

Pujya Swami Dayanandaji's Address at the National Conference of AIM for Seva, Saylorburg, USA, April 20-21, 2013

How It All Began

The idea of initiating this movement was born when I learned there are hidden villages in the mountains around our *gurukulam* in Anaikatti, near Coimbatore. We were there for ten years, we had been seeing these mountains, but we did not even imagine that there were villages hidden in the mountains. We had come across a few nearby villages but in these tall mountains, hidden by the forest, miles away, there are many remote villages. When I came to know that there are villages then we decided to do something for the people in these villages.

In one such village there was spring water available up in the mountains, but down below in the valley, people had no access to water. When I heard about this, we provided a pipeline to bring the mountain spring water to the villages in the valley. After this, the news that we were willing to assist went around, and people from more villages began seeking our help.

There was another village that was seven miles off the main road. This village had no road leading to it. We had to go in a jeep, and the ride was a memorable one, because it was extremely bumpy. The people of this village initially wanted assistance with gaining access drinking water, and so we helped with that. During one of my trips to this village, I asked one lady, "What would you want us to do for you?" She said she wanted to have a home for children near the school where they could live and attend school without the threat of encountering wild animals during their daily walk to the school. The nearest school, we discovered was six miles away.

There was no road, no bus service. Wild elephants and cheetahs frequently attacked the villagers, and so the villagers were naturally afraid to send their children to school. Therefore, this lady said to me that they



needed a home where the children could stay and attend the school.

I enquired of her whether there were not already such homes in existence, and the lady replied by saying that there was one home, but whenever they sent the children to this home, the children would come back and remove the *GaGela* and *Hanumn* pictures from the walls and throw them away because they were indoctrinated to think these are all not gods. The home was a Christian home. The villagers wanted a home where the children are protected and respected just as they are.

I decided then that that there should be a movement, an all-India movement. It is not yet-another-NGO. A movement is one that involves people. People should take-over, it should be for people, run by people. India needs another movement. We had a successful freedom movement under Gandhiji. Now it is time for a movement to bring out our innate nature, dharma.

The Colonial Legacy and the Culture of Competition

You might have heard of Lord Macaulay's address to the Crown recommending introduction of an educational system where English would be the medium of instruction. In this address, Lord Macaulay said that he had traveled the length and breadth of this country, and found the Indians to be extremely honest, independent, and a very proud people. He observed that there was a high level of morality, where people seldom took to a life of lying, stealing or cheating. Such people, he claimed, could not be ruled by any foreign power unless they were made to feel inferior.

He proposed that if the education system was changed, so that Indians would think that everything that is English is good; this would gradually destroy their self-esteem and culture. The Indians would then feel inferior to the English, and could therefore be easily overpowered and ruled.

India never had a culture for competition, and therefore it was ill-equipped to enter the so-called modern age. In Indian culture, what matters is not somehow getting ahead in life, but having the leisure to discover oneself. Therefore, even before the child was born, everybody knew what the child is going to be as an adult. If the father was a priest, the son also grew up to become a priest. If it was a daughter, she grew up to marry the son of a priest.

A movement is one that involves people. People should take over, it should be for people, run by people.





carpenter. Even today the son of a blacksmith is a blacksmith, that of a goldsmith is a goldsmith. These days, however, you cannot say every son of a priest is a priest. But every priest is still a son of a priest, and marries the daughter of a priest.

Now everything is changing fast. Competition is the contemporary culture.

To get admission into a medical college is virtually impossible. You have to pay hundreds of thousands of rupees just to gain entrance. It is the same with the field of engineering. They have competitive exams and the cut off point is at 98.5 percent. Either way you are cut off—you either get financially decapitated, or you have to score 98.5 percent to avoid what is aptly known as “capitation fees.” How can any body score 98.5 percent? To take a hypothetical situation, let us say, the father scored 65 percent in his days, while the mother had scored 72 percent. How can the offspring of such a couple gain 98.5 percent? It is genetically impossible. These days, the

competition is such that even a three-year-old needs a recommendation for admission into a good pre-school. I get such appeals everyday, asking for letters of recommendations—as though my recommendation is going to work! When competition is the reigning order of the day, you need a culture to compete. Competition without rules cannot work. You cannot have a football match where the player plays for a while and, when he gets tired of it, takes the football and goes home. To compete you need to have a competitive culture. We come from a culture of zero competition.

AIM for Seva Resurrects Our Innate Dharma of Sharing and Caring

We have to create a new social chemistry, by drawing on our original strength, which comes from a long-established culture of giving and caring. Even today India is intact, not because of the government, not because of any other reason other than voluntary contributions. The greatest contribution to India is from volunteers,

individual people. All over the country we have *choultries* –resting place for pilgrims or visitors, where room and food are provided by charitable institutions. Every third mile has a *choultry*, all over the country. People can travel from Varanasi to Ramesvaram by just living in *choultries*. This is an amazing, amazing country. This is only possible because there is a value for reaching-out actions, known as *pkrtakarma*:

*vpi-kkpa-tamkdi-devatyatanni ca |
annapradnam rma[ca pkrtamityabhidh+yate ||*

There are only two types of *karma* that earns you grace. One is prayer, the other is reaching-out type of actions. *Vpi* is water harvesting, *kkpa* is a public well. *Tamkam* is a pond for animals, and *di* means, etc. Much of the work that AIM for Seva is doing comes under the word *di*. *Devatyatanam* means the building of temples, which is also very important for preserving the culture. *Arma%* means providing a comfortable place of rest —

children's homes, and homes for the elderly can be included in this category. This is our culture of caring. The most beautiful thing about it is that is practiced voluntarily. Each one does voluntary *karma*, even today, and this is what keeps India going. The reigning culture of competition is threatening to erode this culture of caring. We need to evoke in the people the innate *dharma* that is there, the sharing and caring. In the face of this rising competition, this is our only source of strength. Competition creates a

certain insecurity. When one is culturally inept to face competition, then definitely insecurity increases and people scramble to

grab whatever they can. No sooner than one manages to grab something, it gets outdated, and is replaced by something new, and the rat-race to be at the top starts all over again. It is endless. Take this whole

2 G, 3 G and 4 G for example. It is all a scam. The "G" lingo is taking over everything, and, therefore, I tell people "Don't call me Swami-Ji! Drop the 'ji', and just call me "Swami."

The Power of Thinking Big

You will find that our projects are now all over the country. From Karnaprayag to Kanyakumari, we are active in fifteen states, We have a student home in Karna Prayag, we have homes in Srinagar. We have a home in Haridwar. We have a home in Dehradun. We have a home in Mathura. In Madhya Pradesh, also, we have a home. We have student homes and various projects running in Orissa, Bihar, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. The 100th student home will soon open in Lucknow.

It is a colossal job to run all these homes. Last year, when we were ran into financial troubles, you all helped out by hosting fundraisers in ten cities. Eventually, these projects will be cared for by the Indian people and corporations. Only recently are the corporations in India becoming aware of the concept of corporate social responsibility, and they have started to support a few social projects. It is complicated because the corporations tend to have their own agenda, making it hard for them to commit funds to AIM for Seva. It will all gradually change. Until then, we have to care for these homes. The idea is to have at least one student home in each district.

India has about 633 districts. We now have hundred homes, which means that only one-sixth of the work is done. We have a goal of 600 and odd homes, and then our work is complete. After this, we have to keep the homes running. We are working to motivate the local communities to take

care of them, but it is not easy, as some of the villages are rather remote and impoverished. We are also working to have the local towns support the rural homes. All this will take time. In the meantime we require to sustain the same energy and momentum that was created last year. We should maintain what we are doing; in fact, should involve more people. In every area, there can be a group of people that are committed to AIM for Seva. That should be our goal.

For this to happen, you have to begin by visualizing what you want to achieve. Everything begins with a thought. This is a powerful thing to know. In the year 2000, when I thought that there should be a movement, it was just a thought. But it was a thought that caught on. A lot of people,

several of them who are traditional *cryas*, have started doing this kind of work. I am inspired by the fact that the very thought does something. The government of India also suddenly got awakened and started promoting the idea of social responsibility. Once AIM for Seva started, everything has

started to come together in a very big way. It was a thought that has caprovide an opportunity to develop on the idea of what has already begun. In this way, we can continue to create more awareness and involvement of people.

The more the people participate, the easier it is for us to take this movement forward. We have colleges, we have schools, and we have hospitals also. If you want to see an example of what we have accomplished, you should go to Manjakkudi. The progress there is simply breath-taking. We have elementary school, we have secondary school. Now they have started Tamil medium and English medium. We have a college that is complete with a huge

auditorium. There is IT, and the first rural BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) in India is Manjakkudi. The first alcohol de-addiction program is in Manjakkudi, UNESCO is calling it the "Manjakkudi Experience," as it is a very successful de-addiction program. More than five thousand people everyday visit that village. You should see the village roads at nine o'clock, with the bustle of buses, cars, and bicycles. It is a happening place, it is something to watch and feel proud of.

Manifest Your Wholeness by Giving and Letting Go

The human being is endowed with empathy. Empathy is the ability to pick up on another's pain, another's need. It is very natural emotion. You can clearly see this in a tennis game. The winner of the Wimbledon match is ecstatic. He throws his racket, he throws his jacket; he boxes the air and kisses the ground—all before he follows an important etiquette, where he has to approach the net and shake hands with his opponent. After engaging in great expressions of joy and revelry, the winner goes to the net and shakes hands with the one who lost the match. You have to see the face of the winner. Just a few seconds ago he was totally ecstatic, but now he is sad. He is sad that he won and the other lost. Do you know why? It is because he knows exactly how it feels to be the other side, having been there before. This is human empathy. *Bhagav'n* has made the human being have empathy. It is the window through which you look at others, emotionally, empathetically.

You can do something that expresses your humaneness, your goodness, your bigness. Everyone wants to be big; nobody wants to be small. The unfortunate thing is everybody feels small. You can make any rich man feel like very poor fellow by just

asking him for a donation! Bigness is to be maintained because one feels basically small. Being intrinsically big, as an individual one feels small and insignificant. If you have any doubt about this, google some NASA pictures. One such series of photos shows our planet, compared to our fellow planets in this solar system and others. Even compared to Jupiter, the earth is only the size of a tennis ball. On this tennis ball, you have to pinpoint your geophysical location. Think about doing that. Next, compare the earth with the sun and it becomes smaller still. Afterwards the earth is just a pixel and then it is no longer in the picture, when we talk at the level of galaxies. One is not there at all, yet one keeps making big noises.

The insignificant nature of an individual is not something that we really need to talk about. Any which way you look at yourself, you become small and wanting: one is wanting in knowledge; one is wanting in terms of memory, wanting in strength, wanting in health, longevity and, in terms of money, one is always wanting. The feeling that you are wanting is natural, and that you cannot stand to be a wanting person reveals the truth of your nature.

Your intrinsic nature is not that of a wanting person, it is *pkrGa*. *PkrGatva*, wholeness, is your nature. There is a truth about you, a wholeness that emerges every now and then in your experiences of happiness. Especially when you are giving, you really become big. In giving alone your bigness is manifest. Grabbing and hoarding only manifest your smallness and insecurity. There are some people who cannot even throw away things that are useless. They keep them somewhere in the house. Then afterwards the items are stored in the garage. For three years if you do not use something, you will never use it in your entire lifetime. That is a principle you can live by. The incapacity to throw away

things is a psychological problem. Long ago, there was an old swami that I knew. I was a kind of a mentor for him. One summer he came and asked me for a blanket. I said: "It is summer and you want a blanket? It is so hot, and you want a blanket?" He replied: "I want to use the blanket as a mattress to sleep on. You see, I am sleeping outside." "Why?" I asked him, "Do you not have a room?" He said, "I have a room, but there's no room in the room."

Hearing this, naturally, I was very curious and enquired into this matter further. I found out that he had collected all these old 'abb's (boxes and tin canisters) and was supplying 'abb's whenever people wanted them. He had a hoarding of old 'abb's and the entire room was filled with boxes. He had no place to stay. What a *ty'gin!* He had given his whole place to 'abb's his whole life was taken over by *dabb's* I got some people together, and we cleared his place, 'abb' after 'abb' after 'abb'. I had never seen so many 'abb's at one time. Hoarding is a clear sign of insecurity.

To work for the public cause you have to evoke your empathy and bigness. Your bigness has to come out. You have to think big. You may not have a lot of money but you still have to think big. In your bigness you are ready to give your time, if not money. There is a readiness to share, a readiness to give. There is an awareness of being fortunate in one's own life. You happened to be at the right place at the right time, because of which you are what you are today. A lot of people were not lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time. Your background, your parentage have helped in putting you at right place at the right time. From birth onwards some people have lucky breaks to help them to be where they are in terms of education or profession. Others do not have such breaks, so we can reach out to them; we can afford to give them a break.

You should think that you are going to give all these people a break and that you can make a difference in the lives of people by just thinking big, by sparing your time.

Tools for Moving Forward: Prioritization and Free Will

Because there is no spare time available, you have to create time for this kind of work. All kinds of priorities occupy your time. Your own priorities consume your time. There was a time in the past, when I did not have time for any *satsangs*. Then there was a time when I did not have any time for clubs or movies. When my old friends would call and invite me for a movie, I would say, "I have no time. I have a *satsang*," "I have a lecture," "I have a Veda class." Sometimes, I would call the old friends and say: "Please attend this *satsang*, with me, there is a good lecture tonight." They would then respond by saying that they had no time for attending *satsang*, as they had a movie to go see. You see, you will have time only for what you value, what you consider to be important.

We need to have priorities, and they have to be properly organized. When you have your priorities in order, perhaps AIM for Seva will feature somewhere in your list. For some people AIM for Seva might be on the top of the list, while for others, it may be number two, number three, number four, or number five. I don't mind being number five, but not below that. The first priority is usually family, spouse and children. The second is one's profession. Number three should be AIM for Seva. I am giving two more slots: number three and number four, for your friends, hobbies, etc. You have two more slots. There is flexibility up to the fifth slot. I don't want

AIM for Seva to go below fifth slot in your list. If it goes below this, I do not want you,

because you will never be available for the cause.

Therefore, prioritization is very important. If you give a certain priority to this work, not as Swamiji's work, not as seva for an organization's work, but as your own movement, your own commitment, your own call, then it will be successful. You are in the team of people who make things happen in India. I value your participation, your presence, totally, in whichever small or big way you are able to participate. You have to inspire others to participate and make things happen there. We have to make things happen. We believe in this, we believe in *karma*, we believe in free-will also. In Western astrology, the astrologer predicts something unpleasant is going to happen. You cannot do anything. You have to sit and wait for something unpleasant to happen. Even if it is not going happen, the very anxiety surrounding it, will make it happen. An Indian astrologer, however, will tell that there is something unpleasant, and therefore do this *pk'ja*, a prayer for warding off or mitigating the unpleasant situation. This is India! We don't allow even *karma* to take care of it, we go by our free will, we make things happen. We don't just take

things lying down. We do things and make things happen and when things don't happen, after all our efforts, then we accept it as *karma*. *Karma* is a shock absorber. Therefore we are proactive in making things happen. You make things happen and you are in the team that makes things happen.

Therefore play your role well and make things happen. Whenever there is great enthusiasm in a gathering, one can infer that that meeting was successful. Seeing the enthusiasm in your faces, I am inspired that, together, we can move forward. Thank you all. Om tat sat.