

#### 4. The very breath

THE nine steps in the pilgrimage of man towards God along the path of dedication and surrender are: (1) Developing a desire to listen to the glory and grandeur of the handiwork of God and of the various awe-inspiring manifestations of Divinity. This is the starting point. It is by hearing about the Lord again and again, that we can transform ourselves into divinity. (2) Singing to oneself about the Lord, in praise of His magnificence and manifold exploits. (3) Dwelling on the Lord in the mind, revelling in the contemplation of His Beauty Majesty and Compassion. (4) Entering upon the worship of the Lord, by concentrating on honouring the feet or foot-prints. (5) This develops into a total propitiation of the Lord, and systematic ritualistic worship, in which the aspirant gets inner satisfaction and inspiration. (6) The aspirant begins to see the favourite Form of God, which he likes to worship, in all beings and all objects, wherever he turns, and so, he develops an attitude of *Vandhana* (reverence) towards nature and all life. (7) Established in this bent of mind, he becomes the devoted servant of all, with no sense of superiority or inferiority. This is a vital step, which presages great spiritual success. (8) This takes the seeker so near the Lord that he feels himself to be the confidant and comrade, the companion and friend, the sharer of God's power and mercy of God's triumphs and achievement, His *sakha*, in fact, as Arjuna had become. (9) As can be inferred, this is the prelude to the final step of total surrender, or *Aathmanivedhanam*, yielding fully to the Will of the Lord which the seeker knows through his own purified intuition.

##### **Look upon all as limbs of your own body**

You will note that the seventh step is *dhaasyam* (the servant stage). That is the stage of service, which every person calling himself a social worker, or volunteer, or *sevak* has to reach. It is more fruitful than reciting the Name or counting beads, or spending hours in meditation, though one's service will be richer and more satisfying if done on the basis of spiritual discipline. You must look upon all as limbs of your own body, and just as you try to heal any bruise or wound on any limb as quickly and as efficiently as possible, you must heal the woes and pains of others to the best of your ability and as far as your means allow.

The Lord is now worshipped by offering Him all things that you crave for, by treating Him with all the honour you like to be done to yourself. The idol is bathed and washed, bedecked with jewels, fed and fanned, surrounded with fragrance, etc., since these are things you desire. But, the Lord is pleased only when you do things the Lord desires! How else can you win His Grace? How else than by nursing and nourishing, succouring and saving His children? How else than by helping them to realise Him, as their Lord and Guardian, and cultivating faith in Him, through your own straight and sincere living?

Seek both outer and inner cleanliness

One of the first principles of straight living is: Practise silence. For the Voice of God can be heard in the region of your heart only when the tongue is stilled and the storm is stilled, and the waves are calm. There will be no temptation for others to shout when you talk to them in whispers. Set the level of the tone yourself: as low as possible, as high as necessary to reach to outermost boundary of the circle you are addressing.

Conserve sound, since it is the treasure of the element *Aakaasha* (space), an emanation from God Himself. Reason can prevail only when arguments are advanced without the whipping up of sound. Silence is the speech of the spiritual seeker. Soft sweet speech is the expression of

genuine Love. Hate screeches; fear squeals; conceit trumpets. But, love sings lullabies, it soothes, it applies balm. Practise the vocabulary of Love; unlearn the language of hate and contempt.

The second sign is cleanliness: not outer cleanliness alone, but, even more, inner. You cannot be fresh and feeling fine, wearing a washed vest under an unwashed shirt; or, an unwashed vest under a washed shirt. Both have to be clean to provide the sense of tingling joy. So too, outer and inner cleanliness have both to be sought and won. In reality, the outer cleanliness is but the reflection of the inner achievement. There is a strange glow on the face of a guileless person. Inner cleanliness has its own soap and water---the soap of strong faith and the water of constant practice.

The third sign is that the true aspirant will have a reverent attitude to the duty he is bound with. He will carry out every task assigned to him as if it is an act of worship by which the Lord will be pleased, through which he can approach the Pedestal of God. Duty is God; Work is worship---that is the motto. Worship is not a uniform to be put on and off, at stated hours of the day.

Render every thought into a flower, worthy to be held in His Fingers; render every deed into a fruit, full of the sweet juice of love, fit to be placed in His Hand; render every tear holy and pure fit to wash His Lotus Feet. The Symbol on the Flag at Prashaanthi Nilayam is a reminder of this ideal, which you have to put into practice. It is the symbol of Victory, achieved by steady endeavour over the diabolic foes of lust and greed, of envy and hate, of malice and conceit. It is the symbol of the silent state of supreme Bliss, won through self-control and self-realisation.

Do not judge others, to decide whether they deserve your service. Find out only whether they are distressed; that is enough credential. Do not examine how they behave towards others; they can be certainly transformed by Love. *Seva* (Service) is for you as sacred as a vow, a *saadhana*, a spiritual path. It is the very breath; it can end only when breath takes leave of you.

*Prashaanthi Nilayam, 19-2-1970*

*Butter is in every drop of milk; chicken is in every part of the egg.  
So too, God is in every, part of the Universe. He is the strength; He  
is the substance; He is the sustenance.*

*Sathya Sai Baaba*