



Prema Vahini

Divine Discourses of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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1. Prema Vahini

0. Dear Reader

Addressing a mammoth gathering at Gudur some years ago, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba said, "You will not be wrong to call Me Premaswarupa (Embodiment of Love)." In fact, Baba showers love (prema), seeks love, and establishes love in the heart of the individual, the fabric of society, and the complex of nations. Humanity, which has lost its way and is shivering in terror, unable to control the evil that it has generated by its insane pranks, needs Baba's grace and love to allay its neurosis and bring it back to the light. Baba said twenty-two years ago that He would inaugurate His task of recreating and reforming man on the true basis of dharma when He had completed thirty-two years of stay here upon the Earth. In 1958, when He reached that moment, He blessed the venture of a monthly magazine, and he named it Sanathana Sarathi, a name full of the fragrance of the Gita and the Lord's role as the charioteer of whoever selects Him as the guide.

It is significant that the very first series of articles that Baba wrote for the Sanathana Sarathi was Prema Vahini (Stream of Divine Love). These discourses are collected in this book as they were first presented, in English translation. Truth (sathya), dharma, peace (santhi), and love are the four pillars of the new world of the Sai era, and under Baba's guidance, humanity has to discover peace through love. For that task, this book will be of great help, for while reading it, you are in touch with the very source of love; while translating its message into action, you are visibly led on by the grace of the Lord Himself; while enjoying the thrill of spiritual practice (sadhana) prescribed here, you are responding to the majesty of the very Ocean of Mercy.

N. Kasturi

Editor, Sanathana Sarathi

1. Prema Vahini - Part 1

1. Good character is spiritual power

More than all previous eras (yugas), the present one (the Kali-yuga) offers multifarious paths through which people can acquire discrimination (viveka). If it is education that is needed, there are many schools and institutions, and if it is wealth that one is after, there are various avenues by which, with effort, it can be honourably earned. In spite of this, however, we don't find any increase in human happiness or peace. In fact, there is much more misery than in previous ages!

What is the reason? The reason lies in human behaviour, in the way people live. Human life is undoubtedly the highest in evolution, and to give it meaning, spiritual endeavour, endeavour that is pure and holy, is essential.

For this way of life, character is all important. Character makes life immortal; it survives even death. Some say that knowledge is power, but it is not true. Character is power. Even the acquisition of knowledge demands a good character. So, everyone must yearn to attain flawless character, without any trace of evil.

Note that Buddha, Jesus Christ, Sankaracharya, and Vivekananda, as well as great sages and saints and devotees of the Lord - all these are treasured in the memory of people even to this day. What quality made them all memorable for all time? I say that it is the character of each.

Without character, wealth, education, and social status are of no avail. Character is the fragrance of the flower; it gives value and worth. Poets, painters, artists, and scientists may be great, each in their own field, but without character, they can have no standing in society.

Doubts will certainly arise whether those who are now greeted with respect by society have the character that we consider essential to greatness. But I

am speaking of a society and a character that cling to certain unchanging values. Ordinarily, society attaches varying importance to certain qualities from day to day, and fashions in character change with the vagaries of society. But the basic nature of a flawless character is eternal; it is the same, whatever the vicissitudes of society. In this sense, it is immortal, being associated with another immortal entity, the Atma.

2. Reshape character by cultivating noble qualities

Among the qualities that make up a flawless character, love, patience, forbearance, steadfastness, and charity are the highest and have to be revered.

The hundred little deeds that we indulge in every day harden into habits; these habits shape the intelligence and mould our outlook and life. All that we weave in our imagination, seek in our ideals, and yearn in our aspirations leave an indelible imprint on the mind. Distorted by these, we form our knowledge, our picture of the world around us, and it is to this picture that we get attached.

One's present is but the result of one's past and the habits formed during that long period. But whatever the nature of the character that one has come by, it can certainly be modified by changing the accustomed process of thought and imagination.

The wickedness of nobody is incorrigible. Wasn't Angulimala, the robber, turned into a kindhearted person by the Buddha? Didn't the thief Rathnakara become Valmiki, the sage? By conscious effort, habits can be changed and character refined. People always have within them, within their reach, the capacity to challenge their evil propensities and to change their evil habits. By selfless service, renunciation, devotion, prayer, and ratiocination, the old habits that bind people to earth can be discarded and new habits that take them along the divine path can be instilled into their lives.

The purpose of all spiritual literature, poems, epics, books, and periodicals is

to discuss the nature of this character, its ways and vagaries, and to inform about the process of reshaping it. The Sanathana Sarathi has just this aim in view; it does not seek either the exhibition of erudition or the acquisition of name and fame.

But it has to be said that the mere reading of a book or journal will not vouchsafe discrimination (viveka).

That which is seen, heard, or read must be put into practice in actual life. Without this, reading is mere waste of time. If anything is read to pass the time, it passes the time and nothing remains.

3. Read life histories of saints and sages

Books are available in plenty, and at very cheap prices. The Vedas, scriptures (sastras), and Puranas can be obtained and read by everyone. There is also no dearth of spiritual teachers (gurus). Schools abound and are ostensibly granting the boon of knowledge. Facilities for training the mind are plenty and within reach. And yet, from nowhere is heard the note of content at having partaken of the nectar of spiritual wisdom (jnana).

When I see the heaps of books that lie around everywhere, I feel that the wisdom inside a book cannot succeed in penetrating the heavy binding and emerge into the light. God is hidden by the mountain ranges of lust, anger, envy, and selfishness. So too, the sun of wisdom is hidden by these huge heaps of books. Though these books have spread to all corners of the earth, we can't say that culture or wisdom has increased; the human is still not far from the ape. An attractive binding and title, a beautiful picture - these are what the reader seeks, viz. transitory pleasure and momentary contentment.

Only those who, by means of discrimination, select the books they read and practice what they read can realise truth and enjoy everlasting bliss. Only those people live worthwhile lives. Therefore, those who seek the highest path and who revel in thoughts of God should strive to read only the life histories of saints and sages and books that help the contemplation of the

Divine. Aimless reading of books all and sundry, whatever comes to hand, will make confusion only worse confounded. It gives no profit; it confers no peace.

4. Cultivate one-pointedness and equal vision

Above all, cultivate one-pointed steadfastness (ekagratha) in whatever you do. Impartial vision (sama-drishti) is auspicious vision (subha-drishti).

The lion, though king of the forest, turns back every few steps while walking through the woods, because it is afraid of being pursued. Fear in the mind makes the vision falter. Violence within the heart distorts the vision and distracts the sight.

People must have impartial vision. All creation must appear as equally auspicious to their eyes. They must look upon all with as much love and faith as they have in themselves, for nothing is evil in creation, no, not even an iota. Evil appears as such only through faulty vision. Creation gets coloured by the nature of the glasses we wear. By itself, it is eternally pure and holy.

There have always been, there are, and there will always be teachers who reveal to people and who instruct them in attaining the heights they can reach through one-pointed steadfastness and the fullest manifestation of their physical, mental, and intellectual powers. But people's minds revel in external objects and in purposeless observation and criticism of the outside world. How then can their minds be trained to be steadfast?

Each one should ask themselves this question: Great souls (mahatmas) and outstanding sages were also people like me; they were also embodied beings. If they could attain perfection, so can I, if I follow their method. What profit do I get spending my time in discovering the faults and weakness of others?

5. First search and correct faults within yourself

Thus, the first spiritual practice (sadhana) is to search for the faults and weaknesses within yourself and to strive to correct them and become perfect.

The unceasing toil of each succeeding day has as its aim and justification this consummation: to make one's last days sweet and pleasant. But each day also has its evening. If the day is spent in good deeds, then the evening blesses us with deep sleep, invigorating refreshing sleep, the sleep about which it is said that it is akin to samadhi. One has only a short span of life on earth. But even in this short life one can attain divine bliss, by wisely and carefully using the time. Two people, in appearance the same, ostensibly of the same mould, grow under the same conditions, but one turns out to be an angel while the other stays on with their animal nature. What's the reason for this differential development? Habits, behaviour formed out of these habits, and the character into which that behaviour has solidified. People are creatures of character.

6. Life is a selfless loving sacrifice

To a superficial observer, life appears to be a rotation of eating and drinking, toiling, and sleeping. But verily life has a much greater meaning, a much deeper significance. Life is a sacrifice (yajna). Each little act is an offering to the Lord. If the day is spent in deeds performed in this spirit of surrender, what else can sleep be except total immersion in the Godhead (samadhi)?

People commit the great fault of identifying themselves with the body. People accumulate a variety of things for the upkeep and comfort of the body. Even when the body becomes weak and decrepit with age, people attempt to bolster it by one means or other. But how long can death be postponed? When Yama's warrant comes, each has to depart. Position, pride, and power all vanish before death. Realising this, strive day and night, with purity of body and mind and spirit, to realise the Higher Self by the service of all living beings. The body must be preserved as a vehicle for this service. But remember, you are not this body; this body cannot be you.

7. Thou art That (Thath-twam-asi)

This is the highest and holiest spiritual maxim (maha-vakya); you are the indestructible Atmic principle (Atmathathwa).

It is for the sake of the Atmic principle that you have this body, so, in the attempt to realise the supreme Lord (Parameswara) here and now, you must be prepared to offer this body as a sacrifice, at any moment.

Utilise your authority over this body to foster the welfare of the world. This body is but an instrument, an implement given by God. Let it serve its purpose.

Until the realisation of the purpose for which the implement is given, it is your duty to watch over it vigilantly and protect it from injury and disablement. During winter, woollen clothes are worn to withstand the rigour of the cold gales, but when the cold subsides, they are discarded. So too, when the cold gales of material life don't affect us in the least, the material body is no longer essential. One is conscious of only the incorporeal body.

8. Consecrate every act as worship of the Lord

When the rains come, earth and sky are one in the sheety downpour. It is indeed a beautiful inspiring scene, a scene by which creation itself is teaching you to become one, in unison with it. Three lessons can be learned: the impermanence of created things, the role of a person as the servant, and God as the master. This creation is the wherewithal of the worship (puja), the person is the worshiper, and God is the worshiped. The game called life is played with these.

People must be happy that the highest Lord (Purushothama) has placed around them newer and newer materials for serving Him and gets the worship of Him done in various forms. People must pray for newer and newer opportunities and exult in the chance that their hands receive. This attitude gives immeasurable joy. To lead a life suffused with this joy is indeed bliss.

Whatever is done from sunrise to sunset must be consecrated, as if it is the worship of the Lord. Just as care is taken to pluck only fresh flowers and to keep them clean and unfaded, so too, ceaseless effort should be made to do deeds that are pure and unsullied.

If this vision is kept before the mind's eye every day and life is lived accordingly, then it becomes one long unbroken service of the Lord. The feeling of I and You will soon disappear; all trace of self will be destroyed.

Life then transmutes itself into a veritable devotion to the Lord (Hariparayana). "I am the worshiper (sevak). The world is the offering. God is the master who is worshiped." When one attains this stage of thought, feeling, and action and all difference between mine and thine disappear.

9. Fill every deed with service, devotion, wisdom

There is no distinction between devotion to God (bhakthi) and spiritual wisdom (jnana). Just as materialization (sa-guna) becomes formless (nir-guna), devotion becomes spiritual wisdom. I don't agree that dedicated action (karma), devotion, and spiritual wisdom are separate. I don't even like to classify one of these as first, the other as the second, and the next as the third. I don't accept a mixture of all three, or even a merger of the three.

Dedicated activity is devotion and devotion is spiritual wisdom.

A block of Mysorepak (a sweet made of chickpea flour) has sweetness, weight, and shape; the three cannot be separated, one from the other. Each little part of it has sweetness, weight, and shape. We don't find shape in one part, weight in another, and sweetness in a third. And when it is placed on the tongue, taste is recognised, weight is lessened, and shape is modified, all at the same time. So too, the individual soul (jiva), the Atma, and the Supreme Lord (Parameswara) are not separate; they are one and the same.

Therefore, each individual deed must be full of the spirit of selfless service (seva), divine love (prema), and spiritual wisdom (jnana). In other words, each group of life's activities must be saturated with dedicated action, devotion to God (bhakthi), and spiritual wisdom. This is verily the yoga of the Supreme (Purushothama-yoga). It has to be acted in practice, not merely spoken in words. Spiritual discipline should be done constantly with an ever expanding heart full of devotion and spiritual wisdom. The sweetness of nectar of the

Lord's name is the charm of life; the internal joy derived from the name is akin to the external joy of the outer life.

10. I and you, we, should become He

When you perform an activity (kriya) as an offering to the Lord, your good, the higher good, and the highest good (swartha, parartha, and paramartha) all become one. First, I and you become we. Next, we and He become identified. The individual soul, the 'I' (jiva) should accomplish identity first with the creation (prakriti) or 'you' and then with the Supreme Spirit, He (Paramatma). This indeed is the significance of the mantra Om Tat Sat. (which expresses the identity of the individual and the Universal Brahman).

Today, yesterday, and tomorrow Om Tat Sat is, was, and will be. "He" and "I" are always there. The spiritual practice (sadhana) is also always there. Just as the sun is inseparable and is never apart from its rays, under no circumstances should any aspirant be without their spiritual practice. It is only when spiritual aspirants adhere to their spiritual disciplines in such an incessant manner that they can be said to be one with Om.

2. Prema Vahini - Part 2

11. Shed attachment to worldly pleasures, develop attachment to God

The heart's blemishes have to be washed by a moral life and doing of one's duty. A time may come when one becomes tired and weak, but one should then pray thus: Lord, things have gone beyond my capacity. I feel further effort is too great a strain. Give me strength, O Lord!

At first, God stands at a distance, watching one efforts, like the teacher who stands apart when the student writes out answers to questions. Then, when one sheds attachment to sensual pleasures (bhoga) and takes to good deeds and selfless service, God comes encouragingly near. Like the sun god (Surya-narayana), He waits outside the closed door. Like the manservant who knows their master's rights and their own limitations, He doesn't announce his presence or bang on the door but simply waits. And when the master opens the door just a little, the sun rushes in and promptly drives darkness out from within. When His help is requested, He is present by a person's side, with hands extended to render assistance. So what is wanted is only the discrimination (viveka) to pray to the Lord and the spiritual wisdom (jnana) to remember Him.

12. Good character, virtue is wisdom

Spiritual wisdom (jnana) means understanding, but it is not just an intellectual feat. "Eating" doesn't mean placing food on the tongue; it is worthwhile only when food is chewed, swallowed, digested, assimilated into the blood stream, and transformed into muscle and bone, into strength and vigour. So too, spiritual understanding must permeate and invigorate all moments of life. It must be expressed through all the organs and senses (karmendriyas and jnanendriyas). One must reach up to this high stage.

Mere accumulation of learning is not spiritual wisdom (jnana). Only good

conduct (sat-guna) is spiritual wisdom. In order that one might do selfless service (seva), a little eating (bhoga) has to be gone through. Such eating is a part of sacrifice (yajna). To make this body-machine function, the fuel of food (anna) has to be used.

Food is not sacrifice, but it makes sacrifice possible. Therefore, eating food is not to be laughed at as catering to greed, as feeding of the stomach. It is part of worship.

Worship (puja) is not merely plucking a flower and placing it on top of the image; the gardener who toiled to nurse the plant that gave the flower is also a worshipper. It is only when food is given that the body can function.

Even the means for a sacrifice is an offering (yajna).

All action (karma) done for the sake of three goals is sacrifice, viz. to utilise the world for the worship of the Lord, to establish peace and justice in society, and to control and coordinate the functions of the body. The first is called a holy, sacrificial ritual (yajna); the second, charity (dana); the third, penance (tapas). All human acts must subserve these three needs.

13. Reach God by the path of truth and discrimination

An ethical life is the foundation for attaining the stage in which all human acts subserve the above-mentioned three needs. This ethical life is based upon discrimination between truth and falsehood. Just as the pearl is retained while the shell is discarded, the essence that is truth must be accepted and the nonessential rejected. Then again, individual exertion and divine grace should both be existent. One should also constantly practice the great lesson that the body and the Atma are separate. This is a highly beneficial exercise. Such discrimination (viveka) is necessary for all aspects of life - secular as well as spiritual. It is indispensable for realising the truth, the truth that persists in creation, existence, and destruction, the truth that is God Himself.

To serve this supreme Lord, purity of food has to be observed. Regarding

food, the question is not how much but of what quality. Of course, quantity also cannot be overlooked. But why is food necessary at all? It is needed for acquiring the strength required for selfless service. For the sacrifice of service (seva-yajna) to yield fruit, food is needed, and such food must be pure. Attention has to be paid to this aspect of food. In this way, each should pay constant attention to their habits and to the traits of their character. Then, attachment to the body will fall off and the task of securing the bliss of Atma (Atma-ananda) will be made easy.

One has all these various duties to perform before actually attaining realisation, for only through such spiritual life can one acquire purity, and only through that pure nature can one realise the Supreme Self. Without getting engaged in the duties, it is no use crying in agony that one has not been able to really know the supreme Lord (Paramatma).

In this material world, one cannot appreciate the value of spiritual endeavour without experience in spiritual life and its purity. It may be said that one can undertake spiritual endeavour only after appreciating its value, but this is like saying that one should get into water only after learning to swim. Swimming can be learned only by getting into water with a float attached to the body. In the same way, with some float attached to the mind, plunge without fear into spiritual discipline. Then, you will yourself understand the value of spiritual endeavour. The nature and conditions of the spiritual path are known only to those who have journeyed along the road. They know that the path of truth and discrimination (sathya and viveka) leads to God (Paramatma). Those who have not trodden that path and those who are not aware of its existence cannot explain it to themselves or to others.

14. Meditate on God as truth and love

God alone is real. God is truth. The Supreme Lord is love. Meditate on Him as truth, as love. It is possible to realise Him in whatever form you meditate upon. Be always in the good company (sath-sang) of His devotees.

Through this good company, discrimination and renunciation (viveka and

vairagya) will be implanted and increased. These will strengthen the spirit and endow you with inner peace. Your mind will then merge in God.

In everything you do, speak and act truthfully, using all the strength and talent with which you are endowed.

At first, you might fail in this and encounter difficulties and sufferings. But, ultimately, you are bound to succeed and achieve victory and bliss. Only truth conquers, not untruth (satyameva jayathe, nanritham). By your behaviour, through your way of life, you can realise the truth; you can realise God (Paramatma).

15. Eschew selfishness, conceit, and pride

People create and develop in themselves an abounding variety of selfish habits and attitudes, causing great discontent for themselves. The impulse for all this comes from the power complex, the greed for accumulating authority, domination, and power, the greed for things that can never be eternal and full. In fact, it is impossible for anyone to attain them to the level of satiation. Omnipotence belongs only to the Lord of all (Sarveswara).

A person might feel elated to become the master of all arts, owner of all wealth, possessor of all knowledge, or repository of all the scriptures (sastras), but from whom did the person acquire all these? They must indeed be greater. One might even claim that one earned all this through their own efforts, labour, and toil. But surely someone gave it to them in some form or other. This one cannot gainsay. The source from which all authority and all power originate is the Lord of all. Ignoring that omnipotence, deluding oneself that the little power one has acquired is one's own - this indeed is selfishness, conceit, pride (ahamkara).

A person who is a genuine vehicle of power can be recognised by the characteristics of truth, kindness, love, patience, forbearance and gratefulness. Wherever these reside, ego (ahamkara) cannot subsist; it has no place.

Therefore, seek to develop these.

The effulgence of the Atma is obscured by ego. Therefore, when ego is destroyed, all troubles end, all discontents vanish, and bliss is attained. Just as the sun is obscured by mist, so the feeling of ego hides eternal bliss.

Even if the eyes are open, a piece of cloth or cardboard can prevent vision from functioning effectively and usefully.

So too, the screen of selfishness prevents one from seeing God, who is, in fact, nearer than anything else.

16. Avoid argumentation and exhibition of scholarship

Many a spiritual aspirant (sadhaka), recluse, and renunciant (sanyasin) has allowed all excellences won by long years of struggle and sacrifice to slip away through this attachment to the self. Power without the bliss of God-realisation is a wall without a basement. Mere punditry is of no use at all; the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the scriptures (sastras) are doctrines for living out in daily practice. Without this practice, whatever the wealth of words, whatever the standard of scholarship, it is all a colossal waste. To bring the teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads, and scriptures into one's actual life, one has to scotch the feeling "I know", open one's eyes to the real essence, and introspect on it. Then, one can attain bliss, without fail.

The almanac might indicate that ten units of rain will fall, but even if the calendar is folded ten times and squeezed, not a drop of rain can be extracted. The purpose of the calendar is not to give rain but only to give information about rain and its quantity. Its pages do not contain the ten units of rain. Rain is in the clouds above.

So, too, the scriptures (sastras) can give only information about doctrines, axioms, rules, regulations, and duties.

The sublime characteristics of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and scriptures are

that they give instruction in the methods of attaining peace and liberation. But they aren't saturated with these essences of bliss; one can't collect the essences by squeezing the texts. One has to discover the path, direction, and goal as described in them; then, one has to tread the path, follow the direction, and reach the goal. However, if the I-consciousness produces the pride "I know all", a fall is inevitable; the delusion causes death. The secret of salvation lies in the realisation of this danger; rebirth is inevitable if this danger is not averted.

Aware of all this, if you get immersed in spiritual practice, the world and its worries will not affect you. It is only when you are far from this truth that you suffer, feel pain, and experience travail. At a distance from the bazaar, one hears only a huge indistinct uproar. But as one approaches it and walks into it, one can clearly distinguish the separate bargainings. So too, until the reality of the Supreme (Paramatma) is known to you, you are overpowered and stunned by the uproar of the world; but once you enter deep into the realm of spiritual endeavour, everything becomes clear and the knowledge of the reality awakens within you. Until then, you will be caught up in the meaningless noise of argumentation, disputation, and exhibitionist flamboyance.

17. Avoid doubters and ignorant people

Every aspirant who seeks the Eternal through the path of devotion should strive to keep away from the turmoils, cruelties, and falsehoods of this world and practice truth, righteousness, love, and peace. This is indeed the path of devotion. Those who seek union with God and those who seek the welfare of the world should discard as worthless both praise and blame, appreciation and derision, prosperity and adversity. They should courageously keep steady faith in their own innate reality and dedicate themselves to spiritual uplift.

No one, not even a great spiritual personality (maha-purusha) or Avatar, can ever escape criticism and blame.

But such people do not bend. They hold on to truth. Truth will not yield to

threats. The real nature of the great sage or the Avatar is realised by those who indulge in criticism or blame only after they wade through unbearable trouble; then they also start to praise. The weakness of ignorance is the cause of this failure. So, let aspirants keep away from all such waverers and ignorant people and desist from discussing their beliefs and convictions with them. Let them become immersed in holy books and be in the company of devotees of the Lord. Later, rich with the experience of realisation and courageous on account of that contact with reality, they can mix in any company without danger and even endeavour to direct other minds on to the truth that they themselves have seen.

18. Develop devotion and faith

Three types can be recognised among those who seek to do good deeds and tread the path of self-realisation.

1. Those who are too frightened by troubles, losses, and difficulties to begin the endeavour. They are of the lowest type.
2. Those who, after having undertaken the journey and gone some distance, are depressed and defeated by obstacles and disappointments and give up in the middle. They are of the middling type.
3. Those who steadfastly adhere to the path with calmness and courage, whatever the nature of the travail, however hard the road; these are, of course, of the highest type. This steadfastness, this faith and constancy, is the characteristic of the devotee (bhaktha).

You may be deluded by attachment to this illusory world and attracted by temporal joy, but don't barter away the means of achieving permanent and complete happiness. Carry on your spiritual duties with full devotion. God cannot be known without faith and steadfastness. The Lord comes only through supreme devotion (para-bhakthi); supreme devotion only through spiritual wisdom (jnana); spiritual wisdom only through faith (sraddha); and

faith, only through love (prema).

19. Cultivate love through two methods

So how is love to be cultivated? Through two methods:

1. Always consider the faults of others, however big, to be insignificant and negligible. Always consider your own faults, however insignificant and negligible, to be big, and feel sad and repentant. By these means, you avoid developing bigger faults and defects and you acquire the qualities of brotherliness and forbearance.
2. Whatever you do, with yourself or with others, do it remembering that God is omnipresent. He sees and hears and knows everything. Whatever you speak, remember that God hears every word; discriminate between the true and the false and speak only the truth. Whatever you do, discriminate between right and wrong and do only the right. Endeavour every moment to be aware of the omnipotence of God.

The body is the temple of the individual (jiva), so whatever happens in that temple is the concern of the individual.

So too, the world is the body of the Lord, and all that happens in it, good or bad, is His concern. From the observed fact of the individual and the body, know the truth of the unobservable fact of the Lord and the world.

The relationship of the individual (jiva) and the Lord, the kinship between the two, can be grasped by everyone who acquires three chief instruments: (1) a mind unsullied by attachment and hatred, (2) a speech unsullied by falsehood and (3) a body unsullied by violence.

Joy and peace do not inhere in external objects; they are in you yourself. But in your foolishness, you search for them outside yourself in a world from

which, today or tomorrow, you are bound to depart. Therefore, awake soon. Try to know the essence of everything, the eternal truth. Try to experience the love that is God (Paramatma) itself. Discriminate at every turn, accepting what is true and discarding the rest. As long as you have worldly desires in view, you cannot escape sorrow.

20. See the macrocosm in the microcosm

Many people slander image worship, but its basis is really one's capacity to see the macrocosm in the microcosm.

The value of image worship is testified by experience; it doesn't depend on one's imaginative faculty. What is found in the form of the Lord (Virat-swarupa) is also found, undiminished and unalloyed, in the image form (swarupa). Images serve the same purpose as metaphors and similes in poetry. They illustrate, amplify, and clarify.

Joy comes not through the shape of things but through the relationship established. Not any child but her child makes the mother happy. So also with each one and with all things. With each and every thing in the universe, if one establishes that kinship, that Godly love (Isvara prema), then truly an overpowering joy can be experienced! Only those who have felt it can understand.

3. Prema Vahini - Part 3b

31. Bharath is the home of the Eternal Universal Religion

The Vedic religion is the only religion to achieve and maintain the foremost position among all religions from earliest times and to be established permanently. The only people who have survived without being destroyed, throughout the historic age, are the Hindus. In this religion, more than in any other, people have practised lives of love, equality, and gratitude. The Hindus have earned their dharma through the discovery of philosophic principles and through the Vedas. They have drunk deeply the essence of the Vedas, which are without beginning and end. A land so holy is a veritable spiritual mine for the world. Just as the bowels of the earth reveal mines of different metals in each area, so in Bharath is found the mine of the Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma), of the essence of all the principles of all the scriptures (sastras), all the Vedas, and all the Upanishads.

As if by the good luck of the Bharathiyas (Indians), from the moment the mine of the Eternal Religion emerged, leaders, thinkers, commentators, apostles, and teachers have been appearing in this land for the purpose of fostering it. Also, from this very Bharath, seers arose - selfless yogis of action (karma-yogis), wise men, realised souls, and divine personages connected with this religion. Through these people, spiritual wisdom guaranteed by experience flowed all over the country. In this way, loaded with divine essence, the Eternal Religion progressed throughout the world.

But although it spread, the "original home" is Bharath itself. Look at the world today. Machines, cars, and engines of some new type or other are produced in one country and exported to others. But their original home cannot be forgotten. Such cars and engines are manufactured only on the basis of that country's experience. Nothing can be done without that basis. So too, the Eternal Religion arose. Bharath and people of other countries benefited from its waters through the great personages and the books they composed. Hence, the basis of the original home cannot be ignored. That is impossible.

32. Eternal Vedic religion is the heritage of all mankind

But there is some concern today in this Bharath, the birthplace of those holy persons who nursed and fostered this sacred dharma. New modes are being accepted as one's dharma, and the Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma) itself is being ignored; it is being kept aside for people of other countries by people who have not even tested the sweetness of the dharma, who have not grasped its meaning, and who have smothered it in empty disputation.

The reason for this is, of course, the absence of proper guides who could show the way. But even when there are such guides, people yield to these modern modes and get attached to them. These are really like little food treats (pakoras). They attract by their smell and are bought by people who do not discriminate. Though their own duty (swa-dharma) is the pure Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma), the fascination exercised by outward show is absent, so it gets neglected. Truth has no need for such decorations. Taste is the important thing.

The basic reason for this problem is the fact that people today are motivated by mere whim and fancy. It has become the habit to reject reality and accept the dharma of another. This is a great mistake. It is against dharma for Bharathiyas (Indians) to be attracted by external forms and outward show. No other dharma has, or will have, truth and highest love above and beyond that contained in the Eternal Religion. The Eternal Religion is the veritable embodiment of truth. It is the heritage of all. There can be no boundary for holiness. Holiness is one without a second, right?

Those who have attained liberation in this life by adherence to this Eternal Religion, who have earned the grace of God, who have understood the nature of truth, who have achieved realisation - they are all Bharathiyas.

Bharathiyas have adored those who have reached that holy stage, without distinction of caste, creed, or sex. The holiness of that stage burns to ashes all such limitations. It is only until that stage is reached that it becomes

impossible to consider everything as equal. So, it is necessary to determine boldly on the realisation of the Eternal Religion. This is the birthright of Bharathiyas.

33. Divine personalities predominate in Bharath

If we examine history since its very beginnings, we can know in detail what great personages were born and in which sections of the Bharathiyas (Indians) they were born in.

Incarnations, divine personalities, enlightened persons (jivan-mukthas) like Rama, Krishna, Balarama, Janaka, and Parikshith, and yogis on the royal path (raja-yogis) like Viswamitra arose among the protectors (kshatriyas).

Highest sages (brahmarshis), great pundits, scriptural scholars, and Vedic sages (rishis) originated in the brahmin caste. Labourers (sudras) predominate in the epical books, like Bharatha and Bhagavatha. Among the great devotees of the Lord, members of the lower castes form a large number. To attain holiness without being affected by the world, and to reach the Highest Lord (Paramatma), each one's spiritual discipline (sadhana) is important; other things like caste will not be a hindrance at all. But one should deserve the grace required for it; one should become regular and disciplined in practice.

Such holy Bharathiyas (Indians), however, now bring endless disgrace on the Eternal Vedic religion by neglecting the principles of life of the above-mentioned great personages, by not studying them and following their instructions, by modifying their way of life to suit the changing times, and (as the saying goes, the hour of ruin brings wicked thoughts) by becoming slaves to name and fame and the craving for power and position and the anxiety to promote the well-being of their wives and children through selfish means.

Still, there is no dearth of people who love all in equal measure, who are devoid of selfishness, who are engaged in the promotion of the welfare of all, who have dedicated themselves to the service of mankind, and who sacrifice

everything. But they are suppressed; they are not appreciated or placed in positions of high authority for fear there will then be no place for the wicked, the crooked, and the unjust.

However broad and deep the ocean, when the earth quakes underneath, the waters part of themselves, and when the commotion subsides, they resume their original position. So too, these good people keep away without being caught up in it during the earthquake of injustice, unrighteousness, selfishness, and ostentation. And as soon as the hullabaloo subsides, they reenter the world. Evanescent authority and self-glorification cannot be permanent.

"To grow is only to decay," it is said. The present peacelessness is decay, not growth. For example, consider some Bharathiyas (Indians) who from the beginning grew up in righteous ways with pure feelings, with selfcontrol and reverence for the good name, who were fed on the breast milk of the Vedas, scriptures (sastras), and Upanishads, who welcomed and honoured races driven out of their own country and vouchsafed to them love in equal measure. Today, for the love of power and self, some of these Bharathiyas accuse their own brethren, impatiently envy the prosperity of others, deceive their own brothers maddened by selfish greed, keep at arm's length their real well wishers, pursue only their own selfish end, multiply bad qualities hitherto unheard of in the Hindu fold, follow wrong paths and ways of life, and become the target of conflict and restlessness. All this because of the absence of fear of sin, fear of God, discipline, reverence, and faith. The fall is indeed incredible.

34. Awake, arise, and tread the path of love and devotion

Hindu brethren! Children of Bharath (India)! Followers of the ancient (sanathana) way! Where have the human qualities of old gone? Truth, tolerance, morality, discipline - when would you accept them? Arise, awake! Establish once again the kingdom of Rama (Rama-rajya), resplendent with mansions of truth, dharma, and peace. Love your Bharathiya (Indian) brethren. Practise the Eternal Religion, quench the burning flames of

ignorance, peacelessness, injustice, and envy with the waters of love, forbearance, and truth. Develop the feeling of mutualness. Sweep away all jealousy and anger.

Remember the rule of the holy personages, the characteristics of the most eminent and of the reign of God.

Each one should realise their own faults and understand that there is no use in searching for faults in others. It is a mere waste of time; it also breeds quarrels. So give up that trait.

If this opportunity is missed, what else can be done? Don't yield to dejection, but say "finis" to all the unrighteousness of the past. Repent sincerely and tread the path of prayer to God, good deeds, and brotherly love.

Establish the eternal kingdom of Rama (Rama-rajya).

The Sanathana Sarathi was started to win this kingdom; its army will help this effort by word and deed.

Draw that chariot forward! Gird up your loins and seek the protection of the Lord. Bharathiyas (Indians) are all children of one mother - her name is Sanathana Dharma (Eternal Religion). Redeem the debt due to the mother.

He is no son who forgets the mother. He cannot be good who says the mother is bad. Her breast milk is the very breath of our life. The giver of this life, the father of all is the supreme Lord (Paramatma).

All are children of the same parents. So, without blaming and accusing each other, without wishing evil for your kith and kin, understand that your brothers have the same attachment to the objects they love that you have to the ones that you love. Don't find fault with or laugh at what another loves. On the other hand, try to love it.

These are the characteristics of truth and love, of Bharathiyas.

35. The Universal Soul is One and Only One

The Vedas, the scriptures, and the messages of the sages (rishis) - all have proclaimed uniformly and without any possibility of doubt, from that day to this, that the supreme Lord (Paramatma) is the universal Soul (Sarva-antaryami), present and immanent in everything. Issues like the relationship between "He who is served", "he who serves", and "the wherewithal of service" have also been the subject of endless discussion. Every believer (asthika) has heard the Bhagavatha verse in which the great devotee Prahlada states out of his own experience that the supreme Lord need not be searched for far and wide, that He is already very near the seeker.

He's here, He's not here - give up such doubts.
Listen, Oh Leaders of the demons (danavas)!
Wherever you seek and wherever you see,
There He is; and there He is! He is!

People speak of the Lord as having a particular nature or characteristic, as having a particular form, and so on. These statements are true only to the extent that imagination and guesswork can approximate the truth; they are not the fundamental truth. Such conceptions are valid as far as practical worldly knowledge goes, but they can't be considered as valid knowledge of the Absolute. For it is impossible to see or speak about the Complete (Purna).

36. Be universal in outlook

In spite of this, devotees and aspirants have been framing some form or other of the Divine as the basis of their devotion, each according to the stage of their own inner progress. They worship the supreme Lord (Paramatma) as existing in some Ayodhya or Dwaraka and nowhere else, as found in places where some image or picture exists and nowhere else. They worship that

form itself as complete (purna). Of course, it is not wrong to do so.

But devotees should not proclaim that only their belief is the truth, that the names and forms that they have ascribed are the only names and forms of the Divine, and that all other forms and names are worthless and inferior.

It should be realised that the names and forms that are the ideals of others are as dear and sacred to those others as such names and forms are to oneself.

When a form is idealised like this, it really becomes a symbol of the Universal. But how can a mere symbol of the Universal ever become the Universal itself? Conscious always of this, everyone should acquire the vision that all forms of the ideal are equally valid and true, without giving room to senseless hatred. Without this, it is impossible to realise the Complete (Purna). All these gross forms of the ideal are fully saturated with the subtle, divine Principle.

The taste of the vast ocean is to be found, complete and undiminished, in every single drop of its waters, but this does not mean that the drop is in the ocean. Though we recognise the drop and the ocean as separate entities, the nature and taste of both are identical. Similarly, the Universal Soul (Sarva-antaryami), Paramatma, and the gross form and name that the supreme Lord assumes and through which He is realised - these are not separate entities but are identical.

When the all-pervasive, all-inclusive pure Existence is described, the matter and method depend on the principles of the speaker and tastes of the listener. When the individual name and form imposed by the devotee are transformed into the Attributeless and the Formless, it is referred to as Brahman; when this same Brahman appears with attributes and forms, it is referred to as Rama, Krishna, Vishnu, or Siva.

Don't the followers of other religions agree that all distinction between the devotee and God disappear when the devotee attains the ecstasy of mystic union? The yogis and philosophers of other lands and faiths also accept

without demur that this distinctionless experience can be earned through supremest devotion (para-bhakthi).

Even if some little trace of difference is retained, it is due to the individual's own taste and desire and not to anything specially basic.

It is only when name and form come in that it is named differently as nature (prakriti), the supreme Lord (Paramatma) and devotee (bhaktha). When name and form are absent, doubt and discussion whether it is masculine, feminine, or neutral won't even arise. Then, any description fits. For something that is above and beyond imagination, any name and form can be ascribed. In fact, It has no attribute and no form. It is all pervasive, omnipresent.

When this subtle omnipresence is systematically worshiped through a gross form, with attributes, the devotee will clearly realise its nature through the spiritual practice (sadhana) itself.

37. Incarnations reveal the universal form of the Lord

To vouchsafe the knowledge of this spiritual practice and that truth, and to bless the devotees with that bliss, the attributeless Supreme Lord incarnates in this world, assuming name and form, and gives scope for all embodied beings to have concrete experience and joy. Through these experiences, the incarnations facilitate the realisation that the supreme Lord (Paramatma) is the Universal Soul (Sarva-antaryami) and All-pervasive, the Inner Atma of everything in creation. Lord Krishna showed the entire creation in His own form. Even Arjuna failed to understand that Krishna was the universal Soul until he saw with his own eyes how Lord Krishna contained the entire creation in His gross form.

Love, lover, and the Loved - all three are one and the same. Without love, there can be no lover. Even if there are both love and the lover, without the loved, love has no function. In all three, love is the chief ingredient.

That which is saturated chiefly and uniformly in everything, that is the

supreme Lord (Paramatma). So there is no difference between these three. In all three, love (prema) is discernible as the Universal Soul (Sarva-antaryami).

So can't it be realised that everything is the embodiment of the Lord (Paramatma-swarupa)? Certainly, it can be realised, without fail.

38. Nondualism teaches the highest knowledge: the unity of all

Everything is suffused with love (prema). So, we can unhesitatingly declare that the supreme Lord is the form of love (prema-swarupa). In the entire creation, in all living things, love is manifesting itself in various forms. The nature of love cannot alter, though it is known under different names like love for offspring, affection, devotion to God, desire (vatsalya, anuraga, bhakthi, ishtam) etc., according to the direction in which it is canalised. But whatever the form, the essence cannot alter. On the basis of this knowledge and experience, the conclusion becomes clear that the supreme Lord is the inner Atma of all created things (Sarva-butha-antar-atma).

That which teaches the highest knowledge of this unity is known as nondualism (a-dwaitha); that which teaches the principle of the lover and the Loved, the individual (jiva) and the Brahman, is known as dualism (dwaitha); that which teaches about all three, love, lover, and loved - or nature (prakriti), individual (jiva), and Brahman - is known as qualified nondualism (visishta-adwaitha). But these three are one. The child that is born changes into the student; the student changes into the householder; but all three are one and the same person, right? While the manners and attachments change in various ways, the person remains the same.

Butter and buttermilk emerge from milk. Milk, which contains all, is nondualism (a-dwaitha). Butter, which contains the two categories, is dualism (dwaitha); after that is separated, the buttermilk that remains is qualified nondualism (visishta-adwaitha). But though their tastes differ, the colour of all these is the same, always. This, which is the same in all, is the Brahman without qualities (nir-guna Brahman).

39. Have firm faith in the unity of Self and Cosmic Lord

The attitude of the worshiper and the worshiped is the seed of devotion (bhakthi). First, the worshiper's mind is attracted by the special qualities of the object of worship. The worshiper tries to acquire these special qualities. This is spiritual discipline (sadhana). In the early stages of spiritual discipline, the distinction between worshiper and worshiped is full, but as the spiritual discipline progresses, this feeling diminishes and, when attainment is reached, there is no distinction whatsoever.

Whatever the object of worship one has grasped and loved and sought by spiritual discipline, one should have firm faith that the individual self (jivatma) is the supreme Lord (Paramatma). There is only one wish fit to be entertained by the aspirant: the realisation of the Lord (Iswara Sakshatkara). There is no room in the mind for any other wish. That is why Kunthi prayed thus to Lord Krishna, "Let us have always, O Lord of the world, distress, and misery, if only You grant us Your sight (darshan), the sight that destroys rebirth." Devotees (bhaktha) who desire and seek to attain the Supreme should have this mental attitude. Then, regardless of joy and sorrow, without any worry about their own satisfaction, they will engage in spiritual discipline (sadhana) firmly, uninterruptedly, and with conviction; after understanding the Reality, they will have full contentment.

From this point of view, there is no difference between a liberated soul (jivan-mukthas) and a devotee; both are beyond ego (ahamkara), nature (prakriti) with its three attributes, and the dharma of the caste-stage of life (varna-ashrama). The hearts of such will be full of compassion and the urge to do good to the world. Their Brahmic bliss impels them to act in this way. They will have no desires, for desires are the products of feelings of "I" and "mine". Only after these desires are uprooted do people become devotees, right? So there can be no room in them for desires. They are devotees of immortal nature (amritha-swarupa). For those with that immortal nature, there can be no appetite except for the sweetness of spiritual bliss (ananda).

40. Start spiritual practise at the earliest moment

Yama (Lord of Death) is as omnipresent as Siva! Yama is associated with the body (deha); He cannot affect the individual soul (jiva). Siva is associated with the individual soul, but He won't allow the body to subsist for any length of time. The body is the essential vehicle for the individual soul to understand its real nature. Still, who knows when it may become the target for the attention of Yama, the master of the body? Who knows when this body will get entrapped in the coils of Yama's ropes?

The individual soul, burdened with this easily destructible body, must grasp the above-mentioned caution and be all-eager to merge in Siva, whatever the moment, that very moment! No single moment that is passed by can be turned back. People usually delay doing some things; yesterday's till today and today's till tomorrow. But the tasks of spiritual discipline are not of such a nature. For them, there is no yesterday and no tomorrow. This very moment is the moment! The minute that just elapsed is beyond your grasp; so too, the approaching minute is not yours! Only the individual soul that has this understanding engraved on its heart can merge in Siva.

3. Prema Vahini - Part 3a

21. Listen, contemplate, and sing God's name

Vedas and Puranas deserve to be read and heard. God's name is to be recited and listened to. For some ailments, medicines are prescribed for external application while for others, they are given for internal use. But for this universal ailment of the cycle of birth and death (bhava-roga), listening to spiritual discourses (sravana), singing God's name (kirtana), and other medicines are prescribed for external and internal use. One has to utter as well as hear the Lord's name. An aspirant might win God's grace, the guru's grace, and the grace of devotees of the Lord, but all this grace is of no avail if another grace is not secured, the grace of their own inner consciousness (anthah-karana). Without this grace, the aspirant falls into perdition, for all the rest are of no account whatsoever.

The grace of God is not easily attainable. The feeling of I-ness (ahamkara), which makes one say "I am the doer", should be plucked by the roots from the heart. Everyone, be they learned or illiterate, should feel an overwhelming urge to know God. God has equal affection toward all His children, for to illumine is the nature of light. Utilising that illumination, some can read good books and others can do their daily tasks, whatever they are.

So too, uttering God's name, one can progress in the realisation of God, another can even do wicked deeds! It all depends on how you use the light. But the Lord's name is without blemish, always and forever.

22. Seek knowledge of the Eternal Truth

Haven't people trained themselves in countless skills and arts and sciences? Haven't they devised countless machines? Haven't they accumulated vast tomes of knowledge? Nevertheless, they haven't attained peace of mind, which is so essential for happiness. Instead, with every passing day, this education (vidya) drags them into deeper and deeper waters, while peace

recedes more and more into the distance.

The reason can be stated thus. These arts and sciences have only transitory value; these machines cater to worldly comfort; this knowledge is all about temporary, transitory things. This education does not reveal the innermost secret of the universe.

There is one secret that, if known, lays bare all secrets. There is one problem that, if solved, solves all others; there is one knot that, if untied, loosens all knots. There is one science that, if mastered, masters all. That key science is spiritual education (sanathana vidya).

If a tree has to be destroyed, its tap root has to be cut. There is no use trying to kill it by plucking its leaves one by one, for it takes too long and it may not work. The ancient Vedic seers knew this spiritual education (vidya), but Indians are becoming ashamed to claim the seers as their kith and kin.

The seers saw God through their ascetic endeavours and won His Grace. They expounded the science that they so boldly discovered. Seekers from other countries perused these books and said that India had blazed a trail for the whole world. This is a well-known fact. The lamp illumines the house, but just at the very foot of the lamp lurks a dark circle. India doesn't know or care for that treasure. Can we ascribe this to the play of fate and keep quiet?

23. Don't neglect the study of Sanskrit and Vedic culture

In past ages, Indians performed their daily rites, sat in purified places, surrounded by sacredness, and immersed themselves in the study and practice of the teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads. They recorded their experiences in order to guide others to bring those experiences back again into their own consciousness. But their children and grandchildren placed the books on the altar and duly worshiped them. Neglect reduced them to dust or lumber; the palm leaves disintegrated, and rats ate into them.

Eager students from the West have sought out this lumber, realising that it enshrines incomparable sources of illumination and priceless pearls of wisdom. They lift it reverentially above their heads and acclaim it as the precious gift of the continent of Bharath (Bharatha-khanda) to themselves and their children. They carry it across the seas with joy in their eyes and thankfulness in their hearts.

Shall I reveal what the children of India have been doing? They don't open the pages, peruse the contents or even concern themselves with them. Only one in a million reads them, but even he is ridiculed as a fool and a crank. People laugh at the books as a conglomeration of lies and legends and argue about the historicity of the books and their authors. They dismiss Sanskrit as "very hard to learn" and pass on the treasure to scholars from other lands. What a sad spectacle this is! It would have been some compensation if they attended carefully to the study of their mother tongue, but even this they fail to do. It is neglect; neglect everywhere.

No. I don't condemn worldly happiness. I feel glad when people are happy. But, please don't believe that this happiness is permanent. I want you to study all the arts and sciences for acquiring worldly happiness, but I want you to remember that this happiness is not everlasting.

Permanent happiness can be secured through only one knowledge (vidya), the Upanishad knowledge. That is the science of God-realisation, the teaching of the sages (rishis). Only that can save one and grant one peace.

There is nothing higher than that; this is an indisputable fact. Whatever your joy and sorrow, whatever the subject you have specialised in for a living, rivet your eyes on knowledge of Brahman. If only intelligence is sharpened, without the growth and practice of virtues, and if mere information is stored in the brain, the world cannot progress and its welfare will be in jeopardy.

But people now seem to be losing faith in virtues, for the educational system does not assign any place to spiritual teaching or training. True education does not mar or pervert the beautiful virtues of boys and girls, it does not

content itself with filling the brain with cumbersome junk. Only education that gives full scope for the blossoming of all the virtues that distinguish people is beneficial.

24. Don't mistake appearance for reality

Actually, people see the shadow and take it to be the substance. They see length, breadth, height, and thickness and jump to the conclusion that they have an object before them. They experience a series of sensations and memories and, adding them all up, infer that some objects produce them. This mistaking of appearance for reality is misnamed spiritual wisdom (jnana). How can it ever be spiritual wisdom? Can the image of a person ever be "he"? If the image is taken to be "he", can we call it knowledge? Such is the nature of all knowledge now; what is cognised as an object is not real at all; its reality is not cognisable.

Nondualists (a-dwaitins) believe "I am Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi)". How do they acquire that conviction?

Ask one of them, and the reply is, "The scripture (sruthi) declares it so; the guru taught it like that." But learning it from these sources does not entitle one to make that profound statement. Do people who are masters of these three words: "I am Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi)" attain unity with Brahman? No, ceaseless striving through countless births, loyal performance of scriptural duties - these purify the mind. In such a mind, seeds of devotion sprout and, when tended with care and knowledge, grow into blooming flowers; fruits appear and ripen and get filled with sweetness and fragrance. When the fruit is eaten, a person becomes one with the Supreme - the power that permeates all things and all regions and that is eternally present, conscious, and blissful.

People may enunciate the formula, "I am Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi)" correctly; their etymology may be perfect; but when they are ignorant of the "world", unaware of "I", and completely in the dark about "Brahman", how can they ever taste the rare joy of the wise (jnani)? It is not mastery of words and

their meanings that counts:

it is awareness, experience - these are the fundamentals.

25. Understand that the objective world is as unreal as the dream world

Mud alone is real. The pot-consciousness is born of ignorance regarding mud; mud is the basis, the substance of the pot. How can a pot exist without mud? How can effect exist apart from the cause? The world appears as multiplicity only to the ignorant. To wise people (jnani), Brahman alone exists, Brahman upon which all else is superimposed. The Atma alone is cognised by them; there is nothing else. That is the nondualistic (a-dvaitic) experience.

If the world is real, it must be cognised even during the stage of dreamless deep sleep, but we are not conscious of it at all. Hence, the visible world is as unreal as the dream world. The world is imposed on Brahman just as a snake is imposed on a rope through illusion. The snake and the rope are not seen at the same time; the entire rope is the snake. So too, Brahman is all this world, all this vast variety of name and form. But this imaginatively conceived variety is fundamentally false. Brahman alone is true.

The sky might be reflected in a pot of toddy but does not defile it. Similarly, in this vehicle - the body - the Atma dwells pure and undefiled. The fruits of action, good or bad, fair or foul, adhere to the vehicle and not to the indweller, the seer.

When such wisdom (jnana) dawns, the dark shadows of the three types of actions (karma) flee before it: present actions, which affect the future (agami), accumulated (samchitha), and commencing (prarabdha) actions.

Yes, even present (prarabdha) karma can be overcome. For the will of God is omnipotent, and for omnipotence there can be no limit or exception. When, through spiritual practices (sadhana), you win the grace (sankalpa) of the Lord, you can achieve victory over commencing karma also. Don't be

discouraged on any score.

The suffering and travails of this world are illusory and transitory. Fix your mind firmly on this great fact and set out bravely on the path of spiritual practice, the practice of devotion.

26. The journey of life depends on inborn desires

People are immersed in many activities and engaged in various undertakings. This is a well-known fact. They are so many in number that sometimes one may feel that the span of twenty-four hours is too short for daily activity. Drinking, eating, reading, walking, sitting, and also hating, dreaming, boasting, praising, weeping, laughing, moping, hoping - all types of activities go on without end. They fill up the span of life. These activities are all intimately attached to the mind. This makes life a mere collection of inborn desires (samskaras), which make an impact on character and personality.

There are two types of activities, good and bad. The effect of both on the life of a person has to be considered.

The acts of a child during that tender age fade away like the writing of that child on slate. When the events of one's own childhood are thus consigned to oblivion, how can the events of the past life be retained in memory?

Leaving this point aside, it would be wrong to infer that only remembered events have shaped character.

The acts and activities that have transpired and that have been thrust back into forgetfulness by subsequent events have left a trace of their consequences in the mind. The residue is there. When you try to bring back to memory at bedtime the events of the day, not everything that happened, from the insignificant to the significant, will answer the summons. Those that are meaningful, that are deeply embedded inside - only these can be recalled.

When such is the case with the happenings of a single day, when we forget all

events that are not associated with joy or pain, what shall be said of the events of last week or month or years? Most events turn hazy, recede, and disappear. Only the chief events are registered clearly and remain; these few are the inborn desires (samskaras).

Performing innumerable deeds, gathering vast experience and knowledge, learning a wide variety of lessons from a wide variety of activities, one retains as capital only a mere four or five of them, strong, deep-rooted, vital.

27. Direct your life to acquire your last moment's mental tendency

A merchant calculates the debit and credit at the end of a week or month or year and draws up the balance sheet, to arrive at one figure - his earnings. So too, in this business of life, everything ends in some bit of net earnings after all the giving and taking concludes. At the very end of life, it is this small quantity that will come into memory. The experiences that persist to the very last moment, the two or three that well up into consciousness when one recalls all that has happened in life, these are the real sustainers, the genuine achievements.

This does not mean that all other acts and experiences have been a waste. Forgetting them means only that their work has been accomplished and their value realised.

When business is done with thousands of rupees, one's heart freezes if a loss of a few thousand is sustained and leaps in joy if a few thousand are gained. Such is the story of the business of life. At the point of death, if one yearns to cater to the tongue, it is proof that throughout life the tongue has been the master. At the point of death, if a woman remembers her child and seeks to fondle it, the inner desire (samskara) of child-love has been predominant all through life. It proves that all other experiences have been thrown into oblivion.

Thus, of the inborn desires (samskaras) of life, some are stronger than the rest and stand out to the last. Life is like that; this has to be learned. The net

result of all this living and toiling is whatever comes to memory at the last moment of life. Therefore, direct the entire current of life toward acquisition of the mental tendency (sam- skara) that you want to have during the last moment. Fix your attention upon it, day and night. The feeling that dominates the moment of death works with great force in the coming life. This truth must guide a person for the journey of this life too, for inborn desires are the wherewithal for this journey as well as for the journey after this.

Therefore, from tomorrow, always keep death, which is inevitable, before the eye of memory and engage yourself in the journey of life with good wishes for all, with strict adherence to truth, seeking always the company of the good, and with the mind always fixed on the Lord. Live, avoid evil deeds and hateful and harmful thoughts, and don't get attached to the world. If you live thus, your last moment will be pure, sweet, and blessed.

Disciplined striving throughout life is needed to ensure this consummation. The mind has to be turned over to good mental tendencies (samskaras). Everyone must examine themselves rigorously, spot defects, and struggle to correct them. When people uncover and realise their own defects, it is like being reborn. People then start anew, from a new childhood. This is the genuine moment of awakening.

Life is eternally stalked by death. Yet, people don't tolerate the very mention of the word "death". It is deemed inauspicious to hear that word, though, however insufferable it is, every living thing is every moment proceeding nearer and nearer to it. Intent on a journey and having purchased a ticket for the same, when you enter a train the train takes you willy-nilly to the destination, whether you sit quiet or lie down or read or meditate. So too, each living thing received a ticket to death at birth and has come on a journey; so, whatever your struggles, safeguards, and precautions, the place has to be reached some day. Whatever is uncertain, death is certain. It is impossible to change that law.

People have taught the eye, ear, and tongue the luxury of constant novelty. Now, the opposite tendencies have to be taught. The mind has to be turned

toward the good; the activities of every minute have to be examined from that standpoint. Each deed is a chisel stroke shaping the rock of human personality. A wrong stroke may spoil and disfigure the rock. Therefore, even the tiniest of acts has to be done with great care and devotion.

For a drowning person, even a reed is some support. So too, to a person struggling in the sea of inborn desires (samskara), a few good words spoken by someone might be of great help. No good deed can go to waste; no, not even a bad deed, for that too has its consequence. So, strive to avoid the slightest trace of evil activity. Keep your eyes pure. Fill your ears with words of God and stories of Godly deeds; don't allow them to listen to calumny.

Use the tongue for uttering good, kind, and true words. Let it always remind you of God. Such constant effort must grant you victory. It is to earn these holy mental tendencies that one has to maintain the uninterrupted flow of high feelings and thoughts.

28. Perform good deeds and saturate the mind with God

Use the hands to perform good deeds. Have the Lord's name within and the practice of one's duty (swadharma) without. With the hand busy in selfless service (seva), let your mind be engrossed in all this - there is no harm. When the rains pour on the mountain peaks and the water hurries down the sides, no river emerges therefrom. However, when the waters flow in a single direction, first a brook, then a stream, then a torrent, and finally a flooded river is formed, and the rains reach the sea. Water that runs in one direction reaches the sea; water that flows in four directions soaks in and is lost.

Mental tendencies (samskaras) are like this. Of what use are they if they merely come and go, this way today and that way tomorrow? The holy stream of good inborn desires must flow full and steady along the fields of holy thoughts and finally abide in the great ocean of bliss at the moment of death. Worthy indeed is the one who reaches such a goal!

Twenty hammer strokes might not succeed in breaking a stone, but the

twenty-first stroke might break it.

Does this mean that the twenty blows were of no avail? No. Each contributed its share to the final success; the final result was the cumulative effect of all the twenty-one. So too, the mind is engaged in a struggle with the world, both internal and external. Needless to say, success might not always be your lot. But you can attain everlasting bliss by getting immersed in good works and by saturating your mind with the love of God. Infuse every moment of life with that love. Then, evil tendencies dare not hamper the path. If your mind dwells always with the Lord, you will be drawn automatically only toward good deeds.

The object of all spiritual practice is the destruction of the mind, and some day, some one good deed will succeed in destroying it, just as the twenty-first blow broke the stone. All the good deeds done in the past have contributed to this triumph; each little thing counts; no good deed is a waste.

29. Be engaged in good actions, with God in your thoughts

While struggling in the spiritual field, you should take on the Lord (Parameswara) Himself as your protector.

To instil courage in the child, the mother persuades it to walk a few steps and turn about, but she won't allow it to fall. If it totters and is about to lose balance, she hurries from behind it and catches it before it falls.

The Lord (Iswara) too has His Eyes fixed on the individual (jivi). He has in His hand the string of the kite, which is humanity; sometimes He may give it a pull, and sometimes He may loosen the hold; but whatever He does, be confident and carefree, for it is He that holds the string. That faith ever-present, that feeling hardening into an inborn desire (samskara), will fill you with the essence of love (prema-rasa).

The string is the bond of love and grace. The kite or individual is thus bound to the Lord (Iswara). You must do and earn auspicious mental desires so that

the bond of love and grace may exist and tighten.

The inborn desires (samskaras) make or mar the individual (jivi); they are the steps that take all individual souls to the goal. Mental impressions (samskaras) make the individual wade through loss and grief. Only through good mental tendencies can one attain the Lord. So, every individual has to be wholly engaged in good actions (sath-karmas). Good action is authentic worship (puja). It is the best form of remembering the Lord. It is the highest devotional song. It spreads love, without distinction and difference. It is service done as the duty of the individual.

Be engaged in such actions (karmas). Revel uninterruptedly in the thought of the Lord. This is the royal road to the goal you have to reach.

30. Eternal Religion: the divine mother of humanity

The Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma) is the mother of all religions, all ethical codes, and all dharmas of this world. And Bharath (India) is the home where the mother was born. Oh! How fortunate are the Bharathiyas (Indians)! How sublimely splendid is this Bharath!

The world in its entirety is the body of the Lord of the world, and Bharath is that body's unique organ, the eye. Without the eye, the body is not master of itself, is it? Again, it can be said that Bharath has been beautified by two eyes: the Vedas and the scriptures (sastras). On account of this, it can be declared without doubt that the mental tendencies (samskaras) attained by the Bharathiyas (Indians) haven't been acquired by the people of any other country.

The Eternal Religion (Sanathana Dharma), which teaches the truth of all religions and tolerance of all religions, is the dharma of all humanity. Born in various areas, flowing through various paths, rivers at last reach the ocean; so too, born in different lands, practising different ways of dharma, people reach the ocean of the presence of the Lord through different modes of worship. The Eternal Religion is the central location in which all these various

paths, moving in different directions, converge. Followers of the different religions can practise this Eternal Religion by being truthful in speech, avoiding jealousy and anger, and acting always with a loving heart. All those who so practise the Eternal Religion and, without faltering, achieve it, are entitled to be called Bharathiyas.

4. Prema Vahini - Part 4

41. Seek the vision of the Divine, not death

Without assimilating this truth in the heart, the individual soul is immersed in the aims of today and tomorrow, based on the assumption that the body is all important. It thus lays the foundations for worldly attachment, so it is born again and again with body and continues to have the vision (darshan) of Yama!

It is the right of the aspirant (sadhaka) to have the vision of Siva and not the sight of death (Yama-darshan)!

The aspirant won't wish for or even contemplate it. Only those who have this relationship of the body (deha) and the individual (jiva) are human. And those who have realised this principle won't flag even to the slightest extent in their spiritual discipline.

These days, people are content to visualise and experience evanescent worldly joys. People have no rest.

Spending the nights in sleep and days in eating and drinking, they grow and grow, until, in old age, death pursues them. Then, they can't decide where to go or what to do; all senses have weakened. No one, nothing can rescue them, so they end as obedient meat in the jaws of death!

How sad it is that this human life, precious as an invaluable diamond that can't be priced at all, has been cheapened to the standard of a worn-out worthless coin! After wasting time without profit, there is no use repenting without meditating on God or practising some spiritual discipline to realise Him. What is the use in planning a well when the house is on fire? When is it to be dug? When will water become available? When is the fire to be extinguished? It is an impossible task! If, at the very start, a well was ready, how helpful it would be on such critical occasions! Beginning to contemplate

on God during the last moments is like beginning to dig the well when the house is on fire.

So, it will stand you in good stead when the end approaches to equip yourself, right now, by contemplating God off and on. Start today the spiritual discipline that has to be done tomorrow! Start now the spiritual discipline that has to be done today! One doesn't know what is in store the next moment; therefore, there should be no delay in engaging oneself in the spiritual practice that has to be done. Physical stamina is also necessary for this spiritual practice, so the body has to be tended, though overtending causes damage. To the degree that is essential, it should be looked after with great care.

42. Walk the path of spirituality and liberation

This human birth is very difficult to attain. It cannot be got for a song. The body is like a caravanserai; the mind is its watchman and the individual soul (jivi) is the pilgrim. Thus, no one of these has any kinship with the others. The pilgrim is bound for Salvation City (Moksha-puri). For a trouble-free journey, there is nothing as reliable as repeating the name of God (nama-smarana), the remembrance of the name of the Lord. Once the sweetness of that name has been experienced, the person won't have exhaustion, unrest, or sloth but will fulfil the pilgrimage of spiritual practice joyfully, enthusiastically, and with deep conviction. Still, to achieve this spiritual practice, righteousness (sadbhava) is very important. Without fear of sin, righteousness can't originate, and love of God can't develop either. This fear produces devotion, which results in worship of the Lord.

Stupidity is the root cause of one's downfall. It is like sheep-ishness! When one rolls into a pit, all fall into the same pit. That is ruinous. Avoiding this, it is better to think about the good and bad, the pros and cons of whatever is done, and then jump. Death won't pass anyone by, whoever that person is. It continues to threaten all - if it's another's turn today, it's yours tomorrow.

43. Let go the ego in order to reach the goal

Look at the blossoms in the garden! When the gardener plucks the flowers, the buds exult that tomorrow is their turn to be gathered into the gardener's hands, and their faces are full of joy when they unfold in that hope. Do they feel any sadness? Do their faces droop? Are they any the less bright? No. The moment they know that the next day is their turn, they make themselves ready with great gusto and excitement.

In the same way, be ready on the path of spiritual practice, enthusiastically remembering the name of the Lord, without worrying and feeling sad that your turn is tomorrow or so because someone died today.

The body is like a tube of glass. Inside it, the mind is ever changeful and restless. Seeing its antics, death keeps laughing. The bird - the individual soul (jiva) - is in the nine-holed pot. It is a wonder how the bird has a body; how it came into the pot, and how it rises up and goes. The gods, the sages, and people (naras) of the nine continents (khandas) and the nine divisions of the terrestrial world (dwipas) are all undergoing the sentence of carrying about with them the burden of the body. Now, of these, who are the friends and who the enemies? When egotism dies out, all are friends; there are then no enemies. This lesson has to be remembered by all.

People experience joy and misery through the ear. Therefore, avoiding the cruel arrows of hard words, one should use sweet, pleasant and soft ones - and with that softness, add the sweetness of truth. Making the word soft by adding falsehood only clears the way for more misery. A person who has become a spiritual aspirant should use very soft, sweet, true, and pleasant words. Such a person can be recognised by their good qualities.

Thus, of those who have become spiritual aspirants, the mind (manas) is Mathura (birthplace of Krishna), the heart (hridaya) is Dwaraka (Krishna's capital), and the body (deha) is Kasi (Benares).

It is possible to realise the supreme Effulgence (Paramjyothi) at the seat of the tenth gate. But all efforts are of no avail if the heart is not pure. Look at

the fish! Living as it does perpetually in water, has it rid itself of its foul smell to any extent? No. Inclinations (vasanas) won't disappear as long as one's heart is full of the illusion of egotism, even if one is immersed in many heart-purifying spiritual disciplines. Such people, if they want to get rid of the feeling of "I" and "mine", must worship the Lord (Hari). They must become spiritual aspirants, without likes and dislikes. Modifications (vikaras) like these can't coexist in the same heart with the aspirant's nature.

Light and darkness can never coexist at the same place, at the same time, right?

One whose heart is ruled by the group of six passions can have only ego (ahamkara) as counselor (manthri)!

Those who have such a counselor are worse than foolish, however great they claim to be as pundits, aspirants, or renunciants (sanyasins).

44. Pursue the path of good and Godliness

Can a donkey carrying perfume become an elephant? Can an ass change into an elephant simply by carrying a bundle of sandalwood? It can appreciate the weight but not the scent! But the elephant pays no regard to the weight; it inhales the sweet scent, right? So too, the spiritual aspirant, renunciant, or devotee will take in only the pure truth, the pure essence of good activities, of Godliness, and of the scriptures, Vedas, and Upanishads. On the other hand, one who goes on arguing for the sake of mere scholarship, learning, and disputation will know only the weight of logic and missing the scent of truth! Onlookers may praise one as the embodiments of the scriptures and Vedas, but where even the essentials are lacking, how can there be an embodiment? For those in search of the essence, the burden is no consideration. If mere reason is employed, nothing worthwhile is gained. Love (prema) is the one big instrument for the constant remembrance of the Lord. Keeping that instrument safe and strong needs no other appliance than the scabbard of discrimination (viveka).

Many in the world utilise their vast learning in disputations and believe they are superior; this is a great mistake. If they really were so learned, there would not be so much disputation at all. They would assume silence as the honourable course, because those exalted in learning will have experienced the essence of the Vedas, scriptures, and Upanishads. They will see that the nature of that essence, its core, the purity of the Godhead it proclaims, are all One, however one may realise It. They know that God appears in whatever form He is taken to have and that He manifests in action to anyone the feelings that that person associates with Him.

45. Practise single-minded devotion and equanimity

What is important is not the acquisition of argumentativeness but the acquisition of single-mindedness, equanimity, and freedom from likes and dislikes. Why have all these spiritual disciplines, this chanting, meditation, devotional singing, etc.? Isn't it for acquiring single-mindedness, one-pointedness? Once that onepointedness has been earned, human effort becomes unnecessary, its inner significance will then be revealed.

So, those eager to become spiritual aspirants, to attain salvation, should not yield to arguments and counterarguments.

They should not be enticed by the wiles of bad feeling. They should see their own faults and not repeat them again. They should guard and protect the one-pointedness they have acquired, with their eyes fixed on the goal they are after, dismissing as trash whatever difficulties, defeats, and disturbances they encounter on their path. They must dwell on subjects that would give enthusiasm and joy and not waste valuable time building up doubts regarding all things, big and small.

46. Eschew conceit and doubt

Whatever else is important, these two have to be attended to as essential: (1) the conceit that knows everything and (2) doubt whether It is or is not. These are the two chief enemies of the spiritual aspirant. But what does it matter

who these enemies are? Simply decide for yourself to be firmly fixed in your reality. If that is pure, everything is pure. If that is true, everything is true.

If you wear blue eyeglasses, you see only blue, even though nature is resplendent with many colours, right?

If the world appears to you as with differences, that is due only to the fault in you. If all appears as one love (prema), that too is only your love. For both of these, the feeling in you is the cause. It is only because you have faults within you that you see the world as faulty. When there is no knowledge of fault in yourself, no fault can be found even by search, for you wouldn't know which are the faults.

Now, the question may arise whether the Lord Himself has faults because He also searches for faults. But how can it be said that the Lord searches for faults? He searches only for goodness, not for faults and sins. Those are based on the standard of the qualities (gunas) of each. The Lord won't examine the wealth, family, caste, status, or sex. He sees only the righteousness (sadbhava). He considers those endowed with such righteousness as deserving His grace, whoever they are, whatever they are.

Therefore, develop righteousness, goodness. Live and act in joy and love. These two are sufficient; with them, salvation can be attained without fail.

47. Be humane, not demonic

Humans are full of love (prema). Their hearts are springs of mercy. They are endowed with true speech.

Peace is the characteristic of the mind of humans. It is the innate quality of the mind. In searching for peace there is no need to go anywhere else. Just as gold and silver lie hidden under the earth and pearl and coral under the sea, peace and joy lie hidden in the activities of the mind. Desirous of acquiring these hidden treasures, if one dives and turns mental activities inward, one becomes full of love. Only one who has so filled themselves with love and who

lives in the light of that love can be called human. Those devoid of love are demons, monsters, subhumans.

That holy quality of love will not remain unmanifested off and on; it will be ever present, without change. It is one and indivisible. Those saturated with love are incapable of spite, selfishness, injustice, wrong, and misconduct.

But in those who have no love, these latter qualities are always above everything else.

The demons (danavas) are those who trample on love and consider inferior qualities as important, while the humans (manavas) are those who consider love as the only quality to be fostered and inferior qualities as snakes to be destroyed. Bad conduct and bad habits distort the humanness of people. Hearts filled with the nectar of love indicate genuine humanity in people. By love (prema) is meant love that is unsullied, unselfish, devoid of impurity, and continuous.

The difference between human (manava) and demon (danava) is only ma and da! But the letter ma is soft, sweet, and immortal in symbolism, while the sound da is merciless, lawless, and burning. Are they humans who have no sweetness in them and who endeavour to suppress the craving for immortality? Theirs is the nature of demons, though the form is human! For the character and not the form is primary. How can those with human form be called humans if they have no kindness and no rightness, and if they have the nature of demons? No; they cannot be called so.

The sentences in my discourse are addressed not on the basis of form but on the qualities of people. Among people, there are demons in plenty! Humans and demons look alike, but their qualities make them distinguishable as human and demon. Humans engage in soft and sweet deeds of kindness, rightness, love, and truth; they are witnesses to the possibility of realising and manifesting one's immortality. Their good nature is resplendent on their faces as bliss (ananda). But without that goodness, even if they are infatuated with joy their faces will indicate only the destructive fire of the demon; they

won't have the grace of spiritual bliss.

48. Develop the characteristics of genuine devotees

During the Thretha era (yuga), when Narada asked Sri Ramachandra about the nature and characteristics of His servants and of the spiritual aspirants, He answered, "Listen O Narada! People who are my slaves are full of love; they always stand by righteousness (dharma); they speak the truth; their hearts melt with mercy; they are devoid of wrong; they avoid sin; their nature is wellfounded; they will renounce everything gladly; they eat in moderation; they are engaged in doing good to others; they have no selfishness; they aren't worried by doubts. They won't lend their ears to flattery but are eager to listen to the praise of the good nature of others. They have beautiful, strong, and holy character. Spiritual aspirants are those who endeavour to acquire such qualities and possess such a character.

"Now I shall tell you about those who are dear (priya) to me: Anyone who is engaged in repetition of the name (japa), penance (tapas), and vows (vratha), anyone who has self-control (samyama) and discipline (niyama), anyone who has faith, patience, comradeship, kindness, and joy as well as unalloyed love (prema) toward me - such a person is dear to me.

Now, about my real devotee. Whoever with discrimination and renunciation (viveka and vairagya), humility and wisdom (vinaya and vijnana) is aware of the knowledge of Reality, whoever is always immersed in the contemplation of my divine play (leela), whoever dwells on my name at all times and under all conditions, and whoever sheds tears of love whenever the Lord's name is heard from any lip - these are my genuine devotees." Thus did Sri Rama answer Narada. So the Lord will protect in all ways and at all times those who worship Him in complete and uncontaminated devotion (bhakthi) - just as a mother protects her infants, a cow saves her calf from danger, and the eyelids guard the eyes effortlessly and automatically.

When the infant grows up into an adult, the mother won't pay so much attention to its safety. So too, the Lord doesn't pay much attention to the wise

one (jnani). The devotee of form (sa-guna bhaktha), like an infant of the Lord, has no strength except the strength of the Lord. For the realized soul (jnani), their own strength is enough.

Therefore, until one can rely on one's own strength, one must be an infant in the Lord's Hands, as a devotee of the form, right? No one can become a devotee of the formless Supreme (nir-guna bhaktha) without having been a devotee of the form.

49. Surrender completely to the Lord

So, devotees should grow up like infants in the lap of the mother and, thereafter, become realized souls who can rely on their "own" strength and be free. Still, both have the same source of strength, the Mother. Those indeed are really fortunate who grasp this secret of the path of devotion, who develop one-pointed devotion and straighten the traits of their character, who transform themselves into infants in the lap of the Lord, and who get everything done as He wishes.

Therefore, those who yearn to be devotees, servants, dear ones (prias), and one-pointed devotees should take up the corresponding path and name and live accordingly. The devotee should develop the above-said characteristics of devotion; the dear ones should follow the love (prema) of the Lord; the one-pointed devotee has to surrender completely to the Lord.

50. The nine paths of devotion

Mere reading and rolling on the tongue are of no avail. Spiritual bliss (ananda) is the result only of action.

This bliss is not dependent on caste or race or sex. Even in those days, while Sri Rama was gladly partaking of the feast of roots and fruits selected and reserved by Sabari for him after tasting every individual item herself, she asked him, "Lord! I am but a woman. Moreover, I am of feeble intellect. Above all, I am low-born. How can I praise You? I don't know what to do or how!" Sri

Rama smiled and said, "Sabari! My mission is only the kinship of devotion. I have no kinship of race or caste. Of what use is it to have status, wealth, and character but no devotion? Like the cloud that does not bear rain, which wanders about in the sky, people without devotion are at the mercy of the winds, however much status in caste, wealth, power, and fame they may possess. Devotees reach me through nine paths; any one of the nine paths takes them to Me." Then, Sabari prayed Sri Rama to tell her the nine paths, and Sri Rama responded thus:

1. Listening to stories about God (sravanam)
2. Singing the name (kirtanam)
3. Remembrance of God (Vishnoh-smaranam)
4. Serving the holy feet (pada-sevanam)
5. Reverence toward nature and all life (vandanam)
6. Worship (archanam)
7. Dedication, servitude (dasyam)
8. Befriending (sneham)
9. Surrender to the Self (Atma-nivedanam)

The devotee who sincerely practises any one of these paths can attain Me. I am bound by these nine forms of devotion (bhakthi). That is why you have been able to so easily obtain this opportunity of seeing, touching, and speaking with Me, an opportunity that even yogis find too difficult to get. You have realised life's purpose today.

See! Today's words are only the works of yesterday!

5. Prema Vahini - Part 5

51. Devotion is of two kinds: effortful devotion and self-surrender

Those who follow the above-said nine-fold path are of two kinds.

1. The followers of the hard path.
2. The followers of the safe and easy path.

These are sometimes referred to as (1) devotion with effort (bhakthi) and (2) self-surrender (prapatthi). That is to say, the practice of the young of the monkey is devotion and the practice of a kitten is self-surrender.

Devotion has to be continuous, uninterrupted, like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. Though the two kinds are basically the same, the practices are different. Without love (prema), nothing in this world can be acquired. Only when there is love does attachment (anuraga) in its turn produce the desire to protect and guard.

In both the above kinds of people, love is equal, no doubt, but in actual manifestation there is a difference. In the young-of-the-monkey path, the child has to rely on its own strength to protect itself - wherever the mother might jump about, the child has to attach itself fast to the mother's belly and not release its hold, even if pulled apart!

So too, the devotee has to stand the tests at the hands of the Lord and hold on to the Lord's name at all times and under all conditions, tirelessly, without the slightest trace of dislike or disgust, bearing the ridicule and the criticism of the world and conquering the feelings of shame and defeat. The example of this type of devotion is that first among devotees, Prahlada.

The path of surrender is instead like the way of the kitten. Just as the kitten

simply continues mewling in one place, placing all its burdens in the mother cat, so the devotee puts complete trust on the Lord. The mother cat holds the kitten in its mouth and removes it to more elevated places or transports it safely through even very narrow passages. So too, the devotee places all burdens on the Lord and surrenders fully to His will. Lakshmana is the witness of this path.

The discipline of surrender (prapatthi) is much superior to that of devotion (bhakthi). The characteristic of surrender is complete self-surrender, in all aspects. To serve Rama, Lakshmana renounced all obstacles in his path, like wealth, wife, mother, home and even sleep and food. And this was not for a day or month or year but for a full fourteen years. He felt that Rama was his all, his happiness and joy, that He would grant him everything that he needed, and that his life's purpose was only to follow Him, serve Him, and surrender his will to Him. If all burdens are placed on the Lord and He is followed ceaselessly and unforgettingly, He will certainly provide everything. This is the nature of the surrender type of devotion.

52. The course of life of a forest dweller

After being a housholder - experiencing the sorrow, happiness, and joy and learning the true significance of all these - one has to retire into the forest at the age of 45 or 50, leaving the house one built and the place where one lived. If his wife is alive, he has to get her consent and entrust her to the care of the son or her parents or take her with him and treat her like a brother, himself being immersed in celibacy (brahma-charya).

There is a great change even in diet. He has to eat roots and fruits and drink only milk. Things should not be baked full but only up to a third. Rice should not be used much. If it isn't possible to arrange a diet on these lines, he can visit the nearby village and collect food by begging. But he has to bring the food into the forest and eat it there, in his own habitation. He has to give to his dependents the same food that he takes, for they can't prepare food they prefer or get it supplied. If they don't relish it, they have to be content with only milk and fruits, for he must not change his routine to satisfy others.

However troublesome it may be, the discipline should not be modified or given up.

This is to be specially noted: the forest dweller cannot have any worship, alms-giving, or any such duties.

Even if he gives food or articles to others, it cannot be regarded as alms (dana). Also, he cannot receive anything from others as alms. He must have the same pure love toward all in equal measure. Discarding old clothes once a year, he must don new clothes during September-October (the month of Aswija).

The vows of penance during the waxing and waning of the moon (chandrayana-vratha) is the most important of the forest-dweller's vows. For the first fifteen days of this month, he must eat a morsel less every day, and for the remaining fifteen, a morsel more. On the new and full moon days, he has to take only rice gruel (kanjee).

In the rainy season, he must do ascetic practice (tapas) standing in the rain; in winter, he must wear wet clothes while engaged in ascetic practices. Performing such asceticism systematically, he has to bathe three times a day.

The various Upanishadic statements are to be studied and their meanings understood and experienced. If such a forest-dweller falls victim to any disease, the diet routine has to be canceled and he has to live on air and water. He shall walk on and on in the northeastern direction until he dies. On the other hand, if he has no bodily disease and is hale and hearty, after adopting the above disciplines, he will experience the spontaneous dawn of true knowledge.

By means of this knowledge, he will attain liberation (moksha).

53. External and internal disciplines are necessary for one-pointed devotion

Many argue about how this discipline can result in the dawn of knowledge. Aren't these mere bodily limitations, they ask. Knowledge can arise only by the realisation of the principle that guarantees self-realisation.

How can something that does not contain this principle be called knowledge, they argue.

But this line of thought is based on a big mistake. Through these physical regulations, traits (vasanas) are destroyed and concentration is established. The Upanishadic statements serve to foster and strengthen this one-pointedness, step by step - the experience of the Upanishadic maxims alone will bring about the dawn of knowledge. Aren't the Upanishads the very knowledge itself? With that embodiment of wisdom (jnana-swarupa) as companion, realising It in one's own experience, what need is there to search for knowledge elsewhere? Onepointedness is essential to establish spiritual wisdom firmly in the heart, and this one-pointedness can easily be gained by the above-mentioned bodily disciplines and austerities (tapas).

External control helps internal control in many ways. To succeed in external controls is more difficult than to achieve success in controlling the internal! A turn of the steering wheel in one's hand in any direction makes the wheels of the car, which are not in one's hand, move in the same direction. The wheels won't turn in one direction when the steering is turned in another. The introspective wheels are based on the extrospective steering itself!

It is the natural basis. Sometimes, when the steering is turned one way, the wheels may drag another way, but this is due to the giving up of the natural characteristic. The internal wheels, if they have no air, which is the true essence, may behave as if there is no relationship with the steering. But they can't go beyond the bounds of steering. The steering in the hand is related to the wheels below. If there is no such relation, the journey becomes impossible. The connection is inevitable. Therefore, for the one who has struggled with and conquered the external tendencies, the internal tendencies become easily controllable.

The external tendencies have name and form and are attracted by becoming objects of experience. So, to overcome them is a matter of some difficulty. But internal tendencies have no form even though they may be endowed with name; they are also experienced as spiritual bliss (ananda), so they can be overcome more easily.

They can be tamed with greater ease.

The bother is more for external conduct and behaviour. These are associated with taste, form, and heaviness.

The internal tendencies have no form, taste, or weight. Pure water has no form, taste, or heaviness. Impure water is different in all three. So, to clarify impure water is indeed difficult, but pure water can be given any form required, with very great ease.

Similarly, the difficulty is all about purifying mental behaviour, which is spoiled by the delusions of the world. There is no need to set right mental behaviour that is free from such delusions. Delusionless behaviour is necessarily pure. It is without any trace of defect and doubt. Why should it be set right? Therefore, if people first control and conquer external delusion as much as possible, the internal tendencies will easily move in the direction of Atmic bliss (Atma-ananda).

Yoga and penance (tapas) are only other names for the path of the control and conquest of these external tendencies and delusions. The rules of forest-dweller (vanaprastha) are but methods to succeed in this yoga. When one subdues delusion of all types in the forest-dweller stage, the journey ends in liberation (moksha). But we cannot say that liberation has only this one path. Through whatever path grace is obtained, that path may be chosen.

Liberation is achieved by these rules and observances of the forest-dweller stage; it can be secured by following this path. It also makes a person delusion free. It gives them one-pointedness.

54. The four stages of liberation

Worship, with fixity of consciousness and purity of feeling and free of all extraneous thought, becomes itself mental union with the Divine (bhava-samadhi). As a result of this mental union, the Lord appears before the inner eye of the devotee in the form that he has chosen for worship. The vision is not merely a matter of imagination; it is a "face-to-face" experience. Without changing location, the devotee can abide in the presence of the Lord in the self-same place. This is called "being always with God (salokya-mukthi)". Besides being always with the Lord, devotees realise all that they see as the glory of the Lord. The experience is referred to as "seeing always the glory of the Lord (samipya-mukthi)". Existing ever with the Lord, witnessing always the glory of the Lord, and becoming suffused with God-consciousness is merger in the divine form (sarupya-mukthi). This is the final fruit of devotional scriptures.

But at this stage, there is still a trace of differential feeling. So, the nondualist won't admit it as the highest.

Simply because a devotee has the same form as the Lord, we cannot assume that the devotee has the powers of creation, preservation, and destruction that the Lord has. Only when all trace of difference disappears and unity is attained is the highest stage reached. This is called union (sayujya). This comes of divine grace won by the essence of the spiritual practice of each; it cannot be claimed as the fruit of effort.

The devotee will aspire to this merging (aikya). The devotee wishes to serve the Lord as he pleases and to experience the joy of the form that he has attributed to the Lord. But the Lord, out of His grace, gives them not only existence with the Lord, witnessing always the glory of the Lord, and being suffused with God-consciousness but also union (sayujya)! The path of devotion (bhakthi marga) results also in attainment of knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana). Even if the devotee does not crave it, the Lord Himself vouchsafes it to the devotee. Union-with-God liberation (sayujya-mukthi) is also referred to as absolute liberation (ekantha-mukthi).

55. Perform all actions in dedication to God

For delusion-constituted (maya-constituted) human beings, there are two gates of illusion: the appetite for sex and the appetite of the tongue. These two have to be conquered by everyone; as long as they persist, they cause sorrow. All worldly desires are comprehended by these two, so only those who have mastered these two can be said to have successfully waded through the world. These two are the causes of all sins, and sin is the manure on which illusion (maya) thrives.

Really speaking, this world has to serve only the purpose of sustaining the body. Those aspiring for liberation have to subdue the senses. "Food for guarding the body, dress to ward off the cold," says the later (uttara) Gita.

However, if one gets immersed in these pursuits, one will forget the purpose for which one has come and the goal of all activity and holy endeavour. Instead, whatever activity a person may be engaged in, the person must, as automatically as breathing, be contemplating on and always aware of this: "I am born to serve God and to realise my true self." All acts - wearing, eating, walking, studying, serving, moving - should be performed in the belief that they take one into the Presence. Everything should be done in a spirit of dedication to the Lord.

A farmer clears and levels the land, removes the stones and thorns, ploughs and prepares the field, manures and strengthens the soil, waters and fertilises it. Then, after sowing, transplanting, weeding, spraying, and waiting, he reaps the crop. After winnowing and threshing, he stacks the corn. All these various processes are for the sake of the stomach. So, too, one must feel that all hunger and thirst, joy and sorrow, grief and loss, suffering and anger, food and appetite are but impulses helping us toward attaining the presence of the Lord. When one has this attitude, sin will never tarnish these activities. The appetites will also vanish, without a vestige of name or form.

On the other hand, if the appetites are treated as important, one can earn

only sorrow, not joy. It will be impossible to acquire peace. Mastery of the sensory desires can't be learned at schools where the arts of sustaining the body are taught systematically.

56. Perform good deeds, with constant remembrance of God

If the person is ill or even if the mind is immersed in something else, the taste of food cannot be grasped. So also, if the heart is full of ignorance (thamas) or is wayward, no joy can be experienced even if one is engaged in remembrance of the name (nama-smarana), devotional singing, recitation of the name (japa), or meditation.

The tongue will be sweet as long as there is sugar on it. Likewise, if the pillar of light called devotion continues to burn in the corridor of the heart, there will be no darkness. The heart will be illumined in bliss. A bitter thing on the tongue makes the whole tongue bitter; when the qualities greed and anger enter the heart, the brightness disappears, darkness dominates the scene, and one becomes the target of countless griefs and losses.

Therefore, those who aspire to attain the holy presence of the Lord must acquire certain habits, disciplines, and qualities. The usual ways of life won't lead to God. They have to be modified somewhat by means of spiritual discipline.

Look at the crane; it walks about pretty fast in water. But while walking, it can't catch fish; for that purpose, it must become quiet and stand motionless. So also, if one proceeds with greed, anger, and similar qualities, one cannot secure the fish of truth (sathya), dharma, and peace (santhi). Whatever spiritual practice one may have, one must practise uninterrupted remembrance of the name (nama-smarana). Only then can one master the natural attributes of greed, anger, etc. All the scriptures (sastras) teach but this one lesson: since the Lord is the universal goal and this journey of life has Him as the destination, keep Him constantly in view and subdue the mind, which makes you wander from the path.

All the good qualities automatically gather around the person who practises control of speech and constant contemplation of the Lord. See! In the Dwapara era (yuga), the Kauravas were engaged in wicked deeds even while experiencing the fruits of their previous good deeds. On the other hand, the Pandavas were thinking and doing only good deeds, even while undergoing sufferings due to their previous evil deeds! This is the difference between the wise and the unwise. The Kauravas were slaves of the appetites of hunger and sex, and the Pandavas did every act for the sake of the Lord, with truth (sathya) and dharma as their charioteers.

Those who are overwhelmed by grief can never feel interest in either a feast or a fight; similarly, the real aspirant who is immersed in thoughts of God can never taste or even think of worldly objects of enjoyment.

57. Awake, arise, and attain the Highest

Before death takes its toll, one must realise in this body itself the eternal truth and the relationship between a person and that truth. The Kathopanishad exhorts,

Uththishtatha! Jagratha! Prapya Varan Nibodhitha!
Arise, awake!

Those who are agitated by doubts about what to accept and what to reject, those who are blinded by illusion, and those who cannot distinguish between darkness and light, death and immortality - all these should approach great people who can show the path to understand the eternal truth, the self-illuminated basis of all creation. Then, both this world and heaven will be merged in the same effulgence! For the sake of this realisation, one should have deep yearning and hard, disciplined practice.

This human birth is the consequence of countless good deeds, and it should not be cast aside; the chance must be fully exploited. As the Kenopanishad says, This present precious life should not be thrown away (Na Chath Iha Avedheen Mahathee Vinashtih).

When there are many chances of saving oneself, isn't it a big loss if no thought is spent on ways of escape?

For all those who are really animals in human form, slaves of pride and animal traits, this awareness in time is most important. Delay is fruitless; it is as silly as starting to dig a well when the house catches fire. Therefore, the discriminating individual will endeavour by all means at their disposal to understand the underlying principles, to master the teachings of the great people who practised the spiritual path, and to bring all this, as much as possible, into the ken of their own experience.

58. Dedicate yourself to the discovery of truth and contemplate the Everlasting

Discarding the path and wasting one's life is an insult to the very name of the species! Instead of getting enslaved to the evanescent and the false and wasting precious time in their pursuit, dedicate every minute to discovering truth and contemplating the everlasting, ever-true Lord. Such dedication is the real function of the soul. On the other hand, spending time in illusory appetites is the drag of the world. One shouldn't fall victim to the poisonous attractions of worldly luxuries or the wiles of seductive beauty. One day, all these fascinating scenes will vanish as a story unfolded in dream!

Education and other things that make one grow and become big are of no use for spiritual progress; they bring about only spiritual downfall. That is why this is the illusory universe (maya-prapancha). Truth, in whatever illusion it is immersed, will only shine more effulgently, for such is the nature of truth. How can we say that the objective world, which undergoes modifications every minute, waning and waxing with the waywardness of appearing and disappearing, is eternal truth?

The characteristic of a spiritual aspirant is the attainment of truth, not the search of the unreal in this evanescent world. In this false world, there can be no true living (sathya-achara). There can be only false living (mithya-achara). True living consists in the realisation of the Lord. This must be borne in mind by everyone every moment of their life.

59. To reach God, be free from external and internal illusions

The spiritual aspirant should note the distinction between the conduct of the natural (sahaja) person and the spiritual aspirant. The natural person has no fortitude (sahana), is conceited (ahamkara), and is full of desires relating to the world (jagath), by which the person is trying to have a contented existence (janma). Aspirants are engaged in contemplation of the Lord (Sarveswara-chinthana) as ceaselessly as the waves of the sea (sagara), accumulate the wealth (dhana) of equality and equal love to all, and are content in the thought that all is the Lord's and nothing is theirs. Unlike the natural person, the spiritual seeker won't easily bend before grief or loss, anger or hatred or selfishness, hunger, thirst or fickleness.

One should master all the above good things as much as possible and journey through life in fortitude, courage, joy, peace, charity, and humility. Realising that tending the body is not all-important, one has to bear even hunger and thirst patiently and be engaged uninterruptedly in contemplation of the Lord. Quarreling at every tiny little thing, losing one's temper, becoming sad at the slightest provocation, getting angry at the smallest insult, worried at thirst, hunger, and loss of sleep - these can never be the characteristics of an aspirant.

Rice in its natural state and boiled rice - can these two be the same? The hardness of natural rice is absent in the boiled one. The boiled grain is soft, harmless, and sweet. The unboiled grain is hard, conceited, and full of delusion.

Both types are souls (jivis) and humans, no doubt, but those immersed in external illusions (avidya-maya) are "people", while those immersed in

internal illusions (vidya-maya) are "spiritual aspirants".

God is immersed in neither external nor internal illusions. He is devoid of both. He who has no external illusions becomes a spiritual aspirant, and when he is devoid of even internal illusions, he can be termed a God. Such a person's heart becomes the seat of God.

Therefore, it is possible to deduce that all is pervaded by God. Though, of course, the Lord is situated in every heart, spiritual practice is necessary so that they may discover it for themselves, right? It isn't possible for us to see our own face! We need a mirror to show us its image! So too, a basic path (marga), a spiritual practice, is necessary to become devoid of qualities (gunas).

60. The harvest of the spiritual aspirant

In this world, there is no penance (tapas) higher than fortitude, no happiness greater than contentment, no good deed (punya) holier than mercy, no weapon more effective than patience.

Devotees should consider the body as the field and good deeds as seeds and cultivate the name of the Lord, with the help of the heart as the farmer, in order to get the harvest, the Lord Himself. How can one get the crop without cultivation?

Like cream in milk and fire in fuel, the Lord is in everything. Have full faith in this. As the milk, so the cream; as the fuel, so the fire; so also, as the spiritual discipline, so the direct experience (sakshatkara) of the Lord, right?

Even if the attainment of liberation (mukthi) isn't directly realised as a consequence of taking up the Lord's name, four fruits are clearly evident to those who have had the experience:

1. company of the great
2. truth
3. contentment
4. control of the senses

Through whichever of these gates one enters, whether one is a householder, recluse, or a member of any other class, one can reach the Lord without fail. This is certain.

6. Prema Vahini - Part 6

61. The characteristics of the devotee and worldly person

People crave worldly happiness. Analysed properly, this itself is the disease, and sufferings are but the drugs we take. In the midst of these worldly pleasures, one rarely entertains the desire to attain the Lord. Besides, it is necessary to analyse and discriminate every act of a person, for the spirit of renunciation is born out of such analysis. Without it, renunciation is difficult to get. Miserliness is like the behaviour of a dog; it has to be transformed.

Anger is enemy Number 1 of the spiritual aspirant; it is like spittle and has to be treated as such. And untruth? It is even more disgusting - through untruth, the vital powers of all are destroyed. It should be treated as scavenging itself. Theft ruins life; it makes the priceless human life cheaper than a pie; it is like rotten foul smelling flesh.

Moderate food, moderate sleep, love (prema), and fortitude will help in the upkeep of the health of both body and mind. Whoever one may be, in whatever condition one may be, if one gives no room for dispiritedness, if one has no fear at all, and if one remembers the Lord with unshaken faith and without any ulterior motive, all suffering and sorrow will fall away. The Lord will never enquire at any time the caste to which you belong or the precepts (achara) that you traditionally follow.

Devotion doesn't consist in wearing an ochre cloth, organising festivals, performing ritual sacrifices, shaving the hair, carrying water pot or rod, matting the hair, etc. Instead, the characteristics of devotion are a pure mind (anthah-karana), uninterrupted (whatever one may be doing) contemplation on God, the feeling that everything is the Lord's creation and therefore One, non-attachment to sense objects, the embracement of all in equal love, and dedication to true speech.

62. Consider the name of the Lord as the breath of life

Of the various types of devotion, remembrance of the name (nama-smarana) is best. In the Kali era (yuga), the name is the path for saving oneself. Jayadeva, Gouranga, Thyagara, Tukaram, Kabir, Ramdas - all these great devotees attained the Lord through just this one practice. Why speak of a thousand things? Even Prahlada and Druva were able to enjoy the sight, touch, and conversation (darshan, sparshan, and sambhasana) of the Lord through only repetition of the name, right?

There can be no better path to liberation (mukthi) than considering the name of the Lord as the very breath of life and, with complete faith in good deeds and thoughts, developing the spirit of service and equal love for all. Instead of this, if one sits in some solitary nook holding the breath, how can one master the innate qualities?

How is one to know that one has mastered them? Devotion like Ambarisha's and activities like Durvasa's - the combination of these two will result in the fate of Durvasa himself; at least, in the end, Durvasa must fall at Ambarisha's feet. May you avoid becoming such Thrisankus; may you experience the eternal truth and achieve the genuine state.

63. Watch out for your own faults and cultivate the truthful and joyful

Every person is liable to commit mistakes without being aware of it. However bright the fire or light, some smoke will emanate from it. So also, whatever good deed a person might do, mixed with it will be a minute trace of evil. But efforts should be made to ensure that the evil is minimised, that the good is more and the bad is less. Naturally, in the present atmosphere, you may not succeed in the very first attempt. You must carefully think over the consequences of whatever you do, talk, or execute.

In whatever way you want others to honour you, or to love you, or to behave with you, in the same way you should first behave with others and love and honour them. Then only will those honour you. Instead, without yourself

honouring and loving others, if you complain that they are not treating you properly, it is surely a wrong conclusion.

Besides, if those who advise others about "which principles are right, which are true and good, which conduct is best? etc." would only follow the advice themselves, there would be no need to give the advice at all. Others would learn the lesson simply by example. Instead, Vedanta spoken parrot-like to others, without any attempt to put it into practice in one's own conduct, not only deceives others but is even worse; it deceives oneself. You must be as you want others to be.

It is not the nature of a spiritual aspirant to search for faults in others and hide their own. If your faults are pointed out to you by someone, don't argue and try to prove that you were right, and don't bear a grudge against them for it. Reason out within yourself how it is a fault and set right your own behaviour. Rationalising it for your own satisfaction or wreaking vengeance on the person who pointed it out - these are certainly not the traits of a spiritual aspirant or devotee.

The spiritual aspirant should always seek the truthful and joyful and must avoid all thoughts of the untrue, sad and depressing. Depression, doubt, conceit - these are as Rahu and Kethu to the spiritual aspirant. They will harm one's spiritual practice. When one's devotion is well established, they can be easily discarded if they appear.

Above all, it is best for the spiritual aspirant to be joyful, smiling, and enthusiastic under all circumstances.

Even more than devotion and spiritual wisdom, this pure attitude is desirable. Those who have acquired it deserve to reach the goal first. This quality of joy at all times is the fruit of the good done in past births. A person who is ever worried, depressed, and doubting can never attain bliss, whatever spiritual practice is done. The first task of a spiritual aspirant is the cultivation of enthusiasm. Through that enthusiasm, any variety of spiritual bliss (ananda) can be derived.

Never get inflated when praised or deflated when blamed. Be a spiritual lion, regardless of both. Analyse yourself and correct your faults; this is most important.

64. Stick to the name and form of the Lord you adore

Now, one has to be careful even in matters relating to the realisation of God. Whatever inconveniences one may encounter, one must try to carry on spiritual practices without any break or modification in the disciplines.

One should not be changing the name that one has loved and cherished and selected for remembrance (smarana). Concentration is impossible if the name is changed once every few days. The mind won't attain onepointedness.

All spiritual discipline has this one-pointedness as its ultimate aim. Therefore, avoid constant adoption and rejection of names and forms of the Lord. One single name must be used throughout for repetition of the name (japa) and meditation.

One has also to get the strong conviction that all the Lord's names and forms are but the name and form that one is repeating. That name and form must not give the slightest feeling of dislike or disaffection.

Taking all worldly losses, sufferings, and worries as merely temporal and transitory, and realising that all this repetition of the name and meditation is only to overcome such grief, the spiritual aspirant should keep the two things separate, without mixing up that with this and this with that. The aspirant must understand that loss, suffering, and worry are external, belonging to this world, and that repetition of the name and meditation are internal, belonging to the realm of the love for the Lord. This is called chaste (pathivratha) devotion. The other variety, where the spiritual aspirant selects one name and one form and after some time discards them for another name and form, is called unchaste (vyabhichara) devotion.

Changing the name and form is not a fault if it is done in ignorance, but

having once known that it is wrong and harmful, and after continuing repetition of the name and meditation on the one name and form faithfully, subsequently changing them is certainly wrong. Sticking faithfully to the name and form is the highest vow, the highest austerity. Even if elders advise you, don't give up the path approved by your mind! Of course, which elder would suggest that you should change the name of the Lord and give up the name that you adore? Consider those who tell you to do so not as elders but as dullards.

As far as possible, see that the time and place of meditation and repetition of the name are not changed and shifted. For example, while traveling, keep the time unaltered even if it becomes necessary to change the venue.

At the specified time, at least recall to mind the meditation and repetition of the name done at the same time in the past, even if you are in a railway train, a bus, or some such inconvenient surrounding.

In this way, accumulating spiritual wealth, one can surely become the master, and attain the Atma.

65. Help ever, hurt never

Everyone should so lead life that no pain is caused to any living thing. That is their supreme duty. Also, it is the prime duty of everyone who has had the chance of this human birth to spare a part of their energies occasionally to prayer, repetition of the Lord's name, meditation, etc. Everyone must equate living with truth, righteousness, peacefulness, and good works that are of service to others. One must be as afraid of doing acts that are harmful to others or deeds that are sinful as one is now afraid to touch fire or disturb a cobra. One must have as much attachment and steadfastness in carrying out good works, in making others happy, and in worshiping the Lord as one now has in accumulating gold and riches. This is the dharma of humans.

66. The Lord incarnates to promote goodness and universality

The Lord incarnates Himself in human form in order to strengthen this type of goodness. But the question may arise, how can a nonexistent thing be strengthened and developed? Indeed, these qualities are not nonexistent; they are there in everyone! When these qualities decline and wither, the Lord comes with the purpose of promoting them and bringing about the decline of the forces that work in the opposite direction. It is to make clear this purpose that Krishna, in the Dwapara era (yuga), while teaching Arjuna, said, All incarnations of the Lord are for the protection and promotion of holy seekers.

parithranaya sadhuunam
vinashaya cha dushkritham
dharma-samsthapanarthaya
sambhavami yuge yuge.

The word seeker (sadhu) does not refer to any single religion, caste, family stage of life, community, or even any single species, like the human! It refers to all religions, all stages of life, all races, and all creatures.

The Lord revealed His Universal Mind in the Gita. It is because of this universal message that the Gita has become so essential and so famous. Why, Krishna Himself has declared in plenty of situations and places that He is the dutiful servant of His devotees. An example of this is His accepting to be the charioteer of Arjuna!

If the culture of the ordinary person results in such elevation, each one can judge for themselves how much more purified and holy would be the character of those who are engaged in spiritual exercises and the incessant contemplation of God! For both these types of people, the quality of their character is the important criterion.

67. Follow the sages of yore in contemplation of Brahman

There is a great difference between those established in God-contemplation (Brahma-nishtas) in the past and today's contemplators of Brahman. First, it is necessary to grasp the greatness of contemplation of Brahman.

In the past, this greatness was realised, and holy people were immersed in experiencing holiness. It is because this has not been done by present-day holy people that poverty has come upon us.

The question may arise why such holy feelings don't arise now, but they are not absent. For fire to increase or decrease, fuel is the only cause; there is no other reason. The more the fuel, the more the illumination! In all humanity, every individual has the undisputed right to feed their fire with fuel! By its very nature, fire has the power to give light, but it needs fuel. The fuel of renunciation, peacefulness, truth, mercifulness, forbearance, and selfless service has to be constantly placed in the fire of the intellect (buddhi) of the spiritual aspirant, the fire that emanates the light of wisdom. The more spiritual seekers do this, the more efficacious and effulgent they can become.

Only trees growing on fertile soil can yield good fruits. Those growing on saline soils will be poor. So also, only in unsullied hearts can holy feelings, power, and gifts shine in splendour.

The present-day contemplators (Brahma-nishtas) practise the same meditation and the same Om (pranava) as their namesakes in the past. The difference between them arises in the decline in self-control, as far as the field of spiritual discipline is concerned.

When the number of great souls (maha-purushas) who engage themselves in unflinching meditation of God in solitary places declined, much suffering descended on the world. Those who exist today are damaging their contemplation on God by arranging for the accumulation of obstacles for carrying out their spiritual practices, by getting enslaved to mean praise and fame, by becoming entangled in delusion, and by restlessly endeavouring to earn glory and to expand the institutions they have founded.

68. Seek solitude, meditate, and acquire one-pointedness

Those who yearn to establish themselves in contemplation of Brahman (Brahma-nishta) must seek solitude, practise meditation and repetition of the name at specified times, and acquire one-pointedness through these spiritual exercises. They must always be anxious to do deeds that will bring about the welfare of all beings. They must always be engaged in performing work without any concern for the fruit thereof. It is only when such people come upon the Earth that all suffering will cease. This is the mark of the Golden Age (Kritha Yuga).

In this world, kind-hearted doctors run medical institutions here and there and serve the diseased and cure the afflicted. Similarly, if we had ashrams here and there of holy personages who were experts in the treatment and cure of the "birth-and-death disease", then people could be cured of the afflictions of ignorance, untruth, immorality, and self-aggrandisement. Ignorance produces wickedness, and it can be cured only by the medicine of the knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-jnana) with supplementary doses of the drugs peacefulness, fortitude, selfcontrol (santhi, sama, dama), etc.

Instead of this, the "great men" of today give those who approach them the medicines they demand and the drugs their patients relish! They thus become the instruments of their followers and, for the sake of name and fame, they behave like doctors dictated by patients! The so-called "great" fall into perdition even before they taste the spiritual bliss themselves on account of their weakness and foolishness in becoming prey to the wiles of the greed for name and fame! The main reason for contemporary poverty is just this. Present-day virtuous aspirants and "great" people have not understood this fact and don't act according to it.

The holy essence has to be experienced and realised. One's selfish needs have to be sacrificed. There must be constant effort to do good to others. One's desire should be to establish the welfare of the world. With all these feelings filling the heart, one must meditate on the Lord. This is the right path. If "great men" and those in authority are thus engaged in the service of

humanity and in promoting the welfare of the world, the thieves of passion, hatred, pride, envy, jealousy, and conceit won't invade the minds of men. The divine possessions of people, like dharma, mercy, truth, love, knowledge, and wisdom, will be safe from harm.

69. Uproot internal and external foes and uphold righteousness

The police and rulers can overcome only external foes; they have no power to destroy the internal enemies.

They will find the task impossible, for they are not the authorities for that. The internal foes, the six enemies (arishadvarga) that operate inside a person, can be uprooted only by the teachings of good people, love of God, knowledge of the Lord, and the company of the holy and the great.

The world suffers harm at the hands of wicked people when the police and the authorities responsible for apprehending thieves become themselves dependent on them. Similarly, the world becomes enveloped in darker ignorance and dharma is destroyed when those contemplating Brahman incessantly and the "great" spiritual aspirants give up the path of world welfare and become victims of sense enjoyment and ambition to earn name and fame. Also, suffering increases daily.

The whole world will bask in peace and joy only when both groups - worldly authorities and spiritual aspirants - realise the right attitudes and, with the welfare of all at heart, ponder the omnipotence of the Lord.

These two groups are governments for humanity's two states. Spiritual elders are the rulers of the internal state; administrative authorities are the rulers of the external state. If both groups act and direct properly, both states will function to create happiness. The fault of causing the present misery must therefore be shared by both.

It is at such times that the Lord resolves to vouchsafe happiness to all states and to suppress ignorance and injustice.

It is to make this clear that the Lord said in the Gita,
Oh Bharath, whenever dharma declines and evil (a-dharma) raises its head, I
make myself
born.

Yadha yadha hi dharmasya glanirbhavathi Bharatha Abhyuththanam
adharmasya
thadhatmanam srirjamyaham.

70. Pray to God for His incarnation

Really speaking, the prayers of the great act as an invitation even for the advent of the Lord. In the external world, when the subjects need any convenience or help, they approach the rulers and inform them of their request. So also, in the internal state, when there is no possibility of achieving and acquiring devotion, charity, peace, and truth, the great and good people who desire to achieve them pray to the Lord within themselves. Then, listening to their prayers, He Himself comes into the world and showers His grace on them. This fact is well known to all.

Didn't Rama and Krishna incarnate because the Lord heeded the prayers of the sages? Many have read this in the Ramayana and the Bhagavatha. Even Ramakrishna, though he was divinely-born, prayed to Goddess Kali (for he could not bring dharma about) to send someone who could preach to the whole world the dharma that would uproot injustice and selfishness. This is known to all who have read his life history.

Thus, prayers should be offered again and again for the realisation of the task. No one should become desperate and give up prayers if they don't result immediately in the advent of the Lord. In the external state, how often does a person have to write and how much does he have to wander about for the work to be done - and, perhaps at the end, it may not fructify at all!

How is one to know the consequence of the soul's yearning? Since this can't be known, one has to pray until the world is established in happiness. The happiness of the world is the sign of His arrival; if this is understood, then it is easy to recognise the Avatar immediately. It is then that the religion of truth (sathya), of compassion (daya), of spiritual wisdom (jnana) and of love (prema) will grow and prosper. So, until these are firmly rooted, people must continue their prayers. That is the responsibility of the people.

The road laid out by holy people has to be repaired now and then, either by those who travel through it or by those who claim authority over it. That is what is called "teaching (bodha)". It is for the sake of such repairs that the Lord occasionally sends some authorised individuals, sages, and divine people. Through their good teachings, the path opened by the God-people of the past is again made clear and smooth. Thus, when the Lord's will, the needs of spiritual seekers, and the teachings of great persons produce their combined effect, the happiness of the world will be assured and undiminished.

If all humanity prays at one time for unrest, injustice, disorder, and falsehood to be transformed into peace, truth, love, and mutual service, things will certainly become better.

There is no other way out. Worrying is fruitless. This is no occasion for despair. It is against the essential nature of people to plead weakness and want of strength. Therefore, giving up the search for other means, people must try prayer, service to others, and mutual love and respect. They should delay no longer; they will soon acquire contentment and joy.

71. With faith in human divinity, service to mankind becomes service to God

People say that service to humanity (manava-seva) is service to God (Madhava-seva). That is a true statement.

But although the service of humanity is holy, unless it is merged in the bigger

ideal, people won't benefit, however huge the service.

Mere repetition of the slogan is useless if service is done without faith in the divinity of people and with an eye on name and fame and the fruits of one's action. Whatever actions one undertakes, if one constantly has as companion the contemplation of the Lord, and if one has faith in the essential divinity of people, then the statement about service to humanity and service to God being the same is justified.

Without thoughts of God (Madhava), how can service to God originate? All such talk is mere show. I won't agree to that. Instead, whatever is done with the Lord in mind, along the path of truth and according to aspects of dharma, has to be considered as selfless service (seva) to the Lord, and whatever is done for name and fame and for the fruit thereof shall not be referred to as service to people.

In fact, those who are immersed in the uninterrupted contemplation of the Lord need not do any other task at all. The fruit of their prayer itself can make the world holy. However, all can't be thus engaged, so the others must try to prepare for that stage by purifying their mind and diminishing their desires. The spiritual seekers who have achieved this can realise things for themselves. Others can't grasp the sameness of service to people and service to God.

72. Purify the mind by meditation and japa

This does not mean that you can sit quietly. Grasping the sameness is dependent on your destiny, past actions, and spiritual discipline. Until you grasp the sameness, do meditation and repeat the name, so that your mind will become free from the waves of feeling and full of the divine form. Also, carry out deeds for the good of others.

Devote your time to the service of the world, regardless of the results thereof. Thus can you become blessed.

Otherwise, though the body may be inactive, the mind will be very busy, committing acts on its own. People with such minds fall prey to fate (karma) in spite of their not doing anything! When a person has the mind fixed on contemplation of God and the pursuit of truth, though the body and senses do acts that are of service to the world, they won't be affected by them; though they do actions (karma), they are still non-doers of action. The lesson of the Bhagavad Gita is embedded in this.

The heart of the person who doesn't strive to cultivate the mind with holy thoughts is certain to be the paradise of evil and wickedness. This has to be borne in mind by all those who aspire for salvation, who seek onepointedness, and who hope to rise to greatness. Neither caste nor monkhood nor rituals nor scholarship gained by study of the scriptures is a criterion to realise this knowledge of the Atma. Steady contemplation of Brahman (Brahma-nishta) is the only criterion. The Upanishad text also emphasises this:

Spiritual wisdom alone is the cause of liberation; not the stage of life or philosophy.

Nashramam karnam muktheh, darshanani na karanam Thathaiva sarvakarmani jnanamevahi karanam.

73. Pray for the advent of divine personages!

There are no limitations of time or space for the establishment of oneself in the contemplation of the Omnipresent Lord. There is nothing like a holy place or a special time for this. Wherever the mind revels in contemplation of the Divine, that is the holy place! Whenever it does so, that is the auspicious moment! Then and there, one must meditate on the Lord.

That is why it has been announced already before,

Na kala niyamo yathra, na deshasya sthalasya cha
Yathrasya ramathe chittham, thathra dhyanena kevalam.

For meditation on God, there is no fixed time or place.

When and where the mind so desires, then and there is the time and place.

The world can achieve prosperity through disciplined souls whose hearts are pure and who represent the salt of the earth. In the attempt to promote the welfare of the world, from this very minute, everyone should pray for the advent of such men, should try to deserve the blessings of the great, and should try to forget the sufferings of the day.