

54. The Badge: a call to saadhana

Seeing these volunteer badges that I have brought for distribution, you feel happy that you are soon to be decorated, and perhaps you hope, by means of this badge, to exercise authority over others and escape heavy work, during this Birthday Festival. I am not giving these badges to endow you with authority, or confer leisure on you or because it is customary on such occasions to have some women and men moving about with badges. This will impose heavier work on you, but, if you look upon it as work, then you have no right to receive these badges. It entitles you to welcome and serve your kith and kin who are arriving at this place from all parts of the world. The badge should not burden you with the weight of conceit; it should not make you feel superior, as if yours is the upper hand and the recipient of your service has the lower hand. It is not a boon that you drop into his hand but an offering that you dedicate at his feet. It is the expression of kinship between your nature and the nature of those whom you serve. In the Principle of the Self (*Aathma thathwa*), he and you are the same; he and you are but two waves of the selfsame sea.

Take this badge as a call to *saadhana*, as an introduction to a spiritual adventure, an exercise in the practice of prema. *The Vedhas* teach you that which deserves to be learnt; the *Shaastras* lay down disciplines that help shape man into *Maadhava*; *saadhana* brings into you the awareness of that which will give a new and truer meaning to every act of yours. I am eager that you must all get to know this and so, I am leading you into the *saadhana*. A mother cannot ignore the health and progress of the children. Though they may neglect her advice, she will be eager to correct them and lead them into proper habits.

Volunteers have to forgo their comforts

The main plank of the programme of *saadhana* is the overcoming of the ego, the feeling of "I" and "Mine". That, in a nutshell, is *Aathma vidya*. Now, you as volunteers have to forgo your comforts and even chances to have *darshan* and to listen to My discourses, when service calls you somewhere else. This *thyaaga* or renunciation gladly undertaken is a very important qualification for the *saadhana*. If you feel the urge, "My need first, the other person's later" then, what you perform is not *seva*, it is strategy. Give up your seat to someone who is older or infirm, or more deserving, that is *seva*; not sticking to it, when such people are desperate for accommodation.

' You will earn my Grace more by such service and sacrifice than by sitting in the front line and nodding to whatever I say. Do not push or pull people; speak softly and sweetly; tell the old and the infirm that you will take them to more comfortable vantage positions and they will be extremely grateful to you. See that they are not exposed to the scorching sunlight, for they may suffer from blood pressure and other handicaps and they may be affected. Seek them out from among the gathering and offer to rescue them. Handle them as you would handle a rare flower or a costly fruit.

I have known many volunteers who reel off the excuse, "They won't obey, Swaami, if we speak soft; they are accustomed to rough treatment only". I will never pardon such volunteers. The fault is always in their manner of speaking, the way in which they explain their actions, the temper, the attitude, the approach. Have you reflected on the responsibility which is now being endowed on you? What is it that is about to separate you from the thousands who have come here? Not this badge, surely.

Needs of guests should take precedence

You are being invested as Prashaanthi Nilayam Representatives, you are being entrusted with the traditional duty of hospitality towards the kinsmen who are arriving. So, you must have Prashaanthi in your hearts; you should not be agitated or worried or angry or upset. Behave in keeping with the dignity conferred on you. When guests come, does the wife tell the husband, "We shall feed them after we have eaten"? Their needs take precedence, they are to be attended to with care and consideration. So, too here, the men and women who have come are to be met with love and care, irrespective of your convenience and comfort. That is the way to please Me and win My grace.

The best way to show respect to them is to treat them as reasonable, devoted, nice, respectable people. If any of them talks loud, not knowing that he must not disturb the silence of the place, do not rush to him and hiss, or place your palm across his mouth. Go near him and whisper in his ear the rules and discipline of this Place, the fact that many are here engaged in meditation, *japam* and quiet study, the value of silence as a check on the passions and impulses. Then he is certain to co-operate and recruit others too, into the forces of silence. He will also realise the value of the discipline and perhaps decide to practise it even after he leaves the Nilayam.

Volunteership should not be a temporary role assumed by you for this one week. It should not be like the role of Harischandra in the drama, played by the champion liar of the town. Harischandra never wavered from the path of truth, whatever the milieu that served as background for life' the palace, the jungle, the cremation ground.

The volunteer is a candidate for Grace

Some feel that the disciplines of the Prashaanthi Nilayam are limited to the geographical bounds of this area and so they can be ignored when one is beyond the gates. They smoke and swear, shout and swagger, fight and frighten, talk loose and light, indulge in slander and scandals, in the coffee houses beyond the gate, where they lounge and loll. It is shameful behaviour for any self-respecting human; it is reprehensible for pilgrims to holy places, who must yearn to soak themselves in spiritual joy; it is ruinous for a volunteer, for, here, a volunteer is also a candidate for Grace and an aspirant for Bliss. For you, the whole world must appear as a Prashaanthi Nilayam (abode of Supreme peace), not simply this stone and cement structure. As a matter of fact, the world is, fundamentally, a Prashaanthi Nilayam; only, man, by his ignorance and perversity, has fouled it into a snake-pit of crime and hate.

I want that each one of you must so transform yourself during this period that you will carry with you the atmosphere of the Prashaanthi Nilayam wherever you go, for, you cannot live happily in any surrounding that is not fragrant with love and humility, discipline and control. You will naturally endeavour to make the place where you are and the men among whom you move, a bit more spiritual than before.

You must have not merely enthusiasm to serve, but the intelligence and the skill; then only can you be efficient and useful. Enthusiasm without efficiency is often a source of loss and grief. There were two friends once who had to sit for an examination. The duller among the two wanted the other chap to supply him in the hall with the answers to the questions asked; but their seats were too far to permit whisperings to be heard; so, their problem was, how to cheat the invigilator and communicate with each other without being noticed and expelled. The sharper

one was at one end of the hall and the duller one at the other. So, they hatched a plan, which they felt was fool-proof.

Service must be done intelligently

The school had a cat which used to roam freely in all the halls. The answers were to be tied to the tail of the cat and then, the dull fellow will place some sweets under his bench, which will attract the cat to his side. When the cat eats the sweets and licks the floor where they were kept, he could loosen the paper tied to its tail and spread it before him on the desk. The plan went through, up to a point; the answers were tied. But, the cat was so distracted by the thing on its tail that it scampered round and round in terrific excitement. It attracted the attention of the invigilator and that was the end of the story. You must not be so foolish as to believe in the possibility of such a stratagem. The *seva* that is entrusted to you, you must do intelligently and to a successful finish. It does not matter if the recipient is not fully satisfied; you must have done your best, without hesitation or favour.

What is the good of hurrying along the ranks of persons who are sitting for meals with a basket of *laddus*, shouting, "*Laddus, laddus*. Who wants laddus?" without stopping and serving even one *laddu* on the plate of a single person? The diners have the benefit of the name, but not of the substance. Nowadays, service has become more talk and less deed. But, the Lord cannot be deceived; He is vigilant and all-knowing.

Once, Parameshwara and Paarathi were going along the sky over Vaaranaasi, on a Shivarathri Day. There were millions of pilgrims crowding the ghats and narrow lanes of the Holy City. The precincts of the Vishweshwara Temple were filled with devoted men and women singing the praise of Shiva.

Purity and Truth alone can open the gates of Bliss

Paarvathi turned to her Lord and asked, "Look at these millions of human beings; they are all certain to win Heaven, for they are full of devotion and they are here on this sacred day; I wonder if heaven can accommodate all of them." Shiva laughed at her innocence. He said, "If every one who comes to Vaaranasi on Shivarathri Day can secure heaven, then, Vaaranaasi will be heaven. No. We both are in heaven because we have no egoistic desire, no selfish attachments. These people are all so saturated with selfish desire that no one of them can ever hope to have access to heaven. Can a thief who steals and purchases a ticket to Vaaranaasi with the stolen money climb to heaven? Purity, love and truth alone can open the gates of Bliss. Come on, I shall prove my thesis that very few of these can ever enter heaven. Let us go into this city as an old decrepit beggar pair."

And, in one of the lanes that led to the temple, in full sight of the hundreds who filed along, with the holy Ganga water in their hands, for being poured ceremonially on the Linga in the Vishweshwara Temple, the bony centenarian lay on the lap of his aged wife, lolling his tongue in the agony of extreme thirst, and the woman was appealing piteously for water to her dying husband. "Water, water; give this man a mouthful and save him for me", was the cry. No one of the devout came near to relieve his distress. Many cursed her for her shrill importunity; some asked her to keep off the road; a few said they will give him water after finishing worship in the temple; a large number swore that beggary must be made a crime and the police must clear the lanes of this nuisance; one or two people laughed and remarked that the lady was putting up a good show to attract attention. No heart melted at the woes of the old helpless pair.

At last, one man came near them, moved by sympathy. He was a pickpocket who had come to Vaaranaasi's ghats to ply his wicked trade; he knelt by the side of the old man and pulled out a dried gourd full of water; that was his water bottle. But, Paarvathi wanted to test whether he had other virtues too. So, she said, "Thank you, dear brother. But, my husband will drink the water you give only when you describe some good deed you have done so far, while pouring the water into his parched mouth. He is about to die, so, tell him of some good deed you have done in your life and offer the merit of that to him when you give him the water". The hardened thief replied, "No; I have done no good deed so far; this is the first time my heart has melted at another's misery. Let the Lord of Vaaranaasi, Vishweshwara in the temple yonder, be my witness", he said and poured the precious water. At that, the Lord appeared in His real Form and Paarvathi too rose as the Goddess; they blessed him as the only person entitled to Heaven out of that motley throng of millions of empty hearts. Truth and Love won for him the Grace of God.

Seek out opportunities to be of service

The heart of the volunteer must melt in sympathy with the ignorant, the poor, the hungry and thirsty, the children separated from the parents in the rush, the parents searching for missing children, the sick, the infirm and all other cases of distress. Be on the look out for suspicious characters who also come during festivals to ply their trade of theft; warn the pilgrims of such persons and help them to guard their things when they have to leave the places where they have deposited them. Help spread a sense of security and safety.

Seek out opportunities to be of service; do not be under the impression that you have certain limits for service and that you should not overstep them. When the buses come and the people alight, there is always confusion while they secure their luggage from the top; see that you provide them help and attention. Also, guide them lovingly to the places where accommodation is available. Do not look on from a distance, because you have not been assigned that particular work. They are coming to your place and they deserve a hearty welcome and kind attention.

Volunteers have no limits for service

Treat the guests as you would like to be treated, if you were in their place, visiting the Nilayam after years of yearning and months of preparation and anticipation of joy. The driver and conductor of the vehicles can leave them and move off; but, if in the confusion the visitors lose any article, it tells upon your vigilance. If you are there to help them, they will say "O, some good friend helped us to recover our things, he spoke so reassuringly to us, as soon as we reached the place; every one there is more full of *prema* towards us than our own kith and kin. That is the one place where we can be certain of kind and sympathetic and intelligent service suffused with love, which knows no distinction of caste, creed, status or wealth".

Observe Me; what benefit can I derive from all My activity, I who assign all benefits to all activities according to what they deserve? But yet, you will find Me busy from dawn to dusk, from dusk to dawn. I finish My lunch or dinner within minutes so that I can teach you the value of time; I attend to the smallest detail of all the various items of work, for I try to set an example for you, in meticulous attention to, and careful anticipation of, all contingencies. I know many of you idle away hours on end, wasting precious hours in idle gossip, purposeless talk and debate. When you practise the attitude that God is everywhere as the witness of every act of yours, that God is in every being you meet and serve, then, you will certainly be rewarded by a Vision of the Lord.

Do not let go the chance to do seva

When you have the brilliant chance, do not let it go, through ignorance or negligence; grasp the opportunity and advance! The best way to win Grace is to obey instructions, to follow the advice, and to submit to the control exercised with lot of Love. I am worried that people are not benefitting from Me as much as I would like to confer. In the lotus pond there are many frogs; the bees that come from afar are not able to convince the frogs of the nectar in the lotus bloom.

Seva done lovingly and well to the people who gather here to have *darshan* and to listen to the discourses is a great opportunity for you to acquire discrimination and non-attachment, to widen and deepen your *bhakthi*, and to realise how Sai is the inner motivator of all beings. I wish you well. Be humble, be sweet, be sincere.

Prashaanthi Nilayam: Birthday Festival, 22-11-1965

*Bhakthi merges in Jnaana
and becomes identified with it.
Bhakthi ripens into Jnaana,
so do not speak of them as different.
At one stage, it is called Bhakthi,
at a later stage,
we refer it to as Jnaana.
Once it is cane, later it is sugar.
SHRI SATHYA SAI*