

## 6. The burden of the badge

I have called all of you here today so that I may tell you something about the attitude you must cultivate while doing volunteer service at the Nilayam. I Myself have selected you for this and that itself is a rare privilege. There are so many among the thousands who have come for the *Upanayanam* and Shivarathri Festivals who are pleading with all their heart to be given the chance; but you have caught My eye and you alone have been picked. I must tell you that volunteering is not just a momentary spurt; it cannot be done well, without deep discipline, long training and humility. You cannot be ready for that role all of a sudden, as soon as the badge is pinned on your shirt.

First, you must be conscious of the value of *ajna*, (the command), which so far as I am concerned, is more a Direction, than an Order. The Geetha was the *ajna* of Krishna, though Krishna supplemented it with copious explanations of the why and the wherefore. Arjuna admitted that he was a prapanna, that he had surrendered to His Will. So, there was no need for Krishna to argue with him or to see that he was convinced of the correctness of His Command. Still, in order that Arjuna might fight with a full heart, He gave him the reasons which supported the course He laid down for him. Likewise, I too want you to know why I desire that you should act in a particular manner and why I do not like you to behave in another manner.

Next, you must *develop prema* (love) for all. Do not think that a volunteer is a superior person, more devoted than the rest; do not look down upon the rest, as disturbances and nuisances. If you have prema towards Me, you will have prema towards all, since Sai is in every one. You sing at the *bhajana* (congregational chant), *Anthaa Sayi mayam; ee jagamantha Sayi mayam---*"All this is Saii-full; this World is Saii-full". So, how can you have love for this Sai alone? You have on the walls of this Prayer Hall many pictures of Swaami; you revere the pictures; you take each of them to be Me. If someone speaks ill of any of them you do not like it, do you? You stand before the picture and exclaim in joy, "O! Swaami!" Remember every human being is My Picture. Why, every being is *Me*. *Anthaa Sayi mayam*, isn't it? So, when you treat any one harshly, you are treating Me harshly. When you are insulting any one, you are insulting Me.

### The six duties of every householder

This is your home and all those who have gathered for these Festivals are *athithis* (guests) or your kith and kin. There are six duties that every *grihastha* (householder) has to perform every day: *snaana*, *sandhya*, *japa*, *homa*, *puja* and *athithiaa sathkaar*, meaning bath, worship during morning, noon and evening, recitation of the Name of the Lord, offering ritual articles in the sacrificial fire, ritual worship of the Lord, and hospitality to guests. You are to see that the guests are treated in that spirit of hospitality. You are *sevaka*, dedicated to service. Whether the people whom you serve thank you or traduce you, you must gladly do the task allotted to you. For, you are serving yourselves, not them, remember. Bouquets or brickbats, receive them with equal calm. It is only those who identify themselves with the body that are exulted or pained; you must feel that you are the *dehi*, not the *deha* (the self, not the body), that will give you the strength to serve best.

While doing your work do not argue that this particular bit is your jurisdiction and that other one is not; do not be sticklers for boundaries and limits. Support each other, supplement each other in joyful co-operation; strengthen each other. Act as an ideal *sathsanga* (spiritual gathering), infusing into each other energy and enthusiasm. That does not mean that you should carry a

greater burden than that allotted to you. Do not interfere wildly with what other people are doing; or, criticise others sullenly. Be worthy of the status of persons connected with the Prashaanthi Nilayam. There should be no place in your hearts for malice or envy or even competition. Spread around you the atmosphere of Prashaanthi (tranquillity); do not rush about, falling on all and sundry, discovering faults where none exists. That is misdirected enthusiasm.

### **Observe the rules of Prashaanthi Nilayam**

Do nothing to disturb the calm of others; for, you know how valuable calmness and quietness are in your own case. I hope you know it. Behave towards others as you wish them to behave towards you. That is the measure of your love. Seek out the old, sitting in the sun or darkness, outside the auditorium, for, they are too weak to push to the front lines; seek out those who are of defective vision or hearing; and bring them gently near the dais making room for them, by asking younger persons to vacate their seats. You should not claim any special privilege for your badges, in the Bhajana Hall or at the Auditorium. Those who come first have the first chance; don't argue and create a scene. Let people sit quietly, wherever seats are available, when they arrive; each must earn his or her place and claim it, not in the Auditorium, but in My heart; do not claim it in these brick and mortar halls.

In the rules of the Prashaanthi Nilayam, it is laid down that those who come after the *bhajan* or discourse starts, must not distract the attention of those who are immersed in it by striding up to the front lines or to some vacant space in the front. See that this is observed strictly. Nothing should be done by any one to distract attention, once the programme has started. You have come here, away from kith and kin, eager to uplift yourself and progress in the spiritual field; why then should you slide into old habits that breed egoism and hate?

Volunteers must not wait for chances of service to come to them; they must be on the look-out for them, alert and ready. Then, they can find them all around. It is the heart of stone that blinds the eye to the pain that others endure.

### **Look out for chances to serve**

I have directed all residents of the Colony to inquire of their neighbours, as the first task of the day, whether they are well. This is not just a courtesy call, but a genuine token of love. Among the thousands who have gathered here, there are many who would be thankful for some help. Some kind hand that will lead them to food or shelter, the river or the *Mandhir*, the auditorium or the hospital. Speak to them gently and offer to be of use to them.

Do you not see Me and hear Me, moving among them? I speak softly and endearingly; for, I love them ardently, in spite of all their faults. Why then should you be harsh and rude? There is no kinship so dear as the kinship forged by spiritualities. Family relationships are not so firmly based on identity of aims and sameness of effort. You are bound by bonds that are more longstanding and pleasant. Let these people return home and exult in the discovery that, at Prashaanthi Nilayam, they have kith and kin who respect them and love them, as no relative has done so far.

### **Volunteers should give up life of comfort**

You must realise now that this badge which I gave you is not a passport for easy life; it means strenuous routine, the giving up of comfort, the acceptance of hard toil, sleeplessness and sacrifice. If you are used to a soft life, you are useless as a volunteer, or for anything else. Reduce your wants to the minimum; do not yield to the temptation of carrying a transistor radio

and listening to all that enervating stuff. Examine your room, your table, your wardrobe, your box and find out how many superfluous things you have accumulated. You have acquired them because you saw some one having them and you felt that unless you too possessed them you will look small in their company.

A foolish desire to be esteemed up-to-date, to keep up with fashion, has made you gather needless habits and needless articles. Man can be happy with much less equipment than you seem to think essential. When some article is with you for some little time, you feel it is indispensable and you do not know how to live without it. Like the silkworm, you weave a cocoon for yourself, out of your fancy. Do not allow costly habits to grow, costly from the monetary as well as the spiritual point of view. Watch your likes and dislikes with a vigilant eye and discard anything that threatens to encumber your path.

Detachment is generally called *vairaagya*, or the absence of *raaga*. It is a precious spiritual quality, which, if it must sustain you, must be based *on jnaana*. Now, you have here this silver figure of Shirdi Sai Baba; when you think of the silver, its fineness, its cost, etc., there is no Sai; when you think of Sai, His *Mahima*, His *Leela* (miracle power and divine play), there is no silver!

#### **Volunteer's role is a call for personal improvement**

At Thirupathi, when you stand before the Venkateshwara idol, if you think about the stone, its colour, its geological structure, its weight, etc., there can be no Venkateshwara in your mind; fill yourself with the thoughts of the Lord of the Seven Hills, and then, there is no stone before you! So also, see everywhere, in this carpet, this towel, this vessel, this wall, the basic *Brahmam* (the Eternal Absolute), and you will be filled with spiritual knowledge, *jnaana*. There will be no attachment; this is the "*San/am Brahmamayam*" (All filled with *Brahmam*) finale of all *saadhana* (spiritual practice). Do not despair; practice it from now on, step by step; at least see everything as His; offer everything to Him; do everything, as for Him, leave everything to Him. Be an instrument; an instrument has no likes and dislikes; be just a tool; be an efficient tool.

Spread joy at all times. Do not pour into others' ears your tales of woe and worry; carry a smile on your face so that every one who sees you can catch that exhilaration. When you tell others of your success, your purpose is to create envy in them. You must not only love others, but you must be so good that others too may love you. Try to console, encourage, strengthen, and enlighten those who are miserable, downhearted, weak or ill-informed. Get yourselves equipped for this role. That is the role into which you are ushered now. This chance that I have given you, to move about as a volunteer here, is a call for personal improvement and *saadhana*. When thousands are thirsty for this chance, imagine how lucky you are and how great is the responsibility.

When you assist some eager aspirant to do meditation undisturbed, you earn not only gratitude, but, even a share of the merit. For example, a mother may hasten into the hall, when the bell strikes at 4.30 a.m. for the *Pranava* (Primal Cosmic sound, *OM*) recital, leaving her child sleeping in the shed. If the child awakes meanwhile and starts screaming, a lady volunteer can, without calling the mother out, herself take the child on her lap and pacify it with a soft lullaby, until the mother arrives. Serve others gladly; do not serve with an air of superiority or the sour face of disgust. Let people know that you are genuinely glad at the chance to help.

### **Serve others gladly**

Do not pretend or patronise. If you simply say, "Do not talk aloud" or give some such blank direction, you are patronising and treating people with disdain. They deserve to be told why. Tell them that silence is the very first rung of the ladder of *saadhana*; that it is the hall-mark of Prashaanthi Nilayam; that they must learn to make every place where they are, a Prashaanthi Nilayam; that loud talk disturbs those who practise *Naamasmarana* (remembrance of Lord's name) or *dhyaana* (meditation) or *japam* (recitation); that noise breeds further noise. This is a workshop, where damaged minds and hearts come for repair or overhaul. In the workshops, there will be the din of hammer, the clang of wheel, the whirr of engine and the clatter of chains. In this workshop, there must be heard only the whisper of the Name of God. With new parts fitted and new coats of paint, cars emerge out of the workshop as good as new and they run smoothly, without trouble, for miles and miles. People must find this place also as a workshop for persons, who are travel-worn, weary, or about to enter upon a long journey.

*Prashaanthi Nilayam, 24-2-1965*