

## “Are You Being Served?”

By Radhika Randall

### Coffee and Cake

A friend of ours came to visit recently, and we took him to Kingscliffe for coffee and cake, which was nice, but the after-service was abysmal, somewhat souring the taste of the outing. On the brighter side, we had dinner that evening at the Marina Mirage on the Gold Coast, where the food was good, and the service was pleasing. It made the evening so pleasant and relaxed.

Then on the Radio, we heard that service appears to be slipping all over. Why this is, I don't know – are people too busy? Maybe have become too greedy? Is this 'don't care' attitude one of vast ego or just plain selfishness? Is it even necessary to have good service anymore? The other side of the coin to consider also is – Are we good customers? Is money the only criterion?

### There's Service and Service

In Yoga philosophy, there are 2 concepts of Service that come to mind – Selfless service or volunteer work, and Action for its own sake.

### Enlightened Service

There is a word meaning 'service' in Sanskrit, called 'seva'. The usual attitude brought with it is 'selfless service' or 'volunteer work'. The Salvation Army or Meals on Wheels comes to mind, as do a host of other community based organisations, where a large number of people volunteer their services without any expectation of financial remuneration. The service itself is its own reward.

I have heard the story of a young Western gentleman who goes to visit a well-known 'holy' man in India looking for enlightenment. He is asked to come around very early the next morning to help celebrate the holy man's birthday. Very excited at the invitation, he arrives bright and early, only to be whisked away with the family members in a loaded old mini-van to a remote old people's home. All day there, he helps to unpack and serve beautifully cooked food, until at the end of the very long day, he tumbles gratefully into the van for the drive back home. In the car on the way home, the holy man turns to him and speaks for the first time, “Yes” he says, “Now THAT was a real birthday celebration!”

### “Is that so?”

There is a similar concept of service – Action for its own sake, ie acting entirely without motive (called 'karma yoga' in Sanskrit). Here too, you do what is necessary, without being attached to the idea of reward. Unselfishness and detachment grow simultaneously. By practising this, the mind gets stronger, clearer, more disciplined. It is not just work that you do, but correct Action.

I have heard the story of a Japanese sage in a small village, who is praised by the villagers for his clear insights and good deeds. One day, a young girl comes to his door for shelter, having been rejected by all the villagers as a stranger. He lets her stay, but when it transpires that she is pregnant, the villagers accuse the sage of

immoral behaviour. “Is that so?” he asks, and continues to look after the baby even after the young mother runs away. When she returns with her husband and father of her baby, the villagers realise their dreadful mistake, and again praise the sage for his good deeds in looking after mother and then her child. “Is that so?” asks the sage, and continues to do what has to be done.

### **Serve Yourself**

These are ancient concepts that are relevant today. Test yourself – service does not usually require money, just good manners. Why not try some good service to your family, loved (or unloved) ones, your community or at work? For one day, selflessly and cheerfully volunteer your services, or perform the correct Action without expecting any reward. I hope it gets easier with practice.