

Understanding the Mahabharata Stories

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in the following discourse explains the spiritual context of the stories of Mahabharata.

To lead a purposeful and worthy life, you have to recognize the true meaning of the body, the senses, the mind and the intellect and know how to use them effectively. All the troubles of mankind are due to the fact that 99% of the people lead lives without understanding this truth. The body, the senses, the mind, and the intellect are only instruments for the individuals and have no *chaitanya* (consciousness) of their own. The body is inert. Beginning as a mere mass of flesh, it grows into a handsome boy, an attractive youth, and becomes a decrepit old man in later years. Because of these changes in the body, man imagines that the body has consciousness and is not an inert mass. But it is not the body that is the cause of this growth and change. To cite an example, if you sweep your house every day and throw the dust into a dustbin, in due course there will be a big dung heap. Can consciousness be attributed to the dung heap because of its growth over a period? Likewise, the body grows on account of the food consumed by it. See what happens to the body when the food is denied for some days. It ceases to grow; in fact, it begins to deteriorate.

The five elements vary in their subtlety

The body is only a temporary rest house for the spirit. *Vedanta* declares: "The body is a shrine for the eternal spirit inhabiting it." It is necessary in this context to know what enables the body, the mind, the senses, and the intellect to develop or to deteriorate. The whole Cosmos is made up of *pancha bhootas* (five basic elements: space, air, fire, water, and earth). Their subtle qualities are represented by sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. All these have emerged from *sat-chit-ananda* (being-awareness-bliss), the Primal Source.

Akasha (space or ether) provides the initial impulse. It is comparable to an infinite container. The other four elements—air, water, fire, and earth—are contained in it. These elements vary in their subtlety. Water is subtler than earth and is more expansive and lighter than earth. Fire is subtler than water and air is subtler than fire and more pervasive. *Akasha* is subtler than air and is all-pervasive. Each of these elements is covered by a *kosha* (sheath). The mind, the intellect, the will, and the ego are enveloped by these sheaths.

Akasha (space or ether) is activated by what is called *ati-gati* (very high-speed motion or vibrations). These vibrations by their movement give rise to air. The movement of air results in fire or heat. It is a scientific fact that friction causes heat, as in the case of rubbing of the palms. To generate heat air is necessary. When the heat cools off, water is produced. Fluids solidify into earth. Hence, the starting point for the five elements is *akasha* (space). These elements have come into existence for sustaining the universe and demonstrating the omnipresence and omniscience of the Divine.

***Prana* functions between the mind and body**

In the human being, the *antahkarana* (the inner instrument) is made up of the mind, the intellect, the will, and the ego. The ego is linked to the *prana* (life principle). It is encased in the *vijnanamaya kosha* (the sheath of integrated awareness). The mind is linked to the *chitta* (will) and is encased in the *manomaya kosha* (the mental sheath). Thus, between the individual soul and the *prana* (vital principle), the mind functions. The life principle functions between the mind and the body. The *buddhi* (intellect) functions above the level of the mind. The vital principle functions below the mind. Both the intellect and the *prana* are surcharged with *agni* (heat). It is their combined presence in the body that accounts for the heat in the body.

The mind should not be treated as something trivial. Man comprehends the world through the mind and hence its workings should be completely watched. Because the mind is located between the *buddhi* (intellect) and the *prana* (vital principle)—both of which are filled with the fire principle—it tends to melt. The presiding deity for the mind is the Moon. The Moon represents coolness and fluidity. Fluids like water have a tendency to flow down and find their level. Fire, on the contrary, has a tendency to go up. The mind, because of its watery nature, has the tendency to move downward to get interested in petty things. Efforts have to be made to make the mind look upward.

The primal source of the five elements and man

It should, however, be remembered, that the mind, the intellect, the will, and the ego are made up of the five elements, which are all emanations from the Supreme—the *sat-chit-ananda* (being-awareness-bliss). This is their Primal Source from which they have emanated like innumerable sparks from a fire. From this source they emerge as billions of atoms and assume countless forms. Man should realize that he has also come from the same Divine Source.

Endowed with the human form and gifted with sense organs, the mind, and the will, man nevertheless is failing to remember the source from which he came. What is the cause for the body? The root cause is ignorance. Ignorance robs man of the power of discrimination. Lacking this capacity, man tends to inflate his *ahamkara* (ego). Egoism breeds hatred, which is the cause of attachment and desires. All *karmas* (actions) are born of attachment and desires. Hence, the primary cause of birth in a human body is one's *karma*.

What is the ignorance that afflicts man? It is the false vision which makes one mistake the unreal for the real and the real for the unreal. An episode in the *Mahabharata* illustrates how this happens. Recognizing the supreme virtuousness of Dharmaraja, the eldest of the Pandavas, *Maya*, the architect of the *Asuras* [demons], offered to build a unique mansion for him in his capital at the time of the *Rajasooya Yajna* performed by Dharmaraja. This mansion, the *Maya Sabha*, had one remarkable feature. In it where there was no water, a pond would appear to exist. Where there was a pool, there would be no appearance of water. Where there was a door, no door would seem to exist; and a door would be present in an apparently blank wall. It was unique in producing delusions of this kind. Duryodhana, Dushasana, and other Kauravas came to see this mansion. Imagining that there was water in one place they lifted their clothes only to find there was no water at all. At another place they drenched themselves because they stridently walked into a pool not seeing the water in it.



What is the inner meaning of this story of the *Maya Sabha*?

The cosmos itself is one vast *Maya Sabha* (mansion of delusion). Attachment and hatred are represented by Duryodhana and Dushasana. Dushasana means one who is the violator of the rule of law. Duryodhana is one who misuses his strength and abilities. In every man there are these traits of Duryodhana and Dushasana. In life everyone has to adhere to certain regulations. In the Sathya Sai Institute, for instance, there are regulations relating to conduct of students in the hostel and elsewhere. It is only when these regulations are observed strictly that they can call

themselves *vidyarthi* (seekers of knowledge). When students misuse their talents and skill, they become weak and go astray.

How does this misuse take place? The eyes are misused by looking at undesirable objects. The tongue is misused by indulging in evil talk. The ears, the heart, and the hand are all misused in different ways. Misuse occurs whenever a divinely endowed capacity or talent is used for wrongful purposes. It is misdirection of energy. If students indulge in such misuse, they turn into Duryodhanas and Dushasanas and come to grief like them. Hence, no one should misuse any of the powers with which he is endowed. It amounts to an affront to the Divine, which is the source of all powers.

Everyone thinks that it is his sense organs, his eyes, ears, etc. that enable him to experience and comprehend the world. How true is this? In the dream state none of the senses is functioning. And yet one has the experience of seeing, talking, hearing, walking, and doing other actions. What is the eye that sees in the dream? What is the tongue that talks? In the dream state the mind does all the functions of the sense organs, which are dormant at that time. When you feel in a dream that you are walking through a forest, it is not your legs that are walking. It is the mind that does the walking. It is the mind that assumes all the functions of the senses. The entire world is the projection of the mind. When the mind is properly directed, all the senses will be under control. When you water the roots of a tree, all the branches and leaves will get the benefit.

Cause of man's mental aberrations

The mind is subject to fancies and aberrations. In poor light you mistake a rope for a snake and are filled with fear. When light is brought, you find there is no snake. The appearance and disappearance of fear are entirely the result of mental aberrations. The rope alone was there all the time. The idea of the snake was superimposed on it by the fancies of the mind.

The Brahman cannot be experienced unless one gets rid of the delusions of the mind. How is one to get rid of the delusions? By developing faith in the omnipresence of the Divine. This faith can grow when one realizes that every object in the world needs a basis for its existence and support. The Divine is the basis and the support for the entire cosmos.

The *Vedas* are the authority for accepting the Divine as the source of everything in creation. If one can accept the authority of the ordinary almanac for recognizing a particular date in the calendar, why should one refuse to accept the authority of the *Vedas* with regard to the nature of the *atma* (Self) and the *Brahman* (Supreme Omni-self)? There is authority in the *Vedas* for everything that we experience in daily life. The *Vedas* have recognized the uniqueness of human birth and proclaimed the existence of God. It is illogical for man to accept on the authority of the scriptures his uniqueness as a human being and at the same time deny the existence of God.

How misconceptions and doubts can arise may be seen from a scientific example. When you hold the mirror before you, your image is reflected by the mirror. But the image is not in the mirror. The reflection is seen because of the mercury-coated surface at the back of the mirror. You imagine also that it is a true reflection of yourself. This is not true. In the image, your right eye appears as your left eye and the left eye as the right eye. Hence, the image is not the true reflection of yourself.

Nature is the vast mirror of Divinity

Likewise, Nature is a vast mirror. You regard as real the varied objects you see in Nature. But they are all different forms of the Divine. "The One willed to become Many." This is the truth recognized by all religions. But man forgets this truth and leads a life divorced from faith in the Divine.

Students! You may yourself enquire into the basis of this creation. To start with, you try to find out what causes dreams. Some may say "thoughts" are the cause. Some others may attribute dreams to the kind of food that is consumed. Neither of these is correct. The fact is it is the sleep that is the cause of dreams. So, to the question, "What is the cause of creation?" The answer is: *ajnana* (ignorance). For example: during the summer, the land gets heated up and is completely barren. As soon as there is a rainfall, things begin to sprout and the land looks green. Where did the sprouts come from? Before sprouting, the seeds remained in the earth, and when the rains came they began to sprout. If there had been no seeds earlier, the sprouting would not have occurred.

Results of actions are inescapable

Likewise, *karma* (past deeds) is the seed for human birth. Your present life is a reaction, resound, and reflection of your past actions. Therefore, you are advised to "Be good, see good, and do good". When you perform any action, you do not think about the long-term consequences. You are preoccupied with the concerns of the moment. But when the final results come you are frightened. Whether results are pleasant or unpleasant they are inescapable. If sugar is dissolved in water, even if you think it is poison, it will only do you good. But if poison is put into water and you drink it thinking that it is sugarcane juice, it will be fatal. If you regard something bad as good and act on it, the results are bound to be bad. The results are based on your actions and not on your fancies.

It is his conduct that is most important for every person. Conduct is determined by the state of the mind. Instead of giving way to promptings of the senses, every action should be done as a sacred offering to the Divine. You should be indifferent to censure or praise. Such equanimity can come only from faith in God. Lacking this faith and filled with the conceit that he is the doer of everything, man gets immersed in sorrow and trouble. The one who boasts about his achievements should recognize equally that he is the author of his misfortunes. He cannot claim to be the doer and at the same time deny responsibility for the consequences of his actions.

Do your duty leaving the results to God

Hence, in all your actions whether good or bad, do your duty leaving the results to God. The flowers that you may offer in your *Puja* may not please Sai. It is what you offer from the lotus of your heart that will please Sai. Consider everything in nature as gifts of God. And when you offer anything, have the sacred feeling that you are offering God what he has given to you. When you feel and act in this way, your life will be filled with peace and joy. Have the firm conviction that the cosmos and God are not different. Look upon creation as the manifestation of the Divine and make proper use of your opportunities to experience the Divine.

In your studies, try to combine spiritual discipline with academic pursuits. Only then will you find fulfilment in education. Every one of you should become an ideal person. You must develop the habit of examining yourself and correcting yourself. Self-correction and self-punishment are as important as Self-realization. Your senses, like the eyes, the ears, the tongue, are God-given gifts. They should be used only for sacred purposes and should not be misused. There is only one royal road to realizing God. It is the path of Divine love. You have come from the Divine and your destiny is the merger with the Divine. Entertain only sacred thoughts and engage yourselves only in sacred deeds. Thereby you will be sanctifying your lives.

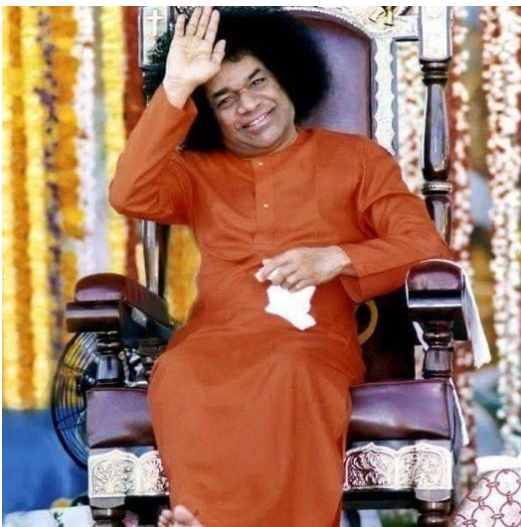
Source: Divine Discourse at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute Students' Hostel,
on October 2, 1988

Be Perfect!

Years ago, Bhagavan granted interview to a group of youngsters from Kerala. Bhagavan graciously materialized a ring and put it on the finger of one of the boys. Amazed and overjoyed, he was enjoying the beauty of the Creator's creation. "Is ring perfect?" queried the Lord. "Yes, Swami!" the boy answered. To this, Swami said, "Be perfect!" Life's journey as a humble child of our Beloved Bhagavan is a journey 'from Sai, with Sai, to Sai'. This journey demands perfection at each and every step, then only can we realize the perfection that is within ourselves!

This journey to perfection demands constant self-audit; the 'ABC of Life' that Swami has given us, "Always Be Careful" is very important in this regard. During one of the Vishu celebrations, I got the opportunity to speak in the Divine Presence. In the speech, I highlighted Bhagavan's assurance, "When you take one step, I take a hundred." In the Divine Discourse that followed, Bhagavan said, "What Mukundan said is correct. When you take one step, I take a hundred. But that one step must be in the right direction." The awareness about this 'right direction' must be the light that guides our life's journey.

Another important aspect of this journey is: be positive always. The second *Sadhana* Camp of the Sai Youth of Kerala was in progress at Brindavan. On 11th of April 2004, a drama was to be staged by the Sai Youth in the Sai Krishan Kalyanamandapam. At 4.45 p.m., we went inside Trayee to report to Bhagavan that everything was ready. But Bhagavan gave us the opportunity to sit near Him and talked to us on the theme of the drama. When the discussion came to the point of positivism, Bhagavan asked "Where does this positivism come from?" Bhagavan was evidently not satisfied with the various answers that we gave; He went on asking the question over and over again. All that we could do was to pray for the Divine answer on this vital point. Finally, Swami declared, "Positivism need not come from outside; it is inside only. Our duty is to develop it."



Bhagavan's Love knows no limits. On one of the days of the *Sadhana* Camp for the Sai Youth of Kerala in 2005, two youngsters were selected to speak in the Divine Presence, as instructed by Bhagavan.

When Swami came to the verandah of the Sai Kulwant Hall, the boys were about to get up to come to Swami. I signaled to them to sit down and conveyed to them that they could come to Swami after Swami occupied the chair. But Swami intervened and told me, "No... They are coming from distant places... Let them come to Me..."

It was on the first day of the *Sadhana* Camp for Sai Youth in 2003. All the Sai Youth had assembled at the Sai Ramesh Hall, when Swami came for *darshan*. I prayed to Bhagavan to inaugurate the Camp, to which Swami asked, "At what time?" "Swami... 8.30." I replied. "Why so early?" asked Swami, "The boys and girls have just come. They may not have had their breakfast." It was another instance that revealed how much Swami cares for each one of us.

Bhagavan has categorically remarked that His love for us is to the level of seeing Himself in every one of us. Let us see Swami in all, so that our love is pure, selfless, and perfect. In this divine journey, it is best to realize that we are nothing and He is everything. It is He who plans; it is He who does.

In 2004, a school named 'Sri Sai Vidya Vihar' was opened in Aluva [in India]. The response from the public was tremendous and applications piled up in our office. It became necessary that we purchased a new plot and constructed a bigger building. Banks came forward to offer help. Everything was set to take a financial loan from a bank. Suddenly a devotee came to our office and said, "Why take a loan? This is Swami's school... I shall contribute the cost of the entire project."

We are amazed at the amount of confidence the society has in Swami and His Principles. When we announced the opening of the Sai School, many parents withdrew their children from prestigious schools (despite the heavy donations they had paid to them) and enrolled them in our school. To one of the Muslim parents who had come for admission, we made it clear that we would teach the children *Bal Vikas* lessons, *Vedas*, and *Yoga*, he happily responded, "Why not? These are part of our culture, let my child also learn them..." After one of the sessions of 'Sai Parenting' that was held in the school, a mother approached us and said, "I am terribly upset after today's session; to this day, I have not been a good mother."

It is a matter of great joy seeing how the society of Kerala is adhering to Sai ideals. 'Sai Parenting' has become the guiding principle of families all over the state. When our young 'Sai Soldiers'—the team formed to take Swami's message to newer and newer areas—visited new areas, they observed that Swami was not at all new there. Wherever they went, they were greeted by Bhagavan's photographs. Now Swami's Message is reaching every nook and corner of Kerala.

Bhagavan's infinite love has transformed the Sai Youth of the state. The three *sadhana* Camps in the Divine Presence were unique and have provided golden opportunities for them. Now they are fully involved in the *Grama Seva* Project. We have also been arranging Summer Camps for the *Bal Vikas* children all over the state for the past three years. Going through the responses of the children, we understand that much more than the sessions of the camp, what touched and transformed them was the love and care the Sai brothers and sisters shared with them. They are motivated to involve themselves in the Sai activities.

Now we have '*Deenajanodharana* Projects' in all the 14 districts of the state for rehabilitating destitute—old and young.

One of those who joined one such project was a boy who had discontinued his studies. We enrolled him in the school and encouraged him to study. He has passed this year's Std. X Public Examination with 68% marks. These centers convey Swami's message of love and *seva* to the society. When we commenced this project in one district, the local people belonging to all religions approached us and asked as to what they could do for the project. Thus, Sai *Seva* transforms not only us, but the society also. Really, we are becoming the "role models" for the society to gauge the Glory of Sai.

Once Swami asked a devotee as to what he wanted. He promptly replied, "Swami... I want to merge in you..." "How is that possible?" Swami asked, "You are very fat... I am very small..." The statement that followed was very revealing, "If you want to merge with Me, become like Me..." Let us observe our Lord; let us emulate Him. Let us try to become like Him, so that we become one with Him.

It was during the Onam of 2002. Bhagavan called me inside the interview room to ask about that year's *Onam* program. When I took out my glasses to read, Bhagavan smilingly remarked, "See... You are only 50... I don't need any glasses... One has to use one's energies properly." What a great lesson! We should always be aware as to how we can match His *sankalpa*.

This narrative will not be complete without sharing with you the infinite grace that Swami is showering upon my family and me. During one of the interviews, Swami said, "I am above you, below you, around you and in you... I shall always protect you...." Every split second of our lives has proved this to be the Absolute Truth. When we are fully engaged in *Sai Seva*, Swami will take care of everything—not only the major things of our lives, but also the minutest ones. Once my elder son, who was then a student at Prasanthi Nilayam, developed distressing headache. He was examined at the Super-Specialty Hospital; nothing abnormal was found. The Warden asked me to take him to the NIMHANS for a second opinion.

I took him to Brindavan, as Swami was there at that time, to take His blessings and permission. There Swami told the Warden, "The boy has no problem, but for the satisfaction of the father let him take him to the NIMHANS."

As I entered the doctor's room at the NIIMHANS, he greeted me with a smile as if he knew me. He appeared to be from Kerala; when I told him that I was a Professor at the U.C. College, he was very happy. He was an old student at my college! And it is needless to say that the doctor, after examining my son, said that he had no problem of any sort!

A few years back, we were about to leave for Puttaparthi when my younger son, who was then studying in the eighth standard, developed pain in the abdomen. The doctor diagnosed acute appendicitis and advised emergency surgery. His right lower abdomen bulged and was extremely painful. We took him to Parthi and Swami graciously granted us interview. After discussing the matters relating to the Sai Organization, I told Swami that my son was having appendicitis. "What appendicitis..." Swami asked, "No... No... Just Gas...." Within hours, all the pain and bulge disappeared.

The rehearsal for the drama, '*Bhakta Hanuman*', to be presented in the Divine Presence was on. One night, Swami came in my wife's dream and told her that the boy who was enacting the role of Hanuman was not holding the mace in the way it should be. True, Swami takes care of even the minutest aspects of our life. Gratitude to our Beloved Bhagavan cannot be expressed fully. It is not to be explained with words, but to be expressed by plunging ourselves into Swami's Divine Mission. What greater opportunity can we have than to be part of His Story!

~Prof. E. Mukundan
State President, Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, Kerala

The Voice of the Heart

There is no fear while He is so near;
Still, my eyes are filled with tears!
O—they are tears of joy, not grief.

Sometimes it looks as if He does not glance at me
But, no it is a gesture of grace and care!
Even the absence of the glance.

From today, I shall have no despair,
No trace of frustration
I bid good-bye to grief.

Like a fresh-blown rose
In whose lap there smiles the charming spring,
In His shimmering Robe,
His Robe—the banner of peace—!
The air is rich with fragrance
And joy. The world is fairer far
With a new brilliance of color.

O Comrades! With what shall I compare Him,
I pray. The full moon is dim—
Before His dazzling face.
In His lotus palm, there is the healing balm
For all the burns of life.
Do you adore the Formless in the Form?—
Question the disputants, but leave alone
The dispute; I am already prey.

How I long to behold the charm
Imbibe and fill, recall, meditate
Through all the days of life—
Alas, Tahira, do you realize
That life is too short for this?

~Urdu Original recited at Kavisammelan
by Bano Tahira Sayeed; Dasara, 1966
Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, December 1966

From Death's Cold Hold

Whatever science sets its seal upon is believed as truth and the rest is discarded as false by the educated, that is the situation today. When a man of science cannot explain or accept any happening as possible, it is dismissed as either superstition or as impossible. But in medical science (with which I am at present concerned) there is even today a large region that has remained inexplicable. Why some diseases are caused, how they have to be treated, by what means can they be prevented—these are yet not placed beyond conjecture by scientists spending millions of dollars and years of research. Therefore, one is compelled to admit that there is a higher power, all-knowing, all-accomplishing, all merciful, without change and free from blemish, a power that is beyond human understanding: That Higher Power is God. It is beyond the capacity of science to explain It.

If this is branded superstition, he who brands it so is ignorant of facts, is unaware of the experience. "An ant cannot bite except under direction of Shiva", it is said. All movements and happenings in the Universe are prompted by that Almighty Force. The span of human life is no exception. For, have we not read in the *Puranas* of people who got a new lease of life through grace? It was my good fortune to witness through the grace of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba the emergence of a patient from the cold hold of death.

Last March, from the 9th of the month, during the Shivaratri festival I was privileged to serve in the Sri Sathya Sai Hospital under the direction of Baba. The day after Shivaratri, on the 10th, a "serious case" was brought and admitted into the hospital. His name is, C. Chaganlal, Proprietor, Damodar Envelope Factory, Madras, a devotee of Baba. He was suffering since some years from cirrhosis of the liver. His age is 58. He is also afflicted with diabetes. He had fallen unconscious on the 10th and was brought in a stretcher to the hospital.

On examination, I found that another complication had intervened on the cirrhosis of the liver from which he was suffering. He had developed hepatic coma, a condition which is fatal in almost all such cases. In hepatic coma, the liver, the kidneys, and other organs do not work effectively. So Chaganlal had contracted urine secretion, also. His pulse was beating dangerously fast. He was a long-standing sufferer from high blood pressure. His respiration indicated that he might collapse any moment. He was unconscious in deep coma. The only "treatment" we could give was the administration of two liters of intravenous glucose.

When Bhagavan was informed that the patient was in a very critical condition, He smiled and said, "You treat him as best you can; nothing will happen to the patient."

The best we could do at the time and place was the IV Glucose and we did it. But we knew that it was not the treatment at all. The only other treatment we knew of was to sit beside the bed and watch him, praying to Sathya Sai Bhagavan to save him. We

found that his condition was becoming worse and worse. Still, Bhagavan's words, His assurance that 'nothing will happen to the patient' gave us some courage and confidence. We administered him just one specific: the *Vibhuti* (sacred ash) that He created by the wave of His hand and gave us to be given to Him.



At about 2 a.m. on the 11th, I noticed some improvement: the respiration rate improved and became less fast. The patient slowly opened his eyes before sunrise; it appeared that he was slowly recovering from coma. He passed urine. He started swallowing a little of the water that was given. At 8 a.m. on the 12th, respiration became normal, and we heard the patient repeat unto himself in low tones, "Sai Ram, Sai Ram." At about noon, he started becoming aware of the need to pass urine. By evening, he began recognizing those around him. Very soon, his talk, too, became normal.

On the morning of the 13th, he sat on the chair placed in the verandah of the ward. That evening, he came down the Hospital Hill and was able to stand with the group of devotees waiting for a chance to have the *darshan* of Bhagavan. Chaganlal was born again. He had a new lease of life awarded to him.

Chaganlal's case is a miracle in medical science. Even when the latest drugs that are not easily procurable are administered, it is seldom that a patient comes out alive from hepatic coma. So the recovery of Chaganlal, so

dramatic, so sudden, and so complete is certainly due to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's grace, represented by the *Vibhuti* He created and gave.

To question the veracity of His *leelas* [Divine play] and to try to explain the miracles He works serve but to expose our ignorance. As Baba advises us, let us understand ourselves first. Then we can reach one step nearer to Him. If we perform our duties, if we rid ourselves of lust, anger, greed, attachment, conceit, and hate and if we surrender to the Lord completely, thinking only of Him always at all places under all conditions and circumstances, we secure forever the guardian grace of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

~Kommareddi Bhaskara Rao, M. B. B. S., Eluru
Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, May 1967

Q&A

WITH BHAGAVAN

Brahmavidya and Women

Q. You were talking of strict regimen; men, too, should follow this, is it not?

A. Of course! They, too, are flesh, blood, bone, and marrow; they, too, are afflicted with illness. Each and every person who is afflicted with birth and death and suffering from this cycle is in need of this medicine. And whoever helps himself to this treatment has to follow the regimen, too. Man or woman, whoever neglects the regimen, cannot get rid of the illness. Men cannot afford to say that they are free from it; they have to stick to it closely and observe it strictly. Even if they have had *Brahmopadesam* (initiation into the spiritual path of Brahma-realization), if they are devoid of virtues like *sama* and *dama* [internal restraint & restraint of the senses] they cannot save themselves, whether they are men or women.

Q. But then, Swami, why do many scholars learned in the *Shastras* declare that women have no right for acquiring *Brahmavidya* [spiritual knowledge]? What is the reason?

A. There is no reason at all in declaring that women are not entitled to *Brahmavidya*. Vishnumurthy taught Bhudevi the glory of the *Gita*; Parameswara taught Parvati the *Brahmatatwa* through the *Guru-Gita*. That is what the *Guru-Gita* means when it says, "*Parvati Uvaacha*". What do these words mean? Besides, Easwara initiated Parvati into *Yogasastra* and *Mantrasastra*. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* mentions that Yajnavalkya taught Maitreyi this very same *Brahmavidya*. This is a well-known fact. Now, you can yourself judge and draw your own conclusion whether women are entitled to *Brahmavidya* or not.

Q. There are some others, Swami, who declare that women are not entitled to *Brahmacharya* and *Sanyasa*. Is it true? Do the *Vedas* prohibit it?

A. The *Vedas* have two sections: *Karmakanda* and *Jnanakanda*. The *Karmakanda* is for beginners, for the undeveloped; and the *Jnanakanda* is for the more advanced, the developed intelligences. There is no reference to men or women in connection with these. The beginners are worldly; how can they understand the immortal message of the *Jnanakanda* about the *atma*? In the *Brihadaranyaka* we have mention of Gargi and Maitreyi who shine in the spiritual splendor of *Brahmacharya* and *Sanyasa*. In the *Mahabharata* also, we have Subha Yogini and other women who are ideal women, full of virtue.

Q. Can women win *Brahmajnana* even while leading the householder's life?

- A. Why not? Madaalasa and others were able to get *Brahmajnana* while in the *grihastha* stage of life, the householder status. You must have heard of these from the *Yogavasishta* and the *Puranas*, how they attained the height of auspiciousness, *Brahmajnana* itself. Then again, do not the *Upanishads* declare that Kaathyayini, Sarangi, Sulabha, Viswaveda, and others were adepts in *Brahmajnana*?
- Q. Swami, are there any women who have, attained *Brahmajnana* while in the *grihastha* stage? And who attained it while in the *sanyasa* stage? Or any who realized it while in the *vaanaprastha* stage? Are there women who got it in the *Brahmacharya* stage of life?
- A. Do not think that there are no women who have realized *Brahmajnana* while in any one of these stages. Choodaala attained it while a *grihastha*; Sulabhayogini won it while a *sanyasini*; Maitreyi attained it while in the *vaanaprastha* stage of life; and Gargi got it in the *Brahmacharya* stage. There were other great women of *Bharat* [India] who have achieved this height. Why, there are even today many who are of this great category. I simply mentioned some four names because you came up with that question now; so do not in the least lose enthusiasm. There is no need for loss of heart.
- Q. When we have so many examples of women who have attained *Brahmajnana*, how is it that so many argue against it? Why do they impose limitations on women?
- A. It is sheer absurdity to deny women the right to earn *Brahmajnana*. But in worldly matters, it is necessary that some limitations are respected by them. They are laid down only in the interests of *dharma* and for *loka-kalyana* (world welfare). For the sake of the upkeep of morals and for social health in the world, women have to be bound by them. They are too weak to maintain certain standards of life and discipline; they have some natural handicaps; that is the reason for these limitations.

This does not mean any fundamental inferiority. Why, even *pundits* and men learned in the *Shastras* acquire their *jnana* through the reverential homage they pay to the feminine deity Saraswathi. The patron deities of *vidya*, as well as of wealth and *jnana* are all three feminine. They are Saraswathi, Lakshmi, and Parvati. Even in customary correspondence, when women are addressed, they are referred to as, "To...who is equal to Lakshmi" etc. You always speak of *Mata-Pita* (mother-father), Gowri-Shankara, Lakshmi-Narayana, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna etc. The feminine name comes first and then the masculine. From this itself you can gather how much reverence is paid to women here.

- Q. The distinction between man and woman—do you condemn it as *mithya-jnana* [false knowledge] or do you value it as *atma-jnana* [that which reveals the unity in multiplicity]?
- A. My dear fellow! The *atma* has no such distinction; it is eternally conscious, pure, self-effulgent. So it can only be *mithya-jnana*; it can never be *atma--jnana*. It is a distinction based on the *Upadhi*, the mask, the limitation. The *atma* is neither masculine, feminine, nor neuter; it is the form that limits and deludes and that wears the names.

Source: *Prasnottara Vahini*

Thought of the MONTH

Happiness Comes Out of Suffering

Contemplation of God is the right royal path that will remove all types of worries. Therefore, do not try other means for achieving mental peace and get into trouble and worry. March on along the divine and glorious path. All the *karmas* (actions) in the spiritual field are meant to bring peace and happiness to us. They are not intended to trouble us. Mental peace can be achieved only by performing one's own duty, not by any other means. *Karma* brings about a result; and that result brings happiness and peace. Even when you are undergoing difficulties, always think that they are meant to bring you happiness. Every human being undergoes difficulties, only to enjoy happiness later. However, he does not realize this during the period of suffering. But in the course of time when suffering ends and happy days arrive, he would realize the truth. Hence, always remember the truth that sorrows and difficulties are prelude to happy days ahead. In fact, real happiness comes out of suffering only.

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If there are no difficulties to start with, how can you enjoy the sweetness of pleasure? So you must struggle to some extent and face difficulties. Without darkness, does brightness have any value? Without hunger, does food have value? Similarly, you must discover the true taste and value of happiness. In what way must you do this? Discover first the love within you, and then use it to receive God's love. Once you tap the pure and unpolluted love within you, you will become the recipient of God's love. God would even overlook and forgive your mistakes. However, do not take this for granted and commit mistakes endlessly! You must safeguard all the treasures God has deposited in you.

Summer Showers 2000

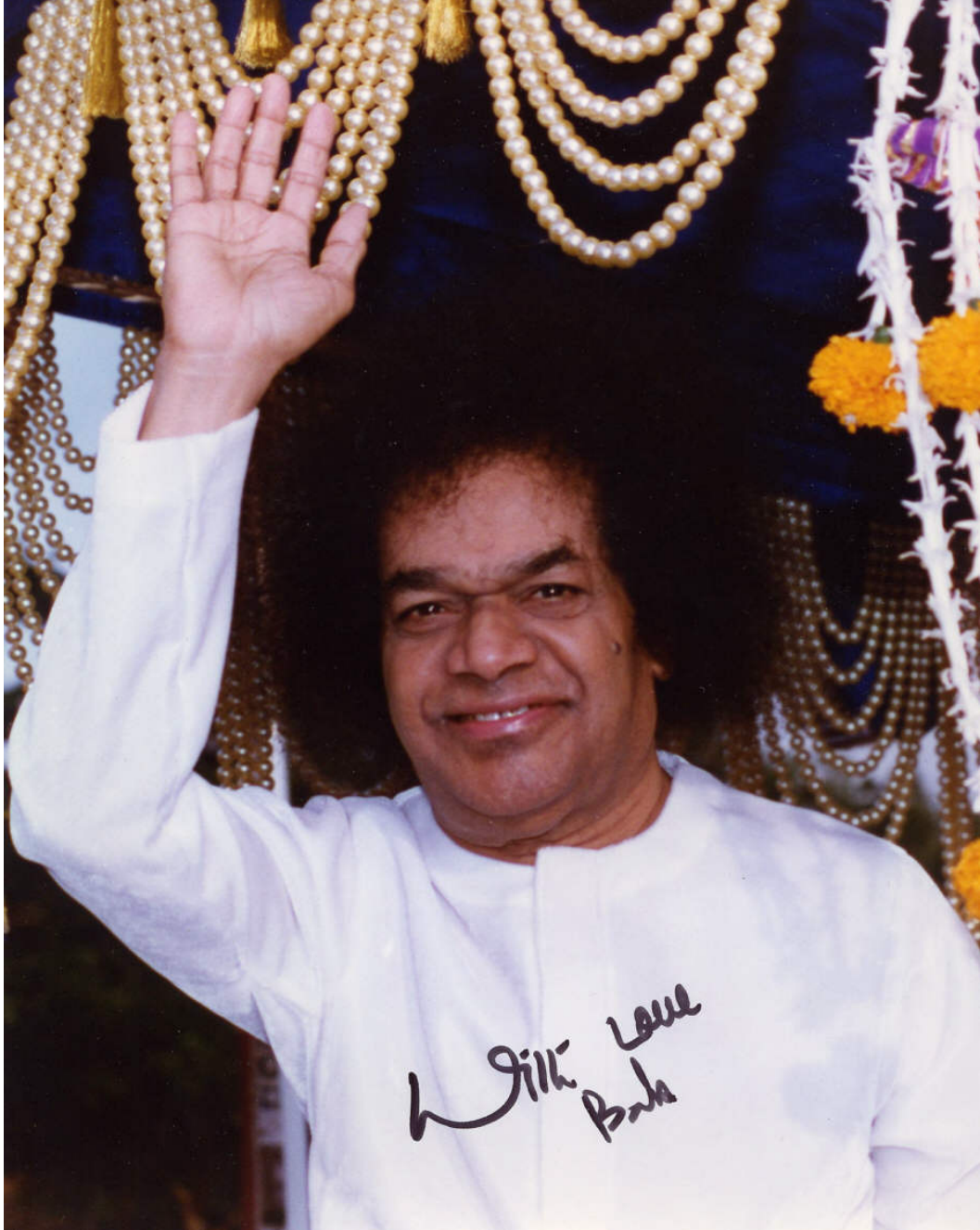
Do not give room to worry and anxiety. God is not stone hearted. He will certainly take care of your needs. His heart is filled with compassion. Swami's concern for you is hundred times more intense than the concern you have for yourselves. You need not be worried at all. Develop the feeling that difficulties and suffering are for your own good. Even insurmountable difficulties will vanish like thin mist when you have firm conviction. Hence, do not be unduly perturbed about your problems. Difficulties come and go. Not only the poor, even a millionaire cannot escape from difficulties. Swami confers His blessings on you so that you will be relieved of your suffering soon.

The physical body may undergo suffering, but you should make efforts to attain peace of mind. The mind is the basis for happiness for everyone. All physical comforts will be of little use without peace of mind. Only through contemplation of God can you attain peace of mind and not by any other means. Hence, chant the Name of God incessantly, unmindful of the difficulties that come in your way. It is because of contemplation of God's Name that you have been able to experience peace despite the innumerable difficulties you faced. God is the refuge for the poor and the forlorn. He is always with them through all the vicissitudes of life. Do not think that God is in some distant land. God is by your side always. In fact, He is present in the inner recesses of your heart. Never think that God is away from you at any point of time. Neither friends nor relatives can come to your rescue. God is your sole refuge. He will protect you under all circumstances.

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Smilingly, Dharmaja replied, "Draupadi! Look at the Himalaya mountains. How beautiful are the peaks! I am filled with joy looking at those mountains. They do not serve me in any way, but still, they fill me with joy. The beauty of Nature gives me joy. Beauty is bliss. That bliss is nectarine. There is no joy equal to the enjoyment of the beautiful. When you look at a flower, you derive ineffable joy, though the flower renders you no service. Nature is the vesture of God. When you behold Nature, you experience bliss. I love Nature for the joy it gives. I derive joy from seeing it and for no other benefit. Likewise, God should be loved in a selfless spirit. I love Krishna regardless of what difficulties I must suffer, because that is the way I love him. I have no interest in the transient pleasures and possessions of the world. True bliss transcends the fleeting pleasures experienced by this perishable body. Draupadi! Do not seek these pleasures relating to the body. Seek the Divine feet of the Lord, which will confer enduring bliss. Do not grieve over petty difficulties. Concern yourself with the means to experience God. All other things are valueless." The bliss from experiencing the Divine has been extolled by the *Vedic* seers and sages from ancient times. It is holy, eternal, ineffable and infinite. It is the bliss of oneness with God.

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