

*Sarva roopa dharam shantam
Sarva nama dharam shivam.
Sath, chith, anandam advaitam
Sathyam, shivam, sundaram.*

With love, reverence and gratitude, I offer myself at the divine lotus feet of our dearest, sweetest, loving and most beautiful Lord, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Distinguished guests, respected elders, dear sisters, brothers and delegates, greetings of loving Sai Rams to all of you on this auspicious occasion of the 85th birthday celebrations of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

First and foremost, I want to express gratitude to Bhagawan for giving me this opportunity to share with you His universal and eternal message and His pure, selfless, unconditional divine love. I am grateful to Bhagawan for guiding us at every stage of this world conference. He has chosen the dates. He has provided us this beautiful venue, the Poornachandra auditorium, which is next to *Yajur Mandir*, the divine Abode, in the holy land of Prasanthi Nilayam. We are immensely blessed and fortunate to have His divine blessings and guidance.

The scriptures declared, *Yatho vatcho nivartante aprapya manasasaha*. God is beyond the comprehension of the mind and expression in words. Swami's love and compassion are unfathomable and infinite. God takes care of even the minute details. For example, the other day, I requested Swami to kindly bless the books, bags, and badges for all the delegates. I showed 5 badges to Swami and He asked, "Are only 5 people coming to the conference?"

Chakravarthi garu came to my rescue and said, "No Swami, these are only the samples."

In the *Gita*, Bhagawan Sri Krishna says, whenever there is a decline in the practice of *dharma*, the Lord incarnates from age to age. The Lord who is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, the one without any attributes—without name or form, who has no birth, no death, who is eternal and changeless—takes a beautiful form and name with the wonderful attributes of love and compassion for the redemption of mankind.

When the places of worship became places of business, Lord Jesus showed the way of love, sacrifice, and forgiveness. When the people of Bharat forgot the inner significance of the scriptures and were carried away by the *Vedic* rituals and the performance of animal sacrifices, Lord Buddha guided mankind onto the path of love, compassion, and nonviolence.

Now, in this present materialistic world, we are all caught up in the "world wide web" or "www" — pursuit of wealth, wealth, wealth. The merciful Lord Sathya Sai has come to emancipate us from this bewitching web. Swami says that just as the earth goes around the Sun, man goes after money from dawn till dusk. As Swami has shown us, when the same "www" is recast as "work, worship, and wisdom", we are freed from this net. So from grief, sorrow, and bondage we progress to joy, peace, and liberation.

We are immensely blessed and fortunate to be the contemporaries of the loving Lord Sai. It is said in the scriptures that three things are impossible to get by human effort. Only by divine grace can one get these three things: *manushyatvam* (human birth), *mumukshatvam* (desire for liberation), and *mahapurusha samshrayam* (contact with a great master).

Manushyatvam—Human birth: There are 8.4 million species of beings on this earth, and the pinnacle of creation is human birth. It is the first sign of divine Grace. Only through human birth can one achieve the supreme goal of liberation. Even the angels and celestial beings yearn to be born as humans. So we are fortunate to have human birth.

Mumukshatvam—Desire for liberation: The second sign of divine grace is to have the longing for God. Among the billions of people on this planet earth only a few are interested in knowing the ultimate pur-

pose of human life. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said that people cry a jug full of tears for wife, children, wealth, name, fame, and power. Who cries for God? If we have a sincere longing for God, He will surely make Himself known to us. So here we are today, as spiritual seekers in search of the goal of human life. Let us be steadfast and be focused on the path to liberation.

Mahapurusha Samshrayam—Contact with the great master: The third sign of divine Grace is to be in contact with great masters. In this world, there are two types of teachers, *bodha gurus* and *badha gurus*. *Bodha gurus* are genuine *gurus* who teach true wisdom. Great masters like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi, and Paramahansa Yogananda are examples of *bodha gurus*. *Badha gurus* are of no help. They actually cause pain. They chant a *mantra* in the ear and immediately collect money. It is like the blind leading the blind. Due to our good fortune we are lucky to have the *Purushothama*, the supreme Lord Himself, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, as our *Guru*. He is the universal teacher, the divine teacher, the teacher of teachers.

Swami, in His infinite compassion and love, on 17 May 1968, during the first world conference, gave us glimpses of His Divinity. He said we are more blessed and fortunate than the sages, monks, and the anchorites of yore. Swami has said that in this present form, the names and forms of all the divine entities ascribed by man to God are manifest. Never be deluded by the human aspect of Bhagawan. He is one in all, all in one, all in all and beyond all.

Who is Swami? Swami is the embodiment of love. He is love walking on two legs. His life is His message and His message is love. Swami says, “Start the day with love, fill the day with love, and end the day with love. This is the way to God.” Swami also says, “God is Love, Love is God, live in Love.” Swami’s life, His message, His ideals, and His humanitarian works can all be enshrined in one word: Love. Swami says, the source is love, the path is love, and the goal is love. In fact, His miracles are the manifestations of His love. Just as Jesus made the lame walk and the blind see and brought the dead to life, so also Swami has performed miracles galore, and each one of us has been a witness to His miracles.

Let me share with you a miracle that occurred this week. One of our senior devotees, who is presently seated among us, had an emergency, a surgical abdomen. His dire condition was confirmed by lab tests, a CT scan, and an ultra-sound of the abdomen. I prayed to Swami and said, “Swami, his condition is very critical and needs immediate surgery.” Swami said, “Doctors, what do you know?” Swami is the divine physician. He is the Physician of physicians. He transcends all laws of nature and time.

Let me tell you, my friends, what happened after that. Lo and behold! The next day when we visited this devotee, he had miraculously recovered by Swami's Grace. He was cured by our beloved Bhagawan, the surgeon of surgeons, without undergoing any surgery. How fortunate are we, for He is here to guide us and guard us at every step.

Why does He do these miracles? Miracles are His visiting cards. Swami says that miracles are like mosquitoes on top of an elephant. Miracles, while awe inspiring and inexplicable, are by themselves not significant. The purpose of these miracles is for our spiritual transformation. Swami tells a beautiful story to illustrate the importance of transformation. Swami uses these stories and parables to explain the highest metaphysical truths of the scriptures in a simple and practical way.

Swami said that there was a great King who was very generous and was known for his philanthropy and charitable activities. One time a great sculptor came with 3 identical statues, and he wanted the reward to be given depending upon its value.

A wise minister of the King took the statues and told the King that he would assess the value of each statue. He put a thin wire through the ear of one statue and it came out of the other ear. He said this is of the lowest value, probably worth \$1000.00. Then he took the next statue and when he put the wire through the ear, it came out from the mouth. He said this is better; it may be worth \$10000.00. Then he took the last statue and put the wire through the ear. It remained inside and did not come out. He said this is the most valuable statue.

Similarly, Swami says there are three kinds of spiritual seekers. For some, the teachings go through one ear and come out the other ear. They say, “Oh! What a wonderful and powerful discourse Swami gave.” But when you ask them what Swami’s important message was they have a blank face. They are the lowest kind. The second category consists of seekers who carefully listen to Swami’s discourses, remember them, and repeat them in their speeches. They give impressive talks, and Swami says they are platform heroes and practical zeros. But the highest kind of seeker is like the last statue. The information goes from the ear to the depths of the interior and remains inside. Such spiritual seekers digest and live the teachings. As Swami says, their life is His message. Swami wants us to listen to His teachings, ruminate over them, contemplate on them and make them a part of our lives. That is real transformation. Swami says transformation is more important than information.

During the first world conference held in Bombay in 1968, Swami said that the best way to get His Grace is to follow His divine Command implicitly, immediately, and completely. Swami has shown us the path to our redemption. He says that following His Command will benefit us more than all *japa*, *dhyana*, and austerities combined. Thus, we need to implicitly follow His divine Command.

What is His command? He addresses us as *Divyatma Swaroopalara* and *Prema Swaroopalara*. This means we must realize our true identity as embodiments of divine *Atma* and divine love. To realize our true nature, spiritual transformation is essential. There are two main obstacles for spiritual seekers in the process of spiritual transformation, namely *ahamkara* (ego) and *mamakara* (attachment)—doership and enjoyership.

Once, devotees from the USA presented a nice play in the Poornachandra auditorium in the divine Presence. The play was good and was very well appreciated. Swami asked the leader of the group who the director of the drama was. The devotee humbly said, “Swami, you are the director of the drama.”

Then Swami asked, “What about you?”

He replied, “I am just an assistant.”

Swami said, “I don't need an assistant!”

We must never forget that Swami is everything: He is the producer, He is the director, and He is the actor. Hence we should not feel that we are the doers.

The late Professor Kasturi told me a beautiful story about a devotee from Delhi. The devotee requested Swami, “Please come to my house in Delhi.”

Swami asked “Your house!”

The devotee realized his mistake and quickly said, “No Swami, our house.”

Swami remarked, “Oh! 50–50 partnership”

The devotee said, “No Swami, your house.”

Swami then quipped with a smile, “Why are you inviting me to my house?”

For overcoming *ahamkara* and *mamakara*, Swami has said the easiest path is selfless service. We should serve with the attitude that whatever we do and whomsoever we serve, we are serving the Lord. Then, all our work and service becomes worship and an offering at His divine Lotus Feet. When we do service with the attitude, “Service to man is service to God,” our hearts become pure. Then, we realize and experience Divinity. That is why Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

If service is not done with the right attitude, it increases our ego and becomes an obstacle for our spiritual progress. We should pray to Bhagawan to bless us so that we do service without ego and purify our hearts to reach our goal of self-realization.

The highest service one can do, according to Swami, is to realize one's divine nature. Then we experience that everything—every cell, every atom, every moment—is permeated by God; we see God with eyes closed and eyes open. Swami says, “Do not try to seek God, but see God.” The whole Universe is permeated by God. “*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*—everything is Brahman.” Due to our delusion, illusion, imagination, and ignorance, we forget our true identity and mistake ourselves to be the body, mind, and intellect complex. Thus, all we have to do is remove this ignorance. Swami says, “Removal of immorality is the way to immortality. Removal of ignorance is the way to enlightenment. And removal of duality is the way to non-duality.”

Swami tells a compelling story to remind us of our true nature. A lioness was passing through a forest. It gave birth to a cub and died. A shepherd spotted the lion cub and took it under his care and raised it with his sheep. The baby lion grew up amongst the sheep and ate grass and bleated like the sheep. After some years, another lion was passing on the way. He was surprised to see a lion amongst sheep. This lion charged the sheep and all the sheep fled in fright. The young lion also fled along with the sheep. Finally the lion caught hold of the young lion, took him to the nearby lake, and showed him his image in the water. He said, “Look, you and I are one. You are not a sheep, you are a lion. Do not bleat like a sheep, but roar like a lion.”

When Swami proclaims, “You and I are one”, He is reminding us of our divine nature. He says, “Roar like a lion and say I am divine, I am the *Atma*, I am Brahman, *Aham Brahmasmi*.” Swami says the title we should get is *Shrunwantu vishway amritasya putra*. Hearken, ye sons of immortality.

Swami exhorts us to assert ourselves as children of immortality, *Amruthasyaputra*. Let us pay heed to the divine clarion call “*Uthishtata jagrata prapyavaran nibodhita*—Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.”

I pray to Bhagawan to bless all of us with devotion, discrimination, detachment, dedication, and determination so that by His grace we realize the goal in this very lifetime.

Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavanthu—May all the worlds be happy.