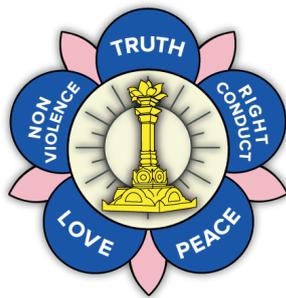

STUDY GUIDE

Selfless Service

A compendium of discourses and quotes from the works of
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

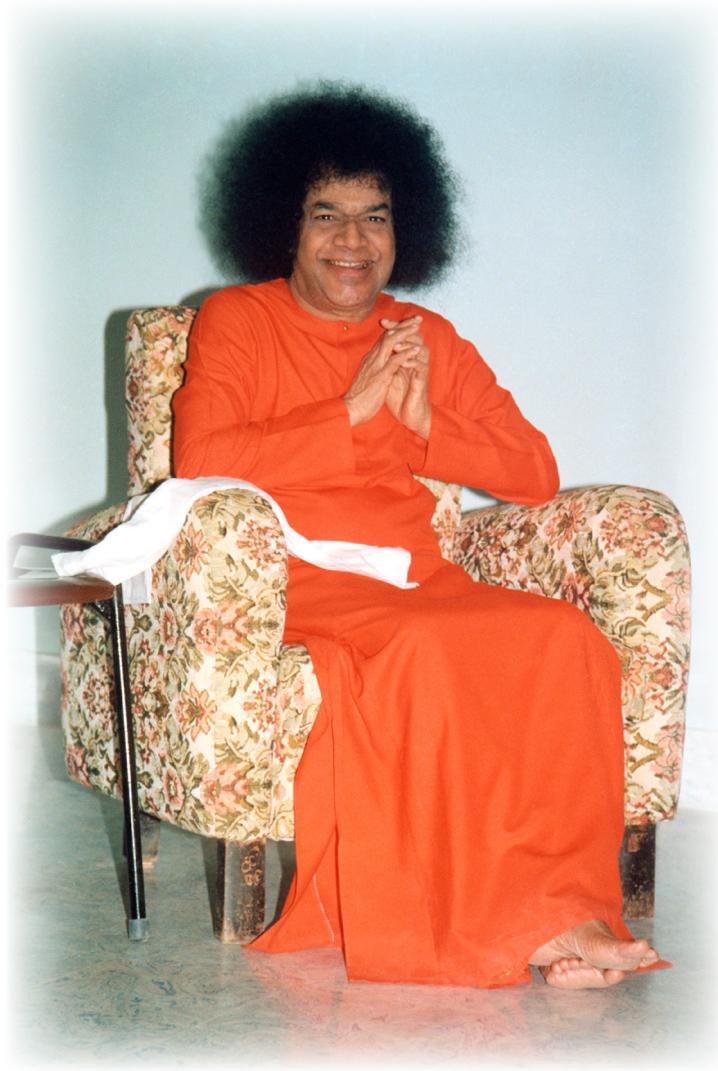




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DEDICATED WITH LOVE AND REVERENCE

AT THE DIVINE LOTUS FEET OF

BHAGAWAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

THE EMBODIMENT OF DIVINE LOVE

*For the human being love and service are like two wings, with the help
of which, one should strive to realise the spirit.*

SSS 28.34: November 21, 1995



Editors' Note

This study guide is a compendium of discourses and quotes from the following works of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba: *Sathya Sai Speaks*, *Vahinis*, *Summer Showers*. The editors have attempted to remain faithful to the presentation of the quotes as they occur in the online editions of the works from which they come, with the exception of minor changes to facilitate readability and coherence in the context of the study guide. Original audio files of Bhagawan's discourses were referred to as needed. The reader can easily find these discourses and quotes by visiting the international website <http://www.sathyasai.org> and by selecting "Discourses-Writings" from the top menu.

PREFACE

This set of two study guides, *Love* and *Selfless Service*, is a compendium of selected discourses and quotes from the discourses and writings of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba on the topics of love and selfless service. The two volumes have been prepared for use by individuals and groups at pre-world conferences in preparation for the Tenth World Conference to be held at Prasanthi Nilayam in November 2015. The study-guide set may also be of use to any spiritual seeker on the subjects of love and selfless service.

The choice of these two topics is deliberate. If one word could sum up the essence of Swami's life and teachings, that word would be "love". Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's life, His message, His ideals and His humanitarian works can all be enshrined in one word—Love. His life is His message and His message is love. He is truly the incarnation of love—Love walking on two legs. He says, "God is love; live in love", and exhorts us to "Start the day with love; fill the day with love; spend the day with love; end the day with love—this is the way to God". Just as the moon can be seen only by moonlight and not with the help of a candle, God who is the embodiment of love, can be experienced only through love. "But this love", Swami says, "is unconditional, pure, selfless love which is directed towards God with one-pointedness".

Lord Jesus Christ, when asked what is the greatest commandment, said, "The greatest and the first commandment is love thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength; and love thy neighbour as thyself". The great apostle St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians says, "Faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love". Swami says, "Love is the source; love is the path; and love is the goal". So, when we live our lives saturated with love, our lives get sanctified. Swami says, "The greatest examples of pure, pristine love are the *gopis* (cowherd girls of Brindavan) of yore". There are some other examples of pure, unconditional, Divine Love in this compendium. If one could master this single Divine Principle, the other four human values—Truth, Peace, Righteousness and Non-violence—would also, automatically, be mastered. Perfect mastery of love amounts to nothing less than Self-realisation.

Selfless service is perhaps the single, most efficient and universal tool for understanding, experiencing and expressing this Divine Principle of Love. Service is love in action. Swami says that the best way to love God is to love all; serve all. The main purpose of the Sathya Sai Organisation is to help one realise one's innate Divinity by the practice of Divine Love through selfless service. Swami has also made it clear that the quality of service is most important, not the quantity. The spirit or the motive behind service is the deciding factor. When we render service, we should feel that we are serving God. This is why He says, "Service to man is service to God". Service done in this manner makes us realise that "service is done by God, to God, and for God". The person who is serving, the recipient of the service and the process of serving are all one—and are all divine. Just as the proof of rain is in the wetness of the ground, pure, selfless, loving service transforms us and we enjoy supreme peace and equanimity—the "peace that passeth understanding".

Swami cautions us about major obstacles that stand in the way of selfless service: *ahamkara* and *mamakara*—ego and attachment; and *karthrithva* and *bhokthritva*—the feeling of doership and enjoyership. A true Sathya Sai volunteer strives to overcome these obstacles through selfless service. Service done in a pure, selfless manner then becomes yoga—leading to union with God. Swami says that when we realise “service to man is service to God”, we also experience the ultimate truth, “*Isa vasya idam sarvam*” (everything is pervaded by God).

The two subjects—love and selfless service—are, therefore, foundational and integrally related.

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s teachings are a treasure beyond compare. My sincere hope is that the readers will not allow this treasure to slip from their grasp. This compendium is intended to facilitate the reader’s ease of access to Bhagawan’s teachings on these two important topics. My sincere prayer is that each and every reader might experience Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s divine presence through His words on love and selfless service in these study guides and thereby be transformed by putting into practice these ideals.

Let us dive deep into the nectarine words of Swami, saturate ourselves with His love and redeem our lives through the daily practise of His universal and eternal message of love and selfless service.

To the One who has made the concepts of love and selfless service simple and easy to understand through His writings and discourses, and whose life is a supreme example of both, I offer my heart-felt gratitude. I humbly seek His blessing and grace on behalf of every reader who parts the pages of these guides to learn and follow Him.

Dr. Narendranath Reddy
Chairman, Prasanthi Council

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

What Is Selfless Service?

Introduction

Our true nature is pure love. This love expresses itself spontaneously and without any external promptings as selfless service. In selfless service, there is recognition of oneness between the one serving and the one being served. This, then, leads us to realise the truth that the God in us is serving the God in others. Swami often tells us that selfless service is the most important spiritual discipline for a devotee and the direct path to Self-realisation.

This chapter is an introduction to selfless service as a spiritual discipline. It includes quotes that tell us that selfless service is the main purpose in our life. Serving and helping others is the essence of the *Puranas* (scriptures) and is the highest form of worship. Selfless service is worship of the Lord in His cosmic form whereby He is seen in every being and in everything.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Selfless service as spiritual discipline
- Adoration of God in every form
- Characteristics of selfless service



Selfless Service as Spiritual Discipline

On the spiritual path, the first step is selfless service. Through selfless service, one can realise the Divinity that is all this creation.

SSS 10.32: November 20, 1970

Sevā (selfless service) in all its forms, all the world over, is primarily a spiritual discipline for mental clean-up. Without the inspiration given by that attitude, the urge is bound to ebb and grow dry; or it may meander into pride and pomp. Just think for a moment. Are you serving God? Or is God serving you? When a pilgrim stands waist deep in the Ganga, takes in his palms the sacred water and, reciting an invocatory formula, pours the water as an offering to the Deity—an *arpañ* (offering) as he calls it—what he has done is only poured Ganga into Ganga. When you offer milk to a hungry child or a blanket to a shivering brother or sister on the pavement, you are but placing a gift of God into the hands of another gift of God. You are reposing the gift of God in a repository of the Divine Principle. God serves. He allows you to claim that you have served. Without His will, not a single blade of grass can quiver in the breeze. Fill every moment with gratitude to the Giver and the Recipient of all gifts.

SSS 9.10: May 19, 1969

I consider *sevā* (selfless service) as the most important activity of the *samitis* (centres or service groups), for it is the highest *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline). Do not entangle yourselves in pros and cons, in arguments for and against, whether this way or that. They are the consequence of wrong or perverted scholarship. Love ignores logic. *Sevā* respects no syllogism. Try to observe the rules that have been framed through Love, to canalise the Love that you are required to cultivate. I have said this so often that all of you know my mind already: “*Start the day with love; spend the day with love; fill the day with love; end the day with love; that is the way to God*”.

SSS 11.35: December 23, 1971



Adoration of God in Every Form

Sevā (selfless service) is the adoration of the Lord as *Vishwa-Virāt Swarūpa*, God with multi-faced form and with immanence in the entire cosmos. The *Vedas* described Him as “thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed”. The thousands of hands and eyes and feet are all His, the Lord’s. Worship Him. That is the purpose of your *sevā*. And He is none other than your own Self. Do not count an individual as just an individual. The individual has God within him or within her as the reality. Be aware of that.

SSS 8.33: September 22, 1968

Great sage Veda Vyāsa has declared that service to human beings is the highest form of worship (“*Paropakārāya puñyāya, pāpāya parapīḍanam*”). Do not offend or harm anyone. That is true adoration of God for, in truth, the other is you yourself. Awareness of this truth is *moksha* (liberation). Share your joy, your wealth and your knowledge with others less fortunate. That is the surest means of earning divine grace.

SSS 14.18: January 25, 1979

The wise ones use money, strength, intelligence, skills, aptitudes and opportunities for helping others and making their lives happier. Thus, they win divine grace. For *sevā* (selfless service) is the highest form of worship.

SSS 18.23: November 21, 1985

Spend the years of life, the wherewithal you earn or possess, in the service of others who are in distress. Love grows on such service. Service is the sincerest form of adoration of God.

SSS 11.25: May 15, 1971

You are called *sevaks* (servants) because you are engaged in *sevā* (selfless service). What exactly is *sevā*? Is it the way in which *bhakti* (devotion) manifests itself, a consequence of devotion? Or is it the cause of *bhakti*, one of the methods by which *bhakti* is expressed and developed? It is neither. It is not the *sine qua non* of *bhakti*; nor is it the result. It is the very essence of *bhakti*, the very breath of a *bhakta* (devotee), his or her very nature. It springs from the actual experience of

the *bhakta*—an experience that convinces him or her that all beings are God’s children, that all bodies are altars where God is installed, that all places are His residences.

SSS 7.14: March 29, 1967

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Characteristics of Selfless Service

Your *sevā* (selfless service) will be judged with reference to the mental attitude accompanying it. So whatever work is allotted, do it with fervour, understanding and reverence.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Rendering service selflessly with a compassionate heart is alone true service.

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

While judging the *sevā* (selfless service) done by a member of the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps), it is not the quantity or the number of individual instances that matter. They do not count at all. Judge rather the motive that led him or her to serve, the genuineness of the love and compassion with which the *sevā* was saturated. You may explain that it was your duty and so you had to do it. You may say that it was a responsibility which was imposed on you by the scarf and badge. But the explanation that appeals to Swami is that you did the *sevā* with no taint of ego and that you derived unsurpassed *ānanda* (bliss) as a result.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1978

Two attainments mark out the *sevak* (service volunteer), especially the Sathya Sai *sevak*—absence of conceit and presence of love. Service to those needing help makes you the comrade of all, irrespective of other considerations. Be looking all around you, all the time, even beyond the horizon of your allotted tasks for any extra chance to serve. An old man may be stranded in the hot sun. A paralytic may be casting his eyes for a chair. A child may be wailing for its parent. A mother may be clamouring for water to slake her thirst. Watch for these and run towards them with a smile and a word of cheer. It may be that someone has swooned or fainted. Get the doctor or take the patient to the dispensary, with loving care and with gentle alacrity, instilling courage and confidence. Let them go back to their places and say that not

even their nearest kin could have dealt with that situation as lovingly and as intelligently as you did. Have compassion, love, readiness to sacrifice personal comforts and patience. Then you can be a successful *sevādal* (volunteer service corps).

This means that you must be engaged in constant *nāmasmaraṇa* (remembering God’s name) yourself so that you remain a true servant of God while claiming to serve others, or rather so that you may see in others the God that is their real nature. If you have not acquired that vision, you will not find unity among these diverse representations of the Divine. You will get confused by the multiplicity.

SSS 11.10: February 21, 1971

Sevā (selfless service) can be identified by means of two basic characteristics: compassion and willingness to sacrifice.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

There are many who come forward when there is a call for social service, but most of them crave publicity seeking the camera whenever they help others and very disappointed when they are not mentioned in newspapers. Such persons push themselves forward and climb into positions of authority, just to parade their importance before the public. They forget that service is worship, that each act of service is a flower placed at the feet of the Lord and that, if the act is tainted with ego, it is as if the flower is infested with slimy insect pests. Who will contaminate the Feet with such foul offering? Have no egoism while you serve the people of your district. Be guides in their spiritual struggle. Nourish faith in God. Upon that faith you can build any type of spiritual organisation. Trees that grow by the side of canals will flourish thick with foliage and fruits. So too, *bhajan mandalis* (devotional wings) and other units of this Organisation will flourish when faith in the Divine feeds the roots. Emphasise simplicity and sincerity more than pomp and show. Make the mind the shrine.

SSS 11.16: March 8, 1971

Every *sevā* (selfless service) done with sympathy and skill to anyone in distress anywhere in this world is Sathya Sai *sevā*. If a Sathya Sai *sevādal* (volunteer service corps), man or wom-

an, finds a person swooning on the road or suffering pain or agony when going towards college or office, it is the duty of the finder to render all help possible to relieve the suffering. Do not ignore it and walk on. The *sevādal* must be eager to serve and trained to serve, for service from those who take My name must be intelligent and sincere.

SSS 7.14: March 29, 1967

Discipline entails the strict observance of rules and regulations and directions. The sense of duty can yield results only when discipline is observed and when devotion to Sai and the message of Sai is the basis for the sense of duty, which keeps you ever bound to discipline. Do not be part-time devotees leading one kind of life when you wear the scarf and badge and another kind of life when you have removed them. Be ever *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants) and *sevakas* (servants). Do not forget. Do not modify. In the path of service that you have chosen, there should be no bumps of doubt or jumps of deviation. Move on steadily and bravely, with your eyes fixed on the goal, the grace of the Lord. Be intent on the development of the human mind, not the monkey mind. Do not hop about from decision to indecision, from acceptance to denial. Be alert and inspired as humans, not dull and fitful as beasts. Above all, cultivate love; express love; move among other *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) members with love; let love be your very breath.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

There was a king once, who questioned many a scholar and sage who came to his court, “Which is the best service and which is the best time to render it?” He could not get a satisfying answer from them. One day while pursuing the forces of a rival king, he got separated from his troops, in the thick jungle; he rode a long way, exhausted and hungry, until he reached a hermitage. There was an old monk who received him kindly and offered him a welcome cup of cool water. After a little rest the king asked his host the question that was tormenting his brain, “Which is the best service?” The hermit said, “Giving a thirsty man a cup of water”. “And which is the best time to render it?” The answer was, “When he comes far and lonely, looking for some place where he can get it”.

The act of service is not to be judged, according to the cost or publicity it entails; it may be only the offering of a cup of water in the depth of a jungle. But the need of the recipient, the mood of the person who offers—these decide whether the act is gold or lead. Fill every act of yours with love. Let no one suffer the slightest pain as a result of your thought, word or deed. Let this be your *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline). It will surely help you to achieve the goal.

SSS 7.23: May 24, 1967

Study Questions: What Is Selfless Service?

Group Study Questions

1. How is selfless service a spiritual discipline?
2. What are the essential attributes of selfless service?
3. How is selfless service an act of worship?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a time when someone served you selflessly? If so, how did that experience affect you?

CHAPTER 2

Forms of Selfless Service

Introduction

This chapter includes quotes that provide a deeper understanding of the three *guñas* (qualities of purity, passion and sloth) as they relate to service. With regard to service, one should discriminate between the pure and that which is influenced by passion. Swami explains that the urge to serve arises from a compassionate heart in response to seeing someone in distress. Service is *sātvic* (pure) when it is offered purely for the happiness of others and without self-interest or pre-conditions.

Swami tells us that social service is not the only way to practise selfless service. We can also serve God by cultivating pure thoughts, by speaking softly and sweetly, and by offering our actions to God. Reducing our desires and conserving natural resources with a sense of sacrifice is also a form of service.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Selfless service through thoughts, words and deeds
- Service through reverence to nature
- Service through righteous living
- Service on the basis of *gunas* (qualities)

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Selfless Service through Thoughts, Words and Deeds

Let the day dawn for you and others with the thought of the almighty, the compassionate, the omnipresent, all-knowing God. What greater service can you do for yourself and others? This will give you health and happiness. Your egoism will be shattered when you sing in the streets in full view of your neighbours. You will forget in your enthusiasm all pride and self-esteem. Thus, this *nagar-saṅkīrtan* (devotional singing in streets) is a great *sādhana* (spiritual discipline), a great piece of social service.

SSS 8.21: May 18, 1968

Just as all earthly matters are not taken directly to a king but are presented to the concerned ministers for action, all prayers do not reach God Himself. They are attended to by His ministers Indra, Varuna and others. Only those prayers, which have their origins in the spirit of *nishkāma karma* (selfless action), infinite and pure love and an unsullied heart, reach the Lord directly. It is not possible for prayers of any other kind to reach Him directly. Therefore, it is only through these three media—selfless service, boundless love and an unsullied heart—that we can hope to secure direct contact with the Lord and obtain His divine sanction to our request.

SS 1979.2

If some kind of hurt or harm is caused to others, we should make an attempt to help them by doing some service. It is not only by work and by keeping our surroundings clean that you can do service. You can do service by your words as well. With a good word, you can soothe their hearts and by doing good deeds you can soothe their minds. Therefore, by using good words and doing good work, you will give comfort to others and this is good service.

SS 1973.8

Service does not mean helping with hands alone. Talk softly and sweetly. Speak good words. That is also a form of service.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

Never use harsh words. You cannot always oblige but you can speak always obligingly. Bodily wounds can be cured by the use of medicines. But the wounds inflicted by the tongue can never be healed. That is why I repeatedly tell you to cultivate love and talk with love. I never use harsh words even when I appear to be angry. I always speak lovingly. You too will become divine when you cultivate such Divine Love.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

The [service] badge should not be defiled by your indulging in deleterious habits such as impulsive anger, selfishness, flippant conversation, smoking, drinking, gambling or loitering in unsanctified places. Do not wag or argue just for the sake of argument. Let your words be few, fair and felicitous. Soft speech adds sweetness to living. Even when you are engaged in discussion amongst yourselves, be short of speech and polite in behaviour.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

You are all educated persons, experienced in many fields of activity, equipped with many skills and capabilities. You are animated by genuine enthusiasm to help others. You are encouraged by the example of other clubs to take up many schemes which will benefit the community. These are great assets. Heart has to meet heart, so that service may succeed. Speak soft and sweet; be soft and sweet. Speak with sympathy and with no pretence, no artificiality. Keep away from impure listening, impure acts, impure words, impure thoughts—everything that contaminates the will to serve and the skill to serve.

SSS 5.51: November 4, 1965

One should fill the heart with compassion. Always speak the truth and dedicate the body to the welfare of society. The thoughts, words and deeds of a person should always be sacred. The heart unpolluted by desire and anger, the tongue not tainted by untruth and the body unblemished by the acts of violence—these are the true human values. It is because of the lack of these human values that the country is facing hardships today.

SSS 32.pt2.1: July 26, 1999

One should strive only to do good deeds which alone will lead one to *moksha* (liberation). *Moksha* is not an object that can be acquired from outside. It is a way to life itself. When you follow your inherent nature and cultivate good feelings, you can attain liberation from worldly bondage.

SSS 27.10: April 11, 1994

Knowingly or unknowingly you commit sin. Consequently you suffer. You are unable to trace the root cause of your suffering. So undertake meritorious deeds. Cultivate sacred feelings. Serve your fellow beings. Taking to this path amounts to devotion. Devotion does not mean performing worship and offering flowers to God. Worship amounts to good actions alone. One should have good thoughts within. One will not be redeemed if one undertakes good actions with bad intentions.

SSS 32.pt1.2: February 14, 1999

What is *karuṇā* (compassion)? Seeing a person in distress and verbally expressing sympathy is not compassion. Compassion must express itself in action to relieve the suffering. Nor should you adopt an attitude of aloofness or indifference on the plea that each one is suffering for his or her own folly. Though suffering may be due to one's mistakes—mistakes to which everyone is prone—we should seek to remedy such suffering just as we try to get rid of our own suffering. Some people try to show off their sympathy by setting up charitable institutions like hospitals.

True compassion should emanate from the heart. It should not find expression in outward manifestations which only reveal one's vanity. In the Sathya Sai Organisations there is no place for such demonstrations of vanity. Everything that is done to help the poor or the suffering should be based on the feelings coming from the heart and appealing to the hearts of those who are helped.

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

Time is infinitely precious. Hence the performance of good deeds should not be put off to another day. Time waits for no one. Hence both the body and the time should be utilised for doing sacred actions.

SSS 23.30: November 19, 1990

Service through Reverence to Nature

The human being is deriving innumerable debts from Nature and enjoying the amenities provided by Nature in various ways. But what is the gratitude the human is showing to Nature? What gratitude is he or she offering to the Divine? The human is forgetting the Divine who is the provider of everything. That is the reason for a person becoming prey to various difficulties and calamities. While we are receiving countless gifts from Providence, we are offering nothing in return to Nature or God. This shows how unnatural and heartless is the behaviour of the human being. When we are enjoined to return good for evil how unbecoming it is to fail even to return good for good. We are not learning the great lessons Nature is teaching us. The foremost lesson is doing service with no expectation of return.

SSS 21.19: July 12, 1988

I do not waste even a drop of water because water is God. Air is also a form of God. That is why I switch off the fan immediately when it is not required. Some people keep the light on throughout the night even if it is not required. But I switch on the light when it is necessary and at once switch it off when it is not needed. This is not miserliness. I am not a miser. I am the embodiment of sacrifice. But I don't like to waste anything. Use everything as much as it is necessary. But people today are misusing the five elements.

SnSr April 2012: July 18, 1996

Some people say, "Swami, I do not wish to be a burden to Mother Earth. Please grant me death". Will the burden of the earth decrease just because you die? Your death will not make any difference to it. The burden carried by the earth will diminish only when you lessen your own burden. What is the true burden you bear? Desires are your burden. If you put a ceiling on desires, you become lighter and come closer to God. That is why Swami often says, "*Less luggage, more comfort, make travel a pleasure*". You must therefore sincerely try to decrease the burden of desires. If you do so, you will also cease to be a burden to God. Increase in your burden means more work for God.

SS 2000.2

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Service through Righteous Living

There is no meaning in preaching spirituality to a starving person. Feed the hungry. Offer solace and encouragement to those in distress and despair. The educated should try to teach the illiterate and open the minds of the ignorant to wider vistas of knowledge. The educated persons may be doctors, lawyers or businessmen. Doctors should be ready to render free medical service to the poor. Lawyers should be helpful to those who are in need of legal aid but who cannot afford to pay for their services. Businessmen should be content to keep a reasonable income for their needs and utilise the surplus for charitable purposes. It is rare to find such persons. The wealthy should realise that money should be earned by righteous means and used for right purposes. True happiness can be got only from wealth acquired by fair means. Money got through exploitation of others will lead to suffering in one way or another.

SSS 23.30: November 19, 1990

The forefathers believed that the very observance of *Dharma* (righteousness and justice) by the individual contributed to the welfare of the world and could be evaluated as “service”. The broad circular heavy footprint of the elephant can include and even obliterate the footprints of many an animal. So too, the imprint of *Dharma* includes service to society and to humankind. This was the faith of the sages.

SSV 19

With regard to Truth, it is often said that to be truthful in business will result in loss. This is not so. Though initially there may be some difficulty, in course of time integrity and honesty will bring their own reward. The MBA students must convince their chiefs in their respective firms how truth in accounts and audit helps to raise the image of the firm. They should be content with reasonable profit margins. Even if this policy does not pay in the beginning, in the long run it will be most rewarding. This is the way to inspire confidence. Running a business honestly must be regarded as a form of social service and spiritual *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline).

SSS 23.3: February 10, 1990

To plead that one has no time for service activities because of official duties or other preoccupations is an utterly lame excuse. Even in your official work you can render service. There is no need to go to bazaars for street cleaning. That is not the only means of serving the public. Whatever your official duties, whatever your profession or occupation, if you discharge your duties properly and efficiently, that is also social service. The right attitude for officials in authority towards service should be to ask themselves whether the services they render are commensurate with the salaries they receive. Seldom do we see persons in employment, whether they are workers or officers, doing the amount of work that would justify the salaries they get. They all want more remuneration but are not prepared to work more. They should realise that this kind of an attitude is a betrayal of the nation. Whose money are they receiving as wages? It is the public’s money. To fail in the discharge of one’s duties to the public is a grievous disservice. If a teacher imparts education on the right lines, he or she is rendering real national service. Likewise, if a merchant conducts his or her business on the basis of earning not more than what is needed to meet reasonable needs, he or she will be rendering public service. When this attitude prevails there is no need to claim that one is engaged in service. One should be content to abide by the dictates of one’s own conscience. What will please Swami is the proper performance of one’s duties. This constitutes *sevā* (selfless service).

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

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Service on the Basis of *Guñas* (Qualities)

The mind, according to the scriptures, is the cause of a person’s bondage or liberation. The mind has three qualities: *tamas* (sloth and inaction), *rajas* (passion) and *satva* (purity). The *tāmasic* quality (sloth and inaction) makes the mind ignore the truth, pursue the false and impels a person to indulge in what is unholy and improper. It is necessary to correct this tendency of the *tamo-guṇa* (quality of *tamas*). The *rajo-guṇa* (quality of *rajas*) is responsible for a person living in a kind of dream-state and treating it as

real. The *sātvic* (pure) quality makes a person see good even in a bad person or object. The *sātvic* person sees God in the whole cosmos and fosters the godly approach to creation.

SSS 28.38: December 25, 1995

Satva-guṇa (quality of purity) is steady, pure, unselfish, light. So those who have this characteristic will have no wish or want. They will be fit for the knowledge of *Atma*. Those with *rajo-guṇa* (quality of passion) will be engaged in acts tarnished with a tinge of ego. They may have the urge to do service to others, but that urge will drive them on to win fame and take pride in their achievements. They will yearn for their own good, along with the good of others. Those who are endowed with *tamo-guṇa* (qualities of sloth and inaction) are overcome by the darkness of ignorance and so they grope about not knowing what is right and what is wrong.

GV 23

With regard to service, you have to decide what is *sātvic* (pure) and what is *rājasic* (with quality of passion). We go and clean streets, build roads in villages or dig wells and do them all as a service to the community. But the kind of service which we do should give real happiness to the people. In the name of “social work” you go to a hospital and approach a patient. This is not real service. Any person whom you wish to serve, you should regard as an embodiment of the Divine. Going to the help of the destitute and the neglected is rendering service to God.

Narayana (God) has two forms. One is “*Lakshmi Narayana*” (affluent). The other is “*Daridra Narayana*” (poor and distressed). This “*Lakshmi Narayana*” is full of wealth. He is able to help any number of people. He will be able to get many persons to serve him. But for “*Daridra Narayana*” there is nobody to serve him. It is to such persons that we should do *sātvic* service.

SSS 18.31: December 29, 1985

It seems a person once saw a man struggling for life in the deep waters of a lake. The fellow could not swim and was really helplessly floundering. But without the least compunction of sympathy and without making the least effort to save him the onlooker had the audacity to ask

him, “Tell me, how deep is the lake?” Such is the behaviour of most people now-a-days. These persons are sunk in *tamas* (qualities of sloth and inaction). They are too wooden and dull, too hard and impervious. It is only when a person gets rid of *tamas* that he or she can rise into *rajas* (passion), the sphere of activity, emotion, devotion, compassion and service. When that person rises higher into the *sātvic* (pure) stage, the activity gets elevated into *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) and the effort is more spiritual.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

When a sculptor converts a piece of rock into a beautiful idol to be worshipped in a shrine, what was inert and worthless becomes sacred. This is transformation. Similarly, an idol made out of silver becomes an object of worship. In the same manner, everything which is petty and worldly can be transformed in course of time into something sacred and divine. Such a transformation is necessary for the human being. Take, for instance, the body. It is an entity which houses much that is bad and that is undesirable. Externally we take great care of the body through bathing and cleaning. We are aware of the external impurity and we try to get rid of it but are we aware of the internal impurities? How do we purify them? For this internal purification, we have to acquire sacred thoughts and do sacred deeds. We have the concepts of *jīva* (individual self) and *Deva* (God). The human being is composed of the three *guṇas* namely *satva*, *rajas*, *tamas* (qualities of purity, passion and sloth). As long as you are part of these *guṇas*, you are *jīva*. Once you transcend these three qualities you become *Deva*. The three *guṇas* (qualities) are like the husk that covers the rice in the paddy. When you remove the husk it becomes the rice-grain. Whatever we do, whatever actions we undertake, if they were to be permeated with thoughts centred on God, they would become sacred. Today in our *sevā* (selfless service) activities, we do not have this lofty sense of dedication. We should get rid of the thought that *sevā* activities are being done for others. You should understand that they are being undertaken for your own sake and for your own betterment.

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

The human being is encompassed by attachment to worldly desires, which produce delusions of various kinds related to the three *guṇas*, namely *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (qualities of purity, passion and sloth). To attain liberation one has to rid oneself of these desires. The mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. It is only by controlling the mind that a person can achieve liberation.

Everyone is proud about the body, the mind and the intellect, forgetting the indwelling *Atma*, which is the basis for all of them. The *Atma* has no birth or death. It is the root of a tree, which sustains the branches, the leaves, flowers and fruits. It is the basis on which the superstructure of life rests.

The *Vedas* have declared that the human being can attain immortality by *tyāga* (sacrifice) and not by any other means—actions, wealth or progeny (“*Na karmañā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amrutatvamānashuh*”). What is it that has to be renounced? One has to renounce one’s bad qualities. Humans today are human only in form. They are filled with beastly qualities. To manifest their inherent divine nature, they have to cultivate love of God and fear of sin and adhere to *sanghanīti* (social morality). When people have fear of sin and love of God, they will not indulge in immoral acts. Thereby morality in society will be automatically ensured. It is meaningless to be born as a human being and lead an animal existence.

God can be known only by experience and not by experiments. *Sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) is needed for this purpose. Human beings who are engaged in exploring space do not make the slightest effort to explore the Divine within them. Of what use are experiments aimed at exploring space, while there is no genuine cultivation of human qualities and the practise of such basic virtues as showing reverence for the mother, the father and the preceptor? Everyone should act up to the motto “Help ever; hurt never”. Every educated person should engage himself or herself in selfless service to society with humility and a pure heart.

SSS 27.16: June 5, 1994

The dull, activity-hating *tāmasic* persons (ones dominated by qualities of sloth and inaction) cling to the ego and to kith and kin. Their love is limited to these. The *rājasic* (passionate) persons seek to earn power and prestige and love only those who will contribute to these. But the *sātvic* (pure persons) love all as embodiments of God and engage themselves in humble service. Pundalika was one such. He was massaging the feet of his old mother when God appeared before him. He did not interrupt the service, for he was serving the same God in his mother. Tukaram declared to Pundalika that it was God who had manifested before him but Pundalika did not waver. He asked God to wait for a while until he had finished the service of the God he had started serving.

SSS 7.23: May 24, 1967

Study Questions: Forms of Selfless Service

Group Study Questions

1. How does the mind affect the quality of service?
2. What is the nature of service characterised by each of the three *guṇas*?
3. What are the various ways in which we can serve others?
4. Why should we serve Nature?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a time when you rendered selfless service to another? If so, how did that experience affect you?

CHAPTER 3

Whom Do We Serve through Selfless Service?

Introduction

Service should be offered to those who are less fortunate than us and without judging them. The weak, the distressed and the destitute are the ones who need our service the most. However, in rendering service to such persons, we should not feel that we are serving “others”. We must practise selfless service with a feeling that we are serving the Lord who dwells in all.

The individual lives in society and derives happiness from it. Society is part of a larger community and communities together form a nation. Thus, the individual’s happiness depends on the welfare of the society, the community and the nation he or she lives in. The duty of every individual, therefore, is to render selfless service for promoting the common welfare of society. Swami tells us that selfless service ensures that the world we live in is safe, harmonious and peaceful.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Service to the needy
- Service to animals
- Service to family
- Service to society
- Service helps the one who serves
- Service to man is service to God
- All is God

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Service to the Needy

Of all good deeds, the best is *sevā* (selfless service), intelligent and loving service to those in need.

SSS 18.11: May 13, 1985

There is nothing meritorious in serving those who are high above us. For one thing, they can command the services of attendants. Rendering service to those who are in the same position as ourselves also is not commendable. Service should be rendered to those who are worse off than us and who are neglected by the world. It is the weak, the destitute and the helpless who need to be served. Even in rendering service to such persons, there should be no feeling that we are serving “others”. We should feel that we are serving the Lord *Narayana* who dwells in them.

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

Always try to help those who are in distress, those who are suffering and the poor. Once upon a time, there lived in Tamil Nadu a poet and holy man who used to sit on a veranda in his house in front of the Lord’s picture and chant beautiful songs. One day, it was raining heavily and he sought shelter in another little veranda in the village. One other man came and asked him if he could also take shelter there. The *bhakta* (devotee) said he could. He said, “There was place only for me to stretch out, but now that you are here we will sit up”. Later, another man came and asked for shelter. The *bhakta* consented saying, “There was place for the two of us to sit. Now that you also have come, let us all stand”. He thus taught the principle of helping one another and not sending anyone away who needed help. If you have three morsels of food and you find another man with no food, you must cultivate the spirit of serving and parting with one morsel of food for the other man. You must cultivate this attitude of sharing with others the good things you have. Then only can you put into practise the great principle of finding *Īshwara* (God) in every creature. You must practise this principle in daily life.

SS 1972.21

There are millions who are hungry, desperate and miserable. I am directing you to limit the intake of food to actual need so that you can share it with the poor. Do not waste food. Do not fritter away money for harmful purposes. Use it for helping others. Do not waste time and energy. Allow others to benefit by your skills.

SSS 18.23: November 21, 1985

Teach the illiterates in the villages how to read and write and broaden their vision. Visit the slums in the cities and instruct them how to avoid disease and maintain health. Welcome the slum dwellers into your group and work together with them to make the area clean and attractive. Once you take up *sevā* (selfless service) you will discover many ways of doing good.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Whenever a hungry person stood in front of our house, I used to provide food to him even foregoing My own share of food. For those who had no clothes to wear, I used to give away My clothes. Thus, I have been helping every needy person since My childhood. My motto then as well as now has been “Help ever; hurt never”. I had a lot of opportunities to help others since childhood. Several people pay lip service to the poor but they do not really help them.

SSS 40.5: February 16, 2007

We should serve the poor and needy. We should strive for their uplift. After all, they are also human beings and we should treat them as our own.

SSS 35.21: November 22, 2002

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Service to Animals

Animals, like bulls and buffaloes, render service to human beings in a number of ways. But the human being lacks the spirit of service that even animals possess.

SSS 38.7: April 9, 2005

The supreme Lord of the three worlds, Sri Krishna Himself, when He came down to proclaim the divine destiny of the human being, rendered

service to beasts and birds. He tended horses and cows with love.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

During the battle of Kurukshetra, which climaxed the *Mahabharata* story, Krishna served as the driver of the chariot of Arjuna throughout the day on the field and when dusk caused the adjournment of the fight, He led the horses to the river, gave them a refreshing bath and applied healing balms to the wounds suffered by them during the fierce fray. He mended the reins and the harness and rendered the chariot battle worthy for another day. The Lord sets the example for the devotees to follow. He teaches that service done to any living being is offered to Him only and is accepted by Him most joyfully. Service rendered to cattle, to beasts, to human beings is laudable *sādhana* (spiritual discipline).

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

Bhūta Yagna (ritual ceremony for living beings)—this entails kindness to animals, especially domestic animals that yield milk and slave for us in the field as draught animals. It includes pets, cats and dogs, sheep and all things that creep and crawl, including even ants. The heaping of grains over anthills in order to feed them is done as expiation for the destruction of such ants as might have taken shelter in the fuel that we burn.

SSS 10.20: October 3, 1070

A very pious person was once proceeding from Kashi to Rameshwaram, at the other end of this vast country. He was carrying with him some holy Ganga water to be mixed with the sea at Rameshwaram. That would be the consummation of his long and arduous pilgrimage through many a holy place and many a sacred river. While halfway through, he saw by the side of the road a donkey in the last throes of life since it was too incapacitated to move towards some source of water to quench its thirst. Its dry tongue and rolling eyes indicated the agony of extreme thirst. The pilgrim was so moved by the tragic sight that he poured the precious Ganges water he had with him down the throat of the distraught animal. Moments later, the donkey recovered and could gain enough strength to pull itself out of the grip of death. Seeing this, the companion of the pil-

grim asked him, “Master! The sacred water you brought from Kashi had to be offered to the ocean at Rameshwaram. Why did you commit this sacrilege by pouring it into the mouth of this despicable animal?” The pilgrim replied, “But I have poured the holy water in the ocean itself, don’t you see?” Any *sevā* (selfless service) done to a suffering *jīva* (individual self) reaches the Lord Himself and can never be a sacrilege, for *sevā* to the *jīva* is *sevā* to *the Deva* (God). Always be firm in that belief.

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

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Service to Family

The first lesson *sevā* (selfless service) has to be learned in the family circle itself. Father, mother, brothers, sisters—in this limited group, which is well-knit, one must engage in loving service and prepare for the wider *sevā* that awaits outside the home. The character of each individual member determines the peace and prosperity of the family. The character of each family is the basic factor that decides the happiness and joy of the village or the community. And the nation’s progress is based on the strength and happiness of the communities which are its components. So, for the welfare of the country and of the entire world, the spirit of service, vital enthusiasm, constructive imagination, pure motivation and unselfish alertness are all urgently needed.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

All are workers. No one can consider himself or herself a master. Service can assume any form. What a mother does for her child is service. A husband and wife render mutual service. In this sense all are servants. God is the only master. All others who call themselves “master” like postmaster and stationmaster are not masters at all.

SSS 28.34: November 21, 1995

There is no service greater than service to parents. Consider service to parents as service to the Lord.

SSS 31.40: November 19, 1998

Serve your parents. Never hurt their feelings.

SSS 35.21: November 22, 2002

Start practising love. That is the correct spiritual practise. Share your love with more and more people. You will experience oneness. Once you start sharing your love with everybody, then the whole world will become one family.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

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Service to Society

Avail yourself of every possible occasion to render service to the society. It need not be limited to individuals. It is important to do national service. You need not seek to know what kinds of service should be done. Whenever you find that you can render help to anyone in need, offer it. Do not make distinctions between rich or poor or the deserving and the undeserving. Offer service according to the needs of the situation. Today the needs of the poor in the rural areas are quite great. In this situation you must go out into villages, organise service activities and encourage the rural population to participate in them. The village folk should be told the importance of health and hygiene and how to keep their homes and villages clean and healthy.

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

Doing something because it is being done elsewhere is a sign of ignorance. The programmes must satisfy a local need, solve a local difficulty. They must arise out of felt needs and should be adapted to local conditions. It must be taken into consideration whether the place concerned is urban or rural, industrial or agricultural, a pilgrim centre or civic extension, a developing area or a sinking economy, a tribal settlement or a hill station.

The person who borrows some idea from another region and executes it might feel satisfied that he or she has achieved some concrete programme. But do the people whom he or she tried to benefit feel better and happier? That is the test. Do not think of the fame or praise you win. Think of the good that people derive. Do not crave for publicity. Crave for the joy that shines in the faces of the people whom you help. *Sevā* (self-

less service) brings you nearer to Me. The flower that is your heart gets fragrance by means of the *sevā* you do and so it becomes more acceptable to Me. Love is the essence of that fragrance.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Sevā (selfless service) of Sai and *sevā* of Sai devotees is the same. When you serve the Sai devotees, because they are Sai devotees you see the Sai in them, you seek to please the Sai in them, you revere the Sai in them. It is like serving a temple where Sai is installed, a room where a picture of Sai is adored. Throughout this period of *sevā*, you think only of Sai. So, this training helps you to purify your impulses, defy your thoughts, canalise your devotion and expand your love. These are big steps in *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline), laudable victories.

SSS 7.14: March 29, 1967

You should merge your welfare with the welfare of the world. How can you be happy when your neighbour is in misery? Therefore, I call upon you to give up praying for your own advancement. Pray for the peace, prosperity and happiness of all humanity, irrespective of clime or colour. Pray intensely and with faith. Then grace will be showered on you. When the heart is soaked in love, it cannot be contaminated by egoism and its evil consequences. Just as you crave for physical health, which means health for the limbs of the body, you should strive for the health of humanity, which means peace and joy for all sections, in all nations. If you dwell in that wider outlook, you will start feeling less and less for your own troubles and worrying more and more for troubles of others. That is the initial offering of yourself in the great "*yagna*" (sacrifice) called "living".

SSS 10.26: October 7, 1970

The prayer that rose from millions in this country from all its temples, *yagnashālās*, (institutes for ritual ceremonies), *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage), holy seafronts, shrines and altars for centuries, has been *Sarve janaḥ sukhino bhavantu*—"May all be happy and prosperous"; *Samasta lokāḥ sukhino bhavantu*—"May all the worlds have peace and prosperity". So pray for all humanity, for the welfare and happiness, the peace

and progress of Russia, China, Africa, Pakistan, all countries of the world and all beings everywhere.

SSS 12.15: April 1973

Never think that society cannot progress if you do not render service. Society does not depend on you. If not you, someone else will do the needful. God governs everything. In the first instance, try to understand the meaning of the word "service". It is possible to understand this once you understand who you are. You are a *mānava* (human being). *Mānava* does not mean the physical form alone. It is synonymous with the principle of the *Atma*.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

The first step is to understand the link that connects any two individuals. It is nothing but Love. It is on the basis of Love that the entire society is closely knit. What is a country? It is not the land but the society that makes a country or a nation. When the nation is prosperous and progresses with healthy growth, the needs of the individuals are also fulfilled. The individual is dependent on society. He or she is born, brought up and sustained by society. Therefore, it is the duty of every individual to render selfless service for promoting the common welfare of society.

SSS 27.10: April 11, 1994

A society, a community or nation can be safe, secure and happy only when the individuals comprising it are mutually helpful and bound together in skilful and sincere service.

SSS 19.29: December 28, 1986

The world today is torn into factions and groups that hate and hack each other. No method is considered too cruel if the aim is to destroy one's enemy. No one is aware of the innate unity, the ever-present current of Divinity that animates every single living being on earth. You have the role now of demonstrating that all is not lost; that there are still people who believe in Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love; that acts of loving service rendered in a spirit of humility and reverence are still making people happy; and that the day when the kinship of human beings and the Fatherhood of God will shine bright and beautiful is drawing and dawning near.

All efforts are now being concentrated on the production of more food, the building of more houses and the manufacture of more cloth. But what is most needed today is a total effort to make the human being manifest more tolerance, more humility, more brotherliness, more compassion and deeper awareness of the springs of joy and peace that lie within the heart of each one.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Just as hands, eyes, nose and mouth are the limbs of the body; likewise, all human beings are the limbs of society. Society is the limb of Nature and Nature is the limb of God. Seeing this vast Nature, one should not think that it is different from God. One should understand the fundamental truth that Divinity pervades the entire creation. Bulbs, their colours and wattage may vary, but the current in all of them is one and the same. Likewise, names and forms of individuals may be different but the principle of the *Atma* that exists in all of them is one and the same. The service you render will become meaningful only when you understand this truth. You should not think you are different from the one whom you are serving.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

The world has to be brought back to the rails. Only Love and Peace can achieve this. Fill your thoughts, speech and actions with Love, Truth and Peace and engage yourselves in service actions.

SSS 18.27: December 9, 1985

Strive for the peace of the world. The world is at rest but the human being's mind is full of unrest. Let the mind, which is full of unrest, be filled with peace. All this depends on the human being's conduct. Teach the world through noble actions and words. Fill your heart with the name of God. Fill your mind with the spirit of service.

SS 1993.6

Everyone in the world is a servant and not a master. All relationships—husband and wife, mother and child, the employer and employee—are based on mutual service. The world is progressing because of such mutual service. If the principle of service did not operate, the world would come to a halt.

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

By rendering service to society, not only can you alleviate the sufferings of the people, but you can also bring about transformation in their lives. *Yad bhāvaṃ tad bhavati* (As is the feeling, so is the result). If you serve with sacred feelings, it is bound to yield sacred results. Serve society to your utmost capacity.

SSS 33.12: August 22, 2000

Do not allow the desire for ostentation to enter the mind. Do not allow egoism to approach you. Be humble and be loyal to high ideals. Then only can you serve the cause of world peace and prosperity. "*Shreyāste vishwashreyaḥ*". It is only when the individual succeeds in being good that the world too can become good. One who is eager to be a real student must place before himself or herself the ideal of world peace and prosperity. He or she has to be unpretentious. That person must vow to be of service to others.

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A wave of service, if it sweeps over the land catching everyone in its enthusiasm, will be able to wipe off the mounds of hatred, malice and greed that infest the world.

SSS 9.18: September 10, 1969

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Service Helps the One Who Serves

The human being is born to render selfless service and not to indulge in selfishness. Selfless service alone can achieve unity of humankind. Only through unity can humanity attain Divinity. Hence service is very essential to understand this unity in humanity. People are under the impression that service means merely to help the poor, the weak and forlorn. It is a big mistake to think that you are rendering service to others. In fact you are serving yourself because the same principle of the *Atma*, the same Principle of Love, is present in all. All human beings are essentially one. The differences lie only in their feelings. So, a person should change his or her feelings and try to recognise the truth that the same Divinity is immanent in all. Only then can there be transformation in the human being.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

When you grasp the significance of the word "service" you will find that it is not so much the service of others but service for yourself. Once you feel the distinction that the other person is foreign, then service becomes patronage. It loses its savour. It fosters the evil of egoism. The person served also feels hurt. The person is aware that he or she is inferior. Such service is quite against the *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) called *sevā* (selfless service).

SSS 10.20: August 16, 1970

You are doing *sevā* (selfless service) for your own sake. You are engaged in *sevā* in order that you may become aware of the *Atma* in you, in order that you may discard the allurements of your ego, in order to know yourself and to get the answer to the question that torments you, namely, "Who am I?" You do not serve others. You serve yourselves. You do not serve the world. You serve your own best interest.

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

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Service to Man Is Service to God

In order to deserve the sacred name "*sevā*" (selfless service), the activity must be freed from all attachment to the self and based on firm faith in the divine resident in every being. *Sevā* has to be considered as worshipping the form that God has assumed to give the *sevak* (servant) the chance of worship. When a hungry *nara* (human) is served a hearty meal, what is being done is *Narayana sevā* (service to God); for *nara* is only "a form and a name" projected by *māyā* (delusion) on *Narayana* (God).

SSS 19.25: November 21, 1986

Whatever you do as service, to whomsoever you offer the act, believe that it reaches the God in that person—*Īshwaraḥ sarva bhūtānām* (God is in every being). So it is *Īshwarārpaṇam* (dedicated to God).

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

When the *rājasūya yagna* (ritual ceremony performed by the kings) was being performed, Krishna came and asked Dharmaraja to allot some work to Him. Dharmaraja turned to Krish-

na and said that there was no work appropriate to Krishna and that, if Krishna would Himself indicate what work was suitable to Him, it would surely be allotted to Him. Krishna went close to Dharmaraja, patted him on the back and said that he had a special qualification and that He would like to do work appropriate to His qualification. Dharmaraja could not make anything out of this. So Dharmaraja asked Krishna to tell him what His special qualification was so that he could find suitable work for Krishna. Krishna said that He was fit for removing the leaves in which people ate their food and which had been used once. Because after people eat their food in the leaves, they become somewhat unclean and if those leaves are not removed they create some dislike in the minds of people. Krishna therefore took up this work so that He could give pleasure and good feeling to people. The Lord sets the example for the devotees to follow. He teaches that service done to any living being is offered to Him only and is accepted by Him most joyfully.

SS 1973.8

Do not postpone the cultivation of devotion to God. Start serving God through service to your fellow-beings. Every act of service, however small, is service to the Divine.

SSS 16.18: July 24, 1983

All potencies are within you. This is indicated by the *Gāyatri Mantra*. You have to feel at all times your inherent Divinity, which is also present in everyone. When you help or feed someone you must feel that the Divine in you is feeding the Divine in others.

SSS 29.30: July 30, 1996

The individual is *Chitta* (consciousness). God is *Sat* (eternal and absolute). When *Sat* and *Chitta* combine you have *Ānanda* (bliss). *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*. Only the *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) undertaken to realise *Satchidānanda* (Being-Awareness-Bliss) is true *sādhanā*. Where is this *Sat*? This *Sat*, the Divine, is in everybody. So you must be prepared to serve everybody, regarding everyone as the Divine. You may have normal relationship with your kith and kin. There is nothing wrong in this. You must perform *sādhanā* in

the spirit that the One pervades the many. In this process you must cultivate the feeling of love. There is no higher *sādhanā* than the cultivation of love.

SSS 18.31: December 29, 1985

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All Is God

It is the sense of dualism—of “mine” and “thine”—which accounts for all the joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes, experienced by the human being. This dualism is rooted in selfishness, which makes one think that as long as he or she is all right, it does not matter what happens to the world. Such a self-centred person, who regards body, wealth and family as all that matters, looks upon truth as untruth and the false as true. To get rid of this deep-seated malaise, men and women have to engage themselves in service. They have to realise that the body has been given not to serve one’s own interests but to serve others.

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

Service is best built on the strong foundation of *Tat twam asi*. “That” and “This” are the same. “That” is “This”. “This” is “That”. There is no other. There is only One. Kites fly high but all are lifted and kept high by the same air, the same wind. The kites have no separate wills. The pots of water in which the sun is reflected may be many, but the sun is one and unaffected when the pots break or the water is dried up. All help that you give is therefore help given to yourself. All service is to the self alone. When another is poor, you cannot be rich. When another is in distress, you cannot have joy. The same current runs through and activates all. *Īshāvāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ*. All this is God. *Vāsudevaḥ sarvaṃ idaṃ*. All this is *Vāsudeva* (God), nothing more, nothing less.

SSS 5.58: November 27, 1965

Be in perpetual contact with God. Let the pipe that leads into the tap which is you be connected with the reservoir of His grace. Then your life will be full of unruffled content. Without that awareness of the constant Presence, any service that you do to others will be dry and barren. Be aware of it. Then any little act of service will yield plentiful fruit. *Sarvatāḥ pāṇi pādāṃ*. “God’s hands and

feet are everywhere". *Sarvatokshi shiro mukham*. "God's eyes, head and face are everywhere". *Sarvatāḥ shrutimalloke*. "God's ears are all over the universe". *Sarvaṃ āvṛutya tishṭhati*. "He remains enveloping all".

SSS 12.12: April 4, 1973

Study Questions: Whom Do We Serve through Selfless Service?

Group Study Questions

1. Whom do we serve through selfless service?
2. How does service help in spiritual transformation?
3. What does the following aphorism mean: "Service to man is service to God"?
4. What do you understand by the statement "Service is by God, to God and for God"?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of an instance in which you experienced that service to man is service to God?

CHAPTER 4

The Aim of Selfless Service

Introduction

Service arises out of one's yearning to win divine grace. The purpose of selfless service is to alleviate someone's pain and distress. Swami emphasises that while helping those who are physically suffering we must also try to transform them mentally and spiritually. This can be done through education and by providing the means to improve their lives. Later in this process Swami says that it is important to help the afflicted person cultivate good thoughts, actions and habits necessary to fight off the evil tendencies, which are the root cause of suffering.

Service is not only about helping others. The goal of selfless service is also to bring about our own spiritual transformation. Selfless service gives us an opportunity to sublimate our minds and sacrifice our ego. Swami teaches us to utilise all our knowledge, skills and resources for the welfare of others.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Alleviation of suffering
- Spiritual progress
- Offering of love

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Alleviation of Suffering

Serve society, help the poor and needy in distress and thus manifest the human quality of compassion. By doing *sevā* (selfless service), service to people, you are doing *sevā*, service to God. Even Adi Shankara, who was the supreme exponent of *jnāna mārga*, the path of spiritual wisdom, in his later days came to realise that *bhakti mārga*, the path of devotion, is the best path for humankind to realise God.

SSS 27.24: September 4, 1994

Deserve the grace of God by helping the weak and poor, the diseased and the disabled, the distressed and the downtrodden.

SSS 13.4: January 28, 1975

Sathya Sai *sevā samitis* (centres or service groups) have to bear in mind the word “*sevā*” (selfless service) and take up *sevā* work enthusiastically. *Sevā* must be directed towards the removal of physical distress, the alleviation of mental agony and the fulfilment of spiritual yearning.

SSS 7.18: April 21, 1967

When you stepped into this world, you did not bring anything with you; nor can you take anything with you when you leave. No benefit accrues to you from having palatial buildings and huge bank balances if you cannot use them for the service of the society. Spend your money for the welfare of society. Only then you can win divine grace. Serve the needy by providing comforts and conveniences.

SSS 32.pt1.5: March 12, 1999

Narayana sevā, which is feeding the hungry with reverence and humility, is the *sevā* (selfless service) that is urgently needed today. The cry for food is being heard everywhere, though if each one worked hard, the problem would not arise at all. We talk of stomachs to be filled, but each stomach arrives in the world with two hands. Those hands, if they are kept idle or unskilled, cannot fulfil their assignment of finding the food for the stomach. Work hard—that is the message. And share the gain with others. The harder you

work, the greater your gain, the more you can share. Work hard and, more important still, work together with others in loving kinship.

SSS 14.18: January 25, 1979

If we ensure the right kind of future for our children, the nation will benefit immensely. Every spiritual organisation should provide free education. In the name of the Lord free education and medical relief should be provided.

SSS 23.34: November 23, 1990

There are many poor people in our country who lack the basic necessities of food, raiment and shelter. Who will take care of them when they are afflicted with diseases? Doctors should render free service to patients to the extent possible. Doctors should serve the poor with the spirit of sacrifice. There is no greater service than this. God is the sole refuge for the destitute and the forlorn. As the human being is the embodiment of God, it is his or her primary duty to help the destitute and the forlorn. Medicine should not be commercialised. It is meant to promote heart-to-heart and love-to-love relationship between doctor and patient. Service to patients is service to God. There is no service higher than this.

SSS 36.11: July 5, 2003

Education is a business. Music is a business. Health is a business. The whole world has become a market place. Welfare services should be free for all.

SSS 28.16: June 3, 1995

The service that you render must reward you, not only with your satisfaction, but with the satisfaction and relief of those whom you serve. When those whom you serve are not relieved or made happy thereby, of what avail is your elation or exultation at the help you have been allowed to offer? You should have the joy of the recipient as your objective. Do not sit back and talk of your having done what is expected of you but try to discover whether your act of service has really been worthwhile, whether it has been intelligently rendered with full appreciation of the peculiar circumstances of the individual who needed it.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Devote every day at least five minutes for reciting the Lord's name and a few minutes for rendering some kind of service to the needy and the forlorn. Include in your daily prayers a prayer for the welfare of all people in the world. Do not be engrossed in your own wellbeing and salvation.

SSS 23.2: February 8, 1990

Any individual may offer worship and engage in spiritual activities according to his or her preferences. But, in My view, the merit to be gained through service is greater than what can be attained through these religious observances.

Na tapāmsi Na tīrthāñām, Na shāstrāñām

Na japānapi

Samsāra Sāgarottāram, Sajjanasevanam

Vinā.

(Neither by penance nor by taking baths in sacred waters; neither by the study of scriptures nor through meditation can one cross this ocean of worldly life. This ocean of worldly life can only be crossed by rendering service to the good.)

Whatever pilgrimages we may undertake, our hearts hanker only after worldly objects and hence no cleansing of the heart occurs. The individual's quest for *mukti* (liberation) is self-centred. This is not right. One should strive to help others also to achieve liberation. That is true service. Few have such large-hearted approach today.

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

In the Sai Organisation there is no room for distinctions of race, religion, caste, class or community. All should regard themselves as the children of one God. When they are united by this sense of divine kinship, they will act with love towards all. They should shed all narrow and limited ideas and engage themselves in service with a heart full of love for all. True *sevā* (selfless service) can come only out of a pure and loving heart.

SSS 17.27: November 18, 1984

We have here ten thousand *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) members, trained and dedicated for *sevā* (selfless service). However I doubt that you are being sincere in your duty to yourself and to others. As part of rural service you go

into the villages adopted by the *samitis* (centres or service groups) and repair roads, clear drains, give some medicines, conduct *bhajan*, (devotional singing) and deliver lectures. Is this the work that the Sathya Sai *sevādal* has to do? Suppose you have a glass, which you use to drink water from. Is it enough if the glass is cleaned on the outside? Inner cleanliness, inner health, inner illumination—these are far more important and the Sathya Sai *sevādal* has to take them up in a big way.

Find out how many families are in misery and poverty on account of the evil habits of their bread-winners. Drinking, gambling and other vices have to be tackled with humility and love, through persuasion and even personal submission. Even the government builds hospitals, provides roads, arranges for water supply and caters to their other material needs. But only a spiritual band of *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants) like you can succeed in reforming habits and leading onto the path of peace, prosperity and harmony. Every effort to give the villager a few more coins through employment will only make things worse if his or her moral fibre is not made strong enough to overcome the temptations of drinking and gambling. Lead him or her slowly and surely along the path of God and these habits will drop off one by one.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1978

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Spiritual Progress

Social service is a *tapas*, a spiritual exercise. It promotes the practical application of your knowledge, skills and virtues. Wealth, scholarship, power and prestige are all despicable if they are not directed towards moral ends.

SSS 18.11: May 13, 1985

The path of service is superior to all the spiritual practises like *japa* (recitation), *dhyāna* (meditation) and yoga. Only through service can you please God.

SSS 34.7: April 14, 2001

Know that *sevā* (selfless service) is a better form of *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) than even *dhyāna* (meditation). How can God appreciate the *dhyāna* you do when adjacent to you, you have

someone in agony, whom you do not treat kindly, for whom you do not make all efforts to help? Do not keep yourself apart, intent on your own salvation, through *japa* (recitation) or *dhyāna*. Move among your brothers and sisters, looking for opportunities to help but have the name of God on the tongue and the form of God before the eye of the mind. That is the highest *sādhanā*.

SSS 10.3: February 1, 1970

Unselfish service is the sheet-anchor of *karma yoga* (yoga of action). The basis of yoga is disciplining the mind and the body through disinterested service.

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

We should undertake today what is known as *nishkāma karma* (selfless action) action performed without any desire for the fruit thereof. Service of the downtrodden, the disabled and the diseased also constitutes an obligation in one's daily life and cannot be described as *nishkāma karma* or motiveless work. This is because the human being's love for the universe is not without selfishness. If a person loves any object, he or she does so for his or her own sake and pleasure. Similarly, if a person conceals an object in a secure place, it is not on account of his or her love for the object but because of the love for himself or herself. Thus, in the world, all kinds of love are born of love for oneself and not out of love for others. It is the primary duty of the members of the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) to give up the thought of the utility of an act of service to one's own self and consider service for the benefit of others alone as being truly selfless in character.

The human being can be described as a conglomeration of thoughts and ideas. Every little thought becomes an integral part of his or her life. The quality of feelings one has determines the future. Therefore, a person must install sacred ideas in the heart. The fostering of pure thoughts will promote the spirit of selfless service in our hearts. *Nishkāma karma* uproots the bestiality in a person and confers Divinity on that person. Selfless service is a more exalted means of spiritual progress than such other ways as meditation, *bhajan* (devotional singing) and yoga. This is so because when we undertake meditation, *japa* (recitation) or yoga, we do so for our own benefit

and not for the good of others. These are aimed at subjugating one's individual desires and securing happiness for oneself. What we should aspire for is the attainment of the good of others without any desire for personal gain.

SS 1979.2

Of the nine steps in *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline), as laid down in the *Bhakti Sūtras* (aphorisms on devotion by Sage Narada), leading to the realisation of the Self, *dāsyam* or the attitude of service to God is quite near the final goal. It is the eighth step. The study of texts, the renouncing of wealth in charity, the repetition of the name or the chanting of psalms and hymns may be good exercises to sanctify the mind and to avoid falling into evil ways and ruinous pastimes but they seldom purify the consciousness of the human being. Instead they serve mostly to bloat the ego and instil pride and promote a competitive craving for superiority. You may be sitting in the *bhajan* (devotional singing) hall and loudly singing in chorus, but your mind may get involved in anxiety about the pair of *chappals* (sandals) you have left outside the hall. Always at the back of the mind there is fear of the loss of the *chappals*. This vitiates the *bhajan* and makes it a barren show.

The *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) of *sevā* (selfless service) is quite distinct. In *sevā* you devote all your energy and attention to the task at hand, for it is a dedicated task. You forget the body and ignore its demands. You set aside your individuality and its prestige and perquisites. You pluck your ego by its roots and cast it away. You give up your status, conceit, your name and form and keep all *chitta* (consciousness) pure. Whatever the task you are performing, renounce your personal individuality and share its travails and troubles, its fruits and benefits with God. You need not bring in God from somewhere outside you. He is in you all the while. This truth must be your own discovery, your own treasure, your own strength. This is the grand purpose of the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps). That is the reason why the *sevādal* is assigned a high place in the Sathya Sai Organisation.

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

Work, worship and wisdom all begin with service. No matter what service it is, if it is done

with love and divine feelings, it becomes *upāsana*, worship.

SSS 32.pt1.6: March 14, 1999

Through *sevā sādhanā* (discipline of selfless service), Hanuman attained identity with Rama, as the river attains identity with the sea. Arjuna too considered every act as *sādhanā* to attain the grace of Krishna, for Krishna directed him to fight on, ever keeping Him in memory—“*Māmanusmara yuddhyacha*”. You too should keep God ever in your mind as the pacesetter, whether you are serving patients in hospitals or cleaning a drain in the bazaar. That is the *tapas* (penance). That is the highest form of *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline). More than listening to a hundred lectures or delivering them to others, offering one act of genuine *sevā* (selfless service) attracts the grace of God.

The body has to be utilised for service to others. Activity is its main purpose. Krishna says, “I have no need to be engaged in work but I do work in order to activate the world”. More *ānanda* (bliss) can be won by serving others than what can be got by merely serving oneself. Offer service to someone in need, with a full heart and experience the *ānanda* that results. It need not be something big. It can even be small and unnoticed by others. It has to be done to please the God within you and within the person you serve.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

Through *sevā* (selfless service) you realise that all beings are waves of the ocean of Divinity. No other *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) can bring you into the incessant contemplation of the oneness of all living beings. You feel another’s pain as your own. You share another’s success as your own. To see everyone else as yourself and yourself in everyone, that is the core of the *sādhanā* of *sevā*. Again, *sevā* makes the ego languish for want of food. It makes you humble before the suffering of others; and when you rush to render help, you do not calculate how high or low a person’s social or economic status is. The hardest heart is slowly softened into the softness of butter by the opportunities that the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) offers.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

While engaged, as you are, in *karma, sevā karma* (service activity) as *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline), you encounter many hurdles. But that is the nature of the world in which you act. It is a world of dual characteristics—good and bad, joy and grief, progress and regress, light and shade. Do not pay heed to these. Do what comes to you as a duty, as well as you can, with prayer to God. The rest is in His hands.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Why has God given hands to you? They are not given to scribble something on paper. They should be fully engaged in the service of God. Work is worship. Duty is God. Do your duty.

SSS 39.18: November 23, 2006

A wealthy person has been able to acquire riches only with the help of others. Realising this, that person has a duty to extend help to others in need. The human being derives strength from three sources: wealth, knowledge and the physique. The power derived from these sources should be used properly for right ends.

SSS 23.30: November 19, 1990

Dr. Modi has been engaged during the last ten days, at the Prasanthi Nilayam, in the service of the people who were in great distress, since they could not see—service that is really commendable and sacred. The eye is the mainspring of the body so far as contact with outer nature is concerned. The *netra* is the *sūtra* (the eye is the medium) as the saying goes. By this act of service done selflessly, efficiently and gladly for years, Modi has become a *yogi*, much greater than many who claim that title. This is real *tapas* (penance), the sacrifice and asceticism that win God’s grace. He is happy as a result of this ceaseless toil and he makes all those who come to him for relief, happy. He is clear evidence that service is twice blessed—making the giver and the receiver happy. Service tends to destroy egoism. It confers enormous joy. His life is an inspiration for doctors and others to use their skill for the service of the really deserving. By devoting skill to this end, it is rendered pure. By devoting the hand to the service of the sick, you are purifying it; you

are justifying it. Direct the senses towards these ends; they become beneficial instruments.

SSS 8.4: February 14, 1968

Love is God and God is Love. A life without love is sterile and barren. Whatever one's difficulties or troubles, one should try to help others to the extent possible. Selfless, loving service to others is the highest form of *sādhana* (spiritual discipline). It represents true devotion—*bhakti*. Such *bhakti* is not affected by the reverse of fortune or changes in circumstances. One should not be concerned only about one's own welfare, career and prosperity. It is not for the enjoyment of personal possessions and comforts that the human being has taken birth. He or she has a greater goal to achieve, something more permanent and lasting. It is the realisation of oneness with the Divine, which alone can give lasting bliss. Even while being engaged in the activities of the secular world, we should strive to sanctify all actions by dedicating them to the Divine.

SSS 18.6: February 2, 1985

Convince yourselves that life cannot continue long without others serving you and you serving others. Master-servant, ruler-ruled, guru-disciple, employer-employee, parents-children, all these are bound by mutual service. Everyone is a *sevak* (servant). The farmer and labourer whom you serve produce by their toil your food and clothing as their service to you. Remember that the body, with its senses-mind-brain complex has been awarded to you to be used for helping the helpless (*Paropakārārtham idaṃ sharīraṃ*). *Sevā* (selfless service) is the highest of path of devotion which wins the grace of God. It promotes mental purity, diminishes egoism and enables one to experience, through sympathetic understanding, the unity of humankind.

SSS 19.25: November 21, 1986

Service is basically activity arising out of the yearning to win the grace of God.

SSS 9.12: June 26, 1969

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Offering of Love

What is the inner significance of the reference to the four kinds of offerings? *Pātraṃ* (vessel) refers not to some kind of leaf that is subject to withering. Your body is the leaf that has to be offered. *Pushpaṃ* refers to the flower of your heart. *Phalaṃ* refers to the fruit of your mind. And *toyam* (water) signifies the tears of joy flowing from the devotee's eyes. These are to be offered to God. When one offers these things to the Lord, he or she enters the state of the over-mind. This devotion, moreover, should not be a part-time exercise. It should be present all the time, through weal or woe, pleasure or pain. "*Satataṃ yoginah*", declares the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The *yogis* are in constant communion with God. To be *yogis* in the morning, *bhogis* (lovers of food) at noon and *rogis* (victims of disease) in the evening are the ways of human beings today.

The true devotee is immersed in the Lord all the time and performs all actions as offerings to the Lord. Any action you do, as a teacher or a student or an employee, when you do it in the name of the Lord, it becomes a pious offering. This is the easiest way to sublimate the mind. When you consider your body as a gift from God, you will not do any sinful act. When you consider your wealth as a gift from God you will not misuse it. You will make the right use of it. Likewise, when you regard all your talents as endowed by God, you will use them in the service of the Divine.

SSS 26.22: May 24, 1993

All activities of the human being must result in cleansing the *chitta*—the levels of awareness. When these are done as offerings to God, they advance this cleansing process a great deal. The way a person works, shapes that person's own destiny. Work is sublimated into worship, which fructifies into wisdom. The flower is work (*karma*). The emerging fruit is worship (*bhakti*) and the ripe, sweet fruit is wisdom (*jnāna*). It is one continuous and spontaneous process, this spiritual fulfilment of the *sādhaka* (spiritual aspirant), the *sevak* (those practicing selfless service as spiritual discipline). They are like childhood, youth and old age, each imperceptibly growing into the succeeding stage.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

You may ask, "How is it possible to transcend the ego through *sevā* (selfless service)?" By saturating with love, work can be transformed into worship. When the work is offered to God, it gets sanctified into *pūjā* (sacramental worship). This makes it free from ego. It is also freed from the earthly desire for success and the earthly fear of failure. You feel that when you have done the work as best as you can, your *pūjā* is accomplished. It is then for Him who has accepted the *pūjā* to confer on you what He considers best. This attitude will make the work *nishkāma* (selfless). Regular practise of this discipline will render the consciousness clear and pure. It will promote *chitta-shuddhi* (purity of consciousness). Without this primary equipment how can one ever hope to scale spiritual heights?

I shall illustrate this point. Take an ordinary postal envelope. Upon it, in golden ink, write the address of a person in very artistic calligraphy. Insert a beautifully worded letter full of amazing sentiments and then drop it into a post-box. What happens to it? It will not move even a yard away from that box. Now take a mere post card, the cheap unimpressive thing. Write the address with no special care. Scribble the news you like to convey. Affix a stamp and drop it into the same box. Watch what happens. The artistically ornamental envelope is inert, while this inartistic, cheap document travels a thousand miles towards the person indicated. Therefore, whatever may be the uniqueness or importance, the furore or attractiveness, the *sevā* that you do can yield no fruit if it is done without a pure *chitta* (consciousness). Your yearning to do *sevā* and your enthusiasm while doing *sevā* are rescuing you from harm. God is the witness. God has no desire

to bless, nor anger to induce Him to punish. You get blessed and punished as a result of your own feelings and acts. *Yad bhāvaṃ tad bhavati* (As is the feeling, so is the result).

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

The spiritual path does not consist merely in singing *bhajans* (devotional songs) or reciting hymns. Only actions performed as a complete offering to the Divine can be regarded as spiritual. The person who is in a state of ignorance about the Self is like the bud of a flower that has not yet blossomed. When the flower blossoms, it sheds its fragrance all round. Likewise the person who has realised the Divinity within becomes a source of light and strength.

SSS 16.8: April 6, 1983

Nishkāma karma (selfless action), or selfless service, is the fragrant flower of altruistic love. It is not to be performed for the satisfaction of the person rendering the service or the person at whose bidding it is done. We should regard *nishkāma karma* as the purpose for which we are given life. This feeling should flow through our very nerves and bloodstream and permeate every cell of our bodies. Whatever the work we do, we should do it as an offering to God and for His pleasure. Members and officer-bearers of the Sathya Sai *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) should not feel obliged to do service on the grounds that the rules and regulations require them to do so. They should not look upon the regulations as compelling them to do service. Without being regimented by rules and regulations, we should take up service activities for the purification of our own hearts.

SS 1979.2

Study Questions: the Aim of Selfless Service

Group Study Questions

1. What are the physical, mental and spiritual benefits of selfless service?
2. How is selfless service one of the nine types of devotion?
3. How can selfless service help one attain union with God?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a time when you served with your heart and mind fully focussed on God? How did that experience affect you?

CHAPTER 5

How Do We Perform Selfless Service?

Introduction

Swami asks us to serve with the attitude that work is worship. Purity of heart and sacrifice are two essential pre-requisites. They are also fundamental, guiding principles for rendering selfless service. In this chapter, Swami provides guidelines for selfless service and explains the importance of practising it with the appropriate mental attitudes, including compassion, detachment and equanimity.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Preparation for selfless service
- Sincere efforts
- Be aware of the obstacles to selfless service
- Guidelines for selfless service
- Attitude in selfless service



Preparation for Selfless Service

On waking, pray every morning of your life, “Oh Lord, I am born now from the womb of sleep. I am determined to carry out all the tasks of this day as offerings to You, with You ever present before my mind’s eye. Make my words, thoughts and deeds sacred and pure. Let me not inflict pain on anyone. Let no one inflict pain on me. Direct me; guide me this day”. And when you enter the portals of sleep at night, pray, “Oh Lord. The tasks of this day, the burden of which I placed on You this morning are over. It was You who made me walk, talk, think and act. I therefore place at Your feet all my words, thoughts and deeds. My task is done. Receive me. I am coming back to You”.

SSS 2.14: July 27, 1961

The *Upanishads* say, “*Tasmai namaḥ karma-ñe*” (salutations to action). You should offer your salutations to the action you perform so that it becomes sacred, brings you good name and contributes to the welfare of the world. This is one of the primary doctrines of the culture of Bharat (India). Since time immemorial, the Bharatiyas (Indians) have been offering respect to action, be it big or small, before undertaking it. A dancer pays her respects to the anklets that she wears before the commencement of her dance performance. Even *tablā* (Indian drums) players start playing on the *tablā* only after offering their respects to it. Not only educated people follow this practise. Even an illiterate lorry driver offers his obeisance to the steering wheel before driving the vehicle. This is the sacredness that our culture imparts to action. Offer your *namaskār* (salutation) to the action you perform. What is *namaskār*? It is giving up the sense of ego.

SSS 34.7: April 14, 2001

When you offer worship to God in the morning, you must offer your obeisance to whatever work you propose to do. You must pray to the presiding deity of *karma*, “Let me do today only pure, purposeful and helpful actions”.

SSS 20.9: May 3, 1987

Before embarking on a service project one must introspect and examine one’s equipment for the *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline)—whether

one’s heart is full of selfless love, humility and compassion; whether one’s head is full of intelligent understanding and knowledge of the problem and its solution; whether one’s hands are eager to offer the healing touch; whether he or she can gladly spare and share time, energy and skill to help others in dire need. These qualities can sprout and grow only when the reality of unity is implanted in the consciousness. All human beings, all living beings, are cells in the body of God. Their origin, continuing existence and progress are all in God, by God, for God. The individual is a unity in this unity. There are no other aliens. When one is ill, all suffer. When one is happy, all are partners of that happiness. Faith in this truth is the fundamental equipment the *sevak* (servant) must acquire.

SSS 19.25: November 21, 1986

To receive God’s love, you must be totally free from worldly desires and constantly engaged in selfless service. The service must be of a pleasing nature. All actions must be performed exclusively for God’s pleasure. For this, you do not have to give up anything. Just keep on doing your normal duty in the manner ordained by destiny. You wish to study. By all means do so. But in what manner should you study? You should do it for God’s pleasure. You are employed in some place. How should you do your work? Do it as if you are trying to please God. Tell yourself, “I am doing this job as an offering to Him”. Install this feeling in your heart and do whatever you want to do or have to do. However, before rushing to adopt this course, pause, reflect and make sure that God would really be pleased with what you are trying to do and to offer to Him. You cannot do all sorts of silly and stupid things claiming that you are doing it for God’s pleasure. If you act just according to your fancies, do you think that God will accept your actions as an offering? Every action of yours must have the stamp of quality that is acceptable to God. Without that stamp, your action is counterfeit. God should acknowledge that your action is good. When you affix the proper postage stamp, your letter can go to far-off places. But if there is only an address on the envelope and no stamp, it is of no use. An unstamped letter dropped into the mailbox will end up only in the

dead-letter office. Therefore, if you really want your offering to reach God, then you must affix the stamp of *prema* (love). Only when *prema* saturates every action of yours will God shower His grace. He will do so in many forms too.

SS 2000.11

As a preliminary to *sevā* (selfless service) you have to win purity of heart. You must examine your motives and skills, your intentions and qualifications and discover for yourself what you hope to achieve through the *sevā*. You should ferret out any trace of egoism and also the desire for fame or even of being near Swami. If you have an irrepressible urge to possess things that contribute to your comfort or a sense of superiority over others who are your friends or kith and kin, then the sooner you leave the *sevādal* (voluntary service corps) the better.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1978

First cultivate humility and compassion. Then, learn the knowledge and the skill needed for the particular *sevā* (service) project. Thus, you can make your life meaningful. By this means, you can add to the *ānanda* (joy) of the person who has given you the chance to render this *sevā* (selfless service) to your fellow human beings.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Young people should consider the true purpose of life. They should get rid of all the impurities in their hearts. With pure hearts they should embark on service at all times and everywhere. "Hands in society, head in the forest". From today develop an unwavering mind and a steady vision. That is the way to divinise the world.

SSS 30.14: July 16, 1997

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Sincere Efforts

Not recognising the sacredness and purifying power of service, people hesitate to embark on social service.

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

"Oh, *Sādhak* (spiritual aspirant), arise. Gird up your loins. Plunge into social service". This is the Sai message. No room should be given for laziness and indifference. Controlling your senses

you should take to social service. A life not dedicated to service is like a dark temple. It is the abode of evil spirits. Only the light of *sevā* (selfless service) can illumine the spiritual aspirant.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Do not proclaim that you are rendering *sevā* (selfless service) once a month or three times a year. That reveals laziness, want of enthusiasm and faith. Do you take food only once a month? Your hunger is not appeased even now when you have four meals a day. Your spiritual hunger can be quenched only by more frequent *sevā*, at least for two or four hours a day. Each one of you wastes more hours every day in gossip and scandal-mongering. Better than these barren pursuits, one can visit hospital wards or villages or sweep and clean bazaars or bus stations.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Every act must be regarded as an offering to the Divine. It may not be easy to develop such an attitude. But if the effort is made sincerely, it can be achieved. It does not call for abandonment of hearth and home or giving up your wealth and position. What I ask from you is to devote at least half an hour in a day of twenty-four hours to service. Is this beyond your capacity? If you can serve the government or someone else for eight hours a day for the money you earn from them, experiencing in the process many trials and difficulties, can't you devote some time to win the grace of God, the benefit of which is immeasurable? What you earn through the grace of God will confer on you enduring benefits greater than the wealth you earn by other means. The grace of God is like insurance. It will help you in your time of need without any limit. Material wealth confers *bhoga* (enjoyment) which leads to *roga* (illness). But selfless service is yoga, which secures divine grace.

SSS 17.13: May 20, 1984

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Be Aware of the Obstacles to Selfless Service

You have to encounter various contrary gusts of passion, emotion, impulse and intellectual doubt. Nevertheless, bear them bravely and overcome them through prayer and meditation. The Lord, too, will provide many tests to ensure that your faith is firm, that your spirit of *sevā* (selfless service) is full and universal. The weaker practitioners of this *sevā sādhanā* (service-centred spiritual discipline) will soon be shaken by these tests and stray away from the right path. The six enemies—lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride and hatred—that lie in wait to foil their *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline), overpower the inner urge and make them slaves of the merely physical and material.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1978

One may encounter difficulties in rendering service but one should not be overwhelmed by them. The Pandavas became immortal because of the sufferings they underwent for the sake of *Dharma* (Righteousness). Jesus sacrificed His life for the sake of those whom He came to serve. Prophet Mohammed had to face similar troubles in His mission. Do not aspire for comfort. Greater than all other forms of worship is *sevā* (selfless service) done in an unselfish and dedicated spirit.

SSS 18.2: January 22, 1985

More than *tapas* (penance) and *dhyāna* (meditation), service to others is the means by which one transforms oneself. In rendering service, you should be moved by genuine concern for those you serve. You should try to ascertain the cause of their suffering and try to remove it. Only then can you do *sevā* (selfless service) properly. Momentary sympathy or charity or competing with others in exhibiting one's generosity is not true *sevā*.

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

When you mix with volunteers and others who have no deep faith or sweet experience of the value of *sevā* (selfless service), you may get caught up in conversation that might shake your conviction. Do not allow their superficial judgement to undermine your steadfastness. Keep away from such persons. Let them test their

doubts on the touchstone of their own experiences of *sevā*. Take their disbelief indifferently and allow them time to realise and overcome their doubts by their own will.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Tyāga (sacrifice) is essential for rendering dedicated service. Pride is the first evil trait that has to be renounced. Getting rid of bad qualities is real sacrifice. It is also yoga.

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

To escape from the clutches of desire, which gives birth to the brood of anger, hatred, malice, greed, envy, faction and falsehood, one has to cleanse one's consciousness by prayer and *sat-karma* (good activity, selfless, desireless activity). *Sevā* (selfless service) is the best *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) for eliminating the nefarious pull of the mind towards desires.

SSS 10.23: October 4, 1970

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Guidelines for Selfless Service

Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi, Prema and *Ahimsa* are in us like the *pañcha prāṇas* (five vital airs). We think that the five *prāṇas* (*prāṇa, apāna, uḍāna, samāna* and *vyāna*) are protecting this body. But it is Truth, Right Conduct, Love, Peace and Non-violence which give real happiness to the body. These are the real *pañcha prāṇas*. In no circumstances should these five vital principles be departed from or given up. Render service to society with these principles in your mind and with broad-minded dedication to the wellbeing of all. That alone will please Sai.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Your life is controlled by action. You cannot live even a moment without action. Let every action of yours be a prayer to God.

SSS 34.7: April 14, 2001

Consider every good work as God's work.

SSS 32.pt2.1: July 29, 1999

Be firmly convinced that what you are doing is something sacred. In service there is nothing good or bad. Whatever requires to be done to

serve anyone, at any time, in any form, you should do without hesitation.

SSS 23.35: November 24, 1990

Let God work through you and there will be no more duty. Let God shine forth. Let God show Himself. Live God, eat God, drink God, breathe God. Realise the truth and the other things will take care of themselves.

SSS 14.18: January 25, 1979, Colophon

Wherever you are, whatever work you do, do it as an act of worship, an act of dedication, an act for the glorification of God who is the inspirer, the witness, the master. Do not divide your activities by deciding, “These are for my sake” and “These are for the sake of God”.

SSS 7.18: April 21, 1967

You have to shoulder heavy responsibilities and execute various duties in the spirit of *sādhana* (spiritual discipline), which enjoins you to revere duty as God and to engage in work, not as dreary drudgery, but as worship of the Lord Himself. You have dedicated yourselves to *sevā* (selfless service), which has to be saturated in selfless love.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Do not hope to gain grace by looking down upon humankind and looking up at Sai. Remember, also that your dress, behaviour and appearance will reveal your character and attitude towards others. Always have sweet, soft words on your tongue. Cast your eyes only on holy sights. Wear clean, simple clothes and do not imitate those who are fascinated by the latest fashions in dress and style. How can you do *sevā* (selfless service) when you move so far away from the common person? I advise you to “follow the master”. By “master” I mean the conscience within you, the voice of God. Only then can you “face the devil” and escape from his temptations unharmed. And you must be ever vigilant that old habits and past attitudes do not come home again. Thus, following the third rule of “fight to the end” you finally gain the victory in the fourth round: “finish the game”.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1978

Shiva is omnipresent. He is the Inner Motivator of all beings. He is ever present, everywhere, in our realm as well as in the realms around us. This fundamental truth has to be firmly believed by every *sevādal* (voluntary service corps) member and, realising this, he or she has to be humble and full of reverence towards all.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1978

Do not hesitate to practise humility and obedience, discipline and compassion. Give up pride at your status, wealth, scholarship or official position. “Can I, a big officer, a rich merchant, a great scholar, a person highly respected in society, descend to this level of chumming with this sorrowing person?” Do not ask such silly questions. Every one of these qualifications of which you boast will disappear with death or sometimes sooner. The *ānanda* (bliss) that you give, the love that you share—these alone will be your lasting possessions.

SSS 14.13: November 22, 1990

Hanuman is the supreme exemplar. When the *rākshasas* (demons) asked Hanuman, during his search for Sita in Lanka, who he was, he replied simply, “*Dāsoham kosalendrasya*”. He was content to describe himself as the humble servant of Rama.

SSS 18.2: January 25, 1985

Give in reverence. Give in plenty. Give with modesty. Give as to a friend. Give without any thought of reward. Do not give ostentatiously. The service in the hospital, the service in the *bhajan* (devotional singing) group all have to be done with humility and reverence. Then only can they yield *chitta-shuddhi* (purity of consciousness), which is the main benefit derivable from *sevā* (selfless service).

SSS 7.48: December 21, 1967

The *sevā* (selfless service) that you do, should not be done out of a sense of compulsion or to please others. It should be wholehearted and spontaneous.

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

You must be bold and courageous and plunge yourselves into the service of society. This is what Sai would like everyone to do. This is the ideal

before you. Develop forbearance, patience, peace and love and carry on your work. This is your true *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline).

SSS 18.27: December 9, 1985

Face whatever problems may arise with faith and courage and carry on the service activities without fanfare in a spirit of humility and dedication.

SSS 17.27: November 18, 1984

In spite of his precious birth as a human being, the human being leads a life worse than that of the animals. Animals are not consumed by envy. They do not take pride in their possessions. They have no bank balances and they have no monthly salaries. They live happily from moment to moment, content with whatever food and shelter they can get. As human knowledge and skills have increased, the human being's moral calibre has declined. Human beings have to discover the secret of a good life. They have to realise that they have taken birth not for enjoyment of worldly pleasures but to realise their divine destiny by the cultivation of good qualities and by performing good actions. To indulge in demoniac actions while having the human form means degrading human nature.

Of what use are wealth and position if one has no peace of mind? A quiet conscience is a person's brightest jewel. To achieve inner peace, desires have to be subdued and all thoughts should be centred on God. Engage yourselves in service activities in a spirit of dedication. Do not hanker after leadership. True service consists in helping the poor and the forlorn in the society with humility and dedication. This is service to the Divine. "*Dil me Rām, hāth me kām*" (Rama in the heart and service with the hand). Prepare yourselves for serving the people with God in your hearts and strength in your arms.

SSS 21.3: January 9, 1988

Service helps you to remove the ego. So do not pay heed to what others might say when you engage in service activities. When you are doing good acts, why hesitate, why feel ashamed? Why fear? Let compassion and sacrifice be your two eyes. Let egolessness be your breath and love be your tongue. Let peace reverberate in your ears.

These are the five vital elements you have to live upon. God will not ask you, when and where did you do service? He will ask, "With what motive did you do it? What was the intention that prompted you?" You may weigh the *sevā* (selfless service) and boast of its quantity. But God seeks quality, the quality of the heart, the purity of the mind, the sacredness of the motive.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

God is hidden and obstructed by the clouds of egoism. Getting rid of egoism is the *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) to be practised. Learn a lesson from the tree. When it is heavy with fruits it does not raise its head aloft in pride. It bends low, stoops, as if it does not take any credit for its accomplishment and as if it helps you to pluck the fruit. Learn a lesson from the birds. They feed those who cannot fly far. The bird relieves the itch of the buffalo by scratching it with its beak. They help and serve each other without thought of reward. How much more alert must the human being be, then, with superior skills and faculties? Service is the best cure for egoism. So engage in it to relieve pain and grief to the extent that you can.

SSS 8.3: January 13, 1968

We require today those who take delight in selfless service, but such humans are rarely seen. You who belong to the Sathya Sai *Sevā* (service) Organisation, every one of you, must become a *sevak* (servant), eager to help those who need it. When the *sevak* becomes the *nāyak* (leader) the world will prosper. Only a *kiṅkara* (servant) can grow into a *shaṅkara* (master). Of course, one has to eliminate the ego totally. Even a trace of it will bring disaster. However long you may do *dhyāna* (meditation), however constant your *japa* (recitation), a little ego will render them barren of results. *Bhajan* (devotional singing) done with egoistic pride will be as harsh as the crow's caw. So try to avoid the ego marring your *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) even to a small extent.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

When it comes to rendering service, do not observe any differences. Do not consider that you are rich and the other person is poor.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

The body is the temple and God is the Indweller. If this body is a temple, so is that body and every other body. All bodies are temples and the same God resides in every one of them. Therefore, does it make any sense to say that you like so and so and do not like so and so? The same God is present in all. Hence, regard the entire universe as one big family and love all without exception. If you hate anyone, it amounts to hating your own self. So, hurt never and help ever.

SS 2000.1

Sai *sevaks* (service volunteers) should cultivate a similar spirit of tolerance and serenity to be able to render social service effectively. It is unbecoming of Sai Organisations for anyone in them to bear ill will towards others. All should behave as children of one another. Consider that everyone is an embodiment of the divine *Atma*. Only then you can render service with zeal and vigour. Whatever may be one's wealth or position, in the sphere of service he or she should regard himself or herself as equal with everyone else. All should bear in mind that wealth and position are not permanent. What is it that can be achieved through these? You can get what is destined for you and lose what you are fated to lose. Neither of these can be prevented by any subterfuges. Only the grace of the Divine will remain forever.

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

All beings are as flowers that bloom and fade before the day is over; but like this garland you offered Me when I came amidst you, they are strung on one eternal indestructible thread, the *sutra* that is called *Brahman*. Establish this *bhāva-adwaitam* (non-dual attitude) in your mind. It will render your service more enjoyable, more fruitful, more sweet and pleasant to the recipient. Without that attitude, *paropakāram* (help to others) becomes help, doled out to lesser human beings and poorer folk by superior persons. All such help will be suspected and resented. It is contaminated at the source as well as at the destination. Of course, one should not treat all equally or have the same prescription for all. Serve each according to the specific need and capacity to benefit by the help.

SSS 05.51: November 4, 1965

Fill your thoughts, actions, emotions with Love, Truth and Peace. There may be people who may hate us but love them too. Workers in the Sathya Sai Organisation should be filled with this spirit of Love and Peace and take to service activities. There should be no room for ego or hatred. Whatever the difficulties, we should not become despondent or dejected.

SSS 18.27: December 9, 1985

When you see a person doing service to others with love, you have to respect him or her. It is not the formal action that counts. Only the good heart behind the action is entitled to respect and regard. So we should develop a tender heart filled with love rather than act mechanically. If there is no love in the heart, there is no use in doing anything whatsoever.

SSS 18.2: January 21, 1985

Mere execution of some duties enjoined on the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) by the rules cannot be recognised as *bhakti* (devotion). Duty done without love is deplorable. Duty done with love is desirable. But acts of love that emanate from a person because it is his or her nature and not because it is enjoined as a duty to fulfill, is really divine.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

If the doctor is full of love and compassion, God works through him or her. The doctor is no longer the human but is *Narayana* (God) who manipulates the fingers and dispenses through that person.

SSS 14.53: September 1980

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Attitude in Selfless Service

Anapekshā is described as being free from desires. But this is not wholly correct. It is when a person gives up the feeling, in the performance of all actions, that "I am the doer" (the sense of ego) and "I am the experiencer" (the sense of fulfilment of desire) that true *anapekshā* emerges. This means that conceit of doership and the sense of enjoyment of desired things should be wholly renounced. This is the true state of *anapekshā* (desirelessness).

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

The foremost duty of the human being is to do good deeds with a pure heart. There should be no egoistic feeling, "I have done these good deeds". It is not right to entertain the slightest desire for enjoying the fruits of these actions. Egoism and desire are the cause of bondage to *karma*. Desire is the barrier between the pure mind and devotion to the Self. To regard the performance of right action as one's duty and to eschew egoism in one's conduct and desire in one's motives is real sacrifice.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

To feel that one should be the sole enjoyer of the results of one's actions is a sign of selfishness. It is naive to think that one alone is the doer of one's actions. All the things in the world are not intended for the exclusive enjoyment of any single person. They are to be shared by all. It is only when attachment to the fruits of one's actions is discarded that the action becomes *yoga*.

SSS 17.27: November 18, 1984

The more deeply one is attached to the fruits, the more intense and painful is one's grief when one is disappointed. The only means, therefore, to escape from both pride and pain is to leave the result to the will of God, while one is happy in the thought that one has done one's duty with all the dedication and care that one is capable of. No one can do better than his or her best.

SSS 17.21: September 10, 1984

Mudita means acquiring peace of mind through cultivating equanimity in the experience of honour and dishonour, praise or calumny, loss or gain, joy or sorrow. These pairs of opposites should be regarded as things which come and go, like passing clouds. Every *sevak* (service volunteer) should develop such equanimity of mind.

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

You must be concerned only to see whether your actions are pure and selfless according to your conscience. Nothing else matters, neither the praise nor the blame of other people. When your conscience tells you that what you are doing is good, you may go ahead regardless of the opinion of others, whether they are your kinsmen, friends or others. This is the true meaning

of *udāsīnatā* (spirit of indifference). You should not be swayed by fears or threats. In this context it is advisable for *sevaks* (service volunteers) to keep away from politics. Sometimes, out of a desire for recognition or publicity, one may be tempted to cultivate men or women in power. This temptation corrupts your mind. By developing the *udāsīnatā* in its best sense, you must seek to serve all with a feeling of love. "Indifference" should not assume the form of arrogance or ostentatious condescension. Adhere to what is right and turn away from what is bad. That is the highest *udāsīnatā*.

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

In *sevā* (selfless service) there can be no high or low, for Sai is in all. Sai receives your *sevā* to whomsoever you may offer it. Do not be sad that you have been posted on some duty that keeps you far from Me. Know that I am nearest to the one who calls on Me and sees Me in all beings.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

Many look down upon acts like cleaning of streets, relief to the sick, feeding the hungry, and service to the poor and the destitute, as undignified. This is a grievous mistake.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

In *Ramayana*, apes brought huge rocks and threw them into the sea to build a passage across for Rama and His army. The tiny squirrel too helped, as far as it could. It rolled on the sands on the seashore, ran towards the heap piled as part of the passage-way, whisked the sand from its fur by a vigorous shake, adding only a pinch of material to the quantity heaped by the giant apes. Rama saw the squirrel. He appreciated its devotion. He took it fondly in His palm. He stroked its back tenderly and with a blessing. That was ample reward. The squirrel-race has since acquired three lines on its back to indicate that sign of gratification and grace.

SSS 8.3: January 13, 1968

Service activities in all lands can thrive only through selfless dedication. Fanfare is a sign of insincerity. Silent, unsullied work alone can appeal. The villager has enough common sense to see through the show. Remember that, though illiter-

ate, the villager is aware of the ideals propounded by the scriptures, saints and sages of this land, of the core of Bhāratiya (Indian) culture. Clever propaganda may achieve some temporary results but, in the long run, it will bring disappointment and disillusion. Like the “rockets” lit by children on *Dīpāvali* (Festival of Lights) night, it will flare up and fizzle down. God is enshrined in your heart. He is ever ready to guide you. He does not appreciate external pomp and exhibitionistic behaviour. He does not calculate the number of hours you did *bhajan* (devotional singing) or *japaṃ* (repetition of Lord’s name), or the number of miles you walked during *nagar-sankīrtan* (devotional singing in streets). He examines the purity of your heart, as evident from your words and deeds. Today, we are confronted everywhere by statistics parading quantities and reports in glowing terms. Do not bother about adding to the number or achieving a target. I value quality not quantity. Genuine, intensive, devoted service offered in a few villages is more fruitful than casual contacts and superficial service offered to a large number.

SSS 19.25: November 21, 1986

In rendering service, see that you do it for the satisfaction of your conscience and not to impress others. Treating service as an offering to the Divine, do it perfectly. Remember that God is watching every one of your actions. Be your own watch person to scrutinise what you do. When you do everything to satisfy your conscience, you are well on the way to Self-realisation.

SSS 28.34: November 21, 1995

All acts of service are not equally sanctifying or uniform in the benefits they confer. When service is undertaken by power-hungry people or under compulsion or by imitative urges, it results in more harm than good. Self-aggrandisement or competition or ostentation are motives that will pollute the sacred *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) of service. The candidate for this *sāadhanā* has to avoid *ahaṃkāra* (egoism), *āḍaṃbara* (exhibitionism) and *abhimāna* (false pride).

SSS 19.25: November 21, 1986

The fulfilment of human life consists in the service that the human being renders, without any thought of return, in an attitude of selflessness. Service rendered in this spirit sheds light in the dark interior of a person. It widens the heart. It purifies the impulses and confers lasting *ānanda* (bliss).

SSS 10.39: December 25, 1970

The sages of ancient times divided *karma* into *vikarma* (that is intentionally done) and *akarma* (that is done without any intention to gain the consequence). Follow the latter and you will save yourselves from suffering. All other activities—the earning of wealth, or reputation, of fame and publicity—result in suffering. Gain internal peace, internal joy. That can be done only when you act without an eye on the gain. The act must be its own reward. Or rather, the act must be according to the prompting of the God within so that its consequence is left to Him. Practise this attitude consistently and you will find great peace welling within you and around you.

SSS 5.17: March 26, 1965

God’s grace will come when *sevā* (selfless service) is done without expectation of reward or recognition. Sometimes *ahaṃkāra* (egoism) and *abhimāna* (false pride) rear their heads during *sevā*. These should be eliminated altogether.

SSS 18.2: January 25, 1985

Embark upon service to your fellow human beings without any expectation of reward. Do not waste your time in profitless talk. Of what avail is it to mouth expressions such as “The Lord is all-knowing, omnipresent and omnipotent”? You clap your hands when these epithets are used, deriving pleasure from simply hearing them. How many act according to the word they speak? There must be harmony between what is said and what is done.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

The Organisations named after Me are not to be used for publicizing My name or creating a new cult around My worship. They must render *sevā* (selfless service) to the helpless, the sick, the distressed, the illiterate and the needy. Their *sevā* should not be exhibitionistic. It must seek

no reward, not even gratitude or thanks from the recipients. *Sevā* is *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline) not a pastime of the rich and well-placed. Each one must realise his or her own truth. That is the

purpose of all the teaching, all the curing, all the counseling, all the organising, all the advising that I do.

SSS 8.6: February 23, 1968

Study Questions: How Do We Perform Selfless Service?

Group Study Questions

1. How should we prepare for selfless service?
2. What should be the attitude when one does selfless service?
3. What are the obstacles to selfless service?
4. What are the qualities of a karma yogi?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a time when you forgot to offer your service to God? If so, did that service experience differ from service experiences in which you offered the service to God? Please explain.

CHAPTER 6

Unity Is Essential to Selfless Service

Introduction

Selfless service demonstrates the unity that subsumes the diversity in Nature. At an individual level, integrity in selfless service means unity and purity of thought, word and deed. Our thoughts must be pure and our actions must match our words. Swami warns us against preaching what we do not practise.

Unity in an organisation means putting aside all differences of opinion, social status, faiths and cultures in service activities. Swami tells us that, to reconcile differences in service groups, love is the single, most-important rule. Love must precede rules, logic and reasoning.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Unity at the individual, family and society levels
- Unity in the Sathya Sai Organisation

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Unity at the Individual, Family and Society Levels

The underlying truth of *karma yoga* (yoga of action) is the demonstration of the unity that subsumes the diversity in the universe.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Dharma (righteousness and justice) is that which sustains humankind. True humanness consists in observing unity of thought, word and deed. All actions done with this triple unity are *dhārmic* (righteous). All such actions will be non-violent. Words spoken with such triple purity will be truth. *Dharma* conceived in this way transcends the barriers of space, time and circumstance. Hence it is called *Sanātana Dharma*—the eternal verities.

SSS 23.32: November 21, 1990

Nothing seems permanent. But the spiritually realised person will recognise the permanent that subsumes the changing entity. Such a realisation can come only when a person is pure in thought, word and deed. Purity must express itself in loving service.

SSS 23.32: November 21, 1990

What is the reason for the lack of peace in the world today? It is because there is no harmony in thought, word and deed in the lives of the people. Peace must begin in the family, in the home. When there is understanding and harmony in the family, peace will spread to the community and from there to the nation and the world. Hence unity is the primary need today. Unity confers joy and peace. Transformation must begin with the individual. When the individual changes, the world will change.

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

Never speak harshly to anybody. Several people today pose themselves as devotees but take to evil ways. This is not a mark of devotion. In fact, such behaviour goes against the concept of devotion. A dissonance between thought, word and deed is the characteristic of an evil-minded person.

SSS 36.4: March 2, 2003

You should undertake service. In fact, the hands are given to you to serve humanity. The hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray. Therefore, undertake selfless service and attain glory. When you undertake good work, you enjoy peace in your life.

SSS 36.1: January 1, 2004

What is the use of prayers? Prayer does not mean uttering words with the lips. Prayer must come from the heart. Remember that the hands that serve are greater than the lips that pray. Dedicate yourselves to service to all.

SSS 23.7: April 27, 1990

There are any number of preachers in the world. There are equally numerous scholars. But there are few who practise what they preach and make others do likewise.

SSS 23.35: November 24, 1990

I wish to give you two directives. One is “practise what you preach; act according to what you say”. The other is “don’t preach what you do not practise”. If you talk about something which you do not practise yourself it is deceit. If you do what you say, it is an index of greatness. Vyasa has said, “If you cannot do what you talk about, that is sin. To do what you say is purity”. Remember the significance of these two statements and carry on your work in a spirit of dedication.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Service rendered to villagers, who are denied the ways and means of decent lives, draws divine grace more than service elsewhere. Give a helping hand to the helpless, who are afflicted with many ailments and handicaps. But before attempting to advise them, you must endeavour to advise yourselves. Before venturing to reform them, reform yourselves. Care must be taken to avoid boasting before them about your superiority. It will hurt them and keep them away. Do not indulge in lectures. Action alone can inspire action. Example alone can instruct. Tall talk is a barren exercise.

SSS19.25: November 21, 1986

The heart does not blossom through the mere study of books or by listening to discourses. It is only the cultivation of love that breaks the knots

binding the heart. One who does no service has no right to call upon others to serve. The right to speak has to be earned by doing service.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

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Unity in the Sathya Sai Organisation

All units must work as a single entity like the fingers on one's hand. The *Sevā Samiti* (service organisation) is the thumb. The *mahilā vibhāg* (women's wing) is the pointing finger. The *sevādal* (service volunteer corps) is the middle finger. The *bālvikās* (children's education programme) is the ring finger and the little finger is the *bhajan mandali* (devotional singing group). I find there is very little co-operation among the units now. It is mostly "operation" that is happening. Have high ideals of great *sevaks* (servants) like Hanuman before your mind's eye. Service to the human being is service to God. In the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*, God is described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. That means all heads are His; all eyes are His; all feet are His. So, *sevā* (selfless service) to the human being is the command of the *Vedas*.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Society is the coming together of people. Co-operation among people in a society, motivated by spontaneity and by pure intentions, is the hallmark of *sevā* (service).

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

You must work together joyfully, as brothers and sisters. When any difference of opinion crops up among you, how can *sevā* (selfless service) be done with uniform attention and enthusiasm? You have to reconcile such differences silently and with love and place *sevā* in the forefront of your activities. When *sevā* calls, all must come together as one. There should be no politicking in *sevā*. No trace of politics should pollute the *sevā* you do. No idea of separateness should tarnish your thought.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Do not import into the Sathya Sai Organisation political faction-mongering, group-formation, scandal-spreading and vote-catching in order to win positions of authority or oust oth-

ers from them. Do not create splits and parties among the devotees in order to establish yourselves over others. Even when you are slandered, you should not lose balance. Put up with slander and scandalising talk. Anger is the chief enemy of *sāadhanā*, (spiritual discipline) as Vishwamitra discovered. One attack of anger exhausts three months of health and efficiency.

SSS 11.24: May 14, 1971

Service is the best school for training in leadership. You should eliminate in that school all traces of disgust, anger and impatience. Pride and personal prejudices will try to put spokes in the wheel as you go to serve the distressed and the diseased. But you should never give up faith in the right path you have chosen. Remind yourself that you are a *sādhaka* (spiritual aspirant) and that *sevā* (selfless service) is the spiritual path that you have ventured upon as the easiest and the best.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

There should be no room for bossism. All are *sevaks* (servants) in the Sai fold. Why should there be distinction amongst them?

SSS 20.30: November 24, 1987

One day Krishna approached Yasoda and told her that all His cowherd friends were inviting Him to go with them and tend the cows and that He was planning to go. The mother explained to Him that to go to the forest will mean that He will have to walk on thorns, that He may have to meet snakes and that He may get close to bushes. She said that His tender feet may not be able to put up with the troubles and she said that it is better if He puts on footwear before going to the forest. She said that shoes for Him will be ready only the next day and He could go to the forest only the next day. Immediately, Krishna asked the mother to tell him how she addressed Him. She said that His name was Gopal and that she addressed Him by His name. The word "*gopal*" stands for one who tends the cows. He said that He acquired that name because He could tend the cows and be the leader of the cows. Since the cows will follow Him as their leader, He said that He will have to do something which the cows also will do. The cows do not have shoes to protect their feet and

therefore He said that He also should not have the shoes to protect His feet. He said that He will do only that which persons who follow Him can possibly do. He said that if He wore shoes, the cows will also want to wear shoes because their leader was wearing shoes. He was not going to wear shoes and allow those whom He has to protect to go without shoes.

SS 1973.8

Sevā (selfless service) brings out all that is great in a person. It broadens the heart and widens one's vision. It fills one with joy. It promotes unity. It proclaims the truth of the Spirit. It drives out all the evil qualities in a human being. It must be regarded as a great spiritual discipline. You are born to serve, not to dominate.

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

Without being a devoted follower you cannot become a worthy leader. Without being a *kiṅkara* (one who is ready to do any work) you cannot become a *shaṅkara* (the Divine).

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Banish all differences and unite in the cause of promoting the welfare of everyone in the village. When the villages grow, the cities and the states grow and the nation on the whole pros-

pers. The progress of the nation is based upon the progress of the villages.

SSS 18.6: February 2, 1985

What a single individual cannot accomplish, a well-knit group or society can achieve. A person walking alone will feel tired and miserable at the end of five miles but walking with ten others as a group he or she will find the five miles a jaunt. That person arrives refreshed and strong. Social living contributes increased happiness and more efficient effort among birds and beasts. They are able to defend themselves from enemies, secure food and shelter and migrate to places beyond great distances when they act as a group. Even ants have learned that immense benefits are derivable from group activity and social organisation. Monkeys also live in groups for greater security and happier lives. Let me tell you that nothing is impossible to achieve if an organised society is set on achieving it. Even liberation from material entanglement (*moksha*) can be won through serving and promoting the progress of society. Through the sense of unity, the willingness to sacrifice and the softness of compassion all objects can be gained.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

Study Questions: Unity Is Essential to Selfless Service

Group Study Questions

1. How is unity of thought, word and deed essential to the individual who renders selfless service?
2. How is unity essential to the Organisation that renders selfless service?
3. What is the power of selfless service rendered in unity?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a current planetary problem that might be solved through selfless service? How would unity in selfless service contribute to the solution of that problem?

CHAPTER 7

Resources for Selfless Service

Introduction

A loving heart is more important in selfless service than money or material resources. We should take up service based on our capacities and skills. Taking up service activities that are beyond our capacity is a sign of ego and must be avoided. Swami tells us that if the cause is pure and worthy, the necessary funds and resources will come.

This chapter has quotes that provide clear guidelines regarding resources and funding for service activities in an organisation. Swami, through His own example, directs us to keep away from raising and soliciting funds for service activities.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Loving heart
- Service guidelines for Sathya Sai volunteers

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Loving Heart

What is required for service is not money or materials. A loving heart is the first requisite. All service done without a love-filled heart is as dry as dust. Fill your hearts with love. When you are filled with conceit, everything looks out of shape. When you are immersed in the Spirit, everything looks good and beautiful. Forgetting this higher destiny, people are ceasing to be human.

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

People are engaged today in the all-absorbing occupation of acquiring money, more money. They are obsessed with the feeling that through money alone they can get all they want. This obsession is the root cause of the crisis facing humankind. Although money is needed for certain purposes, it is not the main source of security and happiness for the human being. People should learn to lead good lives with modest incomes. Ostentation and pride are the enemies of spiritual progress.

SSS 21.31: November 21, 1988

Human life is not meant to amass wealth. When you depart from the world, can you take even a *naya paisa* (penny) with you? A person cannot take even a fistful of sand when he or she leaves the world. Otherwise, there would have been rationing for sand also. What you ultimately carry with you is only the results of your actions, merit or sin. Hence, do not indulge in sinful deeds. Undertake meritorious activities. *Paropakārāya puñyāya, pāpāya parapīḍanam* (One attains merit by serving others and commits sin by hurting them). Help ever; hurt never. To the extent possible, perform acts of charity and help everybody. Fill your hearts with love.

SSS 35.2: January 19, 2002

The advent [of this Avatar] took place sixty-four years ago. All these years, this hand has not stretched at any time to seek anything from anyone. I have not asked anyone. I will never ask anyone and there will never be an occasion for it. How then are these things happening? For any good work, there is no impediment in Bharat (India). When you want to do any good work whole-

heartedly, money flows in torrents. The narrow-minded who undertake any work will never be satisfied. They cannot understand the actions of those who are large-hearted and broad-minded.

SSS 23.34: November 23, 1990

I am not asking you to serve the whole world in a big way. It is enough if you keep God in your heart and serve as per your capacity.

SSS 34.7: April 14, 2001

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Service Guidelines for Sathya Sai Volunteers

You can take up whatever work is appropriate, in keeping with your aptitudes and capacity.

SSS 18.15: July 7, 1985

In rendering service if you try to do something which is beyond your capacity it is a sign of your ego. If you give less than what you can, then you are a thief (denying to others what is due to them). You must exercise discrimination in performing service. You must regard service as a *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline).

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

There is a programme connected with *Ceiling on Desires*. You must realise that the programme has not been launched to raise funds. The object of the programme is to prevent waste of money, time, food or other resources and to use all these for the welfare of the people. The money that is saved need not be kept for the Sathya Sai Organisations. It may be used in the best way you choose for the benefit of others.

SSS 17.16: July 14, 1984

Nowadays even avowedly spiritual organisations are involved in business. Sathya Sai Organisations should never become such commercial institutions. The only kind of commerce in which they can indulge is from heart to heart, from love to love. It is in such a sublime exchange that they should take part. They should have no financial or other material involvement. Organisations which get entangled in money or property do not grow. We should be concerned with genuine, God-oriented, heart-to-heart association. *Sevā* (selfless service) must be done hand-in-hand in

comradeship. This will demonstrate the unity of the Cosmic Being.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

The Sathya Sai Organisation and its units must not collect money or material from those outside the membership. Fund collection is as much opposed to this movement as fire is to water. If you yield on this point, spiritual advance will perish. Let only members contribute. Do not ask all and sundry or anyone who is not a member of the *samiti* (centre).

SSS 11.24: May 14, 1971

We have for every unit a president, a secretary, a joint secretary and a treasurer. But I wonder why we should have a treasurer when we are not concerned with money. The name indicates that we have a treasure, which we have collected, which we guard and on which we rely. We deal with something much more valuable than money—love. Where money is collected and kept, misunderstanding grows, factions are rampant and love departs. Money and the ways in which people run after it have caused chaos in the world. Base your activities on *dharma* (righteousness and justice). Fill your hearts with *prema* (love). Then I will shower grace and be ever with you. Where is the need for money for *bhajan* (devotional singing), for *dhyāna* (meditation) and for *nagar-sankīrtan* (devotional singing in the streets)? For *nagar-sankīrtan*, you require only legs to move, tongues to sing and hearts to receive the name of God. For special purposes and on special occasions, funds are collected only from members of the *samiti* (centre). This has been the rule from the very beginning. It is the very basis of this Organisation. For all other activities, you need no funds. You need only a loving heart, a pure heart, a wide heart.

SSS 10.33: November 21, 1970

I was perusing the reports you gave Me on the points I had placed for your consideration. I must say that your suggestions regarding the raising of funds were uniformly bad. On the point, all of you are of one mind and that is not satisfactory to Me. Money is fundamentally *rajo-guṇa* (quality of passion), fraught with danger and harm. Like the bees which collect and store honey for a future

day, the human too stores and collects money but alas the bees are smoked out and the honey is stolen. I do not agree with any of your ideas to collect and store money. I do not like your going about collecting funds, or raising donations. I assure you that funds will come, provided you sincerely pray for every worthy cause. Have that faith and watch the funds flow in. The sages of ancient times celebrated many *yagnas* (rituals ceremonies) with no resources other than faith and sincerity.

Moreover, I must tell you that not much money is needed for many of the items of work. Yearning in the heart, Name on the tongue—these are enough for *bhajan* (devotional singing) and *nagar-sankīrtan* (devotional singing in the streets). The *gopīs* (milk-maids of Brindāvan) sang the name of God when they churned the pots for butter in the early morning hours. The bangles on their wrists jingled the time. The whirl of the rods and the pots provided the background tune and the fragrant morning breeze carried the song into every neighbouring ear. The fifteen or twenty who constitute a *samiti* or *sangha* (centre or group) must be able to put together, without any fuss or fanfare, the money needed for all these activities. You should not draw in anyone as member of the *samiti* for the sake of the money that he or she may have. *Guṇa* (qualities) are more valuable than *ānās* (coins). Money is the root cause of all misunderstandings and factions. Keep it in the background. Give it the least importance. Have love, humility, detachment and service as your funds.

SSS 8.44: November 21, 1968

Do not plan beyond your capacity and move about with lists from person to person to get funds. By this the institution gets a bad name and you too will not be spared. You may say, “But when Swami comes to our place we must spend a lot on reception arrangements”. Do not involve yourselves in expensive luxury. I would like you to spend any extra money that you have for the feeding of the poor or for any similar beneficial object.

Attempts are being made in many places to build Sathya Sai *mandirs* (temples). But Sathya Sai will be happy if He is installed in your hearts.

That is the *mandir* I like, not those. When you seek to build that other *mandir*, you have to go about seeking donations. Religion has declined in this land due to this donation-seeking and donation-granting. Really speaking, the most precious donation is a pure mind. Give that to the Organisation and it will shine.

I shall tell you a method by which the extra funds you may need for any undertaking the *samiti* (centre or groups) has in view are to be collected. Estimate beforehand what the expense will be. Suppose it comes to a thousand rupees. Give that information to the fifteen members and fix a day when they shall all meet. That day, keep a locked box with a slit on the lid in an inner room. Let everyone go in alone into the room and deposit in the box whatever he or she feels able to do. A person can come away without deposit-

ing anything. He or she has the freedom to do so. There is no compulsion.

If funds are collected with the knowledge of the rest, a person who is unable to give as much as another may feel humiliated and so this is the best method. When all have finished their turn, let the box be opened and the amount counted. If it falls short of the estimate, divide the shortfall among all members equally and collect the share from each. If there is some surplus, keep it for the next occasion. Do not have lists, appeals, receipt books and all the cumbrous complex of fund collection campaigns. That way will lead you to stratagems and falsehoods, competition and calumny. Do it in this quiet and sacred manner suited to the holy objectives you have.

SSS 7.18: April 21, 1987

Study Questions: Resources for Selfless Service

Group Study Questions

1. How essential is money for selfless service?
2. What are the various shapes that desire for publicity can take and why should they be shunned?
3. How should funds be raised in the Sathya Sai Organisation?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a time when you served, lacking in some capacity or resource, but somehow God made up the balance? If so, please describe that experience.

CHAPTER 8

Spiritual Benefits of Selfless Service

Introduction

Love is the means and also the end of our spiritual journey. Selfless service is love in action that ultimately leads to Self-realisation. At the physical level, selfless service brings happiness to those being served. Seeing others happy makes us happy. Selfless service, when practised as a spiritual discipline, brings about transformation of character and purification of the inner self. It helps us overcome the chief enemies of spiritual progress such as egoism, pride, hatred, lust and envy. And, it helps cultivate virtues such as humility, generosity, equanimity and compassion.

Selfless service purifies the inner consciousness, allowing the splendour of the Atma to shine through.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- God's grace
- Physical and mental well-being
- Removal of ego
- Mitigation of *karmic* consequences
- Purification of mind
- Beauty in character
- Cultivation of love
- Discovering peace within
- Awakening of Divinity
- Experience of bliss
- God-realisation

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God's Grace

Service without idea of self is the very first step in the spiritual progress of a human being for it trains you to transcend all the distinctions artificially imposed by history and geography and to realise that the human community is one and indivisible. Learn this truth. Experience it in action. That is the duty of the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) organisation. How can a person be held “divine” (as every human being truly is), unless he or she has established himself or herself in the sense of this unity and shaped all actions thereby? The human being has been brought forth so that he or she may enjoy a heritage, namely the bliss that comes of the realisation of the One. Any activity solely intended for the individual is, on that account, barren. For the community is essential for the individual, for his very survival. Your service will confer on you and on the community wherein you live untold benefits. It will also bring an invisible but potent benefit, namely divine grace. *Sevā* (selfless service) is an important ingredient in the nine-fold discipline of *bhakti* (devotion). You can see, sense, understand and sympathise with others who are akin to you and so you have greater reason to render them help and service. If you do not feel the call at the sight of human distress or disease, how can you muster the determination and dedication necessary to serve the unseen, inscrutable, mysterious God? When you do not love the human being, your heart will not love God. Despising brother man, you cannot at the same time worship God. If you do, God will not accept that hypocrisy. God is the resident in every heart. So offer service to anyone. That service reaches the God within a human being. It brings on you the grace of God.

SSS 12.49: October 16, 1974

I often tell the students that the one truth proclaimed by all the eighteen *Purāṇas* (epics) is “*Paropakārāya puṇyāya pāpāya parapīḍanam*” (One attains merit by serving others and commits sin by hurting them). The term *paropakāra* should be properly understood. It is not merely rendering help to others in one form or other. The term *para-upa-kāra* means “bringing (*kāra*) to the proximity (*upa*) of God (*para*)”. Purely

mundane forms of help cannot be described as *paropakāra*. They are gross, external and worldly. True *paropakāra* consists in bringing your life close to the Divine. That is *puṇya* (merit). *Puṇya* does not mean going on pilgrimage or giving gifts. *Puṇya* means taking your life close to God. This calls for *ekātmabhāva* (the recognition of the Divine in all beings). *Para-pīḍanam* (bringing harm to others) means failing to see the Divine in all beings. That is *pāpa* (sinful).

SSS 28.9: April 14, 1995

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Physical and Mental Well-being

People suffer from two types of ills, physical and mental; the one caused by the disequilibrium of the three tempers of *vāta*, *pitta* and *sleshma* (three *doshās* according to Ayurveda) and the other caused by the disequilibrium of the three *guṇas*—*satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (qualities of purity, passion and sloth). One peculiar fact about these two types of illnesses is that the cultivation of virtue cures both. Physical health is a prerequisite for mental health and mental health ensures physical health. An attitude of generosity, of fortitude in the presence of sorrow and loss, a spirit of enthusiasm to do good, to be of service to the best of one’s capacity—these build up the mind as well as the body. The very joy derived from service reacts on the body and makes you free from disease. The body and the mind are closely inter-related.

SSS 1.23: September 9, 1959

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Removal of Ego

Karma helps to cleanse the heart of egoistic impulses.

SSS 5.11: March 3, 1965

Little acts of *sevā* (selfless service) can confer on you great spiritual benefit. Firstly, they will destroy your egoism. Pride will transform friends into enemies. It will keep even kinsmen afar. It will defeat all good schemes. *Sevā* will develop in you the quality of humility. Humility will enable you to work in happy unison with others.

SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981

Service is meant to kill ego. You cannot call it service if it is rendered with ego. First of all, ego has to be subdued. Body attachment is the root cause of ego. Ego will vanish once the body attachment is given up. The spirit of oneness will develop once the ego is annihilated.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

Whether it is meditation that you are encouraging, or discourse that you are arranging, or *bhajan* (devotional singing) that you are organising, or clothes that you are offering to the poor, or worship that you are conducting, the object is just cleansing the mind of the taint of egoism, greed, hatred, malice, lust and envy. The one quality that you must acquire as a result of all this is “mutual love”. That is the sign of the Sai devotee and of devotees of all the forms of God.

SSS 8.44: November 21, 1968

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Mitigation of *Karmic* Consequences

Your yearning to do *sevā* (selfless service) and your enthusiasm while doing *sevā* are rescuing you from harm. God is the witness. God has no desire to bless, nor anger to induce Him to punish. You get blessed and punished as a result of your own feelings and acts. It happens as you think and behave.

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

Once you take to the path of service, your problems will gradually decrease. Love all; serve all. Do not consider anybody as other person. Develop the feeling that they and you are one. The entire humanity is one. What you see in this world is only the reaction, reflection and resound of the reality that is One. Once you understand this truth, you will be peaceful. Only then will your mind be steady and one-pointed in the pursuit of your study and profession. Therefore, first and foremost, engage yourself in the service of society.

SSS 39.18: November 23, 2006

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Purification of Mind

Through activity the human being attains purity of consciousness. In fact, a person has to

welcome activity with this end in view. And why strive for a pure consciousness? Imagine a well with polluted and muddy water so that the bottom of the well cannot be seen. Similarly within the human heart, deep down in the consciousness, we have the *Atma*. But it can be cognised only when the consciousness is clarified. Your imaginings, your inferences, your judgements and prejudices, your passions, emotions and egoistic desires, muddy the consciousness and make it opaque. How then can you become aware of the *Atma* that is at the very base? Through *sevā* (selfless service) rendered without any desire to placate one’s ego and with only the well-being of others in view is it possible to cleanse the consciousness and have the *Atma* revealed.

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

How is the mind to be purified? Through service to society with dedication and identification with everyone. You have to cultivate this feeling of *ekātma-bhāva* (spirit of oneness with all). By engaging yourselves in service, you develop this sense of oneness. In this context, the supreme importance of love should be recognised. Love is your true nature.

SSS 23.32: November 21, 1990

Virtue is the panacea for both body and mind. The virtuous person can be both healthy and happy. How is virtue to be cultivated? How can it express itself in daily practise? Through service to living beings, through *sevā* (selfless service). Virtue must flow through the triple channel of love, mercy and detachment in order to feed the roots of *sevā*. In order to urge humans onto the path of mutual sympathy, continuous compassion and concrete service, they have been endowed with the instinct of gregariousness.

SSS 14.53: September 1980

In ancient times, the great sages performed rigorous penances to experience the Divine. Some of them gave up the attempt after a time, considering the Divine as unattainable. Some others persisted in their attempts with the determination to achieve the goal. Thereby they realised the Divine. What did they proclaim to the world after their realisation? “*Vedāham etam purusham mahāntam ādityavarṇam tamasah parastāt*” (We

have known the Supreme Being who is beyond darkness and ignorance and who is effulgent as the sun). Where did they see God? “*tamasah parastāt*”—“beyond the *tamo-guṇa*” (qualities of sloth and inaction that cause darkness and ignorance), came the answer.

Today the human being is enveloped in a thick cloud of *tamo-guṇa*. The effulgent Lord can be seen beyond the *tamo-guṇa*. This *tamo-guṇa*, which holds everyone in its grip, should be gotten rid of. For this purpose, we should perform good deeds and render service.

SSS 26.07: February 20, 1993

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Beauty in Character

For the hand, charity lends beauty. For speech, it is truth that lends beauty. For ears, wisdom lends beauty. What more beauty do you need than these? For life, service to humanity is beauty.

SSS 26.3: January 21, 1933

When you look around today you find that there is little evidence of sacrifice for the sake of society. A person may call himself or herself a great devotee or a *sādhaka* (spiritual aspirant) or a scientist but without the spirit of sacrifice there is nothing great in that person. *Sevā* (selfless service) is the salt which lends savour to life. The spirit of sacrifice imparts fragrance to living. One may live for sixty, seventy, or eighty years but it will have no meaning unless the life has been devoted to ennobling one’s character and rendering selfless service to others.

SSS 18.28: December 11, 1985

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Cultivation of Love

Humans are born. They die. In the interval they grow and fade. The sign of growth is the mutual love, expressed through *sevā* (selfless service). The rich and the high-laced have many to serve them. You must serve those who have no one to serve them. Serve those who manage to live by serving others.

SSS 8.44: November 21, 1968

Service to society is very important. The best way to love God is to love all and serve all.

SSS 35.21: November 22, 2002

If you want to earn the love of the Lord, you have to render service to anyone anywhere as an offering to the Lord.

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

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Discovering Peace Within

What exactly is the secret of ensuring peace and prosperity for humankind? Rendering service to others without expecting service from them in return. *Karma* or activity which binds is a huge, fast-growing tree. The axe that can cut the roots of this tree is doing every act as an act of worship to glorify the Lord. This is the real *yagna* (sacrifice), the most important ritual. This sacrifice promotes and confers *Brahma-vidyā* (knowledge of the Self). Note that the yearning to do *sevā* (selfless service) must flow in every nerve of the body, penetrate every bone and activate every cell. Those who engage themselves in spiritual *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) must have mastered this attitude towards *sevā*.

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What is the reason for all the violence in the world? With the decline of selfless service, irrational desires have grown. The pursuit of mundane desires without fear of sin has led to a waning of the love for God. Humans have lost their humanness. As a consequence peace in the world has been shattered.

SSS 22.35: October 28, 1989

Remember that world welfare and peace cannot be achieved without selfless service to humankind.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Peace is right within you. To experience what is right within you, why think of withdrawing to the forest? Such thoughts are foolish. Peace is in one place and you are thinking of looking for it elsewhere. Peace is within you. If you want to discover this treasure within you, you must serve others and experience love. If you do so then you will automatically discover peace. Enlightenment

is nothing but experiencing peace and love within and this enlightenment is nothing other than supreme bliss and absolute happiness.

SS 2000.10

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Awakening of Divinity

I eat a little food, yet I have tremendous *tejas* (brilliance). The *tejas* comes not because of food but because of the spirit of sacrifice. One gets a lot of strength when one involves oneself in social welfare activities. When I walk slowly among the devotees, some people wonder if I have pain in My legs. Neither do I have pain in My legs nor do I have any disease. I walk slowly among the devotees only to give them *darshan* for a long duration of time. I have no pain whatsoever, nor a disability. I am always blissful. My bliss is ever increasing day after day. Consider service to humanity as your very life breath. Then you too will have divine effulgence.

SSS 33.18: November 19, 2000

Work done, with no concern or desire for the profit therefrom, purely out of love or from a sense of duty, is yoga. Such yoga destroys the animal nature of the human being and transforms that person into a divine being. Serve others visualising them as kindred *Atmas*. That will help one to progress. It will save one from sliding down from the spiritual stage attained. Service (*sevā*) is far more salutary than even vows and worship (*pūjā*). Service disintegrates the selfishness latent in you. It opens the heart wide. It makes the heart blossom.

So, work done with no desire is the supreme ideal for the human being; and when the mansion of life is built on that foundation, through the subtle influence of this basis of *nishkāma sevā* (selfless service), virtues will gather unto that person. Service must be the outer expression of inner goodness. And as one undertakes *sevā* more and more, one's consciousness expands and deepens and one's *atmic* reality is more clearly known.

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Experience of Bliss

Through *sevā* (selfless service) you can experience dignity and inexpressible bliss.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

The bliss you derive from service is something you can never get through any other activity. The thrill that a kind word, a small gift, a good gesture, a sigh of sympathy, a sign of compassion can bring about on a distressed heart is something that is beyond words to describe.

SSS 9.22: October 14, 1969

There is no greater quality in the human being than selfless love, which expresses itself in service to others. Such love can be the source of real bliss. The relationship between *karma* and *karma yoga* (yoga of action) should be properly understood. Ordinary *karma* done with attachment or desires causes bondage. But desireless, selfless action becomes *karma yoga*. Our life should become a yoga rather than a *roga* (disease).

SSS 16.8: April 6, 1983

Service, the utilisation of time and skill for the uplift of society—that is the highest form of adoration which God will reward with grace. You get the actual experience of *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* (Being-Awareness-Bliss) through service, for through service you conquer egoism and convince yourselves of the unity that underlies creation.

SSS 11.32: August 24, 1979

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God-Realisation

Sevā (selfless service) is prescribed as one among the nine steps towards realisation. You must therefore be earnest about it and welcome all chances to serve the old, the sick, the disabled, the diseased and the distressed.

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

The body is not primary. What is important is the Indwelling Spirit. Keeping the goal of Self-realisation in view, you must engage yourselves in service till the destination is reached. Selfless, dedicated, pure-hearted service is the means. When the entire life is devoted to this purpose, direct experience of the Divine can take place.

Eschew as far as possible attachments and aversions. Every effort must be made to keep the mind and the body unpolluted.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Worship of God in temples and shrines has its place in sanctifying time and in sublimating the instincts and impulses. Inquiry into reality has its use in clearing the fog of doubt. But activity in the shape of *sevā* (selfless service), charged with love, fulfils the aims of all paths of the Godhead, says the *Bhagavad-Gita*. All hands are His. All eyes and all faces and mouths are His. He works through all hands. He walks through all feet. He sees through each eye. He eats and speaks through every mouth. Everything is He. Every step is His. Every look, every speech, every act is His. That is the lesson that *sevā* instils.

SSS 11.22: May 11, 1971

Service is a path to God-realisation. God is the embodiment of love, truth and peace. Therefore, to realise God, one has to develop love, adhere to truth and experience peace within oneself. The human body is like a chariot and the *Atma* is the charioteer. The bodies may have different forms and names. But the *Atma* is one and the same. It is essential to recognise the unity that underlies the apparent diversity. For instance, hunger is common to all, though the kind of food through which it is appeased may vary from an emperor to a beggar. Likewise, joy and grief, birth and death are common to all. The *Atma* is common to everyone. Recognising this oneness, they should engage themselves in service to all. Unfortunately, there is no feeling of unity today in the world. All the problems bedeviling humankind are due to the absence of unity. The foremost duty of the Sai Organisations is to promote unity on the basis that all are sparks of the Divine and constitute one family. Without this basic truth, there is no use in rendering any kind of service. There can be no sacredness in service, if good thoughts and good feelings are absent. Service as an act of *dharma* (righteousness and justice) can be offered only by one who is pure in heart, selfless and equal-minded towards everyone (*samatva*).

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

When the mind turns away from the senses to the *buddhi* (intellect) for enlightenment, *ānanda* (bliss) starts to flow and the glory of *Atma* is revealed. *Buddhi* promotes the search inward. While the sense organs—the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the tensile skin—all open out towards external objects, true *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline) consists in turning the vision inwards, in fact, to swim against the on-rushing current. It is seldom realised how near is the goal of Self-realisation when once the sense organs are turned inwards. Students should realise the importance of service to realise the Divine. It makes one's life significant and purposeful.

SSS 16.18: July 24, 1983

You are all the Divine packed into human skin and bone, the Self encased in evanescent flesh. Know this and you become fearless, happy without limit. Get rid of the ego-enclosure in which you now feel you are shut. Then you are liberated from the non-existent prison which now enfolds you as hard as an existent one. This is the higher wisdom, the knowledge of the spirit. The lower one is that which adheres to the mind, which cleanses the mind and calms its agitations, which is earned by *japa*, *dhyāna*, *nāma-saṅkīrtan* (recitation, meditation and singing of God's names) and such other meritorious activities. I must tell you, however, that *sevā* (selfless service) is a process through which the lower wisdom, and after that, even the higher wisdom can be gained. *Sevā* can instil more intensely than any other activity, the sense of the basic One.

SSS 11.28: July 8, 1971

It is unbecoming of a person to exchange his or her valuable life—as precious as a gem—for worldly desires and ambitions which are as worthless as a coal stone. The human being becomes immortal neither by deeds, nor by progeny nor by wealth. What makes a person eternal is the spirit of sacrifice. So we should try to make our lives meaningful by sacrificing personal comfort for the sake of our fellow beings.

SSS 13.10: April 10, 1975

Study Questions: Spiritual Benefits of Selfless Service

Group Study Questions

1. Describe at least three benefits of selfless service.
2. How does selfless service lead to purity?
3. How does one attain Self-realisation through selfless service?

Personal Introspection Question

Since taking up the practise of selfless service have you changed in significant ways? If so, please describe those significant changes.

CHAPTER 9

Exemplars of Selfless Service

Introduction

God incarnates and lives among us as a human being out of His love and compassion. Rama, Krishna, Jesus and the Sai Avatars have demonstrated the principles of selfless service through their own actions, for humanity to follow. Nature, too, silently demonstrates the principles of selfless service without expectations or rewards.

This chapter includes examples of selfless service from the life of the Avatars and their devotees who put their teachings into practise.

Key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Nature as an example of selfless service
- Abou Ben Adhem
- Saint Ramadas
- Shiva, Parvati and Robber
- Hanuman
- Sri Krishna
- Jesus Christ
- Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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Nature as an Example of Selfless Service

All are the children of Mother Earth and should follow the selfless activity of the earth, which rotates on its own axis and goes round the sun at sixty-six-thousand miles per hour. By this constant motion we get day and night and variations in the seasons without which we cannot have food crops which sustain humankind. As children of the earth, people should learn the lesson of *tyāga* (sacrifice) from Mother Earth. Without sacrifice it is difficult to sustain life itself. Some say knowledge is valuable. But, character is more valuable than knowledge. One may be a learned scholar, one may hold high positions of authority, one may be very wealthy or an eminent scientist, but if one has no character all the other acquisitions are of no use at all. Sacrifice, love, compassion and forbearance are the sterling human qualities that should be fostered, shedding jealousy, hatred, ego and anger, which are animal qualities. What is the use of being born as a human and leading a life of birds and beasts?

SSS 27.10: April 11, 1994

Nature's role is to help humanity, the crowning achievement of the evolutionary process, to realise the Divinity immanent in creation. Mountains help humans to build houses by providing stone slabs quarried from them. Trees provide the timber for construction of houses and also firewood for domestic use. Among animate beings, every creature, from an ant to an elephant, is of assistance to humans in one way or another. Cows provide nourishing milk. Bullocks are useful for ploughing the fields and helping to grow food crops. All other creatures like birds, fish, sheep and others are serving humans in different ways. Seen in this light it will be clear that all things in creation are helpful to the human being in leading his or her life. Even the sun and the moon are serving the human.

SSS 21.19: July 12, 1988

Take the example of trees, which bear sweet fruits for others, but do not themselves take; cows, which give milk to others, but do not taste even a drop; rivers, which provide copious supply

of water for the people and animals and birds too, but do not take even a bit of it themselves. The human is only enjoying everything itself and is not doing anything for the society at large. *Dharma* (righteousness and justice) protects those who protect it but will destroy those who attempt to destroy it. You have got this precious human life as a divine gift. Do not waste it by seeking worldly pleasures. Pray to God and serve God by serving humanity.

SSS 31.14: April 20, 1998

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The Service of Saints

Abou Ben Adhem

Students might have heard the story of Abou Ben Adhem who always offered "*sarva bhūta dayā pushpam*" (compassion on all beings) to the Lord. Every day he used to go round the streets to serve the destitute and the handicapped and return home late in the night. One night when he returned home, he found in his bedroom an angel writing something. When he asked her as to what she was writing, she replied that she was making a list of those who loved God. She replied in the negative when he asked her if his name was there in that list. The following night, when he returned home, he again found the angel writing something. He queried, "Mother, what is it that you are writing now?" She said, "Son, I am writing the names of those who are dear to God". He again wanted to know if his name figured in the list. She replied that his name was on the top of this list. The sum and substance of this story is that God is pleased when you serve your fellow human beings.

SSS 33.12: August 22, 2000

Saint Ramadas

In a place called Badar in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra, a son was born to a couple highly devoted to God. He was named Narayana. He grew up as a naughty boy, neglecting his studies and quarrelling with other children. At the age of eight years he lost his father. His mother Rama Devi found it difficult to control her mischievous and delinquent son. Her relatives and neighbours advised her to get him married so that he might

realise his responsibilities and change for the better.

Although the boy was only thirteen years old and too young for marriage, his mother yielded to the persuasions of others and arranged for his marriage. At the time of the wedding a screen of thick cloth was held in-between the bride and bridegroom, according to the prevailing custom and the *purohīts* (priests) removed the curtain to hand over the *mangala sūtram* (the sacred thread of wedlock) to the bridegroom for him to tie it round the bride's neck. Lo and behold! The bridegroom had disappeared behind the curtain without anybody's notice. A thorough search was made to trace him out but in vain. So the marriage could not be performed.

The boy Narayana, who had escaped from the marriage hall, ultimately reached a place called Nasik near the source of the sacred river Godavari. He stayed there for some time and then moved to a nearby mountain called "Chitrakuta" which is considered holy because Lord Rama lived there for nearly twelve years. There he selected an exquisitely beautiful spot by the name Panchavati. The boy was enraptured by the grandeur of the scenery of the place. And its sanctity, associated with the stay of Lord Rama there during His exile, sent thrills of ecstasy in Narayana. He was always immersed in the contemplation of Lord Rama.

What was the cause for the naughty boy turning into a pious young man? Apart from the fact that his latent good *saṃskāras* (accumulated tendencies) were aroused by the sudden shock of the prospect of being saddled with the heavy responsibilities of married life, the boy during his journey to Nasik, entered a famous Hanuman temple en route and wholeheartedly prayed to the Deity to bless him with all the noble qualities for which Hanuman was renowned. And he had an indication of his prayer being answered by way of gentle movement of the idol transmitting spiritual vibrations in the direction of the boy.

After twelve years of intense penance at Panchavati, Narayana gained the three-fold realisation of Lord Rama, as did Hanuman. Namely, when he had body consciousness, he was the servant and Rama the Master. When he was conscious of his being a *jīva* (individual self) he was a

part of Rama and when he was aware of his being the *Atma* he and Rama were One.

After this realisation, he returned to Nasik from Panchavati. While there, he came to know that the country was in the grip of a severe famine. Then he began to reflect that to spend his time thinking of only his own liberation, when all his countrymen were suffering due to famine amounted to extreme selfishness. So, he coined the slogan, "*Dil me Ram, hāth me kām*" (Rama in the heart and service with the hands) and entered the arena of social service with all his energy and zeal, giving himself and his band of dedicated workers mottoes such as "*Mānava sevā* (service to the human) is *Mādhava sevā* (service to God)" and "*Grāma sevā* (service to the villages) is *Rama sevā* (service to Rama)". He filled the tank of his heart with the holy water of *Rama-nām* (Rama's name) which flowed through the top of his hands to quench the thirst of the multitudes of his countrymen.

SSS 26.10: March 19, 1993

Shiva, Parvati and Robber

Millions come to Kashi as pilgrims. It is said that those who see Kashi will not be born again. One day at Kailasha, Parvati asked Shiva, "Lord, I have heard it said that all those who visit Kashi, where there is a celebrated shrine for your worship, will attain Kailasha and stay on there in your presence. Millions are coming to Kashi, but is this place big enough to accommodate all of them?" Shiva replied, "All the millions cannot come to Kailasha. I shall design a play and make clear to you who among the millions can come here. You, too, have a role to act. Do as I direct you to".

Parvati became an old hag of eighty and Shiva a rickety old man of ninety. The old woman had the old man on her lap, right at the main entrance of the famous Shiva shrine of Vishweshwara, and she implored in piteous tones the pilgrims who passed by on their way to the temple, "My husband is terribly thirsty. He is about to die of thirst. I cannot leave him and go to the river Ganga to bring him water. Will any of you pour a little water down his throat and save his life?"

The pilgrims were coming up from the *ghāts* (bathing piers) after their ceremonial bath in the holy river, their clothes still wet and clinging to

their bodies. Some of them lamented that their peace was disturbed by the sight of this pathetic couple. "We have come to take *darshan* of the Lord and look what meets our eye". There were some who flatly ignored her cries and lifted their noses in the air. Some said, "Wait. Let us finish the worship inside the temple and then we shall bring the Ganga water for you". No one offered to bring the needed help to the aged patient.

Just then a robber who was hurrying into the temple to pick a few pockets, heard the plaintive voice of the old woman and halted near them. He asked her, "Mother, what is the matter?" She replied, "Son, we came to this place to have *darshan* of Lord Vishweshwara of Kashi but my husband has fainted out of sheer exhaustion. He might survive if someone will bring a little Ganga water and pour it down his throat. I cannot leave him here and go for water. Please help me and earn the merit".

The robber was moved into compassion. He had a little Ganga water in the hollow gourd he had with him. He knelt down near the dying person on the lap of the old woman but the woman stopped him saying, "The moment the Ganga water wets his throat, my husband may die. He is in the last stage of living. Therefore speak a word of truth and pour the water". The robber could not understand what she meant, so she explained, "Speak within his hearing some good deed that you have done in your life and then pour the water in his mouth". That created a problem for the robber. He was at his wits end. He could not quite comply. He said, "Mother, I have in truth not done any good deed so far. This present act, the offering of water to this thirsty man, is the very first good deed I am responsible for". And saying this, he placed the gourd at the lips of the old man and gave him a mouthful.

Just at the moment, the couple disappeared and in their place stood Shiva and Parvati, blessing the robber. Shiva said, "Son, life is to be dedicated for the service of others and not devoted to the exclusive interests of oneself. Howsoever many wicked deeds you might have done so far, for your selfless offering of Ganga water with truth on your tongue, we bless you with this vision. Remember there is no morality higher than

truth; there is no prayer more fruitful than *sevā* (selfless service)".

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

Hanuman

Take Hanuman as your example in *sevā* (selfless service). He served Rama, the Prince of Righteousness, regardless of obstacles of all types. Though he was strong, learned and virtuous, he had no trace of pride. When asked who he was by the *Rākshasas* (demons) in Lanka, into which he had entered so daringly, he described himself in all humility as the servant of Rama. That is a fine example of uprooting of the ego that *sevā* must bring about in us. No one can serve another while the ego is rampant. The attitudes of mutual help and selfless service develop humanness and help the unfoldment of the Divinity latent in the human.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

When Hanuman entered Lanka, the land of *rākshasas* (demons), the first friendly person he encountered was Vibhishana. All the *rākshasas* in Lanka, who had not seen a monkey, were curious to know all about the simian visitor. They asked him, "Who are you? Wherefrom have you come and at whose behest? How did you enter Lanka?" Hanuman was unruffled. He told them, "I am the servant of the Lord Kosala, Shri Rama", though he was very powerful. This means also that in any situation one should remain calm and unperturbed. How is this tranquillity to be secured? When the heart is pure, peace is assured. Without purity of the heart, peace is unattainable. Even if one appears to be at peace, it is only a pretence. When one has both purity of heart and peace of mind, one can achieve anything. There are three P's. The first "P" stands for purity, the second "P" for patience. The third "P" stands for perseverance. When these are present, one can acquire the grace of Sri Rama. This was amply demonstrated by Hanuman. But Vibhishana was full of anguish. He told Hanuman, "Oh Hanuman, how lucky you are. How meritorious to earn the company of Ramachandra. I have not had that good fortune. I have been meditating on Rama's name for many years. But so far I have not got the *darshan* of Rama. You have not only enjoyed the com-

pany of the Lord but you are privileged to carry out the commands of Rama. Please tell me how I can secure such a blessing". Hanuman replied, "Vibhishana, it is not enough if you merely recite the name of Rama. You have to carry out the injunctions of Rama and engage yourself in the service of Rama. Only then you will experience the power of Rama within you". From that moment Vibhishana resolved to participate in the service of Rama.

SSS 28.26: October 14, 1995

Dedicate all tasks as offerings to the Lord. Never deviate from that attitude. Hanuman was such a *bhakta* (devotee). Rama was the very life-breath for him. After the coronation, one day, Sita and the three brothers of Rama met and planned to exclude Hanuman from the *sevā* (service) of Rama and wanted that all the various services for Rama should be divided only among themselves. They felt that Hanuman had enough chances already. So, they drew up a list, as exhaustive as they could remember, of the service from dawn till dusk, down to the smallest minutiae and assigned each item to one among themselves. They presented the list of items and assignees to the Lord, while Hanuman was present. Rama heard about the new procedure, read the list and gave His approval, with a smile. He told Hanuman that all the tasks had been assigned to others and that he could now take rest. Hanuman prayed that the list might be read and when it was done, he noticed an omission—the task of "snapping fingers when one yawns". Of course, being an emperor, Rama should not be allowed to do it Himself. It has to be done by a servant, he pleaded. Rama agreed to allot that task to Hanuman.

SSS 4.24: August 15, 1964

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The Service of Avatars

Sevā (selfless service) is the highest *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline), for God Himself takes human form and comes down to serve humankind and lead it to the ideals it has ignored. Therefore consider how delighted God will be when the human being serves the human being.

SSS 7.5: March 8, 1967

An act dedicated as an offering to the God resident in all becomes as sacred as the highest *sevā* (selfless service). Devote yourselves to this *sevā*. Avatars (divine Incarnations) of God are engaged in *sevā*. That is why Avatars happen. Hence, when you offer *sevā* to humankind, the Avatar will naturally be pleased and you can win grace.

SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

Sri Krishna

God will give anything for the devotee including Himself. No one can equal Him in the sacrifice He will make for the sake of the devotees. Krishna asked Radha what she wanted at the last moment of her life. Radha said, "I don't want anything except to listen to the music of your flute once before I pass on. Sing, Oh Krishna. Speak to me. Fill my heart with bliss", sang Radha. "Distill the essence of the *Vedas* and make it flow into the eternal music of your flute, Oh Krishna". Krishna took out His flute and played it and when Radha closed her eyes, He threw it away. He never touched it again. He dedicated the flute to give delight to Radha. Thus, all the mysteries of Krishna served to relieve the distress of the devotees. Krishna used all His power to serve the devotees.

SSS 29.40: September 4, 1996

The omnipresent Lord, in the form of Krishna, served Arjuna as a charioteer. Not only this, but after His work as charioteer was over for the day, He used to take the tired horses to the river and wash them. In that manner he was prepared to work even as a cleaner. At that time, Vyasa looked at the Lord and felt that many great persons did not get the fortune which the horses had at the divine hands.

SS 1973.8

Jesus Christ

If the name of Jesus is glorified all over the world today, it is because of His boundless love. He served the lowly and the lost and in the end offered His life itself as a sacrifice. How many of those, who call themselves devotees of Jesus, are following His teachings? Those who claim to worship Rama, how far are they following His example? How many professed devotees of Krishna are living up to His teachings. There are many who claim to be Sai devotees. How many of them are following the message of Sai? If everyone seeks the answer within, each one will see that it is a zero. Anyone who claims to be a Sai devotee should dedicate his or her life to Sai ideals. That is true devotion and real penance. That is the hall-mark of humanness. It will be reflected in love, which will find expression in compassion that generates real *ānanda* (bliss).

SSS 26.37: December 25, 1993

Jesus exemplified the spirit of social service. The inspiration for this came from His mother Mary. From His childhood Mary taught Him such good qualities as truth, kindness, compassion and justice. In His twelfth year, Jesus and His parents went to Jerusalem for a festival. In the crowds the parents lost trace of Jesus and searched for Him everywhere. Not finding Him anywhere, Mary sat under a tree and prayed to God to come to her help. At that moment a thought flashed in her mind that Jesus was perhaps in a nearby temple. And Jesus was there sitting in a corner of the temple and listening to the words of the priest. Mary affectionately rushed towards Him and embraced Him. "Child what agony I went through on your account", she said. Jesus told her, "Mother, why should you have any fear? Those who believe in the world will have fears. But why should anyone believing in God fear at all? I am in the company of my Father. Why do you fear? You taught Me that God is everything for us. How, then, can you worry like this?" Jesus learned His lessons from His mother and developed His spiritual faith. After they returned from Jerusalem Jesus felt that service to His parents was His foremost duty, because He owed everything to them. In that spirit, He used to assist His father in His carpentry work.

Joseph passed away when Jesus was thirty. He sought His mother's permission to devote Himself to the service of the needy and the forlorn.

SSS 27.33: December 25, 1994

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

You should follow Swami, the leader. This is because from morning to night, Swami performs even the smallest task Himself and all His work is for the good of the world. It is in this context that I often say, "My Life is My Message". God and the voice of God are one and the same. Thus, doing what Swami does, as well as what Swami ordains forms work that pleases Him. Work done without the thought of self and eschewing the craving for name or power pleases Him most.

SS 1979.2

This body has been engaged in service right from birth. You should also spend your life in serving others. This is My message. I practise whatever I preach. I love all and serve all and exhort you to do the same. You are not able to understand My love as your feelings are narrow.

SSS 32.pt2.12: November 18, 1999

I am prepared to help anyone from any village, any state or any community. I do not cherish differences of any kind. Whether you believe it or not, I may assure you that I respect only one caste, the caste of humanity, only one religion, the religion of love and only one language, the language of the heart. I shall never say "No" to anybody who seeks My help, whatever his or her caste, region or creed may be.

SSS 30.29: October 11, 1997

Study Questions: Exemplars of Selfless Service

Group Study Questions

1. How is Nature an example of selfless service?
2. What made Abou Ben Adhem so dear to God? How can your own experience in selfless service benefit from following his example?
3. How is Hanuman a good example of selfless service?
4. How is the life of the Avatar a message of selfless service?

Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of an example from your own life of someone who exemplified selfless service? If so, please describe that example and how it affected your life.

PART II

DISCOURSE 1

Lessons on *Sevā Sāadhanā*

Society is the coming together of people. Cooperation among people in a society, motivated by spontaneity and by pure intentions, is the hallmark of *sevā* (selfless service). *Sevā* can be identified by means of two basic characteristics: compassion and willingness to sacrifice. History informs us that, in all countries and in every age, the human is a social animal. The human being is born in society. He or she grows in and through society and his or her life ends in society itself. A human being's songs and speech, duties and diversions, are all determined by society. Society for the human is like water for fish. If society rejects a person or neglects a person, he or she cannot survive.

What a single individual cannot accomplish, a well-knit group or society can achieve. A person walking alone will feel tired and miserable at the end of five miles but walking with ten others as a group he or she will find the five miles a jaunt. That person arrives refreshed and strong. Social living contributes increased happiness and more efficient effort among birds and beasts. They are able to defend themselves from enemies, secure food and shelter and migrate to places beyond great distances when they act as a group. Even ants have learned that immense benefits are derivable from group activity and social organisation. Monkeys also live in groups for greater security and happier lives.

Let me tell you that nothing is impossible to achieve if an organised society is set on achieving it. Even liberation from material entanglement (*moksha*) can be won through serving and promoting the progress of society. Through the sense of unity, the willingness to sacrifice and the softness of compassion all objects can be gained. So, the Sathya Sai Organisation must move forward with hearty enthusiasm in the field of service to society.

Service Must Bring About Uprooting of Ego

The first lesson *in sevā* (selfless service) has to be learned in the family circle itself. Father, mother, brothers, sisters—in this limited group, which is well-knit, one must engage in loving service and prepare for the wider *sevā* that awaits outside the home. The character of each individual member determines the peace and prosperity of the family. The character of each family is the basic factor that decides the happiness and joy of the village or the community. And the nation's progress is based on the strength and happiness of the communities which are its components. So, for the welfare of the country and of the entire world, the spirit of service, vital enthusiasm, constructive imagination, pure motivation and unselfish alertness are all urgently needed.

Take Hanuman as your example in *sevā*. He served Rama, the Prince of Righteousness, regardless of obstacles of all types. Though he was strong, learned and virtuous, he had no trace of pride. When asked who he was by the *Rakshasas* (demons) in Lanka, into which he had entered so daringly, he described himself in all humility as the servant of Rama. That is a fine example of uprooting of the ego that *sevā* must bring about in us. No one can serve another while the ego is rampant. The attitudes of mutual help and selfless service develop humanness and help the unfoldment of the Divinity latent in the human.

Krishna was known to all as almighty, all-knowing, all-encompassing and all-fulfilling. Yet, the enthusiasm to do *sevā* prompted Him to approach Dharmaraja, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, on the eve of the magnificent *Rājasūya Yagna* (ritual ceremony performed by the kings) he had planned to celebrate and offered to take up *sevā* of any kind. He suggested that He might be given the task of cleaning the dining hall after the guests had partaken of the feast. Krishna insisted on outer cleanliness and inner cleansing. Clean clothes and clean minds are the ideal combination.

During the battle of Kurukshetra, which climaxed the *Mahabharata* story, Krishna served as the driver of the chariot of Arjuna throughout the day on the field and when dusk caused the adjournment of the fight, He led the horses to the river, gave them a refreshing bath and applied healing balms to the wounds suffered by them during the fierce fray. He mended the reins and the harness and rendered the chariot battle-worthy for another day. The Lord sets the example for the devotees to follow. He teaches that service done to any living being is offered to Him only and is accepted by Him most joyfully. Service rendered to cattle, to beasts, to human beings is laudable *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline).

Sevā Rendered to Every Living Being Is Sādhanā

The Lord sets the example for the devotees to follow. He teaches that service done to any living being is offered to Him only and is accepted by Him most joyfully. Service rendered to cattle, to beasts, to human beings is laudable *sādhanā*

(spiritual discipline). Keeping the environment of our residences clean, providing help to those who live around the place, going to hospitals and serving the patients who are in the wards—in such acts of service the members of the Sathya Seva Organisation must take active part. Many do such things now as “social service”, not as a *sādhanā* in a full-hearted manner. The *sādhanā* spirit is not found in the activity.

Through *sevā sādhanā*, Hanuman attained identity with Rama, as the river attains identity with the sea. Arjuna too considered every act as *sādhanā* to attain the grace of Krishna, for Krishna directed him to fight on, ever keeping Him in memory—“*Māmanusmara yuddhyacha*”. You too should keep God ever in your mind as the pacesetter, whether you are serving patients in the hospitals or cleaning a drain in the bazaar. That is the *tapas* (penance). That is the highest form of *sādhanā*. More than listening to a hundred lectures or delivering them to others, offering one act of genuine *sevā* attracts the grace of God.

The body has to be utilised for service to others. Activity is its main purpose. Krishna says, “I have no need to be engaged in work but I do work in order to set an example for the world”. More *ānanda* can be won by serving others than what can be got by merely serving oneself. Offer service to someone in need, with a full heart, and experience the *ānanda* that results. It need not be something big. It can be small and unnoticed by others. It has to be done to please the God within you and within the one you are serving.

Avoid the Ego Marring Your Sādhanā

We require today those who take delight in selfless service, but such human beings are rarely seen. You who belong to the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, every one of you, must become a *sevak* (servant), eager to help those who need it. When the *sevak* becomes the *nāyak* (leader), the world will prosper. Only a *kinkara* (servant) can grow into a *shankara* (master). Of course, one has to eliminate the ego totally. Even a trace of it will bring disaster. However long you may do *dhyāna* (meditation), however constant your *japa* (recitation), a little ego will render them barren of results. *Bhajan* done with egoistic pride will be as

harsh as the crow's caw. So try to avoid the ego marring your *sāadhanā*, even to a small extent.

You all know the story of Vishwamitra, who, as a result of severe *tapas* for years, had earned the power even to create another heaven amenable to his will. His ego made him intensely passionate and short tempered (*rājasic*). So he was known as *rāja-yogi* and *rājarishi*. He was jealous of the sage Vasishtha who was adored as a *Brahmarishi* and sought that title for himself. This made him even more *rājasic*. The wilder his desire, the higher rose the ego flames.

Be Vigilant against Doubts and Fears

The Sathya Sai Organisation has laid down *sevā* as *sāadhanā* in order to uproot from your mind this evil trait. Service helps you to remove the ego. So, do not pay heed to what others might say when you engage in service activities. When you are doing good acts, why hesitate, why feel ashamed, why fear? Let compassion and sacrifice be your two eyes. Let egolessness be your breath and love be your tongue. Let peace reverberate in your ears. These are the five vital elements you have to live upon. God will not ask you, "When and where did you do service?" He will ask, "With what motive did you do it? What was the inten-

tion that prompted you?" You may weigh the *sevā* and boast of its quantity. But God seeks quality, the quality of the heart, the purity of the mind, the holiness of the motive.

You have been doing, as *sevādal* (volunteer service corps) members, *sevā* in many fields and directions for ten or twelve years. You are not novices. You are aware of the *sevā-way* of life. But since you are human, veils and fog, weeds and worms infest the mind. Doubts and fears haunt your work. But be vigilant against the onslaughts of these. Strive every day, faithful to the ideal you have set before yourself, to improve your *sevā* activities along pure, unselfish, sacred lines. This day and tomorrow, people with years of experience will be telling you the means and methods by which your *sevā* activities can become more beneficial to a larger number of deserving people. You will also have group discussions on these topics. Confer among yourselves in a meaningful way and arrive at some proposals for bettering your service programmes. Later, I shall resolve any doubts that arise and advise you not only for *sevā* here and now, but also for attaining peace and joy forever. I shall converse with you and reward you with *ānanda* through My Blessings.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981



DISCOURSE 2

Born to Serve

Rendering Service selflessly with a compassionate heart is alone true Service. One is bound to attain peace if one serves in a friendly spirit. This is the truth. This is the truth.

(Telugu Poem)

Embodiments of the Divine Atma. You have to recognise that life is meant for selfless service and not to be lived for selfish purposes. Only through such service can the oneness of humankind be experienced. The secret of *karma* yoga (path of action) is selfless service. The basis of *yoga* is disciplining the mind and the body through selfless service.

Society honours only such persons who serve society. Such persons earn the grace of God. Every individual has to realise the paramount importance of selfless service. The spirit of service should be coupled with readiness for sacrifice. Only then it can be called selfless service free from any taint of self-interest. Such service lends savour to life. Universal love sustains life by its nourishment. Love is the life-breath of the human being. Magnanimity of spirit lends fragrance to life.

However eminent a person may be, he or she has to realise that the main purpose of life is to render dedicated service to one's fellow human beings. The relationship between mother and child, preceptor and disciple, God and devotee, is based on mutual dependence. There cannot be a child without a mother, a disciple without a teacher, a devotee without God. Each is associated with the other in an inextricable bond.

Service Should Be Rendered to the Helpless

One should be prepared to serve others rather than choosing to be served by them. Moreover, there is nothing meritorious in serving those who are high above us. For one thing, they can command the services of attendants. Rendering service to those who are in the same position as ourselves is not also commendable. Service should be rendered to those who are worse off than ourselves and who are neglected by the world.

There are three levels of people in the world. At the highest level are those who may be placed in the category of *Lakshmi Narayana*. Those who are in the same stage as ourselves are in the category of *Aswatha Narayana*. Those who are poorer than ourselves may be described as *Daridra Narayana*. There is no need to render service to one who is *Lakshmi-Narayana*, as there will be servants to take care of him or her. *Aswatha Narayana* is the type of person who is filled with endless desires and is never contented, whatever his or her accomplishments or earnings. Service to such a person is unnecessary. It is the weak, the destitute and the helpless who need to be served.

Even in rendering service to such persons, there should be no feeling that we are serving "others". We should feel that we are serving the Lord Narayana who dwells in them. When service is rendered in a total spirit of dedication, with concentration of thought, word and deed, the heart gets sanctified. Without purity of the heart there can be no spiritual progress.

Active Workers Should Not Be Arrogant

"Active workers" (in the Sai Organisation) should have no feeling of arrogance or ostentation in carrying on their activities. They must be broad-minded, completely free from selfish concerns, and must develop love towards all. Active workers are the spinal cord of the Sai Organisation. They should understand what are human qualities and practise them in their lives. Without having the right attitude, service done demonstratively in a spirit of self-conceit is a travesty. Those who serve should rid themselves of the sense of "mine" and "thine".

Pre-occupation with one's own welfare and happiness is the bane of the dualistic mentality. It breeds discontent and sorrow. Feelings of attachment and aversion sully the mind. Through service such a mind can be purified. External observances like bathing several times a day and smearing *vibhuti* all over and mouthing *mantras* (chants) mechanically will not serve to cleanse the mind of impurities. These are only outward show, with nothing spiritual about them.

Transcendental knowledge that can arise through diligent enquiry and steadfast faith, and which will help to raise the human being from the animal level, is being ignored today. No effort is made to acquire this knowledge. Perceiving untruth as truth and treating truth as untruth human beings are immersed in accumulating ephemeral objects, considering them as permanent. Human beings must get out of this narrow groove. They must outgrow their selfish tendencies and learn to regard the whole of humankind as one family. That is true service. Few have such a large-hearted approach today.

Do Not Go after Name or Fame

The first requisite, therefore, is to get rid of all the bad thoughts, the selfishness, pride and other undesirable qualities from the heart so that the spirit of love can find its rightful place in it. Only a heart filled with love is pure and holy. Hence you should take up service activities in a loving spirit. You should not be concerned about name or fame. Fame is not a commercial product or a commodity that can be got from someone. It flows spontaneously like a river, which starts in a small way, but gathers volume as it goes along. Do not go after name or distinction. Concentrate your mind upon achieving your objectives. Fill your heart with love and engage yourselves in service. The human being who cannot do service to others is not a human being at all.

Render Service According to Your Capacity

We must consider that we have taken birth only to render service to society as a sacred duty. Whatever small service we may do, if we do it in the right spirit, serving with no thought of self, we shall be doing something commendable and worthwhile. An act of service by itself may be a small thing but it must be done wholeheartedly. Just as a cow transforms whatever it may consume into sweet, wholesome milk, any kind of service rendered with a pure heart will result in great good. You should not have any returns in view in rendering service. "This is my duty. I am born to serve". It is with such an attitude that you should take up service.

All beings in creation are living by rendering mutual service and no one can be considered superior to another. Every person should render service according to his or her capacity and according to the sphere of his or her activities. There are various limbs in the human body. But the hands cannot do what the legs are capable of; nor can the eyes perform the duties of the ears. What the ears can enjoy, the eyes cannot. Likewise, among human beings there are differences. Their capacities and aptitudes may vary. But each should take part in service activity according to his or her ability, equipment and field of work.

Any individual may offer worship and engage in spiritual activities according to his or her pref-

erences. But the merit to be gained through service is greater than what can transpire through these religious observances.

*Na tapāmsi Na tīrthāñām, Na shāstrāñām
Na japānapi
Samsāra Sāgarottāram, Sajjanasevanam
Vinā.*

(Neither by penance nor by taking baths in sacred waters; neither by the study of scriptures nor through meditation can one cross this ocean of worldly life. This ocean of worldly life can be crossed only by rendering service to the good.)

Develop a Large-Hearted Approach

Whatever pilgrimages we may undertake, our hearts hanker after only worldly objects and hence no cleansing of the heart occurs. The individual's quest for *mukti* (liberation) is self-centred. This is not right. One should strive to help others also to achieve liberation. That is true service.

Few have such a large-hearted approach today. How can those who have been immersed ceaselessly in selfish pursuits earn the grace of God? Therefore, to begin with, there must be realisation of the Divinity that is inherent in all human beings and which pervades the entire cosmos. The unity that subsumes the diversity has to be understood in order to grasp the nature of Divinity. So long as there is no understanding of Divinity, there can be no understanding of even human nature.

Eliminate selfishness, which is the cause of dualism and its brood of opposites, joy and sorrow, likes and dislikes. The egoist cannot understand his or her own true nature, much less that of others. Hence, the first step is understanding one's own self. Everyone refers to "I" but where is it located? And wherefrom does it arise? According to the scriptures it arises from the *Hridayam* (the heart). It is all-pervasive. It is otherwise known as *Atma*.

Some consider that the *Atma* dwells in the heart. This is also wrong. *Hridayam and Atma* are one and to view them as different entities is wrong. If this is the case, it may be asked, Why are people plunged in the darkness of ignorance? It is because their vision is not directed towards

Atma. It does not go beyond the mind. One who is unable to go beyond the mind cannot escape from the shroud of ignorance. The way out of this condition is to realise that like the moon and the sun, the mind derives its light from the *Atma* and when the vision is turned towards the *Atma* the mind fades away or ceases to shine.

Few Render Service with Love

It is necessary to realise that the *Atma* is all-pervasive and to cultivate a feeling of love for all. The *vishwam* (cosmos) is a projection of the *Vishñuswarūpam* (the Divine). There is no need to search in any particular place for the Divine who is omnipresent. Formal religious observances or spiritual scholarship will not lead to God-realisation. It is not intellectual eminence that is required for the spiritual *sāadhanā* (spiritual discipline). It is better to have a single person with a good and kind heart than a hundred vain-glorious intellectuals. We should train ourselves to become good men and women, who are fit to undertake worthy tasks. If your minds are filled with hatred, envy and likes and dislikes, you are not qualified to embark on service activities.

"Offer services and receive love". This is the recipe for experiencing Divinity. But today service is not offered wholeheartedly. Few render service with love and hence few receive God's grace. Even their love is self-centred and is not all-embracing. Our love should not be confined to our kith and kin. It must extend beyond the family to society as a whole, then to the nation at large, and finally it must embrace the whole world.

Service in the Right Spirit Is *Dharma*

This is the implication of Buddha's call: "*Sangham sharanam gachhāmi*". Starting from the *buddhi* (the intellect) one should go beyond it to *sangham* (society). This way, the oneness of the society is realised. But mere recognition of membership in society is not enough. One has to recognise and discharge through service one's obligation to society. That is the implication of the prayer: "*Dharmam sharanam gachhāmi*". Doing service in the right spirit is *Dharma*. Service is also a path to God-realisation. God is the embodiment of Love, Truth and Peace. Therefore, to re-

alise God, one has to develop love, adhere to truth and experience peace within oneself.

The human body is like a chariot and the *Atma* is the charioteer. The bodies may have different forms and names. But the *Atma* is one and the same. It is essential to recognise the unity that underlies the apparent diversity. For instance, hunger is common to all, though the kind of food through which it is appeased may vary from an emperor to a beggar. Likewise, joy and grief, birth and death are common to all. The *Atma* is common to everyone. Recognising this oneness, you should engage yourselves in service to all. Unfortunately, there is no feeling of unity today in the world. All the problems bedeviling humankind are due to the absence of unity.

Exemplify the Quality of *Samatwa* (Equal-Mindedness) in Service

The foremost duty of the Sai Organisations is to promote unity on the basis that all are sparks of the Divine and constitute one family. Without realising this basic truth, there is no use in rendering any kind of service. There can be no sacredness in service, if good thoughts and good feelings are absent. Service, as an act of *dharma*, can be offered only by one who is pure in heart, selfless and equal-minded towards everyone (*samatwa*).

No Place for Envy in the Sai Organisation

Sai *sevaks* (service volunteers) should cultivate a similar spirit of tolerance and serenity to be able to render social service effectively. It is unbecoming of Sai Organisations for anyone in them to bear ill-will towards others. All should behave as children of one mother. Consider that everyone is an embodiment of the divine *Atma*. Only then you can render service with zeal and vigour.

Whatever may be one's wealth or position, in the sphere of service, he or she should regard himself or herself as equal with everyone else. All should bear in mind that wealth and position are not permanent. What is it that can be achieved through these? You can get what is destined for you and lose what you are fated to lose. Neither of

these can be prevented by any subterfuges. Only the grace of the Divine will remain forever.

Today we are having a conference of "active workers". There are many who claim to be rendering social service. But selfish motives are present even in the field of service. Such selfishness should not have any place in Sai Organisations. The individual and the society are one. Whatever one does for society is also good for oneself. When service is done in that spirit, the individual, as well as the society, derives benefits from it. It may not be easy to cultivate such a sense of identity. But through persistent effort one can get over the sense of "mine" and "thine" and identify oneself with society at large. Once the will is there, anything can be accomplished. The power of a person's *sankalpa* (resolution) will outlast him or her.

Treat All Service as an Offering to God

All service should be regarded as an offering to God and every opportunity to serve should be welcomed as a gift from God. When service is done in this spirit, it will lead in due course to Self-realisation.

It is this kind of selfless, spiritually-oriented service that is needed today. To a world riddled with conflict and chaos, this will provide a climate of serene peace. Regard yourselves as brothers in a family. But do not stop there. Go beyond kinship to the *atmic* unity. You have to march from the *an-namaya* (the physical) to *vijnanamaya* (the higher wisdom) and on to the state of *anandamaya* (divine bliss). Shed completely all selfishness and self-interest and enter upon service activities as the highest purpose of life. Service must become your life-breath. You must become ideal *sevaks* and set an example to the world.

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

DISCOURSE 3

The Spirit of Service

Embodiments of the Divine. Selfless service enables a person to elevate one to lofty heights and blesses him or her with divine splendor. Selfless service is also responsible for empowering a person's mind and intellect with vitality and awakening the humanity in man. For attaining progress in any sphere, it is not sufficient to put in dexterity and hard work. Love, compassion, morality, work ethics, understanding and tolerance are also needed to achieve accomplishment. Without these essential qualities, it is impossible to perform selfless service. The joys and sorrows experienced daily, the desires and hatred that one develops through daily living, the indulgence that the sense organs crave—these are all responsible for the perversions and diversions of a person's mind. Since ages, they have only fostered the feeling of duality—classifying everything into fragments of “mine and thine”. They have intoxicated him with the feelings that are totally self-centered and bereft of any iota of concern for the world and the surroundings. This feeling of duality has further had a cyclic effect in man, enhancing negative sentiments like desires and hatred. The person who is incapable of thinking beyond himself or the family, wealth and status and is steeped in the mire of duality is a selfish person to the core. He will always be convinced that the truth is untruth and will conduct himself by believing that the untruth is true!

Service to Oneself

If such a blinkered person seeks to cleanse the heart of all such grime, then selfless service is the only way. It is vital to realise that human life is presented to indulge in selfless service and not in selfish pursuits. Such service is not meant to be performed to obtain name and fame or to exhibit the status and power of an individual. Service should not be performed to achieve one's own selfish needs and self-interest. Such service cannot even be considered as selfless in nature. Most men do not come forward to participate in selfless service because they are unable to recognise the sanctity and Divinity associated with such activities. It is wrong to assume that one is doing service because such an act would benefit the society or the nation! One has to believe that selfless service facilitates emancipation to the doer and not anyone else. To the contrary believing that the service one is doing is benefiting others and not recognizing the Divinity associated with selfless service only fosters a feeling of ego in the doer. This ego in turn develops a selfish outlook.

That is why it is said:

“The one who does not have good qualities, spirit of sacrifice, sanctity of purpose and pious intent is as good as a dead person”.

A living that does not involve itself in selfless service is only an existence in total darkness, without any life.

Service to Society

We owe our existence to the society. All the name, fame, joy, happiness, wealth and prosperity that we enjoy are obtained from the society. Society helps in solving an individual's problems and confers all happiness. It helps the flower of humanity to blossom in an individual. It is therefore essential that the one serves such a society. It is important that one serves nature through which one learns the highest Truth of Divinity. When someone lifts the handkerchief we drop and gives it to us, we do not forget to express our gratitude and say “thank you”. However, we pay no attention to expressing our gratitude to nature and the society which are responsible for giving us so many comforts and facilities. Such a life that fails to express its gratitude is worse than the life of a beast. Service should be the prime goal of human existence and its primary task. To the contrary, we are discarding our main goal, placing our faith and vision on transient objectives and thus wasting our life.

Service and Sacrifice

Service does not mainly require wealth, riches, grains and other ingredients. Service indulged in by a heart bereft of any love is only going to be a wasteful exercise, despite all the other ingredients. It is therefore important that we first fill our hearts with love. The spark of conscience in us is not wasteful. When associated with ego, it takes a distorted form. When associated with the spirit, it takes a splendid form. Human life is blessed with the quality to recognise this sacred reality. Sadly, we are discarding this quality in human life. The consequence is we exist as human beings only in the form, but not in the quality. Every human being only yearns to acquire wealth, power, authority and worldly indulgence and nothing else. A person is firmly convinced that wealth alone can give emancipation and libera-

tion. To the contrary, it is responsible for destroying humanity in man! Wealth does not foster us; neither does it protect us. Wealth is certainly essential. But the secret is to lead a moral life with wealth that is limited only to the extent required.

It is observed openly today that any act of service by an individual or an organisation is steeped in ego, pomp and show. As long as pomp and show are present, the splendour of the spirit will remain in the dark. Without experiencing the splendour of the spirit, the true human nature will never blossom. Existence as a human being is not possible unless humanity blossoms. A person will exist as a man, for example, in human form but will not be able to profess any quality associated with man. It is therefore important to understand that service first requires a spirit of sacrifice. The ego in man is the first distortion that must be sacrificed.

“To discard the evil in our thoughts is itself true sacrifice and the highest form of self-control. Nothing is achieved by merely deserting one's wealth and family and proceeding to the forests”.

Serving God Present in Everyone

What is the reason for the society to degrade itself to such a sorry state today? It is because there are no experienced scholars who can correctly interpret the teachings of our great culture and disseminate the information to the people. Considering that we are serving some unknown person is a grave error of judgement. Instead, one should entertain the sacred thought that he or she is serving Divinity embodied as that person. We need to strengthen the feeling that the same Divinity resides in one and all.

Avoid Criticising Others

It is correctly said:

“Criticising and slandering others accrues sin, the effect of which will never leave you in this world. Recognise that others are not unknown entities but Divinity itself”.

Therefore never hurt or criticise anyone. Doing so is a sure sign of exhibiting the evil nature of your own self which has been lying suppressed. When you find a single fault with one person, others are instantly ready to point ten faults within you. The one who recognises this truth will never

commit the mistake of pointing faults in others. Those who indulge in projecting themselves as superior and degrade others are only showing the despicable side of their nature. A human can be termed as man only when such mean mentalities and qualities are driven out of him. Therefore, see the Divine in each and every individual. It is only then that the true fruits of service can be obtained. Never aspire to obtain the fruit or result of your service. Instead, consider it as an opportunity given to you to seek your salvation. A service undertaken with such a sacred feeling and with such a pure intent becomes selfless in nature.

Service Leads to Purity

Embodiments of the Divine. Understand that the service activities you are undertaking today are all planned by you since you aspire to taste the sanctity of such tasks and thus progress in the path of spirituality. But they do not affect Me in any way and are not concerned with Me! Swami always preaches that selfless service should be indulged in by all those who seek to wash away the filth covering the subconscious mind and thus attain a purified state. Recognise the fact that all service activities achieve only this purpose. Many consider that service gives liberation and thus sanctifies their lives. But this is not so. How can your life be sanctified without first purifying your subconscious mind? You must therefore implant in your hearts the knowledge that all activities performed are meant only to purify the subconscious mind. Understand and believe the truth that human life is given to undertake such sacred activities that purify and sanctify.

Seva with Sincerity

From birth comes activity; from activity comes righteousness; from righteousness comes Divinity—*Janma, Karma, Dharma, Brahma*. This is the link between the four—one must emerge from the other. Some people claim that they cannot indulge in service activities because they are short of time or because they are tied up with their official duties or that they have other responsibilities. Such excuses are only signs of weakness. It is a misconception to think that service means only activities like hard labour, or sweeping the

streets or such. Discharging your official duty sincerely, using your authority at work with proper work ethics—these also constitute selfless service. People who are employed in a position of authority should always ask themselves if they are discharging their duty sincerely in accordance with the salary that they are being given. Constantly thinking thus is also equivalent to doing selfless service. It is a sad commentary of states today that no employee is discharging his or her duty with such sanctity. Everyone yearns to accumulate wealth and get more money, but none pauses to introspect and ask if they are working sincerely in accordance with the salary that they are receiving. It is akin to being a traitor who has betrayed his or her country.

Whose hard earned money is being given to you as salary? It is your own countrymen's earnings. Hence, when you behave in a way that harms your countrymen, it is against the principles of service. As an example, let us consider a teacher. When that teacher ensures that his or her best effort is put forth to teach and that the students learn well, he or she is actually doing a service. Similarly we can consider a trader. It is not essential that he goes into the market and sweep the streets. If he can ensure that he makes just the required profit and does not grind the customers for more that too is an act of service. One must act in a way that satisfies one's own conscience. The conscience must be the judge for the act. You may ask what does Swami like? I will say that one must discharge his or her duty sincerely. That is service. Do some form of community service to the society whenever you can. Instead of stopping with an individual, true service must span the entire society and then the nation. It is only in such kind of service that one can experience Divinity.

There are no set rules and regulations for service. Wherever you feel some kind of service is required, you may bend your back and indulge in that activity. Do not give place to sundry thoughts during such times. Do not discriminate between the poor and the rich. Whoever, wherever or whatever may be, if there is a need, then act. Difficulties, sorrows and pain are common for one and all. Therefore, it is futile to discuss the situation before doing service.

Serving in the Villages

Importantly, it is being noticed that those residing in our villages are today undergoing lots of hardships. Under such circumstances, it would be advisable to go the villages, encourage them to participate in selfless service activities by explaining the situation clearly to them and thus give them succor. There are some who focus on cleanliness related activities in the villages as a part of service. How long can you continue to do this? Instead, we may educate the villagers about the benefits of cleanliness and the need to keep dirt away from living areas. It can be clearly explained to them that because of the filth, the health will suffer, thus impacting their capacity to earn a livelihood. If it is emphasised to them that health is wealth, then they will themselves put in efforts to keep their surroundings clean. To the contrary, if we make appearances once in a month or two and clean the villages, is it going to be of much use at all? One could instead encourage and educate the villagers themselves to keep their neighbourhoods clean.

Ceiling on Desires

In the past, a topic was discussed called “Ceiling on Desires”. What is the inner significance of this phrase? Due to the pressure of limitless desires, the mind of man suffers from serious delusions. He is living in a world of fantasy and craze and is totally alienated from Divinity. It is therefore essential that some kind of limit be set on the desires that one has. Thus, the concept of “Ceiling on Desires” came into being. There are also people who are spendthrifts and waste away their money. It was our wish that such wealth instead of being frittered away could be spent for the poor, needy and destitute ones. However, people have misunderstood the concept of “Ceiling on Desires”. They think it is sufficient to donate some amount for such charity but they continue to have limitless desires. The correct process is to first reduce our own desires. As long as we infuse excessive desires of the world into us, peace will continue to evade us. That way, one only binds oneself more and more to the world. Breaking free from these bonds will require one to reduce desires and limit them to only those which are essential.

Do Not Waste Food

How does one reduce one’s desires? Eat only to the extent you require. If you serve yourself large portions of food out of selfishness, you will only end up with the sin of wasting food. The wasted food could have easily been served to another person who needed it. Hence, the first principle is “Do not waste food”. Food is God, life is God. It is from food that one gets life which sustains the body and mind. The gross part of the food taken gets excreted as stool. The molecular part of the food goes to the blood. The subtle part of the food goes to the mind. It can therefore be concluded that man’s mind is shaped by what he eats. The food that is being consumed today is primarily responsible for the demonic nature of man. There is no compassion, mercy, tolerance and love. Instead hatred, jealousy, attachment and other evil qualities have taken their place. The responsibility for this lies with the food that we eat. Therefore, the food that is partaken should be pure and sacred. Such food fosters good feelings. The gross part of the water that we drink is excreted as urine. The subtle part is transformed into the spark of life. It is therefore clear that food and water are directly responsible for making a person reach the state of the Divine. It is said that food is God. Hence, if you waste food it amounts to wasting God. Ensure that you eat pure food and in limited quantities only.

Do Not Waste Money

The second quantity is wealth. Indian have always considered wealth to be the very embodiment of goddess Lakshmi. Elders have therefore advised that wealth must never be misused since it would foster bad thoughts and intentions. It is for this reason that it is said: “Do not waste money. Misuse of money is evil”. Squandering away of money only makes man take the wrong path.

Do Not Waste Time

The third essential and important quantity is time. Time should never be wasted. Time should always be well spent since everything revolves around time. It is for this reason that the ancient *Vedas* have extolled God as time, the one beyond time, the controller of time, the embodiment of time. Time has been equated with God. Man’s

life and death is governed by time. His growth in between the two extremes of life and death is also dependent on time. Wasting time therefore amounts to wasting God. Do not indulge in needless gossip—talk only to the extent required. Do not defile time by using it to vilify others. Not indulging in such slanders and gossip is itself the main requirement of “do not waste time”.

Do Not Waste Energy

The fourth quantity is energy or strength. Energy here refers to physical and mental as well as spiritual strength. All three should not be wasted. How does this energy get wasted? Seeing evil, hearing evil speaking evil, thinking evil and doing evil—these five contribute to slackening our energy. Using these five properly contributes to enhancing our energy and making us realise Divinity.

That is why it is said:

See no evil; see what is good;

Hear no evil; hear what is good;

Talk no evil; talk what is good;

Think no evil; think what is good;

Do no evil; do what is good;

This is the way to God.

Do Not Waste Energy on Sensual Pleasures

When our entire energy is draining away in wasteful expenditure, it impacts our memory and intellect. It also affects our discrimination. This is the reason why we find people totally bereft of any semblance of discrimination today. When discrimination is thus affected, how can man be expected to discharge his actions properly? Let us consider a radio as an example. We are tuning it to some station and listening to news. Whatever be the volume level you use, as long as the radio is on, some units of electrical power will certainly be consumed. Our human body is also like a radio. Whether you think or talk, some energy from inside you is surely going to be consumed. Until you go to sleep, your mind has some thought process going on in it. Why not ensure that the thoughts are good and sacred? This ensures that the energy consumed is for a good cause. In this way, whatever be the thought you are thinking, whatever be the activity you are doing, we can

ensure the proper use of energy. In this way, “Ceiling on Desires” points to the proper use and limiting of the four important quantities of food, wealth, time and energy. These are essential for those who wish to enter into service.

Service Is More Important Than Money

However, today, such a ceiling is not visible. People dodge the main issue of limiting their desires and instead, donate some token amount for the activities taken up by Sathya Sai Organisations. Money was never desired by Sathya Sai Organisations. The main agenda of our Organisation is to ensure that people stand as ideals for others to emulate. We should change our mindset gradually to be able to achieve this. Sathya Sai Organisations should work for this with unity without any discriminations of caste, creed or nationality.

Inculcate Virtues in Life

Embodiments of Divinity. Morality and ethics are more important than our caste or creed. Fostering love should be of higher priority than religion. Hankering after religion without first developing a feeling of love will only succeed in distorting the mind of man. There is only one religion and that is the religion of mankind. Love is the highest morality that one needs to adopt. One should foster love, take morality and ethics as ideals of life and then make efforts to guide his fellow-men towards the right direction.

Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara

Since times immemorial, India had always been the teacher who propagated truth and righteousness to the world. This is the reason why the dictum “Speak the truth, follow righteousness” reverberates through every corner of this country. Our countrymen should realise that the greatest welfare of the country is ensured when such sacred virtues like truth and righteousness are propagated with tolerance and understanding. One should expand the heart with such sacred virtues. Hankering after scientific knowledge without focusing on wisdom is certain to be of no use. That is why it is better to have one person with a kind heart than a hundred intel-

lectuals. This single person with a good heart can bring about a far greater change for the better in the world.

Being in the Sai Organisation, Purify Your Hearts

Man is shaped by his mind. Hence when the mind is pure and influenced by good ideals, man too becomes worthy of his humanity. Everyone should aspire to experience that humanity within themselves. One may possess sense organs that are sharp, alert and fully developed. A person's mind may be of the highest degree of intellectual achievement. He or she may also be blessed with good wisdom. Along with all these, it is also important to aspire for spiritual awakening. Without spiritual awakening within, the senses, intellect and wisdom are sure to transform into artificial entities only. As a consequence, one will lead one's life like an automaton. Our life is not a machine, but reverberates with the sacredness of Divinity. Sathya Sai Organisations have been established to enable man to rediscover the path to Divinity. Every member of this organisation is encouraged to enter into service activities for his fellow man as per his own potential and capabilities. Do not enter the Organisation seeking fame, pomp and show. Never give scope for ego to infuse into the Organisation. Just accept your role as a servant of the Divine, engaged in Divine activities. You are not the master. Remember that unless you are a servant first, you cannot be a master. Each member of the Organisation should stand like the backbone to the Organisation.

Office Bearers Should Be Humble

Embodiments of Love. It is important for those who are office bearers of the Organisation to always tread the right path. If they take to wrong-doing, it would influence all others to follow suit. Hence, if the Organisation aims at emancipating the world, then the office bearers and the members of the Organisation have to first be ideal in their outlook and selfless in their approach. Never give scope for selfishness and self-interest to creep into the service activities. Pomp and show must not even be encouraged to approach anywhere near. These two qualities have infused into every aspect of our lives and have

become a fashion to be imbibed. They will only succeed in harming the nation but are of no use whatsoever. Those who wish to be of constructive help to the nation should involve themselves only with selfless service. Pomp and show are destructive influences on the country. Our Sathya Sai Organisations should cultivate love by being selfless and without any trace of selfishness, self-interest, pomp or show. They should be pure in nature and thus encourage the spirit of sacrifice. We should put into practise tolerance and understanding. These are the attributes of a person who genuinely wishes to indulge in service activities. One should not seek to use the power of authority on others. All are equally empowered. It is only the task distribution that puts us at different levels. One should limit oneself to only supervising the work aspect of those whom he or she is responsible for.

Ideals of Sai Organisation

Love does not depend or give any authority. Our discipline should be associated with love. None of the procedures laid down in our Organisation should be rigid and enforced like in the military. The only "force" to be used here should be that of love. Speak with love. If a fault is detected, it should be addressed and corrected with love. Love should play the dominant role for everything.

That is why it is said:

Start the day with love;

Spend the day with love;

Fill the day with love;

End the day with love;

This is the way to God.

Love should be in all aspects of our life. Love is God and God is omnipresent. You are all embodiments of Love. You should therefore live in love and serve with love. Enjoy with love. You must ultimately merge with love. This is the ultimate goal of service with love. Sathya Sai Organisation must not involve themselves with other issues. They must focus only on love and connect with the heart of others through love. They should not aspire for wealth or authority and should seek to progress only through love. I do not desire temples or places of worship; I do not wish for ritu-

als and worship. Our actions should be our ritual and our service should be our worship.

Seeking to mobilise and collect funds for building temples or other service activities is a despicable act which must never be encouraged in our Organisation. I have often been cautioning you to keep the Organisation away from wealth and money. Instead, we should focus on associating ourselves with good ethics and behavior. It is unfortunate that some in the Organisation are discounting this caution and resorting to collection of money, thus opening themselves to the sins of connections and relationships. There are others who falsely claim that Swami has blessed them with special powers and thus collect money. There is nothing more demonic in quality than this kind of behavior. You have all observed that for all these years I have never interfered with the activities of any person or persons. However, these people are using Sai's name to indulge in such shameful acts and thus defaming the name of Sai. They have converted the sacred purpose of the Organisation into a business. In retrospect, it is indeed a business—but what kind of business? It is a business where only love has to be given and taken in return! It is sad to note that despite My repeated counseling some in the Organisation defile this sanctity, accumulate wealth in the name of the Organisation and show favouritism by helping some and putting down others. Such behavior is not expected. It is not that our Organisation is filled with poor people—there are several rich people as well. Would it not be better for such people to volunteer and come forward from within the Organisation itself to contribute for the service activity instead of mobilizing funds from others? Why should these rich people in the Organisation resort to the disgraceful act of begging for funds? Are they not satisfied with what they have? Do not indulge in such perverse ways to make money. It will only bring the Sathya Sai Organisations a bad name. My message to you all is this—do not bring a bad name to the Sathya Sai Organisation. Apart from this, I am not involved with the Organisations in any way. To Me everyone is a devotee and all can join the Organisation.

In the Sathya Sai Organisation, there must be no discrimination between members and office bearers. This Organisation has been established

solely for the devotees and with no other purpose or intent. Every individual has equal authority in this Organisation—and that authority is to work and enhance one's humanity and uncover one's true nature. Human values should be enhanced and fostered and not the worldly values and vices. Rest assured that wherever funds are collected in the name of service activities, rituals and prayers, it cannot have any relation to the Sathya Sai Organisations. It is sad to see that several devotees indulge in this business of collecting money. There is nothing wrong if a few people with the required means get together and decide to undertake some service activity. But do not go from door to door and solicit for donations. Sai only desires the welfare of the entire world. Everyone should be happy; everyone should foster human values in themselves. Every person should be able to help the other. This feeling of unity and tolerance should be developed within us.

That is the real worth of taking a human birth and is the meaning of the statement "Human life is the most difficult to obtain among all".

Be Independent

Embodiments of Divinity. All of you must resolve that Sathya Sai Organisations must not have anything to do with wealth and money. Members of the Organisation can plan among themselves and execute service activities. Understand that there are only two important aspects associated with our Organisation. Do not have anything to do with wealth and do not have anything to do with the government. Let us do whatever we can as per our own capacity. The Government is anyway undertaking its own welfare schemes. Let them continue to do it. We should not use their name and resources and undertake those activities already under consideration and execution by them. We will do what we can with our own resources and might. Do whatever little you can in service. You will then see that the government will itself come forward to help us. But we should never go to seek their help for our service activities. Resources will come in from any direction because there are always good people who appreciate the good work done by us. If you seek the help of the government, a new official on transfer may not help or support us like the pre-

vious official. Then what happens to the service activity we have undertaken by depending on the government's help? Hence, we should depend on our own strength and resources. Never depend on someone else's strength to discharge your service. That is true reliance on the strength of your own spirit. Place full confidence on the strength of the spirit since that is the true strength—the rest are all false sources only.

With this confidence, involve yourself in service and put the world on the right path. You will then see the real resplendent form of India. Do not hanker after name and fame. Seek love instead. Know that this is the true mission and task of Sathya Sai Organisations.

November 21, 1988



DISCOURSE 4

A Flower at His Feet

I have told you about the ideals and technique of *sevā* (selfless service) often times before and I am calling upon you once again to experience the joy thereof. I need not dilate again on the special nature of the opportunity that is now offered to you here. Render your hearts cool with delight. Share the delight with others. Adore God in this delectable form. When you go into the qualifications needed for *sevā*, you will know that a pure heart, uncontaminated by conceit, greed, envy, hatred or competition is essential. Also essential is faith in God as the spring of vitality, virtue and justice. *Sevā* is the worship you offer to the God in the heart of everyone. Do not ask another which state you belong to, or which caste or creed you profess. See your favourite form of God in that other person. As a matter of fact, he or she is not “other” at all. The other person is His image, as much as you are. You are not helping some “one individual”. You are adoring Me in that person. I am before you in that form. So what room is there for the ego in you to raise its hood?

Duty is God. Work is worship. Even the tiniest work is a flower placed at the feet of God. Approach the pilgrims who come here for the festival with a heart filled with treasure of love.

Every Kind of Service Is an Act of Worship

Do not put the badge in your pocket when your work here is over and the festival is finished and you leave for home to resume your old avocations and your discarded habits. This is not a three-day *tamāshā* (show). This is a lifetime’s pilgrim march. The badge must get inscribed on the heart indelibly for life. Wherever you see a sick person, a dispirited, disconsolate, diseased person, there is your field of service. Every blood cell, every nerve must tingle with love, with eagerness to share that love with the forlorn. When love has filled the heart, it has really been transformed into Divinity, for God is love and love is God. It is this love, and the compassion that flowed from it that made the great saints of India and of other countries like Kabir, Tukaram, St. Francis and Ramakrishna immortal.

There are people, at the Prasanthi Nilayam, who have been here for twenty, fifteen, ten years and such long periods; but only their bodies have grown older. Their *sevā* yearning has not grown. Life at the Prasanthi Nilayam must deepen faith in the *sevā* path to salvation. It is the attitude that is essential. The particular item of service might be small. You may not get a chance to partake in some gigantic scheme of service through which millions may be benefited. You can lift a lame lamb over a stile or lead a blind child across a busy road. That too is an act of worship.

A copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita* may be available for twenty-five paise. A puerile novel may cost ten rupees. Which is more worthwhile? Which can transmute base metal into gold? *Sevā* is more

fruitful than the *japa* (recitation), *dhyāna* (meditation), *yajna* and *yāga* (rituals and sacrifice) usually recommended for spiritual aspirants. For it serves two purposes—the extinction of the ego, and the attainment of *ānanda*.

When someone sitting near you is sunk in sorrow, can you be happy? No. It may be that a baby weeps within hearing most pathetically. You will get tears in your eyes in sympathy. Why? There is an unseen bond between the two. The human being alone has this quality of sympathy. The human being alone can be happy when others are happy and miserable when others are miserable. That is why the human being is the paragon of creation, the acme of animal advance. The human alone is capable of *sevā*. That is its special glory, its unique skill.

You Can Serve God Only by Serving the Human Being

Before the festivals of Dashera, Birthday and Shivaratri every year, I am exhorting you to take up the vow of *sevā* as a spiritual *sādhanā*. I must say that I am not satisfied with your performance yet. But I have not given up instructing you and commissioning you for I am hoping that you will catch up with the ideal some day or other. This is an example of the quality of mercy that is natural to Me. That quality makes Me appreciate even the little attempts you make to practise the ideal of *sevā*.

Why have you come such long distances, braving all the expenses and troubles of the journey? To be in My presence and to win My Grace, isn't it? Why then do you seek other contacts, others' favour once you have reached this place? Why fall into grooves that deny you My presence and grace? Forget all else and stick to the orders that I give. I want only to initiate you into the spiritual path of *sevā* and love. Do not be ashamed that you have been asked to watch a heap of sandals or to carry water to the thirsty or to stand at the gate. The privilege and pleasure consists in the use to which you put your skill and time for helping others. You long for serving Me. Let Me tell you, serving those who serve Me gives Me as much satisfaction as serving Me. Serving anyone is serving Me for I am in all.

The relief and joy that you give to the sick and the sad reach Me, for I am in their hearts, and I am the One they call out for. God has no need of your service. Does He suffer from pain in the legs or ache in the stomach? Try to serve the godly. Be *dāsānudāsas*, servant of the servants of the Lord. The service to man is the only means by which you can serve God.

Serve the People with Humility and Efficiency

Every one of you has, I know, the yearning to do *pādasevā* (massaging My feet). And if I give the chance to all who are anxious to get it, what will happen to My feet? And what a rush there will be around Me. In the very nature of things, all those who yearn cannot be satisfied. But know My feet are everywhere. "*Sarvatāḥ pāṇi pādamaḥ*" (All hands and feet are His) says the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The *Purusha Sūkta* of the *Vedas* says, "*Sahasra shīrshā, purushaḥ, sahasrākshaḥ, sahasrapād*" (The Supreme Sovereign Person has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet). The heads, eyes and feet of the thousands who gather here are My heads, My eyes and My feet. Nurse them, respect them, attend to their needs. Then you have done your *japam, dhyānam, and pūjā*.

The *mantra* (verse) says, "*Sarva deva namaskāram Keshavam prati gachhati*" (The homage that you pay to all the Gods flows towards the One only, Keshava). I would elaborate it further and give you this new *mantra*: *Sarva jīva namaskāram Keshavam prati gachhati* (The reverence, the service that you offer to every single being flows automatically to the One, namely Keshava). What does Keshava mean? It means the Supreme Godhead of the creation, preservation and dissolution.

Serve the people who will gather here with love, humility and efficiency. Then when they return to their villages, they will tell their kith and kin, "The people we met at Prasanthi Nilayam treated us much more lovingly than any close relative. They seated us in the shade. They came to us often to inquire about our health. They brought the doctor to us. They gave medicine when someone was ill. They spoke soft and sweet whenever we asked for some information".

Respect Everyone—No One Is Small or Low

The badge does not endow you with authority to boss over those who are badgeless. You cannot exhibit harshness, pride or persecution. Once you have been blessed by it, you should not indulge in loose talk or loose living, lewd behaviour or evil habits like smoking, gambling, drinking and scandalising others. You cannot attain positions of leadership, if that is your ambition, without years of sincere *sevā* to the people.

Let me tell you some details of the *sevā* you can do here: See that old persons and the sick do not sit in the hot sun. Supply drinking water without fuss to all who need it. Watch out for unsocial elements and pick-pockets, who come sooner than even the devotees in order to recover the debts they have paid in previous births. Arrange for groups, who will go on the rounds of the area and the sheds at night, to see that everything is secure and safe. Take all precautions to preserve

the cleanliness of the area and also to maintain the quietness of the atmosphere.

Don't shout at people who shout, in your attempt to see that silence is maintained. Talk low yourself and advise others to talk low. Explain to those who speak aloud why they have to lower their voices. If the reason is explained, they will sympathise with you and understand the purpose. Respect everyone and talk as if they are worthy of the highest respect you are capable of. No one is small or low. Sai is in all and if you insult any one, it is an insult directed against Sai. Do not drag away children that start wailing loud. Soothe them softly. Engage yourselves in bringing solace to the bodily ill. I shall engage Myself in giving solace to the mentally and spiritually ill.

SSS 10.6: March 4, 1970



ABBREVIATIONS

GV	<i>Gita Vahini</i>
SnSr	<i>Sanathana Sarathi</i>
SS	<i>Summer Showers</i>
SSS	<i>Sathya Sai Speaks</i>
SSV	<i>Sathya Sai Vahini</i>
VV	<i>Vidya Vahini</i>

