

22. Hospitals and health

HEALTH is an essential requisite of man. The man afflicted with ill-health is powerless to execute even the least burdensome assignment. The scriptures proclaim that health is the very root of all endeavour in the four fields of human *achievement*--*Dharma, Artha, Kaama* and *Moksha* (righteousness, wealth, desire and liberation). Without health man cannot brave temptations, earn a decent living, fulfil his basic needs or succeed in spiritual *saadhana*. Man can engage himself in obligatory and optional functions only if he is healthy.

Food and recreational habits are the two main causes for ill-health. Great care has to be bestowed to ensure that injurious tendencies do not affect these two. At present, though drugs have multiplied and hospitals have been established in every nook and corner, ill-health is also widespread. This situation is attributable to the spread of deleterious food habits and pastimes.

Physical and mental activities are closely interrelated

It is also necessary to keep the environment of the place where one works and lives, unpolluted by smoke, dust or dirt. The clothes that one wears as well as the body that one is encased in, both have to be purged and kept clean. Health endows a person with joy and brightness. The fruits of the tree of human life are sweet, but they are encased in the bitter skin of egoism and ignorance and have hard inedible seeds of desire, anger, pride, etc. One has to exercise one's intelligence to peel off the outer skin of ignorance, throw off the seeds of vice and wickedness and partake of the sweet kernel of life.

To remove the evil of egoism, service is the most efficient instrument. Service will also impress on the person doing service, the Unity of all mankind. He who dedicates his time, skill and strength to service, can never meet defeat, distress or disappointment, for service is its own reward. His word will be ever sweet and soft, his gestures ever revered and humble. He will have no foe, no fatigue, no fear.

The units of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation are engaged in enthusiastic service in the two areas of Health and Education. To improve and maintain the health of the people, continuous education on the principles and practice of hygiene and environmental cleanliness is essential. Education is the most effective safeguard against physical and mental ill-health. So these two activities are closely inter-related. The body is a temporary habitation; it is subject to all kinds of disease and injury. Yet the body is the boat on which alone we can cross the ocean of *samsara* (birth and death cycle). The boat has to be kept trim and serviceable. It should not distract our attention more than the minimum necessary for its upkeep. It has to be used for reducing the burden of others, and should not itself become a burden on us. It should serve others, not demand service from them. That is the reason why this hospital is being established here to remedy disease and help people to keep their bodies in good condition.

Most hospitals indulge in profiteering

People of this village and villages that are in the surrounding area, will resort to this hospital for medical relief and advice. Unfortunately hospitals that treat patients with love and care, with dedication and devotion, are a rarity. There are hospitals with costly equipments and expert doctors, huge buildings and spick-and-span interiors, but they indulge more in profiteering than affording relief. Their services are for those who can pay large sums of money. Villagers are not welcome there, who in turn do not feel at ease to approach them. Therefore this hospital is being

started amidst the villages so that expert advice and treatment can be rendered, to them in a loving atmosphere of reverence and devotion. No charge will be levied here for any service. The villagers and others can come here, regain their health, and return hale and hearty in order to carry out their tasks and fulfil their responsibilities.

The doctors and volunteers who help in these hospitals must feel it a part of their duty to advise the villagers about environmental hygiene and preventive measures. The members of the Sathya Sai Seva Dhal have a special duty for this type of service. They have to visit the villages, and after winning the confidence and love of the people, advise them on good food habits and other means of maintaining health. They must also exhort them to resort to this hospital as soon as the first symptoms of ill-health are evident. Early treatment will save the villagers from spending many days in bed away from the fields.

Educate the villagers on the value of nutrient foods

The villager now lives on food that is deficient in vitamins and proteins, though he is growing vegetables and food that provide these ingredients in plenty and selling them to city-dwellers. He has to be told of the value of fruits and vegetables as a source of nutrients that will promote and preserve his health, for healthy parents mean healthy children, and sick parents pass on their ill-health to the coming generations. Members of the units of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation can also join the Seva Dhal in this campaign of educating the villagers. This activity is as meritorious as worship itself.

Today is the Vighneshwara festival, the day on which the entire country is worshipping the elephant-headed God who helps man overcome all obstacles. Worshipping *Vinaayaka* or Vighneshwara or Ganapathi, as he is also called, endows man with the courage and confidence needed to enter upon and carry through any undertaking in the world. The elephant is the largest animal of the forest. It is very intelligent and has a powerful memory. When it marches through the thick jungle, it clears a path for all other animals to pass. The elephant-headed God confers intelligence and memory and the power to subdue evil and vice. Thus he is also a path-maker. So it is only appropriate that every rite, ceremony or project should be started with the worship of this God. Today we are inaugurating this hospital so that it will provide good and lasting service to the people of this region.

Doctors sweet words are more effective than drugs

I must also point out to the doctors serving here that perhaps even more than the drugs they prescribe, the sweet, soft words they speak and the love and sympathy they evince can cure better and quicker the illness of their patients. Look upon them as your own kith and kin, as your special guests and as your closest friends; and attend to them lovingly and with unflinching care. I call upon you to maintain this attitude in every situation. Remember that the patient has to cooperate with you in order that you may effect the cure, and when cured, the patient confers on you satisfaction, joy and a sense of elation. Be grateful to the patient for all this.

We have in this hospital as doctor, a lady devotee who is highly qualified and who has done signal service for the backward regions in Nigeria and Ethiopia in Africa. We have also others, equally able and enthusiastic. Experts in special branches of medicine and surgery will also be visiting this hospital off and on, and diagnosing, advising and helping patients who need their attention. It is now for you to make the best use of these facilities offered free and with fullness of heart.

I am glad that the members of the Panchaayath of this place as well as of near-by villages are here today and have been with us ever since this project was started. If only they help the patients from the villages to be happy and healthy they will have no more need to beg for votes from door to door when the elections come round. The voters would themselves come in large numbers to get them elected in order to avail of their services in greater measure. India was long famous for the sense of compassion that animated her peoples. She is now dishonoured by some as a 'poor' country. No! She was for centuries the preceptor of the world, and she is assuming that status again today. India is the land where the Ideals of service, renunciation and spiritual endeavour were born and have flourished.

It is only recently, after India fell under the impact of alien cultures which highlighted material comfort, physical luxury, sensual liberty and exterior display, that Indians have trodden the wrong path of exploitation and violence, idleness and pompousness. With the spread of alien cultures and alien ways of thought and life, diseases too have multiplied and mental imbalances have increased. But when simplicity, humility and the idea of social service (having root in the worship of the God in man) are restored, the nation will again be happy and healthy, full of peace, prosperity and Joy.

Sri Sathya Sai Hospital for Women and Children,

Whitefield, 28-8-1976