

## OCCASIONAL MUSINGS

Prof. G. Venkataraman

**This is the transcript of a Radio talk delivered by Prof. G. Venkataraman which was featured on Radio Sai on January 6, 2012. In this latest musing, the distinguished professor shares his views about the types of problems affecting the world today making special reference to the gruesome Newtown shoot-out in Connecticut, USA wherein a school boy suddenly opened fire and killed 20 children and six teachers before taking his own life. He analyses the moot causes for such horrible occurrences and our duty in these troubled times in the light of Baba's teachings.**

At the outset, I would like to offer my humble pranams at the Lotus Feet of our most beloved Bhagawan.

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prasanthi Nilayam. It is a long time since I broadcast what might be called an occasional musings talk. Indeed for nearly three months now, I have not been in touch with you; I am sure many of you are aware of the reason. Firstly I was away from the end of August for about 5 weeks, travelling across New Zealand and Australia, wrapping up with a fleeting visit to Manila in the Philippines. I returned early October, after which the Birthday season absorbed all attention. Immediately following that, I had to do a rapid 2-week tour of Hong Kong, Southern China and Japan. I am now back, and with so much work staring at me I just cannot afford to be absent even for a day; on the contrary, I have to work overtime!

However, that does not bother me as that is my normal routine. My only concern is about meeting the many demanding schedules, particularly because we are starting many new activities, besides expanding what we are already doing.

Let me get down to business and begin by outlining what I propose to do in this talk. I shall start with a short comment on the two recent overseas tours, my first after 14 years. I shall then reflect on various matters of

current interest, and wrap up with where we need to go as also what we all ought to be doing.

As mentioned earlier, my first tour began in New Zealand. I had been there once before way back in 1995. Since then I have maintained good contacts with a few devotees there, which helped a lot during my recent second visit.

Like last time I visited many places and gave talks. However, this time my tour was tailored to accommodate many talks and discussions with people outside the devotee circle. I am happy to say that this happened throughout the tour. Thus in New Zealand I not only addressed two public meetings but also gave a talk in a university and in a hospital as well as a school, besides talking to many people connected with education and healthcare.

I also had the opportunity to have an extended conversation with two doctors engaged in compassionate healthcare, elders of the Maori community and a Member of the New Zealand Parliament. In Australia too I had a few interesting engagements, the most notable of which was a talk I gave in Melbourne on UN Peace day in a beautiful setting, an old church with a serene ambience.

My Manila stay was hectic, with six engagements packed into one and a half days! If I managed it at this age, it was entirely due to Swami's Grace. My schedule included a talk at the Asian Development Bank and also at the Asian Institute of Management. I should not forget to mention that unlike I normally do, this time I had Power Point slides illustrating all my talks, which made a big difference, particularly when I spoke about the life and the mission of Swami.

Word has got around and there has been a great demand for recordings of the talks delivered in New Zealand and Australia. Since the original recordings are of varying quality, I have decided to rerecord them as that is simpler. Of course, this exercise would take some time to complete, since I am occupied with many tasks, many of which go beyond Radio Sai. I should mention that though there was pressure to speak about my so-called experiences, I always stuck to speaking about Swami's teachings. I explained that Bhagawan once told me emphatically, "People come here to see Swami and know about His Message. So in your talks, confine yourself to the teachings and avoid story telling." That is what I have always endeavoured to do, not only when I spoke in the Divine

Presence but also while speaking over Radio Sai. And over the years, I have found that the message too has plenty of takers.

Naturally there are many memories associated with these two tours coming quickly after each other, but they are too many to be shared here. I shall restrict myself to recalling just a few, since they are symbolic of how Swami's Love silently and imperceptibly pervades everywhere.

When I arrived in Australia after a two week stay in New Zealand, I stayed for a couple of days on the Sunshine Coast on the East, with my good friend Douglas Saunders. I reached there on the night of a Wednesday. Next morning Doug drove me to a farm house up in the hills. It was a nice one hour drive through farm country. The farm house I was driven to belonged to Nigel Sims who came to Swami way back in the eighties. He could not afford many trips to Prasanthi but has remained totally dedicated to Swami in every possible way. Swami told him to have bhajan sessions on Thursdays and in the morning. Thus his sessions are at 10:30 a.m. Usually about ten people attend but on the day I went there, there were more than two dozen. All except me and a Sri Lankan were white Aussies. I was deeply touched by many things I saw there.

For example, one lady had driven three hours to attend bhajan that day because she had heard I would be there. The visitors included two ladies who were both deaf and dumb but they wanted to be there that day. And there was a 88 year old psychologist (who has had amazing experiences) who made it a point to attend that morning. The bhajan hall was small and clearly modest, a huge change from all I had seen up to that point. Nothing was fancy, but that in no way made it less serene. Right in the middle was a framed panel containing the words of the Gayathri. In a corner was a statue of Ganesha, and I was told that one day a small mouse peeped into the bhajan hall, ran up straight to Ganesha, had a look and ran back out of the room! Nigel led the bhajan session, most of the bhajans being in English. However, in the middle came Manasa Bhajare, sung by Nigel himself. When the singing ended, there were passages that were read out, while those present reflected on what was read.

After the formal session was over, I was asked to say a few words. Frankly, I was overwhelmed. For me it was a very special experience. I was simply stunned by the fact that someone in faraway India, someone who never went abroad except for one short trip to Africa and that too to visit the house of a devotee, that someone could inspire and fill these

simple people in a different hemisphere with undying Love. All these people were vegetarians and did not drink or smoke. Their dedication to Swami and His teachings was total, which to me was awesome. On the whole, it was a remarkable story of how Swami's Love can shine powerfully, no matter how far the devotees are in a physical sense.

Another experience that I cherish was what happened after my talk on UN Peace Day (20<sup>th</sup> September) in Melbourne. My talk was entitled: **Can Science and Spirituality come together to promote World Peace?** After the talk I had the odd experience of many people wanting their pictures taken with me. This has never happened to me before which is perfectly understandable since I am neither a celebrity nor a movie or sports star. I was feeling quite embarrassed when two people approached me and asked if they could have a picture with me. After saying sure, I asked them where they were from as they were not Ozzies. They both said that they were from Lahore, Pakistan, which blew me away. To me this was very special, particularly because as a boy I had attended school for five years in Karachi – from 1940 to 1945. That was before the partition of British India; after partition, Karachi went to Pakistan. It was a totally unexpected and an eerie experience. It was UN Peace day, and there I was from India in a church in Australia and here were two Pakistani Muslims wanting a picture with me from India, a Hindu! I looked up and said silently, "Swami, what a Leela! I am sure You must be smiling! Only You can bind people with Love in this manner!"

I had a similar feeling when after my talk in the Asian Development Bank, a Japanese gentleman (I was later told he was the number 3 man in ADB), stayed back to chat with me for over half an hour. He had seen World War II including the nuclear devastation it caused, and was therefore happy to talk about compassion and the need to tune social welfare projects so as to be in resonance with actual problems the beneficiaries face. What I am trying to say is that even a hard-nosed institution like the ADB which is like a mini World Bank for Asia, was impressed by what Swami had done for the poor without stretching out His hand or getting funds from IMF and agencies like that.

One of the reasons why I am so keen about the teachings of Swami is the simple fact that if applied earnestly, there is no problem on earth that they cannot solve. This is not a glib statement; rather, it is a very calculated observation made on the basis of deep reflection about the many problems afflicting human society, in conjunction with a careful

study of Swami's teachings. If you think about it, there are basically two distinct categories of challenges that the human mind faces.

The first relates to what I might refer to as challenges from the "outside", while the other concerns challenges set up by the mind itself. The latter is the root of most of our problems today, problems that appear well-nigh insoluble but can in fact be solved, provided we are willing to apply the teachings of Swami. Let me now amplify on the above remarks.

I shall start with small pox, which is a typical example of a problem from the "outside", that is to say, not generated by the mind. Almost everyone born after say 1985 would not know what small pox is. But do a bit of googling and you would get some stunning information. For the benefit of those who do not know what small pox is, here is a short narrative about it.

Basically it is an infectious disease caused by a virus and a pretty deadly one, I might add. If it fails to kill, it often blinds the eyes; at the least, it leaves horrible pock marks all over, especially on the face. I had a class mate in school who bore such scars. Some of you might recall Mr. Kasturi describing how his father died due to that dreaded disease.

It is believed that small pox emerged around 10,000 BC and the earliest evidence of it is available from mummies going back to 3000 BC. Small pox attacks used to come in waves, and as a young boy I remember some of these waves. The vaccine as we now know was developed in England towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, young children were given this vaccine soon after birth. However, since health services were not organised well in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, small pox raged fiercely. You may not believe this; it is estimated that small pox was responsible for somewhere between 300–500 million deaths during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One way of looking at that number would be to say it is roughly 7 to 10 times the number of people who died during the Second World War! Whichever way you look at it, 500 million deaths is an awesome figure to contemplate – and these deaths were all caused by one single virus!

As recently as 1967, the WHO estimated that 15 million people contracted the disease and that 2 million died. But you know what? The last naturally occurring case of small pox was diagnosed on 26 October 1977; and by 1979, the WHO declared small pox to have been eradicated from the face of the earth. To me, this is an absolutely incredible feat, a

remarkable achievement that is hardly ever mentioned these days. I use these effusive adjectives because as a young boy I have known what terror that disease struck when an epidemic broke out.

In 1958 when I had to go overseas for the first time, I had to have a special small pox vaccination certificate. For obtaining this, I had to go a UN Certified agency in Bombay as it was called then and get a shot. They then issued me a yellow document that looked like a passport. It was stamped, signed and all that, and the particulars entered included the batch number of the vaccine used; this vaccine, by the way, had to come from a WHO source. And when I entered Canada after travelling 48 hours – those were before the days of jet travel – the first thing they checked was the health certificate; passport scrutiny came only after that. It was the same when I came to the US in 1968 to spend a year at the University of Ann Arbor in Michigan; first the health certificate and only then the trip to the immigration counter. Today, all that has become a dim memory because of the incredible progress made on disease control.

Now, why am I going into all this? For a very good reason. You see, the human mind is extra-ordinarily powerful and has an amazing capacity to rise up to all sorts of challenges, provided they are not the results of the infection of the mind itself! This is a very important point that somehow most people, including very intelligent ones, totally miss; indeed, that is our greatest weakness, which is what I wish to now focus on.

Consider some of the recent scientific triumphs. Some months ago there was a great buzz about the discovery of the so-called 'God particle' in the international scientific laboratory in Geneva known as CERN. I cannot go into the details of that discovery nor describe here why that discovery was a landmark event. Nevertheless, I would like to say that it was a **tremendous** feat and a **remarkable** triumph of the human mind.

Next I would like to call attention to the landing some months ago of a small lab named Curiosity on the surface of Mars. Normally such events are remote controlled, that is to say buttons are pressed in a lab on earth, which then transmit signals to the spacecraft to guide it. Pilotless planes and near-earth satellites are also operated by remote control. In the case of Curiosity, this was not possible. Why? For a simple reason.

Mars is quite far away and on the average it would take about 12 minutes for an electronic signal to travel from the Earth to Mars. Twelve minutes is a long time where electronic control is concerned, and for comparison I

might mention that it takes about 8 minutes for light from the Sun to reach the Earth – that is how far Mars is from our Earth; please keep that in mind. Now I am sure most of you are aware of the now-retired Space Shuttle. When it was in service, it was used repeatedly to travel to the International Space Station, carrying both cargo and astronauts. On the return journey, the speed of the Space Shuttle would be around several tens of thousands of km/hour during re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere. From that hypersonic speed, the space craft had to be rapidly decelerated before actually landing and coming to a dead stop on the tarmac on the landing ground; and that required a lot of dynamic, rapid-fire control action by the Commander of the space craft.

Curiosity had no pilot. If it had to be landed by remote control from the Earth, then one has to remember that it would take about 12 minutes for the control signal to travel from the Earth to Curiosity. After that, it would take another 12 minutes to bring back information about the control action. Obviously this kind of control would simply not work because things happen very rapidly during a landing. Curiosity was therefore designed for auto-landing, that is to say instruments on board had to judge conditions instant to instant and safely put the lab on the surface of Mars. This is an exceedingly complex task, and there was no way of fully checking out the control system on Earth before launch; after all, Mars is different from Earth and we have so little knowledge about it. And when Curiosity made its contact with the surface of Mars, the first signal about the fate of the landing would be known on Earth only 12 long minutes after the event had actually happened on Mars. Thus at the time of touchdown there were 12 long, agonising and nail-biting minutes before the people in the control room in California became aware whether the mission was a success or a disaster.

As we now know, not only did Curiosity make a successful landing but it has since been working remarkably well, beating all expectations. By any account, this is a **stupendous** achievement for humankind. Once it was known that Curiosity had landed safely, everyone in mission control room broke into huge smiles and cheering. There was widespread celebration, singing, dancing, people hugging each other, congratulating each other and all that. But you know what? In the midst of all this, I did not hear a single person – not in the lab, not in the media, not in the wide world which reacted with great amazement – not one person ever mentioning how all this was possible because the Lord Almighty has blessed humans with a very powerful mind. That is how accustomed we all have become

to using the power of the mind without being conscious that this power has been specially given to us by God. In fact, this indifference to how much God pervades our daily life is far more widespread than what I described, and maybe I shall come back to it later.

Swami once said, "God created this beautiful Earth, complete with a lot of land, plenty of good water and of course a huge blanket of clean air surrounding the entire planet for all creatures to breathe. He then told man, 'Son, all this is for you to use and enjoy. It is completely free. Just make sure that you use all these resources in a responsible manner and leave them as I gave you so that future generations also can enjoy them the same way you have been able to.'"

Swami continued, "Has man done that? Hardly. Instead he has grossly misused the blessings I have conferred, besides selling what I have given free. Humans not only sell land and all that it contains like coal and oil, for example, but have also heavily polluted land, water and air. In other words, man is taking everything so much for granted that he no longer bothers to express gratitude for the bounties I have conferred, absolutely free I might add!"

Man's indifference to God goes far beyond mere ingratitude and misuse of air, land and water. The power of the mind is now being increasingly used for the most abominable perversion. This is a painful topic and presently I do not want to go into it in detail but I am compelled to refer to some of the events that have made headlines in recent times.

Depending on the circumstances and media's preferences, some events get a lot of visibility while others remain unknown. Even events that are on the front pages and the TV screens for a while soon get edged out because there are new crises, scandals, disasters and sensations to report on. Most of us are swept by the 24 hour news cycle and sway with it, egged on by the social media. From a larger perspective, however, we are mostly passive spectators, and take little initiative in eliminating the root cause of mind-made problems; notice I am not saying man-made or human-made but mind-made. There is a deep reason for this to which I hope to return, for it relates to a key teaching of Swami.

When atrocities occur, all of us express anger, sorrow or helplessness as the case may be; we also wonder for a fleeting moment where the world is headed. After that, we promptly withdraw into our respective bubbles because these issues do not personally affect us. That might seem to be

the natural thing to do and also the only possible option available. But is that correct? Can we enjoy the blessing of security while remaining totally indifferent to the suffering of millions who are less fortunate? What are the lessons of history about such massive indifference? What about Swami's teachings? Do they have any relevance at all in relation to what is happening around? These are some of the questions we ought to ponder about.

Now there are people who feel that one must speak only about positive things, which automatically rules out any reference to the urgent but at the same time ugly, gruesome and even dangerous problems. I take a different view. Yes, one must undoubtedly be positive and also strongly advocate positive values as opposed to negative tendencies. That said it is equally important to be acutely aware of things that are wrong so that they may be set right. On this, I believe I am on strong ground because Swami Himself has compared Bhishma with Vibhishana and described how the latter was far better. Though belonging to the Rakshasa (demonic) clan, Vibhishana boldly spoke out against adharma (unrighteousness) when there was a need to. By contrast, not only the venerable and learned Bhishma but also other gurus like Kripacharya and Dronacharya chose to remain silent when grave atrocities were being committed in public in the royal court of the Kauravas.

Swami said that failing to speak out in defence of Dharma must be considered a crime. One commentator put it neatly and in today's context. He said: "When highly vocal fringe groups with outrageous if not extremist views are allowed to wield a huge megaphone while all of us either acquiesce or just remain silent, then one of two things could happen. Either the fringe group would simply race away to wield total power or a counter fringe on the opposite side would appear. In one case, there would be unilateral domination while in the other there would be extreme polarisation, with the silent majority caught in a crunch. Clearly, both are bad options."

One does not have to look beyond today's papers and TV to find many examples. And this has gone on throughout history. That is why in India, the Puranas constantly held out examples of a just society and gave it the name Rama Rajya, which simply meant a society where Truth and Righteousness hold sway. The Western world has its counterpart in Utopia but I doubt if Utopian society laid as much stress on Sathya and Dharma as Rama Rajya did. Today for the Kali Yuga, we need a version

2.0 of Rama Rajya which is what Swami laid out for us – Prema Rajya, if I may call it that.

To help us understand how important as well as effective Prema Rajya can be, let me for a moment make a brief reference to a recent event namely, the horrifying and blood curdling incident in which a young man, presumably mentally deranged, shot his way into a school in the small and picturesque town named Newtown in the state of Connecticut in America, mowed down 20 children and six teachers, all within a few minutes, with a fast firing semi-automatic weapon. He then killed himself. By the way, before coming to the school, he killed his mother.

I shall not go into the gory details but instead comment briefly on why gun violence in America outstrips that in all other countries. There is of course a valid historical reason for the famous Second Amendment to the US Constitution that allows citizens to bear arms. Not many are aware that after defeating the British army, the former colonies of Britain in what is now America did not immediately come together on day one to form one country. They continued for a while as independent and sovereign states while wise elders deliberated intensely about whether they should unite and if so, in what manner. When they finally chose to, one of the things they decided was not to have a standing army! This may sound unbelievable in today's context, but back then there was a serious distrust in armies since they could side with a king and make him a dictator. Then arose a question. Suppose these newly created United States were to be attacked by a foreign enemy? What then? It was then decided that citizens, especially those who had fought in the recent war of liberation ought to have the right to possess their arms so that they could instantly come together to fight the invader. And let us not forget that Britain did try to recapture the lost colonies; indeed they even managed to burn down the White House, to which President Obama made a humorous reference recently, while welcoming the PM David Cameron of UK.

What I am driving at is that a historical constitutional amendment with a definite political objective was, in due course, surreptitiously used by gun manufacturers to create a very powerful lobby, powerful both in political and financial terms. So strong has the clout of this lobby become that it has managed to lock the mental attitudes of most people to the era of the Wild West so to speak. While I can say chapter and verse on this subject, I shall not; instead, I shall just call attention to an obvious

statistics to which Fareed Zakaria of CNN drew pointed and emphatic attention.

Fareed's point was simple and he made it by comparing two countries, America with a population of about 300 million and Japan with a population of about 120 million. Thanks to the deliberate manipulation of the gun laws in America, there are presently about 280 million guns, which makes it roughly 90 guns for every 100 people. In Japan the corresponding figure is 0.6 guns for every 100 people because of very strict gun laws. That is the difference tight regulation makes. Thus, last year while there were over 10,000 gun related homicides in America, in Japan the number was exactly zero.

Many others have commented on this striking difference and here is what one writer says (I apologize I did not take care to note down the citations but that omission is easily taken care of by going to the Google):

In 2008, the U.S. had over 12 thousand firearm-related homicides. All of Japan experienced only 11, fewer than were killed at the Aurora (in the state of Colorado) shooting alone. And that was a big year: 2006 saw an astounding 2, and when that number jumped to 22 in 2007, it became a national scandal. By comparison, also in 2008, 587 Americans were killed just by guns that had discharged accidentally.

What it all means is that with sheer discipline, even the impossible becomes possible. Just imagine how much more can be achieved if through discipline and morality we are able to gain the Grace of God! With so many problems facing humanity, can we say there are no solutions, when Swami has laid them out so clearly? The sad fact is that we do not have either the time and/or the inclination to bother about solutions since those problems are not directly affecting us as individuals.

Incidentally, let me at this point emphatically stress that it is **not** my intention to paint one country black and the other lily white. In fact, if I turn the gaze on India we have a zillion things to be ashamed of and even hang ourselves as the saying goes. My point is entirely different which is that if we have to face adharma in today's world – and who can deny that is not our job – then we have no option but to take Bhagavan Baba's teachings very seriously. And so, let me revert to Swami and His

teachings by going back all the way to what He said as Krishna to Arjuna, about when and why God appears as an Avatar. Here is a translation of that famous declaration in the Gita:

Though birthless and deathless, I the Lord of all beings and Prakriti (Nature) as well, do manifest Myself through My own Divine potency (Maya), keeping My Nature (Prakriti) under control.

Whenever the practice of Dharma is on the decline and adharma on the rise, I embody Myself.

For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the reestablishment of Dharma, I incarnate from age to age.

(4: 6, 7 & 8)

This declaration is oft-quoted and well known. However, as Swami has stressed several times Avatars come mainly to teach a message. Indeed Krishna Himself says that He comes again and again because the Knowledge He imparts disappears with the passage of time. It is when humans ignore the Knowledge of the Atma or Atma Vidya/Atma Jnana as it is sometimes referred to, that the practice of Dharma also steeply declines.

In other words, Avatars come to remind as well as retrain us to put Dharma back on the pedestal to which it belongs. The Avatar does not come as a repair-man to fix the problems we have created. As the saying goes, he who breaks the vase must fix it. It is us humans who have in various ways including sheer indifference who have allowed adharma to gain ascendency; it is therefore our collective responsibility to set things right. I am mentioning all this because although the Bhagavad Gita is well known, not many are aware that it is all about doing one's duty.

The idea of doing one's duty has existed from ancient times and in all societies, though in varying degrees. Thus kings had their duties and so did ministers, administrators, soldiers etc., down the line. And so it is that we find in London the famous statue of Lord Nelson who declared that England expects every man to do his duty. The beauty about the Bhagavad Gita is that it defines duty in the larger context of the Divinity latent in us humans. Not merely that; the Gita also wants us to make sure that everything we feel, think, say or do, also has the flavour of the Divinity latent in us. That is the important point; that is the essence of

the Prema Tathwa or Love Principle that Swami discoursed on so many times, indeed over 70 long years.

Let me attempt a very quick recap of what Swami taught us. And the simplest way is by going back to the Discourse Clip that was screened here on X'mas evening (2012) – those of you who were tuned to the live streaming would have seen this clip. Swami's essential point was about the way man searches for God. He said that man is going all over the place looking for God, without realising that God is there right within him. Swami then asked: "Would you go looking around in search of yourself? Would you ask someone you meet on the way, 'Sir, have you seen me anywhere? If so, please can you tell me where you saw me?' To do so would be utterly ridiculous, but that precisely is what most devotees are doing all the time!"

What Swami was driving at was that all our speech-making, pilgrimages, so-called sadhana camps, service programs and so on are bereft of meaning unless every feeling, thought, word and deed is intimately linked to the fundamental fact that at the core, all of us have Divine Spark. I have heard any number of Discourses but hearing this one again after a long time, this particular sentence was, to me, absolutely electrifying! Allow me please to explain why.

Throughout, Swami has always hammered in the following truths:

1. First realise that there IS a Spark of Divinity in you.
2. Next, appreciate that this same Divine Spark **is present in every single entity in Creation**, which automatically means that God obviously is also in all fellow beings.
3. Remembering that God is Love and Love is God, make sure that when you go out into the world – and you cannot escape this – your feelings, thoughts, words and actions are not tainted by any undesirable trait that could range from anger all the way to jealousy, ego, selfishness and self-interest.
4. All traits take root in the mind before manifesting as actions and words. Hence, you must be very careful about safeguarding the mind from spiritual infection.
5. The best protection is the constant chanting of God's Name. The choice of the Name is left entirely to you. However, as a line in the

bhajan Govind bolo, Gopal bolo stresses, make sure you always call out the Name of your choice with Pure Love and deep feeling!

It is pertinent to offer a few remarks on the above as they are very important. And this I shall do by going back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gita, where there is a discussion between Arjuna and Krishna regarding the best way to worship God. Krishna says that there are basically two ways; one is to directly go inwards and the other is to journey to the inward via an outward path. In practical terms, the first choice boils down to worship of God without Form, while the second choice begins with the worship of God with Form, and thereafter slowly graduating to the worship of the Formless God. Krishna then adds, "Arjuna, for you the latter path is preferable." To put it differently, the former is the so-called Inward path and is referred to as Jnana Yoga while the latter or the outward-to-inward path is nothing but a suitable mix of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga, the mix being tailored to suit the individual.

If we keep all of the above in mind, along with what Swami said in the Discourse played on X'mas day, we can paraphrase the essence of what Swami says as follows:

Bangaru! Remember, a sprinter who is doing a 100 meter dash is totally focussed on the finish line, right from the moment when he gets set on the starting block. Likewise, you too must never forget for a moment that your goal is God, and also that God is already in you; indeed, I have called attention to that in My Discourses, times without number.

Now it follows that if God is in you, He is in all others too. Hence, when dealing with others be careful with your thoughts, words and actions. You may not be aware of it, but even thoughts can cause harm for they are very powerful.

Thoughts are extremely potent because they are born in the mind which has been bestowed with enormous power by God. Few appreciate the fact that no other living being on earth has been given this incredible blessing and power. That is why birth with the human form is a rare blessing.

Now why has God given humans a mind with so much power? So that you may realise that behind the seen lies the unseen. In other words, though God cannot be directly seen around you be assured that His power is immanent in every single bit of

Creation, from the atom to the galaxies, from the ant to the elephant.

Sadly, people fail to appreciate this and instead allow their minds complete freedom to think the way it wants, especially in a negative manner. Avoid that.

If a sprinter makes a bad start he is doomed to lose the race! In spirituality, however, even if you have started rather hesitantly, it does not matter, as long as you quickly develop faith in Me.

What exactly is the meaning of having faith in God? It means that you must earnestly believe that not only am I in you but also in every single entity in Creation – that is essential point about having total faith.

Once you realise that God is indeed Omnipresent and never forget that truth for even a moment, your life would change completely.

Often I tell you two things: 1. Help ever and hurt never, and 2. Love all and serve all. Everyone claps loudly but fails to look carefully at the fine print; and believe Me, there is a lot of it!

Hurt never means: Do not ever cause hurt in any form to anybody at any time, including via thought. Following that instruction would be a very good start. Having started on the right foot, try next to help whenever you can. It does not have to be a great piece of help, but if you offer that help with a radiant face and a good smile, that little help would always go a long way. The cake may be big but have you noticed that the icing is always a thin layer? But what a difference that icing makes!

Hence, always serve the other person with respect and Love, constantly telling yourself that Swami is in that person and that your service is actually reaching Me.

People routinely repeat the phrase, “Love all, serve all”. But it is amazing how quickly those very same people who give this advice soon become bossy, rude and bureaucratic when they are doing seva! Do you know why this happens? Because they do not see Swami in the person or persons they boss over.

Nobody talks to Swami like that. They are always very loving and respectful but when it comes to seva including Narayana Seva, what often happens is that tasks are routinely performed – Naryanaya or the Lord is seldom seen in those who are served nor is He served the way He ought to be.

This is a clear symptom of dehabhimaanam or body-consciousness which, in practical terms, manifests as a feudal attitude. Is that what I asked of you? Whatever happened to the humility that was a part of the fine print?

I know Swami has never said all that in any single Discourse. What I have done is to bring together teachings of Sai from many places to make a coherent argument in the present context. In other words, what I have said above is a comprehensive paraphrase of the many things Swami has said at various times, mostly when talking about duty. Since duty is so vital for leading a useful and spiritual life, allow me please now to take a few more minutes to make some pertinent comments.

In the Gita, Krishna uses the term Swadharma while referring to duty; the word itself translates as ‘Dharma of the self.’ Technically this is an acceptable translation but problems arise when one tries to understand the term ‘self’. Such a difficulty arises because in spirituality there are really two different entities associated with the word ‘self’. Firstly there is the lower-self which is nothing but the individual wrapped up in ego due to spiritual ignorance or ajnana, and secondly there is the Higher or Realised Self, which is the individual who has a body but has shred body-attachment or dehabhimaanam.

Body-attachment goes when ajnana or spiritual ignorance is scrubbed away, following which the individual acquires a radiance that emanates from True Wisdom or Jnana latent within. The much talked about sadhana is all about spiritual scrubbing or refinement that elevates one from the lower-self to the Higher Self. For operational convenience, people often use the lower case ‘i’ to refer to the ego-self and the upper case ‘I’ to refer to the Higher Self or Realised Soul. Ramana Maharishi would be a good example of a Realised Soul.

Keeping this in mind, let us return to Krishna’s use of the word Swadharma. For Him, the prefix Swa automatically meant the Higher Self. In other words, when Krishna asked Arjuna to perform his duty, the subtext was that Arjuna ought to perform his duty in the spirit of a

Realized Soul or the Higher Self. Most commentators appear to miss this point and have given lengthy commentaries relating duty to the lower-self, which clearly is incorrect.

You might at this point jump in to say: "Listen, 99.9999...% of us are NOT realised souls. What we want are guidelines about how to do our duty even as we are trapped in the lower-self." Good point and that is where Krishna's teaching of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga come in. Via His advice 'Love all and serve all', Swami gave us that very same recipe that would guide us from the lower or ego-self to the Higher Self. In other words, Swami's 'formula' is thus nothing but a beautiful amalgam of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga, tailored for this day and age.

For the sake of completeness let me also mention that Swami has, on various occasions, used the terms Atma Dharma and Mama Dharma (meaning my duty) in place of what Krishna referred to as Swadharma; stated differently, these three words are inter-changeable.

Once again: Swami does not want us to become recluses or ochre-robe wearing wandering monks. He allows us full freedom to serve Him in any walk of life, all the way from the President of a country and a super CEO to a simple fire-fighter, school teacher, a janitor and even a loving home-maker. We in the world make all sorts of distinctions between these and similar categories of people. From an outward point of view, certain protocols ARE necessary, which Swami Himself observed as required. However, when it came to dealing with these people as individuals I have seen Swami giving the most charming smile to a very poor person, even as He ignored a tycoon who had shown up mainly to beg for favours!

For Swami it was always very simple, and He made this point succinctly in the Gita Vahini. He says (paraphrase):

Life has to be lived on earth – there is no escape from it. And our feelings, thoughts, words and actions are mostly shaped and conditioned by what happens on earth and how they affect us. Our actions are perforce a response to all this, which is to be expected. However, and this is very important, the motivations for the actions should **NOT** be based on worldly considerations alone. Rather, they should spring from within and must be rooted firmly in eternal values namely, Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa. Since these values are nothing but manifestations of the various aspects of the

Atma, duty performed in this spirit is nothing but Atma Dharma. In other words, your actions must always reflect the nature of the Atma. That would happen only if you stay constantly tuned to Me. Your actions would then carry the fragrance of the blossoms of Heaven. If, however, you allow your mind to guide you, your actions would reflect the ego-self; and understandably, they would then carry the foul odour of selfishness and self-interest.

I think I have said more than enough. I apologize once more for making this a bit long; but then, there were so many things to share with you. I thank you all for your patience that is if you have been with me this long!

Please do share your thoughts and comments with us for they are always helpful, including when they are critical!

Offering this talk at the Lotus Feet, I now bring it to an end.

God bless and Jai Sai Ram.

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