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The Sunday Talk Given at Prashanti Nilayam

by Prof. Anil Kumar

“THE IDEAL YOUTH CONFERENCE”

February 15, 2009

OM...OM...OM...

Sai Ram

With Pranams at the Lotus Feet of our most Beloved Bhagavan,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

NELLORE YOUTH CONFERENCE

I want to share with you an experiment that was successfully conducted in the state of Andhra Pradesh at Nellore, situated nine hour's drive from here. I want to share this experiment with you in order to encourage those who are interested in such programs to consider actually conducting this type of program. This experiment proved to be 100% successful. Just give the experiment a try. Do what is within your reach. We need support of the organisation, so if you represent the organisational hierarchy, please pass this information on to your area.

I will present only a brief outline of the experiment here, because a more detailed report will go to the website. In this way, people browsing the net will be able to access enough information to replicate the program.

On 11th of February 2009, at Nellore in the state of Andhra Pradesh, we conducted a Youth Conference for the youth of the Nellore district. This district is home to approximately 50 colleges. Many of the youth who attended the conference had never visited a Sai center. Some had heard of Baba but had never seen Him. The youth of today who attend Arts colleges can be extremely difficult. If you think that everywhere you go, you will meet students like those you find in the Sai Kulwant hall, you are

mistaken. The students at Swami's colleges are to be regarded as role models. They represent one extreme, displaying 100% discipline. Students elsewhere represent the other extreme, about which I do not wish to elaborate.

A NEED FOR NEW DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP

Approximately a thousand students attended this Youth Conference. The impetus for the conference arose from thoughts occupying my mind over the years. Within the Sathya Sai Organisation, we have reached a stage where a new dynamism is required. More than ever before, we need new dynamic leadership which can recruit youth into our organisation. Those who are committed to the organisation will understand what I am mean. The present leadership is sufficiently aged to be out of touch with what the youth of today want. We do not know what the youth expect, with the result that they go astray. They flit from person to person and between groups, often becoming misdirected as a result.

Our Bhagavan has given a number of talks meant for youth all over the world. He has conducted summer classes for college students on Indian culture and spirituality. All these talks are available today in *Summer Showers in Brindavan*. About 10 volumes cover these discourses in which Bhagavan specifically addressed the youth. We are not short of literature!

THE DIVINE TEACHER

Bhagavan's discourses to the university students at Prashanti Nilayam and Bhagavan's talks presented specifically to the MBA boys (students of Business Management), are also available. In earlier years, on a number of occasions, Bhagavan Himself taught the MBA boys in the classroom just like an ordinary teacher. The contents of these classes are also available. He gave many talks in the hostel for students which are also available.

It is most unfortunate, if not tragic, that the present leadership group has not taken on board the wealth of information given to us by Bhagavan Baba, which is meant for youth all over the world. The day is fast approaching when youth will not be attracted to the present trend in our organisation.

I am still working in the university and therefore am constantly in the company of students. I understand the psychology of the students, both as a parent and as a teacher. As a long time facilitator of youth programs, I know what youth expect. Our attempts to meet their expectations, to reach out to youth, have not been very

successful. I am not blaming anybody. I am simply passing on my observations of the situation. I want to light a lamp in order to have the satisfaction of seeing new youth being drawn towards the Sai movement.

THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S YOUTH

What I did there in Nellore was to send an open invitation to all colleges. Over a thousand students attended--both boys and girls, post-graduates, under-graduates, boys and girls doing their MBA, some medical students, and a few engineering students. It was a truly heterogeneous group.

In most of the Sai centers, we are used to listening to the same speaker throughout. This is a very unfortunate situation. It is really disappointing if the same man goes on hammering you on every occasion, as if he is the authority on devotion, wisdom, music, medical camps, youth camp, etc. It indicates that either we are short of speakers, short of experts, or that we don't welcome new speakers. The same people are repeating the same stuff. They give their biographical details, including when they first came to Swami. They give the year and date of when they had their interview, the year and date when their children were named, the year and date when they were successful in giving Swami their children's wedding invitations.

Such biographical data may be of great interest to the speaker and the speaker's family, but for others it is of little interest. It is in fact a waste of others' time to ply them with such biographical data. But such behaviour is going on in our units. For this reason, I thought that we should invite professors from outside the organisation, who are experts in a variety of subjects. So we invited them to talk on certain topics to the youth of the Nellore district.

Suppose I was to give a talk to the youth entitled, "The Road to *Moksha* (Liberation)". They will immediately liberate me! (*Laughter*) They don't want to listen to this. If I speak on the nine paths of devotion, they will throw me into the ocean! If I go on speaking about meditation techniques, they will not be interested.

My friends, some of us seniors are not aware of what our boys and girls need. In some cases, our parenting has become unsuccessful because we have not been able to understand our children's needs. We are still in the archaic, outdated, bullock cart, cow dung era. We have not kept abreast of the times. What youth all over the world need today is an understanding that present-day society is a competitive environment. It has, in fact, become a rat race.

Take for example the field of Information Technology. The software programs are changing every day. The IT language is changing every day. Super experts who are

familiar with the latest version of the computer language are required. Work pressures on such super experts are enormous. One month's work must be completed within a week. Three month's work must be completed in a few weeks.

The employees in this industry must adjust their timings to the timings of the overseas companies they are working for. In many cases, they must work during the night. Indians working for an American employer get fat salaries. They earn Rs100,000 a month. That is equivalent to my life savings. One month of their salary is the sum total of my saving over 45 years of service!

I am most certainly not jealous of these workers, not even in my dreams. After all, they are my children. But with a monthly salary of Rs100,000, they don't have even Rs10,000 of satisfaction or Rs10,000 of happiness. They work in the night and sleep in the morning. When do they feel relaxed? When can they enjoy life? When is there time for them to be happy? When can they take a vacation? Even while sleeping, they dream of the targets to be met. Their computer is in their dreams!

You can read the result of such lifestyles in any newspaper. Many young men in the 25 to 40 age group suffer from high blood pressure. They take on more and more work, receive more salary, and as a result of increased tension, develop high blood pressure. Many of them have also developed diabetes as a result of hypertension. Aged 25-40, what will they do with all the money they earn? I am not saying that they should not be well paid. It is, after all, payment for hard work, talent and skill. But I do ask what do these youngsters of today really need?

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Firstly, they need to learn about stress/tension management. Youngsters need to learn techniques that help them to minimise stress, worry and tension. Baba has said many things relevant to this topic but we fail to pass this information on to students. We invite post-graduate students to learn *bhajans*. Many are not interested in learning *bhajans*. Rather than tell you to your face, they will successfully avoid you. Their immediate need is to learn Stress Management. Why don't we pass on the information that Baba has given with regard to this important topic?

TIME MANAGEMENT

The second thing today's youth need to learn is time management. Should I think about the office at home? Should I think about the family when in the office? If I think about

the family in the office, I will soon be kicked out of the office. If I think about the office at home, the family will eventually kick me out. I will end up out of both places!

How can I find time for enjoyment? How can I find some time to spend with my family? How can I find some time for spiritual activities? Can I ever find time for service, for recreation, for enjoyment, for happiness, or even for occasional sight-seeing? Most of us have no idea whatsoever about how to manage our time in order to lead a well balanced life. The focus is solely on work and salary. We have lost sight of the charm and beauty of life. We have lost sight of the purpose of life. So, youth need exposure to information about time management.

HEALTH MANAGEMENT

Thirdly, students need to learn how to manage their health. Many people today spend all day sitting in front of computers in air-conditioned offices, and then drive home in air-conditioned cars. So they end up with conditioned bodies. (*Laughter*) Most of these people suffer from very poor health. We should teach students some *yoga* exercises and other physical exercises, so that they can be slim and trim, vital, energetic and dynamic, and look good. No work is worth a sagging, pasty, castor oil face. We should be active and dynamic. We must endeavour to remain fit and healthy. Bhagavan spoke about the need for a healthy body long back, but our people seem to have totally ignored what He has said.

BREATH MANAGEMENT

The fourth topic that youth need to be taught is breath management. I am speaking about these matters for the benefit of devotees all over the world who may access our website. As this is an international forum, the website is available in eight foreign languages. Hopefully this information may encourage people to develop the ideas presented.

The fourth topic is breath management. Many people are not able to concentrate. Work performance suffers when one is unable to focus one's attention on a given task. One who cannot focus and concentrate is rather unsuccessful in many other areas of life where focused attention is required.

Meditation practice facilitates greater levels of concentration and focused attention. It is nothing other than breath management. There are many people who conduct meditation classes for which they charge heavily. Meditation classes--\$150 for 15 sessions.

Meditation is not a commercial commodity. Meditation is not a business. We should know how to manage our breath, our inhalation and exhalation.

Baba has spoken a lot about this subject, my friends. We have to pity ourselves for not taking advantage of what He has told us. If a fellow who is living by the side of a river with very abundant good drinking water dies from thirst, what do you say? You pity him. There is plenty of good drinking water, yet he dies from thirst. Who is responsible for his death? Baba has given us a fund of information, but we are not tapping into that source. We continue to live according to our own dogmatic, age-old beliefs.

Breath management is the fundamental meditation technique. For how many seconds should one inhale? For how many seconds should one exhale? For how many seconds should one hold the breath? There are three steps: *Pukara*--inhalation, *Kumbaka*--retention and *Rechaka*--exhalation. How many seconds should we spend at each stage? Baba has given us all the details pertaining to breath management.

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The fifth point pertains to success. Everyone wants to be successful in life. What steps should one take in order to be successful in life? First of all we must ask, "What is success?" Do we have an idea of what it means to be successful? "Steps towards Success" is another topic that modern youth need instruction in.

Personality development is of vital importance. These days, people limit the concept of personality development to dress style and fashions. In fact personality development includes three components. What are they? Firstly, there is the physical component. One should have a good physical *persona*. One should never give the impression that he or she is sickly. One should appear healthy.

The second component is psychological development. The mind should be sharp and alert. It should be a storage house--the house of memory. It should be a center of recapitulation and recording, at all times sharp and alert.

The third component of personality development is intellectual development. Intellectual development ideally enables one to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad.

The three dimensional development of the physical, psychological and intellectual aspects of the human being constitute personality development. This is what youth need today.

MONEY MANAGEMENT

The sixth topic is Money Management. What I am speaking about today relates to three periods of time--past, present and future. The needs of today, the experience of the past and the vision of the future all go together as we think about issues relevant to modern youth all over the world. The youth need training in money management. They have no time for financial planning, which takes into account expenditure, income and prioritising how best to utilise resources.

Money management involves the concept of "Ceiling on Desires". But if I jump straight into "Ceiling on Desires" the youth may rebel. They will say, "Let me first cultivate desires. I will put a ceiling on them later. As yet I haven't explored desires; so how is the question of 'Ceiling on Desires' relevant?" So youth need training in money management.

FAMILY MANAGEMENT

The seventh area of training for up and coming professionals is the management of the family--how to rear children and how to attempt to keep everybody happy. My absence at home should not be a relief to the family members. Some families celebrate when the husband or the master of the family is away.

This is like what happens when classes are cancelled. The students jump in joy. This implies that the teacher is boring. This does not happen in our Sathya Sai University, but in colleges where I have taught in the past. Whenever any VIP visited the college and the principal announced, "In honor of the visit of so-and-so, classes are suspended for the day," boys would clap enthusiastically.

I always felt so badly thinking, "Am I boring or what? Why do they want to escape from me? Why do the students clap when they don't have to meet with me? Is it something wrong with me or something wrong with them?" I always used to introspect on such issues. I really dream of a day when an announcement is made that tomorrow is a holiday and the boys would come to me and say, "It is very unfortunate that we will not see you tomorrow." (*Laughter*) I don't know if that will ever happen during my lifetime!

My friends, the family should not celebrate my absence. Sometimes there is a gala celebration in the office when the boss is on leave. Such celebrations occur because the boss is a sadist. Sometimes this applies to the head of the family also. Perhaps the head of the family doesn't want his children to smile. Perhaps he does not want the children to enjoy watching TV. The children have to wait for their father to go out, or they have to go to the neighbour's house to enjoy themselves. This is a tragic situation.

The youth need to know how to be happy at the family level and in the workplace. Baba has dealt with such topics at length.

MECHANICS OF THE CONFERENCE

The Youth Conference at Nellore was comprised of three sessions. Each session had a facilitator, who was a senior Sai devotee with communication skills, able to speak on any topic related to Swami. Each facilitator could explain things from Bhagavan's point of view in an articulate and acceptable way. In addition to a facilitator who was considered to be an expert from our organisation, two speakers from the outside gave presentations during each session. These speakers were highly qualified professors with PhD, MD or FRCS. They were top people in their respective fields and extremely popular professors.

Each speaker was supposed to speak for half an hour only. It often proves to be difficult for an audience to remain focused on any speaker for more than an hour. An hour is the maximum. After 45 minutes, the torture begins. Up until half an hour, one feels quite relaxed. (I do not mean to point a finger at anybody in particular, but if you put pressure on me, I may have to reveal his name! Please don't drag me into that position.)

We have a top person who gives package lectures of 5 hours duration each. So if you come at 8 AM, you will not leave until 2 PM,, whether in an unconscious or semi-conscious state I do not know. (*Laughter*) And the same speaker will come out with a second such package lecture in the evening. This lecture will go on till 11 o' clock in the night. Next day the same thing will happen. So by the third day some participants have decided not to be spiritual in this life or in any of their future lives! (*Laughter*) Some have decided not to attend such talks ever again during this lifetime. Some regretted having attended the first two days of the conference, and go to see a movie at the IMAX Theatre on the third day, in order to relax. Does such a youth conference serve any purpose? For this reason, each speaker was given just half an hour. It is enough time to speak on any of the above topics.

The first speaker was Professor, Dr. K. Narasimha Reddy, who is a reader in personal development. He spoke on personality development. He spoke very well. Every sentence he uttered was applauded by the students because it was full of wit and humor. He was a highly resourceful speaker.

QUALITIES OF A LEADER

The second topic was given to another PhD holder, Dr Narendra Kumar. He spoke on the qualities of an inspiring leader. He included case studies of some great leaders in his talk. Dr Narendra Kumar is a remarkable young man. It is nice that young people

speak to youth. If an elderly person speaks to these youngsters, they will say, “We will listen to you when we reach your stage in life.” Men of the younger generation, representatives of today’s youth, should be encouraged to speak, because they have a greater awareness of the problems the younger generation faces. The topic of leadership was very well handled by this speaker.

He compared Osama Bin Laden to Obama, the new President of America. Osama’s leadership led towards destruction and death, whereas Obama utilised leadership to generate hope and the promise of change, leading to a better society. Osama to Obama. (*Laughter*) Obama offers hope for a better future. He promises positive change. The new President of America is a man of only 45 or 46 years. His personality and young age are impressive. Let us wait for some years before we judge his performance.

Today we have people with all sorts of debilitating illnesses holding on to leadership roles. Such people want to leave this world with state honors. We need young, healthy and dynamic people in leadership roles. The job of the older generation is to offer whatever resources it can afford, and to offer guidance and advice whenever it is sought. The older generation should sit back and show appreciation for the work done by the younger generation. We will give you resources if we can afford to. We will give you the guidance if you care for it. We will give you advice if you seek it. We will appreciate you and sit among the audience.

Krishna did not fight. He made Arjuna fight. Krishna offered Arjuna encouragement and dispelled all of his doubts. He never said, “You sit down while I fight on your behalf.” We, the senior members of society, should play the role of Krishna. We should encourage the youngsters to take over the helm. That is what is needed urgently today.

Thus the morning session concluded. The facilitator and the two speakers each addressed the gathering for an hour and a half. The first session was one and a half hours in duration.

NEW SPEAKERS AND NEW TOPICS

During the second session, a principal from a degree college spoke on the management of time and stress. The second speaker, a professor, spoke on self-actualisation. Then there followed a guided meditation, which was very well received. After the second one and half hour session, we had a lunch break.

The third session embraced three topics. The principal of a college spoke on “Science and Spirituality”. Another speaker, a very popular professor of English, spoke on communication skills.

In all, there were three sessions, each session lasting one and half hours. The Youth Conference at Nellore was hailed as a 100% thumping success. Why was it such a success? The topics dealt with were relevant to the needs of the youth who attended the conference, and the speakers were local academics rather than a team from Bombay or Hyderabad. We used local talent. The speakers were all resourceful people and extremely popular. Most of the students and all the professors were new to Sai literature. A thousand students registered at 8:45 in the morning and stayed with us till 5:30 in the evening. We had two breaks for tea and one lunch break. The youth in attendance enjoyed the topics presented. They liked to listen to new speakers. They liked to listen to new points which they found to be relevant to their lives.

Towards the end of the conference, I was just sitting back and enjoying. For the first time in my life, I was listening to others speak for an entire day. Everywhere I go, I am invited to speak; but this time I preferred to be a listener. I organised the whole thing, and wanted the others to speak. At the end of every speech, I gave the speaker a small memento, a hug and words of acknowledgement. That was my job. I was simply a catalyst. I dealt with two issues: first, that the boys are very intelligent and need appropriate stimulation; and second, that you cannot only utilise Sai devotees saying, "Sai Ram, Sai Ram, Sai Ram" all the time.

FORUM TO REACH OUT TO A WIDER AUDIENCE

One question I was asked by the audience was, "What do you want to achieve in a one day conference for youth? Can you achieve anything in a one day conference?" That was the question put to us. Well, Bhagavan is with us. We can never fail. I got up and said, "You get married on one day only, but you live with your wife throughout your life." (*Applause*) Why can't the effect of the conference be like that?

The second question I was asked was, "Is it possible for a speaker to cover the entire subject in the half an hour allotted to him?" My answer was, "You don't need to swallow the whole of the Ganges River to quench your thirst. A glass of water is enough." After all, according to the great Aurobindo, the best way to teach is to make a student learn by him/herself. The best way to teach is to arouse the student's interest in the subject. Then he/she will gather more and more information on that topic. This is the best way to teach. All of them were very, very happy with these answers.

SWAMI FOCUSES ON THE STUDENTS

I am sorry if I have digressed or deviated from the topic that I usually take up for the Sunday talks. I did this deliberately, even though it may not be useful to most of you. My

idea was only to reach out to the many who care to browse through our website so that the model for the youth conference can be copied everywhere.

My friends I have taken so much time to report on the Youth Conference at Nellore because I am excited about the program. I am really excited because Swami spends most of His time with the students. He has got very high hopes for youth. He talks more to the students than to other devotees. Why? Don't those devotees have enough devotion? Don't they lead a disciplined life? Don't they meditate?

Youngsters have a long journey ahead of them. For this reason, they need extra training, extra time, extra love, and the extra shower of grace. The time He spends with older devotees is enough. Know that you will be blessed from within. You will be encouraged from within. The time that He spends with you is more than enough.

We older ones may have to get off the train on which we are traveling at any time because we have been traveling on the train for 60 or 70 years or so. The train may stop at any moment and we may have to get off. We should keep our luggage ready.

Bhagavan will never commit any mistake. He spends more time with the college students because He intends that they be nation-builders. He wants them to be ideal citizens. He wants them to be patriots, ideal administrators, top professionals, successful human beings and worthy heirs of the rich cultural heritage of this country. This is what He expects from His students.

YOUTH CONFERENCES A SUCCESS

My friends, I appeal to everybody: may my excitement and enthusiasm be passed on to others who are working in the organisation so that they can also take up this experiment. The Nellore Conference was the third such experiment and was a great success. The first experiment was in Srikakulam district and was attended by 1500 youth. We never expected such a huge attendance. The youth demanded that another such seminar be held in the immediate future. They wanted that dates be announced for the next such meeting.

The second experiment was also very successful. It took place at Anantapur. There the youth asked many questions and wanted to know when their questions would be answered. They also wanted to know when they could all gather together again. They said that they had found the meeting very helpful. I was immensely happy.

The third experiment at Nellore, about which I have reported this morning, was also very successful. But we cannot conclude that the information presented is meant for youth only.

EXISTENCE IS ONE

I would like to conclude this morning's session with two or three most fascinating and interesting points, relating to the subject normally under discussion during our Sunday meetings. Ramana Maharshi gave a very important teaching to humanity. He asked, "How is it possible to know that 'I am the one, the only one, that that there is no other'."

He stated, "The many I see around me are my own reflections, that's all. Existence is one, Divinity is one." The important question is this: how can I know that I am the One-without-a-second? How is one to understand the plurality, the multiplicity, the variety one perceives, when the Truth is that there is actually only one?

Ramana Maharshi gave an example. He said, "You hold this pen with your left hand. Come on and shift it to the right hand. Are you two now? No. The one holding the pen with the left hand is the very same one holding the pen with the right hand. It is the same man. There are not two men. Similarly, there is only one Divinity, but that Divinity is viewed as many. There is only One-without-a-second. The pen shifts from one hand to another hand, but the hands belong to the same person." This simple example illustrates the primary level of spiritual awareness--the understanding of oneness.

THE NEED TO BE SPECIAL IS BORN OUT OF IGNORANCE

Another very important question was put to Ramana Maharshi: "Why am I proud? Why am I egoistic? Why do I want to dominate? Why do I want to pretend that I know more than others? Why do I want to be special?"

The answer is simple. "It is due to ignorance. When you are the only One-without-a-second, when all are your reflections, why do you need to be egoistic? Is there anyone else to feel jealous of? Is there anyone to feel proud? Is there anyone else separate from you? When there are two, one can feel jealous of the other, or one can feel proud of himself and greater than the other; but when there is only one, how can one be greater? Greater than what? Therefore, it is ignorance, or absence of the experience of the One-without-a-second, which is the cause for ego, pride and prejudice."

THE GURU WAKES YOU UP

Then we move on to the question, "Oh Bhagavan, what are You doing? How are You helping me, Bhagavan? I am still asleep, in deep slumber. I still find myself in ignorance

and ego. How are You helping me, Bhagavan? How am I to know that I have Your assistance? How am I to know that I have received Your grace? How am I to know that I am advancing, that I am progressing?”

A patient knows how his or her condition is improving when the temperature comes down, when appetite increases, and some weight is gained. A student can judge academic improvement by earning better marks. We can know if our financial situation has improved by checking our pass-books. But how am I to know if I am progressing spiritually? How am I to know that Bhagavan, the *guru* of *gurus* is helping me? How am I to know that He has helped me? This is a genuine question which is often asked. We have no time to put that question to ourselves because we are so busy questioning others about their spiritual progress. We are so busy observing others that we leave no time to observe our own selves!

So how can I know if I am progressing spiritually? The answer is this: a man is in a deep sleep. But it is time to get up because he has to go to the office and he has a long distance to drive to get there. How can one help this man? You need to wake him up. Similarly, an ideal *guru* will wake you up from the sleep of identification with the body, the sleep of worldly attachments, from the sleep of *dvaita bhava* (the feeling of duality). The *guru* will wake you out of this sleep into the waking state of awareness of non-duality, of knowledge, of wisdom, of unity, of oneness. That is the job of a *guru*. Within the awareness of unity and the identification with the unity lie our bliss and our peace. This is the job of a *sadguru*—to awaken us from the slumber of ignorance.

In our ignorance, we think that Baba’s job is to receive our letters, and see to it that our joint pains are relieved. No, no! He only performs such tasks so that you come closer to Him. Then He can hammer you. If he does not first draw us to Him by giving us what we want, we wouldn’t go to Him because to have one’s ego chiseled and hammered can be extremely painful. The most painful thing in this world is to have one’s ego hammered and chiseled.

If you pickpocket my wallet, I don’t mind. If I am not promoted, I don’t mind. But when my ego is tackled, I feel suicidal. It is very painful. Speaking about being egoless is a sure sign of having a big ego. It is not easy to give up the ego because we have spent thousands of lives in the world of ego. It is not easy to give it up all of a sudden.

PREPARATION BEFORE OPERATION

Divine surgery is not an easy thing. God has to crush you in order to disrobe you of your ego. Stripping you naked is Divine surgery. Before undergoing physical surgery, the patient must be prepared. We are prepared before Divine surgery also. What is that

preparation? He will attract you by giving you whatever you want. Do you want chocolate? Come closer, I will give you chocolate. You want a visa? How many visas do you want? You want promotion? Come here. Now you have your promotion. This is the preparation. Next comes the operation to make us get out of the ego state. Because this is such a painful process, we don't go in for the surgery without preparation. This is the job of a *guru*.

FROM THE FORM TO THE FORMLESS GOD

Then comes a further difficulty. How do we think of God when God is everywhere? How to think of God when all are forms of the one God? How to comprehend God when God is formless? How to imagine the formless one? It is a problem.

Compassionate *gurus* like Paramahansa Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, and Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba have all given us a technique with which to overcome this problem. They have all said, "First think of a form of the Divine. Concentrate on this form. This will lead you to the formless." It is difficult for the mind to imagine and comprehend the formless, so begin with a form. Go from formfulness to formlessness.

"Oh I see, Swami. You want me to travel from formfulness to formlessness. What part do you play in this transition, Swami?"

This is the answer He gave: "I will not leave you until you reach the stage of formlessness. I will not leave you until you reach that stage." This is the Divine promise. "I will carry you. I will guide you step-by-step. I will not leave you. I will be with you until you reach the formless, nameless, cosmic, universal, existential stage, which is eternal. This is liberation. I will not leave you until you reach that stage."

Is this not the greatest treasure we can ever have? Is this not the greatest promise ever given to us? He will not leave you until you go to that state of formlessness, of namelessness. This is the role of a *guru*.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE DIVINE

That is an assurance given by Bhagavan, and still He continues to talk to us. Even God wants feedback. Immediately after He gives a discourse, He will ask the people around Him, "How did you like My talk?"

"Oh, Swami, it was very nice." "Ha, it is so very nice." "No, no! Bhagavan it was very nice."

Then He asks you to talk about two or three points He made during His discourse. Then He will give another discourse followed by a supplementary talk, during which one can always pick up a few points. The golden opportunity to talk to Swami after His discourse is such a wonderful experience.

“Hmmm, how do you like the topic? Was Swami’s speech okay?” He wants to know to what extent you grasped His message. He wants to know to what extent you could assimilate, to what extent you could absorb, to what extent you could digest His message. He wants to know to what extent you are impressed by His message. This is why He asks, “Swami’s speech *bagunda?*” (“Was it good?”)

“Swami, it was very nice.”

Then Swami elaborates on each point that we remember. Why? He won’t leave you alone until you understand what He wants you to understand. He wants you to recapitulate, recall, and be reminded of His message. He won’t leave you until you understand.

Long back, I followed Him to some districts. It was a seven-day journey during which He visited different places. At one point He asked, “Did you follow My talks?”

“Yes, Swami.”

“Which talk did you like?” (*Laughter*)

I just said something . . . anything to reply to Swami’s question.

“Ha! You were sleeping, that is why you said that. You don’t even remember one point that I made!” (*Laughter*) When you don’t even remember one point that was made, what do you say? Swami tests you. He asks you whether you liked His discourse or why did you like it? That is one way He tests you.

There is a second way. Swami asks you how long you would like to be in kindergarten. “How long would you like to be in the kindergarten stage? Don’t you want to move on to higher levels of awareness? Haven’t you taken up some practice? Don’t you want to experience spirituality in depth?” He urges you to proceed along the path. That is the second technique.

Then comes the third test. He will force you to go within. We get used to Swami talking with us every day. Then He puts us into cold storage for six months. He treats us as if one is an ant or a mosquito. What is one supposed to do then? To whom can one complain? There is no complaint box there. What can one do?

At this point, the only thing left to do is to close your eyes and feel Him within; enjoy, talking to Him within. This is one method He uses to force you to go within--to practice

introspection, self-assessment, and self-evaluation. Enjoying Him and conversing with Him within yourself is Divine dialogue. It is a monologue when He talks to you outside, and a dialogue when you converse with Him within. Then you are hearing the inner voice. You experience the inner voice when He talks to you from within.

PATH OF SADHANA

Evolution takes place slowly and steadily. You grow closer and closer towards the expected standards. He said, "I won't leave you till you reach the highest stage." Without knowledge you are simply like a child. When a child continually nags, "I want an airplane, Daddy. I want an airplane," what shall the father do? The child continues to cry for an airplane, but the father doesn't have an airplane. So, what can he do? He sees a sweet. He diverts the child's attention with the sweet.

Similarly, when you approach Swami with a problem, He will divert your attention and you forget what you wanted to ask Him. You forget to offer Him the letter in which you describe the problem. Meanwhile, He has installed some spiritual truths into your head.

He has taken on a very heavy responsibility. He sees to it that we become interested in the thing that He has come to give us. He will see to it that we proceed along the path to liberation. He will not leave us until we have reached the goal.

WHAT IS LOST AND WHAT IS GAINED?

I will close this morning's session with one final point. Given that He will never abandon us, what is it that I am going to lose and what is it that I am going to gain? When we proceed along the path given to us by Baba, when we experience the painful chiseling process of *sadhana*, what is it that we are going to lose and what is it that we are going to gain?

We are going to lose the only thing which has to be lost at one time or another, in one life or another. We are going to lose our attachment to untruth, our belief that "I am the body, and I am the mind." Is this a loss or a gain?

Suppose someone has a temperature of 103, but after swallowing some Paracetamol (aspirin) tablets, the temperature comes down to 98.4. Should that fellow cry, "I lost 4 degrees, I lost 4 degrees!" Is this really a loss? Don't you think that the reduction in temperature is a gain? Similarly, the loss of belief in untruth is a gain. When one loses belief in untruth, one realises the Truth. One realises the true 'I', the Self, pure consciousness. The Truth is revealed when the false 'I' is lost.

We conclude this morning's session on this note. Thank you for being with us this morning, for your rapt attention and for your interest in this subject. I repeat once again in all earnestness that I am grateful to each and every one of you for giving me the greatest joy of being able to share whatever little knowledge I have, whatever little information I could gather. This thrills me and gives me bliss. I gain more than all of you from giving such talks.

May Bhagavan bless you. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

OM

*Asato Maa Sad Gamaya
Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya
Mrtymoraa Amrtam Gamaya*

*Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu
Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu
Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu*

Om Shanti Shanti Shantih

*Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji ki Jai!
Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji ki Jai!
Jai Bolo Bhagavan Shi Sathya Sai Babaji ki Jai!*

Thank you. God bless you.