

15. Sadhana and Seva

YOU have worked very hard in your life discharging worldly duties and come to Prashaanthi Nilayam, seeking rest for the body and peace for the mind. That being so, it might look strange if you were asked to undertake some kind of work here also.

In the olden days the Guru would collect his disciples in the forest and give them different types of work, sometimes for 10 to 12 years. This was done with a purpose. One important object of work is purification of the *Chitha* (heart). Once the heart is purified one is ready to receive the teachings of the *Guru*. Therefore, in the olden days the disciples were given work in the beginning, and after the disciples were purified by doing work, and the teacher was satisfied regarding the student's ripeness for receiving spiritual instruction, the teacher would start teaching *Brahma Vidya*.

The five *Yajnas* to remove sins

Besides this, there are other reasons why one should undertake work. Every family man is engaged in a number of activities in the course of which a number of small creatures and insects may be destroyed. In these and other ways, sins may be committed, knowingly or unknowingly. For removing such sins, the Sastras have prescribed five types of *Yajnas*' *Brahma Yajna*, *Deva Yajna*, *Pithru Yajna*, *Manushya Yajna* and *Bhuta Yajna*.

Brahma Yajna includes the study of sacred books and scriptures. *Deva Yajna* includes offering worship, *Bhajans*, *Upaasana* etc. *Pithru Yajna* refers to ceremonies to departed parents. The fourth one, *Manushya Yajna*, refers to extending hospitality to guests, 'invited and uninvited. *Bhuta Yajna* refers to offering food to animals, birds and insects, etc, and looking after wild animals. By engaging in acts of service and fulfilling the requirements of these *Yajnas*, we will be atoning for sins of various kinds that might have been committed.

Service activities undertaken in other places, such as construction of roads in villages, or in the construction of temples or feeding the people, help to serve only that village or town; but by undertaking service activity in Prashaanthi Nilayam one would have an opportunity to serve God directly. Any work done here is an offering to Swami Himself. Work has to be taken up in this spirit. One should not be idle. Whatever work is done here, should be done out of a feeling of love. You can take up whatever work is appropriate, in keeping with your aptitudes and capacity. While doing such sacred work, residents can carry on their own *Sadhana*, whether it be *Sravanam*, *Kirtanam*, *Vishnusmaranam*, *Paadasevanam*, *Archanam*, *Vandanam*, *Daasyam*, *Sakhyam* or *Atmanivedanam*.

Obstacles should be taken as tests

Sometimes people say that many obstacles occur during *Sadhana*. When obstacles come they should be taken as tests. Tests are intended not as punishment, but they are given for ascertaining one's fitness for promotion. Frequent tests mean frequent opportunities for promotion. If there is a big time-lag between test, it only means that promotion is not possible for a long time. The obstacles in *Sadhana* should be taken in this spirit, and you should try to overcome them.

While practising *Sadhana* one has to follow the rules laid down in the scriptures or follow the command of the Guru or that of God. While following these rules or commands, one should not worry whatever obstacles come. One should continue with one's prescribed *Sadhana* and achieve success, even at the cost of one's life. Some people say that they are following Swami's

commands, but they are getting so many obstacles in their Sadhana. This is not the correct attitude. In fact, if one follows Swami's instructions carefully and correctly, no obstacles will come. If obstacles come it means one has not followed the commands correctly. Before undertaking Sadhana there are certain things which one should know.

Sadhana refers to an activity undertaken for achieving one's goal or purpose in life. The *Sadhana* has to decide what he wants to achieve, what his purpose is. Then *Sadhana* has to be carried on until one achieves that goal. If one undertakes *Sadhana* without knowing these aspects one will falter, face obstacles and problems. Then one may lose faith in the Guru, which could result in a total fall and destruction of oneself. So, one must be very careful in doing *Sadhana*.

Six steps in spiritual efforts

In *Saadhana* there are six steps; *Sama*, *Dama*, *Titiksha*, *Uparathi*, *Shraddha* and *Samadhan*. *Sama*, *Dama* and *Uparathi* have to do with various aspects of mind and sense control. *Titiksha* refers to having equal-mindedness in gain or loss, in pain or pleasure, and in praise or censure. *Shraddha* is very essential in spiritual life. Only the one who has *Shraddha* {faith}, will get illumination and wisdom. So whatever work is undertaken, one should do it with interest and faith. *Samadhana* refers to contentment. He who has the least desires is the richest man in the world. He who is filled with desires is the poorest man in the world. Therefore, one should have contentment and self-satisfaction. Self-satisfaction comes from self-confidence. Self-satisfaction can lead one to self-sacrifice and through it to Self-realization.

These three are important for man: Knowledge, Skill and Balance. If one approaches knowledge with skill, one will get balance. Balance is very important. It means equipoise in praise or censure. For balance, skill is necessary. For skill, knowledge is necessary. If you lose balance, suffering will soon follow.

Winning the *Guru's* grace

When you are given some work, you should put your heart and soul into it, and do the work with the utmost sincerity and dedication, to the limit of your capacity. Take for example a person who is entrusted with planting trees and developing a garden. If he does the work wholeheartedly the plants will come up well, and the garden will grow into a thing of beauty. When Swami comes to see that garden and feels happy with the condition of the plants, then Swami's joy becomes the Grace He bestows on that person; and that Grace will confer great happiness on that individual. Here is an example of this:

Sri Sankaracharya had a number of, disciples, of whom 13 were considered important. Of these, four were the closest to the Master. They were Hasthimalika, Thotaka, Suresha and Padmapada. The first three chose to study the scriptures under their Guru, but the last one said that he would be most happy just serving the Guru. Sankara asked him what service he wanted to perform. The disciple replied that he wanted to wash the Guru's clothes and have them ready for the Guru each day. The other three would ridicule him for choosing only service to the Guru, while they were learning the great scriptures, but the fourth disciple was not at all bothered by that. Every day he used to take the Guru's clothes to the middle of the river so that they could be washed in the purest water available. One day there was a flood and he was caught in the middle of the river. He was not worried about losing his life, but he was greatly concerned about getting the clothes to the *Guru*, in time. He began rushing across the river, which was now in spate. Wherever he placed his foot a stone lotus sprang up. Thus he got the name of Padmapada. When he brought

the clothes to the *Guru*, the *guru* was so pleased with the disciple's devotion that he showered his Grace on him, and immediately Padmapada became a great scholar. This is the greatness of service to the Guru and the Grace it can evoke from him.

Always use polite language

If you can earn Swami's Grace then everything will be added unto you and you will be happy here and hereafter. Whatever work is being done by you, do it with utmost sincerity. Always use polite language and speak sweetly. During Swami's 60th Birthday Celebrations, lakhs of devotees will come here. They should be treated as guests. Show them all possible courtesy and consideration. Do not hurt their feelings. They have not come here for your sake, but for the sake of Swami, in the same way as you came here for the sake of Swami originally.

If you are in charge of accommodation and someone wants room, but none is available, then you should politely tell him so. He may repeat the request but you should not shout back at him. You should politely tell him that there is no accommodation.

There are four stages in the journey to God: *Saalokya*, *Saamipya*, *Saarupya* and *Saayujya*. Now you have entered the first stage of *Saalokya* which is coming into the Divine Presence. You should progress forward to *Saamipya*, which means coming nearer; then move on to *Saarupya* where you shine with the very form and splendour of Dignity. Finally you enter the stage of *Saayujya* complete merger, where the bubble bursts and finds itself to be the Sea. Service will give you the opportunity to progress along these steps and come nearer to Swami!

Discourse on 7-7-1985 to residents in

Prashaanthi Nilayam who have sealed down in the Ashram.

If you have to be told in a manner that you can understand, one can say "Do unto others as you want them to do unto you"--that is Dharma. Dharma consists in avoiding actions which would hurt others. If anyone causes happiness to you, then you in turn should do such things that would cause happiness to others. When we recognise that what others do will cause difficulties and if we do the same things, that would be Adharma.

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