

2 Tender saplings

STUDENT Inmates! Though you have to observe a rather strict regimen of duties in this institution, you should find in your stay here a valuable opportunity to mould your lives and shape your character for the better while there is time. A sapling can be helped to grow straight, but once it becomes a tree it cannot be guided in its growth. In your childhood you were led astray because you did not know which act was right and which wrong. There was no one to guide you along the good path. You fell into bad company because no one warned you or rescued you when you had done so. No one pointed out to you the way to God and goodness. If they had, you would have quickly absorbed the advice, for the minds of children are capable of imbibing the good as well as the bad. No one around you had faith in your innate Divinity or compassion to save you from evil and guide you into good ways.

Well, forget the past. It has already elapsed. The present is the most important time for us. Hold on to truth and follow the right path now. *Sathyam vadha; dharmam chara*--speak the truth, act righteousness---say the *Vedhas* (ancient scriptures of spiritual wisdom). Do not entertain thoughts of despair or dejection. Be happy that you have this chance of rebuilding yourselves into fine boys and girls with loveable manners and behaviour.

The Name of God on your tongue will guide you

People from the *Seva Samithi* (voluntary service organization) come to you and through *bhajans* and prayer raise an atmosphere of love and mercy. They tell you of God, the *Avathaars* (divine incarnations) and saints. Have Raamakrishna and Vivekaanandha as your ideals. Follow their ideals. In this institution you are given training that will liberate you, unlike the training which you had when you were children and which put you in bondage. Absorb the lessons you are taught here to the fullest possible extent and put into practice the guidance given to you.

Do not have any ill feeling amongst yourselves. Help others when they need your help and when you can really help them. Do not think that it is enough if you just sing *bhajans* (congregational singing) when the people from the *Seva Samithi* come and join you. Sing them in your minds, silently and sincerely, when you are at work with your friends, or even alone by yourself. Just as a torch in your hand shows you the way if you are walking at night in the dark, the Name of God on your tongue will guide you through the night of ignorance in your journey of life.

Resolve to be good and loving from this moment. Do your duties gladly and well, to the satisfaction, to your well-wishers. If you feel sorry for the wrongs you did, that itself will please God and He will pardon you. If you endeavour to turn a new leaf and become better, God will shower His Grace on you. Here you are given protection and education and an opportunity to learn how to be useful sons and daughters of your great land.

Whenever an idea of hurting others or taking some one else's belongings or spreading falsehood about others enters your mind, turn to God for help. Ask Him to give you strength, for all these ideas are born of fear and cowardice, qualities which in turn come from weakness. Repeat the name of God or hum a *bhajan*, and you will find that all your bad thoughts-will flee, leaving you free from evil.

When you leave this institution, you must serve as examples for others by leading active, useful lives. This is a workshop where you have come like cars damaged through ignorance and neglect. You must leave the institution in fine running condition, rid of all your faults, and

attractive in appearance and character. Your kith and kin, your friends, the elders of your village and all who have the welfare of the country at heart, must be happy and proud to see you acquiring new skills, fine character and eagerness to serve others.

Remand Home, Hyderabad, 19-3-1978