

### 13. Make adoption meaningful to villagers

HOWEVER carefully a man may live, he is prone to commit five types of dhoshas (offences) unwittingly. The first of these relates to the use of words. The second relates to actions like sweeping and cleaning. The third relates to walking. The fourth relates to the use of fire for different purposes. The fifth concerns the use of water. The words one uses may cause pain to others, or harm them in one way or another.

Moreover, in the act of speaking many germs may get killed. Their death affects us even if we are not aware of it. When we sweep or clean the house, countless ants or other insects may be destroyed. Likewise, when we are walking, many tiny creatures may get crushed under the feet without our knowing it. When fire is lit for one purpose or another, some living objects may get burnt. When water is used for washing or other purposes, several microbes and other organisms may be killed. These five types of offences, though they may be committed unconsciously, have their effects on a man's life and may cause suffering and sorrow. How is one to avert the consequences of such offences? The *Vedhaantha* (concluding essence of ancient revealed scriptures, the *Vedhas*) has laid down five kinds of *Yajnas* (sacrificial acts) to expiate for such offences. These are: *Dheva Yajna*, *Pithru Yajna*, *Dhaiva Yajna*, *Bhuutha Yajna* and *Athithi Yajna*. These five kinds of *Yajnas* help to mitigate the consequences of the five types of *dhoshas* (offences).

#### The Yajnas to propitiate the Divine and the parents

*Dheva Yajna* (propitiating the Divine) comprises various forms of worship to atone for offences committed by speech. They are *Shravanam* (listening to things divine), *keerthanam* (singing the praise of God), *Vishnusmaranam* (contemplation on God), *mananam* (reciting the divine names), *vandhanam* (prostration), *dhaasyam* (service) and *aathmanivedhanam* (self-surrender). The *bhajans* (devotional songs) you do and the *nagarsankeerthan* (street singing of spirituals) done by devotees, can be regarded as a form of *Dheva yajna*.

*Pithru yajna* is the service which one does to one's parents by way of gratitude for the gift of life and upbringing received from them. To please the parents by one's actions, to look after them in their old age and to protect them in every way possible---all these constitute *Pithru yajna*. Such acts serve to atone for some types of misdeeds. When the *Upanishaths* laid down that the mother and the father should be revered as God, they revealed the spiritual value of respect for parents.

*Dhaiva yajna* comprises such acts as study of the *Vedhas* (revealed ancient scriptures), reading sacred books like the *Geetha*, the *Upanishaths* and the epics. This has an expiatory effect for some kinds of unconscious offences.

#### Means to propitiate lesser beings in creation

*Bhuutha yajna* includes various kinds of actions done for the protection and welfare of animals, insects and other living objects. In ancient days various duties were prescribed for people to regulate their lives on right lines. For instance, on festive occasions, the place in front of every house was strewn artistically with rice flour, which was a kind of offering to birds, ants and other insects. By this means the lesser beings in creation were propitiated. Unfortunately, this ennobling custom has either gone out of vogue or is surviving as a meaningless ritual by the use of a white powder instead of rice flour.

In the old days people used to take rice flour or sugar and scatter it over anthills or other places for consumption by insects. What was once a sacred obligation to other living things in creation is now treated as a superstition. It is not realised that by this type of *Bhootha yajna* considerable merit was earned and many evil consequences of one's actions were averted.

The fifth *Yajna* is *Athithi yajna* (the service rendered to guests). To satisfy a person who comes to your house by offering him food according to your means, or at least offering him buttermilk or water, is a sacred duty. It is an important form of *saadhana* for the spiritual aspirant.

In rendering *seva* (selfless service), members of the Sai Seva Dhal should not think that their services should be confined to the poor and the destitute. There is no need to make any artificial distinction between the rich and the poor in the sphere of service. What matters is the service done to a person that needs it. There may be servants who attend to the needs of the well-to-do. But when you are out to render service, your concern should only be with what kind of service is required, when and where, and not the status or position of the person concerned. The first requisite is a genuine spirit of love and fellow-feeling. If there is no feeling of kindness and compassion, whatever service that is done becomes an artificial exercise, done for getting publicity or recognition. Sai sevaks (volunteers) do not need name or position. Ostentation in rendering service is totally out of place. It will only inflate the ego. You should render service to the limit of your capacity, neither more nor less.

#### **Power of the Divine reveals itself in numerous ways**

The first quality every member of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation should have is firm faith in God. This faith must be based on the awareness that God is Omnipresent. The Divine pervades everything in the Universe. This may not be understood by everyone. Some may not agree that the Divine is Omnipresent. But whether they accept this fact or not, the truth is, evidence of the presence of God can be found wherever one turns.

Is it possible for this boundless creation to be brought into existence by man, if there had been no Divine Principle behind it? For instance, fire is latent in the branches of a tree and in the tree itself. If the branches rub against each other, they may generate a fire which could burn down the tree, branches and all. Which is the power that filled the branches with the latent fire and ensured at the same time that they did not destroy themselves by releasing that fire? Is man responsible for this? Take, again, the example of the process by which the food that we take is converted into blood. Is this the invention of any man?

It is the immanent, all-pervasive power of the Divine that reveals Itself in numerous ways. We see flowers of all kinds. Men are able to make plastic flowers of the same kind. But can any one fill the plastic flowers with the native fragrance that is got from natural flowers? This is possible only by the Divine. There is sweet water inside a tender coconut. Who poured the water inside the coconut? Was it the work of any man? No. Only the Divine can do such a thing.

#### **Serve to meet the essential needs of villagers**

Examples such as these should serve to confirm your faith in the Divine. No one can probe the mystery of the power of the Divine or grasp its infinite magnitude. If members of the Sathya Sai Organisation have no faith in the Divine, there is no purpose in their remaining in the organisation. Such persons need not join the organisation or continue in it. It is with faith that one should take up social service. Society is our primary concern. The Divine is manifest in society.

Venugopal (President of the Andhra Pradesh Sai Samithi) stated that the State Samithi had adopted two hundred villages. He gave a list of the names of these villages. But is the mere selection of villages for adoption enough? ' Will one's hunger be appeased if only the leaf is spread out before him for serving food? The hunger will be appeased only if food is served and it is consumed. You go to an adopted village, conduct *Nagara-sankeerthan* (public devotional singing in streets) and undertake renovation of a dilapidated temple. Can these activities fulfil the purposes of adopting the village? They all merely symbolise preparations for serving food. They only whet the appetite of the villagers. What you must do is to find out what are the essential needs of the villagers. Do they suffer from poor water supply? You may feel that you need money for digging a well. But if all Seva Dhal members work whole-heartedly, two wells can be dug in a single day. You must render service out of spontaneous urge from within, with a heart filled with love.

### ***Seva* must be a spiritual experience**

How is service, in fact, done at present? There are doubtless persons who undertake service with love. But for whose sake are they doing it? It is for their own sake, not for the sake of others. It may not be done to achieve name or to gain something. It is done for the pleasure derived from it. To engage in service activities with pleasure and to regard a day devoted to service as a good holiday is not enough. The pleasure derived from service must be a spiritual experience. Service must be regarded as a *yajna* (a ritual sacrificial act) to atone for one or other type of lapses one may have committed.

To utilise one's wealth, one's talents and resources for the service of the people and help to all living things must be regarded as an offering to, and a form of worship, of the Divine. Only then can *Seva* (selfless service) become true service. Putting in one's appearance once a week or month in the name of service should not be thought as sufficient. Each Seva Dhal member should ask himself whether he is rendering real service to the maximum extent of his capacity.

Today you have all come to this conference as delegates wearing the Seva Dhal delegates badges. You must ask yourselves whether you are really qualified to wear this badge. Each one must ask himself: Have I done genuine service? Or have I joined one group only in the expectation of getting the chance to approach Swaami? Examine yourself with a pure mind.

You all know how large is Aandhra Pradesh in area. If the number of delegates is so small, you yourself can decide whether this is not a matter for shame. The greatest loss the country has suffered in recent years is the loss of a sense of decency and self-respect. For instance, if the clothes we wear become soiled we feel ashamed to be seen in them by our friends. We try to dress well before we go out, because we want to be respected. Likewise, we try to keep our dwellings dean because we do not want to feel ashamed when visitors see the dirty state of the house.

### **Motives of actions must be pure and unselfish**

While we feel so concerned about, the state of our house or clothes, the heart in which the Divine resides is utterly polluted. It is filled with unclean thoughts and impure fancies. How many go about the world with such impurities in their minds without a sense of shame. If they make an honest examination of the impure state of their minds and the kind of double life they are leading, they will be able to get rid of their bad thoughts in a moment. What they are doing is to conceal their thoughts, but are externally well-dressed and move about as impeccable persons.

Of what use is such conduct? We attach importance to the external appearance of the body and value the respect shown to it. But one who cares only for the body-and ignores the state of his mind is only a two-legged animal.

It is not enough to appear to do fight actions. Your motives and impulses must also be pure and unselfish. It is only when your motives are pure that the Divine will extend His grace. Whatever service you render, it must be unsullied. The motive is all important. The form of the action does not matter. Without pure impulses, actions get tainted at the source. If you are a good man, your actions will necessarily be good.

### **Sai Sevaks should promote a co-operative attitude**

There is a Thelugu proverb which says: "If the whole village unites, the entire farm can be harvested." With unity any work can be accomplished. You must strive to promote unity. You must fraternise with the villagers and demonstrate your awareness of the Divine that is present in everybody. You should not get entangled in local politics. Political differences have entered the villages and mined community life in the rural areas. You should tell the villagers: "Every individual can have his own political views. But these should not affect the welfare of the village as a whole."

In matters concerning the progress and wellbeing of the village, all the villagers should act as one regardless of party differences. You may support any party of your choice. But this should not affect your attitude to matters concerning the development of the village. All of you should act unitedly. Sai Sevaks (volunteers) should promote such a cooperative attitude.

Insanitary conditions account for most diseases in rural areas. You have to provide sanitary facilities for the villagers such as dust bins, drains, latrines, etc. In all such work, the involvement of the villagers should be ensured so that they learn to develop self-reliance. You must try to wean the addicts from the drink evil, which has ruined many homes. Provision of roads, wells, lights and the like should be undertaken wherever they are required. The service you do must meet the needs of the villagers and give satisfaction to them.

### **A malady that is noticed in the organisation**

Adoption of a village can become meaningful only when you give love to them and earn the love of the villagers. Nothing should be done in a spirit of condescension. I know there are many good workers in the Seva Dhal. Not in Aandhra Pradesh alone, but in all the States. There is however, a malady that is noticed in the organisation. If the leaders behave well, the workers can render excellent service. The primary requisite is to see that the right persons are chosen as leaders. They must be dynamic persons. They must be filled with the spirit of service to society and dedication. They must feel that they owe everything to society and that their life can be worth while only when they have discharged their obligations to society. They must consider social service as their primary aim in life. It is only when they devote all their physical, mental and other resources to the service of the community that they will be doing real *saadhana*.

*Saadhana* (spiritual effort) does not mean performing *japa* in a lonely place. There is no greater *saadhana* than service to one's fellowmen done in an unselfish spirit. Ignoring the sufferings of others, if you occupy yourself in meditation or other devotional activity, it has no spiritual value at all. It is only one form of selfishness. Through genuine selfless service, not only can peace of mind be achieved, but progress can be made in self realisation and the ultimate goal of life can be attained.

As members of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, you have to be an example to others. In whatever service you do, it is the quality that counts, not the quantity. No act of service should be considered trivial or debasing. Nor should there be unhealthy rivalry in rendering service. If one State has "adopted" two hundred villages, another should not think it should adopt an equal number or more to produce a better impression. Mere numerical claims have no meaning. It is better to render proper service in two villages than nominal service in two hundred. It is not the presentation of lists of adopted villages that matters.

### **Be your own judges of the service you render**

What is the real work that has been done in the two hundred adopted villages? Let those who have worked in these villages speak up. For whose satisfaction are you claiming to serve the villagers? You must be your own judges of the work you are doing. Consult your conscience and see whether you are rendering proper service. I do not want anything to be done for Swaami's sake. My only object is promotion or the welfare of mankind. When you render service in the villages, you are redeeming your lives.

The sages of yore acquired various kinds of powers by their penance. They were able by these powers to fulfil whatever they promised. They used their powers with restraint. There is nothing wrong in acquiring even titanic strength. But it should be used in a humane way. It should not be wielded to oppress others. Shakespeare, the famous English dramatist, observed: "It is glorious to have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant." Everyone must heed this warning.

There are all kinds of organisations in the world today, including spiritual organisations and service organisations. What are these organisations doing? How useful are they to the people? There is no proper answer. What use is there in having such organisations? ' If the Sai organisations also function in this manner, what purpose is served by starting them? You must all be filled with the zeal to render service at any time, at any place, when the need is there. You must try to attract young people to the service organisation.

### **If you misuse the present, the future will be worse**

With more young people in the Seva Dhal, you can carry out many welfare activities in the years to come. The present is a product of the past, but it is also the seed for the future. If you make good use of the present, you can ensure a better future. If you misuse the present, the future will be worse. Hence, all those who are in the Sai Seva Organisation should engage themselves in worthwhile activities and achieve fulfilment in the service they render.

Every village today is exposed to many diseases. We need not blame any one for this situation. We must be concerned only about the resources in men and materials at our disposal and use them with devotion for carrying out our welfare services. We have to do this work with faith. People display devotion and earnestness in the presence of Swaami, but act in a contrary fashion when they are away from Swaami. This is not a sign of true *Bhakthi*. *Bhakthi* (devotion) means wholehearted love for Bhagavan. Such love can tame even wild animals. It is only when your hearts are filled with such love that you can claim to be Bhakthas (devotees). You must show that love to anyone whom you see or talk to and in every one of your actions.

### **The grace of God is like insurance**

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 of win the grace of God, the benefit from 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.

*"Shivam," Hyderabad, 20 May 1984*