

The Significance of Vinayaka Worship

*With your elephant's trunk
And single tusk, and benign looks,
With the tingling of your anklets,
And your prodigious belly,
Looking like a dwarf,
But capable of bestowing all knowledge,
Oh Son of Parvati!
Hail! Lord of the Ganas.*

The festivals of Bharat [India] are pregnant with spiritual significance. Unfortunately, *Bharatiyas* today give importance only to external rituals and observance, ignoring their inner meaning and eternal values.

"*Parvati tanaya Ganadipa!*"—Oh Son of Parvati! Lord of the *ganas*. In these terms the *Vedas* [scriptures] extolled Ganapati. Who is this Parvati? Who is her son? What is the relationship between mother and son? Few *Bharatiyas* care to enquire into these questions. The *Vedas* proclaimed: "Oh Ganadipa!" Who are these *ganas*? Are they celestial hosts or *asuras* (demonic beings)? They are celestial beings. Where are they? Are they wandering in the external world or are they present subtly in human beings? He (Vighneshwara) is called *Ganaadhipati* because he is the Supreme Lord of the *ganas*. The *ganas* are the embodiments of the *jnanendriyas* (organs of perception) and of *karmendriyas* (organs of action). The mind is the master of these ten senses. The presiding deity of the mind is called Indra as he is the Lord of the *Indriyas* (the senses). The master over the mind is the *Buddhi* (intellect).

The meaning of "Ganapati"

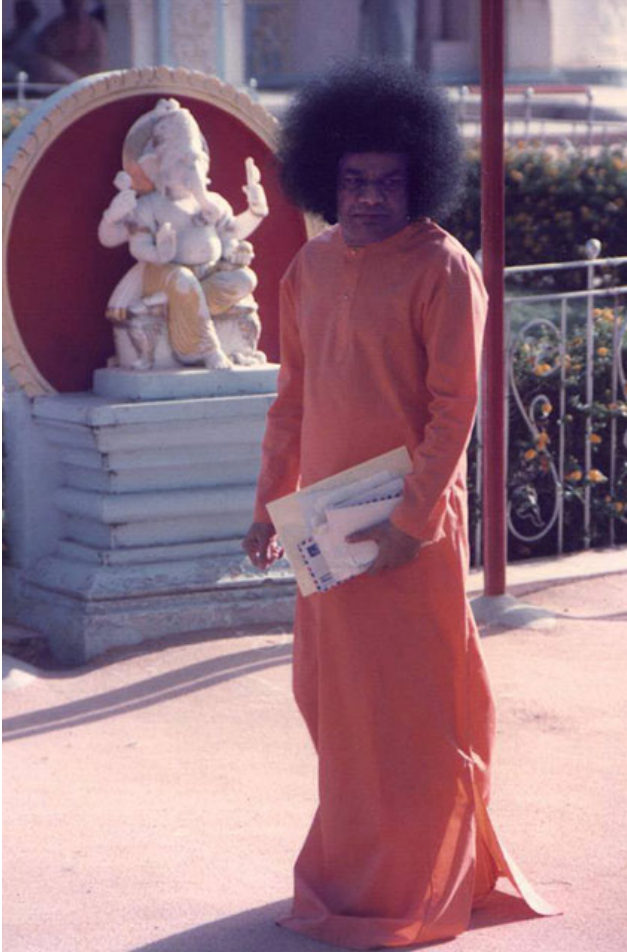
What does the name 'Ganapati' signify? 'Ga' means *buddhi* (or intellect), 'na' means *vijnana* (wisdom). As Vighneshwara is the Lord of the intellect and wisdom, He is called Ganapati. It follows from this that what are called *ganas* are parts of the human body. The *vyakti* (individual) is a part of *srishti* (creation). Hence, Divinity, of which the cosmos is a projection, is immanent in the human being. "*Vigato nayakah Vinayakah*"—Vinayaka has no master over him. This means that Vinayaka is a totally autonomous and independent deity. He has no lord above him. In the world, any individual or authority has someone superior above him. But Vinayaka has no overlord.

The worship of Vinayaka has been in existence from times immemorial in *Bharat*. The *Rig Veda*, the *Narayanopnishad*, and the *Taittiriya Upanishad* have passages referring to Vinayaka. It is embedded also in a *Gayatri mantra*.

*Tatpurushaaya Vidmahe
Vakratundaya Dheemahi
Tanno Danti Prachodayaat*

This *mantra* indicates that Vinayaka's Divinity is glorified in this *Gayatri mantra*. Hence, Ganapati signifies an all-pervading divine potency.

In everyday parlance, Ganapati is described as the son of Parvati. Parvati represents *prakriti* (nature). Man is a child of nature. Hence every human being is a Vinayaka. He is a spark of the Divine Shiva-Shakti, the union of the Lord and Nature. Everything in the world has emanated from *prakriti* (nature). All things are aspects of nature. It is to reveal this sacred truth that holy festivals are observed.



Elephant head and Mushika

How did it happen that Vinayaka has the head of an elephant and has a mouse as his vehicle? The mouse is called *Mushika* in Sanskrit. It is a sign of night, which signifies darkness. The mouse is a symbol of darkness. Because Vinayaka has control over darkness, He is described as the rider on a *Mushika*. He is the one who dispels darkness and sheds light on the world.

The *Mushika* (mouse) is also a symbol of the sense of smell. The mouse moves about following the direction of the *vasana* (smell). Vinayaka is the one who has mastery over *vasanas*, that is, desires and ignorance (represented by *Mushika*).

What is meant by describing the *Mushika* (mouse) as the vehicle of Vinayaka? It means that Vinayaka rides on the *Mushika*, representing

vasanas (desires) and ignorance (darkness). Vinayaka is one who drives away all sorrows, difficulties, and miseries. He is the enemy of all obstacles. He will not allow any obstacles to come in the way. He is the destroyer of obstacles. He confers

happiness and peace (on his devotees). He is the master of all these powers—*buddhi* and *siddhi*. What is this *siddhi* (fulfillment)? When there is purity of mind you achieve peace, which is *siddhi*. Vinayaka is thus the Lord of *buddhi* and *siddhi* (the intellect and self-realization). Hence, every human being should acquire control over the mind.

Nature of food offered to Vinayaka

Every festival is celebrated by various culinary preparations. For *Vinayaka Chaturthi*, these preparations are of a special kind. The edible offerings to Vinayaka are totally free from oily substances. Vinayaka is offered only items cooked through steam. What is the reason? According to the science of *Ayurveda* (the ancient Indian system of medicine), food cooked through steam is easily digested.

Moreover, the Vinayaka festival, which is celebrated in the month of *Bhadrapada*, falls in a month when sesame and jaggery come to the market after the harvest. The sesame seeds are powdered and mixed with rice flour and jaggery and cooked in balls that are offered as *naivedyam* [food that is part of worship] to Vinayaka. Jaggery is a cure for several ailments relating to phlegm and bile. The sesame seeds have the power to cleanse the lungs and improve vision. These balls of sesame and jaggery are thus noted for their medicinal properties for curing both external and internal ailments.

The ancient *Bharatiyas* never indulged in meaningless practices. Every festival has an inner spiritual significance. Every word they spoke, every step they moved, every food they consumed had spiritual significance.

The Lord of learning

Vinayaka is the Lord of all *vidya* (learning). Does learning mean bookish scholarship? No. Everything pertaining to the cosmos is included in the term *vidya* (learning). Walking, talking, laughing, sitting, eating, strolling, thinking, every kind of activity is related to learning. Vinayaka is the master of every kind of learning.

Today learning is identified with acquisition of information. But apart from knowledge of the physical world, we have many other kinds of knowledge relating to chemistry, the fine arts, and other skills.

Vinayaka is the master of every kind of knowledge. Learning is related to *buddhi* (intellect). It is not mere scholarship. Familiarity with books is not knowledge. One's entire life is a continuous process of learning. Any process of enquiry is related to learning. But basically, our enquiry should be concerned with finding out what is transient and what is permanent. This is true knowledge.

Hence, today students worship Vinayaka with zeal. Vinayaka is not the one who merely comes to the aid of those who read their books. He helps everyone at every step in life's journey. He is readily accessible. He is pleased with an offering of

flowers of no value ("Lilley" flowers). It is said that anyone who eats these flowers will become insane. Such flowers are offered to Vinayaka. Vinayaka is also worshipped with an offering of green grass.

What is the inner meaning of these kinds of offerings? His face is that of an elephant. His vehicle is a mouse. These are symbols from the animal kingdom. They indicate that Vinayaka is worshipped even by birds and beasts. Vinayaka is thus worshipped by all beings and is Lord over all beings. He does not belong to one country or one nation or one period of time. He is related to all places and all times.

Puranic stories to testify Vinayaka's greatness

There are scriptural texts that testify to all this. But some of them are quite fanciful. For instance, in one *Puranic* story it is stated that once Shiva and His consort Parvati were playing a game of dice. For any game there must be an umpire who has to declare who is the winner. Shiva and Parvati agreed to have Nandi (the divine bull) as the umpire. Nandi is a favorite of Shiva, as he is Shiva's vehicle. Although Shiva lost the game, Nandi declared Him the winner. It is stated that Parvati was indignant over Nandi's partiality for Shiva and cursed him that he should die from an incurable disease. Thereupon Nandi fell at the feet of Parvati and pleaded for forgiveness. "Mother! Forgive me. Should I not show at least this amount of gratitude to one who is my master? Is it not humiliating for me to declare that my master has lost the game? To uphold his honor I no doubt uttered a lie. But am I to be punished with such severity for so small an offence?" Nandi prayed for forgiveness in this manner.

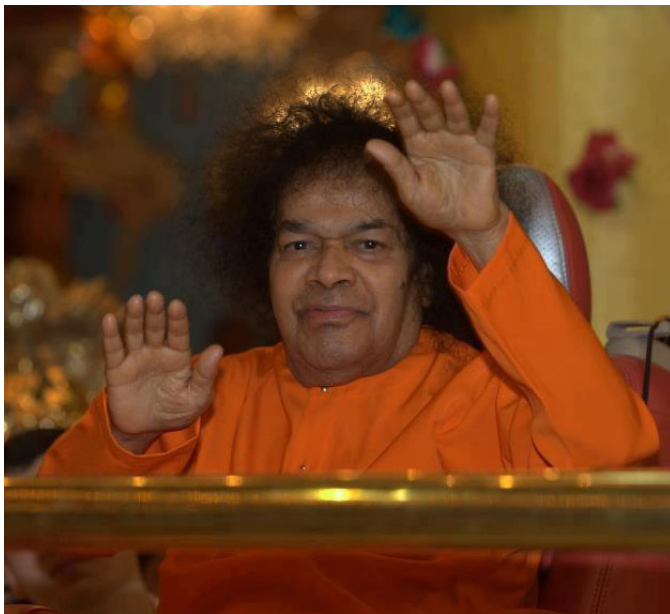
Parvati forgave Nandi and taught him the means to atone for his lapse. She told him, "The *Chaturdasi* day [significant day, before full moon or new moon] in the month of *Bhadrapada* [fifth month of the Hindu calendar] is the day when my son's birthday is celebrated. On that day you have to offer to my son what pleases you most (green grass)." This means that one atones for one's sins when one offers to the Lord what is most pleasing and enjoyable to Him. For Nandi the most enjoyable and relishing food is green grass. As directed by Parvati, Nandi worshipped Ganapati by offering green grass. Nandi was then relieved of his dreaded disease. His health improved and by Parvati's grace he was redeemed.

This incident is the basis for the practice recommended for pilgrims to Gaya, Benares, and other places that they should give up something they love most as an offering to the Divine. This means that they should give up something that they like most and not something that they do not like. Whether it be a fruit or a vegetable, what you should choose to give up as an offering to God is what you like the most. This means that you give up consuming thereafter that vegetable or fruit. This practice has been prevailing from ancient times among pilgrims to Benares, Prayag, or other sacred places for a holy bath in the Ganga or Yamuna.

Offer to God what you like most

Today many people go to Prayag (Allahabad). What is the real meaning of Prayag or Kashi? The scripture declares: "The indweller is the Eternal Self." The body is the temple in the center of which the Ganga of *jnana* (wisdom) is flowing. In this Ganga of wisdom, the two rivers of *bhakti* and *shraddha* (devotion and earnestness)—represented by Yamuna and Saraswati [the rivers]—merge and the point of conjunction of the three rivers is known as Prayag. Hence, the Divine should be offered what is most pleasing to one.

Unfortunately, today this ancient traditional practice has been reduced to a fashionable formality. Pilgrims going to Prayag are asked by the *pandas* (priests) to give up what is most pleasing to them. Some of the pilgrims ponder over what they can easily give up and mention the names of these vegetables and fruits. They give up the bitter gourd or something else that they don't like. This is not proper. People should offer to give up what they relish most as the best offering to the Lord. But when they offer something that they don't like, the Lord seated in the heart declares: "Be it so!" As you have not offered what is most dear to you but what you dislike most, the Lord also offers to you what you dislike most. The reward for such dubious offerings to God is that instead of health you get disease. If you offered what is good, will not God give you what is good for you?



As is your offering so is the reward

This is illustrated by the example of Harishchandra. He made an offering of what was most dear to him, namely, *satyam* (truth). He was prepared to give up his kingdom, his wife and son, and sell himself in bondage to uphold truth. Truth is God. God is truth. Where there is truth there is God. Therefore, adore truth. Make all your offerings truthfully. Thereby you will reach the abode of truth. As is your offering so is the reward. This is the truth demonstrated by Vinayaka.

There are other examples of Vinayaka's greatness. Vinayaka will not inflict trouble on anyone. However, apprehending that if Vinayaka accompanies anyone he will cause trouble, he is given a food offering and kept in the corner of the house. But Vinayaka is not a lover of sleep like Kumbhakarna (Ravana's younger brother). Seeing his big belly people imagine that he is slothful.

Gajasura and Shiva

There was once a demon by name Gajasura. He was a demon King. He performed severe penance. *Eashwara* appeared before him. *Eashwara* is easily propitiated, and He gives readily whatever one prays for, without examining whether it is right or wrong to confer such a boon. He gives whatever the devotees pray for. This was what happened in the case of the demon, Bhasmaasura. He prayed to Shiva to grant a boon that whomsoever He touches by his hand should be reduced to ashes. Shiva granted the boon. Immediately Bhasmaasura wanted to test the power he had received by trying to place his hand on Shiva Himself! Ultimately Shiva had to be saved from Bhasmaasura by a stratagem of Vishnu who made the demon place his hand on his own head. He was then reduced to ashes.

Likewise, Gajasura also performed penance and prayed to the Lord. *Eashwara* appeared before him and asked him what he wanted. Gajasura said, "Lord! you must merge in my stomach." Shiva granted the boon and lodged himself in the demon's stomach. Parvati, not finding *Eashwara*, went out in search of her Lord and could find him nowhere. She went to her brother, Vishnu, and appealed to him to trace her missing Lord.

Vishnu knew that Shiva was in the habit of granting boons indiscriminately and getting into difficulties. He told her, "Parvati! I know what has happened. Be calm. You go to your abode. I shall bring *Eashwara* there."

Vishnu took Shiva's Nandi and decorated it to appear like a performing bull. Assuming the role of a bull-performer, Vishnu led the bull to the city of Gajasura, playing on a pipe all the way while the bull danced to the tune. The bull was dancing to the music of the Divine embodiment of all mysteries. Gajasura was intensely watching the performance of the bull and its master. Pleased with their performance, Gajasura asked the bull trainer, "What do you want?" The latter said, "You should not go back on your word. Will you grant me what I want? You are Gajasura, a great king." "Yes," he said. Give me *Eashwara* who is in your stomach," said Vishnu. Only Vishnu knew this fact, no one else. Gajasura immediately fell at the feet of Vishnu and said, "Swami! This secret is not known to anybody except yourself. I will keep my word even at the cost of my life. But there is one condition. My head should be worshipped by all and *Eashwara* should wear my skin." Vishnu agreed to it. That is the reason why *Eashwara* wears an elephant's skin. The head of Gajasura is worshipped as Vinayaka's head.

Significance of *Puranic* stories

These are some of the *Puranic* stories relating to Vinayaka. They are only stories. But such stories have been related to turn people's minds Godward.

If a deep enquiry is made, it will be realized that there is only one God. God is present in all. Vinayaka is not separate from us. The indwelling principle in our hearts is the Divine *atmic* principle. What is it that you should offer to God? Is it

unripe or a ripe fruit? You should offer only a good ripe fruit. Likewise, you should offer your good thoughts to the Divine. That is the supreme significance of the *Vinayaka Chaturthi* festival. Without realizing this, people install a mud idol, decorate it with meaningless flowers, make offerings of useless things, and seek the most valuable things from Him. What kind of bargain is this?

You should offer to the Lord what is most sacred. Look at the example of a cow. It is offered all kinds of grass and other fodder. But it offers in return the most nourishing milk. Even the cow offers to man something pure and holy. But what does man offer to God? He keeps the pure things for himself and offers the impure to God. This is not right. You should offer to God what will please Him. You pray to God to give you all kinds of things. How are you entitled to ask for them? Only if you offer to God what will please Him. If you do not perform acts that will please God, how do you expect God to do things that will please you?

Inner truth about Vinayaka

Therefore, at the outset you must do things that will please God. Then God will offer what will please you. This is one of the truths to be learnt from the Vinayaka festival.

Vinayaka is the Lord of life. Men should learn to shed selfishness and cultivate love of the Supreme Self. This is the inner truth about Vinayaka. Vinayaka should not be considered as merely an elephant-headed deity riding on a mouse.

Similar mistakes are made about other deities. For instance, Saraswati is represented as a Goddess riding on a swan. Saraswati is the Goddess of *speech*. Speech is based on the inhaling and exhaling of breath. In this process of respiration, the sound *So-ham* is produced and when it is repeated regularly, you have the sound *Ham-so*, which is identified with a swan. The inhaling and exhaling process is the chariot on which the Goddess of speech moves.

The inner meanings of the terms and symbols used in *Vedantic* parlance must be properly understood.

Everything is for your good

The best way to please God is to act according to His injunctions. For instance, I advise students not to indulge in excessive talk. Carry out your duties. Contemplate on God. Is all this advice being given for God's sake? No. Whatever Swami tells you is for your own good. Recognize that everything is for your good.

I would relate a story in this context. There was a minister to a king who was in the habit of declaring that whatever happened was for one's good. Once the king cut his finger while slicing a piece of sugarcane. Seeing the bleeding finger of the king, the minister remarked that the cut was for the king's good. The king got so angry that he committed the minister immediately to prison. Even then the minister remarked that the prison sentence was for his own good. A few days later the king went alone

for hunting in a forest and was resting under a tree. The servants of the tribal chief of the forest seized the king to be offered as human sacrifice for the tribal goddess.

When the king was about to be beheaded, it was noticed that the king's finger was mutilated, and such a mutilated person could not be offered as sacrifice. The king was freed. He remembered the minister's words and realized that the injury to his finger had saved him from death. He went to the prison straight and asked his minister how he could declare that the prison sentence was good for him. The minister replied that but for his being confined in prison, he would have accompanied the king and the tribal would have chosen him in the place of the king for their sacrifice.

The lesson of this story is that one should learn to welcome everything that happens as for one's own good. Recognition of this truth is the means to acquire God's grace. Develop the firm conviction that whatever God says or does is for your own good.

This is what all the *Bharatiya* festivals seek to teach. Underlying every festival is a profound spiritual message. Unfortunately, present-day students, caught up in modernity, are unable to comprehend this truth. They are obsessed with trifles and do not realize that education is for the purpose of leading the good life and not for earning a living. Yearn to lead an ideal life.

Consider Vinayaka as the Indweller in your heart. He is constantly warning you against what is bad. You ignore the warning and get into trouble. How much will you benefit if you "follow the Master" within you. Your conscience is the Master. Above all, heed the dictates of the Divine. That will be your best safeguard.

Vinayaka is one who has all the five elements under his control. Arjuna did penance for acquiring the *Pashupata Astra* from Shiva and overcame the powers of the five elements by the power of his penance. Vinayaka is the embodiment of all potencies. He has no superior above him.

In our *bhajans*, the first prayer is addressed to Vinayaka. The *bhajan* starts with *Om*, the *Pranava*. It is the combination of *Pranava* with Vinayaka that serves to redeem our lives.

Source: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, Vol. 28

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

The True Guide and Guardian

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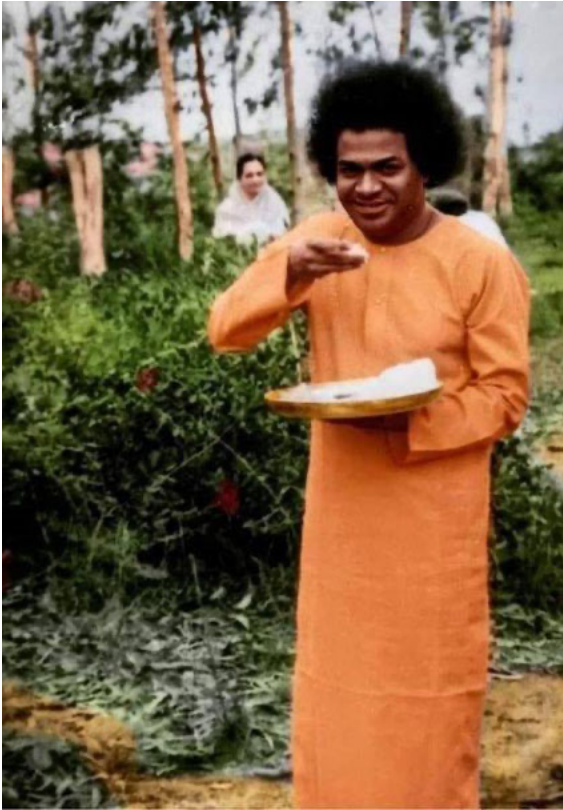
It was Sunday, June 20th, 1999. I was studying in my fourth standard in the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School. It being a Sunday, all the Primary School students had gone for morning *darshan*. But in an unfortunate turn of events, I fell sick and was admitted to the General Hospital. As I was sleeping, the school doctor came and informed me that Swami has called my family for a personal interview that morning.

I felt sad and depressed on hearing this news and started crying, and in the process I fell asleep. In my sleep, I dreamt that my entire family was sitting in the Interview Room in front of Swami. Swami then looked at my elder brother, called him and asked, "Where is your brother?" My brother kneels and replies, "Swami, he is down with fever and is admitted in the General Hospital". Swami just casually replies, "Don't worry, he will become all right very soon". With this my dream came to an end. Around noon, I was woken up as my family had come to meet me. While I was interacting with them, I asked my brother if Swami had inquired anything about me during the interview. My brother replied in the affirmative and then began narrating the happenings in the interview. The description that he narrated matched the scene that I had dreamt of. I narrated this to my parents who were overjoyed on hearing it.

Later in the evening, I persistently requested the doctor to let me go back and recuperate in the school as I did not want to stay in the hospital. After a while, the doctor relented and let me go back to the school. By nightfall, my condition again took a turn for the worse and the doctor decided that if the situation got any worse, I would have to be admitted again in the hospital. She gave me some medicines and told me to sleep. By next morning, around 7.00 am when the doctor came to check upon my condition, to everyone's surprise, I was awake, hale and hearty, and sitting upon my bed. The illness had completely vanished. Swami's word had come true. Swami had ensured that I did not miss the opportunity of an interview, by not only playing out the entire scene of the interview for me in my dream, but also curing me of my illness.

Another incident that comes to my mind demonstrates the Divine guardianship of Sai. One evening, a senior devotee of Swami was going to address the staff and their family in the hospital. My father was given the responsibility to set up the hall for the talk. As the day proceeded, my father got engrossed in his work and completely forgot about the talk. In the evening, just about five minutes before the scheduled time for the talk, a colleague came to my father and informed him that everyone had gathered in front of the hall for the talk and that the hall was locked. It then struck my father that he had forgotten to collect the keys of the hall from the respective

people. He just informed a colleague to get the keys from the person-in-charge, who stayed a bit far away.



Meanwhile he went down toward the hall. As he was going, he just prayed to Swami to help as he did not want to delay the event. As he approached the hall door, he just made a silent prayer to Swami and took out a bunch of keys from his pocket and used the first key from the bunch to open the door. He was sure that it was not the key for the door.

But to his surprise, the door opened with the key and the event went on as scheduled without any delay. The next day, my father went and tried to open the same door using the same key, but this time the door would not open. My father was very thankful to Swami for saving him from any embarrassment he could have faced. Swami, the Divine teacher that He is, also takes interest in guiding and correcting us, to take care of even the small things that we might consider

insignificant or too small for Swami to notice and respond to.

A personal incident happened to me that demonstrates this very aspect. In my ninth standard, during a family interview I had offered a letter to Swami. In a hurry, I had literally scribbled a few words on paper. Swami, on opening the letter looked at me and said, "Improve your handwriting. Your handwriting should always be clean, clear, and beautiful. In exams if your handwriting is good, you will automatically get good marks because the examiner will feel like looking and correcting your paper. Good handwriting will make the person reading the paper feel happy".

The Lord, who runs this entire universe, showed that even small things that we generally tend to ignore actually matter a lot. The number of miracles and incidents experienced by each one of us are many, but the point to be taken from these 'Calling Cards' as Bhagavan refers to them is that if there is sincerity in our prayer, He responds immediately to our prayer. As the saying goes, 'Prayer is man's only strength and God's only weakness'. We must ensure that our prayers are sincere and selfless. Sai is always there to guide and guard and it is only up to us to realize this fact.

Source: *Sai Nandana 2015* (90th Birthday Offering)

Ananda! O Ananda!

Ananda! O Ananda!
With beauty comes new Ananda!
With Ananda, new loveliness!
Ananda! O Ananda!

Premavahini poured Ananda;
First it came from Baba's hand!
Dhyanavahini, He gave us next!
And then to give our restless selves
The key to peace, He wrote for us
Prashantivahini, from His grace
Ananda! O Ananda!

Saivahini—It then took form
As *Jnanavahini*, the wisdom stream,
To light the thorny parts of doubt
In mental realms of you and me;
He sat by us and held our hand
And led us into Truth!
Ananda! O Ananda!

The fifth! It is here, it flows from now,
The holy *Dharmavahini*,
To steer the lives of scholars and of simple folk
To teach, fulfill His purpose grand,
To tell us how to spend our span of years
True to the Truth He has built us on!
Ananda! O Ananda!

Tremors in *griha* and terror in *graha*
They melt like fog before *Anu-graha*!
The Lord of *grahas*! He is our Lord, too!
We are both housed in Mansion same
So our might is just the same as theirs.
Ananda! O Ananda!

The *Grahas* won't harm, elements rebel—
They all obey His will, His plan!
The load of births, the burden of the past
His Will destroys; He shapes anew.
Ananda! O Ananda!

Dharmavahini, it has sprung today!
Slaking inquiry, teaching the way
Saving and solving, strengthening resolve,
Come, let us read, reflect and act!
Ananda! O Ananda!

Source: *Sanathana Sarathi*, March 1962

My Experiences of the Omnipresence of Sri Sathya Sai

Mr. Victor Kanu, J.P., M.A. (Oxfordshire) is former High Commissioner of Sierra Leone, Africa, to Great Britain, with further accreditations to Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Being an avowed spiritual seeker, he became the first African to be elected as President of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain; Magistrate in the Inner London Magistrate courts for nine years. He worked for the Education in Human Values program in the United Kingdom. He has authored "Sai Baba: God Incarnate Vol. I and II". Victor Kanu is also the founder of the Sathya Sai School for Boys in Ndola, Zambia, Africa, which in 2005 received an International Gold Trophy in Paris for quality in terms of leadership, innovation, training, and excellence in education. He held several senior positions in the Sathya Sai International Organizations. He merged at the Lotus Feet on September 3, 2011.

Issa Vassyam Idam Sarvam. "All this is enveloped by God. All this is soaked in God, saturated by God. Everything is the substance of God."

Some of the wonders and mysteries of the universe, this marvelous creation of God, were made known to me partly by parents and elders of my country of first domicile, Sierra Leone, and partly by my early teachers and missionaries. The instruction, as might be expected, was contained in legends and stories, music, dance, and folklore in oral transmission of a direct nature, and in quasi-secular and spiritual textbooks.

That Sierra Leone is rich both in traditional life and in matters of the spirit cannot be seriously disputed. Yet, despite this richness neither my experiences gained in traditionalism nor those in modernism, as exemplified by Christian education, ever taught me that all that our senses can or cannot perceive is "enveloped by God.... soaked in God.... saturated by God.... is the substance of God."

It was [through] Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's coming into my life that I came to learn not only this indisputable and absolute *truth* but have also, by His Divine grace, become a living witness of the Omnipresence of God. Not even Oxford University where I studied Philosophy, could enlighten me on this all-important

subject. Perhaps, it could be argued, though, that my statement is an over-exaggeration. For, surely, Philosophy as taught at Oxford must contain elements of God's existence and Omnipresence. Even if one were to make a concession to this point, it would still be restrictive and circumscribed within the confines of a particular philosophical school of thought. So, by receiving spiritual enlightenment from Bhagavan Baba, the veil of ignorance and intellectual prejudice have, at the same time, been destroyed—never to return again.

Bhagavan Baba is in Africa, a continent that was once described the "dark continent". How can Africa be dark when He who is Eternal Light has always been present there? Speaking to a section of our London group at an interview in July 1989, Bhagavan Baba pointing to Himself said: "Sai Baba is not this body. Sai Baba is a spirit, I am everywhere." The evidence of His Omnipresence will not be based on what other people say or have said or what I have read from books on Bhagavan Baba, but rather on my own first-hand personal experiences at different levels of consciousness viz. the working, sleep, and dream states. Personal experiences cannot be underestimated, ridiculed, ignored, or thrown away in preference to teachings only.



Baba was present in the pub one evening in December 1974 where He watched me drinking without any limit. No sooner had I gone to bed late that night than He sent two angels to bring me to Prasanthi Nilayam for soul-cleaning. That night I dreamt I was floating in a deep blue

and incredibly calm sky with the two young and amazingly handsome boys (angels), one on either side of me. We were floating in silence, eastwards, to a distant land. We began to descend as we approached our destination, until we finally passed through an arch, along a narrow village road where I was left at the *Gopuram* (above the main wooden entrance that leads to Bhagavan Baba's *Mandir* at Prasanthi Nilayam).

Here all the nations of the world were assembled, and among them were my ancestors, who spoke to me in *Temne* (our tribal language). The assembly was solemnly engaged in healing and spiritual teaching. This dream resulted in a profound change in my social habits and mode of thinking.

I also became aware of His Omnipresence four years later, on 21st February 1978, in my room at another address. I prayed to God that morning for assistance in my newly acquired gift of spiritual healing, which involved the laying of hands on the

sick. I wanted this gift to develop for two reasons: Firstly, for the glory of God, that He may be praised; secondly, for the benefit of mankind. Moments later Bhagavan Baba responded in an enthralling vision, the first vision ever in my life. I had neither prior knowledge of, nor contact with, Bhagavan Baba at that point in time.

He was again present at my new address at 50 Longley Road, London SW17, on 3rd February 1980, when after offering ourselves (my wife and I) to Him in prayer as His devotees, and asking Him to give me a sign if He accepted us, He appeared in my dream that night and confirmed His acceptance. He woke me up in a loud clear voice on 15th March 1980 and said: "United Worship". That command thereafter removed my slothfulness and led me to the habit of rising early for morning prayers.

Events leading to our first visit to Bhagavan Baba were other occasions when He demonstrated His Omnipresence. My wife and I could not raise the necessary funds to visit Bhagavan Baba (both fares cost 700 pounds sterling). Reluctantly, we had to withdraw our names when the time for payment was due in mid-May 1980. However, on the first Monday of June, the postman delivered two letters addressed to me at our home: One of these contained a cheque of 500 pounds sterling made out to me by someone I had met only once, without disclosing to him our financial predicament. In his covering letter he entreated me to use the funds for my passage to Sai Baba. Two days later, the postman delivered another letter addressed to my wife. It contained 200 pounds sterling made out in her name with pleadings to use this amount to buy saree when she arrived in India. Thus, the full cost of the fares was provided by Bhagavan Baba who was (is) present in our hearts and at our home while we discussed our finances.

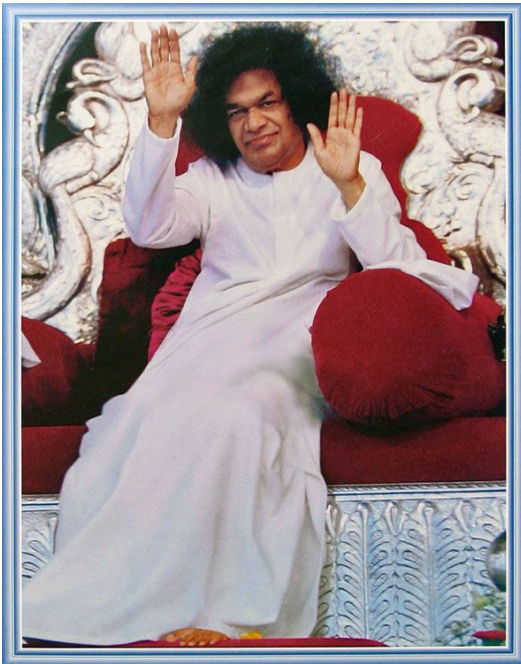
Baba's Omnipresence is beyond human comprehension, yet simple in its execution. Whenever either my thoughts are going astray—toward the path of evil—or when I am in the process of undertaking an action that is contrary to His teachings, or when He simply wants to advise and protect, I would hear a sound from an unidentifiable source—a knock, a tap, or footstep; or I would see an object move or fall; perhaps the fragrance of *Vibhuti* [sacred ash] would manifest itself; or animals would behave differently. Here are two instances.

In the first instance, I had organized a seminar in 1987 at Froebel Institute College in London on how the Sri Sathya Sai Education in Human Values Program could be used to help drug abusers and aids sufferers. For this purpose, I had invited Dr. William Harvey, a Sai devotee, and one who for over 20 years had successfully run a clinic for young black drug abusers in the U.S.A. Bill was to stay with us and I was to meet him at Heathrow airport on an early morning Pan American Flight from New York.

That night I slept in a separate room to avoid disturbing Genoveva's sleep. Just as I was about to wake up, Bhagavan Baba came to my dream and said sternly but sweetly, "Talk to your woman." Before leaving for the airport, I decided to wake her and tell her my dream which, honestly, I did not understand. "Darling", I said to her,

"Swami came to my dream this morning and uttered one sentence only: "Talk to your woman." "What do you think He meant?" She exploded. Yes, I am sick and tired of you. For a couple of months now you entertain no conversation at home other than Human Values. First thing in the morning, in our lounge, at table, and last thing at night it's all about Human Values. You have no time for me, so I have spent the whole night complaining about you to Swami." It is clear that our beloved Bhagavan Baba is Omnipresent, is in us and around us, is everywhere and looks after our well-being.

The second instance happened in Ndola, Zambia, where a Sri Sathya Sai School for Boys (Primary and Secondary) is being built. The plot is 13.85 acres that requires a certain measure of security, such as the presence of a watchman. I accordingly employed Siami, a Zambian ex-prison warden to keep watch over the piece of land where vandalism was rampant. Siami had a gun, and after a week he requested me to provide him with live ammunition so that, as he puts it, he could teach the vandals a lesson. I remained indifferent to his request despite his persistent reminders. Consequently, Siami began to show signs of disinterestedness in his night duties.



So one day, I took Bhagavan's pocket size photograph to the site, called Lungu, the civil engineer responsible for the construction work, and gave Siami, Bhagavan's photograph as ammunition. Siami's bewilderment quickly resulted in anger. "I asked for ammunition and you give a picture. What is this"? he enquired. I explained who Baba is—the Godhead in human form, His powers, His Omnipresence, etc. The more I explained the more Siami ridiculed. In the end I was able to persuade him to keep the photograph on him and to invoke the name Bhagavan Baba whenever he was in difficulty. Four days later, he asked for a larger photograph of Bhagavan, this time not to keep on his body but to put it in his

home. He said to me. "Mr. Kanu, this man Sai Baba is wonderful. You know from the day I took His picture the dogs who used to bark at me now come quietly and play with me. The whole place is very quiet." Siami now collects Bhagavan's photographs and distributes them to his friends.

What greater proof do I need to assert that Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is Omnipresent, is truly God-Incarnate? None whatsoever.

Source: *Sai Vandana* 1990

Q&A

WITH BHAGAVAN

Good and Bad Actions

A Visitor: I see evil on all sides and am puzzled.

Sai: Here is this banana. The skin is useless to us, so it is regarded as bad. But if there were no skin, the inside would not be protected. Do not regard anything as bad. If a person has done evil to you and you take it as evil and retaliate, then you also have become bad. But by remaining good and not regarding others as evil, you gain the right to reform them. If there is a bad smell in the room, and if incense is lighted, the fragrance changes the smell of the room. Bad actions should be met with good deeds and good viewpoint, and the evil will be changed. The difference between good and bad is a function of time. Food when eaten is good. In time that same food undergoes a change, is excreted, and is called bad. Whereas truth remains the same and does not change with the passage of time. Therefore, the time sequence is just imagination.

Hislop: The thought arises that some persons are wholly bad, their crimes are so vicious.

Sai: No person is wholly bad, for God is in every person's heart. A mother and son may fight in court over property, but the relationship of mother and son remains. Two people who have come to hate each other live in two houses. Each has a picture of Baba over the door. The house represents the body, and Baba's picture represents the God resident in the soul. The body may have to be corrected in its behavior, and the best way is to attract the person with love. There is absolute good, but there is no absolute bad. Bad changes, bad is a distorted aspect of good. But it is not possible when one has the ordinary physical vision to see good and bad as one.

Only when one knows the divine spark in oneself and in others, only then one sees good and bad as the same. If one can adopt as an attitude the truth that good only is real, and that all one sees is essentially good even though distorted, one acquires a great strength if he can see the world this way. The learned might argue about the world and say that all this is illusion and despair, but they can never hope to live without loving the world. Love is not to be disregarded. The world might seem to be untruth from the material viewpoint, but the world is truth if looked at from the transcendental viewpoint.

Hislop: We are asking Swami about the 'bad' people. How about the poor victim of vicious action?

Sai: Everyone is good, but there are bad actions; action and reaction. In terms of the victims of bad action, everything was exactly right. We see only the present. Baba sees the past also. A four-year-old boy was attacked by robbers for the gold chain around his neck. The robbers blinded the boy so he could not identify them. The boy was crying bitterly that he could not see. The parents also were crying. They came to

Baba. In the past life, the boy had been a cruel man who had blinded several people. The boy will continue to be blind, but as a man if he starts to consider, understanding that he is blind because of past dark deeds, and then sincerely repents for his bad tendencies, and makes a genuine effort to change himself, praying to God to forgive him, Baba may forgive the *karma* and restore the eyesight.

Hislop: How should we relate to so-called 'bad' people?

Sai: Keep the body separate from people who give bad food to the senses, even though all are brothers. Let souls be in God, but bodies apart.

Hislop: Often it is very difficult to choose the right action. How may one acquire the ability to make this discrimination?

Sai: Every man has the discrimination to know what right action is and what is wrong action. Wrong action develops guilt feelings. Whereas right action is free and without such fear.

Source: *Conversations with Bhagavan*

Thought

of the

MONTH

Inquiry

'We become what our thoughts are.' These thoughts on the validity of the objective world and the value of the joys derivable therefrom, though they emanate from ignorance (*a-jnana*), do shape us from within. The reason we are caught in this mold lies in the absence of four requisites: (1) attention to spiritual progress, (2) steady faith, (3) devotion, and (4) the grace of God. Even if one of these four is absent, people cannot experience the highest bliss of the Absolute.

Sri Sathya Sai Vahini

Every aspirant must enter onto the path of inquiry. Only then can the conviction dawn and grow that nature and all learning connected with nature are unreal; only then will these be given a relative, not an absolute value.

They are, of course, to be learned and experienced as necessary for existence, as a kind of daily routine. However, they should not be mistaken to be the highest knowledge, the unchanging eternal truth. That mistake, if committed, leads to an agitated mind (*a-santhi*). Agitation produces worry and anxiety, which in turn destroy peace. If you aspire to peace, equanimity, the basic thing is to have faith in the temporary nature of Nature and be engaged in the uninterrupted contemplation of the changeless Godhead.

Prasanthi Vahini

Our inquiry should not be directed to the obvious and the superficial. This line of inquiry will only mislead us into believing what is not the cosmos. It makes us forget that it is our mind that has generated this panorama of cosmic proportions and presented it to us as truth.

It is indeed strange that this huge cosmos depends ultimately on whether 'I cognize it as such or not! If you feel it is there, it is there; if you feel it is not there, it is not there!' This means that we have to go deep into this process of the mind. Is there any occasion when our assertion leads to the existence of a thing and our negation results in its disappearance? Or, is this conclusion a figment of the imagination? Inquiry on these lines would undoubtedly reveal the truth.

Sri Sathya Sai Vahini

Well! If only everyone would ask the questions: 'Who are we? Whence did we come? Where have we come to? How long will we be here?', the truth could be easily grasped. That questioning is the sign of discrimination (*viveka*). When, by means of this discrimination, the idea that the world is impermanent gets deeply rooted in the mind, all attachments cease automatically. That is the stage of renunciation or detachment (*vairagya*).

One asks, is it worthwhile to be caught up in this unreal world? This is false and misleading, one tells oneself. One then turns one's efforts to the realm of the Lord, the realm of truth. That is the wise decision.

It is through discrimination (*viveka*) and detachment or renunciation (*vairagya*) that one understands who one really is. Without them, it is impossible to know it. The Lord has blessed only humanity with these two. He has endowed people so that they might use them for that purpose. Hence, people are truly fortunate. But alas, people have forgotten the task for which they have come, ignored the question whence they came, closed their eyes to where they are, diverted their intelligence toward amusement and creature comfort, and wasted all their powers. What a tragedy! If in this most propitious human birth itself the Godhead is not sought, when else is a person to succeed? If today is squandered so, will tomorrow help you?

If one's real nature is first understood, the rest can all be easily grasped. One will thereafter know who one is, whence one came, where one has come to, and how long one exists.

Prasanthi Vahini

