

Lessons on seva sadhana

Society is the coming together of people. Cooperation among people in a society, motivated by spontaneity and by pure intentions, is the hall-mark of seva (service). Seva can be identified by means of two basic characteristics' Compassion and willingness to sacrifice.

History informs us that in all countries and in every age, man is a social animal. Man is born in society, he grows in and through society and his life ends in society itself. Man's songs and speech, his duties and diversions, are all determined by society. Society for man is like water for fish: if society rejects him or neglects him he cannot survive.

What a single individual cannot accomplish, a well-knit group or society can achieve. A man walking alone will feel tired and miserable at the end of five miles; but, walking with ten others as a group he would find the five miles a jaunt. He arrives refreshed and strong. Social living contributes increased happiness and more efficient effort among birds and beasts. They are able to defend themselves from enemies, secure food and shelter, migrate to places beyond great distances when they act as a group. Even ants have learn, that immense benefits are derivable from group activity and social organisation. Monkeys also live in groups for greater security and happier lives.

Let me tell you that nothing is impossible of achievement if an organised society is set on achieving it. Even liberation from material entanglement (Moksha) can be won through serving and promoting the progress of society. Through the sense of unity, the willingness to sacrifice and the softness of compassion, all objects can be gained. So, the Sathya Sai Organisation must move forward with hearty enthusiasm in the field of service to society.

Service must bring about uprooting of ego

The first lesson in seva has to be learnt in the family circle itself. Father, mother, brothers, sisters---in this limited group which is well knit, one must engage in loving service and prepare for the wider seva that awaits outside the home. The character of each individual member determines the peace and prosperity of the family; the character of each family is the basic factor that decides the happiness and joy of the village or the community. And, the nation's progress is based on the strength and happiness of the communities which are its components. So, for the welfare of the country and of the entire world, the spirit of service, vital enthusiasm, constructive imagination, pure motivation, and unselfish alertness are all urgently needed.

Take Hanuman as your example in seva. He served Rama, the Prince of Righteousness, regardless of obstacles of all types. Though he was strong, learned and virtuous, he had no trace of pride. When asked who he was by the rakshasas (demons) in Lanka into which he had entered so daringly, he described himself, in all humility, as the 'servant of Rama.' That is a fine example of uprooting of the ego which seva must bring about in us. No one can serve another while his ego is rampant. The attitudes of mutual help and selfless service develop the 'humanness' of man and help the unfoldment of the divinity latent in him.

Krishna was known to all as almighty, all-knowing, all encompassing and all-fulfilling. Yet, the enthusiasm to do seva prompted him to approach Dharmaraaja, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, on the eve of the magnificent Raajsooya Yaaga he had planned to celebrate and offered to take up seva of any kind. He suggested that he might be given the task of cleaning the dining hall after the guests have partaken of the feast! Krishna insisted on outer cleanliness and inner cleansing. Clean clothes and clean minds are the ideal combination.

During the battle of Kurukshetra, which climaxed the Mahaabharatha story, Krishna served as the 'driver' of the chariot of Arjuna throughout the day on the field and when dusk caused the adjournment of the fight, he led the horses to the river, gave them a refreshing bath and applied healing balms to the wounds suffered by them during the fierce fray. He mended the reins and the harness and rendered the chariot battle worthy for another day.

Seva rendered to every living being is Sadhana

The Lord sets the example for the devotees to follow. He teaches that service done to any living being is offered to Him only and is accepted by Him most joyfully. Service rendered to cattle, to beasts, to men is laudable sadhana. Keeping the environment of our residences clean, providing help to those who live around the place, going to hospitals and serving the patients who are in the wards---in such acts of service the members of the Sathya Seva Organisation must take active part. Many do such things now as 'social service,' not as a sadhana in a fullhearted manner. The sadhana spirit is not found in the activity.

Through seva sadhana, Hanumaan attained identity with Raama, as the river attains identity with the sea. Arjuna too considered every act as sadhana to attain the grace of Krishna, for Krishna directed him to fight on, ever keeping Him in memory---"Maamanusmara Yuddhyacha."

You too should keep God ever in your mind as the pace-setter, whether you are serving patients in the hospitals or cleaning a drain in the bazaar. That is the thapas, that is the highest form of sadhana. More than listening to a hundred lectures or delivering them to others, offering one act of genuine seva attracts the Grace of God.

The body has to be utilised for service to others. Activity is its main purpose. Krishna says, "I have no need to be engaged in work but I do work in order to activate the world." More anandha can be won by serving others than what can be got by merely serving oneself. Offer service to some one in need, with a full heart and experience the anandha that results. It need not be something big; it can even be small and unnoticed by others. It has to be done to please the God within you and him.

Avoid the ego marring your sadhana

We require today those who take delight in selfless service, but such men are rarely seen. You who belong to the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, every one of you, must become a sevak, eager to help those who need it. When the sevak (helper) becomes the nayak (leader) the world will prosper. Only a kinkara (servant) can grow into a Shankara (Master). Of course, one has to eliminate the ego totally. Even a trace of it will bring disaster. However long you may do dhyana, however constant your japa, a little ego

will render them barren of results. Bhajan done with egoistic pride will be as harsh as the crow's caw. So, try to avoid the ego marring your sadhana, even to a small extent.

You all know the story of Vishwaamithra, who had as a result of severe thapas for years, earned the power even to create another Heaven amenable to his will. His ego made him intensely passionate and short tempered (raajasik). So, he was known as Raaja-Yogi and Raajarishi. He was jealous of the sage Vasishta who was adored as a Brahmarishi and sought that title for himself. This made him even more raajasik. The wilder his desire, higher the ego flames.

Be vigilant against doubts and fears

The Sathya Sai Organisation has laid down seva as sadhana, in order to uproot from your mind this evil trait. Service helps you to remove the ego. So, do not pay heed to what others might say when you engage in service activities. When you are doing good acts, why hesitate, why feel ashamed, why fear? Let Compassion and Sacrifice be your two eyes; let egolessness be your breath and Love be your tongue. Let Peace reverberate in your ears. These are the five vital elements you have to live upon. God will not ask you, when and where did you do service? He will ask, "With what motive did you do it? What was the intention that prompted you?" You may weigh the seva and boast of its quantity. But, God seeks quality, the quality of the heart, the purity of the mind, the holiness of the motive.

You know you have been doing, as seva dal members, seva in many fields and directions, for ten or twelve years. You are not novices; you are aware of the seva-way of life. But since you are human, veils and fog, weeds and worms infest the mind. Doubts and fears haunt your work. But be vigilant against the onslaughts of these. Strive everyday, faithful to the ideal you have set before yourself, to improve your seva activities along pure, unselfish, sacred lines.

This day and tomorrow, people with years of experience will be telling you the means and methods by which your seva activities can become more beneficial to a larger number of deserving people. You will also have group discussions on these topics. Confer among yourselves in a meaningful way and arrive at some proposals for bettering your service programmes. Later, I shall resolve any doubts that arise and advise you not only for seva here and now, but also for attaining peace and joy forever. I shall converse with you and reward you with anandha through My Blessings.

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