

49. The devotee's ordeals and God's grace

YOU must acquire the friendship of God. Once you acquire that friendship you can achieve anything. All happiness can be derived therefrom.

You know how Kuchela was a friend of Krishna in their boyhood. Because of his prolific progeny. Kuchela was immersed in a sea of troubles. His wife reminded him that if he went to Krishna, who was his boyhood friend at the *guru's aashram* and who was now a ruler at Dhvaaraka, Krishna would relieve him of his poverty. While he had some apprehensions whether Krishna would remember him and receive him, he got over them and set out for Dhvaaraka. Though Kuchela was in tattered clothes, the moment Krishna learnt that his old friend had come, he rushed towards him and embraced him. He exclaimed: "How long ago is it since we last met? Where have you been all these years? How have you been faring?" Kuchela remembered the Lord only because of his troubles.

Another example may be found in the Mahaabhaaratha. After completing their years of exile, the Paandavas returned to their capital. Happy over the safe return of her sons, Kunthi went to Krishna to offer her salutations. Krishna said: "Dear aunt! Are you happy? Is there anything more you want? I shall fulfill your wishes." Kunthi said: "Krishna! I don't need anything. I have to enjoy your support, your guidance and your nearness at all times. I must be blessed with troubles always. It is because my children experienced innumerable troubles during our exile in the forest, living on roots and fruits, that we found you were always with us, beside us and behind us and you saved us so many times. If we are to enjoy your proximity we have to face troubles."

Experience of two students

In this context, let me reveal a significant episode in Sathya Sai's career which is not known to anyone. Every year summer courses used to be conducted in Brindhaavan. In view of the growth in number of students at Brindhaavan, we undertook to build a new hostel for them. That year I took all the students to Ooty during the summer. All the arrangements for the summer course were completed successfully. Svaami told the students a day before they were to leave Ooty: "Boys! You have had the chance to come to Ooty. You had better go on a sight-seeing trip and enjoy the grandeur and beauties of the Lord's creation." Svaami asked them to go out sight-seeing, but they insisted on Svaami also coming with them. The boys are a stubborn breed. Svaami told them that if He came with them, large crowds would gather wherever He went and they would not be able to see anything.

Modern boys have a stubbornness of their own. They said they would not leave unless Svaami also came with them. Svaami relented and made arrangements for all the students to leave by buses for Doddabetta, the highest point in the Neelgiris range (above 8000 feet altitude). They wanted to take photographs with Svaami on the top of the hill and Svaami agreed to follow them to take photographs with them. Svaami left half an hour later from Nandhavanam to Doddabetta. Two young men went to Nandhanayanam to see Bhagavaan. They were told that Svaami had left for Doddabetta. Immediately the two young men got up on their motorcycle and started driving at high speed to catch up with Bhagavaan's car on the road to Doddabetta. Their only anxiety was somehow to get a glimpse of Svaami.

Svaami noticed the boys and wanted to know who they were. Someone in the car remarked: "They might be some rowdies." Svaami remarked: "No, no. Without knowing the truth you

should not make such remarks. They might be boys eager for Svaami's *dharshan*." When Svaami's car was taking a turning, the boys came at high speed near Svaami's car. At the turning the motorcycle fell on a side. Both the boys fell down from the vehicle. Immediately, I stopped my car, went near them, wiped the mud from their bodies and enquired of them: "Boys! Have you suffered any injuries! Why did you drive at such a high speed? You should not have done so. If you wanted to see me, you could have come to Nandhavanam." I sought to comfort them and gave them two Kamala oranges to eat.

The two boys, who were local college students, said: "Svaami! We came to have your *dharshan*. Because of this mishap, we not only got Svaami's *dharshan*, but also *sparshan*, *sambhashan* and *prasaadham* If this accident had not happened, would Svaami have come near us, wiped our backs and spoken so endearing to us? Svaami! We yearned for your *dharshan*. We earnestly sought you. We got all three *dharshan*, *sparshan*, *sambhaashan* (see you touch you and speak with you). Any trouble is worth while if these three can be got. Please give us always such troubles."

There is no pleasure and pain for the Lord

Kunthi prayed likewise to Krishna. The benignity with which the Lord considers a devotee in the moment of his troubles, He is not likely to show at other items. Of course, the Lord thinks of the devotee even at happy occasions. For the Lord there is nothing like pleasure and pain.

When Kuchela was in Krishna's palace he forgot to ask Krishna what he had come to ask. But there is no need to ask the all-knowing Lord. After lavishing all the hospitality on him, Krishna sent Kuchela back in a palanquin. After going some distance Kuchela reflected on his folly. "I enjoyed all the sumptuous feast Krishna gave me, but I forgot all about the plight of my children. I forgot to ask Krishna what I had gone to ask him. What a fool I am!" But when he neared his old home, what he saw was a magnificent mansion. His wife was dressed in fine clothes and was shining with all ornaments. She came out to welcome Kuchela like a queen. Kuchela wondered whether she was some princess or his wife.

She approached Kuchela and asked him: "Lord! What did Krishna tell you?" Kuchela described how lovingly Krishna rushed to meet him and embraced him endearingly. "How can I describe his all-encompassing love? He is love itself. Is there anyone who could confer countless blessings in return for a handful of Kuchela's parched rice!" (Svaami sang a Telugu song). "What a fool I was not to realise the boundless grace of such a Lord!" Reflecting like this Kuchela went round the mansion, deeply moved by Krishna's love for him.

Believers will never suffer

Nothing will be lacking for those who believe in God. Many non-believers have suffered in life in various ways, but no one who had full faith in God has ever suffered. There are none such sufferers, none at all. Unfortunately many suffer because of lack of faith. Very often they suffer disastrous losses. On the other hand, the real believers are often carried from the depths of life to the Abode of the Lord! Hence, faith is supremely important. Faith is everything. This faith can be acquired and strengthened only through love.

During the past four days, innumerable devotees from all parts of Andhra Pradesh have come here and experienced the bliss of heaven on earth. All of them are utterly innocent people. Their hearts are pure and unsullied. They have firm faith in God. Bhaaratheeya culture today survives to some extent only in the villages.

No one can adequately describe the joy experienced by these innocent villagers. That is true devotion. All other devotees present in Prashaanthi Nilayam were deeply moved by the devotion of these Aandhra village folk. I bless all of them to be happy, to be ever blissful and lead sacred lives.

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Love for the Lord should not degenerate into fanaticism and hatred of other names and forms. This type of cancer is affecting even eminent men nowadays. But you must avoid-it. Believe that all who revere the Lord and walk in fear of sin are your brothers, your nearest kith and kin. Their outer dress or language or skin-colour, or even the methods they adopt to express their reverence and ear are not important at all.

Baba