

### 36. The I in you

THE company one keeps determines one's character; a person tries to join the group where he can freely express his innate nature. So *Sathsang* (holy company) is a very important requisite for moral and spiritual advancement. Man, by nature, is prone to cater to the desires that arise within him or the urges that are prompted from without. Very often these are deleterious. So he ruins himself by giving them the chance to overpower his personality. Consider the happy influence that good association can exert. A length of string is a worthless thing---no one will wear it in the hair or place it reverentially on an idol of God. But when it associates itself with a few fragrant flowers, then women decorate their coiffure with the length of floral garland and devotees place the garland on the idol they adore.

A block of stone in a public square is a much neglected and misused thing---street dogs often foul it. But let the stone receive the company of a sculptor or his pupils, it is shaped into a charming idol of God and installed in a temple to receive the homage of thousands. Again, take the example of the domestic mouse. In the houses where it dwells it is hunted and trapped, poisoned and killed; but when Lord *Ganapathy* adopts it as His vehicle, it comes to be adored as a holy animal.

#### **Evil company demeans and debases man**

The serpent is hated and beaten to death whenever it makes an appearance, for it is dreaded and avoided by man. But in association with Lord Shiva (who has it coiling round His wrists, ankles and neck), the serpent receives reverence from millions. The company of the Divine gives it a halo of consecration.

So, too, evil company demeans and debases man. Take the example of fire. Fire is held to be sacrosanct and holy and is religiously fed and fostered in every orthodox home where the *Vedhas* (revealed scriptures of spiritual wisdom) provide the guidelines of life. But when the fire enters a ball or a rod of iron, it has to suffer hammer blows in plenty while the rod or the ball is being shaped into some tool by man! Attachment to the iron brings about this calamity for the highly venerated fire.

The years of life allotted to man as a result of the enormous amount of merit earned and accumulated through many lives in the past, have to be utilised for the purpose of rising higher into Divinity. For this adventure, congenial and inspiring company is essential. Riches decline only when spent, but life is, in Its own course, being clipped short every moment. Even when we sleep, unconcerned, every minute makes us older, takes us nearer the grave.

#### **The real end of freedom is Wisdom**

In order to direct time into useful channels, life has to be regulated and limited, habits have to be sublimated, harmful tendencies have to be corrected and constructive attitudes fostered. These imperatives are emphasised in the Sathya Sai Hostel, though some of you may not appreciate the restrictions and guidelines presented for your conduct. They might be irksome to you just now, for you have joined this hostel quite recently having grown up in totally different kinds of environment.

Perhaps you crave for what is called 'freedom of will and action.' But when you have not fixed an ideal before yourselves, this freedom can easily become licence to give yourselves up to deleterious habits. What is the end of freedom? The real end of freedom is not pleasure, but

wisdom. *Sweccha* is the Sanskrit word for Self-Will. Self here means the higher Self, the Overself. Its Will is ever to merge with the Supreme and be immersed in *Aanandha* (divine bliss).

dust consider the fate of students in most of the other colleges and hostels. Note the unhappy state of affairs prevailing there. The atmosphere is not congenial either for academic achievement-or for personality development. It is full of imitative excitement and factional politics. Has man evolved from the animal, only to descend to degradation worse than that of the animal? Is man to be motivated only by the needs of hunger and fear like a cow which comes forward to eat a tuft of grass, but runs away at the sight of a suck? Man should be motivated differently. Again, can man be happy by merely attending film-shows or by roaming about in bazaars and spending time aimlessly?

### **Accept the ideal of a disciplined life**

In many cases the parents and elders are at fault because they are bad examples for their own children. They drink and gamble, hate and fight. Education has to save you from pursuing these wrong paths. I may tell you that students who lived in this hostel for some months, in accordance with its rules and regulations, have won the appreciation of authorities of its sister colleges in Bangalore for their punctuality, earnestness and disciplined behaviour.

A disciplined life is the best offering you can make to the country or to the Divine In you. One single person who is averse to regulated living may, by his example, spoil the careers of many others with whom he comes in contact. So each of you must accept the ideal after analysing its implications and being convinced of its validity. Animal instincts and impulses have persisted in human nature as vestiges, and it is only when their upsurge is controlled and gradually eliminated, that the springs of Divinity can manifest, themselves. This hostel provides you Just the opportunity, and the *sathsang* (good company) here helps, you to accomplish this.

Nature can be modified by nurture; even dogs can cease to relish meat when they are trained to relish only vegetarian food. So open yourselves gladly to the influence of the *sathsang* available here. Of course, storks ridicule the swan and crows carp at the cuckoo's song, but in spite of all the cynicism the swan sails upon the water as grand as ever and the cuckoo has not developed any flaw in its song. Those who ridicule others eventually find themselves isolated and laughed at for their own idiosyncrasies.

### **Most intelligent schemes of men can become flops**

Very often even the most intelligent schemes of men result in the opposite turn of events due to some fundamental flaw in their reasoning. It was in Bobbili, years ago, that an infectious disease resulting in bolls on the skin, spread fast. It was discovered that the infection originated from domestic rats. Since the rats could not be totally destroyed by means of traps, the ruler decided to encourage people to keep cats as pets, and he gave each householder a liberal monthly allowance of rice for feeding the cats.

Five kilograms of rice was supplied to the householders every month. After a time complaints reached the ruler to the effect that the cats were not being properly fed, and that the householders were themselves consuming the rice intended for the cats. So the ruler ordered them to present themselves in the court with the cats they were rearing. When they appeared along with their pets, it was discovered that the rumours of misappropriation were false. Every cat was astonishingly well-fed and plump.

One cat, however, the one reared by Raamakrishna, was lean and hungry. When the ruler charged him with misuse of the rice supplied to him by the state, he said, "Master! None of these other cats has ever caught a rat. Those cats are too well-fed for that. When they have no hunger, how can they seek out and kill rats? My cat catches at least dozen a day." The ruler had to agree that his plan was a big flop. It had produced just the opposite result!

Remember, the rules laid down for you are for your own good. Whatever I do, speak, or order, is for your good, for rendering your future years happy and fruitful. This is the most valuable period of your lives and you must be thankful that you are spending it in this atmosphere, in the midst of this *sathsang*. All this is being done because I know that you are all Mine. Even if you deny that you are Mine, I shall persist in telling you that you are so until you understand. For I am the Divinity that is your Reality.

The 'I' in you is disturbed and becomes distressed when you stray into unrighteousness and wander into waywardness. Therefore understand well the value of the schedule of work and worship prescribed for you here, and have your personalities moulded to the best shape so that you may shine forth as inspiring examples of service to man and God.

*Sri Sathya Sai Hostel Brindhaavan, 17-8-1977*

*The pure heart is the best mirror for the reflection of Truth. So all these disciplines are for the purification of the heart. As soon as it is pure, all truths flash upon it in a minute.*

*Sri Sathya Sai*