

Nine Forms of Devotion

Sravanam

(Listening to the Glories of the Lord)

“What is heard has to be pondered over. What is pondered over has to be put into practice. It is only when all three are accomplished that the realisation of Bliss can be attained.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Speaking of *Sravanam* Shri N Kasturi writes in his book ‘Pathway to Peace- Prashanthi’: “A sense of wonder is aroused by *Sravanam*. It is a first but a faint stir, a feeble echo of the call that softly gurgles from the depths within. A voice, a vision, a picture, a book, a dream, a song- any of these may awaken us to the dormant hunger for God.”

From our own experience most of us can assert that *Sravanam* was the first step in our march to Bhagawan Baba. Hearing of Bhagawan’s Leelas and stories of His grace, people throng in thousands to Prashanthi Nilayam. In *Sravanam*, the devotee gets absorbed in the hearing of Divine stories connected with His Divine Name and Form and his mind merges in the thought of Divinity; he cannot think of bad things. Gradually the mind loses, as it were, charm for the worldly objects and persons and attains *Vairagya* (dispassion, detachment).

Sravana Bhakti is attained in the company of the saints and wise men. Mere reading for oneself is not of much use. Swami says, *“It is excellent to listen with a number of earnest aspirants. If the person who expounds has had the thrill of genuine experience, then it yields best results. For, his face will blossom into joy, his eyes will shed tears of joy at the very contemplation of the glory of the Lord. Those who listen to him will catch that inspiration; they will experience the joy themselves. The words of those who are saturated with devotion to God will saturate the hearts of those who listen.”* Sankaracharya says, “The company of the wise, even for a moment, becomes the boat to cross the ocean of samsara.” Bhagawan Baba says, *“The satsang, the gathering of God ward-bound seekers, is a must for the sprouting of spiritual desire and its fulfilment. Even the tardy will soon develop a keen enthusiasm for the spirit through the influence of satsang. You must take all the trouble and have all the patience needed to seek satsang and remain therein.”*

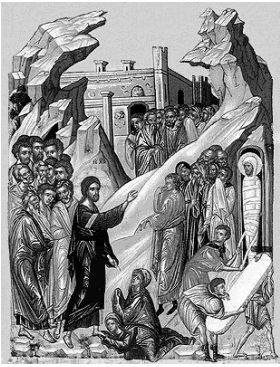


There is the glaring example of King Parikshit attaining liberation through *Sravanam*. King Parikshit, the moment he learned that he had been cursed by Sage Sringeri to meet with death in seven days, summoned all the sages to ascertain how best he could utilise every moment of the remaining life span given to him. When Sage Suka entered the assemblage, the king requested him to redeem his life by converting what was a curse into a blessing. Suka taught the king continuously, day and night, all about the Supreme Lord and His incarnations. Listening to Suka’s words, Parikshit was immersed in an ocean of bliss. All the sages present felt equally ecstatic and were lost in contemplation and love for the Lord. By enjoying the stories about Him, Parikshit was filled with devotion and experienced the Lord within him. He exemplifies how devotion can find the highest expression in merely listening to the glories of God.

Love of God is dormant in everyone, but if one is given a chance to hear about the Lord, certainly that love develops. Bhagawan Baba says, *“Through the process of listening, a dirt-laden heart will be transformed into a clean illumined heart, shining with genuine light. To the foul odours of sense-pursuits, keenness to listen to the glories 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.”*

The following is taken from the Bible, New Testament: (John1 V14) “The word (i.e. Jesus) became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We (i.e. John and the other disciples) have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” One way in which this

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glory is seen is where Jesus raises a man called Lazarus back from the dead. Jesus told the people there to remove the stone laid across the entrance to Lazarus's tomb. Then he said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" Jesus then called in a loud voice, Lazarus come out!" and to everyone's total amazement, he did! Many of those who saw the miracle of Jesus put their faith in him; a result of Jesus bringing glory to God.

Muhammad received his first revelation while he was in a cave in Mount Hira, near Makkah. God spoke to him through Angel Gabriel. The Angel gave him some words to learn by heart. Muhammad continued to receive revelations throughout the rest of his life. He began to recite the words he heard from the Angel Gabriel and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him. At this time people worshipped many different Gods and Muhammad's message was not well received. But some people began to listen to him and started praying to Allah. The non-believers made life so difficult for Muhammad and his followers that they left Makkah and moved to Medina. Several years later Muhammad and his followers returned to Makkah and Muhammad was accepted as the Prophet of God.

Let us look at the life of Saint Francis of Assisi. One Sunday morning when he was hearing Mass in the Church of St Mary of the Angels, a revelation came to him. He left the church, cast off his shoes and without purse or possessions, went out to preach the Gospel in the highways and byways. "The Peace of God be with you", was his salutation to all he met and having uttered it, he began to preach. It was a new wonder to the people of Assisi to hear Francis saying words that were like fire piercing the heart. Bernard of Quintavalle, one of Francis's former rich friends wished to know more and invited him to his house. Francis's enthusiasm passed into Bernard's heart and soul. He sold his possessions, gave his wealth away and became Francis's first companion and they went together preaching two by two like the poor men of Lyons.



In most religious services, there is the practice of someone reading passages from the scriptures. Most services in church have readings from the Bible. A sermon is given by the vicar or priest. Sermons usually explain some of Jesus' teaching and other passages from the Bible, and tell the people how to live as Christians. During worship in a Mosque, the Imam or prayer leader delivers a sermon. Mosque worship is based on the word of Allah. The Indian sages valued community prayers for the welfare of the world as good for the individual and the world.

One way of giving people a chance to listen and talk about the glories of God is through Study Circles. Swami says, *"You have been listening to my discourses for many years. You take notes and listen to tape records. Has there been the slightest change in you? If you are merely content to listen, it is sheer waste of time. You have to ruminare over what you have heard and try to put into practice the teachings. Listening, reflection on the implications and putting into practice what has been learnt are the three stages in the spiritual journey. Not information but transformation; not instruction but construction should be the aim of the study circle. Knowledge that does not give harmony and wholeness to the process of living is not worth acquiring."*

"All the nine kinds of worship are designed to achieve purity of mind and heart. But purity should find expression in action. Without purity in action, the real nature of the Self cannot be recognised. Are you making an effort to sublimate your life? In the absence of any change for the better in your daily conduct, all your so-called practices will be futile," Says Bhagawan Baba.