

OM SAI RAM

Loving Pranams at the Divine Lotus Feet. We thank You, dear Lord, for the Grace and countless Blessings You are bestowing upon us. We know that even our being here in this Divine Valley—taking part in this historic event— is but another Sign of Your Grace.

Honored guests, young adults, sisters and brothers, let us pause and contemplate for a moment the awesome grandeur of this occasion.

We are gathered in the Holiest of Holy Places, conducting a conference—a coming together of like-minded souls from all around the globe, in order to engage in an historic spiritual pursuit.

The Divine Master, the Universal Teacher, the Ocean of Compassion, Who, 85 years ago, incarnated expressly for the purpose of restoring the practice of Dharma, has seen fit to bring us here—to feed and shelter us, and to grant us the rare privilege of numerous, elongated *darshans* (gazing upon a form of the Divine). How very blessed and fortunate we are.

The success of the Avatar's mission is assured. Nothing and no one can stand in the way. He does not need our help. Yet, He has allotted us a small but significant role in His Mission. The vehicle He has given us is the Sri Sathya Sai Organization.

Much can be said about the Lord's Name. It has tremendous potency—which is why we chant His Name, with fervor and devotion, as often as possible. Repeating the Name can cause all worldly obstacles to crumble.

I believe history will declare that the year 2010 marked a watershed in the unfolding of the Sathya Sai Mission. It will be designated the year when Sai Devotees working within the framework of Sri Sathya Sai Organization made a quantum leap forward. Collectively, we began moving away from 'business as usual,' from carelessly wasting time, from merely giving lip service to practicing His teachings.

Earlier, too many of us were half-hearted in the quality of our *sadhana* (spiritual practices). We were, as Swami once characterized it, part-time devotees wanting full-time compensation.

What has caused this acceleration of pace as we make our journey back to our Source?

The superficial analysis clearly points to February, when devotees in all overseas countries began the diligent study and contemplation, and subsequent practice of three of the grand spiritual principles enunciated by Lord Sai: *God Is. I am I. Love All, Serve All.*

Going more deeply, we realize that it is only His Grace that enabled these efforts to succeed.

What a great boon He is giving! Awakening us from our slumber, He is permitting us a glimpse into the core of our inner being, along with the flashing realization that Divinity is everywhere.

No wonder He once remarked that we would do well to regard Sai Organization as our Life Breath. Being active in Sai Organization helps us to hold fast to the ideal practice of 'Hands in Society, Head in the Forest.

Whole-hearted participation fosters the critical skills and loving attitude that facilitate our interactions with family members and with our sisters and brothers in the wider community. And more and more, we are appreciating the fact that all people deserve our respect, all people deserve our patience, all people deserve our unconditional love.

Swami tells us repeatedly that the individual owes a great debt to society. It is one we can never fully repay. Because of this, Sai devotees are constantly on the lookout for ways in which to render selfless community service. And, hence, one of the roles of the Organization is providing meaningful opportunity for collective service activity. In a manner of speaking, we might say that devotees serve society and the

Organization serves the devotees. You know, Swami, Himself, has declared: *Never leave the Organization.*

Hence, in the Pre-conferences, their after-math, and in the proceedings here over the last two days, we are—in a unified and loving fashion—using the talents Swami has given us, using these talents to help improve the Organization. That is, to make it a purer instrument in His Service. Of course, the Organization is the collective of us individual devotees, and that means we must first purify ourselves in order to purify our Organization.

Our challenge is to muster the courage, the strength, and the confidence to *not worry*. To be happy, even when things seem to be going badly. Bliss, Swami reminds us, is our very nature. It is our essential core. And it can be available to us anytime, at any place, under any circumstance.

Sai Baba often says that the mind can be responsible for our liberation or our bondage. It can be a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. Therefore, we have to maintain the correct relationship with our minds. We are the Master. It is the servant.

Controlling the mind means controlling our thoughts. We are often surprised and disheartened when certain disturbing thoughts seem to “pop into” our mind, and we are tempted to conclude that we cannot control them. We believe we ourselves to be our body, our mind; and that we are the doer and the enjoyer of the things that are taking place around us. It is a fundamental delusion, and, because we harbor it, all kinds of thoughts “pop into our mind” at all sorts of weird moments.

Yet, this is not cause for alarm. Swami has taught us that we do not have to follow unwanted and uninvited thoughts. In other words, we do not have to tolerate or endure, negative, harmful, or depressing thoughts. True, we cannot prevent them from paying us a call. But we are not obliged to permit them to stay. We do not have to allow disturbing thoughts to linger and give us pain. Instead of entertaining these negative thoughts, we must form the new habit of turning our attention to something positive.

In order to do this, we need only recall a pleasant moment, a beautiful sunset, a flower. Or, we can simply begin to think of Swami. We can remember a *darshan*, His Look, His Glance, His Smile. And, as always, we can, and should, commence to repeating His Name. Repeating it With Gusto!

By doing this, we will find that gradually our bad feeling disappears. This happens because we have turned our attention to something positive, something good and pure.

It is important to avoid the mistake of trying to push away negative or depressive thoughts. That is, it is important to avoid trying to *force* them from the mind. Swami tells us that only intensifies them.

It is similar to our entering a dark room. We cannot drive out the darkness. But if we turn on a light, the darkness is no more. It goes away of its own accord.

Then, as we continue to purify our thoughts, we find that we begin to have more consistently loving and considerate interactions with our family members. You see, it has to start there, at home—out of the public view. Swami does not want us to be heroes at work and other places outside and zeroes at home. From the home, we can then take this orientation into the workplace, the school, and certainly into the Sai Center.

Perhaps, more than anything else, Swami wants us to have unity, harmony, tolerance, and loving peacefulness in our Sai Centers. We should remember to work in harmony and unity when we are planning and executing our Center service projects.

Unity, Swami tells us so often, is very important. More important, in fact, than the apparent outcome of the project we may be planning or executing.

Again, this is an occasion where our minds may mislead us. The goals of the service project may be lofty, and that tempts us to conclude we are justified in being rigid and inflexible about pushing for a particular approach. In fact, the more lofty, the more easily we are seduced into concluding that the approach

we wish to recommend or impose—the one we are most comfortable with—is best. It is at these times that we must find a way to remember that unity and harmony are what Sai tells us is important. Unity outweighs the potential merits of a particular community service project.

There is another point to make here. Though I have devoted considerable time to stressing that we must control the vagaries of the mind. We have to balance that caution by remembering that Swami teaches us that the mind is not all bad. Just as it has the potential to lead us down the wrong road, it also has the equal potential to lead us into good and wonderful pursuits.

By its nature, Mind is pure! It becomes polluted because of our mixing with bad company. Swami assures us that if we associate our mind with things that are good, noble, and uplifting, it also becomes good.

Swami says the proper and vital function of the mind is to exercise discrimination, to exercise preferences, and to judge correct “do’s and don’ts”. As long as we are ‘in the body’, we have to pay a proper amount of attention to the rules of the “game of life”.

Throughout the day, we play various roles, we perform various tasks, we discharge certain responsibilities that accompany those roles. In this sense, we regard the unfolding drama as if it were real.

However, Swami wants us to remember that the world is *not real* in terms of permanence. It is not present in all the states of awareness. In other words, above the physical or worldly perspective is the spiritual perspective. We must give equal attention to the spiritual perspective.

One way for us to avoid slipping into the illusion-yrap is for us to consciously dedicate all our actions to God. To the extent that we form the habit of dedicating each and every action to the Lord, we accomplish two important things: Firstly, we become prone to remember that we are not the body, that we are not the “doer”. Secondly, the Lord will accept the *karmic* consequences of the act.

In addition, we should never lose sight of the fact that we must be careful about the nature—quantity and quality—of the food we consume. The kind of food we eat plays a crucial role in determining the purity of the mind, a *crucial* role.

Another thing we can do is to rely on our Conscience. Our Conscience is the voice of God within. Our Conscience will tell us if an impulse is good or bad. If the Conscience says the impulse is bad, do not proceed. But do not hesitate if the Conscience judges the impulse to be good. Do not hesitate or be concerned about the possibility of failing to achieve success.

We will not fail!

Even when an action appears to fail, we still gain valuable feedback information that will enable us to come closer to the target with our next action.

However, we should not make too hasty a judgment about whether it succeeded. Very often we will find that if we are patient, we come to realize that what initially seems an unsuccessful outcome is eventually deemed by us to be a success. We eventually realize that *everything does happen for the best*, once we have consciously surrendered to Him.

Also, we must be open to other expressions of a successful manifestation of the outcome we were seeking—as opposed to the narrow, pre-conceived notion of what we thought success was going to look like. Obviously this is where patience comes in. It is all the strength we need.

It is also important to remember that we are responsible only for the effort. The results—being multi-determined—are up to God, alone.

Well, many of you know I that I like to close with the reminder about the ABC’s of Sai Teaching. Over the years I have come to offer this as a mnemonic device to help us remember the essence of Swami’s teachings.

First ABC: *Always Be Content*. Contentment is best. Realize that we are always in the right place. Things actually do happen for the best.

Second ABC: *Always Be Cheerful*. We have every reason to be cheerful. We are extremely fortunate. Our cheerfulness makes others feel better.

Third ABC: *Always Be Careful*. Don't get in a hurry. Pay attention to details. And don't become overly proud of our good fortune, or of what we believe is our spiritual insight. Spiritual arrogance is the worst kind of arrogance.

A fourth ABC is: *Avoid Bad Company*.

And recently a young adult in the USA suggested I add: DEFG. What does DEFG stand for?

Don't Ever Forget God!

Thank you,

Jai Sai Ram