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PRANAMS AT THE LOTUS FEET

Journal

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Between You and Us

Dear Readers,

Devotees from various countries constantly plead that Swami's Lotus feet must sanctify their land. In reply, He just smiles and says, "Sugar candy does not go in search of ants; it is the ants that come in search of the sugar candy!" Yet, Bhagawan made one exception: that was way back in 1968 when He went to East Africa. May be the ants prayed hard enough for the 'Sweet' Lord to rush to them and pour all his Sweet love on them. That is why it is said, the greatest of all is not even God, but the devotee who can even make God change his plans! The cover story this issue is about this unique event in the Avatar's life: The African Odyssey!

Apart from this, we have a new feature called 'From your Heart' where we try to answer the spiritual questions received from the readers on various occasions. Readers should note that they are 'our' answers based on 'our' knowledge of Swami's teachings. Please use them as pointers to get to the core of your questions and find the answers that satisfy you. All the answers are within you. Dive deep inside and all doubts shall vanish! That is what Swami says.

Lots of our readers are sending many good photographs of Nature for the feature 'Glory of God'. We thank you all for the wonderful pictures!

Enjoy the reading and do get back to us on what you feel about this magazine.

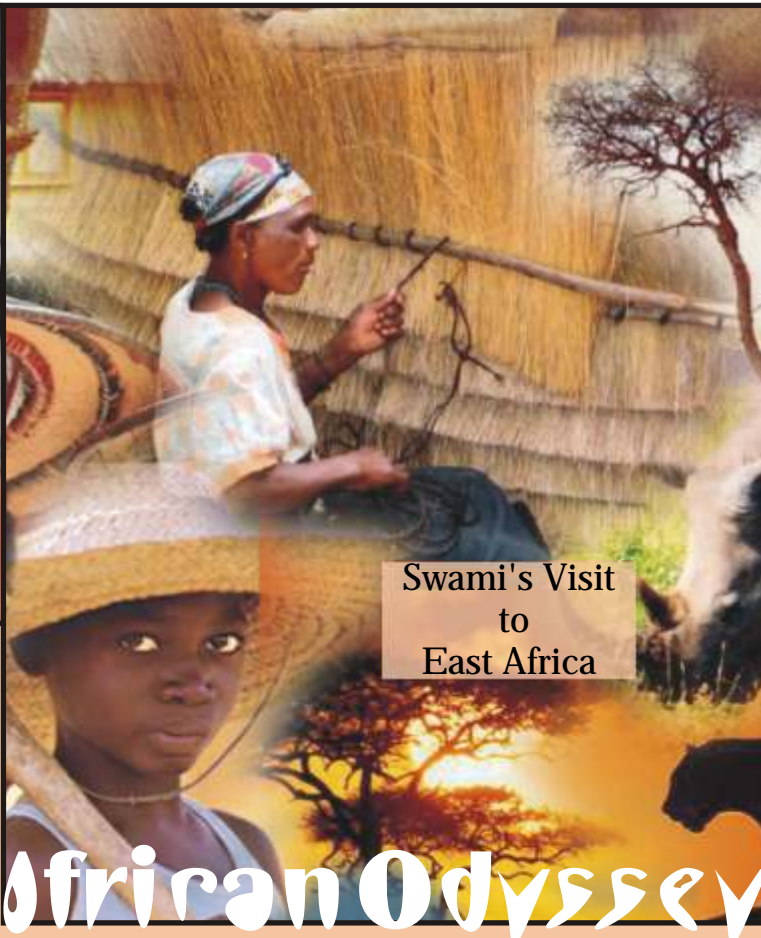
Jai Sai Ram
SGH TEAM

The African Odyssey

The African Odyssey



This was Baba's first voyage beyond the confines of India.....he was going to the infant republics of a continent that was just emerging into the dawn. He was to confer courage and consolation, to knit hearts and quicken the circulation of love!



Swami's Visit to East Africa

African Odyssey

From day one, devotees have always been pleading with Bhagavan to visit their homes, towns, cities, and countries. Swami has yielded many times to requests of the first three types, but, with one notable exception, has diplomatically avoided visits to other countries. One may wonder why, especially since the whole world, nay the whole universe is His.

Swami has explained this puzzle. It is not that he is per se against overseas visits. However, in recent times, it has become a fashion for many of the so-called spiritual leaders and self-styled gurus to constantly jet across continents in the name of spreading some message or the other. Obviously, Swami does not wish to be looked upon as yet another member of this jet-set.

However, way back in 1968, Swami did go abroad, and that was to East Africa.

When overseas devotees quote this example and pray that the lotus feet must sanctify their soil also, Swami just smiles and says that he did not go to Africa but to the house of a particular devotee. It so happened that The devotee was in Africa, that is all!

When preparations for the African safari were being made, divine mother Easwaramma became rather anxious.

Not much was known about Africa in those days, and she was deeply concerned because she had heard that Africa was full of wild animals and savages.

When someone gently pointed out that this was not really true, and that even if true, nothing would happen to Swami because he was God, Easwaramma shot back, "I know swami is God, you know he is God, but do those wild animals and savages know he is God?"

As in the case of Yasoda, so too it was with Easwaramma. Baba was her son first and then only God!

Let us now turn to Kasturi, for a wonderful account of this extra-ordinary exception, namely the only overseas trip to-date, of Bhagavan :

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This was Baba's first voyage beyond the confines of India.....he was going to the infant republics of a continent that was just emerging into the dawn. He was to confer courage and consolation, to knit hearts and quicken the circulation of love!

The citizens of Bombay at a mammoth public meeting convened at Dharmakshetra bade him farewell on the 29th of June. Later, at the airport on 30th June, crowds spilled over the terrace, pushed through to the tarmac area in thousands and used every atom of enthusiasm to cheer Him as the plane took off!

Flying at 590 miles per hour at altitudes of over 35,000 feet, Baba was busy in the Boeing, granting the passengers, (many of whom had boarded the flight on purpose) signs of his grace, such as autographing a book or a photograph, materialising *vibhuti*, or furnishing illuminating answers to solve personal problems of every kind.

Bob Raymer of Los Angeles, a member of the party, saw Baba keep both his feet pressed on the slanting back of the empty seat just ahead of him; and he did not miss the chance; he clicked twice and got two pictures of the lotus feet that millions adore.

At this Baba pulled out one of the cards from pocket behind his seat and wrote an affectionate admonition, sending it to "Bob, Boeing 707!" Bob responded with an apology cum adoration, through

Welcome Baba



another picture card:

*The sky is blue,
The ocean too;
Our wish has come true,
And we are flying with you!"*

In fact, the sky was not always blue. It was mostly murky, what with the huge concourse of slow-moving monsoon clouds on their way to India. The sea mirrored the sky; there was an occasional zig-zag of silver ripple on its surface. One felt as if the plane hung in mid-air, while sea and land were pulled away from underneath by an unseen hand.

Soon, gleaming streaks of rocks and boulders and blotches of greenery were visible as far as the eye could see. Mount Kenya was announced! We saw only its jagged crown of blue, over the sea of milk.

In a moment, the sea was over us! Below us, scintillating in, and reflecting the sun was a quilt of red and brown roofs, Nairobi! The clock showed four minutes to twelve, while our watches insisted it was already 2.24 p.m.

Baba at the doorway was greeted, "*Nandalala, Yadu Nandalala!*" spontaneously from the yearning hearts of thousands perched on all available vantage points. While we of the party waded past the counters and through the corridors, filling forms, and having certificates stamped and signed, climbing over the routine hurdles, Baba was whisked away in a floral automobile by Dr.C.G.Patel into the gathering from which the *bhajan* had emanated.

"It was a feast for the eye and the ear- the scene where they showered



At the Bombay airport before departure

flowers, and waved lights, when they sang melodiously and from the depths of their hearts," Baba said. "I was reminded of the days when Jayadeva and Gauranga sang the glory," he wrote.

We had to proceed to Kampala, the capital city of Uganda the state known as the pearl of Africa. The road was 407 miles long. The cars sped on, encouraged by the fine unbending road through miles of delightful scenery.

The motto of the state of Kenya through which we passed until night enveloped us, is "Marambee", meaning, let us pull together. This spirit was evidenced all along the route in wheat fields, cattle farms, plantations, and in groups of village folk on the wayside, brimming with vitality. They were merrily dancing along with leafy boughs in their grasp, which they shook vigorously at the sky.

The tedium of dreary hours of travel was made less monotonous by the beautiful avenues of trees through which we passed. Their restful green, together with the coolness of air as we climbed higher and higher, was comforting. The rains that come upon this land all months of the year have mothered a succession of gurgling streams and fresh-water lakes.

We had a glimpse of the rift valley about which I had read while

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teaching anthropology in my college in Mysore. Two thousand feet below us it gaped, with sheer escarpment for its banks! We saw the soda lake, Nakaru, and the town bearing its name. A sizeable gathering of eager Africans and Indians awaited Baba there; they were rewarded with *darshan*. Baba moved among them blessed them, and created *vibhuti* for a few that needed it.

From Malaba, on the border of Uganda, an impressive pilot car preceded the car of Baba, as a sign and symbol of his being welcomed by the rulers of that state. The cars drove on to Jinja, where the Nile emerges out of the womb of Lake Victoria, and, channelled through turbines, flows on north to fulfil its vow of a 3500-mile pilgrimage to the Mediterranean sea.

Kampala was reached at 1.30 a.m., hardly the hour for a hearty welcome by a cheering throng. But Baba is in a category all by himself. Wildly waving banners of silken welcome stretched across the streets; every few yards a floral arch (someone in our party counted exactly 108) beamed with lights as Baba passed through.

Outside Dr. Patel's bungalow, 2000 people continued the *bhajan*, singing with unabated ardour in the hope that Baba would give them the coveted *darshan*. and Baba did not disappoint them. Alighting, He walked slowly amidst them, feasting the eye and delighting the heart. Their restraint and reverence were exemplary.

Never had Kampala yearned so excruciatingly for daybreak as on that night! For the city knew that Baba had arrived and would be granting *darshan* when the sun rose. Baba came out early next morning; he stood facing the unprecedented massive gathering. He moved, lithe and lovely, along the passage between the



On the way to Nairobi

barricaded blocks of people, showering upon everyone his supreme compassion. he went up to the lines of standing Africans on the margins of the assembly; He held many by the hand and brought them himself into the shade among the others so that they may sit in comfort, listening to the community sing of *bhajans*.

"I have no need to see places. I am everywhere, always!" Baba told us. "You may drive around. I have my work, for which I have come." but Dr. Patel persuaded him to visit the Hindu temple, the Bahai house of worship, and the television tower hill. While driving down, he summoned the six-foot police constable acting as motor-cycle escort, and created for him a charming locket with the picture of Christ, to be worn around the neck. He knew the man was

Christian.

During the *bhajans*, he selected the sick and the disabled, the deaf and the dumb, the blind and the maimed, and, taking them into the bungalow, he spoke to each one with love and tenderness. He spoke in Swahili, in English or Hindi, and gave each a token of grace *vibhuti*, talismans, lockets with his own portrait or the picture of Christ or some sacred design. Everyone who came out of the room had a smile on the face, a twinkle in the eye, a ray of sunshine in the heart, and firmness in the step.

A person who was stone-deaf when he went in, came out wonder-struck at the amazing world of sound. A polio-affected boy came prancing outside; a patient who was wheeled into the 'room of hope' walked out, his hands on the shoulders of his companions, while a volunteer pushed the empty wheel chair out of the gate.

Third day of July was a memorable one. First, the flight to Ngorongoro crater. It is the largest concentration of wild life in Africa. Reaching the entebbe international air port by car, Baba, with some members of the party boarded a twin-engined aircraft

Embakasi Airport at Nairobi



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at 9 a.m., while three of us having full faith in him, brushed aside the fears aroused by overzealous friends who warned that a single-engine plane was not the craft that one would choose to fly over a jungle teeming with wild life!

We followed Baba in a frail super-wagon, piloted by a veteran Britisher who oozed confidence all the time. For an hour and a half we flew over an immense inland sea of fresh water Lake Victoria which the Nile attempts in vain to drain.

We could see hundreds of gazelles, zebras, and wild beasts while our vehicle flew slowly over the Serengeti national park. The crater is a huge circular plain, over 127 square miles of grassland, bush and forest, sheltering large masses of wild life. A few farms stocked with fat cattle were to be found in this fantastic milieu.

As we drove from the airstrip to the crater lodge, a family of wild elephants received us with the gentle

At the Serengiti National park



flapping of broad ears and an array of ivory tusks gleaming in the pre-noon sun.

Landrovers took us into thick shoals of wild buffaloes, zebras, and gnus. Soon we entered the haunt of the Simba (lion). From the safety of the cars we admired a heavy-weight male yawning on a mound, and very nearly ran over a pair of fat females having their siesta amid the grass! We came upon more such families, and soon they endeared themselves to us. Baba had come to bless them, we felt.

Rising up almost from nowhere, a stately dowager lioness walked majestically towards a group of sleek giraffes. This onset of danger was communicated to the long-necked fraternity by some birds, and they in their turn, alerted the buffalo, zebra and gnu! In a few seconds they disappeared into the distance and the distinguished lady stood sniffing the empty air!

Baba drew our attention to this demonstration of mutual service. He said that man is highlighting the advantages of competition and the struggle for survival, but the beast is teaching him co-operation and service as the ideal means for survival.

We took off from the crater at four o'clock in the afternoon, and when we neared Lake Natron, the planes flew perilously over a newly formed volcano, emitting incense to the god of fire! Our 'mini' wagon hovered for



Darshan at Kampala

a while, awaiting signal from the Nairobi national park giving us a bird's eye-view of the giraffes and the ostriches, before landing at Entebbe.

Baba's car crawled through the crowded roads of Nairobi to the park where he was to address his first public meeting in Africa.Baba then returned to his residence and blessed the enormous gathering that surged around it.

Later, he sat before the television set which some members of his party were seeing for the first time. The programme being shown then led to a discourse by Baba on the evil sown by that medium. Baba said that it blunted the higher impulses and activated the lower. "The aim of the sponsors is to bring more and more people before the receivers; so standards get more and more vulgarised and this valuable instrument of education is reduced into *televisham* (telepoison!)," he said.

Nairobi is the only city in the world that has a suburb owned and inhabited by lions! It awakens everyday to the full and free roar of these regal cats.

On the 5th of July, early in the day, we went into the national park and went to the hippo pool. There was a busy school of these monsters, and also a few crocodiles basking quite near. This led baba to point out to us how the beast is wiser than man in the art

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of living. "We slaughter our own kind, for the greater glory of ourselves!" he said.

While driving back from the pool, we saw two magnificently maned lions, and three well-groomed lionesses basking indolently in the sun. They did not wince at all, when a dozen cameras clicked. Instead, they preened themselves like stars surrounded by fans! We also watched many ostriches, and giraffes hurrying in uncouth haste to some mysterious rendezvous.

After lunch, Dr. Patel took Baba and party in cars to Nanyuki, 6400 feet above sea level, a town where, if you have poetry in you, you can experience the thrill of having one foot in the southern hemisphere, and the other in the northern, for the equator passes through the place! In fact, a hotel here boasts that the line passes through its veranda.

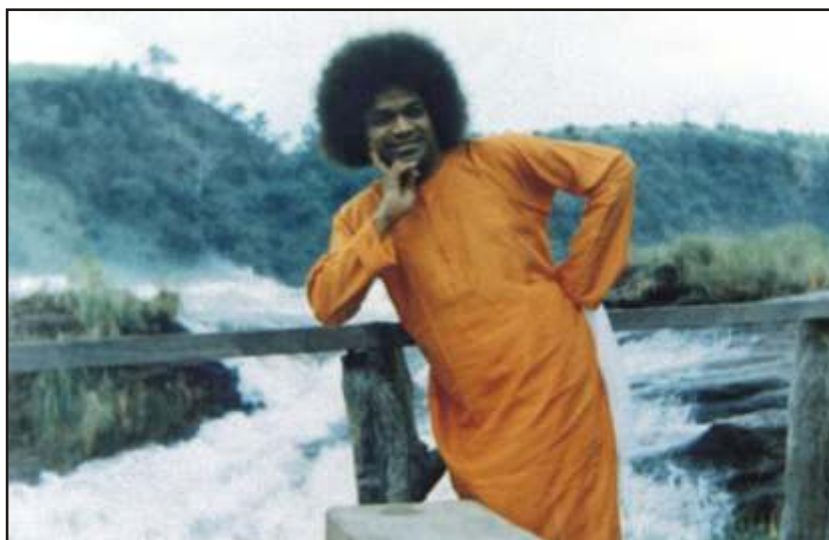
The road to Nanyuki showed us coffee and sisal plantations; thatched huts of kikuyu peeped furtively at our cars. In secret valley, we stayed at 'tree tops', built on stilts, from where at night, under an artificial moon, we could see leopard mauling meat, bisons licking salt, and elephants, gazelles and other beasts showing themselves off, and generally enjoying themselves.

It was Thursday; so Baba turned us away from elephantine fantasies, and the antics of animals. He took us instead, into the jungles of our own minds and described how the wild beasts sheltering there



A bandaged Kasturi with Swam could be trapped.suddenly with a gesture, he created a jewel with an imprint of his own portrait, and placed it in the hands of the person sitting by his side. "Here! Wear it!! For many years you have longed for this." Then turning to us he said, "Oh, each of you wants something, don't you?" and the hand waved again. There was a golden vessel in his hand now. When he unscrewed the lid, it was full to the brim divine ambrosia! Fragrant beyond imagination thick, sweet, liquid grace!

Next morning, on the road back to Nairobi, Baba alighted at Nanyuki The Murchison falls



and many other towns and villages, where crowds were waiting for him. He wondered, "Who has informed these people that I would be passing this way?"

About noon, Baba and the others boarded the waiting aircraft, and flying over the rift valley, the famous Kenya highlands, and the inland port of Kisumu on lake Victoria, reached Entebbe.

On the 7th, Baba addressed the first public meeting at Kampala. He told the multi-racial, multi-religious gathering, "Just as the same bloodstream circulates in all the limbs of the one body, the one divine principle activates the entire universe. ..." This was a heartening message, and it was received with enthusiastic approval by Muslims, Christians, Bahais, Hindus, and Parsis alike.

On the 8th of July, Baba addressed another vast gathering at Kampala. He said, "Here in Kampala, I shall pinpoint the basic requisites for a good, contented and happy life.love is power; love is bliss; love is light; love is God."

These discourses bound Baba close to the hearts of the Africans. People recognised in him a friend, a guide, a leader, and a light. But word had spread that Baba was leaving for India on the 10th, since that day was Guru Poornima. So that evening when Baba moved among the thousands seated in the Pandal, rows of Africans knelt, handing notes and letters to him, some with tearful

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pleas. Looking through a window of Dr. Patel's bungalow at the faces filled with adoration, I could not suppress my tears. I was overcome by a delightful sense of gratitude for the opportunity that Baba gave me to witness this spontaneous surge of devotion in a new continent. I was awakened from my reverie by a light tap on my back from Baba who enquired, "Why the tears?" The notes and letters filled with sorrow, for the Africans had learnt that Baba planned to leave for Bombay on the 10th. "Father, do not leave us so soon!" was the plaint in every prayer. India was informed by cable that the return was postponed!

The full moon day, when spiritual aspirants dedicate themselves anew at the feet of the master, was on the 10th. Baba had told Bombay that he would reach the city by plane by 9.45 p.m., leaving Kampala at 11 a.m., so that both Africa and Asia would have the thrill of his *darshan* on the same day! But, yielding to the yearning of the Africans, he decided to spend the whole day at Kampala, granting devotees in other continents other evidence of his omnipresence.

More than 25,000 persons gathered that morning for the *bhajan*. The Africans joined the chorus led by a Tanzanian, Mr. Zoodoo. For over two hours, Baba walked slowly among the lines of lonely, love-seeking eager hearts, giving each person a handful of sweets and a packet of *vibhuti*. To the amazement of the recipients, most of them discovered inside the packet, lying ensconced in the midst of the holy ash, enamel or metal portraits of Christ, the Cross, Krishna, or Sai Baba himself.

The *Uganda Argus* published an article, announcing that Baba had brought the message of unity and service to the peoples of that continent. Baba's discourses as well as activities were also televised and broadcast, so that the entire population could share the inspiration of the gospel.

On the evening of the tenth of July, Baba talked to about 200 young men and women, who served as volunteers at the *bhajan* gatherings

Simba from Africa



and at public meetings. The constables on duty as well as the chauffeur of the pilot car were also rewarded by His grace.

On the 11th, besides the *bhajan* sessions, for which, as days passed, more and more people from far and near flowed into the capital, Baba met groups of active workers in service organisations, from the far-flung states of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Later, Baba visited Dr. Patel's clinic and also the residences of many ardent devotees. Wherever he went, throngs of people, eager to win one more glimpse of the radiance, rushed in and stood at the gates or on the pavements for hours.

On the 12th, Baba proceeded to the

Murchison falls national park, one of the most beautiful and fauna-stocked regions of East Africa. The straight road, leaping over the shoulders of a series of hills, tempted the person who was at the wheel of our car to race and overtake every car that moved in front. We were catapulting so fast, that a sudden turn of the road found the car rolling madly over and over, finally coming to rest on its jammed wheels in agonised silence.

Baba's car had gone beyond Masindi which was some 30 miles distant. He said to the people in his car, "The second car has trouble. They will resume their journey in a taxi!"

We four were thrown against the roof and the floor, receiving knocks, bumps, hits and cuts, we knew not where! The man at the wheel fell out; the friend at his left struggled to open the stuck door with his uninjured left arm. The cushion from the back seat was on my head, wedged between it and the caved-in top! I found myself sitting astride on the chest of my companion, with blood trickling on his shirt from along the gash in my forehead.....the third car came up in utter bewilderment, and friends gently pulled us out.

We packed ourselves in this third car and reached Masindi. From there, we hired a taxi and moved on towards Baba. When we reached the park, we saw the welcome poster: "Elephants have the right of way." It meant that we could see some herds during the day.

We found a gigantic pair of bisons eyeing us rather wickedly, munching roadside grass. Our cars were ferried

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across the wide green Nile, and passing between two live tembos (Swahili for elephant) with sharp white tusks about five feet long, we rushed into the Pra safari lodge. Baba came forward to pat us and pet us, while listening to our description of the accident of which he already knew.

Within minutes we went for a motor-boat ride up the Nile for over fifteen miles, towards the Murchison falls, and back. The boat passed through 'schools' of hippos lying close to each other, showing just their eyes, ear tips, and occasionally their noses, above the water! Some of them were on the land, with red, barrel-like hippolets behind them peeping through the thick papyrus weeds. There were crocodiles too, with open jaws, but the vicious tail and the voracious jaw did not frighten the hippos in the least.

Returning to Pra safari, and re-crossing the Nile, our cars took us through elephant-land to the Nile above the falls. Herds of thirty or forty elephants looked from a distance like flocks of sheep grazing on the downs, but when we neared them, the sight filled us with awe and amazement. A bull stood a few yards away from the car wherein Baba was, and to give him good *darshan*, Baba stood on the foot-board! It appeared that the elephant was highly grateful for he stood there gazing for a few minutes, filling his little eyes with loveliness; then, turning back, he quietly joined his herd.

The Murchison falls are furious and fascinating. The Nile comes foaming and rapid, down a continuous stairway until the bed contracts suddenly into a gap in the rock, barely

six yards wide; through this strangling portal the tremendous river is shot in one single jet, down a depth of 160 feet, into a stream of terror and beauty. Baba was happy that we could see this sublime scene.

Bob Raymer got a series of lovely pictures of Baba before these waters. Returning to Masindi through a road rendered slushy with a thick shower of rain, we had to slacken speed to avoid skidding. Elephants crossing the highway were another cause for delay.



On the Nile

From Masindi we proceeded to Kkondo, 80 miles away, where a *bhajan mandir*, in authentic afro-architectural style built by a devotee, was to be inaugurated. It was a large estate, growing paddy, sugarcane and bananas. The *mandir* was full of squatting African labourers, who venerated Baba as the god-man from the east. Baba sat on a special seat arranged for him, but soon he was among the farmers, creating and distributing sweets and curatives.

He told the gathering of Africans and Indians that man alone among the beings strayed from his allotted tasks; the rest stuck to their respective *dharma*s, whatever the obstacle. The

tiger will never stoop to eating grass; the elephant can never be tempted have a meal of fish or flesh. But man, the crown of creation, is grovelling in the mire of bestiality and, withal, proud of it!

Kampala was reached at 1 a.m. The lateness of the hour only whetted the appetite for *darshan* of the thousands who were waiting there all day, busy singing *bhajans*. Baba gave them the much-coveted gift, walking among them and standing on the decorated dais long enough to satisfy them.

The 13th of July was a day of growing gloom.from Mazwa, Dar-es-salam, Mombassa, and Eldoret, people came to persuade Baba to visit their places. The mayor of Kampala pleaded for a short extension of the stay.

Baba is always everywhere. He reveals his presence to all who call on him, or even to many who are unaware that God is amidst them for their sake. For Baba, there is no coming or

going, no arriving or leaving. Still, the physical presence wins such indelible loyalty that one feels an orphan without it.

On the 14th, hours before dawn, half of Kampala was at Dr. Patel's door. Streams of cars and planes brought people from Jinja, Mbale, Kakira, Kabale, Ikaye, and Kapila, where Sathya Sai Seva Samithis and bhajan mandalis were active. "I have no desire to stun or shock people into submission or adulation; I have come to install truth and love in human hearts," baba declared.

When Baba got into the car, even the hefty constables on duty, keeping back surging rows of citizens, wiped

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tears streaming from their eyes! Baba patted their backs, but that only sharpened the pang!

The road to Entebbe was choked with cars, trucks, scooters, and cycles. The East African airways plane that was to take Baba to Nairobi (where the Air India international Boeing was waiting) developed small trouble while moving on the runway; so Kampala got the bonus of two more hours with Baba on its soil!

Nairobi was reached at 2.30 p.m., and the thousands who acclaimed the plane were rewarded by a quick darshan, since the delay prompted the airport officers to set the Boeing on its way immediately.

We flew over Ethiopia and Somaliland, ferried across the Red Sea at a height of over two miles and a half, and landed at Aden at 5.15 p.m. Bombay was 1910 miles away and two hours and forty minutes ahead!

Though Baba did not disembark, and though the date of the flight had been postponed while at Kampala, we were surprised to find a long line of devotees and admirers (Indians and Arabs) filing into the aircraft and touching the lotus feet. Baba spoke to them with sweet affection; he created vibhuti for their sake.

At 12.45 a.m., Indian standard time, the plane, which had the unique fortune of carrying the most precious cargo that the world offers in this age, touched ground at Santa Cruz, starting off a chorus of jais from over ten thousand quickly pounding hearts.

That then is an account of Swami's only overseas trip thus far.

Since then, Bhagavan has been invited any number of times by overseas devotees to visit and bless their countries. Usually, Swami just smiles in reply and leaves it at that.

At other times, he says, "I will come." When devotees press and ask, "When Swami? We want to charter planes and start making preparations," Baba says enigmatically, "Wait!"

When people press and ask, "Swami, you have told so and so you will visit his country. When exactly would you do so?" He smiles and says, "Do I have to go only by plane?"

So the million-dollar question, as they say, remains! Will he or won't he, in physical form that is? No one knows.

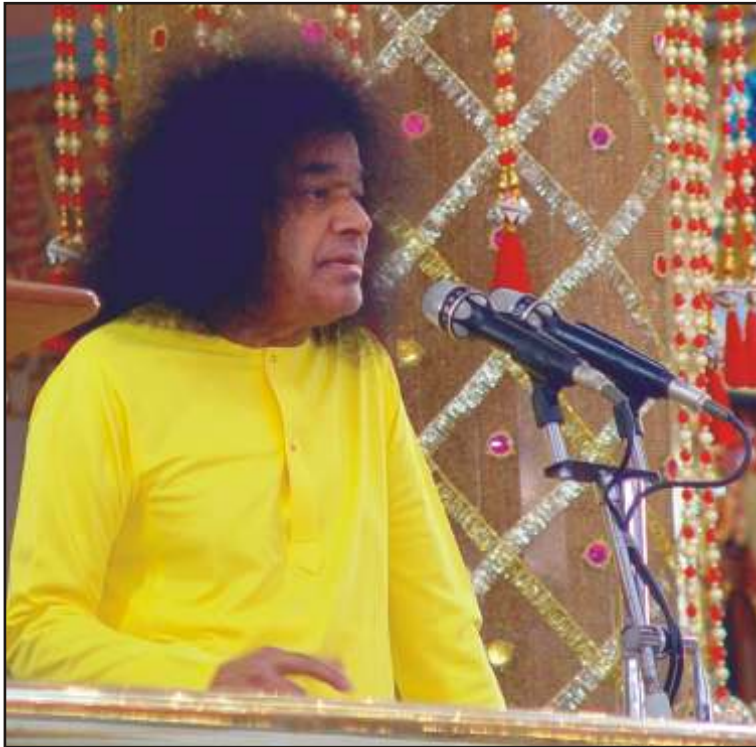
Devotees know only one thing: Bhagavan is capable of extraordinarily surprising decisions, taken most suddenly.

Meanwhile, anxious devotees abroad wait breathlessly! Swami says, "Love my uncertainty." That is what these devotees are all trying to do, but a tough job it is! ♦

Leave us not Dear Father



Where is God?



*As in the sesame seed oil exists,
As in milk ghee is present,
As fragrance resides in a flower,
As the juice exists in a fruit,
As fire is latent in a faggot
So Is the Divine immanent in
subtle form*

Oil is present throughout the sesame seed. Ghee is present in every drop of milk. Fragrance is present in an invisible form in a flower. A fruit is filled with sweet juice. In every piece of wood fire is latent. In the same manner the Divine is immanent in the entire cosmos in a subtle form.

God is present not in some country or some body. Like vision in the eye and hearing in the ear, God is present in the mind as Consciousness (Chaitanya). The cosmos is the visible manifestation of the invisible Supreme Self.

While the Divine is in such close proximity to him, man in his ignorance goes seeking God everywhere. The Divine is effulgent in every man as Sath-Chith-Ananda (Being-Awareness-Bliss), the Cosmic Consciousness.

Reflections of the sun shining in the sky can be seen in the oceans, rivers, the lakes and in wells. Though the reflections are varied, the sun is one alone. The Divine is present in man like the unseen thread which holds a garland of gems together. The entire cosmos is permeated by the Divine and is the visible manifestation of the Divine.

Nothing in the world, no object, no human being, no

creature can be found wherein God is not present. Though man appears in the world in different forms, speaking different languages, his essential humanness is common to one and all. There is only one race, that is the human race. God is only one. He is Sath-Chith-Ananda.

Just as a seed sprouts and grows into a plant wherein a flower blossoms, so does the Divine seed grow in the heart of man and blossoms as a flower, Sath Chith-Ananda. Just as it is natural for a seed to become a fragrant flower, so is it natural for man to experience the bliss of the Divine (Sath-Chith-Ananda).

There are many evidences to demonstrate the Divinity that is inherent in man. But few men are ready to make the sacrifice that is required to experience this Divinity.

The ancient sages regarded human life as full of fragrance to be enjoyed. They considered life as full of nectarine sweetness. When man is oblivious of this sweetness, he ceases to be human. Sacrifice (Thyaga) is the sweetness in humanness (Manavathva). The scriptures declare: Only through sacrifice can man realise the eternal Divine. But, immersed in selfishness, man fails to recognise this truth. ♦

From Your Heart

Answers to Questions from our readers

Dear Readers,

This is a new feature that seeks to answer various spiritual questions posed by you from time to time. Every care has been taken by the H2H team to cull out the answers from Swami's teachings given on various occasions. However, they are only pointers to the real answers which have to be found within your own heart through introspection, inquiry and prayer.

This will not be a regular feature, but will appear from time to time when we have enough questions and answers. The names of the readers sending the questions are being kept anonymous keeping in view requests to that effect.

Please feel free to send your questions, preferably with full details to h2h@radiosai.org

Question 1

Sai Ram !One thing I have realized in my relationship with Swami is that when I am in the process of figuring something out, He responds in some way to help me. My recent reading of the article entitled "If you are God", provided me with some insights into this great mystery of life (!)I have learnt this from the article - Don't judge, and focus on purifying oneself. If there is no "sin" and no "merit", no "right" and no "wrong", I take that to mean that it is pointless to wallow in guilt for "wrong-doings" and celebrate the glory of "good deeds"; instead I need to focus on the thought of God and let go of all of it. It is also pointless to judge others by saying so-and-so is good/bad, etc. If I do something that goes against my inner voice because the desire is so great, then I just have to bear the consequences. I don't think anyone can get away from it just because there is no "sin" and no "merit", but neither does God send me to eternal damnation. Depending on the "level" of existence we choose (or try?) to be in (actually I'm not sure to what extent we have a choice), we are subject to the appropriate laws of existence as He laid out. Am I on the right track?

Answer

Sai Ram.

We have read your mail carefully. Basically we would say that you have got it right. As Swami says, past is past and there is no need to brood too much on it. Instead, it is better to concentrate on the present and 'get on with it'.

As regards the second part of your mail, we feel that while accepting what the present has to offer, we need not feel that we have no choice. As a matter of fact there is an important choice, which is: TO ENHANCE OUR FAITH OR NOT.

Put that way, it should be clear what choice we ought to make! As our faith increases, the influence of the "appropriate laws of existence" as you call it diminish. You may wonder how this is possible but astrophysics gives a ready example.

Now according to modern physics, there are four basic or fundamental forces the strong, the weak, the electromagnetic and the gravitational forces. In the Cosmos, if we take a planet like the Earth, its physics is largely dominated by the electromagnetic force. In the interior of the Sun, it is the strong force that comes into play while on the scale of galaxies etc., the gravitational force, which is normally considered too feeble, becomes dominant.

In the same way the Law of Karma, which basically belongs to the Dual World, normally holds sway over our lives. However, the closer we get to God, the less effective it becomes. That is because God with His Grace can overrule the Law of Karma. But then this privilege is not easily won, and we have to work real hard to get close to God!

What does it mean to get close to God? God Himself has defined that for us please see the 12th Chapter of the Gita!

Hope what we have said is clear! Thank you for writing to us.

Question 2

We have all seen wealthy people with apparently no care in the world but without much thought for others, their only concern is with amassing more wealth regardless of how it is done. Now put this question to others and they will say it is the merit earned in a previous life of that person. My question is if they have had so much merit in a previous life, how come they are so uncaring in this life? My own feeling is that is not the merit earned in a previous life but more a great desire to be rich and so they are experiencing this. And of course being rich is not always equated with being happy. But that is just my own opinion what is the truth of the matter?

Answer

Sai Ram, and thank you for your question, which is not only interesting but also thought-provoking.

Basically, your question boils down to: Is everything that happens to a person in that person's present life determined entirely by the Law of Karma or are there other factors also?

By and large most people would say that the Law of Karma decides it all. However, we are not too sure about this. Yes, the Law of Karma is very powerful and is an offshoot of the Moral Law that governs the Universe, as Gandhi put it. But there are scholars who have argued for other forces also. If one accepts this view, then the Law of Karma is necessary but not entirely sufficient to explain all aspect of life as we see it.

What are these extra factors? Basically it is

From Your Heart

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connected with the evolutionary force. Strangely, most biologists do not talk about it. For them, evolution of species is the result of a long trial-and-error process involving mutations etc., coupled with the law of survival of the fittest. A couple of centuries ago, a French biologist named Lamarck argued that "intention" is another factor that determines the "arrow of evolution". Lamarck said that the camel has a hump because it "decided" it would trudge across the desert. Since this is a concept or a hypothesis, it has not been as accepted as widely as it deserves. Actually, Darwin's theory also was just a hypothesis but thanks to patient research, it has got validated. Lamarck's hypothesis cannot be validated so easily using the traditional methods of science. Who can go and ask questions of horses, pigs, and camels?!

Yet Lamarck deserves more credit than what modern biologists give him. If every step in evolution is the result of random mutation followed by the survival of the fittest business, then if we calculate how many years would be required to evolve a species like man [remembering that billions of random accidents occurred on the way to the appearance of the human] then the total time required would be millions of times the age of the Universe [which is around 12-15 billion years].

Now let us move on to Vedanta. The Vedantic view of this was strongly echoed by Tilak in his famous book the Gita Rahasya [the Secret of the Gita], which, by the way, Tilak wrote while in prison in Mandalay in Burma [where he was put by the British]. Interestingly Tilak also offers the "intention" hypothesis. He says that every being, whether it is an amoeba or giraffe or whatever is nothing but Pure Consciousness or the Atma at the core. Evolution is a script written by the Atma; therefore, at some point, the Atma "develops an intention". A single-cellular living being has the desire to become multi-cellular so that it can have greater functionality. At that stage, there is a "mutation" and all the details are handled by molecular biology. The Atma thus issues the "executive order" so to say and molecular biology is just the "front office" that implements the order! As you can see, this is

Lamarck's idea presented against a more philosophical and spiritual background.

Incidentally Swami has mentioned this explicitly in one of His Discourses [we are sorry we are not able to pin point this Discourse of the cuff]. He said that if a person has a desire, who is it that really has the desire? It is the embodied Atma and not the hunk of flesh that forms the body of the person. Ramana Maharishi also would always ask: "Who is the one who wants to do this or that or who is the one who really has the desire?"

Putting all this together,

- In evolution, there are factors that determine evolution on a short time scale and there are factors that determine evolution on a long time scale.
- The existence of two distinct time scales is true of astronomical evolution, geological evolution and biological evolution.
- We argue that this applies also to the spiritual evolution of a person.

We now briefly amplify the last point. The long-term evolution of a human being will eventually take that person closer and closer to God, from Whom all of us have come.

Getting closer to God means less and less of desires must be present in the person. The person must be drained of all desires. In ordinary life, people often have some desires when young but when they become old they grow out of these desires. For example, many when young are crazy about movies, but when they become old, movies no longer attract them they have grown out of that desire. It is quite likely, as you seem to imply, that many are offered the chance to be wealthy and all that, in this life. As you say, wealth will not bring them happiness! And when material wealth fails to deliver the goods, that is the time to get fed up!! In other words, the arrow of long-term evolution perhaps gives wealth to the seekers as an opportunity to drain themselves of all residual desires.

There are a few commentators who have occasionally aired this hypothesis of "curing through opportunities for getting fed up", shall we say?!

In a nutshell, there is something in what you say; it cannot be summarily dismissed. But, like many hypotheses in the field of Spirituality, it cannot be established by the usual methods. However, an evolved Soul who can look deep into the mystery of Creation would probably be able to say something more definitive than us.

So, we cannot quite give the "truth of the matter" as you want us to. We are, however, prepared to vote for your hypothesis! Would that be OK?!

Thank you for writing to us and greatly stimulating our thoughts. ♦

'Reforms with a Human Face'

Reflections by Dr.G.Venkataraman

Sai Ram, and greetings. This is probably the last article I shall be writing from Brindavan this summer, since Swami is likely to leave soon, back for the base. Of course speculation is heavy as to when exactly He would leave, and I don't know if there is betting as well. People sometimes can be very crazy, and I would not be surprised if there is some of that too but I sincerely hope not. As it is we are given to too much trivialization of Divinity and we don't need this extra bit; to use a corny phrase: "We need such betting as badly as we need a hole in the head." That opens up a topic, namely gambling, but I shall not deal with it this time. Instead, I would like to deal with something that has been happening here after the recent general elections. Suddenly we are beginning to hear the phrase "reforms with a human face". Actually, the meaning of this is very clear to those who have been reading the newspapers carefully and yet, a devotee who undoubtedly reads the papers every day, asked me, "What is the meaning of reforms with a human face?" That is the topic I would like to deal with today, especially because this topic has a deep spiritual undercurrent.

The word reform as applied in the Indian economic and political scene refers to the streamlining of economic philosophy, political institutions and the laws of the land to enable free enterprise to thrive and to allow free play to market forces. In short, it means that everything must be done to help business prosper and businessmen to thrive and make money, lots of it. The general idea is that if business thrives, money would be generated in plenty, and when money is plentifully generated and businessmen become wealthy, some of that wealth would trickle down and help the upper middle class to come within an inch of being rich, the lower middle class to climb up towards the upper middle class

bracket, and the poor to become less poor. This is the famous trickle-down theory that has been heavily promoted since the seventies by the advocates of market forces, as they are called. In principle all this sounds fine and the trickle-down theory even appears to work. Experts would tell you how country X introduced market reforms and prospered; how country Y has now banished poverty, and so on. Some of the statistics that they dish out are factual and cannot be denied. And yet, in many of these success-story countries, huge



Are the rich just getting richer

problems have also surfaced. The problems are of varied kind but they are there all the same and cannot quite be swept under the rug.

You might at this point wonder: "What on earth has all this got to do with Spirituality? When did H2H turn into a business or economics journal?" Please wait! I shall come to the spiritual aspects after completing the required preamble. To get back to what I was saying, there was this trickle-down theory that was invariably trotted out to convince one and all that once wealth is generated in the country, all would get rich, all would prosper, and poverty would be a dim memory of the past. The governments of the

world were told: "The business of government is to get out of business!" There is a saying that you can fool some people for some time but not all people all the time. So one fine day, many pundits woke up and challenged the trickle-down theory. They said, "Hey wait a minute! The rich are getting richer but the poor are at the same time getting poorer. Besides, the number of poor people is also increasing. The trickle-down theory is like the 'Emperor's new clothes'; it is fiction!" The business community then went on a counter attack and the debate was now in full swing.

Just before the elections, there was a lot of support for economic reforms as they are called and the rich had it good. By the way, actions that aid the business community are called reforms because the earlier policies were unduly restrictive. In effect, what had happened was that the economic pendulum had swung from one extreme to the other. Earlier there was excessive state control and now the move was to have the state do little or nothing at all; the mantra was that the magic of the market place would sort out all problems and take care of everything.

OK, all this was before the elections and when the elections came there were, as I just said, many parties that challenged the economic reforms and wanted to go back to state control. The entire debate now took a different turn and finally some sort of compromise was sought to be evolved. The compromise formula is: "Yes, we must have economic reforms but that must not hurt the poor people." This almost sounds like having the cake and eating it too, but I shall not go into all that here. The point simply is that many people said, "Reforms must go on because otherwise the GDP will crash. However, we must effect the reforms in such a manner that no hardship is

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caused to the weaker sections of the Society." And thus came into existence the catch phrase: Reforms with a Human Face.

I hope you have got the general hang of it. At this point I should make one thing very clear. I am not taking any sides. Basically I have said there were three points of view. First there was the extreme left, and then came the extreme right and now some people are saying we need a balance that is all I am trying to convey.

I now wish to go away from the debate and look at the so-called trickle-down theory. The pundits in all countries who actively promoted the market forces said it would work. It has not worked in countries, which, to start with, had wide disparity in income. In India, it certainly did not. Why? For a simple reason. The trickle-down theory totally ignored human nature. It was based on the assumption that when the rich become very rich they would start spending their money heavily and this would generate a lot of jobs etc., which would help an all-round

authors of the trickle-down theory ignored human psychology and the tendency of humans to be extremely selfish. In spiritual language, they ignored the power of the *Gunas*.

Yes, when the upper strata people got more money they did begin to spend heavily but the money spent went to the wrong pockets. In India, lots of the upper strata people started buying imported goods and so all that money spent went to foreign countries. They started travelling abroad on vacations and so that money also went abroad. And so on. This is one side of the story. Many spent on luxuries within the country; for example, people go to a seven star hotel and blow money like anything. You know something? During the recent elections, a lot of rich people did not stay at home to watch the results on television. They formed groups, hired a room in a big hotel and spent the time there watching the results. Why? Because they could drink while watching and commenting! Just the other day, I was reading in the newspapers that a rich Indian businessman settled in the

UK is getting his daughter married in Paris and is spending only FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS on the marriage! Imagine that, this man is spending on his daughter's marriage an amount that is almost what Swami spent to bring drinking water to nearly a million people in Anantapur District! Swami says money is God, do not waste it. Unfortunately this man has not heard of that. If you look around, there is plenty of this kind of stuff going on.

food], essentials [clothes, house, education, job] important needs [water supply, sanitation, lighting, transportation], needs related to comfort [fan, fridge], and even luxuries [air conditioners]. But even beyond that is conspicuous consumption the flaunting of wealth. If you think about it carefully, there is a lot of that going on right now. For example, there is, I am told a Bentley car that costs a little over \$ 1 million in India. All the fifteen cars imported in the first batch have been sold out and there is a waiting list for 50! So one side of India wants to live like this while we have on the other side an India that we see during Grama Seva, and so on.

This brings me to the question of poverty. Ask a rich man and he will say, "The poor deserve to be poor. They are lazy, and they are idle. Look at me. How hard do I work! Do you ever see me idle for a minute? It is all due to laziness." Superficially this argument may seem correct [at least it seems so to many] but if you look deep, you would come to another conclusion. True, there are the rags to riches stories but in most cases, the person who is now rich started off with some advantages. In some countries, it was the advantage of race. In others, it was that of community. So it is in every country. Let us look at this business of laziness.

I would like you to travel with me to the interior part of the State of Madhya Pradesh. This State has a lot of tribals who live today more or less like their ancestors did two hundred years ago. They live deep in the jungles and know just how to survive living off the land. They have no education and do not even know there is such a thing called school. Nobody has bothered about them and most did not even know that these tribals existed. Then how come they have suddenly hit the headlines? That is because of a big dam that is



Development at what cost

growth and benefit the poorer sections. That is what did not quite happen and that is because the

As one of my colleagues, a professor in economics, once told me, in life we have vital necessities [air, water,

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coming up in that State. This dam will submerge a lot of forestland and that is going to leave about three hundred thousand tribals homeless. According to a ruling of the Supreme Court, these people who are displaced must be resettled but no one has bothered about that ruling. These poor people have no clout and only a few sensitive individuals are battling for their cause. Most of Society does not lose sleep over their problems. Incidentally, many dams have been built and almost in all cases the displaced persons had to fend for themselves. No such thing as compensation etc. All on paper may be but nothing in practice.

Take resettlement. Suppose the tribals are resettled in some other place. Can they survive? They cannot; they know only how to live in a forest and not in a village. These people simply do not count. That is certainly heartless of Society. But those who are in a hurry for progress are usually bothered only about themselves and do not hesitate to trample on others. This is what is called progress without a human face. Those who talk of reforms with a human face are saying essentially: "By all means streamline the economy so that industries grow and so on but let not such progress benefit only the businessmen, leaving the weaker sections high and dry."

Incidentally, one of the slogans of the reform crowd is: "Government must cut down expenditure. It is spending too much, and such expenditure is unproductive." OK, let us accept this for a moment. Now let us take software. As you know there is a lot of piracy and MNCs complain all the time about piracy. Now who is supposed to tackle piracy? Who is supposed to conduct raids, arrest the pirates and put them in prison? The Government. Can the Government do all this; pay for the police, the Judiciary, the prison staff and so on without expenditure?

What I am trying to drive at is that at some point there are social costs to be paid and it is the Government or Society that is asked to pick up the tab. How can the Government do all that by cutting down on taxes etc., which is what businessmen want? In short, everybody wants a free lunch, even though there is supposed to be no such thing as a free lunch.

This brings me to the subject of social costs. The advocates of free enterprise, market reform, etc., avoid mentioning this subject because it is most inconvenient. Take a thing like mobile phones. I am told that there are today over five hundred million mobile phones. Many regard this as a tremendous progress and what not. Let us leave that aside. Do you know what happens to old mobile phones? Since fashions are changing fast, people just trade in their old phones and go for new exotic models with camera and what not. The millions of discarded mobile phones, PCs etc., end up in countries like India and Vietnam, where there are small-scale industries that dismantle these junk items. I heard in a BBC program an interview with a person doing PC dismantling in Delhi. He admitted it was a very hazardous job and might even endanger his life. But he added in a philosophical manner, "Anyway, I have to die some day. This job at least gives me some money to take care of my family while I am alive." This is what I mean by social cost. The big companies make money by selling millions of computers and mobile phones, and introducing newer and newer models all the time. They are least bothered about the pollution they create and do not spend one cent of their huge profits for dealing with the hazardous waste. Somebody buys the waste and exports it, and the country that originally made and sold the hi-tech products is spared of pollution, etc. The cost in lives is paid by someone else. But who cares?

All progress has a price tag; only, the price is often paid by those who never got any benefit of the progress. That is the reason why social costs are seldom considered. But believe me that even rich countries cannot go scot-free for ever. When progress takes place too fast, even in rich countries people get shunted and discarded. For example, many advanced factories employ robots, which mean fewer jobs for people. Thus it is that these days we have what is called jobless economic growth. Profits increase but so does unemployment. One is beginning to see more and more of it in the advanced countries.

I have no excuse to postpone any further a discussion of the spiritual aspects of all that I have said so far. There are two points I would like to mention and discuss. The first is the hierarchy in Creation that Swami often mentions. He says the hierarchy is: *Vyashti*, *Samashti*, *Srishti*, and *Parameshti*, meaning, the individual, Society, Nature, and God. Man must first realise that he is a part of Society, that Society is a part of Creation, and Creation is something that has come out of the Creator. If man always keeps this perspective in view, then his actions would be proper. One who forgets this is likely to indulge in wrong action.

Take a simple thing like plastic bags [about which I wrote recently]. Shops give practically everything in plastic bags, with least concern for the pollution they create. Who is affected by such pollution? Society. Besides Society, the environment or Nature is also affected. And by being indifferent to Nature we are actually insulting God few realise that. However, one who has understood the links pointed out by Swami would not act in that way. He would, if he were a merchant, offer paper bags instead of plastic bags. Incidentally, if only we were to limit our desires a bit, there would be much less of these

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plastic bags floating around. Thus, both ceiling on desires and the hierarchy mentioned indicate how the question of social costs is related to spirituality. If the individual were not spiritual, then he would be forcing Society to pay a price. And one fine day, he would end up by paying a part of that price himself. This is actually happening to the rich, as Swami often tells them. They the rich are busy amassing wealth, in the process trampling on many. When the wealth-divide increases, so does crime. And one fine day, the rich find that they are the targets of kidnapping, extortion etc.

This is one aspect of the spirituality business. There is another aspect that is seldom discussed and worth mentioning. I have touched upon it earlier and so shall be brief; and that relates to the trusteeship concept. Rich people think the wealth they have accumulated is theirs because

they have "slogged" for it. However, do they ever consider the fact that if there were no Society, they could not have earned one cent? They cannot hide from that fact and must realise that they are what they are on account of Society, which means that they must show at least some degree of social responsibility. In what way? By regarding their wealth as God's property and themselves as the Trustee of God. If only this man who is spending close to 50 million dollars on the marriage of his daughter felt he was a trustee of God! By the way, material wealth is just one of the many types of wealth that God bestows on us. Some receive the Grace of God in the form of talent that talent too is wealth. Some are very intelligent intelligence too is wealth. Thus, all of us in some manner or the other are trustees of God and we have to take care of everything God gives us, including our body, our eyes, our brain etc.,

using them only for sacred purposes. If only people did that, there would be no pornography, no cheating, no swindling, etc.

Impossible? Why should it be? All one has to do is to start by being a bit less selfish. One can always be a bit less selfish but one does not want to that really is the problem. By the way, when I was discussing this reforms business with a learned devotee, he said: "Transformation accompanied by the rise of humanness will automatically lead to reforms with a human face!" I thought that summed up the issue neatly.

Do you agree? Why don't you write and let us know what you think?

Jai Sai Ram.

G.VENKATARAMAN



A room with a view

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the

other man couldn't hear the band - he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away.

As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed. It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you."

Epilogue...

There is tremendous happiness in making others happy, despite our own situations. Shared grief is half the sorrow, but happiness when shared, is doubled. If you want to feel rich, just count all of the things you have that money can't buy. ♦



The Creator...

by His Student

Year after year, students have the good fortune to photograph Bhagawan. We are mesmerized with the illusion that we have a lot to do with taking a good picture. Bhagawan has a way of teaching the simple yet profound messages.

In April'94, in Kodai Kanal. Nearly all the students on this trip had a camera with them. Four of us had been taking pictures of Bhagawan for over 4 years, and were known to have a camera handy, in His presence.

One crisp and beautiful morning, Bhagawan instructed the students to get ready for taking pictures and prepare to leave after morning darshan. We boarded the bus and made our way to a devotee's house in Kodai Kanal. The garden was in spring bloom overlooking the clouds hugging the mountain ridges.

After taking several pictures in various locations around the garden, we were preparing to return to Sai Sruthi. Before getting on the bus, we asked for one more pose. It so happened that, I

needed to change the film in my camera. To keep out of the way for other photographers, I moved behind a small post with a creeper clinging to it. Before I knew it, Swami was walking towards me. HE came up to the creeper and plucked a few leaves. Swami turned His palm upwards and showed me a pair of fruit. He asked, "What is this?" I replied, "Swami, they are plums." Swami gave his sweet smile and said, "Do plums grow on creepers?" Swami instructed the students to board the bus and Swami graciously joined us. As we started to move, HE put the "Plum" into the mouth of one of the boys and asked, "How does it taste?" he replied, "Like chocolate and no seed!"

There isn't day that passes when Swami reinforces the principle of GOD - Generation, Organisation and Destruction.

(The accompanying photograph captures the exact moment described here. You can even see the boy, with the camera, behind the creeper!)



Echoes of Kind Words

If they ever asked for a show of hands, he would certainly be voted the least liked kid in my third grade class. Robert just never seemed to fit in. He was always creating minor disruptions in the classroom, and went out of his way to get kids to dislike him.

It was my first year at a new school and wouldn't you know the person I was placed next to was Robert. It was important to me to fit in and to do well in my new classroom. What a way to begin the school year!

I had always seen myself as a peacemaker. I had no problem asserting myself in a peaceful and loving way when I felt someone was being mean or unfair to me or someone else. After all, I had a 17-year-old brother who had taught me everything about being a peacemaker, and I had my role models, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi as my guides. But did that mean I had to like Robert?

That was the challenge I was faced with. My family encouraged me to look at how I was being prejudiced because Robert was different and difficult to be around. They suggested if I *really* wanted to be a peacemaker, I needed to turn around my negative judgments by trying to find something positive about him and paying him some compliments. I agreed to try because I always like a challenge, and I wanted to prove to myself that I could be a peacemaker no matter what, like King and Gandhi.

I began slowly, but I was a boy on a mission, and I would not fail! The first day we got into an argument because he had brought Pokemon cards to school. When I knowingly pointed out to him that the teacher absolutely forbade kids from bringing them to school, he claimed he didn't know that. I quickly reminded him that the teacher had told us several times, and I even got other kids in on the argument by asking them if they agreed. I wasn't going to let him get away with his excuse!

The second day he made a point of showing me he still had a Pokemon card in his desk and told me he forgot to take it home. I quietly told him I wouldn't tell the teacher and asked him to put it away.

The third day I decided to compliment Robert. My mind was already telling me this was going to be hard. Before I even got a chance, Robert asked if I would like to have the treat the teacher had placed on his desk. She had put one on everyone's desk. I was really impressed by his kindness. We had a good day with each other that day.

The fourth day I gave Robert a compliment. It wasn't difficult at all. I told him his cursive writing was really good. He immediately responded by saying, "No, it's not." When I tried to convince him I really meant it, he just kept saying, "No, it's not." The funny thing is, his writing really was good. Later that day, the teacher had us correct a test differently than we usually did. Robert wasn't listening and did it wrong. When I showed him how he needed to do it, he got really down on himself and said, "I'm so stupid, really, really stupid." It was that day I realized how much Robert did not like himself. I also started to understand how tough it must be when you feel you're doing things wrong a lot, and you can't even feel good about the things you do well, like Robert and his writing.

The fifth day I began to see a change in myself. I was actually feeling okay about Robert and liked sitting next to him. I started realizing that he wasn't such a pest after all. He was also a lot smarter than I had ever realized. I only wish he knew it too. I tried to talk with him like I do with my friends just little things. I also tried to compliment him on his drawing. This time he didn't say anything. At least he didn't say, "No, it's not."

As the days moved into weeks and weeks into months, both Robert and I continued to change and a friendship grew. I learned a lot that year in school. Most of all I learned that everyone has prejudices they have to face, deal with and overcome, even kids. Prejudices are actually just expressions of our own fears, and a true peacemaker faces his fears and finds a way to make lemonade out of lemons. Only then can he really make a difference!

Zach Pesavento, age 11 SSBC of San Diego, CA (Article from SAI WORLD, spring 2003)



Managing A Disaster

The village of Levanjipuram, Tirunelveli district, the state of Tamil Nadu. A tiny hamlet with 200 houses, mostly huts. The time was around 1 a.m in the night on the 24th of January 2004, when the entire village was asleep. One of huts caught a fire whose menacing flames threatened to burn the entire hamlet. The resident of the hut, Mohammed Ibrahim came out shouting for help.

Immediately, four young men swung into action: Jaypaul, Velmurugan, Rajadurai and Perumal. Acting with great presence of mind, they quickly moved and pulled down the thatched roof of the burning house with fire hooks and prevented the fire from spreading.

Apart from this, they boldly moved in and rescued the meager belongings of the resident.

A relieved Ibrahim hugged his saviours and thanked them profusely for saving his only belongings. The village Panchayat too heaped praise on these brave men.

But the heroes of our story, in turn, thanked Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba who had enabled them to be of some service to the village. They had acquired this courage and these skills as part of the nationwide Disaster Management program that has been undertaken by the Sathya Sai Seva Organizations. The aim is to create vibrant, fully trained, well motivated and equipped teams of Sai youth members in each district of India who will move into any natural disaster affected zones within 24 hrs and render seva to minimize the effects and after effects of such disasters.

Want to be part of this noble endeavour? Contact your local Samithi Convener immediately!



Men of Courage



The house that got gutted



The rescued belongings



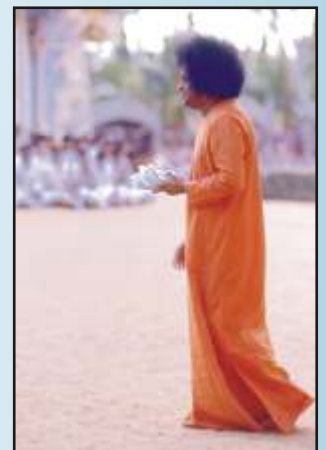
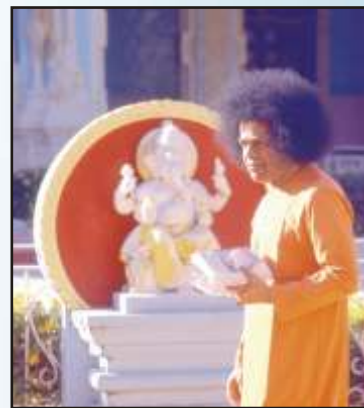
Training the youth



Ready to rescue

Darshan on the sands

Darshan On The Sands of Parthi, Before
The Sai Kulwanth Hall Came Up.....



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shining water in the Warragamba dam, all welcomed us with warm heart. They all were waiting for us to have our company. The rays from the morning sun touched the water surface and danced

in joy. Mother earth was happy to let her children run and play across her grassed slopes.

The devotees were quickly setting up Bhagawan's picture, the lamps and



the rest of the altar for bhajans. Retreat program & duty rosters sprung up on the walls. After light refreshments and morning tea, we sat at our Lord's lotus feet, to praise our Lord with bhajans. Bhajans resonated through the hearts reminding us that it was our Lord's will that was being fulfilled at Warragamba. Nothing would have materialised without Swami's will.

Our first activity in the retreat after salutations to the supreme was "Connecting with Nature". We gathered near the slopes on the banks of Warragamba. Sunrays beamed though the eucalyptus branches and a cool breeze



caressed our faces. The trees danced in joy because they too have planned this activity with God, to have our company.

We talked about the beauty of nature and the need to connect to the surroundings. We did a few yoga routine exercises with rhythmic music in the background to energise our body & mind to spring in to action. After singing two devotional songs we sat down to connect with mother earth in meditation. With a beautiful gentle music in the background Saranya's recorded voice filled the atmosphere. "Just ask the trees how is life, is it enjoyable? Take time to listen to them" echoed across the slopes. When we opened our eyes, the trees and the sky were asking us "How is life, is it enjoyable?"

It was divine love all around. We became the trees and the trees became us. We became God and God became us. God showed us what he means by "oneness of all



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perched on the edges of the rocks, basking in the beauty of the divine creation. The next challenge was to climb back to base. Everyone found his or her way back to the top with consummate ease, safely. Our Lord was the shepherd and we



beings”.

It was time for lunch. The devotees who were on the duty roster, served the lunch with love. All stood around the lunch table and chanted the food “mantra” and offered food to our mother/farther the Lord, before laying our hands on it. The food that was served with lots of love and affection was delicious. Devotees chipped in washing up the dishes and the lunch table & kitchen were cleaned up in a flash.

The next event in the agenda was the walkabout. This was to explore more of the Warragamba nature. Old and young gathered at the slopes, on the banks of the reservoir. Some chose to stay behind, as the slopes were rugged and steep, the rest set off through the trees, towards the water. Some without proper footwear also joined the walking party.

Mother earth kept us all intact until we reached the banks of Warragamba. The children were

were his flock. He brought us back safely.



By this time a few had gathered in the main hall singing some folksongs bringing the memories of the past. Slowly it gathered momentum and some of the 30year old big hits filled the room.

Swami's teachings”. Swami spoke through Sarath who conducted the workshop.

The introduction was brilliant. Devotees revealed where they were before their devotion to Swami and where they are now. During the discussion, we walked for miles in to our past in silence and brought back only one thing in our hand; “Divine love” though mentioned in different words. For Sai seekers, Swami fills the time that has passed with His vast presence. All memories become an illusion. Finally, we will remember only the present. Our Athma is timeless.

We refreshed ourselves for the evening Bhajans. After singing to praise the Lord, we all gathered at the hall occupied by the Balvikas kids and the youth. They had practised a play on the subject “Water” and a study circle based on “Problems faced by kids growing in the modern society”

The kids, acting as teacher and



Programs rolled on perfectly as if it was rehearsed. Yes, the Lord had already rehearsed it and our experience was only a video recording that was being replayed.

We all gathered in the hall for a workshop on “The impact of & the progress under



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students discussing the present day crisis on water, enacted the play. Although it was a short script, the acting was creative and the kids showed their prowess in creating a play on their own without any guidance or supervision. Subsequently, the kids explained the points they discussed in the study circle. The subject "Problems faced in growing in the modern western society" was well discussed. They asked serious questions (which looked serious to them at their age) from the parents. At the same time they were also diligent to find answers for the very same questions.

A small snag hit our program. One (Tong) of the two Thai students (Tong and Ni) suddenly developed an asthma attack in the night. All attended to Tong with lots of TLC. Finally, Dushy who brought the kids to the retreat sacrificed her share of happiness and drove the girls back to Sydney. Tong was treated immediately at Ryde Hospital and with Swami's grace she recovered quickly.

Swami sent all of us to bed in peace of mind. He had prepared something

special for us for the next morning.

A few of us were up and ready by 5.00AM and had gathered outside. It was cold but comfortable. We set off from our main hall, singing "Nagara Sankeerthanam". We went around to the other cottages and sang bhajans to wake the others with divine music. Slowly people crept out of their cottages and joined the joy of singing. The east was soon lighting up for the sunrise. The experience was beyond explanation. Some of us did this for the first time in our lives and realised that God had planned this all along our life without telling us. God's love was the unknown, now being revealed to us.

We concluded the Nagara Sankeerthanam at 6.00AM and entered the bhajan hall for further proceedings. Devotees chanted "OmKar", then "Suprapaatham" in a fabulous rhythm and continued with Sai Asthothram (108 names) and then continued with Bhajans. Swami had brought Puttaparthi to us. The vibrations were beyond comprehension. Devotees were bathing in Swami's bliss and it was perfect timing to enter in to meditation. Devotees were free to move as they wished (quietly) but the meditation continued for twenty to thirty minutes. The recorded meditation commentary filled the hall. God took us in to the world of light to show us our original pure form of our souls. At the end of the meditation the hall was filled with the divine energy and it was like being inside Puttaparthi Mandir, after Swami's darshan. If it can be explained, it wouldn't be real.

After morning refreshments, we gathered in the



conference hall for a presentation on "Water and Us". Mohan's presentation with projector using "power point program" was very informative. The presentation was such that even a layman could understand the causes that have created the present water crisis on earth. The devotees were so involved with the program and they had relentless questions on every issue. We all went in to the presentation feeling "Water is part of us" and when we left the presentation, the feeling was "We are part of water too". It is now apparent that every human in the modern world (who are mainly responsible for the degradation of earth's water resources) should go through this education. The innocent uneducated nomad from the village knows to look after the natural water resources and only the well-educated businessman need to be educated not to pollute the water resources. Mohan nailed it well.

As water was one of the focal points of the retreat, we gathered again



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blessings and in return would bless the whole humanity with the free flow of its energy, for very many years to come.

Divya joined us in the main hall to present his experiences with Swami when he led a music group to Puttaparthi. His narration was full of humour that highlighted Swami's leelas in a unique way.

Divya also paid tribute to Pushpa acca for her relentless work for the Sai movement. We the members of the Rydalmere Sai Centre always appreciate the sacrifices Pushpa acca has made. She has given her house to us for our devotion to Swami and Divya's tribute was timely and fitting.

Children and adults joined in a game of charades that was filled with lots of fun.

To add to the fun adults joined in a short softball cricket game with the kids.

It was time to wind up, to say good-bye to the trees, the grass, and the water. Swami staged the retreat to invoke love that is hidden

below the murky minds of every soul. With great hesitation to part, devotees embraced each other with pure love and affection and bid goodbye. The hugs went to the trees, the birds and all inanimate objects that shared their love with us.

We were back home in total bliss.

It was not a long vacation. It was not a flight across the oceans. It was not an expensive cruise around the continent.

Swami took us on an hour drive within a weekend, to reveal to us the glory of God's creation. He made us to travel long distances within our mind to discover the divinity within us. We love God and God is everyone.

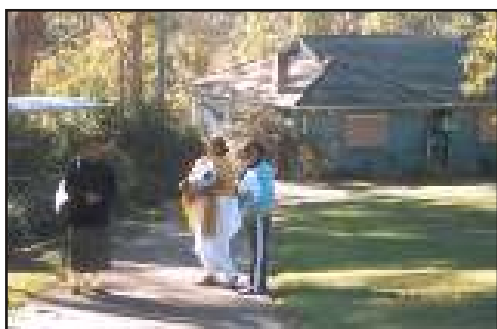
The question being asked now is, "When is the next retreat?"

SAIRAM!

---Brothers, Sisters & Children of the Rydalmere Sathya Sai Centre



above the banks of Warragamba reservoir to invoke Divine blessings with the powerful "Gayathri Mantra". All sat on the grass and chanted the Mantra 108 times sending light and blessings to the water element that keeps us alive on this planet. The chanting was concluded with "Araarthi" to the



water that was stored in the reservoir. Water, our lifeline, received our

Hospital Statistics

Upto 31st May 2004

BANGALORE SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cardiac Surgeries:	4,400
Cardiac Catheterisation:	7,691 [3,970-Diagnostic; 3,721-Interventional]
Neuro Surgeries:	3,763
CT Scans:	13,511
MRI Exams:	14,138

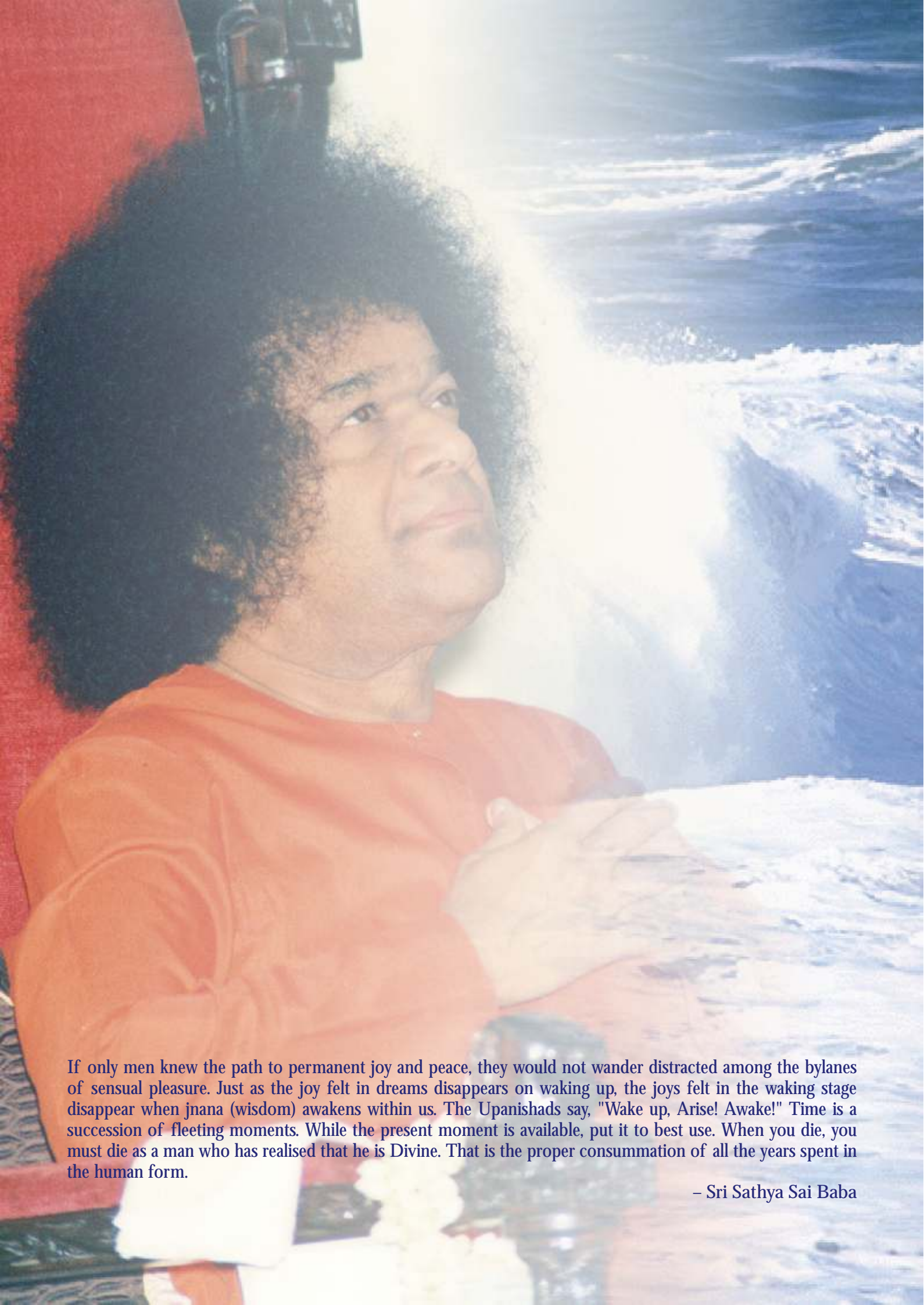
PUTTAPARTHI SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Heart surgeries:	13939
Cath procedures:	14130
Urology surgeries:	23357
Ophthalmology surgeries:	23355
CT scans:	3745

Coming Next..... In H2H!

A story on Late Dr. John S Hislop, a most remarkable and respected American Devotee of Swami, whose unique experiences stand as a beacon to every Sai Devotee.





If only men knew the path to permanent joy and peace, they would not wander distracted among the bylanes of sensual pleasure. Just as the joy felt in dreams disappears on waking up, the joys felt in the waking stage disappear when jnana (wisdom) awakens within us. The Upanishads say, "Wake up, Arise! Awake!" Time is a succession of fleeting moments. While the present moment is available, put it to best use. When you die, you must die as a man who has realised that he is Divine. That is the proper consummation of all the years spent in the human form.

– Sri Sathya Sai Baba



LOVE ALL SERVE ALL