

The Question and Answer Session in Atlanta

April 25, 2009

SAI FOR EVERYONE

OK, the first big question comes from the Youth Association. Where is the Sai movement going? Where will it take us next?

Anil Kumar: Do you want a quick answer? OK, good—a rapid question/answer session. The Sai movement is going to take us to the international, global level. The Sai Organisation has spread all over the world now and our business is to take the Sai movement to everyone's doorstep. Sai for everyone! (*Applause*)

SWAMI PROMPTS US AT EVERY STEP

Wonderful! Next question: how do I know if I am hearing my inner voice or simply my mind?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: Sai Ram. I had the same doubt in the beginning. After some time, we are able to know the difference between the mind's voice and the inner voice, which is Swami's voice. If you do some *sadhana*, you will come to know that. In the beginning, you will get your answers through a book, for example, or a person or an object.

The first time I came to Milwaukee, the people at the Sai Centre there asked me to speak. At that time I hesitated because I thought I wouldn't be able to speak in front of them. Swami showed me something for clarification: that same evening I was reading a book by Joy Thomas and there on the first page was my answer! I was reading how Joy Thomas was giving some lectures and Swami granted her an interview. First Swami stared at her; then He looked at her smilingly and said, "You go on and continue your speeches."

That's how I got my answer and the courage to speak at the Milwaukee centre. That is how you will get answers from Swami, through some book or object, or even sometimes through an animal, or through an individual or group. That is my personal experience.

DIVINE WILL IS CHOICE-LESS

Very nice. Thank you. So, the next question: Please elaborate on the relationship of individual will and Divine will. Is there an individual will or is there only Divine Will?

Anil Kumar: Individual will is what I call 'preferential will'. What do I mean by preference? When you have two things, you say you prefer this rather than that. If I don't get my preference, I adjust to the next option.

"Sir, would you prefer coffee or tea?"

“I prefer coffee.”

“I’m sorry, it’s not available.”

“Ok, I’ll adjust and have tea.”

That is preference. Choice is different.

“Which of the two do you choose?”

“I choose coffee.”

“Sorry, it’s not available.”

“Thank you, don’t disturb me,” I say.

Choice means only one. Preference is one or the other. Human will is preferential. Divine Will is choice-less awareness. Please understand: Divine Will is choice-less awareness, while human will is preferential.

The second point is that human will is just human effort. Divine Will is pre-ordained and predestined. If human will is in accordance with Divine Will, life will be so happy and harmonious. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” *Thy* Will be done on earth, not *my* will be done on earth. No, no, no. *Thy* Will be done. That’s what is called ‘surrender’.

PRAYER FROM THE HEART IS THE TRUE SLOKA

Wonderful, thank you. OK, the next question. How are bhajans, Vedas, and slokas important for Sai activities?

Anil Kumar: *Slokas* are not that important. *Slokas* may be recited, but one may remain in *shoka*. *Shoka* means ‘misery, crying’. Therefore, my friends, *slokas* are not that important.

I don’t know Sanskrit, so what am I to do now? Shall I cry? You know Sanskrit; well, do you mean to say that you don’t cry? So *slokas* are not that important. The prayer that comes from the heart is the real *sloka*. The verses go on changing. Language is not that important, I tell you.

Living in a country like America, let’s not insist on *slokas*. If you are interested, go ahead and do it; but let’s not make it a general, common thing.

Prayer from the heart is the most important. The Lord’s Prayer, a *bhajan*, an English song—let’s make it universal and cosmopolitan, not sectarian. That’s how I feel about this subject.

GOD IS THE ETERNAL WITNESS

Are we responsible for our own fate or destiny and thoughts? Or is it God who controls all our thoughts, words, and deeds?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: God is the witness. We have to undergo our *karma*. Whatever bad actions we have done, we must endure the results. We cannot escape from that. But we can escape

through *sadhana*. We have ninety per cent *karma*, but Swami can waive forty-five per cent. So just like that, we can get a waiver from *karma*.

Anil Kumar: Good, she has given me the clue, so I shall continue! (*Laughter*)

Friends, we are responsible for our own destiny. Destiny is not designed by God. Here is a simple example—these are all examples from Swami’s discourses. I receive a wedding invitation card from the postman. The next day the postman gives me another letter, this one threatening my life.

When I receive the wedding invitation, I don’t hug the postman. When I receive the threatening letter, I don’t kill the postman. Both the wedding invitation and the threatening letter concern only the one who wrote them and the one who received them. The postman has nothing to do with it. His only business is to deliver the letter. So, one is the action, while the other is the reaction. God is the witness. He has nothing to do with the contents of the letter at all. Am I clear?

The second thing is this: *karma* or destiny is very hard to escape from. It is very painful but:

Sai Nama Hi Madhuram
Sai Roop Hi Madhuram
Madhuram Sai Madhuram
Sai Sarvam Madhuram

By singing His name, we will be able to cross the sea of suffering; we will be able to bear the suffering. You cannot escape suffering.

Suppose I receive ten *lakh rupees* or one hundred thousand dollars. I must pay income tax. I cannot say, “I’m sorry,” and not pay, or else I will be put behind bars. You cannot escape from paying tax, but there is tax exemption. If you pay some life insurance, you will get a certain amount of exemption from your tax. If you give some money to charity, an amount will be deducted. Some amount will also be deducted for cars and maintenance.

Similarly, out of one hundred per cent of *karma*, if you participate in *bhajans*, then there’s twenty-five per cent exemption. (*Laughter*) And if you participate in *Narayana seva*, there’s another twenty-five per cent exemption. If you participate in service activities . . . another twenty-five per cent. So you have to pay only twenty-five per cent out of one hundred per cent! Therefore, our *sadhana* will give us tax exemption, if not tax evasion. This is the law of *karma*. (*Laughter and applause*)

SELF EFFORT AND GOD’S GRACE LEAD TO LIBERATION

Thank you. Sir, you have been teaching for over thirty years. You have asked your students thousands of questions. Speaking of karma, because of your good karmic account, we are now asking you all these questions!

Anil Kumar: It is my good *karma* to reply to you! (*Laughter*)

Thank you. The next question is also about karma. In Karma Siddhantha, it is said that we receive karmic balances from our past or previous births, and we carry forward whatever

actions we do in our present birth to our next birth. My question is, why can't we settle all of our accounts and balances in this present birth? Is my question wrong?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: The question is not wrong. Past *karmas* will come as *vasanas*. We may not know what we did in our previous births, but we face the results now. For example, many good people face difficulties at present, including many devotees. Why? They are good people, good devotees, and do a lot of service to society. What is the reason for their difficulties? It is because of *vasanas*, the bad tendencies or bad deeds brought forward from previous births. We don't know what they are; we don't remember *vasanas*. That is how we have to face difficulties when they come along.

Vasanas accompany us continuously. That is how we have to face that bad *karma*. I think this will go on in future births, but if we are with Swami, in proximity to the *Avatar*, I think we may get rid of them to some extent.

Anil Kumar: Most of you must have been students of commerce. Even if you did not graduate in commerce, most of you must be familiar with accounts as income tax payers and employees. As you write accounts, the last entry on one page will be first entry on the next page. Am I right? It is called "brought forward". Therefore last lifetime's results are "brought forward" to this *janma* or life. We can't help it, good or bad, whatever it may be.

But there is one thing: If I am suffering from a severe pain and some form of anaesthetic is given, then I don't feel the pain. The pain is there but I don't feel it because of the anaesthetic. Similarly, because of God's grace—which is an anaesthetic—you don't feel the pain. You don't feel the pain at all. (*Applause*)

So there is pain. The next part is how to get away from it in this life itself. Well, it depends upon our effort now. Here is a simple example—all these examples are from Baba's talks. A river is flowing but there are no rains at present. So what happens? In due course, the river dries up, just as the rivers in Andhra Pradesh or India are now dry.

Suppose a river is already flowing and the rains come; then what happens? The river will flow with much more intensity, full of water. Similarly, when our effort is combined with God's grace, the river of our *karma* will flow much faster. We can come out of the *karmic* effect by working hard with intense devotion, by making God's heart melt through our devotion and hard work. Thus we obtain a waiver from God. If you get ninety per cent, you don't have to study next semester; you can jump a class. Similarly, He will give us a waiver according to our intensity.

Dustara Bhava Sagara Taranam

How is it possible? Simply by submitting:

Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam
Dustara Bhava Sagara Taranam

Dustara: very difficult, impossible, strenuous, tedious. *Bhava sagara taranam*: to cross this ocean of life is very difficult or impossible. But it is possible by *Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam*,

by contemplation on God. By contemplation on the Feet of God, you can cross across this ocean of *samsara*. That is how to get free of the *karmic* effect. OK? *Sai Ram*. (Applause)

Mrs. Anil Kumar: We must not make our lives miserable because of deeds from previous births. We should have a positive attitude and we should lead our lives contemplating on God, doing service, singing *bhajans*, and so on. We should not make our lives miserable by thinking of the past. We should live in the present.

RESPECT THE HIGHER SELF IN EVERYONE

Thank you very much. Most important point are the wonderful examples that you are providing for each of these concepts. These examples register very well in our hearts and minds. We request another example for this question: What is the borderline between ego and self-respect? What are the limits when it comes to tolerating humiliation from others?

Anil Kumar: Okay, ego and self-respect? Ego is negative, while self-respect is positive. Ego is to be condemned, while self-respect is to be appreciated. Ego is to be eliminated, and self-respect cultivated. It is ego that feels humiliated. A man with self-respect receives honour and respect. That is the difference between the two.

What is self-respect? We call it 'self-respect' referring to the body. It is not the body. If I say, "I have self-respect because I have a first-class pass from the university and a PhD", that is respect for the mind.

Some people say, "I know what self-respect is: I know what is right and what is wrong." That is just intellectual respect. So it does not mean physical, intellectual, or psychological respect.

Respect of the Self refers to the Divinity within you. Respect that same God that is in everyone. That is the Self. Respecting the Self is Self-respect.

On the other hand, the expression of self-respect at the mental, psychological, or physical level is ego. Respect for the inner, intuitive Self is true Self-respect. Am I clear?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: A lion should behave like a lion, not like a goat. A snake should behave like a snake, not like a cow. They should honour and respect their own qualities; otherwise they will get exploited.

SWAMI HAS TRANSFORMED MY LIFE

Thank you. The next question is for you, Mrs. Kumar. How has your close interaction with Swami changed your outlook on life?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: There have been a lot of changes since we first came to Parthi. We have been living there for fifteen years now. Our concept of life and our views have changed. Our views have been broadened. Now we want to do so much service to society.

In the beginning, my interest was limited to my own family. Now I feel as if the whole world belongs to me and I must do some service to society. That is what Swami has told me, and He has given me so many opportunities.

In the space of one year, we performed one hundred and eight mass marriages, one hundred and eight *shashti poorthis*, and also one hundred and eight *sumangali pujas*. We did all this on our own. We bear the expenses and don't ask for anybody's help. Whenever I buy something for my daughters or grand-daughters, I make it a point that I also buy something or do something for society, for the ladies who are very poor.

That's how Swami has broadened my outlook. It is all inspiration from Swami. The inner voice talks to me in this way. I follow it. I am also grateful to my husband because he has allowed me to do all these things. That is one more point. (*Applause*)

Anil Kumar: I am a democrat! (*Laughter*)

EVERYTHING IS FOR OUR OWN GOOD

I have written a letter to Swami about some prospects and left it at His altar at home. I see things happening, but how do I know which prospect I should follow? Confusion always prevails for me.

Anil Kumar: Confusion may always prevail, but when the result comes, there is no more confusion. This dilemma and confusion will continue until the end of the matter.

So, whatever happens in the end will be the Will of Bhagavan. Our duty is to accept it willingly, wilfully, and happily, thinking that it is for our own good. That is the effort we should make. Sai Ram.

ACTION IS DUAL, WHILE SOUL IS NON-DUAL

This next question is from a ten-year-old child. It is as follows: You are not supposed to point your feet at Baba, but since He is everywhere, where can you point your feet? (Laughter)

Mrs. Anil Kumar: You can feel Swami's presence everywhere, but practically you must not point your feet at Him if, for example, you are sitting in front of His picture.

Once the poet Kabir was lying down flat on the ground and his feet were pointing towards a portrait of God. One of his disciples said to him, "Your feet are pointing towards God. Why do you do that?"

Kabir said, "God is everywhere, so where else should I put my feet?"

Even though this is the case, you should not touch Swami's photo with your feet. You should refrain from doing it because this is our tradition. We are brought up this way.

The culture and tradition inherited from our parents is an entirely different matter from non-duality. You can feel non-duality, but you cannot always act accordingly. When you are in society, which is dual, you cannot follow non-dualism.

Anil Kumar: A simple example:

*Sarvatah Pani Padam Tad.
Sarvatokshi Shiro Mukham.
Sarvatah Sruthiman Loke.
Sarvaman Vrithya Thishtathi.*

*All hands are His.
All feet are His.
All ears are His.
All limbs, all senses are His.*

Suppose I say, "There are ten hands in my office." What does it mean? That there are ten disembodied hands there? No! Here "hands" means "men". They all belong to God. That is the ideological aspect. Practically, however, there are differences.

A simple example: we have a leather shoe and a leather belt. Both are made of leather. Can I have the shoe here and the belt there? (*Anil Kumar gestures to put the shoe on his head and the belt on his foot*) No. The belt has its place as does the shoe. Both may be made of leather, but I cannot keep the shoe on my head as a *paduka*! Both are made of leather, yet each has its own place. As Mrs. Kumar pointed out, *kriya* is *dwaitha*: in action is duality. *Bhava* is feeling. *Bhava advaita*: "in feeling, the soul is non-dual."

SAI FOR EVERYONE

That was a really wonderful question from a ten-year-old. The next question: when we have too many thoughts during meditation, is it okay to keep on trying and sitting? Or are we wasting our time when we are not able to focus? Sometimes I hear Baba say that it is useless to sit with closed eyes when your mind is wandering. But I don't know if that message applies to certain individuals or to all.

Mrs. Anil Kumar: I think a ten-year-old boy needs more concentration and more maturity of the mind. Even adults are at different stages; it takes them a lot of time to learn to contemplate and meditate. I don't think that a ten-year-old would be able to learn to detach from himself. It takes a lot of time to master that.

The first stage of meditation is contemplation. You should be a silent observer and then your thoughts will go more slowly. You cannot get rid of the thoughts. The flow of thoughts should be reduced slowly and only then can you reach the state of meditation.

Anil Kumar: What does Baba say about it? Well, at least the boy has a question. Such a question is out of the question for all of us because we silence it, "All right, *chaltha hai*." We are not that bothered. That boy is bothered because in *Bal Vikas* he has been taught what meditation is. Therefore he has posed this question of mind management.

Baba, the compassionate God, the merciful God, knows our weaknesses, pitfalls, drawbacks, and setbacks. What does He say? When you cannot meditate, when thoughts come into the mind like the busy traffic in New York or Chicago, what is to be done? Stop.

Then what is meditation? Baba says meditation is reading, writing, walking, and talking. What does Swami mean by that? That sort of meditation is anything that is totality of action.

While I am walking, I should not think of my office. Let me walk straight ahead and enjoy my walk. See some people jogging in the morning and watch their faces. Are they smiling and enjoying the walk? What is happening?

We see some people fiddling madly with *japamalas*. (*Anil Kumar makes funny hand motions.*) Are they telling us the cricket score or what? (*Laughter*) And we see some people going around Ganesha in a hurried manner. Is this rocket speed or what? (*Laughter*) Ganesha will be terrified by the speed at which you are moving! (*Laughter*)

No, no, no! As you walk, walk totally. As you read, read with complete attention. In eating, writing, talking, and walking, totality is meditation. Let us understand this rather than confusing ourselves.

The final point is, as Mrs. Kumar said, meditation has three steps. The first is concentration, the second is contemplation, and the third is meditation.

What are these three steps? Let's say I want a rose. What should I do? I go to the garden. There in the garden, what do I see? Many, many flowers, but I want only the flower of a rose. I go to the rose bush. What do I do? I don't pull out the whole plant. No. I pluck only the flower, removing the leaves and cutting the thorns. I take only the flower. What do I do next? I smell it.

So, there are the three stages: first, going into the garden and selecting the rose plant; second comes selecting the flower and removing the leaves and thorns. And third, I enjoy the fragrance.

Removing or omitting the other plants that you don't want is contemplation. Cutting the flower and removing the leaves and thorns is contemplation. Enjoying the fragrance is meditation. *Hari Om.* (*Applause*)

SAI ONLY WANTS OUR LOVE

A beautiful example! Wonderful! The next question is probably very important for all of us, as we are embarking on a pilgrimage next year. What does Swami expect from us as His followers?

Anil Kumar: Okay. What does He expect from us? He expects nothing but our love—nothing else. For what is it that He doesn't have? He has everything. You are not going to be able to give Him anything. All that we have is given by Him.

*Ae Hridayambu Nosanginthuvo.
Eesa Naaku Aa Hridayambu Nivvu.*

*Oh God, that heart You have given me, I offer the same heart to You.
That love You have filled me with, I give it back to You.*

Other than love, there's nothing. There's no business transaction between Swami and the devotee. It is only love-to-love, heart-to-heart. Sai Ram.

SWAMI IS OMNIPRESENT

The next question is for Mrs. Kumar. Please narrate and share one of your personal Divine experiences that is beyond human comprehension.

Mrs. Anil Kumar: One day a man from Uzbekistan came to Parthi. He brought two small statues of Swami holding a letter in His hand. He sent one statue to Swami and the other one came to our house. The statue was of Swami as a little child.

So, one of the statues came to our house. We don't have much room in our house, so we packed it up and kept it under the cot. For a few months, it stayed like that. After some time, the paint on that statue started coming off, so we took it out and stood it up. Swami was standing when He came as the statue, then lying down for some time, and after that standing again.

I thought that it was very bad to make Swami stand like that, so I put the statue on a bed just like a small child. From that time onwards, Swami started talking to me in the inner voice as if He was a small child. I was very afraid and told my husband, "Please send this statue away." I tried my best to get this statue sent away. Nobody would take it.

To me this meant that Swami was making His Omnipresence known. He was making me aware of His presence all the time and I couldn't bear it. A person watching over us all the time! I couldn't bear it.

This continued for some time. I was searching for a person who would take this statue of Swami. One day a man from Kavali, a family friend, came to our house. So I thought of sending Swami's statue to somebody.

At last I found somebody and I pleaded with my husband, "Please send this statue away!" Then Swami told me through the inner voice, "Everybody invites Me to their houses, but you want to send Me out of your house!" (*Laughter*) That was a shocking experience for me. At last I found a person who would take the statue away, and I was relieved of the pain.

SURRENDER IS TOTAL UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Thank you. The next questioner wants to know: how can we tell whether something is the destiny that Swami wants for us or whether we are not trying hard enough? How to tell which is which?

Anil Kumar: Destiny is the one thing that is sure to happen. We have to work hard for only one thing—not to change or alter it, not to make it suit our own choice or taste—no! We must work hard to accept our destiny, that is to say His Will. That is what we call surrender. Surrender means total, unconditional acceptance. That is what we have to do.

To accept our destiny, to accept all, is good. Why not? A simple example, one Baba gives: it was Lord Chaithanya who started *Nagarsankeertan*, with a number of followers walking behind him, singing *bhajans*. Other people used to say, "What is this nuisance, so early in the morning? It is disturbing us." (This current gang was also present at that time!) (*Laughter*) We are not new!

What happened was that some fellows snatched away his *dholak* (double-ended drum) so that this *Nagarsankeertan* nuisance would stop. But Krishna Chaithanya thought, “Oh Lord, I am not beating the *dholak* properly and You don’t like it. But I have *talas* or cymbals.” Very big ones, like those *Hare Krishna* fellows! *Abba*, it is a bigger noise now! (*Laughter*)

The next day, these fellows also snatched away his cymbals. Then Krishna Chaithanya said, “Oh God, You didn’t like that. Now I’ll sing full-throatedly.” (*Anil Kumar loudly chants Hare Krishna*) Nobody could stop him. Then people thought, “This man won’t stop, so let’s join him.” That’s how *Nagarsankeertan* began.

Krishna Chaithanya didn’t stop because his *dholak* was snatched away. He didn’t stop when the cymbals were taken away. He continued with what he had. That is what is required of us—to accept and proceed. That’s what we have to do. Sai Ram.

GIVING UP IS DETACHMENT, HOLDING ON IS ATTACHMENT

Thank you. Next question: can you please tell us the difference between desires and attachment?

Anil Kumar: Desire and attachment. Desire has two aspects, fulfilment and non- fulfilment. I have the desire to be the President of India—impossible! (*Laughter*) Desire can be this way or that way; it can be any way you like. But attachment is wrong.

Suppose I got my desire, and I was in charge of the veranda there in Prashanti Nilayam. You should see those fellows, those in charge of the verandah! They think they are IAS officers! (*Laughter*) I simply watch and laugh, amused. “Swami, You have wonderful actors there! You don’t have to go to the movies!”

One day a gentleman sat in the place where I usually sit. I sit in a corner, which is not an important place because I’m not an important man. I don’t like that word “VIP”. It’s disgusting. Who is a VIP in front of God? We are all very insignificant people, that’s all, not very important. I feel very insignificant. We are not even dust; we don’t deserve His *darshan*. How can we consider ourselves “very important”? Such a fellow can never improve in his lifetime!

So one gentleman sat in the place where I usually sit. When I went there he said, “Anil Kumar, I’m sorry, I am sitting in your place.” I replied, “I did not purchase that particular plot. Thousands have sat there before, and thousands will be sitting there hereafter; so please enjoy it for the present.”

There are some people who, if someone else sits where they usually sit, say, “Don’t you know that this is for staff? Don’t you know that this is for VIPs? Don’t you know that we are first-row people?” Who said so?

Therefore, to feel that you are important is to get attached to your place and your position. Some people are convenors or presidents of some centres. “*Arre*, you are an old fellow now. You have arthritis, spondylitis, and bronchitis. Why don’t you step down?!” (*Laughter*) “You are over seventy. Are you not ashamed to continue in that job? Don’t you know that children should take that place? Don’t you know that the youth should take over?”

In offices, you eventually retire; in business, you ask your children to take over. But a Sai position is permanent! (*Laughter*) Why? Because nobody will listen to these fellows in their homes; therefore they want to dominate here! (*Laughter and applause*) This is what is called attachment. To give up is detachment, while to hold on is attachment. Detachment is *vairagya*.

There are, after all, no salaried positions in the *Mandir* seating arrangements. A convenor may insist on sitting in the front row, but Baba will conveniently avoid this convenor.

Why do they think they have to pay for it? What is this position? Some people think they are very important; they want a retinue following them. I see people running behind them with papers, like *thalsidars*, revenue inspectors, or police officers!

Are they not ashamed? In our Sathya Sai Organisation, a spiritual gathering is full of love, equanimity, Divinity, equality, and harmony—not your position or VIP chair. That is detachment. (*Applause*)

EACH ONE HAS HIS OWN DESTINY AND DUTY

Thank you. Next question: parents try to raise their children with all the values, but if the children do not follow the right path, is it the parents' fault or the child's fate?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: In the first instance, we must do our duty as parents. We should guide our children and inculcate them with all the values, and we should send our children to *Bal Vikas*. We must do all we can, as far as we can.

After that, it is their destiny. That is all we can do. We guide and advise them; but if they don't follow our guidance, we cannot do anything. Destiny plays an important role. That's what I can say.

Anil Kumar: Now, let's understand one important point. Many people here are parents. We say children are born *to* us. It is a wrong usage of language. Children are not born *to* parents. Let us be very clear. They are born *through* parents, not *to* parents. Parents act as the medium for the manifestation of life in the form of a child. The child is the manifestation of life energy. The child is an expression of life *through* parents, not *to* parents. If I think that I was born *to* my parents—no, that is wrong. It was *through* my parents.

When a current flows, there is nothing special about the electrical wire. It only allows the flow of the current. Therefore, we are only the medium. We have to do our duty, that's all. We are not the makers of destiny.

We have Hiranyakashapu, #1 in stupidity! But he gave birth to a great devotee, Prahlada. And you also know about the demon Ravana, *abba*, Rowdy #1! Yet he had Vibhishana, a pious man, as his own brother. So everyone has their own destiny, but we have to do our duty.

ENLIGHTENED BEINGS DON'T FEEL PHYSICAL SUFFERING

The next question is as follows: I have seen self-realised people go through bodily hardships and illnesses even after enlightenment. Why?

Anil Kumar: Suffering is there in the case of good people. Suffering is also there in the case of enlightened people. Someone asked Swami, “Swami, Dharmaraja was the very embodiment of *dharma*. Poor fellow, what did he enjoy in life? Whereas Duryodhana was the very metaphor of selfishness, yet he ruled his kingdom for a long time. So, stupid people get to enjoy life, whereas good people suffer. What is all this?”

That is everyone’s question. Those who are selfish prosper, while those who are selfless remain as they are. Those who are good, remain as they are. Those who manipulate and connive, prosper. Why?

All that I am relating to you was spoken by Baba, please understand. For a good man, goodness is the reward and result. Some don’t actually suffer. Jesus Christ was nailed on the cross, but did He suffer? No. His suffering on the cross is a lesson of sacrifice to the whole of humanity. His body on the cross is a lesson of life to the whole of humanity. Baba said that although noble, enlightened people appear to be suffering they don’t suffer at all. Inwardly they live in joy. Inwardly they are blissful.

Why then this suffering? Suffering relates to the body and mind; but the soul is bliss and bliss is soul. The lesson in consciousness that these great souls teach is that they *appear* to suffer, although in reality they are *beyond* suffering. Sai Ram.

STAND FOR CONVICTION AND NOT FOR CONVENIENCE

This is an interesting question. A friend invites you to dinner at her home. This friend is aware of the fact that you are a vegetarian, so she goes to great efforts to please you. However, the meal includes eggs or some animal products. How do you stay true to your dietary preferences without offending or hurting the feelings of your friend?

Anil Kumar: Why not tell your friend, “I am a vegetarian. Please don’t be offended, but I’ll be happy with a glass of water.” Why not? “You can serve me some fruit and I’ll be happy. You can give me some juice and I’ll be happy. I’ll sit by your side. I’ll be happy if you give me some juice or fruit.” They will appreciate you.

In simply converting yourself according to the circumstance, you stand for convenience. Please understand that. The one who changes his stand does so for convenience, while the one who sticks to his principles stands for conviction.

Understand that conviction is a principle deeply-rooted within oneself, whereas convenience is political, to please the other. Conviction, on the other hand, is to please one’s own Self. Am I clear?

MAKE EVERY ACTIVITY DIVINE

Another very practical question: how do we make time for satsangs?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: Where there is a will, there is a way. If you want to attend a *satsang*, you will go. You’ll find time for it. You’ll finish all your other work, finish up your children’s work, and then go to *satsang*. When the desire is so strong, you will find a way.

Anil Kumar: This question was put to Ramana Maharshi. You must have heard of Ramana Maharshi. “Swami, I don’t have good company around me. You said I should join *satsang*, but I have only *dussang*—bad company—around me. What shall I do?”

Ramana Maharshi gave this beautiful definition, so kindly follow me. What did he say?

Sathyam Jnanam Anantham Brahma
Sathyam Brahma
Jnanam Brahma
Anantham Brahma
Sathyam Jnanam Anantham Brahma

Sat means God. That *Sat* is Brahma. It is Divinity. *Sanga* means to be in the company of God. When you sing *bhajans*, it is *satsanga*. When you read a book, it is *satsanga*. When you meditate or repeat God’s name, doing *japa*, it is *satsanga*. Anything in relation to God, union with the Divine, service or whatever it may be, is *satsanga*. *Satsanga* is not necessarily always having good people around.

Number two: we should take every opportunity to turn our mind towards the Divine. Take Baba Himself, our Hero of heroes. He will call some people for interview. Each one has his own problems—knee problem, eye problem, mental problem—some problem or other.

Swami will say, “What is your problem?”

“Swami, my daughter has to get married.”

“Don’t worry. Swami will take care of it.”

Or, “Swami, my husband is sick.”

“Oh, I see, he will be alright. You see, *bangaru*, what happens is Divine will. It was Dharmaraja who accepted everything that was given to him. Lord Sri Rama accepted whatever was given.”

Swami talks like this, so that you forget your own problems and questions. So with any talk, please follow this, with any conversation you are having, slowly spiritualise it, slowly divinise it. Do not allow it to pass to a worldly direction.

A simple example: one day, Swami came to Brindavan to inaugurate our house there. Swami entered the house first. Both of us were standing outside. Since my childhood, I have had the habit of curiosity. What was I to do? Somehow, slowly, I entered the house. I found Swami standing in front of the mirror, adjusting His hair. (*Laughter*) I am thinking, “*Hmm*, God also is body-conscious.” (*Laughter*) “Good. Sai is a man. Okay.”

Then Swami noticed me. You know what Baba said to me? “What are you staring at?”

“Swami, I am staring at You only.”

Then He said, “Look here, there is a mirror there. I am here. In the mirror, what do you see? My reflection. So we are three: I am here, the mirror is here, and My reflection is here. So, three: Me, My reflection, and the mirror.”

“Now, remove the mirror. There is no reflection. Only I remain here. In spiritual mathematics, three minus one is one. In regular mathematics, three minus one is two. Three are there because of the mirror; but if you remove the mirror, only one is left. The mirror is Nature, the reflection is creation, while I am the Creator.”

That is Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. That is how He divinises and spiritualises.

SERVICE, MEDITATION, AND UNITY WITH GOD ARE OUR GOALS

Let me move onto this card here. It says, “I am blessed to be enlightened by your talk. I would like to know how I should benchmark myself on the spiritual path. How do I benchmark myself at the body, mind, and intelligence level? Or at the level of my consciousness?”

Anil Kumar: At the physical level, we have to do service. At the psychological level, we should do *bhajans* and meditation. At the intellectual level, we are supposed to experience that Oneness in everyone, the Divinity that is in all.

So, at the physical level, do service. At the psychological level, enjoy *bhajans* and meditation. At the intellectual level, experience unity with God. These are the three levels of awareness. These are the three levels of consciousness, of achievement—the three rungs on the spiritual ladder. Am I clear?

DEARNESS TO GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN NEARNESS

So this is the last question. Can you please explain the difference between nearness and dearness? How do you feel when you are next to Swami? And then, how do you feel away from Swami (referring to physical proximity)?

Mrs. Anil Kumar: You need not stay there in Parthi to be near Swami. People who are abroad can feel His Divine Presence. They can feel it. Even some of the people there in Parthi don't have that feeling. It is a heart-to-heart connection with Swami that makes Him near and dear.

Mr Anil Kumar: I can give a few examples. Once somebody said, “Bhagavan, I am not able to visit You every year. Oh Swami, I am not able to visit You frequently. What shall I do?”

Baba's reply was, “Every day, bus conductors and bus drivers come here. Do you think they are devotees? Not necessarily. So you don't have to come regularly; you don't have to come annually. You don't have to feel badly that you are not able to frequent this place. It is not necessary.”

Secondly, it is not the nearness that is important; it is the dearness. How so? A simple example: there were people all round Krishna, He had eight wives, *ashta bharyalu*, but His thoughts were on the *gopikas*. He thought only of the *gopikas*, not those eight wives.

He thought only of those people, not of His Dwaraka. His heart was in Brindavan. Bhagavan's heart is the seat of a devotee. The heart of the devotee is the seat of Bhagavan. Physical nearness has nothing to do with it.

Sri Ramachandra was closer to the monkeys than anybody else. His own mother Kaikeyi wanted Him to be sent to the forest. His father died because of physical separation. His wife Sita wanted the golden deer; therefore she had to undergo separation.

Ramachandra would have given her a golden elephant if she had wanted one—after all, what is a deer? So long as she was with Rama, with *prema*, Divine love, she was happy. The moment she had *kama*, or desire, towards the golden deer, she had to be separated. So nearness is not important; dearness is important.

Baba always speaks like this to the students about the foreigners: “See those fellows coming from overseas? The moment they see Me, look at their faces— fully effulgent, radiant, and brilliant like a thousand candles or light bulbs; whereas you fellows have castor oil faces!”
(*Laughter*)

He also says, “These people are like honey bees, travelling long distances to come to the lotus flower. They suck the honey and go back. The honey bee comes for the honey of devotion, the flower of their heart. But close up to the lotus flower are snails and fish, who do not know the value of the flower. You students are like those snails and fish.”

Bhagavan further says, “Consider a lighthouse. The light of the lighthouse shines for a long distance. But directly below the lighthouse is a shadow or darkness. So because of being this close to Me, you are in the dark. And because of their distance, they are in the light.”

Therefore, should we run away from there? No, no. Baba makes another point, “You should be at that distant so as to be near. You should be that near so as not to be thrown out to a far distance.” (*Laughter*)

Entha Deggara, Antha Dooram Kakunda Vundali
Entha Dooramo, Antha Deggara Avvali.

You should be so near as not to be too distant;
You should be so distant as not to be too near.

Because Sai is fire, you should see the light and enjoy with delight. Come closer and you will feel the warmth. Come any closer and you will get burnt! (*Laughter*) We should enjoy the warmth and light, but not get ourselves burnt! *Paramam Pavithram . . . vibhuthi ash*, that's all! Sai Ram. (*Applause*)

Very good! Thank you. This basically concludes the question and answer session. So once again I would like to thank everybody who provided their questions to Professor Anil Kumar and Vijayalakshmi Garu (Mrs. Kumar). I am sure a lot of us learned a lot that we were not aware of.

We are getting close to the devotional program which is at six o'clock. So for the next half hour, I kindly request you to enlighten us further with more experiences.

UNITY IS ACHIEVED BY LOVE

Anil Kumar: Okay. It is not seniority that counts. Some people might say, "I've had ten interviews." We can answer, "But you have not changed. It is an investment wasted, a Divine investment wasted!"

So let's not claim our seniority, and let's not show our ego because of the gifts of grace that we have received from Him. It is a disgrace to Bhagavan if you are proud on those grounds.

Let us not, therefore, be divided by silly conditions. Unity is the final message. How to achieve that? Unity is not achieved by any political slogans, special groups, or ego. No, no, no.

Unity is achieved only by Love: *Eswara Prema Hey*. So, let's have that *Eswara*, God with Love. Therefore, where there is Love, there is unity. Where there is unity, there is Divinity.

God bless you! (*Applause*)

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