

Kodai Kanal interview Q&A Satyam Sivam Sundaram Character Building Through Education

Part 3

This is radio Sai Global Harmony, coming to you via the Worldspace Digital Broadcasting Service and bringing you the love and the message of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Dear listeners, we broadcast a special program **Satyam Sivam Sundaram** on the 2nd of March marking the 100th day of our service to you. For those of you who missed that special broadcast, we take pleasure in re-broadcasting a part of that special program. Now you'll hear the part entitled "Character building through education".

From time to time, Baba organizes for the benefit of students a summer course in Indian culture and spirituality. Typically, the course is conducted in the later half of May and except for one occasion, Brindavan has always been the venue.

The main objective of the course is to give students a strong dose of spirituality, which is achieved in part through lectures delivered by elderly devotees and men of esteem in public life. Needless to say that the highlight is the daily discourse delivered by Swami.

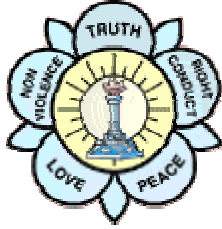
For every summer course, Swami chooses a particular theme. For example, in 1993 the theme was the "Mind", and in 1996 it was the "Ramayana". In 1976, the venue was shifted to Ooty, because the hostel in Brindavan was under construction. That year Baba's discourses were on the human aspects of the Krishna Avatar. The summer courses were first conducted way back in the 70s. At the time, the student population in Baba's colleges was small. Participation in the summer course was therefore open to students from all over India. At times, there were also overseas participants. But once the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning came into existence, participation in the summer course had to be restricted mainly to the students of the institute and of course some select guests.

As of all such activities, Swami takes complete charge of the summer course. For the entire duration of the course, food is served free for all. In addition, there are sweets as well as mangoes, the fruit of the season. Evening entertainment and cultural programs are not overlooked, and one year there was even a play by youth from New York.

The summer course is always a memorable experience, especially for new students it is an eye-opener to Swami's infinite Love. The camaraderie and the support that the freshers receive from their seniors are in marked contrast to the crude and vulgar initiation rites practiced elsewhere.

The summer courses always conclude with a farewell lunch personally planned and supervised by Bhagavan Baba. Swami arrives for the farewell lunch even as students and honored guests are taking their seats. To start with Bhagavan goes on a round of inspection, so to speak, stopping to make small talk here and there. Swami scrutinizes everything-the kitchen, the items prepared, whether the boys detailed for serving are ready. Nothing escapes his keen eyes. After this Swami begins playing the gracious host and this is when people manage to slip in their letters. It is amazing, no chance to give letters is ever wasted. Finally Swami heads for the table set especially apart for Him. From there he glances over the entire gathering. After this a beautiful smile and a gentle nod. This is the signal for chanting Brahmaarpanam. Swami hardly ever stays back to have a proper lunch. Having tasted a little bit of the fair, he rises, moves around for a while, receives aarti and leaves the Hostel dining hall. This is the standard routine.

One year, there was an extraordinary difference. While the food was being served, Swami slowly moved to the head table, where important guests were seated. Bhagavan stopped by to talk to an old devotee. As He was conversing, food was being served including to the guest to whom Swami was talking. Occasionally and quite casually too, Swami took small bits of items being served to the person he was talking with and



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popped them into his mouth. It was a remarkable gesture of intimacy, but the person to whom Swami was talking was so immersed into the conversation that he hardly noticed what was happening. Indeed, hardly anyone noticed what was happening, so subtle were Swami's actions. Suddenly, Swami said "All of you, what are you waiting for? Start eating! People have buses, trains and planes to catch." But no one made any move to start eating. How could they, when Swami had not yet taken his seat and Brahmaṛpanam had not yet been chanted? Swami then repeated his command, "Start eating!" The devotee with whom Swami had been chatting then said, "Swami, how can we eat? Brahmaṛpanam has not yet been chanted." Swami then smiled and replied, "Bangaroo, where is the need to chant Brahmaṛpanam. I have already taken the food even before you have formally offered it to Me. So go ahead and eat." What a beautiful reminder of who exactly He is.

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