

*Prof. Anil Kumar's Address to the Youth  
at the National Youth Conference*

*Chicago, Illinois*

*May 29, 2009*

Sai Ram! Thanks to Swami, for making it possible for me to be among you on this pleasant evening. I have spent time in the company of youth for the last forty-six years only! So, I know the temperament of youth, the attitude of youth, the ills of youth, the wealth of youth, and the strength of youth. Why not? I have spent my life in the company of youth.

In fact, it has been announced that this is an informal session, and that I should answer your questions. Still, I cannot resist the temptation to make certain comments based on first-hand information and observation.

My friends, please believe me, whenever I go anywhere, I understand that there are many things to learn. Baba has given me a number of chances to interact with the youth in the United States. It all began in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Who could organise a youth workshop within a notice of forty-eight hours only? Hats off to Milwaukee! That was a wonderful job! (*Applause*) Is here anybody here from Milwaukee? Yes? Why don't you stand and let us all see you. Good! That's right! (*Applause*) They organised in just forty-eight hours, that's all!

I was also thrilled and excited to see an improvement over Milwaukee in the next youth workshop held in Dallas. They've done exceedingly well also. Those from Dallas, kindly get up! (*Applause*) Louder, louder! (*Applause*) Ah, that's great! It was a fantastic experience indeed.

I thought, 'I am climbing steps: Milwaukee first and Dallas next.' But, Baba wanted me to go to still higher levels. Then I noticed Atlanta did exceedingly well. Excellent! Those from Atlanta, Georgia, kindly get up! (*Applause*) Atlanta! Oh great! Why was it so great? Because fifteen of them participated in the workshop right on the stage, in action, while fifteen others supported them. Seventy youth attended that workshop, which was not an easy job.

Then we took another step: the fourth youth workshop was organised in Seattle, Washington. I cannot fully define the scene—the mountain there had the beauty of Kailasa. I saw the mountain (Mt. Rainer) with a bridal look, all covered in a silken white robe like Kailasa. What a beautiful scene it was! And full of greenery! This place seems to have the same roots as Kodaikanal and the lake there is absolutely Kodaikanal. It made me feel that I have not missed anything. (*Swami was in Kodaikanal at the time Prof. Anil Kumar was in Seattle. Normally at this time of year, Prof. Anil Kumar would be with Swami there.*) And the place where I stayed is a replica or carbon copy of His residence in Whitefield, Bangalore: Trayee-Brindavan. So I haven't missed anything!

I got a phone call from my friend in Kodaikanal. He said, "Anil Kumar, we all miss you. We miss you here." I told him, "I don't miss you." (*Laughter*) For this simple reason: I find Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba here in the United States of America. Excellent! Those from Seattle, kindly get up! (*Applause*) *Wah, wah, wah, wah!* Great, great!

And apart from this, I could also meet youth in different places as well, like in Orlando, Florida. I met many youngsters there. Hats off to their discipline, spiritual service and *bhajan* standards! Yes, those from Orlando, kindly get up! They have done a good job! I see them here, but I don't know why they don't get up? Orlando, Orlando! Please get up! Orlando! Orlando! (*Applause*) I was deeply touched by their *bhajans*. The time was 9:30-10:00 in the night, and they didn't want to leave me. And I didn't want to leave them. That is the bondage of *bhajans*! Excellent!

And also, I got to meet a number of youth in New Jersey. More than 2000 people attended there! New Jersey, excellently organised! Those from New Jersey, kindly get up! (*Applause*) Come on, come on, come on! (*Applause*)

At the same time, to feel a native touch, in Rochester, New York, I had an opportunity to witness a cultural programme at a place where *Bharatnatyam* was the main programme for the evening. *Bharatnatyam!* I saw girls of all age groups, from 10 to 25, wearing the costumes. Oh, what kind of performance it was! I don't remember ever seeing that kind of *Bharatnatyam* performance in recent years. I enjoyed the dance thoroughly. After that dance, there was another program by four presenters from Ireland, doing an Irish dance. But it didn't end there. Then we saw *Fusion-Bharatnatyam*. I can never forget that wonderful performance in my life. Rochester, New York, you have done a very good job!

### *DIVINE INSURANCE COVERAGE*

Thus the trip and our stay here have been very fruitful. I have been to the U.S. a number of times in the past. But this visit has been different from earlier visits. This visit has been very fulfilling as we could organise youth workshops and encourage the youth. Bhagavan encourages us when we encourage others.

One day, all of a sudden, I got a phone call from Dr. Narendra Nath Reddy, requesting me to stay and join the National Youth Conference here in Chicago. I was hesitant to accept because I was supposed to return by the 27th, as per the original programme. But Dr. Reddy went all the way to Prashanthi Nilayam, got Swami's permission, and called me from there. He said, "You're quite safe. Divine Insurance coverage!" (*Laughter*)

That assurance made me feel relaxed. Working right under His nose, in His institutions, we have to be extra careful. We often say, "Living with God is education." But living with God is also "staying by the side of fire!" We have to be close to the fire, without getting ourselves burnt!

Before I get into the other topics, I would like to highlight two more points: of course, there are many, but I am dumbfounded when I notice the service you have done at the Butong Refugee camp. A number of young adults from all over the U.S. participated and helped them. Besides material help, they extended moral support to all these refugees. They showered love on each of them. The young adults hail from different places like Nashville, Boston, Dallas, Phoenix, Memphis, Cincinnati, Denver, and Atlanta. They all participated in that refugee camp. So, please give them a thunderous applause! (*Applause*)

### *ROLE MODEL TO OTHERS*

The youth here must have many achievements and accomplishments; these are just the ones brought to my notice. There's one more important thing: the youth not only did service. Not only did they participate in service activities, they also acted as catalysts, inspiring others to also participate. So they were a role model to others.

There was one place where our young adults wanted to distribute clothes to those who are in dire need of them. Only about nine volunteers had started in the university campus. The university was so happy about it that the university authorities themselves came forward liberally, keeping boxes at different centres for the purpose of collecting clothes for distribution. These young adults are from Birmingham, Alabama University. (*Applause*)

There are so many details I have learnt from you, my friends. With no hesitation, with Swami as my witness, I openly declare that I went through your journals, your newsletters, and your reports. And I dare say, whatever people may think, the young adults in the U.S are doing an excellent job—an excellent job, with a spirit of research, and with a spirit of commitment and dedication. It's not an ordinary thing.

Staying there in Prashanthi Nilayam, I interact with youth from all over the world, including those from different states in India. Youth from different states come there and necessarily invite me to interact with them. As I see the literature you have gathered, I am tempted to speak on all these aspects.

But there is another interesting thing I want to mention before I answer your questions: the accounts made on “Ceiling on Desires”. None can ever match the excellent job done by the Ceiling on Desires group! If you're here, kindly get up! Ceiling on Desires, Ceiling on Desires group. (*Applause*) Excellent job! Excellent job! Not an easy thing!

### *CEILING ON DESIRE*

To be honest, each one of you deserves the award of youth field degree. Good! Excellent! If you give me time, I can speak throughout the night until you are convinced. And I can also tell you another point that touched me. Unimaginable! There is ‘food’ under Ceiling on Desires. I don't think of food in terms of having a ceiling on desires, because I have more desire for food. I have made an in-depth study of your work, and interacted with many people. The account on food is unparalleled, unbeaten, and excellent! Kindly get up! Food group! (*Applause*) *Wah!* Great!

And there's another aspect on money, and having a ceiling on desires with regard to money. This kind of brief write-up on money, I am sure nobody else can write like that—an MBA or a student of MFM can dare interpret accountancy or the banking system from the spiritual point-of-view. So the group who worked on money, under Ceiling on Desires, also did exceedingly well. Those of you, who are here, kindly, get up! Money group! (*Applause*) Yes, they want to save all their money. (*Laughter*)

### *LIFE IS A PROCESS OF LEARNING*

There are lots of things to share with you. We'll certainly interact and talk. I have come here to learn. Life is a process of learning, from womb to the tomb, from birth to death. I am not here to conduct ceremonies. I am not here to say something new, because the things that you do here

are suited to the situation in the U.S. I cannot expect you to do *Narayana seva*, as we do in India. You can't expect people here to sit on the streets, can you? Impossible!

So, whatever you are doing is quite adapted to these particular geographical conditions. Having identified people and interacted with the youth here, I would say that you can get along well all by yourselves without outsourcing, including Anil Kumar! You don't need anybody. I have seen you, what you are. I have seen your talent. I have participated in programmes.

Please encourage the local talent. Encourage your people to participate, or else it leads to frustration. It leads to aloofness from the mainstream. Let young people come to the front. We elders can give you some ideas, but let us forego certain opportunities for ourselves because we have had enough chances earlier.

If any mission or any spiritual organisation is to progress, it will progress only with the help of the locals, not due to anybody coming from outside. Therefore, in this conference, let us resolve firmly that the local people, the people from the U.S., will be given all opportunities. Let them do the job, thereby doing justice in accordance to the expectations of everybody, and also according to the prevailing situations.

I would also like to make this point: this conference should aim at another important area. We are preparing a second line of leadership. The youth are going to take up the reigns of the Sai Organisation. For your information, all over in Prashanthi Nilayam, Swami is replacing the seniors with youngsters now. We find so many youngsters occupying high posts. Why not here in the United States? Therefore, this conference should think of preparing the youth, who will be ready to shoulder the responsibilities of the organisation in the coming year. So, aim for a second line of leadership.

Depending on the available time and opportunity, I will share the rest of the material I have with you. Thank you for listening to me in rapt attention. God bless you! Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

Yes, you can put some questions from where you are. You can stand there, and a hand mike will be passed to you.

### *BOYS WILL BE BOYS*

Boys are boys, you know. A boy of the MBA class at the Sathya Sai University asked me, "Sir, do you know what happened in the canteen today?"

I asked him, "What happened?"

It seems *chapattis* were being distributed to students in the canteen yesterday: two *chapattis* per student. One student said, "Sir, I need three *chapattis*."

The teacher said, "No, two *chapattis* only."

The MBA boy said, "Sir, I am sorry. But Baba said, 'You are not one, but three: the one you think you are, the one others think you are, and the one you really are.' So I need three *chapattis*." (*Laughter*)

Boys are boys, you know. I often mingle with students, just straight out of their classes. I treat them like my own children. Another boy, a student of M. Tech, came up to me and said, "Sir, this morning, something happened in our hostel."

I asked, "What?"

They have just a few toilets in the hostel. The boys have to be ready to be on time at the university. But there was a long queue, so they were just standing in front of the bathroom. The fellow inside the toilet was taking too long to come out. So what is to be done? Somebody outside shouted, "Who is there? Who are you?"

The boy inside replied, "I am I."

Because Baba says, "I am I" that's what he said. These jokes, you see, I really love these jokes, and go to students to hear those things.

When I was in Bangalore, two boys came to my office. One boy said, "Sir, my age is eighteen. But it is reported as nineteen on the concession form. Something's wrong, so please correct it. Sir, I am only eighteen, so why should they put nineteen?"

I said, "I will look into that, don't worry. After all, one year doesn't matter."

In the meantime, the two boys started talking to each other: His friend asked, "Arre, how old are you?"

The first boy repeated, "I am eighteen."

"What's wrong with it?"

"They have put in nineteen on this form; therefore I am objecting."

"Arre, you are not the body, so then why do you worry about the age? You are not the body, so why do you worry?" (*Laughter*)

Boys are boys! Anyway, I enjoy their jokes.

Any teacher is quite active because of their association with youth and youngsters. Those who live among youth will understand better. They will be able to interact much better. They will be able to cater to youth's demands in a better and more organised way.

I know how Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba talks to every student. Swami was giving *darshan* one day and He looked at a PhD, "*Haan* (Yes), you completed PhD? I see. What do you do next? Do MRS."

Then Baba said, "Have a wife. Get married and think life is wife, wife is life. When wife becomes knife, you will come to Me later!" (*Laughter*) It's such a very nice thing how Swami interacts with college students and staff!

Sorry for taking up so much of your time. We will call upon questions straightaway. Now the floor is open to you.

Sai-ji, I am sorry if I have taken up too much time. First of all, it was this boy who made me extend my stay: Sai-ji! (*Applause*)

And later on, the one who contacted me on the phone happened to be the youth advisor, sitting over there. Thank you very much, Sir. Thank you. And the other person, who came all the way to New Jersey, extending the invitation and meeting me is Sangeeta, the National Coordinator. I thank her very much for her kind gesture. (*Applause*)

**Moderator:** Thank you, Uncle, for your generous words. I think we are ready to start this question and answer session. Sharda, you have the mike on the female side and I have the mike for the male side. I can say there are no limits to the questions that can be asked. So if you have a question, raise your hand, and I will walk up to you. Let's keep the questions short. We already have a question. Let's keep the questions short, so we can extend Uncle's time here.

### *ALL ARE CLOSE TO SWAMI*

So, the first question:

***Sai Ram Anil Kumar Kamaraju. Thanks a lot for coming. We really enjoyed your talk. I would like to know what are some of your ideas to encourage the local youth to get closer to Swami?***

The question is: how to encourage the local youth to get closer to Swami? The answer is simple and straight. All are equally close to Swami. Please be convinced of it. If anyone thinks he's closer to Swami, he is living in Himalayan ignorance. If anyone thinks that someone else is closer to Swami, he is full of oceanic innocence. So, it is ignorance and innocence to think one is closer to Swami than another. All are equally close to Swami. Am I clear? That should make you happy.

It is a fact. When He says, "I reside in your heart," what does He mean? That He's close to everyone. When He says, "I am before you, above you, below you, behind you, around you, and within you," then who can be closer than Bhagavan Baba?

So, all are close. What to do is this: be in contact with Swami who is within us. Suppose I ask for a pen. "Would you give me a pen?"

Somebody would get up and say, "Sir, you have got your pen there in your pocket."

"Oh, is that so?"

So, the pen is already there in the pocket! But if I believe that I don't already have one, I ask where the pen is. Similarly, you are already close to Bhagavan. What we need is this realisation, this inter-connection and inner connection.

Feel Him within. Participate in *bhajans*. When you sing *bhajans*, sing full-throated. Some people sing *bhajans* as if they are murmuring or whispering. Sing full-throated, because it is not a musical concert. I love to sing with all joy and enthusiasm. It's not a public concert, you see.

So, establish inner contact through the medium of *bhajans*. Have inner connection through the medium of service. By reading His literature, you can feel Him. In meditation, you can see His manifestation. Am I clear? Thank you for your good question.

Thank you. We'll take one from the ladies side. Also, I'll appreciate if you tell me your name and the places you belong to, because then we can appreciate the centre and you too.

### *IT IS ONLY INTENSITY THAT MATTERS*

***Sai Ram, My name is Alisha.***

Where are you from?

***Malaysia***

Hari Om, Malaysia! Oh! How are Batu caves there? Penang, Aloha, Kuala Lumpur? I've been there. Carry on, carry on!

***I have actually never met you before in person. Only I've known you through your voice on my mother's radio translating Sai's discourses. So, I have searched for my inner Self or inner guidance for a long time. Swami always tells us, "Search for the voice of conscience to lead us in our lives." I have read Swami's books by Dr. Hislop. There Swami told him, "You can think of Swami for five or ten minutes, then search for your inner Self." I have also heard something that you have said about meditation. But it still seems vague and not very clear to me. So, how to search for God in myself? Do you have any comments?***

Oh, good! That is Malaysia! I want to add something before answering this question. For your information, Mr. Jagadeeshan hails from Malaysia as well. He has published a number of books for the youth, done many service projects there, has influence at the centres, and is in government areas also. I know, therefore, you are really great. Yes, it's not a question of ten minutes or half an hour. No! It is the intensity that matters. It is the intensity. It is the intensity of your feelings, the intensity of your love.

See, how much you eat depends upon your appetite; how much you drink depends upon your thirst. Similarly, your inner desire will make you find a way. In spirituality, my friend, we cannot generalise anything. Those who love *bhajans* say, "Do *bhajans*." Well, they don't appeal to me. Some people say, "Meditation is the only process." But when I sit for meditation, I think of only Andhra pickles and hot coffee! (*Laughter*) So it is coffee meditation or pickle meditation, but not God meditation.

So, meditation may not fit into the system for some. *Bhajans* may not fit into the system of some. It all depends upon our *samskaras*. It depends upon our temperament. It depends upon our attitude. It depends upon our likes or dislikes. So, the method we select should be the one that fits us.

Some are very good in reading Sai literature. Some are very good in *bhajans*. So every path, like every airline—whether it is British Airways or American Airlines, whatever it may be, or Air France—may take you to your destination. So, follow any procedure. Whether the cat is made of

wood or mud, the cat must meet the rat. Am I clear? So likewise, whichever path you choose, it should serve the purpose by giving you a kind of blissful satisfaction. That's what is important, not the path.

*FAILURE IS NOT A CRIME, LOW AIM IS A CRIME*

***Sai Ram, Prof. Kumar, I am Ravi Uppadhyay. I was born in Nepal, grew up in Dallas, and now I am in Boston.***

You're a Dallas boy? I don't remember having met you there. You avoided me successfully!  
(Laughter)

***Professor Kumar, you referred to leadership. As you know, we have a new President and a new government. Many of us are excited. Few of us disagree. At the same time, Swami has said to stay away from politics, stay away from such things. Some of us are very enthusiastic about the changes. And while we spend our Sunday mornings with the Sai organisation, which is kind of a shelter, we are also enthusiastic about spending the rest of the days of the week involved in the government and the overall structure of our country. How close should we fall to one side or the other?***

Good, you have any desire to contest the elections? All the best to you! (Laughter)

***I was born in Nepal, so I can't do better than that.***

Why not? As Napoleon Bonaparte said, "Failure is not a crime; having a low aim is a crime." So you are aiming high to be a president. Good! God bless you.

Well, when Swami said, "Don't join politics," what did He mean by that? Let us take politics in a broader sense. Don't we have politics in our centres? (Laughter) Don't we have politics in the family? Don't we have politics in the community? Don't we have politics in institutions? Politics began at the time of the birth of man in this universe. When there are two, there are bound to be politics!

So, we don't find fault with politics. But what is to be done is this: be a statesman, a politician par excellence, a politician with exemplary character, conduct, integrity, and individuality. Such a politician rises to the level of a statesman. So Swami wants you to be a statesman, not a cheap politician. Playing one against the other is politics. Proceed in your own direction, or proceed towards your commitment, come what may; this will make you a statesman. Be a statesman, not a cheap politician. Am I clear?

*FIRST PRIORITY MUST BE GIVEN TO PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS*

***Sai Ram, Prof. Anil Kumar. I am Akheela. I am from Oklahoma. My question is this: we are always taught to respect elders, like our parents and our grandparents. But if they have some kind of aspiration or desire for us which we feel is not right, what should we do?***  
(Laughter)

Are your parents and grandparents advising something negative?

***Not negative, but you feel differently about it. Like, if you have family members who are not into . . . Sai.***

You know, now the cat is out of the box! I understand your point. When you are in a dilemma, when are you at a crossroads—the parents and grandparents saying one thing, while you are convinced of doing it in a different way—what is to be done? Isn't this your question?

I shall say what Baba said in this context, my friends. I shall not give my own interpretation, because being with Swami for the last twenty years, and working right under His nose in the institution, I quote Him or keep my mouth shut! I shall not give my interpretation. Now what does Baba say about this question, where parents and grandparents feel one way and your feeling is different. Both seem to be contradictory. So, what am I to do now?

Baba said that priority should be given to the parents and grandparents. Why? Their decisions, their suggestions, their recommendations, and their advice are all based on their maturity, their long experience, and their exposure to thousands of people. Out of a richness of experience, and with a deeper conviction, they come forward with certain advice. They give you certain suggestions that are in your best interest. But you may feel differently about what they say. Why? It is because of your age. You are at that age where you are not prepared to accept the advice of others. That is effect of your age. You should know that I was also like you!

Just an off-the-record joke: one of my students is now in Chicago, I believe—a very promising student and a great speaker. Well, one day he was just walking by the side of the staff quarters with his head bent down. I love that boy very much. I called him, “Arre boy, why are you going like that? Why don't you say, ‘How are you, Sir, this morning?’ Don't you know that I was also young like you at one time and walked briskly?”

That boy came back and said, “Sir, we think that you have good English. I am sorry. Correct your English. Why do you say, ‘I was also young like you’ No! You **are** young like me!”

So our ideas are different from our grandparents and our parents because of our age, because of our inexperience, because of our emotions, because we are not able to exercise our judgment properly, so we are not able to discriminate properly; plus, the company around us may not give us proper guidance. These are the factors that make us deviate, divert, and differ, from the opinion of our elders.

So, give top priority to parents and grandparents. Alright, but if they don't hear me, what shall I do? If they put me down, what shall I do? If I don't agree with them, what shall I do? This will be your next question.

Baba said this: “You should try to convince them. You should be patient enough; you should be pleading. You should explain things in such a way that the reason behind your decision is clear, so that your parents and grandparents can also agree with your decision.” This is what Baba said. Am I clear? That's it. Thank you. Good question, good question. (*Applause*)

### ***PARADIGM SHIFT FROM THE PAST***

***I am going to continue with that question. My name is Aviral.***

Where are you from?

**Houston.**

**So I am going to go more into a sensitive topic. I see most of us here are less than twenty-five years old. And I see that most of us have brown skin and are of Indian origin. So, there is an Indian tradition known as “arranged marriage”.**

Are you married?

**No, no! That’s the good part. I am coming to the bad part. So, there is a dilemma here. The dilemma is that anybody who grew up in this country grew up in a certain culture where arranged marriages are an alien concept. Most of our parents grew up in India and had arranged marriages. So, how do you convince them? How do you go about convincing them? You are not able to convince your parents, and still you are trying to convince yourself that what your parents are thinking for you would be the best! That’s why I said I am going to continue with that question.**

**This is a sensitive topic; a lot of people feel very strongly about it. A lot of people say, “No, no, arranged marriages are the way to go because your parents said so. And your parents are fine (meaning, happily married), so you should go along with it.” Other people say, “No, this is my life. Right?” So, how do you go about convincing yourself that what your parents might be thinking for you is the best? Or, how do you convince yourself the other way?**

Good! *(Laughter)* All of you are in the same position or what? *(Laughter)*

Okay! Of course, I am not in your shoes. But, I do sympathetically understand your question. Arranged marriages have been going on down the ages in India. It is in practice even to this day. But I can tell you, even before I come to your point, that most of the arranged marriages are successful.

We find people celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> or 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, which is quite peculiar or even funny here. How are you able to live with the same woman for fifty years? How is she able to bear with you for forty years? So, most of the arranged marriages are very, very successful in India. That’s one point.

Two, days are changing, even in India. In many cases, in the recent years, women are earning more money than men! *(Applause)* Women are more qualified than men! *(Applause)* And so the position today in India is such that it is difficult to get the son married, but easy to get the daughter married. Quite reverse of what it was before! The daughter gets married easily, but the son has become a problem now. So, times are changing whether you like it or not, whether you are willing or not.

Because of very high education, because of very high status, a woman is now able to think independently. She will not bend her head simply like that. Gone are those days! Therefore, women have got a chance to make their own decisions, and have got their own judgments in many matters. Therefore, that makes a paradigm shift from the past.

Then, how to convince yourself? This is your question. You have to convince yourself why you want a particular person. Why do you want a particular spouse? Why do you like a particular

person? Why do you love her? Is it because of her bank balance? Is it because of any visa problems? For many fellows, they're after a visa; so Mrs. also comes. *(Laughter)* Is it because of money, or is it because of visa or green card? Or, is it because she is the only daughter in the family? Or is it because you have no other choice?

One fellow said, "Sir, I want to be a bachelor."

I said, "The world is not going to lose anything. *(Laughter)* At least, the life of one girl will be saved!" *(Laughter)*

Therefore, we have to consider what it is that attracts you. What is it that enchants you? Is it the family culture, the family tradition, which is very important? Do you know that with the passage of time, things that glitter right now due to young age, fade out slowly? Later, you may have to revise your opinion; but by then it is too late.

So, give due value to the parents. At the same time, question yourself. What is it that I like? Is it because of friendliness? Is it because of understanding? Is it because of work? Is it because of co-operation? Is it because of submissiveness? Is it because of togetherness? Understand why. Is it merely one or two factors? Then you will understand if your decision is correct or not. If it is merely external, it is infatuation. If it is internal, it is attraction. Therefore, one has to be discrete. One has to carefully consider and judge before taking a final decision. Am I clear?

There are some families where the parents said, "No!" in the beginning; but later they reconciled after observing the good behaviour of the counterpart. They realised that they could not have chosen a better person than the one selected by their son. Therefore, time will reveal whether your judgment is correct or not. So it is important to take time. But, the reasons that make you arrive at your decision are much more important. Am I clear? *(Applause)*

Good, good! It's a genuine question.

### *HOW TO ACHIEVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN SAI CENTRES?*

***Sai Ram Uncle! My name is Veena and I am from Rochester. I have a question along the lines of politics. You mentioned that, as youth, we should take more leadership positions in the centre. I am sure you know where this question is going. A lot of times, there is an established hierarchy. There are people who have been doing these things forever; and if we come and interfere, they don't like it. So how do we get involved and not get bogged down by the existing politics?***

*Arre*, come on and give her a big hand! *(Applause)* She has the guts to express this, so I appreciate her. She has the guts to express herself. What is to be done when there is a hierarchy? What is to be done when we are put down, when we are let down? What is to be done now? That is her question.

My friends, instead of aiming at positions, instead of looking forward to be an office bearer, first associate yourself with the existing office bearers and start working with them. Very soon, they will realise that they cannot do without you. Then they will come themselves and nominate you!

When we are at a distance, we think that they are not giving any positions; and they say that we are not taking any responsibility. Therefore, what we have to understand is this: let us work in

close collaboration, in close proximity with the existing people. Work with them, and they will be convinced that you should be the next in line.

Here's a simple example—a collector. In India, an IAS man is not immediately appointed as a collector. First, he has to be a deputy-collector. Similarly, an IPS police officer must be ASP (assistant superintendent of police) first. A chartered accountant has to charter articles first. Our surgeons have to first be a doctor.

Similarly, those of you who really want to be in the Sai state organisation, first be the deputy; work hand-in-hand with the elders. They may not agree with your views. They may not say 'yes' to you; but they still will say, "Yes, do in your own way." You cannot always oblige, but you can always speak obligingly. (*Laughter*)

Here is a simple example, showing how nicely we can escape this situation: one day, ice creams were being distributed outside. I had my quota. (*Laughter*) Then I went in the Mandir later. Swami started distributing ice creams to everybody there. So I stretched out my hands, but Baba said, "You had it outside. Why do you ask now?"

I said, "Swami, I did not say that I did not have it outside. I did not say that. I am stretching my hands because You are giving." (*Laughter*)

"Oh-ho, come on, have two!" He said. (*Applause*)

There is a judge by the name of Mohandas of Kodaikanal. He owns a very big house—only 13 rooms! Some of the guests of Bhagavan Baba stay there. And Bhagwandas is my age. Both of us sit side-by-side. Well, we are close friends. It was breakfast time when Swami walked close to us. And for breakfast that day, *puri* and *idli* were served. Swami picked up one *puri* from Mohandas's plate.

"It's not properly done. It's not properly fried." Then He tore at the centre. There a diamond ring was seen! He took that ring out of the torn *puri* and presented it to Mohandas.

I am sitting there. (*Laughter*) I cannot help but think, 'Why not me? I too have a finger like Mohandas!' (*Laughter*) But I cannot ask Swami, "Please give me one." So I started eating *puris* dead slow, very slowly.

Swami watched this and then asked, "Why are you eating like that?"

"Swami, who knows? There may be a diamond ring in my *puri* also. Who knows? (*Laughter*) And if I eat it, the diamond ring will get stuck in my gullet. Therefore, I am careful."

Baba laughed and said, "I won't give you. You ask your mother-in-law!" (*Laughter*) We can put things in a nice way, you see.

Once He presented diamond watches to many of us. They were shining like anything. What to do? Can we simply have it and sit down like that? It's not your grandfather's property, and you cannot tell Him, "Thank you, Swami." It won't look nice. What shall I do? So what I did was, I was sitting very close to the steps. Sunlight was falling on the veranda. Then I started moving my watch like that. (*Laughter*)

And Swami said, "Why are you moving your watch dial like that?"

"The watch You have given us is shining. And we are very happy, Swami."

That's what He said when He was about to leave the place. But I don't want Him to go. This is an opportunity to hold Him back. So I said, "Swami, You have distributed watches to everybody, but You are not having one. You distribute sweets, but You don't eat sweets. This is something that really bothers me, Swami."

This is the answer. Please note this. This is the Divinity of Baba. Baba said, "You have desires, so I must fulfil them. I have no desires. You have ambitions to reach or to attain, so I should help you. I don't have any desires; therefore, I don't need anything." The one with desire is human, while the desireless one is Divine. That is the Divine romantic conversation with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Please go ahead.

***Uncle, thank you so much. We just ran out of time, but we do have three more questions. While I pass the mike, you just finish the rest of the story. When you asked your mother-in-law for the ring, what happened?***

Oh, I dare not ask her because I have grandchildren. At this age, I cannot ask for anything, you know. No back payments!

***Thank you. I think we'll do a rapid firing session: the questions will be very short and your answers will be...***

Answers will be shorter. (*Laughter*) No problem. We are used to multiple-choice questions. (*Laughter*)

#### ***THE HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENT IS TO REALISE GOD WITHIN***

***Sai Ram. My name is Casey. I am from Asheville, North Carolina. It is hard to ask short questions, but I will do my best. I understand that Swami says that the main thing we are supposed to learn here is how to realise that we are God and escape from the world. With your experiences that you have had with Him over the years, what are the one or two short things we could do to in our lives to achieve that?***

Well, we may achieve one or two small things in our lives. The highest achievement is to realise God within. That is the highest achievement in our lives. All others are trivial compared to it.

Please pass on the mike. There are two more at the back.

#### ***DAYS ARE CHANGING***

***Sai Ram. My name is Ashwin. I am from Oklahoma. I find that new age thinking is one of the challenges for Sai youth, because people in older generations who are not in the Sai family don't think/act like we do. We see a lot of age-old traditions and stuff like that, which are kind of divisive and narrow-minded. So how do we actually address that? I feel***

***a strong need to address that with the elders and try to see their point—to reach out to address the divisiveness, caste, name, religion and all that. There are a lot of practices that have come through the ages. How do we fight them in a constructive way, without hurting others' sentiments?***

Do you need to fight them? Is there any need to fight them? It is not possible to fight; plus, you cannot fight alone. But on the other hand, if you follow the system in full understanding, in full awareness, in full knowledge of what you are doing, even if it is different from the past tradition, then if what you feel is correct and ideal and if you act in such a way, they too will be convinced.

A simple example is untouchability, which was the practice at one time. Yet today it is no longer there. Another thing was in observance then: at one time, a girl had to be married at the age of 8, E-I-G-H-T, *Ashtavarshat bhavet kanya*. And today, better that I don't say! (*Laughter*) At one time, people had to pay the girl's dowry; but today, boys have to pay dowry to girls, *Kanyasurkham*. Days are changing, they are changing. So don't worry.

***Sai Ram, Sir. I am Pallavi from North Carolina. I know you have had many conversations with Swami; but since the question has to be short and the answer also has to be even shorter, can you think of a short conversation which Swami had in your presence, where He mentions what He expects or what His deepest expectations are from Sai youth?***

You have put a one-sentence question, so I will give you a one-word answer: Love, Love, Love only! Nothing else. (*Applause*)

*Thank you so much. There's still a couple more questions, and then we'll wrap it right there.*

***Sai Ram, I am Sujana. Like His students, I am going to say I am from His Lotus Feet, though I live in L.A. My question to you is: can you recollect any amazing miracle that He performed or does anything miraculous come to mind?***

It cannot be a short answer.

*Make it long, doesn't matter.*

But, Sai-ji won't allow me! (*Laughter*) Seek the moderator's permission. I have lots of stories of miracles. Yes, somebody else. I will certainly answer that before we go.

***Sai Ram, Uncle. I am Nirupama from Milwaukee. The question I have for you is this: there you are standing on stage, full of life, energy and enthusiasm. You are more energetic than the rest of the youth who are sitting here in this hall! And I don't see a lot of us Sai youth come up there on stage and be the way you are. For us, there's a lot of holding back. What is your secret? What is it that we can learn from you? That's my question.***

Brief answer: I don't compare myself with anybody. I don't compete with anybody. I don't have any kind of ambition to dominate. I have no desire to be egoistic. I feel like sharing with everybody, mingling with everybody, moving with everybody, singing with everybody, dancing with everybody. Therefore, I am happy. That's all, that's all. (*Applause*)

One announcement please: kindly visit the website **saiwisdom.com**. You will see all the details

of all the workshops held at different places like Milwaukee, Dallas, Atlanta, and Seattle. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

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