

- LOVE IS
  - SOURCE
    - PATH
      - GOAL

Lord Jesus Christ, when asked what is the greatest commandment, said, “The greatest and the first commandment is love thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength; and love thy neighbour as thyself”.

TOPIC TO RESEARCH FOR ROCHESTER SAI CENTER

**KEERTHANAM (COSNTANT CHANTING OF LORD’S NAME)**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT IS LOVE

**Introduction:** “I separated Myself from Myself, so that I may love Myself”, proclaims the Lord.

Love is the primordial urge and the basis of creation. Love is God. This love assumes many different forms in the phenomenal world and gives a variety of experiences to individuals. While the forms of love keep changing based on one’s relationship, the Principle of Love remains unchanged.

BRAINSTORM AS A GROUP THE VARIOUS DEFINITIONS AND TYPES OF LOVE.

SOME OF THE SUGGESTED OUTPUT IS:

- Love—the basis of creation
- Love—the essence of devotion
- Love—the pathway to God
- All love is One
- Worldly love
- Divine love
- Love is God
- Being is Love

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN LIST.....

ROCHESTER SAI CENTER TOPIC is ‘KEERTHANAM’ Hence here the focus is

## LOVE AS THE ESSENCE OF DEVOTION:

Introduction: What is devotion? It is not merely offering several types of worship or going on pilgrimage. Unalloyed and true love for love's sake alone constitutes devotion. True devotion is the love flowing from a pure heart unpolluted by selfish motives. Love is the intimate bond of relationship between the devotee and the Lord.

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There are nine types of devotion. But they are not equal to *prema* (pure love). The inner current of all the nine types of devotion is *prema*—love for God.

SSS 28.11: May 6, 1995

At the human level, love assumes many forms. The word love is used in common parlance in the context of the relations between mother and child, husband and wife, master and servant, the preceptor and the pupil. But this is not true love. It cannot be termed *prema* (love). It is only *anurāga* (affection). *Prema* can be applied only to the total love towards the Divine. It is utterly selfless. It has not come from the world nor has it fallen from the sky. It is *sabhaja svarūpaṃ*, (the essence of one's nature that expresses itself spontaneously without external promptings).

SSS 25.21: May 30, 1992

There are nine types of devotion: *shravaṇam* (listening to the glory), *kīrtanam* (devotional singing), *viṣṇusmaraṇam* (contemplating), *pādasevanam* (worshipping the Lord's feet), *vandanam* (adoring), *archanam* (worshipping), *dāsyam* (being a servant), *sneham* (cultivating friendship) and *ātmanivedanam* (surrendering). In whichever way you offer worship, God responds in the same way.

SSS 27.1: January 1, 1994

The *Purāṇas* (scriptures) have described the lives of the great exemplars of nine forms of *bhakti* (devotion). They are Parikshit for *shravaṇam* (listening to the glory), Narada for *kīrtanam* (devotional singing), Prahlada for *viṣṇusmaraṇam* (contemplating), Prithu for *archanam* (worshipping), Akrura for *vandanam* (adoring), Hanuman for *sevā* (service), Arjuna for *sākhyam* (friendship), Lakshmi for *Pādasevanam* (worshipping the Lord's feet) and Bali for *ātmanivedanam* (self-surrender).

SSS 22.1: January 14, 1989

Everything in the world is governed by the bounds set for it. However, love has no limits. “*Anirvachanīyam prema*” (Love is beyond the power of words), declares the sage Narada. The flow of love is the life-giving water for everyone. How is this love to be secured by one? Not by *japa*

(recitation) or meditation or by studying the scriptures. God does not dwell in the *Vedas* or the *Purānas* (scriptures). God dwells in the heart and should be sought there. People should close their mouths and open their hearts. Then they will experience the divine bliss.

SSS 29.52: November 23, 1996

Here is this body. [Swami points to His body.] It is made up of the five elements. There is another body. [Swami points to a person nearby.] That too is made up of the same five elements. Therefore, both are one. Where is the scope for difference? Your mother, father, friend—every one of them is made up of the same five elements. Thus, even from the purely material point of view there is only one, reflecting the philosophy of *advaitam* or non-dualism. In the entire universe, there are only the five elements; there is no such sixth element. No matter where you search, you cannot find a new element; everywhere, it is only these five. Yet, within a human being, there is a separate and distinct element. It is not gross but subtle. And that is Supreme Love. This Supreme Love may be regarded as the sixth element; it reflects the Indweller and the Divine Principle. The *vedic* aphorism “*Tat tvam asi*” meaning “That thou art”, reflects this Divine Principle. You must aspire for this sense of unity between yourself and God.

SS 2000.9

About Divine Love the *shruti* (*Veda*) declares: “It did not originate from the firmament. It did not grow from the earth. It has no birth and death. It is all-pervading. It emerges from the heart when the knots of ignorance are broken”. This is how the *Vedas* glorified Divine Love. Even Narada, the author of the *Bhakti Sūtras* (Aphorisms on Devotion), could not describe the nature of Divine Love. He described in various terms the state of mind of the devotees filled with love of the Lord, but he could not describe *prema* (love) itself. He compared *prema* (love) to a priceless gem. Likewise Tulasidas also referred to Rama’s name as a precious gem. Where is this love to be found? It can be got only from Bhagawan Himself, who is the very embodiment of love. Do not treat lightly this infinitely valuable love, which is eternal, pure, sacred and powerful beyond words.

SSS 29.29: July 27, 1996

### **Personal Introspection Question**

**Think of the significant relationships in your own life. Which ones are attachment and which are selfless love? Please describe. Have you ever encountered an example of Supreme Love? Please describe how you recognised that experience.**

## 2. HOW TO LOVE

Introduction:

A person makes every effort to accumulate wealth. An equal effort is needed to acquire the wealth of love. Human beings today invest their assets of love in pitiful ventures. Instead they should invest all their love in the divine bank of devotion. This deposit is not only safe but will yield you increasing returns in terms of bliss. Your heart is the bank where your love for God should be deposited. Deposits elsewhere are insecure. Deposits of money may be in danger of being lost. We must strive to love more and more people and see God in them. Swami says expansion is His love and that this is the highest spiritual practice.

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There are different ways of loving God through different methods such as Service (Love all Serve all), Purity of mind and heart, steadfast devotion, ceiling on desires etc. Rochester Sai center will be analyzing devotion through Keerthanam.

Devotees recite or sing the names of the Lord in two ways. One is *Keerthanam* and the other is *Sankeerthanam*. *Keerthanam* is done individually and benefits only the devotee concerned. *Sankeerthanam* is done collectively for the good of the world as a whole.

*Keerthanam* is of various kinds. First is *Guna Keerthana* - praising the qualities and attributes of God through song. Second is *Bhava Keerthana* - expressing the inner feelings and emotions of the devotee. Reflecting the feelings of peace, companionship, yearning, filial love or sweetness experienced by the devotee, these songs give vent to the emotional outpouring of the devotee. The third is *Leela Sankeerthanam* - praising in song the sports and divine play of the Lord. This is done through singing the *Ashtapadi* (of Jayadeva) or describing the sports and miraculous deeds of the Lord. The *rasa krída* is also in this category. The fourth is *Nama Sankeerthanam* - singing the names of the Lord. This is the most efficacious of all forms of devotional singing. But in actual practice the devotees derive joy from singing all types of devotional songs.

**Special significance of Nama Sankeerthana**

What is the special significance of *Nama Sankeerthana* - singing the names of the Lord? "*Nama*" is made up of three letters: "*Na* .... *aa*.....*ma*". All music is based on the seven *swaras* -the seven notes. According to the science of numerology the letters "*Na*", "*aa*" and "*Ma*" have the numerical values: 0, 2 and 5 making up seven in all. The seven notes are *Sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni*. The Gopikas made use of these seven notes to combine music, rhythm and devotion in the *Rasa Krida* dance with Krishna. In this group dance, the Gopikas were so completely lost in devotion and song that they experienced oneness with the Divine.

In this way, *Sankeerthan* (community singing) in praise of Krishna became popular and helped to develop devotion and promote collective prayers for the welfare of the world. Similarly community singing in the name of Rama also came into vogue. Numerologically, the letters in the name of Rama (*Ra+aa+ma*) add up to seven. Besides the seven notes, the mystic number seven is associated with many sacred things like the seven islands, the seven oceans, the seven sages and so on.

### **Community singing of *bhajans***

When the chanting of the Name is done in community singing, it should be in a form in which the entire group can participate easily. The tune, the rhythm, etc. should be such that all can follow the *bhajan*. If the lead singer takes up a song that is not familiar to others, the response from the group will be poor. There will be no enthusiasm or genuine participation. Their minds will be distracted. When all the devotees participate in the *bhajan*, the vibrations that are produced will generate joy and harmony. Today we are having the *Akhand Bhajan* (nonstop twenty-four-hour global *bhajan* by Sai devotees all over the world). This is being done not for the sake of one individual, one nation or one community. It is for the welfare of humanity as a whole.

SOURCE:

<http://www.sathyasai.org/discour/1986/d861108.html> (Discourse on the occasion of akhand bhajan on 8November, 1986).

Discussion questions:

WHY ARE ONE POINTEDNESS AND INTENSITY IMPORTANT IN DEVOTION AS AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE?

## HOW DOES AKHAND BHAJAN PROMOTE LOVE AND HARMONY WITHIN THE FAMILY, SAI CENTER, COMMUNITY AND THE WHOLE WORLD?

### 3. CULTIVATING LOVE

**Introduction:** Everyone has this spark of love. This tiny spark of love has to be kindled and nurtured before it can grow into a flame that encompasses the entire creation. To foster this flame, some of the ways we can cultivate love is through curtailing ego, keeping good company, cultivating good thoughts, constant and disciplined practice of Namasmarana, Keerthanam, meditation and self inquiry.

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God has four qualities and it is only when you cultivate them that you can understand Him. They are Divine Love (*prema*), beauty (*souandarya*), sweetness (*mādhurya*) and splendour (*shobhā*). The development of *prema* is enough to add unto you the other three. When you are so full of love for the Divine in all creation, that stage is beauty. When you are immersed in the sea of Universal Love you reach the acme of sweetness. When your mind loses its identity and merges in the Universal Mind, then there is splendour indescribable.

SOURCE: SSS 6.42: November 23, 1966

If you are really filled with devotion, manifest your love for God who is the very embodiment of love. If you are genuinely hungry and thirsting for God, partake of Divine Love to appease your hunger and quench your thirst. Divine Love is the only panacea for all your troubles and miseries arising from insatiable desires and frustrated ambitions. God's love is like a lighthouse beacon. It shows you the right path. Divert the boat of your life towards the lighthouse of Divine Love. You are then bound to gain the shore of bliss. You do not need any special type of penance or meditation. Meditate on love. Fill your mind with love. Even while attending to your daily chores, regard all of them as offerings to the Divine. God is omnipresent. See God in everything and every being. Let love grow in your hearts like the waxing moon. Divine Love will not wane like the moon. Let such steadfast love be enshrined in your heart. As Tukaram said, "*Dil me Ram, bath me kam*" (Rama in the heart and work in the hand). The duty of everyone from today onwards is to cultivate true,

unsullied love. With love of God you can secure anything. Without that love, you will only be steeped in misery.

SSS 29.52: November 23, 1996

#### MEDITATION OF THE DIVINE NAME

Always meditate on the divine Name—not just contemplation, but meditation. That meditation should be with love for God. Without love your meditation will not achieve the desired result. Your love for God should be continuous through day and night. It is possible that when you pray to God to fulfil some desire and things go contrary, you may get angry and develop hatred against Him. But, it has nothing to do with spirituality. Your innate nature and love for God should never undergo a change. You should continue to attach yourself to the divine Name. That is real meditation. When you are in deep meditation, nothing in the external world should be visible to you even if you open your eyes.

SOURCE: SSS 42.5: February 23, 2009

Discuss: How does Keerthanam help in cultivating Love?

How can you cultivate Love within yourself, within your family, your Sai center, your community and the whole world?

#### 4. OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF LOVE

**Introduction:** Swami says we are the embodiments of love and the reason we cannot experience our true nature is because of negative qualities like ego, jealousy, anger, hatred and pride. Once these obstacles are removed, there will be spontaneous expression of Divine Love

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For all diseases of the mind there are two basic reasons: raga and dwesha ( attachment and aversion). The mind in this state considers the six basic enemies of the human—lust, hatred, delusion, greed, envy and pride—as virtues. These six vices can poison a person’s entire being. But a person filled with good feelings enjoys peace and happiness.

SSS 30.26: October 7, 1997

Other obstacles in the way of Love include Jealousy, Anger, Greed, and Envy. Instead develop love. Love is God and God is love. “*Prema mudita manase kabo Rama Rama Ram*” is the *bhajan*. Love is the greatest gift God has given to a human being.

People talk about *bhakti* (devotion), yoga and *jnāna* (knowledge). What do they mean by these terms? Does *bhakti* mean getting involved in *bhajan* (devotional singing) and enjoying the tune and beat of the songs? Does yoga mean sitting in a corner and exercising breath control? Does *jnāna* consist in reading some books and getting by rote a few *shloka* (verses from hymns)? What is *sanyāsa* (renunciation)? Is it wearing the ochre robe? *Bhakti* means getting rid of the vices of attachment, hatred and envy and manifesting pure love. Anyone who loves pomp, who is filled with pride and is consumed by envy cannot be a devotee by any test. Devotion will go nowhere near that person. The devotee has to overcome hatred, envy and attachment and experience the peace and bliss of love. That devotee will then acquire the attributes of the Divine.

SSS 28.1: January 14, 1995

### Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a time when your love was obstructed? How did that happen and what was the effect for you and for the other person? Can you imagine a way in which the obstruction could have been removed by a loving action or a loving shift in viewpoint on your part?

## 5. QUALITIES OF A PERSON WHO LOVES GOD

**Introduction:** The lover of God sees God everywhere. The greater the love for God, the greater is the bliss that one experiences. Swami says that the person with such love for God is so immersed in God that he or she sees nothing but God in everything. Some of the qualities they exhibit are Purity, Detachment, Blissfulness, Absence of Hatred, Freedom from sorrow, Yearning to please God, Total surrender, Always giving never taking, Serenity, etc.

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The greater a person’s love for God, the greater the bliss that he or she experiences. When love declines in a person, joy also declines equally. The lover of God sees God everywhere. Hence a



person's heart must be filled with the love of God. Love will not enter the heart of one who is filled with selfishness and self-conceit. Therefore, one should forget the petty self and concentrate thoughts on God. Love of God makes a person oblivious to his or her own existence. Love becomes a form of intoxication. Love makes the devotee and God dance in ecstasy and becomes one with them. It induces self-forgetfulness. It generates an ecstasy in which everything is forgotten.  
SSS 24.23: September 2, 1991

From this we can conclude that the Supreme Bliss that Gopikas experience in the presence of Lord Krishna is an expression of their enormous love for him and a path to achieve the divine. Some of the qualities described above can be seen in those who express their devotion and love through Keertanam, such as Narada, Meerabai, Tukaram, etc, You can come up with your own examples.

One's thoughts, one's words and looks should be filled with love. This is Divine Love. One who is saturated with this love can never be subject to suffering. Human beings today are affected by praise or blame. But one who is filled with Divine Love transcends praise or censure. He or she is unaffected by criticism or flattery. That person treats alike joy and sorrow, profit and loss, victory and defeat. It is not easy to experience such love. It is easy to blame God but difficult to realise God. Human beings today prefer the easy path to the rough one. They should realise that there can be no pleasure without pain.

SSS 28.38: December 25, 1995

### **Personal Introspection Questions**

Think of a challenging situation in your own life. Imagine how Divine Love ( particularly expressed as devotion through Keerthanam) might confer the benefit of a solution to that problem.

## **6. LOVE – THE PATH TO SELF REALISATION**

Introduction: Realisation transpires when one sees, recognises and experiences everything as God. Swami teaches us through an example of the *gopis* of Brindavan, who experienced the Krishna Principle in every speck of dust and every blade of grass. They were filled with the highest form of love for Krishna and denied existence of anything else other than Krishna. Love of Krishna made the

whole world Krishna to them. Swami says that even one's own identity is lost in this experience of the unity of everything. He tells us that we must practise and contemplate on such ever-expanding love and become one with God, who is Pure Love.

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*Bhakti* (devotion) can flow along two paths—*saguṇa bhakti* (with form and attributes) and *nirguṇa bhakti* (without form and beyond attributes). When you feel that God is far away, far higher, far beyond you and when you plead for mercy, petition for grace and pray for boons, it is *saguṇa*. You adore Him as Lord and Master, as Guardian and Saviour. You go through the ceremonials of praise, propitiation and prostration, submission and service. But when you practise the discipline of seeing Him in all beings, as the core of every cell or atom, alive and aware; and experience unity with all creation—for creation is but His body and you are also in it and of it—then, it is *nirguṇa*. The *nirguṇa* is the contemplation on the sugar. The *saguṇa* is the adoration of a sugar doll, which has caught your fancy and attracted your love and loyalty. Let every act of yours stand as your credential when you quit the world. Let no single act be a drag or a debit. Soak every moment in love, that is to say, in God. Of what avail is it to spend hours in *dhyāna* (meditation), if when you rise and move amongst the people you spread anger, inflict resentment by your words and deeds? The *Bhagavad-Gīta* asks you to be “*satatam yoginah*”—ever controlled, ever restrained, ever yoked with the Divine. So be vigilant, be steady, be earnest. The steady person earns wisdom. By the absence of careful tending, a spark can be nursed into a huge conflagration. By vigilant care, even a conflagration can be reduced to a flicker.

**SSS 12.21: November 23, 197**

**Question: Discuss the above quote in the light of devotion through keerthanam**

Adi Sankara was propagating *advaita jnāna* (wisdom of non-duality) all through the famous *Bhaja Govindam* verses. He said mere scholarship will not come to one's rescue at the time of death. One has to pray and worship God in order to get released from the bondage of birth and death. *Prema Tatva* (Principle of Love) is essential for the emancipation of every human being. *Advaita* (non-duality) is to see unity in diversity.

SSS 31.14: April 20, 1998

The *gopīs* (cowherd girls) were so filled with the highest type of love that they saw and experienced the Krishna Principle in every speck of dust and blade of green that they saw. Love of Krishna makes the whole world Krishna. The denial of everything else is the method of visualising

Krishna in all. There is only One, the integer I. When it is repeated once again, we have two. The manifold creation is only He and He and He repeated so often. Dust and blade, drop and spot—each is He, He and He alone. And, you are no exception. You are also He. The realisation of this truth, this identity, this mergence—this is *sākshātkāra*.

SSS 11.15: February 24, 1971

Questions: Does Keerthanam promote duality or non duality?

How can your devotion to God expressed through Keerthanam lead to self realization.

## 7. EXEMPLARS OF DIVINE LOVE (expressed through keerthanam)

The *Purāṇas* (scriptures) have described the lives of the great exemplars of nine forms of *bhakti* (devotion). They are Parikshit for *śravaṇam* (listening to the glory), Narada for *kīrtanam* (devotional singing), Prahlada for *viṣṇusmaraṇam* (contemplating), Prithu for *archanam* (worshipping), Akrura for *vandanam* (adoring), Hanuman for *sevā* (service), Arjuna for *sākhyam* (friendship), Lakshmi for *Pādasevanam* (worshipping the Lord's feet) and Bali for *ātmanivedanam* (self-surrender).

SOURCE; SSS 22.1: January 14, 1989

Sage Suka taught how by listening to the leelas of the Lord, singing His glories and constantly reciting His name, the supreme goal of God-realization can be achieved. Suka experienced the bliss of union with the Brahman by revelling in singing His glories.

SOURCE:

[http://www.sathyasaicenters.org/c07/chicago/R05IL002a/WATCH/2008/WATCH\\_August\\_2008.pdf](http://www.sathyasaicenters.org/c07/chicago/R05IL002a/WATCH/2008/WATCH_August_2008.pdf)

Global Akhanda Bhajan (non-stop twenty-four-hour global Bhajan by Sai devotees all over the world), is done not for the sake of one individual, one nation or one community. It is for the welfare of humanity as a whole. Singing with intense yearning for God and enjoying the experience of adoring Him, helps to purify the atmosphere and render it pure, calm and ennobling. It is with this high purpose in view that the programme of global sankeerthan was designed.”

In most religions music is an important part of worship. In Christian worship in church, music is used to glorify God, and the most common way a congregation does this is through singing hymns and gospel songs. A hymn is an expression of praise, adoration and thankfulness to God. Hymns

originally were written solely from the Psalms. Later composers wanted to make the hymns easier to sing, so they created their own. Gospel songs, although similar to hymns, have a different focus, they were originally created for the purpose of convincing people at camp meetings to become Christians. Whereas hymns communicate from men to God, gospel songs communicate from men to men. They are lighter in nature and easier to sing. The hymn gives adoration to God, and the gospel song exhorts others to make Him the central focus of their lives. Many hymns are written directly from Scripture or include a paraphrase of a passage. The messages they convey attempt to bring people to a deep, personal relationship with God.

Martin Luther said, "Besides theology, music is the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart..." After singing a hymn, members of the congregation feel uplifted and closer to God and are better prepared to learn from the rest of the service.

Qawwali is a form of music practised by Sufis to inspire religious devotion and instruction. Sufism is a mystical school of Islamic thought where truth and divine love are achieved through personal experience. During Qawwali concert, the music becomes hypnotic and meditative, leading to a trancelike state. In this heightened state, the participants can achieve fana- spiritual enlightenment.

Swami says, Guru Nanak (The founder of Sikhism) was the initiator of the practice of community singing of devotional songs. He believed that through such community singing the common man can ennoble his life and experience the presence of the Divine in everyone. The Sikhs consider music as the food of the soul. The sacred devotional music in Sikhism is called 'Kirtan'. Kirtan is also one of the pillars of Sikhism and in that context refers to the singing of the Sacred Hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib(the Holy Sikh Scripture) to music. The Sikh Scripture contain 31 ragas and 17 thalas, which form the basis for KIRTAN singing.

SOURCE: Sri Sathya Sai Organisation of Scotland, June 2005.

<http://www.saiscotland.com/resource/nineforms/lordpraise.pdf>

***Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba***

### **Swami's Letter to His Brother**

Do not attempt to know Me through the external eyes. When you go to a temple and stand before the image of God, you pray with closed eyes, don't you? Why? Because you feel that the inner eye of wisdom alone can reveal Him to you. Therefore, do not crave from Me trivial material objects but crave for Me and you will be rewarded. Not that you should not receive whatever objects

I give as sign of grace out of the fullness of love. I shall tell you why I give these rings, talismans and rosaries. It is to signalise the bond between Me and those to whom they are given. When calamity befalls them, the article comes to Me in a flash and returns in a flash taking from Me the remedial grace of protection. That grace is available to all who call on Me in any name or form, not merely to those who wear these gifts. Love is the bond that wins grace.

Consider the meaning of the name Sai Baba. *Sa* means “divine”. *Āi* or *āyi* means “mother” and *baba* means “father”. The name indicates the divine mother and father, just as *sāmbashiva*, which also means the divine mother and father. Your physical parents exhibit love with a dose of selfishness but this Sai “mother and father” showers affection or reprimands only to lead you toward victory in the struggle for Self-realisation.

For this Sai has come in order to achieve the supreme task of uniting the entire humankind, as one family through the bond of kinship, of affirming and illumining the *atmic* reality of each being in order to reveal the Divine that is the basis on which the entire cosmos rests, and of instructing all to recognise the common, divine heritage that binds human to human, so that the human being can rid himself or herself of the animal and rise into the Divine, which is the goal.

I am the embodiment of Divine Love. Love is my instrument. There is no creature without love. The lowest loves itself at least. And its *self* is God. So there are no atheists, though some might dislike Him or refuse Him, as malarial patients dislike sweets or diabetic patients refuse to have anything to do with sweets. Those who preen themselves as atheists will one day, when their illness is gone, relish God and revere Him.

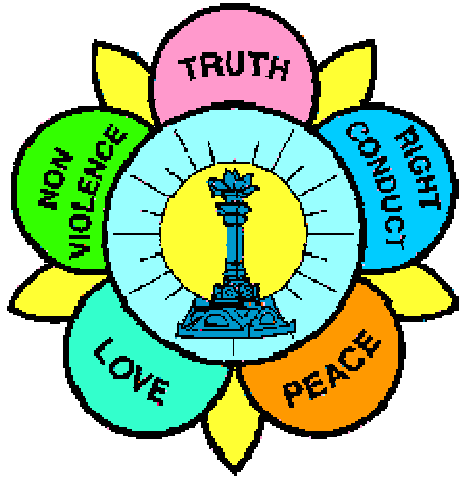
I had to tell you so much about My truth, for I desire that you should contemplate on this and derive joy therefrom, so that you may be inspired to observe the disciplines laid down by Me and progress toward the goal of Self-realisation, the realisation of the Sai that shines in your hearts.

SSS 12.38: June 19, 1974

### **Personal Introspection Questions**

Can you imagine specific ways in which your recognition of the love inherent in each and every person you encounter, regardless of their behavior, can contribute to the coming of the Golden Age? If so, please describe.

How has Swami's life and message deepened your understanding of Divine love?



**STUDY CIRCLE TOPIC:**

**SELFLESS SERVICE**

**ROCHESTER SAI CENTER FOCUS:**

**KEERTHANAM**

**Dedicated with love and  
reverence**

**at the Divine Lotus Feet of  
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba**

**The Embodiment of Divine Love**

**INTRODUCTION:**

*For the human being love and service are like two wings,  
with the help of which, one should strive to realise the spirit.*

SSS 28.34: November 21, 1995

Selfless service is perhaps the single, most efficient and universal tool for understanding, experiencing and expressing the Divine Principle of Love. Service is love in action. Swami says that the best way to love God is to Love all; Serve all. The main purpose of the Sathya Sai Organisation is to help one realise one's innate Divinity by the practice of Divine Love through selfless service. Swami has also made it clear that the quality of service is most important, not the quantity. The spirit or the motive behind service is the deciding factor. When we render service, we should feel that we are serving God. This is why He says, "Service to man is service to God". Just as the proof of rain is in the wetness of the ground, pure, selfless, loving service transforms us and we enjoy supreme peace and equanimity.

**1.WHAT IS SELFLESS SERVICE?**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Our true nature is pure love. This love expresses itself spontaneously and without any external promptings as selfless service. In selfless service, there is recognition of oneness between the one serving and the one being served. This, then, leads us to realise the truth that the God in us is serving the God in others. Swami often tells us that selfless service is the most important spiritual discipline for a devotee and the direct path to Self-realisation. From the point of view of **Keerthanam**, we can define selfless service as Adoration of God in every form.

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*Sevā* (selfless service) is the adoration of the Lord as *Vishva-Virāt Swarūpa*, God with multi-faced form and with immanence in the entire cosmos. The *Vedas* described Him as “thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed”. The thousands of hands and eyes and feet are all His, the Lord’s. Worship Him. That is the purpose of your *sevā*. And He is none other than your own Self. Do not count an individual as just an individual. The individual has God within him or within her as the reality. Be aware of that. (SSS 8.33: September 22, 1968)

You are called *sevaks* (servants) because you are engaged in *sevā* (selfless service). What exactly is *sevā*? Is it the way in which *bhakti* (devotion) manifests itself, a consequence of devotion? Or is it the cause of *bhakti*, one of the methods by which *bhakti* is expressed and developed? It is neither. It is not the *sine qua non* of *bhakti*; nor is it the result. It is the very essence of *bhakti*, the very breath of a *bhakta* (devotee), his or her very nature. It springs from the actual experience of

the *bhakta*—an experience that convinces him or her that all beings are God’s children, that all bodies are altars where God is installed, that all places are His residences. (SSS 7.14: March 29, 1967)

Group study question:

How is selfless service an act of Worship?

Personal introspection question:

Can you think of a time when someone served you selflessly? If so, how did that experience affect you?

## 2. WHOM DO WE SERVE THROUGH SELFLESS SERVICE?

### INTRODUCTION:

Service should be offered to those who are less fortunate than us and without judging them. The weak, the distressed and the destitute are the ones who need our service the most. The individual lives in society and derives happiness from it. Society is part of a larger community and communities together form a nation. Thus, the individual’s happiness depends on the welfare of the society, the community and the nation he or she lives in. The duty of every individual, therefore, is to render selfless service for promoting the common welfare of society. Swami tells us that selfless service ensures that the world we live in is safe, harmonious and peaceful.

Brainstorm whom do we serve through selfless service? Suggested output could be:

- Service to the needy
- Service to animals
- Service to family
- Service to society
- Service to man is service to God
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A very pious person was once proceeding from Kashi to Rameshwaram, at the other end of this vast country. He was carrying with him some holy Ganga water to be mixed with the sea at Rameshwaram. That would be the consummation of his long and arduous pilgrimage through many a holy place and many a sacred river. While halfway through, he saw by the side of the road a



donkey in the last throes of life since it was too incapacitated to move towards some source of water to quench its thirst. Its dry tongue and rolling eyes indicated the agony of extreme thirst. The pilgrim was so moved by the tragic sight that he poured the precious Ganges water he had with him down the throat of the distraught animal. Moments later, the donkey recovered and could gain enough strength to pull itself out of the grip of death. Seeing this, the companion of the pilgrim asked him, “Master! The sacred water you brought from Kashi had to be offered to the ocean at Rameshwaram. Why did you commit this sacrilege by pouring it into the mouth of this despicable animal?” The pilgrim replied, “But I have poured the holy water in the ocean itself, don’t you see?” Any *sevā* (selfless service) done to a suffering *jīva* (individual self) reaches the Lord Himself and can never be a sacrilege, for *sevā* to the *jīva* is *sevā* to *the Deva* (God). Always be firm in that belief.

(SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977)

There is no service greater than service to parents. Consider service to parents as service to the Lord. (SSS 31.40: November 19, 1998)

Start practising love. That is the correct spiritual practise. Share your love with more and more people. You will experience oneness. Once you start sharing your love with everybody, then the whole world will become one family.

SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000

You should merge your welfare with the welfare of the world. How can you be happy when your neighbour is in misery? Therefore, I call upon you to give up praying for your own advancement. Pray for the peace, prosperity and happiness of all humanity, irrespective of clime or colour. Pray intensely and with faith. Then grace will be showered on you. When the heart is soaked in love, it cannot be contaminated by egoism and its evil consequences. Just as you crave for physical health, which means health for the limbs of the body, you should strive for the health of humanity, which means peace and joy for all sections, in all nations. If you dwell in that wider outlook, you will start feeling less and less for your own troubles and worrying more and more for troubles of others. That is the initial offering of yourself in the great “*yagna*” (sacrifice) called “living”.

SSS 10.26: October 7, 1970

The prayer that rose from millions in this country from all its temples, *yagnashālās*, (institutes for ritual ceremonies), *tīrthas* (places of pilgrimage), holy seafronts, shrines and altars for centuries, has been *Sarve janāḥ sukhino bhavantu*—“May all be happy and prosperous”; *Samasta lokāḥ sukhino*

*bhavantu*—“May all the worlds have peace and prosperity”. So pray for all humanity, for the welfare and happiness, the peace and progress of Russia, China, Africa, Pakistan, all countries of the world and all beings everywhere.

SSS 12.15: April 1973

Strive for the peace of the world. The world is at rest but the human being’s mind is full of unrest. Let the mind, which is full of unrest, be filled with peace. Teach the world through noble actions and words. Fill your heart with the name of God. Fill your mind with the spirit of service.

SS 1993.6

In order to deserve the sacred name “*sevā*” (selfless service), the activity must be freed from all attachment to the self and based on firm faith in the divine resident in every being. *Sevā* has to be considered as worshipping the form that God has assumed to give the *sevak* (servant) the chance of worship. When a hungry *nara* (human) is served a hearty meal, what is being done is *Narayana sevā* (service to God); for *nara* is only “a form and a name” projected *by māyā* (delusion) on *Narayana* (God).

SSS 19.25: November 21, 1986

Whatever you do as service, to whomsoever you offer the act, believe that it reaches the God in that person—*Īshvaraḥ sarva bhūtānām* (God is in every being). So it is *Īshwarārpaṇam* (dedicated to God).

SSS 13.18: November 14, 1975

### Discussion questions:

Keerthanam through Akhand Bhajan is an excellent way of sharing love and serving humanity. Elaborate.

What does the following aphorism mean: “Service to man is service to God”?

What do you understand by the statement “Service is by God, to God and for God”? (Discuss the last two questions in light of Narayana seva particularly during Sai bhajans/Akhand Bhajans/keerthanam)

### Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of an instance in which you experienced that service to man is service to God?

### 3.THE AIM OF SELFLESS SERVICE

#### INTRODUCTION:

Service arises out of one's yearning to win divine grace. The purpose of selfless service is to alleviate someone's pain and distress. Swami emphasises that while helping those who are physically suffering we must also try to transform them mentally and spiritually. Therefore the goal of selfless service is not just to reduce suffering but also to bring about our own spiritual transformation through our offering of love to humanity.

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There are many poor people in our country who lack the basic necessities of food, raiment and shelter. Who will take care of them when they are afflicted with diseases? Doctors should render free service to patients to the extent possible. Doctors should serve the poor with the spirit of sacrifice. There is no greater service than this. God is the sole refuge for the destitute and the forlorn. As the human being is the embodiment of God, it is his or her primary duty to help the destitute and the forlorn. Medicine should not be commercialised. It is meant to promote heart-to-heart and love-to-love relationship between doctor and patient. Service to patients is service to God. There is no service higher than this.

SSS 36.11: July 5, 2003

*Narayana sevā*, which is feeding the hungry with reverence and humility, is the *sevā* (selfless service) that is urgently needed today. The cry for food is being heard everywhere, though if each one worked hard, the problem would not arise at all. We talk of stomachs to be filled, but each stomach arrives in the world with two hands. Those hands, if they are kept idle or unskilled, cannot fulfil their assignment of finding the food for the stomach. Work hard—that is the message. And share the gain with others. The harder you work, the greater your gain, the more you can share. Work hard and, more important still, work together with others in loving kinship. (SSS 14.18: January 25, 1979)

Devote every day at least five minutes for reciting the Lord's name and a few minutes for rendering some kind of service to the needy and the forlorn. Include in your daily prayers a prayer for the welfare of all people in the world. Do not be engrossed in your own wellbeing and salvation. (SSS 23.2: February 8, 1990)

Know that *sevā* (selfless service) is a better form of *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) than even *dhyāna* (meditation). How can God appreciate the *dhyāna* you do when adjacent to you, you have someone in agony, whom you do not treat kindly, for whom you do not make all efforts to help? Do not keep yourself apart, intent on your own salvation, through *japa* (recitation) or *dhyāna*. Move among your brothers and sisters, looking for opportunities to help but have the name of God on the tongue and the form of God before the eye of the mind. That is the highest *sādhana*. (SSS 10.3: February 1, 1970)

The study of texts, the renouncing of wealth in charity, the repetition of the name or the chanting of psalms and hymns may be good exercises to sanctify the mind and to avoid falling into evil ways and ruinous pastimes but they seldom purify the consciousness of the human being. Instead they serve mostly to bloat the ego and instil pride and promote a competitive craving for superiority. You may be sitting in the *bhajan* (devotional singing) hall and loudly singing in chorus, but your mind may get involved in anxiety about the pair of *chappals* (sandals) you have left outside the hall. Always at the back of the mind there is fear of the loss of the *chappals*. This vitiates the *bhajan* and makes it a barren show.

The *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) of *sevā* (selfless service) is quite distinct. In *sevā* you devote all your energy and attention to the task at hand, for it is a dedicated task. You forget the body and ignore its demands. You set aside your individuality and its prestige and perquisites. You pluck your ego by its roots and cast it away. You give up your status, conceit, your name and form and keep all *chitta* (consciousness) pure. Whatever the task you are performing, renounce your personal individuality and share its travails and troubles, its fruits and benefits with God. You need not bring in God from somewhere outside you. He is in you all the while. This truth must be your own discovery, your own treasure, your own strength. This is the grand purpose of the *sevādal* (volunteer service corps). That is the reason why the *sevādal* is assigned a high place in the Sathya Sai Organisation. (SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977)

You may ask, “How is it possible to transcend the ego through *sevā* (selfless service)?” By saturating with love, work can be transformed into worship. When the work is offered to God, it gets sanctified into *pūjā* (sacramental worship). This makes it free from ego. It is also freed from the earthly desire for success and the earthly fear of failure. You feel that when you have done the work as best as you can, your *pūjā* is accomplished. It is then for Him who has accepted the *pūjā* to confer

on you what He considers best. This attitude will make the work *nishkāma* (selfless). Regular practise of this discipline will render the consciousness clear and pure. It will promote *chitta-shuddhi* (purity of consciousness). Without this primary equipment how can one ever hope to scale spiritual heights?  
SSS 13.29: March 6, 1977

#### GROUP STUDY QUESTION:

How is selfless service one of the nine types of devotion? Discuss with special reference to Keerthanam.

**Personal reflection question:** Can you think of a time when you served with your heart and mind fully focussed on God? How did that experience affect you?

#### 4. UNITY IS ESSENTIAL TO SELFLESS SERVICE

##### INTRODUCTION:

Selfless service demonstrates the unity that subsumes the diversity in Nature. At an individual level, integrity in selfless service means unity and purity of thought, word and deed. Unity in an organisation means putting aside all differences of opinion, social status, faiths and cultures in service activities. Swami tells us that, to reconcile differences in service groups, love is the single, most-important rule. Love must precede rules, logic and reasoning.

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What is the reason for the lack of peace in the world today? It is because there is no harmony in thought, word and deed in the lives of the people. Peace must begin in the family, in the home. When there is understanding and harmony in the family, peace will spread to the community and from there to the nation and the world. Hence unity is the primary need today. Unity confers joy and peace. Transformation must begin with the individual. When the individual changes, the world will change.

SSS 23.31: November 20, 1990

What is the use of prayers? Prayer does not mean uttering words with the lips. Prayer must come from the heart. Remember that the hands that serve are greater than the lips that pray. Dedicate yourselves to service to all.

SSS 23.7: April 27, 1990

I wish to give you two directives. One is “practise what you preach; act according to what you say”. The other is “don’t preach what you do not practise”. If you talk about something which you do not practise yourself it is deceit. If you do what you say, it is an index of greatness. Vyasa has said, “If you cannot do what you talk about, that is sin. To do what you say is purity”. Remember the significance of these two statements and carry on your work in a spirit of dedication.

SSS 18.22: November 17, 1985

Society is the coming together of people. Cooperation among people in a society, motivated by spontaneity and by pure intentions, is the hallmark of *sevā* (service).

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

You must work together joyfully, as brothers and sisters. When any difference of opinion crops up among you, how can *sevā* (selfless service) be done with uniform attention and enthusiasm? You have to reconcile such differences silently and with love and place *sevā* in the forefront of your activities. When *sevā* calls, all must come together as one. There should be no politicking in *sevā*. No trace of politics should pollute the *sevā* you do. No idea of separateness should tarnish your thought. (SSS 15.32: November 21, 1981)

One day Krishna approached Yasoda and told her that all His cowherd friends were inviting Him to go with them and tend the cows and that He was planning to go. The mother explained to Him that to go to the forest will mean that He will have to walk on thorns, that He may have to meet snakes and that He may get close to bushes. She said that His tender feet may not be able to put up with the troubles and she said that it is better if He puts on footwear before going to the forest. She said that shoes for Him will be ready only the next day and He could go to the forest only the next day. Immediately, Krishna asked the mother to tell him how she addressed Him. She said that His name was Gopal and that she addressed Him by His name. The word “*gopal*” stands for one who tends the cows. He said that He acquired that name because He could tend the cows and be the leader of the cows. Since the cows will follow Him as their leader, He said that He will have to do something which the cows also will do. The cows do not have shoes to protect their feet and therefore He said that He also should not have the shoes to protect His feet. He said that He will do only that which persons who follow Him can possibly do. He said that if He wore shoes, the cows

will also want to wear shoes because their leader was wearing shoes. He was not going to wear shoes and allow those whom He has to protect to go without shoes. (SS 1973.8)

What a single individual cannot accomplish, a well-knit group or society can achieve. A person walking alone will feel tired and miserable at the end of five miles but walking with ten others as a group he or she will find the five miles a jaunt. That person arrives refreshed and strong. Social living contributes increased happiness and more efficient effort among birds and beasts. They are able to defend themselves from enemies, secure food and shelter and migrate to places beyond great distances when they act as a group. Even ants have learned that immense benefits are derivable from group activity and social organisation. Monkeys also live in groups for greater security and happier lives. Let me tell you that nothing is impossible to achieve if an organised society is set on achieving it. Even liberation from material entanglement (*moksha*) can be won through serving and promoting the progress of society. Through the sense of unity, the willingness to sacrifice and the softness of compassion all objects can be gained.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

### Study Questions:

1. How is unity of thought, word and deed essential to the individual who renders selfless service?
2. How is unity essential to the Organisation that renders selfless service?

### Personal Introspection Question

Can you think of a current planetary problem that might be solved through selfless service? How would unity in selfless service contribute to the solution of that problem?

## 5. SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF SELFLESS SERVICE.

### INTRODUCTION:

Love is the means and also the end of our spiritual journey. Selfless service is love in action that ultimately leads to Self-realisation.

**Brainstorm the spiritual benefits of selfless service.**

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Suggested outputs:

- God's grace
- Physical and mental well-being
- Removal of ego
- Mitigation of *karmic* consequences
- Purification of mind
- Cultivation of love
- Discovering peace within
- Awakening of Divinity

People suffer from two types of ills, physical and mental; the one caused by the disequilibrium of the three tempers of *vāta*, *pitta* and *sleshma* (three *doshās* according to Ayurveda) and the other caused by the disequilibrium of the three *guṇās*—*satva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (qualities of purity, passion and sloth). One peculiar fact about these two types of illnesses is that the cultivation of virtue cures both. Physical health is a prerequisite for mental health and mental health ensures physical health. An attitude of generosity, of fortitude in the presence of sorrow and loss, a spirit of enthusiasm to do good, to be of service to the best of one's capacity—these build up the mind as well as the body. The very joy derived from service reacts on the body and makes you free from disease. The body and the mind are closely interrelated. (SSS 1.23: September 9, 1959)

Little acts of *sevā* (selfless service) can confer on you great spiritual benefit. Firstly, they will destroy your egoism. Pride will transform friends into enemies. It will keep even kinsmen afar. It will defeat all good schemes. *Sevā* will develop in you the quality of humility. Humility will enable you to work in happy unison with others.

SSS 15.32:

Service is meant to kill ego. You cannot call it service if it is rendered with ego. First of all, ego has to be subdued. Body attachment is the root cause of ego. Ego will vanish once the body attachment is given up. The spirit of oneness will develop once the ego is annihilated. (SSS 33.19: November 20, 2000)

Whether it is meditation that you are encouraging, or discourse that you are arranging, or *bhajan* (devotional singing) that you are organising, or clothes that you are offering to the poor, or worship that you are conducting, the object is just cleansing the mind of the taint of egoism, greed, hatred,



malice, lust and envy. The one quality that you must acquire as a result of all this is “mutual love”. That is the sign of the Sai devotee and of devotees of all the forms of God.

SSS 8.44: November 21, 1968

How is the mind to be purified? Through service to society with dedication and identification with everyone. You have to cultivate this feeling of *ekātma-bhāva* (spirit of oneness with all). By engaging yourselves in service, you develop this sense of oneness. In this context, the supreme importance of love should be recognised. Love is your true nature.

SSS 23.32: November 21, 1990

For the hand, charity lends beauty. For speech, it is truth that lends beauty. For ears, wisdom lends beauty. What more beauty do you need than these? For life, service to humanity is beauty. (SSS 26.3: January 21, 1933)

Humans are born. They die. In the interval they grow and fade. The sign of growth is the mutual love, expressed through *sevā* (selfless service). The rich and the high-laced have many to serve them. You must serve those who have no one to serve them. Serve those who manage to live by serving others.

SSS 8.44: November 21, 1968

What exactly is the secret of ensuring peace and prosperity for humankind? Rendering service to others without expecting service from them in return. *Karma* or activity which binds is a huge, fast-growing tree. The axe that can cut the roots of this tree is doing every act as an act of worship to glorify the Lord. This is the real *yagna* (sacrifice), the most important ritual. This sacrifice promotes and confers *Brahma-vidyā* (knowledge of the Self). Note that the yearning to do *sevā* (selfless service) must flow in every nerve of the body, penetrate every bone and activate every cell. Those who engage themselves in spiritual *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) must have mastered this attitude towards *sevā*. (VV 8)

Peace is right within you. To experience what is right within you, why think of withdrawing to the forest? Such thoughts are foolish. Peace is in one place and you are thinking of looking for it elsewhere. Peace is within you. If you want to discover this treasure within you, you must serve others and experience love. If you do so then you will automatically discover peace. Enlightenment

is nothing but experiencing peace and love within and this enlightenment is nothing other than supreme bliss and absolute happiness. (SS 2000.10)

### Group Study Questions

1. Describe at least three benefits of selfless service.
2. How does selfless service lead to purity?
3. How does one attain Self-realisation through selfless service?

### Personal Introspection Question

Since taking up the practise of selfless service have you changed in significant ways? If so, please describe those significant changes.

### 6. Exemplars of Selfless Service

#### INTRODUCTION:

God incarnates and lives among us as a human being out of His love and compassion. Rama, Krishna, Jesus and the Sai Avatars have demonstrated the principles of selfless service through their own actions, for humanity to follow. Nature, too, silently demonstrates the principles of selfless service without expectations or rewards.

Brainstorm as a group some exemplars of selfless service.

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Nature as an example of selfless

Saint Ramadas

Hanuman

Jesus Christ

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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### Nature as an Example of Selfless Service

All are the children of Mother Earth and should follow the selfless activity of the earth, which rotates on its own axis and goes round the sun at sixty-six-thousand miles per hour. By this constant

motion we get day and night and variations in the seasons without which we cannot have food crops which sustain humankind. As children of the earth, people should learn the lesson of *tyāga* (sacrifice) from Mother Earth. Without sacrifice it is difficult to sustain life itself. Some say knowledge is valuable. But, character is more valuable than knowledge. One may be a learned scholar, one may hold high positions of authority, one may be very wealthy or an eminent scientist, but if one has no character all the other acquisitions are of no use at all. Sacrifice, love, compassion and forbearance are the sterling human qualities that should be fostered, shedding jealousy, hatred, ego and anger, which are animal qualities. What is the use of being born as a human and leading a life of birds and beasts?

SSS 27.10: April 11, 1994

Take the example of trees, which bear sweet fruits for others, but do not themselves take; cows, which give milk to others, but do not taste even a drop; rivers, which provide copious supply of water for the people and animals and birds too, but do not take even a bit of it themselves. The human is only enjoying everything itself and is not doing anything for the society at large. *Dharma* (righteousness and justice) protects those who protect it but will destroy those who attempt to destroy it. You have got this precious human life as a divine gift. Do not waste it by seeking worldly pleasures. Pray to God and serve God by serving humanity. (SSS 31.14: April 20, 1998)

Take Hanuman as your example in *sevā* (selfless service). He served Rama, the Prince of Righteousness, regardless of obstacles of all types. Though he was strong, learned and virtuous, he had no trace of pride. When asked who he was by the *Rākshasas* (demons) in Lanka, into which he had entered so daringly, he described himself in all humility as the servant of Rama. That is a fine example of uprooting of the ego that *sevā* must bring about in us. No one can serve another while the ego is rampant. The attitudes of mutual help and selfless service develop humanness and help the unfoldment of the Divinity latent in the human.

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

### **Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba**

You should follow Swami, the leader. This is because from morning to night, Swami performs even the smallest task Himself and all His work is for the good of the world. It is in this context that I

often say, “My Life is My Message”. God and the voice of God are one and the same. Thus, doing what Swami does, as well as what Swami ordains forms work that pleases Him. Work done without the thought of self and eschewing the craving for name or power pleases Him most. (SS 1979.2)

### Group Study questions:

What does Nature teach us about selfless service

What can we learn from the life of Avatars about selfless service and how can we apply it in our daily lives?

How can we do selfless service through Keerthanam?

How can we do selfless service as an individual, family, community, sai center and the world as a whole?

## **DISCOURSES**

DISCOURSE 1: LESSONS ON SEVA SADHANA

SSS 15.31: November 19, 1981

DISCOURSE 2: BORN TO SERVE

SSS 20.26: November 19, 1987

DISCOURSE 3: A FLOWER AT HIS FEET

SSS 10.6: March 4, 1970

