tremendous influence on the factors affecting health, disease, and cures. This has never been a subject of investigation for medical researchers. That bodily ailments are only one of the several manifestations of a state of imba-

lance in the living organism and that this imbalance can have spiritual dimensions to it is hardly acceptable to the so-called scientific mind of the modern physician.

A little deeper inquiry into the phenomenon of spiritual healing will naturally lead us to a discussion of the nature of human consciousness. While physicists have shown that a consistent quantum theory is possible only with reference to the consciousness of the researcher, the psychologists and psychotherapists have only recently started showing interest in states of consciousness. The understanding of individual human consciousness and cosmic consciousness calls for enquiry beyond accepted scientific definitions and concepts, at least for the present. But it was long known to our ancients that the consciousness in every living being is a projection of the Divine and that the individual consciousness is closely linked to and integrally related to the cosmic consciousness. This cosmic consciousness has been equated in our scriptures with *Brahman* or *Paramatma* or God. That the individual consciousness can contact the collective consciousness is now accepted by psychologists in what they call Transpersonal Experiences.

### **Link with the cosmic**

That the Self in us can have a tremendous influence on our physical frame was once emphasized by Bhagavan Baba in a private discussion He had with doctors. He told an elderly doctor, "I am three years older than you in age, and see how I look and how you look! "The doctor's immediate reply was," But Swami, you are divine!" Swami retorted: "But the physical body is the same." The implication was that the real "Person" inhabiting the body can have a tremendous influence on the physical system and even counter the ageing process, if only we can learn to respond to the divine force in us. This also explains Baba's powers to influence the physical bodies of other people, because there are no "others" for Him. All that we need is the ability to link our individual consciousness with the cosmic consciousness that He is. This is possible only when we develop intense faith in Him. But what is faith? It is not just faith in an external Godhead. It really means faith in one's Self, faith in the infinite potency inherent in every individual.

It is this aspect of the Sai phenomenon that doctors have to consider and give a spiritual dimension to the practice of medicine. However, for "spiritualizing" medicine, the doctor should have a considerable knowledge of the different aspects of consciousness so that he can provide the patient with a spiritually supportive atmosphere to facilitate the healing process. In this process of harnessing the healing power of the Self in the patient, the physician's own level of spiritual development is an essential factor, since otherwise he will not be able to establish a link with the deeper levels of consciousness of the patient, however much the physician may be endowed with qualities like professional competence, compassion, and empathy.

### **Educating the patient**

The main effort of the physician in this endeavor will be to educate the patient about the cause of his illness and about the unlimited power of the Self in him and how he



can utilize these powers to heal himself. This does not mean that the patient has to become an accomplished spiritual *sadhaka* (spiritual practitioner) before he can cure himself, as this is too much to ask from any patient. It is primarily a question of educating him so that he can develop the required intensity of faith. Thus the doctor has to assume the role of a teacher.

As the impact of the philosophical and existential aspects of life on the physical sciences increases, the time is not far off when medicine will also get influenced by them and an entirely new scientific system of spiritualized medicine is developed. Doctors belonging to the Sri Sathya Sai Organizations have a unique role to play in this development because they have the Avatar Himself to inspire and guide them.

—Dr. M. Balasubrahmanyam

Source: Sanathana Sarathi, Nov. 1987

# Q&A

WITH BHAGAVAN

## The World is a Mirror

**Hislop:** Swami mentions *Vedanta* [one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy]. What is the correct use of that word?

**Sai:** *Vedanta* is metaphysical enquiry of the divine, the world and the valid experience of each. Metaphysics begins where physics ends. *Vedanta* proves by experience that which has been formulated. Philosophy is the fruit that has all the parts, whereas *Vedanta* is the sweet juice. Philosophy takes you to the edge of truth, gives you a vision of truth. *Vedanta* takes you into the heart of truth. Philosophy is a way of intellectual enquiry.

**Hislop:** Swami speaks of the divine, the world, and the individual. What is the relationship of Swami to the individual?

**Sai:** Swami is the activator of the individual. He is the 'I,' the Self in you and in everyone else. Sun is reflected in the water and the water becomes warm. Yet, warmth is not in water's nature.

**Hislop:** What is the difference between God and the world?

**Sai:** Only in words, in the mind, is there a difference. When one is fully devoted to God, desiring Him only, the verbal and conceptual differentiation will cease, and the world also will be seen as God. The sequence should be experienced and seen as God, life, world. But most people see the world, life—and God is far distant.

**A Visitor:** Why is creation? What is the reason for it?

**Sai:** First ask, 'Why food?' No reason. 'Why marriage?' No reason. Then children. 'Why children?' No reason. It is your wish. Creation is God's wish, His *sankalpa* [inner thought, resolution]. There is a seed of a tree. It sprouts and there are many twigs and branches—and more and more. Thousands of leaves grow, and hundreds of fruits. There is diversity. All from a single seed.

**Visitor:** But what is behind creation? What is the reason?

**Sai:** First ask, 'Who are you?'

**Visitor:** I am a nobody.

**Sai:** No. No. Who are you? First find that and then you will find the answer to your question.

**Visitor:** Is there life on other planets?

**Sai:** Creation is endless.

**Hislop:** Is it that man creates his world by projecting concepts? For example: 'table' is not real. It is the wood that forms the table that is real, yet we accept the concept 'table' as being real, and we act according to that concept.

**Sai:** The table is wood, and 'table' is a projection of the human mind, and 'table' is only temporary. But the image in the mind is in the nature of an archetype. Likewise, castles in clouds are passing phenomena, but God is their base; just as waves, spray, bubbles arising from the ocean fall away and disappear, but the ocean does not disappear.

**Hislop:** Swami once said that the world emerges outward from man, just as human beings emerge outward from the body of the mother. Does this mean the entire world of which we are aware, everything?

**Sai:** There is one exception. There is one thing that comes into man from the outside. That thing is the ego, which is formed by attachment to outside objects. With desire for the world cut, ego automatically vanishes. Impressions that are taken into man from outside, if taken as reality, are harmful. Because man looks at something outside and then creates, he thinks he is reproducing the outside. Whereas, in fact, the outside thing seen merely recalls to memory that which is already within. When the eyes are open, one sees creation. All beings are created by the help of the eyes. The source of all that you see is the eyes. All so seen is impermanent. The three letters in 'eye' represent the three *gunas* [qualities]. But with 'I,' the Self, one can see something quite beyond the transient.

**Hislop:** Would Swami please explain his statement that the world is a mirror?

**Sai:** The world is a mirror and life is the reflection of God. If the mirror is pure, only God is seen. The opposites, good and bad, are no longer seen at all. There is only God. If the world is not seen, then there is neither mirror nor any reflection. We have the idea of the world only because of the mirror effect. The mirror (world) exists only as long as our desires exist. 'World' means the inside sense world. We apprehend the world through the senses. These senses are seen outside. It is only because of the illusion of the senses that there appears to be a body. A corpse is burned when the wood is set afire. The inner senses correspond to the wood. When they are burned through enquiry and *sadhana* [spiritual effort], the body automatically disappears. Both enquiry and practice are necessary.

**Hislop:** But, Swami, our experience is that objects exist independent of our consciousness of them.

**Sai:** For us the world exists only if we are there to see it. If we are blind, we do not see it. If we are in a faint, it does not exist for us. For us, the world is as we see it. It takes shape for us according to our viewpoint. If our viewpoint is that all is God, then everything we see is God. Suppose we take a picture with a camera. Do the trees enter the lens and impress themselves on the film, or does the camera reach out and grasp the trees?

**Hislop:** The trees impress themselves on the camera.

**Sai:** Wrong! I take a picture of a person who does not want his picture taken. Will the refusal prevent the picture? Or, put it the other way. The person wants his picture taken. Will that result in the picture? The heart is like a film that can capture the image of Swami. If the film is latent and clean, it can capture Swami even if he does not want. But if the camera is without such a film, if the heart is impure and clouded, then Swami's image cannot be there even if he wants. The body is the camera, the mind is the lens, the intelligence is the switch, and love is the film.

**Hislop:** But Swami's image in the heart is His form. Krishna says, 'The devotee need picture the *Paramatma* as unpicturable, that is enough.' What does that mean, and how does it apply to the image of Swami in the heart?

**Sai:** The image need not be that of Swami. It may be love, which is Swami. First, God is realized in form. Then He is seen everywhere in that form. Then God may be realized without form since all form is impermanent. A child, learning, sees an elephant statue. On the statue, 'elephant' is written in words. The child cannot read the words, but he learns about 'elephant' from its name as he hears it. Once he has learned to read, then just the word remains and from that he understands 'elephant.' The statue, the form, is impermanent, but the word remains as long as the language endures. The word 'elephant' represents elephant in its formless state.

Likewise, once the devotee learns the language of divinity, then God need not be pictured; the word is enough. But one learns about God through form and name.

**Hislop:** We see here the form of God as Swami. How are we to understand that form? Does God appear only as that one form? If the question is improper, may Swami please disregard it.

**Sai:** The question is all right. Wires in the room are everywhere, but only one bulb is connected into the wires. Only the one light is seen in full power. The same current is in all the wires. The *Avatar* [incarnation] is one only, and this one body is taken by the *Avatar*. Of course, a brilliant light spreads outward into rays, but the rays are not different from the light.

**Hislop:** Swami, please go a little deeper into 'form' and 'formless.'

**Sai:** The body is not the truth we attribute to it. An example: For 30 years a man worships the mother who gave him birth. He massages her feet, prostrates before her, gazes into her eyes with love, listens to her voice, is warmed, and made happy by her affectionate and loving regard. At age 60, the mother dies. At once the son cries out, 'Mother, Mother, why have you left me?' To whom did the man cry out? The body he worshipped was there, the feet he massaged daily were there, but he cried out that his mother was not there, that she had left him. We have to conclude that even though the man had for the past 30 years regarded the body and mother as one and the same, yet when mother died, he instantly knew that mother was not body and that mother had departed even though body remained. So, of what value was the body that never was mother even though for a time it had been regarded as mother? Contemplating this mystery, it is apparent that had it not been for the body, mother could not have been known. It was only through the medium of the body that the man had been able to experience and thus know the tender, loving, sublime quality of mother that resulted in love rising up in his heart. The formless, timeless quality of 'mother' could be known and attained only through the impermanent form.

**Hislop:** Swami! This is wonderful! This explains the real significance of form!

**Sai:** The same is true of the formless, transcendent divine. Without form, it is non-existent for us. We become cognizant of the divine through the medium of form.

**Hislop:** Sai has told us the secret of form and formless! How is transition made from worship of God in form to worship of the formless divine?

**Sai:** Transition is made by full adoration of God in form, then seeing that beloved form in everyone, then God is in every place and loving others comes naturally and easily.

**Hislop:** When Swami is present, His form is easily seen and may be worshipped, but when Swami's physical person is absent, should one form a mental image of Him so that one may continue to see His form?

**Sai:** Yes. One should have a mental image of a form of God, fully developed, the mind poured into that form. When the image of God is seen outside, it is qualified dualism. When seen in the mind it is qualified monism. When the form is absorbed into the *atma* [soul], that is *Advaita*, non-dualism. The two preliminary steps are not separate stages; they are contained in *Advaita*, as buttermilk and butter are contained in milk. The image of God seen outside should be taken into the mind and then into the soul.

**Hislop:** What is the best way to form the mental image of God?

**Sai:** If you wish, the form you see can be taken as an image. Or a photograph can be taken.

**Hislop:** If a photo of Swami, or the directly perceived image of Swami is taken as the mental image, no doubt the concentration should not waver from the chosen image?

**Sai:** The mind should be steady on the one chosen image of God. When an image is made of silver, the eyes, hair, mouth, skin—all are silver.

**Hislop:** Please say that again?

**Sai:** The mind is poured into the mold of the image so that the mind is the image of God.

**Hislop:** I see. That is most enlightening! But Swami, we feel happier when in Swami's physical presence and not so happy when Swami is away.

**Sai:** You are identified with your physical form and so you look to the form of another. When you are less attached to physical form, your happiness will be even more.

**Source:** *Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

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# Thought of the MONTH

## What Is Work?

### Embodiments of love! Teachers and students!

In this vast expansive world, times are becoming worse, and great changes are happening very quickly. Man is giving up his body even before he has been able to recognize his primary duty. Every person should recognize why is it that they have been given the body.

The body has been given to us in order to do service. In order to do work, this body has been endowed.

### And what is work?

Work is to be done in order to make time sacred, sanctified. We must try to direct every work of ours in a holy path. Every work has got to be looked upon as a spiritual task. Work has got to be transformed into worship. The teachers must first evaluate time, body, work, the holiness of all these three. The body has been given for the sake of work. And work has to be done in order to sanctify time. These two things every person must instill into his heart. It is the work than man does that either raises him to the spiritual height or lowers him to perdition.

Work is like a mirror. This is a mirror, and you stand before it. It reveals to you your features. So, too, the work that you do reveals to others your character and your nature. Some people, before they begin work, they appear to be really calm and peaceful. But once they enter into work, they begin to exhibit irritation and even some anger. Others, before they start work, they are filled with unrest or irritation. But after they enter work, they'll do it with a calm and peaceful mind and enjoy it with sacred feelings. Therefore, our holiness, or unholiness, is evident in the work that we do, in the manner in which we do the work.

That is why it is said in the Bhagavad Gita, "For work alone you have the right. You have no right for the consequence or the fruits thereof." Every work that we do has got in it the power to develop character traits in us that will manifest in the future. Of course, it is very difficult in the beginning to enter into work about which we don't regard the consequences (*nishkama karma*). We have got to enter into the really true or good work (*sathya karma*) from bad work (*dushta karma*). And from good work we have to proceed to work for which we don't desire the consequences (*nishkama karma*).

Work is like a thermometer. Just as a thermometer shows the temperature of the body, whether it is increased or decreased. So also the work that a person does indicates the level of *tapatrayas* (internal afflictions) whether it has risen, decreased, or is extinguished. You can measure the motives, the vices, and the virtues.

The work that you do indicates whether the person has got a balanced mind, or a passionate mind, or a slothful dull mind. Therefore, it is only when a person becomes an expert in work, or a heroic work, or he takes up sacred work, that we can reveal our real inner nature.

For a person who wants to reveal his divine nature, his real nature, through his work, first of all, he must develop one particular quality. That quality is virtuous character. If you've got virtuous character, you will never entertain any bad thought. Not only that, but it will also make him do more and more work with greater and greater and better and better motives. And the character will also endow you with an earnestness in social work and in work for society. And character also will make a person feel that they have to live, not for food, but for certain ideals. And a life without character is like a dark house. It will be like a kite that has no string attached to it. It is like a counterfeit coin that won't be accepted by anyone.

*Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 15 (1981 - 82) Bal Vikas Teachers Training*

Work has to be undertaken, so that time does not hang heavily on you and is not a burden. Work is your mission. Without it, you will get lost in the darkness of ignorance and be overwhelmed by dullness and sloth (*tamas*). Ignorance will multiply your doubts, and these have to be chopped off with the sword of wisdom.

On one occasion, when such mystic subjects were taught to Arjuna, he got puzzled and asked Krishna, "One time You say that we should renounce all activities (*karmas*); another time You say that the discipline of *karma* (*karma-yoga*) has to be adopted. Tell me, which of these two paths is better?" Krishna answered thus: "Renunciation (*sanyasa*) and the discipline of *karma* both lead to the same goal of liberation, oh Arjuna! But know this. There is greater joy in doing work than in giving up work. Renunciation and work are not contradictory; they are interdependent, complementary. By giving up work, without the progress derived from activity and the training achieved through it, people will only decline. The real renunciant (*sanyasin*) is one who does not desire one thing or hate another." The word renunciation can well be applied to work done without regard to success or failure, profit or loss, honor or dishonor, to any activity performed as an offering to the Lord.

*Prasanthi Vahini, Chapter 21*