



The Eternal Companion

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On the occasion of Sathya Sai Aradhana Mahotsavam
24 April 2020

With love and gratitude, I offer my prayerful Pranams at the divine lotus feet of our dearest, sweetest, loving and omnipresent Lord, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Dear brothers and sisters, loving Sai Ram to all of you.

It is wonderful to see Swami's darshan in all the three *Punyakshetras*: the holy places in Prasanthi Nilayam, Brindavan and Kodaikanal, and it reminds me of sweet memories when we were with Swami in Kodaikanal in 1994.

First, I would like to offer my gratitude to Bhagawan and all of you for this opportunity to share His love and message with you on this special day. This is the day when Sathya Sai devotees all over the world offer their love and gratitude by singing His glories, by sharing His Leelas – the divine sports, and the stories. They also get involved in the divine works, divine mission, and also dive deep into Swami's teachings and practice them. There are four ways we can express our gratitude: singing His glories and participating in His mission, studying His teachings and practising and listening to His stories – which is Sai Bhagavatham.

Nine years ago, on April 24, 2011, on the holy Easter Day, Swami decided to leave His physical form. God decides when to enter and exit. That is why His birth is not called *Prasavam* (Conception). When God enters the human body, or when He is born, it is called *Pravesam* (Divine Entry). He comes and He decides when He is going to exit. He decided to exit on the holy Easter Day, which signifies the love and sacrifice He has made for all of us, the whole humanity.

It also signifies this is the day when Swami awakened the Sai consciousness in all of us, wherein we can feel Him wherever we are, which transcends the barriers of time, space and causation. Then, He became our eternal companion: He was with us, He is with us, and He will be with us because He has repeatedly said that He has no birth and no death.

Lord Krishna beautifully said in the Gita

*“Avyaktam Vyaktim Apanyam
Manyante Mam Abuddhayah
Param Bhavam Ajananto
Mamabhootha Maheswaram.”*

These ignorant, dull-headed people think, I am the manifest body and not the universal unmanifest reality that I am. These people are not able to realize that I am the Lord of all creation. Swami has also said this in many discourses and in private: “I am NOT this body, I am the all-pervading reality”.

Then who is this Sai? We say He is God and God is infinite, who cannot be comprehended by the finite mind, speech, intellect and body. That is why the scriptures say “*Yatho Vacho Nivartante, Aprapya Manasa Saha*”.

God is the supreme reality which cannot be comprehended by the mind or expressed by speech. Swami Himself said this in a landmark discourse on 17 May 1968 given at the First World Conference in Mumbai. Swami says that this form is “*Sarva Devata Swaroopa*... This is the human form in which all divine principles, all divine entities, that is to say all names and forms attributed by man to God are manifest.”

The Eternal Companion

And He cautioned us never to allow any doubt to distract us from this. That is why we also chant:

*“Sarva Roopa Dharam Shantam
Sarva Nama Dharam Shivam.”*

He is all names and all forms. My father once saw Swami as a blue complexioned Krishna. My mother saw Swami as Sri Ramakrishna because she was initiated by the Ramakrishna order. However, she had a doubt whether she is doing the right thing by coming to Swami. One day, Swami came in her dream and showed her that He is the same as Sri Ramakrishna.

My wife’s chosen deity from her young days is Lord Venkateshwara, Balaji and she also had a dilemma sometimes. Once she went to Seven Hills of Tirupati to have the darshan of Lord Venkateshwara. In the sanctum sanctorum, in place of the idol of Balaji, she saw our beautiful Lord Sai, Anupama Sundara (unparalleled beauty).

He is all names and forms. Not only that, Swami Himself said He is in every atom, cell and moment: *Anu Anu* (every atom); *Kana Kanamu* (every cell) and *Kshana Kshanamu* (every moment), and everything is permeated by the divine.

*“Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma.”
(Everything is Brahman)*

I remember a beautiful incident. Once when Swami was with His devotees, He showed a piece of rock and asked, “What is it?” Somebody said it is a stone, and somebody said it contains sand, and there was a geologist who said, “Swami it is silica and calcium carbonate.” Swami smilingly listened to all this and then suddenly said “See” and there appeared a beautiful sugar idol of Lord Krishna in place of the rock. Swami said “See, divinity is present in everything; not only divinity, sweetness is present in every part because the whole creation has come out of Him”. *“Viswam Vishnumayam Jagath.”* (Whole universe is Lord Vishnu). Everything is permeated by the divine, not only humans, but also plants, animals, and inanimate objects. That is the revelation Swami made in His discourse on 17 May 1968.

Secondly, in a 1998 Christmas discourse, Swami beautifully said “If somebody asks you who is Sai Baba, then sing this Bhajan”.

*“Love is My form
Truth is My breath
Bliss is My food.
My life is My message,
Expansion is My life.
No reason for love; No season for love;
No birth; No death.”*

Again, He is emphasizing that He has no beginning, no end, no birth and no death. We should have complete conviction that He is our eternal companion. He said, “Love is My form” – He wants us to remember that. Swami says, “God is love, love is God, live in Love. And the best way to see God is through love.” Swami also gave the example of the moon. How do you see the moon? Only through moonlight. Similarly, God who is love can be seen only through love. Swami’s life, His message, His Ideals, His humanitarian works, can all be enshrined in one word: Love.

He then says, “Truth is My breath”. Swami said “I am Sathya *Bhodhaka* (Teacher of Truth). I teach the truth and the truth shall set you free”. That is what Swami is – Truth. Then, He said “Bliss is My food.” Swami is *Ananda Swarupa* (Embodiment of Bliss). This is the second revelation Swami made about who He is.

Thirdly, on 19 June 1974, Swami revealed who Sai is. Swami was talking about the name Sai Baba. He said Sa means divine, Ayi means mother. Baba means father. So, He is our divine mother and father. He is Sathya Sai Baba. That means He is our true divine mother and father. Swami said physical parents may have an iota of selfishness. But, His love is pure, unconditional, and unalloyed. His love is that of infinite mothers.

He always showers His love, guides us, guards us, protects us, corrects us, and cajoles us. Whenever you think of Sathya Sai Baba, always think you have your parents. We may lose our physical parents, but the divine parent, true father and mother, is always with us.

The Eternal Companion

I want to share an anecdote of how Swami takes care of us. This happened about 20 years ago. My mother and father, at the command of Swami, and with His guidance, used to live with us in Arcadia, California. One day, my father suddenly had extensive seizures (convulsions) and became unconscious. We called the ambulance and the paramedics came right away and took him to the hospital, which is very close.

My father was past 70 and at that age if somebody has convulsions, it could be either a brain tumour or it could be a stroke. I have many friends who are doctors and they felt that the prognosis was very poor. Meanwhile, my mother was in panic. She did not come to the hospital but went to her Pooja room and holding on to Swami's feet, she was praying. We thought he may not even recover. Then we found that the cause for his convulsions was low sodium in the blood because he was on a very strict low salt diet. Once intravenous saline was given, within 24 hours he recovered. Within two days, he was discharged from the hospital and came home.

We were all very happy and jubilant. When we went to see Swami in Prasanthi Nilayam, we expressed gratitude to Him for saving my father's life. Swami said beautifully, "How can I not do that? Your mother was holding on to My feet so tightly in the Pooja room". This is to show that Swami is with us always. With longing and love, if we hold on to His feet wherever we are, He will take care of us. He gave the assurance – "Why fear, when I am here." Sai is our mother and our father. When we have Him, we have Sai name on our lips.

We have also published in Sathyasai.org website, a letter written by Swami to teachers and students in Brindavan. All of us should read this letter, where Swami made a profound statement, "The one who has Sai name on his lips is a Jeevan Mukta." Like a Mantra, let us remember that the one who has Sai name on his lips is a Jeevan Mukta. Jeevan Mukta means we are liberated while alive.

He then continues to say that one who repeats His name, gets self-realization and becomes one with Swami. I can finish my talk now, because if we have Sai's name, we are realized, and become Jeevan Mukta.

That is the whole purpose and the goal of life.

Swami sings this beautiful Bhajan, "*Pibare Rama Rasam*", which means drink the nectar of the divine name of Rama. There He says "*Sakala Agama Nigamagama Saram.*" Who is Rama? He is the essence of all Vedas, scriptures, Shastras: essence of everything is in His name.

For me, the name of Sai is everything: the source which is love, the path which are all our spiritual practices, and the goal which is love.

I want to elaborate on the name of Sai. Once we have Sathya Sai Baba, who is our true divine mother and father, He takes care of us. We start loving Him, more and more. He then becomes S-A-I. We give priority to Swami in our life as follows: S – Swami first, A – all others next, then little I – our ego, last. So, our priorities change.

Swami says, there are two kinds of people. Some people are like houseflies and others are like honeybees. What do houseflies do? They go and sit on delicious dishes sometimes, and then sit on the garbage. Whereas, honeybees go only for the honey. Similarly, there are spiritual seekers who only think about God. They talk about God, hear about God, see God, walk God, drink God, and eat God. Everything is saturated with divine love. Swami says that a lot of people are part-time devotees but want full-time benefits. Swami says that part-time devotion, but full-time benefits does not work. We need to have complete surrender or complete devotion to Swami, as priority; then comes our other responsibilities. Once we give priority to Swami in our life, we get transformed. All of us can see how we were 30 years ago, 20 years ago, and now. Swami slowly moulds us and that's why He calls us Bangaru, which means gold – like a goldsmith making the gold pure, He is trying to get rid of the impurities in us, thus bringing about transformation.

The Eternal Companion

What does S-A-I stand for? As per Swami,

- “S” for spiritual transformation
- “A” for association transformation
- “I” for individual transformation

Education in Human Values (EHV) is “3HV”. Swami says that when we start practising the human values we get transformation of our head, heart and hands. Then, we will have the head of Adi Shankara, who was the great master of Advaita and always emphasised discrimination:

- *Sat, Asat*
– is it real or unreal?
- *Shreyo Marg, Preyo Marg*
– is it good or pleasing?
- *Pravruthi Marg, Nivruthi Marg*
– is it outward path or inward path?

We need to use our head for discrimination like Adi Shankara. The next is the heart. The heart of Buddha was full of love and compassion for all beings. His kindness was over-flowing. There was no limit for his kindness. We should have heart of a Buddha. Lastly, we should have hands like King Janaka who was also called Videha – one who never had body consciousness. Swami said Janaka did the duty of a King with complete detachment and love. That is the way we should use our head, heart, and hands, which is the integration of all the three yogas as taught by Swami.

When we give priority to Swami, we get spiritual transformation. Swami showed us three ways (three yogas) to get out of bondage. We are all caught up in the 3W’s of worldwide web WWW: wealth, wealth and wealth. Swami showed that the 3 W’s can also help us get out of bondage – Work, Worship and Wisdom.

This path to liberation is in Swami’s name itself. S-A-I

- “S” for service
– the path of Karma Yoga (Selfless service)
- “A” for adoration
– the path of love, bhakti-yoga
- “I” for illumination
– the path of Jnana Yoga

Swami talked extensively about these yogas. I will only touch upon a few points, firstly regarding service. The Sathya Sai Organisation is involved in various service activities. We provide food, water, clothes, shelter, education and medical services to needy people all over the world. But Swami explained that service could be much more than that. If we use kind and loving words to help somebody, that is also service. Even a kind gesture like a smile or encouraging someone with a pat which can make them happy, or praying for other people, is also service. Sending loving thoughts towards someone is also service. So, service could be done in many ways. We should feel that even when we are at home, we can serve. Service can be done wherever we are.

When someone said to Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi, “You don’t do service because you are staying in one place”, he replied “How do you know? These powerful thoughts themselves permeating the universe can do a lot of service.”

In my personal case, I can relate another incident. Once, Swami gave a series of discourses on Shirdi Baba in Telugu, which were not translated into English. My mother tongue being Telugu, I wanted to translate them, and I asked Swami if I can do this as a service. Swami right away stopped me and said that it is not a great service. He said that finding out “Who I Am” is the greatest service. Swami revealed that finding our true nature is the greatest service we can do. He also gave a beautiful definition of service. In Sanskrit, service is called *Paropakara* – *Para Upa-kara*. Swami explained that “*Para*” means God, and “*Upa*” means close – thus, anything or anybody who takes us close to God does service.

Whether we come closer to God or we help other people come closer to God by being exemplars or by doing service or by talking about the Leelas of the Lord, or by bringing people together – we are doing service. Swami says that what is important is how we do service – the attitude with which we serve.

Firstly, “*Sakala Karma Bhagavad Prithartham*” – whatever we do, we should do it to please the Lord. Let us think if Swami will be pleased with what we are doing. Secondly, whatever work we

The Eternal Companion

do, the results should be offered to Him. “*Karma Phala*” – the fruits of our action should be surrendered at His feet. The next step is to realise that we are serving ourselves only and not somebody else. Seeing God in the person we are serving is important. That is why Swami calls it “*Narayana Seva*”.

When we do “*Narayana Seva*”, there are two major problems or obstacles we need to overcome: “*Ahamkara*” and “*Mamakara*” – which means ego and attachment. This is very important, and at this time I want to share an important aspect of serving others. Swami asks us to do service in addition to our regular work at the beginning. But later, He asks us to divinise everything. That means, all work becomes God’s work. In Telugu, He beautifully said, “*Unnade okate karma adi bhagavad karma*”, which means, there is only one kind of work: God’s work.

My wife is a physician. She had responsibilities to take care of the children and take them to school, while she was practicing paediatrics. She had to balance her life between family, taking care of the children and her career, and I was not a great help at home. Once she told Swami, “I am not having enough time for spiritual practices”. Swami gave her a profound message which is applicable to all of us. He said, “Number one, when you are serving your children and your husband, think that you are serving God, that you are serving Swami.” Number two, He asked her to divinise everything and said, “When you are working in the kitchen at home, or vacuuming, or taking away the garbage, think that you are removing the impurities from your heart. When you are cutting vegetables, think that you are cutting up your ego. When you are making Chapati, rolling the bread, think that you are making your heart broad, filling it with love.” Is there anything more important to spirituality than seeing God in everything, getting rid of the ego and getting rid of the impurities and filling our heart with love? That is how Swami showed us how to divinise everything in day-to-day life.

Now I will discuss Adoration, which stands for the next letter I in the word S-A-I. Swami says that it is the easiest and best yoga for this Kali Age. That is why the first of the 16 Vahinis He

wrote was Prema Vahini. Swami says that God is love, Love is God and the best way to reach God is through love. But when we have love, we need to have intense longing.

Once, I asked Him, “Swami, how do I know I have *bhakthi*?” Swami said, “*Neeku theevra parithapamu unte bhakti*”, which means if you have intense longing, intense hunger and thirst for God, it means you have *bhakthi*. It is very important to have intense longing for God because it can liberate us. He gave the example of King Parikshit who was cursed to die within 7 days. He listened to the Leelas of Lord Krishna during those 7 days and was liberated. However, Swami says that you do not need even 7 days. For example, there was a great King called Khatvanga, whose story can be found in Bhagavatha Vahini and Bhagavatham. Once, he came to know that he had only a few minutes to live – not a few days, or even a few hours. Once King Khatvanga knew he was going to die soon, he immediately focused his love on the Lord with intensity and was soon liberated. So, the important thing is to have that intensity of love, which will empower us to surrender to Him completely and immediately.

In the Gita, Swami says there are three important Slokas which discuss only *Saranagathi* (Surrender). The first Sloka is from Chapter 2, where Arjuna surrenders to Lord Krishna, only after which Lord Krishna starts giving the divine message. Until then, Arjuna weeps, saying “I don’t want to fight this war”.

“*Karpanya-Dosho Upahata-Svabhavah*” (2:7)

Then in the ninth chapter of the Gita, Lord Krishna says:

“*Ananyas chintayanto Maam Yae Janaah*

Paryupaasatae

Taesham Nithyaabhiyuktaanaam Yogakshemem

Vahamiamham” (9:22)

“Anybody who thinks about me all the time, I will take care of their welfare.” Since He gave us that assurance, we should always trust Him.

And finally, Swami said that the most important verse is in Chapter 18 of the Gita:

The Eternal Companion

“*Sarva dharmaan Parityajya
Maam ekam Sharanam Vraja
Aham Tvaa Sarva paapaebhyo
Moekshayishyaami Maa Shucha*” (18:66)

“Once you completely surrender to Me, think about Me only, I will remove all your sins, all your grief and anxiety and I will give you Moksha itself, the ultimate goal.”

This is considered *Charama* (Final) Sloka by Vaishnavites.

So, through service you can get Moksha (liberation) and, through Adoration also you can get Moksha.

And finally the most important is illumination, which stands for the “I” in S-A-I. Swami says “*Advaita darshanam Jnanam.*” What is *Jnana*? It is seeing only One, not two. Swami expounded on *Jnana* in many Vahinis, particularly *Jnana Vahini*.

The three Vahinis, *Gita Vahini*, *Upanishad Vahini*, and *Sutra Vahini* are Swami’s commentaries on the *Prasthanas Thrayam*. The summary of all these Vahinis is in *Sathya Sai Vahini*, which is the quintessence of all Vedanta. I would advise people who are serious thinkers and spiritual seekers to read the *Sathya Sai Vahini*.

Swami said beautifully in Telugu,

“*kanula kagapadu
Drushyambu kanchi meeru,
Sathyamani madi yenchaka
sambrahma muna terano daagina
Sathyambu telusu konaga
vishramimpaka nathodi tarali randu*”

“Do not be deluded by what you see in front of your eyes; see the Truth behind the curtain.”

What is that Truth?

“*Yeddi kaladantuchuntimo
addi ledu. Yeddi ledanuchuntimo, addi kaladu.
Onnadu okkate Daivambu yennatikini
Lene dayunu vishwambu kaanaraiya.*”

“What you think exists, does not exist. What you think does not exist, exists. What does exist?”

There exists only one thing and that is God. Even though it does not exist, you see the universe.”

Whatever you are thinking is the universe, the world, is all your illusion, your *Bhrama*.

It is not really true. That is why Swami emphasized this ultimate, fundamental Truth in these Vahinis.

“*Brahma Satyam Jaganmithya
jeevoo bramhai na paraha.*”

“God alone is real, and this world is an illusion and we are all divine.”

We need to keep this in mind and dive deep to experience the bliss inside.

In Swami’s name itself, we have an answer. What is His name? Sai Baba, S-A-I: **See Always Inside**. Our mind and senses go outwards. This is the time to go inside and contemplate. What do you See? B-A-B-A. **B** for being, **A** for awareness, **B** for bliss and **A** for Atma, which stands for *Satchitananda*, that ultimate formless reality, which is knowledge, existence and bliss.

Swami gave us a beautiful formula to attain this in a discourse on His Birthday, November 23rd in 1983. He advised us to do the following prayers to get self-realization.

- “*Nenu Daivambu Thadbhinnameme Kadu*”
– I am God; I am not different from God.
- “*Akhanda Parabrahmame Audu Nenu*”
– I am the indivisible, infinite Parabrahman.
- “*Vyadha Kleshamulu Nannu Sprishmpa Bovu*”
– Grief, anxiety, worries cannot touch me.
- “*Satchitanandame Thadbhinnameme Kadu*”
– I am Satchitananda.
- “*Nitya Thriptunda Bheethi Nan Cherabodu*”
– I am ever content, fear can never come near me.
- “*Ullama paluku Om Tat Sat anuchu*”
– O mind, say Om Tat Sat, because that is the representation of Parabrahman.

We always start the Sarvadharmas prayer with Om Tat Sat. Swami advises us to go on repeating these prayers. “*Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhava-*

The Eternal Companion

ti": Go on thinking about Brahman, and we will become Brahman. Then, we can get the bliss we talked about.

What is bliss? It is *Brahmananda*. Swami says that we say casually, "Oh! I had *Brahmananda*! I had wonderful food, so I had *Brahmananda*, or, I saw a nice movie, so I had *Brahmananda*, or hearing nice music is *Brahmananda*." That is not *Brahmananda*, that is only temporary pleasure. In a divine discourse given in Brindavan on 23 May 2000, Swami quoted the definition of *Brahmananda* from Taitreya Upanishad:

The basic unit of happiness is *Manusyananda* – the happiness enjoyed by a person who is youthful, handsome, and physically strong, with good health, wealth, scholarship and good character. A thousand times that happiness is *Gandharvananda*. A thousand times that is *Daivananda*. A thousand times that is *Brihaspatiananda*. A thousand times that is *Prajapatiananda*. A thousand times that is *Brahmananda*, the highest joy or bliss.

Swami says that we downplay the concept of *Brahmananda*, which is actually 10 to the power of 15, or a thousand trillion, or a quadrillion times greater than *Manusyananda*! This is something we cannot even comprehend. The Upanishads and Vedas say that when the disciple is in bliss, he cannot express his feeling in words – he just makes sounds! That is the state to which you come through Sai.

What is that state? The ultimate stage is Sai And I are one. When you have that feeling inside, acquired by repeating these affirmative prayers, you experience *Brahmananda*, which is nothing but Sai. Then you become S-A-I. I am happy to have the chance to dwell on the name of Sai, which is the essence of all scriptures.

If we just have His name on our lips, Swami said that we will become a *Jeevan Mukta*. We do not need to worry about rituals, spiritual practices or scriptural studies. Just repeating His name and practising His teachings is enough.

I pray to Swami to bless all of us with dedication, devotion, detachment, determination and discrimination, so that we can love Him and

serve Him and His creation till our last breath. Jai Sai Ram.

QUESTION: There are different types of love in the world. Swami always asked us to focus on developing divine love. How can we develop divine love?

First, Swami said that we need to understand what divine love is, because we glibly talk about love. He said, "What is divine love? Divine love is eternal – it is always there, all the time. it is unconditional; it is selfless, and it is pure. In contrast, worldly love is temporary, conditional; selfish and impure." We need to transform this selfish love into divine love. In simple language, Swami says that "Love is selflessness and self is lovelessness. Love gives and forgives. Self gets and forgets."

But, why are we not able to develop divine love? The number one obstacle is the impurities in our mind which must be overcome. Firstly, let us not find faults with others. That is a great obstacle to develop divine love. Swami advises that whatever faults we see in others, however big they are, make them insignificant. On the other hand, He asks us to consider even our small defects, our minor faults, as big, and advises us to repent, be sad and correct our own faults. This is the way to develop pure, divine love, which is *Parabhakti*. Then, we become one with God.

Secondly, Swami says "Always practise the omnipresence of God." He repeatedly said that there is only one God, and He is omnipresent, and only one religion, the religion of love. Wherever we are, we should always see Swami with us, inside us, above us, below us, besides us – everywhere and in everyone. We should practise that His eyes are everywhere.

For example, when I went to Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami used to relate the conversation I had in my house in Los Angeles. This proves His omnipresence, beyond any doubt.

I can share another incident. From childhood, I used to be a devotee of Shirdi Baba. When I came to Swami, I knew that Swami is the same as Shirdi Sai. But, I still had love and attachment to the Shirdi form. During worship in my Pooja

The Eternal Companion

room, I used to offer flowers first to Shirdi Baba and then only to Swami. Once, I asked Him, “Swami, I first offer flowers to Shirdi Baba and then only to you. Is this wrong?” Swami replied, “There is nothing wrong with that, it is the same thing. If you want, you can put flowers on your head too. That is also OK.” I thought first that Swami is teasing me. Then, after contemplation, I realised that He wants us to see the Sai within ourselves, shining forth. This is what He wants. But He did not say that immediately, only after contemplation, it was revealed to me.

That is why Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, when he was a priest in Dakshineswar, was so God-intoxicated that he used to put flowers on his own head. The temple authorities were very annoyed at this, but he was so God-intoxicated that he became one with Mother Kali.

Swami said that if we really have divine love, we will not only see God outside, but we will see God within ourselves. Swami says, “Don’t seek God – See God, with eyes open and eyes closed.” He is outside us, and inside us.

These are the two ways how we can develop divine love: not finding faults with others and seeing God outside and inside. When we point one finger at somebody, three fingers are pointing towards us. This is why Jesus said, “Do not look at the speck in somebody’s eye, look at the beam in your own eye.” This is a disease for many of us, so first we need to try to get rid of this sickness, which is an obstacle for divine love.

We can also have satsangs like this, where people of similar mentality talk about God’s Leelas that reinforce divine love. This is Bhagavatam – that is why in the USA we started this Sai Bhagavatam Series. As I mentioned before, King Parikshit upon hearing the Bhagavatam for just one week, was liberated. King Khatvanga, focusing on God completely for a few minutes, was liberated. I advise everybody to read Bhagavatha Vahini because it can give you everything you seek.

Swami says that with “Bha” we get *Bhakti*, with “Ga” we get *Jnanam*, with “Va” we get *Vairagyam* (dispassion), and with “Tha” we get *Tatvam*

(the reality of ourselves), and finally, with “Mu” we get *Mukti* (liberation). Thus, we can get *Bhakti*, *Jnana*, *Vairagyam*, *Tatvam* and ultimately *Mukti*, by knowing our real nature, which is love. This is why Swami says that divine love is precious. To delve into this truth, we held the Tenth World Conference in 2015, with the theme, “Love is the Source, Love is the Path, and Love is the Goal.”

QUESTION: By virtue of living in the world, we get praise, blame, criticism and challenges – all from different directions. To stay strong and at Swami’s feet, how do we better handle criticism and challenges which come to us on a day-to-day basis?

Criticism is part of life. Actually, it starts from home. Your own spouse could be critical of you. Your children could be critical of you. Your parents could be critical of you. People could be critical of you at work. The society and the Organisation could be critical of you. Criticism is part of life. Lord Krishna says, “*Anithyam Asukham Lokam*”. “This world is temporary and full of pain.” Swami says that for a spiritual seeker this is very good, because it cleanses our heart of the impurities.

Whenever somebody criticizes us, if we do not react, it cleanses out our impurities. Swami also says that when somebody criticizes us, there may really be a fault in us, and we may not be aware of it. If there is a fault, let us take care of that and correct it. The man who criticizes us is doing us a favour, so that we can correct ourselves.

Swami also says that if there are no faults in us and somebody is criticizing us, then that person is actually doing us a favour – their *Punya* comes to us and our *Papa* (bad karma), goes to them. So, they are really doing us a favour by building our spiritual “bank balance.”

Therefore, we should not react to criticism, which is part of life. Swami Himself set an example. When He was young, many people were critical of Him. People were criticizing Swami not only in other parts of India, but even near

The Eternal Companion

Puttaparthi, Prasanthi Nilayam, in bus and train stations. They reported this to Swami, saying “Swami, they are talking ill about You.” Swami said, “You people are thinking about me and praising me only in your Pooja room. They are talking about me in public places, spreading My name.” He took it in a sportive way. So, let us not react. Instead, let us say “that doesn’t affect me”.

Bhagawan Ramana is a beautiful example of this. Somebody wrote a letter to him criticizing Bhagawan Ramana. Then, Ramana looked at that letter. He corrected the typos, the grammar and sent it back. A man standing next to Ramana said, “Bhagawan, he is criticizing you, and you are correcting the grammar and typos and sending it back to him.”

Bhagawan Ramana laughed and said, “They are talking about a person called Ramana. I am the One which is not affected. I am the Supreme Self. This is criticism for the body-mind which are subject to change. So, this does not affect me.”

That kind of attitude is important. Lord Buddha did the same thing, saying that when somebody gives you criticism, politely give it back to them. If we take that attitude, nothing will affect us.

Finally, we need to remember Swami’s commandment: “*Manchi Chaddalu Kuda samamuga bhavinchute bhaktinaku*”. “My definition of devotion is treating all pairs of opposites with equal mindedness.”

We can use this to verify for ourselves if we are devotees. If, when somebody praises us, we get elated, and if somebody criticizes us, we get depressed, or if we get profits, we get elated, while if we have losses, we get depressed, or if we get success, we get elated, while if we get failure, we get depressed, then that means there is no devotion to God.

Swami said, “You need to maintain that *Samatv-abuddhi*” (Equal-mindedness). He says that is very important. “*Samatvam yoga uchyate*.” “Equal-mindedness is called yoga.”

This is Swami’s advice regarding handling criticism.

QUESTION: Very often, we struggle with controlling our mind and we really want to focus on Swami, but the mind comes in the way and diverts our thoughts. One thing leads to the next and we go from here to there. How can we control the mind and try to make it completely focus on Swami all the time?

That is a very, very important question for spiritual seekers. For people who are not aware, Swami has given a series of talks just on the control of mind in Prasanthi Nilayam. I was fortunate to attend those talks on *Manasu Marmamu* in Telugu.

Swami said that the mind is the cause for our liberation and bondage. “*Manayeva Manushyanam Karanam Bandhamokshayeth*.” “The mind is responsible for our liberation and the mind is responsible for our bondage.”

Swami gave a beautiful example. If we turn the key in the lock to one side, it locks and if we turn it to the other side, it unlocks. So, the whole secret of mind control is taking the mind towards God and not the world, and that is not easy.

That is why Arjuna, who was a one-pointed and focused man, and a great archer, tells Lord Krishna “I can hold the wind in my hand, but I cannot control my mind.”

Lord Krishna, who is our Sai Krishna now, shows the way by saying,

“*Asamshayam Mahabaho,
Mano Durnigraham Chalam.*”

“No doubt, *Mahabaho* (great one), it is very difficult to control the mind because the mind is fickle, temporary, and jumps around.” Then, He says,

“*Abhyasena tu Kaunteya Vairagyena Cha Grihyate.*”

“By constant practice of *Viveka* (detachment), and *Vairagya* (dispassion), the mind can be controlled.”

The Eternal Companion

If we are attached to sense objects in this world, we cannot focus the mind. We also need dispassion towards worldly objects. Swami says in the Sutra Vahini,

“Athatho Brahma Jijnasa.”

“After these qualifications only, you become eligible to know the truth of Brahman.”

I can relate to this personally. We were once in Swami’s room during an interview, where a young girl was present. She was very sincere and said, “Swami, I am trying to control my mind, but I do not know what to do.”

Swami gave a beautiful example. He said, “When a little child wanders all over, you do not try to catch the child. You just watch. Otherwise if you try to catch, the child will go all over the room. Just be a witness and watch what happens. Suppose you are in your house and in front of your house a truck full of jasmine flowers goes by. You will get a nice smell. Next, a truck full of garbage goes by and you will get a bad smell. You are not affected by either because you know it is like a passing cloud. So just watch the thoughts.”

Secondly, He said to her, “When you are learning bicycling, in the beginning you fall, then you practise, and finally a stage will come with constant practice, when you can cycle even without holding the handle.”

Hence, first it is important to not get involved in sense pleasures, and second, it is very important to practice. Swami says watch the mind, do not catch the mind. Still the mind first and finally, Swami says, kill the mind – *Mano Nasha*.

The mind goes from bad thoughts to good thoughts and finally to no thoughts. That is the stage of illumination. That is why mind control is very important. Please read these wonderful discourses Swami gave regarding mind and its control.

QUESTION: Can you share a personal experience on the power of prayer and chanting Swami’s name, Om Sri Sai Ram?

I would like to remind myself and everybody that “Om Sri Sai Ram” is a powerful Mantra. That is why as part of the global *Sadhana*, people are chanting it at least 108 times daily. Swami said if we have Sai’s name on our lips we are a *Jeevan Mukta*.

He wrote, “If you have My name on your lips, you will attain *Jeevan Mukti* or liberation while alive. That is the way to self-realization. That is the way to Swami.”

I will give one instance and then I will tell you the significance of “Om Sri Sai Ram”. This happened in 1994 when we were in Kodaikanal spending a few weeks with Swami. We were blessed to have breakfast, lunch, dinner, and go out with Him. One day, Swami suddenly said “Narendra, can you drive me?” I responded, “Swami, I do not have an international driver’s license.”

By the time, I realized my mistake and wanted to say “yes”, He had already given the chance to somebody else. When God is giving license, I do not need license from anybody else. So, I lost this chance of serving God.

Then, I was praying intensely to Swami for two days: “Please forgive me and please give me another chance, so that I can respond with my heart instead of my head.”

After a couple of days, Swami took us on a picnic in Kodaikanal. I happened to be just behind Swami. Then He saw some poor woman carrying firewood on her head. Swami has a heart full of compassion and love. He wanted to give some money to her, and He looked back at me and said, “I want to give 100 Rupees to that lady”, and Swami jokingly said, “I don’t have a pocket, see I don’t have money.” You and I know that if He wants, with a wave of His hand, He can create anything. I was lucky and fortunate to have another opportunity. I had 100 Rupees which I gave to Swami. I was very happy that Swami answered my prayers.

The Eternal Companion

That evening, when we were having Satsang, Swami said, "Narendra, come." He wanted to give me some money. I said, "No Swami, that is your money." Then He gave me a 500 Rupee note, over which we had a little tussle because I did not want to accept it at first. But finally, I accepted it as His *Prasad*. I said, "Swami, it is the best thing, because in a few hours, 100 Rupees multiplied five times to become 500 Rupees!"

So, whatever we do for God, it multiplies, and He responds to our prayers. That is why He said, "Take one step towards me, and I will take 100 steps towards you. You shed one tear, and I will wipe 100 tears." That is the power of prayer. He responds and corrects our mistakes and gives us opportunities.

In conclusion, Om Sri Sai Ram is the most powerful *Mantra*. "Om" is a *Pranava Mantra* and, by itself, it can help liberate us. "Sri" is a *Beeja Man-*

tra. It can also give us liberation. "Sai", about which we already talked, Swami says just have Sai which is divine mother and "Rama" is another powerful *Mantra*. It is a combination of two *Mantras* – "Ra" from *Narayana Mantra* (*Om Namō NaRAyanaya*) which is the *Ashtakshari Mantra* and "Ma" from *Panchakshari Mantra* (*Om NaMAh Shivaya*). When we chant the name Rama, it is equal to chanting a thousand names of Lord Vishnu.

There are many *Mantras* in Om Sri Sai Ram: *Pranava Mantra*, *Beeja Mantra*, Sai as divine Mother, and Rama, which is combination of both the *Ashtakshari* and *Panchakshari Mantras*. This is the most powerful *Mantra* – and it has Sai's name. Let us always chant His name and be happy.

Jai Sai Ram.