

Devotion (December 1983)

From the reports published earlier in this magazine our readers might remember that the 20th All India Sai Devotees' convention was held at Nellore in the Andhra Pradesh in the month of January 1983. In one open session in all such conventions all delegates are allowed to speak on any subject, they like, relating to the aims and objects of holding that convention. In the open session in the aforesaid convention many delegates expressed their frank opinion about the duties of the Sai devotees and about the utility of the conventions of .Sai devotees on the All India basis.

Many of the delegates of the former generation spoke about the necessity of spreading Sai devotion among the masses in general and about the spreading of devotion among the younger generation in particular. Though most of them did not have the darshan of Shri Sai Baba, during His life-time, still they had the good fortune of associating with saints like Naisimha Swamiji or late Saipadanand Radhakrishna Swamiji or some other saints in their vicinity and therefore in their opinion devotion was the basis of a common tie among Sai devotees. They therefore thought that this sentiment of devotion, which is a natural instinct among human beings, should be used for bring in together Sai devotees and later on infuse in their minds the urge to do some social work. Some of the young Turks however did not like this idea. It may be because of the nature of atmosphere in which they have been brought up. Devotion to God, devotion to elders, saints and teachers was being formerly infused by the parents in their children. 'Of late the parent themselves hardly have any devotion to the aforesaid persons. Some people attribute this change to the modern fast life and the acute struggle for existence that every one has to do in the modern world; but the fact remains that devotion has lessened to a certain extent among the parents of today and therefore the young Turks spoke vehemently against the idea of talking only about the spread of Sai devotion among the masses. The purport of their speech in short may be given as follows, "How long are we going to speak only about the spread of devotion to Sai Baba and think about it? How long are we going to plan ways and means only to spread Sai devotion? If we mistake not this item has been given enough thought

during the last nineteen conventions held at 'different places.. During the initial stages it was alright, because 'Sai devotion had not been spread at that time. This great saint was not known to the masses and they did not know His life, power and philosophy. It was therefore quite necessary at that time to think seriously about the spread of Sai devotion, and try whole-heartedly only for that; but the circumstances have now changed. Sixtyfour years have elapsed since the Mahasamadhi of this great saint. Sai devotees can perhaps be counted, in this country and abroad, in millions Sai temples and Sai centres also are about two hundred or more in number. Does it therefore not seem proper that we now turn our attention to doing some social work through this medium ? Should we not channelise our energies towards giving some medical help to the poor and needy through these centres, which have now got some organisation, and which are definitely attracting people to them ?." From the above sum and substance of the speeches of the young Turks, it will be clear that the minds of some young Sai devotees have started thinking about social work, educational work and medical help to the poor and needy. It is definitely a welcome sign and suggestion. Shri Sai Baba, it will be remembered, when He came to Shirdi and settled there, was giving medicines to the poor and needy. He was even nursing and treating some patients. During His stay at Shirdi He started so many festivals like Ramanavami, Gokulashtami, Dasara etc. Giving food to the poor was also His specialty. He was himself collecting the materials required for preparing the handi and after the food was ready it was served to the poor without any distinction and above all what was His advice to His devotees ?.

Leaving aside all your cleverness and doubts always remember the name of "Sai", which will remove all your shackles. Do not have any doubt in this respect. (Chapter 10 ovi number 135 Sai Sachcharit).

Apart from the brief advice of devotion towards Him by way of chanting His name, given above, Shri Sai Baba has given advice to have devotion towards God for attaining the stability of mind and good will to all. In chapter Twentyone Shri Hemadpant has narrated the story of Shri Anantrao Patankar of Pune. After falling at Baba's feet he said.

"I have read many books. I have studied the Vedas and Upnishads, I have heard the Shastras and Puranas; but how is my mind not still at rest ? I now feel that whatever I have read has gone in vain and that ignorant but devout persons are better than myself. So long as my mind is restless all my reading of books, study of the Shastras and bookish knowledge is of no use.? How useless is the study of the development of Shastras? What is the use of remembering constantly the important words of the great ? What is the use of that Brahmadnyan which does not help to achieve peace of mind ? I heard from many people that by taking darshan of Sai Baba all your care vanishes. He guides people on the good path by casual talk, which is full of humour. Therefore Oh Lord Sai Baba, who are a store of penance, I came to your feet Bless me that I will get peace of Mind").

After listening to the above request from Shri Anantrao Patankar, Shri Sai Baba told him the story of the Soudagar (Merchant), who collected nine balls of stools, passed by a mare, and thus got concentration (peace) of mind. Shri Patankar could not make out the meaning of the above story. So he asked Shri Ganesh Damodar alias Dada Kelkar as to what was the meaning of Baba's words,. He replied," I too do not know all that Baba says and means, but at his inspiration, I will tell you what I have understood. The mare referred to in the story is God's grace and the nine balls of stool excreted by the mare are the nine forms or types of devotion (bhakti);. If any one of these forms is faithfully followed, Lord Had will be pleased and manifest Himself in the home of that devotee. All the Sadhanas, viz, Japa, Tapa, Yoga, study of the scriptures and expounding them are quite useless unless they are accompanied by Bbakti i.e, devotion. Knowledge of the Vedas or fame as a great Jnani and mere formal Bhajan are of no avail. What is wanted is loving devotion. Be anxious and eager, like the merchant, to cultivate the nine types of devotion and then you will attain stability and peace of mind".

(The above story of Shri Anantrao Patankar tells us a lot about the teaching of Shri Sai Baba. Even though Shri Sai Baba was helping a number of families to subsist by giving them monetary help out of the Dakshina, which He collected every day, even though He did poor feeding and even though He relieved people of their bodily

ailments by giving them Udi, still He did not advise people to do social or educational work for getting mental peace or for getting Moksha (Liberation from the cycle of birth and death). What He advised was the cultivation of devotion. It appears from His advice that devotion was the base of all well-being. If you cultivate absolute devotion in you then other things like liberal mind, urge to do social work and tendency to work for the well-being of the society and to sacrifice something for the good of others follow automatically.

The Bhagawadgeeta also lays great stress on devotion. In earlier chapters Lord Krishna explained Sakyayoga (Chapter two), Karmayoga (chapter three), Gyana Karma Sanyasa Yoga (Chapter four), Karma Sanyasa Yoga (Chapter five), Ghyana Yoga (Chapter Six), Gyana Vigyana Yoga (Chapter Seven) and Akshara Brahma Yoga (Chapter Eight), but in the ninth Chapter He explains the importance of devotion as follows (patram, pushpama, phalam, Toyam, yoga mein bhaktya praychita). After explaining His Vibhooties in Chapter ten and giving Vishwaroopa Darshan to Arjuna in Chapter Eleven, Lord Krishna has spent one full Chapter to explain the qualities and behavior of a devotee. In this Chapter (Twelve), Lord Krishna categorically says that this way of devotion is easier than other ways explained by Him earlier and tells in the last Shloka of the Chapter (those devotees who adore me with great faith are liked most by me). Really speaking after explaining several ways of spiritual uplift in chapters two to eight, it was not necessary to point out any other channel of worship; but Lord Krishna does it later in two chapters Viz the ninth and the twelfth. In these two chapters He tells us at length the value of devotion in the spiritual field and explains the place of a devotee in the realm of God.

In our Puranas there are a number of stories of devotees who have been one with God due to their sincere and absolute devotion to God. The biographies of most saints and their teachings also point out the importance of devotion on the spiritual path. Lacs of devotees are flocking at Shirdi, Tirupati, Guruvayur Rameshwar, Badrikedar, Banares, Allahabad, Nasik, Pandharpur, Mecca, Amritsar, and such other places of religious importance to all the religions of the world not

because of any social or political reason but because of mere devotion to God. This natural instinct of devotion in the human beings should therefore be fostered and made use of for forming a congregation of the devotees with some ultimate aim.

In this connection we might refer to a thought-provoking article by a modern thinker and sincere devotee of Shri Sai Baba, Acharya Shri E. Bharadwaj, published at Pages 26 to 29 of the February 1983 issue of Shri Sai Leela captioned "Sai Baba Mandirs". In this article Shri Bharadwaj, has made some concrete suggestions to spread Sai devotion in a systematic way. All Sai Mandirs, Sai Samajas and Sai Spiritual Centres should give a thought to that article and the suggestions made therein. The suggestions made in the article are mainly for having a regular system of rituals which are to be (followed at Sai Mandirs and other Sai Institutions; but while estimating the result of this drill Shri Bharadwaj observes, "All the countless Sai Devotees all over the country would be linked together into one spiritual family by this subtle spiritual power of Baba" and this achievement would be very important from the point of view of running all Sai institutions. As pointed out before, it is a very good sign that Sai devotees of the younger generation have turned towards social, education and other avenues of work and their intention of making use of the Sai institutions for this type of work is no doubt praiseworthy and laudable; but for the common man this other work will not appeal so much as devotion. Therefore devotion should be our sheet anchor and as pointed out above by Shri Bbaradwaj, we may channelise the energies of Sai devotees elsewhere after they come together and form one spiritual family by this subtle power of devotion to Baba, which will form the nucleus of all organisations of Sai institutions.