



How to Deal with a Bad Habit



One got into the habit of eating opium. It was not possible for him to control this habit. He was always in a kind of coma. A saintly person visited his city and was offering advice and comfort to many. The opium-eater also sought the advice of the saint. The saint said that his health was deteriorating and that he should give up eating opium. At this, the opium addict said that it was not possible for him to give it up. He requested the saint to give him some advice. The saint asked him how much of opium he used to take every day and was shown a certain lump as the quantity being taken every day. The saint got a piece of chalk, equal to the lump of opium and told him that he may continue eating opium but should not take more than the weight of the chalk each day. The opium eater was quite happy but he was also told that every day he should write 'OM' three times on a blackboard with that chalk. In this manner, the chalk was reduced in size every day and so the amount of opium which the person was eating also got reduced gradually and ultimately this habit was removed.

Devotional Activities in Chicago and Suburbs

Activity	Time	Venue	Contact
Every Monday – Bhajans	07:00 pm to 08:00 pm	Aurora (Shirdi Mandir)	630-854-2004
Every Wednesday – Bhajans	07:30 pm to 08:30 pm	Hoffman Estates	847-519-1631
Every Friday – Bhajans	08:00 pm to 09:00 pm	Oak Brook	630-655-1718
1st Thursday of the Month – Bhajans	07:30 pm to 08:30 pm	Hoffman Estates	847-695-7110
1st Saturday of the Month – Bhajans	03:30 pm to 04:30 pm	Glenview	847-729-2779 / 773-510-5936
Saturday, January 18 th – Padhuka Puja	10:30 am to 12:30 pm	Bolingbrook	630-819-9081
Thursday, January 23 rd – Bhajans	7:30 pm to 08:30 pm	Hoffman Estates	847-809-9975

For more information, please contact any of the Center Officers

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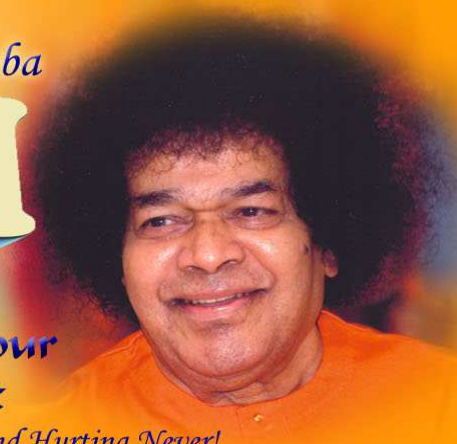
Aum Sri Sai Ram

Pranams at the Lotus Feet of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Chicago Sai WATCH

Dear Swami, please help us to watch and control our Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character and Heart

So that we realize our inherent Divinity by Loving All, Serving All, Helping Ever, and Hurting Never!



Upcoming Events!

Sunday, January 12th, Sankranti Celebrations (Extended Devotional Singing)
Time: 09:30 AM to 1:00 PM Venue: Longfellow Center, Oak Park

Friday, February 28th 8:00 PM – Saturday, March 1st 6:00 AM, Maha Shivrathri Celebrations
Venue: Sant Nirankari Bhavan, 1S750 Route 59, West Chicago, IL

Saturday, March 8th, Bread Truck Project
Time: 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM Sandwich and Lunch Bag Preparation
Venue: Details to Follow
Time: 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM Lunch Bag Delivery to Bread Truck
Venue: Port Ministries, 5017 S. Hermitage Avenue Chicago, IL 60609

Sunday, March 30th, Ugadi Celebrations (Extended Devotional Singing)
Time: 09:30 AM to 1:00 PM Venue: Longfellow Center, Oak Park



Love All , Serve All

Date	Calendar of Events
01/04 – Saturday	06:00 PM – 09:30 PM: Dinner Service Project at Northside Housing Men's Shelter (on Lawrence Ave.) 06:00 PM – 08:00 PM: Dinner Service Project at Sarah's Circle Women's Shelter (on N. Sheridan Road)
01/11 – Saturday	06:00 AM – 08:00 AM: Breakfast Service at Northside Housing Men's Shelter (on Lawrence Ave.)
01/12 – Sunday	10:00 AM – 11:00 AM: Bingo with Nursing Home Residents (on North Ave., Oak Park)
01/18 – Saturday	06:00 PM – 09:30 PM: Dinner Service Project at Northside Housing Men's Shelter (on Lawrence Ave.) 07:00 PM – 10:30 PM: Dinner Service Project at Jesus People USA Men's Shelter (on Kenmore Ave.)
01/25 – Saturday	06:00 AM – 08:00 AM: Breakfast Service at Northside Housing Men's Shelter (on Lawrence Ave.)
02/01 – Saturday	06:00 PM – 09:30 PM: Dinner Service Project at Northside Housing Men's Shelter (on Lawrence Ave.) 06:00 PM – 08:00 PM: Dinner Service Project at Sarah's Circle Women's Shelter (on N. Sheridan Road)
	<p>Sunday Center Schedule: 09:00 AM – 09:30 am: Center Setup 09:30 AM – 10:25 am: Study Circle 10:30 AM – 11:30 am: Devotional Singing</p> <p>Ongoing service projects on Sundays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grocery collection for the needy families (Delivered at the end of every month) Sandwich preparation & delivery for residents of Northside Housing Men's Shelter (Lawrence Ave.)



It is through viveka and vairagya that man understands who he really is. Without them, it is impossible to know it. The Lord has blessed only man with these two. He has endowed him so that he might use them for that purpose. Hence man is truly fortunate. But alas, man has forgotten the task for which he has come, ignored the question whence he came, closed his eyes to where he is, diverted his intelligence towards amusement and creature comfort, and wasted all his powers. What a tragedy, this! If in this most propitious human birth itself the Godhead is not sought after, when else are they to succeed? If today is squandered so Will tomorrow help you? If one's real nature is first understood, the rest can all be easily grasped. One will thereafter know where one is, whence one is going, how long one exists, etc.

These four issues are dependent, one on the other. If one is solved, all the rest can be known; but not one of these can be ignored. For example, suppose you write a letter to somebody. Whatever be the contents of the letter, if it is put into an envelope and posted, whom will it reach? It won't be given to anyone. Well, will it come back to the person who wrote it? No. In the end, it will be neither here nor there. Instead, if on the cover the address of the person whom it should reach and the address of the person who wrote it are both written, one can even predict when the letter will reach its destination, is it not? So too, what do you do with your letter, your life? To whom do you address it? Where do you write it? When can it reach? Whom should it reach? Ignoring all these, not caring even for the time, if you simply worry yourself, how can you ever hope to know the Reality?

First, you must know your own full address.

Who are you? The Atman. Whence did you come? From the Atman. Where are you going? To the Atman, itself. How long can you be here? Until you merge with the Atman. Where are you, now? In the Unreal, the Ever-changing. In what form? As Anatma. What are you engaged in? In evanescent tasks. Therefore, what should you do hereafter? Give up these three and try the other three—to enter the Eternal, to engage in Never-changing tasks, and to enjoy the Bliss of the Atman. This must be the chief effort of the Jivi, its perpetual aim, the greatest adventure in this world.

All other tasks are humdrum and silly. They glitter a moment and vanish. You will realise this truth if only you turn your back on them and watch wisely.

There is a short story which illustrates these points. There was once a Raja, who had transferred all responsibility of ruling to his Manthri (Minister), and who was spending his time in ease. He never worried about anything, be it big or small. He had a personal companion, whom he had always by his side, more or less as a bodyguard. This fellow was very wise, for he never did anything without deep deliberation about the how and the why and the wherefore. The Raja took all this deliberation to be just foolishness and he nicknamed the companion, "Avivekasikhamani" or "The Crest-Jewel of Fools." He went to the length of actually engraving the title on a plate of gold and compelling him to wear it on his forehead for all to see! Many people were misled by this and they took him to be an ignoramus at court. They did not heed his words.

Meanwhile, the Raja fell ill and took to bed. The kingdom was combed for physicians who could heal the king. Messengers went to the eight corners, seeking drugs and doctors. A hundred were busy round the royal patient, but all efforts failed. The illness worsened day by day. The Raja was at the very door of death.

The Raja suspected that his end was near. So he hurriedly made some dispositions, spoke to all those whom he wanted to meet, and was immersed in sorrow. He had no thought of God or any other auspicious Power. He was in terrible fear of Death and could not think of anything else.

One day, he called Avivekasikhamani to his bedside and whispered feebly in his ear, "Well, I am going soon, my friend!" Then the Fool asked without any compunction, "What? You are weak and cannot walk a few steps. I shall order a palanquin, please wait till it is ready." "No palanquin can take me there," said the Raja. "Then, I shall order a chariot," entreated the Fool. "The chariot too is of no use," replied the Raja. "Of course, then the horse is the only means of journey," wailed the companion, who seemed eager to come to the rescue of his master, and spare him the toils of travel. The Raja said that the horse too could not enter there. The Fool was at his wit's end. Then suddenly an idea struck him, he said, "Come on master! I shall carry you there." The Raja became sad. He said, "My dear friend, one has to go alone to that place, when one's time has come. No companion can be taken." The Fool was thrown in great doubt. He asked the Raja, "It is curious, is it not? You say that the palanquin won't reach there, that the chariot can't go there, nor the horse. You say that no second person can join you! Well, can't you tell me at least where that place is?" The Raja replied, "I do not know."

Immediately, the Fool unwound the Golden Plate with the engraving of the title, "Avivekasikhamani," and tied it round the brow of the Raja, saying "Raja, you know so much about the place, even which things cannot go there, but you do not know where it is, and still you are going there soon. Oh, you deserve this title much more." The Raja was overcome with shame, "Alas," he said to himself, "I wasted my years in eating and sleeping and pursuing pleasures, never caring to inquire who I am, whence I came, what I am doing, whither I am going, and why I came. The precious time allotted to me has come very near its end. There is no time for me any more for all that inquiry. Death is knocking at the door. Children have started weeping. My subjects are in great anxiety. Can I, under such conditions immerse myself in inquiry? Can a thought that I never entertained throughout my life suddenly arise now, during my last moments? It is impossible. Yes, I deserve the title, Avivekasikhamani, more than anyone else, for I wasted my life in useless pursuits without any thought of the Reality." The Raja let it be proclaimed that inquiry is the best means of knowing the Truth.

The inquiry must be directed to separating the true from the untrue, the eternal from the temporary. The people should arrive at the conclusion that, "God is the only true and eternal Entity"

And that by their own independent investigation, his subjects must not only grasp the entity intellectually but must also attain the Grace of God, by their pure lives. Announcing this lesson to his subjects, the Raja breathed his last. Note how the Raja, blinded by material power and pleasures, misdirected his energies towards the world, away from God, and ended his days in agony.



Embodiments of Love!

Today, everybody is enthusiastic about New Year's Day. Significantly, this New Year's Day started on a Thursday. It is one's foolishness to single out a particular day in a year and celebrate that day with great joy. For a true devotee, every day is a festival day. Therefore, it is essential that we consider every minute of every day as new and celebrate it with joy. In fact, every day is a New Year's Day.

Everything in this objective world is impermanent and unreal. Hence, we have to contemplate upon the eternal truth and reality. We should not waste our time brooding over the past or anticipating the future. It is great foolishness to worry about the future or the past, forgetting the present. Only the present is real. The past is past, you cannot get it back, however, much you may pray for it. The future is hidden in the womb of time. It is not possible to visualise it. Therefore, only the present is important. Unable to realise this truth, people are worried about the past and future.

The foremost activity that man should engage in is service to fellow human beings. Instead, people are wasting their precious time worrying about either the past or the future. Therefore, embodiments of love! You should always engage yourself in service to fellow human beings. There is no greater sadhana than such service.

Considering the nine paths of devotion, namely sraavanam (listening), kirtanam (singing), Vishnusmaranam (contemplating on Vishnu), Padasevanam (serving His Lotus Feet), vandanam (salutation), archanam (worship), dasyam (servitude), sneham (friendship), and Atmanivedanam (self-surrender) as the only important means for salvation, people are engrossed in these activities. They totally forget the importance of service. Only the fruits of service will be eternal.

We must constantly engage ourselves in service to others. God has given us this body for that purpose only. This body is not meant to be engaged in mere eating and drinking and thus wasting our valuable time. We must realise the truth that God has given us this body for serving others and thus help others. There is nothing greater than service to humanity. Service to man is service to God. All great men have sanctified their life only by serving humanity. Therefore, you start serving humanity at least from now onward. Service is more important than bhajan and all other sadhanas (spiritual disciplines)

What, according to you, is service? You consider helping people in difficulties is service. No. It is not as simple as that. Your body should be constantly engaged in serving others. The human body consists of several limbs. All these limbs are meant to be engaged in serving the fellowmen and not for other activities. Unfortunately, we are forgetting this basic fact. Every limb in the human body has been granted by God for Karmopasana (worshipping God through service). Karmopasana is the only means by which the human life can be sanctified. We are building several temples. We are undertaking various sadhanas.

But, all these sadhanas can give us only temporary satisfaction, not eternal joy. Our ancient rishis (sages) have been able to achieve eternal joy through a conscious effort. Therefore, you must develop firm faith in the truth that nothing can provide eternal joy except service to humanity. Undertake service to the suffering humanity. Service is not merely confined to health services. Service encompasses every possible help to the fellow human beings.

The ancient culture of Bharat (India) is still preserved in the villages, and not in towns and cities. In fact, our culture is defiled in all possible ways in the cities. Therefore, go to the villages, find out their necessities, and undertake such types of services that will alleviate their sufferings. Today, several people shift to the towns and cities in pursuit of comfort and luxuries. In the process, they end up in sorrows and difficulties. This is their own making. Na sukhat labhyathe sukham (happiness cannot be obtained out of happiness). Only through suffering can happiness be achieved.

You should undertake service. In fact, the hands are given to you to serve humanity. Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray. Therefore, undertake selfless service and attain glory. When you undertake good work, you enjoy peace in your life. Today, the boys who sang bhajans are former students of the Institute. They have undertaken several services to please Swami. God is not interested in worship and other sadhanas (spiritual disciplines). He is interested only in service. Hence, undertake service and more and more service. The best way to love God is to Love all and Serve all. God is interested only in love and service. If you can recognise the importance of these two sadhanas and conduct yourself accordingly, there can be no greater sadhana.

You need not have to spend a lot of money in service. Sanctify your life by undertaking loving service. Today, the old students of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning have brought a cheque for Rs. 48 lakhs to present to Swami as a token of their love and service. This amount has been saved by them from their salaries, by undergoing lot of difficulties. But to whom should the amount belong, really? This amount is meant to be utilised for service in the villages. It is for serving the poorest of the poor. Therefore, I told them, "My dear ones! You deposit the money in the bank and undertake the service activities with the interest accrued on the amount." Money is of no help in developing good qualities. Sacrifice alone can develop noble qualities. It is only in sacrifice, there is real yoga. That is why it is said thyagenaikē amrutatthwamanasu (it is only by sacrifice that man can attain immortality). Today, however, people want bhoga (enjoy material comforts). By such bhoga, only roga (disease) will be contracted. They cannot attain yoga. Hence, you try to attain yoga by thyaga (sacrifice). Only then can you attain eternal joy.

There is no use contemplating on God without making sacrifice. By contemplating on God, you may perhaps derive some mental satisfaction. But that is of no use. Therefore, develop firm faith in the truth that every living being is permeated by God and act accordingly. God lives in every living being and experiences bliss.

You should not be under the impression that God is confined to some temple or a structure somewhere. The real temple for God is the body itself.