

PODCAST 229: SPIRIT OF SERVICE OR SERVICE TO THE SPIRIT

Feb. 22, 2024

Om Sri Sai Ram!

Welcome to Prasanthi Sandesh,
Podcast 229, "The Spirit of Service or Service to the Spirit."

*The following text contains excerpts from Prof. Anil Kumar's book
"Sai-Chology," pg. 157 to 161.*

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SERVICE

"The Spirit of Service or Service to the Spirit?" Which one is more important? Should we have the 'Spirit of Service' or should we consider 'Service to the Spirit'?

We find Service to be an important element in the world of Sai and Service being prescribed as a spiritual path for all devotees. We should therefore ponder on the philosophy of service.

By rendering service without understanding its philosophy and spirit, we tend to become mechanical and the purpose is lost. Then service becomes monotonous and boring. So we should know the value of service and maintain its spirit. But when service becomes monotonous it is meaningless. Hence, we should understand what service actually means. This is necessary because everybody speaks of service in a most frivolous and shallow manner.

So what is it that we should know? Is it enough to have "The Spirit of Service?" What does "The Spirit of Service" mean? By knowing what service is, we will have answered this question. And when we know what service is, we will also understand the meaning of "Service to the Spirit".

An unfortunate aspect of today is that we perform service mechanically and without enthusiasm and thereby miss the joy that it imparts. We should be happy to be of service.

Are we joyful at the end of service? We do not enjoy what we do because of our prejudices - we want somebody else's job or we want Swami's attention. Thus, the very motive and purpose becomes meaningless. Hence, the need to understand the idealism and spirit of service.

SERVICE IS AN OPPORTUNITY

Before we develop "The Spirit of Service", let us comprehend what service is. First of all, service is an opportunity. Mercenary service like a job or a career is not an opportunity. One does service to earn income for his livelihood. This is a necessity, but **true** service is a matter of good fortune. This chance is not given to everybody and

comes but rarely. It drops like heavenly manna, as the Holy Bible says. All may serve at an unexpected hour. When you are quite unprepared, service drops down as a stroke of good luck.

SERVICE IS LOVE IN ACTION

Really speaking, service is **love in action**. It is not enough if a father says to the son, "Dear son, I love you." But, when the son demands money or clothes and the father refuses, then the spirit of love is missing. Similarly, when a husband expresses love for his wife, it should be manifested in action. Unless we serve, we cannot say that we love.

TRUE SERVICE IS ABOVE SELF

The third point is that true service is above ego. When we nurse ambitions of becoming the convener of a Sai Centre or such position, it is an expression of total ignorance. Here, the ideal of true service is missing.

When we have no desire for name or fame and we are silent, calm and serene in our efforts, that service spreads like the fragrance of a flower, which goes without announcement, propaganda or broadcast. This is true service, one that is above self.

SERVICE IS SPONTANEOUS, NOT SCHEDULED

The next point is that service is spontaneous. It is not scheduled or studied. For example, if one is on a particular duty and there is an emergency call, then one cannot say that one will not respond to that call because his/her duty is on. In fact, there should be a spontaneous and immediate response to the emergency. An immediate reaction to the situation is service. It is not anything bound by time.

Service that is spontaneous and natural like a fountain is true service, carrying with it the real spirit of service. Moreover, service is silent. When one recounts one's length of service, one is doing disservice by announcing it so; when one has the spirit of service, one does not take credit.

BABA IS A SILENT WORKER

We have to take a leaf from Baba's life. He does not want publicity nor does he expect recognition. He does not wait for our expression of thanks or gratitude. In fact, Swami gives the example of parents who do not expect expression of thanks from their children for all the things that they do for them. Indeed Baba dislikes any praise because Baba's work is true service done in silence.

SERVICE IS NOT ABOUT MAGNITUDE OF WORK

Service is not about the magnitude or intensity of work. It is the ideal that matters. It is *bhava*, the feeling that matters. The spirit of service is more important than the amount of service. We may do any number of things. But after all, without true feeling, it is meaningless nor does it have any importance.

A boy in Kodaikanal purchased a small gift made of Sandalwood for Bhagawan. Swami left everything else and started looking at it. The item was nothing special or expensive but He stared at it intently.

Bhagawan remarked that it is the feeling behind the gift that is important. All others were busy purchasing gifts for their near and dear ones, but that boy had not forgotten Baba, and thus purchased that small gift.

“Patram, Pushpam, Phalam, Toyam” means a small flower, a spoon of water, a small fruit given with a sensitive and pure heart in good spirit - that is service. It is not the magnitude that counts.

TRUE SERVICE IS CONTINUOUS, NOT SEASONAL

True idealism requires us to serve continuously and it is not seasonal. One cannot say that one serves only during specific periods. Service is a lifelong activity, till the last breath. We should seek every opportunity to be of service because the chance that comes now may not be there later, maybe not for another lifetime. Hence, let us be motivated to serve.

SERVICE IS NOT MERELY SKILL OR PROFESSIONALISM

In true service, it is not merely the skill or professionalism that matters, but it is the heart that counts. Our skills and expertise belong to the head; but the feeling and sentiment emanate from the heart. So, it is the heart that ultimately matters because a pure heart is the temple of God. Hence, it is the prompting of the heart that should propel everybody to serve; skill or expertise of the head are secondary.

The spirit of service is transcendence and transcendental. Service is not restricted to any caste or community, creed or gender, nationality, time or space. Spiritual service transcends all limitations. It is beyond all these relations.

The scope of service becomes very narrow if it is limited to a particular community or class. This is also selfish and self-centred. Such service is localised and goal-oriented. But the true spirit of service is beyond age, class, caste, community or nationality, and such considerations should be sidelined.

Thank you for your time. We will continue on this topic from professor Anil Kumar's book *Sai-Chology* in the next podcast.

Om Sai Ram!