



From Sai Vani

Divine guidance of Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba

What is the fine line that every educated person should carefully tread?

In everything you do, use all the strength and talent with which you are endowed, speaking and acting truthfully. At first, you might fail in this and you might encounter difficulties and sufferings. But ultimately, you are bound to succeed and achieve victory and Bliss. Each one of you should pay constant attention to your habits and to the traits of your character. Always remember the maxim, Sathyameva Jayate (Truth alone Triumphs). Through your behavior and your way of life, you can realize the Truth and Paramathma (the Eternal Self).

What should we do today and every day, to win His Grace?

The blemishes of the heart have to be washed by leading moral life and doing one's duty. A time may come when you become tired or weak - If it is, then you should pray thus: "Oh Lord, things have gone beyond my capacity. I feel further effort is too great a strain. Please give me strength." At first, God stands at a distance, watching your efforts like the teacher who stands apart when the student writes the answer to his questions. Then, when you shed your attachment to enjoyment and take to good deeds and service, God comes encouragingly near. For, He is like the Sun God, who stands waiting outside a closed door. Like the servant who knows the rights of the master and his own limitations, God does not announce His presence or bang the door. He simply waits! When you open the door just a little, the Sun rushes and promptly drives out the darkness from within. So too, when God's help is asked for, He is present by your side, with his Hands extended to render assistance. All that is needed is the wisdom to remember Him and the discrimination to pray and ask Him.

What is the importance of leading an ethical life?

For attaining growth in spirituality, an ethical life is the foundation. This ethical life is based upon discrimination between Truth and Falsehood. Just as the pearl is retained while the shell is discarded, you must accept the Truth and reject the non-essentials. To achieve this, individual

exertion and Divine Grace, both should be existent. You must constantly practice the great lesson that the body and the Soul are separate. This is a highly beneficial exercise. This will serve you to realize the Truth - the Truth that Divinity persists in all, which is God Himself.

What is Ahamkara? Why should we identify its traits and uproot it within us at any cost?

Unknowingly, you may create and develop in yourself an abounding variety of selfish habits and attitudes that causes great discontent for oneself. The impulse for this comes from the power complex, the greed for accumulating authority, domination, power and the greed for things which can never be eternal and full. You may feel elated that you are master of all arts or owner of all wealth or possessor of all knowledge...From where did you acquire these? You may even claim that you earned all this through your own efforts, labour and toil, but surely, you received it from someone. The source from which all power originates is Sarweswara (Lord of All). Omnipotence belongs only to the Lord of all beings. Ignoring the omnipotence and deluding oneself that the little power that one has acquired is one's own is indeed ahamkara (selfishness, conceit, or pride). Ahamkaara causes grief and must be uprooted from within. It will not subsist in an individual filled with genuine devotion, recognized by the characteristics of kindness, love, patience, forbearance and gratefulness. Seek therefore, to develop these virtues in you.

What is the most important reform that must be urgently done to attain Peace for all?

In this created world, wisdom is enveloped in ignorance. So long as the lamp is burning, there will be a shadow beneath it. That is just inevitable. So too, when the flame of illusion is burning, the shadow of ignorance persists, right underneath! However, the Knowledge of Self destroys the ignorance, and wisdom does shine, just as Sunrise illumines the whole world and there is peace. To attain this result of peace, effort is super critical. The mind is conditioned to good or bad, by the environment. The reformers of today do not strive to transform the qualities of people. They are trying to bring about equality in economic matters, in outer life. Improving economic status alone will not bring about lasting peace. Lasting Peace can only be obtained, when character is moulded and developed. There is an urgent need to reform the character through the Knowledge of the Self. This reform alone will bear fruit - the fruit of peace and eternal bliss.

How can we become smarter and sweeter living in this world full of afflictions?

The Divine Self can be realized, only when one possesses the discrimination to free oneself from bondage. You must transform your intellect to become pure and sharp. Ignorant people, to whom the understanding of the Divine Self is beyond reach, delude themselves by the belief that they can derive joy from the objective world which their senses can experience. If only they reflect even a little, it will become crystal clear that even that joy they experienced is a gift of God. The Divine Nectar is present in all places at all times. As a mature aspirant, accomplish yourself to give up the glittering falsehood of the objective world, relish the joy of Divine and attain peace. Will a honey sucking bee ever drink the bitter juice?

Why should we fix inconsistencies in our thoughts and practices?

By mere force of intention, one can imagine in an instant, a scene in America. However, can it also be experienced in actual, at that very instant? No, you cannot! There is no use imagining and framing fancily. It must be experienced in mind, word and body. Similarly genuine peace

cannot be obtained by merely knowing and learning about Divine Self. You may even firmly believe that Joy is present in these, but that is of no avail. You must dedicate your life to win that joy and experience it and enter upon the discipline needed to acquire it. Only then do you deserve the Grace of the Lord and from that, you receive eternal love and peace.

What should be the goal of our lives?

Always enjoy the Peace that is the result of the stoppages of all mental agitations. Do not allow the mind to run after this and that. Train it to keep quiet. Keep away and afar, the mental reactions caused by the contact with the external world. Then you can become mere Existence, Sath. That is the state beyond the realm of senses. This is the real Sakshaathkaara, the Goal of Life..

Why is Human birth considered to be highly sacred? What is the Supreme Self?

It is often said "Daivam Manusha Rupena". It means, God incarnates in the form of a human being. Divinity is not a separate entity. It is immanent in humanity. God incarnates as human to remind this and redeem mankind. That is why human birth is considered to be highly sacred. The human form is a conglomeration of five elements, namely Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether. The Divine Power which makes the five elements function is called Atma, the Supreme Self. Atma does not have any form. It transcends all names and forms. Hence, do not be under the mistaken notion that God is confined to a specific form. Always remember, God is Love and Love is God!

What is the difference between Education and Educare?

You must understand the distinction between Education and Educare. Education is information-oriented. Educare is transformation-oriented. Education is limited to physical and mental Levels. Just as the rivers like Krishna and Godavari have their sources in the ocean, Education has its roots in Educare. Educare is related to our inner feelings and purity of heart. Our speech, song and way of life (mata, pata and bata) should originate from the heart. That is the essence of Educare. Only those endowed with the practical knowledge and wisdom will be able to understand and appreciate the concept of Educare. Even if you acquire a number of degrees, if you lack purity in your heart, you cannot be called truly educated.

Why should we always believe and see Unity everywhere at all times?

Divinity is One. The names and forms may vary, but the inherent Divine Principle is One and the Same. For example, this hall is decorated with a number of bulbs. But the electric current that flows through them is the same. Similarly, sweets may be many, but the essential ingredient in them, that is sugar, which imparts the sweetness is the same. Often times, we merely go by the names and forms, forgetting the reality.

What are the signposts to know if we are good or not?

Every human being should essentially have three qualities - Nischalathwa, Nirmalathwa and Nirmohathwa (Steadiness, Purity and Detachment). One who has these three qualities is verily God Himself. You need not enquire from others, whether you are good or otherwise. Your conscience is your own judge. You should always think of God. People worship God, sing His

glory, thinking that He is present in some distant place. There have been many Divine Incarnations in the past, but the inherent Divine Principle in all of them is one and the same. Your heart is really the temple of God. Hence, fill your heart with Love.

Does God care deeply about our actions or our motives?

First of all, you have to realize that Divinity is present everywhere. Let all your actions be pleasing to God. You have come from God and are living in God. All your actions should therefore be dedicated to God. When you follow such a sacred path, you will ultimately merge in God. God is Bhavapriya (Lover of inner feelings), not Bahyapriya (Lover of external demonstration of feelings). He sees the feeling behind your actions. The world is interested in Bahyam (Outward Show) but God is interested in your Bhavam (Feeling). Hence, purify your feelings in the first instance.

How should we deal with criticism? What are the leading indicators of a noble soul?

There is love in one and all. There is none bereft of love in this world. Sometimes, people may speak what they want. You should not be perturbed by such criticism. If someone criticizes you loudly, it will vanish into thin air. If they criticize you inwardly, then they will suffer. Either way, you will not be affected by it. In this manner, you should practice developing equanimity. Then, you will neither be elated by praise nor be depressed by criticism. If you want to attain God, you must have harmony in your words, thoughts and deeds. Harmony in thoughts, words and deeds is the sign of a noble person. Those who lack harmony amongst the three are wicked.

What hides us from experiencing God daily?

God is present everywhere. Wherever you see, God is present there. There is no place, where God is not present. There is no form that does not belong to Him. However, you search for God, thinking that He is at some distant place. But God is in front of you, behind you, beside you. Every single person around you is the embodiments of God. However, you do not consider the people around you as embodiments of Divinity. You look at their form and consider them as mere human beings. Forget the form. Be firmly established in the feeling that wherever you see it is only God. It is only He who provides everything for our sustenance. You see duality in the world since you go by names and forms. If you see beyond names and forms, you will find unity everywhere.

How to deal with uncertainty?

Some people are constantly immersed in worldly thoughts. Some consider themselves very intelligent and accumulate their bookish knowledge. In fact, these types of pedantries are like an allergy. Once the allergy starts spreading, their energy is sapped. Unfortunately today, we are developing allergy, not energy. Do not keep deliberating whether something is good for you or not. Everything is good. Whatever happens, consider that it is good for you. When you develop such an attitude, everything will turn out to be good for you. Be loving and cheerful always. It is only love that protects and sustains you!

What is the duty of every aspirant on the path of loving devotion to the Lord?

Every aspirant must strive to keep their self away from the turmoil, falsehood and cruelties of the world, and practice truth, righteousness, love and peace at all times. This is truly the path of devotion. Those who seek union with God must discard as worthless both praise and blame

appreciation and derision, prosperity and adversity. No great soul or even Avatar (Divine Incarnation) can ever escape criticism and blame. In such instances, they do not bend but hold on to the truth. With this realization, immerse yourself in holy books and in the company of the devotees of the Lord. Desist from discussing your belief or conviction with the ignorant. When you are rich with the experience of realization and devotion, then you can mix freely and even endeavour to direct others to the truth you have seen and experienced.

How can we lead a life like a flower that blossoms and smells sweetly?

Service is the blossom of Prema (Love), a flower that fills the mind with rapture. Harmlessness is the fragrance of that flower. Let even your little acts be suffused with compassion and reverence. Be assured that your character would thereby shine greatly. The highest happiness is contentment. Where there is no harshness, holiness will thrive and virtue will flourish. Where greed exists, there, vice will breed thick.

What is the watch we must wear and practice on our own intellect to attain Union with God?

Do not barter away the means of achieving permanent and complete happiness, deluded by attachment and attractions of temporal joy. You must carry on your spiritual duties with full devotion. The Divine cannot be known without faith and steadfastness (Sraddha). Only through Love (Prema) comes faith and dedication. Through faith and dedication comes wisdom (Jnana). Through wisdom, you get transcendental devotion to God. Only through such loving devotion, you will achieve union with God.

What are the three instruments we must acquire and if kept clean, will enable any one to experience God?

Kinship with the Lord can be realized by every single person, who acquires these three chief instruments: (1) A mind unsullied by attachment and hatred (2) Speech unsullied by falsehood and (3) a body unsullied by violence. Discriminate at every stage, keep your instruments pure. Accept what is true and discard the rest. You cannot escape sorrow if you have worldly desires. Joy and Peace do not reside in external objects; they are in you. Endeavour to experience the Love, that is Divine itself.

What is the similarity between a medicine and singing the glory of the Lord?

The scriptures (Vedas and Puranas) deserve to be read and heard. God's Name should be recited and listened to. For some ailments, medicines are prescribed for external application or consumption. However, for this universal ailment of Bhavaroga (the cycle of birth and death), Sravanam (Listening to the Glory of God) and Kirtanam (Reciting or Singing the glory of God) are the medicines prescribed for internal and external use. Every aspirant must utter as well as listen to God's Name to receive His Grace.

How does one live in the world just like a lotus in the pond?

You must live in the world with "Udaseenabhava", the stage of disinterestedness, which describes the condition of one who has grasped the truth. In this stage, you will taste the sweetness of the Divine and will never entertain distractions or doubts, and live without any afflictions. The great sages, Suka, Sanaka and Sananda lived in this Bliss and with the conviction of Oneness with the Divine. They used the intellect as the prime instrument, which

shined in its pristine effulgence, cleansed from the rust of the sensory attractions. You can attain this through your own disciplined lives and ceaseless effort.

What is the sweetest of all? How does that pave the way to attain real and permanent happiness?

If there is anything sweeter than all things, more auspicious than everything else, holier than the holiest, truly, it is the Name of the Lord, or the Lord Himself. Give up the company of the worldly minded and seek always the company of the wise and the good. Take refuge in the Lord, He is the embodiment of Peace. He will reside constantly in the place where devotees honor His Name sincerely, with devotion and dedication. Practice intense devotion to the Lord and that is the key to attaining real and permanent happiness.

What should we run after...fleeting pleasures or permanent happiness?

Worship the Lord who lives in the cavity of your heart, nearer to you than your thickest friend, your father, mother or preceptor. He is all of these and more to you. The physical body and the pleasures and comforts you crave for are all subject to damage and decay. One day or other, it becomes food for dogs and jackals. The Lord, on the other hand, grants you bliss and joy forever. He cannot be won by unlimited scholarship, pompous vows or colorful rituals. Surrender your heart to Him. He desires nothing else from you.

What are the subtle changes we should make in our daily lives in our journey to the Lord?

The worldly individual is infected with love towards material objects only. Whereas, the same love, when it is directed towards the Lord, leads him to God Himself. Truly, Devotion to God is the real technique for human liberation and it is a Sadhana par excellence. Devotion will contribute to the growth of wisdom. Devotion and hatred cannot co-exist. When a person is filled with devotion, ignorance will vanish, step-by-step. Love fixed on God is most beneficial and will produce the highest good for all. Cultivate devotion.

What are the fallacies to be given up, in the path of devotion to the Lord?

Until devotion is fully developed, you must practice listening to scriptures and singing His glory, without any interruption. Sometimes, devotees often deal with God, in a bargaining spirit or in the spirit of a tradesman! This attitude should be given up. Whoever you may be, you should not ask from your favorite Lord, anything other than Devotion or Love for God. Uninterrupted flow towards the feet of the Lord is real surrender. Such surrender guarantees genuine and everlasting peace.

Why do we sometimes not receive the Grace of the Lord?

The Grace of the Lord is not easily attainable, when the feeling of "I" ness or ahamkara resides. Every one, learned or illiterate, should feel an overwhelming urge to know God. God has equal affection towards all His children, for to illumine is the Nature of the Light. Using light, one can read good books and others may perform wicked deeds. You must not use the Light (Grace of the Lord) in the wrong means. You must utter God's Name to progress in the realization of the Lord.

When can we call ourselves as devotees of the Lord?

One can claim to be a devotee of the Lord only if the passions and emotions are pure and the character virtuous. The tongue may utter the Name of the Lord, the ear may hear the glory of the Lord, the hand may scatter flowers on the image of God; but the tongue may not know or relish the taste, the ear may not yearn, the hand may not hanker for God. These can happen only when the heart is aware of the Supreme, and the mind is thrilled recollecting the glory of God. Otherwise one is like the spoon which dips into sour and sweet with equal alacrity and insensitivity. It does not refuse or relish any of the tastes.

What should we do to lead a life of one long unbroken service to the Lord?

Whatever is done from sunrise to sunset must be consecrated, as if it is for the worship of the Lord. As care is taken to pluck only fresh flowers and to keep them clean and unfaded, so too, ceaseless effort should be made to do deeds which are pure and unsullied. If you keep this vision before the mind's eye and live life accordingly, then your life is transformed into one long unbroken service of the Lord. The feeling of 'I' and 'Thou' will disappear and all traces of Self will be destroyed. You will attain the stage where God is the Master and you are the servant and the world is the Offering. Leading a life suffused with this joy is indeed bliss.

What is the roadmap to reach God? Which is better - The Path of Service or Devotion or Wisdom?

There is no distinction between Bhakti (Devotion) and Jnana (Wisdom). A block of sweet, when cut into three equal pieces has the same sweetness, weight and shape. The three cannot be separated as we do not find sweetness in one part, weight in another and shape in the third part. When the sweet is placed on the tongue, the taste is recognized, weight is lessened and shape modified, all at the same time. So too, the Jiva (Individual Soul) and the Paramatma (Divine Soul), are not separate. They are one and the same. Therefore, each individual deep you perform must be full of the spirit of service, of Love and of wisdom. This is verily the roadmap to reach God.

What should be the goal of our lives?

To obtain the knowledge of the Divine Self (Brahman), the first requisite is spiritual practice. The first practice that must be done is service to the real teacher (Sadguru), with full faith and full submission. When the sound "horse" is heard, the form of the horse, presents itself before the mind. Similarly, to an aspirant, when the word "Brahman" is uttered, the nature of the "Brahman" should come into the consciousness. To be stabilized in this practice, the aspirant should cultivate control of senses and passions, and possess the attitude of acting without any desire for the fruits of the action.

What is a metric to measure ourselves, if we are on the Path of Knowledge in our Journey to God?

Joy in times of good fortune and sorrow in times of bad, mistaking the pain of the body and the senses as one's own - such dual attitude and feeling must be overcome! Step by step, the identification with the body and the senses has to be given up. This is the sign of one acquiring the very foundation of Jnana Yoga (the Path of Wisdom). If you attain this stage, then eternal joy and bliss will be yours, forever!

What is the one key we must gain while in this birth?

You must attain the state of steady love for God at all times, under all conditions. God is the embodiment of sweetness (Raso vai sah). It is only when such steadfast love is won towards the Absolute; your heart will brim with joy. A pure heart, the study of the Divine, and surrender to the Divine Self will be the natural outcomes at this stage. This stage is called Niyama, meaning a pure one, always being full of joy, engaged in remembering the Name of the Lord or performing spiritual practices.

What is the connection between simple joys in life and immortal joy?

God is sweetness; He is Bliss Incarnate. For even the little sweetness that material objects give, He is the cause. Without His sweetness, even the temporary sweetness and joy derived from worldly objects and materialistic pursuits will taste bitter. The wise understand this and associate themselves with the great ones who have tasted the Divine Sweetness, in a spirit of humility and reverence. Develop unwavering love for God and do not be affected by derision or praise, by wind or sun or rain, by honor or dishonor. This one-pointed journey to the goal will set you free.

Why should we Love All and Serve All?

When someone whose ways you do not appreciate comes near you, there is no need to find fault with him or her. There is no need either to laugh at them or show them your contempt. It is enough if you continue to do your work unaffected by their arrival. Let them follow their path; leave them alone. This is the attitude of 'Udaseenabhava', the attitude of unaffectedness. When you practice and attain this state of mind, you will have unchanging love for God. This attitude will bestow on you everlasting peace, self-control and purity of mind.

Why should we care deeply when we prioritize our needs now?

If at the point of death, you yearn to cater to the tongue, it is proof that the tongue has been the master of your life. If at the point of death, a woman remembers to fondle the child, the samskara (propensities and actions) of child love is predominant in her. The net result of life is that which comes to your memory during the last moments of your life. Death is inevitable for all. Direct your life towards acquisition of that samskara which you feel is best for the last moment. Fix your attention upon it day and night. Engage yourself in the journey of life with good wishes for all, seeking the company of the good and godly. Keep your mind ever fixed on the Lord.

What is the Genuine Moment of Awakening? Why is it important to us today?

Disciplined effort throughout your life is needed to ensure spiritual consummation. The mind has to be turned over to good actions. Everyone must examine themselves rigorously, spot out their own defects and struggle to correct them. When one realizes one's defects and uncovers them, it is like being reborn. This is the genuine moment of Awakening. Therefore, live a life avoiding evil deeds and hateful, harmful thoughts and do not get attached to the world. If you live thus, your last moments will be pure, sweet and blessed.

What is the state of Samadhi? How can one attain that blissful state?

Samadhi (self-realization) is the ocean to which all sadhana (spiritual practice) flows. Every trace of name and form disappears in that ocean. The one who serves and the one who receives the service, the one who meditates and the one who is meditated upon - all such manifestations of duality is dispelled and destroyed. One will not experience even the experience. This is to say, one will not be aware that he/she is experiencing! This is the fruit of the highest meditation, the dearest moment of all those who yearn for God. It is the sign that the grace of the Lord is fully upon that individual.

Why should we focus fully in transforming ourselves and not have a half-hearted approach?

If a tree has to be destroyed, there is no use trying to kill it by plucking its leaves one by one. It takes too long a time and, besides, it may not work. The ancient seers realized that this was true even with respect to eliminating bad qualities within us and hence focused their spiritual practices and energies to transform themselves completely. They also won the grace of the Lord. If intelligence alone is sharpened without the cultivation and practice of virtues and the brain becomes a mere storehouse of information, the world cannot progress; its welfare will be in jeopardy. That education alone is beneficial which gives full scope for the blossoming of all virtues that distinguish a human from an animal.

Can we ever overcome the baggage of grief that we carry and experience every single day?

Clay alone is real. How can a pot exist without clay? How can an effect exist separate from its cause? To the wise, it is the Divine Self that permeates everything and everyone. When such wisdom dawns, the dark shadows of the three types of Karma namely: Agama Karma (the consequences of our actions which are yet to come), Prarabdha Karma (the consequences of our current actions) and Sanchitha Karma (consequences of cumulative actions from the past) will flee away from you, making you pure and free! For, the will of God has no limits or exceptions. Resolve through your spiritual practices that you must win the Grace of the Lord. Do not be discouraged on any score.

Why should we persist on our spiritual practices, every single day, and work on improving ourselves?

If you try to bring back to your memory at bedtime, the events of the day, everything that happened, you will recall only those events, which are meaningful, those that are deeply embedded within you. The rest of the insignificant events turn hazy, recede and disappear from memory. Be comforted with the firm faith that the suffering and travails of this world are illusory and transitory. Fix your mind firmly on this great fact and set out bravely on the path of Sadhana (spiritual practice), on a continuous journey of devotion to the Lord.

What is the purpose of Shivarathri? What should we do on this special occasion?

Every night is marked by darkness. But tonight it is Shivarathri (the holy night of Lord Shiva). What is the difference between rathri (night) and Shivarathri? For the man who has recognized his divinity, every night is Shivarathri. For the man immersed in worldly concerns, all nights are the same. That night is marked by darkness. This night is marked by light. Spirituality is the lighthouse that spreads light for the man who is full of despair, immersed in insatiable desires. The name of God is the lighthouse. By chanting the name, the bearer of the name can be realized. To recognize the omnipresence of the Divine is the purpose of observing Shivarathri.

This purpose is not served by fasting and keeping awake through the night. These are mere auxiliaries to what is considered the ultimate goal. But God-realization should not be put off to some distant future. It has to be taken up here and now. That is the purpose of Shivarathri.

Where is Shiva and how to attain and experience Him?

When you realise Shivoham (I am Shiva), then, you have all the happiness, all the auspiciousness that there is. Shiva is not to be sought on the peak of a distant range of mountains, or in some other special place. You must have heard that sin and merit are inherent in the acts that men do; so too, Shiva is inherent in every thought, word and deed, for He is the energy, the power, the intelligence that is behind each of them.

How does perfection matter, even in the tiniest of the acts we perform daily?

People have taught the eyes, the ears and the tongue the luxury of constant novelty. Now, you must teach them the opposite tendencies. The mind should be turned towards the good and the activities of every minute should be examined from that standpoint. Each deed is a chisel by which the rock of the human personality is being shaped. A wrong stroke may spoil and disfigure the rock. Therefore, do even the tiniest of the acts with great care and devotion.

How can we be assured of victory in our journey to God?

For a drowning man, even a reed is of some support. So too, for a person struggling in the sea of samsara (worldly existence), a few good words spoken by someone might be of great help. No good deed goes waste. Likewise, each bad deed has its consequence. So, strive to avoid the slightest trace of evil in all your activities. Keep your eyes pure, fill your ears with the words of God and do not allow them to listen to calumny. Use the tongue for uttering kind, good and true words. Always remember the Divine. Such a constant effort will certainly grant you victory.

Why should we adopt a simple and effective strategy and stick to it, in our journey to Him?

When the rains pour on the mountain peaks and the water hurries down the sides, no river emerges. However, when the water flows in a single direction, first there is a brook, then a stream, then a torrent and finally a flooded river is formed and the river merges with the sea. So too, your mind and actions must flow full and steady along the fields of holy thoughts. The hands should be used to perform good deeds. Have the Lord's Name within and perform your natural duties. Worthy indeed is the one who marches in such a manner to the goal!

Why shouldn't we give up, though the results we desire hasn't yet occurred?

Twenty hammer-strokes might not succeed in breaking a stone; the 21st stroke might break it. But does that mean that the 20 blows were of no avail? No, each of those 20 strokes contributed its share to the final success. The final result was the cumulative effect of all the 21. Infuse every moment of your life with Love for God. Then, evil tendencies will not hamper your path. The object of all spiritual practices is the destruction of the mind and some day, one good deed will succeed in destroying it. This triumph is the result of all the good deeds done in the past. So never give up, and no good deed will be a waste!

Why should you lead a carefree and confident Life with faith in the Lord?

While struggling in the spiritual field, you must take the Lord Himself as your protector. To instill courage in the child, the mother persuades the child to walk a few steps and turn about, but she will not allow the little one to fall. If the baby totters and is about to lose balance, she hurries from behind and catches the child before he/she falls. God too has His eyes fixed on you, His devotee. He has in His hand, the string of the kite with which He holds you. The string is the bond of Love and Grace. He may give it a pull and sometimes, He may loosen the hold. Whatever He does, be confident and carefree, for it is He who holds you and gives you the strength.

What benefits do listening to the scriptures yield?

.Sound is the very core of the Vedas. Sound is associated with harmony and melody, and hence the Vedas have to be listened to. It is not to be analyzed, judged and commented upon; but when you listen to it, you will derive ecstasy. Hence the Vedas are called Sruthi (that which is to be heard). Therefore, mere listening to its recital creates the awareness of the Divine and confers bliss on the one who listens. The bliss thus earned manifests in one's words and deeds, and radiates bliss all around.

What do we learn from the lives of the ancient seers and sages? What is its relevance?

Vidya is the process of education which teaches one that the cosmos is the manifestation of the Lord's Sport. "Ishaavaasyam Idam Jagath" - the whole world is the residence of the Lord! Therefore, no one should entertain a sense of personal possession or even a trace of egoism. Renounce the feeling of attachment, feel the presence of the Lord everywhere. Welcome the bliss that the Lord confers on you and experience it with thankfulness, without being bound by desires. This is the message of the ancient sages and seers.

What is the acid test to validate if an activity has been performed as an offering to the Lord or not?

Give up the feelings "I" and "you". Only then can you understand the glory of that which is neither "I" nor "mine". This does not mean you renounce everything. Deal with the world as duty demands, in a spirit of detachment. The acid test by which an activity can be confirmed as holy and sacred is to examine whether it promotes attachment or bondage. The activity is unholy or sinful if it arises from or promotes greed. With the intent of fulfilling your legitimate duties, pray to God to keep you alive for a hundred years. You will not incur blame. This is the lesson from true education.

What is the readiness required from our end to receive the love and light from the Divine?

Poison bearing insects will be at home only in dark, dirty places. No snake or scorpion or any other poisonous insect will enter a room that is kept scrupulously clean. So too, the sacred wisdom cannot enter hearts which are dark and dirty. Instead, poisonous breeds like anger will find these hearts as congenial resorts. The sublime significance of Vidya or Higher Learning can be grasped by one, when the mind is pure. It can be communicated to one only when the pure mind sheds its revealing light.

What should we do to succeed in our journey to the Lord?

When one desires to rid coal of its black colour, what can soap and water do? Nor can washing it in milk help. The only means is to put it in a fire. That will turn it into a heap of white ash. In the same manner, when one is anxious to destroy the darkness of ignorance and the dirt of desire, the knowledge of the Self is necessary. Darkness can be ended only with the help of Light. We cannot overwhelm darkness by attacking it with more darkness. Knowledge of the Self is the illumination that one needs to destroy the inner darkness. Each one of you must win it for yourself through steady faith and ardent devotion.

Which is better - worshipping God through Puja or singing Bhajans? Why?

Spiritual exercises such as puja (worship), bhajans (loving adoration), and dhyana (meditation) are activities prompted by devotion to take you to a higher plane. Controversy about their efficacy should not be indulged in by those who are unaware of the depths and heights to which they can lead. These can be gained and judged only through actual practice. The proof lies in one's personal experience alone.

If the faith falters or peaks high and low, how do we gently steer it at a steady pace?

A word to those who are overwhelmed by the burden of worldly responsibilities and anxieties and to those who find themselves unable to pray to the Highest...Maybe you have condemned yourself as undeserving or you may not have faith in the Highest: Do not give up! You must desire and adopt every means to attain joy, peace of mind and lead an exemplary life. With the gift of life as a human being, one should not disown the nature of humans. You must firmly resolve that you will not allow yourself into depths of demonic beings or the level of beasts! The spiritual path can and will awaken, strengthen and sustain your desire and resolution!

How can we find our Loving Lord, in every single moment, amidst the hustle and bustle of the hectic lives we lead?

The expression "God is nowhere" can remain unchanged; there is no need to confront or contradict that expression. The only thing necessary is to read the "w" in "where", in conjunction with the previous "no", so that it becomes, "God is now here!" The negative suddenly becomes positive! Similarly, by merely unifying your vision towards God in one direction, the distinctions and differences you see in the world disappear and the Many becomes One. Great devotees from all faiths have all realized this truth by their unwavering faith, won through the purification of the mind.

When can our character shine? How can we lead the life of a true human being?

The magnet can draw iron towards itself, but it cannot attract pieces of iron covered with dust and rust. Of course, talks are good - only the practice is paralyzed. Unless this illness is cured, the manifestation of education and scholarship cannot happen. The dust and the rust on the pieces of the iron must be washed away in order for the magnet to attract. When the mind is polished and pure, there will be harmony in thought, word and deed. This harmony in thought, word and deed is the best proof for the worth of any human being.

Why should we prioritize the act of correcting and reforming one's own self?

Food when left unconsumed for long becomes stale and emits foul smell. So too, when our faults are not corrected, they will have a negative impact on our own lives. We must persist in the internal cleansing process, either by our own efforts or by heeding to the advice of those

sympathetic souls who have succeeded in cleansing themselves. If we do not do it, like the plate of cooked food left aside too long, our life will begin to degenerate.

Why do people react differently with different people?

Every living being looks at the world around and can find each one looking at it uniquely, in one's own special way. The same object is looked at by ten different persons, with ten different feelings. One individual is looked at by the son with the feeling that he is a father. The wife looks upon the same individual as a husband. His companion looks upon him with the feeling that he is a dear friend. Being the same individual, he responds differently to each one. Each one of those who visualize him differently is uniquely affected. Realize this Truth and fill your vision with Wisdom. You will realize God's omnipresence, everywhere, at all times.

What is the ONE super important aspect we must always remember to please God?

Rare and costly articles might attract us by their external beauty, but to the eye that is illumined by spiritual light, it will appear trivial in value. Physical charm and strength can never overpower spirituality. The passion that breeds egotism can be identified wherever selfishness and pride are displayed. Until this mode of thought and action are suppressed, the quality of goodness will not shine. You must ensure that goodness prevails so as to propitiate, please and win the grace of the Lord.

What is the royal road to reach the Loving Lord?

Your tendencies (samskaras) make or mar your life. These are the steps that take all beings to their goals. The actions you perform make you wade through loss and grief. Through good actions alone you can attain the Lord. So every individual must be wholly engaged in doing good tasks. Performing your duties sincerely is the authentic form of worship. It is the best form of remembering the Lord. It is the highest Bhajan. It spreads love without any distinction or difference. Your daily duties are nothing but acts of service. Be engaged in them, remembering uninterruptedly, the goal to reach the Lord. This is the royal road to your success.

What are the entry criteria to be a good Devotee?

Born in various parts of the world, through various paths, all the rivers, at last reach the ocean. So too, born in different lands, practicing different modes of worship, people reach the Ocean of the Presence of the Lord. A true follower of Sanathana Dharma (Eternal Truth), will be truthful in speech, avoid jealousy and anger, and always acts with a loving heart. All those who practice the above without faltering, are entitled to be called as "Bharathiyas (Loving devotees of God)".

What is the Loving Lord's clarion call to us today?

My dear children arise and awake! Establish once again the Rama Rajya (Rule of the Lord), resplendent with the mansions of Truth, Right Action, Peace and Love. Quench the burning flames of ignorance, restlessness, injustice and envy with the waters of Love, Forbearance and Truth. Sweep away all jealousy and anger. Each one should realize their own faults and understand that there is no use in searching for faults in others. That is a mere waste of time and it also breeds quarrels. Forget your past, repent sincerely for your misdeeds without yielding to dejection and tread the path of prayer to God with good deeds and brotherly love to all.

What does "Veda" mean? Why has it acquired such importance?

Veda is the name for a mass of Divine Knowledge. They teach the truth that cannot be revised or reversed by the passage of time through three periods - past, present and future. Vedas are a collection of words that are truth, which were visualized by sages who had attained the capacity to receive them in their enlightened awareness. Vedas are really the very breath of God. The unique importance of Vedas rest in this fact: Vedas confer peace and security on the entire society. They ensure welfare and happiness for the whole world.

Why should we focus inward and fine tune ourselves?

The real goal of a person's existence should be giving up of desire. Giving up of desire involves giving up of lust, anger, greed, hatred, etc. Presence of desire implies the presence of these harmful tendencies; these other feelings and emotions are its natural attendant reactions. These together are veritably the gateways to hell. Envy is the bolt and pride is the key for the doorway to hell. Unlock and lift the bolt - you can certainly enter in! Hence the fundamental renunciation should be that of desire!

No matter how dearly we love a select God, why is it that we must realize and adore His other manifestations?

People believe in the Divine according to the stage of their inner progress and maturity. Some worship Rama and Krishna in Ayodhya or Mathura as the poornam (absolute manifestation of Divinity). It is not at all wrong to do so; only, one should not proclaim that their belief alone is the truth that the forms which they have ascribed are the 'only' names and forms of the Divine and all the others are unsuitable and inferior. Poornam implies the Lord is Universal. One must always be conscious of this and acquire the vision that all forms of God are equally valid and true.

How are the Vedas relevant to us in our daily life and conduct?

Every being that lives in the world strives to possess what it desires and avoid what it dislikes. Know that the Vedas (scriptures) instruct how to succeed in both these endeavors. The word 'Veda' is derived from 'Vid' which means 'to know'. So, Veda means and includes all knowledge. They are concerned with both - the material and the spiritual. They clearly lay down what has to be done and what should not be done. When these prescriptions and prohibitions are followed, one can earn the good and avoid the evil.

What are the weeds we must clean out, day in and day out, through self-effort?

Anger will pollute the wisdom earned by man. Unbridled desire will foul all his actions. Greed will destroy his devotion and dedication. Desire, anger and greed together will undermine the devotion and wisdom of anyone and turn them into an animal. The root cause of anger is desire and desire is the consequence of ignorance. Ignorance is the characteristic of an animal. Realizing this truth, everyone must do well to elevate themselves through self-effort and training.

How to understand and appreciate the unity that exists between all forms of the Divine?

The taste of the vast ocean is to be found complete and undiminished in every single drop of its water. But this does not mean that the drop and the ocean are the same. We recognize the drop and the ocean as two separate entities, but the nature and taste are both identical. Similarly, the

All-pervasive Inner Motivator of all (Sarvantharyaami) and the Name and Form you adore are not separate entities. They are identical. All the gross forms of Divine are fully saturated with the subtle. Without understanding this truth, it is impossible to realize your Loving Lord.

Why have the Vedas emerged and why are there so many branches of these hymns?

As the Vedas are vast and limitless, it was difficult and would take very long for ordinary men to study it. Hence, it was classified into four, so that it can be within the reach of all. The Riks or hymns in praise of the Lord were grouped under Rik Samhitha and Yajur Samhitha. The verses capable of musical rendition were grouped under Saama Samhitha and the formulae and spells were compiled under the Atharva Samhitha. There is no trace of conflict in any of these texts. They have emerged to enlighten people in different states of awareness to benefit from Divine Guidance and cross the sea of suffering.

Why should we persist with sublimating our qualities and tendencies?

Pashu (animal) refers to that which accepts what the external vision conveys. 'Pashupathi' means Lord of all, the One who has the inward vision. The one who has not mastered the senses is Pashu. An animal has several innate undesirable qualities, however hard it may try to eliminate them, they cannot be transformed. For example, we can bring up a tiger cub with affectionate care and train it to be gentle and obedient, but when it is hungry, will it relish poori (an Indian dish made of wheat flour) and potato curry? No, it will only relish raw meat! Hence, the scriptures quote: "Man indeed is the most fortunate and sacred amongst all beings, for one's inborn qualities can be sublimated". Realizing this truth, each one must elevate their self through training and self-effort.

What is the process and what are the stages in our journey to God?

The attitude of the worshipper and the worshipped is truly the seed of Bhakti (Devotion). First, the worshipper's mind is attracted by the unique qualities of the Divine. He tries to acquire for himself these special qualities of the object of his worship. This is Sadhana (spiritual practice). In the early stages of worship, there is clear distinction between the worshipper and worshipped. Later, as Sadhana progresses, the feelings of distinction diminish. Finally when the attainment is reached, there is no distinction whatsoever. To get there, one must have the firm faith in the Lord. The only wish that is fit to be entertained in the mind of a devotee is the desire to realize the Lord in this very birth.

Why should we restrain ourselves from indulging in criticizing others?

God is present in everyone. He resides in every heart. So, do not confine God to a temple, mosque or church. Where man is, there God is! As you do not realize this, you indulge in the criticism of others. To overcome this habit, enquire within yourself, "Whom do I adore? Whom am I criticizing?" God is present in everyone. So, when you criticize another, it amounts to criticizing yourself. When you love others, you love yourself.

What is the best way to celebrate Ugadi?

True Ugadi (New Year's Day) is the day when man gives up bad qualities, fills his heart with love and takes to the path of sacrifice. Do not limit the celebration of Ugadi to merely putting on new clothes and partaking of delicious items. Today you may wear a new shirt, but how long will it remain new? Tomorrow it becomes old. Today's newspaper becomes a waste paper

tomorrow. Our life is like a newspaper. Once you have finished reading a newspaper, you do not like to read it again and again. You have been given this birth which is like a newspaper, and have gone through varied experiences of pleasure and pain. Enough is enough. You should pray, "Oh God! You have given me this 'newspaper' and I have gone through the experiences of this life. I don't want to have another birth."

When does one become a true devotee?

Only after the feelings of 'I' and 'mine' are uprooted, one becomes a devotee. The heart of such a devotee is filled with compassion and the urge to do well to the world. It is the supreme bliss they attain thereby which impels them to act in this way. They crave for nothing else but being one with their sweet Lord. With this single goal in mind, regardless of joy and sorrow, without any concern about their own satisfaction, they engage themselves in spiritual practices steadfastly, incessantly and with conviction, and after understanding the Reality, they attain full contentment.

We often repeat Mantras which extol the Names of God. What is its significance?

The syllable 'man' in the word 'Mantra' indicates the process of probing through the mind. The syllable 'thra' means that which has the capacity to liberate or save. In short, 'Mantra' is that which saves you when your mind dwells upon it. While rites, rituals and sacrifices are performed, you should remind yourself of their nature and significance. You must repeat the Mantras to attain the goals you pray for. If you recite them mechanically without learning the meaning, they yield no fruit. You can reap the full reward, only when you recite them with the knowledge of their meaning and their significance.

What is the most important spiritual activity we must be engaged in to lead a happy life?

A life lived without mastering one's senses does not deserve the name. You have been endowed with many capabilities and if you do not control your senses and direct them properly, then that life is wasted. Vidya or true education helps you to achieve success in this process. Vidya promotes humility and through humility, you acquire the deservedness to engage in professions. Deservedness confers prosperity. A prosperous person has the capacity for undertaking acts of charity and right living. Right living will confer happiness here and hereafter.

What causes us to be born again and again? How can we win in this game of life and death?

People tend to delay doing their duties. But for undertaking spiritual practices, there is no yesterday and no tomorrow. This very moment is the moment. If you have engraved this understanding in your heart, then you can merge in Lord Shiva. If this truth is not assimilated, and you get immersed in aims of today and tomorrow, it lays the foundation for worldly attachment! Then you will be born again and again to have the darshan of Yama (God of Death)! Those who realize this truth will not fail even to the slightest extent in their spiritual practices. It is the right of every aspirant to have the vision of Shiva (Lord of Auspiciousness).

Love alone can move God!

When Sri Krishna was being weighed in a balance, all the jewels of Sathyabhama could not balance His weight. Rukmini then came and declared that the mere chanting of the name of

Krishna would be equal to His weight. By the weight of an additional offering of a leaf, a flower or a little water, the scales will be tilted against Krishna. So saying she placed a Tulasi (Basil) leaf on the scale. And lo! It went down. Such is the power of the Lord's name and a love-filled offering to the Lord. The Lord is not swayed by wealth or scholarship, power or position. Love alone can move Him.

What is the key lesson conveyed by Rig Veda?

The Rig Veda teaches unity. It exhorts all living beings to have good thoughts that are directed towards good ends. It insists that all hearts must be charged with the same good feelings. All beings must tread the path of Truth, for all are manifestations of the same Divinity. Some people believe that the lesson of unity of mankind is new and progress towards it is praiseworthy. In Rig Vedic times, the concept was proclaimed much more clearly and emphatically than it is now. All are sparks of the same flame of Divinity. The Rig Veda also demands that difference and distinction should not be imposed and a universal, inclusive outlook must be cultivated.

What is the connection between a tree and the human body?

The human body is a world in itself. The body is a tree. Love of the Self is the root. Desires are the branches it sends forth. Qualities, attributes and modes of behavior that are based on the basic nature are the flowers from the tree. Joy and grief are the fruits thereof. Blood flows through and animates every part of the body. So too, Divinity is flowing in and through and activating every spot in the world.

How should we plan our journey to God?

What is the use in planning a well when the house has caught fire? When will it be dug? When will water become available and when will the fire be extinguished? Isn't it an impossible task? If at the very start, a well was dug, how helpful it would be during critical situations? Beginning to contemplate on God during one's last moments is like beginning to dig the well after the house has caught fire. No one knows what is in store the next moment. Therefore, from now on, engage in contemplation of God and perform your spiritual practices. Physical stamina is very necessary for sadhana (spiritual practice), so look after your body with utmost care. But remember that over-tending is also harmful.

How should we pray to the Lord to earn and gain wealth?

Wealth acquired through the grace of Mother Veda is the most potent wisdom in itself. For this reason, the ancient seers prayed to God thus, "Dear Lord, You are the very embodiment of Veda. Burden me not with worldly riches, but grant me the wisdom that is the source of Paramaishwarya (Supreme treasure). I shall be fully content with that wealth and since it is capable of being utilized for your service, you too will be glad when I have it!"

How can we ensure that our journey to God is smooth and hassle-free?

For achieving success in any task, Sadbhava or righteousness is very important. Without fear of sin, righteousness cannot originate and love for God too will not develop. From this fear of sin arises devotion which leads to worshipping the Lord. Your body is a caravanserai, your mind its watchman and your soul is the pilgrim. For a hassle-free journey to eternity, there is nothing as reliable as remembering the Name of the Lord. Once the sweetness of the Name has been

experienced, you will not have any exhaustion, unrest or sloth. You will complete your pilgrimage joyfully, enthusiastically and with deep conviction.

How can we leverage desires to achieve everlasting peace?

Desires breed wishes. Wishes cause birth and also death. If you are devoid of desires, you need not go through birth and death. The next birth is the result of unfulfilled desires in this life and is determined by them. However, the desire to know God, to love God and be loved by God is a desire that does not bind. When awareness of God dawns in all its splendor, every worldly, sensual desire is reduced to ashes. The individual Self will then turn towards Universal Self and delight itself in supreme everlasting peace.

Why are the four goals of life and how should we pursue them?

The Vedas lay down four goals before man: Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth), Kama (desire) and Moksha (liberation). But they have to be pursued in pairs, Dharma and Artha together and Kama and Moksha combined. That is to say, Wealth has to be earned through Righteousness, and our Desire should be for Liberation. But man takes these four separately and ends up losing everything. He puts them into separate compartments and adopts distinct plans to achieve them. He gives up Righteousness and Liberation as beyond him and wastes his life pursuing only Wealth and Desire. This leads him to ruin.

What is the one important lesson that the beautiful flowers teach us every day?

Look at the blossoms in the garden. When the gardener plucks the flowers, the buds exult that tomorrow is their turn to be gathered into his hands, and their faces are so full of joy when they unfold in that hope. Do they feel any sadness? Do their faces droop? Are they any less bright? No, the moment they know that the next day it is their turn; they make themselves ready with great gusto and excitement. So also, one must be ready on the path of Sadhana (Spiritual practice), enthusiastically remembering the Name of the Lord, without worrying and feeling sad about when we may have to depart from the earthly plane.

How to convert the negative in the world to positive? How to see unity in this world of diversity?

The expression "God is nowhere" can remain unchanged; there is no need to confront or contradict that expression. The only thing necessary is to read the letter "w" in "where", in conjunction with the previous word "no", so that it becomes, "God is now here!" The negative suddenly becomes positive! Similarly, by merely unifying your vision towards God, the distinctions and differences you see in the world disappear and the many becomes One. Great devotees from all the religions have realized this truth by their unwavering faith won through the purification of the mind.

Can education alone give us happiness? What do we really need for fulfilling joy in our lives?

Education is now sought after for securing a means of livelihood. The attempt of many parents and their children is to learn some skills which will fetch them a good job in a business establishment for a decent salary. Of course, man must live and live comfortably. So, it is necessary that some useful skill is mastered. But, man needs things much more satisfying and

essential than comfort. He must have faith in himself, so that he may respect himself. This Atma Vishwasa (confidence in the Self) lies at the very root of joy.

What is the secret to extend friendship with all in the Universe?

The bird called Jeeva (individual soul) resides within a nine-holed pot called body. Seeing the antics of the mind, death keeps laughing. It is a wonder how the bird has a body, how it came into the pot, and how it rises up and goes. All the sages, and human beings of all the continents, are constantly undergoing the sentence of carrying about with them the burden of the body. Now, out of all these beings, who are friends and who are enemies? When egoism dies out, all are friends. There are then no enemies. This lesson must be remembered by all.

How to overcome delusion and march towards God?

The four subtle elements of consciousness - manas (the mind), buddhi (the intellect), chittha (will) and ahamkara (the ego) - are all maya (delusion). What is maya? Maa (means 'not') and ya (means 'exist') - that which does not exist but appears to exist is maya. Maya makes the unreal appear as real and the real as unreal. The other name for maya is ajnana (ignorance). Ajnana is that which hides the reality from you and makes you regard the non-existing as existing. It makes the false appear as true. As you move towards the light, your shadow falls behind you; when you move away from the light, you have to follow your own shadow. Go every moment one step nearer to the Lord and then maya, the shadow, will fall behind you and will not delude you at all.

What is a key quality for every spiritual aspirant?

You experience joy and misery through the ear. Therefore, avoiding the cruel arrows of harsh words, one should use words that are sweet, pleasant and soft. With that softness, add the sweetness of truth. To make the words soft, if falsehood is added, it would only clear the way for some more misery. Hence, a spiritual aspirant should use very soft, sweet, true and pleasant words. The mind of such an aspirant is Mathura, their heart is Dwaraka and their body is Kashi. Such persons can be recognized by their good qualities themselves.

How can we attain perfection and lead a fulfilling life?

The inevitable destiny of every living being is the attainment of perfection and fullness. Our present condition of incompleteness is the consequence of our activities during our previous lives. The thoughts, feelings, passions and acts of past lives have caused the present condition in life. Similarly, our future is being built on the basis of our present deeds and desires, thoughts and feelings. Seek help from the Divine to purify and sublimate your consciousness. Thus, your spiritual progress will be accelerated and you will attain perfection and fullness.

Why is it super important to keep our hearts pure, every single minute of our life?

All spiritual practices are of no avail, if the heart is not pure. Your cravings and attachments will not disappear even if you are immersed in many spiritual practices so long as the heart is full of the illusion of egoism. Remember that agitations of the mind cannot exist in the same heart filled with love. Can light and darkness ever co-exist at the same place and the same time? Hence, you must remove the illusion of egoism from your heart. To get rid of the feeling of "I" and "mine", you must worship the Lord. You must become an aspirant without likes and dislikes.

What are the key essentials of the master-pupil relationship?

A great teacher is one who has the knowledge of the Self imprinted in his/her heart. The individual who can welcome this truth and is eager to know it alone deserves to be a pupil. The seed must have the life principle latent in it. The field must be ploughed and made fit for sowing. If both these conditions are fulfilled, the spiritual harvest will be bountiful.

How can we continue our journey to Him, with enthusiasm and joy, every single day?

You repeat the name of the Lord, sing bhajans, and perform meditation to earn single-mindedness, is it not? Once this single mindedness has been earned, its inner significance will be revealed to you and effort will become unnecessary. Those eager to become aspirants, to attain salvation, should not yield to arguments and counter-arguments. You should not be enticed by the wiles of bad feelings! You should see your own faults and not repeat them. You should guard and protect the one-pointedness, with your eyes fixed on the goal, and dismiss as trash whatever difficulties, defeats and disturbances you may encounter on your path.

What is the most beneficial way to lead a life in this world?

Living a regulated and disciplined life is very essential. Real education must train you to observe these limits and restrictions. You take great pains and suffer privations in order to master the knowledge of this world. Similarly, you follow with strict care the routine to develop your physique. Therefore, whatever be your objective, you must obey the appropriate code of discipline.

What are the benefits of a disciplined life?

In spirituality, the rules and regulations appear elementary at first. Later, they enable you to be aware of regions beyond the reach of the senses. Over time, you realize the experience of the Truth of all truths and appreciate that the one Lord is imminent in all and pervades the entire cosmos. You will be filled with bliss when your mind is fixed in this faith and awareness. This is true Vidya (learning), the culmination of the best educational process.

What is the fundamental truth that we must never forget and put into practice?

You should make the right use of the eyes, ears and tongue which God has gifted to you. Whoever is able to control these will achieve greatness. One should therefore cultivate these virtues and attain divinity. This is the primary objective and fundamental basis of all education. Those bereft of these virtues are verily demons. This is the essence and the message of Ramayana. Never neglect these teachings. They are for emancipation and redemption of mankind. Put them into practice in your life.

Who are the real people in this world and how to become like them?

Real people are those, who are filled with love. Their hearts are springs of mercy. They are endowed with true speech and their minds are filled with peace. Just as gold and silver are hidden deep under the earth and pearl and coral deep under the sea, peace and joy also lie hidden in the mind. Desirous of acquiring these hidden treasures, if you dive inward and direct your mental activities towards acquiring these treasures, you become filled with love and peace. You must fill yourself with this love and live in the light of unsullied, unselfish and pure love.

What is our unique fortune and how to preserve it?

You may have outstanding physical beauty. You may have the sparkle of robust youth. You may be from a high and noble lineage. You may be a famed scholar. However, if you lack the virtues that only spiritual discipline can ensure, you will be reckoned only as a beautiful flower with no fragrance. You must live in accordance with the prescriptions from the Scriptures and perform actions with the attitude that is needed to preserve the status you have gained as the highest soul amongst animals and living beings.

What is the loving guidance in our Journey to the Lord?

The advice given by Vedic teachers to young departing children, after their schooling are exalted are, "Revere your mother as God", 'May your father be God' and 'May your Teacher be your God'; 'Speak the Truth and Act Righteously, Do not adopt other ways'."

Engage yourselves in such activities that will promote your progress. By devoted service to parents, and consistent adherence to Truth, several great souls, including Rama and Harishchandra have made themselves immortal. By means of right conduct, common people exalted themselves to the position of World Teachers. Hence, every bit of this advice, given to pupils, is highly powerful and relevant.

What is the purpose behind celebrating many festivals all round the year?

The mind of man is apt to doze off after some spurt of spiritual activity. This is the reason festival days have been marked out on the calendar - to awaken the mind of man from sloth or complaisance. They are like alarm bells, which go off at intervals during the year, warning men of the journey ahead and the goal beyond the horizon. 'Be warned, be warned', say the sages, 'Awake, arise, stop not till the goal is attained.'

How can we easily tell the difference between a "manava" and "danava"?

A 'manava' (human being) is soft, sweet and immortal, whereas 'danavas' (demonic-natured persons) are merciless, lawless and have no sweetness in them. They may look like good people; however bereft of kindness and righteousness, how can they be called as human beings? Good human beings are those, who engage themselves in soft and sweet deeds of kindness, righteousness, and tread the path of love and truth. Their good nature is resplendent and reflects on their faces which beam with joy at all times.

How to contain the enemies within and proceed on the spiritual path?

The real tapas or asceticism in life is to observe disciplines and restrictions as prescribed. The mind is the foremost of the three inner instruments in human beings. We must protect the mind so that attachment, passion and excitement do not enter. These extremes are natural to the mind. The waves that rise in fury in the mind are lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy; these six are your inner foes. Lust and anger bring on the remaining four. To release ourselves from these inner foes and to proceed in our spiritual path, we must observe spiritual practices.

Is it ok to demonstrate our Love occasionally?

Those devoid of Pure Love are sub-humans. The holy quality of Love is that it is ever present; not something which manifests off and on. Love is one and indivisible. Those saturated with Love are incapable of spite, selfishness, injustice, wrong and misconduct. Those who trample

on Love and consider inferior qualities as important should destroy their evil qualities. Bad conduct and habits distort your humanness. Hearts filled with the nectar of Love indicate genuineness. You must possess Love that is unsullied, unselfish, devoid of impurity and that which is demonstrated continuously.

What is true yoga?

Work done with no concern or desire for the profit there from, purely out of love or from a sense of duty, is Yoga. Such work destroys your animal nature and will transform you into a Divine Being. Serve others, visualizing them as Divine Souls. That will help your progress and will save you from sliding down the spiritual stage you've attained. Service is far more salutary than even vows and worship. Service disintegrates the selfishness latent in you and opens your heart wide. It makes your heart blossom.

How do we measure up as a loving devotee of the Lord?

Everyone who is engaged in repetition of the Holy Name observes vows and has self-control and discipline is dear to the Lord. These people have faith, patience, warmth towards all, and are filled with kindness and joy. They have unalloyed love towards the Lord. The true devotees of the Lord are endowed with discrimination, filled with humility and wisdom, and are always immersed in contemplation of the Lord's sport. They dwell on the Lord's name at all times and conditions, and shed tears of love when they hear the Lord's Name on any lip. These are the characteristics of genuine devotees! Such devotees are very dear to the Lord.

How can we get near and dear to God?

Whoever assigns his wealth, strength, intellect and devotion towards the promotion of humankind is worthy of reverence. They are those who are born for a noble purpose. They observe the holy vow of service, unsullied by thoughts of self. This ideal of service and the urge to practice it forms the very heart of education. This is Pure Love in its chief manifestation. God loves those individuals who undertake activities for the benefit of other people, as His dear children. These are ideal brothers and sisters for their countrymen.

How to recognise a true devotee of the Lord?

Anyone who is engaged in meditation, spiritual practices and is imbued with self-control and discipline is dear to the Lord. Such devotees will also epitomize faith, patience, comradeship, kindness, joy and have unalloyed love for God. They possess discrimination, humility, wisdom and renunciation, and are always aware of their inner Self. They are constantly immersed in the contemplation of leelas (Divine play) of the Lord. Whoever dwells on Lord's Name at all times and under all conditions, and sheds tears of Love when the Lord's Name is heard from any lip, know them to be genuine devotees.

How can you become a harbinger of peace in your neighborhood and the community?

Prompted by the urge to advance the progress of others, you must dedicate your wealth, skill, position and status for the wellbeing of all. Then, you will become truly great. You must fulfill unflinchingly the vow of selfless service. If you are conscious of your basic duties and obligations, and spend your days in carrying them out, you will be in supreme peace, wherever you are. Through your influence, your neighborhood too, will share that peace.

How important is devotion to the Lord?

If you want to be a devotee, you must surrender completely to the Lord. Mere reading of scriptures is of no avail. One can experience joy only as a result of action. To have devotion, there is no restriction on caste, creed or gender. For the Lord's mission, the kinship with Him is attained only on account of devotion. Of what use is it to have status, wealth and character without loving devotion to the Lord? Like the cloud that does not bear rain, but wanders in the sky, people without devotion are at the mercy of the winds, irrespective of their caste or wealth, power and fame they possess.

What is the hallmark of true education? What is the barometer for true service?

Vidya (true knowledge) impels one to pour into the sacrificial fire one's narrow ego and foster in its place, universal Love, which is the foundation for the superstructure of spiritual victory. Unbounded Love purifies and sanctifies the mind. Let your thoughts centre around God, your feelings and emotions be holy, and your activities be the expression of selfless service. Let the mind, the heart and the hand be thus saturated with goodness. True education must accomplish this task of sublimation. Service rendered to another has to confer full joy in all ways. Vidya must emphasize that in the name of service, no harm, or pain or grief should be inflicted on another.

How should our devotion to the Lord be?

Your devotion to God has to be continuous, uninterrupted, like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. You may have observed that the young monkey relies on its own strength to protect itself. Wherever its mother might jump, it has to attach itself fast to the mother's belly and should not release its hold, even if pulled apart. So too, as a devotee you must stand the test at the hands of the Lord and hold on to the Lord's Name at all times and under all conditions, tirelessly, without the slightest trace of dislike or disgust, bearing ridicule and criticism of the world and overcoming the feelings of shame and defeat. Practice of devotion of this kind is called Markatakishora Marga. Prahlada, a great child devotee of the Lord, practiced this kind of devotion.

How is service related to acquiring knowledge?

While rendering Service, the attitude of it being done for one's own satisfaction should not tarnish it. Service must be rendered as an essential part of the process of living itself. This is the real core of true knowledge. It is as core as brick and mortar are to a house that is being built. The activity of service needs the Vidya (true education) that can strengthen our resolve in purifying our thought, word and deed. Such Vidya and service springing from the heart is essential for the country's progress.

What can we learn from the life of a young kitten?

A kitten simply continues mewling in its place, placing all its burdens on its mother. The mother cat holds the kitten in its mouth and moves it to more elevated places or transports it safely through even very narrow passages. So too, the Lord will grant everything that is needed in this life, if all burdens are placed on Him and if He is pursued ceaselessly without forgetting Him for even a moment. All that is required is to place the entire burden on the Lord and surrender fully to His Will. He will certainly provide everything. Lakshmana, the dear brother of Rama, was an exemplar who followed this path of devotion called Marjalakishora.

What exactly is the secret of ensuring peace and prosperity for humankind?

Rendering service to others, without expecting service from them in return is the secret to ensure peace and prosperity for all. Karma or activity which binds is a huge, fast-growing tree. Undertake every act as an act of worship to glorify the Lord; it is like a powerful axe that can cut the root of the tree. This is the true Yagna, the most important ritual that one must practise. This sacrifice promotes and confers Brahma Vidya (Self Knowledge). The yearning to do Seva must flow in every nerve of the body, penetrate every bone and activate every cell.

How to experience the Lord?

Worship God with purity of feeling and free from all other thoughts. As a result of this worship, the Lord will appear before your inner eye, in the form which is dear to you. This vision is not a matter of imagination; it is a 'face to face' experience. Without difference of location, you can abide in the presence of the Lord. Sometimes you may see everything as the glory of the Lord and become suffused with God consciousness. All these are the fruits of your devotion. As your devotion matures further, all differences disappear and unity is attained, and the highest stage is reached. This is called Saayujya. You should aspire for this merger with the Lord. At this stage, you will wish to serve the Lord as He pleases and experience joy from the Divine Form.

What is the importance of Vinayaka Caturthi?

Ganapathi is the embodiment of Buddhi (intellect) and Jnana (wisdom). Truth emerges out of wisdom and ultimately leads to Ananda (bliss). This is the teaching of Ganapathi. You are under the false impression that today is the birthday of Vinayaka, but He has neither birth nor death. He has neither beginning nor end. He is the eternal witness. All the festivals of Bhaarith are suffused with deep inner meaning. They are highly sacred. Festivals are not just meant for preparing delicious items and consuming them. They are meant to remind us of Divinity. On festival days, you decorate your houses with buntings of green leaves and you also wear new clothes, discarding the old ones. Likewise, you should give up your old bad habits and cultivate new and sacred ideas.

What are the two gate-checks we must win over to reach God? Why?

For beings immersed in the world, there are two obstacles that must be overcome: the craving for animal desires and the craving of the tongue. Every one of you must conquer these. So long as they persist, they cause sorrow. These are the causes of all sins, and sin is the manure on which maya (delusion) thrives. Those aspiring for liberation should subdue the senses. To conquer these desires whatever activity you do - eating, walking, studying, serving or moving - you should perform them in the belief that they lead you to the presence of God. Every action should be done in a spirit of dedication to the Lord.

In this mundane world, is there hope for a simple devotee to reform the society?

Vidya (true knowledge) instructs you to reform yourself first. After transforming yourself, try to reform others. That is the advice offered by Vidya. The delusive attachment to the objective world can be uprooted by means of selfless service rendered as worship to the Lord. Genuine devotion is characterized by love for all, at all times, everywhere.

How can we learn from the life of a farmer, the process to attain perfection and lead a full life?

A farmer clears and levels the land, removes the stones and thorns, ploughs and prepares the field, manures and nourishes the soil, waters and applies fertilizers on it. Then he sows the seeds and transplants the saplings. This is followed by the process of weeding and spraying of pesticides. Finally, after a long wait, he reaps the harvest. Once the crop is harvested, he then winnows it, threshes it and finally stacks the produce. All these various processes are for the sake of feeding the stomach. So too, one must feel that hunger, thirst, joy and sorrow, grief and loss, suffering and anger, food and appetite are but impulses that impel us towards attaining the Presence of the Lord. If you have this attitude, no sin will ever tarnish your actions. Over time, these impulses too will vanish, without a trace.

Why is it super important to keep our hearts pure, every single minute of our life?

Your nature is revealed by your acts, gestures, looks, speech, food habits, dress and the manner in which you conduct yourself. Therefore, you must pay attention to ensure that your speech, movements, thoughts and behavior are all correct and filled with love and nobility, devoid of wildness and waywardness. You have to develop the humility to believe that you have much good to learn from others. Your enthusiasm, aspiration, resolution, capacity to work, knowledge and wisdom have to be directed towards the welfare of all and not utilized solely for your selfish ends. You should be broad-minded and cultivate all-embracing love.

What is the importance of respecting the mother?

You must understand the value of mother's love and her concern for you. You must give your mother the topmost priority. Sometimes, modern youth do not care for their mothers. They think they are highly educated and that their mothers do not know anything. It is a great mistake to think so. Never look down upon your mother. Mothers also should not compel their children to accede to each and every wish of theirs. Through love and sincerity, she should put her children on the proper path. Every mother should aspire that her children should be good; they need not be great.

Why is Mother's Grace so important?

More fragrant than the sweet smelling flowers like jasmine and lily, softer than butter, more beautiful than the eye of the peacock, more pleasant than the moonlight is the love of a mother. Human life is a journey from 'I' to 'We'. In this short journey, you have to detach yourself from the body and develop attachment towards the 'Self'. For this, mother's grace is very essential.

What is the special formula to love all, yet love God?

When one is involved in the world, only worldly thoughts will arise during one's last moments. To those who yearn wholeheartedly for the Lord, the Lord will present Himself. One may love his/her kith and kin, respect them and keep them in good humour so long as one moves about in the world. But, while still being in the world, one must offer unstinted love and loyalty all through the life to the Lord alone, none else.

Why is it important to engage in spiritual practices?

The taste of food cannot be appreciated if the person is ill or if the mind is immersed in something else. Similarly, even if you are engaged in spiritual practices, you will not experience joy if your heart is filled with evil qualities. You can taste sweetness so long as there is sugar on the tongue. However, if there is even a tinge of bitterness on the tongue, your whole mouth tastes bitter. Therefore, those who aspire to attain the Holy Presence of the Lord must cultivate good habits, discipline and noble qualities. The usual accustomed ways of life will not lead you to God automatically. You must perform sadhana (spiritual practices) to modify it suitably.

What lesson can we learn from the crane as it gets its food?

Look at the crane - it walks about pretty fast in water. But, during that walk, it cannot catch any fish. It must, for that purpose, become slow and quiet and stand motionless. So also, if one proceeds with greed, anger and other evil qualities, one cannot secure the fish of truth, love and peace. You must chant the Name of the Lord. Then, you will surely overcome the natural traits of greed and anger. Hold on to the Lord as the Universal Goal and make Him the destination of your life's journey. Practice control of speech and constant contemplation of the Lord. Then you will be able to subdue your mind that makes you restless, and gradually you will be filled with all the good qualities!

Why should we perform even the basic functions of life, carefully and joyfully?

Eating food is a holy ritual, a yajna. It should not be performed during moments of anxiety or emotional upheavals. Food should be considered as medicine for the illness of hunger and for the sustenance for life. Treat each trouble you encounter as a fortunate opportunity to develop your strength of mind and toughen you spiritually.

How can we redeem our lives?

Good character is the precious jewel of human life. Human birth itself is the consequence of countless good deeds and it should not be frittered away. This chance must be utilized to the fullest extent. With deep yearning and steadfast discipline, you must endeavor to experience Divinity and redeem yourself.

What is the prescription to cure the malady of Ignorance?

In the garden of the Heart, you must plant and foster the Rose of Divinity, the Jasmine of Humility and the Lily (Champak) flower of Generosity. In your medicine chest, you must keep in readiness, the tablets of discrimination, drops of self-control and three key powders: Faith, Devotion and Patience. Through the use of these drugs, you can escape the serious illness called Ajnana (Ignorance).

Why is developing virtues very critical?

In this world, there is no penance higher than fortitude, no happiness greater than contentment, no blessing holier than mercy and no weapon more effective than patience. Devotees should consider the body as a field, the good deeds as seeds and cultivate the Name of the Lord. Take the help of the Heart as the farmer in order to get the harvest - which is the Lord Himself. Like cream in the milk, fire in the fuel, the Lord is in everything. Have full faith in this.

What is it that we should watch out, as a student of the World?

There are many destructive forces in the world. But, luckily along with them, there are also constructive forces. As students of Vidya (True Knowledge) you should not turn yourself into worshippers of bombs and machines. You must transform yourself into active persons, worshipping the Divine. Authority and power are powerful intoxicants. They will pollute one until he/she is completely destroyed. They breed misfortune. But, genuine knowledge will confer on you fullness and fortune.

What is the blessed assurance of the Lord to every spiritual aspirant?

Just as cream is present in milk and fire in the fuel, so also the attainment of Divine is a sure result for those who perform spiritual practices. Even if the attainment of Liberation is not directly realized as a consequence of taking the Lord's Name, the following fruits are clearly evident: (i) the company of the great (ii) truth (iii) contentment and (iv) control of the senses. Through whichever of these gates one may enter, whether one is a householder or a recluse or a member of any other class, one can certainly reach the Lord. This is certain!

What is the asceticism that every living being must practice?

The real thapas or asceticism in life is to observe disciplines and restrictions as prescribed. The mind is the foremost of the three inner instruments in human beings. We must protect the mind, so that attachment, passion and excitement do not enter. These extremes are natural to the mind. The waves that rise in fury in the mind are lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy. These six are your inner foes. Lust and Anger bring on the remaining four. To release ourselves from these inner foes and to proceed in our spiritual path, we must observe spiritual practices.

Why should we transform our evil qualities?

Miserliness is like the behavior of a dog. It has to be transformed. Anger is the first enemy of every aspirant. And untruth - it is even more disgusting! Through untruth, all the vital powers are destroyed! Thievery ruins life; it makes the priceless human life cheaper than a pie. Moderate food, moderate sleep, love and fortitude - these will help in the upkeep of the health of both body and mind. Whoever you are, whatever condition you may be in, if you give no room for dispiritedness and fear, and remember the Lord with unshaken faith, without any ulterior motive, all suffering and sorrow will fall away from you!

What is the importance of the depth of faith we have?

The benefit we can derive from anything is proportional to the faith we place in it. From adoration of Gods, pilgrimages to holy places, uttering of mantras (hymns) to resorting to doctors, we derive benefits only according to the measure of our faith. When someone gives a discourse, the more faith we have in the individual as a scholar and expert, the more clearly and directly we can draw the subject into our hearts and understand it deeply. For the growth of faith and the fostering of clear understanding, the most essential requirement is the purity of the heart.

How can we love all and be loved in return?

Every person is prone to commit mistakes without being aware of it. However light the fire may be, some smoke is bound to emanate from it. So also, whatever good deed one might do, there is likely to be a trace of evil in it. However, efforts should be made to ensure that evil is minimized so that the good is more and the bad is less in due course of time. You must also

carefully think over the consequences of what you do, talk or execute. In whatever way you want others to honour you, or to behave with you, in the same way, you should first behave with others, love and honour them. Only then will they honour you. Instead, if you don't love and honour others, and complain that they are not treating you properly, it is surely a wrong conclusion.

Why is it important to turn inward our focus?

The consciousness (chittha) must first be withdrawn from the objective world and turned inwards towards the awareness of the Eternal Self, Atma. Seeds can sprout fast only when planted in a well-ploughed land. So too, the seed of Atma Vidya (Self-Knowledge) can sprout in the field of heart only when it has undergone the necessary samskaras (refinement process).

What are the subtle traits of a Sadhaka or Bhaktha?

If Vedanta (Vedic Philosophy) is spoken parrot-like to others without any attempt to put it into practice in one's own conduct, it is not just deceiving others but deceiving oneself, which is even worse. Therefore, you must be as you want others to be. It is not the nature of a sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) to search for faults in others and hide his/her own. If your faults are pointed out to you by anyone, do not argue and try to prove that it is right or do not bear a grudge against him/her for it. Reason out within yourself how you are at fault and set right your behaviour. Instead, rationalizing for one's own satisfaction or wreaking vengeance on the person who pointed it out - these are certainly not the traits of a sadhaka or bhaktha (devotee).

What is the purpose of listening discourses?

These days, listening to lectures and discourses has become just a fad, a craze. When they have been heard once, people imagine they have known all. Do not rest content with mere listening to advice. What you have listened to must later be contemplated upon and what has thus been imprinted on the mind has later to be experienced and expressed in thought, word and deed. Only thus can the Truth be a treasure in the heart; only then can it flow through the veins and manifest in full splendor through you.

As a spiritual aspirant, how should we look and behave in our daily lives?

As an aspirant, you should always seek the truthful and joyful, and avoid all thoughts that are sad and depressing. When your devotion is well-established, even if depression, doubt or conceit appears, you can easily discard them. It is best that as an aspirant, you are joyful, smiling and enthusiastic under all circumstances. This pure attitude is more desirable than even devotion and wisdom. If you are worried, depressed or doubting, you can never attain Bliss, no matter what spiritual practice you perform. Hence, the first task of an aspirant is the cultivation of enthusiasm. Never get inflated when you are praised, never get deflated when you are blamed. You must analyze yourself and correct your faults. Be a spiritual Lion.

What are the tips to lead life like a lotus blooming in the water?

Faith is very important. When lust, anger and other evil qualities diminish and disappear, faith in the Eternal Self and in the rightness of spiritual inquiry will grow and get confirmed. Non-attachment is the very foundation for attaining the Universal Absolute. Even for a small structure, the foundation has to be stable and strong; else, it would fall in a heap pretty soon. To make a garland, we require a string, a needle and flowers; so too, when Jnana (wisdom) has to

be won, the string of devotion, the needle of non-attachment and the flowers of steady, single-pointed focus are essential.

What is the importance of selecting and sticking onto a single Name and Form for meditation?

One has to be careful in matters relating to realization of God. Whatever inconveniences one may encounter, one must try to carry on one's Sadhana (spiritual practice) without any break or modification in the discipline. One single name that does not give any slightest feeling of dislike or disaffection should be selected for meditation and repetition. One should not constantly change the Name and the Form that one has loved and cherished, and selected for repetition. Concentration is impossible if the Name is changed; the mind will not attain one-pointedness.

What is the secret to achieve victory in our endeavours?

Everyone in the world desires victory. No one desires defeat. All crave for wealth, no one craves for poverty. But, how should one achieve victory and wealth? There is no need to undergo threefold struggle - physical, mental, intellectual - to achieve victory. Nor one need get perturbed or anxious or pine for wealth and prosperity. Take refuge in the Lord. Wield the bow of courage by holding your heart pure. That is enough. Victory and wealth will be yours. As you pursue victory and wealth, remind yourself that they are like your shadows, not substantial things in themselves. You cannot attain your shadow, even if you pursue it for a million years.

What is the right code of conduct prescribed for all of us?

Everyone should lead their life so that no pain is caused by them to any living being. That is the supreme duty. Also, it is the duty of everyone who has had the chance of this human birth to spare a part of their energies occasionally for prayer and repetition of the Lord's Name. One must devote oneself to a life of truth, righteousness, peace and good works which are of service to others. One must be afraid of doing acts that are harmful to others or deeds that are sinful, just as one is afraid to touch fire or disturb a cobra. One must have as much attachment and steadfastness in carrying out good works, in making others happy and in worshipping the Lord, as one now has in accumulating gold and riches. This is the Dharma (duty) of every being.

Why should we focus on salvation, here and now?

For political or other reasons, some persons are arrested and kept in detention in order to preserve law and order of the country. They are kept confined in big bungalows and given special treatment as befits their status and provided meals and also luxury articles as commensurate with their grades in social and political life. However, around the bungalow and the garden, there are always policemen on guard. Whatever be the standard of life enjoyed by the prisoner, he is not a free man. So too, a person confined in the 'prison' of the world should not be feel elated over the sensual comforts he/she can enjoy. He/she must not feel proud of their friends and kinsmen around but must recognize and keep in mind that he/she is in prison.

Why is there a dearth in experiencing holiness, unlike how it was in the past?

For fire to increase or decrease, fuel is the only cause. The more the quantity of fuel, brighter will be the illumination. Fire has the power to give light by its very nature. So too, in the fire of intellect of the spiritual aspirant, the fuel that produces renunciation, peacefulness, truth, kindness, forbearance and selfless service has to be constantly fed so that the light of wisdom is

produced. The more 'fuel' placed, the more the efficacious and effulgent the spiritual practitioners will become. Only trees growing on fertile soil can yield good harvest. Trees which grow on saline soils will bear only poor yield. So also, it is only in hearts that are unsullied can holy feelings, divine power and gifts shine in splendor.

In these troubled times, how can we accomplish peace and joy for all?

People have now become more vicious than ever. They utilize their intelligence and skills to indulge in cruelty. They relish and revel in inflicting pain on others so much that as history reveals, around 15,000 wars have been waged in the last 5,500 years. The impending atomic war threatens to destroy the entire human race. What exactly is the cause of all this anxiety and fear? It is clear that the beast in the human being is still predominant and has not yet been overcome. Only when this is achieved can our country attain peace and joy.

Why should we care deeply about sacrificing selfish desires?

One's selfish needs have to be sacrificed. There must be constant efforts to do good to others. Your desire should be to establish the welfare of the world. With all these feelings at heart, you must meditate on the Lord. This is the right path. If great men and those in authority are thus engaged in the service of humanity and in promoting the welfare of the world, the thieves of passion, hatred, pride, jealousy, envy and conceit will not invade the minds of common people; the values such as Right Conduct, Mercy, Truth, Love, Knowledge and Wisdom will be safe from harm. The six internal foes called the Arishadvargas can be uprooted only by the teachings of great souls, love for God, knowledge of the Lord and the company of the holy and the great.

What is an effective strategy to the gigantic problems of the world?

Evil qualities such as hatred, envy, greed and ostentation should be uprooted. These traits are vitiating not only common people but even ascetics, monks and heads of institutions. Among these, envy and greed have gone unchecked. What the world needs today is not a new order, a new educational system, a new society or a new religion. Holiness must take root and grow in the minds and hearts of youth and children everywhere: this is the need of the hour. The good and godly must endeavour to promote this as the greatest Sadhana (spiritual practice) that everyone must undertake.

In this mundane world, what can a common person do for the wellbeing of humanity?

Truly speaking, prayers of great, holy people act as an invitation for the advent of the Lord. In the external world, when the subjects need any convenience or help, they approach the rulers and inform them of their needs. So also, in the spiritual kingdom, when there is no possibility of achieving and acquiring devotion, charity, peace and truth, the good and great souls who desire to achieve them, pray to the Lord within themselves. Then, in response to their prayers, the Lord Himself comes into the world and showers His grace on everyone. This is known to all who have read the stories of the Lord.

How can one know the fruits of the yearning of the soul?

You must pray until the world is established in happiness. Only when the Lord arrives, the religion of Truth, Peace, Compassion, Wisdom and Love will grow and prosper. The roadway laid out by holy souls has to be repaired now and then, either by those who travel through it or those who claim authority over it. It is for the sake of such repairs that the Lord sends

occasionally some authorised individuals, sages, and divine personages. Through the Sadbodha or good teachings of these, the path opened by the Godmen of the past is again made clear and smooth.

When does Service to Man, become Service to God?

People state, "Service to Man is Service to God." No doubt service of humanity is holy, but unless it is merged in the bigger ideal, people will not benefit from it, no matter how huge the magnitude of the service is. You must have faith in the essential divinity of every person and have the Lord in your mind. If you also adhere to the path of Truth and Right Conduct, then it will be considered as Service of the Lord. Mere repetition of the slogan is useless if the service is done without faith in the Divinity of all, and with an eye on the name and fame and fruits of one's action.

What is the value of discrimination?

Mountain peaks are charming from a distance. When approached, they confront us with terrifying jungles. So too, the samsara (objective world) appears charming when you have not delved into its meaning and value. When discrimination is employed to explore its value, the truth is revealed that the 'jungles' of family or the world cannot give genuine happiness. You should learn Atma Vidya, the Knowledge of the Self, and become aware of your reality. By learning it and living it, you can quench your thirst and help to quench the thirst of all mankind.

What is the best time to worship the Lord?

For establishing oneself in the contemplation of the Omnipresent Lord, there are no limitations of time or space. There is nothing like a special time or a holy place. Wherever the mind revels in the contemplation of the Divine that becomes the holy place. Whenever the mind meditates on the Lord that becomes the most auspicious moment. The world can achieve prosperity through disciplined souls whose hearts are pure and who represent the salt of the earth. Everyone, from this very moment, should pray for the advent of such holy souls, try to deserve the blessings of the great, endeavour to forget one's sufferings and promote the welfare of the world.

What is the special formula to attain spiritual victory?

You have to achieve many objectives during this life. The highest and the most valuable of these is winning the mercy and love of God. The love of God will add unto you the wisdom you need for attaining unshakeable inner peace. Everyone should endeavour to have an understanding of the true nature of the Divine. If you want to succeed in this pursuit, you have to cultivate the spirit of service and be engaged in good deeds which will earn you the gratitude of all people. Thus, you not only accomplish the task of cleansing your consciousness, but also become a fit candidate for achieving spiritual victory.

Why is it important to pay attention to the possibilities in this life?

Acquisition of the Higher Knowledge alone can fulfill the main purpose of human life. Such knowledge makes one aware that one is not the inert, non-sentient body, but is really the consciousness itself manifesting as the embodiment of "Being-Awareness-Bliss" (Sat-Chit-Ananda). When this truth dawns and is experienced, one is liberated; one is freed from the fog

of ignorance (ajnana) even in this very life. One becomes a Jivan Muktha, a person liberated even while alive.

What is the role of a monk in the society?

The role of a sanyasi (monk) can be likened to a species of fish. The fish moves around in the depth of the lake; it does not stay at one spot. And while moving around, it eats up worms and the eggs of pests, thus cleansing the water. So too, the sanyasi should always be on the move, journeying into the far corners of the land. His duty is to cleanse the society of evil by his example and precept. He must transform it by his teachings into a society free from vice and wickedness.

What is the purpose of the incarnations of the Lord?

People believe that incarnations of God happen only for two reasons - the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the righteous. These represent only one aspect. The Avatar or the Divine Incarnation is really the concretism of the yearning of the seekers of God. It is the solidified sweetness of the devotion of godly aspirants. The granting of peace and joy, and sense of fulfillment to seekers who have striven long... this too is His task. The primary reason for the formless Divine to assume the Form is for the sake of the aspirants and the seekers.

What is the purpose of aphorisms (Sutras)?

A Sutra (aphorism) enshrines in a few words, vast expanses of meaning, vast depths of fundamental significance. The Brahma Sutras gather multi-coloured flowers from all the Upanishads and string them together to form an enchanting garland. Each aphorism can be elaborated and explained in a number of learned ways, according to one's understanding, faith, preference, experience and pleasure.

Why is it important to strengthen devotion and dedication in young children and families?

A tree can spread its branches wide; its branches can bring forth blossoms which yield fruit, but this happens only when water is fed to the roots. Instead, if the water is poured on branches, fruits or flowers, can the tree grow and spread? Society has as its root of peace and prosperity, the virtues of devotion and dedication. Hence the educational system must pay attention to the promotion and strengthening of these virtues amongst the people.

How critical is our yearning for God? Why?

The cow secretes milk for the sustenance of the calf; the calf is its chief beneficiary. But, as we see, others too benefit from this milk. So too, though the devotees are the primary cause and their sustenance is the prime purpose; other incidental benefits such as fostering of righteousness, suppression of evil and the wicked also happen in the mission of an Avatar. God is above and beyond all the limits of time and space, and no list of characteristics and qualities can describe Him completely. The place and the Form of the Avatar are chosen such that they promote the purpose of fulfilling the yearning of the devotees.

How can we leverage the Knowledge of the Self to live in joy every day?

The Jagath (world) is unreal, non-existent, and the mistaken notion that it is real has to be renounced. The understanding that the idea of Jagath is a superimposition by our mind on the

Reality is Jnana (Spiritual Wisdom). Though the objective world appears real, one must be aware that it is deluding us. Therefore, one has to give up the yearning for deriving pleasure from the objects that appear and attract both here and hereafter. Thus, one is liberated as soon as one renounces all attachment and desires. The ajnana (ignorance) can be destroyed only with Atma Vidya (knowledge of the Divine Self). When this illusion disappears, the ups and downs that one faces in Samsara (the ever-changing world) also gets destroyed.

What was a strategy used in the past to resolve very hard conflicts in the society?

In olden times, when in any region, the people were sunk in fear or anxiety, or when the sources of joy and contentment ran dry, they traced the cause for the calamity to some fault or failure in the worship offered to God in the temples of that area. They sought to identify these mistakes and correct them, so that they could have inner peace. They believed that the crisis could be controlled through these means. Such acts are now bundled together and called superstitions, and are cast aside. This is not superstition at all. The ancients grasped the supreme truth only after personally experiencing its validity.

Why should we change our direction in the fast-hurried-pace towards seeking pleasure?

People today believe that they are the body, the senses, etc. and crave for objective pleasures. They convince themselves that this pleasure is wanted by them and under this mistaken notion, they seek to fulfill their cravings. They delude themselves that they can secure bliss by catering to the body and the senses. Such attempts cannot earn bliss. The pleasure obtained from external objects brings grief along with it and such attempts to obtain pleasure are rewarded with disillusionment, defeat and disaster. The three source texts (Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad-Gita) clearly call out that YOU are the very embodiment of Ananda (bliss). They help people attain the highest wisdom.

Why should we transform our evil qualities?

The name 'Bhagavatha' can be applied to every account of the experiences of those who have contacted God and the Godly. God assumes many forms and enacts many activities. The title 'Bhagavatha' is given to the description of the experiences of those, who have realized Him, who have been blessed by His Grace and chosen as His instruments. By Bhagavatha, we also mean those, who are attached to God, who seek the companionship of God. To be in the midst of such devotees is to foster one's own devotion. The experience of devotees is a panacea that cures physical, mental and spiritual illnesses.

How can we obtain real happiness that does not disappear?

Every living being craves for happiness. It does not long for misery. Some desire the acquisition of riches, some believe that gold can make them happy. Some amass articles of luxury, some collect vehicles, but everyone is set upon obtaining things that one believes can give him/her joy. But those who know wherefrom one can get happiness are very few in number. Sathwic happiness is of the nature where it appears to be poison in the beginning, but turns into nectar later. This happiness is secured through the awareness of the Self using the preliminary sadhana of Sama (control of the senses), dama (control of emotions), etc. which has to be initially gone through, and appears hard and unpleasant. It involves struggle and effort. So the reaction may be bitter. This type is Sathwic happiness.

Where is the real joy in life?

Involvement in objective pleasure leads ultimately to grief. So, you must direct yourself towards the right means to attain bliss. Where can you gain bliss from? It is not inherent in external objects. Though external objects appear to bring pleasure, they bring in grief as well. The Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad-Gita clarify the truth that you are the very embodiment of bliss. The scriptures clarify the truth and help everyone attain the highest wisdom.

Why is it important to practice Unity in all beings at all times?

God is above and beyond all the limits of time and space. For Him, all beings are equal. The difference between man, beast, bird, worm, insect and even God is but a difference of the 'vessel' (the upadhi). It is like the electric current that flows through various devices and expresses itself in many different functions. There is no distinction in the current; it is the same. So too, the one single God activates every creature and gives rise to manifold consequences. The ignorant feel that all devices are distinct. The wise see only the one uniform current. God appreciates the consciousness of unity as the basic motive of all acts.

What is the most difficult quest in the universe?

Even the boundless ocean can be drunk by one with ease. Huge mountains can be plucked from the face of the earth easily. The flames of a huge conflagration can be swallowed without any difficulty. But controlling the mind is far more difficult than all these. Therefore, if one succeeds in overwhelming the mind, one achieves the awareness of the soul. This success can result only when one undergoes many ordeals and denials. The bliss that is the result of this effort is the highest kind of happiness.

What is the most powerful weapon we must treasure?

The awareness of Brahman (God) cannot be won by the accumulation of wealth or even by giving away of riches. Nor can it be achieved by reading texts, rising to power, acquiring degrees and diplomas, or performing scriptural sacrifices and rituals. The body is an anthill, with the mind inside the cavity. The mind has hidden in it, the serpent named ajnana (ignorance). This serpent cannot be killed by resorting to kamya karma (pleasurable activities). Jnana (spiritual wisdom) is the only weapon that can kill the serpent of ignorance. That person alone who has faith can secure this spiritual wisdom.

Why is it important to listen to His Stories?

You must know that there is no end to the incarnations that God takes. He has come down on countless occasions. Sometimes He comes with a part of His glory, sometimes for a particular task, sometimes to transform an entire era of time, an entire continent of space, sometimes with a fuller equipment of splendour. The drama enacted by the Lord and the devotees drawn towards Him is the subject matter of Bhagavatha (stories on the Glory of God). Listening to these stories promotes the realization of God. Many sages have testified to its efficacy and extolled the Glory of God, and they helped to preserve it for posterity.

What is the tipping point to transform ourselves?

On account of the impact of the external objects on the senses of perception, one experiences pleasure and mistakes it to be nectar. But over time, the pleasure initially mistaken as nectar

turns into bitter and unpleasant poison. This type of happiness is Rajasic happiness. If one welcomes Rajasic sensory pleasure, one's strength, awareness, intelligence to achieve the four human goals of Dharma (Right Action), Artha (Wealth), Kaama (Righteous Desire) & Moksha (Liberation) are weakened; one's interest and aspiration to attain divine bliss declines.

Why should we prioritize renunciation as the primary goal?

Acquisition of positions of authority and power, of skill and intelligence which can manipulate people and things, of fame and supremacy, of personal charm, of good health and happiness or of a large family with many children or wealth... none of these can confer liberation. You cannot attain liberation by undertaking sacrifices, vows, charities, pilgrimages or donations to holy projects. Though the objective world appears real, you must be aware that it is deluding you. You must give up yearning for deriving pleasure from the objects that appear and attract - both here and hereafter. Renunciation alone can lead to immortality. You will be liberated as soon as you renounce your attachment and desire.

Why is sometimes the judgment of God different from ours?

The fruits of the karma or activity appeal only to those who identify themselves with the body. They do not appeal to those, who know they are the indestructible Self or Atma, which is the inner motive force in everything. God is above and beyond the limits of Time and Space. He is beyond all characteristics and qualities, no list of such can describe Him fully. Hence, God always appreciates the consciousness of Unity, as the basic motive of all acts.

What is a litmus test to understand if we are pursuing real happiness?

If the intellect is dull and derives happiness from sleep and slothfulness, points out other's faults, it characterises Tamasic nature. This nature will make one ignore the knowledge of self throughout one's life. True education is that which directs and counsels the mind and intellect of man towards earning Sathwic happiness. The scriptures declare Na Sukath Labhyathe Sukham (Happiness cannot be derived from happiness), that by undergoing unhappiness alone can happiness be won. This truth has to be instilled through Vidya (Self-knowledge or education). If you understand the joy of Sathwic happiness, true Vidya will be found to be easy and palatable.

What are aphorisms? Why is it important in our daily lives?

The word 'Sutra' means that which, through a few words, reveals vast meanings. The Sutras discuss contrary points of view in order to remove all possible doubts about the validity and meaning of the sacred texts. The word 'Mimamsa', as used in ancient Indian philosophy, means the conclusion arrived at after inquiry and investigation, the inference adopted as correct after deep consideration of possible doubts and alternatives. The Vedas deal with two concepts: Dharma (Righteous actions) and Brahma (God). The Purva Mimamsa deals with Dharma or performing the rites and rituals in daily life in a righteous manner. The Uttara Mimamsa deals with Brahma (God) and its emphasis is on Jnana (experiential wisdom).

What can give us real peace?

Even the most comfortable house equipped with all the luxuries man craves for; even heaps of treasures are helpless to endow one with Shanti (Peace). Shanti can be won only by surrender to God, who is the very core of one's being, the very source of all life and living. Consider this: Are those lucky enough to possess wealth, gold, property and comfort having Shanti? No! Are

persons of high scholarship or extraordinary beauty or super-human physical strength at peace with themselves and the world? What is the reason for the misery of even these people? The reason is: they have forgotten the Divine basis of Creation; they have ignored the one Absolute Underlying Principle. All lives lived without faith and devotion to the One Supreme Overlord are despicable; lives spent without tasting the Nectar of the Divine Principle are all wasted chances.

What should be our focus if we avoid sorrow and misery?

Everything in this world is ephemeral, transitory; it is here today, but it may not be here tomorrow. So, if you desire for something, seek the Lord, who has no decline. Instead, if you crave for progeny, wealth and all comforts, you will suffer untold misery when you are called upon to leave everything and depart. At that moment, you would lament, "Oh, did I love so deep that I may weep so loud?" In this transitory life, joy and pain are also perforce transitory. There is nothing here fit to be worshipped as eternal. So, to get immersed in this search for the evanescent and to forget the Supreme and the Everlasting is indeed unbecoming of man.

Are we self-made? Are our achievements entirely due to our self-effort?

Man creates and develops in himself an abounding variety of selfish habits and attitudes that leads to great discontent for himself. A person might feel elated that he has become the master of all arts, or owner of all wealth, or possessor of all knowledge; but from whom did he acquire all these? That source must indeed be greater. He might even claim that he earned all this through his own efforts. But surely someone gives it to him, in some form or other. This he cannot gainsay. The source from which all power originates is God. Ignoring the omnipotent Lord and deluding oneself thinking that the little power one has acquired is one's own is indeed egoism.

With what kind of an attitude should we maintain our relationships so as not to be ever being in sorrow?

Ignoring madhava (God) who is free from maya (delusion) and spending time immersed in maya is fruitless; in this scenario, sorrow alone is the final gain. Whomsoever you love, that love has to come to an end. The self-same Lord gives and takes, as and when He wishes. Everything is His; so how foolish it is to lament when things belonging to Him are taken back by Him? The wise man will therefore not pine over anyone or feel undue attachment to anything. Let all the pining and all the attachment be reserved for the Lord; He alone is eternal; He is the source of all joy. For the rest, love a thing as a thing, not more. Love man as man, not more. If you love them more, it is a sign that you have been deceived about their real nature.

Why is it important to train the mind to perform spiritual practices?

Generally speaking, one gets easily drawn to sense objects, as one becomes a victim of instincts. Instincts readily seek sense objects. Instincts come along with the body and do not require any training, just as an infant seeks milk from the mother's breast and the new born calf nestles at the udder. But for the infant to walk and talk, training is necessary. They are not automatic; these skills are acquired by example and imitation of others. So also, training is essential for the proper pursuit of sense pleasure, for it is the wild, untrained search for such pleasure that promotes anger, hatred, envy, malice and conceit. To train them along salutary lines and to hold them under control, certain good disciplines such as japa (repetition of God's Name), dhyana (meditation) and upavasa (fasting) are essential.

How can we overcome the ups and downs in our daily life?

Ajnana (Ignorance) and Dukha (Sorrow) cannot be destroyed by rituals and rites. This is the lesson the scriptures teach us. However, what is happening now is that people have forgotten their real nature. They believe that they are the body and the senses, and crave for objective pleasures. They delude themselves that they can secure joy by catering to the body and senses. Such attempts cannot earn bliss. Instead, they earn disillusionment, defeat and disaster; they reap sorrow and joy in quick succession. The ajnana can only be destroyed with the knowledge of the Divine Self. When illusion disappears, the sorrow produced by one's involvement in the ups and downs of the world is destroyed and one can realize that humanity is the Embodiment of Bliss.

What are the readiness criteria for attaining spiritual victory?

The capacity to overcome the gunas (tendencies) of prakriti (Nature) is not inherent in any one; it comes to one with the Grace of the Lord. And that Grace is to be won by japa (repetition of God's Name) and dhyana (meditation). The truth has to be experienced, in order that it might not slip away from consciousness; and the discipline needed for this is also japa and dhyana. This must first be clearly understood: it is impossible for everyone to control the tendencies of prakriti; the power is possessed only by those who have prakriti in their grip and whose commands prakriti does obey. Prakriti is the basis of everything in the Universe. It is the basis of Creation and Existence. All this is prakriti: men or women, beasts or birds, trees or plants; in fact, all that can be seen is inseparable from prakriti.

How can we persist in walking along the path of the good and godly, when we are so deeply immersed in the world?

The infant does not know the taste of milk. By taking it daily, it develops an attachment for it which is so deep that when milk is to be given up and rice substituted, it starts to protest. But the mother does not despair. She persuades the child to take small quantities of cooked rice daily and through this process, the child starts liking rice and gives up milk. By practice, rice now becomes the child's natural food, so natural that if rice is not available even for a single day, it becomes miserable. So too, sensual pleasures are 'natural' at first. However, by means of practice, listening to the words of the wise, slowly, you will derive greater joy listening to the glories of God. Thereafter, you cannot exist without that holy atmosphere even for a minute. The company of the worldly chatter will no longer attract you. You will feel that there is nothing as sweet as the experience of listening to the splendour of the Lord.

What are the two primary qualifications for inquiring into the Divine Self?

For understanding the Divine, mere yearning to know and the study of Vedas are not sufficient. The primary qualification you must acquire is Viveka: discrimination between the transitory and the eternal. Atma alone suffers no change; it alone is Timeless Truth. You must gain this unshakable conviction and be established in it. The second qualification is renunciation of the desire to enjoy the fruits of one's actions, here and hereafter. This is called Vairagya (Non-Attachment). Non-attachment does not mean giving up hearth and home, spouse and children and taking refuge in forests. It only involves the awareness of the world as transitory and, as a consequence of this awareness, discarding the feelings of 'I' and 'mine'.

What is the important role played by the monks in the society?

Sanyasa (monkhood) does not mean the mere acceptance of the fourth stage of life and its rights and obligations, and retirement into forest after breaking off contacts with the world. The monks should be journeying into the far corners of the land and cleanse the society of evil through their example and precept. They should move among people, become aware of their sorrows and joys, and impart the instructions they direly need. They must transform society to be free from vice and wickedness by their teachings.

What are truly the godly and good?

Spiritual aspirants will rejoice in listening to the Glory of God. They will join the company which exults in praising the Lord. This is their hallmark. Spiritual aspirants and votaries of the Lord are to be judged using these barometers and not by external appearances or apparel. If you mix with people who revel in sensory talk and activities, then you put yourself out of His Court. Spend your time in the company of the good and godly, engaged in Godly affairs. Avoid the company of the ungodly. Only when you establish yourself in good company and avoid bad company, can you be called as Bhagavatha or God's own!

What is the importance of mind control?

Mind control is very hard to attain. The mind can cause bondage as well as confer liberation. It is an amalgam of the passionate and ignorant attitudes, and can be easily polluted. It relishes in hiding the real nature of things and casting on them the forms and values that it desires. So you must regulate the activity of the mind. Understand the first characteristic of the mind: it runs helplessly after the senses. Whichever sense the mind follows, it is to invite disaster. When a pot of water becomes empty, we need not infer that it has leaked away through ten holes - one hole is enough to empty it! So too, even if one sense is not under control, you will be thrown into bondage. So, every sense has to be mastered.

What is the role of a monk in the society?

Of all the professions, the teacher's profession has to adhere utmost to the ideal of truth. When teachers stray from truth, society meets with disaster. Thousands of tender children, unacquainted with the ways of the world, pass through their hands. The impact of their teachings and personality will be great and lasting. Therefore, the teacher has to be free from bad habits, for children automatically adopt the habits and manners of elders. This is an ever-present danger. When the evil influence is directed towards the thousands who receive the impact, society gets polluted.

How can we accelerate our own spiritual progress?

People have three chief instruments for uplifting themselves: intelligence, mind and senses. When the mind gets enslaved by the senses, you will get entangled and bound. When the same mind is regulated by the intellect, you can become aware of your own Reality. The potency of your mind can be promoted by good practices like meditation, repetition of Lord's Name, devotional singing and worship. The mental power thus gained from spiritual practices should be turned away from wrong paths. Your mind must be released from the hold of the senses and directed by the principle of intelligence. Then, spiritual progress will be rapid.

Why is listening to the Glory of God super critical?

Reading and enjoying the stories of the glory of the Lord in some sacred spot like temple, prayer hall, shrine, hermitage of a saint, or in the company of virtuous and good people, is a source of great inspiration and joy. It will make you forget everything else. Taste for such wholesome literature is the result of accumulated merit and endeavour. You can even approach pious men, serve them and listen to their exposition of the glory of God. Listening alone will be enough in the beginning. Later, the stories will arouse interest in the nature and characteristics of God and the aspirants will find and seek for themselves the path to Self-realization.

What is an important knowledge we must acquire?

Knowledge was compared to light and ignorance to darkness by the ancients. Vid is the root of the word Vidya. Vid means light, Ya means what. So, the meaning of the term 'Vidya' is that which gives light. From this term, it is evident that Brahma Vidya (knowledge of the Self) alone deserves to be known as Vidya, as it illumines our minds. Just as light and darkness cannot co-exist in the same place at the same time, Vidya and Avidya (ignorance) cannot be together. So, when you journey along the path of progress, you must purify your consciousness and illumine yourself with Brahma Vidya.

How can we benefit from the company of the holy and the wise?

The person who expounds the glory of God must have the thrill of genuine experience. Then you are supremely lucky as a listener, for it yields the best results. The expounder's face will blossom with joy; their eyes will shed tears of bliss at the very contemplation of the glory of God. When you listen, you should catch that inspiration. Then, you will experience that joy yourself. When an infant smiles, those around also smile in unison. Similarly, the words of those who are saturated with devotion to God will saturate the hearts of those who listen too with devotion and joy. It is impossible to measure the profit that one can derive while in the company of the pious and the great.

How can we elevate ourselves, when we are performing the mundane daily chores?

Control of the body and senses can be achieved only by spiritual practices and not by any other means. You must avoid wasting precious time in useless pursuits. You must be ever vigilant and engage the senses of perception and action by performing congenial and noble tasks to keep yourself busy. There should be no room for sloth to creep in. Also, every act must promote the good of others. Thus, while performing your daily duties in this manner, you can sublimate the body and senses, and uplift yourself.

What is the subtlest education we must acquire, which is core to our lives?

Knowledge can be considered as having two aspects: Baahya Vidya and Brahma Vidya. Baahya Vidya provides the wherewithal for human livelihood. You can study many subjects, earn valuable degrees, acquire lucrative job and manage to spend your life with no worry and fear. This type of Vidya helps you perform whatever job you may doing, be it that of a humble clerk or a prime minister. Brahma Vidya, on the other hand, endows you with the strength, that will enable you to discharge successfully the duty you owe to yourself. It lays down the path which leads both to joy in worldly relations and bliss in the life beyond. Therefore, Brahma Vidya is far superior to all Vidya available to man on earth.

Why is listening to the Glory of God the foremost spiritual practice?

Through the process of listening to the glory of God, an impure heart will be transformed into a pure, illumined heart shining with divine light. To the foul odors of sense-pursuits, keenness to listen to the splendor of God is a valuable disinfectant, besides being in itself so full of sweet fragrance. The listening will cleanse the heart through the prompting it gives for good work. Such a cleansed heart is the most appropriate altar. In that fragrant bower, the Lord will establish Himself. At that very moment, another event too will occur. The group of six vices that had infested the heart will quit without any farewell. When these vices quit, the wicked retinue of evil tendencies and vulgar attitudes which live on them will break camp and disappear without a trace! Then, you will shine in your native splendour of Truth and Love, and be successful in merging with the Universal and Eternal.

What are a few simple questions that will guide the mind gently to accomplish spiritual progress?

The mind is a bundle of thoughts, a complex collection of wants and wishes. As soon as a thought, desire or wish raises its head in the mind, the intellect must probe its value and validity. Is it good or bad? Will it help or hinder? Where will this lead? Where will it end? If the mind does not submit to this probe, it will land itself on the path of ruin. If it does and obeys the intelligence, it will move along the right path.

Why is it essential to understand the knowledge and align with practice?

If you desire to wash off the dirt accumulated from the clothes you wear, you need both soap and clean water. So too, if you are anxious to remove the impurities that have got accumulated in the mind, both Vidya (spiritual knowledge) and Thapas (penance) are essential. Only when both are used can the levels of consciousness be thoroughly cleansed. No vehicle can move without at least two wheels, nor can a bird fly with just one wing. So too, no one can be rendered holy or purified without Vidya and Thapas.

Why should installing Love in our Hearts be the foremost task?

Your very nature is Prema (Love). You cannot survive even for a moment when deprived of Love. It is the very breadth of your life. When the six vices to which you were attached so long disappear, Love becomes the only occupant of your heart. Love has to find an object, a loved one. It cannot remain alone. You will then direct it to the charming, sweet Lord, who is Purity Personified, who is the embodiment of service, sacrifice and selflessness and who has taken residence in the cleansed altar of your heart. Then, there will be no scope for any other attachment to grow. Step by step, this love for God will become deeper, purer, more self-denying, until at last, there is no need for thoughts, and the individual is merged in the Universal.

What is the most powerful weapon we must treasure?

Withdrawal from sensory objects is an important virtue. It implies a state of mind that is above and beyond all dualities that agitate and affect common people, such as joy and grief. Withdrawal from sensory objects can be achieved while engaged in day to day living. Do not look at the world with a worldly eye. Then, even you can escape from the opposites of grief and joy, and attain balance and equal mindedness. You experience the One as many because of the mind playing its games. Practice seeing everything as a projection/extension of the Loving Lord. Then, you will be able to cross the horizon of dualities into the region of One.

What is the primary duty of an educated person?

You must learn how to make your parents happy. Today, parents are being treated like servants. Some parents are being admitted into old age homes, when there is shortage of money. This is not correct. It is your responsibility to look after your parents and provide necessary support to them. They should not be sent to old age homes. You must keep them with you and serve them. You need not prepare special items for their sake. It is enough if you can give them what you are eating. Whatever job you take up, you must always serve your parents and make them happy. Serving your parents must be the greatest fortune you must aspire for. It is enough if you take care of your parents, children and family. That is the hallmark of real education.

What is the tipping point for society to live in peace?

Today people have lost the precious virtue of fear of sin. It is only lack of fear of sin that is responsible for the present plight of society. People these days are committing several sins with the notion that God is kind and will ultimately forgive their sins. With this belief, they are indulging in increasingly more sinful acts. They have developed a sort of complacency and think that they can escape punishment. But the fact is otherwise. Though God is compassionate and may forgive all sinful acts, every human being has to necessarily pay for his/her sins. For morality to exist in society, fear of sin is essential. Hence everyone must develop the three qualities of: love for God, fear of sin and morality in society.

What is the importance of Guru Poornima?

Gu represents darkness and ru means to dispel. Therefore, Guru Poornima is the day when we decimate the darkness of our ignorance and fill it with joy and bliss. This is the true significance of Guru Poornima and not worshipping the feet or circumambulating or offering contributions to the gurus who give a mantra to recite or anything of that sort. Therefore, on this sacred day, we should strive to make the principle of our heart within poorna or full by contemplating on divinity, augmenting our purity, and sincerely endeavouring to understand our innate atmic principle.

How can we convert a fearful aspect in life to a powerful weapon for our liberation?

The contemplation of death is the very foundation of spiritual discipline. Without it, you are certain to fall into falsehood, pursuing the objects of sense-pleasure and trying to accumulate worldly riches. Death is no ominous calamity. It is a step into the auspicious brightness beyond. It is inescapable; it cannot be bribed away or adjourned by certificates of good conduct or testimonials from the great. Once born, death is inevitable. You must perform deeds which breed no bad consequences. Engage every day in every activity as an offering to God. Then you need not taken repeated births and can escape death. This inquiry is the very core of spiritual path and will help you achieve immortality.

What is the simplest way to observe penance in our daily lives?

Tapa (penance) does not mean positioning oneself upside down; head on the ground and feet held up like a bat. Nor is it the renunciation of possessions and properties, wife and children, emaciating one's body or holding the nose to regulate one's breath. Physical actions, oral assertions and mental resolves—all three have to be in unison. The thought, the speech and the act, all have to be pure. This is the real Tapas. And they have to be coordinated not by the

compulsion of duty. The effort must be undertaken for satisfying one's inner yearnings, for the contentment of the Self. This struggle is the essence of Tapas.

Why is it super important to transform ourselves? What will be the result of such effort?

It is creditable if you behave as a human being and even more laudable if you behave as God would. But to behave as a demon or a beast is indeed despicable. Human beings were long born as a mineral, then became a tree; in the process of evolution, got promoted to an animal, and finally rose to the status of a human being. It is a matter of great shame if an individual slides into the nature of a beast or an ogre. One deserves praise only if one rises to the Divine status. That is the fulfillment of one's destiny. Avoid contact with the vices and develop attachment to virtues. Transmute your heart into an altar for the Lord. Destroy all the shoots and sprouts of desire. Then, your heart will be sublimated into a ksheerasagara, the pure ocean of milk where Lord Vishnu reclines. Your heart will be transformed and you will discover endless delight.

What is the most important quality we must cultivate whether we practice any other spiritual discipline or not?

It is mentioned that "Success begets success." But how is success to be achieved and what is the success you should aim at? The Bhagavad-Gita declares: Shraddhavan Labhathe Jnanam (The persevering seeker secures wisdom). This means that without perseverance and earnestness, no success can be achieved. Man is not able to make significant progress towards the Divine because of absence of strenuous striving in the spiritual sphere. Without spiritual practice, reading religious books and listening to spiritual discourses have no value. Study of scriptures and reciting God's names may be good acts in themselves. But, if there is no love, which is the basis of all sadhana (spiritual discipline), they are of no use.

What is the crucial role played by a Guru in the life of a disciple?

It is a very difficult task to secure a good Guru. Sishyas (disciples) can become exemplary persons only when a real Guru accepts them. When pure-hearted, unselfish and non-egoistic students approach a Guru, the Guru exults in ecstatic delight. Parikshith, the Emperor, renounced everything and decided to realise God, and, right at that moment, Maharshi Suka appeared, to guide him straight to his goal. Similarly, when the good sishyas get good Gurus, they succeed not only in attaining Bliss but also in conferring peace, prosperity and joy upon the entire world.

What is the sweetness that we should pursue in our life?

The story of the Lord's adventures is all nectar. It has no other component, content or taste. Everyone can drink their fill from any part of that ocean of nectar, just as sugar is sweet irrespective of whether it is eaten during the day or night. For, it is day or night only for the person who eats, not for the sugar. Sugar behaves uniformly always. So too, the love of God and the love for God are both eternally sweet and pure, whatever the method of accepting or attaining them. The same sweetness exists, everywhere, at all times, in every particle.

What are some inadvertent actions that trap us? What is the right attitude to cultivate love for God?

Your mind speeds fast, pursuing wrong actions. Without letting it in a hurry like that, remember the Name of the Lord at that time or attempt to do some good deed or other. Those who do thus, will certainly become fit for the Lord's Grace. Give up the evil tendency to feel impatient at the prosperity of others and the desire to harm them. Be happy that others are happy. Sympathize with those who are in adversity and wish for their prosperity. That is the means of cultivating the love for God.

What are the qualities that characterize great people who lead men and women towards God?

They (great people) will have no craving for wealth. They will neither love those who praise them nor hate those who blame them. They will not prevent their disciples from approaching them and will not prohibit anyone from approaching them. They will look upon all with equal love. They will not relish the defamation of others. They will not be vengeful against those who point out to them their own mistakes and wrongs. They will always spread Truth, Right Action, Peace and Love. They will ever yearn for the joy, welfare and progress of others.

What are the signs of the 'progress report' that leads us to realizing God within ourselves?

Progress in devotion or meditation means the attainment of concentration. Never lose the sight of the Divine Form which you have pictured for yourself. Don't allow the mind to wander on distractions. Be convinced that the distractions of sight and sound are designed to scatter your attention away from the Divine Form. Be on your guard, do not be deluded and never forget the auspicious form. Picture in yourself the Divine Lord, in whom is immersed all creation. What you will experience and when depends upon His Grace. Your mission is to practice one-pointed concentration on Him. It does not depend upon the length of time, or the number of births you have taken. Some may realize the goal even in a few days. It completely depends upon your dedication, devotion and relentless practice. The time cannot be calculated or reasoned out. It is all His Grace.

What are the best practices to mature as a spiritual aspirant, in our journey to God?

Elation at profit, joy and cheer; dejection at loss and misery, these are the natural characteristics common to all mortals. One can identify excellent spiritual aspirants very quickly, as they will never forget this principle: Being vigilant and suffering the inevitable, gladly! When difficulties and losses overwhelm you, do not lose heart and precipitate some action. Meditate calmly on how they ever came to be. Try to discover some simple means of overcoming them, or avoiding them, in an atmosphere of peace.

What are the key investments we must make to receive God's Grace?

Even for being blessed by the Lord's Grace, one must have peace and wait patiently. Serenity alone succeeds in bringing about the result of the spiritual practices. Add this lesson to the practices you are engaged in. The true devotee will always dwell in God. He/she has no time to know or feel their welfare or worries. Attaining the Lord is the one and only idea in their mind. It is hard to understand this nature... Let me explain with an example. A small child runs about shouting "amma, amma" searching for his/her missing mother. The mother takes it up in her arms and places it on her lap. The child stops crying and is free from all fear. But can the child calculate and find out the difference between its previous state and its present relief? No! Nor is

it necessary to do so! So too, if you seek to ever serve the Lord, immerse yourself in service and be engaged in thoughts of God.

What is the ONE quality we MUST acquire to experience God?

First, give up all impure impulses and cultivate the pure ones. After this, try step by step to give up even these and render the mind objectless, Nirvishaya. Peace thus obtained is effulgent, blissful and associated with Wisdom. It is indeed the experience of God himself. Peace is the key quality that every one of you must aspire to achieve. The aspirant who wants to attain this peace has to constantly practise a virtuous life, overcoming all the initial obstacles. Peace is like a mountain of rock. It can stand up against the continuous floods of temptation against evil. This Prasanthi (supreme peace) need not be sought anywhere outside. It emanates from the inner consciousness itself. It is the very basis of the urge towards liberation.

How should your actions be, every single day, in your journey to God?

Do not shape your conduct with an eye on the opinion of others. Instead, follow bravely, gladly and steadily the sweet and pleasant promptings of your own gentle and good manners. Follow your own Inner Self. Associate yourself with those who are richly endowed with Truth. Spend every second of your life usefully and well. If you possibly can, render service to others. Engage yourself in nursing the sick, but when thus engaged in service, do not worry about either the result or the act of service or the person to whom it is rendered. The service is made holy and pure, if you ignore both the good and the bad, and keep on silently repeating in your hearts the name of the Lord that most appeals to you.

What are the spiritual practices that you must undertake and acquire mastery to reach God?

Remove from the garden of your heart, the thorny bushes of greed and anger, jealousy and selfishness, the evil breed of "I" and "Mine". Uproot them even when they emerge as seedlings. All this discipline is truly required for earning Shanthi (Peace). Be firmly convinced that you are the Universal Soul. That conviction will make every subsequent spiritual practice very easy. If you fondle the illusion that you are the body or the senses, then any spiritual practice that you will yield will tender only rot-ridden fruit. It cannot grow and become ripe and the sweet fruit of Peace cannot be won even at the end of many lives. Give up the theory that you are the body and the senses; this itself will lead to the receding of vasanas (desires, tendencies) and you will acquire mastery and gain Prasanthi (supreme peace).

What is the importance of worshipping God with oneness and practicing Unity in Diverse forms of worship'?

Mankind can win happiness only through unity and not through diversity. If thoughts and feelings run along the routes of distinction and division, happiness is beyond reach, and peace cannot be experienced. Consider the One Indivisible Ocean as the goal. Then, what does the direction of the flow matter? How does the name matter? They merge in the self-same sea, is it not? All devotees and aspirants, adopting the path of yoga or devotion or peace, right action, truth, and love, when they reach the ocean of Grace at last, the Name and Form fade away and distinctions disappear. They are blessed with the merger in the sea of Peace. So unity must ever be kept before the eye. Never nourish the ideas of difference, of distinct names and forms of the Lord. Such ideas are obstacles for the attainment of joy. Avoid these obstacles and develop the equal vision!

What are the key questions to which we should have clear answers to steer our life towards God?

Suppose you write a letter to somebody - whatever be the contents of the letter, if it is put in an envelope and post it, whom will it reach? It will not be given to anyone and will not come back to the person who wrote it too. Instead, if, on the cover, the address of the person who wrote it and to whom it must go are both written, then it will not only reach the receiver, but one can even predict when it will reach its destination. So too, what are you doing with your letter - your life? You are ignoring this important question, and do not have time to think about it. You must first know your own full address - Who are you? You are the Atman. From where did you come? From the Supreme Self. Where are you going? To the Supreme Self. How long will you be here? Until you merge with the Supreme Self. Knowing this truth, engage yourself in acts that will help you enjoy the bliss of the Supreme, Self Same Atma.

What should we do to elevate ourselves to become one with God?

It is said that, "Manomoolam Idam Jagat" (The world is a projection of our mind). Our Vak (speech) represents Shiva. We need not go anywhere in search of Gods, to a distant place. God is in us, with us, above us, below us and around us. In fact, you are God. Your mind alone is responsible for your joy or sorrow. We think sorrow is thrust on us by someone from outside. No! All these experiences flow from you only. You are responsible for everything. If you identify yourself with the world and think "I am so and so" you will remain separate from God. On the other hand, if you realize that all experiences emanate from your mind, and that you are God, you will become God!

What is the role of character in shaping our destiny to reach God?

Human life is undoubtedly the highest in evolution and to give it meaning, spiritual endeavor is essential. The endeavor should be pure and holy, and for this way of life, character is the most important! Without character, wealth, education, social status - all these are of no avail. Character to a person is just like the fragrance to the flower... the fragrance gives the flower its value and worth. By conscious efforts, habits can be changed and character refined. Everyone has within his reach, the capacity to challenge his evil propensities and to change his evil habits. By selfless service, renunciation, devotion and prayer, the old habits that bind can be discarded and new habits which take us along the divine path can be instilled into our lives.

What is the key question we must ask ourselves to progress in our journey to God?

You must ask yourself this question: "The great saints were also persons like me... When they could attain perfection, I can also succeed if I follow their method! What profits me if I spend my time in discovering the faults and weaknesses of others?" The first spiritual practice is to search for the faults and weaknesses within oneself and strive to correct them and become perfect. You have only a short span of life here upon earth...even in this short span, by wisely using the time with care, you can attain Divine Bliss.

How should your actions be, every single day, in your journey to God?

To a superficial observer, the life of man appears as a rotation of eating and drinking, toiling and sleeping. But verily, Life is a yagna, a sacrifice. Each little act is an offering to the Lord. Do not commit the great fault of identifying with the body. Do not accumulate a variety of things for the

upkeep and the comfort of the body. Before death, everything - position, pride, power, etc. - will vanish. Realize this and strive day and night with purity of body, mind and spirit, to realize the Higher Self by serving all living beings. Remember, Thou Art That; You are the indestructible Eternal Self. Utilize your authority over this body to foster the welfare of the world. The body is but an instrument, an implement given by God. Let it serve its purpose.

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What is the process of refinement that transforms a human into God?

A potter collects clay from the river bank, mixes water in it, puts it on a wheel and makes pots. The pot cannot hold water unless it undergoes refinement through fire. Just as a pot becomes strong when it is processed in fire, man becomes God when he undergoes refinement in the fire of wisdom. Clay gains value when it is refined and made into a pot. The metal gold gains added value and strength when it is made into a beautiful ornament. Likewise, refinement manifests the latent power in man and increases his value.

When God is ever-present within, why does one experience suffering?

Out of the nine paths of devotion, sravanam (hearing) is the first and foremost. You should enquire what you are hearing is good or bad. When you yourself think that what you are hearing is bad, how can you put the first path of devotion to practice? Today, many people achieve

success by resorting to untruth, injustice and evil ways. You may think that you are not going to reap the consequences of your sins immediately and no one knows what may happen at a later date. You should not have such a misconception. Results may come this very moment, or the next. Therefore, make sure that every thought of yours is sacred. Your every action must be sacred. One may have devotion but his actions may not be good. It is very essential that you perform good actions. Purity is very essential. You should make your mind pure by performing sacred actions. This will lead to realization of the Divine.

Why should we not be confused about the multiplicity of Gods?

God is omnipresent, though at times He incarnates in one form at one place. God is only one. He is not two, though people refer to Him by different names and forms. "Ekam Sath, Viprah Bahudhah Vadhanti" (Truth is One, but wise refer to it by various names). It is only our illusion that we ascribe different names to God like Rama, Krishna, Jesus, Allah, etc. The Sun is only one, and it appears in different parts of the world at different times. It may be 9:00 a.m. in India but it is night time in the USA. So also, the same one God dwells in different people in different forms. Since your perceptions are different, you ascribe different names and different forms. Always realize that God is present everywhere, in every country and in every individual. He is Omnipresent.

What is the one and only principle we should practice assiduously to reach God?

We have to treat others' suffering and difficulties as our own. We have to be amicable with one and all. We must develop faith in the maxim that we are "Ekatmaswarupas (Embodiments of One Divine Self). If our thoughts are good, we will always engage ourselves in satkarmas (good deeds). If you indulge in bad thoughts, you will see bad everywhere. If you eat a mango, can you get the belch of a cucumber? No! Similarly, if you always entertain good thoughts, you will see good everywhere. We must also develop a sense of discrimination to differentiate between the good and bad, and incorporate the good, leaving the bad behind. This principle should be followed in society too with all our fellow human beings. See good, do good and be good - that is the way to God!

How Love alone can move God?

When Sri Krishna was being weighed in a balance, all the jewels of Sathyabhama could not balance His weight. Rukmini then came and declared that the mere chanting of the name of Krishna would be equal to His weight. By the weight of an additional offering of a leaf, a flower or a little water, the scales will be tilted against Krishna. So saying she placed a Tulasi (Basil) leaf on the scale. And lo! It went down. Such is the power of the Lord's name and a love-filled offering to the Lord. The Lord is not swayed by wealth or scholarship, power or position. Love alone can move Him.

Why is it that we sometimes do not get the results we require, even if we believe we have faith and practise good habits?

The present state of affairs is due to people losing faith in themselves and in the sastras (scriptures). Those who claim to have faith do not conduct themselves according to the scriptures and nourish them. Consequently, goodness and good habits have gone out of the world and wicked habits and degradation has gained the upper hand. This is incorrect and needs transformation. A child may refuse to swallow a pill when it is in the bed, suffering from fever. It may clamour for a plantain, instead of a pill. Do you know what to do at that time? Do

not omit the pill. Insert the pill inside the plantain and offer it to the child to be swallowed. Its desire is satisfied. The fever too, comes down. The fundamental has not been discarded. It has remained unchanged. Only the method of administering it has been modified. So too, in the midst of crazy habits and behaviors, fundamental scriptures must be presented in a way it is easy to absorb; it must be practised, understood, experienced and enjoyed.

What is the best path to reap concord and goodness?

To nourish the scriptures, it is important to practise two statements: "Speak the Truth" and "Speak it pleasantly". If only these two are kept in view and practised, there is no greater discipline needed. It is only in an atmosphere of peace that such sacred maxims can be put in action. To earn that calmness, steady effort and concord are essential. Devotion is the very fountainhead of Peace. If everyone plants devotion in their heart and nourishes it with care and constant attention, a harvest of goodness and concord can be reaped. The path of devotion is the best and easiest for everyone under present conditions.

What is the best path to reap goodness?

People should of course have some comforts for this physical body and fulfill some desires that are necessary for their daily life. But unfortunately, these desires are reaching to a point of insatiability. You may live for a few years or a full hundred years in this physical world. One day or the other, the body has to be cast off. Hence, do not cultivate unlimited desires. Some people have intense desire to have the vision of God. Where is God? You are all embodiments of Divinity. God is not separate. People are more valuable than all the wealth in the world. We see three kinds of beings in the world: Tame Animals, Wild Beasts and Human Beings. One has to analyze for oneself, whether one belongs to the category of animals or beasts or human beings. If you are a human being, then you should cultivate human values.

What is the point in listening and observing all the goodness?

If all is eaten at the same time, the food will not be digested. It would lead to bad health. What we eat requires time to get digested and assimilated. Similarly, what is heard should be understood and put in practice. Take time to digest and practice what you internalized. Placing your burden on Destiny and keeping quiet means diminution of effort. Without effort and prayer, Destiny and Grace cannot be attained. Start the effort! With effort and prayer, Destiny can be attained.

What are the two primary qualities that are very important for every person?

Man needs primarily two qualities: Devotion to God and the spirit of sacrifice. Without sacrifice there can be no devotion. Sacrifice is the key to immortality. Man is caught up in the coils of selfishness and self-centeredness. How long will these attachments last? Why sacrifice the lasting bliss of a divinely oriented life for the petty tinsel of worldly possessions? Devote yourselves to the service of mankind in a spirit of dedication and sublimate your lives.

When God is ever-present within, why does one experience suffering?

Some people say that they are facing hardships and are leading a miserable life. It is foolish on their part to say so. God, the indweller has absolutely no sorrow and worries. He is the embodiment of supreme bliss. God Himself says, "I am present in you. You are but a spark of my Divinity." Such being the case, how can one be affected by difficulties and sorrows? When

you enquire on these lines, you will realize that the demonic and bestial tendencies in you are responsible for these feelings. You will not be able to experience the truth that God is all-pervasive unless you give up evil qualities. God is present in all elements and in all beings in the form of radiance.

What is the need of the hour?

What you need today is unwavering faith in God. Faith in God alone can protect you. Under all circumstances, at all times, consider God as the basis of your life. Give up evil qualities like anger, greed, jealousy, etc. Anger is a fire that always keeps burning. Desire is the cause of one's downfall. Hence, eradicate desire and anger within you. Develop Love for the Divine, learn the language of the heart.

What do we need to do to protect ourselves and be of utility to those around us?

You must endeavor to understand the principle of Divinity. Nobody in this world can help you in the ways God rushes to your help. Hence surrender yourself to God, and pray for His help. Also devotion to God safeguards your ancient culture. People get haunted by misery and grief when they forget God. Control your emotions. Do not entertain evil thoughts. Develop Love. Love all and all will love you. Sing the glory of God. In doing so, you would have rendered a great help to the whole world. Chant God's Name and make your heart sacred.

What is the first step we should take to experience real love in our lives?

Control your emotions. Develop Love. Do not entertain evil thoughts. Nothing can confer the experience of bliss that the proximity of God gives. Love all and all will love you. Share your love even with your pet animals and you can see how they reciprocate your love. Yad Bhavam, Tadh Bhavathi. (As you think, so you become). You are bound to experience the reflection, reaction and resound of your feelings, be they good or bad. If you see bad in others, it is a reflection of your own bad feelings. It is a mistake to blame others ignoring your own faults. Purify your feelings as a first step as quickly as you can.

How can we achieve positive results when working in a difficult environment?

Love even those whom you consider wicked. In fact, there is nobody who is wicked in this world. It is because of delusion that you consider some as good and a few others wicked. Develop noble feelings and follow the path of truth. Do not indulge in vain gossip. Do not entertain bad feelings or use bad words. Do not hurt others. Instead, sanctify your time by chanting the Divine Name. There is nothing sweeter in this world than the Divine Name. The Divine Names that you chant purifies the hearts of many. Use only sacred words and sing the glory of God. In doing so, you would have rendered a great help to the whole world. Make proper use of your time. Help everybody. When you help others, you will certainly achieve positive results.

Where is peace? Where can we go to attain peace?

Unity is indispensable, be it for the wealth and prosperity of a nation or the peace and happiness in a family. The whole world will be plunged into unrest and chaos in the absence of unity. Unity confers peace and bliss. Disunity leads to discontent and restlessness, and makes one forget divinity. Peace is what one has to aspire and pray for. In fact, you do not need to go anywhere in search of peace. Each one of you is the embodiment of peace. Sarva Rupa Dharam Shantham, Sarva Nama Dharam Shivam. Every human being is a personification of

peace, all Names of God are equally auspicious. Searching for Peace outside yourself is like acting like a foolish person who searches for his spectacles, while wearing them right over his nose.

What is the first step we should take to fill our heart with noble feelings?

The arishadvargas (six inner enemies - desire, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy) are responsible for one's misconduct and suffering. If one behaves in the same way as animals, in what way is one superior to them? When one makes proper use of intellect, one will not suffer. All matters relating to the world are like passing clouds. When God is present in everyone and everywhere, how is that one faces hardship and misery? The reason is that one has filled their heart with bestial tendencies. One has to drive them out and cleanse the heart. For instance, in a tumbler filled with water, if you want to fill it with milk, the water has to be poured out. Similarly in order to fill your heart with noble feelings, you have to get rid of the evil qualities.

What is the right way of taking food?

If you talk while taking food, the digestive system will be spoiled. Once the digestive system is spoiled, several diseases will confront you. Before partaking your food, pray to God silently keeping your eyes closed. Take your food in silence in a calm environment. Do not howl, talk and chit chat while taking food. Do not cry or laugh too. Do not entertain worry before or while taking food. These are some of the precautions to be taken to lead a happy life.

If one is disappointed in not receiving what they asked for in prayer, what should be done?

Having grasped what ought to be grasped, do not let go of the grip till you succeed. Having desired what ought to be desired, hold on till your desire is fulfilled. Having asked what ought to be asked, hold on till your request is answered. Having thought what ought to be thought, hold on till you succeed. Either God should yield to your prayer or you should ask with wholehearted intensity. That is the path a true devotee should pursue.

What is the importance of time? How should we best dispense it?

Do not waste time. At present, you are wasting a lot of time in vain pursuits. In fact, time is our life. Time is everything - "Kaalaya Namaha, Kaala Kaalaya Namaha" (Worship time, Worship the Lord of Time). If you spend such a valuable time, indulging in vain and unsacred things how can you get it back? It is only to sanctify this life, God has given you your span of time. If you channelize your thoughts in the right path, your actions will be timely. The time, the action, the cause and the duty should be harmonized. Do not ever leave the sacred path; the path will help you lead a sacred life. You can definitely achieve this.

What is the importance of time? How should we best utilise it?

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Why is our approach and attitude to others important?

If you enquire deeply, you can visualize God in every human being and in every material. Any padartha (matter) should not be looked upon as mere padartha, but considered as parartha (essence of Divinity). There is a gulf of difference between padartha and parartha. Since padartha is viewed as mere matter and not Divine, its value is demeaned. You should consider everything as Divine. Every drop of blood in your body is suffused with Divinity. This Divine Energy has to be properly utilized by entertaining Divine thoughts.

What is the importance and value of refinement?

One cannot partake of paddy in its raw form. It has to be dehusked and refined into rice and cooked well; only then will it be fit for consumption. When paddy undergoes refinement and becomes rice, its value is enhanced several fold. The process of refinement involves grinding, separating the husk, removing the dust and polishing. In the same way, one cannot get happiness for the mere asking. One has to work for it. The more one engages in good work, the greater will be the reward. The process of refinement lies in accepting all that is good and rejecting all that is bad. You should be prepared to work hard and get refined.

When can we experience real and permanent happiness?

Today people have no regard for truth. Many people do not really mean what they speak. They have something in their mind but say just the opposite. They manipulate their words according to the person and situation. Truth is that which does not change with time. Truth is changeless in past, present and future. Truth is one, not two. The Upanishads (ancient Indian scriptures) extol the principle of truth in many ways. Truth cannot be described in words. Bliss is its form. When you close your eyes and start contemplating on truth, you will experience inexpressible bliss. Unknowingly, you start smiling. Where has this smile come from? It has come from your feelings of bliss. And what is the source of bliss? The source of bliss is God. The happiness you get by your union with God is eternal. Happiness is union with God. When you are dual-minded, you cannot experience this happiness.

What is the relationship between the individual, the Divine and the Society?

Each one should observe three principles in life - Love for God, Fear of Sin and Morality in Society. You should realize that the soul, the Divine and the Society are all aspects of the Divine. Lack of fear of sin in human beings is the root cause of the absence of morality in society. One bereft of morality is not a human being at all. For everything, morality is important. God loves all. If one has love for God, there will certainly be unity in society. People indulge in sinful deeds despite knowing that God can give them punishment. They have no fear of sin. If one lacks fear of sin, there can be no morality in the society. If everybody has fear of sin, then there will be morality in the society.

Why should we restrain from unkind acts, knowingly or unknowingly?

One should not act in an arbitrary manner with limitless ego. Everybody should enquire, "If I do this, what will happen? Whether I should do it or not?" You should see to it that you do not see what is evil, do not do what is evil and do not speak what is evil. You have to reap the consequences of your actions, if not today, at least tomorrow. You may think that God has forgiven you for your sins, but you will have to suffer the consequences of your actions, some

time or the other. It is also possible that all your evil deeds may come to you, all at once. If you want society to progress and prosper, you should always keep the welfare of the society in your view.

What is the essence of devotion?

Those who conduct themselves without morality will never be respected in the society. One who has morality will be respected by all. People will talk high of them saying, "He/she is a good person. Do not put obstacles in their way." You should always diligently follow moral principles. One without morality will be looked down upon, as worse than a dog. Body is meant to perform good deeds. When you put this body to proper use, you will have a good mind. When you have a good mind, you can earn the love of God. A devotee should always aspire for the love of God. This is the essence of devotion. To attain love of God, morality and fear of sin are very essential for everyone.

What are the three cardinal principles each one should follow?

Each one should observe three principles in life - Love for God, Fear of Sin and Morality in Society. You should realize that he or she is the Individual Soul as well as the Divine, and Society is also an aspect of this Divine Principle. Lack of fear of sin in human beings is the root cause of absence of morality in society. One bereft of morality is not a human being at all. So, for everything, morality is very important. God loves all. If one has love in him, there will certainly be unity in society. People indulge in sinful deeds, in spite of knowing that God can give them punishment. They have no fear of sin. If everybody has fear of sin, then there will be morality in the society.

Why is it not desirable to crave for ephemeral worldly gains?

It is not desirable to crave for money and ephemeral worldly gains. You can never say when money will come and when it will go. Money has a form and that is why it comes and goes. But there is no form for morality. You should develop morality for the progress of the society and the welfare of the world. You should have faith in the Divine Principle. One who has faith in Divinity will not be subjected to injustice and impropriety.

What is the need of the hour?

Whatever actions you perform, you will have to reap their consequences accordingly. Therefore you should develop morality and imbibe human qualities. When the food becomes stale, there is no use keeping it any longer, because it will become more stale. You may hide sins from society, but you cannot hide anything from God. Therefore do not try to hide anything. If you can do good to others, do it. Otherwise, keep quiet. At least, do not harm anybody. Cause no harm to anyone by your thoughts, words or deeds. The consequences of your actions will come to you sooner than later. There may be some delay but you cannot escape these consequences. Develop love for God and develop human qualities and morality. When there is morality in the society, all will be protected and no harm will come to the society.

What do we need to do to protect ourselves and be of utility to those around us?

Destroy all your evil qualities such as pride, ego and wickedness. Whenever you drive away all these evil qualities, you will become a pure human being. Wherefrom does humanness come? It comes from your heart. Here, the heart is not referred to as the physical heart but the spiritual

heart, which is free of all blemishes. Like fragrant air, your purity should spread everywhere. You should share with others, pure thoughts and pure feelings that emanate from you. Whatever you do, it should be helpful to others.

Why should we strive for the progress of everyone?

When you put a step forward, there is God in it. It is the same current that makes the bulb shine, fan rotate and mike function. When you put off the main switch, all the electrical gadgets stop functioning. God is like the main switch. When you look at something, there is God in it. God is the Divine Force that makes everything function. When you forget God, it amounts to forgetting everything. Therefore, always love God. Kill the demons of your evil qualities. Only those who have good qualities can develop society. Strive for the progress of the society tirelessly.

What should be the constant endeavour in our lives?

All of you should lead your lives with humility and obedience. Destroy all your evil qualities such as pride, ego and wickedness. When you drive away these evil qualities, you will become a pure human being. Wherefrom does humanness come? It comes from your heart. Here, the heart does not refer to the physical heart, but the spiritual heart which is free from all blemishes. Like fragrant air, your purity should spread everywhere. You should share with others the pure thoughts and pure feelings that emanate from you. Whatever you do, it should be helpful to others. Help Ever, Hurt Never. If you imbibe these two qualities, everything will become good for you.

Why is it critical that we uphold the principle "Love for God, Fear of Sin" and observe morality in every single act of ours?

Whatever actions you perform, do it in a spirit of self-improvement. Do not be under the impression that you are serving the Organization. Rather, you are serving yourself by your sincere efforts. Do not at all give room for ego and pride. By depositing the savings in a bank, it is not the bank, but principally you, who will benefit, for it will come back to you only. In the same way, the good you do to others, you are doing it for your own good life. If you are committing a mistake or indulging in an evil deed, others will try to imitate you. Hence, you must "Be good, do good and see good. This is the way to God."

Why should you avoid dual mind?

Whatever you seek in the external world is present within you. There is nothing outside that is not within. Love is your true nature. Nothing can really exist in this world without love. You are an embodiment of love. Forgetting this reality, you are craving for mundane things. What you have to aspire for, what you have to experience and enjoy in this world is love and love alone. Other than love, nothing is permanent. Love is present in all names and all forms. It is eternal, non-dual and blissful. You should not be selective in sharing your love...lavishing it on the near and dear ones and being indifferent to others. If you are immersed in a dualistic feeling, you cannot experience non-dual bliss. A man with a dual mind is half blind. You should identify yourself with others and experience unity.

What are some inadvertent errors that will deflect us from the path of spirituality? Why is it important for a good devotee to lead a life of restraint?

If you continue to imitate other cultures, your innate strength and purity will gradually diminish. Therefore, do not imitate others. For example a lion attacks an animal only when it is hungry. It does not go about killing every animal that comes across. Even a wild beast like the lion has the capacity to restrain itself. Limitless ego, anger and desire will only lead you astray. You have to divert your mind from such a situation and follow the noble path, so that you do not cause harm to others nor do you suffer in the process. Do not utilize your strength and power indiscriminately. You see the modern children enjoying unrestrained freedom. Freedom no doubt is good and permissible, but should be within a limit. Only then it acquires value. Trying to amass wealth and being over-smart will only lead you to a danger.

What are the key guidelines in life that we must follow for purposeful living?

Do not waste your thoughts. For it makes your mind unsteady and wavering. Take the example of a handkerchief. Is it a cloth? No, it is not. It is a bundle of threads. No, not even threads. It is just cotton. Without cotton, there can be no threads and without threads there can be no cloth. Likewise, the mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts. Having understood this deeply, put a check on your thoughts. Even the wealth you acquire and the food you eat must be within a certain limit. Food is God, do not waste it. Help others, never hurt them. These are some key guidelines that you must follow for purposeful living.

What are the important speed breakers in life that we must adhere to?

If you continue to imitate others, your own strength will gradually diminish. Therefore, do not imitate others. Observe restraint. For example, the lion attacks the animal only when it is hungry. It does not go about killing every animal that it comes across. Thus even a wild beast like the lion has the capacity to restrain itself. Hence it is necessary for every human being to observe restraint and certain limits. Do not utilize your strength and power indiscriminately. Trying to amass wealth and being over-smart will only lead you to danger. Limitless ego, anger, and desire will only lead you astray. You have to divert your mind from such a situation and follow the noble path so that you do not cause harm to others nor do you suffer in the process. .

What is the true sign of a person with moral mettle?

Whomsoever you come across, you should offer your salutations. Even if you encounter your enemy, offer salutations to him first. Surely, the other person will reciprocate your noble gesture. Thus, we have to conduct ourselves with mutual love and unity. It is only such people who deserve to be called human beings. This is, in fact, the sign of people with morality. You must develop such morality today. Love for God expects one to enjoin such morality in society. Hence, you must cultivate and practice Love for God, Fear of Sin and Morality in Society. Do not ever forget these three principles.

What is the fine line that every educated person should carefully tread?

Just as the rivers Godavari and Krishna have their sources in the Ocean; education has its roots in Educare. Physical and worldly knowledge corresponds to education. Educare is related to our inner feelings and purity of heart. Our mata, pata and bata (Speech, Song and Way of Life) should originate from heart. That is the essence of Educare. Even if you acquire any number of degrees, if you lack purity of heart, you cannot be called truly educated. You must understand the purpose of education and act accordingly. Then your life will be redeemed.

What is the importance of treading the sacred path at all times?

From today onwards, develop noble feelings! Make efforts to instill such faith and devotion in your fellow human beings. Follow the sacred path. Never give scope for anxiety or worry. Do not give scope for despair and despondency with any negative attitude. Do your duty and face any situation with courage. Then, the result is bound to be good. Your future will certainly be safe and secure. Love is God. Love is everything. Live in Love.

What is the secret to validate that we are treading the spiritual path?

God is Love and Love is God. True spiritual discipline lies in developing love to love relationship. These days, people teach Parartha (Spiritual Values) without giving up Swartha (Selfishness). That is a grave error. You should give up Swartha in the first instance and consider Parartha as the basis of all your endeavours. Develop faith in God. God is the only support, and everything else is Adheya (Supported). Divinity is One. Never forget that. Sweets may be many, but the essential ingredient in them, that is sugar, which imparts the sweetness, is the same. Hold on to this principle of love and demonstrate this ideal of unity.

What is the real value in developing human values internally within us?

Modern Education is breeding selfishness. It is for acquiring goods and services for one's own comfort. These are worldly pleasures. The qualities of desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride and envy drive one's efforts in pursuit of worldly pleasures. No doubt worldly education helps to provide comfort and joy in the objective world, but it does not at all contribute to inner bliss. Only the five human values of truth, peace, love, non-violence and righteousness can confer inner bliss. A person who cultivates these five human values will always be happy. The five senses of action provide external pleasure whereas the five human values confer inner bliss.

What quality should we develop to attain the protection of the Lord at all times?

Love is one quality that is common to all human beings, animals, birds, beasts and insects. Every living being loves its progeny. Love is Divine. Whoever cultivates such love, God manifests in them. It is only the divine quality of love that saves us from sorrows, difficulties and calamities. Unfortunately, people do not cultivate love and instead go after transient things. Real love manifests from the depth of one's own heart. You must attain such Divine Love. Wherever you go, whatever activity you may undertake, let your heart be filled with Divine Love. Such a person, wherever he/she may be... whether in the town or in the forest or in the sky or in a deep sea will surely be protected.

Why do we sometimes experience pain?

We think that the qualities of anger, envy, jealousy, pride, etc. are God-given, but it is not true. God does not make any distinction between people by granting positive attributes to some and negative qualities to others. All these differences are human-made and God has nothing to do with them. When our wish is fulfilled, we praise God. On the other hand, if something goes wrong, we attribute our failure to God and blame Him. God is only a witness to everything that goes on in this world, good or bad. He neither gives nor receives anything. All our sorrows and difficulties are of our own making.

How can we leverage the monkey mind and keep it pure and make it an effective instrument in our spiritual journey of life?

Rain water is pure. When you place a vessel while it is raining, you can collect pure water. It is like distilled water. By drinking that water, you will not be troubled by any ailment. When the same water is mixed up with other substances, it gets polluted. In the same manner, the mind is always pure. It gets polluted by desires. Hence, do not pollute your mind by cultivating desires. When a desire arises in your mind, brush it aside to keep your mind free from pollution. You read your text books and acquire knowledge; similarly, it is your duty to keep your mind always pure and free from pollution. This is most important learning you must acquire today.

What is the simple step that we can do today, which will ensure that we are blessed with all kinds of happiness?

You may or may not worship God, but you must respect your mother and father, who are responsible for your birth. Respect your mother. Keep her always happy. No one can estimate or describe a mother's love. It has no pollution. If you are able to win the love of your mother, it amounts to acquiring all degrees. Our scriptures enjoin us to respect mother, father, teacher and God in that order. First and foremost is your mother who gave you birth. The father brings you up and puts you on the road to development. The mother is the foundation for the mansion of your life. The father represents the wall and the Guru is the roof. Finally, God is your life itself. Hence, those who yearn for God must love their mother first. If only you keep her happy, all other things of happiness will be added unto you.

What is the important lesson we should internalize today and practice every day?

You call yourself a human being. Unless there are human values in you, how can you be called a human being? Only when you develop noble qualities you are entitled to be called a human. We often come across people changing jobs with a hope of getting high salaries. Do not develop this craze for money. Instead of the craving for money, develop human values. When you develop love for God, the demonic qualities in you will be removed. When people get rid of demonic qualities, the society will become better. You will earn a good name in your society. God will always protect persons who adhere to human values and constantly guard and guide them. Hence, develop morality and love for God.

What is the relationship between Human Values and Happiness?

Truth is the first and foremost human value. Truth does not undergo any change in all in the three periods of time - past, present and future. You have to develop faith in that Truth. Next is Love. "Love is God, Live in Love." In fact, your entire life should be nourished and nurtured by love. When truth and love go together, non-violence is the result. Where there is love, people will not quarrel amongst themselves. When you develop love, you will consider all others as your brothers and sisters. Suppose you meet someone and say, "Hello Brother", even your enemy will respond by saying "Hello Brother". Hence, first purify your own thoughts and when you develop purity, there will be Divinity. When unity, purity and divinity go together, your life will certainly be happy.

Why should we love our enemies and our neighbors as our own?

An embodiment of Divine Love, God is complete love incarnate. This Love shines equally in every human being. The fragrance of a flower remains the same, whether it is held in the right hand or the left. Likewise, God has no distinctions, such as the favoured and excluded. Different persons, proceeding from their own likes and dislikes, attribute to the Divine, the differences

existing in their own minds. The sandalwood tree imparts its fragrance, even to the axe that fells it. Likewise, God is ever prepared to love, foster and protect everyone equally without any distinction.

What is the key message of Christ to the world?

Christ declared to the world three important things: 1) God is One. 2) God is omnipotent. 3) Do not hurt anyone. God is the indweller of every being. Christ embarked on His mission and went about calling upon people to earn the love of God, by developing Love towards God. People professing different faiths worship God under different names. The truth is there is only one God. God is not to be found in mathamu (religions), but only in the mathi (mind). It is only when the mind is controlled and purified that God will be recognized.

How long the disturbances around us will continue to bother us?

At a distance from a bazaar, one hears only a huge indistinct uproar. But when we approach it and walk into it, one can clearly distinguish the individual bargaining at each shop. So too, until the reality of the Paramatma (Divine Self) is known, you are overpowered and stunned by the uproar of the world. But once you enter deep into the realm of spiritual endeavour, everything becomes clear and you are awakened. Until this awakening, you will be caught up in the meaningless noise of argumentation, disputation and exhibitionist flamboyance.

What is the secret to live joyfully every single day?

Cultivate one-pointed steadfastness in whatever you do. Samadrishti (Equal mindedness) is the right and auspicious outlook (Subhadrishti). All creation must appear to your eyes as equally auspicious. You must look upon all beings with much love and faith as your own kith and kin. For, there is no evil in any creation... not even an iota! Evil appears as such only through faulty vision. Creation gets colored by the nature of the glasses we wear. By itself, it is eternally pure and holy.

What is truly responsible for the different degrees of sorrows and joys that people experience in this world?

Creation involves the putting together of substances. What is put together must come apart, in course of time and get liberated. The individual is created and so he has to disintegrate and die. Now some are born happy, and enjoy healthy, happy lives. Some are born miserable. Others are born without hands or legs, or are feeble-minded or defectives. Who hurt them or injured them? God is proclaimed as just and kind. It can be argued: how can such a God ever be so partial and prejudiced? How can such differential treatment come into the realm ruled by God? Such doubts are natural. But the vision of the sages of ancient India who moulded the thought of this land revealed to them that God is not the cause of these differences. They are the consequences of the acts indulged in by the individual in lives previous to the present one. They result in happiness and misery, health and handicaps. Good and bad are self-made, the effects of what was done in previous lives.

How crucial is our speech and how can we utilise it in the best manner possible?

If your foot slips, you earn a fracture; if your tongue slips, you fracture some one's faith or joy. That fracture can never be set right; that wound will fester forever. The softer you talk, the less you talk, and the sweeter you talk, the better for you and the world.

How can we experience the Universe as a reflection of the Lord?

It is wrong to take the Universe and its Lord as different. It is a delusion. It is a product of your imagination. So long as you have this delusion, you cannot visualize the Reality immanent in you. Also, you will slide into wrong thoughts, words and deeds. A piece of sandal wood if kept in water will produce a bad smell. But, if taken out and rubbed into a paste, its perfume will return. When the authorities of the Vedas and Sastras are respected, and when discrimination is sharpened on the practice of good actions, the evil smell of the wrong and wickedness will vanish and the pure innate perfume of the Self will emerge. Then the duality of the doer and the enjoyer will disappear. You will realise that just as your image under the water is not different from you, the Universe is the same as He.

What should we train the mind for assiduously?

The Supreme Lord is the prompter of the activity and the dispenser of the consequence. He is beyond the intellect. Like the spokes of a wheel that radiate from the hub that leads from all directions towards the centre, all creation radiates from Him. To reach the central hub and to know that all spokes radiate from it, the mind is the instrument. Brahman (The Supreme Lord) is the target to be reached by the arrow of the mind. Have your mind fixed on the target. Use the knowledge of the Upanishads (ancient Indian scriptures) as the bow, shoot straight and hard to reach your goal. Train the mind with single pointed attention to meditate on Him, to worship Him in your heart. Let Him be the central hub to which all nerves from all directions in your body look up to. If this process is followed, you can realize the Glory of the Lord within you.

What are the few vital steps that we must practice daily to lead a joyous life?

Cultivate devotion steadily every day and derive joy from there. One should have a mind filled with equanimity, the conviction that fundamentally all are same. The spiritual life is not a matter of meaningless talk. It is really life lived in the spirit of the Lord. It is the experience of pure joy and is another name for full Life. To lead such a joyous life, you should keep your promises and never forget them. You should be courteous and well-mannered. You have to be impartial in your dealings and be immersed in the ocean of devotion, as immovable as the Himalayas.

When is it that we have to get rid of to lead a light and happy life?

Reduce the luggage you carry about when on the journey of life. Remember, all that is not "you" is luggage. You are not the body, so the body is an item of luggage. The mind, the senses, the intelligence, the imagination, the desires, the plans, the prejudices, the discontent, the distress, etc. are all items of luggage. Jettison them soon, so as to make your travel lighter, safer and more comfortable.

What is the attitude that we should develop towards the faculties we are gifted with?

The Headmaster of a school is a good example of the attitude we should develop. While always aware that the chairs, tables and benches are not his, he nevertheless knows it is his duty to see that no item of furniture or equipment is lost or damaged, that it is all handed over intact when he leaves. Therefore he keeps vigilant, though unattached. The senses, the intellect, the heart, the mind - these are the furniture put in your charge; look after them with care. If any is damaged by oversight, make the appropriate entry in the list, explain the circumstances and crave for Grace.

Who will guide you to travel in a perfect direction in your life's sojourn on this earth?

You have boarded a train to reach a village. You have heard that you need to get down at a station to go to the village. Many a station of the same type come during the journey and the train halts in each one of them. Just because the train halts, you do not get down at any of them with all your luggage, do you? If you get down, you will not be able to reach your destination; you will miss your goal and suffer many hardships, not to speak of delay. The wiser course is to note even before the start of the journey, the list of intermediate stations and the alighting station by approaching some persons who have travelled on the same route before. A Guru (Spiritual Teacher) shows the path and teaches what is beneficial and leads you to the destination. He should be shown respect and gratitude.

The world is so full of deceit. When those who we believe are good turn out to be bad, how can faith grow?

Believe in yourself first. Then believe in the Omnipresent Lord. When you have faith in these two, neither the good nor the bad will affect you. When one is deluded by the mere external world and when one does not attain success in external desires, the faith in the Lord diminishes. So, give up such desires. Desire only is for the spiritual relationship. Then you will not become the target of doubts and difficulties. The important thing for this is faith in the Lord. Without Faith, you start doubting everything - big and small.

How do we keep cool when our mind is restless and unable to decide upon anything?

No effect can take place without a cause. You do certainly know the cause of your present condition. Given the scenario, when you experience a mental pain, do namasmarana (repeat the Name of God) for a while sitting in a lonely place. Or sing bhajans (Devotional Songs) loudly in a raised voice. Or if that is not possible, spread the bed and sleep for some time. Thereafter your worries will disappear and you'll find solutions.

What is the fine line that a devotee should tread? What should one eliminate in oneself?

It is not good to spend time in conversations which are fault finding and abusive in nature. These are natural and common with many people. Knowing this, those who aspire to become true devotees should search only for bases on which they should build their joy. All the available time should be used for holy purposes, it should not be wasted. You have nothing to do with the good and the bad in the others. Instead of wasting the time, it should be utilized to discard the bad and develop the good in you.

What are the pitfalls that we lead ourselves to, trapped in our worldly lives? What are the tips to avoid the pitfalls?

During the little time available, if you don't think of some good subject, but merely recollect the ignorant prattle of others, it is as if you too joined in the blame game. This is harmful to a devotee. One word following another produces anger and pain. The path of devotion is designed for suppressing, not developing these qualities. The talk of the fault finders is like the sound of bronze. Cheap metals make more sound. Gold which does not make sound is very valuable. So too, true devotees will remain mute, following the path of silence. Their tongue will be fully engaged in the repetition of the essential greatness of the Lord's Name. It is best that

they have no respite for any other word. So do not permit the words of the bronze-voiced persons to enter your ears, instead fill them with the Name of the Lord.

What is the key quality that a devotee, aspiring to attain oneness with the Lord, should possess?

Alertness is a key quality that a devotee should cultivate. To attach oneself to the flimsy, paltry, foolishness of the world and to run after them and worry when they slip out of the hands or jump in glee when you get them, is avidya (Ignorance). On the other hand, if you are awaiting a chance to commune with the Divine, keeping awake for the opportunity of hearing the words of the Lord, imbibing their essence, that is called Vidyamaya (Internal Illusion). If a devotee gets this, they are fortunate. Develop this quality of alertness and dwell on the thoughts of God. Do not give it up or reduce for any reason to any extent. The thoughts will illuminate you and you will become holy without fail and attain the goal.

What are the important jewels that we should wear every single day?

I am now giving you some selected jewels, maxims of conduct, that are very important. Collect and treasure them well:

Let Love be considered the very breath of your life. Believe that there is nothing greater than Truth, nothing more precious, nothing sweeter and nothing more lasting. Be always on the alert against the four sins that the tongue is prone to commit - Speaking falsehood, Speaking ill of others, Backbiting and Talking too much. It is best to attempt to control these tendencies. One must be always very vigilant, without a moment's carelessness against the eight sins that the mind perpetrates - Craving, Anger, Greed, Attachment, Impatience, Hatred, Egoism and Pride. Your primary duty is to keep all these things at a safe distance, free from yourself.

What are some common rules that we must always observe?

It is easy to conquer anger through love, attachment through reasoning, falsehood through truth, bad through good and greed through charity. No reply should be given to the words of the wicked. Be at a great distance from them. That is for your good. Seek the company of the good people, even at the sacrifice of your honour and life. But do pray to God to bless you with the discrimination needed to distinguish good people and the bad. You must also endeavour with the intellect given to you. Whatever acts a good or bad person may do, the fruits thereof will follow him and will never stop pursuing him.

If we are experiencing a dull moment, how do we overcome them?

Bear with fortitude both loss and grief. Try and search for plans to achieve joy and gain. When you are invaded by anger, practice silence or remember the Name of the Lord. Do not remind yourself of things which will inflame the anger more; that will do incalculable harm. For faults and sins committed in ignorance, repent sincerely. Try not to repeat the faults and sins again. Pray to God to bless you with the strength and the courage needed to stick to the right path. From this moment, avoid all bad habits. Do not delay or postpone. They do not contribute to the slightest joy.

What can we do today to make a difference in our lives?

Try as far as possible within your means, to satisfy the needs of the poor, who are really the Lord in the form of the poor. Share with them whatever food you have and make them happy at

least at that moment. Do not allow anything that will destroy your eagerness and enthusiasm for God to come near you. Lack of eagerness will cause the decay of your strength. Do not get swelled up when people praise you. Do not feel dejected when people blame you.

We often get caught in trying to find faults, when things go wrong. How should we analyze?

Instead of searching for others' faults, search for your own faults yourself. Uproot them; throw them off. It is enough if you search and discover one fault of yours. That is better than discovering hundreds of faults in others. Whatever people may say about the faults that you know are not in you, do not feel for it. As for whatever faults that are in you, try to correct them yourself, even before others point them out to you. Do not harbour anger or bitterness against the persons who point out your faults. Do not retort by pointing out their faults. Instead, you must show your gratitude to them. It is good for you to know your faults. Trying to discover others' faults is a greater mistake on your part. Knowing others' faults is no good for you.

What should we do if we make a mistake?

You should not ask either for pardon when wrong is done, nor for reward, when right is done! Why? Doing right is but man's duty. What other reward can there be? The joy of having done one's duty is its own reward. Doing wrong is against the duty of all human beings. So, if a wrong action has been done, one should repent and pray for the intelligence and discrimination necessary for not repeating the wrong already committed. Beyond this, it depends upon His Grace, whether He punishes and protects or pardons and corrects!

What are the obstructions of the present that we should be vigilant against?

The obstructions to the present are of the four types: Attachment to sense objects, Cynical criticism, Dullness of understanding and Absurd conceit. The first is the cause of attachment to the objects that attracts the senses. The second makes people discover wrong meanings in the teachings of Guru (spiritual teacher). The third causes confusion, because the teachings by the Guru are not grasped at all. The last attraction makes one feel that one is a great scholar, pundit or ascetic, mistaking the body and the senses for the Atma.

How can we overcome the obstructions of the present?

There is no obstruction that cannot be surmounted. Attachment to sense objects can be removed by Sama, Dana, uparathi, thithiksha, that is, by developing purity, self-control, withdrawal of desires, and the ability to suffer. Dullness of understanding can be removed by listening again and again. Constant meditation on things heard will abolish the habit of cynical criticism. All absurd conceit will vanish through the teachings one imbibes.

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Trapped in our worldly lives, what are the pitfalls that we lead ourselves to? And how to avoid them?

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What is more valuable? Preaching or Practice?

Even an ounce of experience is useful than a ton of learning! Many people lecture hours after hours things that are learn by rote. Can one become great by merely the length or the beauty of the lectures? That is like vomiting a swallowed meal. Give up this talk about others being bad or wrong. Develop your faith and devotion. Strengthen your discipline to meditate on the Lord and engage yourself in beneficial deeds. Speak only what will bring good. Worship the Lord, keep Him ever in your memory. If you are immersed in these, you will not worry at all about the right and wrong of others.

How should we perform the tasks that get assigned to us in our daily lives?

If you are able to divest yourselves of desire when you are doing work, no impurity can touch you. Do you know the "Chilliginja" seeds when dropped into muddy water have the power of separating the dirt and depositing itself at the bottom? The seeds sink to the bottom and slip out of sight. In the same way, those who are experts in doing karma without attachment will have their minds perfectly cleansed and the results of their acts will lose effectiveness and sink to the bottom.

How should we train our minds?

You must have noticed the crane walking silently or standing motionless in order to catch a fish. Why? If it plunges headlong or runs about helter-skelter, can it get the fish? Similarly, the Lord is the fish in the forms of Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema. The Lord can never be won, when the hullabaloo of lust, anger, egoism and envy is rampant in the heart. If the bitter qualities of lust, anger and envy germinate in the heart, fear, anxiety and sloth will be the fruits thereof. When there is sugar on the tongue, you will feel the sweetness in the taste. Similarly, so long as the heart has Bhakti, (Devotion) Santhi (Peace) and Prema (Love for Lord), you will be filled with Ananda (Bliss).

What are the signposts that are barometers to identify the wise and people with character?

When hardships overwhelm you, know that it is the consequence of your own past deeds. Do not blame the Lord and develop a grouse against Him. Do not pay heed to this trouble or take it as such. Engage yourself in the service of others and in deeds of merit. Continue relying on the Name of the Lord as support. That is the sign of the wise. To strengthen this attitude, peace is a great source of help. Basking in the happiness born of good deeds you do, you should not be

tempted to commit deeds of evil. You should strive to perform even more meritorious deeds. Then you can make your lives holier and purer and reach the Divine Presence. Such striving is the sign of the highest character.

How should we be committed to our spiritual goals?

Stabilizing oneself in vairagya (renunciation) is itself the highest penance, the most exacting vow. One has to be ever alert in that thapas (penance) and strive again and again. Like a child endeavoring to walk, you might toddle a few steps, falter and fall. But like the child, you must lift yourself with smile and start again. Peace is essential for such persistence. Failures are not boulders that block your way, remember they are stepping stones to victory.

What is the secret to the path of Beauty that is really charming in our daily lives?

To enjoy peace, mankind must be directed by the ideals of Dharma. This depends on the mutual toleration in the family. That is again based on individual conduct that is sathwik (pure and righteous), and aims at pleasing everyone. Such conduct has a charm, all in its own. Avoid in your behavior, actions, and in your speech, all trace of pain and desire to hurt others, to insult others or to cause misery to others. Find out the best means of reforming yourself and thus practice this type of living. Desist from injury to yourself and for your own good, walk always in the path of Truth. That is verily the path of Beauty that is the conduct that is really charming.

What is the first and foremost quality we must possess?

One can acquire large heartedness only if one has inborn impulse or samskara and devotion in every act. Through devotion to the Lord, one gets humility, fear of sin and faith in scriptures. Through these qualities, the littleness of the mind is wiped out and one becomes large-hearted. Therefore, oh yes seekers, first direct your effort towards acquiring 'Faith in God' and developing 'Fear of Sin'. These two will promote meekness and remember. Meekness is Peace!

What is the secret to be in the world, but not full of it?

Some persons who have no experience and who do not put their words into practice go about declaring that the way to peace is to keep samsara (worldly life) at a distance. That is not peaceful living. If you do not want the tree to grow, you will have to boil the seed or fry it over a fire; then it will not grow. Instead, if the seed is taken far away from the tree, will it not grow into a tree again? So too, the impulses and vasanas (desires, tendencies) are the seeds that germinate. They should be fried over the fire of discrimination only then can real peace emerge. If one escapes from the responsibilities of life or duties to society, peace cannot be enjoyed; peace will never come. However, if the desires and tendencies are eliminated and controlled, there is no need to run away.

What is the inconsistency in thought and practice that we may need to fix?

Prayer must be united with practice. You should not pray for one thing and practice another; such prayer is only a means of deception. The words you utter, the deeds you do, the prayers you make - all must be directed along the same path. If you slander others, and look down upon them, you will instead have turmoil and along with the turmoil, all the attendant sorrow and pain! This is incorrect practice. When the food is taken by the hand to the mouth, and then chewed and swallowed, the essence spreads to every part of the body. So also, when the hands are

engaged in acts promoting peace, the tongue must be occupied with prayers for peace. Let these virtues saturate your thought, word and deed. This is the basis for genuine peace...for the individual and the word.

What is the correlation between nourishing the body and worshipping the soul within?

Many do not understand the real meaning of "Deho Devalayam" (Body is the temple). What is the purpose of the body which is actually a temple? It is to worship the Lord within. The temple of body is to be preserved and decorated for the sake of God there in, the Atma Swarupa. Forgetting this, people are immersed in faith in the body, bliss of the body, decoration of the body and dedication to the body. Do not hold fast to the unreal, temporary outer building called the body. Nevertheless, you should maintain the body carefully and not ruin it, because through this temple, the Lord can be seen. Hence always watch your body with care and protect it and never neglect the Lord within.

What is the most important task that we should never forget, wherever we may be?

The world is the Lord's Mansion. Know it as such. He is moving about in that mansion, in its many rooms. God's worship can be done well, only if the temple is clean and pure. Never forget the fact that what gives your body the value and purpose is the Atma (Divine Self) within you. So engage yourselves in winning peace for yourself and the world. Never ignore the Lord whose mansion is the world. Without Him, the body is a tomb, not a temple. If you always remember Him, that is joy and victory; that will bring you all auspiciousness (sarva mangala).

Why should we engage in spiritual practices? Until when should we perform these?

Engage in Sadhana (spiritual practices) with full faith in truth and the Lord. You will attain the real prasanthi...pure and eternal peace. There is no status higher than that of the Lord, no embodiment of His is higher than truth. Truth even if enveloped in the darkest illusion, will shine brilliantly! However strongly you may imprison it in darkness, its effulgence cannot be suppressed. Truth can never die. Untruth can never live. You must all get firmly established in this belief.

What is the task that mankind should be engaged in now?

Animals and human beings have these things in common - eating, wandering about, sleeping and seeking pleasure. However, human beings have other unique abilities like the power to reason out, the power to renounce and the power to decide on right and wrong. These are the special powers of human beings. These powers should be applied not only in worldly matters, but also in the investigation of the Ultimate Truth. If Discrimination, Renunciation and Inquiry are carried out while passing through the joys and sorrows of life, conviction is bound to dawn in a moment that all the worldly pleasures are unreal and have no basis for eternal joy. When such knowledge dawns, one is bound to tread the path of religion, perform Sadhana and take up the inquiry which leads him to Truth. This is the task that mankind must be engaged in.

What are the secrets that we should not forget while developing progressive pure will?

Every human being is a bundle of impulses and intentions. One can reduce one's innate divinity and inner peace by giving free vent to one's impulse or intention. The impulse is the fuel and the intention is the fire. The fire can be put out, only by placing the fuel aside. When the fire dies

down, peace is attained. You are the embodiment of Divine Peace. Let your wish, will and effort be directed to your own good. Do not divert them to worldly pleasures, for they will cause harm and destroy peace.

Which is superior - the path of action or the path of renunciation?

Work is the mission of every individual. Renunciation and doing work are not contradictory - they are complementary. By giving up work, you will decline, without the progress derived from activity and the training achieved through it. A real sanyasi (monk) is one who does not desire one thing or hate another. The word sanyasa (renunciation) when applied to work means to do your role without regard for success or failure, profit or loss, honor or dishonor... and perform each activity as an offering to the Lord. Without work, you will get lost in the darkness of ignorance and be overwhelmed by inertia, dullness! So, better than giving up your work, renounce the fruits of the actions. It yields greater joy and that is the best path!

What are the signposts that mark an aspirant who wants to attain wisdom?

Even if you have all the means of comfortable travel through the grace of the Lord - namely cars, planes or other conveniences, you should still walk, in spite of everything, for the sake of your own health. So too, whoever you may be, whatever spiritual practice or sadhana you may be engaged with, you still have to undertake work, learn and experience the activity and learn the consequence yourself for the sake of your mental health. This is necessary, if you wish to cure your mental weakness. The progress of the individual consists in activities done using discrimination. The end and the consequence of each and every act must be to acquire wisdom.

What does it mean to be "Silent?" Why is it important?

It is said, "mounam bhajaswa (practice silence)". What is mounam (silence)? It does not mean keeping the mouth shut. It means, getting beyond the influence of all the senses and being established always in the consciousness of One's own Reality. When the mind withdraws from the external world, the tongue too becomes silent. All senses follow suit. That is real silence. Hence, you should learn to observe this world from afar, with an uninterested attitude. Then, you can also escape the wiles of the intellect which breeds doubts, delusions and dualistic diversions that draws you away from Bliss and Peace. One who has reached that stage will be in highest peace and attain the highest joy.

What are the key ingredients that constitute Loving Devotion to the Lord?

Valuable time should not be wasted in worthless talk. Conversation must be pleasant and to the point; it can be kept polite and simple, then your peace will become firm. When everything is dedicated to the Lord, there will be no room for worry or sorrow or even joy. If you rid yourself thus of attachment, your peace can never be disturbed. When I, my, mine, my own, you, yours...when these ideas take hold of the mind, peace suffers a setback. To get the attitude of sincerely offering all to Him, Love combined with faith in oneself, is essential. That is what is called Bhakti or Devotion.

What are the different categories of devotees? Which is the highest type of devotion?

The Lord's Name is like a mountain of sugar. Approach that mountain, have faith in it, taste it anywhere and experience that joy. The highest devotee is the one who ever revels in that joy. Others there are who live beside the mountain, enjoying for sometime the Bliss of constant

remembrance of the Lord and at other times, experiencing the objects of the world. Such devotees are of the middle class. Some devote a quarter of their time to the Lord and three quarters to the world. These are the lower class of devotees. There are also others who take shelter at the foot of the mountain of Lord's Name when a calamity hits them and move far away from it when the crisis is over. Of these four grades, the highest type of devotees is those who steadily cling to the path of devotion and enjoy the Bliss throughout their lives. Resolve today that the purpose of human birth is to reach the Lord through worship. All experience, all knowledge, all actions should be directed towards that goal.

How can we attain success through the path of devotion?

Think about this: You may have experienced that when you do some task for a long time, you will correct your mistakes as and when you discover them. You also will avoid the repetition of the same mistake while continuing with the task; is it not? As you continue to perform these, you will invariably achieve even more success than you hoped to get! What is wanted in this circumstance, is just the unflagging desire to achieve victory. That will lead you to discover the means thereof to develop earnestness and care in the pursuit of those means and to invariably achieve success. The wish to succeed must be strengthened by the will, and the will, by the effort. Similarly, you must develop the desire to be devoted to God. If the wish is powerful, you will learn the means and practice with steadiness in effort to attain your wish.

What hides us from experiencing Divine Bliss?

The effulgence of the Divine Self is obscured by egoism or vanity. Therefore, when egoism or vanity (Ahamkaara) is destroyed, all troubles end, all discontents vanish and Bliss is attained. As the Sun is obscured by mist, the feeling of Ahamkaara hides eternal bliss. Even if the eyes are open, a piece of cloth or cardboard can prevent vision from functioning effectively and usefully. So too, selfishness prevents a human being from seeing God, who is nearer to Him than anyone or anything. To bring the teachings of the Scriptures into one's actual life, you must scotch the feeling "I know" and open your eyes to the Real Essence and introspect on it. Then, you can attain bliss without fail.

What is the meaning of true devotion?

True devotion consists in offering all your thoughts and actions to God and yearning for His grace. Devotion confined to a brief spell in the pooja room (shrine) or temple is not true devotion. During that time, devotion seems to swell within you and you feel at peace but, once outside, the peace is lost and anger takes its place. This cannot be called devotion. Bhakti (Devotion) has been described as a state of non-separation from God. Regardless of time, space or circumstance, one should feel closeness to God – that is Bhakti. True devotion transcends the limitations imposed by one's daily routines and the obligations of life.

Why is it important to believe that we are one with God?

The timeless soul which is beyond delusion and darkness has to be cognized by every person through his/her own efforts. You have taken birth as inheritors of this estate of Eternal Bliss. You are the dearly loved children of the Lord. You are as pure and as sacred as air. Do not condemn yourselves as sinners. You are lion cubs, not sheep. You are wavelets of Immortality, not bodies compounded from matter. Material objects are there to serve you and do your bidding. You should not serve them and do their bidding.

What is the best method to gain freedom from bondage?

The sacred activities like rituals and sacrifices that are laid down in the Vedas (scriptures) cannot confer liberation (moksha) from bondage. They help only to cleanse the consciousness. It is said that they raise people to heaven, but heaven is also only a bond. It does not promise eternal freedom. The freedom that makes one aware of the truth, of one's own truth, can be gained only through listening to the Guru (sravana), ruminating over what has been listened to (manana), and meditating on its validity and significance (nidi-dhyasana). Only those who have detached their minds from desire can benefit from the Guru. Others cannot profit from the guidance.

What is the barometer to measure ourselves as educated people?

Do not think that the Vedas (scriptures) lay down a bundle of frightening rules, regulations and laws. Every one of them has been laid down by the Lord, as the lawgiver. All elements in the Cosmos, every particle everywhere, are acting every moment as ordained by Him. This is what the Vedas inform us. No worship can be higher and more beneficial than serving the Lord. One has to offer Love to Him, more Love than one bears to anything else in this world and the next. He must be loved as the One and Only. He has to be remembered adoringly with such Love. That is the fruit that real education must result in.

What is the significance of forbearance as a virtue?

The attitude of forbearance is to refuse to be affected or pained when inflicted with sorrow, loss, or ingratitude and wickedness of others. In fact, you should be happy and calm, because you should know that these are the results of your own actions now recoiling on you, and therefore you should view those who caused the misery as friends and well-wishers. You should not retaliate or wish them ill. You must bear all blows patiently and gladly. The natural reactions of people, whoever they may be, when someone injures them is to injure in return; when someone causes harm, to retaliate violently; and when someone insults them, to insult back in some way or the other. This is the characteristic of the pravritti marga (worldly path) — the path of objective involvement. If you seek nivritti marga (the inner path of sublimation and purification) you must avoid such reactions and exhibit forbearance.

How should we live in this world, and share love with all beings?

The lotus leaf is born under water and it floats on water, but it does not get wet. You too must be in the world likewise—in it, by it, for it, but not of it. The special feature of Vidya (higher education) is to prepare you for this role. That is to say, with the heart immersed in the Divine and the hands busy in work, you must live thus on earth. Love should not degenerate into an article of commerce. Love fulfils itself in Love.

Why is forbearance a superior virtue?

Returning injury for injury, harm for harm, or insult for insult only adds to the Karmic burden, which has to be endured and eliminated in future lives. This load is termed "Aagaami" (impending). You can't escape the task of undergoing the consequences of your thought, word, and deed in due course. Paying evil for evil can never lighten the weight of Karma; it will only become heavier. It might confer immediate relief and contentment, but it can only make you suffer later. Forbearance, therefore, instructs you to do good even to those who injure you.

What is the true wealth that we should acquire?

Your intellect must rest upon and draw inspiration from the Atma (Divine Self) at all times and under all circumstances. As an aspirant for spiritual progress, you must be attached only to the unchanging Universal Consciousness. All your actions should have the joy of God as your goal. You must place implicit faith in the scriptural dictum: "All living beings are facets and fractions of God." To confirm this faith and strengthen it, you must look upon all beings as equal. You have to acquire this virtue of equanimity as this is Sadhana Sampathi (the real treasure acquired through spiritual practices).

What is the purpose of having unwavering faith?

One of the most important virtues to be cultivated is unshakable, unwavering faith — faith in the shastras (sacred scriptures) and the moral codes they contain, as well as in the Atma and your Guru (preceptor). Scriptures are designed to ensure the peace and prosperity of the world and the spiritual perfection of mankind. They have before them this great aim; they show the way to its realisation. So, you must place faith in such Holy Scriptures, Gurus (preceptors), and elders. Gurus are indeed worth worshipping, for they show us the Shreyomarga (path of the ultimate fulfillment). The one who has unwavering faith will achieve this wisdom.

What is the relevance of the past to current society?

One of the basic rules of living is not to be ashamed of your forefathers. As you read more of the history of the past, and visualise the human condition in those ages, your pride is bound to increase. Let faith in the supreme achievements of your forefathers flow in and energise the blood in your veins. Let the strength of that faith render your body, mind and spirit equally strong. The fruit of Vidya (true learning) is the recognition that every community of people and every religion has, along with a basic unity, something special of its own to offer.

Why should we respect every religion?

We may each have different ideas on the nature and characteristics, the form and attributes of God. One person may believe that God has the qualities and form of humans. Another may believe in a God devoid of human form and signs but yet manifesting in embodiments. Another may believe in God as altogether formless. Every one of these can find in the Vedas declarations supporting their stands. For all have faith in God, that is to say, in a mysterious Sakthi (power) which is the source, support and sustenance of all, a Power which subsumes all.

What is the superior importance of virtuous character?

The one who devotes their life to earn the knowledge of the Atma, that is, their true Self, must possess holy virtues, mould their conduct and have sacred contacts. For no knowledge can be higher than virtuous character; truly, character is power. For persons who have dedicated their years to the acquisition of higher learning, sterling character is an indispensable qualification. Every religion emphasizes the same need, not as a special creedal condition but as the basis of spiritual life and conduct itself. Those who lead lives on these lines can never come to harm; they will be endowed with sacred merit.

What is the simplest and most effective means to return to God?

Virtues are the most effective means for purifying the inner consciousness at all levels, for they prompt the person to discover what to do and how to do it. Only those who have earned good destiny can claim excellence in discrimination. Adherence to this determination is the raft that can take one across Bhava Sagara (the worldly ocean of flux and fear). A person of virtues has a place in the region of the liberated. That person can merge in Brahman (Divinity), the embodiment of Supreme Bliss.

What is the true meaning of the term "Bharathiya"?

Codes of behaviour, spiritual practices and manifestations of Love - all have enormous virtues which promote the progress of man. The basic truth of Creation is unity in multiplicity. The 'Bharatiya' (Indian) mode of worship is based on the awareness that the One manifests through many discrete forms and attributes when confronted by various situations and conditions. So Bharatiyas have the intellectual tolerance among all peoples of the world to proclaim to all the quarters that God exists and can be found in every religion. This is their unique good fortune.

What is the role of spirituality in strengthening a Nation?

When it is desired to promote the prosperity of the nation, every one of you must gather into yourself all the spiritual resources that you can. This implies that all the spiritual inclinations, beliefs and urges which are now feeble and dissipated must be united and reinforced. As part of religions, many creeds and cults may exist just as many branches are present in a tree. You should not condemn them as wrong and no branch should fight against another or compete with another. Realize the truth in the maxim, "Ekam Sath, Vipraah Bahudhaa Vadanthi" (Only One exists; the wise describe it in many ways).

Why should we not judge others but play our role to win His approval?

We see the outer circumstances, the processes which result in the final event and in our ignorance we judge that this set of causes produced these effects. But circumstances, events, emotions and feelings are all simply 'instruments' in His Divine Hands, serving His Will and His Purpose. The world is the stage on which each one acts the role He has allotted. Every one struts about for the time given by Him and obeys His instructions without fail or falter. We may proudly think that we have done this or that by ourselves, but the truth is that everything happens as He wills.

What is the supremacy of moral character?

People may have performed a variety of Vedic rites and sacrifices; they might even be expounding the contents of a variety of sacred scriptures that they have mastered; they may be endowed with prosperity, owning vast wealth; they might teach the Vedas and their complementary disciplines with due exposition of meanings. But without moral character, they have no place where Brahman (Divinity) is taught or learned. This is the important lesson conveyed by divine aphorisms.

Why is it super important to believe in ourselves?

If you condemn yourself, day and night as petty and weak, you can never accomplish anything. If you think that you are luckless and low, thereby you become luckless and low. Instead, when you cultivate the awareness that you are a spark of God that you have as your reality Divinity Itself you can become really divine, and you can have command over all powers. "As you feel,

so you become” (Yad bhaavam, thad bhavathi). It is how you feel that matters most. That is the basis for all that you are. This is a must for every one of you! Have faith in the Atma, the Divine Self that you really are!

Why is it critical to have an attitude of loving surrender to the Lord?

Not even the tiniest event can happen unless willed by the Lord. Be fully convinced of this. He is the Suthradhari, the holder of the strings that move the puppets and make them act their roles; but He seats Himself among the spectators and pretends He is unaware of the plot or story or cast. The characters cannot deviate a dot from His directions. His Will guides and determines every single movement and gesture. The varying emotions affect the hearts of those who witness the play; but they do not cause a ruffle in the heart of the Suthradhari. He decides what this person should say or that person should do and He prompts in them the appropriate words and deeds.

Why is it super important to acquire equanimity in our daily lives?

The stage of equanimity is essential for spiritual progress. It can be gained only when the Buddhi (intellect) is cleansed of the blot of deluding attachments and involvements. Without that serenity, the intellect cannot proceed on the trail of Brahman (God). In fact, the term ‘virtue’ is only another name for the ‘intelligence’ that follows the promptings of the Atma, the Self that is your Reality. Only one who has such virtue can win awareness of Atma. And, once awareness is gained, you will no longer be caught in delusion or desire.

What is the barometer to indicate an educated person?

Your forefathers achieved prosperity, peace and joy and succeeded in attaining their goals only through faith. If you lose faith, you are certain to fall. For, faith is the very breath of life. When there is no breath, one becomes a shavam (corpse). With the breath of faith, you become Shivam (Divine), the same as the Lord Himself. Faith can endow you with all forms of power and render you full and complete (poorna). For, Atma, by its very nature, is self-sufficient and full. No other Sadhana (spiritual exercise) is needed to realise that state. Purity and self-sufficiency (paripoornatha) is also your true nature. Impurity and insufficiency are alien to mankind. You should not ignore or forget this fact. Real education must arouse this faith and infuse the awareness of this fullness in every activity. This is the essential aim, the core of the right type of education.

While learning from the best, what are the pitfalls we must avoid?

Imitation can never become culture. You may wear royal robes and act the role; but can you, as a result of this imitation, become a king? A donkey clothed in tiger skin does not become a tiger. Imitation is a sign of cowardice. It cannot further one’s progress. In fact the tendency to imitate leads you down, step by step, into frightful shape. You must endeavour to uplift yourselves. You must be proud that you are devotees of the Lord. You must hold your ancestors in high esteem. You should not imitate others and copy their attitudes. However, you may imbibe the good in them.

How can we outgrow the "Me" and "Mine" attributes?

Desire and bondage to the objects desired and the plans to secure them are attributes of the jeevis (individualized selves), not of the self or atma resident in the body. The sense of “me” and

“mine” and the emotions of lust and anger originate in the body-mind complex. Only when this complex is conquered and outgrown can true virtue emanate and manifest. The sense of “doer” and “enjoyer”, of being an agent, might appear to affect the Atma, but they are not part of the genuine nature of the Atma. Things get mirrored and produce images, but the mirror is not tarnished or even affected thereby. It remains as clear as it was. Every jeevi has these as genuine, basic attributes: purity, serenity, and joy. Every individual is ebullient with these qualities.

How can we win the game of life?

The Vedas and the Shastras (scriptures) are the greatest repositories of Hitha (beneficence) as they were won through penance and travail by sages and seers who were interested in the welfare of humanity and the liberation of man. They advise that man must regulate his 'outer-look' and develop the 'inner-look'; the inner reality is the foundation on which the outer reality is built. It is like the steering wheel inside the car which directs the outer wheels. Know that the basic reality is God. Become aware of it and stay in that awareness always. Whatever be the stress and the storm, do not waver from that faith.

What is the best way to learn?

We have to learn good things from others. We sow seeds in the ground and provide it with manure and water. The seed sprouts, becomes a sapling and grows into a huge tree. It does not become soil when placed therein, nor manure when it feeds thereon, nor water when it partakes thereof. It only imbibes from each of them whatever it can benefit from them. It grows into what is essentially IT, namely, a huge tree! May you too grow likewise. You have to learn much from others; imbibe about the Supreme and the means of attaining it from even the lowest. Learn from others how to practise progressive sadhana (spiritual exercise) and saturate yourselves with it. But do not be transformed into others.

Why should we discriminate and renounce?

A bird in flight in the sky needs two wings; a person on the earth below needs two legs to move; an aspirant eager to attain the mansion of moksha (liberation), the abode of freedom, needs renunciation and wisdom - renunciation of worldly desires and wisdom to become aware of the Atma. When a bird has only one wing, it cannot rise up into the sky. In the same manner, if one has only renunciation or only wisdom, one cannot attain the supreme Self, Brahman. The sense of “mine” is the bond of deluding attachment. How long can one cling to what one fondles as mine? Someday, one has to give up everything and leave, alone and empty handed. This is the inescapable destiny.

Why should we express our deep gratitude to the Almighty, in every moment of our day?

It is due to the gift of His Divine Grace that we survive in this world. Every drop of blood coursing through our veins is but a drop from the shower of His Grace. Every muscle is but a lump of His Love. Every bone and cartilage is but a piece of His mercy. It is clear that without Him we are but bags of skin. But, unable to understand this secret, we strut about boasting “I achieved this,” and “I accomplished this.”

What is the true definition of "service"?

Education is rendered noble when the spirit of service is inculcated. The service rendered must be free of the slightest trace of narrow selfishness. That is not enough. The thought of service should not be marred by the desire for something in return. You have to perform the service as you would perform an important Yajna (sacrificial ritual). As trees do not eat their fruits but offer them to be eaten by others in an attitude of detachment; as rivers, without drinking the waters they carry, quench the thirst and cool the heat from which others suffer; as cows offer their milk, produced primarily for their calves, in a spirit of generosity born of Tyaga (renunciation), to be shared by others; so too you should offer yourself to others prompted by the motive of service and without consideration of selfish interests. Only then can you justify your status as sajjana (noble men).

Why should we not forget Divinity in our daily lives?

Consider what happens when a person sees a dry stump of a tree at night: he/she is afraid that it is a ghost or a bizarre human being. It is neither, though it is perceived as either. The reason for this misperception is darkness. The absence of light superimposes on something another object that is not there. In the same manner, the darkness that is spread through maya (false perception) veils and renders unnoticeable the Primal Cause, Brahman (Divine Self), and imposes the cosmos on it as a perceptible reality. This deceptive vision is corrected by the Jnana (awakened consciousness) and transmuted into the vision of Prema (Universal Love).

What is the true barometer for a scholar?

A true scholar should not entertain egoism in his thoughts at any time. However, the misfortune is that scholars as a class are today afflicted with unbounded egoism. As a consequence, they follow incorrect ideals and take to wrong paths. They confer the benefits of education only on themselves and on their kith and kin. As a result, they forgo their position among sajjans (noble men) and the respect it can bring. One must grant generously to others the knowledge, skill and insight that one has acquired. If this is not done, human progress itself is endangered. In order to promote the best interest of mankind, one has to cultivate the holy urge of paropakaaram (service to others) and the attitude of sharing.

How can we discover ourselves?

There is a technique by which the Immortal Spirit can be discovered. Though it may appear difficult, each step forward makes the next one easier, and a mind that is made ready by discipline can discover the Divine basis of man and creation in a flash. There is no short-cut to this consummation. One has to give up all the tendencies that one has accumulated so far and become light for the journey. Lust, greed, anger, malice, conceit, envy, hate – all these tendencies have to be shed. It is not enough to listen to spiritual discourses and count the number you have listened to. The only thing that counts is practising at least one of those teachings.

What is the significance of the incarnation of Krishna?

Even the smallest acts of Krishna were saturated with supreme sweetness. Krishna was everyone's dearest kinsman and fastest comrade. The Leelas (Divine Sport) of Krishna are sweet and meaningful. All activities of Krishna were for the well being of the World. His advent was for the uplift of the world from wickedness and unrighteousness. It was also for fulfilling the needs of those who are devoted to Him, for the establishment of righteousness and the revival of the Vedas. Though people caught in the coils of ignorance see the Leelas as self-centered

and even motivated by delusion, genuine devotees cherish each one of these as significant and sustaining examples of Grace. The Lord showers Grace on each and every one in such a way that suits the time, the person and their aspirations.

What is the central message from the life of Lord Sri Krishna?

Love has no reason. Love is the basis for love. Only through this love, we can attain God. Any other spiritual pursuits give us temporary joy not permanent bliss. Only through the principle of love and its practice, we can recognize and realize the Embodiment of Love. Where is this Love? This love is within us, but we divert this in different ways. We have a variety of sweets, but the same sugar is present in all of them. Similarly, Divine Love is inherent and immanent in everybody; there is no human heart bereft of love. So, we should visualize the love which is in everybody. To teach this path of love, Lord Krishna incarnated who said, "Yadaa, Yadaahi Dharmasya Glaanir Bhavathi Bharatha; abhyuthaanam adharmasya, Tadaatmaanam Srujaamyaham - Whenever the hearts of human beings become barren, because of unrighteousness and lovelessness, in order to sow the seeds of love and in order to propagate the principle of love, God incarnates

What is the correlation between the awareness of the Divine and the realization of Oneness?

The Divine is the base, and is also the superstructure. The beads are many, but the interconnecting, integrating string of the rosary is one. So also, for the entire world of living beings, God, the permanent, omnipresent parabrahman, the Supreme Divine Consciousness, is the base. "Soham", "I am God", "He is I", "I am that" - all these axioms indicate that even those who differentiate themselves under various names and forms are in fact God Himself. This is why the scriptures proclaim, "Brahmavith Brahmaiva Bhavathi" (He who realises Brahman becomes verily Brahman). This awareness of the Divine in oneself is the awareness of the Reality.

How should we deal with "difficult people"?

While dealing with uncultured folks, you must exercise caution. So too, you must be careful with ungrateful people, who forget the good done to them. The law is the instrument that Government will use to punish those who do wrong. As educated persons and students, you should not condemn difficult people outright. You must manifest your natural virtue of detachment and practise your characteristic attitude of helpfulness.

Why should we persist in visualizing the underlying unity of all creations at all times?

The bubble born of water floats in it and bursts to become one with it. All the visible objective worlds are like the bubbles emanating from the vast ocean of Divinity, Brahman. They are on the water and are sustained by water. How else can they arise and exist? Finally, they merge and disappear in water itself. For their origination, subsistence, and mergence, they depend only on water. Water is one; bubbles are plentiful. Water is real; bubbles are appearances. Water is the basis; bubbles are delusive forms of the same imposed on it.

How should we deal with troubles and calumnies?

One may be subjected to calumny, insult and dishonour; or plunged into poverty or pain; but the person who has surrendered to the Will of God will welcome each of these gladly and bear it

with equanimity. The Lord will never give up His children. Those devoted to God have to be patient and calm, under the most poignant provocation. The fact is the pious and the God-fearing are those who are most visited by travails and troubles: in order to teach mankind these great truths, Krishna enacted the drama in Mahabharata, with the Pandavas as the cast. Every incident in their lives is but a scene in His Play.

Why is it critical to be simple and sweet?

Every educated person and student must cultivate simplicity and discard ostentation. If they are addicted to pompousness, they lose their genuine nature or individuality. Even if a person is a master of all sciences or famous as a great intellectual, he is certain to be counted out of scholars and pundits if he has no humility and discipline in his dealings with others. He may win respect for some time but that will decline pretty soon. Alertness to serve and simplicity alone will confer honour on a person. When one gives up an attitude of pretentiousness, one earns permanent respect from people. Real education imparts a spirit of renunciation, a dislike for ostentation, and the yearning for serving others.

How to see through the delusion and remain focused on our goal?

Every being has its own Dharma or innate specialty or individuality or special characteristics. This rule applies equally to blades of grass and the stars. The cosmos is not one continuous flux; it progresses persistently towards achieving a totality in the qualities and circumstances. But if you are too immersed in the all-pervasive delusion, you cannot elevate yourself. When in delusion, you are not aware of the path of peace and harmony in the world. You will also not be able to hold on to the good and avoid the bad, and establish yourself in the righteous path. However, you can transform yourself from the present status through self-effort and discrimination. The moral forces permeating the cosmos will certainly promote your achievement!

What is the yardstick for an educated person?

If you seek Vidya (knowledge), you must possess kindness, compassion and love towards all living beings. Compassion to all beings should be your very nature. If it is absent, you become a bore. Vidya means, more than anything else, the quality of genuine concern for all living beings. If you bear ill-will against any being, your education has no meaning. The advice given in the Gita, "Adweshta Sarva Bhoothanam (with no ill-will towards any being)," conveys the same message. Love and compassion must not be limited to mankind only; they must embrace every living being.

How do we comprehend the Eternal, Never-Changing God?

The genuine characteristics, the Swaroopa Lakshana, never undergo change. It abides in all. The form, name, time or space may suffer change; but the core of truth (the Swaroopa Lakshana) will not alter. That core is denoted as Asthi (existence), Bhathi (luminescence) and Priyam (attractiveness) in Vedantic texts. Existence is the unchanging truth; it may change its form and name, in time and space, but the 'is-ness' is genuine. It makes itself known as existing, through the native characteristic of Prakasha (luminosity) or capacity to attract our awareness and confer knowledge. We can know it because it has luminescence; all things we are aware of have this innate characteristic. Each thing also has the nature of likeability, the capacity to invoke attachment and love as a result of usability. The above three together are the nature of God.

What are the key traits each one of us must acquire, as enshrined in the scriptures?

The Gita warns that any insult or injury or even neglect directed against any living being is an act that ridicules or hurts the Divine ("Sarva Jeeva Thiraskaaram Keshavam Prathigachchathi") The Gita also clearly says, "Sunee chaiva svapaakecha, pandithaah sama darshinah", that is, the learned man who has acquired humility through Vidya (knowledge) must deal with equal compassion and consideration for all living beings. Uniform kindness shown in this manner transforms itself into homogenous welfare for the recipients. Wishing well for all is the sign of one who has earned Vidya. The narrow vision that is limited to one community must be given up. Bhaarithiya culture thus emphasises the highest truth, the broadest vision.

What is the attitude of one who is truly great?

The hearts of the great will be so full of divine content and equanimity, that they will not be affected by the ups and downs of fortune. A fragrant flower will please one with its captivating scent, whether it is held in the left hand or in the right. So too, whether in the sky or in the forest, village or city, on the heights or the valley, the great will be equally happy. They know no change as demonstrated by the Pandavas in the epic Mahabharata. Even though they were in the jungle, they were able to spend their days happily by the grace of Lord Krishna.

What is the supremacy of the scriptures?

Brahman (Divinity) is the source of all the Holy Texts and is therefore all-knowing. Brahman is the very source of illumination. Only the Omniscient One can be the source of the Vedas. Only the scriptures can liberate people through that illumination named knowledge. They regulate one's life and foster it, guarding it from grief. The Vedas offer comforting counsel; they deal with people affectionately and lead them forward, for they are received through venerable personages who attained the highest knowledge, Brahman.

What are the some of the important aspects that every student should pay attention to?

Students have to pay great attention to an important quality—cleanliness, both outer and inner. When either of these is absent, that person becomes useless for any task. The clothes you wear, the books you read and the environment around you must be clean. This is the outer cleanliness. That is to say, every material object you deal with for living has to be kept clean. The body has to be scrubbed and washed every day, or else, it may cause infection to you and others. The teeth and eyes, the food and drink, all should be free from dirt. You can then lead a healthy life.

What is an effective strategy to reform in the evil times?

When the ruler becomes cognizant of the activities of evil times, 'Kali', he must investigate into the conditions favourable for its spread. Emperor Parikshit analyzed the situation and declared that Kali or wickedness can have sway only through the incompetence of the ruler, the loss of self-reliance among the people and the decline in the earning of Grace. These three are the factors that promote the plans of Kali. Without them, man cannot fall a prey to its wiles. Hence, Parikshit promoted alertness and leadership through personal example to his people. "Yatha raja, thatha praja" (As the ruler, so the ruled) is the proverb, he said. As their king, he attempted to give no room to injustice, force, evil character, untruth and violence; he formulated preventive plans to effectively check the influence of Kali.

Is to err a natural human trait?

Many feel that it is human to err and that Bhagawan should forgive their lapses. In fact, if they were truly human, they should not commit mistakes at all. Even if sometimes a mistake is committed, willingly or unwillingly, it should not be repeated. It is a grievous error to think that it is natural for a human being to err. To follow the directives of the senses is the mark of an animal. To be guided by the Atma is the sign of a human being. None should attempt to justify his or her weaknesses and lapses as natural to a human being; they should be regarded as signs of mental debility. When you have truly acquired sense-control, you will experience the power of the Divine in you.

What exactly is spirituality? When can we say that we are spiritual?

What is spirituality? It is the resolute pursuit of cosmic consciousness. Spirituality aims at enabling a person to manifest in all its fullness the Chaitanya (Divine Cosmic Consciousness) that is present both within and outside oneself. It means getting rid of one's animal nature and developing the divine tendencies in one's personality. It connotes breaking down the barriers between God and Nature and establishing their essential oneness. Today, people think that spirituality has no relation to mundane life, and vice versa; this is a big mistake. True divinity is a combination of spirituality and social obligations. National unity and social harmony are founded upon spirituality. It is the Divine that links spirituality and social existence.

We all have hearts, but what exactly is this heart and where is it?

Everyone is endowed with a hridaya (spiritual heart). When you fill your heart with love and compassion, peace will reign supreme in the world. There will be no jealousy, hatred or anger, but only love everywhere. Restlessness will disappear from the face of the earth. One who has filled his heart with compassion will always remain in peace. It is most essential to know this truth. People mistake hridaya for the physical heart but truly it represents the all-pervasive Atmic principle, in other words, the Aham. So you should keep your heart absolutely pure and sacred.

What is the reward for selfless service?

Engage yourselves in selfless service. The reward for it will come of its own accord. Do not have any doubts on this score. Whatever you undertake, do it with all your heart and to your full satisfaction. That satisfaction is all the reward and recompense that you will need. It will confer great strength on you. This is the virtue that you have to cultivate. Acquire this true wealth. Without goodness, all other riches are of no avail.

What is the most important lesson the scriptures teach us?

The shastras (scriptures) direct and counsel everyone. People yield to delusion and become one with the darkness caused by false values and attachment to the unreal - the "me" and "mine". But scripture is the mother; she does not give up. She persists and pursues; she reminds people of their goal in order to ensure that they will be saved. One need not drink the entire ocean to know its taste; placing just one drop on the tongue is enough. Similarly, it is impossible to understand all the contents of the scriptures. It is enough if one grasps the important lesson that is elaborated therein and puts that lesson into practice. The lesson is: Constant thought of God.

What is the barometer of a good human being?

Keep the mind and the intellect serene and sacred, free from dirt. When thoughts and feelings are impure and agitated, you cannot be calm and happy. When the mind is polluted, so are our reactions. To keep the mind clean, you must analyze sympathetically situations involving others and their activities, and then decide on how to react to them. You should not rush to draw conclusions. Adopting the reactions of others is certainly not desirable. You must resolve on any action only after intelligent discrimination and inquiry. "Some course of action is being followed by someone; so, we shall follow that course ourselves" - this attitude is mean and demeaning, it is a sign of weakness. It is the consequence of basic ignorance. Only sheep behave in that manner.

What is the most desirable of all?

It is an arduous process for people to become aware of the One that is their core. People are of the essence of food (Annam). The gross body is the product of the food consumed. But within everyone there is a subtler force, an inner vibration named Vital Air (Prana). The mind (Manas) within is subtler still, and deeper and subtler than the mind is the intellect (Vijnana). Beyond the intellect, people have in them the subtlest sheath of spiritual bliss (Ananda). When people delve into this region of spiritual bliss, they can experience the reality, the Brahman (Divinity). That Divine awareness is indeed the most desirable.

How much does the Lord bend, to serve His dearest devotee?

During the war, the palms of Lord Sri Krishna, soft and tender like lotus petals, developed boils all over, since the steeds strained their hardest, when they were restrained or controlled as He had to hold the reins tight. The Lord devoid of food and sleep, performed services both high and low, and kept ready both horses and chariot in perfect trim. He also went on various other sundry errands, which were fundamental to achieving victory. He bathed the horses in the river, attended to their wounds and applied balm to cure them. Basically, He acted as a servant in the household of Pandavas! He never assumed the role of the Universal Sovereign that is His real nature and status. That was the measure of His affection for those devoted to Him!

Why should we not mirror others' behaviour when we get hurt?

The ideas and pronouncements of others may often be personal, or may induce feelings of hatred between people. Why should we accept them as ours and mould our feelings accordingly? We should not try to shape our feelings and patterns of behaviour to conform to those of others. We must not relinquish our faith, our experience and our innate holiness. Born as human beings, moving about as educated persons, yet foolishly following others as sheep do and polluting the minds with ideas borrowed from others are things to be avoided.

Why should we treat work as worship?

The scriptures are as affectionate to us as a mother is. They teach lessons as a mother does to her children, in conformity with the level of intelligence and according to the needs of time and circumstance. A mother with two children gives the strong and healthy one every item of food for which it clamours, but she takes great care not to overfeed the ailing child and gives it only those items that can restore it soon to good health. Can we, on that account, accuse her of being partial to one and prejudiced against the other in conferring love? The scriptures draw the attention to the secret and value of work (Karma). Work can improve life and set its ideals

aright. Everyone must be instructed on how to transform work into beneficial activity. Yet, Karma is not all; it is only the means to the end. Advocacy of Karma is not the chief goal of the scriptures.

What is an effective way to earn respect in society?

We may not always be able to know the reasons for our faith. It originates and is shaped by our personal likes and dislikes, our dominant feelings. But we must not become the target for anger, hatred, jealousy and the evil deeds they lead us into. We must cultivate broad, inclusive feelings. Only then are you entitled to acquire Vidya (higher learning), and you will earn respect in society. You must keep far away from narrow selfish thoughts, feelings and plans.

What is a simple yet powerful tool in our journey to God?

Withdraw your mind from worldly thoughts and fix it on the Name of the Lord, Hari, who charms all hearts. Listen to the wisdom of the Divine, the Bhagavatha Thathwa with all your heart. There is no activity holier than that. There can be no greater spiritual exercise or discipline or vow. The human body is a worthy boat. The story of Lord Hari is the rudder in this world of constant change. Lord Hari is the boatman who will safely ferry you across Samsara, the sea of birth and death.

What is the root cause of anxiety and calamity?

The root cause of all anxieties and calamities of man is envy. We can find from the Bhagavad-Gita that Krishna warns Arjuna repeatedly to be free from this negative trait. Envy is invariably accompanied by hatred. These two are twin villains. They are poisonous pests. They attack the very roots of one's personality. A tree may be resplendent with flowers and fruits. But when the inimical worms set to work on the roots, imagine what happens to the splendor! Even as we look on admiringly at its beauty, the flowers fade, the fruits fall off and the leaves turn yellow and are scattered by the wind. At last, the tree itself dries up, it dies and falls. So too, when envy and hatred infect the heart and set to work, however intelligent and highly educated the individual may be, he falls. He is turned into an enemy of society. He becomes the target of ridicule because he is no longer human!

Where is peace? Where can we go to attain peace?

Unity is indispensable, be it for the wealth and prosperity of a nation or the peace and happiness in a family. The whole world will be plunged into unrest and chaos in the absence of unity. Unity confers peace and bliss. Disunity leads to discontent and restlessness, and makes one forget divinity. Peace is what one has to aspire and pray for. In fact, you do not need to go anywhere in search of peace. Each one of you is the embodiment of peace. Sarva Rupa Dharam Shantham, Sarva Nama Dharam Shivam. Every human being is a personification of peace; all Names of God are equally auspicious. Searching for Peace outside yourself is like acting like a foolish person who searches for his spectacles, while wearing them right over his nose.

What is the right way of taking food?

If you talk while taking food, the digestive system will be spoiled. Once the digestive system is spoiled, several diseases will confront you. Before partaking your food, pray to God silently keeping your eyes closed. Take your food in silence in a calm environment. Do not howl, talk

and chit chat while taking food. Do not cry or laugh too. Do not entertain worry before or while taking food. These are some of the precautions to be taken to lead a happy life.

If one is disappointed in not receiving what they asked for in prayer, what should be done?

Having grasped what ought to be grasped, do not let go of the grip till you succeed. Having desired what ought to be desired, hold on till your desire is fulfilled. Having asked what ought to be asked, hold on till your request is answered. Having thought what ought to be thought, hold on till you succeed. Either God should yield to your prayer or you should ask with wholehearted intensity. That is the path a true devotee should pursue.

Why is our approach and attitude to others important?

If you enquire deeply, you can visualize God in every human being and in every material. Any padartha (matter) should not be looked upon as mere padartha, but considered as parartha (essence of Divinity). There is a gulf of difference between padartha and parartha. Since padartha is viewed as mere matter and not Divine, its value is demeaned. You should consider everything as Divine. Every drop of blood in your body is suffused with Divinity. This Divine Energy has to be properly utilized by entertaining Divine thoughts.

When can we experience real and permanent happiness?

Today people have no regard for truth. Many people do not really mean what they speak. They have something in their mind but say just the opposite. They manipulate their words according to the person and situation. Truth is that which does not change with time. Truth is changeless in past, present and future. Truth is one, not two. The Upanishads (ancient Indian scriptures) extol the principle of truth in many ways. Truth cannot be described in words. Bliss is its form. When you close your eyes and start contemplating on truth, you will experience inexpressible bliss. Unknowingly, you start smiling. Where has this smile come from? It has come from your feelings of bliss. And what is the source of bliss? The source of bliss is God. The happiness you get by your union with God is eternal. Happiness is union with God. When you are dual-minded, you cannot experience this happiness.

Why should we work for the harmony of all religions?

Today, the experience and wisdom of great seers who have unveiled the mystery of the cosmos and their feelings of universal love are not appreciated, accepted, and respected. All religious dogmas, except a few, can easily be harmonized and reconciled. The same God is extolled and adored under various names through varied ceremonial rituals in many religions. In every age, for every race, God has sent prophets to establish peace and goodwill. Presently, many religions have spread far and wide across the world and have lost fraternal feelings over time. There is an urgent need for harmony. All great people are images of God. There is only one single caste in the realm of God and all belong to one nation, the Divine Fellowship. You must interest yourself in understanding the practices and beliefs of the others. Only then you can, with cleansed mind and loving heart, attain the Divine Presence.

What are the subtle ways through which envy raises its hood?

No enemy can be as insidious as jealousy. When one sees a person more powerful or knowledgeable, or with greater reputation, wealth or beauty, or even wearing better clothing,

one is afflicted with jealousy. You may find it difficult to acknowledge and accept the situation. Your mind may seek means to demean and lower them in the estimation of people. Such propensities and evil tendencies should never strike root in your minds. You must be careful such that your character is not polluted.

What is the power of listening to the Name of the Lord?

The story of the Lord is an enchanting treasure. Store His story in your memory and save yourself from delusion and grief. You may have listened to the recitals of all shastras (scriptures) and mastered all sadhanas (spiritual practices). But the greatest of them all is the sacred Name of the Lord and the sweetness that it oozes. When His Name falls on the ear, your heart will be filled with joy. When you recall His Name, a stream of Love will spring forth from your heart.

What is the underlying source for the blossoming of hearts?

Love for the Divine Self is primary; while for other worldly objects or persons is secondary. Worldly love for another person cannot be termed as genuine love. The Jagath (cosmos) or the Prapancha (five-element composite) emanated from the Brahman (God). There is no spot in the Universe where the Divine is not manifest. The cosmos is ever in movement and the Lord of the Cosmos (Jagadishwara) is the mover. Love for the Divine Self is the source of all worldly love. The Upanishads clearly proclaim that when you love the Divine Self, it brings everyone nearer and dearer to you (Atmanastu Kaamaaya Sarvam Priyam Bhavati).

What is the right attitude when others are praised?

You must learn to be happy and filled with joy when others are acclaimed as good and are respected for their virtues and the ideals they hold dear. You must cultivate broad outlook and purity of motives, and also must be ever vigilant such that the demon of envy does not possess you. This demon of jealousy is certain to destroy all that is precious within you. It will even ruin your health and damage your digestive system. It will rob you your sleep and sap your physical and mental stamina, ultimately reducing you to the state of chronic illness. Hence, if someone is praised and you desire it, you must resolve to emulate those who do better than you and earn equal appreciation. You must strive to acquire knowledge, skills and experience as much as others. That is the proper ambition you must have.

Why are there 'devotees' and 'non-devotees'?

God does not incarnate merely for the destruction of the wicked. Truly speaking, God incarnates primarily for the sustenance of the faithful, the devoted, the virtuous and the good. But even the faithless and the bad, use the chance for their own purpose. In the Bhagavatha, stories of wicked persons intervene amidst the accounts of the Glory and Grace of God. These stories do not make the Bhagavatha any less holy. When the sweet juice has been squeezed out of the sugarcane, the bagasse is discarded. When the sweetness of Divine Majesty has been tasted, the pulp can be thrown out. The cane has both bagasse and sugar; it cannot be only sugar. So too, devotees have to be amidst the faithless; they cannot be without the others.

Why should we see the Divine at all circumstances, every single day?

The apparently moving (chara) and unmoving (achara), the active and inert, are both willed by the Divine. That Divine Will is a conscious act (chetana); it is not a form of inertness (achetana).

Whatever arguments and counter-arguments are advanced by any person, the truth that Divine Will is the root of everything stands unshakable. People who argue about this either are deluded by appearances or are only trying to bolster up their pet fancies, avoiding deeper probes. -

What are some of the common traps we must avoid at all times?

Praising oneself and condemning others are equally dangerous. Attempting to hide one's meanness and wickedness, and putting on the mask of goodness, justifying one's faults and exaggerating one's attainments - these are also poisonous traits. Equally evil is the habit of ignoring the good in others and assiduously seeking only their faults. Never speak words that demean the other. When we are friendly with another and like them very much, whatever he/she does is certain to strike us as good. When the wind changes and the same person is disliked, even the good he/she does appears to us as bad. Both these reactions are misconceived. They are not commendable at all.

Why is it that God loves everyone and has no likes or dislikes?

God has no bondage to time and space. For Him, all beings are the same. He is the master of the living and the non-living. At the conclusion of every aeon, the process of involution is completed in the Pralaya (Great Deluge). Then, evolution starts again as Lord Brahma, the Creator creates beings again. He enlightens everyone with a spark of His own Glory and fosters every one of them on the path of fulfillment as Lord Vishnu. He, as Lord Siva, concludes the process by the destruction of all. Thus, you can see that there is no limit to His might; no end to His potency. There can be no boundaries for His achievements.

What is the need to pray?

The blind cannot be saved by one who has no eyes; the destitute cannot be helped by the impoverished. How can a person who is needy and helpless remove the poverty, suffering, and pain of another? The poor must approach the affluent, the wealthy. The blind must seek the guidance of a person who can see. One who is bound and blinded by the dualities of creation has to take refuge in the inexhaustible treasure of compassion, power, and wisdom, namely, the Divine Atma. Then, one can get rid of the destitution of grief, revel in the wealth of spiritual bliss, and attain the goal of human existence. This consummation is won through the Grace of the Lord.

Why should we develop a sharp sense of discrimination?

Each one of you should transform yourself into a Sumathi (a person with a good mind). You must avoid turning into a durmathi (an individual with perverted and polluted intelligence). A huge heap of fuel can be reduced to ashes by a tiny spark of fire. A drop of poison can render a pot of milk totally undrinkable. Envy and hatred are the sparks that destroy the cluster of virtues in you. Be aware!

How do we fathom the reality of God's existence?

Brahman (Divinity) cannot be comprehended by means of proofs or arguments. It is beyond reason and calculation. It is indefinable, cannot be pronounced as being such or so, for this reason or that. It is immeasurable (aprameya) by time and space. The usual evidences for truth are direct perception (pratyaksha) and inferential perception (anumaana). But Brahman cannot be cognized by these two means. The sages experienced it and expressed this in the

scriptures, and these Holy Texts themselves are the proof. The Word or Shabdha is the firmest testament for the existence of Brahman.

How can we be happy even as evil minds try their best to disrupt our peace?

When the good are happy and living in peace, the bad cannot tolerate it; they develop intense headache! Unless the wicked contemplate on the loss and hardships that the good undergo, they are never happy! The problems suffered by the good are the gain of evil minds. The sweetness of the cuckoo is bitter to the ear of the crow. The Kauravas tried their best to create dissension among the Pandava brothers and spread heinous scandals. But the five Pandavas respected Truth and abided by it, and so, nothing could separate them. No event could make a dent on the happiness of the five brothers.

How should we proceed in our spiritual advancement?

Discover for yourself your stage of spiritual development, to which class in the school you would fit in. Then determine to proceed from that grade to the next higher one. Strive your best and you will win the Grace of God. Do not bargain or despair. One step at a time is enough, provided it is towards the goal, not away from it. Beware of the pride of wealth, scholarship, status, that drag you into egoism. Do not seek the faults of others; look for your own. Be happy when you see others prosper, share your joy with others.

What are the traps that we should always be vigilant about?

You must exercise constant watchfulness over your feelings and reactions, and endeavour to keep out selfishness, envy, anger, greed and other such evil tendencies from entering your minds. These are nets which entrap you; these vices overwhelm and subdue your holiness, so that you cannot be influenced any longer. Then you forget yourself and behave like another worse individual, a person caught in frenzy. You blabber as your tongue dictates, without regard to the effect—good or evil, and engage your hands in work that it favours. Be aware and keep them in control! If you carefully discriminate, you can be recognised by the good company you keep, the noble works you delight in and the pleasant words you utter.

What is the root cause of our desires? And how can we get over this tendency?

Your desires - wants, longings, resolutions, and wishes - are multiplied and prompted by our activities (karma). The initial impulse for desire is ignorance of the reality (ajnana). If so, then naturally the doubt arises as to how the consciousness that is unaware can transform itself into the consciousness that is aware (jnana)? Darkness can never remove darkness. So too, ignorance can never destroy ignorance. It can be accomplished only by spiritual wisdom (jnana), which is, Awareness of the Truth. This is the dictum promulgated by Adi Sankara. The world today very much needs this harmony and awareness.

What is the benefit of listening to the Glory of the Lord?

Those who listen to the narration of the Lord with earnest devotion (and not just hear casually) and not only reflect upon its value and significance but also act according to the light it sheds on their minds will merge in the Bliss of the Lord. Their hearts will be filled with the sweet nectar of the personification of His captivating charm. They will experience the Adwaita Ananda, the Bliss of being one with Him. To attain this fruit, the highest Sadhana (spiritual exercise) is the

recitation of the Name of God with full vigilance of thought, feeling and utterance (mano-vaak-kaya) and the loud singing of His Glory. There is no greater spiritual practice than singing His Glory.

Why is it super important to win the Grace of the Lord?

Envy expands the string of mischief it plays on people. It makes one revel in scandalising others. This evil today is widespread among the youth. It comes naturally to them, for it is a sign of ignorance. To get rid of this habit, you must devote some time, early in the day and before retiring for sleep, in exploring the mind and examining faults that have secured foothold therein. You must pray to God to save you from this tendency. When once you have won the Grace of God, you can be rest assured that such absurdities will not deform your character!

Why is it critical to have an open mind with everyone?

When the cause is known, one can know all its consequences. The entire universe was formed from the five primordial elements (prapancha), and is a projection by the Divine Will. It is a consequence of the Will of God (Bhagavath-Sankalpa). God is the cause of all creation. Correct vision will reveal to us unity in diversity; one's limited intelligence cannot unravel it. With distorted vision (ku-darshan), one sees only the name and form, the appearances, and therefore gets deluded and confounded. One gets tossed by likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain, elation and depression. One is aware only of the unreal which appears in diverse names and forms. Correct vision (Su-darshan) makes you see the One in the many. It reveals unity in diversity and confers supreme delight.

Why is it critical to have an open mind with everyone?

It is quite a common occurrence that stories of the Divine are narrated and heard by gatherings of thousands. But Jnana (wisdom) can be achieved only by placing complete faith in what is heard. That faith must result in a cleansed mind, a pure heart. Whoever listens to the Lord's narrative and imbibes the nectar therein with a heart bubbling over with yearning for the Divine, with unshakeable faith in God, they will attain constant joy and Self-realisation. This is beyond the realm of doubt.

Why should we deeply care about our inner feelings?

Eyes and ears that seek evil, tongue that craves to malign, nose that enjoys the foul, and hands that delight in wickedness—these must be totally avoided. Whoever has any of these must correct them immediately. Or else, one's future is bound to be disastrous. The wrongs of the five indriyas (senses) will result in the destruction of the five pranas (vital energies) and the killing of the five koshas (sheaths of existence). Of course, the senses yield momentary pleasure and joy but, as the saying goes, "senility lies in wait." Sensual pleasures bring about great grief quite soon.

What is the barometer of the path chosen by the intelligent?

Liberation is the realisation of awareness, achievement of oneness with the Divine. Each and every living being has to attain this consummation, this goal - the Brahman. That is its true destination. Some day or the other, the urge to win release from the shackles of grief and joy, and the bonds of "I" and "mine" will awaken and emerge. The path that is taken then inevitably leads to freedom (moksha). Seeking that path is the sign of the intelligent person. Instead of

this search, when one considers the objective world as all-important and feels drawn toward its charm, life is barren and is of no consequence.

What is the foremost quality each one of us must have?

Each one of you require faith in yourselves, more than most other qualities. The absence of self-confidence marks the beginning of one's decline. Today, the world is facing ruin and disaster because people have lost confidence in themselves. Self-confidence alone is capable of granting peace and prosperity to each and every person. If you cultivate self-confidence, you will receive kindness everywhere. You will be honoured in all places. Whatever you touch, will become gold!

How can we know if we are leading a true life?

Those who are intent on sensory pleasures spend their days in worry, anxiety, pain, grief and tears throughout a long period of life; they breed like birds and beasts. They eat good food and cast it away as waste. This is the purposeless life that most people lead. Can you call this the process of living? Enormous numbers of living beings exist on the earth. Living is not enough. It has no value by itself, for itself. One can be considered to be alive only if the motives, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes that prompt a person reveal the divine qualities within.

How can we know if we are leading a true life?

When the person who is bound relies on the one who is not bound, he can get rid of his bonds and move about freely. The person who is deep in grief must seek refuge in the one who is floating on spiritual bliss (ananda) filled with joy. Bondage plunges one into sorrow; the Lord is Total Bliss Personified. Therefore, one can be completely cured of grief only by resorting to the inexhaustible spring of delight, the Lord. And what exactly is liberation (moksha)? It is release from grief, the absence of sorrow, and attainment of spiritual bliss (ananda-praapti). The supreme Self, the sovereign Lord, is the embodiment of indivisible sweetness (rasa), the treasure house of bliss (ananda nilaya). Hence, those who seek and secure His grace gain eternity itself.

What is the barometer for a good student and a teacher?

Teachers who teach with the salary paid to them in their minds, and students who learn with the jobs they may procure as their focus are both pursuing wrong paths. In fact, the task of the teacher is to discharge his duty of instructing and inspiring the students so that they develop their latent talents and advance in the perfection of their skills. The task of the student is to unfold the Divine in him and equip himself for serving society with his skill and knowledge.

What is the purpose of the Avatar?

The Supreme Sovereign Lord manifesting Himself as Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara, through the prompting of Primal Will is engaged in creating, fostering and destroying the worlds. In what is thus created, there is always the principle of Dualism. There is difference and disparity between one and another. If these differences and disparities are harmonised wisely, the world will have happiness and peace. If, on the other hand, living beings behave wrongly, the world will be sunk in anxiety, misery and confusion. When these arise, the Lord assumes appropriate Forms and affords necessary protection and correction. He sets right the damaged world, removes the evil forces that caused the damage, and instructs mankind in the science of fostering the right and the good.

What is the nature of our minds?

The mind is engaged in two activities: alochana or planning, and sambhashana or dialogue. Both these follow different lines. Planning is intent on solving problems that present themselves before the mind. Dialogue multiplies the problems and confounds the solutions causing confusion and adoption of wrong and ruinous means to solve them. The inner conversation and controversial chatter continues from morning till night, until sleep overtakes the mind. It causes ill-health and the early setting in of old age. The topics on which the chatter is based are mostly the faults and failings of others and their fortunes and misfortunes. This perpetual dialogue is at the bottom of all the miseries of man. It covers the mind with thick darkness. It grows wild very quickly and suppresses one's genuine worth.

Why should we consciously train ourselves to look inward?

Ordinary humans struggle to win material happiness and external pleasures. They do not seek the spiritual bliss (ananda) that the Atma, their inner reality, can grant. They lose the great opportunity of experiencing it, and they don't take any steps appropriate for the purpose. All the time, their attention is directed only to the external world. It does not turn inward. Looking outward is the characteristic of animals, not of humans. The important organs of sense perception in the human body - the eye, the nose, the tongue, etc. - all open outward in order to contact external objects. The Sovereign Lord is the embodiment of indivisible sweetness (rasa), the treasure house of bliss, and can be realized only when you look inward. A wise person would gradually and steadily endeavour to look inward and acquire that victory of Bliss.

What is the mystery of an Avatar?

1. It is not possible to limit the freedom of God in assuming Forms. He adopts endless Forms to manifest Himself to save the world. His incarnation is in conformity with the need of the crisis at the time. When the Earth moaned under the injustice of the demon Hiranyaksha, He had to appear as a boar, taking Form and equipped with Attributes, though in essence, He is without Form and Attribute. The will of God cannot be explained by categories or as consequences. It is according to the needs of the situation, in the Forms best suited for the destruction of the wicked and for the protection of the good and godly.

2. The Upanishads prescribe certain sadhanas (spiritual exercises) to achieve inner peace. One of that is engaging in Karma or beneficial activity - that is to say, service to people which will help diminish the sense of ego; this refers to acts that are good and godly. When one's thoughts are engaged in such activities, the mind turns away from the talk it indulges in. Listening to spiritual advice, reflection on spiritual directions, and discovering ways and means of confirming faith in the Lord, recital of the names of God and withdrawing the mind from sensual pursuits have been prescribed by the scriptures for silencing the mental chatter, this inner talk, as a preparation for attaining the Supreme Lord. For it is only when the mind is cleansed and clarified that it can achieve such a profound task. Only then the lessons taught and the experiences undergone can be pure and unsullied.

What will be the state of the mind of a pure soul, in times of joy and sorrow?

The rain falling on the mountain range slides down the sides into many valleys and flows as turbid streams. The same rain falling on fresh water lakes or limpid rivers remains pure and clear. The sages who are cognizant of their Atmic reality are transformed into the purity,

equanimity, and charity that it represents. They are ever in the full awareness of the Atma, their inner core. In the purified consciousness of these persons, there is the experience of identification. Likes and dislikes, sense of "I" and "mine", anxiety and calmness, elation when praised and depression when blamed - these cannot contaminate or agitate a person who has attained that state. These opposites become balanced and are accepted with equanimity as waves on the Atmic consciousness. This is the authentic Atmic attitude, the Brahman inner-look, the unitary vision.

Why do we struggle very hard sometimes? How can we get past the tough times?

I am immanent in every being. People forget Me, even though I am within and without them. I am the inner core of every being, but they are not aware of this. So, they are tempted to believe the outside world to be real and true, and pursue objective pleasures, and fall into grief and pain. On the other hand, if they concentrate all attention on Me alone, believing that the Lord has willed everything and everyone, I bless them and reveal to them the truth that they are I and I am they. Thousands have been blessed thus.

What is the power of the choice of our words? How should we leverage it?

Speech is a beautiful instrument that is gifted to man for uplifting himself; it is charged with tremendous power. Through the choice of our words, we can communicate to a person something which upsets their balance or shocks them into grief; the words then completely drain off their physical strength and mental courage. They fall on the ground, unable to stand. On the other hand, when through speech, we communicate something happy, or cheer them, they get the strength of an elephant. Words do not cost anything, but they are priceless. So they have to be used with care. They must be employed not for gossip, which is barren, but only for pure and productive purposes. The ancients recommended the vow of silence in order to purify speech of its evils. A mind turned inwards towards an inner vision of God and speech turned towards outer vision - both of these will promote spiritual strength and success.

What is the principle of The One behind the diverse creation?

The One Divine Principle works through many forms in order to manipulate and complete the process Srishti (creation). All forms are fundamentally of the same essence. There is no higher or lower. All are equally divine. When God comes down assuming special form on special occasions for a specific purpose, He is known as Avatar. Each Avatar is born as a consequence of Divine Will and with the purpose of restoring Dharma and moral life.

What is the lamp we should light today?

Deepavali has to be observed as a day for getting rid of all the bad qualities in us, symbolised by the demon Narakasura. The inner meaning underlying the festival should be rightly understood. A whole array of lamps is lit by the light from one lamp. That one lamp symbolises the Supreme Effulgent Lord. The others represent the light in individual selves. The truth of the Vedic saying, "The One willed to become the many" is exemplified by the lighting of many lamps by the flame of one. Deepavali festival thus bears out the profoundest spiritual truth. The lamp also points to another significant fact. Wherever it may be placed, the flame rises only upwards and never moves down. Likewise, the flame of Jnana (Spiritual Wisdom) leads one to a sublime level through the path of Righteousness.

How we can lighten and brighten our lives from this holy day of Deepavali?

Do not get elated at the riches, status, authority, intelligence, etc., which you may possess. Consider that they have been given to you on trust, so that you may use it to benefit others. They are all signs of His Grace, opportunities for service, and symbols of responsibility. Never seek to exult over others' faults; deal sympathetically with the errors and mistakes of others. Seek the good in others; hear only good tidings about them; do not give ear to scandal. On this Deepavali day, resolve to light the lamp of Naamasmarana and place it at your doorstep, the lips. Feed it with the oil of devotion; have steadiness as the wick. Let the lamp illumine every minute of your life. The splendour of the Name will drive away darkness from outside you as well as from inside you. You will spread joy and peace among all who come near you.

What are the challenges that spiritual seekers must overcome? Why?

The farmer, intent on cultivation, ignores even food and sleep, for he is too busy ploughing, levelling, scattering seeds, watering, weeding, guarding and fostering the crop. He knows that his family will have to subsist on the harvest that he brings home and that if he fritters away the precious season in idle pursuits, his family will be confronted with hunger and ill-health. So, he sets aside or postpones other pursuits and focuses all his attention on farming alone. He puts up with difficulties and deprivations, toils day and night, watches over the growing crops and garners the grain. As a consequence, he is able to spend the months ahead, in peace and joy, with his happy family. Students and spiritual seekers have to learn important lessons from the farmer. The stage of youth is the season for mental and intellectual culture. These years should be intensively and intelligently cultivated irrespective of difficulties and obstacles. The clamour of the senses has to be silenced; hunger and thirst have to be controlled; the urge to sleep and relax has to be curbed.

How should we mould our lives?

Fill the reservoir when it rains, so that in times of drought, you can feed the fields. Do intense Sadhana (spiritual exercises) now, when you are young and strong so that you can be in peace and joy for the rest of your life. Make the most profitable use of this present period of your lives. Do not waste the hours in irrelevance and irreverence. Do not indulge in the condemnation of others or in self-disapprobation. Let your hearts rejoice, clothed in fresh ideals, feelings and resolutions. Mould your lives into sweet songs of Love.

Why is singing the glory of the Lord, a powerful tool to our growth?

There are many snakes of wicked qualities in the anthill of your heart. When you do Naamasmarana (remembering the divine name) all the 'snakes' of bad qualities will come out. Naamasmarana is like the musical wind instrument (Nadaswaram) which attracts snakes and brings them out of anthills. This Nadaswaram is your Jeevana swaram (music of your life) and Prana swaram (breath of your life). One has to repeat God's name in order to get rid of evil qualities. Today there are many who do not attach any importance to Naamasmarana. It is a great mistake. In this Age of Kali only chanting of the divine name can redeem your lives. There is no other refuge. Singing the glory of the Lord is highly sacred!

How should we sing the glory of God? What are the benefits?

Today the country is facing a lot of problems because people are not doing enough Naamasmarana (remembering the divine name). Let each and every street reverberate with the singing of divine glory. Let each and every cell of your body be filled with divine name. Nothing

else can give you the bliss, courage and strength that you derive from Naamasmarana. Even if some people make fun of you, do not bother about it. Do Naamasmarana with total concentration and dedication. Do not be afraid of anyone. Sing the glory of God wholeheartedly without any inhibition. Only then can you experience divine bliss.

What is the true meaning of Surrender?

Surrender does not mean offering your body to God. Real surrender is the chanting of the Divine Name and making it the basis of your life. It is for the same reason that Guru Nanak, the first Guru of the Sikhs, started community singing. He told his followers that they should seek fulfillment in life by chanting the Divine Name. Consider the chanting of the Name of God as the most important spiritual practice. You may spend any amount of money in charity and in doing acts of service, but these practices will give you only temporary mental satisfaction at the most if they are not complemented with the chanting of the Divine Name.

What is a simple and powerful strategy to win God's Grace?

Bhajan is very necessary to melt the heart of God. When you do Nagar Sankirtan early in the morning, everybody will get up and listen to the Divine Name. Hearing the name of God as soon as they wake up will fill them with great bliss and enthusiasm. Constantly remember the name of God; never forget Him. This is the noblest path; the true spiritual practice. When you do this, you will be immensely blessed.

What is the key outcome expected from Namaskirtana?

Unfortunately, no transformation is taking place in the human beings in spite of repeating the Divine Name several times. You should chant the Name of God wholeheartedly with full faith. Faith develops love towards God and that love towards God confers Grace. No doubt, people today are repeating the holy name, but not with love and steady faith. They are more concerned with how others are singing and whether their shruthi (pitch) and raaga (melody) are in order, etc. They are doing Naamasankirtana with a wavering mind. There can be no transformation in them by such fickle minded sadhana in spite of doing it for hours together. Naamasankirtana has to be done with absolute concentration and steady faith like a yogi. It is said "Sathatham Yoginah". One can achieve great transformation if the mind is steadily fixed on the Divine Name.

What is the efficacy of the Divine Name of the Lord?

The power of the Divine Name is unparalleled. People often take it lightly. This is wrong. One should not mistake a diamond for a shining piece of glass. The real diamond is truly different. Incidentally, do you know the meaning of diamond? It is 'Die mind'. God's name is the real diamond. Keep it safe and secure. Do not ever be bothered by pain and suffering, losses and difficulties. They just come and pass. That is not your real nature. Your innate Self is strong, eternal and real (Sath). You should not follow the fleeting and unreal, forsaking your own true and eternal nature. Once you seek refuge in the lotus feet of God, you should never give up. Wherever you go, the Divine Feet will protect you. If you install the Divine Name firmly in your heart, your life will become sanctified. It is only for making people realise this truth that the Sadhana (spiritual exercise) of Akhanda Bhajan (continuous singing) has been prescribed for devotees at least once in a year.

How can we contribute to building a better society?

What you should offer to God through the fruit of your Sadhana (spiritual exercise) is the essence of good qualities, noble thoughts and love. The world itself will be benefited by an individual who has good conduct. If fire starts on one tree, it will not stop after burning that particular tree. It will spread and burn the entire wood. In the same manner, if there is one individual who has bad qualities, he will spoil the whole community in addition to ruining himself. On the other hand, if there is a plant which is full of fragrant flowers, it will fill the entire area with sweetness. In the same manner, even a single person with a noble code of conduct will not only improve himself but also will better the condition of the entire society around him through his noble deeds.

What is the attitude with which we should perform our duties?

A person driving a car concentrates on the road for he is anxious to save himself and others from accident. Fear is what induces single-mindedness in this case. Love is a greater force for achieving concentration. If you have steady and resolute love, your concentration becomes intense and unshakeable. Faith develops into love and love results in concentration. Prayer begins to yield fruit under such conditions. Pray using the Name as a symbol of the Lord, by keeping all the waves of the mind still. Let the performance of a duty be the only justification for your coming into the world. Hold fast to the Lord. The bhaktha (devotee) should never retract. Never give way to doubt or despair.

When can we experience the true "Bhagavatha"?

'Bhagavatha' connotes three sections of knowledge: (1) The glory and majesty of the incarnations of God, (2) The names of those who are fully devoted to God and (3) The intimate relationship between God and the godly. Wherever and whenever these three are found together, there we have the Bhagavatha. All that is visible is not beyond or outside God. To put it succinctly, everything is Bhagavatha!

Why are there so many forms of God? Which is the best?

Every concrete manifestation of God is significant. There can be no higher or lower. The story of each one of them is elevating. Each is a complete manifestation. Listening to their stories may make you feel that one incarnation is grander and more sublime than another. It would appear as if you get more inspiration from one Avatar than another. But all are equally Divine and enigmatic. Every manifestation is suited to the time, the task, the circumstance and the need. Its form is in accordance with the purpose.

How should we treat the womenfolk in the modern times?

From time immemorial, women of Bharat, by their adherence to ideals have bestowed joy on this land and hence occupy an exalted position, which is higher than that of men. Women of such exalted character have set great ideals of womanhood in Bharat. Only if the women come up in society, will the whole world turn sacred. There is nothing in this world that women cannot achieve. Recognising the nature of such women, we must encourage them and give them equal opportunities in society. However, in today's world, there is no encouragement for women to cultivate high ideals. In modern times, the ways of life have become so perverted that only evil thoughts, feelings and behaviour rule the roost.

What is the rationale for the Descent of the Lord?

For the protection of the world, for upholding Dharma (righteousness), for fulfilling the yearnings of devotees, He wills and assumes a special Form and moves in the world. He confers joy on the devotees by His Divine acts, which convince them of His Advent. They are thus confirmed in their faith and prompted to dedicate their activities to God and thus save themselves, and liberate themselves. On certain occasions, for resolving certain urgent crisis, God has incarnated with Forms embodying only a part of His Divinity, with some Divine powers and potentialities.

What is the purpose of a Miracle?

The common man is drawn by external pomp and apparent motives. So he judges the leelas (Divine sport) as common and even low. The inner meaning and purpose are not easily patent to all. But the Lord can never engage Himself in purposeless and paltry activities. His advent is for the uplift of the world from the morass of wickedness and unrighteousness, for fulfilling the needs of those devoted to Him, for the reestablishment of righteousness and morality, and for the revival of the Vedas. He has to take into account the merit acquired by each in previous lives and shower His grace accordingly. His leelas or Divine activities are so shaped that they suit the time, the person, the aspiration and the compassion which cause each shower of grace!

What is the need of the hour?

Education should be used for promoting the welfare of the nation. Knowledge gained through education should be used selflessly for promoting the well-being of humanity. What we need today are Uttama-purushulu (noble and ideal men and women). The nation will prosper only when there are such persons. And people like these will emerge in society only when there is purity of mind and morality in society. Only a society with a moral foundation can foster such noble persons. Spirituality is the only means for redemption.

See Good, Be Good and Do Good. This is the way to God

