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A Word To The Reader

"I am the Sai Baba of Shirdi come again; then, I was mostly engaged in preparing the meal; now I have come to feed you all with the strengthening, purifying repast," says Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He announced thus, in his fourteenth year, while casting away his school books and addressing the first gathering of devotees in 1940.

Ever since, Baba has been consoling, correcting, and curing, with His compassion and all-conquering love, an ever-increasing band of physical and spiritual sufferers and establishing the new Sai era of peace and joy.

As part of His mission of establishment of dharma, in February, 1956, Baba started a monthly magazine, which He named Sanathana Sarathi (Ancient Charioteer). Evidently, He meant to declare more clearly through that title that He is both Ancient and the Charioteer of all physically embodied beings. He announced that the Sanathana Sarathi is engaged in a campaign against falsehood of all types and varieties, as well as against the spirit of selfishness. This series of dialogues with Baba, published in the magazine originally in Telugu, unravels the mysteries of spiritual truth and lovingly removes the mist that hides the vision of aspirants. Perused with care and faith, these dialogues are bound to clarify, reinforce, and convince. May the perusal lead you nearer and nearer the goal.

N. Kasturi, M.A., B.L.

New Year, 1985

1. Gurus And Mantras

Devotee: Swami, can we ask you freely about any topic concerning the spiritual path that we don't know?

Swami: Certainly. Why this doubt? What is the objection? What am I here for? Isn't it for explaining to you things you don't know? You can ask me without any fear or hesitation. I'm always ready to answer. However, I want earnest inquiry with a desire to know.

Devotee: But some elders say it is wrong to vex the guru with questions. Are they right, Swami?

Swami: That is not correct. Whom else can the disciple approach? Since the guru is everything to the disciple, it is best to consult the guru in all matters and then act.

Devotee: Some say that we should reverentially carry out whatever the elders ask us to do, without raising objections. Is that your command also?

Swami: Until you develop full faith in them and know that their words are valid, it will be difficult for you to carry out their orders reverentially. So, until then, it won't be wrong to ask them the significance and validity of their orders, so that you may be convinced.

Devotee: Swami, whom are we to believe, whom are we to discard? The world is so full of deceit. When those whom we believe to be good turn out to be bad, how can faith grow?

Swami: Well, My boy! Where is the need for you in this world or any world to grow faith in others? Believe in yourself first. Then believe in the Lord (Param-atma). When you have faith in these two, neither the good nor the bad will affect you.

Devotee: Swami, faith in the Lord also diminishes sometimes. Why is that?

Swami: When one is deluded by the mere external world, and when one doesn't attain success in such external desires, faith in the Lord diminishes. So give up such desires. Desire only the spiritual relationship; then you won't become the target of doubts and difficulties. The important thing for this is faith in the Lord; without that, you start doubting everything, big and small.

Devotee: They say that until we understand the reality of the Supreme Self (Param-atma), it is important to be in the company of the great and the good and also to have a guru. Are these necessary?

Swami: Of course! The company of the great and the good is necessary. To make the reality known to you, a guru is also important. But you should be very careful. Genuine gurus are scarce these days. Cheats have multiplied, and teachers have retreated into solitude, in order to realise themselves undisturbed. There are many genuine gurus, but they can't be secured easily. Even if you get them, you must thank your destiny if they vouchsafe to you more than one single divine maxim; they won't spend time telling you all kinds of stories! There should be no hurry in the search for a guru.

Devotee: Then, what in the world is the path?

Swami: Why, it is just for this that we have the Vedas, Sastras, Puranas, and Ithihasas. Study them, adhere to the path they teach, and gather the experience. Understand their meaning and the trend of their message from pundits.

Follow them in practice, and meditate on the Supreme Self (Param-atma) as the guru and as God. Then, those books themselves will help you as your guru. For what is a guru? The guru is that through which your mind gets fixed on God. If you consider the Supreme Self as the guru and do spiritual exercises with unshakable love, the Lord Himself will appear before you and give you a mantra just as a guru. Or, He may so bless you that as a result of your spiritual exercises, you may meet a true teacher.

Devotee: But nowadays, some great big people are granting a mantra (upadesa) to all who ask; aren't they true teachers (sadgurus), Swami?

Swami: I won't say they are or they are not. I declare only this: It is not the sign of a true teacher to grant a mantra to each and every person who comes with praise, without considering the past and the future, without discovering the qualifications of the pupil and testing whether the pupil is fit.

Devotee: Then Swami, I have committed a blunder! When one great person arrived at our village, and when all were receiving a mantra from him, I also went and prostrated before him and asked him for it. He granted me a good mantra. I repeated it for some time, but soon, I learned that the great person was a cheat. Since that day, I lost faith in the name he gave me; I gave up the mantra. Was this wrong? Or am I right?

Swami: Do you doubt the right and wrong of this? It is very wrong. Just as the guru, as I told you now, examines the qualifications of the disciple, the disciple also has to critically examine the credentials of the guru before receiving a mantra. Your first mistake was that you didn't pay attention to this but hastily accepted the mantra. Well, even if the guru gave it without the necessary qualification, why did you break your vow and stop repeating the name? That is the second mistake: casting the fault of another on the sacred name of God.

Before receiving a mantra, you should have taken the time to learn of the guru's genuineness and develop faith in them. Then, when the desire to accept the person as guru emerged, you should have received the mantra.

But once you accept it, you must repeat it, whatever the difficulty; you shouldn't give it up. Otherwise, you commit the wrong of accepting without deliberation and rejecting without deliberation. That wrong will be on your head. You should not accept a Name when you are still afflicted by doubt or a Name that you do not prefer. Having accepted it, you should not give it up.

Devotee: What happens when it is given up?

Swami: Well, my boy. Disloyalty to the guru and discarding the name of God - on account of these, your onepointed endeavour and concentration will wither away. As the saying goes, "The diseased seedling can never grow into a tree."
Devotee: But if the guru grants the mantra even though we lack the merit?

Swami: Such a guru is no guru. The result of the guru's wrong act won't fall on you. The evil of that wrong will devolve only on the guru.

Devotee: Can disciples realise the goal if they act according to the promise made to the guru and honour the guru as before, regardless of what the guru may turn out to be?

Swami: Certainly! What doubt is there? Don't you know the story of Ekalavya? Though Dronacharya did not accept him as his disciple, he installed an image and took it as Dronacharya himself; revering as such, he learned archery and achieved mastery of all arts. Finally, when the guru, blinded by injustice, asked for his right thumb as his fees, he offered it gladly. Did Ekalavya take to heart the injury done by the guru?

Devotee: Of what avail was that offer? His education was all a waste, that was all. What was the net result of his achievement?

Swami: Though Ekalavya lost all chance of using his skill, the character that he earned by that training was never lost. Isn't the fame he acquired by his sacrifice enough compensation?

Devotee: Well, what is past is past. Hereafter, at least I shall hold fast and try not to discard the name. Please grant me a mantra (grant upadesa) yourself.

Swami: Your attitude is just like that of the person who, after having witnessed the Ramayana being enacted all through the night, asked someone at daybreak how Rama was related to Sita! I was telling you that the guru and the granting of the mantra will come when your qualifications ripen. It will come by itself. There is no need for you to ask!

Really speaking, the disciple should not ask for a mantra. The disciple cannot be aware of being ripe for it.

The guru will watch for the proper moment and will themselves bless and help. You should not get a mantra (receive upadesa) more than once. It is not repeatable. If you give up one mantra and take up another, whenever you feel like it, you will be like a married woman gone astray.

Devotee: So, what is my fate now? Is there no way to save myself?

Swami: Repent for the mistake committed, but continue meditating on the name you received. For remembrance of the name of the Lord (nama-smarana), apart from soft prayer (japa), you can use as many names as you like.

For meditation (dhyana), only the name obtained by initiation into a mantra should be used, remember. Don't change that sacred name; transform yourself by persistent yearning and effort, and proceed.

Devotee: Swami! Today is indeed a great day; for all doubts have disappeared by the message you gave. As you said, the granting of a mantra created the doubt, and Your instruction dispelled it. If permitted, I will return now to my place. When I come again, I'll bring some new doubts to be cast away in Your Presence, in exchange for peace and joy. If you so command, I shall come next month.

Swami: Very good. That is exactly what I want - that people like you should rid themselves of doubts, should grasp the real significance of life, and, welcoming the instruction with faith and steadfastness, should dwell in constant remembrance of the name of the Lord. Whenever you come, whatever comes, learn from Me the method and means of ridding yourself of grief, doubt, and worry. Never suffer from grief, for with that pain inside you, you will not be able to do any spiritual exercises. Whatever spiritual exercise you do will be like rose water poured on ash. Very well, go now and come later.

2. Listen To Yourself, Not To Disbelievers

Devotee: A reverential salutation to you, Swami.

Swami: Happy to see you. You seem very tired, and in this summer, travel is even more exhausting. Rest for a little while; we can converse thereafter.

Devotee: When there is no peace of mind, where can rest be got?

Swami: Well my boy, rest is for the sake of peace of mind. Once you have that peace, where is the need for rest?

There is need for a bandage until the wound heals; after that, what is its use?

Devotee: Swami, just now my mind is restless. I cannot decide upon anything. I don't know what or why. What shall I do?

Swami: Well, no effect can take place without a cause. You do certainly know the cause of your present condition.

Well, nothing else need be done. At such times of mental pain, do repetition of the name (nama-smarana) for a while, sitting in a solitary place, or sing devotional songs (bhajans) loudly in a raised voice. If that isn't possible, spread the bed and sleep for some time. Thereafter you can think about all this.

Devotee: You have told us that in this world, each one has some dearly loved thing or other, and that if any harm came to that thing, peace of mind could not be had. Then how can I have peace of mind when something like this happens - someone either disrespecting my dearly loved thing or finding fault with it? What am I to do then?

Swami: Well. Good people who have understood what inquiry into the Atma (Atma-vichara) is will not blame the things that others love. Nor will they even

associate with such people. For they would argue within themselves that when they blame another's beloved, they will feel as much pain as one feels when one's own beloved is blamed. Therefore, be at peace with yourself, realising that people who abuse like this are ignorant of inquiry into the Atma. Engaged as you are in inquiry into the Atma, you have nothing to do with ignorant persons who don't know about such inquiry. Well. Let it go. What has really happened to cause all this? The whole trouble will end if what is inside comes out.

Devotee: The world knows well how You are vouchsafing courage and daring and guiding men to do good spiritually, physically, and mentally. The world knows how You have rendered educational and medical help. You have never done any harm or caused harm to anyone in any form. How can we suppress the people who invent and spread all kinds of silly stories about such as You? Do they gain anything by this?

Swami: Oh. So this is the story! Well don't you know that good and bad are of the very nature of the world? If all are engaged in selling, who will buy? With regard to God, fault finding has come down from the beginning of time; it is not new. But present-day people might manufacture some new tales. Well, why should you take such abuse to heart? Take it that they are remembering Swami by this means!

Memories of love and memories of hatred are two types. The latter are ignorance-based illusion (a-vidyamaya) and are related to the quality of passion (rajoguna). The former are knowledge-based illusion (vidya-maya) and are related to the quality of serenity (sathwa-guna). Ignorance-based illusion results in grief; knowledgebased illusion results in bliss (ananda). Their results are indicated there itself.

Now, why should you suppress? You asked about the gain, right? They don't need any gain; finding fault with others has become their habit; they do it as their duty. As the saying goes, "What does the moth care or gain whether the sari costs a hundred tankas or is cheap? To gnaw and tear is its nature." The moth tears a costly sari or a rag equally. Does it know the value of things? Its

work is such. So be at peace, realising that the work of these fault-finders is the same as the work of these moths.

Devotee: Swami! What You said is the truth. We can take it that ignorant people, when they behave like this, are of the brood of moths. But when people who are well educated, who are great, who know - when these devote themselves to spreading such stories, how can it be endured?

Swami: Learning means learning about the Atma (Atma-jnana); it is not the knowledge of things related to the world, which trains for a living and is useful as basis for a living. To compare learning about the Atma with such knowledge (vidya) is a great mistake. Great men are those who don't abuse others, who search for the reality with good intentions. Spiritual matters cannot be understood by those without the power of discrimination, by those who are puffed up with the authority they have, or by those who are unaware of any knowledge of the Atma. So consider those whom you described as educated and great as belonging to the brood mentioned above and, without yielding place to such ideas and worries, engage yourself in strengthening your belief.

Devotee: Many believers (asthikas) in this world are changing into atheists (nasthikas) on account of such people, aren't they, Swami? Is there no weapon to put down these people, who, without any regard for their own learning and without any effort to know the reality, abuse the outstanding sages?

Swami: Why? There is. "A load of rags is placed on a ragged saddle," is the saying. The words of such people will be listened to only by such people; no real believer will associate with them. Even if they do, they will move far away as soon as they understand that those stories are fictitious. So, the weapon to put down these people is in their own hands. Haven't you heard the story of Bhasmasura? He placed his hand on everyone's head and reduced them to ashes; finally, he placed his hand on his own head and reduced himself to ashes! Similarly, accusing others, they themselves will be finally accused by their own words.

Those who find fault with the Lord are of four types:

1. People who have no interest at all in matters related to God.
2. People who, on account of individual spite, cannot endure another's greatness.
3. People who have neither personal experience nor contact nor knowledge of anything and so merely manufacture stories based on hearsay to which they have become enslaved.
4. People who come with some worldly desire and who accuse the Lord, as an excuse for the failure caused by their own destiny.

Only these four types of people clamour as you say; the others won't shout or jump about like puppets. Even if they don't have personal experience, when they hear such stories, they will just analyse them within themselves and arrive at conclusions for their own satisfaction. They won't abuse others.

It is not the correct path to disbelieve one's own mind and give room therein to another's words. Besides, there is no profit in discussing with those who don't know the Reality. As a matter of fact, Reality does not admit of any discussion at all. To argue with those who don't know either but who are in the intermediate stage is like seeing the trunk and believing it to be the entire body, as in the story of the blind men and the elephant.

Well. Note this! It is not good to spend time in this type of conversation. Abuse and fault-finding are natural and common. Knowing this, those who aspire to become true devotees should search only for bases on which to build their bliss (ananda). All available time should be used for holy purposes; it should not be wasted. You have nothing to do with the good and the bad in others. Instead of wasting time, utilise it to discard the bad and develop the good in you.

Ask me about some spiritual exercise or instruction that you need, and seek something that is worthwhile.

Hereafter don't bring me such stories of fault-finding indulged in by others. You shouldn't take in such things.

Devotee: All this happened because we also have the same human nature. But now that I understand the subject from your answers, courage and joy have entered into me, driving away the doubt and sorrow I had. Through the talk of such men, even the little faith, devotion, and earnestness that men have are being reduced. That was why I asked you these questions. Otherwise, I have also nothing to do with such topics. Pardon me; hereafter I won't talk along these lines to you.

Swami: Very good! During the little time available, if you don't think of some good subject, but merely recollect the ignorant prattle of others, it is as if you joined in blaming those people. That is harmful to devotees. Whatever others may say, don't give up your faith. Once you are firmly established in that, you will not be in want any day.

One word following another produces anger and pain. The path of devotion (bhakthi-marga) is designed to suppress, not develop, these qualities.

You tell me that devotion and faith disappear because people listen to such accusers - but for how long? As soon as the truth is discovered, will they be trusted again? Will their words be valued again?

The talk of those fault-finders is as the sound of bronze. Cheap metals make more sound; gold, which does not make sound, is very valuable. True devotees will be mute. They will follow the path of silence. Their tongues will be fully engaged in the repetition of the essential greatness of the Lord. It is best that they have no respite for any other word. So, don't permit the words of the bronze-voiced people to enter your ears, but fill them with the name of the Lord, which is the Om (pranava) sound itself.

Next month, if you get any problems regarding such useful topics as spiritual exercise or action (anushtana), come here and have them solved. But don't bring with you bundles of such doubts!

Devotee: I am indeed blessed this day. On account of them, You have vouchsafed to me the light of wisdom.

Seeing all this, I feel that the saying, "All is for our good," is true. Henceforth, whatever anyone may say, I will be patient and won't take it in because "All is for our good." Salutations (namaskaram). Allow me to take leave.

3. The External World, Internal World, And Bhagavan

Swami: Oh! When did you arrive? You were not visible anywhere outside. Are you well?

Devotee: I came two days ago. I see here a number of people everywhere outside. I hear the incessant confusion of voices. Coming from my place to avoid that confusion, I find here crowds also. Therefore, I came inside. There, it is fine, blissful, quiet. That is why I was inside the Hall. It is as quiet inside as it is restless outside.

Swami: What is special about this? It is natural. Where there is sugar, the ants gather - and between outside and inside, this is the distinction! That is the characteristic. That is how it is.

Devotee: Swami! I don't understand what You say. If You tell me in detail, I shall listen and be happy.

Swami: You yourself said, didn't you, that there is an outside and an inside? Well. Those are what we call the external world (bahya-prapancha) and the internal world (antara-prapancha). Now, which is the internal? Give me your idea.

Devotee: You want it to come from my mouth itself? It would be so good if You speak.

Swami: Well. Making the questioner give out the answers is the ancient and eternal method of teaching. If those who question gave the answers, they would clearly understand the subject. The lecturing style is now different. In olden days, all the sages enabled their disciples to understand Vedanta by only this method. So come on! Speak! Let us see.

Devotee: Do you ask me to speak of the objects I have seen with the eye?

Swami: Not only the eye. Tell me all that you have experienced and known through all the senses of cognition, the eye, the ear, etc.

Devotee: Earth, sky, water, sun, moon, wind, fire, stars, dusk, mountains, hills, trees, rivers, women, men, children, old persons, animals, birds, coldness, heat, the happy, the miserable, fishes, insects, diseases - like these I have seen many.

Swami: Enough, enough, that's enough! This is the world (prapancha). Did you see it only today? Did it exist yesterday? Will it exist tomorrow?

Devotee: Why do you ask me, Swami? It has existed like this for ages, hasn't it? Who knows for how long it will exist, or for how long it has existed?

Swami: "For how long it has existed!", you said, right? That is what we speak of as beginningless. This external world is beginningless.

Where there is "external", there must also be "internal", right? Well, have you ever seen a cinema?

Devotee: Ever seen! Why, Swami, the cinema is also part of the world (prapancha), isn't it? I have seen many.

Swami: What did you see? Tell me.

Devotee: I have seen many wonderful "pictures"; I have heard numerous experiences of joy and sorrow.

Swami: "I have seen," you say. The screen is one; the "picture" is another. Did you see both?

Devotee: Yes.

Swami: Did you see the screen and the "picture" at the same time?

Devotee: How is that possible, Swami? When the picture is seen, the screen is not visible; when the screen is visible the picture is not seen.

Swami: Right! The screen, the pictures, do they exist always?

Devotee: No. The screen is permanent; the pictures come and go.

Swami: As you say, the screen is permanent and the pictures come and go. For this "permanent" and "impermanent", we use the words steady (sthira) and unsteady (a-sthira), permanent (nithya) and impermanent (a-nithya), imperishable (a-kshara) and perishable (kshara).

I'll ask questions on another subject. Does the picture project on the screen or the screen on the picture?

Which is the basis for what?

Devotee: The pictures project on the screen, so the screen is the basis for the picture.

Swami: So too, the external world, which is like the picture, has no permanence; it changes. The internal world is fixed; it does not change. The external has the internal as its basis, its substratum.

Devotee: But, Swami! I heard you say imperishable-perishable and permanent-impermanent.

Swami: Yes, my boy! You were speaking now of pictures; do they have names and forms?

Devotee: Haven't they? It's only because they have names and forms that the story is understood. Only then do we recollect Ramayana and Bharatha. There is no formless name and nameless form.

Swami: Good! That is well said! Where there is form there must be name;

where there is name, there must be form. They are connected with each other. When we say, "separable relationship", it is to this relationship that we refer. Have you understood now the meaning of "cosmos (prapancha)"?

Devotee: I have grasped that it is identified with name and form. But Swami, I would like to hear you describe how it originated.

Swami: Do not fall into the tangle now. If we engage ourselves in describing that, it would be like getting into a mango garden without eating the fruit we have plucked - calculating the number of trees in the garden, the number of twigs on each branch, the number of fruits on each twig, and what the total price of all the mangoes would be if the price of one mango were so much. Instead of senselessly wasting precious time in the collection of this information, we should, like the person who eats the fruit, find out what is of primary importance, understand that thing first, and attain contentment and joy. Leave that alone.

What did you say is the nature of this world (prapancha)? This world has another name - do you know it?

Devotee: I said that the world is identified with name and form. I have heard that it is known by another name, creation (jagath).

Swami: This name-form world, this creation (jagath), is like magician's art: it is real only as long as you see it.

So too, the world is real only as long as you experience with your senses (indriyas). That is to say, anything not experienced in the wakeful stage is taken as non-existent. Under such circumstances, we say sat for existence and a-sat for non-existence. Now what do you say of this world? Is it existence or non-existence?

Devotee: It exists in experience in the wakeful stage, so it is existence (sat); it doesn't exist in the deep sleep stage, so it is non-existence (a-sat).

Swami: Oh! Existence, non-existence (sat, a-sat), did you say? These two words together give sadasat, right? This is what is spoken of by us as illusion (maya), do you know?

Devotee: Is that illusion (maya) similar to magic?

Swami: Is it not? "All this is magician's work (indra-jalam idam sarvam)." That is what the sages have been saying for ages.

Devotee: Then there must be a performer of all this magic, right?

Swami: Certainly, there is. That magician is God. He is endowed with countless auspicious attributes. The great sages have formed a name on the basis of each attribute and a form on the basis of each name and have attained Realisation meditating on those forms, making the Attributeless attributeful and the Formless formful. Is it not their experience that is being proclaimed through a thousand tongues? In the holy scriptures (Sastras), Vedas, and Upanishads haven't they declared how they have realised God in their totally absorbed meditation (dhyana samadhi), each in their own way, according to their attitude and devotion and worship? Haven't they declared how each has been blessed with the vision of the Lord and the actual consummation of union with Him?

Devotee: Yes. Swami! I have understood that. But you said that name and form are based on attributes. Kindly explain this to me.

Swami: Certainly. We must now pay attention to such important topics only because the others are beyond your powers of imagination. Listen carefully. Since the Lord pleases all, He is known as Rama. So also He is the embodiment of love (Prema-swarupa); He is full of affection to His devotees; He is the ocean of mercy. In each such name and form, He has vouchsafed direct experience of the Lord (sakshatkara) to devotees and blessed them with union with the Divine (sayujya). The formless God assumes all forms in order to bless devotees.

Devotee: I am happy. I am indeed so happy, Swami! Through Your grace, I am understanding quite clearly. Just one doubt: You said that the formless Supreme Self (Param-atma) has countless names. Are all names and forms equal? Is there any difference?

Swami: What a question! Certainly, all names and forms are equal. Whatever name and form are worshiped, the Lord is only of that unique real form (swarupa). It is possible to realise Him through that name and form. But, the devotee should pay attention to one matter. In whichever form the Lord is worshipped, the favour prayed for, the purpose, must be one.

Devotee: What type of purpose, Swami?

Swami: Desire for liberation. The Lord alone should be loved, nothing else. Love That. Meditate on That. Concretise That. Finally, resolve to merge in That. You should have only this type of acute desire.

Devotee: True, Swami! I have understood well. As you said, I have heard many stories from the Bhagavatha and the Ramayana of people who asked the Lord all kinds of favours and brought about their own ruin. Hiranyaksha, Ravana, Bhasmasura and others are remembered for their ways from that day to this. You have said it clearly. It is something that devotees should carefully consider.

Swami: Well! There is no use simply nodding the head for everything, relishing them as "true", "true". Once it is firmly fixed in your heart that this is true and this is good, then it is necessary to put it into practice. If you say that it is true as long as I speak and forget when you go away, this listening itself is useless. The food that is eaten is to remove hunger, not for being kept on the tongue, away from the stomach. Then hunger will start again. So also, hearing and not acting accordingly is useless.

Devotee: So far, you have discussed some important things: (1) the external world, (2) the internal world, and (3) Bhagavan, the Lord. Are these separate entities, like cause and effect? Or are they connected one with the other?

Swami: Think about it yourself! For this I have already sent the reply in Prema Vahini. It must have reached you today. Look into that. Look closely at what is said there of the relationship between "he that serves", "he that is served", and "the wherewithal of service".

Devotee: Swami, You said also perishable-imperishable (kshara-akshara), impermanent-permanent (nithyanithya). Are there any other names too?

Swami: These two are also known as the Supreme (Purusha). They are said to be consciousness (chetana) and unconsciousness (a-chetana). They are also referred to as soul (jiva) and inert matter (jada). The perishableimperishable are named in another context as higher nature (para-prakriti) and lower nature (a-para-prakriti).

If you contemplate with a clear intelligence, you will find that only names change; the thing does not change.

Devotee: Then, Swami, just as perishable and imperishable have as synonym souls (purushas), does Bhagavantha, the Lord, have any synonym?

Swami: Why? Bhagavan is well known by a very appropriate name, Supreme Lord of All (Purushothama), since He is the Highest of the Supreme Spirits (Purushas).

Devotee: Oh! How sweet! What a sweet name! Did the souls originate from the Supreme Lord of All?

Swami: Here comes the big problem. Once before you asked, "did it originate?" We must use correct words. Otherwise, we get wrong meanings. We should not say, "originating" from the Supreme Lord of All (Purushothama).

In Him they shine. I told you before that these entities (purushas) are indicated by the words higher-lower nature and soul-inert matter (jiva-jada). The word "nature (prakriti)" gives the sense of essential nature (swa-bhava)

and divine energy (sakthi), right?

Devotee: It does. I understand that the Supreme Lord of All is one, and His nature (prakriti) is the second.

Swami: No. You are mistaken. Think again. Is there any difference between a thing and its nature? Is it possible to separate and see the nature apart from the thing? Still, you said "two".

Devotee: It's a mistake, Swami. It's wrong. No one can separate them. The two are one.

Swami: In current speech we say that sugar is sweet, the sun gives light, it is hot, etc. Sweetness is in sugar, light is in the Sun. They are not separate; they are one. Sweetness cannot be known unless sugar is placed on the tongue; without seeing the sun, light and heat cannot be known. Thus, Bhagavan has two characteristics. When we speak of them as two, they are referred to as spirit (Purusha) and nature (prakriti), but they are really one. Nature in the Bhagavan (this is what is known by the name Great Illusion (Maha-maya) is unmanifested and inseparable, like sweetness in sugar. "Inseparable relationship" means just this relationship. By mere willing, this illusion (maya) envelops Bhagavan and manifests in the form of cosmos or Brahma's egg. This is what is called Absolute-FullWorld-Form.

It is this Absolute that expresses itself as creation (jagath), through the power of ignorance (a-vidya) according to the divine will.

Devotee: What is this, Swami? It was all so clear so far, but this new word ignorance (a-vidya) has upset my train of thought! I didn't understand anything. Please explain.

Swami: Don't be in a hurry! Have you heard the word "education (vidya)"? Do you know its meaning?

Devotee: Certainly. Vidya means study!

Swami: Vidya means spiritual knowledge (jnana). When "a" is added, it becomes a-jnana (ignorance). Although one, ignorance takes multifarious forms.

Devotee: Yes, Swami. How did this ignorance come about? Where did it come from?

Swami: You know, don't you, of light and darkness. Do they both exist at the same time?

Devotee: There can be no darkness when there is light nor light when there is darkness.

Swami: When there is light, where does darkness exist? When there is darkness, where does light exist? Think well.

Devotee: This subject is very difficult, Swami! Still, I will reply as best as I can. Pardon me if I am wrong. Darkness must be in light; light must be in darkness; how else can it be?

Swami: I will ask another small question. Answer me. This light and this darkness, are they independent, or are they dependent on anything else?

Devotee: They are dependent on the Sun. When the Sun rises, it is light; when the Sun sets, it is darkness.

Swami: Well, my boy, knowledge (vidya) and ignorance (a-vidya) are dependent on Bhagavan. Knowledge has another name: consciousness or awareness (chit). I will describe all that to you if you come next month. This is enough for today. Go and come. If all is eaten at the same time, it won't be digested. It would lead to bad health.

What we have heard, what we have eaten, requires time to get digested and assimilated. That is why I have given a month's interval. If within that time all this is fully digested and practised, I will gladly tell you the rest. Otherwise,

you can imagine what that day would be like.

Devotee: Salutations (namaskaram). I am indeed blessed. To digest what is heard and what is eaten - the power to do this should be vouchsafed by You alone. When everything is the Lord's, how can this alone be ours? But I will use the power and knowledge with which You have endowed me as much as possible, without any waste.

Beyond that, it is all my destiny and Your grace. I will leave, with your permission.

Swami: Placing your burden on destiny and keeping quiet means diminution of effort. With effort and prayer, destiny can be attained. Without effort and prayer, destiny and grace are not gained. Start the effort! Well, my boy, go and come gladly again.

4. Awareness And Its Lower Form

Swami: Oh, You have come! I was watching for a long time whether you had come. I knew you are a person who comes punctually. Glad to see you.

Devotee: Whatever else I might disregard, would I disregard Your command, Swami? In fact, I'm eagerly looking forward to the sixteenth of every month to meet you. What greater happiness can I get? What better food can I take?

Swami: Very good! Such faith (sraddha) and devotion (bhakthi) are great helps on one's true path. Better than losing sleep and rejecting food in the fruitless pursuit of evanescent worldly pursuits, how much more joyful it is to attain the true, the meaningful, and holy goal! Leave that aside now. What do you want? Speak, let me see.

Devotee: Swami, last month You said something about awareness (chit), and You were pleased to say that You would explain more about it this month. Since then, I have been counting the passing days in order that I may know about it from You. The day has come at last. Please tell me about it.

Swami: Have you understood what has been told so far? Understanding does not mean mere mugging up! By practice and experience, have you realised in thought, word, and deed, and with full equanimity, the true nature of the world, that the world is unreal?

Devotee: It is only by understanding that, isn't it, Swami, that one can be ever immersed in thoughts of Sai, the Lord, giving up all other activities and duties? Had I not understood that much, I would have wasted this precious time.

Swami: Good, my dear boy! How sad the farmer would be if the seeds he planted didn't sprout and yield a harvest!

So too, if the seeds of true wisdom that I sow do not come up as good

saplings and give good harvest, I am affected. On the other hand, if they grow well and fructify into a harvest of bliss (ananda), how happy I am! That is My food. This is the selfless service (seva) you should do to me. There is nothing higher than this. Without flinging away the good and true words, spoken for your sake, if you practise them and derive joy from them, the essence of that joy is my food. If you thus act according to My words and put them into practice, I will gladly tell you more, whatever may be the number of things you ask. When what is said is allowed to deteriorate without being put into use, if people come and ask me to speak and speak again, what is to be said? If all start practising, as you are doing, the world will not have any troubles; untruth will not manifest itself.

Devotee: Swami! The Lord's grace is the basic need in order to practise the divine words, just as for everything else. Without that, nothing can happen. It is ever present, as You said. Just as the Sun is hidden by fog, grace can be obstructed by the darkness of "I" and "mine". But these can be overcome by practice and discipline. That is why, if we understand well the meaning of what we hear and follow, it is so easy. This is my experience; I don't know of others.

Swami: True. True. What you say is correct. You have understood it well. Without grasping the meaning, if various interpretations are given, that distorts Reality. And if a wrong sense is imputed, it falsifies Reality. But if it is clearly understood, practice becomes easy. Now consider this. Are all born at the same time? Do all die at the same time? Similarly, the highest wisdom will dawn at different times in this person or that. If you go on singing song after song, you learn music. So also, if I speak and continue speaking, all will understand the Reality. It is not my mission to keep silent because people are not understanding. To such, it must be communicated once, twice, and more times if necessary.

Devotee: Swami, we are like lumps of iron; the Lord is like the magnet. Both are related to each other. But if that lump of iron has to be changed into an article of use in God's hands, it has to be heated in the fire of anxiety and beaten by the hammer of pain, so that it may obey and respond. So, in order

to shape lumps of iron like us into instruments, You have to take much trouble. You have said that this is Your mission. Now, please tell me about awareness (chit), which you mentioned last month.

Swami: Yes. Awareness has another name: pure consciousness (suddha sathwa). It is as opposed to the impure consciousness as knowledge (vidya) is to ignorance (a-vidya). Impure consciousness is inherent in the pure as much as darkness is inherent in light.

Since many words are spoken, don't get confused my dear boy! Knowledge-ignorance, wisdom-stupidity (jnana-ajnana), pure-impure consciousness - all indicate the same idea, not different ones. I shall ask you another question. Have you heard the word that is the opposite of "nature (prakriti)"?

Devotee: I heard it, Swami. When I studied grammar, I learned that the opposite of prakriti is vikriti.

Swami: What does vikriti mean?

Devotee: Vikriti means changed, transformed, derived (vikara). Agni (fire) is the original; aggi, the derived word.

So, too, jama is derived from yama (control of the inner senses), janna from yajna (ritual), and so on.

Swami: So also, the Lord's nature (prakriti) is known as knowledge (vidya), and its derived or lower form (vikriti) is known as ignorance (a-vidya). For knowledge or pure consciousness (suddha-sathwa), ignorance (a-vidya) or impure consciousness is the lower form.

Devotee: How is that, Swami? Knowledge (vidya) is effulgent in the Lord and ignorance (a-vidya) is apparent only because of knowledge. That is to say, the universal cosmic principle is in the Lord, and this principle itself appears as different from individual to individual - the appearance of individuals is caused by the external characteristics of name and form. This power of

ignorance (a-vidya-sakthi) also manifests as an inseparable entity. For the Lord is the only existence. Therefore, that one existence is the basis or foundation for the universal and the particular, the totality as well as the apparent parts. This is Your meaning, isn't it, Swami?

Swami: That is why the Lord is referred to as truth (sathya) and Brahman. This truth is indivisible (akhanda). It is non-dual (a-dwaita). It is without end. In the Upanishads, this truth, which is associated with the unmanifested power of illusion (maya-sakthi), is called the Full (Purna), "That (Adah)". The truth associated with the manifested power of illusion is called the Full, "This (Idam)". This is the secret of the Upanishadic mantra "Purnamadah Purnamida ...".

Devotee: Oh, what fine teaching! Just like giving unto the hand a fruit peeled and ready to eat! This manifested total cosmos (purna) arose out of the Fullness (Purna) of unmanifested indivisible Reality - this is what you spoke of, isn't it?

Swami: It is on account of this that we say Vasudevas-sarvamidam, Sarvamkhalvidam Brahma, etc. The words Vasudeva and Brahma are different, but there is no difference in meaning at all. Did you understand?

Devotee: It is all like nectar, Swami. But so far, you haven't told me who I am.

Swami: This is enough for now. Next month, I 'll solve your doubts with illustrative examples. Grasp well what has been told. Practise; don't forget and lay aside. Meditate on it. Well, you can take leave now.

5. Thai! Thai! Thai! Dummy!

Swami: Well, my boy, I am glad you have come. Are you reflecting on the answers I gave last time, and are you practising with firm conviction what has been told? Are you deriving bliss (ananda) from it?

Devotee: Swami, would any devotee like me allow your nectar-like words to go to waste? No one aspiring to attain real bliss will throw away the ambrosial words that you confer in Your grace. I don't know about others, but I reflect upon your answers night and day and practise them with courage and conviction. I am awake all the time, waiting for the next chance to meet you.

Swami: It is this alertness that devotees should cultivate. To attach oneself to the flimsy, paltry foolishness of the world and to run after them and worry when they slip out of the hands or jump about in glee when you get them, all this is ignorant illusion. But your counting of days, waiting for the chance, keeping awake for the opportunity to hear the words of the Lord and imbibe their essence, that is illusion of knowledge (vidya-maya). If devotees fall into this illusion, they will attain fulfillment some day or other, without fail. So, since this illusion of knowledge has illumined you, you are fortunate. Develop this, that is to say, this dwelling on the thoughts of God; don't give it up or reduce it for any reason, to any extent. You will become holy without fail. You will reach fulfillment and attain the goal.

Devotee: Swami! Last month, You said You would explain to me who "I" am. If I understand that also, I can be rid of the little delusion that I have and, without the slightest trace of doubt, meditate on You and be blissful. What greater fortune can I have?

Swami: Well, my boy! To speak about the real nature of "I" is very easy, but until it is experienced, full contentment is impossible. For me to tell you to my satisfaction and for you to grasp its full meaning needs some time.

This month, even the allotted hours of the day are not enough for me! Though

it is like this, I am using all the time only for the bliss (ananda) of devotees; I have nothing of my own. Being useful for my devotees, that is my selfish purpose. Throughout the last month, I went to Nellore, Gudur, Venkatagiri, and the surrounding villages.

Afterward, I went to Bangalore and returned. I used what little time was available for writing Prema Vahini! This month, I visited Hyderabad, Rajahmundry, Samalkot, Chebrolu, Nuzvid, etc. So there is no spare time.

Next month, I shall tell you about who "you" are to your full satisfaction. For the present, try to grasp the meaning of this song, in folk dance style; then you will understand who this "you" is to a large extent. It is possible you will achieve detachment (vairagya) to a large extent through this. Later, you will understand the meaning of what I have to say more clearly and with greater ease. Do not merely read this song but think well on the meaning of each word. The song will certainly turn your brain!

Devotee: All right. Give me at least that. I shall satisfy my desire; I shall drink the nectar and digest it.

Swami: Listen, carefully.

1. Thai! Thai! Thai! Thai! Thai! Dummy!
See the ignorant (thamas) play of this puppet doll.
O soul (jiva), listen to the long long tale
Of its past, its future, behind and front!
2. It rolled at first in mushy mire
Of mother's womb, its prison dark.
It came with a whimper, but all around
They smiled in joy and feasts galore.
3. "O tragedy! I am born again",

It knew and wept, both loud and long.
But all the while, they caressed it
And laughed to raise a laugh!

4. In its own dirt it wallowed by day,
Without a sense of shame;
It rose and fell, at every step,
Acting daily a childish play.

5. It runs and skips with gangs of chums
And learns a hundred tricks and trades;
It grows so tall and thick and broad;
From year to year, very fast and fair.

6. It moves in pairs, and bills and coos
In rosy rainbow style;
It sings in tunes unheard before,
And quaffs the cup, unique and strange.

7. 'Tis Brahma who makes these dolls in pairs
And dolls and dolls in millions,
But this our puppet does not know
When it plays with dollies:
Thim! Thim! Thim!

8. This illusion (maya) doll, like the holy bull,
Has the slothful (thamas) rope in nostril hole;
Lust and anger are the scorpion whips
That whack the back of the slave.

9. It gloats with glee, when others stop
Before it shuddering low;
It doles them pain; but cannot bear
A microscopic share!

10. It swears and shouts and waves its arms
And frets and fumes with blood-red eyes;
It is indeed a wondrous sight
Possessed by devil ire!

11. It scans and spells, it scribbles and swots,
It does not know the reason why,
It runs in panic trying to glean
Fodder for belly, willy nilly.

12. Ah, did you see this queer little dummy,
With so many books in its tummy,
Turning and twisting in jealousy green
When a learned doll encounters it?

13 . And, you should hear its secret cluck
When a shameful sensual urge,
A wicked lurking greed
Is satisfied in sin!

14. It proudly pats; what? - its own back!
For beauty, brawn, vitality,
While all the time and step by step
It moves on toward senility.

15 . It totters and blinks through wrinkles and folds;
And when the children cry, "Old Ape, Old Ape",
It gapes and grins a toothless grin;
Its bones do clatter so!

16. Unto the last, it is lost in fear,
Wear and tear and many a tearsome fray!
Of what avail, O dummy doll, you gasp and groan,
You needs must meet the doom.

17. Aha! The bird! It shakes its wings!
It flies out, brrrr, from out the cage of skin.
Empty, it tightens; vacant, it straightens;
O, drag it out of sight; it bloats and stinks.

18. The elements join their parents five;
The doll's desires are dust and ash;
Why weep, you fools, when one of you
Falls on the crowded stage?

19. Uncles, cousins, aunts, and friends
March in gloom until door of room!
The illusion (maya) doll, alas, forgot its kin,
The divine name, redeemer true!

20. O soul (jiva), don't lean upon this slender reed;
Just a sneeze! This frail skin boat
Endowed with thrice three leaks
Will plunge you, middle stream!

21. This puppet weeps, it sleeps and wakes,
When the string is pulled by unseen hand
The Lord it is, who stands behind,
But the dummy swears, it is I, I, I.

22. Dharma, fate (karma) are the hardy strings
He tightens or He loosens.
Unaware, the puppet swaggers
Criss-cross, on the planks.

23. It takes the world as stable,
This silly strutting dummy!
A twinkle! He winds up the show!
Exit the pomp and pride!

24. O soul (jiva), you have waded
Through ant and snake and bird;
Seek and find without delay,
The road to lasting bliss!

25. Bless your luck! You now can see
Sai Krishna, He has come!
Be kin with him and you will know
Your what and why and how.

26. A million words so clever and nice,
Can they appease your hunger's maw?
Light the lamp of the soul instead,
And, freed from bondage, run out and play.

27. This song that tells of dummy doll
Makes soul (jiva) sad and wise! I know;
But (jiva)! See the grand play (leela) of
Sathya Sai Nath and . . . know Thyself!

Devotee: Ah! I have understood! I have clearly understood that "I" am not the body, intellect (buddhi), mind (manas), or memory (chittha). If I am not any of these, "I" must be only the Atma, and if "I" am the Atma, then "I" am the Supreme Atma (Param-atma), so everything is the Supreme Atma! All this I have understood! Believing out of ignorance that "I" is the body (deha) and the intellect, we experience all these miseries. True, true. We are passing through all that you said now, one after the other, as beads in a string. Oh! What a truth! What a truth!

Listening to this one song is enough; the brain, as you said, turns into detachment (vairagya).

Swami! I felt very disappointed when You said first that You had no time to spare. But that was due to my ignorance. Though I knew that our Swami would never disappoint anyone or cause trouble, I feel as if You have conferred even more bliss (ananda) than what I thought I would get. How is Your kindness to be described! They sing of you, "For a single drop of tear, Sai will melt." And they say you can never bear to see us suffer. This is proof of the truth of these sayings.

Shall I take leave?

Swami: Very good. Go and come again. I also have no time to spare. I have to see and send those who are going to their places.

6. The Internal And External Senses

Devotee: Greetings, Swami.

Swami: Be well.

Devotee: With Your grace, everything is auspicious (subha). Without it, everything is inauspicious.

Swami: Good, but have you realised how both of these are based on grace? In one, both subsist; both are conferred by the self-same grace. Well, let that topic stand by. Last time you had a folk poem to digest, and it must have affected your thoughts deeply. In what stage of equanimity is your brain now?

Devotee: Ah. Everything appears as a puppet show now, Swami. But only on and off. The mind forgets and gets caught by the fascination of objects. What mystery is this, Swami?

Swami: Well, the mind is associated with all kinds of activities. It always follows the trail of the impulses and instincts (vasanas). This is its very nature.

Devotee: That is as much as to say that we cannot set it right. Then what is the hope? Ultimately, Swami, do we have to get immersed in impulses and become degraded?

Swami: There is hope, my boy! No need to get immersed and lost. Though it is its nature, it can be changed.

Charcoal has as its nature blackening all that it gets mixed with. But you should not take that as final. When fire enters it, the charcoal becomes red. So too, though the mind is always wandering in the illusion of darkness, when through the Lord's grace the fire of spiritual wisdom (jnana) enters it, its nature changes and the pure (sathwic) nature pertaining to the Divine comes

into it.

Devotee: Swami, they speak of something called anthah-karana; what is it?

Swami: The mind is referred to like that. Karana means sense (indriya). Anthah-karana means internal sense.

Devotee: So are there two types, internal senses and external senses?

Swami: Yes, of course. The external senses are called organs of action (karmen-driyas); the internal senses are called organs of perception (jnanen-driyas).

Devotee: Swami, please tell me which are the organs of action and which the organs of perception.

Swami: Well, all acts done bodily are done by the organs of action. There are five of them. Those that impart wisdom (jnana) from inside are the organs of perception. They are: hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell. Both kinds together are called the ten organs.

Devotee: What work do they do together? What's the connection between their function and the mind (manas)?

Swami: Well, really, whatever work they do, they can't achieve anything without the meditation of mind. The organs of action perform acts in the world and receive knowledge, and the organs of perception discriminate between the good and the bad and offer them to the Atma, through the mind (manas). If there is no mind at all, how can these transmit? When we have to reach the other shore of a flooded river, we rely on the medium of a boat or raft. When the organs of action and the organs of perception, which are connected with nature (prakriti), desire to attain the Atma, they have to accept the help of the boat, the mind. Otherwise, they cannot attain.

Devotee: If so, where do these other things you spoke about - intellect

(buddhi), memory (chittha), and ego (ahamkara) - reside?

Swami: They too are in this only. Together, the organs of action and perception are called the ten organs. Of these, four are distinguished and referred to as the four internal senses. Those four are mind (manas), intellect, memory, and ego.

Devotee: Very nice. That is to say, all are in the same thing. Life is indeed funny. But Swami, what is the function of these four?

Swami: The mind (manas) grasps the object; the intellect (buddhi) examines arguments for and against; the memory or subconscious mind (chittha) understands the object by means of these; the ego (ahamkara) changes the decision for or against and, by attachment, slackens the hold of wisdom (jnana). This is what they do.

Devotee: Excuse me, Swami, I am asking only to know; where do they exist in the body?

Swami: I am glad; don't worry. The mind is in the cupola, the intellect in the tongue, the subconscious mind in the navel, and the ego in the heart.

Devotee: Excellent. So, the intellect and the ego are in the most important places! These are the chief causes of all the world's miseries. Then, if we examine with reference to Your words, it looks as if there will be no misery when these two places are made pure!

Swami: You have indeed listened to me attentively. Yes, that is right. First, the use of words in a clean and pure manner is proof of the intellect treading the right path. Second, suppression and conquering of the ego is proof of the heart being pure. Therefore, be very careful regarding these two. Then, even your mind and subconscious mind will come to have good activities. Only then will you be free from pain and misery. Pain and misery can never happen to you then.

Devotee: So among all these, who is the "I"? Who is the experiencer of all this?

Swami: We have arrived at the right point. "You" are none among all these! All these exist only as long as the feeling "This body is mine" exists. They are all associated with some activities. The Atma, which observes all these activities, that is "You". The joy and sorrow, the loss and misery, the good and bad of these activities are all related only to the body, so they are not yours; they will not be yours. You are the Atma. Until this truth is realised, you sleep the sleep of "I" and "Mine". In that sleep, dreams appear of loss, misery, sorrow, and joy. The dreams persist only until you awake, and after you wake up, the fear you had while dreaming and the sorrow you experienced all disappear and are no longer true. Similarly, when delusion is thrown off and you "awaken" in spiritual wisdom (jnana), you will understand that all this is not "you", that you are the Atma.

Devotee: Then, Swami, for whose sake do mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), subconscious mind (chittha), and ego (ahamkara) do all this work?

Swami: For no one's sake! They are engaged in their own work! The Atma observes everything, and its shadow, the individual soul (jiva), which is deluded by the association of the body-consciousness, plays this drama, through all these acts.

7. Forty-six Maxims Of Conduct

Devotee: Greetings, Swami.

Swami: Oh, you have come, is it? You didn't come for Dasara!

Devotee: The number of devotees would be large, I thought, so I was afraid I would not be able to speak to you to my heart's content. Hence, I came now, a few days prior to Your birthday, so that with Your blessings I could realise the ideal that You teach and have both devotion (bhakthi) and spiritual wisdom (jnana) born in my heart, on the auspicious day of the celebration of Your advent.

Swami: Good! Very good intention, indeed! But do you mean to say that devotion and spiritual wisdom will not be born in you on days other than my birthday? Is that your idea?

Devotee: No, no! That is not so! You come to this world on an auspicious day at a holy moment with an auspicious form, right? My idea is that at least on such a day I could establish Your holy words in my heart and make it pure.

The day is holy; the moment auspicious.

Swami: Fine! What doubt do you have today?

Devotee: I came today determined to hear and put into practice Your Holy words, Swami. As the saying goes, "Even if you go to Kasi (Benares), you have Saturn by your side!" So I didn't bring the demon of doubt with me today. Nor did that demon accompany me! It is all due to Your grace.

Swami: Very good! Understand that when doubts do not come of themselves and are not entertained by you, then indeed the mind is pure. When these two happen, it can be called one-pointedness. When you have none, why should I remind you of doubts? Then tell me, what shall I speak to you about?

Devotee: Swami, tell me how we should, generally, conduct ourselves. What qualities should we possess? Which type of subjects should we try to understand? To receive divine grace and attain Your Holy Presence, what acts should we perform? Please tell me the more important of these, the essential things, the chosen jewels.

Swami: Oh! It seems, Parvathi asked Iswara once, "It is difficult to retain in memory the thousand names of God; it takes a long time to learn them and repeat them; so, please tell me one single name that is the essence of all the thousand." Similarly, you perhaps find it difficult to grasp all that I write and explain, so you are asking me to tell you about the most important, right? But you see, Names have their essence, and the subjects you ask about are different. Though their objective and final result are one, the practices, the paths of activity, cannot be one. They cannot all be summarised in one word! Still, I'll give you now some selected jewels, maxims of conduct, that are very important. Collect and treasure them well. Experience them well, put them into practice, and derive joy therefrom. Wear these jewels and beautify yourself.

Devotee: Exactly what I wanted! How lucky I am!

Swami: Then listen carefully, I shall tell you.

1. Divine love (prema) should be considered as the very breath of life.
2. The love (prema) that is manifest in all things equally - believe that that love is Supreme Atma (Paramatma).
3. The one Supreme Atma is in everyone, in the form of divine love.
4. More than all other forms of love, one's first effort should be to fix one's love on the Lord.
5. Such love directed toward God is devotion (bhakthi); the fundamental test is the acquisition of devotion.
6. Those who seek the bliss of the Atma should not run after the joys of sense objects.

7. Truth (sathya) must be treated as life-giving as breathing itself.
8. Just as a body that has no breath is useless and begins to rot and stink within a few minutes, so life without truth is useless and becomes the stinking abode of strife and grief.
9. Believe that there is nothing greater than truth, nothing more precious, sweeter, more lasting.
10. Truth is the all-protecting God. There is no mightier guardian than truth.
11. The Lord, who is the embodiment of truth (sathya), grants His sight (darshan) to those of truthful speech and loving heart.
12. Have undiminished kindness toward all beings and also the spirit of self-sacrifice.
13. You must possess control of the senses, an unruffled character, and non-attachment.
14. Be always on the alert against the four sins that the tongue is prone to commit: (1) speaking falsehood, (2) speaking ill of others, (3) back-biting, and (4) talking too much. It is best to attempt to control these tendencies.
15. Try to prevent the five sins that the body commits: killing, adultery, theft, drinking intoxicants, and the eating of flesh. It is a great help for the highest life if these are kept as far away as possible.
16. Be always vigilant, without a moment's carelessness, against the eight sins that the mind perpetrates:
 craving (kama), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), attachment (moha),
 impatience, hatred, egotism, and pride.
 One's primary duty is to keep these things at a safe distance from oneself.
17. The mind speeds fast, pursuing wrong actions. Without letting it hurry like that, remember the name of the Lord at that time or attempt to do some good deed or other. Those who do thus will certainly become fit for the Lord's grace.
18. First give up the evil tendency to feel impatient at the prosperity of others and the desire to harm them.
 Be happy that others are happy. Sympathise with those who are in adversity and wish for their prosperity.

That is the means of cultivating the love for God.

19. Patience is all the strength one needs.
20. Those anxious to live in joy must always be doing good.
21. It is easy to conquer anger through love, attachment through reasoning, falsehood through truth, bad through good, and greed through charity.
22. No reply should be given to the words of the wicked. For your own good, be at a great distance from them. Break off all relations with such people.
23. Seek the company of good men, even at the sacrifice of your honour and life. Pray to God to bless you with the discrimination needed to distinguish between the good men and the bad. You must also endeavour to discriminate, using the intellect given to you.
24. Those who conquer states and earn fame in the world are hailed as heroes, no doubt, but those who have conquered the senses are heroes who must be acclaimed as the conquerors of the Universal.
25. Whatever acts a good or bad person may do, the fruits thereof follow them and will never stop pursuing them.
26. Greed yields only sorrow; contentment is best. There is no happiness greater than contentment.
27. The mischief-mongering tendency should be plucked out by the roots and thrown off. If allowed to exist, it will undermine life itself.
28. Bear both loss and grief with fortitude; try to find plans to achieve joy and gain.
29. When you are invaded by anger, practice silence or remember the name of the Lord. Do not remind yourself of things that will inflame the anger more. That will do incalculable harm.
30. From this moment, avoid all bad habits. Do not delay or postpone. They do not contribute the slightest joy.
31. Try, as far as possible within your means, to satisfy the needs of the poor, who are really God as poverty.
Share with them whatever food you have and make them happy at least at that moment.
32. Whatever you feel should not be done to you by others, avoid doing such to others.

33. For faults and sins committed in ignorance, repent sincerely and try not to repeat them. Pray to God to bless you with the strength and courage needed to stick to the right path.
34. Don't allow anything to come near you that will destroy your eagerness and enthusiasm for God. Want of eagerness will cause the decay of the strength of people.
35. Don't yield to cowardice; don't give up bliss (ananda).
36. Don't get swelled up when people praise you; don't feel dejected when people blame you.
37. If anyone among your friends hates another and starts a quarrel, don't attempt to inflame them more and make them hate each other more; instead, try, with love and sympathy, to restore their former friendship.
38. Instead of searching for others' faults, search for your own, uproot them, and throw them off. It is enough if you search and discover one fault of yours - that is better than discovering tens of hundreds of faults in others.
39. Even if you can't or won't do any good deed, don't conceive or carry out any bad deed.
40. Whatever people may say about the faults that you know are not in you, don't feel for it. As for the faults that are in you, try to correct them yourself, even before others point them out to you. Don't harbour anger or bitterness against people who point out your faults; don't retort, pointing out their faults, but show your gratitude to them. Trying to discover their faults is a greater mistake on your part. It is good for you to know your faults; it is no good for you to know others' faults.
41. Whenever you get a little leisure, don't spend it in talking about all and sundry, but utilise it in meditating on God or in doing service to others.
42. The Lord is understood only by the devotee; the devotee is understood only by the Lord. Others cannot understand them. So don't discuss matters relating to the Lord with those who have no devotion. Such discussion will diminish your devotion.
43. If anyone speaks to you on any subject, having understood it wrongly, don't think of other wrong notions that will support that stand but

grasp only the good and the sweet in what was said. True meaning is to be appreciated as desirable, not wrong meaning or many meanings, which give no meaning at all and cause only the hampering of bliss (ananda).

44. If you desire to cultivate one-pointedness, don't, when in a crowd or bazar, scatter your vision to the four corners and on everything, but see only the road in front of you, just enough to avoid accidents to yourself. One-pointedness will become firmer if you move about without taking your attention off the road, if you avoiding dangers, and if you don't cast your eyes on others' forms.
45. Give up all doubts regarding the guru and God. If your worldly desires don't get fulfilled, don't blame it on your devotion, for there is no relationship between such desires and devotion to God. These worldly desires have to be given up some day; feelings of devotion (bhakthi) have to be acquired some day. Be firmly convinced of this.
46. If your meditation (dhyana) or soft prayer (japa) doesn't progress properly or if the desires you have entertained don't come to fruition, don't get dispirited with God. It will dispirit you even more and you will lose the peace, however small or big, that you might have earned. During meditation and soft prayer, you should not be dispirited, desperate, or discouraged. When such feelings come, take it that it is the fault of your spiritual exercises and endeavour to do them correctly.

You can easily attain the divine principle only when you automatically behave and act in this manner and along these lines, in your daily conduct and in all actions. Therefore, hold on to these maxims firmly. Chew and digest these spoken sweets, which have been distributed on the birthday festival of your Swami, and be happy!

Have you understood?

Devotee: Your words are like divine nectar, Swami. Yes! Divine nectar! In all these ordinary dealings of life, people does not know the road; they follow the wrong track; and there are no books to tell them the means of a happy

journey. For all such strugglers like me, what you have said is the very breath! We are indeed blessed! Bless me, that these words get imprinted on my heart and are realised in practice every day. There is no good in simply listening to or reading them. It is only when Your grace accompanies them that we get strength. I shall take leave, Swami!

Swami: All right! Go and come for the birthday festival. There are just seven days more, right? Today is the 16th and the Birthday is on the 23rd, so there are seven days left. Till that time, let this sweetness fill and overflow your heart!

8. The Meaning Of Superimposition

Swami: Oh! How is this? You came so early this time!

Devotee: You made me come, so I have come! Is there anything I can call mine?

Swami: That is true; but will even a scrap of paper move without some cause? So too, there must be a reason for you to come so early.

Devotee: Nothing else, Swami! Hearing that You are proceeding to Trivandrum on the 16th, at the invitation of Sri Ramakrishna Rao, the Governor of Kerala, I felt that I might not get much chance to speak to you if I came only on that day. So, I came now, excuse me!

Swami: Well done! But why do you ask Me to pardon you? Really speaking, one should not ask for pardon even when one commits wrong! Then, what is the fun of asking for it, when you have done the right thing?

Devotee: Why, Swami? Why should we not ask for pardon when we do wrong?

Swami: No, you mustn't ask either for pardon when wrong is done or for reward when right is done! Doing right is but man's duty; it is its own reward. What other reward can there be? The joy of having done one's duty is your reward! Doing wrong is against one's duty. So, one should pray repentingly for the intelligence and discrimination necessary for not repeating the wrong already committed. Beyond this, it depends on His grace, whether He punishes and protects or pardons and corrects.

Devotee: That is very fine. Henceforward, I shall do so, Swami.

Swami: Let that be. Are you treasuring the gems given before the Birthday and making good use of them?

Devotee: As far as possible! With my maximum effort, using the quality of intellect (buddhi) granted by You, I am putting them into action.

Swami: What do you mean by "as far as possible"? For devotees like you, what other task is greater than this?

Why is it not possible? You need only faith and will. With them, it should not be difficult at all to carry out the duty.

Devotee: Swami, You Yourself have said that even when there is faith and even when one has the will, putting things into practice may be difficult for want of favourable circumstances and also because the meaning of things may not be grasped clearly.

Swami: Oh! That means that want of both favourable circumstances and understanding are bothering you! Well if you have not understood, ask, and if you have no favourable atmosphere, tell me what the obstacle is.

Devotee: Doubt is the biggest obstacle; what can be bigger than that? Even after hearing so much, the demon catches hold of me on and off. I don't know why.

Swami: The first reason for that is lack of faith in yourself, faith born out of the conviction that you are really the embodiment of the Atma (Atma-swarupa). The second reason? Taking the divinity in humanity as only humanity and getting lost in the pursuit of sense enjoyment. These demons pounce on you for just these two reasons. Instead, if you establish yourself in God, understanding the divinity in people as divinity itself, this demon of doubt will not attack you. You simply must give up this superimposition (adhyasa), which makes you mix things up.

Devotee: There! Now and then you use unintelligible words! That makes me even more confused, Swami!

Swami: I will never tell you unintelligible words. You have no power to

understand, so you feel worried. I use them, really, in order to make you understand their meaning! Now, in what I told you, which is the difficult word?

Devotee: You used the word superimposition (adhyasa). What does it mean, Swami?

Swami: What? You don't know its meaning! "Seeing one form and taking it to be another, super-imposing one thing upon another." Devotee: How is that? On which object do we super-impose another? Tell me.

Swami: Well, seeing a rope and imagining it to be a snake; seeing waves of hot air in the sun and imagining them to be horses; seeing a mirror shining in the sun and taking it to be a lamp,

Devotee: But what do I see and what do I take it to be?

Swami: You see the Supreme Atma (Param-atma) in this form of nature (prakriti) and take it to be the mere world (prapancha), and you are afraid. It is on account of this delusion that you have become the victim of all these varieties of weakness and are declining through doubt and illusion. If you see it right, the delusion will vanish; the fear will disappear. The faith that it is the Supreme Atma will be firmly and boldly established in you. To get that firmness, the lamp of discrimination (viveka) is necessary. How much a person suffers as long as the rope is seen as a snake! How much is the fear! The delusion! Can it be realised how all that vanished as soon as it was seen in the light? Similarly, these doubts and delusions will also vanish unawares, as soon as you know that nature is Supreme Atma. Imposing a delusion on a delusion, imagining one object to be another, this is called superimposition (adhyasa), my boy!

Devotee: But, Swami, how can nature (prakriti) be said to be Supreme Atma (Param-atma)? When you ask me to discern this cosmos, which appears as the world (prapancha) to the eye, as the Supreme Atma, doubt is sure to arise.

Swami: That is true. Still, if the reality is reasoned out, even what you now see will appear as the Supreme Atma.

Cloth cannot be formed without yarn, right? Yarn is essential for cloth. In fact, it is all yarn. In spite of this, yarn is not spoken of as cloth, and cloth is not called yarn. This is exactly the relationship, between nature (prakriti) and Supreme Atma (Param-atma). Supreme Atma is the yarn of which the cloth, nature, is formed. Have the yarn and the cloth become separate? No. The yarn is used in one way, the cloth in another. But for just this reason, it would be wrong to consider yarn and cloth as different.

Devotee: Yes, Swami. Since nature is formed of Supreme Atma, it is clear that they are not separate. Now, if both these are the same, which among these is the individual soul (jiva)?

Swami: That is exactly the doubt that is tormenting you, my boy. The individual soul (jiva) is the "I" consciousness!

It is associated with the limitations of body and the senses. But it is the Atma, true Self (jivatma), the inner "I" (pratyagatma), supreme-consciousness Atma (chidatma), doer, enjoyer, everything.

Devotee: Again another word, jada, is used to mean inert matter etc. What is it, this it? How does it operate?

Swami: From intellect (buddhi) to body, all transformations of nature (prakriti) are inert matter (jada). This is the unreal, the unconscious, the false (a-sat), the non-intelligent (a-chetana). You must take everything that is not being (sat) and awareness (chit) as inert matter. In essence the world is really inert matter and nothing else. But inert matter is inseparable from consciousness (chaithanya), or awareness and being, just as air is inseparable from the atmosphere. Why, it was said in the Gita that all movable and immovable creation is due to the union of nature and the Supreme Spirit (Purusha), don't you know?

Devotee: Then what is the relationship between the intellect (buddhi) and mind (manas) on the one hand and Atma on the other?

Swami: Well, really, there is no special relationship between them and the Atma. Atma is pure and without blemish; the intellect is also pure and without blemish. And, just as the Sun is reflected in a mirror, the splendour of the Atma is reflected in the intellect. Then the shining intelligence (chaithanya) of the intellect is reflected in the mind, the shining of the mind falls upon the senses, and the light from the senses falls upon the body.

Now, what is the connection between all these? The relationship of all is the splendour of the Atma, isn't it?

The activity of every other thing is caused by the fact that there is an intellect, which can reflect that splendour, right? So, note how the intellect is related on one side with the Atma and with the mind and senses (indriyas) on the other!

Devotee: Then what is the relation between the individual soul (jiva), which says "I", and the senses and the body?

Swami: There is no relation at all! The "I" is separate from the body, mind, etc. The "I" simply superimposes on the soul - that is, on Itself, the body consciousness and the internal behaviours of the mind, etc. "I am fair", says the soul, superimposing upon itself something with which it has no connection. "I am dumb", it says, making the same mistake about the senses. It says it has this desire and that and imposes on itself the activities of the mind, etc.

All this is mere superimposition. The basic truth is only One. The Supreme Self (Param-atma), the Supreme Light (Param-jyothi), The Eternal, the True, is only One! Understand this well.

Devotee: Ah, what superb teaching, Swami. If only this teaching of the principle of the Atma, which even children can grasp, would spread over the

whole world, the world would emerge from darkness to light.

Swami: That is the why I converse with you about every point and allow all to partake in it. The sun's light falls upon the mirror, the light from the mirror falls upon the bungalow, the light upon the bungalow falls upon the eye.

Similarly, this "Dissolving Doubts (Sandeha Nivarini)" has been decided so that the illumination of My teaching may fall upon the mirror of the devotee and then onto the bungalow "Ancient Charioteer (Sanathana Sarathi)", so that from there its effulgence may shed light on the peace and harmony of the world.

9. The Supreme Soul

SWAMI: O, you have come! Well. What is the news?

Devotee: What other news do we have except yours? I heard that Your Kerala tour was most pleasant and wonderful.

I am sad that I was not destined to join.

Swami: Why are you sad for it? Listen to the account and be happy, that is all. Have the confidence and the hope that when such an opportunity next presents itself, you may be able to join. Don't brood over the past.

Devotee: What is the use of confidence and hope when one is not destined? Hope will cause only greater disappointment.

Swami: Has destiny a shape and a personality so that you can recognise it even before it shows itself? You should not hang on its favour, talking all the time of destiny, destiny, ... How can that destiny itself fructify without your will and wish, taking practical form, as action? Whatever be the destiny, it is essential to continue acting. Action (karma) has to be done, even to attain one's destiny.

Devotee: If one is destined, everything will come of itself, right?

Swami: That is a big mistake. If you sit quietly with the fruit in your hand, hoping that its juice will reach the mouth, how can you take it? It is sheer stupidity to complain that destiny denied you the juice, without squeezing and swallowing the fruit. Destiny gave the fruit into your hand; action (karma) alone can make you enjoy it. Action is the duty; destiny, the result. Result cannot emerge without action.

Devotee: So, Swami, we should not sit with folded hands, placing all burdens on destiny?

Swami: Listen. Never underestimate your powers. Engage yourselves in action commensurate with that power.

For the rest, talk of destiny to your heart's content. It is wrong to desist from the appropriate action, placing reliance on destiny. If you do so, even destiny will slip out of your hands. Whoever one may be, one must engage oneself in action.

Devotee: Yes, yes, Swami. In the Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna, "Even I do action (karma); the universe can't go on if I desist from action." So, if one withdraws from it, how can one realise the result? I believe now that action is the hallmark of men.

Swami: And of women too. It is the hallmark of nature (prakriti). All beings, men or women, trees or animals, worms, insects - all have to do action; everything in the universe is bound by this law. There is no escaping this obligation. Action is the characteristic of nature. Do not refer to it as the hallmark of men. The Supreme Atma (Param-atma) is the one and only Soul (Purusha). Nature (prakriti) is all divine energy (sakthi), feminine. You are all not men (purushas), remember.

Devotee: But Swami, there is that distinction in nature; how is it correct to say that all are feminine?

Swami: You may imagine it to be so, guided by your natural reason, but the reality is not that. All this is just secular experience - temporal, temporary. These are not the basic truth. This is simply play-acting; mere impersonation.

In some plays, men take the role of women, and sometimes women enact the role of men. Are they therefore men? In the drama nature (prakriti), all the actors are feminine, though there may be men roles too.

The genuine Supreme Soul (Purusha) is only one, that is Siva, the Atma. The Atma is immanent in everyone, but for this reason alone, all cannot be deemed masculine. The nature theatre is like a girls' school where all the

roles of the play are taken up by girls. Divine energy (sakthi), which is feminine, puts on all these parts. But don't take the drama as real, my dear fellow.

Devotee: Swami, even after hearing all this, the nature of the world remains an enigma to me. When one side is seen, it strikes me as real; when the other side is presented, it strikes me as unreal. Nothing is definite.

Swami: That is exactly the nature of the mixture of truth and falsehood (mithya). It means that the world is neither truth nor untruth (sathya nor a-sathya); it is real as well as unreal. You are born in truth-untruth (mithya). You are enmeshed in it, so you can't distinguish this from that, the truth from the untruth.

Devotee: Then setting aside this discussion of truth-untruth, tell me something, Swami, about that Truth (sathya), that Supreme Soul (Purusha), whoever He is.

Swami: The Supreme Soul has neither birth nor death; He undergoes no change. He is the embodiment of consciousness (chith-swarupa), the embodiment of spiritual wisdom (jnana-swarupa). Codes of social conduct (dharma) are not of His nature, so He is not the embodiment of dharma (dharma-swarupa). The wisdom that is His nature does not change; it is not corrected or supplemented from time to time; it is eternal wisdom. Light is its nature, so it does not admit of a dot of darkness. The sun does not have effulgence added to it from the world it illumines; it emits splendour whether or not there are worlds.

The Supreme Soul (Purusha) is self-luminous. He is always the object of knowledge; He cognises all activities or mutations of the consciousness (chittha). He is modificationless, unevolved. The consciousness changes and evolves; it changes and evolves. The Supreme Soul is sentience itself; He is not affected by apprehension or non-apprehension. No activity can affect Him. Even when unmanifested, effulgence is His nature.

The seed in the soil grows into a tree, and the tree is the manifested form of the seed. This change from seed to tree and tree to seed shows that the power (sakthi) in the seed has activity. This is change. But the Supreme Soul (Purusha) is unchanging, unaffected; He is the See-er. He is completely apart from nature (prakriti). No deed can diminish His glory or exhaust His personality.

Devotee: Then which is nature (prakriti)? Who is Supreme Soul (Purusha)?

Swami: The principle behind the Seen is nature; the principle behind the see-er is the Supreme Soul. The root cause has no root, it is said; Causeless, both nature and Supreme Soul have no beginning.

Devotee: Then this objective world (samsara) should also be beginningless, shouldn't it, Swami? It resulted from the union of the two.

Swami: That union is the result of delusion; prompted by delusion, it produces delusion again. That is the law of the seed and the tree.

Devotee: Union means what, Swami? What is the condition?

Swami: Union is the reflection of the Supreme Soul (Purusha) in the three qualities (gunas), which evolve from nature (prakriti). Here is an example. The Sun is not water, and water is not Sun. Still, by their juxtaposition, reflection is produced. The image has the characteristic neither of the Sun nor of water. Nor can it be said that it is devoid of these. When the water is agitated, the image also gets agitated. The image also shines a little. Again, the magnet is distinct from the iron, but when the two are brought near, the magnet affects the iron and makes it similar to itself. This is the relationship called union (samyoga).

Devotee: Of these, which is the real Supreme Soul and which is the active Supreme Soul? Please tell me.

Swami: Didn't I speak of the Sun and the image? The image-soul (image-

Purusha) is the doer, the enjoyer, the experiencer. The original, the Supreme Person is unaffected. He is the non-doer, the non-experiencer. Therefore, the image-soul is known as the changing-soul or the acceptor. The Supreme Person is the True, the Eternal, the Real, the embodiment of Atma (Atmaswarupa). The Acceptor is the knower and, by the act of knowing, has undergone modification.

Devotee: Right, Swami. Wonderful. How many books one should have conned in order to know all this! And, even then, to grasp the meaning is so hard. I have now known that the Supreme Soul (Purusha) is not in the world, that all this is merely a drama, the highest Atma (Param-atma) being the One Supreme Soul. To attain Him, everything in nature (prakriti) is striving; this is probably what is spoken of as Siva-Sakthi. Fine, Fine.

Swami: You are right. It is also referred to as soul-Brahma (jiva-Brahma) union. Everyone must strive for this union. The soul can't exist alone; spiritual exercise for liberation has to be done, willy-nilly, by every living thing.

Without it, there can be no peace.

Devotee: What does moksha mean exactly, Swami? And what is mukthi?

Swami: Both mean the same. That which is burdened with the mind (manas) is the soul (jivi); when the mind and the name and body from out of which it spins its substance are destroyed, then the soul attains liberation (moksha).

Then it becomes one with Brahman; that is liberation. When the Ganga or the Godavari rivers reach the sea, their separate names, forms, tastes, and limits all disappear and they acquire the name, form, taste, and limit of the sea itself.

Until a soul (jiva) attains the end of the mind, it bears the name, body, and taste of delusion, my-ness, and I-ness. When the soul nears the sea, these characteristics begin to disappear slowly; when the qualities (gunas) as well as the mutations of the mind are destroyed, then one can say that union has

been accomplished with Brahman.

How can the Ganga that has merged with the ocean be sweet? If it is said that one has merged in Brahman, one should have neither the three qualities nor any taste of mind. Such full union is known as ... liberation.

Devotee: O, how grand, Swami. Bless everyone to attain that union; then the world will really be happy.

Swami: What? Such blessing would go against the freedom with which you are endowed. Take up the spiritual exercise prescribed for winning that blessing and gain the blessing by effort - that is the way. It is not something that is given away. You do not pray to the Sun to make the rays fall on you, do you? Shining is His nature; He is doing it always. Remove the obstacles between you and the sun and the rays are on you. So too, when you keep the obstacles of delusion, my-ness, and I-ness between you and the rays of grace, what is the use of complaining that they don't fall on you? What can the rays do?

Devotee: That is as good as saying that we must remove all traces of I-ness and my-ness from our minds.

Swami: Why do you say, "As good as saying?" I say it emphatically, over and over again. If you seek the rays of grace, try to remove the obstacles. Remember, even if you don't strive for it now, you will feel the urge sometime later. You can't escape that urge. It has to happen some day, this shuffling off the coils of delusion. Why postpone the day of joy, the day of liberation? Strive for this from this very day, nay, this very minute.

10. Reflections On Manifesting And Merging

Swami: Well! You look so full of joy today!

Devotee: You yourself said that people are the embodiment of joy, right?

Swami: Then you must always be in this mood; do you remain so?

Devotee: I am trying as far as possible.

Swami: Why do you say "trying"? Doesn't sorrow flee the instant reality is known?

Devotee: But what is the reality, Swami?

Swami: All that "is" is unreal! The efforts you undertake, the words you utter, are all unreal; when you know this, the reality will be evident. Remove all the unreal ideas, opinions, and acts and the truth that is hidden can be seen.

Piling up all this on top, if you ask what Reality is, how can it be seen?

Devotee: How is it possible to take all that is done, spoken, seen, felt, and listened to as unreal?

Swami: First, understand who is experiencing all these. You refer to the body as "I", don't you? That is unreal.

When the experiencing "I" is itself unreal, how can the experiences be real? All have the same Atma. The person who experienced is not "you", the person who listened is not "you". You only witnessed all this.

Devotee: Swami, You said that in everything there is Atma. Is there Atma in a dead man?

Swami: Oh! a good question indeed! Is it more to solve your doubt or the doubt of a dead person?

Devotee: Mine.

Swami: Well it is only when you have awakened from deep sleep (sushupti) that you are aware there is an "I", right? In the same manner, there is the Atma in the corpse also.

Devotee: Then how can it be called dead, how can death happen, when there is Atma?

Swami: If you discriminate properly, there is no dying and no living. A moving body is called living and a still one dead. In dreams, any number of living bodies and corpses are seen. On waking they do not exist. Similarly, this world, both moving and still, is non-existent. Death means the fading out of the "I" consciousness. Rebirth happens when the "I" consciousness comes again. This is what is called birth and death, my boy! Ego (ahamkara) is born, ego dies, that is all.

Devotee: So, I exist always, right?

Swami: Of course you do! When the "I" consciousness is there, you exist. When it is not there you also exist. You are only the base for the awareness; you are not the awareness.

Devotee: But they say, "attained liberation (mukthi)", etc. What is that?

Swami: Understanding the root of death and birth, one must destroy completely the awareness of the separate "I"; that condition is "liberation (mukthi)".

Devotee: So, when I die, I and You are One, right?

Swami: Who said "No"? That feeling of One when you are firmly established in

it, there is nothing separate at all.

Devotee: Until then, in order to identify the real "I" in the unreal "I", they say that the support of a guru is wanted.

How far is that true, Swami?

Swami: It is only when you have so many "I"s that you need someone's support, is it not? When all is One, why seek another? Still, until that "I" (aham) fades out, this speaking "I" and this listening "You" have to be there.

When that "I" is gone, whom is there to speak to? Who listens? All are one. The reflection of Atma, conditioned by awareness (chit) is God; God conditioned by the inner fourfold instruments (anthah-karana) is the soul (jiva), is it not?

Devotee: But what exactly is this chidabhasa?

Swami: Chidabhasa means the "I" awareness conditioned by the consciousness (chit) that One became three, the three became five, the five became many. The "I" awareness (purity, sathwa) became three on account of contact with passion (rajas) and ignorance (thamas); in these three, the five elements (bhuthas) arose; and through those five, the manifold happened. This is what causes the illusion that the "I" is the body. Speaking in terms of ether (akasa), there are three: chidakasa, chitthakasa, and bhuthakasa.

Devotee: What is chidakasa?

Swami: That is the Atma.

Devotee: Chitthakasa?

Swami: Its deflection. That is to say, the mind stuff (chittha). When this mind stuff changes into mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), and ego (aham-kara), it is

called anthah-karana, a word that means the internal senses (indriyas).

The "I" awareness conditioned by consciousness (chidabhasa) having the mind stuff (anthah-karana) is the individual soul (jiva).

Devotee: And bhuthakasa?

Swami: Atma (Chidakasa) conditioned by mind stuff (chitthakasa). When it sees the elemental ether (akasa), it is mind-ether; when it sees the object, the real, it is pure consciousness (chinmaya). That is why, my dear fellow, it is said, "The mind (manas) alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation." The mind manufactures any amount of delusion.

Devotee: How can that delusion disappear, Swami?

Swami: When you grasp its secret through inquiry, the many merge in five, the three in one, and the I exists as I.

You get headache, you apply ointment, it disappears, you are as you were. The delusion that "I am the Body" is similar to this. It will disappear if you apply the ointment of inquiry (vichara).

Devotee: Can everyone adopt this path of inquiry?

Swami: No, my boy. It is only for those whose mind stuff (chittha) has become ripe.

Devotee: Then what should we do to reach that ripe stage?

Swami: Now we have come to the place from which we started! Don't you have things like soft prayer (japa), meditation (dhyana), worship, and breath control (pranayama) for this? Steadily, through these, you become ripe and become capable of understanding the "I" by inquiry into reality. For ripe people, the Atma is not something different from themselves or yourself. All is Atma!

Devotee: But Swami, You mentioned only soft prayer, meditation, worship, and breath control. Some advanced persons adopt the vow of silence (mouna). Of what use is it? What exactly is silence?

Swami: The illumination of the soul is silence! How can there be silence without the Atma being illuminated?

Without that, merely keeping the mouth shut is not silence. Some adopt the vow of silence, but they communicate by writing on paper or a slate or they point successively to the letters of the alphabet on a chart! All this is pseudosilence!

It is only another way of talking without interruption! There is no need to attain silence. Silence is ever with you. You have only to remove all things that disturb it!

Devotee: But many people don't open their mouth to speak. You mean that this is useless?

Swami: Who said so? If you don't use your tongue, if you are silent in order to keep out the external obstacles to spiritual exercise, you certainly can develop your thoughts, you can desist from disturbing others, you can escape criticism and worry from others, you will get concentration. Your brain will be saved from unnecessary burdens, and it can improve much. With such a brain, you carry on remembrance (smarana) of the Lord's name better. You will realise all these advantages when you do spiritual exercises.

Devotee: Then for the fully wise person (jnani) all this is unnecessary?

Swami: There is no fully wise person in the world! Such a person is in no need of the world itself, so why would they need all this?

Devotee: If that is so, who are those people called wise people?

Swami: The silent men I spoke about just now. "Spiritually wise one (jnani) is

a term applied by courtesy; a full jnani is non-existent in the world. The jnani must know "All as one"! Your jnanis are all either experts in logic or experts in knowledge of world; they haven't known the Reality.

Devotee: Who are the real spiritually wise (jnanis)?

Swami: One who knows the Atma as Atma will know themself as milk added to milk, oil to oil, or water to water.

When the physical body dies, they likewise merge in the Atma. But some may have some traits still persisting.

They continue to have some resolutions and desires. Until these are exhausted, they will wander in the world, with body. Such men are called "bits of divinity born as men (daivamsa-sambuthas)." This is also as per the Lord's will.

Devotee: Why should this difference arise, Swami?

Swami: It arises out of each one's spiritual exercises (sadhana) and resolve (sankalpa). Eat a mango, and you belch its smell. How can you prevent it? The belch brings the perfume of the thing eaten.

Devotee: Will such people also have limitations?

Swami: Without limitations, how can work get on? They also have it. But only in a subtle form, until they attain transcorporeal liberation (videha-mukthi).

Devotee: What is that, Swami?

Swami: Their acts are like the line drawn on water, seen while the line is being drawn but absent as soon as it is finished. While being done, you notice it; in an instant it is not noticeable anymore.

Devotee: Swami, you said that spiritually wise people (jnani) have

renunciation as their hallmark. How does this agree with that?

Swami: That is true! Renunciation is the hallmark. If out of the traits of previous birth one gets attached, one must know that it is only for the body and not for oneself. This attachment damages the bliss of liberation-while-alive (jivan-mukthi). Spiritual wisdom (jnana) is most important for transcorporeal liberation.

Devotee: Even if one has no spiritual wisdom (jnana), can one attain liberation (mukthi) by mere renunciation (vairagya)?

Swami: What a foolish question! How can the fruit be sweet without ripening? Renunciation cannot arise except from spiritual wisdom. There is no liberation (moksha) without renunciation. Be sure of that!

Devotee: Then where does devotion (bhakthi) come in?

Swami: We have come to the very beginning again! Before spiritual wisdom (jnana) comes devotion. Before devotion, affection. But all these are one. Affection is the flower, devotion the fruit, which ripens into wisdom; renunciation (vairagya) is the sweet juicy final stage. Without one, you cannot have the next. In order to tend the fruit until the juice and taste are developed, you must practise daily prayer, etc., as mentioned above. But, from the first, have in view the Oneness of all. Understand that there is no "other".

Devotee: At least, to keep up appearances in the world one has sometime to say "this is mine." What is one to do then?

Swami: Of course, you may have to say so. But simply because you say so, what need is there for you to feel separateness between I and You? When you travel in a carriage, do you take the carriage as "I"? Look at the Sun.

He gets reflected in a small pot filled with water, in a broad river, in a mirror, or on a polished pot. For this reason, does the Sun feel that all these things

are "He"? Does He get sad when the pot breaks or the river gets dry? This is exactly like that. If you take "I" to be the body, then it is all bother! If you don't take it so, you will shine like the Sun, independent of anything else. Besides, You will be immanent everywhere.

Devotee: That is as much as to say that each one must first discover for oneself who one is.

Swami: Exactly. Inquire into that first. Of course, for those who are not competent, this will be too hard. So, those experienced in this line say that such people should not be told these things. If you say, "You are Yourself Brahman, You have attained liberation (moksha), You are in that stage," to those not competent, they won't do any spiritual exercises. They will act without any rule or order, and they will pay no regard to right and wrong.

This must be revealed only by a guru or by the Lord's command! Of course, those who have the thirst and determination to undergo the discipline can ask about it! But it must be practised; there is no use simply hearing it and repeating, "All is One." That is meaningless.

Devotee: Swami, Sankara has already said,

viswam-darpana drsyamanaganaree thulyam hi anthargatham.

If you really penetrate into its inner meaning,
the world is like a city seen through a mirror.

This vision - that the world (jagath) is unreal, that it is all illusion (maya) - is this for common people or for the spiritually wise (jnani) also?

Swami: The eye of the spiritually wise sees all things as Brahman! The

ignorant person (a-jnani), the person without wisdom, cannot understand whatever is said! So, all spiritual texts (sastras) are intended to benefit the middlings.

Devotee: This means that all spiritual exercises are included in the path of inquiry (vichara-marga)?

Swami: Yes. The teaching of Vedanta is about "Who am I?" Only those equipped with the four instruments are competent to make this inquiry. The purpose of the four is to realise that the Atma is real and that all else is unreal and to discriminate between Atma and all else.

Devotee: How is that to be realised, Swami?

Swami: By inquiring into the nature of the Atma! First they do all varieties of spiritual exercises and finally enter upon this. While a child, they teach you A, B, C, right? Even M.A. and B.A. curricula consist of the A, B, C, D and their permutations and combinations! But to realise this fact, one has to complete one's studies! The spiritual texts (sastras) are based on a-kshara; meaning both letter and the Imperishable. All paths are based on the path of inquiry (vichara-marga).

Devotee: But there are some who attain samadhi. Will they have all this enquiry, etc. in samadhi?

Swami: Wonderful fellow! How can there be inquiry in samadhi? When you sleep soundly, do you have any thoughts about the world around you? Samadhi is like that.

Devotee: There will be no mind in samadhi, will there?

Swami: The mind that persists in sleep will be there also.

Devotee: They talk of a "beyond stage (thuriya)" in samadhi. What is that, Swami?

Swami: Beyond the waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep stages.

Devotee: Why are those stages absent there? What are the characteristics of that stage?

Swami: Those three stages are the characteristics of I-ness. Ego (ahamkara), the person with mind (manas), who does all acts. That will not be present in the "beyond" stage. It would have disappeared long ago. For them, it is all the same, with eyes open or with eyes closed. It is all One.

Devotee: Swami, without that "I (aham)", how can they talk?

Swami: What was "I" in the beginning is transformed into the true entity (swarupa) when the reality is grasped; this is referred to as the destruction of the mind (mano-nasanam).

Devotee: So, this undifferentiated deep communion (nir-vikalpa-samadhi) is all destruction (nasam)?

Swami: Well, my boy, all samadhis are merging (laya), not destruction. The spiritual-aspirant stage is when you have both construction and destruction.

Devotee: This subject is very interesting, Swami.

Swami: Don't sit quietly, merely appreciating it. Practise it in daily life. All right, you can take leave.

Devotee: Very good Swami. Please bless me in that practice. I shall be back soon.

11. Obstructions Of The Past, Present, And Future

Swami: If you dearly love a dog, that dog is also Brahman! The dog has a name and form. If you remove both your name and form and its name and form, then Brahman alone remains. Name and form are "past obstructions".

The absence of name and form is Brahman. Inherent in all the manifold names and forms is inherent just One, Brahman. You have to recognise that "is-ness" in all. The is-ness is being (asthi), the knowledge of the knower is effulgence, the shining splendour (bhathi). That is also Brahman.

There is a yearning, isn't there, to see it, experience it, to seek for it? That is due to the attraction (priya), the charm. These three are basically characteristic of Brahman, my dear boy!

Devotee: What is this being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) they speak of?

Swami: Atma itself is known as being-awareness-bliss, because its nature is existence-effulgence-lovableness (asthi-bhathi-priya).

Devotee: Swami, since "lovableness (priya)" is also its nature, shouldn't everything be lovable? But scorpions, snakes, and wild animals don't evoke love!

Swami: You may not love them, but they love each other, don't they? A thief likes another thief, a devotee likes another devotee - each loves their own kind.

Devotee: I don't understand all this clearly, Swami. Give me some example, if there is any, of this existenceeffulgence-lovableness from the present world.

Swami: My dear boy, why say, "if there is any"? When all is Brahman, which one is not an example of that? Now, you go to a picture. The picture exists on

the screen; it persists, it is. That is existence (asthi). Who sees it and understands it? You. So it is splendour (bhathi)". The names and forms, which are lovable (priya), come and go.

Even if you set them aside without being deluded by them, the screen is always there.

One point has to be noted here. The pictures fall on the screen by means of a beam of light projected through a small slit in the wall of the machine room. But if it comes from the entire room without the slit, escaping from that limitation, the figures won't be seen! The screen will be fully bathed in light! So too, if the world is seen through the small slit of one's mind, the manifold multi-coloured creation will be cognizable. If the floodlight of knowledge of Atma (Atma-jnana) is poured, and you see it through the Atma, it will be One Unlimited Light, and no individual picture can be cognised. That is to say, all will be cognised as the one indivisible Brahman, do you understand?

Devotee: Swami! I have one doubt; can I ask you?

Swami: Certainly. Why do you say, "Can I ask you"?

Devotee: Some people describe Brahman as asthi-bhathi-priya. What does that mean? How are these related to Brahman?

Swami: Is that the doubt? Asthi means "that which is"; bhathi means "that which shines"; and priya means - of course, you know it, don't you? - pleasing, desirable, capable of satisfying. All that is dear (priya) to you is Brahman!

Devotee: I have understood it clearly, Swami. Now I know what is meant by the "obstruction of the past". What are the "obstructions of the present?"

Swami: Good, I'll tell you. The obstructions of the present are of four types: attachment to sense objects, cynical criticism, dullness of understanding, and absurd conceit. The first is the cause of attachment to objects that attract the senses. The second makes people discover wrong meanings in the teachings of the guru. The third causes confusion, because things explained by the guru

aren't grasped at all. The last obstruction makes one feel that one is a great scholar, pundit, or ascetic, mistaking the body and the senses for the Atma.

Devotee: And the "obstructions of the future"?

Swami: Oh! They come always through sinful deeds. They come and obstruct unawares!

Devotee: How are we to meet them, Swami?

Swami: It isn't possible for all. To some extent, the aspirant can be cognisant of the approaching wrong and its wiles. It creates a desire, which puts on the cloak of want. Then you must recognise it as an "obstruction of the future". It is difficult to be forewarned like this as the result of the effort of one single life. It may take many births to acquire this education.

Devotee: Are there any who have so learned it?

Swami: Why, there are. The scriptures speak of Bharatha and Vasudeva; Bharatha required two or three births; Vasudeva had to be born once.

Devotee: That means these three obstructions cannot be overcome except after many lives. Can't we succeed without all that bother?

Swami: Why? The aspirant can, by reasoning out the nature of these three, escape from being worried by them.

Otherwise, it may take many lives.

Devotee: Swami, how can we get over the "obstruction of the present"?

Swami: There is a way for this also. Through karma, the appropriate karma. There is no obstruction that cannot be surmounted. Attachment to sense objects can be removed by control of the senses (sama), control of the outer senses (dama), control of the mind by withdrawal of the senses (uparathi),

forbearance (thithiksha); by developing purity, self-control, withdrawal of desires, and the ability to suffer. Dullness of understanding can be removed by listening again and again. Constant meditation on the things heard will abolish the habit of cynical criticism.

All absurd conceit will vanish through the teachings one imbibes.

Devotee: Swami, to master all this seems impossible for everyone! To make it easy for all, tell me which is important?

Swami: My dear fellow, to know a thing, a discriminating intellect (vi-jnana) is necessary. Stupidity (a-jnana) makes one ignorant, don't you know?

Devotee: So many people say so many things about this highest intellect and stupidity. Please tell me the basic thing behind both.

Swami: Now you have come again to the very first step. Ignorance (a-jnana) is the mental attitude that has reference to the external object, and highest intellect (vi-jnana) is the mental attitude that has reference to the internal subject. Ignorance is known also as mind (manas) and subconscious mind (chittha). When activity and attitude turn inward, they are called intellect (buddhi) and the inner instrument (anthah-karana).

Devotee: Some say that the spiritually wise (jnani) will have only two things, the desire to attain the other world and the burden of past karma. Is that true?

Swami: Both the spiritually wise and the ignorant will have desire, absence of desire for the other world, and the burden of past karma, all in equal measure. Their experiences will also be in equal measure. But the spiritually wise one will not have the consciousness of doership, so they won't be bound. The ignorant is conscious of doership and therefore gets bound. This is the distinction. I have already told you, haven't I, that "the mind" is the cause of bondage as well as of liberation? The mind is the cause of everything.

Devotee: Mind, mind, they keep on saying. What is it? What is its form?

Swami: "Cognition", "understanding" is its form. If you know the basis of that knowing, there will be no bondage at all!

Devotee: What is the basis?

Swami: The basis is what you refer to as I. Seeking for the I, if you are in that I state, however many "understandings" come or don't come, you will remain unaffected.

Devotee: Right. That is very good, Swami. Please make all this soak into our brains, so that we may realise the purpose of our lives. I shall take leave, Swami.

Swami: Do so. Depart gladly and return later. Take my blessings with you.

12. The Gross And The Subtle

Devotee: Swami, at Venkat hill (Venkatagiri), during the Assembly of God, You said some things that I couldn't clearly understand. Can I ask about them now?

Swami: I am happy when people ask Me about things they haven't understood. Of course, you have every right.

Devotee: You said the gross form (sthula-rupa) and the subtle form (sukshma-rupa), didn't You? These two, are they the characteristics only of the mind (manas)? Or are they related to everything?

Swami: They are characteristic of everything; in fact, all the names and forms found in the gross exist also in the subtle stage! Why, the gross is there only to make you understand the subtle!

Devotee: Well then, Swami, we see the gross firmament (sthula-akasa); is there also a subtle firmament?

Swami: My dear boy, all this exists in that subtle firmament (akasa). The subtle one is as imperceptible and as all-pervading as the gross one.

Devotee: What is its name, Swami?

Swami: It is known as the subtle firmament of the heart (sukshma-hridayakasa).

Devotee: How can that be all-pervading?

Swami: Nothing else possesses the extent, the area, the breadth that this firmament of the heart has. See how many scenes, how many feelings, how many conjectures are immersed and imbedded in it!

Devotee: Then do we also have a Sun in that subtle sky?

Swami: Of course! Who said no? Without that, how could there be all this splendour, all this light and wisdom and brightness?

Devotee: What is its name, Swami?

Swami: When the heart is the firmament (akasa), naturally, the intellect (buddhi) is the Sun that illuminates that sky. The effulgence of the intellect is as bright as the rays of the Sun, so the intellect is the subtle Sun.

Devotee: Then it is possible that the moon is also in the firmament of the heart in subtle form.

Swami: Why do you ask about all these, one by one? Didn't I tell you at the very beginning? Every gross name and form has its corresponding subtle name and form. The moon in its subtle form is love (prema), with its cool rays pleasing to the heart. Love is the subtle form of the moon.

Devotee: Excuse me, Swami. The Pandavas and the Kauravas waged a war, didn't they? How are they supposed to have waged the "subtle" war, these "subtle" Pandavas and their opposite number, the "subtle" Kauravas?

Swami: Why do you say "supposed to have waged"? They are waging it even today in the subtle form! In this war, the evil qualities are the Kauravas and the good qualities - truth, righteousness, peace love, and nonviolence (sathya, dharma, santhi, prema, and ahimsa) - are the five Pandava brothers. The evil qualities are many, so the Kauravas are also a horde. Each one, under their own firmament of the heart (hridayakasa), on their own earthly consciousness, is waging this struggle, every moment.

Devotee: Swami, they say the Pandavas are children of King Pandu, and the Kauravas are the offspring of King Dhritrashtra. In the "subtle" form, how are we to recognise them?

Swami: Both are disputants for the kingship of the self-same heart; they are in everyone as the Unwise Personality and the Wise Personality. The unwise blind ruler is Dhritarashtra; the wise Pandu is the father of all good qualities. Have you understood?

Devotee: But then, Swami, excuse me; in that war there were millions of soldiers and chariots. And the subjects - who are they in this "subtle" conflict?

Swami: Of course, they are all there, in people. The million feelings and thoughts and impressions are the soldiers and subjects. The ten senses (indriyas) are the regiments, and the five senses are the chariots. In everyone's heart a perpetual war is being fought between good and evil, between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Is that clear?

Devotee: Well, who is Lord Krishna in the subtle war; He who was then neutral in that struggle for power?

Swami: Don't you know? He is the Witness, known as Atma. He is the charioteer (sarathi) of the chariot of the individual soul (jiva).

Devotee: Another question. All these people had Hasthinapura as their capital. In people, which is the Hasthinapura?

Swami: The basis for all these subtle manifestations - these men, chariots, Pandavas and Kauravas - is, as you know, this City of Bones (Asthinapura), this body. This skeleton is Asthinapura! Both have nine gates. There, both the Kauravas and the Pandavas were born; they played and were trained there; they grew up together there.

So also, in this same Asthinapura, all the qualities, good and bad, are born and grow, they develop and subside, they watch and hate each other, all in the same body. Are not the warring rulers in this body also the Unwise Personality and the Wise Personality?

Devotee: Yes, Swami. There is an intimate connection between the

Mahabharatha war and the qualities and conduct of humanity. Really, the relationship is there, without a doubt. What a fine comparison! As you said, this type of warfare is taking place in everyone, even now. Well Swami, when will this war end?

Swami: When will this war end, you ask? When both bad and good qualities fade out and humanity becomes quality-less; only then can people have peace (santhi).

Devotee: At that time, this battlefield, this City of Bones (Asthinapura), won't exist, will it?

Swami: When there is a battle, there must be a battlefield. When you have no battle, why bother about a field?

Devotee: Can't we avoid the battle altogether?

Swami: Why not? Kings develop the spirit of war because they have confidence in their subjects. The subjects encourage the rulers to unleash the hounds of war. Delusions are the subjects, who push the individual into the battle.

When there is a paucity of such subjects, war will not be waged. So divest yourself of such subjects as delusions, illusions, and feelings of "I" and "Mine" and you can be at peace, enjoying undisturbed divine peace (santhi).

My boy! You can go now! Wait! Let me tell you one thing: entertaining doubts of all kinds is also a delusion!

13. The Ramayana In The Heart Of Man

Devotee: Swami, last time you spoke of the Mahabharatha war; in the same manner, does the Ramayana also happen in everyone's heart?

Swami: Undoubtedly! It takes place systematically and in the same sequence.

Devotee: Then, in what form does Rama come in this?

Swami: The Atma is Rama. He has come, in the character of the soul (jivi), wearing the dress called body.

Devotee: Then, being one whose will prevails, and being omnipotent and all powerful, why does He suffer so much?

Swami: It is all play, His sport (leela). What can be joy for Him? And what can be suffering for Him? He is the embodiment of bliss (ananda-swarupa), who knows neither. By His will, He can produce everything. He enacted the Ramayana on the stage of the theatre of the world, with Himself taking a role and showing each quality (guna) as a separate form. Such a Ramayana is taking place, in every heart. The Rama in the heart (the Atmarama) is observing everything, as witness.

Devotee: But the inert material (jada), and the individual soul (jivi), how does they enter into this Ramayana?

Swami: This inert material accepts the active consciousness (chaithanya), viz. the knowledge of Brahman. This consciousness is born with the name of Sita. The inert-matter-consciousness become One. This is referred to as Sita-rama. As long as the inert matter and the consciousness are One, there is no trouble and no suffering. It is the separation of one of these two that gives rise to all the bother.

Devotee: How is that, Swami?

Swami: Sita, who is knowledge of Brahman, goes away from the Atma, which is in the form of the individual soul. Hence, falling into the darkness or jungle is inevitable. Rama has acted in this way to show us this; if Sita, or knowledge of Brahman, is allowed to be lost, one cannot escape wandering about in the jungle of darkness.

Devotee: Swami, then why is Lakshmana always with Him? What does he stand for in our life?

Swami: One should not be alone in the dark jungle of life; one should have the mind (manas), ever by one's side.

It is for this that Lakshmana is kept near, always.

Devotee: In the Ramayana, Vali and Sugriva are described. Who are they?

Swami: When wandering in the dark jungle one gets despair when one should get discrimination. They have vengeful hatred of each other. Vali, who is despair, has to be destroyed; only then can success come. Despair is Vali; discrimination is Sugriva.

Devotee: Hanuman, who appears between these two, who is he?

Swami: He who is of great help in the conquest of despair, viz. courage! That is Hanuman; He is courage. When associated with courage, it is possible to cross the ocean of illusion; that is why Rama built the bridge with the help of Hanuman.

Devotee: After crossing the ocean of illusion, what is to be planned?

Swami: Don't you know what Rama did after crossing the bridge? Conquering illusion (moha), He slew the qualities of passion and inertia (rajoguna and thamoguna) in the form of Ravana and Kumbhakarna. The remaining brother, the last, the quality of purity (sathwa-guna), viz. Vibhishana, was crowned king. The three qualities (gunas) have been illustrated in the characters and

careers of the three brothers Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibhishana.

Devotee: After this, what has to be achieved?

Swami: Has to be achieved, do you say? Next is the attainment of self-experience (anubhava-jnana), or Sita - the spiritual wisdom (jnana) reached after experience, wisdom realised in actual life. When both inert matter (jada) and consciousness (chaithanya) unite again, that is the coronation - that is to say, salvation (jivan-mukthi) for the individual soul (jiva). Therefore, the fundamental teaching of the Ramayana is this:

The soul (jiva), mind (manas), spiritual wisdom (jnana), despair, discrimination, courage, delusion, passion (rajas), sloth (thamas), and purity (sathwa) - these demonstrate themselves each in a different form. It is to be learned how and in what ways each of these can be either acquired or subdued.

All this is done by the Atma, who has come in the form and with the name of Rama, by His acting, behaving, directing, and guiding. So, the Ramayana didn't end long ago. As long as in each life there is a struggle for achievement through these paths, and people attain the self knowledge (anubhava-jnana) in the end and the quality of purity (sathwa-guna) is crowned at last - until then, the Ramayana will continue to take place in the heart of people. On one side, the Mahabharatha war, on the other, the Ramayana; and on another, the Bhagavatha; thus is life led perpetually. These are the subtle (sukshma) forms of the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, and the Bhagavatha. Do you understand?

Devotee: That means that in the Ramayana of actual life, Atma is Rama, mind (manas) is Lakshmana, and Selfknowledge (anubhava-jnana) is Sita. And when that Sita is lost, Rama falls into the forest of existence. There, in that forest, are despair and discrimination; if we associate ourselves with courage (Hanuman), we can go across the sea of delusion with the army of zest, strength, and steadfastness represented by Jambavan, Angada, and other monkeys (vanaras). As soon as we cross the sea, we can destroy the

passionate (rajasic) and slothful (thamasic) qualities, symbolised by Ravana and Kumbhakarna, and the pure (sathwic) quality or Vibhishana can then be crowned, self-knowledge (anubhava-jnana) or Sita is attained. This union of inert matter (jada) and consciousness (chaithanya), that is, of Sita and Rama, is the bliss (ananda), the salvation (jivan-mukthi) for the soul. Ah!

What a splendid Ramayana! The Ramayana accomplished as the son of Dasaratha is being enacted now as the subtle Ramayana, through qualities (gunas) and senses (indriyas) in each individual so to say.

Swami: There is no "so to say" in this. It is happening as the subtle Ramayana!

Devotee: Swami, You said that each quality and each sense adopts a separate form in the Ramayana. It causes some surprise to imagine that the senses also put on some form! In these, the gross and the subtle Ramayanas, in what form do the senses appear? Please tell me this.

Swami: Whatever the quality, how can it express itself without the help of the senses? Qualities are bred in the senses. The senses of action are five; the senses of knowledge are five. These ten, with the help of the mind (manas), create attachment, don't they? Otherwise, there can be no merging at all. "Born in illusion (maya), bred in illusion, man's mission is to master illusion," it is said. So too, born in the senses, bred in the senses, the inert consciousness (jada-chaithanya) has to master the senses. That is their basic duty, don't you know? Do you know where Rama, the soul (jivi), was born? Whose son is He? Dasaratha has that name because he symbolises the ten senses (dasendriyas). Whichever quality (guna) or form (rupa) we consider, it cannot be unrelated to the ten senses of action and of knowledge, (the karmen-driyas and jnanen-driyas), in the form of Dasaratha.

Devotee: Four sons were born of Dasaratha. Of what were they the forms, Swami?

Swami: From the ten senses, not only four but any number of qualities and

forms can originate. But only the chief, the four symbolising the four faces of the Lord, originated by His will. They are born as Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, and Satrughna. In the subtle form, they are truth (sathya), dharma, peace (santhi), and love (prema).

These are the Four Faces of the Lord.

Devotee: Who among these, Swami, is truth? Who represents dharma, peace, and love?

Swami: Can't you discover? Rama is truth. "The status and the honour should go to him who has the right, not to me," said Bharatha when he was offered the crown, so he is dharma. He placed complete faith in the Atma, that is, Rama, believing that there is no bliss (ananda) sweeter than its uninterrupted company, Lakshmana followed Rama, so he is love. Having no individual separate ambition of his own, treading the paths followed by these three, Satrughna was calm and unperturbed, so he is peace. Is that clear?

Devotee: Yes, Swami, but these four were born of three mothers; who are whose mothers?

Swami: As I said just now, "born in illusion (maya), bred in illusion, one has to transcend this illusion." So also, one is born from qualities (gunas), one is brought up with qualities, and finally one has to transcend the qualities.

The three mothers represent three qualities! Among them, Kausalya is the pure quality (sathwa-guna); Kaikeyi, the passionate quality (rajoguna); and Sumitra, the slothful quality (thamoguna); they play those roles, in the epic.

Dasaratha in the form of the ten senses (dasendriyas) is associated with these qualities, so he is the embodiment of the sense-qualities. It is only because people can't easily grasp the truth through the senses and the qualities that the Lord taught them through the Ramayana. The Lord is teaching this even to this day. The Lord performed that day the gross Ramayana; and today, He is performing the subtle (sukshma) Ramayana on

the stage of the hearts of people.

14. The Bhagavatha: The Description Of Atma

Devotee: Swami, the inner meaning of the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana, which You explained, is really very interesting. If only one probes deeply, what else is there in them? That kind of Mahabharatha and Ramayana is taking place in every heart, through the action and interaction of mind, subconscious mind, and intellect. You said that the Bhagavatha also occurs in the same manner. If you will kindly explain how that is happening, we can, after knowing its inner meaning also, start following the "subtle" Ramayana, Mahabharatha, and Bhagavatha, all three. Please tell me about the Bhagavatha.

Swami: Well, the Bhagavatha is not like the other two. It has no qualities and no form! It deals with the Atma, which is beyond and behind the qualities (gunas), senses (indriyas), mind (manas), and subconscious (chittha); it deals with the powers and prowess of the Atma and Its apparent activities (leelas). The Bhagavatha contains the stories of the incarnations of that which is the Witness of everything.

Devotee: What are the forms that the Witness assumed? Why did He assume those forms?

Swami: Really speaking, He is all forms, (sarva-swarupee). There is no limit to the number or nature of His forms. Still, if something must be said in conformity with what has happened, Its incarnations are Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Narasimha, Rama, and Krishna. In order to transact the creation, preservation, and destruction of the world, and to punish the wicked and protect the good, He Himself assumes the form that He designs as best at the time and purpose He has set before Himself. When that purpose is realised, He is as before, the Witness, the embodiment of Atma.

Devotee: Rama and Krishna also punished the wicked and protected the good, didn't they, Swami? Then, how do you say that in the Ramayana and

Mahabharatha, there is the embodiment of quality (guna-swarupa), while in the Bhagavatha there is no embodiment of qualities?

Swami: You see, qualities have a beginning and an end, and the Atma has neither. Rama and Krishna also have no qualities, essentially. They have demonstrated how, being above qualities, it is possible to keep all qualities under control. The Ramayana and the Mahabharatha stories have an end, don't they? In that sense, the Bhagavatha has no end. It speaks of the Lord, who has no beginning or end. It tells of the forms that the Lord wore in the context of the age, time, and object. On the other hand, the other two teach the correct policies to be followed in this false, evanescent world and urge men to follow truth (sathya), dharma, peace (santhi), and love (prema).

Do you understand?

Devotee: Then the Bhagavatha is of no practical use to us, so to say!

Swami: What! The Bhagavatha is of most use to the spiritual aspirants. Only it explains the real secret of the Lord. His real glory and His real path! The Ramayana and Mahabharatha try to some extent to uplift the commoner, the ordinary person, by moral teaching and example. They show how people can deserve the Lord's grace.

But those who seek to know the nature of the Atma and of the highest Atma (Param-atma) should study the Bhagavatha more than anything else,.

Devotee: Swami, what is the relation between the Lord (Bhagavantha), Bhagavatha and the devotee (bhaktha)?

Swami: The relationship between the great king, the crown prince, and the heir apparent! The Lord is the great king, of course; the Bhagavatha is second in rank because it came from the Lord as a derivative, with the status of crown prince; the heir apparent is dependent on both of these, and so is the devotee. The status of heir apparent is not an ordinary one, in that the heir apparent merits the position of great king. The rest are inferior to these three.

Those who don't rise up to the status of devotee or heir apparent have no access to the court of the great king.

Devotee: Then, Swami, yogis, the spiritually wise (jnanis), ascetics - don't they deserve that position?

Swami: Whoever one may be, without devotion (bhakthi) and the love of the higher truth, how can they become a yogi, or a spiritually wise person, or an ascetic? They also have devotion in an equal measure. Take the milk-ball sweet, orange sweet, hard candy, and a number of other sweets. In each of them, as the common cause of sweetness, there must be the one article, sugar, right? How else can they be made? So also, in these three paths, the sweetness of the Lord's Name or devotion (bhakthi) is an ingredient. Without it, the very names of these objects become absurd!

Devotee: Another point, Swami! To approach the presence of the Lord, is it necessary to have faith in the Lord and, with that faith, perform soft prayer, meditation, devotional singing, and worship? Or is it possible to attain that position through the path of truth, the path of dharma, the path of love (prema), or the path of service to others?

Swami: Well, how can the qualities you mention originate without the fear of sin and the fear of God? Are these paths and the qualifications needed for them ordinary and common? No. They are the doors to the inner apartment of the Lord. Those that follow those paths can easily reach the precincts of the Lord.

And yet, there is a difference between friends and relatives! Those who only develop these qualities are friends, but those who practise them, along with devotion to the name and form, become relatives. That is the difference. The meditation on the name and form also helps to strengthen the qualities (gunas). Without that foundation, the qualities cannot be strong and firm and pure. The Lord's name and form remove the dross from the qualities of people.

Devotee: But the devotee and the person with good qualities attain the same place, don't they, Swami?

Swami: Certainly. The merely good person becomes a candidate who deserves the place. The good one who has devotion has a title to the place and can't be passed over.

Devotee: Swami, many people are active, doing various things under the slogan, "Service to humanity is service to God." Do their deeds entitle them to the place?

Swami: Why do you ask so? Certainly - for those who do service with that attitude. But it is very hard to get that real feeling. Considering others as people, simply saying that "serving them is serving God" is not sincerity. The mind will then run in two channels.

Grasp the glory of Madhava (God) fully; understand that Madhava is in every human (manava); believe that serving people is only serving Madhava. Then, your actions will certainly entitle you to the place. What greater qualification is needed than that?

Instead, if "service" is done for name and honour and fame, and if the mind craves the fruits of one's actions, then the statement, "Service to humanity is service to God" has no meaning, and one won't get the expected result.

Devotee: It is very interesting, Swami! Speaking about the Bhagavatha evoked many holy ideas and morals today.

So if one delves into It, what invaluable truths will emanate! I am indeed blessed, this day.

Swami: Have you understood it all? Bhagavatha is the story of the beginning-less, and ending-less Atma. It is in both forms, subtle and gross. It is subtler than the subtlest, grosser than the grossest. It has no limit or measure.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharatha are historical epics (Ithihasas). The Bhagavatha is different; it is the description of the Atma; it instructs in the path of devotion (bhakthi). It can never end and never has a "Finis". This is the significance of the Bhagavatha.

15. Gurus And Ashrams

Devotee: You must remove a big load from my head, Swami. However much I try to forget it, in whichever direction I turn, I suffer from it; I hear only that! Then how can I dismiss it from my mind? Finding it impossible, I pray to You. Please don't mistake my intention. Kindly give me a direct answer, because if you do, the weight will be lifted from the heads of all people like me, and enthusiasm will increase for spiritual exercises.

Otherwise, I'm worried that we may lose even the little faith that we have in the Lord, and I'm afraid we may turn into atheists. Your answer will be of immense help, not only to me but to all devotees everywhere. Therefore, I pray to You to wipe off my doubts without hesitation and tell me the real truth, in very clear terms.

Swami: What is it? Tell me. What is the cause of so much headache?

Devotee: Swami, You told us that people have four stages of life (asramas) - student, householder, hermit, and renunciant (brahma-charya, grihastha, vanaprastha, sanyasin) - and that those who reach the last stage are indeed blessed, because they attain realisation. Now, please tell us what exactly is that renunciant?

Swami: So this has caused you all the worry! Right? My dear fellow, the wearing of the orange cloth, the shaving of the head, these do not make a renunciant. The renunciant is a person who has given up all desires. The renunciant must be fully immersed - in desire, design, and deed - fully in the One Godhead and in the discipline to attain Him. Whoever is so immersed is a renunciant. Instead, if a person retains all kinds of desires and engages in every activity to realise the desires, then the person is a counterfeit (sanyasi) instead of a renunciant (sanyasin), as the saying goes. Do you understand?

Devotee: But Swami, now we get counterfeits very cheap for a rupee, a paisa, or even a cigarette! Whom of these should we approach, whom should we

accept?

Swami: Why are you concerned with all this? You are concerned with your advancement, your progress. You must crave a person to point out to you the right path for your spiritual exercises (sadhana). Or, if that is not possible, you approach and accept your Self - that is enough to give you what you require. Depend upon yourself, and your doubts will be destroyed.

Devotee: In that case, Swami, what about the statement, "guru-less education (vidya) is sight-less education"? It is essential to rely on some great person, isn't it? To show the way, I mean.

Swami: Great men have not vanished from the face of the earth, my child! Do not think that all are of the type you mention. There are many great men even now; otherwise, how could the world have daylight, as the saying goes?

Devotee: Great men may exist among householders, hermits, and renunciants, Swami! I haven't much experience with such, but still, I have seen among them people with big name and fame. However, I can say this: it is very difficult to discover really holy men among renunciants. It's impossible to find a single renunciant without some desire or other. When renunciants have so much desire, what is wrong if householders have them? To whichever place we go, the one demand is, "money, money, money!" Swami: Really speaking, renunciants should have no desire, as you said. Lust and greed are their dreadful enemies.

Renunciants should have no contact with them. Renunciants can accept only whatever little food is given, whenever it is offered, that is all. They can have no desire for more. That is the vow, the rule. They have nothing to do with money.

Devotee: Well, Swami, excuse me. Renunciants are perpetually in need of money! No householder worries as much as they do about money! They exploit disciples and extract their hard-earned cash from them. Those who do not give are condemned. Is all this right, Swami? Is this just? Are these people

gurus?

Swami: No wise person will say that these things are just. How can I say it is right? Why, can't you ask such renunciants once, "Sirs, why do you need the money? Isn't it wrong for you to have this craving for the fame that comes through money?" Devotee: Oh, I have asked them, Swami.

Swami: What did they say?

Devotee: Some said, they wanted money for their expenses; others said, they wanted to develop their ashrams further. Many such reasons were given. For those who have learned to argue, reason-giving is not very hard. It is only when it comes to believing that we have to choose and discriminate, isn't it?

Swami: The guru must engage in the progress of the disciples who come for guidance, and not in the ashram; taking refuge is more important than the ashram. The excitement, the anxiety about the ashram becomes itself a huge burden (srama). It is on account of this that people lose even the little faith and devotion that they have and are transformed into atheists. Such gurus, instead of giving up all ties, have yoked themselves tighter; they are beasts of burden. My dear fellow, listen to Me, don't cast your looks upon the guru who inflicts pressure on a disciple to extract money. Keep as far away as possible from such people; don't lose faith by contact with them. Preserve faith and develop it, all by yourself.

Devotee: We go to such people eager to learn the higher things of life and to know the path for the attainment of the Lord; we seek and search for them, for we don't know which snake lives in which hole, but we find these cobra renunciants and are shocked! The anxious desire that they exhibit for the ashram - isn't that also wrong, Swami?

If they want to serve the public like that, they can as well be just ordinary people and retain their original names and go about collecting funds and spending them, right? Calling themselves renunciants and wearing that dress, being initiated into a mantra (getting upadesa), taking upon themselves

numerous vows at the time of initiation into monkhood, declaring that they have destroyed all desire ... if later they follow the path of accumulation, doesn't that spoil the very sacredness?

Swami: That individual may be spoiled, that is all, my dear fellow; the sacredness of renunciants (sanyasins) can never be diminished! Don't run away with that idea. Of course, there are such men in the world today. But please don't include them in the list of renunciants or swamis. They have no relationship with these two categories. They only harm their disciples by retaining those designations. Don't spend even a single thought on them.

Devotee: All right, Swami. But for those who have built ashrams and established themselves as gurus, this desire for money, etc., is wrong, isn't it?

Swami: Why do you ask? Have these people any special adornment like horns on the head? Really speaking, these people have to be even more careful. They train many disciples, so they must make a special effort to see that the trainees acquire the right attitudes and get fully immersed in contemplation of the Lord. Otherwise, much injury will be caused. If the guru pays attention to the spiritual progress and inward joy of the disciples, the disciples themselves will struggle for the development of the ashram. No one need exert any pressure.

Instead, forgetting their progress, if one clamours for so much money from this disciple and so much from this devotee for the development of "his" ashram, one will lose the ashram itself! The disciple will lose devotion and the guru will lose the institution!

Devotee: Besides all this, Swami, if anyone points out to them that it is wrong, they get wild and threaten severe punishments. Is that right, Swami?

Swami: This is an additional wrong. How can it be right? It is not correct for any guru to weaken the heart of any disciple; the guru must please it and satisfy it. People who frighten and extract are not teachers but cheaters. They are not shepherds but sheep.

Devotee: Then what do you advise us to do? How are we to deal with these people? Please tell us.

Swami: My dear child, give up all talk of people who have lost their way. Speak of your reaching the path. Give up all contact with such people. Instead, cultivate contacts with people and places where there is neither lust, greed, nor any other desire. Seek the guru who looks on all with equal love (prema).

The real guru must have certain qualities. Note this. If these qualities are present, go there and be happy.

If you don't find such a place, meditate on God within yourself. Do meditation and devotional singing. That is enough; you needn't search for another place at all. Whenever you have leisure, read good devotional books.

Even from these books, take what you need and discard the rest. Be careful; don't get entangled in all kinds of nets and traps.

Devotee: What are the qualities of those great men, Swami?

Swami: They will neither crave wealth nor have ambition to develop their ashrams; they will neither love those who praise them nor hate those who blame them. They won't prevent their disciples from approaching them; they won't prohibit anyone from approaching them; they won't relish the defamation of others; they won't be vengeful against those who point out to them their own mistakes and wrongs. They will look upon all with equal love; they will always spread truth, righteousness, peace, and love (sathya, dharma, santhi, and prema); they will ever yearn for the joy, welfare, and progress of the devotees. Seek such people. They are the true gurus.

Don't even cast a glance at those who are afflicted with anger, anxiety, hatred, envy, etc., or those who worry about name and fame and honour and status, however pompous their personality, however resounding their reputation.

Devotee: All right, Swami. It is all very good. But just one little doubt. These big gurus, highly learned, giving long lectures for hours together, how is it that they don't realise all this? Can't these big men see their own faults and set them right?

Swami: Well, even an ounce of experience is useful! But a ton of learning may prove useless. Many people lecture in colleges and pour forth hour after hour things they have learned by rote. Can one become great by merely the length or grandeur of lectures one gives? That is like vomiting the swallowed meal.

You must see how much of what is spoken is practised; those who give advice must follow it themselves. If you can't avoid doing a thing, don't ask others to avoid it. So, however learned one may be, unless one has experience and practice, it will be simply a nine-days wonder, and after that one will be neither here nor there.

Of course, the qualities I mentioned are to be noted not merely in the gurus but in all. So give up this talk about others being bad or wrong; develop your faith and devotion; strengthen your discipline for meditation on the Lord; engage yourself in beneficial deeds; speak only what will bring good; worship the Lord; keep Him always in the memory; do soft prayer and meditation. If you are immersed in these, you will not worry at all about the right and wrong of others.

Devotee: Swami, you explained the relationship of the guru and pupil (sishya). Looking at present conditions, one who reveals the reality is not liked at all. Many of the gurus, swamis, and wise aspirants are, as you said, behaving wrongly and in many ways ruining their very name. Besides, they are acting contrary to the vows of renunciation and the dharma relating to the Lord.

Such people may not appreciate your statements. They may even develop animosity, because you're laying bare their defects. Or, what is worse, they may try to justify their conduct and invent stories and arguments to make their actions appear correct. Your remarks apply only to the wrong-doers,

they don't refer to those engaged in good activities. So, really good wise aspirants and those interested in upholding the ideas will be happy that You have spoken thus. But regardless of what people might say, please Swami, help spiritual aspirants to progress and reveal to us the glory of the Lord.

Swami: Well, what does it matter to Me how people talk? How can falsehood be supported, fearing comment?

As the burden so the bearer, says the proverb. Only fakes will resent and comment adversely. The genuine gurus will rejoice. As the saying goes, only a thief will feel his shoulder when someone announces the theft of a gourd, because he is afraid that the stolen gourd is actually on his shoulder! Those who don't steal gourds won't feel their shoulders. Those who are genuine will have no fear or anger. The others can learn a lesson if they develop a sense of shame and resolve to mend their ways, at least, hereafter.

For deeds done in ignorance, repentance is the way to make amends and to earn pardon. Not to repeat the same deed is the sign of the morally strong.

16. Meditation

Devotee: Swami, I have a few doubts concerning the subject of meditation (dhyana), which You are now writing about. Can I ask You?

Swami: Of course, you can ask and have your doubts removed. It is good for you and it gives Me joy.

Devotee: Some people practise meditation, but they are unable to know whether the mediation has progressed or not. What do You say about that?

Swami: Progress in meditation means attainment of concentration (ekagratha). Each one can judge for oneself, without doubt, how far one has been able to succeed in concentration, right?

Devotee: Some say that they see all sorts of things during meditation, and some hear all types of sounds. Do these indicate progress?

Swami: They are delusions. They handicap progress. They implant conceit and disperse concentration. The distraction of sights and sounds is no sign of meditation.

Devotee: Then what is to be done when such are seen?

Swami: Don't allow the mind to wander on to them; never lose sight of the divine form that you have pictured for yourself. Be convinced that these are but obstacles designed to scatter your attention from the divine form. If you permit these sights and sounds to creep in, the original form will be dimmed, your ego (ahamkara) will increase, and you will lose your way.

Devotee: But Swami, some people do say that these things are signs of progress in meditation!

Swami: That means only that they themselves are not practising meditation

properly! Besides, not knowing what meditation is, they delude their disciples by talking like this, to please them. That is the only profit earned.

Devotee: Well, does it mean then that, by means of meditation, we cannot see the Lord?

Swami: Why not? Certainly, it is possible. If you fix your attention on the sublimely beautiful form of the Lord and concentrate on That alone, you will receive His grace in that form Itself in various ways. While doing so, many a disturbance might intervene. You should not be deluded; be on your guard, never forget the auspicious form. Picture to yourself that all creation is immersed in it.

Devotee: But really, can we not know at anytime what stage we have reached in meditation (dhyana)?

Swami: You can identify the progress or decline of meditation only when you know this is stage number so and so, this stage is such and such etc., right? The form of meditation (dhyana-rupa) is beginning-less and endless, so its fruition also cannot be declared complete and finished.

Devotee: Then, do You say that meditation is endless?

Swami: What is generally called the end is the end of the I and the merging of all in the one form. Meditation has no end.

Devotee: How are we to understand its stages?

Swami: You can have an idea of the stage if you examine daily how you are able to concentrate, how far you have subdued the wandering nature of the mind, and how deeply you taste the divine form; that is all. The stage reached cannot be cognised. What you receive, and at what time, depends on His grace. The spiritual aspirant's mission is to practise meditation, without deviating from the path. The rest is all His grace. It doesn't depend upon the number of days or the length of time. Some may require many births; others

may realise the goal in a few days even. It depends on each one's faith (sraddha), devotion (bhakthi), and spiritual exercise (sadhana). It cannot be calculated and reasoned out.

Devotee: So we shouldn't worry about our spiritual exercise - its progress, stage, and possible decline, etc.

Swami: Exactly. Worry about the discipline needed for the spiritual exercise, but not about its fruition. The reality and the realisation of the reality have no steps or limits. Don't yield to all sorts of delusions or desires for this stage and that. Stick to the goal and the journey. Never give up the discipline of the spiritual exercise. Don't change the time of meditation. With one aim and unchanging attitude, strive to attain it. That will vouchsafe the fruit. That will bless you with the bliss. Don't be led away by what others speak about their imaginary experiences. For you, nothing can be as genuine as your own experience. Therefore, first attempt to gain undeviating concentration (ekagratha); let that be your one aim.

Devotee: Meditation (dhyana) means vision of the form of the Lord, doesn't it, Swami? When such a form is actually seen, they say it is not real and genuine! What do they mean by this?

Swami: Seeing the form of the Lord is the goal of meditation. To achieve that is the aim. But before that goal is reached, there are some obstacles in the way. These are to be guarded against.

Devotee: What kind of obstacles? How are we to guard ourselves?

Swami: You have boarded a train to reach a village. You have heard that the particular village has a station. Many stations of the same type come during the journey and the train halts at each of them. But just because the train halts, you don't get down at any of them with your luggage, do you? If you get down, you won't reach the place where you have to go, will you? It is no good, alighting at intermediate stations, for you miss your goal and suffer many hardships, not to speak of delay. The wiser course is to note, even

before starting on the journey, the names of the intermediate stations etc., by approaching people who have traveled that route before.

Devotee: Everyone appears as a seasoned traveler on the route! How are we to distinguish between those who pretend and those who know?

Swami: Of course, this has to be pondered. Each one might have traveled by a route of their own. Some might tell you the details of the route, the stations, etc., with only the aid of maps. If that is so, you should not follow their directions on that basis. Consider wherefrom they started and wherefrom you are starting; consider the route they traversed and the route you have to take. Moreover, it is impossible to consult those who have traveled as far as the goal, for they won't come back; they won't be available for consultation at the stage where you are.

So, you need not take the trouble to search and secure people who can tell you their own experience of the route. It is best to take the help and the advice given by the veterans in the Gita, the spiritual texts (Sastras), the Vedas, and the Upanishads. Rely on the words of the Lord and follow the teaching (upadesa) of the Avatars of the Supreme Spirit (Avatara Purushas). Besides, there are countless great men who can guide you as far as they themselves have traveled - but not beyond. For how can they tell you things they themselves haven't experienced?

Devotee: Well then, how can we get the opportunity to reach that path and attain that goal?

Swami: If one is destined for it, it won't be difficult at all; the chance will come seeking you. You must have heard the saying, "The person who went in search of a creeper tripped over it on the way." You need not doubt it; this will happen.

Devotee: Swami, some people say that if we do not get some visions and sounds and lights during meditation, we can take it that our meditation has not progressed! Do You say that they are wrong?

Swami: It is the image of their own idea. Perhaps they do meditation in order to get such sights and sounds!

Therefore, they experience them. They are things by which each one of them is deluded; they don't analyse the truth underlying the visions! Really speaking, they should not seek these impermanent delusions.

Devotee: Then what are we to seek, Swami?

Swami: Seek and desire the Principle of everything: that which, if known, everything is known; that which, if seen, all is seen and understood. Don't seek drops in your attempt to know the flood. When you have attained the Ocean (the basis of all the drops), you won't have the delusion of the drop.

Devotee: Some spiritual aspirants picture the guru to themselves during meditation. Is that correct?

Swami: The guru shows the path and teaches what is beneficial. So the guru has to be shown respect and gratitude.

But the guru should not be taken to be all-powerful and all-inclusive. Of course, the Lord is in everyone, as the Atma; give each the status that is their due and no more.

Devotee: But some great men declare that the guru is both father and mother; that the guru is Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara all in one.

Swami: Based on the Atma, that is correct. But such gurus are rare. You can speak of such a guru as father, mother, God etc., on account of love and regard, that is all. How can the guru be so in fact? As loving as the mother, as protective as the father, you can say. But then, what do you say of those who gave you this body and brought you up even before you got the guru?

First and most important, be grateful to your mother and father. Serve them; make them happy; respect them.

Respect the guru as the person who shows you the path, who looks after your progress and is interested in your welfare. Worship the Lord as the witness of everything everywhere, as the master of creation, preservation, and dissolution, and as the All-Powerful One. Remember, you can consider only the Lord as the universal form and as the universal friend and protector. All others have to be treated for just their individual status - mother as mother, father as father, guru as guru. In truth, these cannot be one.

Ponder this. If you seek direct experience of the Lord Atma, (Atma-sakshatkara), you have to install in your meditation the form of the Lord (the universal Atma) that you like most, and not the picture of your guru. It is not proper. The Lord is of a status higher than the guru, right? Of course, have His words as the foundation and try to attain the origin of all things; that will give the fruition of all efforts.

You are asked to treat the pebble as a gem and the gem as a pebble! Of course, through compulsion and bound by order, people may obey and accept, but can that feeling be genuine? It is no sign of meditation to have one idea outside and another inside. Unless this conflict is resolved and the same idea is outside as well as inside, there won't be any stability or success in meditation.

Devotee: Very good, Swami. Without knowing matters fully, many spiritual aspirants waste years in what they call meditation. They observe no law or limit. For all such, Your advice shows the Reality. It will establish them in the eternal. Today I am indeed blessed, Swami.

17. The Power Of Ignorance

Devotee: I have been anxious for a long time to ask You some things and to learn the answers from You. Today, I have the chance. This mind (manas) and its principle are unknown categories. Their meanings don't get fixed and clear without actual experience. But Swami, this delusion of the objective world (samsara) overpowers us, thick and strong, like the darkness of clouds in the rainy season. What is this mighty force that drags us along? This is what has been bothering me. I feel that people like me should understand these things clearly in the very beginning. Will you kindly enlighten me?

Swami: Well, my boy. What am I to say? You are suffering from fright, imagining a tree stump seen in the park to be a person. That is, you are mistaking the non-dual (a-dwaita), the full (purna), which is Brahman as a separate incomplete soul (jiva) and suffering from that error. That delusion is the cause of all your sufferings.

Devotee: How, then, did this delusion come about?

Swami: You slept, or you dreamed. You slept the sleep of ignorance (a-jnana) and delusion (moha). Therefore, you dreamed this objective world. Awake, and you will have no more dreams. When the dream is gone, the delusion also goes.

Devotee: Swami, what is this ignorance? What are its characteristics? How does it operate?

Swami: That, which is attached to the body and feels as "I" is the individual soul (jiva). The soul is outwardfaced; it believes all this mutable creation (jagath) and objective world; it is immersed in both. When the soul ignores and forgets its non-dual embodiment (a-dwaita-swarupa), we call it ignorance (a-jnana). Is that clear?

Devotee: But Swami, the spiritual texts, all of them, say that this objective

world is caused by illusion (maya).

You are now saying it is due to ignorance. What is the distinction between the two?

Swami: Ignorance (a-jnana) is known variously as illusion (maya), primordial matter (pradhana), nature (prakriti), unmanifest, ignorance (a-vidya), delusion (thamas), etc. Hence, understand this well: the objective world is the consequence of ignorance.

Devotee: How can ignorance produce this objective world; I want to know from you, Guru-God (Guru-deva).

Swami: Know that ignorance has two powers: the veiling power (avarana-sakthi) and the projecting power (vikshepa-sakthi). It veils Reality and projects upon it the unreal. The veiling power acts in two different ways: veiling with untruth and veiling with appearance.

When a spiritually wise person (jnani) and ignorant people (a-jnanis) meet, even though the wise one teaches that the Atma is One and non-dual, the ignorant ones deny it, because they can't grasp the reality so easily. Even when they hear the truth, they don't have the faith and steadfastness to imbibe it, so they dismiss it with a shrug of indifference. This is the veiling with untruth.

Now about veiling with appearance. Even when someone believes by study of the scriptures (sastras) and by the grace of providence that there is non-dual Atma, one can be carried away by cursory and superficial arguments and dismiss it as non-existent. Though one has the consciousness (chit) that is aware of the very thing that one denies, the delusion (moha) makes one declare that it is non-existent. This is the sinister role of veiling with appearance.

Devotee: You also spoke of the projecting power. What is meant by that?

Swami: Though you are formless and changeless, and though your nature is bliss (ananda), you are deluded into believing, feeling, and acting as if you are the body, which has form, which changes, and which is the seat of pain and grief. You refer to your self as the doer and enjoyer; you speak of I, you, they, this, that, etc., deluded into believing variety and multiplicity where there is only One. This illusion of projecting many on the one is called vikshepa-sakthi, or superimposition.

Devotee: What is that?

Swami: When you superimpose the object "silver" on mother-of-pearl, when you see not the stump but the human form, you have superimposed on it. Or when instead of the stretch of desert you see a lake, you have superimposed the unreal on the real. This is superimposition.

Devotee: Well, Baba. What is the real, and what is the unreal? Please explain that too.

Swami: The one and only, non-dual, being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda) absolute Brahman (Parabrahman) is the Real. Just as the name and the form of the snake are superimposed on a rope, this cosmos (jagath) - inclusive of everything from Brahman to a blade of grass, all creatures, all inert objects like the earth - is super-imposed on that Absolute, Supreme Real. The cosmos is the unreal (a-vastu) - that is, the superimposed thing.

Devotee: This superimposition of the name-form cosmos on the non-dual Real, how is it caused?

Swami: By illusion (maya).

Devotee: Illusion means ...?

Swami: The power of ignorance (a-jnana-sakthi) of the above-said Universal Absolute Brahman (Parabrahman).

Devotee: Power of ignorance means ...?

Swami: I told you, didn't I? The incapacity to understand the Supreme Being (Brahman) even though you are fundamentally Brahman - that is ignorance (a-jnana).

Devotee: Well how does that ignorance produce all this cosmos (jagath)?

Swami: The power of ignorance doesn't allow you to see the rope; instead it imposes the snake upon it; it makes you see the cosmos where there is only Brahman.

Devotee: Swami, when there is only the non-dual One (A-dwaitha), how did the creation of all these worlds happen?

Swami: You have come back again to where we started! Even if I tell you now, it is very hard to grasp. Still, since you have asked, I shall tell you. Listen. The power of ignorance exists in the latent form in the rope itself. That is to say, it is latent, unmanifested in the Brahman. This is also called ignorance (a-vidya). Its base is Brahman, which is awareness (chit) and bliss (ananda). Of the two powers that illusion (maya) has, veiling (avarana) and projection (vikshepa), the one veils the Brahman and the other makes it manifest as mind (manas). The mind creates all this panorama of name and form through the exuberance of impressions (vasanas).

Devotee: Wonderful, Swami. How wonderful is this nature (prakriti)! What is the distinction between the waking stage and the dream stage?

Swami: Both are of the nature of illusion. The impressions operate in both. The cosmos (jagath) is the stable illusion; the dream is the unstable illusion. This is the distinction, there is no other.

Devotee: Swami, how can it be said that this cosmos is unreal, when it is concrete and capable of being experienced in a variety of ways?

Swami: It is a delusion that hides the reality from the understanding, the cosmos is as much a superimposition on Brahman as a series of pictures on the wall.

Devotee: Ignorance (a-vidya) is said to be without beginning, isn't it? Then why is it blamed so much?

Swami: The beginningless ignorance is ended when spiritual knowledge (vidya) dawns. This is only logical.

Darkness is destroyed by light. Every object has five parts: origin, nature, function, period, and result. But in the case of the Supreme Atma (Param-atma), these cannot be enunciated, though everything that has evolved as if from Him, has them. Only illusion (maya) has no explicable origin. It is its own proof. It is there in Brahman, with Brahman: it is without beginning. No cause can be given to explain how it manifested itself so luxuriously. Just as a bubble rises through the force of its own nature, up from the water, a force that takes the form of name-form emerges from the Limitless, the Full, the Supreme Atma. That is all. Only the ignorant will speak ill of ignorance.

Really, there is no well or ill.

Devotee: How can it be said illusion has no origin or cause (hethu)? Just as the potter's handiwork is the cause for the clay to take the form of the pot, the will (sankalpa) of Iswara (a name for Siva) is essential for the force latent in Brahman to become patent.

Swami: In the final dissolution (maha-pralaya), Iswara will also become non-existent. Brahman alone will exist, right? Then, how can the will of Iswara be the origin? It can't be. While considering this subject, you should not take Brahma, Vishnu, and Iswara as three separate entities. These three are forms shaped by the three qualities (gunas). All three are One Supreme Self (Param-atma). But, since it is difficult to understand the working of the world, it is explained and grasped as three: three forms engaged in three types of actions, bearing three names. At the time of creation, dissolution is absent.

Both can co-exist only beyond time. People, who exist in time, action, and cause, can never hope to grasp it. When you transcend the three qualities, you can also attain that, but not until then. So, without spending time in such un-understandable problems, engage yourself in the things you urgently need, traversing the path that will lead you to the Goal.