

31. The Spirit Of Service

Social service does not mean merely going out into the streets and cleaning them. Whatever work you are engaged in, whatever duties you have to perform as an official or an employee, to do your duties efficiently and with diligence and devotion is also *Seva* (social service). Those in authority who discharge their functions well enough to justify the salary they receive are rendering real service. But such persons are rare. Employees agitate for more wages but do not render commensurate service to justify the incomes they receive.

Disinterested service will ennoble man and raise his stature. It endows man with the intelligence and the skills required to refine human nature. Doing one's duty diligently is not enough. Men have to cultivate other qualities like love, sympathy, fairness, compassion and forgiveness. Only when one has these qualities will he be able to render dedicated service.

It is the sense of dualism---of "mine" and "thine"--which accounts for all the joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes experienced by man. This dualism is rooted in selfishness, which makes one think that as long as he is all right, it does not matter what happens to the world. Such a self-centred person, who regards his body, his wealth and his family as all that matter to him, looks upon truth as untruth and the false as true. To get rid of this deep-seated malaise, men 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.

Service is an expression of gratitude to society

Service should not be done in a spirit of condescension or to achieve some ulterior selfish objective. Not recognising the sacredness and purifying power of service, people hesitate to embark on social service. It should not be imagined that one is promoting the well-being of the nation by one's service. One should realise that he is bettering himself by rendering service.

Service should proceed from an awareness of what one owes to society. One's name and fame, all the comforts one enjoys, are derived from society. One finds fulfilment in society. That being the case, if one does not serve society, whom else can he serve? Sheer gratitude demands that one should serve society which is the source of all benefits enjoyed by man. Men without gratitude are worse than wild animals.

What are required for service are not money and 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 of man, people are ceasing to be human.

The money obsession

Men 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 mankind. Although money is needed for certain purposes, it is not the main source of security and happiness for man. Men should learn to lead good lives with modest incomes. Ostentation and pride are the enemies of spiritual progress.

Thyaga (the spirit of 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* (spiritual communion). This is the message of Bharathiya culture. As this is not being properly

conveyed to the people, they tend to go astray and take to wrong paths. They do not realise that to whomsoever they may be doing service, they are indeed serving the Divine in various human forms. Those who serve have to cherish this sublime and sacred feeling. They must strive to see God in everyone.

Embodiments of the Divine Spirit! You must realise that your service activities are done for the sake of your own spiritual purification and uplift and have nothing to do with Swami. All actions should be done with a view to purifying the mind and removing all the dross from it. This is Swami's teaching. It is wrong to think that through actions alone you can attain liberation or redeem your lives. Actions have to be done only for the purification of the *Chitta* (Will). Without purity of Will, life cannot be spiritualised. Human birth is the result of *Karma* (action). Right action leads to *Dharma* (Righteousness). Through *Dharma* the Divine has to be realised. Birth, Action, Righteousness, Brahman are interrelated in this manner.

Duties and service

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 fight lines, he is rendering real national service. Likewise, if a merchant conducts his business on the basis of earning not more than what is needed to meet his reasonable needs, he will be rendering public service. When this attitude prevails there is no need to claim that one is engaged in service. He should be content to abide by the dictates of his conscience.

Set an example to service organisations

What will please Swami is the proper performance of one's duties. This constitutes *Seva* (dedicated service). 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.

The Sai Seva Organisations have to set an example to the service organisations all over the world. There is no place in them for differences in caste, creed or community. Character is greater than caste. All your activities should be based on love and sacrifice. "Speak the Truth, Act Righteously." These Upanishadic injunctions sustained Bharath's way of life for centuries.

When people live up to them with sincerity and zeal, Bharath will once again stand out as an example to the world.

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India is the land where the dichotomy of 'that' and 'this,' of 'creator' and 'creation,' of 'energy' and 'matter,' was resolved in one great unity, by both theory and practice, in philosophical schools and in hermitages. The Tree of Life with its countless branches proliferating into thoughts, words and deeds, attitudes, tendencies and impulses, is known by great sages in India to have its roots in heaven! So, every rule and ritual was made sacred and holy, suffused with purity, humility and love.

Sathya Sai Baba