

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

There are two dimensions to education in these times. One is what is taught in modern schools and colleges and is often referred to as secular education. It is this curriculum which fills the students' minds with information on literally everything that can be seen in the world outside, from science and environment to stock markets and entertainment. This process provides skills and channels young minds to aspire for a life with a high standard of living but shies away from mentioning values, mistakenly associating them with religion. In fact, for the products of this educational system, values and ethics are for the untutored mind.

The other dimension of education is what goes on inside the exclusive enclosures of madrassas, mutts and missionary schools. Here, religious texts and practices are drilled into unblemished minds to the exclusion of everything else by chauvinistic teachers. These students' belief in their religion is zealous but their understanding of its philosophy is often superficial. This constricted approach to religious learning often fails to equip students with a broader perspective of the world and frequently results in creating fundamentalist attitudes.

If we look at the troubles that beset the planet today, be it nuclear proliferation, excessive consumerism, terrorism, the menace of cyber crimes or money laundering, at the root of all these evils is not so much a lack of education but one which is unbalanced; an education that caters to the head, ignoring the heart; that trains students in technology but does not teach tolerance; that develops competence but leaves out compassion; that emphasizes profit-making but does not promote sharing and caring. What humanity needs today is a new dimension of education where science goes hand-in-hand with spirituality, technology is joined with human values, and information is coupled with intuitive experience. And this is where the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning comes to the fore.

When Bhagavan Baba inaugurated this unique University on November 22, 1981, He clearly stated the meaning and purpose of education. "The end of education is character. And, character consists of eagerness to renounce one's selfish greed. Persons without a good character cannot claim to be educated ones." In these words of Bhagavan, we find echoed the thoughts of many enlightened world leaders of the modern era. It was Lincoln who said, "Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing..." and it was Swami Sivananda who said, "The quintessence of man is his character." So a character-focused system of education is not a novel idea; in fact, it is as old as the mountains. There are many schools in India and elsewhere which for years have been engaged in inculcating morality in young minds. But what is exciting about the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning is that it is only here value-education is passionately imparted with great success at the university level. When a child grows into a young adult, impressing values is something parents shy away from, teachers prefer to bypass, and institutions either do

not have in their agenda or presume it is an impossible idea to implement. In this respect, what Baba's University has achieved in the last two and half decades is path-breaking.

What makes students from undergraduate classes to doctoral studies in this University live together in a dormitory and follow a demanding schedule which includes prayers, physical exercises, and volunteer service activities in addition to academic rigors? Imagine the students of a university obtaining top ranks at the national level in GATE (Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering) while at the same time maintaining the hostel garden, singing bhajans, and going to villages to distribute food and clothes! What inspires the students of this University, after securing professional degrees, to forsake a prosperous career and dedicate their lives in His service? When you read our cover story, you will see how this University has walked on the road less traveled and proved that competence and success do not have to bypass character, rather, they are attained and easily maintained through a strong foundation of values. For this reason, this Institute has been hailed as a Crown Jewel and role model for the university education system in India by the Government's University Grants Commission.

In the words of Sri R Venkataraman, former President of India, "The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning is a venue of higher behaviour and a seat of higher understanding." This deemed university is, in fact, the dream university envisioned by Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, among others. And what is it that has made this bold experiment successful? "It is the infinite love of Bhagavan for His students," answers the Warden of the Boys' Hostel in Bangalore, Sri B N Narasimha Murthy.

The impact of selfless love is amazing. When you read the story of the Sai Movement in Argentina, you will find yet another impressive demonstration of how Pure Love can bring about transformations that are lasting and far reaching, time, space, and distance, notwithstanding.

Selfless love: In a nutshell, this has been Swami's message ever since He declared His advent. "It is only through the cultivation of love that man can find fulfillment," He says. In this month of November, as we celebrate Swami's birthday, let us foster this sublime virtue of love and offer it to Him who is present in every being.

Let's fill the world with His love.

Loving Regards,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

BECOMING BLISS, BECOMING PEACE

In this month of November, when we celebrate the Birthday of our beloved Bhagavan, let's recapitulate His Birthday message given exactly four decades ago on November 23, 1966.

In the beginningless and endless stream of time, night and day, summer and winter roll endlessly on, carried ceaselessly through the Universe by the flood. The term of living beings diminishes with each passing day, yet while being carried forward in the flood of time, man remains surprisingly unaware of his fate and rarely spends a thought on his fast declining life-term. He is blind in his ignorance. Riches and wealth are short-lived; office and authority are temporary; the life-breath is a flickering flame in the wind; youth is a three-day fair and pleasures and fortunes are bundles of sorrow. Knowing this, if man devotes this limited term of life to the service of the Lord, then he is indeed blessed.

Seek refuge at the Feet of the Lord even before the life-breath flies out of the cage of the body. It is an open cage! At any moment, the bird may fly into the outer regions. That is the fact. The ignorant do not realize this; they beat their drums and proclaim proudly how rich they are or how happy they are, surrounded by their sons and grandsons. Alas, the very physical frame which is so carefully nourished since birth falls aside and rots. What then shall we say of those who feel that these other things are "mine?" Theirs is but the delusion of an insane mind. Everything is untrue, everything is impermanent, no more than castles in the air or constructions in dreams. Contemplate on this truth and approach Sri Hari and glorify Him. That alone can confer on you permanent joy.

Inside the room called Body, in the strongbox called the Heart, the precious gem of jnana exists. However, four wily thieves – namely kama, krodha, lobha and asuya, or lust, anger, greed and envy – are lying in wait to rob it. Awake to the danger before it is too late; reinforce yourself with the support of the Universal Guardian, the Lord and keep the gem intact. That will make you rich in prema, rich in shanti.

When the clouds that hide the face of the moon are wafted by the winds, the moon shines clear and cool. So too, when the clouds of egoism are wafted away, the mind of man will shine pure and full with its own native light. That is the stage of Bliss. When that is attained, there is no more grief. Where there is a lamp, darkness cannot exist. The lamp of jnana once lit never dies, never fades, never flickers. Ananda and shanti also never fade and never flicker. But the ananda and the shanti that men seek from the objects of the world, driven by their senses, flicker fast, then fade and die. They satisfy for a moment only a foolish craze. They are attained through lust, anger, hate and envy, and so they are false and fickle. Control and conquer these; then only can you

acquire true ananda and shanti. You cannot only acquire these, you can become these.

What do the wars of mankind teach, except this: that lust, anger, hate and envy are evil forces that haunt man. Examine the anarchy and the lawlessness, the chaos and killings that have arisen in the world today. They are the products of these forces. Why, even the ills of your bodies and of your homes are but the consequence of these evils. Unaware of the faults and failings in oneself, man imputes faults and foists failings on others and starts blaming and hurting them. This is sin; this gives you a feeling of innocence and exultation for a while but cannot confer anything other than worry, grief and pain....

The Sastras (scriptures) say that envy, greed, lust and anger are all *vyadhi karanam* [sources of disease]. Those afflicted with these qualities may consume the most healthy food but it will not bring them health. They will suffer from various digestive and nervous troubles. Therefore, devotees and those aspiring to be liberated must cut asunder these evil tendencies with the sharp sword of jnana. They must pray to the Lord to save them from contact with these foul characteristics. From this very moment, pray for the grace which will enable you to control and conquer them. Deepen your faith in God. Expand your prema and take into its fold the whole of mankind. There is no alternative path for the *bhakta* (devotee).

– *Divine Discourse on Bhagavan's Birthday, 1966*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI - Part 26

H: Sometimes Swami speaks of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as if they were historical, and sometimes as if they were to be taken as representative of every individual's inner conflicts, virtues, bad qualities, etc. Are these events and people historical fact?

Sai: Yes, they are a record of historical people and incidents. But in themselves, the battles and troubles of these families are unimportant. What is of lasting significance is the inner spiritual significance of the happening. Rama was a real person and an Avatar and Dasaratha was His father. Krishna was real and the events of His Avatara were real. Rama's life, over the ages, has been altered and distorted somewhat, and Swami's story of Rama will be a classic through several Yugas. In the time of Krishna, the viewpoint was different, and actions occurred that would be viewed in a different light today.

H: Swami once mentioned that if we could see Rama today we would be much surprised at His appearance.

Sai: Every age has its own circumstances, traditions and values, so it should not surprise us if everyone is not just like ourselves. Even today there are such differences. In African forests people have their own ideas of what is beauty. For example, they distort lips, nostrils and ears. In the age prior to that of Rama, people were accustomed to take as their unit of measure the distance from the fingertips to the elbow. At that time, the norm for the height of a person was 14 times the measurement. Thus the height of every person would have its own harmony. In the Threta Yuga, the age of Rama, the norm for height had reduced to seven times the distance of fingertip to elbow. For the Kali Yuga, the multiple is three and one half. The description of Rama is, "That which charms." Extraordinary divine charm was a particular characteristic of Rama's person. His features were perfect and had a beauty that pulled the heart of every person who saw Him. His figure was likewise perfect. Height and limbs were in perfect symmetry.

H: We read that even the demons were unable to resist the charm of Rama.

Sai: The Yakshas were called demons, but even they prostrated before Rama when they perceived His charming face and figure. The Yakshas had deformed faces. Sometimes the nose was missing. Sometimes the eyes were very deeply set.

H: What about Krishna? How would He be described?

Sai: The situation was somewhat different with Krishna. He had the quality of attraction. All were attracted to him and wished to come very close to him.

H: Krishna was quite young then, was He not?

Sai: Krishna was always young. In years, he was six or seven. The Gopis would pet Him like a child.

H: In those days they had airplanes, did they not?

Sai: The first was Pushpak, the one Ravana used to kidnap Sita. Indian Airlines is now building a small plane by the same name.

H: Did they use atomic energy for power?

Sai: No. By the power of mantra the plane would fly. Mantras were also used to shoot arrows. The arrows were worshipped to make them effective. When Arjuna heard of Krishna's death, he forgot all mantras and was powerless. Today, at the festival of Navarathri, the farmers worship their farm implements with mantra and that has an effect.

H: Then even today, mantras still have effect?

Sai: Oh, yes. Even Westerners who experiment with the Gayatri mantra find it has power. The mantra should be said by a person well practiced in spiritual life.

H: Swami does not seem to give out mantras. When His devotees are ready for mantra should they ask Swami, or will He say when they are ready?

Sai: Mantras now are given out by low persons, the head of a Mutt here and there, some yogi, and so on. Avatars have never given mantras. The Avatar shows that God is everywhere. The recitation of a mantra is narrow-minded. In the time of an Avatar, to hear him, to understand what he says and do it is a mantra. Krishna gave no mantra to the Pandava brothers, not even to Arjuna. He simply said, "Do this, do that." This was enough and the action was very powerful.

H: Baba's teaching carries the ring of truth and His words carry into action almost by themselves. Their authority does not even depend on whether Swami is an Avatar or not.

Sai: Don't doubt about the Avatar as Swami. Without His reading it, any question asked of Baba is answered immediately, without any pause, and in detail.

H: An incident in Sri Krishna's life that I do not understand is that when He instructed Arjuna to conduct the women and children to safety, Arjuna failed. Why?

Sai: Arjuna always felt that Krishna was in his heart and that gave him his strength. When he heard that Krishna had died, he felt that Krishna was gone and as he felt this his strength left him.

H: But Swami, if Arjuna had Krishna in his heart, why did Krishna's death have such an effect?

Sai: For some 80 years Arjuna felt Krishna was with him in his heart. The reaction of shock at the news of Krishna's death caused him to momentarily forget. It was weakness. Then, he was not able to recapture the feeling of Krishna being with him.

H: If Arjuna had kept the feeling and concept of Krishna in his heart, would he have retained his strength?

Sai: When he heard that Krishna had died, he lost all interest in the world.

H: The Gopis were overcome with grief when Krishna departed from there. They must have had Him in their hearts.

Sai: At the news of Krishna's death, a number of the Gopis fell lifeless from shock.

H: Then their relationship was only with the form of Krishna?

Sai: The Gopis had both relationships. Because of their years of close companionship with Krishna, they were strongly attached to Krishna's physical presence. But they also were knowing Krishna in their hearts. They always felt He was with them, even when His worldly activity had taken Him far away.

H: Then why the terrible shock, if Krishna was so firmly known in the heart?

Sai: The Gopis had no interest in the world and the body once Krishna was dead. Their only reason for placing any value on their physical existence was because Krishna was also in physical existence. Their hearts were completely pure, and Krishna was their heart. The physical bond was also strong. For example, you have proof that Swami is always with you, but at the same time, you wish to come to India to be near Swami, isn't it?

H: It seems to me that this episode of Arjuna and the death of Krishna carries a very important lesson for us who live today.

Sai: There is no need to take Arjuna as a model. Just realize that God is with you and in your heart at all times.

H: Might an Avatar be born in some other part of the world?

Sai: Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and others were not Avatars. They had some divine power. Only in India are Avatars born, because only in India are the Sastras understood. And only in India do the sages constantly experiment and practice. It is like in a gold mine. Where gold is found, there gather the geologists, engineers, and experienced miners. The gold is mined there, and then it is taken all over the world.

H: Some persons visit a number of Ashrams, and there is certainly a temptation to do this. **Sai:** In America, there is so much restlessness that people grasp anything purported to be spiritual in order to find a little peace. But that peace is temporary. Spiritual organizations may have some value at the beginning level. They encourage the person to start enquiring for God. Inquiry is $\frac{3}{4}$ and sadhana $\frac{1}{4}$. One has the right to inquire about a saint. How does he act, why is it thus, and thus. But going to many gurus is like a man who owns an acre. He digs a bit here, then moves over to a new spot and digs a little and so on. Finally, he digs one hole five feet deep and finds water. The total of all his diggings was perhaps 30 feet. At last, in one digging, he did find water, but his acre was spoiled by the many shallow holes dug here and there. Had he stayed with one hole and 30 feet, he would have had his water. The acre is the

spiritual heart. All the holes are different gurus. Now the spiritual heart is ruined by so many holes; they are leaks.

A Visitor: What is a guru?

Sai: A guru is light to show one the road, but the destination is God. One is grateful to the guru, but it is God that one worships. Nowadays, one worships the guru, which is quite wrong.

H: Suppose that guru is the Lord Himself. How would that change the picture?

Sai: (*Laughs*) It changes the picture a great deal. If the Lord is one's guru, no need to worry about anything. Just as a loving mother cares for her child, if one has surrendered his life to God with full faith in Him, the Lord takes care of that devotee. No need to worry about anything. Really, guru is only God. God is within only. Those outside are not gurus. They are teachers of one sort or another. Guru means, "He who removes darkness." Only God can remove the darkness within; only God's grace.

H: In this business of sadhana, why is it not possible from the very start to take the Lord as guru and surrender one's life to Him?

Sai: (*Again laughing*) That is not so easy! Very difficult to do. First one needs to tame the mind. It is just like a wild elephant in the forest. It must be caught and tamed. Once subdued and tamed, it is like an elephant in a circus who can be made to sit on a small stool by a small boy. And that is the result of training and practice.

A Visitor: The problem of training the mind seems very difficult. Why not take the path of love?

Sai: Love also is not that easy. In the world there can be too much love, which leads to unbalanced action. Indian culture manages wives by keeping them fully occupied in the house. But for the divine, love may be unlimited; no danger. Worldly love should have a limit. But love of God is unbounded, it has no limit. Lack of understanding is not too dangerous, but misunderstanding is very dangerous. In America, the movies, although bad, are taken for granted. In India, they corrupt and destroy respect for womanhood.

A Visitor: How about American gurus?

Sai: People come from America, learn some yoga, return to America, put up a board, "Yoga Institute," and become leaders. They read a few books, then offer to answer all questions. The real leader practices and lives his philosophy, and then people look to him because they see life in what he says.

H: How should we regard these many gurus here and there in the world? Some of them seem to do much good, but Swami has no good word for them. They talk very well about the divine and they collect many disciples.

Sai: The proper course is for that person to admit that he does not know God, and to suggest that he and his followers jointly investigate and practice sadhana. But they do

not do that. The idea is to pick up an answer here and an answer there, then give out the information like a phonograph recording, pretending it is their own wisdom. One such person has a son over whom he has no authority or influence. A man cannot guide his own family, but sets himself up as a guide for others. It is ridiculous.

H: Another type of guru is the Indian who comes to America. The outstanding example is a man who is known internationally and whose followers may even run into millions. Through him people become interested in India, learn meditation and there are thousands of reports of the beneficial effects on the lives of the followers. Is not a guru such as this of some value?

Sai: A million people sit cross-legged in meditation. Not one gains liberation from bondage. What is the point of it all? If even the guru gained liberation, there might be some value. But even that does not happen. And if some slight mistake is made, there is great harm. The net effect of it all is that it spoils both guru and disciple. The apparent benefit is only temporary; it is not permanent. You have had considerable genuine experience. Will you be guru?

H: God forbid! On no account would I be a guru. I cannot imagine anything I would be more against. I'm even against the appearance of it.

Sai: That is it! That is the right path. That way you are a guru. The genuine guru never sets himself up as a guru. He proceeds with his own sadhana, keeping out of public notice. By observing his life, one or two people will pursue him and force him to disclose or share something of value, and such aspirants may get some genuine help from such a person.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

The Bandage on the Nose

ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

There was once a *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) who approached a Guru for guidance. The Guru gave him an idol of Vishnu and all the necessary instructions for daily worship and sent him home. However, after many months of devoted and meticulous puja, the *sadhaka* did not feel he was getting any results in terms of spiritual elevation or advancement. He became frustrated and reported his dissatisfaction to the Guru, who this time gave him a different idol, this time of Shiva, and asked him to give it another try. The disciple returned after another six months demanding yet another idol, because apparently even Shiva had failed him in his quest for spiritual progress. Next, the Guru supplied him with an idol of Durga, which he duly installed in his domestic shrine and did *puja* to as he was shown.

The two previous idols were placed on the windowsill, where they were neglected and gathered dust. One day, while his Durga puja was in progress, the disciple noticed that the perfumed smoke from the incense stick was being wafted by a breeze towards the idol of Shiva on the windowsill. He became irritated that the ungrateful stonehearted God who was deaf to his most sincere entreaties for enlightenment should now be receiving the offering intended for his latest idol! So he took a piece of cloth and tied it around the face of the idol, closing up the nostrils, so that Shiva could not inhale and enjoy the fragrance meant for Goddess Durga.

To his utter astonishment, at that moment a bright light came into the room and Shiva appeared before the *sadhaka* in all His splendor and glory. He was dumbfounded. He did not comprehend how his rude treatment of the idol had induced Shiva to appear and give him darshan. It did not make sense to him, so he hurried off to the Guru in hopes of receiving an explanation.

The Guru laughed and told the confused disciple what had happened. Without realizing it, the *Sadhaka* for the first time actually believed that the Shiva idol was Shiva Himself, alive, conscious and *chaitanya*-full [full of consciousness], since he would never have gone to the trouble of tying a bandage around the nose of an idol which he dismissed as a mere piece of carved stone. The very moment he related with all his mind and heart to the idol as being full of *Chith* (awareness), he instantly obtained blessings from the Lord in his quest for realization.

- Baba

COVER STORY

MODERN EDUCATION'S DIVINE MANIFESTATION

...BLENDING THE ANCIENT WITH THE NEW

A Tale from a Tough World

"It was not even nine months since I had completed my MBA when I was deputed to Jalgaon District Milk Producers Co-operative Milk Union Ltd. as Head of Sales and Marketing functions. It was a very heady feeling to lead a group of 30-35 people," says Jasti Vamsee Krishna. Vamsee was sent to Jalgaon in Maharashtra state by the National Dairy Development Board to head the Marketing wing – the most dreaded in the Milk Unions. It was indeed heady because apart from working hours stretching from early morning to late-nights, he now had to manage a team of people who were the toughest nuts to crack in the organisation – the leaders of workers' unions and other heavyweights. In fact, being posted in the marketing wing was always considered a disincentive. "I was told that heading the marketing wing was one of the nightmares and one should avoid the posting as far as possible," Vamsee says. "The leaders of almost all the unions were in my wing. Most of the rival union leaders would be reporting to me. When I entered the office for the first time, I was welcomed with stern stares from them. I knew I was the most unwelcome addition there." As if this was not enough, as soon as he took charge he was in for a rude shock. "In a matter of hours," he says, "I was told that one more union leader, who was notorious for his blistering attacks on the Management, was being posted to my wing."

Before Vamsee realised what was happening, his office door flung open and with lightning speed, somebody barged into his chamber. The much feared short and stout firebrand was right in front of him. Courtesies like asking for permission to see an officer, listening civilly to what the boss says, etc., were not for him. Whatever he did – whether right or wrong – was the perfect way to go about in life. He was the rule. He had proved this a million times. "What is my work?" he ordered in a brusque voice in his abrasive Hindi while holding out his relieving order. Vamsee was absolutely clueless. It was like a scene from a horror movie.

Unaware of his posting and with completely no idea of what kind of task to assign to an employee of his nature, Vamsee politely asked him to wait outside for a few minutes, which the hot-headed leader fortunately obliged. Vamsee then began his homework. He called his deputy to comprehend the situation and discuss what work could be allotted to him. Recalling his deputy's caution, Vamsee says, "I received my first ever shocking advice from him. He told me, 'Sir, do not give him any assignment. Just send him back to the Personnel Department. We cannot handle him. He will be a big bag of trouble and this marketing section will become a mess if we have him here.'

But Vamsee did not heed his deputy's advice. Instead, he asked for the personnel file of the union leader. Sitting outside, the union leader's malicious

temper only got worse when he saw his file being taken into the room. Vamsee quickly scanned the file. It was full of memos and reprimands, though he had performed his job on many occasions. After a few silent moments with himself, Vamsee called the union leader in. The man was like an incensed tiger who had already sensed danger and was about to pounce. He surmised he was not going to get any assignment and was ready for combat. As soon as he got in, he blurted out, "So you have seen my file. You know all about me. You do not have any work for me, right? I know all you managers. Systematically you people have tortured me for years now....." He went on. There was no break. He had been transferred four times in the last sixteen months. Nobody wanted him. Finally, he said, "I know your decision. I know what you people think. Shall I go back then?" He was anger and frustration personified.

Vamsee absorbed all the fury. He was as calm as he could be. After he exhausted his grievances and grouses and all his fiery waves had subsided, Vamsee gently persuaded him to take a seat and offered him water. Then, in a concerned tone, he asked, "Are you willing to work with me?" The fifty plus union leader was completely taken aback. "Your personnel records are perfectly fine with me," Vamsee continued. "You have always delivered when it mattered. I have absolutely no question about your capabilities. Regarding other behavioural aspects of your personality, they are very subjective and I do not want to go by what others have said. To me, you are a very competent person. Tell me, will you work with me? What is the work you think you can do to the best of your ability?"

In his decades of association with the company, not a single officer had ever spoken to him so endearingly. Like a tiger that had completely surrendered, he said, "I would do any job that you give me, Sir." As much as Vamsee was shocked earlier by his ferocity now he was moved by his vulnerability. Vamsee then explained to him that he had recently been deputed to the unit and once he settled down in his new job, he would give him a suitable offer. The union leader left his office an antithesis of his former self. But before he left, he impressed upon Vamsee that he was basically a good-natured man.

A few days passed, and Vamsee gave him some simple daily tasks which the past-middle age union leader performed quite well. During February 1999, Vamsee's organisation faced many difficulties in logistics. There was a new problem every day. Midnight was when the dispatch dock of his unit had to perform certain important operations and no one was willing to work during those unearthly hours. It was a job that brought no credit to the employees for the work done or for the efforts made. If the assignment was forced upon someone, he always did a half-hearted job and for Vamsee it often meant sleepless nights. At a loss to find a solution, Vamsee suddenly thought of the union leader. He called for him and asked, "Are you willing to take this job?" He made it clear that he was assigning him the job purely because he had complete trust in him and felt he was competent to handle the crucial operation. The late hours of the work were not meant to victimise him. **The union leader was immediately game for it and what he said next left Vamsee bowled over. "Sir, till now, any person who has spoken to me in**

this organisation has always assumed that I am a troublemaker. No one respects me or my abilities and I am always looked upon as a liability – the sooner you get rid of him the better. You are the first one to talk to me in such a friendly and obliging way. I will definitely do this task for you”. Vamsee’s peers warned him of the grave risks of entrusting the responsibility of such a crucial operation to a rebel, but Vamsee stuck to his decision.

From then on, what happened became part of the company’s folklore. The old but experienced employee took charge of logistics, analysed the whole operation, suggested out-of-the-box ideas, convinced Vamsee about his new methods, and in a short time brought sweeping changes to the whole operation. The system evolved by him continues even today. This union leader is now looked upon by the management of the company as a valuable asset. He has all the support he needs to further improve the company’s operations. Vamsee Krishna, according to the top management, had performed a miracle. Special acknowledgements flooded in from the head of the institution.

Henceforth, whenever unions and management were at the negotiation table, rather than heated exchanges there was now a conscious effort from both parties to come to amicable solutions. When Vamsee moved to Hyderabad to work for a different organisation (Reliance Industries Ltd.), the union leader made a special visit to Hyderabad just to meet his previous boss and convey his gratitude. Even now, be it Diwali or the New Year, he never forgets to call Vamsee and offer a warm ‘Happy Diwali, Sir’, ‘Happy New Year, Sir’, ‘How are you doing?’

Isn’t this heartening?

That was Vamsee’s story; now let’s go to another account. This one is about Vidyadhar, again in the corporate world, but in an altogether different setting.

“Live and Let Live”

“It was the final negotiation for a bid that our company had put in for providing soundproofing equipment for a large genset (power generator) room for one of India’s most prominent home-grown IT giants. Our company was short listed as being technically best suited for the job. The price was the only criterion that was against us,” narrates Vidyadhar, Director of Lotus Energy Systems based in Bangalore.

“In keeping with the internal standards set for ourselves,” he continues, “we had prepared a detailed costing and had to draw a line where it became unviable. The Purchase Officer was saying that they would like to give us the order but, he said, “You will have to come up with a price that is twenty-five percent lower or we will be forced to give the project to your competitor.” Pulling out my costing sheet, I went through the items that we had proposed in the absence of a detailed technical specification one by one and explained the repercussions on the performance if this element was removed from the

proposal and these were the cost components, overheads and this was our margin.”

The officer went through the list in great detail. "Your explanations and working sheets appear impeccable, but how is it that your competitor has given a written assurance stating that the performance will be the same as yours at the thirty percent lower price?" Vidyadhar stated, "I can only comment on what we submitted and would like to reserve my comments on someone else's proposal. He pointedly asked me, 'Will you stick by your proposal or can you look into it once again and drop the price?' I replied, 'We need this job to survive, but we cannot trim the scope to give you a lower project cost. To do so, we would have to offer a substandard solution and then pray that things work out somehow.' As a final rejoinder, I said, 'I believe I have given you the best solution possible and at the best price I can offer it at. Beyond this, it is totally your prerogative.'

"The Purchase Officer became reflective for a few seconds and then asked curiously, 'What is your philosophy in negotiation?' I didn't quite know what to make of it or what to say. So I said the first thing that came to mind – Do your best and leave the rest, if it has to happen, it will. That is our philosophy. 'And if it means that you lost the order?' he queried. I said by reflex, *Dharmo Rakshathi Rakshitha* (Righteousness Protects the Righteous). He stood up signalling that the meeting was over. But before he left, pumping my hand, he said, 'That is exactly what our Chief Mentor said many years ago when he had the biggest deal for our company from a multinational account before him across the negotiation table. Don't worry about this job, stick to your philosophy and it will ultimately pay off.'

"We expectantly waited for the officer's response. Two days passed and we found out that we had lost the job. It was a sick feeling in the gut and a major blow to our company. We were shattered. We did a lot of brainstorming and soul searching after that: Did we do something wrong? Is it wise to be so rigid in a fiercely competitive world? Are we being hard headed instead of being smart and hardnosed? These conflicts kept whirring within.

"Then, a year or so later, something very interesting happened. Out of the blue we got a call from the same Purchase Officer asking us to come in the next day. He didn't even mention what it was about – it was just a terse message – 'Come tomorrow at 11:30.' We went there. 'We sat across the same table a year ago,' the Officer said. 'I have not forgotten that day and that is the reason I called you.' He then showed us a plan for a TV broadcast studio and asked, 'Can you do the acoustics for this project for us?' I said, 'We haven't done something like this before.' 'But can you do it?' he asked again. He seemed eager to deal with us. I said, "Yes".

"After a lot of homework, we put our bid in two days later. Not even two hours after sending in our proposal, we were faxed the Purchase Order. We were dazed. Wow! No negotiation called for. It was unbelievable. And then we got another terse message – 'Start work immediately!'

“How did all this happen? A few weeks later I ran into the Purchase Officer on site and after thanking him for the contract asked, ‘How is it that there were no negotiations this time around?’ **With the benign disposition of a spiritual seeker, he said, ‘The last time around I learned a difficult lesson the hard way. That has changed my philosophy of negotiation. Instead of “Live and Let Die”, now I believe in “Live and Let Live.”**”

“From that day on, we have done a great deal of work for the facilities infrastructure of this one company across the country without ever having to sit across the negotiation table again.” Vidyadhar concludes his scintillating story. There is a rare sense of fulfilment in his being. His persistence with his beliefs had ultimately paid off.

Sri Venkatesh Prasad, who is currently the CEO and Director of Trayee Impex Pvt. Ltd., has a similar story to narrate.

Respect and Reward

Venkatesh, in his previous work assignment, was given independent charge of a loss-making unit in the business group and was assigned the task of reviving it. He was also given a free hand to change any of the staff so as to turn it around and attain profitability. At the end of two and half years, Venkatesh says, “We had turned profitable, repaid all the outstanding loans to banks and had declared a dividend for the first time in two decades. To cap it off, we had a very healthy bank balance. Throughout this phase, I did not change any of the staff or the workers.” So how did he achieve this feat? Venkatesh gives a revealing instance. “One of the key personnel I was involved with was an accountant who was over sixty. He had retired from service but I asked him to continue in order to help me tide over the crisis. I valued his experience and treated him with a lot of respect. I trusted his ability in spite of his age.” But at the same time, from an organisational point of view, Venkatesh ensured that a second line was in place and that the older man’s presence did not discourage the young employees, so the company was in no way disadvantaged. One evening, months later after the company had its turn around, when Venkatesh was sitting across from the accountant’s desk, the older man stunned him to silence when he said, “Sir, thank you very much”. **There was a smile of satisfaction on his face and continued, “You have behaved in this way because you are a Baba student”. Venkatesh was dumbstruck. “In all those years, I never mentioned to any of the staff in the unit about my academic background or Swami. I was amazed. I didn’t know how to respond.”**

“This university must be distinct from the rest and attain a unique status” - Baba

Yes, Venkatesh was a Baba student and that is the common thread that runs through all the stories narrated above. Like Venkatesh, Vidyadhar and Vamsee too were beacons of light from the same glorious edifice of learning – the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

One score and five years ago when Bhagavan Baba unfurled this model Institute to the world on the eve of His fifty-sixth Birthday, addressing the mammoth assembly on that momentous morning, **He said, “You are aware that there are now 108 universities in India. This University is the 109th, one more than that traditional total. May all the universities succeed and serve the country well. But this university must be distinct from the rest and attain a unique status.”**

As we see so many Vidyadhars, Vamsees and Venkateshs pass out of this hallowed Institute every single year; as we hear the University Grants Commission’s Peer Team announce that **“the Institute stands out as a ‘Crown Jewel’ in the University system of Education in India”**; when we hear the President of India, Sri Abdul Kalam say, **“Is value-based education possible? Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning has given an answer in the affirmative”**; as we see multinational banks and premier business corporations conduct special interviews just for the Institute students year after year; As we hear Sri Venu Srinivasan, CEO of TVS Motors, say, **“I have seen these boys come to our factory many times over the last many years. Their conduct and their brightness – these are two things that always impress you. You can see character in these boys”**; when you see the National Level Committee which visited the Institute in 2000 report, **“...The SSSIHL is perhaps the only Institute of its kind which has incorporated value education in an integrated manner since 1981 with a shining success”**; and when you hear the Director of HR operations at Xansa India Ltd. say, **“I do not know why, but the students from Sri Sathya Sai Institute are so unique and totally different. In my entire corporate life I have come across many professionals, but never witnessed the display of a sterling character these boys have,”** you know there is surely something very unique about this Institute.

Bhagavan Baba, the Chancellor, while inaugurating the Institute had said, **“Many carry swollen heads because of the degrees they have won through the study of books. Humility is the mark of scholarship. If this mark is absent, the scholar is an ignoramus... By learning mere facts, to what extent can man profit? More important items to study and watch are: How broad is your heart? How much benefit has society derived from you? What are the sacred pursuits that can make you better and more useful? How much are you aware of your inner principle? What exactly is the purpose and goal of your existence?This is the inaugural day of our Institute. It has been planted today. The students are its roots. The tree will grow with branches on all sides; countless flowers will bloom; it will provide and promote peace and security to the world. In order that it may realise this result, students must as the roots do, remain firm and provide sustenance.”**

It was this firmness of sticking to their roots, of reposing immense faith in the values that they have learned at the Institute, that is making the Venkateshs and Vidyadhars of this Institute stand out and make a difference. Their number may be small but in no way is their impact insignificant. Their influence might be slow and gradual, but it is far reaching and long lasting. Remember how the union leaders in Vamsee’s organisation now cooperate

with the management instead of confronting them? How the Purchase Officer that Vidyadhar dealt with had his whole philosophy at work transformed?

The students that join the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning are not extraordinary, but it is their experience at this unique University which makes them so out-of-the-ordinary. But how do values get so deeply ingrained in their character?

Is it the Institute's special curriculum? Is it the Hostel? Is it the distinguished and dedicated faculty? Is it the teaching methodology? Is it the availability of the best infrastructure? Partly, yes. But what has really shaped this Institute into a Temple of Learning is the vision, relentless zeal and complete involvement of its founder, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. In fact, though the Institute was inaugurated in 1981, Baba, as early as 1951, had predicted the coming of the University, albeit subtly. When the invitation card to Prof. Kasturi from the Sri Sathya Sai Baba District Board High School for its school day function stated 'Ph. D' next to his name, Prof. Kasturi humbly submitted to Bhagavan that he was not a doctorate. But Swami then had smiled and said, "You are a Ph. D, from Puttaparthi University." Obviously, nobody at that time understood what it meant.

How These Shining Edifices Materialised

Again in 1971, while inaugurating the Sri Sathya Sai College for Women in Anantapur, Bhagavan said, "Sathya Sai University will have to undertake the task of revitalizing the ancient culture of India and to train the rising generation in the path of love and service to humanity and self-reliance." Nine years later, when Swami inaugurated the Sri Sathya Sai College at Prasanthi Nilayam in 1980, He left nothing to ponder. He openly declared, "This [campus] will be transformed as a University next year. We must ensure a stable basis...since Swami's Will is the almighty Will, the Government of India has agreed to the inauguration of a University by us here. Therefore, this very day, Vijayadasami, the college at Prasanthi Nilayam and the college at Anantapur are raised to the status of the constituents of the University." (Both these colleges were then affiliated to the Sri Venkateswara University while Baba's college in Bangalore was under Bangalore University).

And exactly a year later, on a beautiful Thursday on October 8, 1981, Bhagavan announced that the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning will be inaugurated on November 22, 1981, one day before His fifty-sixth birthday. That was not all. There was another stunning surprise that day for the huge gathering when He disclosed something about His new resolve. He declared:

"There, on top of the range of hills, commanding a beautiful vista of nature's charm, the imposing, attractive centre of University activities will come up soon. For the mind, *Haayi* (calm comfort); for the body, *Reyi* (cool softness); for our life, *Sayi* – that is the reality. On the hill behind South Prasanthi, your eyes can feast on the sight of a magnificent building next year, at this time. The Sai Will must fructify at the specified time. May you all derive the benefit and joy from these developments."

And what is more exciting is that the divine Lord materialized the entire design of the Administrative building with a wave of His hand! The late Colonel Joga Rao, a close devotee and the civil engineer in charge of the project, was at first puzzled and then ecstatic. When Swami inaugurated this marvelous edifice on the 22 November 1981, it was truly, as Prof. Kasturi writes, “The dawn of the Sai era of re-education of man for the establishment of peace on earth and goodwill among all peoples.”

Bhagavan’s Involvement - All-inclusive and Complete

Right from day one, there was no aspect of the Institute that Bhagavan was not involved in. Sri K Chakravarthy, the first Registrar of the University, recalls how Bhagavan used to attend Selection Committee meetings, Governing Body meetings and even Academic Council meetings, and says, “That was an interesting thing, because in the first two years Swami was physically present to watch all the deliberations. He wanted to perhaps see how functional they are when most of the meetings generally become dysfunctional. And most of the deliberations of the Academic Council used to be very interesting. At the end of the proceedings Swami would be convinced that many of the eminent people, who were drawn from various Universities and Institutes of Science and Institutes of Technology had substantially contributed to the evolution of the Syllabus. However, one important thing which was extraordinary was the academic freedom that Swami as the Chancellor gave the outsiders. If the participants coming from first class education backgrounds had good ideas and for various reasons could not implement them in their own place and surroundings, Swami made them feel that here is an ideal opportunity for them to realize their own soul’s fulfillment as an academician. And that is what really infused a lot of people to do things creatively and actively.”

Swami, as always, placed broad guidelines and motivated people to come out on their own with the right decisions. Every programme of the Institute, be it the Post Graduate courses, the Doctorate programme, the Management programme or the Music college, started with His guidance and blessings. Dr. Shiv Shankar Sai, currently the Warden of the Institute Boys’ Hostel, who belongs to the first batch of students of the University, recalling those initial years of the college says, “Swami Himself inaugurated the Bio-Science department. There was a beautiful procession and it was a very memorable occasion with many members of the Central Trust present for the occasion. Soon under Swami’s directions the Physics department, of which I was a student, started the Ph. D programme. We were four of us then – the first batch of Ph. D programme. Swami used to call us very regularly and tell us that whatever we have learnt here, we should pass it on to the students. ‘I have started the Ph. D programme not only with the intention that you do great research work. Yes, you need to have this scientific temper. The world recognizes this, but along with research you should also keep in mind other aspects of life. You are all senior students and as senior students you should set good examples for others.’”

“You must do research in topics that would be useful to society” - Baba

That was the constant message from Bhagavan, recalls Dr. Shiv Shankar Sai. “And, of course, to make us happy, He would take us along with Him to Kodaikanal and during the summers to Brindavan (Bangalore) and shower extraordinary grace and blessings on us. And whenever He used to speak to us, the Ph. D students, He used to say, ‘You must do research in topics that would be useful to society’. What Swami meant was that we should avoid research in abstract areas and not do it solely for academic purpose. Whatever we do should have immediate benefits for society. This was His continuous guidance. And He would take so much pride in introducing all the Ph. D students to all the guests who would come here. **He would ask us to tell our name and then in which area we were doing our research. We would say, ‘fiber optics sensors’, ‘cancer research’, etc., and He used to like it so much.**”

Even now, it is no different. Just recently, on August 26, 2006, Swami inaugurated the Sri Sathya Sai Multi Media Centre of the Institute which will allow faculty in one campus to teach students of both campuses simultaneously through video conferencing. Also, on the same day, He cut the ribbon for the new Humanities Wing of the Institute. **Not only that, every other day He now visits the new Sri Sathya Sai International Centre for Sports which is coming up at breakneck pace and is to be inaugurated prior to His birthday this year.** Swami’s involvement with the Institute has never diminished a bit. Over the years, it has only increased. And that is precisely one of the principal reasons why this Institute is so exceptional.

Teaching the Tree of Life

Right from the beginning, Bhagavan very clearly spelled out the uniqueness of the University, which is value-based education. Elucidating beautifully the guidelines to be followed in the University in the pursuit of human excellence, Bhagavan said:

“The University will not be imparting in its Botany department merely a knowledge of trees in Nature; we will spread knowledge of the tree of true living.

“It will not be imparting the knowledge merely of Economics; the knowledge of theistic ethics too will be included.

“It will teach not only the science of the material world; it will also teach the science of “*Raso Vaisah*”, the supreme embodiment of nectarine sweetness, the *Atma* (spirit).

“It will teach not only the science of the material world (padartha), it will also teach the science of the non-material world (parartha). It will not differentiate the material from the non-material or treat the non-material as irrelevant to the material.

“We have decided that this shall be the uniqueness of this University. This will not be like all other Universities which adopt a few faculties and burden their alumni with degrees, which they can present as begging bowls while clamouring for jobs.

“This University will confer on its alumni the courage and confidence, the knowledge and skill, to shape their careers by their own efforts, standing on their legs and relying on their strength.

“So we have proposed that spiritual education be integrated harmoniously with the teaching of ethical, physical and metaphysical subjects in this University.”

It is these crucial tenets so clearly delineated by Bhagavan which have shaped the curriculum and co-curricular programmes of the Institute. And out of this has evolved this Institute’s distinctive concept of Integral Education. In simple terms, it means catering to the physical, mental, psychological and spiritual growth of the student so that development in the young minds is not skewed in one particular direction and care is taken for the healthy growth of the body, mind and spirit. As Bhagavan says, “So that the knowledge gained is ‘skilled’ and not ‘killed’”, which is possible only when the 3Hs – the Heart, Head and the Hands – function in a coordinated fashion. But how is this implemented in real life in this Institute?

Sri Srirangarajan, an alumnus and now a senior lecturer of the Business School of the Institute, explains, “Here we have this very unique system of three different components making this Integral Education. The education here is a compulsory residential system of education which means all the students by rule stay in the Hostel, and the three important components are the Hostel, the Institute and the Mandir, where students come for Bhagavan’s darshan. What happens in all the three places collectively shapes the personality of the individual. It is a very complex process, but to put it in simple terms it is like *Shravanam*, *Mananam* and *Nidhidyasanam* – that is Hearing, Contemplation and Assimilation.”

“Noble ideals are sown into the hearts of the students when they listen to the words of higher wisdom from the Divine Chancellor in the Mandir, which is something like *Shravanam* (sacred hearing) and then the secular education and the input of knowledge given in the college against the backdrop of these nobler ideals is something like *Mananam* (introspection) that goes on in their minds. And finally, the Hostel in our system is a laboratory where all these are actually put in practice so that the students can strengthen and form their convictions, which is like assimilation. These three together work on the psyche of every student to develop their mind in a holistic way.”

“The secret of happiness lies in liking what you do” - Baba

So it is a powerful triangle that trains the young minds in this Institute. Taking the first aspect, the Mandir, innumerable are the occasions and the ways how Bhagavan drives home divine lessons deep into the students’ hearts and

minds. To give one instance: B. T. Kumar, who studied in Baba's college in Bangalore even before the college had come under the banner of Sathya Sai University, says,

"One lesson I had learnt at the Lotus Feet always stands out in my memory. There were two hundred and fifty odd students in 1976 and the Warden used to divide us into groups and allot us odd jobs like vegetable cutting, premises cleaning, Mandir decoration, etc. Along with fifteen other students, I got the job of cleaning the College Auditorium. I was actually cribbing all the while about my bad luck as I was sure to miss Swami's darshan and discourse that day. But most unexpectedly, and much to our good fortune, Swami made a surprise visit to the auditorium that day. We were elated."

"Swami walked up to me and said, 'The secret of happiness lies not in doing what one likes but in liking what one has to do.' I was completely taken over but Swami went on. He explained for more than five minutes how one ought to love the work that one has to do, be it cleaning or studying. It was truly the Bhagavad Gita straight from the Lord Himself! This lesson changed my perspective of life completely and forever. When I took my first job, I was so dedicated and worked with so much involvement that over a period of five years I rose to become the general manager of a Rs. 400 crore pharma company. And in the next five years, I went on to become the first director outside the promoter's family on the board in its thirty year history."

But not all time does Bhagavan deal with each student in such a direct way. The transformation that happens within every student is, as Srirangarajan says, "A very unique process which takes place from within and without. What can be seen is how Swami 'from without' is trying to shape the students by way of His discourses, His informal talks and interactions. And this is only the tip of the iceberg. There are innumerable ways in which Swami works. I have heard any number of stories where a student is sitting in the darshan line and Swami just looks at him from the corner of His eye and it means so much to this student that He would have answered all the questions troubling his mind."

"Similarly, there is another student whom Swami doesn't see and this boy feels so remorseful about something he has done, he takes a pledge he will never do it again. So there is something that happens deep within by Swami talking, not talking, looking, not looking, etc., which progressively opens up each student's heart so that he becomes receptive to all the positive vibes of the system. There is clarity in him that the system is actually working for his benefit and shaping him in the right fashion."

It is not only the Mandir sessions when boys get to interact with Bhagavan. They learn from Him in the Institute too. Ms. Rajeshwari Patel, a faculty member in the Anantapur campus of the Institute, recalls how Swami in the earlier days used to even "Sit inside the classroom when the classes were going on. He would sit behind and listen to the lecture and if some student

turned around and looked back, He would say, 'No, no, you listen to the teacher.'"

Ethics from the Source

The first hour on every Thursday in the Institute is the Moral class hour and for many years Swami regularly addressed the students on topics of specific interest to them. When the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance came into being in 1986, Swami's visits to the Institute became even more frequent and there is no aspect of management that Bhagavan did not cover in His discourses, be it Marketing, Finance or Production. In fact, all His discourses are compiled into a beautiful volume called *Man Management* which is an ever increasing management epic and serves as a precious guidebook for the department.

Quality Management Redefined

Recalling a very revealing incident concerning the management students, Prof. Sudhir Bhaskar of the Business School, says,

"It was the summer of 1993. Management boys were in Whitefield looking for companies in Bangalore to do their projects. There was one batch of boys who were keen to an assignment on ISO 9001, which was then a buzz word in quality management in companies. One organisation wanted to know how it could incorporate ISO 9001 in its operations and a few boys took up that project. Those days Swami used to be in Whitefield. When the boys returned from the city in the evening, Swami would be waiting to ask, "Where did you go? What did you do?" etc. And then Swami would give individual attention and provide clarifications as to how they should do the analysis, how they should talk to people to obtain data, how to process the data, how to conduct them, and so on. It was a perfect feedback cum training session.

"One evening, Swami asked this set of boys, 'What are you doing?' And they said, 'Swami, we are doing ISO 9001 quality systems project.' Swami then immediately asked, 'What is Quality?' While they were preparing to give textbook definitions, Swami said, 'There is something called Total Quality Management (TQM), isn't it?' 'Yes, Swami,' the boys responded. Then Swami immediately turned to me and asked, '**What is Total Quality Management?**' **We were not teaching this subject then and I tried telling Swami how it is referred to in organizations, but Swami cut through all that. He said, 'All this is not right.'** We then prayed, 'Swami, please explain.' **After a split second, Swami said, 'TQM is nothing but *Thrikarana Shuddhi* that is, Unity of Thought, Word and Deed.'** You should have seen – most of the senior devotees present almost fainted! *Thrikarana Shuddhi* related to spiritual evolution - How can you run organizations based on *Thrikarana Shuddhi*? Of course, Swami then gave a few examples. After we returned from the Mandir, we discussed this – how TQM could be applied in Production, Marketing, Finance, etc. – in the hostel till ten o' clock at night.

“The next morning we went to the Organization and in the discussion we mentioned, ‘Can we look at the purity of thought, word and deed and see if there is conformance to each one of them?’ You should have seen the faces of the top management. It was as if one million volts hit them!

“Suddenly, they realized that their problems were because of not having this *Thrikarana Shuddi*. They have some idea, they have some concept, they don’t talk about it and they do something totally different. When they find this kind of disparity in thought, word and deed, obviously a lot of problems raise their hood and the company is torn apart.

“They asked us, ‘Can you tell us something more about how this particular concept can be implemented?’ We explained to them how to implement the ISO 9001 system in a flawless manner. Today this is one of the very successful companies in Bangalore. In fact, the top management was so happy that the Chairman and Managing Director of the company came to Whitefield and told Swami, ‘You sent the boys. They solved our problem.’”

This is a classic example which goes to prove how values can be seamlessly applied to any discipline, coming directly from the Chancellor. And this is the sincere attempt in every classroom by every faculty member of the Institute. It is not only blending of physics and metaphysics or business and ethics which is conveyed in the colleges, there is also a very special course, or rather a forum, where students can openly discuss issues relating to applying values in practical life called the Awareness Course.

The Golden Triangle

“A frequently talked about topic in this Awareness program,” Sri Srirangarajan explains, “is what we call the Triangle of Life, which has basically three vertices – God or Almighty at the top and at the two other corners of the triangle, are the individual and the society. Normally we find that most of the problems in today’s world are because man lives a split life. We find an individual has one set of rules when working in the office and a totally different set of parameters which govern him when he is at home.

“He goes to the temple and offers prayers but in his practical life he does not live in coherence with his religious beliefs. This triangle of life basically explains to the students how the individual is part of society and cannot live in isolation. And only when he considers the welfare of society as his own, will he be able to live a happy and peaceful life.

“In turn, the society is again a component of God and this goes on to explain that the individual is a part of society, society is part of nature and nature in turn is a limb of God. It is this interdependency that is dealt with in detail and students understand how one telescopes into the other. It might seem simple but it is a very complex and significant issue which would be very difficult for the students to get on their own.”

Self-Confidence – Life's True Sustenance.

Illustrating the whole idea, Srirangarajan says, "In fact, it would be best to quote a particular incident about an alumnus of the Institute, who was facing a job interview when a member of the board asked him: 'You seem to be coming from an institute where a lot of values are taught. You have a totally different type of system there; how do you really think you can fit into this corporate world of cut throat competition where it is all a business type relationship?'

"This student intuitively replied, 'Sir, just as a tyre of an automobile, once it is developed into the final product, is not tested on a smooth road but on a rough road and on demanding terrains to determine its durability, in the same way, our university makes us into ideal students to be tested in a wider world and not in a closed environment.' **The self-confidence the student exhibited was due to the firm grounding on values he had imbibed at the Institute. In fact, the impact it made on the Board Members was so great that they immediately hired this student for the job.**"

The Hostel – A Model Mini Sai Family

While the students learn valuable lessons of life and living in the Institute and in the Mandir, the Hostel – the third dimension of the Integral Education Programme provides the right platform to actually experiment and be convinced of the viability of practicing the age-old principles in day to day life.

Mir Faisal Uddin Ali Khan, working in GE CAP in the USA sharing his views on this dimension of learning at the Hostel, says, "When I first entered the hostel, I thought that I would have a room for myself. When I stepped in, I was directed to a big room. I congratulated myself, assuming that the entire room was for me. I was in for a rude shock. There were fourteen cupboards and by evening we had as many people. Well, out went my privacy via the window. It was a disgusting start I must confess, but as time passed, I learnt the importance of this design. **The Institute was teaching me in its own novel way to adapt to thirteen people with different cultures, religions, belief and even varied sleeping and eating habits. I must say that by the end of two years, the Institute, just by this design, taught me patience, flexibility and adaptability, the three important virtues of corporate survival.**"

The Hostel equips students with much more. You will be amazed to know that the Hostel is a self-sufficient world with over forty self-reliance departments. And every aspect of the Hostel is handled by the students. Right from the maintenance of electrical appliances, to cooking for boys who are sick, to handling the post and telegraph work, to publishing books on Swami, multimedia work, recording programmes or even managing the computer centre - everything is done by the boys. And from whom do they learn? From their seniors, as well as from dedicated teachers who live with them in the Hostel and function like substitute parents. Postgraduate boys, who have been working in the department for many years, take the lead and do the

mentoring for the new boys. They teach them all they want to learn. This happens after the freshers choose their area of self-reliance. With so much to do in the Hostel in addition to the academic rigours and other cultural activities in the Mandir, it becomes, in the words of N Vivek, an alumnus currently working in Coimbatore, “So perfect a training for a manager.”

H-O-S-T-E-L – Home Of Students To Envision Life

The triangle of Integral Education is complete when the theory and lessons learned in the classes and in the Mandir are applied and their value experienced in the real life of the hostel. But Bhagavan gives the students even greater opportunities to assimilate their precious lessons at a macro level through the big events of the Institute - the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet, the Convocation cultural fest, the mammoth Grama Seva project and the like.

The Sports Meet - Fostering Cooperation Not Competition

Unlike other Institutions, Sports Meet Day, held yearly on January 11, is no occasion for competitive sports but rather an exhibition of the power of collective spirit and the beauty of coordinated endeavours. There are no 100 metre sprints or javeline throws or basketball duels on the Sports day. Sri Shashank, currently pursuing his Ph. D at the Institute, describes what really happens,

“It is all planned a month in advance. There are different events that are involved as a part of the sports meet. You need huge structures, you need special costumes, you need bikes and trucks to do stunts, you need a full fledged audio visual set up, you need maintenance and management of space in the ground, you need optimum time and resource management, and all this is exclusively done by the boys. Each one picks an item and an area he is good at and gives it his best. The whole hostel becomes one busy unit – the art room boys, the audio visuals boys, the maintenance boys, all groups work in tandem. **But the most beautiful thing in this well coordinated effort is that not one person thinks, ‘I am doing it’ or ‘it is my excellence’; it is always ‘we are doing it and doing it not for ourselves but as an offering to the Lord.’**”

It is this noble spirit which fires the boys’ enthusiasm to achieve great heights in whatever they do. The endless hours of work, the sleepless nights, the intermittent skipping of meals, etc., never become a deterrent. And Swami too responds just as enthusiastically or even more. In the words of Dr. Sainath, a former alumnus and currently a faculty member in the Physics Department, **“Many times there would be injuries in the sports meet and I remember how He would even go unannounced to the Hostel to see what the extent of the injury was.** That was the very close proximity that He awarded. The programme would include a lot of games, sports and various other items. And He would watch some of the items a couple of items before and if some of them were really adventurous and nice, He would once again call some guest and ask the boys to perform. **In spite of seeing the programmes**

earlier, on the day of the sports meet, He would sit like a child in awe of what we were doing. He would pretend as if He knew nothing and tell the guests, 'see this', 'see this'. You could see the excitement in Him, just like a proud mother."

Swami's love, coupled with the students' enthusiasm and devotion, is what makes the annual sports meet a grand spectacle to behold. By the end of the Sports Meet, they have toned their bodies, sharpened their skills and displayed brilliant talent, but an even more enriching upshot is that their hearts are now suffused with greater love for the divine than ever.

God Assigns a Role for Each One

If the Sports Meet is an exciting mind-body extravaganza, the drama performed by the students on Convocation Days is an unparalleled opportunity for the participants to observe Bhagavan at close quarters and learn lessons of life directly from Him. Bhagavan involves Himself completely in the drama every year. His penchant for the use of theatre to communicate important social values has remained the same from His childhood days when He scripted, directed and staged the famous play *Cheppinattlu Chesttara* (meaning, *Will You Do As You Said?*). In the words of Dr. Sai Giridhar, an alumnus and currently a faculty member in the Business School, "Swami is very meticulous. He is extremely particular about the way the dialogue is delivered, the way the people act, their postures, etc. I think that is what makes dramas different from the boys' perspective. It gives so much insight into playing the role to its perfection."

"There are many things that the people may ignore," continues Dr. Sai Giridhar, "for instance, there was a drama which was titled Bhaja Govindam. The person who was acting as a rich man was also a disciple and he said: 'Money! Money! Money! What is the role of money?' And Swami said: 'The person who is playing the role of a rich man should exhibit the qualities of a rich man. The way he conducts himself should be on par with his part. So the person who wants to imply 'what is money after all' should be humble, there should be a lot of conviction in what he says which should be reflected in his dialogue delivery.' Every line and every detail was closely scrutinised by Bhagavan.

This holds true not only for the actors on stage but also for the almost double in number students who work backstage handling various aspects of the presentation, whether it is lights, costumes, sets, or audio-visuals. Swami often spends a lot of time with this inconspicuous group guiding them, encouraging them and correcting them.

Recalling an enlightening experience, Sri B N Narsimha Murthy, currently Warden of the Brindavan Campus of the Institute, says,

"When for the first time we had our drama presented in the Poorna Chandra Auditorium, we had only four frames with curtains made as we only had that much material available. Three days before we put up the performance, I was

telling Dr. Pallav, (another faculty member), if there were six frames, it would look much better, as that would give more scope for the actors in terms of proper entries and exits. But since there was no more material available, Dr. Pallav said, 'Maybe we will have that next year.' And I never discussed this again with him or any other faculty or even Swami.

"That week, Swami came to the auditorium, saw the four frames and said, "If there were two more frames, it would be nice." Dr. Pallav immediately looked at me as if asking, 'Did you tell Swami about it?' After Swami left, I told him it was something divine and I had never spoken about this to Him. But Dr. Pallav was worried. There were only two days left till the performance. He wondered, "How are we going to do this?" Both of us decided that since Swami has said it, we would give it a fair try. And so, the next moment we were in Robin's workshop. When we reached there we were amazed. He had just two frames in the perfect way that we wanted! We could not believe this. We asked him, "Why did you make these?" He said, "I do not know, Sir. Somebody wanted them, so I made them, but it seems they don't want it now. They are yours if you like." It is an event which is etched in Dr. Pallav's and Sri Narsimha Murthy's memory forever.

"The fact that goes with the dramas is that it is not the final presentation of the drama that matters. It is the interaction with Bhagavan," says Dr. Sai Giridhar. "Bhagavan would come to the Institute and watch the drama. He might have seen the drama *n* number of times. He may have watched it sixteen times, but the seventeenth time, He gives it the same amount of attention. Not merely the dialogue delivery but literally every aspect of the drama."

Bhagavan is perfection personified and through various means and methods He raises all the participants to that level. A great learning experience filled with precious divine insights – that is what the drama is for all the students involved.

Grama Seva – To Love and Serve

In 2000, the millennium year, Swami blessed the Integral Education programme of the Institute with a new dimension to Seva, by launching what is now known as Grama Seva. Since then, every year, for about ten days, the entire Institute, staff and students, get totally involved in going to hundreds of villages and serving tens of thousands of rural folk. They do this by actually going to their homes, speaking to them, performing bhajans in their villages and then offering them sweets, food and new clothes. For the villagers it is as if Bhagavan has come to their doorstep to shower His love and blessings. For the students, it is a learning experience like no other. Apart from this being a grand exercise in planning and management, the Warden, Sri B N Narasimha Murthy, says, **"Most of the students who come from cities haven't visited villages even once in their lives. When they see the poverty stricken conditions of the villagers, they realise the import of Mahatma Gandhi's statement, "India lives in her villages,"** and there is much more to the country than the metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata or Bangalore. The impression on the students is deep and their reaction is spontaneous. They

immediately reach out to these people with empathy in their hearts and serve them with great sincerity.”

Though Grama Seva in its current form was introduced by Bhagavan six years ago, even prior to that it has always been an integral part of the Institute curriculum in some form or the other. In fact, Swami Himself visited two very remote villages near Puttaparthi as early as 1985 along with a big group of students to personally demonstrate the values of rural service and self-reliance. On that historic occasion, Swami went to the extent of saying, “These two villages are My two eyes.” We have a very special account of this visit of Bhagavan in our supplementary article by Prof. G Venkataraman entitled, “A Peep into the Eyes of God” in H2H Special.

Many might ask, “Can a once-a-year visit to the villages really make any difference?” The truth of the matter is that for the villagers, Grama Seva is an annual reminder that Swami, who looks after them in so many ways, through His free Hospitals, the all-year supply of safe drinking water and now the recently launched Mobile Hospital, that same Swami is now greeting them in their homes by sending His students with a Message of Love. For the students, who live by the concept of service in the Hostel and discuss it comprehensively in the college, going to the villages year after year during their stay in the Institute develops in them a new sensitivity to India and her real problems.

Twenty Five Years of Inculcating Holistic Human Excellence

Twenty-five years have passed since the University came into being and many more years have flowed under the bridge of time since Swami inaugurated the first Sathya Sai College in Anantapur (for women) in 1968. The Institute has indeed changed in a myriad ways over the years. Where there were overhead projectors, now there is a video conferencing facility; where there was a simple ground for sports now there is a cricket stadium which has hosted international tournaments and in a few weeks the Institute will have a world-class indoor stadium; where there were in-house faculty or faculty from local colleges, now there are visiting professors from Harvard and Cornell; the Nd YAG laser (acronym for Neodymium-doped Yttrium Aluminum Garnet) non-linear lab in the Physics Department of the Institute, is one of the best in India in the area of photonics (that is, science and applications based on laser light); its annual Convocation ceremonies over the years have been graced by three Presidents, three Vice-Presidents, and three Prime Ministers of India, including other eminent personalities and educationists. This year, President Kalam is coming for the second time; the students secure top ranks in national level examinations like GATE (Graduate Admission Test for Engineering) in spite of being engaged in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities throughout the year (in fact, in 2004 one student obtained the first rank in Physics); the NAAC committee (set up by University Grants Commission) which gave A++ rating to the Institute in 2002 (the highest awarded to any University In India), also mentioned in their report – *“The Committee strongly feels that the Institute must be recognized for promotion*

of peace by UNESCO.” Year after year, the Institute has grown in grandeur and serenity and its story has achieved greater glory.

Yes, the Institute has undergone a lot of transformation. Every change has only strengthened its wings and facilitated its faculty in delivering the best to society – year after year providing the nation with groups of young adults with a holistic view of life who believe that character and virtues are more powerful than any other force on earth.

If the Institute remains passionately focussed on its objective of ‘building character’ in spite of the changing times in the modern era, it is because there is one thing which has never changed in the Institute. And that is the Love of Bhagavan towards His students. He may not be giving students the amount of time He used to in the 1970s or 1980s, largely because of the various mega service projects, but still He gives students more time than all others put together. He still takes them to Kodai Kanal, now by plane rather than by bus. He still finds plenty of time to listen to them chant the Vedas, bless them on their birthdays, interact with them in the Mandir and Bhajan hall, watch their hundreds of cultural programmes all round the year and celebrate all the festivals with them. Truly, that which is connected with the ephemeral world is always subject to change but that which is connected with divinity, remains constant forever.

The Most Prized Relationship In the World

Prof. Sudhir Bhaskar narrates a very moving anecdote which amply demonstrates this aspect of Bhagavan. “It was one evening in the Mandir portico”, he says. “Prof. Anil Kumar, Mr. Bhagya and I were seated along with the boys. Some students were desperately trying to give letters to Swami but for some reason Swami avoided them. Prof. Anil Kumar then took the liberty of saying, ‘Swami, please take their letters.’ Swami asked, ‘Why should I take?’ Prof Anil Kumar replied, ‘Swami, there must be something very important and urgent, maybe there is some emergency. They are trying very hard to share it with you.’ Listening to this plea of Prof. Anil Kumar, the statement that Swami made was epoch-making and mind-boggling. The whole world should have listened to it. It continuously rings in my ears till this day. Swami said, **‘I need not take their letters to know their problems. You are saying there is an emergency? You feel only after it is brought to my notice, will I intervene? Let me tell you, now and forever – My students, will never have an emergency. Even before the emergency can come towards them I would have already intervened. Don’t have the impression that I intervene only when it has been brought to my notice. Students, I am always taking care of you – now and hereafter.’**”

Nothing more need be said about the phenomenal love that Bhagavan has towards His students. Nothing more need be added to explain how the students are so fortunate to have stepped into this hallowed Institute. “The Institute,” as Prof. V K Gokak, the first Vice Chancellor of the University said,

“is extremely fortunate to have as the Chancellor an Avathar who is the Chancellor of the Universe itself!”

Sai Alumni – Beacons of His Love

No matter what corner of India or the world the alumni of this Institute have gone to, they have always carried this light of His love in their hearts and shared it with as many as possible. A group of graduates in Mumbai have adopted a neighbouring impoverished village and with the support of a multinational bank have executed a wonderful project providing safe drinking water to hundreds of villagers. Every weekend, alumni in various cities come together to do free medical camps in rural areas and educate the people about sound healthcare. As the scare of dengue epidemic still continues in various parts of India, alumni in Andhra Pradesh regularly go the villages providing vaccines and educating them on preventive healthcare. When a massive earthquake struck the state of Jammu and Kashmir in 2005, a team of students from different states were the only group, apart from the Army, who reached out to the victims, braving rough terrain and inclement weather, to rehabilitate and construct new houses for the shelter less. In the very cold nights of winter, when people sleeping on the streets and under trees are shivering and writhing in discomfort, the alumni in Andhra Pradesh search out these homeless and cover them with woollen blankets. We can go on and on.

Not only this, if the several Institutions set up by Swami – be it the free Hospitals in Prasanthi Nilayam or Bangalore, the Books and Publications Trust, the Radio Sai Global Harmony, the Higher Secondary School, the Colleges or the apex body, the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust – run 24x7 like a well-oiled engine, it is because there are nearly a hundred alumni of the Institute who have stayed back in the ashram forsaking a professional career and a prosperous life to be directly a part of His mission. For them, it is the greatest fulfilment of their lives.

To save its fate today, humanity needs individuals who possess the right spiritual balance of knowledge and skill. This is what the Institute has delivered with increasing vigour for almost three decades. Now, it is time for the rest of the world to emulate this sacred seat of learning where the ancient and modern gel so well and prove that value education at the university level is not a utopian idea, but one whose time has come and can be postponed no longer.

FEATURE ARTICLES

THE GLORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS –

THROUGH THE EYES OF MODERN SCIENTISTS AND VEDIC SEERS

Loving Sai Ram, and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

This is the tenth talk in the series, *Veda Walkthrough*, an effort of mine to communicate to you the spirit that pervades the Vedas. It is also my last talk in this series. Today, I would like to take you far away from life, mantras and all that, and try to say something about Awareness and Consciousness.

Sat, Chit, Ananda – Truth, Consciousness, Bliss

You might have heard the phrase, Sat, Chit, Ananda. It means roughly, Truth, Consciousness, and Bliss. That is how God is sometimes described. In other words, at the Abstract and Absolute level, God is also described as Pure Consciousness or Absolute Consciousness. Now what exactly is this Consciousness? What has it got to do, if at all, with Creation? What does science have to say, if anything, about this Consciousness? These are some of the questions that I would like to address in this talk. Before I do, I must make it perfectly clear that there is no need whatsoever to know the answer to these questions if one wants to merge with God. Our bhakti would in no way be enhanced if we know something about these aspects. On the other hand, it *does* help us to appreciate how deep was the understanding of the ancient Seers, who were in quest of God. I feel that in this day and age, when people are always asking all sorts of questions, it might be useful to put Creation itself against the background of Pure Consciousness or Absolute Consciousness, as God is sometimes referred to. That, you might say, is my motivation for this talk.

Matter and Energy

I shall start by stating a fact that I am sure you are already aware of, namely that our Universe is made up of two entities – matter and energy. Matter is tangible; we can touch it and see it. Sometimes when the material object is too small to be seen with the naked eye, we can see it using an optical microscope or even an electron microscope. Matter has mass which can be measured. Energy, on the other hand, is intangible when it is latent. It becomes manifest only when it changes its form. For example, a rock sitting on top of a mountain has a lot of potential energy; every high school student knows this. However, nobody can see this energy, although one can calculate how much gravitational potential energy the rock on the mountaintop has. Nevertheless, if the rock is pushed down, the potential energy gets converted into kinetic energy and the effects of this transformation can be seen and measured.

Similarly, it is often said that a lot of energy is locked up within an atom. Indeed. But atomic energy that is latent cannot be seen. However, when the energy that is locked up in the atom is released, then the effects generated by that release can be seen. By the way, this is what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I am mentioning all this just to convey that until about a hundred years ago, physicists used to think that matter is matter and energy is energy and that these two are distinct. All that changed in 1905, and the man who changed this view of matter and energy was Einstein.

$E = mc^2$ – Matter and Energy are the Same

Albert Einstein was at that time a young man of about twenty-three. He was employed in the Swiss Patent Office, and since his official work was not heavy, Einstein spent a lot of time investigating many knotty problems of physics. He published three epoch-making papers that year, which is why the year 2005 has been designated by the UN as the International Year of Physics. One of the three seminal papers Einstein wrote then is on the Special Theory of Relativity, one offshoot of which is the equation $E = mc^2$. This equation has since become so famous that even the general public knows of it. The equation is very simple but it discloses a profound truth. As Einstein himself said in a public lecture, this equation says that both what we call matter and what we call energy are the same thing! There is a unity underlying the apparent duality. It is amazing that God reminds us of universality even in the world of physics.

Insentient and Sentient Matter

OK, there is matter and energy in the Universe and though they might appear to be distinct entities, they are really one and the same thing. Further, matter can be converted into energy and energy can be converted into matter. So what? That is the point I wish to take up next, but before I do that I ought to draw your attention to a fact you already know, namely that matter in the Universe can be of two distinct types: insentient and sentient. Insentient means no life, and sentient means having life.

There is a specific reason why I am making this distinction. An entity with life is aware that it exists. To make the point clear, let me consider a stone and, say, a frog. The stone exists – you and I can see it but the stone does not know it exists. You might say that this is an utterly trivial statement. How on earth can a stone know it exists? It does not have life! Yes, that is true, but the point is that the frog, which has life, knows it exists, it is aware of its existence. The frog has *self-awareness* while the stone does not, and that is the point I am trying to make.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a remarkable gift that living beings possess and we humans never even think of it. We take it so much for granted that we hardly realize that we possess the remarkable gift of self-awareness. You might say,

“OK, living beings have self-awareness; so what?” Let me take up that point next.

The question now is: “Wherefrom did this self-awareness come? Is it related to matter or to energy? Can it be described by any equation of physics? Did it suddenly pop up from nowhere when life first appeared on earth, or has it been latent in the Universe in some mysterious form right from the time the Universe came into existence?” I must tell you at this juncture that few scientists publicly discuss such issues. A handful of scientists have no doubt wondered about such issues, but the mainstream, that is to say 99.9999% of the scientists simply ignore such questions. They know they cannot get any definitive answers and cannot publish any papers on this topic in the standard scientific journals. Since these are days of “publish or perish,” most scientists leave such questions severely alone. However, the questions remain and I wish to consider them and air some views about them.

The first thing I would like to point out in this context is that self-awareness is part of our ability to have experiences. Many things we know come to us from experience. Let us take a simple thing like taste. Taste, you will agree, is a matter of experience. We are able to have the experience of taste because the Blessed Lord has been kind enough to give us taste buds. Let us say that we put a small piece of sugar in the mouth. It would, of course, taste sweet. Everyone in the world irrespective of race and religion would swear that sugar is sweet. You might argue, what is the surprise in that? I am not saying there is anything surprising about sugar being sweet, but have you ever wondered whether what you experience about sugar tasting sweet is the same thing as what X or Y experiences?

Experience: Internal and Subjective

There is an important point here. Experience is *internal* to a person and as a result, there is no way of comparing the experiences of two persons on an objective basis. It is true science can analyze sugar, describe the molecular structure, and all that, but there is no meter or measuring instrument that science can ever come up with for measuring the *experience* of sweetness. It is the same with self-awareness. Science can say whether an entity is dead or alive but it cannot ever deal with any subjective experience.

We need not condemn or criticize science for that; that is the way it is presently structured. However, practitioners of science should not feel high and mighty and look down upon people who wish to consider metaphysics. That feeling of condescension is totally unwarranted but, unfortunately, is present in many modern upstarts. Such arrogance flows from ego and is not the hallmark of a true scholar who is always quite humble.

A Mysterious Something Beyond Matter and Energy

OK, so what is the point I have made with all these words? Just this. Firstly, there are things that go *beyond* matter and energy. Secondly, these subjects

relate to domains *beyond* space and time, which is the domain of science. I hope you agree with my submissions. What next?

Well, here is my next point. Let us ask: where did all the matter we see around us and all the energy that presently fills the Universe come from? No problem in answering that question because science tells us that all this came from the initial Big Bang that gave birth to the Universe. I suppose you have heard of the Big Bang; I have mentioned it in some of my talks. For the present let me say that the term Big Bang is used to describe the event that signaled the birth of our Universe about fourteen billion years ago, give or take a couple of billion years.

Matter and energy now in the Universe can be tracked back all the way to the Big Bang. What about the mysterious entity that confers on us the capacity for self-awareness, and also grants us the ability to have experiences associated with the senses, that is, the ability to have the experience of sight, sound, taste, feeling and smell? Is there a mysterious Something *beyond* matter and energy that confers the ability to have internal experiences? Wherefrom did this ability come? Did it pre-exist the Big Bang or did it sort of evolve as species evolved? If so, how did this thing beyond matter and energy originate during the life-evolution process? Many questions there!

I should, at this juncture, point out that science too is faced with some basic questions of a similar nature. Today, there is hardly any scientist worth the name who doubts the fact that our Universe originated in the so-called Big Bang about fourteen or so billion years ago. It is also agreed that space and time came into existence along with the Big Bang. This immediately raises questions like: "Where did the Universe draw the big reserve of energy it started off with? Does our Universe have a 'mother', from which it was born?" These are questions that are being actively considered by some cosmologists and there are also some theories concerning this question.

Interestingly, ancient Indian sages have also speculated on some of these issues and have spelt out their model, if I might call it that. In essence, it all started with what I have referred to earlier as Absolute Consciousness. Remember that Absolute Consciousness is just another name for God, and this particular name focuses on an aspect of current interest to us.

The Big Bang – The One Became the Many

Let us for a moment agree that everything started off from Absolute Consciousness. What happened then? Vedanta has given a broad-brush outline of how One became many – that is, the essence of Creation. Absolute Consciousness represents the ultimate Oneness. From this Oneness, by coming down many steps, diversification that is characteristic of Creation eventually emerged. I shall not say anything more on this – anyway, the details are quite sketchy. But this much I can do, and that is to refer to Aurobindo who remarked that the energy of Primal Consciousness cascaded many steps before the Universe was created. If I were to put that in words close to science, I would say that a part of the infinite energy latent and

resident in Absolute Consciousness went through many steps of transformation before the energy deposit for the Big Bang became available. I don't know for sure what precisely Aurobindo meant but my own surmise is that this cascading of energy down many steps may perhaps be compared to potential energy becoming kinetic energy and then heat energy. Once the tiny bit of energy that peeled off from the latent energy of Absolute Consciousness became available for the Big Bang, the Big Bang occurred and thereafter the Universe evolved the way science has described for us.

I want you to appreciate an important point here. Vedanta does not in any way contradict modern science, especially the latter's reconstruct of the origin of the Universe and its subsequent evolution. As far as the scenario preceding the Big Bang is concerned, scientists are still speculating and I am not sure if any of these speculations can ever be proved. That means that if scientists dismiss Vedanta's picture of the pre-Big Bang scenario as mere speculation, then they are doing no better.

Consciousness is beyond Matter and Energy

I wonder whether you have been able to catch what I have been trying to drive at all along. Basically it is this: Firstly, there is in living beings a unique capacity called Consciousness. Secondly, this Consciousness is not the same stuff as matter and energy. Thirdly, Consciousness must have been present right from the time our Universe came into existence as some kind of a cosmic background. There are a few other points I would like to make about Consciousness and its role in evolution, but before that, I would like to address one important question.

You might ask, "Is there any scientific proof concerning the existence of Consciousness?" In other words, is Consciousness in any manner accessible to science? The answer is yes. It all goes back to a man called Robert Jahn of Princeton University in America, who got involved in the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena, almost by accident. This is how he himself describes it:

My formal training is that of an engineer and applied physicist, and the bulk of my research has been concerned with aerospace science. In 1978, I was requested by one of our very best students to supervise a study of psychic phenomena. Although I had no previous experience, professional or personal, I agreed. My initial oversight role in this project led to a degree of personal involvement with it, and that to a growing bemusement, to the extent that by the time the student graduated, I was persuaded that this was a legitimate field for a high technologist to study and that I would enjoy continuing to do so.

So that was how Robert Jahn began to study paranormal phenomena. Jahn, though interested in the subject, started off as a skeptic. However, he said to himself, "Let me not dismiss it just because I personally do not believe in this stuff. Instead, I shall try out some experiments and let the experiments decide for me." Jahn must be congratulated for his bold and objective attitude.

Scientific Experiments in Consciousness

To cut a long story short, Jahn started his experiments and found, much to his surprise, that there seemed to be something besides matter and energy. Jahn was not too eager to accept his findings and so he made his subsequent experiments more and more rigorous, with tight controls and all that, and every time he was confronted with the same finding. Slowly and reluctantly, Jahn came to accept that mind and matter could interact and he hypothesized that this interaction occurred via Consciousness. I shall come to that a little later, but for now, let me give you a glimpse of Jahn's experiments.

Jahn performed many experiments, but the most important of them was concerned with mind-machine interaction. Here is a brief description of that experiment. Jahn first built a machine called the Random Event Generator. This machine basically produces a series of time pulses occurring at random instants of time. There are rigorous tests to check if the output of the machine is truly random or not. Having built the machine, Jahn then had a volunteer sit for a considerable period of time before the Random Event Generator and constantly think: "Hey machine, stop being random, stop being random..."

You would think this is a pretty crazy thing to do. But Jahn's idea was this. If the person is *willfully* trying to change the behavior of the machine by sheer thought process, would the machine respond? The scientist in him told him it would not; but the investigator in him said wait for the result before deciding.

Mind over Machine

So what did Robert Jahn find? He found that many volunteers who were highly focused *did* manage to disturb the machine and make it depart from its usual random behavior. It took a long time for Jahn to be convinced about this, but when he was, he started devoting all his time to the interaction of the mind with matter. After decades of intensive research, Jahn came to the conclusion that Consciousness was a field, rather like the electromagnetic field, and the gravitational field very familiar to physicists. Jahn also published many papers on what he describes as the quantum theory of the Consciousness field.

How much acceptance is there of Jahn's idea in the scientific community? Not much, I am afraid. To start with, not many have bothered to study his writings. Among those who have, the friends of Jahn shake their head and mutter, "Poor Robert, whatever happened to him? Why is he wasting his time doing this kind of research instead of the kind he is so good at?" The others who know him but are not so kindly disposed say something to the effect, "This guy Robert Jahn, he has gone bananas!" The neutral community severely attacks his experiments as lacking in rigor in statistical analysis and dismisses it as pseudo-science, or junk science.

By the way, many experiments, even in mainstream physics, have been buried on the ground of lack of statistical rigor. Often, especially when it

comes to unconventional areas, many an experiment is laid to rest with the obituary, "Here lies a victim of pseudo-science, who died due to lack of statistical rigor." But all this has not stopped a few brave researchers from following the lead of Jahn to conduct their own studies, and many have, with their own variations of Jahn's experiments, concluded that there *is* such a thing as Consciousness.

I suppose that all this might sound amusing to believers in Consciousness. After all, have we not seen people getting cured from near-death illness through sheer prayer? How can prayer that originates in the subtle mind and even more subtle heart affect the biochemistry of a sick body? There must be some mind-matter interaction. I believe, as does Jahn, that this interaction occurs through the intervention of the Consciousness field.

The Emergence of Quantum Mechanics

Are there any signatures in the real physical world of the presence of this Consciousness that belong to mainstream physics? I believe there is a very strong one, and that is what I shall now refer to. Between 1925 and 1930, physics went through a great revolutionary period when an entirely new basis for physics was discovered. I am referring to the discovery of quantum mechanics. Prior to quantum mechanics, we had what is called classical mechanics, to which Newton gave a start.

Classical mechanics is essentially deterministic. If a bullet is fired with a certain velocity and in a particular direction, we can, using the rules of classical mechanics, calculate accurately the entire trajectory of the bullet. For about three hundred years or so, classical mechanics went from success to success. But when the atom and its structure were discovered in the early part of the twentieth century, it was found that classical mechanics did not deliver the goods in the atomic domain. The results calculated using classical mechanics were drastically different from what experiments showed, and it seemed as if a new mechanics was needed, especially in the microscopic world of atoms. And in a few short years, brilliant minds came up with precisely what was needed, and an entirely new set of rules; to put it differently, quantum mechanics had been discovered.

Bohr and Einstein: Relativity vs. Quantum Mechanics

At first people were greatly thrilled by this new mechanics because it worked so wonderfully well. At that stage, quantum mechanics was simply regarded as a remarkable new tool; few bothered about what exactly it meant. But there were some who ventured beyond working rules and wondered about the philosophy underlying the new mechanics. The two prominent scientists in this group were Niels Bohr of Denmark and Albert Einstein. Bohr gave brilliant interpretations while Einstein kept on shaking his head in disagreement. In fact, Bohr and Einstein had public debates in many conferences, with Bohr vigorously arguing in support of quantum mechanics and Einstein stoutly opposing it. Now why on earth did Einstein have such strong misgivings about quantum mechanics, especially when it worked so beautifully to explain things

that classical mechanics failed to? There was a deep philosophical reason behind Einstein's objections.

You see, quantum mechanics implied that events happened not in a deterministic manner, as classical theory demanded, but in a probabilistic manner. This idea was totally unacceptable to Einstein. It is interesting that Einstein dethroned Newtonian mechanics, which was classical. But in a sense, even Einstein's relativistic mechanics was classical, being an extension of Newton's mechanics. It did not therefore have any room for random behavior. So strong was Einstein's objection that he and his good friend Niels Bohr argued vehemently over many years.

Einstein would start by describing an imaginary experiment – he used the German word *gedanken* experiment, a word that has since become a part of physics vocabulary. Einstein would describe the experiment and argue how it violated quantum mechanics. Bohr would then get up, clear his throat, and say, "Ah, but you see Professor, you have overlooked this point." Bohr would then go on to show that Einstein's reasoning was flawed, and that therefore his objections were not correct. At one point Einstein simply brushed aside all of Bohr's objections with the words, "God does not play dice," meaning quantum mechanics cannot really be true.

This went on for about three years, until in a famous encounter Einstein came up with yet another *gedanken* experiment, the mother of them all. This one looked iron clad and invincible. So it seemed, till Niels Bohr got up and pointed out a subtle but fatal flaw. Einstein was demolished. He had to yield but was not convinced about the credibility of quantum mechanics. He agreed that quantum mechanics appeared to work and was perhaps a good set of working rules, but not the ultimate truth. Echoing his feelings, Einstein said, "Subtle is the Lord but malicious He is not." This saying of Einstein as well as the other one about God not playing dice are often quoted, and in fact, in Princeton, the saying "Subtle is the Lord..." is, I believe, engraved in a prominent place.

By the way, I should also mention that though they had strong differences of opinion on scientific matters, Einstein and Bohr were good friends. I recall attending a lecture by Bohr in Bombay in 1959, when Bohr talked about his debate with his friend Einstein. Bohr was well over seventy, and we could hardly make out what he said. There was the strong accent of Bohr, and to make matters worse, the hall acoustics was terrible. Also, I did not know much about quantum mechanics then and what Bohr said went way above my head. But this I do remember – at one point, Bohr broke down and started to sob. It seemed as if he was upset about having to vanquish his dear friend in an argument. Mind you, this debate was then 30 years old and yet Bohr could not bear to think of the hurt he had caused Einstein.

Physics and Vedanta

Now why am I mentioning all this? What connection does it have with Vedanta? That is what I shall consider next. You see, Einstein was not

entirely done. The Einstein-Bohr debates took place just before 1930 or so. Soon after that, Hitler came to power in Germany and Einstein, being a Jew, left for America because Jews had no place in Hitler's Germany. Einstein went to Princeton, and there in 1936, he published a paper in which he proposed yet another gedanken experiment, which revealed a major internal contradiction in quantum mechanics.

In Denmark, Bohr saw this paper and thought deeply about it. He then wrote a paper rebutting Einstein's paper, which, by the way, is referred to by physicists as the EPR paper, because along with Einstein there were two other authors – Podolsky and Rosen. This time, Einstein did not concede the debate. Why? Because if one took Bohr seriously, it meant that relativity would be violated and that signals could travel with infinite speed. But that was impossible, and so Einstein politely said, "Sorry Bohr, this is unacceptable. Don't tell me that signals can travel faster than light. You know that is impossible. How then do you expect me to accept this argument?" Bohr's point was, "I know there is a problem there but I am convinced quantum mechanics is true and Nature must be having a mysterious mechanism for taking care of your objection."

Experiments Point to Global Connectivity

There matters stood until the seventies. People had almost forgotten the debate and only philosophers worried about it. But then one fine day, thanks to remarkable advances in technology, many scientists, particularly in France, began to actually conduct experiments that were once considered to be just thought, or gedanken experiments. And what did they find? They found that Bohr was indeed right. In other words, notwithstanding Einstein's firm faith in relativity coming to the rescue, quantum mechanics did work.

This then raised a deep philosophical question. Einstein said that if quantum mechanics works then it means that signals can travel faster than light; but that is not possible. However, scientists had now demonstrated that quantum mechanics was working even in the EPR experiment. Did that imply something was traveling faster than light; did this mean that relativity was out? The pundits thought about it all and finally said, "Not quite. There is actually no signal traveling and so there is no question of any violation of relativity. What was happening in the French experiments was a strange and subtle connectivity that linked everything on a global scale. If one ignored this global connectivity and looked at things piecemeal, then one would have to invoke signals traveling and all that; but if one kept subtle global connections in mind, then there is really no contradiction with relativity."

This is what the experts concluded after examining every argument. Let me restate their findings because they are very important. Basically, the quantum philosophers were now saying: "Listen folks, if we ignore the subtle global connectivity, then it would seem like relativity is being violated in the EPR experiment. That is because the apparatus of the experiment appears to be made of distinct pieces and signals which would have to travel from one distinct entity to another at a speed exceeding that of light. But if we bring

global connectivity into the picture, then there is one and only one entity, and so there is no need for any signals to travel, and hence also no violation of relativity. Quantum mechanics is thus safe, and Einstein's apprehensions are all misplaced."

The Only Individual is the Whole Universe

I know all this might sound a bit mysterious at this point, but please bear with me for a moment. Meanwhile, listen to what Gary Zukov says in his book, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*:

The philosophical implications of quantum mechanics is that all things in our Universe [including us] that appear to exist independently are actually parts of one all-encompassing organic pattern...

Prof. Chew of California puts it more crisply:

The only individual is the whole Universe!

If you think about it, this is an amazing statement coming from a physicist. What Chew is saying is that there are not many but just One! And this Oneness is conferred upon entities that our senses perceive as many, by a mysterious Something that appears to be beyond space and time. Quantum mechanics would fail if there were a real disconnect, because then relativity would come into the picture and scuttle quantum mechanics. However, there appears to be a subtle underlying oneness, thanks to which there is no disconnect. Relativity thus does not enter the picture and quantum mechanics works fine.

All this is a hand-waving explanation, no doubt, but it conveys the gist of the rigorous argument. Even if you have not followed all that I have said, just keep this in mind: *The most philosophical part of modern science is telling us that what we normally perceive as distinct and many is really just One!* For normal purposes, we might treat these as distinct entities different from each other, but at a grand and global level they are all apparently different manifestations of only One. The so-called different pieces of this One actually have an underlying universal connectivity. And there is Something beyond space and time that confers this connectivity.

God Must Be Beyond Space and Time

Now why is this Something that confers oneness, *beyond* space and time? Because if it were bound by space and time, it would have to respect relativity. But this mysterious Something seems to be exempt from relativity, which can happen only if it is beyond space and time.

This is a remarkable finding of modern science, and yet very few people seem to be bothered about its philosophical foundations. I maintain that this mysterious Something that bestows the universal connectivity of Oneness is

nothing but what we call Consciousness. And clearly, Consciousness is beyond space and time.

This raises many questions like: “Was there Consciousness all along right from the birth of the Universe or did it manifest only when living beings came into existence?” According to me, the answer is simple. Consciousness has always been there, indeed even before the birth of the Universe. And, according to Vedanta, the Universe actually originated from Primal Consciousness.

The Role of Consciousness in Evolution

OK, so what role did Consciousness play, if at all, during the evolution of the Universe? I believe that right from the moment of the Big Bang, Consciousness was like an invisible backdrop against which all evolution took place. This prompts the question, “Does that mean that inert matter has Consciousness?” I would think that the French experiments that settled the EPR issue suggest that inert matter also is pervaded by Consciousness – remember EPR refers to the problems posed by Einstein in 1936.

Devotees might at this point recall the famous story of the weeping saris. No doubt Hislop has narrated this story, but I shall quote for you Swami’s version of the same incident. This is what Swami says:

I asked that a hundred saris be brought so that I could select some for distribution to the women workers at Anantapur who were helping to build the Sathya Sai College there. I selected 96 and asked them to return four to the shop. Later when I passed the table on which the four discarded saris were kept, it was noticed that the cardboard box which contained the four saris was dripping tears! They were weeping that they could not get appreciation from Me. Hislop was standing by the side of the table. Yes, they had shed tears!

Through this remarkable incident, Swami taught Hislop that even so-called insentient or inanimate matter has Consciousness or awareness. This brings me to the central point about the role of Consciousness in evolution. I believe the following:

- *Right from the moment our Universe was born, Consciousness was always present as a backdrop or background, whatever you wish to call it.*
- *Space and time expanded against this subtle, primordial, invisible backdrop. In a sense, this is like the ether of classical physics, which, by the way, is a concept discarded over a century ago. I am mentioning the ether merely as an analogy for the benefit of those who have studied classical physics.*
- *The ether of classical physics was supposed to be weightless and penetrate everything in the Universe – it was all pervading. I believe that description is*

eminently applicable to the backdrop of Consciousness pervading the Universe.

- *It must here be noted that though space and time as we know them came into existence only when the Universe we live in was born, Consciousness was always there, is and will always be. That is why Consciousness is regarded as the Abstract Form of God. The Vedas state this via the declaration: Prajnanam Brahma.*
- *Evolution takes place against the backdrop of the curtain of Consciousness that pervades the Universe. When I say evolution, I mean both the evolution of the entire physical Universe as well as the evolution of living beings on our earth, which has been going on for about three to three and half billion years. For comparison, our earth is about four and a half billion years old while the Universe itself is about fourteen and a half billion years old.*
- *Now on the earth, we have both living and non-living beings or insentient and sentient matter. Consciousness pervades all; there is no exception.*

Passive and Active Consciousness

However, there is an important corollary that I must add. Consciousness does not manifest in equal measure in all the entities on earth. What this means is the following. Firstly, Consciousness appears to manifest in one of two possible states, the passive state and the active state. In the so-called insentient materials or entities, Consciousness is present in the passive state, while in the sentient beings it is present in the active state. I must add that no book on Vedanta makes such a statement; this observation is based on my own reflections and my training as a physicist. It is what we in the trade would refer to as a plausible model.

Based on this model, I submit that life manifests when Consciousness in a being makes a transition from a passive state to an active state. Take a seed. It may be lying around for a long time. But when planted and watered, somehow, most mysteriously, life manifests. Again, take a fetus in a mother's womb. For the first few weeks, it is just a growth inside the mother. But then, some time later, the fetus mysteriously starts having a life of its own, distinct from that of the mother.

What causes the transition of Consciousness in the fetus from the passive to the active state? I do not know, but I would not be surprised if it is associated with some kind of crossing of a threshold. There is a critical point, crossing

which Consciousness appears to “fire” and become active. By the way, nature has any number of examples of such thresholds. For example, when water is cooled to a temperature below 0° Celsius, it becomes ice. Warm the ice, and when the temperature becomes 0 degrees, ice melts into liquid water. I would imagine the appearance of life in an insentient piece of matter happens when some threshold is crossed. I do not know what that threshold is, but as a physicist, I believe it is plausible to think of such a threshold-crossing. Death would be a threshold-crossing in the reverse direction.

Climbing the Ladder of Consciousness

Next, the question of “how much” of this Consciousness is present in the various living beings, and what exactly it does. Here again, I shall offer a plausible picture. I believe that amongst living creatures, the role of Consciousness increases, even as their sense organs evolve and develop. What I mean is the following: In the lowest form of living creatures, there are no eyes, ears, etc., the way we know them. Yet, these creatures do have some sense of awareness they exist, and of the external world surrounding them; that is how they adjust to their environment. In such creatures, I would imagine, the manifestation of active Consciousness would be at a low level.

Let us now go up the evolution ladder and come to say monkeys, from which we all are supposed to be descended. I would say that active Consciousness in monkeys would be fairly high, but restricted to just the cognition of the external world.

The Capacity of Human Consciousness: Awareness of the Creator

We now come to human beings. Here, Consciousness really blossoms. You see, in the case of animals, their capacity for being conscious is restricted to the awareness of the external world. This capacity to be aware of the external world is needed for survival, and that is why God has given that capacity. Humans too have that capacity, for they too need to survive. But thanks to the power of the human brain, which, incidentally, is also a blessing of God, humans can not only see and experience the external world, but can even manipulate it. For example, man explores for oil that is underground and then pumps it out, sometimes even from under the sea.

But human beings score over animals in another important respect also. Unlike animals, they can see inside; they have this special capacity. It is a different matter that not all make use of this ability, but the fact is that human beings do have this blessing.

What does this looking inside mean? It means being able to resonate with the Heart and develop feelings of love, compassion and forbearance. It means being able to realize that behind Creation there is a Creator. Humans alone have this ability to be conscious of the Creator. That is why Swami often tells us that human birth is a rare blessing. Of course, it ceases to be a blessing if one insists on being a slave to the senses.

I hope I have managed to convey to you that as the Universe evolved, and as living beings on earth evolved, so has the visible manifestation of Consciousness. This is the right place for me to quote George Wald, a Harvard scientist who won the Nobel Prize. He says:

The idea came to me quite lately, as a new and extraordinary idea, both tempting and repellent, since it shocked my scientific sensibilities. Then I realized with some embarrassment that many others had been there before, not only mystics, but also a few most thoughtful physicists.

It is the view that this Universe breeds life and Consciousness because Consciousness is its source, because the Universe is ultimately made of this mind-stuff. What we recognise as the material Universe, the Universe of space-time and elementary particles and energies, is actually an Avatar, the materialisation of Primal Consciousness. In that case, there is no waiting for Consciousness to arise. It is always there, at the beginning and at the end. What we wait for in the evolution of life is only the culminating Avatar, the emergence of self-conscious bodies that can articulate Consciousness, that can give it a voice, a culture, literature and art and science.

This is an amazing statement, coming from a Harvard Nobelist. Erwin Schrodinger, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, also finally ended up with Advaitam. So you see, Primal Consciousness that the ancient Rishis cognized in their meditations is where serious thinkers of modern times also end up. This is another way of saying that God is the Ultimate Reality, and that great thinkers of all ages have accepted that.

Life Endows Earth with Beauty and Diversity

In passing, I have to draw your attention to an important fact that most of us miss. You know, this Universe is vast. It holds a billion, billion stars like our Sun, and has plenty of empty space to spare. Among these billions and billions of stars, only a very tiny fraction of stars have planets; and of this tiny fraction, an even tinier fraction may have a planet like our earth, suitable for supporting life. In other words, if life exists elsewhere in the Universe, it must be a very rare occurrence.

Now why am I mentioning this? For a good reason. You see, if you compare a dead planet like Mars with the earth, you would find an incredible variety on earth which you would not find in any other planet in the solar system or, for

that matter, on any planet anywhere, not having life. *It is only life that endows earth with so much beauty and diversity.*

Just look at the plants and trees – what a wonderful variety we have, from the grass to redwood trees! And then take the fishes, birds and animals; what a wonderful and colorful variety there is! Have you ever seen pictures of coral formations under the sea? How wonderful they are!

The Glory of the Manifestation of Consciousness

Wherever we look, there is a special beauty not found on planets without life. There is a wonderful glory of the manifestation of Consciousness, or God, everywhere on this living earth, and this is what George Wald refers to as the Avatar. And the crowing glory is the human being who has the special capacity to recognize God. But, alas, man often does not bother to recognize either the presence of God all around him or the presence of God within him. That is why God the Formless has to don a human form and educate man as He is doing right now.

I hope I have motivated you to spend sometime contemplating on this thing called Consciousness and see in the larger perspective what our Vedic seers always saw. Such a perception is more necessary now than ever before, considering the dangers facing humanity and the planet earth.

I think I have said enough. Let me remind you once again, this is the last and concluding talk in my long series entitled The Veda Walkthrough. I have been doing musings for over two years now, and this is the first time I have attempted a long series like this. I do hope it has been of some use to you.

That's all I have to say for the present, and I thank you for being with me throughout this Walkthrough. I hope it benefited you as much as it did me.

God Bless and Jai Sai Ram.

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN ARGENTINA

Awesome Argentina

The crescent-shaped Iguazú Falls, consisting of 270 cascades along 2.7 kilometers, where every second 176,000 cubic feet of water plunges 230 feet into a craggy abyss; the awe-inspiring Perito Moreno Glacier, a 250 square km mountain of ice, where chunks of ice gracefully fall like a carefully choreographed ballet; Patagonia, a naturalist's dream, home to penguins, guanacos, sea lions, flamingos, and whales; Iguazú National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with over 2000 known plant species, 400 species of birds, and the ruins of early Jesuit missions; the Andes, the world's longest mountain chain, with Aconcagua, the highest peak in the Americas; the Pampas, a grand expanse of plains dotted with working ranches and large estates producing grain and cattle and decorated with palatial villas rich in antiques and tradition – the natural beauty of this land encompasses all this and more. With 20 National Parks, deserts, plains, mountains, and wildlife found nowhere else in the world, Argentina is immeasurably endowed with God's natural treasures. Another special blessing, however, occurred nearly six decades ago, a time when even villagers in Puttaparthi had not recognized the Avatar in their midst, when one Argentinean lady came to Prashanti Nilayam for Sai Baba's darshan. The year was 1948.

Extraordinary Blessings in the Early Years

Adelina del Carril de Güiraldes was invited by a Maharani (Indian Queen), a Sai Baba devotee, to meet the twenty-two-year-old Swami. Adelina, wife of Ricardo Güiraldes, a famous Argentine novelist and poet, had been living in India for sometime, and was dedicated to the spiritual path and translating Indian scriptures into Spanish. When she encountered Baba for the first time, she realized, "Here was the One of whom the epic scriptures have been written." Her heart filled with divine experiences, she returned to Argentina in 1951, taking with her Sai Baba's materializations and many thrilling stories.

In those days, Bhagavan would keep in contact with certain devotees by post. So it was with this fortunate lady, whom He affectionately called by the nickname "Mamina" or "Mamitha." On one envelope, He wrote in his own hand, "Mamitha" – Pasupathi Kultiram, Sri Sathya Sai Baba High School Committee, Bukkapatnam." This was a printed invitation, headed by a small photo of Him, inviting her to the inauguration of that school. Swami added, "Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Blessings to Mamita and Ramu from Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi. How is your health, Mamita?" The date is 8 August 1950. There are a number of letters, all handwritten and addressed to Mamina, dated January 22, 1949, September 11, 1949, March 30, 1951, June 9, 1951, and December 16, 1951.

That was the start of the fascinating tale of the Sai Movement in Argentina. Before revealing how Baba, through His mysterious ways and sublime love, inspired Argentineans living across the seas thousands of miles from

Puttaparthi, let's look at this dynamic land, second only to Brazil in size in South America, and the eighth largest country in the world.

Argentina – Gifted and Prosperous

The name Argentina comes from the Latin *Argentum*, meaning silver. When the first Spanish conquistadors discovered the Rio de la Plata (an estuary on the South Atlantic coast), indigenous people gave gifts of silver to the survivors of the shipwrecked expedition. Even now, mining and exports of gold, silver, zinc, magnesium, and copper are growth industries. Apart from metals, agricultural exports (i.e., soy, vegetable oils) and manufacturing (motor vehicles, farm equipment, iron and steel) constitute a large part of the nation's GDP.

More than any other Latin American country, Argentina's population is of European origin with most of the populace descended from [Spanish](#), [Italian](#), and other European settlers, while the largest ethnic minority is the Mestizo (European/Amerindian). Argentina's urban areas have a European look, and many cities in the triangle-shaped country are built in a Spanish-grid style around a main square called a plaza. Approximately 70% of its 38 million people declare themselves [Roman Catholics](#) and Catholicism is endorsed in its constitution. At the same time, Argentina is home to one of the largest mosques in Latin America and a Muslim community of nearly six hundred thousand.

Spanish is the primary language, and a literacy rate of 97.5% puts the country high in global rankings. The ubiquitous white uniform of Argentine schoolchildren is a national emblem of learning. Except for graduate studies, education is free at all other levels.

From the Plains to the Port

Though Argentina's population is predominantly urban with four fifths residing in cities and towns, the [gaucho](#), the legendary cowboy and nomadic herder of the Pampas (as depicted in *Martín Fierro*, the Argentine folk epic by José Hernández) remains a national symbol. The nation's industry, culture, and beauty converge in the capital, Buenos Aires, one of the most modern cities in the world. Often hailed as the "Paris of the South," Buenos Aires gracefully combines space-age high technology with a rich colonial past. Home to more than a third of the country's people, this cosmopolitan metropolis is the nation's largest city. Its port is one of the busiest in the world, and the people of Buenos Aires are known as *porteños* (people of the port), acknowledging the historical importance the port has played in the nation's development. Avenida 9 de Julio in Buenos Aires commemorates Argentina's independence from Spain on July 9, 1816, and is said to be the world's widest boulevard. The Cathedral containing the tomb of José de San Martín is another popular landmark.

There are many more interesting aspects to Buenos Aires and Argentina, such as their culture, sports, music, flora and fauna, but our focus is on how the Sai Movement developed in this South Atlantic nation.

Argentina has twenty-three provinces, but the Sai Organization's Central Council of Latin America has divided the country into six regions. First, we will look at the Sai Movement in Buenos Aires and Córdoba, and then explore Cuyo, Bariloche, Northeast, and Sante Fe.

The Genesis of the Sai Organization in Córdoba and Buenos Aires

Though Adelina del Carril de Güiraldes visited Baba in 1948, more seeds were sown in 1978 with Ananda Giri. In 1969, Ananda Giri came to know of Baba from Indra Devi, the famous yoga teacher, when he lived in the Los Angeles ashram of Paramahansa Yogananda. It was there, in 1978, that Dick Bock gave him a copy of *Aura of Divinity*, one of the first films about Baba, shortly before he returned to Argentina.

Ananda Giri, a yoga teacher, settled in Villa Carlos Paz, in the lovely Mediterranean-like region of Córdoba, a province characterized by stately mountains rising by calm and transparent lakes. (The city of Córdoba has a belt of historical heritage buildings, some of which date back to the Jesuits, who founded La Docta, the first university in the country.) Ananda Giri, inspired by his friend Kriyananda and the personality of Paramahansa Yogananda, decided to organize a spiritual tour of India in 1979, with one stop at Prashanti Nilayam. He screened *Aura of Divinity* in Buenos Aires and Córdoba. Two seekers on this pilgrimage were Monica Zocolosky and Marta Basan. Eventually, it would be Monica who started the first Sai Center in Argentina, while Marta remained in India and lived in Prashanti Nilayam for fifteen years.

Even before Ananda Giri organized the trip to India, Monica Zocolosky had experiences of Sai Baba. One day, she came across a pamphlet about Baba in Buenos Aires, but there was no photograph. She began having dreams of a man in orange, who she thought was her guardian angel. Later, Monica heard of a divine incarnation in India named Sathya Sai Baba. Shortly after, she was in a bookstore when a book fell on her head. It was *Sai Baba, the Holy Man and the Psychiatrist* and it opened to a page with Sai Baba's photograph. Monica instantly recognized Baba as the one who had been appearing in her dreams.

“Many miracles will happen” - Baba

When Ananda Giri arranged the trip to India, Monica joined in hopes of securing an interview with Sai Baba. After reaching Prashanti, days passed with no interview, but she had a dream in which Baba told her she was to help Him in Latin America and that He was going to give her instructions and promised her an interview the next day. As promised, she was called in. Baba indicated she should return to Argentina and open a Sai Center in Buenos Aires. Monica, however, did not know how to

organize a Sai Center and expressed her doubts. Baba assured her, "Don't worry. Many miracles will happen." This was the first of many divine instructions, direct and indirect, which led to the unfolding of the Sai Movement in Argentina.

On her homeward journey, Monica stopped in London, where she lodged with an Indian couple who happened to be Sai devotees. They taught her everything she needed to know about running a Sai Center. Back in Buenos Aires, Monica opened the first Baba Center in Argentina in her home, putting to use what she had learned in London.

Jorge Hadad, President of the Sai Organization in Argentina for several years, says, "After news about the Sai Avatar came to Argentina in 1980 from Ananda Giri, the first Sai Centers were founded in Buenos Aires and Córdoba. Later, Sai groups started up in Mendoza and other provinces."

By 1981, in order to accommodate the growing numbers attending the Buenos Aires Center, a house was rented on Paraguay Street. Activities at the Sai Center on Paraguay Street included devotional singing, a Bal Vikas group, seva projects, and film showings on Sai Baba.

How the Largest Sai Center in Latin America was Born

Mr. Hugo Baldi visited Swami for the first time with his family in 1981. Upon returning, along with other new devotees, he began performing extensive service. Hugo relates, "When the devotees decided to buy an abandoned mechanic's shop on Uriarte Street and move the Paraguay Street Center there, I was initially opposed to the idea, until I had a dream in which Swami and I entered the workshop and He began to dance. This confirmed to me that the Uriarte street building was the appropriate location." The workshop required a great deal of remodeling, but has since become the largest Sai Center in Latin America, often with 400 devotees in attendance.

In 1983, a group from the Paraguay Center traveled to India, and after this visit the budding Sai Organization began to blossom. In 1986, Sai devotees rented a stand at an International Book Fair and sold books, gave away brochures and screened movies on Sai Baba.

In 1989, Monica led the way in organizing a huge public Sai Baba gathering. Held at the Obras Sanitarias Stadium in Buenos Aires, the event included popular artists and musical stars and featured the famous songwriter and singer Alejandro Lerner and a young actress cum singer, Marilina Ross. They co-starred in a musical play, *Who Am I*. 5,000 people packed the stadium with at least 2,500 more watching the show on large TV screens outside. It was a grand success and generated greater awareness of Baba and His message. Sai books were sold and pamphlets with information about the centers and their activities were distributed at this free event.

1985 brought a new Sai Baba Center in Córdoba with a multi-faith stupa like the one in Prashanti Nilayam. Richard and Janet Bock's film, *The Aura of*

Divinity, helped spread Sai's message and centers sprung up in Córdoba province and many others, such as La Rioja, Catamarca, Tucumán, Santa Fe, La Pampa, Entre Ríos and Chubut.

Argentinean television aired the Bock's film every three months in different sections of the country and discussion groups were organized to share Sai Baba's teachings. All of these efforts brought more people into the Sai fold.

The Sai Movement Grows Swiftly

The first Coordinating Committee for the Sai Organization of Argentina was established in 1986, with Hugo Baldi as President. Over the next year, the Organization swiftly expanded. Service projects, devotional singing, and human values lessons for children and adults inspired members across the country. The Sathya Sai Baba Foundation of Argentina was established to assist the multifarious service activities. Also, in 1987, the Central Council of Latin America was created at a meeting in Buenos Aires which drew representatives from the entire continent. Leonardo Gutter and Nassin Michaan were nominated as Central Coordinators.

How Leonardo Gutter came to Baba is a fascinating tale. He heard about Sai Baba while participating in a spiritual group (Sudda Darma Madalam) started by Monica Zocolosky. A powerful dream with Swami led to his first trip to India in 1982. After forty days of waiting and hoping for an interview, Leonardo decided to resign from the other spiritual group. As soon as he did so, Baba called him in. After answering Leonardo's personal questions, Baba whispered in his ear, "Sai Baba is never going to disappoint His devotees."

Returning to Argentina, the reinvigorated Leonardo shared Sai Baba's love and message, taking an active part in the evolutionary process of the Sai Organization of Latin America. Before leaving India that year, he hoped to return in September, though he did not have the funds for another trip. Then, while on a business trip to Ecuador, after speaking about Baba at a luncheon, a businessman asked him to accompany him to India in September. Leonardo was pleasantly surprised, and the next day the man bought their air tickets. The businessman had terminal cancer of the mouth, which Baba cured him of. Back in Ecuador, he printed a magazine with his wonderful experiences and distributed 10,000 free copies.

On a subsequent trip to India, Leonardo broke his nose a few days before leaving. As it was too late to cancel the trip, he traveled with a broken nose. He also came down with a cold, and when he had to sneeze, it felt like his nose was breaking off. He couldn't he blow his nose, and the air conditioning on the airplanes only worsened his plight. When he arrived at Prashanti, Baba called him for an interview. Leo was sitting besides Swami's chair when Baba suddenly grabbed his nose between His forefinger and middle finger and shook his whole head! The pain was excruciating, though only for a minute, and Leo thought his

nose would come off. But then he felt calm and free from pain. Swami had healed the broken nose.

“Watch” Your Thoughts

On another occasion, Leonardo wanted proof that Swami was God. In his room in the ashram, he said, “Swami, if you are God, you can make me a watch.” Leo had a wristwatch which he put it on the table by his bed that night. The next morning, it was gone. **He waited thirty days, and just before leaving for Argentina, while debating whether or not to buy another one, Baba called him in and materialized a beautiful watch. He said, “This is a special watch. It will stop every time you have a bad thought.” During the interview, the watch stopped. Leonardo was surprised and told Baba, “The watch has stopped!” Swami said, “Yes, because you had a bad thought.” Ever since then, Leonardo has been watching his thoughts to keep the watch running. The ways of the divine are truly astounding.**

The Wonder of His Omnipresence

Over the next few years, the Central Council of Latin America established Coordinating Committees in many countries, creating a base for the continued growth of the Sai movement. By 1992, the numbers had grown to seventeen Sai Centers and forty-six Sai Groups in the Argentine territory. In 1998, the first Central Council of Argentina and six Regional Coordinating Committees were established, with Jorge Hadad of Córdoba as its first president. “Often when we traveled to project Sai’s films,” says Mr. Haddad, “we smelled the aroma of incense or a marvelous jasmine fragrance inside the cars, the hotels, and in the public hall, though no one had lit any incense. In numerous ways, Sai’s presence was always felt.”

“Several years ago,” Mr. Hadad continues, “It was announced that a film on Sai Baba would be screened in a hall in Jesús María, a locality in the province of Córdoba. Before the announced hour, to the delight and astonishment of those who saw and tasted this divine manifestation, a sweet liquid with the scent of flowers began exuding from a photo of Sai Baba at the entrance of the hall. Another of the Lord’s leelas occurred at the Sai Center of Córdoba. While chanting 108 Gayatris before the devotional singing, a lady there felt something strange in her hand. When she stepped outside into broad daylight, she noticed her wedding ring had disappeared and on her finger shone a ring with the symbols of the world’s religions; a powerful wish of hers had been fulfilled. Also, her fingers were covered with fragrant vibhuti. This was witnessed by many others who were accompanying her. To complete her amazement and joy, when she arrived home, she found her wedding ring was safely in a box.”

Mr. Hadad also mentioned a group of drug-addicted young adults who occasionally came to the Sai Center, and how through Baba’s divine grace overcame their addiction. Today, they are healthy members of society.

Many such divine leelas along with the uplifting effects of the seva activities propelled the Organization's quick growth. Similar events brought people from the regions of Cuyo and Bariloche to Baba.

Sai's Message Comes to Cuyo

The region of Cuyo is situated at the bottom of the Andes Mountains, looked over by the 7000-meter high Aconcagua Mountain, also known as the Stone Sentinel, the highest peak in the Americas. This region of deserts and oases was the setting for a spiritual resurgence in Argentina.

After the first devotees from Buenos Aires went to visit Baba in the early 80s, they generated a stream of Sai Love through public meetings. Enrique Giaquinta and Norma Galar were among those who set up the first center in Cuyo. In the city of Bariloche, a tourist destination situated on a lake in the foothills of the Andes in South Argentina, Hugo Baldi began showing *Aura of Divinity* in his 'Interlaken Hotel'. Carlos Bastias was one of many who were moved, and with Mercedes Wesley, started the first Sai Center in Bariloche. Mercedes later became one of the principal translators of Sai literature into Spanish.

Translators Mercedes Wesley, Arlette Meyer from Venezuela, and Herta Pfifer from Chile, are largely responsible for making a number of books on Baba available to the people of Latin America in their language. Publishing the books has been a labor of love undertaken by Ricardo Parada from Buenos Aires, Luis Muniz from Mexico and Arnoldo Zarate of Venezuela.

The Word Spreads in Spanish

In the 1960s, Ricardo Parada read the predictions of an American clairvoyant who said there was an extraordinary person born in the East whose mission would be to unite all of humanity. The prophecy stated that from 1985 this great teacher would be known throughout the world. When Ricardo saw an article on Sai Baba, he was certain this was the promised teacher the clairvoyant had spoken of.

At the end of 1987, Ricardo planned his first trip to India. In Prashanti Nilayam, Baba called him for an interview and blessed the work of publishing Sai books in Spanish. On his return to Argentina, Ricardo, a partner in a firm specializing in publishing accounting books, had to overcome the resistance of his associates who thought bringing out spiritual volumes would ruin their business. Ricardo finally convinced them to try it with a few titles. The company grew quickly in a way no one could have imagined, and within four years they were the publishers of a catalogue of Sai books.

At a publisher's conference in Prashanti Nilayam in 2005, Ricardo showed how his company had managed to publish over 200 titles with Baba's message for Spanish speaking countries. He said, "It is wonderful how Swami

makes everything necessary for this work available without anyone asking Him.”

Sai Travels to Corners of Argentina

Atilio Spinello from Mendoza, a province in the Cuyo region, was given permission by Swami to make several films in the ashram and these were widely viewed, bringing new devotees into the Sai fold in these regions. In 1989, Beatriz Celerino traveled to India and Swami told her to start a group in Tucuman, the largest city in northwestern Argentina in the region of Noreste. She protested, saying no one knew about Swami there. But Swami promised to help. Little by little the group was formed and she traveled to the provinces of Jujuy and Salta where additional groups were started. Today these are strong centers with over 40 members.

In the Northeast and Santa Fe regions, the Sai movement was promoted by Ernesto Massin, a former catholic priest, and his wife, Albina Keppl. Ernesto penned the book, *Jesus and Sai Baba*, a comparison of both teachings. With other devotees, the couple started a community service center at Noccan Kani to aid families of the Toba community and help make them self-sufficient.

By 2000, when Leonardo Gutter was named Chairman of the Latin American Sai Organization, the Sai movement in Latin America had thousands of devotees. Leonardo’s stimulating talks attracted numerous seekers to the Sai fold. Baba blessed Leonardo with many spiritual experiences and gave him opportunities to speak in His presence in Prashanti Nilayam. In 2004, when the Prashanti Council was formed to oversee the Sai Organizations worldwide, Leonardo was named one of its members.

After this brief history of the Sai Organization in a few regions of Argentina, we move on to the activities – service, educational, spiritual and others – being undertaken by the country’s Sai community.

Argentina – Marching Ahead in Educare

Education in Human Values has become a major activity of the Argentinean Sai movement. Recently, the Minister of Education of Argentina met the Director of the Sathya Sai Institute of Argentina and approved the Sathya Sai EHV Program. She, in fact, requested the Director of the Institute to adopt as many schools as possible, the only limit being the Sai Organization’s resources.

Pioneering efforts by the Sai devotees culminated in this national recognition. Notable examples are: the daycare center in Córdoba, later converted into a Sai School managed by Jorge and Ana Haddad; Los Bichitos daycare center in Buenos Aires where up to ten devotees serve for five days a week; a program imparting human values lessons and training in skills like music and art for the children in La Boca, and others. Daniel Coifmann, who translated the first human values book, traveled extensively in Latin America introducing the EHV program to many countries.

Miracles Clear the Way for the Mahatma Gandhi School

The Educational Activities got a big boost when, in 2000, Ricardo Parada was asked to create an Institute of Education in Human Values with the goal of establishing new Sai Schools and administering those already functioning. A committee was formed to look for an appropriate site in Buenos Aires. Nothing suitable was found until Ricardo heard of a vacant school available at a reasonable price. It seemed a great opportunity, but being a bankruptcy sale, there were legal complications in the form of employee embargos against the property. Baba guided Ricardo in paying off the employees' claims even before the title was cleared and the transaction went off without a hitch. Renovations began in November 2000, but there were more hurdles to overcome before the school could open on its scheduled date in the first week of March 2001.

An authorization from the Department of Education of the Province was mandatory for the school to operate. Alberto Vasconcelos, future President of the Central Council, decided to speak personally with a high-level civil servant in the city of La Plata. When he sought an appointment, he was given a date weeks away. Alberto explained it was urgent and requested an earlier date but was told that was impossible. With no other option, Alberto sat in the office and prayed to Baba: "Swami, I am going to wait for You for thirty minutes, since You have shown that the project is very urgent."

Fifteen minutes passed and a woman approached and asked, "Were you looking for me?" After confirming she was who he was looking for, Alberto explained, "We are opening a school in human values." Interrupting him, she said, "Come to my office." She called her secretary, opened the files, and authorized it on the spot, signing all necessary documents. It was unbelievable, but that was how the Mahatma Gandhi School was legally born.

After his initial joy, Ricardo realized that although the authorization to open the school was obtained, the Institute had not yet been authorized by the Government Organization. Extremely concerned, he traveled to Prashanti Nilayam and delivered a letter to Swami on January 15, explaining the situation.

That same day, official approval for the Institute arrived, with all the stamps and corresponding dates, even though January is a month of judicial leave of absence for the entire country. This was yet another miracle, and all the obstacles were now cleared.

Although facing some opposition from the community and local religious institutes, the school opened in March, just as Swami had indicated. The drama was not yet over, however, as the Commission of Schools mandated that by July they had to have fifteen children enrolled or their authorization would be canceled. The school had opened with only five students.

Another request brought another miracle: the school had exactly fifteen students enrolled by July. Today, the Mahatma Gandhi School has 160 students and a long waiting list. A new Sai School is scheduled to open in 2007 in Mendoza, Cuyo.

Multifarious Service Projects

One of the reasons for the extraordinary growth of the Sai Organization in Argentina has been its numerous service projects. Describing these various activities, Leonardo Gutter said in a recent Radio Sai interview:

“In Argentina there are currently 80 to 90 centers and groups. A few centers are open 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. every day of the week. Their activities include daily seva, study circles, and bhajans twice weekly. Three or four times a week, *Narayan seva* is conducted. In Buenos Aires, one center serves about 11,000 plates of food monthly to poor people. Other projects include conducting medical camps, adopting slum areas, visiting the lepers’ house, serving in the children’s hospital, etc. The important aspect is that all this is done with great love and is a continuous activity done throughout the week, every week.”

Gold from Heaven for the Helguera Girls’ Home

When Swami told Monica Socolosky in her first interview that many miracles would happen, one which stands out is this:

In 1992, the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Foundation of Argentina was renting a Home for Children which was providing shelter for street urchins and offering education and rehabilitation in a loving environment. **One day, a boy from the home was cleaning flowerpots in order to plant new seeds and found two plastic bags with something wrapped in newspaper inside a pot. When he opened it to see what was inside, out fell two gold bars.**

The devotees consulted legal specialists to find out who the owner was and they were told the one who found it was the owner. So it seemed a street lad had become wealthy overnight. To get further clarification and directions regarding the ownership and usage of this newfound wealth, the President of the Sai Foundation of Argentina, along with the boy and other devotees, traveled to Prashanti Nilayam. Baba granted them an interview and told them that the gold was a product of His Will and should be used to buy a home for the orphans.

Through the sale of the gold bars and donations, the Foundation was able to purchase a house on Helguera Street, now the Girls’ Sai Home. This home shelters nine girls and is supported by the Sathya Sai Baba Foundation. All of them come from unstable families and were assigned to the Home by a judge from the Ministry of Justice. They are provided a family environment, education, loving care, and medical assistance. Three female seva dal workers live with the girls who participate in Sai Center activities, and go to

the church of their choice. In September, 1993, a second house was purchased on Costa Rica Street for use as a Service Center.

Raising Up a Poor Community

Gonzalez Catan is a small community about 40 kilometers from Buenos Aires. It was built by squatters on low-lying land which floods during the yearly rainy season when the river overflows. Many petitions were signed by the residents of Gonzalez Catan asking government authorities to resolve this problem, but with no help forthcoming their situation remained dire and their homes faced regular flooding.

Then someone told them that Sai Baba could help. Not knowing who Sai Baba was, they imagined He was someone who lived in Buenos Aires. So early one morning, the leader of the residents' committee took the bus to the big city. He didn't have any idea where to go, but his faith told him if he could find this Sai Baba, He would help them. He started by asking everyone he met if they knew where Sai Baba lived, assuming Him to be a well-known industrialist or politician. However, no one could give him a lead and he searched for the better part of the day until he was so discouraged and tired that he was ready to give up.

Then he saw a drunken man lying in the street. He thought, "I will not ask this fellow because what can a drunk know?" But he reconsidered and asked the man, who pointed to a house across the street. It so happened that the Sai Organization Youth Coordinator for Buenos Aires lived there and he was at home. He listened to the tale of woe told by the Gonzalez Catan community representative. The Youth Coordinator promised he would visit the community with a group from the service wing to see what they could do.

After assessing the conditions at Gonzalez Catan, the devotees ordered truckloads of earth and helped the community to elevate the level of their homes by 40 centimeters. Since the floors were raised two years ago, no water has entered their humble dwellings. The Sai Organization has also held medical camps there and visits weekly with food for the children and classes in human values. In February 2002, 480 patients were examined and provided free medicine by 100 Sai volunteers. In February 2006, an eye camp was held and free eyeglasses were offered.

The flooding problem in Gonzalez Catan still exists as the yearly overflow from the river is the primary cause. The devotees are currently looking for a more permanent solution, which may mean moving the community to higher and drier ground.

Sai Canteens and Medical Service

There are now fifteen Sai Canteens in operation, thanks to support from the Sai Foundation and individual Centers. The canteens serve lunch to neighborhood children and in some places human values classes are

taught by the Sai Youth wing. At one canteen in Córdoba, a vegetable garden is maintained by the devotees.

The medical service wing was initiated by Dr. Jorge Berra and his wife Rosana, who organized large medical camps with over 100 devotees and up to 40 doctors participating. They have taken these camps all over the country and Dr. Berra has since been named Latin American Coordinator for Sai Medicare to develop this service across the continent. He is also a member of the Prashanti Medical Council and works in the General Hospital in Puttaparthi when he visits Prashanti Nilayam.

Reaching out to the Underprivileged at Noccan Kani

Noccan Kani is in Santa Fe province. The devotees have been helping the Toba community in this region. Doctors have taken measures to prevent and combat local diseases. The Sai Center of Santa Fe has organized workshops and taught knitting and sewing to 130 mothers in the community. These ladies now sew clothing for their families, make bedspreads, tablecloths and school bags for their children, all from scrap materials obtained from a nearby industry.

Devotees are providing literacy training for local mothers based on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values. They have purchased a small bus to travel back and forth and have constructed a community center with the involvement of the local residents. During the medical camp, they also vaccinated dogs to prevent epidemics. In a medical camp held in 2003, twenty-seven medical professionals participated, serving more than 500 patients and providing free medicine.

Medical camps in Argentina, as stated, are a continuous activity. In Grand Bourg, Buenos Aires, two camps were held in March 2006. One was focused on eye care while the other was an all-specialty camp.

Gran Rex and Other Public Meetings

In addition to EHV programs, medical service and other spiritual activities, in 2004 the Sai movement in Latin America instituted Sai Public Meetings, prompted by Baba Himself. This is a unique service activity heralding a new phase of Swami's mission.

On May 8-9 2004, a Public Meeting and Conference for Devotees was held in Buenos Aires, planned by Baba himself. Two hours before the doors opened, a line two blocks long surrounded the Gran Rex Theater, where the meeting was held. The 3200 capacity theater was filled with devotees as well as non-devotees.

While people were being accommodated and lovingly welcomed by more than 100 volunteers, devotees sang bhajans in Spanish on the stage for an hour. A high-quality photographic exhibition displaying seva activities in Argentina and Latin America aroused public interest. During the speeches given by Dr.

Michael Goldstein and Mr. Leonardo Gutter, there was silence and serenity. When the movie *His Work* was shown, hundreds of eyes overflowed. After the meeting concluded, people did not want to leave and stayed in the theater lobby for more than forty-five minutes. The Ambassadors of Chile, Ukraine, Croatia and Vietnam and notables from public and private institutions attended the meeting. The next day, 500 devotees from all over Latin America participated in workshops and listened to inspiring talks given by various office bearers. Many countries presented PowerPoint shows of their seva activities. The impact of the Public Meeting was beyond the imagination of the organizers.

Argentina has also been fortunate to have many senior devotees of Bhagavan visit the country and share their experiences. Prof. Anil Kumar and Dr. Pavan recently visited Argentina. Both of these long-time devotees of Bhagavan reported that “the enthusiasm shown by devotees to listen about Bhagavan and learn from His teachings was overwhelming.”

If the Sai Organization has become a vibrant force in Argentina, it is because someone half a world away is pulling the strings. How Swami draws people to Him and then raises them to spiritual heights is an inspiring tale. The Argentinean devotees have had many divine experiences, but we would like to conclude with one classic tale.

Carlos Fazzari – Cancer Cancelled

In 1984, Carlos Fazzari, from Pina Mar, a resort on the Atlantic Ocean 600 miles south of Buenos Aires, was diagnosed with an incurable disease. He prayed for his health and questioned why he had to die so young. In August 1992, he traveled to Miami just in time to get caught up in the disaster of Hurricane Andrew. After stocking up on food and emergency supplies, he took shelter in the home of a friend. Carlos thought to take a book to read while they waited out the storm. It was Howard Murphet's, *Sai Baba – Man of Miracles*.

The hurricane came ashore with a vengeance and destroyed all the homes in the area except the one Carlos had taken shelter in. Amazingly, the house survived without any signs of damage. After the storm, Carlos underwent another series of medical exams and the results were worse than before. The doctors gave him six months to live. He returned to Buenos Aires and went to the Sai Center in Uriarte to buy more books on Sai Baba, hoping he might yet find a solution to his health crisis.

At the Sai Center, he met Leonardo Gutter, an old friend he had not seen since they were boys. Leo encouraged Carlos to participate in seva activities at the Children's Hospital. Three years later, he was able to travel to India to see Swami. In an interview, Baba told Carlos he should not worry and that He would cure him. Baba also gave him special vibhuti before he left.

Eighteen years have passed since the original diagnosis of the terminal disease and Carlos and his wife have come every year to stay with their beloved Baba for months at a time. Carlos came to understand that it was not only the physical disease that Swami treated, but the disease of ignorance which is even more important to be cured of. This was sufficient reason for his life extension. In 1996, after their return from India, Carlos and his wife started a Sai Center in Pina Mar, for which Baba gave them one of his robes.

Sai's All-embracing Love Sweeping Argentina...

The Sai movement in Latin America is going through an amazing period of rapid expansion and shows no signs of slowing down. It is truly phenomenal what is happening throughout the continent, and one can only watch in awe as Sai's love moves from city to town and country to country. While the activities of the devotees – be they medical camps, public meetings, or EHV programs – are bringing Swami's grace to thousands and purifying the hearts of those doing seva, the force behind this movement is, as always, the sankalpa of the Avatar, which is unfolding simultaneously all over the planet. Swami once made a fist and said, "With this hand I do my work," and then made a fist with the other hand and continued, "and these are my devotees." There can be no better work on this earth than to offer one's talent and skill, heart and mind at the service of the Avatar.

We are grateful to the devotees of Argentina for sharing their stories with us so that we could share them with you.

Jai Sai Ram.

THE SIX LANDSCAPES OF LOVE...AT WORK

*Dr. Jack Hawley, the author of this article, is a prolific author. His works include **Reawakening the Spirit in Work: the Power of Dharmic Management**, and **The Bhagavad Gita: a Walkthrough for Westerners**.*

When Swami directed me to write a book on *Dharmic Management*, I figured it would be a straightforward task. But the closer I came to the thicket of issues facing people at work, the more profound the issues became. I found myself entangled in the big questions of life – questions about spirit, character and faith, detachment, fear and freedom. (The book was eventually published as *Reawakening the Spirit in Work: The Power of Dharmic Management*, Berrett-Koehler, 1993.)

I also began to suspect that the immense but elusive topic of love had to be included in the book. Swami tells us repeatedly that love is the mightiest force on earth. In practically every discourse, He reminds us that there is nothing higher than love (*minchindi ledu* in Telugu). Nothing!

And yet, people around the world are still reticent about this stupendous subject. “Love,” they gasp, “...on the job?” Nobody talks about it in depth. They shy away from it as if it’s taboo.

I even got the opportunity to test this with Him at Kodaikanal. “Yes!” He replied immediately, the affirmative leaping from His lips. Then He added more slowly, for all to hear, “Love is God.” How could I even think of doing a book about Bhagavan Baba’s spiritual and moral teachings without embracing this grand topic, without putting God in it?

Writers of management books dodge hard to pin down the idea of love because to them Love is for poets or philosophers, not pragmatists. Management writers don’t really understand what love is. Like everybody else (including me at the time), they think they know, but they don’t. They narrow it to just a minor facet of love; for example, love as a relationship between people. Most people just don’t really comprehend the colossal immensity and relevance of Love in all of life, as well as life at work.

As Swami directed, I began writing about Love at work, but even then, the closer I got to it the more I found myself stumbling. Over and over again I started and tripped. “Om Sai Ram, please help me,” I mantra-ed.

My wife and I were called in for an interview. Bhagavan told the others in the room, all Indians, “This foreigner is writing a book on dharmic management.” Then He looked kindly at me and said, “You write too slowly because you are afraid that your words may not be what I would say.” Then He added, carefully enunciating each word, “Your inner voice is Me.” These were the most important words ever spoken to me.

Back at my writing, I still grappled with how I might help my readers breathe in this boundless subject. Swami’s guidance came: “Smaller breaths.” In other

words, don't even try to inhale all of it, parcel it into segments. I ended up writing five complete chapters on "Love and Reverence in Work and Life." The basis of those chapters, revealed piece by piece to me over several magical days, is a conceptual model that helps readers grasp the width and breadth of love.

In the model, love is sorted into six parcels: Love as Desire, Emotions, Action, Selflessness, Energy, and Spirit. The parcels are arrayed next to one another, stair-stepped according to a rough idea of spiritual scope and intensity.

The whole array, called The Six Landscapes of Love, lends itself to an imaginary journey from the lower levels up to the highest reaches of this glorious subject.

1. Love as Desire (Wanting Love)

We begin our journey at the lowest parcel. What looked like drab sameness from high above is really a choppy, gray-green sea. The first landscape turns out to be a dark and forbidding seascape, the Ocean of Desire. We find ourselves thrashing about in a cold and dangerous sea teeming with countless millions of people. We hear the word love bandied around loosely. "I *love* my car"; "I *love* that show"; "I would *love* to have that." It's the same word but it means the exact opposite of love – possessiveness and desire.

Greed and gratification is the game here. When one desire is swallowed, another surfaces to take its place. Voracious, shark-like creatures named Anger, Craving and Attachment are also thrashing around here devouring everything in sight. This is a fake love place. Real love contains no possessiveness.

Swami often warns us about becoming submerged in this cold Kali Yuga sea. We shiver, and begin to see more clearly what Swami means when He talks about "self-fish."

2. Love as Emotion (Feeling Love)

We leap from the murky sea to continue on our heart mission, rising above rocky shores and soaring over a pleasant grassy plain. Dry and warmer now, we see love as a familiar set of emotions – the feelings of love.

This is the love we're reminded of when the word love is used – love most recognizable as a sentiment between people. The main constituents are fondness and attraction, a super magnified liking for someone. Your breath quickens, your heart skips a beat and you feel a catch in your throat when the object of your love comes into the room.

This love is woven into our culture. We've heard thousands of love songs thousands of times each. The words and sentiments constantly go around in our heads, programming and shaping us. We've seen countless love stories played before us throughout our lives. This is love as the many splendors

thing. Every one of us experiences this wondrous love as actors in our own love stories. That's what makes this place so comfortable.

3. Love as Action (Doing Love)

We somewhat wistfully rise above the cozy plains of emotional love and move on. The smooth plains begin to gently roll, until we find ourselves in a region of scenic foothills – the Action Hills. This is where love is defined as doing, actually *doing* love. Love, in this country, is made of the daily acts of love that living beings perform.

This is where the sentiment of love becomes obvious/plain/evident as tangible behavior. This is the place where people actually perform genuine kindness, giving, helping, friendliness and team play. Action-oriented people embrace this definition because there's more substance in it. The feelings of love in the preceding landscape are supplanted by concrete acts of love here. To love activists, this is "real" love. To the people here, love is doing, not just feeling. Things begin to change profoundly at this level. Swami repeatedly tells us that the simplest, surest, quickest, and best way for us to show our love for others (and Him) is through helping others – loving through the acts of service, or seva. At this landscape, God's presence becomes more perceptible.

4. Love as Selflessness (Giving Love)

Proceeding on our mission, the gentle hills become steeper and we find ourselves in the towering Selfless Mountains. There's something quite different about this place. Love here is less of a game. We have left some baggage behind.

The "baggage," as Swami puts it, is our conditioning. People are conditioned from childhood to use love as a lever in their relationships. They learn early that love is a give-get competition. You give a little love, and then wait until you get some in return before you give a little more. At any point along the way, if you get nothing in return, the game stops abruptly. This love bartering becomes a habit and is largely unconscious.

But here, at this selfless level, the love is just given, with no expectations of return. As Swami so often says, the love here is freely given, as the tree gives its shade or its fruit – simply because it is its nature to give.

As an example of this, I recall an incident with our son Owen.

Owen (people called him Oh) had just turned seven years old. He didn't get it yet that you ration out your love. He's just a bright-eyed little boy. His best friend was Davey, and Davey's birthday was approaching. Oh was excited. He loves Davey, and the love is still clean and freely given.

But a funny thing happens; he doesn't get invited to Davey's party. The long awaited day arrives and Oh can't wait. "Mom, let's go right now and buy Davey's present."

Louise's heart sinks, "But you haven't been invited to the party." The little boy dismisses her comment with a puzzled glance that says, "What does that have to do with it?"

They drive to the store. Oh happily picks out the present and they have it wrapped.

When they stop in front of Davey's house, noises of a children's party float from inside. Louise didn't know the party would start this early. She glances at the passenger seat.

Oh springs from the car, present in hand, flies up the front steps and rings the doorbell.

Davey's mother comes. Oh, smiling ear to ear, hands her the present. "This is for Davey," Oh beams. She's speechless.

Davey appears at the door. Oh snatches the present from the mother and thrusts it into Davey's delighted hands. "Happy birthday, Davey," he says. "Gee, thanks, Oh," says Davey. Owen, totally pleased, turns and skips off the porch, glowing.

Love here in the selfless mountains is deeper, purer, and simpler. Something mysterious and special occurs between the giver and receiver of it. The space between them fills and overflows with this quality. The secret is *selflessness*. There is no ego-self in this love. When we love in this manner we leave the worldly ego behind.

During our times of selflessness we are given a glimpse of the highest peaks beyond the clouds, where there are forces mightier than our ego. Selflessness is the magic that connects us with these highest forces

5. Love as Energy (Powering Love)

We lift into the highest peaks, aware that we are passing through another boundary, moving from the pull of the worldly toward the pull of the spirit.

We have entered the invisible, vibrating world of love as a collection of energies. Love here is not a mode or a type of love; it's beyond form here. Love, at this high level, is invisible vibrations. It's the very power that draws us to love. It's the force behind the various forms of love we have visited at lower levels.

Love here is the motive force, the driver of everything else. This love reaches out and touches the world and every soul in it. Not a thing moves on the planet without this love energy. This love is the inner voice of God speaking to and through us. It's the universal and primordial inclination within each of us to love and be loved.

It is this love that drives the new conceptualization of management and leadership toward which Bhagavan Baba has pointed us. It is therefore not only relevant, but necessary for us to frequent these higher levels of love. Being aware of and able to draw upon this energy is a requirement of superb management nowadays. Tapping into this love energy is our audacious mission today.

Love here is also the inner goad to grow spiritually. It's the innate sense in all of us to move toward our true Self. This is the empowering energy deep within every soul on earth now, and in all those whoever have been. It's like magnetism. We can't see it or feel it, and at times we even forget about it, but we live with this mighty, mysterious pull of love every moment of our existence. Indeed, this energy, this love-force, *is* our existence itself.

6. Love as Spirit (Being Love)

Brimful of this wondrous energy, we lift from the high peaks and zoom almost straight up, crossing a final boundary and bursting free, as if moving beyond anything worldly. We soar into a vast, limitless quiet, a nothingness in which there is no sense of up or down, no awareness of time or space.

This is far beyond our worldly experience, and yet, curiously, there is something familiar here. Although we are now at an extremely rare level of consciousness, we all feel as though we have been here before. Then we realize that this is where we came from. This is our Source.

Our understanding of the breadth and scope of Love finally begins to coalesce. Love is far greater and more immense than anything we could have imagined. And we now comprehend that Swami is this mighty force. He tells us: "To love is to know Me, My innermost nature, the Truth that I am."

And now we at long last begin to comprehend that we too are love. His oft repeated "Love is God," is absolutely true. We grasp the utter precision and reality of Swami's frequent comment that we are "Embodiments of Love."

Think back to His audacious revelation in the little interview room when I was struggling to write about love in the workplace. "Your inner voice is Me," He said. He was not merely being nice, He means it. And He means that for all of us. It is now eminently clear that He is Love, and so, in truth, are we. Indeed, everything is Love.

OUR SEARCH FOR PEACE IN A CLIMATE OF TERRORISM

- A Multi-Faith Panel Discussion in Milton Keynes, UK

"Different religions were established to promote unity, fellow-feeling and devotion, which are the sacred qualities of mankind. Religion is intended to develop human personality and indicate the basic guidelines for right living. It enables man to live in harmony with his fellowmen. It is not a restrictive concept. It provides a link between the individual and Divinity. Love, sacrifice, service and righteousness are the four limbs of religion."

-Baba

Religion comes from the latin word "re ligare" meaning, "to bind back" or "to reconnect" – that is, to reconnect every individual to his real source. When this happens peace reigns. Every religion has provided humanity with signposts for right living and inner enquiry. Yet right through history, religious followers have carried out violence professing their faith at the same time. And in today's world, we find religion being blamed for terrorist conflict. Is this right? Should we abandon our faiths for greater world peace?

"Many regard religion as the cause for all the conflict, violence and bitterness in the world. But, religion is not the cause. Selfish minds are actually responsible for all the conflict."

- Baba

Here is a possible answer – the cause of the problem is not religion but selfishness, often born of ignorance and perverted education. Surely it is the emotions of anger, jealousy and hatred that lead to terrorism – not religion. True religion has, if anything, only preached love and service.

To discuss, elucidate and carry forward these sublime ideas of peace in a multi-faith and strife-stricken world and also to mark the fifth anniversary of 9/11, the Sathya Sai Human Values Network, UK, recently hosted an enlightening human values based forum - 'Our Search for Peace in a Climate of Terrorism'. Before we go on to share with you the inspiring ideas that emerged in the forum, a little about the organizing team – the Sathya Sai Human Values Network.

The Sathya Sai Human Values Network

The Sathya Sai Human Values Network (SSHVN) is a non-profit making website. [www.sshvn.org] initiated by the Three Counties Group, UK through their study groups on human values. It was approved by Bhagawan Baba in 2004 and since then it has a programme of ongoing development of reaching out to the global community through the universal message of human values. The ethos of the Network is to share knowledge and learning to enhance our understanding of human values. Based on the Sathya Sai Human Values

Program, it seeks to integrate human values into all aspects of our lives for the betterment of society and to develop an online resource to share best practices from a human values perspective. There are human values designed here for an individual's personal growth.

The Genesis of the Forum on 'Our Search for Peace in a Climate of Terrorism'

So how did the idea of a multi faith panel discussion come about for an online forum? It was simply the need felt by the team to do more, to be more proactive. To address the need for human values in dealing with global issues, such as terrorism, environment, climate change, etc., which affect all individuals and discuss these issues in a lively setting with enlightened minds.

The Network team decided to pilot the discussion in the local community in Milton Keynes, a city which had become one of the International Peace Messenger Cities, in 2003. The SSHVN Team approached the leaders from the various faiths to participate in a panel discussion to commemorate 9/11 with a view to promoting peace through the practice of human values common to all faiths. **It was intended for speakers from the interfaith communities to draw upon key messages from their respective faiths towards a commonality of purpose. This was: to raise people's awareness on Human Values inherent in all faiths and to utilise them to promote Peace, Well Being and Harmony.** The response from distinguished leaders was encouraging and the forum had six leaders from six different faiths sharing their views when it was opened on Sep 13, 2006.

The panel consisted of the following eminent invitees from the local community.

Rev. Handa Shonin Sama	– Buddhism
Mr. Fazle Khundkar	– Islam
Rev. Tim Clapton	– Christianity
Mr. James Eckhardt	– Judaism
Mr. Jehangir Saros	– Zoroastrianism
Mr. Kapil Dudakia	– Hinduism

The Forum Opens

Dr. Daksha Trivedi, chair of the Sathya Sai Human Values Network opened the discussion by raising the two primary questions to be considered by the Panel:

- 1) How can faith help bring about peace and reconciliation in the current climate of terrorism?
- 2) How can the different faiths work together proactively to bring about peace?

She mentioned that against the backdrop of the anniversary of the atrocity at the Twin Towers in New York, it was a hundred years ago on September 11, 1906, that Mahatma Gandhi started his protest movement towards peace in South Africa by applying the moral laws of Truth and Non-Violence to the social realm. Dr. Trivedi quoted Albert Einstein, who said that peace can only be achieved by understanding and not through force. She also commented that just as war begins in the minds of men, so should peace begin in the minds of men.

The Mayor of Milton Keynes – The Chief Guest

The Mayor of Milton Keynes was the chief guest of the event and in his short address, he said that Milton Keynes became one of the International Peace Messenger Cities in 2003. Local authorities have a responsibility to establish a culture of peace in their areas. A documentary on “Unfair Trade,” highlighting the issue of slavery, historical and present-day, was produced by the city’s youngsters. On the issue of diversity, the Mayor said that Milton Keynes’ 40th Anniversary celebrations next year will involve 40 different nationalities. Dr. Trivedi thanked the Mayor for his speech and initiated the discussion on “The Search for Peace” by posing the questions to each of the Panel members.

How the Panelists Viewed the Two Questions:

Qs. 1) How can your faith bring about an understanding of peace and reconciliation in this climate of terrorism?

“Humans were born to do good, and the ultimate good is to relieve the suffering of many,” **Rev. Handa Shonin Sama** (Buddhism) said. “We need to ponder on the source of people’s suffering and eliminate the root causes. We need to venerate all others as they are all Buddhas. When everyone and everything becomes an object of veneration, peace will prevail.” Rev. Handa Shonin Sama was born in Japan and left at an early age to live in the ashram of His Holiness Nichidatsu Fuji in India. He came to Milton Keynes to help build the Peace Pagoda and has contributed tremendously towards peace in the community.

Elucidating on this very same idea, Mr. Fazle Khundkar (Islam) said, “Islam means being at peace with the divine and with oneself. The Koran was compiled after the death of the Prophet. Most of the ‘suras’ or verses begin with ‘Bismillah Ir-Rahman Ir-Rahim’ – ‘In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.’ God can not wish us to be violent while being compassionate and merciful.” **Mr. Fazle Khundkar** who is involved in community work through Action Aid, the Society of Friends of the Lotus Children, Interfaith group in MK, the Peace and Justice Network of MK and the Council of Racial Equality, further said, “The five fundamental principles of Islam had no mention of *jihad* or the perpetration of violence on non-believers. Violence and terrorism are not in the core values of Islam. We must look at history to understand the violence that has occurred. When the Muslims were persecuted at the time of the Prophet, they were given refuge by the Coptic

Christian King in Abyssinia. Refuge was also granted in Medina, where Jews lived. The Covenant of Medina was drawn up by the Prophet to maintain peace. In his last sermon, the Prophet asked for peace and understanding.”

The next speaker, Rev. Tim Clapton (Christianity) who is Development Chaplain with the Mission Partnership of the Milton Keynes Churches Council and a Convener of the Interfaith MK Organization, reminding people of what true Christianity stands for said,

“There was a small pacifist group within the Church from the early days. However, in the name of the faith, many people had perpetrated violence and instigated many wars. At the heart of the Christian faith is the hope that all people will live in peace and harmony. Christianity strives for peace by seeking union with God and seeks a resolution for violence. Peace cannot happen without justice (e.g., for the Palestinians). In the Christian faith the aim is to find the violence within oneself and confront this. Those without power are first within God’s kingdom.” Truly, it was something profound to ponder and assimilate for every Christian.

Mr. James Eckhardt (Judaism) who spoke next was a founding member of Jewish-Arab Dialogue in the 1990’s. A student of Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, in the course of his thought provoking talk, he said,

“Judaism is a complex religion, with a written law, an oral law, commentaries, the Kabala, etc. The sensitivity to be instilled in children is illustrated by the reason given for covering the bread in the Sabbath ceremony – covering the bread would prevent it knowing it would be the second item blessed! We have a choice as to how we view other nations; we should view them with love, not fear.”

After this peep into Judaism, Mr. Jehangir Sarosh (Zoroastrianism) educated the audience on the subtle messages of Zoroastrianism. He said,

“Zoroastrianism was a religion of the Persian Empire but now has about 120,000 followers. In answer to critics within Zoroastrianism who say this is too small a group to affect anything, his reply was “Have you ever tried sleeping with a mosquito?” In Zoroastrianism, one can’t ask for forgiveness from God. Zarathustra said, “Listen to my words” but each person must choose what is good, not necessarily what is right.”

Mr. Jehangir Sarosh has been President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace since 1999, as well as a member of the Advisory Committee for the International Interfaith Center and of the World Congress of Faiths. Reflecting on the current trends of violence, he further said, “The word ‘terrorism’ has been hijacked for different reasons by the media. In 1992, the democratically elected government in Chile was overthrown by General Pinochet with the support of the CIA. Zoroastrians need to stand up to governments to say such things are not right. Zoroastrianism tradition says we need to refresh the world. Interfaith dialogue will bring the Kingdom of God on Earth.”

The final panel member to speak was **Mr. Kapil Dudakia** (Hinduism) who is the Chair of the Milton Keynes Council of Faiths and is an advisor to various Hindu Organizations. Greeting everyone with a “Namaste”, he went to explain how this greeting which is so much a part of Indian tradition acknowledges that “at a fundamental level we are all one family, since the same God is within each one of us.”

Explaining the concept of Hinduism and its tenets, he said, “There is a difference between faith and religion. Hinduism is not technically a religion. Hindus believe in a certain path or way of living.” Later on developing Dr. Trivedi’s opening remarks, he said, “Peace begins in the minds of children. Children have to be taught the fundamentals of human values. We will then get children who can communicate with each other. The law of Karma brings us all together – for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. In the Hindu doctrine, there was the concept of personal responsibility. When we realize this, there will be a way forward. All religions have the five human values (Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi, Prema, and Ahimsa – Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love, and Non-Violence). Martin Luther King followed the path of Ahimsa, and like Mahatma Gandhi, lost his life. When humanity comes out of sectarianism, there will be reconciliation. “When I can recognize the God in you is the God in me, how can I harm you?”

Thus ended the enlightening first round of the Panel Discussion. In the second round the question posed by the moderator was -

Qs. 2) From your perspective, how do you envisage the various faiths working together proactively in building peace?

Mr. Fazle Khundkar answered by noting that “The cooperation of faiths has been in existence for a long time, especially in India. While there have been examples of ruthless conquerors, there have also been generous Muslim rulers in India and Spain. Mahatma Gandhi, together with the impact of Subhash Chandra Bose, brought about independence for India. A survey in Saudi Arabia showed non-violent protest is the preferred form of resistance. We need to love our opponents and understand their point of view. Will God want us to kill one of His creations?”

Rev. Tim Clapton then gave some broad guidelines to world peace when he said, “There has to be political action from the interfaith perspective. We need to widen our perspective of peace as not just the absence of war but Fair Trade, and the elimination of poverty. It is incumbent on all faiths to challenge fundamentalism in their own religions and consider political options. There has to be an absence of prejudice at all levels.”

Focusing on the situation in the middle-east **Mr. James Eckhardt** stated, “Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi said: ‘The duty I owe my ancestors who died for their faith is to build a world where people don’t have to die for their faith.’ The environment in the Middle East is fueled by fear. How do we neutralize fear? By building relationships. Conflict arises from poor relationships. We need

reconciliation; both sides need to acknowledge the damage done by either side. Jews and Arabs must see each other as brothers, whose security depends on each other.”

Mr. Jehangir Sarosh who spoke next gave examples of how religious communities can bring tremendous positive change and said, “In March, religious leaders and Ministers from Iraq were brought together in London, in secret. 800 religious leaders from across the world (especially conflict zones like Sri Lanka, the Middle East, Sierra Leone, etc.) were brought together in Japan. It is important to appreciate the strength of religious communities. In Kenya, the stigma of HIV/ AIDS is being removed through the actions of religious leaders. Justice is vital for forgiveness. We need to question our double standards – there was much uproar over the 3000 sadly killed in the Twin Towers but little comment over the 7000 Muslims killed in Srebrenica or the Armenians massacred in Turkey in the last century. Bosnian Muslims have said instead of ‘Forgiveness and Reconciliation’ they want ‘Justice, Forgiveness and Reconciliation.’”

Mr. Kapil Dudakia then stressed on the need for a clear voice from religious leaders and said, “We need more “Fazles” to tell it like it is. We need clarity for teachers of faiths. Tim was frank about Christianity but also reiterated the core values. James said the way forward in the Middle East is for people to listen. What are the barriers to peace? Power and politics. Religions have to make statements. If this means condemning the government, so be it! There will be no confusion if religious leaders take a stand. Eventually leaders who believe in justice will be in power. Peace is within us. The soul can only rest if there is peace. If I recognize the divinity in you, how can I hurt you?”

For the sixty odd targeted special invitee audience - which consisted of community service leaders, youth workers, prison services personnel, educationalists, racial, equality and diversity officers, parents, welfare officers and people from the business community - it was truly a very revealing experience. As one member said,

”The points about inculcating human values for children, highlighting the true message of peace on which religions are based, the point about dual standards and justice for developing states, how the media has hijacked the word ‘terrorism’ and compartmentalized it to Islamic terrorism, the point about peace through dialogue and forgiveness and how inner peace will lead to world peace, all need to be shared through publications in newspapers.”

The audience then came up with searching and down-to-earth questions on the issue of implementing world peace for the panel and this is how the distinguished leaders responded –

Q: *In the current climate when there is such strong negative media influence, how do you provide a counter balance from your faith’s perspective to promote human values in dealing with conflict?*

Rev. Tim Clapton: We have violent video games, etc. these days, but we have choices. We must offer our children alternatives.

Mr. Kapil Dudakia: Each of us is a drop but many drops can make a difference. We need to go back to our core principles.

Mr. James Eckhardt: We can intervene and teach children how to react with calmness. We have a great deal of power and opportunity to influence people.

Mr. Jehangir Sarosh: Individual responsibility can go out to the community. The faith communities can play a part.

Q: With the decline in faith in God, how do we rebuild faith? Will this rebuilding take us to peace and understanding?

Rev. Tim Clapton: There is a decline in religion in the West but there is a mushrooming of interest in spirituality. Our task, as people of faith, is to address people on this quest. Violence within us is a reality, and faith needs to address this.

Mr. Jehangir Sarosh: There is a tremendous hunger for spirituality and experiential religion. Globalization has led to greater awareness and faith in wanting to reconnect.

Q: Most religions monopolize truth and are exclusive. Consequently they contribute to violence and the absence of peace. How do we empower individuals to confront the authoritative power inherent in some religions and the political and economical hegemony (imperialism) of the world powers?

Rev. Tim Clapton: In Christianity, the community is more important than the individual. If you want to be great, you have to be the servant of everybody. You have to learn humility.

Mr. James Eckhardt: We must have the vision of being brothers. If we look at terrorist organizations, a schism usually appears between the moderates and the extremists. This itself is a shift in consciousness. Hezbollah and Hamas are going for peace. They are considering giving up arms to concentrate on the social work they have been doing among their people.

Q: Recently, a newspaper headline read "Not all Muslims are terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims."

Mr. Fazle Khundkar: There are many examples where terrorists are not Muslim, for instance in Sri Lanka. There can also be state terrorism. Islam is against terrorism because it results in indiscriminate killing.

A Senior Officer from Her Majesty's Prison, Woodhill: There is a difference between fundamentalism and radicalization. We have animal rights terrorists. The Muslim terrorists in Woodhill have largely done what they did because of anger fuelled by marginalization and lack of opportunity, and not

on behalf of Islam. At Woodhill, they have time to reflect on their actions, and have become better Muslims as a result.

Youth Worker: Peace comes from understanding and knowledge. Teachers need to play a role in communicating religion to youth.

Mr. Jehangir Sarosh: There's a lot of work being done in building networks. Youth Groups (Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish) are being brought together.

Rev. Tim Clapton: In Northern Ireland there was a well-funded project to bring Protestant and Catholic youth together. We need to do similar work with the Bangladeshi youth in Bletchley, and also the Somali youth in Milton Keynes.

Mr. Kapil Dudakia: If we want to effect change, we need to do it in the formative years, when it is easier. We should impart human values starting young. A quick fix is not possible. There is a lack of resources.

The Panel discussion on the whole generated a lot of positive ideas and public interest. There were suggestions from the audience to take the concept to a much wider audience and involve diverse sections of society. One participant said, "Extend the forum to include representatives of the government and from the UN. Various faiths expressing concerns on their own may not have the desired effect without the involvement of wider representatives from government and other institutions with the power to facilitate change."

Another invitee said, "To sum up, we need to move from interfaith dialogue to multifaith cooperation, i.e., move from talking together to walking together."

Small Steps...New Beginnings

Dr. Trivedi brought the meeting to a close by saying that we had taken a few small steps towards peace. We had common beliefs in the goodness inherent in people. This would spread from the individual to communities and to the society at large. She quoted from Bhagawan Baba's message to explain that:
If there is righteousness in the heart, there is

Beauty in the character – Individual

Harmony in the home – family

Order in the nation – community

Peace in the world – global peace

Members of the panel agreed on the importance of working together to raise awareness of unity through more forums. Dr Trivedi thanked the Mayor, the Panel Members, the guests and the organizers and invited all the participants to continue the discussion on the website of the Sathya Sai Human Values Network at www.sshvn.org.

More About the Work of the The Sathya Sai Human Values Network

Apart from providing an interactive website on Human Values for the local, national and international community to discuss how values could enrich life, the Sathya Sai Human Values Network also takes up many community-based events promoting human values in action through partnerships working periodically. For instance, the team conducted a series of Health Awareness Sessions for senior citizens of the local community in Hertfordshire, UK. With the help of charts, posters, videos and leaflets in various languages, the team provided a holistic approach to better health which stresses on prevention through promoting healthy life styles and stress management followed by health checks.

Spread over four weekly sessions in the Ravidaasa Community Centre, they educated the elderly citizens on prevention of diabetes and related risks, improving bone health and prevention of Osteoporosis, prevention of cancer, overcoming depression, etc.

The SSHVN team also recently worked with Rainmakers, an International folk Dance Group based in Letchworth Garden City, UK to support a local hospice where a good friend known only for his years of selfless service passed away recently. Rainmakers provide joy through cultural music and dance from different countries to many people in the community including entertaining the elderly and the lonely in their community homes. SSHVN and Rainmakers jointly hosted a charity 'Quiz Night' in memory of Mr Adrian Barter. World renowned author Mr Frederick Forsythe graced the occasion with a memorable talk and anecdotes and more importantly greatly appreciated the value of selfless service towards such a cause.

The SSHVN has been receiving requests to host similar community service events and the team has been very active building bridges with organization which share common goals. Talking of the where they would like to be in the next five-ten years, Dr. Trivedi, Chair of the Network team says,

"The Network aspires to become a catalyst and reference point for values based interactive dialogue through our Human Values Discussion Forums. Secondly the Network, being a global initiative, will continue to develop and promote models such as the Panel Discussion which may be adapted and implemented in local communities across the world. Additionally, the Network will develop a steadily growing values based virtual resource centre for people from all backgrounds covering both personal and professional development."

We at Heart2Heart wish the Sathya Sai Human Values Network team all the best in their novel endeavours and hope the network team kindles the spark of right living in the minds of many and spurs them on towards their individual and collective human excellence.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI – PART 23

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT V - SCENE 1

The scene is the Puttaparthi Elementary School, and the bell goes to indicate that the classes are over. Boys come running out, eager to get back home. Venkama Raju comes there to meet Sathya's teacher.

TEACHER: *[to the boys who are rushing]* Slow, slow!

V.RAJU: Hello, Teacher Sir, how are you?

TEACHER: Thank you, Mr. Venkama Raju, I am fine.

V.RAJU: How is my Sathya studying?

TEACHER: If at all there is anyone who is really studying well, it is your Sathya.

V.RAJU: Really?

TEACHER: Yes, and this is the truth. You may not believe it but Sathya does not need to be told twice; he grasps everything first time, right away. The fact is, we are learning a lot from Him! He is far above the Elementary School level...How do I say it? He has to be educated somewhere way up there! *[holds his hand high]* I can't say anything more!!

V.RAJU *[Thinks]*: We must try to admit our Sathya into High School

SCENE 2

The scene is Sathya's house. Discussion is going about the next step in Sathya's education.

V.RAJU: *[to Kondama Raju]* Father, Sathya has completed His education in the Puttaparthi Elementary School. Higher education is available only in Bukkapatnam.

SESHAMA RAJU: *[to Kondama Raju]* Yes grandfather. It is desirable to admit Sathya in the Bukkapatnam School. If He is admitted there, then later He can go for much higher studies.

E.AMMA: If He has to go for higher studies, then does He not have to go to a distant place? Venkamma and Parvathamma also are wondering whether He has to go that far.

SESHAMA: Mother, Temple and School can't always be where we want them. Rather, one has to go where they are! Can't be helped!

E.AMMA: True, but is not Sathya quite young?

V.RAJU: Sometimes it becomes necessary to go to other places for study. We just have to adjust, that's all.

SESHAMA: Yes mother. There are many boys who go to Bukkapatnam for studies. Sathya can accompany them. This is the right age for study, and we should not be hesitant.

E.AMMA: Sathyam!

SATHYAM: Yes mother.

E.AMMA: Are you ready to go to Bukkapatnam and study there?

SATHYAM: Yes, I am ready to go there and study.

E.AMMA: Are You really willing to go to Bukkapatnam for studies?

SATHYA: Most certainly, mother.

PARVATHAMMA: I'll dress You up!

VENKAMMA: And I will walk with You up to the Chitravathi River.

K.RAJU: Easwaramma, it seems that even though Sathya is keen, you don't want Him to. Tell me truly! Do you want Him to go to Bukkapatnam or not?

E.AMMA: Everyone is saying that He should go there. Sathyam also says He wants to go. Don't I want Him to study further? Yes, I too want it!

SCENE 3

Sathya is being helped to get ready to go to the School in Bukkapatnam.

K.RAJU: [to Sathya] You must study well and become a great person!

E.AMMA: Sathyam!

SATHYA: Yes mother?

E.AMMA: Behave properly and study with earnestness. ... I have kept *sanghati* in this; and in this, I have kept other eatables . Remember to eat them! You will eat them without fail at midday, will You not?

V.RAJU: Sathyam!

SATHYAM: Yes father.

V.RAJU: You must study English well and learn to speak it fluently. People should say with pride, "My! This boy speaks like an Englishman!" Understand?!

SATHYA: I will do as you say, father.

SESHAMA: Sathyam, that school is not like our school. It is Bukkapatnam School, and a big one. You should not argue with anyone there. Listen carefully, come home and do your homework properly. If you want to go for higher studies, then schooling in Bukkapatnam is important. You must behave properly with Your teachers.

K.RAJU: [to Seshama] My dear Sir, it is not Sathyam but the teachers who must behave properly with Him! Get it?![in general] Why are you all confusing Him by constantly repeating your advice?

V.RAJU: [to Kondama] Is it not beneficial to repeat good advice? I am telling only your grandson!

K.RAJU: For my grandson, telling once is enough! He is a child prodigy! His education is of a different type. Who is there who can truly educate Him? It is only on account of your compulsion that I am sending Him to Bukkapatnam....

V.RAJU: [to Kondama] It is your attachment to your grandson that makes you shower such praise! [to Sathya] Sathyam, come on, get ready. Your friends are waiting.

END OF ACT 5 SCENE 3

(To be continued...)

GITA FOR CHILDREN – Part 24

(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 11

1. Arjuna says to Krishna, 'Oh Lord, out of compassion for me, You have explained to me most clearly as to who exactly You are and how You pervade the entire Universe.'
2. 'I also understand better not only how You are in me but also how I should recognise You in other beings, especially humans.'
3. 'And now, oh Lord, feebly and most humbly I venture to make a request. Can I see You in Your mighty Cosmic Form, please? Is it at all possible?'
4. The Lord replies, 'Arjuna, what you are asking to see has rarely been seen before. For you, however, I shall make an exception and reveal My Cosmic Form. Get hold of yourself and be ready to see something that is not only breath-taking but also awesome!'
5. 'The Cosmic Form that you wish to see cannot be seen with the normal human eye. It calls for Divine Vision, which I shall now confer upon you. Prepare then, Arjuna, to see something both mind-boggling and fearsome!'
6. At this point, Sanjaya, who is narrating all this to Dhritarashtra, says, 'With these words, Krishna is now revealing Himself as the Supreme Lord of Creation and all that lies beyond.'
7. 'Arjuna sees now, concentrated in one place, in the person of the Supreme God, the entire Universe with its manifold divisions.'
8. Sanjaya continues, 'Oh, King Dhritarashtra, how am I to describe this extra-ordinary spectacle that is brighter than a thousand Suns? I can see Arjuna dumbstruck, struggling to say something.'
9. 'Now Arjuna speaks; he says, "Lord, I am at a loss for words. Within Your blazing Form I can see everything, every being and every entity in Creation. This incredible Form before me does not seem to have any beginning or end. It is truly mind-boggling."'
10. 'Oh, my dearest Lord! I realise now, feebly perhaps, that You are at once the Eternal Being, the Supreme Being, and the goal that is to be attained. Till now, I used to think that the fleeting and transient world was the Reality. But now I realise how wrong I was, and that it is You alone who are truly the Ultimate Reality.'
11. 'By You alone is filled the space between the heaven and the earth. Oh, Almighty Lord, the three worlds tremble at the sight of Your wondrous but terrifying Form!'

12. 'As I see Your Supremely Effulgent Form stretching to the very heavens, I am absolutely petrified. I just cannot bear this frightening vision.'

13. 'I am petrified because I see in You all that is destined to happen in the future, especially the death of our arch enemies.'

14. 'As the moths fly into the flame only to be destroyed, I see these people plunging into destiny to meet their violent end.'

15. 'Tell me, oh Lord, Who presents such an awesome Form that strikes me with fear and fills me with dread, tell me, oh Lord, Who exactly are You?'

16. In reply, the Almighty Lord says, 'Arjuna, I am TIME, and to Me as TIME, everything in Creation must bow. I am Destiny, and I have destined death for every creature. All, including those whom you are hesitant to slay, will die, whether you do it or not.'

17. 'Arjuna, do you understand what that means? When the bodies of all these people are doomed to perish, why do you hesitate to engage them in battle, especially when I am ordering you to do so?'

18. 'Now that you have got a glimpse of Me as TIME and DESTINY, it behoves you to implicitly obey My command. Cast aside your doubts and misgivings and trust in Me. Place your faith in Me. Pick up your bow and arrows. Get up. Prepare to go out there and fight!'

19. 'Arjuna, Creation is a Cosmic Drama, scripted, produced, directed and staged by Me for My pleasure. All beings are actors, nay puppets. Everyone is a puppet; a few know it but most do not.'

20. 'Nothing can happen unless it is according to My Will. Not even a blade of grass can move unless I will that it be so. People do not understand this. You too! I have already ordained that Bhishma and Drona shall die in this war. And they will for certain, whether you fight or not. The question is whether you want to accept the role I am giving you or you choose to quit.'

21. 'Once again I say to you: Get up and fight and slay your enemies. Don't think you are killing them. They are being swallowed by TIME, and you will merely be assisting the process.'

22. Sanjaya says to King Dhritarashtra, 'Hearing these words of the Lord, Arjuna, palms united in humble salutation, body trembling, starts speaking in a choked voice, filled with Fear.'

23. Arjuna says, 'Lord, I now understand why devotees constantly chant Your Name and never miss an opportunity to proclaim your matchless Glory.'

24. 'And why not, my Lord, since You are everything and there is nothing other than You? Lord, at this point, I have an apology to make. Till now, not

knowing who exactly You are, I have taken many liberties with You, imagining You to be merely Krishna, my friend. Please pardon me, my Lord, for all my indiscretions. I feel extremely ashamed and also most embarrassed. I don't know how to seek Your forgiveness. All I can say is, please forgive me, and forget all that I said or did in stupidity and ignorance.'

25. 'Prostrating before You, I pray to You to bear with me, even as a father is indulgent to his wayward son, and a kind man is to his errant friend.'

26. "As for this extraordinary vision that You have granted me, I rejoice that I have seen what no man has till now. At the same time, this spectacle is most frightening. Therefore, my Lord, I humbly pray that You revert to Your normal human form, the beautiful ever-smiling form of Krishna, that we all are so accustomed to.'

27. Krishna obliges by immediately resuming His human form, and having done so says, 'Arjuna, do you realise that you have seen what even Rishis and the demi-gods have not? This vision is a privilege that no austerity can ever earn. And yet you have been blessed with that. Do you know why? Because you are dear to Me, that is why.'

28. 'Arjuna, if only man would realise that I am ever ready to help, assist and oblige in every possible way. All that he has to do is to become dear to Me. Soon I shall tell you how that can be done.'

29. 'Once again, I repeat: He who is steadfast in his devotion to Me, who dedicates every action of his to Me, who is free from worldly attachment – such a one will unfailingly come to Me.'

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

“HANDS THAT SERVE ARE HOLIER THAN LIPS THAT PRAY”

- An Enlightening Panel Discussion.

This is the second part of the panel discussion held in the Brindavan campus of Swami's Institute during the “Summer Course on Indian Culture and Spirituality” in May 2002. In the October issue, we had the first part of this riveting discussion. We continue from where we stopped in the previous issue.

You Can Serve Wherever You Are and Whatever You Do

Prof. G Venkataraman: Talking of duty brings me to the next point. It relates to an observation that Bhagavan made. When Bhagavan visited Delhi in March of 1999, He gave three discourses there. In one of the discourses, where a lot of dignitaries and senior government officials were present, Swami said, “Don’t think service means taking a broom and sweeping the villages. It does not mean that.”

He made many qualifications and one of the things He said, which is very important, is if you do your duties in life to the station you are born properly, that is service. If you are a doctor, do your job properly, that is service. If you are a teacher, if you do your job properly, that is service. If you are a bureaucrat and you do your job properly, that is service. I would like the panelists to comment upon this, particularly drawing upon their own experiences.

Sri Sanjay Sahani: When we finish our education and join various organizations, many students have reported that at least initially they have very little time to do service activities. When you are a fresher in an organization, a lot of work is thrust on you. In such a circumstance, how do we participate in service activities? In this context, this particular issue is relevant. Whatever is your duty, if you do it with all your heart and you do it as your offering to God, He will receive it and He will recognize it and He will appreciate it. I am reminded of a personal experience, in this context.

One of our students was very weak in a particular subject. The first examination results were out, he had not done well and the report went to his father and the father was naturally worried. He had a chance to meet Swami and he expressed his concern to Swami. “Swami, my son is very weak in such and such subject.” Swami said there is a teacher in that college who is teaching this particular subject that he will take care, there is nothing to worry about. The father told his son to go and tell the teacher that this is what Swami has said.

Now what the teacher was teaching was a pure academic subject, there was nothing spiritual about it. Obviously the attitude with which he was doing that

work had caught the attention of Bhagavan and at an opportune moment He let it be known to that individual also that He had recognized it.

If work is to be transformed into worship, it can happen only as Swami said, "Do your duty sincerely." There is no point in going outside and doing seva when in your own house you don't do service to your own children or in the organization where you are your proper duty is not discharged to the best of your capacity. This is an aspect of service which we should not ignore. Thank you, sir.

Prof. GV: This is an important point, where social implications are not properly understood by most people including us. If people do their duty as they are supposed to do, half the problems would just disappear. Without spending a single extra paisa or borrowing from this bank or that bank, discharging the obligations, responsibilities is very important.

Prof. Kumar: This is an episode described by Bhagavan during His earlier discourses. Hanuman was instrumental in bringing Rama and Sita together. When he started right from the mountaintop, Hanuman was warming up taking three jumps. He was just warming himself up, as cricketers do before the match. Three jumps: what do they stand for? One jump indicates determination, the second jump declaration, the third jump start off. Harmony in thought, word and deed.

In service, there is nothing like telling today and delaying later. Bhagavan said on another occasion, one person announced he would give ten thousand rupees. When people came to him, he consulted his wife and brought it down to ten rupees. Service does not mean anything like postponement. Immediate action! That is determination, declaration and action. All the three go together, as it happened with Hanuman.

You wanted me to tell my own experience, which is not such a happy episode, but you would love to hear it. It was the time when Prashanti Nilayam Institute Campus was under construction. I was serving as the Zonal Convener of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, Andhra Pradesh, at the time. Some people said that Bhagavan will be visiting the area. I immediately went there and grabbed a crowbar a few minutes before Bhagavan's arrival. I was coming straight from Venkatagiri. Swami stopped his car by my side and said:

"Appa, Emi nadisthunnarayya, Emi Natakamayya." – "How nicely you are acting."

"Enu Swami Ala antaru?" – "Why do you say that?"

"Nenu Osthunnu, Nanu Aduthunnannanu...Natakamanthena?" – "You are acting because I will be coming? It is not acting?...No!"

Service is not action – service is reality.

That was a hard lesson. I will also tell one more incident.

Service opportunities were given to all volunteers there and also to some of the devotees in Kodaikanal once. One devotee from Argentina by the name of Martin was doing service in his own way. He was just at work. Bhagavan stood by his side and this gentleman did not look at Him, whereas we stopped our work, waiting for Bhagavan, looking at him! Here is a man who very seriously got himself identified with the job on hand.

Swami said, "How are you?"

He said, "Swami, Swami!"

Swami said, "Where is the letter?"

That gentleman was carrying a letter for Bhagavan in his pocket while he was doing work at that time.

"Where is the letter?"

He cannot give Swami the letter because both his hands are totally soiled from digging in the ground. Do you know what he said?

"Swami, my hands are dirty."

"Come on, pick up the letter". Swami received the letter and said, "This is the fruit of service."

We don't have to hand over the letter. When we do His job, He receives your letter. Sai Ram.

Prof. Ramamurthy: Doing your duty is service, I don't deny it. However, there are occasions when you have the options and opportunities to go beyond it. I remember my days when I was not a Sai devotee and I was engaged in teaching professional courses. If the boys do not pass in the first year, then they are left to themselves, no further instructions are given to them and they have to manage on their own.

I requested the authorities to provide accommodation so that their classes could be organized and revisions could be organized. They said "No, accommodation is not available." I went to another school and got the headmaster to provide accommodation and had free classes for them.

A thought came that these are the ones who are left out. They don't have a second chance of hearing and revising the lessons. We must provide them an opportunity. I was going beyond to what I am committed to do.

Small industrialists were there and we formed a small industrialists' management association so that they could be taught how to manage their affairs in finance and other areas, without fee; the programs were organized for them. This came spontaneously because by looking outside we have the

means and we can provide the necessary assistance. When such opportunities come, we must grab them, meaning going beyond the committed duty of the job you have in the profession you have chosen.

There may be many such opportunities and other avenues. If you have the capability and skill, take those opportunities, and if you can, go beyond the committed duty for which you are earning a salary.

A Seeker of Liberation Must Serve

Prof. GV: When one said you are doing the duty, it does not mean you must only do the job properly for which you are paid. It means the whole gamut of the daily experience, one's duty at home to parents, to children. This is something you should think about.

I would like to move on and raise some more points.

I would like to congratulate the students as they have been sending many questions and I am having a tough time listening to the panelists and sorting these out simultaneously. I will dispose the few simple questions I can handle. I will keep the tough ones for the panelists. That is a privilege I have.

One student asked, "Self service is the best service. Prayer is a service to the self. Is prayer itself adequate service?"

My answer is simple. Yes, prayer is a service to the self. Why don't you see the same Self in the others and extend the scope of the prayer by doing them service also?

Now I would like to draw upon this question bank. One thing I would like to ask all of you gentlemen is to briefly tell us, "What do you feel is the importance given to seva in Indian spirituality and culture."

Sri Sanjay Sahani: It is said Paropa kaartham, idham shariram – The body is given only to serve others. Swami Vivekananda used to say, "If you cannot think of the world, at least think about your country; if you cannot think about your country, at least think about your community; if you cannot think about your community, at least think about your family; but for heaven's sake do not think about yourself."

There is a famous saying that Swami often quotes: "Na thapamsi na theerthani," – Not by penance, nor by pilgrimage – "na shastram japa nahi" – not by the study of scriptures, nor by continuous chanting – "samsara sagarothare sajjanam, sevanam bina" – if you have the aspiration to cross the ocean of worldly existence, if you are a mumukshu – seeker of liberation – then you must serve.

Sajjana – Who is a sajjana? It is the good people. One of the important duties of the students was to serve the Guru. Guru is the repository of the knowledge and wisdom. By serving him, they gained the knowledge of the Guru. There is

a famous episode in Shankara's life. There was a disciple named Padmapada. All his fellow classmates used to do lot of study but this boy had no inclination for study, his only aspiration was to serve the Guru.

One day he had taken the clothes of his Guru and gone to the river to wash them. As luck would have it, the river suddenly started overflowing and he was surrounded by the waters. The Guru heard that the river was in spate and he called out to his disciple "Padmapada!" He was worried about him. When Padmapada heard the call, he took his Guru's clothes on his head and started walking on the water. Wherever he put his step, there emerged a stone lotus and he was able to cross the river and reach the presence of the Guru.

When the Guru saw that, he was amazed by this. He said, "Padmapada, come here," stretched out his hand and put it on the disciple's head. Swami says the entire knowledge and wisdom which was gained by long and arduous study by other disciples was bestowed in an instant by the guru to that disciple.

It is a very long tradition that we have. Service is not new today; it is honed and sharpened in the Gurukula of earlier days. Even today, when Swami establishes His own Sai Educational Institutions, so much importance is given to service. Sai Ram.

Prof. GV: Thank you, Sanjay. You made an important point. Service today is viewed as a social concept which brings together a lot of people as an organization with a structure, funding, etc. Service was a concept built into the fabric of the individual's daily life. For example, it is a tradition to offer cooked food to a crow. This is the service; we don't merely serve fellow human beings but also fellow creatures, all living beings. We water the *tulasiplant* and so on. So I want you to get the ideal or lesson that service is not a new invention, it is an old tradition and has many dynamics. Please think about it.

Service and Namasmara Go Together

Here is a question by a student and it is referred to you, Prof. Kumar.

"If service is considered most important, then why in the Kali Yuga is *namasmara* [repeating the Name of the Lord] said to be the path for liberation and not service?" This is a tough one, handle it.

Prof. Kumar: Before I go straight away to the question, for academic interest, one more point. Sir has made a comment just now that service has become a matter of social element today. What did Bhagavan say about it? The social service, which has become a status symbol – how is it? It is a slow service or a show service. Social service is slow service or show service. But this real service is spiritual.

Now onto the question: in Kali Yuga *namasmara* is said to be best, then how do you claim that service is important?

It was the time of construction of the Super Specialty Hospital in Prashanti Nilayam. We were asked to serve and lift some bricks and assist the masons there. Many of us were very busy because we were quite sure of a visit by Bhagavan. Everyone was working very hard. Swami came straight and stopped and called me.

“What are you people doing?”

“Swami, we are doing work.”

“Yes, yes I see.”

“Swami, what do you want us to do?”

“Emi atla ekkuthunnaru? Naku panivaru lekhuna? Bhajan chesthu pani cheyandi.” – “Sing the glory, sing the bhajans as you do work.”

So service and sankeertana [singing the glory of the Lord] are not separate. Service and sankeertana go together. Pumping of the heart and breathing of the lungs go together, so also service and sankeertana go together. That is the answer to this question.

The Bliss of Service

Prof. GV: Thank you, thank you. There is no need to separate the heart from the lungs. Now, over to Sanjay. I am posing this question to you as it relates to something you said earlier. “What confidence do you have that the bliss which you enjoy while serving is the bliss of the God and not the bliss of your own momentary joy?”

Sri Sanjay Sahani: If a person has never tasted sweet, how do you explain what is sweetness to him? If he has had some sweet and you tell him, “This is *mysoorpak* [a delicacy] which you are going to get for lunch,” immediately one who has experienced this, his mouth starts watering. It is not possible to explain what sweetness is; you have to experience it, you have to taste it.

Point two: How do I know if it was true divine joy and not momentary happiness?

When you are able to transcend the senses, that is bliss. When it is within the realm of your senses, that is momentary happiness. There are certain questions which the heart alone can answer, the head has no intellectual ability to properly explain it, and this question is a matter of the heart, not of the head. You have to experience it. If you have experienced it even once in your life, you will know what it is.

Prof. GV: Thank you. Would you like to say something about it, Prof. Kumar?

Prof. Kumar: While in agreement with what Sri Sahani has said, I would like to add a simple supplement. Momentary joy – how do you know that?

Momentary joy is born out of selfishness. That which is selfish gives you momentary joy. When you are selfless, that gives you bliss.

Prof. GV: Wonderful clarification. The point he is making is that which relates to the body and the world is ephemeral. It is momentary. Bliss is not like that. Even if it has passed, when you recall, you will experience the same bliss. Swami smiled at me ten years ago, and when I remember that I am happy now. I ate a *mysoorpak* ten years ago, it was very nice then but does not give me the same joy now. There is a real difference, it is not trivial.

Now to you Professor Ramamurthy. "Define prayer and service."

Prof. Ramamurthy: Service is prayer in action. Prayer can be of many types. You can chant. I chant a number of Sanskrit slokas without knowing the meaning.

When I chant the message I want to convey to the Lord does it occur in my mind? Am I going along? That is a very important factor.

You make silent prayer to the Lord, particularly when you are in difficulty; the intense prayer that you do, the commitment in terms of the mind and heart that goes in the prayer that you are affecting is very important. That is the difference between chanting and praying.

When you believe that God is in man and when you are serving man, you are serving God, which translates itself into prayer. That is why it is said *gnanis* having attained that pinnacle still come back and do their duties, engage themselves in service so they can stand as models for others to follow. "My job is done. I have reached the absolute, there is no need to do anything." That is not their stand.

Lord Krishna says, "I do service." This is the role model that others should follow. So service to man can also evolve as a prayer. When you get the solution for others, solution comes for you also. That is what I would have to say.

Charity Versus Service

Prof. GV: In this explanation, you answered several questions that I have here. In the interest of time, I will take only "star questions" as they say in parliamentary language. This is a question for Sanjay Sahani. What is the difference between *dhaana* [charity] and service?

Sri Sanjay Sahani: Generally there is a feeling that to do service, you need money. It is far from true. To illustrate this point, let me narrate an incident which was depicted the other day by one of the groups of students on the orientation programs. It is a real life incident. There is a youngster who was in Ahmedabad when the riots broke out. To his utter horror, people whom he had known for years, his friends, his neighbors, who he called uncles, who were well-to-do, who were well-educated, left the home and joined the mob.

The mob is in a mad frenzy, in a killing spree. This youngster asked himself, "What should I do? What is my dharma?"

In this particular context and the depiction that was made brought out certain important facets of service.

The boy thought to himself, "First thing is not to join the mob. Individually they may be sane, but the mob as a whole has gone crazy. If I join the mob, I will lose my sanity. The minimum I can do is not to join the mob."

First principle of service: "If you cannot help anybody, at least do not harm them."

Second, he thought to himself, "I cannot prevent these riots from taking place, I cannot put out this raging fire that has swept our town. There are people who I know, who I have interacted with. Perhaps if I talk to them and convince them, at least those people will not resolve to arson."

So he tried to convince them not to participate in the riots and was successful in that regard. To prevent people from doing evil is also service.

Third, he said to himself, "So many people are affected by the riots, how can I help them? Can I talk with them? Can I console them?"

So he went out and talked with some of the riot affected people and took some positive action. He didn't require money to undertake these service activities. This is important.

Bhagavan has clear ideas on charity. He says when you find people in need, don't give them money. Invariably, people misuse it. Find what they need. Do they need clothes? Do they need food? Do they need medicines? Give it to them.

The gram [village] which is coming up next to Puttaparthi, Swami is setting aside funds for the education of those children who are going to be settled there. He does not want to put the money, thousands of rupees, in the hands of those people. No, He wants to put it in the banks. From the interest earned from the deposit, those children will be educated.

Charity is something that is miniscule. Also, the motive is very important. If you are going down the road and a beggar is nagging you and you give him some money, you may be indulging in charity but you are not doing service. You are trying to get away from the nagging beggar which is a fundamental difference between charity and service, which you should really understand. Sai Ram.

Prof. GV: Prof. Kumar, could you supplement please?

Prof. Kumar: Let me give clarity on charity. What is charity, *dhaana*? I have money, you do not have money, I give it to you, that is charity.

Charity is an action between the one who has and the one who has not. From a spiritual point of view, the money you have is not yours. The property you have is not yours, it is God's gift, God's grace. You are intelligent not because of your own *buddhi*, *shakti*, *parakrama*, [strength, intelligence, etc.] whatever it may be. The affluence, the *aishwarya*, that's all God's gift to you, it is not yours. You are passing on God's property to another God.

"Bhavathi bikshandhehi." [Give me alms, oh indweller] That's what the beggar says. I am not asking the *deha*, that body – *dehi*, the Indweller, oh God in you, please serve me the food. That is the spiritual aspect. Sai ram.

Prof. GV: Wonderful elucidation of the service and the Indian tradition. A minor underscore of what is said: When you give charity, you give material that belongs to you, when you do service, you share the bliss. Bliss is God's property. Like Swami gives prasadam and we go and give it around, that is what we spread around during service.

Why Help Others? – Our Debt to Society

This question is for Prof. Ramamurthy. The student says it was put to him by a well-to-do person. "If I have got everything in my life, I have earned it through my hard work. Why should I help others?"

This question has already been answered by Prof. Kumar. You are what you are because of the environment in which you have been allowed to come up. You might have put in your own effort, nobody denies it. The family that gives you full support, the neighborhood where the conditions were congenial. Society has facilitated. We require enormous facilities in terms of transportation, hospital, medical facilities, and so forth. Some agencies have made these things available for you.

Society has facilitated your development. You might not be aware of it, but you must be conscious about it. There is something you have to give back to the society. Swami emphasizes this point very often. There is not a question of my claiming that what I have done is my own making. I am a self-made man, you may say. You can't make yourself unless you are allowed to be made to the stature that you are by those around you and with you. Since the conditions have been made possible for you to develop, it is essential that you have to pay back.

Prof. GV: Prof. Ramamurthy made a very important point: You are what you are because of the society. You just cannot write it away or wish it away. We don't realize that.

Sometime ago, I was reading in one of the magazines devoted to business and commerce a statement made by an executive at Microsoft. You all know Microsoft is a huge company headed by Bill Gates. This man said we cannot

wish away the society. We are here because of the society. It is society that runs the universities and schools. It is society that builds the roads, it is society that constructs airports, provides transportation, power, utilities. But for that, where would Microsoft be? We have a duty to the society and therefore Microsoft does as well.

I would now like to launch the landing formalities, because we have to wind up. I would like to start the closing formalities by requesting each of the panelists to give a one-minute summary of what transpired today. What is the message you wish us to carry home?

Service Leads to Humility

Sri Sanjay Sahani: To sum up, let me add a few words on service in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. The service activities in the Institute are primarily intended to instill in the students the dignity of labor.

When Gunal Mittal, the Swedish economist, visited India, he observed that “Indian education seems to instill a mentality that the young should not soil their hands.” The first objective of the Institute is to inculcate in one and all the dignity of labor.

Each one has their own talents and these talents gain expression in the various service activities of campus life.

Vidhya dhadhati vinayam – Education should confer humility. The more sincerely we participate in these activities, the more humble we become; once we become humble, we draw closer to God. These are some of the objectives of the service activities, social work activities, and self-reliance activities.

Prof. GV: Thank you, sir. Sanjay made an important point. Prayer may not make me humble; on the other hand it may make me more egoistic. Service will certainly make you humble and destroy your ego. Prof. Kumar, now.

Prof. Kumar: If you serve rich people, you are serving Lakshmi Narayana Seva; if you serve equals, you are serving Ashwatha Narayana Seva; if you serve poor people, it is Daridhra Narayana Seva. Narayana is common in all three.

The very title of this session: “Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray.” If you don’t pray and if you merely serve it is *karma*, mechanical. If you serve with prayer, that is spiritual, *karma yoga*. Service and prayer should go hand in hand.

“Na sankalpantho samasthamu chadinchagalanu Itivari oka prameyamu akharaledu
Aiyana apadiki mee shakthi nimithami, mee bhakthi nimithamai
Nee mukthi nimithamai seva bhagyam andhisthunanu
Annaru Swami”

[Which means, “Swami says: wit my mere will I can accomplish everything. But I give you this opportunity to serve for your own welfare, your liberation, your devotion.”]

For your mukthi (liberation), for your keerthi (reputation), service is an opportunity. Sai Ram.

Prof. GV: Prof. Kumar pointed out that even bhakti can be acquired through service. Don't think bhakti is a shortcut.

Pray With All Your Heart, Serve With All Your Heart

Prof. Ramamurthy: I will only say, pray with all your heart and serve with all your heart.

Prof. GV: Pray with all your heart and serve with all your heart. Heart is the core of the individual and everything must flow from the heart. That is the message.

It is the moderator's prerogative to unburden him of the wisdom. Before I do that, I would request the Vice Chancellor to share some of his thoughts as he listened and observed – just a couple of words of encouragement for the boys.

Vice Chancellor: Pranams at the Lotus Feet. I thank Prof. Venkatraman for this rare opportunity given to me. It was not my intention to speak and I can hardly add anything.

In our attempt to make the summer course as varied as possible and provide an opportunity for you to share your thoughts in a freer atmosphere and ask questions, we hit upon this idea of the panel discussion.

Thanks to the extremely professional manner in which it was conducted, you were able to raise a large number of questions and share many insights which could not have been possible in a brief period of time. Collapsing all of them in such a short span of time has enormous significance. That is what has been gained. I would wholly go along with what was observed towards the end of the session: Pray with all your heart, serve with all your heart. There can be nothing better than this. Sai Ram.

All Beings Serve and All Beings are Served

Prof. GV: Sai Ram, sir, and thank you very much, we really feel encouraged by your comments. It is now my duty to bring the curtain down. The question of service is closely related to the 4th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, where the Lord says this entire Universe is a cosmic gear chain.

Everybody serves and everybody gets served. Don't forget that. If God has created ants, it is for a purpose. The ant serves you, though you may not know it. If God has created the crow, the crow serves us. Before our

scavenging system came, the crow was nature's scavenger. Crow serves us. That is why our ancients were so considerate, they used to give milk to the snakes and feed the crows. This is an aspect of our culture which I would like you to go back to and think about. It is closely related to the profound observation of Bhagavan in the 4th chapter. So if we are talking about service, let us not forget there is a cosmic setting.

Next point is related to the advocates of *bhakti* [devotion] who do not serve. Take for example, Shankara. Can you ever surpass the service that he did? Two thousand years ago, to go up and down across the country on foot to leave behind the legacy of the incredible treasures that will never get wiped out – is that not service? Yet, we never think of the karma yoga aspect of Shankara.

We must remember that service is rendered at three levels: to the body, to the mind and to the soul. The soul also needs service. *Gnanis* [men of wisdom] like Ramakrishna and Ramana in recent times also serve. Don't let us imagine that they do nothing and they are parasites in society. In fact, they give the best service.

Nobody can give that service to the soul. Very few people are privileged to give service to the soul; they are the ones who are remembered throughout history. That is why Prof. Ramamurthy said, even a *gnani* has a duty of establishing himself as a role model, and when that fails, God Himself comes down. And you are hearing every day from Bhagavan how he brought the entire drama troupe, not just Rama, not just Lakshmana, but even characters whose names you have not heard of. It is very important.

One Can Always Do Service

Lastly, you can always do service. A blind man can do service, a deaf person can do service, even a person on his deathbed can do service. You can say I have gone out of my wits, but no! There is a famous story from the Crimean War, I believe.

A General was wounded and dying. His soldier was bringing him a glass of water. There was a soldier next to him who was also dying and crying, "Water, water." The General said to his orderly, "Give him the water," and told the soldier, "Thy need is greater than mine," and gave up his life.

Even on your deathbed, you may not be able to do anything, but you can say *Loka Samastas Sukhino Bhavantu* [Let everybody, everywhere be happy]. What is preventing you from doing that? You can do that, I can do that. There is no moment when we cannot do service.

Service is very important and it becomes sweet when the sugar of divinity, *namasmarana*, is added to it. "*Man mey ram Hath mey kam*" – "Lord in the mind, work with the hand," that is what Bhagavan says. You see our sevadals doing it. You go to Prashanti Nilayam, and all the time they will be moving

food, trucks, or whatever it is, and they will be singing bhajans. There is no greater example.

Keep your eyes open. Look at Swami. We had no time to discuss the way Swami teaches lessons on service.

Open your eyes and see!
Open your mind and observe!
Open your heart and feel!

Pray with all your heart, serve with all your heart. God bless you. Jai Sai Ram.

PRASHANTI DIARY

Bhagavan says, “Hands that help are holier than lips that pray.” This year the devotees witnessed a unique combination of both aspects during September/October 2006. On one side, the students were chanting Vedic hymns (lips that pray) with perfect intonations, while at the same time, there was another large group of students who carried Bhagavan’s prasadam in the form of clothes and food to every doorstep in the neighboring villages (hands that help). This is how the Festival of Dasara was celebrated in the Divine Presence. We now bring a detailed account of how the proceedings of Dasara took place in Puttaparthi.

September 26 – October 2: Veda Saptaha Gyan Yagna and Grama Seva 2006

September 26, 2006 – The First Day

As it happens every year, devotees kept surging in for the commencement of the Veda Purusha Saptaha Gyan Yagna. The *rithwiks* (priests) had assembled in the mandir for the ceremonial *Kalasha Puja* accompanied by the chanting of hymns from the Vedas. They then proceeded to the Poornachandra Hall for commencing the Yagna.

As per Swami’s command, the Grama Seva began at this same auspicious moment. It was a wonderful sight to see hundreds of students circumambulating the mandir, singing bhajans, and then proceeding on their journey which would put Swami’s message of love into action. Bhagavan watched the boys until the last one had completed the *pradakshana* around the temple. Sri Sudhir Bhaskar, Sri Narsimha Murthy, the wardens of the two hostels and other group leaders led the procession of staff and students as they then went to assemble in the Poornachandra Hall.

The Yagna Begins

Swami came to give darshan in the Poornachandra Hall at 8:30 a.m. after which the Yagna fire was lit and the seven-day Gyan Yagna began. Even the Gods of the highest heavens would consider themselves fortunate to witness a yagna presided over by the Yagna Purusha Himself. The priests were ably supported in their chanting by the students of the Veda group.

After some time, the students and staff boarded their trucks and vehicles and left for the Grama Seva amidst loud chanting of bhajans. They carried along with them dhotis and saris to be given to every family along with *pulihora* (tamarind rice) and laddu (sweet) prasadam. This being the first day, Puttaparthi village was covered wherein each and every person received prasadam. About 6,000 cloth parcels and 40,000 food packets were distributed. The distribution was done through 6 groups, each consisting of 25 members and a group leader.

September 27, 2006

The second day of Grama Seva started in the morning at 9:00 a.m. and lasted until 1:00 p.m. As per Swami's instructions, the students went around the village doing Nagar sankeertan and Veda chanting before commencing the Grama Seva in the village. This practice was followed in every village where students distributed Bhagawan's Prasadam. 7,500 families were blessed with food and clothes packets. Over 30,000 food packets and laddus were distributed by the students and the staff, covering 20 surrounding villages.

In the afternoon, Swami came for darshan at 4:30 p.m. and sat in Sai Kulwant Hall. Students seeking Swami's blessings sat with trays containing clove and yellow rice. Swami called them and lovingly blessed each one. At 5:00 p.m., Sri S. V. Giri, ex-Vice Chancellor of the University, was asked by Bhagavan to speak about the Navarathri festival and its significance. In his speech, Sri Giri spoke about Grama Seva and the immaculate planning of all the activities personally carried out by Swami for the seven-day Seva operation. He also pointed out that during the Athi Rudra Maha Yagna, Swami's involvement was to the minutest detail. And He did all this for the peace of the entire world. He also related personal incidents from his life, when Swami saved him from many trying situations while he was State Relief Commissioner in 1986 during the devastating Andhra floods.

First Dasara Discourse

At 5:30 p.m., the assembled devotees were thrilled to see Swami standing up and the microphones being arranged, as Bhagavan was about to deliver His first discourse for the Dasara celebrations. Bhagavan first elucidated the meaning of the Dasara festival:

"The festival that is being celebrated today is meant only to encourage you. The ten-day Dasara festival is meant to control your ten senses. The legend says that Goddess Chamundi killed the demon Mahisha during this Dasara festival. What is the inner meaning of this story? We should not under any circumstances associate ourselves with demons. You are a human being and not a demon. How can there be friendship between a human being and a demon? A human being shall have relationship with another human being only."

Speaking on the principle of Love, Bhagavan said: "I always address you as embodiments of love, the reason being, I am suffused with love. Love is My property. You all are heirs to that property. I will distribute that love to one and all. I do not hate anyone. I have no selfishness at all. My love is selfless love."

At the conclusion of His nectarine discourse, Swami sang the bhajan, "Prema Mudhita Manasa Se Kaho" to the joy of all the devotees present.

September 28, 2006

This morning, after having darshan and blessings of Bhagavan, the students and staff proceeded for Grama Seva at 9:30 a.m. They covered another 20 villages in the Kothacheru and Bukkapatnam mandals. They spread Bhagavan's message of "Manava Seva is Madhava Seva" by distributing clothes and food packets to all the people, not leaving even a single person deprived of Bhagavan's prasadam.

The Gyana Yagna Sapthaha continued in the auditorium from early morning. After giving darshan to the devotees in Sai Kulwant hall, Bhagavan went to the Poornachandra auditorium for the Yagna. Along with specific prayers of the Yagna, the devotees could attend pujas to the Goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga, as well as *parayan* (recitation) of the Bhagavatham and the Ramayana. There was also one priest carrying out Surya namaskar to Bhagavan.

In the afternoon, Swami permitted two speakers to address the audience. The first was Sri Ajit Popat from the UK who spoke on Grama Seva and how one can attain true knowledge. He stated that we have to believe completely in Sai as the Poorna Avatar of the age and that belief itself would lead to wisdom. He mentioned that this day also happened to be the birthday of Shirdi Sai Baba. Sri Popat brought a team of 20 dedicated youths from the UK who participated in the Grama Seva along with the students.

The next speaker was the All India President of the SSSS Organisation, Sri V. Srinivasan, who spoke about the Navarathri function and how it is being celebrated all over India in various ways. He mentioned that in the southern states the custom of Kollu is prevalent – the keeping of idols and statues of various gods and goddesses in the home for nine days with get-togethers of relatives and friends. In Gujarat they celebrate with garba and group dances where as in Bengal, Assam, and the northeastern states, they perform the Durga Puja, etc. In short, the whole of India celebrates this festival when the Goddess slays the demon Narakasura with the trident. "Swami has also given us the trident to slay our inner enemies with the mantra of 'Daiva preeti, Paap bheeti and Sangha Neeti' – Love for God, fear of sin, and love for humanity," he said.

"When I Make the Devotees Happy, I Am Happy"

Swami then delighted the assembly by rising to give His divine discourse and spoke for forty minutes. Bhagavan magnanimously gave some precious details about Himself:

"Several people wonder, 'Swami is nearing 81 years, yet, his physical body does not reveal any signs of old age.' My answer to those people is: My dear devotees, I am not taking unsacred food or breathing polluted air. I am breathing the air of prayers of the devotees. How then can I lose My divine effulgence? I have no ailment of any kind. I have no pain at all! Sometime back, I fell down on the floor on account of an inadvertent error committed by

a student. I broke My leg then. Hence, I feel a little difficulty in walking. That is all. There is another reason too. Nowadays I don't feel like walking. Nevertheless, I am coming to Sai Kulwant Hall daily and giving darshan to the devotees. What difficulty or pain is involved in this routine? I do not have any pain or suffering.

“When I am able to make the devotees happy, I too am happy. Sorrows, difficulties and pain are nowhere near Me. I am always happy and blissful. Bliss is My food. There is no greater happiness than My bliss. If for any reason I am unable to come out and give darshan to the devotees, I feel very sad: ‘Alas! How much the devotees are pining for My darshan. For how long have they been waiting in the hall. How much suffering they are undergoing?’

“Sometimes I may be late in coming to Sai Kulwant Hall due to some urgent work. Still I do not miss giving darshan to the devotees. Hence, you should not feel that Swami has not come due to pain or suffering. I am revealing these facts to you today so that you may not feel any distress because of My absence and always be happy and cheerful.”

Later, Swami gave us some valuable insights to maintain a healthy mind:

“You may have some physical pain or mental anxieties, but you should ensure that they do not disturb your *Atma Tattwa* (principle of the Atma). If you are thus firmly established in the *Atma Tattwa*, nothing can bother you. This is the message of Navarathri. We encounter several difficulties, sorrow, pain, etc. We are mentally disturbed day in and day out due to several reasons. But, we should ignore them with a detached feeling, ‘They are not mine, they are somebody else’s.’ They just come and go like passing clouds. As for Myself, I do not at all attach importance to them.”

September 29, 2006

This day began like the previous morning with darshan, when Swami sat on the veranda for twenty minutes listening to the vedic hymns chanted by students. Immediately after darshan, the staff and students left for Grama Seva at 9:00 a.m. singing bhajans. Meanwhile, Veda chanting, and Devi Parayana continued in the Poornachandra auditorium. Nineteen villages under the Puttaparthi mandal were blessed with Bhagavan's prasadam, which included Pedapalli, Konapuram, Marlapalli, Iragarajupalli, Kammavanipalli and Kotturu.

Later in the morning, there was a surprise in store for the tiny tots. At 10:00 a.m., Sai Kulwant Hall was empty except for the primary school boys who were lined up near the veranda. Suddenly, Swami came and approached the line of bright expectant faces. And then, wonder of wonders, He started to pass right alongside them, giving a most personal and intimate darshan to these sweet and innocent boys. One could feel their excitement and joy as Bhagavan passed by the entire row – and as He did, the boys would run around to have another glimpse of their most loving Lord. After this, Swami attended the Yagna and received arati at 10:45 a.m.

In the afternoon there were two speakers. Sri Anil Gokak, the Vice Chancellor, followed by Prof. G. Venkataraman. Sri Gokak dwelt on the significance of Lakshmi, Durga, and Saraswati pujas during Navarathri. He emphasized that the boys should seek Atmavidya, the true knowledge, represented by Goddess Saraswati.

Prof. Venkataraman then dwelt on Swami's earlier discourse on September 28 when He mentioned how development of medha shakti without corresponding buddhi led to serious problems worldwide, in terms of violence, pollution, etc. He narrated that in May 1985, during Grama Seva by the students, Swami personally visited two neighboring villages, Kammavaripalli and Amagondapalyam. Swami went around the village, visited houses, distributed food and clothes and spoke to the villagers. The Professor exhorted the students to listen and follow every single word of Sai for their future betterment. Atmavidya together with secular knowledge alone can help the world attain peace.

Swami then gave His divine discourse. Swami started His hour-long talk in a most moving way by saying:

"Since I came a bit late today for this afternoon program, you all had some misapprehensions about My health. I want to assure you that I am perfectly all right. I cannot be idle, that is my nature. There were a few devotees waiting for Me there. I therefore spoke to them for some time and made them happy. Thereafter, I started for giving darshan to the devotees in Sai Kulwant Hall."

"How Sacred is Bharat" – Vivekananda

Later, Swami commented on the importance of good thoughts:

"The mind is a bundle of thoughts. When the thoughts and resolutions are controlled, it will be clean like a placid lake. Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) tried his best to control his thoughts, when he was a youth. When he finally succeeded, he acquired a pure heart. He constantly reminded himself, 'I am very proud of my birth as Bharatiya. How great and sacred is this country Bharat. How pure it is.' To whichever country he traveled, he used to teach the people of that country about the greatness of Bharat. The very thought of the sacredness of Bharat should make you feel great. Hence, you must constantly remind yourself of the greatness of Bharat."

Swami concluded His discourse with the bhajan, "Govinda Krishna Jai." Then He proceeded to have an engaging dialogue with the boys in front of Him. "What do you want?" The boys shouted back, "You, Swami!" Swami replied, "Take Me, I am ready." Then He called one of the boys in front and materialized a necklace and lovingly put it on him. The wonderful evening was not over yet as Swami signaled for bhajans. Bhagavan departed for His residence after receiving arathi.

September 30, 2006 : Durga Ashtami and Ayuddha Puja Day

The Ayuddha Puja Day falls every year two days before the Poornahuti of the Dasara Yagnam. Swami came to the Hall at 8:15 a.m. After listening to the vedic chanting by the students for ten minutes, He proceeded to the area where the Golden Chariot and four other cars were lined up for Ayuddha Puja. Swami broke the first coconut and thereafter handed over one each to Sri S.K Giri, Sri Anil Gokak, and others who broke them before each of the cars.

Thereafter, the students circumambulated the mandir, singing bhajans. All the while Swami was watching and blessing them until the last one departed for his assigned vehicle. At around 9:00 a.m., the students left for Grama Seva. About 7,500 packets of clothes and 35,000 food packets were distributed in ten villages under the Puttaparthi mandal.

Meanwhile, the Yagna went along with the same fervor. Swami graciously blessed the Poornachandra auditorium where the Gyana Yagna Saptaha was being performed for the fifth day. The Devi Puja and Ramayan Parayana were also going on simultaneously. Swami took arathi and left at 10:30 a.m.

In the afternoon, Swami gave darshan at 4:30 p.m. He sat in Sai Kulwant Hall for fifteen minutes before going to the interview room. Later, Swami came to the mandir and spent more than forty minutes listening to bhajans.

October 1, 2006

On this penultimate day of the Yagnam, Bhagavan blessed all with divine darshan at 8:00 a.m. Swami sat in Sai Kulwant Hall amidst Veda chanting by the students for half an hour and then went to the interview room. He then graced the Yagna in the Poornachandra auditorium from 10:00 a.m. for the many devotees who had been waiting for a glimpse of their beloved Lord.

The Kothacheru mandal was blessed to receive Bhagavan's prasadam this day. Students served twenty-two villages distributing Bhagavan's tokens of love and giving them the assurance that Swami is always there with them.

Afternoon darshan was at 3:45 p.m. As part of the function, two speakers from the Institute delivered talks in Swami's presence. The first was Sri Sanjay Mahalingam, who is currently pursuing his research at the Institute. He spoke on *gyana* and *vairagya* (wisdom and renunciation) and quoted from *Narada's Bhakti Sutras* and chapter two of the Bhagavad Gita.

The second speaker was Sri Ravi Kumar, a faculty member of the Institute at the Brindavan campus. He narrated some of Swami's beautiful leelas and went on to share how his father, the late Sri Thyagarajan, was saved from cancer when doctors had given up hope after performing several operations. Swami cancelled his cancer by His mere will. He lived for 39 years after that and died of old age here at Prashanti Nilayam, without suffering from any major illness.

The Details Only Lord Sai Knows

At 5:30 p.m., Swami stood up and gave His discourse for 45 minutes. He spoke on the Ramayana: of King Dasharatha and his three wives, how Mother Sumitra's sons Lakshmana and Shatrughna were born, the closeness of Lakshmana to Rama and of Shatrughna to Bharatha, the forest life of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, and so on.

Swami spoke in great detail about Sita's life in the Ashoka Vana in Lanka, when she was guarded by the demonesses Shakini and Dhakini, who were the daughters of Vibhishana. These minute details are not available in any books. Only Lord Sai, who is none other than Lord Rama, gives us such minute details from the Ramayana.

Swami then spoke on the qualities prevalent in the days of yore, when Dharma ruled the lives of men:

"The noblest quality of chastity is unique to the culture of Bharat. You don't find it anywhere else in the world. In those days, whenever the gents came across ladies, they used to move on bending their heads in reverence to them. But today, both ladies and gents stand in the middle of the road gossiping. At the end of the Dwapara Yuga, Dharamaraja witnessed such a scene one day. He felt very unhappy and immediately called for a meeting of his brothers."

"He expressed his anguish to them thus: 'Oh, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva. The Kali Yuga has begun yesterday. While I was taking a stroll in the city, I saw a lady talking to a man in public. I am sorry, I cannot bear witness to such immoral behavior.' On another day, his younger brother Arjuna narrated another incident, 'Today, I saw a farmer returning from his field carrying his plough on his head. I asked him why he was carrying it, as he could have left it in the field while returning to his house. He replied, "Alas, Swami, it cannot be left there. If I leave the plough in the field, the thieves may take it away. Hence, every day I am taking it home and bringing it next day to the field."' On another day, the Pandava brothers noticed a lady locking the door of her house before going out. On enquiry, the lady replied, 'If I don't lock the house, someone will enter and carry away our possessions.' All these were signs heralding the advent of the Kali age."

Swami ended his discourse with the bhajan, "Rama Rama Rama Sita" and prasadam was given to all, ending another glorious day.

October 2, 2006: The Poornahuthi of the Yagnya

Thousands of devotees gathered for this last day of Dasara. Swami granted darshan at 8:00 a.m. in the Poornachandra auditorium. The Gyana Saptaha Yagna continued in its entire splendor as the grand spectacle of Poornahuthi

was performed in Swami's presence at 10:00 a.m. when the holy water was sprinkled by the priests, amidst Veda chanting.

[For the full text of Bhagavan's Dasara discourses, please go to:
sssbpt.org/Pages/Prasanthi_Nilayam/Dasara2006discourses.html]

The Grama Seva on the final day was conducted within the ashram premises, by the female students of Anantapur College while the boys went to two villages – Kammavaripalli and Tarakaramanagar near Puttaparthi. 5,000 packets of clothes and 35,000 food packets were distributed during the day.

In the afternoon, Swami came to the veranda at 4:00 p.m. and spent half an hour giving darshan to the devotees. The former Vice Chancellor of SSSIHL, Dr. Hanumantappa, spoke on this occasion of his unique experiences with Swami during his forty years of association with Him, first as a devotee, and later as a Vice Chancellor. In a spellbinding manner, he disclosed some of the miraculous experiences Swami blessed him with and also several times when Swami guided him through a chain of dreams.

October 23, 2006: Gujarati New Year's Day Celebration

A huge number of Gujarathis assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall to celebrate Gujarati New Year's Day. Swami came at 8:30 a.m. Young girls gaily dressed in colorful costumes and carrying garba pots on their heads lined both sides as Bhagavan drove past them. A beautiful welcome song was sung by the Gujarat mahila group. There were cheers and clapping from the crowd as Swami alighted from the car and walked up to the railing. The State President of Gujarat and other officials approached Swami with a rose and other articles for blessing.

The celebrations began with the Bal Vikas girls performing three group dances. These were the traditional garba dances, the first with deepas (lighted lamps) in their palms. About twenty girls between 10 and 14 danced wearing colorful costumes.

The next program was a play by the Bal Vikas and youth students titled "Divyananda." It tells the story of a youth named Arjun who is driven by ambition to strike it rich and make his fortune in the industrial world by any means possible. His friend Vivek is God-loving and a Sai devotee. Arjun's attitude changes for the better when he sees his father suffering a serious sickness. Arjun dotes on his father, but the doctors give him no hope, as his father has lung cancer. Gradually, Vivek and other seva dal youth lead him to seva activities at the SSS Heart Hospital at Rajkot. Arjun soon finds that sincere selfless service and prayers to Sai yield the right results and his father is completely cured.

Swami then asked for bhajans. The lead singers from the Gujarat mahila group sang bhajans with full devotion. The program finished with arathi at about 9:45 a.m.

“Sai is the only Mother”

The afternoon program started soon after Swami came into the mandir amidst Veda chanting. Two speakers were called up at the start of the function. The first was a student who spoke in chaste Telugu with classical quotations. Next, Sri B.N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of Brindavan Hostel, gave a wonderful talk on Sai Mata, the true mother of all. He related his experiences when his mother was ill and had to be operated on. He approached Swami for blessings, and Swami kept asking him, “Which mother?” Swami finally whispered into his ear, “Sai is the only Mother.”

The next cultural item was a drama by the Bal Vikas and youth wing of Gujarat State SSSO, called “Love in Action is Seva.” The theme of the drama was how a group of brash movie going college students are transformed through selfless service into Sai youth. The importance of donating blood was also highlighted. Mohit, who has fallen into bad company, is helped in times of trouble by a Sai youth who donates blood when his father is seriously ill. Mohit is transformed by seeing these acts of service and himself becomes a Sai devotee and sevak.

After the drama, Swami came down and blessed the young children with group photographs and interacted with many participants. All of them were filled with joy as they received this three-in-one blessing of darshan, sparshan and sambhashan.

So till next month, Sai Ram!

SWAMI AND ME

EXPERIENCE HIM IN EVERYTHING AND EVERYWHERE

This is the transcription of a talk delivered by Dr. Narendranath Reddy in USA. Dr. Reddy is a member of the Prasanthi Council which oversees the activities of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations the worldover.

With reverence and love, I offer my prayerful pranams at the Divine Lotus Feet of our dearest, sweetest, loving Lord, Sathya Sai. Sai Ram to all of you.

What a day of holy fun. I don't know if you are ready for a talk after all this wonderful music and play you've had. As Swami says, there is one good thing about spirituality around Swami; it is not having a long face, – as He says a castor oil face – it is having a wonderful joyous time, singing, dancing, and having good food, calling it as prasad; just having a good time. So that is the beauty of living with Swami. Being around Swami is always having lots of happiness and joy.

Kasturi's Test

It reminds me of an incident when Professor Kasturi was giving talks which I attended – this was about twenty years ago. He was talking about how Swami puts us through all kinds of tests. At the request of the devotees, he went to give a talk in West Bengal. He gave a wonderful talk and everything went well. People were very happy; they all felt Swami's Love.

When he came back, he felt Swami would pat his back and say, "What a wonderful job you did." Instead, Swami ignored him and didn't talk to him and he got the opposite treatment. Earlier, at least Swami would talk to him and take him for lunch, but now Swami completely ignored him. This went on for a couple of weeks. He was shocked. He thought, "I went and did service, I talked about Swami, I shared His Love, and He ignores me."

His mother was there. One day she took the liberty and went up to Swami and said, "Swami, my son is devastated. He's crying, he is depressed, he doesn't eat." Then Swami said, "Okay, ask him to come." He went there and got on his knees and said, "Swami, what did I do wrong?" Swami said, "You went to Bengal and you talked." He said, "But what did I do wrong, Swami?"

There he showed the invitation which said 'Professor Kasturi talks about Bhagavan and arranges the interviews'. Swami said: "You gave interviews to people. I don't need to give interviews; now you give interviews to people." He said, "Swami, I didn't do that. People put it without my knowledge." "But you were happy inside: 'Oh they are doing this to me.'" So this ego – rogue – plays the trick. That is why I give any credit – whatever happens – to Swami. I hope Swami's Love flows through me.

“Never Try to Explain Swami”

Another thing Professor Kasturi said, “Never try to explain Swami.” Because Swami Himself said that He cannot be explained, neither can He be understood. Swami gave a history making discourse in 1968 where He said that the Avatar can never be understood. Whoever it is, even great scientists after thousands of years of enquiry, no one can understand Him. We can just experience His love.

When I was there recently on November 4, Deepavali Day, the festival of lights, that morning there was a beautiful, joyous music program. And that day, Swami gave a discourse, and that day God Himself was quoting the great devotee Tyagaraja. In His inimitable sweet voice Swami sang a Sanskrit song meaning God is beyond words. That is why even in the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, it says that this is something to be experienced; you can’t put it in words. And even the Upanishad’s say the mind and the words cannot grasp; they recoil.

When I was new to Swami, I was passing through Singapore. I stopped at some bhajan places; I saw vibhuti coming in the pictures and lot of miracles happening. As soon as I went to Swami, I said, “Swami, I saw these miracles happening.” Because I was new to Swami, I was excited. Swami said, “Every person has a miracle. Every house has a miracle.” So each one of you can probably write a book. That is the Love of the Avatar. So we can all experience and enjoy that Love. And that Love, we should share it with others. That is why having experienced Swami’s Love, we have to expand that Love and we have to share it with others.

The Greatest Blessing: “This is the Golden Chance”

Really we are blessed and fortunate; we don’t realize that. The greatest blessing is to be born as a human being and to have a desire for God and on top of it to come in contact with an Avatar, a *jagadguru*, a world teacher – that is the greatest blessing.

People have probably heard of Don Mario Mazzoleni. He wrote the book: *A Catholic Priest Meets Sai Baba*. A few of you must have read that book. This man passed away in September 2001 in Prashanti Nilayam in the Super Specialty Hospital. He was a Catholic priest who was condemned because he was following Sai Baba. But he said that what he experienced and learned from Swami is the gist and summary of all the holy teachings of all the religions possible. He said his whole life changed. On his deathbed he said:

“Don’t miss this chance – this is the golden chance. To be contemporaries of an Avatar; we don’t know how lucky we are.” That is why sincere seekers come from more than 170 countries who do not understand Telugu or English. That in itself is the greatest miracle of Swami, that Love, His magnetism and how it attracts. So Swami is there for us, for anybody who is a sincere seeker. But the main thing is that we should be able to make use of His teachings and live them practically in our life.

Every Discourse - A Gita

Swami has summarized: “Love all, Serve all. Help Ever, Hurt Never.” But He gives us different examples in different discourses. He is the source of all knowledge, both secular and sacred knowledge. He is not only the source of the Vedas, every word He speaks is a Veda, every word He speaks is a mantra, every sentence He speaks is a sutra, and every discourse He gives is a Upanishad or a Gita. So, everything He says we should listen to very carefully because He is the source of all knowledge. In fact, He is not only a source of spiritual knowledge, He is also a source of scientific knowledge, business, and politics.

I can share with you some experiences. One geologist went to Swami many years ago, and because he was a scientist, Swami took him to the Chitravati River. (In those days, He used to go to the Chitravati River.) Swami took a stone and asked him, “What is this? What does this contain?” He said, “Stone, Swami. It contains silica, atoms,” etc. and he gave all the scientific details.

Sai – the Scientist

Swami said, “No, look again.” And it was a beautiful sugar idol of Krishna. So Swami gave him a message, two things here. Whatever Swami does, there is an inner message. Everything is Divine; that is Krishna is God and everything has sweetness. So don’t try to see the material aspect, but see the divinity and sweetness in everything.

And another thing: Swami is the source of all music. We should remember that a lot of great musicians of India come and perform at the Feet of Swami. Even a couple of weeks ago I saw Pundit Shiv Kumar Sharma, the great santoor player, was there. One time he was performing and he said he composed one for Swami. He said, “For Adi Purusha, I am composing this Adi Raga.”

“One Day You Will See Me as a Speck”

One time I was with Swami in Kodaikanal, I shared this in front of Swami and Swami loved it and I am sharing it with you. There was a devotee, a lady named Kamalasarthi. She was the wife of the Defense Secretary Mr. Parthasarthi. She shared on Swami’s sixtieth birthday what Swami had told them about fifty or sixty years ago when there were only fifteen devotees. He said, “The day will come when you will have to see Me from a distance. You will see Me as a speck and you will see Me through binoculars.”

She thought He was telling stories. Because there were only fifteen to thirty people, she didn’t believe it. She shared this at the Hill View stadium on the sixtieth birthday with Swami. And this lady was a great music lover. She was learning music from a teacher in Delhi. At that time her husband was the Defense Secretary and she was taking lessons. Because she loved Swami and she made frequent visits to Swami, she one day told her teacher, “Do you

want to see Sai Baba?" He said, "No. I am not interested." She said, "Just come one time, for my satisfaction."

Sai – the Source of All Music

So she took this music teacher, who was an expert in Tyagaraja music, to Prashanti Nilayam. He heard all these bhajans. He thought these people don't know what music is. So then Swami called him for an interview. He asked this man to sing some songs. He did. Then Swami suddenly started singing some rare compositions of Tyagaraja. This man was amazed. "Swami, how do you know this Tyagaraja kirtana?" Spontaneously came the reply, "Who do you think taught Tyagaraja?" So He is Sri Rama Himself who taught Tyagaraja. That was the revelation. He was amazed and he became a lifelong devotee of Swami.

So He is the source of music. People forget that. Not only that, in any field you talk about – medicine for example – Swami was asking me what is diabetes and what are the new trends? I told Swami something and Swami told me some aspects of dietary management about eight years ago which at that time were not known. I was wondering what Swami was saying, and then I learned that change has come only five years ago.

Sai – the Real Doctor

I know a few friends in the field of cardiology who were once doing a cardiac angioplasty. One of my friends, a cardiac anesthesiologist, said they were worried the vessel may rupture when they were doing the procedure. Then he said Sai Gayatri and the procedure went on well. So He guides everyone.

In my own case I can tell you from the last year a wonderful experience about an Italian devotee who is the President of an Italian organization. His daughter had a rare condition called Cushing Syndrome. It is a disease of the adrenal gland, and she had a tumor. It was demonstrated by x-rays. She was quite ill. The surgeons in Italy said she needed surgery. Swami told them to consult me as that is my specialty. I said the same thing: "Yes, she definitely needs surgery."

I happened to see them again a couple of months ago. Amazing! She doesn't need surgery! All her tests have come back normal, all her x-rays are normal. Even the doctors in Italy are all amazed. He is the real Doctor. He is confounding. His miracles are mind-boggling. So He teaches us every step.

A Pundit Tests Swami

Once someone was saying, "Even Vedic pundits; who come to scoff at Him, who come to test Him, stay at His feet prayerfully." Recently, at Dasara time, one of the Vedic pundits was admitting that He came to Swami about 40 years ago. At that time Swami was very young and not well known.

Swami doesn't sit there all the time. The pundit was withholding some mantras; he wanted to test Swami whether He would discover this. Swami asked him, "Did you chant those mantras?" He said, "Yes, Swami!" Swami asked him three times. Every time he said, "Yes, yes." Swami didn't say anything. The pundit thought, "Oh, Swami doesn't know." Then Swami took him behind the curtain and He scolded him. "If you skip those mantras again you can never come back to Prashanti Nilayam." Then he fell flat at Swami's Feet and now he has been coming for the last 40 years.

These Vedic pundits are very orthodox from a region called Godavari in Andhra and are well known for their Vedic scholarship. They put up a special mandala and Swami came and told them, "No, not that way." They consulted with some people in Madras who are knowledgeable in Vedic rituals who could verify what Swami said was true. So He is the Veda Purusha, He is the Veda Mata. So whatever He says, whether in a scientific field, a spiritual field, you should take it as a mantra. That is what I have learned.

Sai – The Architect

Every one of the Hospitals is constructed by a company called Larsen and Toubro. The chairman, Mr. Ramakrishna, told me that when they were constructing the Hospital in Bangalore, the front dome was so high. The architects and engineers said there's no way they could do it. Swami gave them some suggestions on how to put the pillars, otherwise they were at a loss. It is the same thing with the planning of the Sai Kulwant Hall, where the pillars at one time were coming in the way. Everything was changed by Swami so now devotees can see.

Even in politics, Swami knows what people are going to do. Once, Mr. Rasgotra, who is one of the persons in charge of Swami's cultural center in Delhi, was sharing that he was sitting in the veranda and Swami came and said of him, "He is the High Commissioner of India to England."

Sai – the Political Prognosticator

This man thought, "Swami is from a small village. He is Divine, He is holy, but He doesn't know about these things." He had already served as Foreign Secretary and had retired. Then, to his amazement, two years later he was appointed as High Commissioner to the U.K. So for Him, He knows our past, present and future. We know only the present. That is why we have tunnel vision, whereas He has global vision.

That is why Krishna says in the Gita: "Oh, Arjuna! I know your present, I know your past, I know your future. But you cannot know about Me." That is why whatever Swami says, we should implicitly believe. We don't know what He knows about the past and present and future. Implicit faith is what we should have. That is what they were singing in that song too: "Lord, let me have faith and follow You sincerely."

As You Perceive Him, So He Is

Whatever you think about Him, that is what He is. If you think of Him as just a man, He is man. If you think of Him as a magician, He is a magician. If you think of Him as a holy man, He is a holy man. If you think of Him as an Avatar, He is an Avatar. If you think He is Para Brahman, He is Para Brahman. If you think He is beyond all, He is beyond all. It all depends upon your level of sincerity, your level of purity.

And then I have heard how people have experienced different aspects of Swami. Most of it I have personally heard from them, some I have read.

The Maya of the Avatar

Easwaramma, like all the mothers of the Avatars, became deluded by Maya. God Himself creates that Maya. Yashoda saw all the worlds in Krishna's mouth, yet she was bewitched by the Maya of Krishna; she thought He was her own son. The same thing happened with Easwaramma. She loved Swami but she had her own thing; she treated Him as her endearing child rather than thinking He is the Supreme God.

But in Brindavan, before her passing when she was ill, she suddenly saw Swami and had a vision of Him as Rama with His bow and arrow in all His splendor and beauty. She was deeply touched and emotionally driven and called this lady named Peddabotu. She used to be a devotee of Swami and was with the Shirdi Avatar as well as this Avatar. Easwaramma told her, "Swami is really Rama." Peddabotu was a very sincere devotee of Swami. She said, "I am happy at least now you have realized He is Rama."

Conquer Maya through Surrender

Because Swami always plays this Divine drama, particularly with all of us. That is why it is said that when you live close to Swami it is very dangerous. He plays this human aspect. You get deluded by His world-bewitching Maya. Even great sages like Vishwamitra were confused. One time I was going with Swami and I said, "Don't put me in your Maya, Swami." He right away said. "Do you think you are greater than Vishwamitra, Vashishta and Jamatyagni?" So His Maya is very dangerous. If great sages like Vishwamitra, Vashishta, and Jamatyagni were confused, what to talk of us?

The only solution is given by the Lord: "By surrendering to Me completely you can conquer Maya." "Lord, I don't know what is good and what is wrong. Thy Will be done. You know what is right." So, if you completely surrender, then Maya won't affect you at all. This is the only way to get out of Maya.

Krishna Darshana

I think a lot of you might have heard of the vision of Krishna. Dr. Hislop talks about the vision of Krishna he had when he was going with Swami in the car from Bangalore to Puttaparthi. On the way, he looked back and instead of

Swami he saw that beautiful blue complexion Form, and he didn't know who He was but he could not take his eyes away from that and then Swami revealed to him later on that it was the Divine vision of Sri Krishna that He gave him.

Yesterday, Dr. Kailin was saying one time Swami gave that vision in Brindavan to many people. So many people saw Him as Sri Krishna! He has given visions of Dasha Avatars to people. During Dasara when I was there, Mrs. Jayalakshmi, warden of Girls' Hostel in Anantapur, was saying Swami gave her the vision of Divine Mother when they were doing the Gauri puja in the Prashanti Mandir. And there was this lady, Swami's elder sister Venkamma, a great devotee of Swami – everybody praises her purity and devotion to Swami, a very sincere devotee – she came late because she was bringing some food.

Darshan of Divine Mother

In the meantime, the puja was going on and she looked through the window and instead of Swami she saw this beautiful sari with beautiful red border and kumkum and jewelry and she was confused. When she looked again, she saw that Form! But when she didn't see it again, Swami called her and said, "Venkamma, look here!" Then again the same Form appeared. After that she couldn't take it and said, "I can't see anymore!"

These stories I have personally heard which is why I thought you should hear the glories of the sweet Lord. There was Dr. Saraf, an ex-Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Once he told that during sports at the Hill View stadium, Swami went early in the morning. Since it was very hot, Swami said, "Give them drinks, give them food." But He was not having anything. He was feeling sad that everybody else has and Swami is not taking even a sip of water. What to do?

Vishwa Rupa Darshana

He was trying to get Swami's attention, but someone said, "You cannot get Swami's attention until He wants to give His attention." So he could not draw His attention and he was feeling sad. But then, suddenly, Swami gave him a wonderful Vishwa Rupa Darshana, how in the form of all the people there He was drinking water. He said he could never forget how just for that moment, he was having the Vishwa Rupa Darshana.

That is why we are so fortunate to be contemporaries of the Avatar. Once in Kodaikanal, another late Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sampat, told Swami, "It is our great good fortune, it is our merit of our previous lives that we are at Your Feet." Swami said, "No, wrong! It is not only your *punya* (merit), but also your parents, your grandparents, your ancestors, all their punyas combined, that is how you are at My Feet."

Taking Our Pains on Himself

The more you Love Him, the more He takes care of all our regular, secular, and spiritual problems. There is a great example of how Swami took the illness of many people. Most of you must have heard of how He took the intense pain and suffering of a young boy who was suffering from mumps. He cried, "Swami! This pain is too much! I can't take it anymore!" Swami took it and suffered for three weeks. By His sankalpa He can cure Himself, but He is so pure and selfless. He says He doesn't use it for His own curing. He said, when people prayed, He cured His illness.

During that time, Swami was kind enough to talk to some American devotees and He shared on different occasions how He took the heart attack of some devotees and paralysis of a devotee. He is so kind and compassionate that sometimes He reveals to people whose sickness He took, but sometimes He does so without revealing anything, He will avert our dangers; that is the beauty of the Lord! We do some good thing and we take the credit. He does so much for us without our own knowledge. Swami says, "So many times I take care of your dangers without even telling you." Sometimes we may not even know that He has come and saved us.

French Fries Prasadam

I can tell two incidents in my own life; it may sound silly, but really, how Motherly Swami is. I was new to Swami. I was going to a Hollywood Vedanta center where we go for bhajans every month. On the way, I saw there was a sign for French fries. I love French fries. I told my wife, "Hyma, let me have some French fries." She said, "No. Swami says, 'Ceiling on desires,' so no French fries! We should practice ceiling on desires."

So I said "Okay." So what could I do? We went to the Vedanta center and we were eating. And there I see French fries. I could not believe it – it never happened before and never happened after. There is usually rice, fruits, etc. How Swami fulfills even our petty desires. That's the compassion of the Lord; He fulfills even petty desires.

"Tell Them the Plum Story"

Another thing happened in Kodaikanal. Swami took the boys and invited some guests. He went to one Arjuna Raja's house. You know Swami; He loves to take pictures with the boys. Suddenly He went to a bougainvillea vine and took out a couple of plums and gave them to two of the students. I was thinking in my mind, "Oh, I wish I had a plum too," but I didn't say anything.

Next morning, we get up and on our nightstand I see two plums. I showed them to Hyma. The next day, we asked the house landlord, "Did you put the plums there?" He said, "No." Then we asked if the servant put it there and he too said, "No." Then we thought, "How kind of Swami."

Right after the trip, when we went to Brindavan, Swami told me to give a talk in the Trayee session. I was talking about Vedanta and He said, “Stop all the Vedanta. Tell them what happened at Kodaikanal. Vedanta you can share later. Tell them about the plum story.” Then I related how Swami was kind enough to manifest those plums. Everybody was enjoying the tale and Swami was laughing.

This shows how Swami takes care of all our desires with or without our knowledge. To be able to enjoy such Divine glories of Swami, to be contemporaries of the Avatar; Swami says, if you want to continue enjoying His grace, you need two things: medicine and *pathyam* [the suitable diet].

Medicine and Pathyam

When He inaugurated the Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Bangalore, He said, “Some people may have a stomach problem, a lung problem, or a heart problem. But everyone who is born has this common disease called *bhava roga* (of being in the world).” We all have that. That is why we suffer. But Swami says there is a cure. “The medicine is Love. Love God with all your heart and soul.” Like Jesus’ first commandment, “Love God with all your heart and soul.” The second thing is *pathyam*, which means dietary restriction. That is, follow His commandments sincerely. If you do this, you will have the grace of Swami all the time.

So how to Love him? Love Him with intensity. For me, the greatest revelation of what Love really means I learned by living with Swami. The next best way is to read *Prema Vahini* where Swami talks about what Prema really is.

For me, one of the greatest examples is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the saint of Dakshineswar, who is regarded as an Avatar. He said he loved Mother Kali so much that he used to rub his face against the ground. “Mother, another day is gone. How can I not see You?” He used to cry. He says but nowadays people cry jug fulls of tears for wife, children, name, and fame. Who cries for God?

The Number One Priority

He says if you cry for God for three days – he didn’t say three years or three weeks but three days – if you cry intensely for God, you will have the Darshan of God. So you should have that intensity of longing, “I want Swami. I want God! And I want the Truth and nothing else!” For spiritual seekers, that should be our number one priority. If we have that intensity of longing, if we have that, everything else is assured. Like the Gopikas, the cowherds of Krishna in Brindavan are perfect examples. They used to curse the eyelids, “Oh, eyelids! Why are you given? Just at the blinking of eyelids we lose the vision of Krishna.” They can’t forget the vision of Krishna for even a moment.

Actually, when I was there during last Gurupurnima, Swami asked one of the devotees from England, “What *sadhana* (spiritual practice) do you do?” She said, “Swami, I remember You.” Swami says that is the greatest *sadhana*.

When we were there a couple of weeks ago, my first daughter asked Swami, “What *sadhana* should I do?” Swami said, “Just remember Me. That is the greatest *sadhana*.” Swami says to just remember Him, through song, play, reading or writing, talking, somehow or another, remember Him. That is the greatest *sadhana*. Love means you should always remember Him. Have that intensity of longing, like Sri Ramakrishna, like the Gopis of Brindavan.

“Give Me an Excuse to Give You Grace.”

But this Love automatically includes sacrifice. Swami says *tyaaga* is very important for a devotee. That’s why the Upanishads say, “Not by good works, not by progeny, not by charity, but by sacrifice alone you will attain immortality.” The real sacrifice is the sacrificing of our whole mind, body and soul for God, sacrificing our ego. For the sake of God, you should be able to at least sacrifice something. Swami says, “Sacrifice your time or sacrifice your energy or your money, something at least; it should give me an excuse so that I can give you some Grace.”

Actually, Mr. Kanu – some of you know he is from Africa – started wonderful service in Zambia. They were trying to start a Swami school but they did not have enough funds. He approached Swami. “Swami, we don’t have enough funds to finish the project.” Swami said, “Sell your house and do it.”

Sacrifice by Swami’s Students

When I was there a couple of weeks ago, Swami was so lovingly talking about His students, about how much they sacrifice. A lot of them are MBA’s, PhD’s and they have left everything. Swami said they were getting 20 to 30,000 rupees a month in Bombay but they left their jobs. One of the boys, He was saying, had a bond with the company for one lakh rupees, and if he quit the job he would have to pay them 100,000 rupees. He quit the job, took a loan and paid them 100,000 rupees and came to see Swami. Swami was touched by the sacrifice.

Then I mentioned to Swami, “How lucky those boys are. How sacrificing those boys are.” Swami said, “That is their great *punyam*. It doesn’t come that easily. It is their *praapti* and good karma, their good merit that made them do this sacrifice.” So Swami really appreciates sacrifice.

Not the Amount, but the Sacrifice

I remember for the seventy-fifth Birthday we were sitting on the veranda and there was a boy named Sainath – he plays the tabla – actually he is a teacher and he is still there. He gave 5000 rupees for Swami’s seventy-fifth birthday. Swami was telling so much about him. “This boy, he has a wife and children!” 5000 rupees – that is not big money – that is about 100 dollars. But Swami was raving about him. There are people who have given millions – it’s not the amount he gave but how much sacrifice he made. But Swami was telling everybody, “He gave 5,000 rupees.” So Swami is *bhava priya* not *bhaya priya*. He sees the *bhava*, with what loving feeling you give.

That is why Krishna says, “You give Me anything – leaf, flower, fruit or water – if you give it to Me with love, I will take it with joy.” But our Swami doesn’t even care for those things. Our Swami beautifully says, “Give me the water, the water of joyful tears of your devotion; give me a flower, the flower of your heart; give me fruit, the fruit of your work; give me a leaf, the leaf of your body and your actions.” He doesn’t even want these material things. He just wants you to sacrifice.

Like Rama. He didn’t even care about Shabari offering Him the fruits that were tasted by her, but He saw the love behind it. Same thing with Krishna when He went to Vidhura’s place. He didn’t eat the banana; He ate the peel of the banana which was offered because it was done with love.

Walking From Bangalore

Just a couple of weeks ago, I was in Prashanti Nilayam. Swami was sitting on the chair in Kulwant Hall and a few devotees and students were there. This man was somewhere in the hall, all the way back. Swami called him and told him to sing a song. This man started singing beautiful Sanskrit bhajans.

Then Swami asked him, “How did you come?” This man had come from Bangalore walking 160 kilometers, by just repeating and saying, “Aum Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaya Namaha.” Swami called him for an interview. He said, “Swami, next time I will come on my knees.” Outside, Swami was telling the students, “See the devotion of this man! He walked 160 kilometers. And next time, he wants to come on his knees.” But inside the interview room he was saying, “Tell him bad! Don’t come on the knees, you will get disabled. There are convenient buses with cheap fare. You can come in a bus.” So I had to tell him, “Swami is saying come in a convenient bus.” But outside He was telling the students, “You see that devotion? That is real devotion. You don’t have devotion like this.” So that shows what real sacrifice is. Just do something; you don’t need to do big things.

Once Swami took me to a place called Sai Nagar where in the last three to four months, Swami recently built for orphans about 100 homes. They give them shelter, education and they also take care of their health needs. I happened to be there with those boys who were orphans on the streets without any knowledge of how to read and write. And now they are chanting Vedas, Rudram, and all these Vedas and Upanishads. I was amazed! They learned all this within three months. I said, “Swami, they have learned by Your grace!” He said, “No, not My grace! Their shraddha and bhakti, their faith and devotion made them learn, not My grace.” God never wants to take credit. He was giving credit to them. I went back and I told those boys how Swami was touched by their love and devotion.

Wild Flowers for Sai

And then when we were coming back from that place – this was at the outskirts – people were picking up wayside wild yellow flowers and throwing

flowers on Swami's car. Swami said, "See their devotion. They didn't even know I was coming. They plucked these flowers." So you see how God is not touched by expensive garlands.

As He was entering the ashram, there was one devotee, she was throwing flowers. Swami said, "Did you see her? She is a Russian devotee." And then He added mysteriously, "I don't know how she finds out. Whenever I am there in the car, she always has flowers." I wanted to see her and tell her how lucky she was that God made a special comment on her devotion.

Extend Love to All God's Creatures

Once we were staying in Prashanti Nilayam and in our room these lizards were bothering us. It was okay with me, but my daughter was scared of them. So I told our boys, "Just take them but don't kill them. Just put them in the garden outside." Then I asked Swami, "Swami what should we do with these lizards? Should we throw them out?" Swami said, "Why should you throw them out? Think they are also worshipping Me in the puja room with you." You should have that broad kind of feeling. You should not only love all human beings, you should even love lizards. Love all doesn't mean one must only love all human beings. You should have that extension of love.

Swami says we should practice His teachings: hear good, hear no evil; speak good, speak no evil. As He said, if we are devotees for so long, we must see whether we talk softly, sweetly, we don't hurt other's feelings. These are simple things. We don't need to be an expert in Vedas, Upanishads, and Gita. He says they are good but you don't need to know them, rather we should practice them.

Today one of my friends was sharing that he had stopped watching TV and movies for so long but now he was tempted to see TV again. Sense attractions are so powerful; they pull us down. Swami told a beautiful story about this, how our vasanas come back because these bad habits have been with us for lifetimes. If we think we have gotten rid of them, they come from somewhere, the anger, the jealousy, criticizing other people.

Vasanas – the Unwanted Guest

Swami told a beautiful story to illustrate this. There was a nice couple who had a guest. But that guest was like a pest. He didn't want to leave. At first, they treated him well for one or two weeks. Later, when they saw he wouldn't leave, instead of giving him three or four snacks, they cut it down to one snack. They used to give him two meals, but then cut it down to one meal. But he still wouldn't leave.

One day they got frustrated because now this guy was staying with the family for almost one year. They didn't know what to do to get rid of this bad guest. Then they made a plan: The husband and wife enacted a drama that they were fighting with each other. "Either you stay in the house or I will." Finally the guest looked disgusted and left. The wife said, "See how beautifully I

acted. That's why he left." The husband said, "No, I acted better, that's why he left." Meanwhile they heard a knock on the door. They asked, "Who is it?" The guest said, "Oh, I acted even better," and he came back.

So like that, these vasanas are very dangerous. You think that you have rid yourself of them? No! You cannot get rid of them easily. They are all the time with us. You should be very careful. That is why in the Gita it says, "If we sincerely pray, only by our sincere longing: 'Lord I don't want these bad qualities. I don't want this,'" and only by His grace can we completely eliminate this. When that stage comes, then we will see only Oneness.

The Same Atma Pervades All

I will end this talk by quoting a beautiful aphorism from Swami. "I will put the essence of all Vedanta and all the scripture's in one sentence: Experience that the same Divinity, the same Atma, is pervading everything."

In every atom, every cell, every moment is pervaded by Sai, the Divinity. We have to experience that Swami is in everything, everywhere, forever. So we have to have that ultimate experience!

I pray to Swami to bless us all on this beautiful and auspicious occasion to have Pure Divine Love for His Lotus Feet and to all His creation so that we can experience Him in everything, everywhere, ever.

Jai Sai Ram.

THERE MAY BE A DELAY BUT NOT DENIAL

By Pallavi Vedantam, a former student of the Anantapur Campus of Swami's Institute.

The best thing that can happen to anyone is when God enters one's life and showers His blessings in various and myriad ways known only to Him. When, where, how and why are questions whose answers are unknown to anyone and will ever remain unknown to mankind.

The Journey Begins

My journey to Swami began when I was 12 years old. The Chinna Kathas told by Him caught my attention in the year 1989, which led to a series of events weaved by Him into memorable reminiscences.

Every person who comes to Bhagavan, no doubt, has a mysterious, scintillating Sai Katha (the story of their journey to Sai) to narrate and treasure. From the moment I first saw Swami at Prasanthi Nilayam in 1989, a desire unconsciously grew in me that I must become His child. A Bal Vikas program nourished this yearning; Swami's discourses and visits to Parthi strengthened it.

Longing for a Photo with Swami

In 1990, I wrote a letter to Swami expressing my desire to have a divine opportunity of being photographed with Him. *What an imprudent desire! How can I have the privilege of standing next to the Almighty?* After posting the letter, I contemplated on this impossibility and smiled at myself. After that, I never nourished that desire again.

But nothing goes to waste with Bhagavan; He reads our minutest thoughts. We may forget about them, but He will not. He is our only true friend. There may be a delay, but there is no denial in God's realm.

Becoming His Student: A Prayer Answered

After eleven years, my passing thought and desire became crystallized. I was praying very intensely to Swami to bless me with the divine opportunity to become His student. My prayer was answered in the year 2001 when He allowed me to enroll in His University for my master's degree in Home Science. The Institute taught me not only Home Science, but Heart Science as well.

After I joined the Anantapur Campus of the Institute, mysterious events led me to become a part of the Nadaswaram group (Nadaswaram is a non-brass band very popular in South India) of the campus. It was a Herculean task to learn as it was totally new for all of us. We had to start from scratch. Being girls, it required a great deal of stamina, willpower, physical strength, self-confidence, and above all, Swami's grace. We put all our hearts and souls

into it just to make Swami happy. But it was not easy! We had five hours of assiduous practice sessions for days together. We rehearsed morning and evening. The constant encouragement, timely guidance, and support of our teachers and other students helped us over the hurdles. With Swami's grace, in only three months' time we learned this new art and were able to present it before Him.

“Are You Going to Play?”

The long awaited day arrived. We sat next to Swami's interview room on the ladies' side with our instruments – four Nadaswarams and three Tavils [Tavil is a percussion instrument while Nadaswaram is wind-based]. On October 12, 2001, after Arathi in the evening, Swami came by and gave us a mysterious and loving look, and with a captivating smile asked, “What is this?” Before we could answer, He said with enthusiasm, “Are you going to play?” We nodded in affirmation. He blessed the instruments by gently touching them and blessed us with His Abhaya Hastha [hand raised in blessing] and graciously granted us permission to perform.

A Most Memorable Moment

We were blessed to lead the procession on Ladies' Day on November 19, 2001. It was the most memorable moment in our young lives. We had practiced vigorously as we were to perform not only on Ladies' Day but on Swami's Birthday as well. In order to please Baba with our performance, we rehearsed for many hours at a stretch while at Parthi, sometimes even going without darshan.

With exactly one day to go, on November 18, 2001, we were at the Culvert gate devotedly practicing. Suddenly, we saw Bhagavan's car coming towards us! Seeing it approach brought tears of joy to our eyes. Incidentally, at that point in time we were playing, “Bhaagyaada Lakshmi Baaramma.” He stopped near us and enjoyed the tune immensely. He gave us all a wonderful smile, like a proud father. It was a torrential downpour on parched souls as we rarely get a chance to be in close proximity of Swami. We were totally drenched in His love.

A Wish Fulfilled: A Photo with Sai

On Ladies' Day, after the function was over, we walked back in procession towards Swami's residence followed by the Band girls. Swami graciously agreed to pose for a photograph with the Band girls. Lovingly, He turned our way and called us to take a photograph with Him. I was dazed by this rare and wonderful opportunity. It suddenly flashed on me that I had written to Swami praying to Him to bless me with a chance to have a photograph with Him. After eleven years, He fulfilled my heartfelt desire!

More and More Blessings

After this, Baba blessed us with further opportunities to perform in His presence during various functions. He also spoke to us several times. He enquired about us, our names, the courses we were pursuing, etc., and gave us advice and guidance. Each time we performed sitting at the gate, though we weren't professionals, He encouraged us by slowing down, putting *thaalam* [providing rhythm by His hand], and blessing with a charming smile and loving glance for each one of us. This encouragement inspired us to work harder and aim for perfection.

Saris and Suitcases: Prasadam from the Divine Hand

God's ways are mysterious and beyond our comprehension. In October 2002, we came to Prasanthi Nilayam for the Dasara celebrations. On October 8, we were recipients of Swami's boundless love. We, the Nadaswaram girls, were called to the entrance of Swami's residence (Poornachandra entrance) where He was waiting for us. He spoke with us and gifted saris to each of us as a token of His appreciation and love. Receiving a gift directly from the Divine Hands of Swami was a unique and thrilling experience! While handing us the saris, He looked into our eyes and filled us with motherly love and affection. They were the most cherished moments for all of us, as we Anantapur students rarely get such opportunities to be so close to Baba.

On January 14, 2002, the day of the valedictory function of the Annual Sports and Games, we were all feeling very sad as this was our last opportunity to perform in His presence in that academic year. We were all gloomy with tears uncontrollably welling up in our eyes. However, not a drop of a tear shed for Baba goes in vain! Swami's heart is like butter which melts with a sincere prayer. Exactly at that moment, He called the Institute Band boys onto the stage and gave them suitcases. I was delighted on seeing that wonderful sight. I felt happy for them and told Baba inside, "Swami, we are also your children. We have put our hearts and souls into our performance and practiced so much just to make you happy." As these thoughts were going on within myself, an announcement over the PA System said that the Nadaswaram girls should go to the dais and receive Swami's blessings. We were all stunned, especially me, on hearing the announcement. It was unbelievable! We went up to the dais where Swami presented us with a suitcase each and an opportunity for a group photo with Him. In the course of His Divine Discourse, He mentioned the Nadaswaram group. Let me humbly submit that it was only by His grace that we were able to play the Nadaswaram as it requires a lot of stamina.

In God's Time

A prayer submitted to Swami eleven years ago to bless me with a divine opportunity of having a photograph with Him was fulfilled. It took many years, but it did get materialized. Therefore, it is very clear that in the kingdom of God there may be delay, but no denial. All our prayers, big or small, will be answered in God's time. We should remain patient and firm in our faith. I had

just prayed for one opportunity, but when it came, He bestowed several upon me. How can I ever express my gratitude to such a loving Lord? I only pray to Swami to make me worthy of His love and blessings so I may be an instrument in His Divine Mission. I will remain grateful to Him till the last breath of my life.

If you tap any Sai devotee, he or she will have stories upon stories to narrate. Even if sage Vyasa comes and turns all the oceans into ink, all the trees into pens, and the entire sky into paper, he will not be able to write the glory of our beloved Bhagavan Baba. Such is Sai *Kathamrutham* – the nectarine stories of the lord; it will have a beginning but no end.

Such is the glory of our Lord Sai!

Jai Sai Ram

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY INTO THE HEART

This is the story of a British couple, Joan and Alan Humphries, and their amazing journey to the Lord filled with moving accounts of divine blessings and protection.

Joan Humphries begins their story...

Love Beckons...The Path Begins

In 1997, Alan and I were following the Christian Spiritualist Faith until we met a couple, who later became our good friends, who asked us to read a book called *Embodiment of Love*. This book told the story of Sai Baba and His teachings, through another couple's experiences. After reading and digesting the contents, we both knew these teachings were our way forward to enlightenment. From that moment on, we felt the need to go and see Sai Baba in India. We made the journey when we met another couple who had helped us so much with their love, wisdom, knowledge and kindness. They organized a trip to India in October 1997 and we went for two weeks to see Sai Baba in all His glory at Prashanti Nilayam. We all experienced so much love and peace during His daily *darshans*, and knowledge and wisdom through His teaching. Though we didn't realize it at the time, our spiritual journey to divinity had begun. In July 1998 we went to India again to see Sai Baba. On our return we heard of a larger group going to India in September 1998 and were very excited to go and see Him again.

Cursed by Cancer

Then in 1999, Alan and I decided to visit our dear Swami for the fourth time, but in August tragically I was diagnosed with cancer. I underwent surgery in September. While I was in the hospital, Baba gave me many signs that He was looking after me. When I returned home from the Hospital, I just wanted to visit Him to say thank you for being with me.

After a few weeks of my discharge from the hospital, I was not feeling very well. I went to see my GP. The doctor looked at my notes and said the laboratory usually states that the cancer will return, but they have not stated a time, which means it could come back at any time. You can imagine how I felt hearing those words. When I got home I did not say a word to anyone, even to my husband, Alan. I kept this conversation a secret between Swami, the doctor and me. From then on, I prayed and prayed to Baba. The hospital said no tablets could cure cancer and I refused the chemotherapy. I put all my faith in my loving Mother-Father God and took *vibhuti* and *lingam* water.

That December (in 1999) I had a dream in which Sai Baba said, "You will go to India, wearing plain clothes." He then raised His Hand and with one finger in the air said, "You will sing." I woke up straight away. Alan and I discussed this dream as to what it meant.

Then in 2000, I kept praying fervently to Baba to let us please visit Him again to convey our thanks. By His Grace we found ourselves preparing for a pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam, truly, the Abode of the Highest Peace. When we arrived at the ashram, we were glad we were entering Sai Kulwant Hall on our first day. I was so happy at the very first glimpse of our beloved Baba. My heart and soul knew my eyes were looking at God incarnated on Earth. I continued to pray, hoping my prayers would be heard. During our stay, we were told by our group leader that Swami would grant us a group interview in the mandir on Tuesday at 2:00 p.m. By 1:30, we were all seated inside and waiting for Him. The auspicious moment arrived and Swami gracefully glided in towards us, showering His Divine Love on all. After listening to His divine discourse, we were asked to sit back-to-back in columns running down the length of the mandir.

“Good, good, good” – The Lord’s Blessings

As He approached where I was sitting, He leaned towards me and asked, “Do you want to talk?” I could only softly reply, “It’s about my cancer, Baba.” He leaned over again and asked me to repeat what I said. I repeated a little louder, “It’s about my cancer, Baba.” He then asked me if I was a Christian and said, “Good Christian.” *Only you know Baba*, I thought to myself. He then turned towards the men and told them I was a Christian. Then my Lord held out His arm and circled His palm and manifested the most beautiful cross set with eleven green emeralds and attached to a gold chain. He held it out in His holy hands and put the cross to my lips to kiss. No words could ever explain the profound feelings I had and still have within my heart. As Baba stood there, I was able to touch His divine lotus Feet. Then He patted my head three times saying, “Good, good, good.”

When I returned home, I shared this wonderful blessing and experience with many friends, but because Baba did not say, “Cancer is cancelled,” there were some doubts. I turned and looked at Baba and apologized for the small doubt which entered my mind. From that moment onwards, I prayed intensely. My prayer went like this: “Please, Baba, could I visit you again soon, and hear your words that my cancer is cancelled, and could there be a witness to hear your words?” Alan always told me when I came home from the Hospital that Baba took the cancer away. His total love and faith in Baba just grew stronger and stronger.

I could not believe we had been in Baba’s mandir for one and a half hours hearing His sweet words, being in His divine presence and witnessing all the wonderful miracles He performed externally and internally within each one of us. We returned home overwhelmed and exhilarated. Our spiritual batteries were recharged and we were ready to face life with renewed vigor.

Evergreen Memories of Healing Grace

Emerald green is Baba’s color for healing. During darshans we sit under a canopy of gold and emerald green in Sai Kulwant Hall absorbing the healing

effect. This is the significance of the emerald green cross He so graciously materialized to protect me. Thank you, dear Baba. We hoped that by His divine grace we would be able to see Him soon in the month of June.

Then 2001 arrived. And by Baba's grace, Alan and I joined the Heart Valve Bank Group which was going to Prashanti Nilayam. During our journey, I still continued my prayers to my beloved, Sri Sathya Sai.

When we arrived, we felt that divine feeling of love and peace as we entered the ashram. During our stay, He honored the entire group. What a blessing it was to hear a divine discourse inside the mandir! After the discourse, we were asked to sit back-to-back in columns, just like last time, to allow Swami to walk around us. **I could hear Baba speaking as He approached the end of the mandir where I was sitting. He said, "Come the day after tomorrow. You and I will talk as there is something worrying you." I got on my knees and said, "Thank you," and He patted my head and said, "Good girl."**

The auspicious day arrived. Six of us were granted an interview that morning. I was a little nervous but felt so much joy in my heart to be at the divine Lotus Feet of Swami. **Straightaway, He asked me, "How is the cross doing in London?" I replied everything is fine. Baba knew what my heart was really feeling and my inner thoughts.**

Then the thought came into my mind, Come on, Joan, ask what you have been praying for all this time, and He gave me the inspiration to ask, "Baba, is my cancer cancelled?" As I gazed into His eyes, He said, "Yes, your cancer is cancelled." Then He asked, "Where is your husband?" I replied, "He is outside, Baba, and wants to come and see You." Then He said, he is a good man and I was a good lady.

After I finished my talk, I bowed down to Baba and He asked, "Do you want me in your heart?" He repeated this three times, and I replied, "Yes, Baba," three times. He then circled His divine hand and materialized a beautiful pendant of His face with a lovely chain. I now feel Baba with His divine love wherever I am.

When I returned to my room, I wrote a letter to Him: "Please forgive me if I have hurt anyone's feelings today. I take full responsibility of what has been said, as no one knew what I was going to say."

When I finished, I read it back to myself, but while doing so, I saw Baba reading the letter in my mind's eye. I folded the letter and placed it under my pillow. That evening when I went to sleep, I heard a voice saying, "You asked me to be in your words." That is just what I asked Baba when I handed a lovely red rose to Him before I started my talk.

The Last Day...Heart Warming Talk

The day before leaving Prashanti Nilayam, the Heart Valve Bank Group was honored by singing in front of Baba in the hall and He handed each one of them a beautiful sari. **While doing so, He asked, “Where is the lady who did the talk?” When I approached the veranda where He was standing, He said, “Ah, Jamuna.” This is the beautiful name Swami gave me in 2003. He said gently, “You did the talk the other day.” I replied, “Yes, Baba” He then said, “I am very happy. It was from the heart.” While holding my hand, He circled His palm and a beautiful three-diamond ring emerged from His hand.**

As Baba placed it on the ring finger of my right hand, He said, “This is for your talk,” and then placed a lovely sari in my arms saying, “I will see you tomorrow and we will talk.” He repeated these words two times. I am sure He was referring to the spiritual time of tomorrow.

After Joan, now, Alan continues the story...

In December 2003 we went again with a large group to Prashanti for a visit to Swami. While this visit was in preparation, I was asked to give a talk at the end of the visit to the group before we returned home. I agreed. I was excited and happy at being asked. During our stay with Swami at Prashanti, I was again asked about the talk I was to give but this time I was told I would be speaking in front of Swami in the Sai Kulwant Hall.

Now there was some nervousness in me, but I still looked forward to it. When the day came, we waited for a confirmation from Swami. Swami sent a messenger over to the group to tell us that the tall Englishman could carry on with his talk. It was Prof. Anil Kumar who gave us this message. The day was given and we all assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall for the afternoon *darshan*. I was sitting at the front awaiting Swami's call to come forward and talk, and when He did, I very nervously went forward to His chair and presented Him with a flower. Then I was asked to begin.

Overwhelming Compassion

I spoke about love, devotion and faith and also about Joan's cancer which Swami had cancelled. After the talk, He invited me to sit on the floor near His chair. I felt so honored and humbled! I sat there through our group's program. Then just before Arathi was performed, I stood up and it was then that Swami materialized a nine gem ring and put it on the ring finger on my right hand. I was overwhelmed by the love and blessings He bestowed on us on this auspicious day. That moment will stay with me for the rest of my life. He even allowed me to kiss His hand.

Several days later we were graciously allowed to perform our bhajan program in the mandir in His presence. As a test of His omnipresence, I mentioned to my friend sharing our room that I was not looking forward to our bhajans in the mandir because I was suffering from backache due to the long sittings we do

throughout our stay. But then forgetting all this, we all assembled in the mandir awaiting Swami's presence. He came in and started talking to some members of the group.

When He came to where I was sitting, He looked down at me and asked, "Are you alright?" I replied "Fine, Swami". **He asked again, "Do you want a chai?" I was not sure whether I was hearing Him right. He repeated, "Do you want a *chair*?" and beckoned someone to bring a chair for me. I reluctantly replied, "Yes, Swami." I sat on the chair for the rest of the program.** At the end He gave us His blessings with a wave of His Hand. I was so grateful that He showered His love on the whole group. His love and compassion is unfailing to all.

H2H SPECIAL

A PEEP INTO THE EYES OF GOD

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

I have had the privilege of being associated with Grama Seva from its inception in 2000, though the nature of the association has varied over the years. During the first few years, I was actively involved with the actual distribution in the villages. Later, I had to look after documentation via photography, videography, and on-site interviews. More recently, I have been asked, along with a few other elders, to go to the villages every day to oversee and make sure everything is going alright. This year too I had this responsibility, but on one day, September 30 to be precise, I took off from the assigned duty to go with Warden Sri Narasimha Murthy to two villages, Ragepalli and Ammagondapalem, visited personally by Swami in May 1985. Sri Narasimha Murthy accompanied Bhagavan during that historic visit, and I was keen to revisit those villages along with Sri Narasimha Murthy to try and relive some of those memorable moments. What follows is a brief account of my pilgrimage.

H2H: Off-road and into the Bush

I have been hearing about Ammagondapalem for many years and always wanted to go there. But somehow, something or the other intervened to put my intended visit off. Access to that village is not easy. The road, if one can call it that, is pretty bad, and believe it or not, the village is surrounded by forests. Moreover, the area is supposed to be infested with Naxalites or insurgents, and I was advised to avoid the place! So I told myself, "This year during Grama Seva, I shall go along with the others to this village – this way I would have a backup in case of breakdown, etc." The schedule showed that Ammagondapalem was to be served on 30/09, so I took off from my normal duty and wore my Radio Sai/H2H hat. Thus it was, on the morning of Saturday the 30th, I got into a Tata Sumo which followed behind the Qualis vehicle in which Sri Narasimha Murthy went around doing his supervisory duty. With me were a couple of our studio boys, handling the video camera, the still camera, and the sound recording.

A Convoy of Trucks, a Party of Hundreds, Swami's Prasadam

We left the ashram at around 9:00 a.m. at the head of a big convoy of trucks carrying hundreds of students and teachers and, of course, Swami's Prasadam in the form of clothes, food, and sweets. We crossed the Chitravati River on the new causeway that makes the river crossing so easy. Entering Karnatakanagepalli, once the gateway to Puttaparthi when the latter was a remote hamlet, we turned right and sped along. The road was very good and everything was green and beautiful. A few kilometers along the road, Sri Narasimha Murthy's van, which was ahead of us, stopped to check the convoy formation to see if anyone had any problems. Vehicle after vehicle went past, reporting by wireless. Occasionally, a truck would stop for

instructions. After the last truck passed, Sri Murthy came to our vehicle – we were all out and the boys were shooting away.

The Warden told me, “Take a look at the lake there. There is not much water there now, but years ago it used to be full of water. It is called Sahib Cheruvu. In the early 60s Swami came here many times with a small group to have a picnic. I myself have had the pleasure of being in His company here a few times.” I asked, “You mean it was like the Chitravati outings we read about?” “Yes, something like that, except it would be during daytime whereas the Chitravati outings used to be in the evenings.”

Crawling Along the (Rough) Road to Ammagondapalem

We then moved on and made a right turn into a dirt track. The road suddenly became rough and the terrain hilly. We were now crawling at around 5 km/hour, barely ten kilometers from Puttaparthi – that shows the huge gulf that separates villages from urban areas. I learned that our driver, a young man twenty plus, was actually from Ammagondapalem. He now lives in Puttaparthi with his parents, but he still has plenty of contacts with his native village. This was evident from the numerous people who greeted him as we slowly made our way up. At times, he slowed down to briefly exchange some small talk.

Embedded here and there in the low regions of the hilly terrain were fields. In some places, the going was steep and the road really bad. Our driver told me that there was a bus service to the villages we were going to: one bus a day! The bus would go in the evening, halt there for the night, and leave in the morning. Seeing the road, I am surprised how the bus managed to travel; it sure must be taking a huge beating, no question about that. In many places, the road crossed a stream, now dry. The dry bed was littered with rocks and stones of various sizes, no doubt pushed there by the current when the streams became flooded in the rainy season. The stream crossings, except in one place, had no pathway, and the going was really tough. Here and there, to help the bus move, the road had been crudely paved with big stones. Truly speaking, only a tough army jeep can negotiate this so-called road. All along, I kept wondering: “If this is how bad the road is in 2006, how much worse must it have been in 1985! How on earth did Swami make it here?” I got the answer a little later, as I shall describe.

Meanwhile, we crawled and slowly the scene changed. The farmland was behind us and we were now in a forest, yes a real forest, not with huge trees but a lot of thick bush; and in many places it was quite hilly. In between, we had a panoramic view and our driver told us that up on one of the hills there is an old bungalow going back to British times. He added that in those days, the [British] Forest Officer used to stay in the bungalow during his inspection trips. Even today, the forests are there but not the animals, that is for sure. However, seventy or eighty years ago there must have been wild animals, at least cheetahs and leopards, and possibly the occasional tiger. In fact, Mr. Giri, who succeeded me as the Vice Chancellor, told me that about a hundred fifty years ago, Puttaparthi was right in the middle of an elephant migration

track from Bellary to Kuppam – a couple of hundred kilometers long, I think. I have also seen writings by old timers reporting that in those days when they went to the Chitravati River for a bath, they would occasionally see cheetahs drinking water!

1985 – the Road was Better!

After nearly an hour of patient slogging, we stopped because the van ahead of us had. I did not know what the problem was, but seeing Narasimha Murthy get out, I did as well to stretch my limbs. A small conversation ensued, which went as follows:

I ask, “How far are we from our destination?”

“We are now about a kilometer away from the Ragepalli.”

“And how far is Ammagondapalem from Ragepalli?”

“Oh, I would say less than two kilometers.”

“You came with Swami in 1985. The road must been much worse then.”

“Actually, it was better. In fact, Swami came in His white Benz car.”

“Benz car? Here? You must be kidding.”

“No, sir, He actually did come by the Benz car. But you see, prior to His visit, Swami’s students worked here for days to cover the road with mud to make it suitable for a car to travel.”

“Oh, I see.”

“But one thing. We did not cross the Chitravati River like we did this morning. We took a roundabout route.”

“You mean you went first to Kothacheruvu, then to Bukkapatnam and all that?”

“Correct. This causeway saved us something like twenty kilometers. I must also tell you something else.”

“What is that?”

Divine Compassion for an Intrepid Photographer

“We made a few stops on the way. And in all those places, there was a man with a camera, who was taking pictures of Swami’s historic visit. This man was not a member of our party, but so great was his love for Swami and so keen his interest in recording this visit that he actually walked and ran with our vehicles all the way. In one place, Swami told us, ‘See that man? Take him in

your jeep. He is walking all the way, poor fellow.’ That is how compassionate Swami is. So we took that photographer on board, and later he became Swami’s official photographer for some years.”

Soon we resumed the journey and entered Ragepalli, which in earlier days used to be known as Kammavaripalli. Our vehicles stopped at the edge of the village. From there we walked, with Narasimha Murthy giving me a step-by-step recall of the path traversed by Swami in 1985 and what exactly happened then. After about a hundred meters, we came to a small temple. This was where most of the action took place, and once again, Narasimha Murthy told me all about what happened. The detailed account of all that follows below, in a piece written by Sri Sanjay Sahani, currently Principal, Brindavan Campus, then a Post Graduate student. This article appeared in *Sanathana Sarathi* in June 1985.

A Journey with Bhagavan

1985 – Swami’s International Year of Youth

May 26, 1985: The day dawned, heralding a new phase in the history of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning and in our national life. Having willed that the International Year of Youth shall be marked by the involvement of His students in His village adoption program, Swami took us, boys and girls, and the teachers of the three campuses at Prashanti Nilayam, Brindavan, and Anantapur, to the villages of Kammavaripalli and Ammagondapalem in the Sri Sathya Sai Taluk.

Earlier, under Swami’s guidance, service activities in the villages had commenced on May 16. Repairing roads, making soak pits, etc., were some of the activities taken up by the boys, while health and hygiene in the villages was the concern of the girl students.

It was a big convoy – twelve vehicles in all – that left Prashanti Nilayam early that morning. It passed through a number of villages, with the students singing bhajans on the way. It was thrilling to watch the reverence with which the villagers greeted Swami as His car passed by. At one place there was a virtual roadblock by the villagers wishing to pay their homage to Swami. It was tactfully cleared by the students in the escort party.

Kammavaripalli Welcomes Baba

After almost a two-hour drive through hilly country, the convoy stopped on the outskirts of Kammavaripalli. Swami was welcomed by the village elders and He entered the village with the students doing Nagarasankirtan. The procession halted at the pandal set up in front of the village temple.

In the inner sanctum, Swami installed idols of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, and Anjaneya and presented a set of musical instruments to the village Bhajan Mandali. Swami then asked the Institute boys to give a recital of the Rama Katha with its lilting folk tunes. This was followed by a short speech by Sri

Challa Subba Raydu, who hailed Swami's visit to the village as akin to the sanctification of Ahalya by Sri Rama.

Five Minutes of Prayer = Fifty-Five Minutes of Grace

In His discourse to the villagers, Swami stressed the need for developing a spirit of sacrifice as the primary requisite for sublimating one's life. Comparing the two villages of Kammavaripalli and Ammagondapalem to His two eyes, Swami said that He would provide all amenities to them if only they live in a spirit of unity and brotherhood. The awareness that Divinity is latent in all will promote true fraternal feelings among them. Stressing the need for the development of faith in God, Swami said that five minutes of sincere prayer would fetch them fifty-five minutes worth of grace. He exhorted them to preserve the devotional atmosphere at the temple, which had been constructed and consecrated by Him. Sathya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema are the virtues that will contribute to their happiness and prosperity.

The village seva dal Convener then read out his thanksgiving address on behalf of the villagers and placed before Swami the needs of the village. To the immense joy of all gathered there, Swami waved His hand and created first vibhuti prasada and later a ring for the seva dal Convener. At Swami's instance, sweets were distributed among the villagers.

From there, Swami continued to the Harijan colony and presented a set of musical instruments to the Harijans there for doing bhajans in the temple constructed by Bhagavan for them.

Ammagondapalem – Another Rousing Reception

Next, the convoy proceeded to Ammagondapalem, a furlong away, where there was another rousing welcome. Flowers were strewn by the villagers on the path Swami tread. Doing Nagarasankirtan, the procession reached the village temple, which Swami had renovated. Sweets and saris were distributed among the villagers. Here too, Swami presented the village Bhajan Mandali with a set of musical instruments. The villagers enthusiastically participated in the bhajan at the temple. It was indeed a joyous occasion for the villagers, some of whom had their children blessed and named by Swami. While returning, Swami again stopped at Kammavaripalli. In response to the prayers of the Harijans of the villages, He again visited the temple where they performed Arathi. Swami walked up to the outskirts of the village waving to the villagers who were singing bhajans alongside the road.

Gratitude for the Chance to Serve

Finally, the convoy began its journey back to Prashanti Nilayam. As was to be expected, villagers had lined up at many places to have Bhagavan's darshan. Swami stopped the car at several places and personally distributed prasada to the villagers. It was a sight to behold, Swami standing on the footboard of His

car and waving to the villagers at Janakampalli. The escort party had a trying time keeping the devotional enthusiasm of the villagers in check.

We reached Prashanti Nilayam around noon. It had been a great day for us, a day not to be forgotten, a day when we had literally journeyed with God. At the end of it, we could only express our gratitude to Swami for having given us an opportunity to participate in His Divine Mission.

To get back to our 2006 trip, while Narasimha Murthy was talking, our crew were busy taking pictures of the temple, of Mr. Venkat Reddy whom Swami blessed, and so on. Sri Narasimha Murthy told me that Swami had named two children during His visit and asked the villagers whether those persons were still there. He was told they left after they grew up. Meanwhile, the daughter of Venkat Reddy showed up, proudly announcing that she belonged to the first batch of students of Swami's Anantapur College. In between, we caught glimpses of our boys doing seva. After visiting the other landmarks and hearing about old times from Sri Murthy, we left for Ammagondapalem.

The Eyes of India

The road from Ragepalli to Ammagondapalem is on flat country; we could therefore cover the distance of about one and a half kilometers quickly. This too is a remote village, and once again, Narasimha Murthy told me of Swami's visit. My main interest was to steer Narasimha Murthy to the Temple built by Swami, and once we reached the spot, I asked him to speak to our camera. A transcript of that video interview now follows which I am sure you will find both fascinating and revealing.

Prof. G.V.: I really thank you for taking your valuable time, Sri Narasimha Murthy. I know you are in a great rush with the Gram Seva. This is a very historic occasion for both of us. We are now in the village of Ammagundepalayam. We heard that in 1985, on the occasion of Swami's sixtieth birthday, Swami took a lot of interest in rural development and also involved not only Himself but also students in rural work. Would you like to give us a brief history of how it all started? What is the genesis? Why did Swami do it and what was the basic motivation?

Sri B.N. Murthy: As you are aware, Swami has always been concerned about the living conditions in the rural areas. Even from the time when He declared His avatarhood, He has been doing something for the villages, here and there. He built a school for Bukkapatnam and a school in Puttaparthi village. In 1985, there was a fillip to the activities. In the months of February and March, Swami thought that He should survey all the villages of Sathya Sai Taluk. I remember very well the first time He sent us for a survey. Dr. Adivi Reddy, Mr. Jayakumar, and myself and a few boys were called into the interview room. He personally handed over biscuits and peppermints and said, "Whichever village you go to, please distribute this wherever you go." He was very particular that we should speak to them in a very pleasing and courteous manner. Don't ignore them as villagers. They are all very good

people. Our culture is in the villages today in India. You talk to them nicely and find out what their needs are. Swami was particularly concerned about satisfying the needs of the villagers, in particular regarding temples and schools: “Gudi Badi rendum prathi gramamulu unlade.” Wherever there was a need for a temple or school building, He wanted us to find out. Swami wanted us to do a survey of all the 140 villages in Sathya Sai Taluk.

Prof. G.V.: What is Sathya Sai Taluk? What are the villages in Sathya Sai Taluk? Can you please explain?

Sri B.N. Murthy: Sathya Sai Taluk was declared in 1985 January and it encompassed the villages of the three mandals – Bukkapatnam Mandal, Puttaparthi Mandal, and Kothacheruvu Mandal. These are Mandals now, but in 1985 they were Panchayats, which have now become Mandals. The 145 villages are grouped together as Sathya Sai Taluk. You know that there is an arch near Pedapalli. That is where it starts. In Dharmavaram Road there is an arch, even in Bukkapatnam to Mudugu there is also an arch. These are the limits of the Sathya Sai Taluk.

Prof. G.V.: Please tell us all about the survey villages and the spadework that was done. What was the criterion in choosing some special villages?

Sri B.N. Murthy: During vacation, the boys go home, but many of them stayed back. Swami went to Ooty to attend a conference of the State Presidents in Nandanavanam where there were planning discussions for preparations for the fiftieth birthday. He went for only three days. He left on the 17th or 18th and came back on May 21 1985. As soon as He came back, mostly the PG boys were staying behind. One new bus was acquired at that time and Swami sent us to those few villages, including this Ragepalli and Ammagundapalayam. I remember that we also went to other villages such as Lochal, Brahmanapalli, Beedupalli, and there the boys did a lot of physical work. It was quite hard, particularly because the weather was very hot. We did a lot of work, laying roads, digging soak pits, clearing drainage ditches, these kinds of activities. On 25 May, Swami came here.

Prof. G.V.: How did you choose these villages?

Sri B.N. Murthy: Swami had a great affinity for these two villages, Ammagundapalayam and Ragipalli. I remember that Swami told us He used to come here when he was a young boy. He loves these forests. He is a lover of nature. For a few nights, He stayed in a forest bungalow which was built by the British for their usage. Now it's in a dilapidated condition. That is where He stayed. Therefore, He had particular affection for these two villages. One year ago, Swami gave funds for rebuilding the old Venkatramana Temple and it was demolished and newly built at that time. We also did the remodeling of the Rama Temple in Ragepalli per Swami's direction. For the Harijan Colony, Swami built the Maramma Temple.

Prof. G.V.: As you came here today, you found the roads pretty bad, to put it rather mildly. How is the scene after twenty-one years?

Sri B.N. Murthy: Sir, before Swami came, we came here a week earlier. We came every day and did some repair work. Before that, no car could have come. Roads between Ragepalli and Ammagundapalayam were non-existent. Now we find stone slabs, etc. Then it was a mud road. And Swami came here at that time on a mud road. It is a great advertisement for the Benz car.

Prof. G.V.: We were in Ragepalli half an hour ago and you were kind enough to show the landmark, the path, and introduced us to Venkatramana Reddy, 75 years old, who received Swami, and we saw the photo that was taken at that time. There was a lady, Reddamma, daughter of Sri Venkat Reddy. She was a student in Anantapur College, first batch, and she lives in this village. How will you describe these villages?

Sri B.N. Murthy: Yes, Reddamma was proud to claim that she was Swami's student in His first batch. Twenty-one years ago, we did not find any houses, only huts except for one or two. For example, Venkat Reddy's house remains as it was. People lived simpler in those days. Their affection for Swami remains the same as it was then. After 2000, every year we have been coming here and doing Gram Seva. They receive us very well and they also tell us reminiscences of Swami's life. Mr. Rangarajan has been coming here every week and he was telling us all that. They have lot of affection and affinity for Swami.

Prof. G.V.: Let me move on to a couple of general questions. After 1985 we have had various versions of seva, starting with the New Year 2000 which heralded the new millennium and the century, we have the present version of the seva, now known as Gram Seva. This is now a global phenomenon wherever Sai Devotees are. Would you like to say something about this Gram Seva? You have been at the thick of it, from day one in 2000.

Sri B.N. Murthy: What Gram Seva has done for our boys is more important than what it has done for the villagers. Of course, when we give them the food packets and the clothes we are handing over Swami's grace and love and food for them. It is not material, it is a spiritual assurance from Swami that "I am there. Don't worry."

The boys are the messengers for carrying these nuggets of Swami's Love and Compassion for the villagers and handing them over. Most of the boys who have come here, actually, many of them would not have seen Indian villagers. They are introduced to the rural scene for the first time. I remember when we went for Gram Seva in 2000, there were many boys who told us, "Sir, we never knew that our country was like this." There was one boy who said, "My particular dream was to go outside the country and live there and serve in a foreign country. Now I have changed my mind. After having seen this, we are required here in our country more than any other country." This Gram Seva is making that kind of impact on the students and also keeping up the bond of rapport, compassion, and their devotion to Swami. This is what is happening.

Prof. G.V.: One last question before we go out into the village to visit the historic landmarks and the places sanctified by the Divine Lotus Feet of our Beloved Lord. Our conversation will be seen and heard throughout the world and also seen throughout the world not only now but in the years to come. What the world sees today, the glittery part of India, the skyscrapers, the fly-overs, the airports, the upper middle class, that is only the fringe of India. People ignore the villages. You were born in a village, and you have been coming to villages with Swami since then. You are now coming again on Swami's work. What would you say to this question: Why are villages important?

Sri B.N. Murthy: Villages are very important for our country because more than 70% of our population is still today living in villages. There are more than six lakh [600,000] villages. And if you want to see the culture of India in practice even today, which is the soul of our Motherland, you can see it in the villages. Because of the influence of the West in the urban areas, we can see it getting extinguished.

Prof. G.V.: Can you please explain what is meant by the spiritual culture of India?

Sri B.N. Murthy: The spiritual culture of India is based on the message of the Vedas, percolated into these villages through the Puranas. If you go and ask a villager about Vedas, he may not know. But if you ask about epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, he knows. Ramayana and Mahabharata and Puranas were composed by the sages with great compassion for the people of this country who wouldn't have understood the Sanskrit language and its subtle nuances and the high technical jargon of that philosophy. But if you go to any village and ask them, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, they know about Rama, they know about Dharmaraja, they know about Sathya Harishchandra. Therefore, the spiritual culture even today is alive in the villages. That is why the villages are very important.

At the same time this is what I think stirred up Vivekananda's heart when he went around the country as a Parivrajitha. He saw on one side the lofty ideals lived by the people and on the other he saw the material poverty, and he cried out for them. This is what I remember when Swami called us into the mandir, He almost broke down when he remembered the material poverty of the villagers of the country.

Another important thing I would like to add here: The Gram Seva that Swami started in 2000 has had a ripple effect. The Sathya Sai Organizations copied it, not exactly how Swami did it, they did it in their own ways. Apart from that, many of the youth of Sathya Sai Organizations are involved in it. For example, here I would like to quote the Andhra Pradesh Youth, who have evolved a beautiful program for rural reconstruction. They call it HEART: Healthcare, Educare, Agricare, Rural Care (infrastructure assistance) and Transformation.

The Government is doing much for the uplift of the villagers. However, there is no spiritual work and hence all that work is not really reaching the

beneficiaries and it is not successful. In spite of people like Mahatma Gandhi, Vinobha Bhave, and Jaiprakash Narayan dreaming of an ideal village, even until today, no ideal village has yet materialized. The dream has yet to be realized. Because the ideal village in India should have both components: the material and the spiritual. Material in that that every child born in a village and every person living in village should have the five primary facilities of food, clothing, shelter, education and medical facilities available to them.

On the other hand, they should have imprinted in the heart the spiritual message. The goal of life is God-realization. They should be taught or they should know how to live in harmony with oneself, in harmony with fellow beings, and in harmony with nature. These are the three components of real spiritual life. Only a village in which both aspects, material welfare and spiritual welfare, are achieved, can we call an ideal village.

Many villagers have fallen into bad habits. Drinking, especially, has become a curse for the villages and the country. This is what I was talking about.

The HEART program is experimenting in 80 villages in Andhra Pradesh.

Muddhanahalli old students came to our Mutuhnahalli Institution and said we would like to help the Institution. We told them that we don't need any help for the Institution. We have adopted eight villages. You make them real ideal villages. And they have been working in earnest.

There are already big temples in three villages. This year they are going to build in five villages. We asked them, "What do you want?" All of them said. "Our villages don't have temples. There are some old temples, just renovate them." That's all they said.

Hence the Gram Seva that Swami took up has inspired lots of people, particularly Sai devotees and Sai Youth, to take this up on a war footing and on a scientific basis.

Prof. G.V.: I want to go back to the culture through the Puranas. Am I right in saying that through the Puranas they understood in a practical way the essence of Sathya and Dharma?

Sri B.N. Murthy: That's a wonderful way to put it. The Vedic teachings like Sathyam Vadha, Dharmam Chara. When you talk about Sathya, they remember Sathya Harischandra. When you talk about Dharma, they remember Dharmaraja, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. When it is duty, you think of Rama. That is how the culture is living on in the villages, in the form of personalities. That is how we remind them.

Prof. G.V.: Thank you very much. I would like to end this on a slightly pleasant and humorous note. One day, Sai Prakash, who is filming this, went to the village where they were doing Bayil Natakam. There he filmed Duryodhana and Dharmaraja. The interesting piece is that Duryodhana came and went on a scooter.

Through these wonderful recollections of Sri Narasimha Murthy, I was able to get a good picture of how Swami has always been concerned about villages and why He called these two villages His eyes. To me, they implied the message that we ought to regard all the villages as the eyes of God, as indeed *Purusha Sukhtam*, that wonderful hymn from the Vedas implied. I also realized that through the Grama Seva program, the Institute students and teachers were involved in right then, Swami was helping them to care for the “eyes of India.” By the way, as far as I could make out, even in this twenty-first century, there was no shop in this village, though a flimsy electric supply line had made its way in.

Higher Learning – Seeing God in Society and Nature

I should wrap all this up. This article appears in the November issue of H2H, wherein we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Swami’s Institute. As Swami pointed out during one of His Discourses delivered on the occasion of the Institute Convocation, higher learning means seeing God in society and nature. Today, most people tend to forget this important truth, and that is precisely the reason why mankind is faced with innumerable problems.

People tend to compartmentalize, seeing everything around them through the narrow prism of self-interest. Sometimes it is purely personal interest, sometimes it is purely family interest, and others it is community interest, and so on. This will not do. Indeed, Swami says it is not enough to look at the affairs of the world even in terms of national interest, or for that matter, in terms of humanity. The time has come to be *far more inclusive*, taking into consideration not only all living beings, but planet Earth and its eco-system as a whole.

Man – Endangering the Natural Balance of Life

Just look at what is happening around us. Once upon a time when human presence on Earth was small and man lacked the capacity to create large-scale imbalances in Nature, there was a natural eco-balance. But today, the human population has increased to such an extent that man is leaving little space for animals and even plants. Forests have been decimated, leaving no space for animals that once roamed free. Inevitably, the population of wild animals is decreasing, with untold numbers of species becoming extinct. What can the poor animals do, when, as happened in Zambia, hundreds of elephants were killed in one year with AK 47’s? Even in the oceans, man is creating havoc. Using what is called bottom trawling and massive mechanized whale hunting techniques, marine species have no peace any longer. Even coral reefs are threatened with sewage and junk littered on the beaches and in the oceans.

What about the villages and farms? Believe it or not, they too are threatened everywhere, even in advanced countries like America and Australia. In India, not only is urbanization rapidly gobbling up rural land, but equally worrisome, many villagers are migrating to the cities, even though jobs there are scarce.

This is also happening in China. We are supposed to have made a lot of progress, but one price we are paying for this progress is watching more and more of our farmers commit suicide, literally in the thousands. Even in Australia, where there has been a six-year severe drought, one farmer takes his life every four days!

Villages – Tradition and Simple Living Among Nature's Gifts

In every part of the world, villages, with all their limitations, *still* represent a bit of olden times when life was calm, quiet, peaceful and far less stressful. Life then might have lacked many of the conveniences we now take for granted, but people were more human and lived surrounded by nature. Today, most of the beautiful jungles of nature have been replaced by concrete jungles as they are called, together with all the problems of modernity. Village life is facing severe disruption. As Sri Narasimha Murthy correctly points out, by focusing on villages, Swami is directing our attention to the virtues of tradition, simple living, and the gifts that God bestows on us via the land, food, and forests. To destroy them or simply misuse them, knowingly or unknowingly, is a crime against humanity and God.

Just think for a minute what would happen if there were *no* villages and farms at all *anywhere in the world*, and only factories, offices, skyscrapers, discos, highways, shopping malls, and hotels. Would life be satisfying? Would it be healthy? Would it even be possible?

It is time we, the human race, learned to be grateful for all the gifts from God we take so much for granted.

WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS - Part 5

Last time, I brought you up to the point when our convoy was heading north from Madurai Airport towards TAFE along the National Highway. As we speed along, we cross many small towns (that were once villages) that I knew very well, like Samayanallur. I was eagerly looking for Sholavandan where I spent one and a half years during the height of the Second World War, having come there as an evacuee from Karachi. But I missed it; maybe the Highway has been aligned to avoid the village. But I see a few others like Vadipatti, for example.

All along, I see advertisements for a restaurant named Fantasy, promising all kinds of attractions. Finally we passed Fantasy, and it seemed far from all that it had promised. Anyway, we are not headed towards Fantasy but a reality of a very unusual kind; more about that soon. We go past a small village named Kalladipalli I had never heard of before, and soon there are telltale signs that we are approaching TAFE.

Music, Chanting, Flowers and Decorations Welcome Baba to TAFE

I see a row of multi-colored flags flying majestically on either side of the road, which means we are pretty close. And close we certainly are because the next thing I see is many seva dals guiding our cars. We are apparently ahead of Swami. The seva dals indicate that we make a right turn and drive past a gate, the entrance to TAFE. A nice floral arch has been specially erected as a sign of respectful welcome, and I also see a Nadaswaram party playing nice music – clearly a very competent party; Nadaswaram is a great instrument and in the hands of a master can produce magical music, but poorly handled, it can torture the listener.

As we slowly make our way into the TAFE campus, I quickly take in the scene. A well-laid out garden and rows of tractors, waiting to be shipped out perhaps. Our car stops close to the factory entrance, where we get out. Our car then moves away, even as other cars come there one by one, to discharge their passengers. The entrance is decorated with two ceremonial umbrellas. There are loudspeakers in many places, playing the Nadaswaram music. I see a group of Vedic Priests, chanting the Vedas and holding the Poornakumbham in readiness to welcome Bhagavan in the traditional style. Of course, Mrs. Mallika Srinivasan, CEO of TAFE, and her entire family are there, led by Mr. Sivasailam, father of Mrs. Srinivasan and formerly the CEO of TAFE, now playing a patriarchal role.

Swami's Benz is sighted and excitement mounts, even as the Nadaswaram plays, most appropriately, a beautiful song of Tyagaraja wherein he joyfully welcomes Lord Rama to his home. The Benz comes to a stop in front of the entrance, even as we all try to catch a glimpse of the historic moment. Swami gets out, full of smiles, to a joyful reception from the entire family, and in a split second materializes a necklace for Mrs. Srinivasan, who naturally is overwhelmed; it all occurs very fast, before we even know what is happening.

Led by Mr. Sivasailam, and accompanied by the loving family, Swami walks into the factory, to the sound of beautiful Vedic chants. We follow at a respectful distance, but students do not; without a word of formal instruction, they know when to be around and when not – that is Swami's training! Swami is led through an area with cubicles and meeting rooms to a large room with glass panels. The room, an office meeting room of sorts, has been temporarily refurbished with carpets and all that, to be Swami's interview room in TAFE. Swami is escorted in by the family, while all others stay outside, including the security people. Some individuals with cameras are trying to shoot through the glass but we in Swami's party move away, giving the family the privacy they are entitled to. The priests stand outside, continuing to chant Vedas.

A Tour of TAFE for Swami and His Entourage

All of us so-called elders adjourn to various rooms in the neighborhood, where we are offered juice, etc. Swami spends a lot of time with the family and after about forty minutes or so, we get word that He is coming out; we get up and go out to join Him. Swami is moving on a chair, with Mr. Sivasailam near Him, and all the other members of the host family. The entire party is headed towards the shop floor, and through a door I can see out there lots of workers. They are busy working on the assembly line and at the same time casting glances to see if Swami is coming. I take a quick look at my watch and find it is 1:00pm.

Walking at some distance behind Swami, I too enter the shop floor. I notice there are decorations all round and a walkway clearly marked for Him to be taken around. The factory is very clean and ultra modern; I had not seen such a factory before and am pleasantly surprised. Lots of posters everywhere, with messages on values, quality, sound management practices, etc. Once again, this is quite novel to me, since I have visited many factories before, though not, I must admit, after the mid-eighties. Maybe this is the current norm in this age of globalization. The Vedic priests walk with the party, chanting into wireless mics! A very good Public Address system is filling the entire factory with the sacred sound, even as the Veda Purusha Himself is blessing the factory with His very physical presence.

Here and there, on either side of the aisle along which Swami is being lovingly guided, I see people sitting on carpets; I guess they are friends and relatives of the hosts. Slowly the party comes to a stop and I can see Swami is now near an altar at one corner of the shop floor. Mrs. Srinivasan says something to Swami and then lights a lamp. Immediately, the loudspeakers fill the hall with good Bhajan music; must be pre-recorded, I am sure. I wonder whether it is a Sundaram Bhajan CD, because the quality of singing is very good.

Karma Yoga and Pranams on the Assembly Line

Swami is on the move again, and is being taken on a detailed tour of the factory. An amazing thing I notice is that there is no work stoppage. Here is Bhagavan right in their midst, but the workers are busy assembling tractors even as the systems move along the assembly line. Of course, they keep

turning towards Swami, offering pranams whenever possible, but it is all Karma Yoga at its best I must say. The scenes are so good, I catch hold of everyone I can to shoot pictures and videos for me – unlike in 2003, this time I am minus the camera.

I look at my watch again; it is 1:15 p.m. and the factory guided tour is still on. In fact, right then a tractor being carried on the assembly line comes too close for comfort. Mr. G. K. Raman is also looking at his watch and whispers to me, “I wonder whether we are slipping behind schedule? This tour is taking longer than I expected.” As if Swami heard him, He moves towards the exit, where He boards the small Toyota car into which His mobile chair fits. After Swami takes His seat, the hostess rushes to a waiting golf cart and zooms away, ahead of Swami. It looks like lunch, and apparently Swami is being taken to the area where special arrangements have been made for serving lunch.

The word reaches us, and we too pile into our vehicles to follow Swami's car. We drive through the factory garden, which I find is neatly laid out with lots of beautiful flowering trees – sorry, I am poor in botany and cannot give the names. After driving a short distance, we get out of the factory premises and enter a coconut grove that is very picturesque. Through the trees, I can see that beyond the grove and some distance away are some hills. Soon we come near a hut where all vehicles stop. The hut, apparently specially made, is where Swami will have a private lunch – knowing Swami, I imagine He will go through the motions of eating just to please His hosts. Swami eats precious little, even less than normal, when He is traveling.

The Ancient and Modern Mingle Over Lunch

Behind the divine hut, the entrance to which is beautifully decorated, there is a huge shamiana, and that is where I believe our party will be served lunch. We slowly walk in and are duly greeted by volunteers representing the hosts. I take in the scene and I find a strange mixture of the very traditional and the modern. There are rows and rows of tables covered with white cloth on which are laid out banana leaves in the age-old South Indian style. There is separate seating for gents and ladies. Assisting us to our seats are men in black suits and bowties [!] looking like maitre d's from a posh hotel. There are also women in saris who I guess are there to play the role of hostesses. What amuses me most are the servers, who are wearing shirts and dhotis as is common in the South but are also sporting chef caps and plastic gloves. The catering is very high class, and to make our lunch even more enjoyable, there is a good PA system playing nice Carnatic music (to which I am rather partial I must confess).

Soon I see Mr. Venu Srinivasan coming to greet us. Ever smiling, he moves around having a word here, a joke there and so on, making us feel perfectly at home. Some are looking at their wristwatches to check how late we are but when they start serving the food, delays, if any, are promptly forgotten. The food is absolutely great. But none of us touch it till Sri Narasimha Murthy gives the signal and the boys chant Brahmarpanam. After that, everyone becomes busy tucking in with gusto. I am, however, my usual cautious self though

allowing myself one or two minor concessions – the food is too darn good to be missed altogether like a Sannyasi.

Even as we are finishing our lunch, we hear Arathi over the PA system. Time is 1:50 p.m. Looks like Swami is about to leave and that departure is on schedule.

Lunch over, we wash our hands and pick up big prasadam packets, earlier blessed by Bhagavan. Apart from the prasadam, the hosts also thoughtfully have betel leaves, the kind that Swami once used to eat. I like betel leaves very much after a heavy meal because it is a very good digestive. Happy to see it, I have a generous helping.

Up the Hills and Off to Kodai

Meanwhile, Swami gets into His Benz and leaves, and now it is a rush for us to find our respective vehicles and pile in. As we get into our cars, we are given water bottles – very thoughtful I must say – since we are in for a long drive up the mountains. In earlier times when it was just boys in the bus and very few guests, Swami's car would often be close to the bus, but this time, especially after some earlier experiences of traffic jams, Swami's car just speeds away.

It is 2:05 when we leave and after driving through many beautiful groves, we reach the foothills by 2:40 p.m. In just a few minutes, we are not only climbing but also driving through forests – wow, what a change from Puttaparthi! And also, what a change from 2003, when we had to literally crawl. Maybe at this point I should offer extracts from that trip so you get an idea of what I am talking about. I shall start from Ananda Nilayam in Madurai, where we had broken journey for a heavy snack. Last time, I brought you up to that point of the 2003 trip, so let me pick up from there.

Tales from the 2003 Trip to Kodai

Meanwhile, Swami disappears, and we are told He has gone next door to pay a brief visit to the home of Srinivasa Chettiar. There is an active debate about what Swami would do next. Some are saying that Swami would comeback for Arathi; He is never known to skip Arathi. Others are saying no, it is getting late and it would delay further if Swami were to wade through the crowd and come back just for Arathi. He will therefore skip Arathi and go straight to Kodai. Meanwhile, I manage to exchange a few words with people whom I know who have come here to Madurai specially to be a part of the welcome party. Among these are Mr. Ramani, President of the Tamil Nadu Seva Organization, and Mr. G. K. Raman, Chairman of Sundaram Finance and President of the State Trust.

Mr. Raman tells me, "I think you will face a severe traffic problem. Today is Sunday and there would be huge crowd of weekenders returning from the hills to the plains. This downhill traffic is bound to slow you." Mr. Raman also stuns me with the news that he has been constantly shuttling between Madurai and

Kodai during the past two days and had in fact made four trips! Amazing, and that is what devotion to Swami does to people.

Meanwhile Swami comes back to Ananda Nilayam, takes *Arathi* and drives off to Kodai, putting an end to the speculation, "Will He or won't He?" We slowly head for the buses and take our seats. It is very hot, and the buses are not showing any signs of moving. We find out why. It appears that the van carrying the luggage is overloaded, and someone has thoughtfully advised that some of the luggage be transferred to the buses as otherwise the van would not be able to climb uphill.

The luggage transfer over, we finally leave. The time is 4:30. We get out of town and hit the highway. I see the beautiful country landscape and am happy to see there is still a lot of greenery left. But there are changes too. All these places are familiar to me, and I recall many pleasant events from the past. A couple of times the bus stops. Once it is for allowing some elderly people to get out, so they could ride in some of the cars going uphill – the bus was rather uncomfortable for them. Another time, it is for collecting some snacks and drinks. My God, everyone stuffed himself in Madurai and something to bite again? But then, that is how trips with Swami always are. In His Discourses He tells us all about moderation in eating but when He is taking His children, He is Mother rather than God, and like every mother, He believes in stuffing his brood!

6:20 and we finally start going uphill. There is still daylight and I am able to catch a glimpse of the forests as they slowly come into view. We rapidly start gaining height, and looking below, I can see the Vaigai Dam storage area. Not much water there, thanks to the drought during the past year.

Traffic Snarls and Snafus

It is now dark, and I see that Mr. Raman's forecast is coming true – a steady stream of vehicles coming downhill, bringing weekenders back to the plains. We are now near a sharp bend and right ahead of us is a lorry trying to negotiate the curve. A bus is coming from the other side and both drivers are thoughtless. This is a standard problem in India. People think driving means knowing how to hold the steering wheel. That is not real driving. Real driving is following road rules; but most people in India have never heard of road rules. One wag says, why worry, when we don't have real roads!

Well anyway, what is happening right now is there is a jam. There is the lorry ahead that is trying to go uphill and there is the bus trying to go downhill. Both are nastily locked in the sharp curve and traffic has come to a standstill. Meanwhile, vehicles coming downhill are piling up behind the bus and I can see a long line of vehicles behind us waiting for us to move. This is the time to resign oneself. But in the midst of all this, I see many motor bikes with back seat riders snaking their way down. They are just not bothered by the roadblock. I am informed that there are now mobike taxis that take a customer on the back seat on a day trip to Kodai. When it comes to earning a living, people exhibit amazing ingenuity.

“Negotiating” a Sharp Turn

Some wise people get down from their vehicles and din some road sense into the driver of the lorry and the bus. There are grunts and moans from the two vehicles as they maneuver inch by inch, the bus driver trying to avoid hitting the hillside and the lorry driver trying to avoid hitting the curb. After what seems like an eternity, we are through. I tell Dr. Reddy, who is seated next to me, “This is what is meant by Liberation!” and he has a big laugh.

I now start counting the vehicles coming down. One, two, three...I go past one hundred, two hundred. I give up and now just make estimates. Looks like we crossed about one thousand vehicles coming down. Mr. Raman sure knew what he was forecasting. I also see many vehicles from Bangalore overtaking us and speeding uphill towards Kodai. Apparently, many of the foreigners are shifting their base to Kodai to be close to Baba.

8:10 p.m. We are now halfway to Kodai in the small town of Pannai Kadu famed for its fruit shops. One more traffic jam, this time caused by vehicles coming downhill stopping for picking up fruit baskets at bargain prices. Fortunately, a couple of alert and agile policemen intervene and the jam is cleared without too much delay. I wonder whether Swami went through all this. Possibly not. He went way ahead of us, and He had a Police escort too. So He must have moved fast. In fact, I tell myself, He must be in Kodai by now.

I do a rough calculation. We took two hours to reach Pannai Kadu which is halfway up the hills. Would we take two more hours to reach Kodai? Fortunately, it is not that bad. The downhill traffic has eased and we are able to move faster than before. At last, Kodai comes into view. Since it is dark, I cannot see the landmarks. 9:45 p.m. We finally reach Sai Sruthi.

Back to the Present and the New Facilities

So much for the past. This time, the ride is much faster until we come to a small town near Kodai. We get held up by a fleet of trucks with banners and carrying a large number of people. I wonder what is going on and am informed that these are all people engaged in election campaigning. State elections are due shortly, and Tamil Nadu, where Kodai is situated, is very politically active. The election traffic slows us down a bit but nothing like what happened in 2003.

By 4:15 p.m., we (the people in the cars), are in Sai Sruthi. Swami, of course, has arrived ahead of us. We enter the main hall, where Swami is seated. He smiles and makes kind enquiries about our trip up the hill. He then tells that He Himself arrived just a little bit earlier. The buses with the students have not yet arrived and He makes enquiries. He is told about the hold up in the town where election rallies are in progress and that the buses will be here soon.

Meanwhile, Mr. V. Srinivasan, who has been very active along with Mr. G. K. Raman in upgrading various facilities in Sai Sruthi, respectfully prays to Bhagavan to bless the new guesthouse and the cafeteria. Swami graciously agrees and so we all slowly move there. The guesthouse complex has many rooms, each with double occupancy; it was built in forty days, quite an achievement, especially considering that Kodai is up in the mountains. But even more impressive is the cafeteria, which was put up in seven days flat. This amazing feat was possible because it was made of prefab parts. Such accelerated work is always necessary where Swami is concerned; targets would be set with impossible deadlines and somehow they have to be executed. And they invariably are, because of Swami's grace.

Tea and Snacks and Korean Rugs

Swami sees everything, blesses and shows His appreciation. We adjourn back to the main building, and once again Swami begins asking, "Where are the boys? Why have they not come yet?" The reply is, "Swami they are almost here; only five minutes more." This "only five minutes more" goes on a few times, until finally, to the relief of all, the boys arrive. Swami at once invites everyone to the dining hall, His dining hall, I might add, for tea and snacks.

Tea over, Swami is anxious to distribute something. Normally, distribution starts the morning after, but this time it is on arrival. I am curious to know what it is that Swami is so eager to give away so soon. I do not have to wait for long; it is rugs, very good rugs from Korea. All of us get rugs, not just the boys. Swami then tells the boys that very good sleeping bags have been provided for their comfort and that they can sleep right next to His room. Also, words of caution/warning: *No talking!* After rug distribution, it is room allotment for us, the elders in Swami's party.

Swami's Instructions: Enjoy Dinner and Go for a Walk

All of us are assigned rooms in the new guesthouse blessed earlier by Swami, and we are sent off there. Meanwhile, the van with the luggage has arrived and there are seva dal volunteers to help us carry the luggage to the allotted rooms. The last instruction to all of us before Swami retires upstairs is: "All of you enjoy your dinner in the new cafeteria, and after that, go for a walk." Boys too are asked to have their meals there – this is a clear departure from earlier years. When Sai Sruthi was first inaugurated, there was no dining hall and boys used to eat where the Divine sessions are now held. Limited space? Well, the party was small too. Then came the dining hall, and now a whole new guesthouse with cafeteria attached.

The dinner is great, the catering being by the same party, Arusuvai Natarajan (Arusuvai roughly means one who has mastered many tastes), that was responsible for lunch at TAFE. Apparently, they have a fine reputation in Tamil Nadu. I find the walk most enjoyable; what a different setting compared to Puttaparthi, in just a few short hours. The walk also gives me a chance to see how fast things change. Three years ago, not many mobile phones

visible, but now there are so many people talking and walking. Also, dress style has changed quite a bit with fewer dhotis visible.

Where dress and style are concerned, things seem to change with amazing rapidity but where transition from impurity to purity is concerned, change, if it happens at all, seems to be excruciatingly slow! That's life and that's all for this installment. More next time!

Jai Sai Ram.

GET INSPIRED

HEAVEN AND HELL

A man requested that God allow him to have a glimpse of Heaven and Hell. God said, "All right, my angel will show you both through the windows, for no one is allowed to enter either until he dies."

Accompanied by the angel, the man with the special permission stood outside a window and looked in. He noticed many people inside. What was unusual was that they all had no elbows. Their arm bones were single and straight, right from the shoulder to the wrist so they could not bend their arms at the elbow. In front of them were tables laden with the best of food. The man said, "This must be heaven for they have such sumptuous food to eat." But the angel said, "Look more closely." As the visitor watched, they picked up the food with their hands but were unable to convey it to their mouths for want of being able to bend their elbows. So despite the banquet in front of them, they were all hungry and felt helpless and were crying.

The angel explained, "Despite so much being available to them, they cannot enjoy it. This is hell."

They walked on further and looked through another window. The people inside also had no elbow joints and there were similar tables laden with sumptuous food. But here, everyone looked happy. Why? Because they were picking up the food and putting it into each other's mouths! Though they could not feed themselves, they could feed others and others could feed them.

"That, my friend, is heaven," said the angel.

Isn't it true that hell or heaven is our own creation? How we handle ourselves, in our own circumstances, is what causes the creation of heaven or hell around us. Those who live only for themselves are inviting unhappiness. Sharing and caring are of utmost importance. When you distribute love and care, it always comes back to you. If you are a dealer in hate, can you expect to get anything but hate in return?

"Heaven is no extra-terrestrial region of perpetual spring, it is an inner experience, a state of supreme bliss," Swami says. "The Lord dwells in our hearts, so our hearts must be kept pure and holy; then the heart becomes Heaven itself, filled with joy. Heaven and Hell are not elsewhere. When you are happy, that is Heaven. When you are miserable, that is Hell. If you wish to experience joy, fill your mind with thoughts of God, for where there is God, there is bliss."

DUTY FIRST, SELF NEXT

The 1968 cyclone came as a ruthless slap on the face of the poor people of Orissa. Cyclonic winds and torrential rains did not merely disturb normal life but took a heavy toll in the coastal areas, leaving behind many homeless and destitute. People barely managing to survive the onslaught of the incessant rain and wind watched helplessly as their cattle, homes, and possessions were swept away by the merciless forces of nature.

All means of communications had been cut off. Government officials were taking an aerial view of the destruction while people below were hoping against hope to get some help. Social workers were trying to reach the victims but the heavy rains and winds prevented them from doing so. Seva workers of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization were also trying their best to reach the victims and offer aid.

One such group of volunteers reached the outskirts of a remote battered village with packets of food, medicine, clothes and blankets. When they arrived at the village, it was past noon and the entire area was submerged. It was still drizzling. The volunteers stood at the gate hoping someone would come forward to show them where the survivors were most in need of their services and goods.

Finally, some villagers saw them and came running. The volunteers thought that help had come and they would be directed to where they could be of the most use, but the villagers began snatching and grabbing the rescue items. The volunteers stood there dumbstruck not knowing whom to pacify and whom to control. They were themselves drenched and exhausted.

"It will not be possible to help these people unless someone of their own comes and guides us," one of them said. "I think we should come back tomorrow and see what can be done," said another. Everybody agreed and as they were about to turn and go, a small girl about 12 to 14 ran towards them shouting, "Uncle, Uncle!" She told them that she would take them to the right place.

She then pacified the villagers. She told them sweetly the necessity of being patient and disciplined and to allow the helping team to carry out their mission. She enabled the volunteers to reach those with the most urgent needs first, such as first aid, medicine and food, and helped organize the entire rescue mission. When the villagers became impatient, she spoke a few kind words and also lent a helping hand in the distribution of food packets and medicine. Throughout the day, she led the team through the muddy and flooded roads to every nook and corner where people were who required help. She never looked tired and her face was always radiating with gratitude and loving-kindness.

The team finished their work and sat down for some rest. Suddenly one of the team members recollected that while the girl had taken them to all the needy people and helped them distribute food and medicine she had not taken any food for herself. They asked her why she had not taken any food packet. Hesitatingly, the girl said that her Guru had told her that duty towards others should be the prime concern and when that duty is fulfilled He himself will take care of their needs. Such a small girl, staying in a poor condition and imparting the knowledge

of the highest teachings reflecting implicit faith in her Guru held the team in awe and admiration. They inquired about the Guru and also wanted to know how she had met her guru.

The girl said, "I have not met or even seen my guru personally but I have his photo given to me by my teacher who stays in the nearby town." The team members got more curious and asked her the name of her guru. "Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba," came the prompt reply. "I am a Bal Vikas student," she said further with a voice soaked in reverence and pride.

When narrated to them, the team members of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization were in tears listening to that small beautiful statue of unselfishness carved by the Universal Guru out of a mere bolster of human form that presented a glimpse of the golden era of Sai Love that is soon approaching us.

Swami always reminds us, "There is no other quality nobler than love in this world." And the highest spiritual practice is to transform this love into service.

VIKRAM, THE STABLE BOY

There once was a stable boy named Vikram who took care of five fine horses. His daily chores included scrubbing the horses and feeding them their oats and hay. He also had to keep the stables clean and occasionally let the horses out for a healthy run. Vikram was a good boy, but his mind would wander and he became careless from time to time.

There were two pastures on the farm. One was well kept, pleasant and quiet, while the other was unkempt and left to grow wild, with plants and grasses abounding everywhere. Vikram's father warned him that he should never let the horses get out into the wild pasture as the scents in the air from the grasses would act like a potent drug and stir their senses and cause them to go into a frenzy and run amuck. Vikram solemnly swore to his father that he would never let the five fine horses loose in this pasture.

For a long time the boy was careful and kept his word. On one particular Sunday, however, momentarily forgetting his father's warning, Vikram was careless and unthinkingly opened the wrong stable doors which led directly to the wild pasture. The result was swift. The horses reared up on their hind legs, snorted like bulls and bolted out. With their eyes rolled back, ears flat, and mouths foaming, they knocked Vikram aside and tore the doors off their hinges and broke free.

The horses raced into the pasture where they immediately began to challenge and fight each other. Vikram watched in despair as they went wild and lost all control. He could do nothing but stay out of their way. In desperation, he prayed fervently. Finally, when they were utterly exhausted, the horses returned to the stable. They were covered with bruises and suffered injuries from their mad dashing about and fighting each other. It took many months for their various wounds to heal. During this time, they refused the healthy food Vikram offered them and were uncooperative and difficult to handle.

Eventually, the horses recovered from their physical wounds and became calm and well behaved once more. As for Vikram, did he learn his lesson and never make the same blunder again? We wish we could say he did, but that is not what happened, unfortunately.

Three months later, on another hot and lazy Sunday when his father was away, Vikram found himself bored and restless. He decided to let the horses out for just a few minutes so they could have a little taste of freedom. He promised himself he would be more careful this time and keep a close watch on them and not let things get out of hand like the last time. He thought he could keep them under control and so opened the doors for them. However, once again, the horses broke free, knocked Vikram flat, pushed the doors right off their hinges and headed for the wild pasture. They turned on each other, became wild without any control and fought each other for dominance. Vikram prayed even harder than he did before, but by the time he managed to get them all back in the stable, they were in even worse shape than the previous incident! It took longer for the horses to return to a peaceful state and heal from their wounds. Vikram's father was very disappointed in him, but not as disappointed as Vikram was with himself.

Dear reader, doesn't our mind act like this? When we feed it healthy thoughts and positive ideas and maintain a clean environment and keep control over it, then it will behave and not cause us any problems or embarrassment. However, the moment we let it run amuck in the pasture of unhealthy ideas and activities, it can develop a taste for this dangerous "freedom" which is not really freedom at all but just rowdiness. Such unruliness can even become a habit or an addiction, which becomes harder to rein in every time we yield to it. When we slip into such a state, it can be very difficult to regain control of our "horses," meaning to tame the mind once we have allowed it to run wild. Only through intense prayer and association with good company and keeping a pious environment can we then return them to the soothing, pleasing green pastures where we can experience peace and happiness. So you see, it is therefore worth the trouble and effort to keep our horses under control rather than let them loose to run wild. Lord Krishna in the Gita says,

*Sraddaa vaan labate jnaanam
Tat parah smyatendriyaha
Jnaanam labdhvaa param saantim
Achirenaa adhigachatti*

"The man of faith, earnestness, perseverance, determination and steadfastness, the man of supreme devotion, the man of sense control will obtain this wisdom. Having obtained this wisdom, he will soon enjoy supreme peace."

- Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas, Sep 2006.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1. During which birthday celebrations was the Sarva Dharma Stoopam inaugurated at Prasanthi Nilayam?
 - a. 1966
 - b. 1975
 - c. 1980
 - d. 1985

2. What one thing does Swami say characterizes the difference between a *jnani* and an *ajnani* - or a knower of the truth and an ignorant person?
 - a. A *jnani* will give away everything to the poor.
 - b. A *jnani* will sing the glories of the Lord.
 - c. A *jnani* will remember that he is not the doer.
 - d. A *jnani* will always chant His name no matter what.

3. How should a Zoroastrian behave if he sees a dead body in a river?
 - a. Make suitable prayers for its journey into the next world.
 - b. Say some prayers for self-purification.
 - c. Attempt to sink it underwater.
 - d. Retrieve the dead body.

4. Lord Rama had three enemies embodying the three *gunas*. Kumbha Karna, Ravana and Vali. Which *guna* did Vali symbolise?
 - a. The Sathwic *guna*.
 - b. The Rajasic *guna*.
 - c. The Tamasic *guna*.
 - d. A mixture of the *gunas*.

5. The following passage provides some of Christianity's most touching and poetic words on love.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move

mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."

Who was the writer?

- a. Saint John
- b. Saint Paul
- c. Mother Theresa
- d. Saint Aquinas

6.

Swami explains the meaning of the word Bhagavatham in the following way: Bhaa' stands for Bhakthi; 'Ga' stands for jnana; 'Va' stands for Vairagyam; and 'Tha' stands for thathvam – what does the last syllable 'M' stand for?

- a. Mukthi
- b. Manava
- c. Murali
- d. Manas

7.

In Buddhism, what is the meaning of the word 'koan'?

- a. A bell that is tolled during prayer services.
- b. The last testament and instructions of the Buddha.
- c. The traditional simple meal taken by practicing monks.
- d. A dialogue or story that attempts to awaken the student's intuitional understanding of the truth.

8.

When Swami was 22, He graciously blessed a temple at Guindy, in Chennai. The devotee who had built the temple washed and worshipped Bhagavan's Feet and then prayed that Swami leave an impression of His holy Feet, first by placing them in sandal paste and then on a piece of silken cloth. What happened next?

- a. Swami refused and instead created an idol of Shirdi Baba for the temple.
- b. Swami readily agreed and asked the man to build another temple at Coimbatore.

- c. Swami agreed and then said, "I shall give the feet of Sai Baba, my previous body".
- d. Swami created some gold padukas and requested those to be worshipped in the temple shrine.

9.

Which religion's holy book explicitly prohibits the consumption of alcohol?

- a. Judaism
- b. Christianity
- c. Islam
- d. Hinduism

10.

When Swami was a boy, He danced at a village carnival in the role of a famous female dancer of the day, named Rishyendramani. Her speciality was to dance with a bottle on her head and then pick up a handkerchief from the floor with her teeth. When Swami performed this dance, how did He improve upon Rishyendramani's special act?

- a. Instead of balancing a bottle on the head, Swami balanced an upright stick.
- b. Instead of picking up a handkerchief with the teeth, Swami picked up a needle with His eyelids.
- c. Rather than dancing for the usual hour, Swami danced non-stop for 4 hours.
- d. Rather than just dancing, Swami also sang some entertaining, but educative, songs on human values.

ANSWERS

1 B

The Stoop was inaugurated in 1975 during the birthday celebrations, thereby declaring to the world that all religions were welcome at Prasanthi Nilayam. At that time people came from 46 nations to pay homage at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet.

During the divine discourse Bhagavan declared:

"Sai has drawn the old and the young to Himself and every one of them has Sai in his heart. The scriptures of different creeds---the Bible, the Quoran, the *Upanishads*, the *Zendavesta*---appear different, but their aim is the same: to establish the Brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God as the basis for the peace of mankind."
(*Divine discourse 23-11-1975*)

2 C

Swami tells us that:
Both the Jnani and the Ajnani will have desire, absence of desire for the other world, and the burden of past Karma, all in equal measure. Their experiences also will be in equal measure. Only, the Jnani will not have the consciousness that he is the doer; so, he will not be bound. The Ajnani is conscious that he is the doer and so he gets bound. This is the distinction. I have already told you, haven't I, that "the mind" is the cause of bondage as well as of liberation? The mind is the cause of everything. (Sandeha Nivaran chapter 11)

3 D

The follower of Zoroastrianism must, if he sees any dead body floating in a river, go to any lengths to retrieve the body from the water and bring it to dry land to be placed under the sun's purifying rays, so that the water is no longer polluted by the dead matter.

4 A

Vali typified the sathwic guna as he repented for his own shortcomings and sought pardon from Lord Rama.

5 B

The passage is taken from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, found in the Bible.

6 A

Thus, Bhagavatham enables one to attain liberation through devotion, wisdom, detachment and Atmic knowledge.

7 D

Koans originate from episodes in the lives of sages and are used in training the mind to go beyond its ordinary concepts and patterns. An example of a koan, taken from the life of the sage Huineng, is the following:

Two monks were watching a flag flapping in the wind. One said to the other, "The flag is moving." The other replied, "The wind is moving." [Huineng](#) overheard this. He said, "Not the flag, not the wind; mind is moving."

8 C

Swami consented to place His feet on the sandal paste but on taking them away all were astonished to see the extra large footprints left by Bhagavan. We can refer to Kasturi's words at this point:

"Lo, the Impression that the silk cloth received from those lovely tender Feet of His was that of a pair of Feet, nearly double the size of Baba's, and definitely that of a person above sixty years of age! The silk cloth with the sandal paste impression that He gave so miraculously to prove that He is "the same Baba come again" is there, inside the shrine at Guindy, for all to see!"
(*Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram II*)

9 C

The following verses from the Koran forbid the follower of Islam from consuming alcohol:

"You who believe, liquor and gambling, idols and raffles, are only the filthy work of Satan; turn aside from it so that you may prosper. Satan only wants to stir up enmity and jealousy among you by means of liquor and gambling, and to hinder you from remembering God and from praying. So will you stop?"
(*The Holy Koran chapter 5 v 90*)

10 B

We find the account in Sathyam Shivam Sundaram 1:

The day of the performance arrived. The curtain rose, "Rishyendramani" tripped her way into the Durbar Hall of Kamsa. The audience was too wild with excitement to notice any difference. The famous dance number began. Sathya had improved upon it and substituted a needle for the kerchief. The needle had to be lifted by the eyelids! The "Rishyendramani" of that day accomplished it, but not without dire consequences!

The carnival president insisted on pinning a medal on the dancer's person. Sathya's mother and others who were at first thrilled with the tributes of praise, the invitations to repeat the feat at other places, and the silver cups and gold medals being pressed into Sathya's hands, became afraid of the "evil eyes" which the boy provoked. Their fears proved true. His eyes

developed a dreadful affliction. They swelled, became red, and exuded tears profusely. His temperature rose.

One night his mother heard heavy footsteps, as of one wearing wooden sandals, entering the house and proceeding straight to Sathya. It was all very mysterious. She got up, went to her boy's room, and placed her hand on his brow to check his temperature. She found the fever gone! She brought a light and looked into his eyes. They had improved beyond all expectations! Sathya was quite well the next day.

HEALING TOUCH

THE GIFT OF LIFE TO A GOOD HEART

Dazzling Darjeeling

“The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of the rest of the world combined.” These words expressed the feelings of Mark Twain when he visited Darjeeling.

Vast expanses of green that carpet the hills and valleys, the refreshing aroma of tea in the air, the bracing weather and the beauty of impassive giant hills that have stood sentinel for eons, Darjeeling’s beauty is a feast for the senses. This is a land rich in history, and the peace it enjoys has been hard fought for and well earned.

Darjeeling is thought to be a derivation of “Dorjeeling,” meaning, the place of the Dorjee, the majestic thunderbolt of the Lamaist religion. The famous Buddhist monastery standing at the top of the Observatory hill was known by this name.

Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the district was part of the dominion of the Raja of Sikkim. Darjeeling and Kalimpong were independent kingdoms ruled by the kings of Sikkim, but in 1706 Kalimpong was conquered by the Bhutanese. In 1780, the Gorkhas invaded from Nepal and took Darjeeling. Later, the British defeated the Gorkhas and returned part of the land to the King of Sikkim, who operated under British protection.

During this period, Darjeeling was recognized for its value as a sanatorium – where people went to regain their health – and also as a hill station. Politically and militarily, it was a key passage into Nepal and Tibet. The British coerced the King into handing over Darjeeling to the Crown and developed it to suit their needs. Eventually, the British annexed the whole of Bengal. By 1857, Darjeeling, which had been heavily forested and virtually uninhabitable, had roads, sanatoria, and 10,000 inhabitants. Nepalese laborers, recruited to work on the tea plantations established by the British in the 1840s, made up the bulk of the population. The vast majority still speak Nepali as their first language, and the name Darjeeling continues to be synonymous with tea.

Today, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), with a large measure of autonomy from the West Bengal state government, governs the land. Darjeeling remains part of West Bengal but now has greater control over its own affairs.

The Spirited Poonam Gurung

The Gurung family hails from Darjeeling and can trace its ancestry to the original Nepalese immigrants who settled in West Bengal. Poonam Gurung is the second daughter of Shyam Gurung and Kamala Gurung. Shyam Gurung

runs a school canteen in their village, Nali Chour, which has many temples devoted to Sai Baba. Her mother is a tea garden laborer. Father Shyam Gurung made sure his three children received an education. Neelam, the eldest daughter, completed her B.A., is married and employed as a private teacher in Darjeeling. Brother Ritesh completed his Twelfth class/ PUC in Arts. Poonam herself has a Bachelor of Science in Botany.

Nali Chour village is set along a two kilometer stretch about seventy kilometers from Darjeeling. The roads are full of hairpin turns, so small jeeps are used for transport. Early in her education, Poonam stayed in Darjeeling, but later traveled this road daily. Today, all three siblings have found their place in society or are in the process of doing so.

Poonam's young life had many blessings. Her parents were devout and God-loving, so it came naturally to her to turn to God for guidance and support. As a child, her favorite deity was Goddess Saraswati. At age seven, she came into Swami's fold. Poonam attended Bal Vikas classes in Darjeeling and was a bhajan singer in the local Sai Samithi. Her involvement in the Sai mission and the teachings and values she absorbed helped her develop a mature perspective towards life. Nevertheless, there come times when it seems nothing can prepare us for the shocks this material world can present us with.

A Disturbing Diagnosis

At 13, Poonam was diagnosed by her family physician, Dr. S. R. Khanra, with valvular heart disease. Surgery was the only option. Unfortunately, that particular procedure was not available in Darjeeling. It could only be done in Bangalore, Vellore, Delhi, or another major city. The fee for Poonam's operation would be 1.5 lakh, an amount far beyond the family's means.

The North Bengal private clinic, and the Sadar and Eden Government Hospitals in Darjeeling, are facilities she could have visited, but the family did not have the financial resources to seek multiple opinions. One verdict was enough to sentence her to a life of dependence.

Poonam's parents were able to provide their children with a good education, but such a huge amount for an operation was out of the question. So, Poonam, the good daughter, understanding her father's predicament, declined the surgery and said that she would live as long as the malady allowed and the rest would be in God's hands. In December 2000, the local Samithi members came home bearing tidings of hope. They told the family there was a Super Specialty Hospital, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, at Prasanthigram, Puttaparthi, where all treatment is free of cost, from diagnosis to surgery and even postoperative counseling.

Swami's Hospital – A Ray of Hope

Her family was convinced and she came to Prashanti Nilayam, the abode of the Lord she had worshipped since she was seven. Being part of the Samithi,

she came as a seva dal volunteer and during the course of her stay underwent investigations into her malady. After performing catheterization on her, it was found that her mitral valve could be dilated, so a PTMC (Percutaneous Trans Mitral Commissurotomy) was done in SSSIHMS PG in 2001 and the valve was dilated. She came with her sister Neelam this time, because it was mandatory that a helper accompany the patient. Before the dilation, she was having breathing trouble and would tire quickly and could not perform any heavy tasks. After the PTMC, her breathing problem was solved and she could get back to a near normal life.

During her seva visits to Prashanti Nilayam, she met the Rai family, also from Darjeeling. Time passed, and it was decided that the friendship between the families should find fulfillment in matrimony. Poonam Gurung married Pramod Rai, the son of Lal Bahadur Rai and Dhan Kumari Rai from the Seeyok tea estate. He had come to Prashanti Nilayam at the behest of a friend for seva at the Chaitanya Jyoti Museum. On one such occasion, Swami personally called him and told him to work at Brindavan in 2001. Since then, he has been employed as part of the Trayee Brindavan security team. Food was provided in the Sri Sathya Sai Boys Hostel Brindavan, and residential accommodation was given in the quarters behind Trayee Brindavan, Swami's Residence at Whitefield.

Poonam's Forte - Firm Faith

After her marriage in October 2005, Poonam shifted to Bangalore in November to live with her husband. She found a job as a registration assistant at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital in Whitefield. By then her case had been transferred from SSSIHMS PG to SSSIHMS WFD. Though the earlier procedure of valve dilation gave relief, it is not always a final procedure. For many it is only palliative. The final solution for valvular heart disease is valve replacement. So it was with Poonam, too. On one of her checkups, it was discovered that the valve was again losing its function and it was determined that the dysfunctional biological valve should be replaced with a mechanical valve. She was slated for a MVR (a Mitral Valve Replacement). The conversation Poonam and Pramod had with the cardiologist was the clincher. Till then they were on the fence, whether to go ahead with the operation or not. The cardiologist clearly explained the process and they decided to have the procedure done. At first they did not inform the parents but spoke to Poonam's elder sister and brother-in-law. Concerned, the parents would be distressed if informed of the seriousness of the situation, the daughters told them it was only minor surgery. The parents gave their consent. Later on, after the surgery was successfully accomplished, the true nature was revealed. Poonam never felt any fear regarding the surgery. She had implicit faith that Swami would look after her and nothing untoward would happen.

A Rare Blood Condition

When she was admitted as an in-patient and the preoperative protocol was done, a surprising fact emerged. Poonam had an abnormal blood condition. It is common knowledge that blood is of four groups: A, B, AB and O. Within

these four groups there is a factor called Rh factor, the presence or absence of which gives the nomenclature positive or negative. This is the primary differentiating factor but there are many more factors which have a bearing on blood transfusion. The details of blood types and their grouping are too complex to discuss here, but basically, different blood groups are incompatible and if they intermix, a biochemical reaction called clumping occurs where the blood forms blobs which look like clots.

This can sometimes occur even if the blood is of the same group. So before blood is transfused to a patient, the patient's blood sample is cross-matched with the donor's sample. Usually it is not a problem to arrange for compatible blood. In some patients, the presence of cold agglutinins (a rare condition when blood temperature falls below normal body temperature and clots form – an irreversible condition with fatal consequences) creates clumping of cells at subnormal temperature. Still, we can do open-heart surgeries in such patients at normothermic cardiopulmonary bypass. This means we do not reduce the patient's temperature on the heart-lung machine. Poonam's case was unique. She had both warm and cold agglutinins, a very rare condition where the patient's body totally rejects blood transfusions; she could not receive *any* transfusion because the body will react and clumping will occur immediately. Despite the best efforts of the blood bank officer, Dr. Nandita Ghoshal, not a single unit of A positive blood was found to be compatible with Poonam's. This was reconfirmed at St. John's hospital.

Support from Sai

The case was postponed many times. On August 16, while sleeping, Poonam had a vision of Swami. Swami used to come in her dreams and advise her on various matters and she kept a meticulous diary of her "conversations with God." These conversations were sometimes more than just dreams. In the Hospital, she felt Swami's physical proximity on more than one occasion. These ethereal experiences calmed her and helped her through these troubled waters. Throughout all this, her husband Pramod was a bulwark of support and both of them prayed to Baba for guidance. One day, Pramod found an opportunity to express their predicament to Swami and on July 6, 2006, He gave them both padnamaskar.

As for her physical aliment, the doctors had two options: one; avoid the risky procedure and let her be. This would leave Poonam with a less-than-satisfactory quality of life and she would eventually succumb to heart disease. Two: be innovative, and get on with the operation.

The Procedure is a "Go"

After deliberation among the doctors and discussions with Poonam and her husband, it was decided to proceed with the surgery. Poonam donated her own blood on two occasions before the operation. This was stored in the blood bank. On the operating table, another unit of blood was collected minutes before the surgery. Using a combination of chemicals and a cell

saver/auto transfusion set, the operation began. A mitral valve replacement was successfully performed followed by an uneventful postoperative recovery.

Auto transfusion is a process of transfusing to the patient his or her own blood. During surgery, blood leakage is unavoidable and in cases such as these where the patient is unique, it is crucial to salvage as much as possible of the patient's blood. A mechanical device connected to a vacuum pump sucks up all the blood and other fluids that enter the surgical field. The fluid is then subjected to a centrifuge, a device which separates components of a colloid on the basis of density. The blood spins at very high speeds and the heavier red blood cells collect at the periphery and are collected through reverse suction. These cells are then returned to the patient and the other clear fluids are discarded. This way the patient gets back their oxygen carrying cells. The other components of blood are slowly regenerated by the body. The cell saver kit used for auto transfusion is a disposable one-time-use only item and is very expensive.

Poonam and Pramod – Singing and Smiling!

Everything went as planned and the surgery was a success and Poonam had the best kind of recovery, an absolutely boring one, and was discharged after a short stay. Now she is back at her job in the General Hospital with the mechanical valve ticking away inside her stout heart. Perhaps it was the stoicism she inherited from her ancestors from Nepal, who came to the wild hills of West Bengal centuries ago; perhaps it was a maturity of mind and calmness of spirit that God had blessed her with; perhaps it was God himself, working through her as an instrument and an example to teach us all forbearance and sacrifice. Poonam's case is yet another instance which teaches is that we "normal" people have to realize that a normal life is a miracle.

As for Poonam? She is back to normal, and really quickly. Her indomitable spirit illuminating her bright smile is a beacon to us all. She loves Chinese food, noodles, and mo-mo (a delicacy of steamed corn flour and cabbage eaten with spicy pickles), her favorite dish. Both she and Pramod are good singers and Pramod also plays the guitar and drums very well. They both get opportunities to sing on Sundays when bhajans are held at Brindavan. The couple share a common desire that they be blessed with an opportunity to sing in the Divine Presence of Swami. When the Lord has granted her the sweet gift of life, this wish will be a small one for Him, for the hand that rocks the cradle also moves the world.

YOUR SAY

Readers' Responses to the October 2006 issue of H2H

Responses to the Cover Story of the October Issue

Dear Editor:

Sairam to the team of H2H. It is always inspiring to read the articles in the H2H journal. The article "A 'Sai'lent Revolution of Rural Development" in the recent issue is amazing. Just reading it gave me immense happiness and inspired me to utilize my time in doing whatever service I can. I am sure the bliss that the youth involved in the grama seva projects are experiencing is beyond description. It was a beautiful glimpse of how we are just mere puppets in the Divine Hands. He pulls the strings at the right time. Thank you very much for compiling such inspiring articles. I am sure reading these articles are inspiring many of us to change our lives for the better by making our faith deep-rooted and our determination stronger than ever.

In Swami's love,

Prasanna Kankanala, Manhattan, USA

Sai Ram:

I just read the article on "A 'Sai'lent Revolution of Rural Rejuvenation." Thank you for an eye opening illustration of the work the Sai Youth of Andhra Pradesh is doing. One feels humbled and grateful at the same time as the 'revolution' is unfolding. Thank you for such an inspiring story! It makes me want to do more and serve more in my own community. Thank you Sai Baba for your wonderful ways of teaching, guidance, support ... the list goes on.

Sai Ram

Diana Liu,

Edmonton, Canada.

Sai Ram,

As soon as I started reading the article my tears started falling. I told my son, these are tears of joy. By just reading the articles I feel so much in bliss. Yes, that's how any project done with pure love can affect anybody, even on the other side of the world, by just reading about it. Thank you so much for sharing with the whole world about this selfless service. Thank you so much for giving bliss. Thank you so much Swami for being with me through this article. Thank you Swami for the staff of H2H! Indeed, they are your ambassadors of goodwill.

With all my love,

Jamela Vivar

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

Thank you for the extensive and inspiring article on the extraordinary Grama Seva taking place in Andhra Pradesh. It is truly humbling and uplifting to know that Sai Youth can accomplish so much in such a short time. My eyes filled with tears several times upon reading this article. Truly, God walks on earth, and His instruments walk beside Him. I am so proud to belong to an organization which accomplishes deeds such as this. Please, please, do share any other accounts of similar seva being done by the Sai Youth of India.

Sai Ram and thank you,
Ellesha Wanigasekera,
Toronto, Canada

Sai Ram, Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

I was positively transfixed reading the cover article, "A 'Sai'lent Revolution of Rural Rejuvenation" in the October issue of Heart 2 Heart. I have been a Sai devotee since 1972 and have been coming to India for over 30 years now. I love India as my second home, and I am thrilled and delighted to read about the wonderful work the Sai Youth are doing in the villages of Andhra Pradesh.

We are all so unimaginably blessed to have Swami in our lives. The transformation I have witnessed over these decades in the hearts and lives of so many people here in the States and in India and countries around the world fills me with wonder. Transformation has touched my own family, and created change deep within my own heart. No words can ever express the sweet experience of receiving Swami's Love and Guidance. Thank you as always for your good work. I love Heart 2 Heart!

In Sai's Love,

Mrs. Leslie Bouché
California, USA

General Responses to the October Issue of H2H

Sai Ram Heart to Heart team,

Just wanted to say thank you for all your efforts. You bring to us masses a wonderful collection of Swami's teachings. I have shared your works with a lot of people, many of whom are not in the so-called "Sai fold." I guess that is Swami's way of reaching out to this world. I write to you all with utmost gratitude. Please keep up the good work. Yours is true seva that I am sure Swami highly approves of.

Thank you very much,
Geeta Acharya

Om Sri Sai Raama,

My dear brothers of the H2H team,

I am immensely grateful to our beloved Swami and all the members of the Almighty team. Not a single early morning passes without reading the Radio Sai Journal. I never imagined that I would be able to share these happiest

moments in my life with millions of Sai devotees to sit before the PC, read the fine articles, divine experiences, photo features, albums, etc., and also take printouts for reading whenever and wherever. Particularly the Prashanti Diary of the 12 day Athi Rudra Maha Yagna is great. It would have been very bulky to incorporate the 31 page illustrated article in our Sanatana Sarathi monthly issue. By Swami's grace, I am alive to see all these fantastic developments in Sai Communications in the electronic media. I was lucky to read the slightly bigger than postcard size Sanatana Sarathi issues (budding stage) edited by the late N. Kasturi during the early 60s and then onwards till now. Except to say, Jai Sai Raama, I have no other words.

With Love,

Yours,

Krishna Prasad

Hello,

I am a devotee of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I look forward to reading the articles on the Heart 2 Heart website at the beginning of every month. Sometimes when I have finished reading the articles waiting for the next month to read more articles is the most testing time for me. I look forward to the first day of the month to arrive. I like the articles as they relate stories of kindness, selflessness, and about Baba. I am grateful to the organization for bringing this well presented and user-friendly website to the devotees.

All I can say is a heartfelt Thank You.

Ms. Pranita Gundannavar.

Sairam and Thanks,

The monthly H2H and the daily Sai Inspires are both very eagerly looked forward to and my husband and I have the Sri Sathya Sai website as our homepage. We like all the stories, and I store them in memory to relate them to my children, aged 14 and 9 at bedtime. In fact, Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan's recollections are so popular with them, that they have even coined a pet name for him "Chiki". I also particularly enjoyed Prof Anil Kumar's discourse where he has mentioned about "loneliness" and "aloneness" and "friendships" and "friendliness". Prof. Venkataraman's writings too are very scholarly and thorough in their academic depth. The pictures of the Athi Rudra Homam were also good, and made us long to be part of the festivals at Parthi, gazing on our Lord!

On behalf of my entire family, I thank all of you at H2H for such a wonderful service, whose value is even greater for devotees like us who are physically far away from our Swami.

Meenakumari Venkateswaran,
Dubai.

Response to the Panel Discussion in the Sai Seva section of October Issue

Sairam.

The enlightening article " Hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray", was worth reading more than once. The panel discussion was just superb. A million thanks for such a thought provoking and inspiring panel discussion. Looking forward for the next issue - part 2.

Mr. V S Venkataraman Iyer

Response to the article "Sai Movement in Panama"

I'm originally from Panama but I live in Florida USA. I moved here 14 years ago. I did not have any idea that in my country with strong catholic roots, people started to be open to other ways. It was very hard when I was growing up. Also I have been reading the articles about the Sai Baba organization and their work in other countries and see that the arms of this organization are all over the world. Like an ocean wave when it hits the rocks and splashes in different directions, Sai Baba's love extends to all the continents. Glad to see and read about my country and see all the love of this people to help others.

Love and light,
Elka Boren, Panama.

Responses to Sai Inspires

Sairam,

I just want to thank you for sending the loving words of Swami. I never start my day without learning what Swami has to say for that day, and almost all the time it matches the requirement of my mind-set for the day. There are so many thorns in my life and the path I have chosen is hard. But, I believe the harder our paths are, the more we can be sure that Swami is with us. Through this mail, I strongly assume that I have the opportunity to send my gratitude to Swami to be with me at all times.

With love,
Ishwariya

H2H team,

I must take the time to thank you for your quotes from Swami, and for your helping those of us who cannot travel easily to Prashanti Nilayam to experience His Presence through reports, stories, pictures and radio broadcasts. A few weeks ago, I was in deep emotional distress. Although there are many sayings of Swami's that would have some bearing on the issue, the one you printed that day was so perfect ("Consider as unimportant the evil that others do to you..."), it could only have been the Lord Himself saving me. I printed it out as a poster and read it over and over until it was memorized. Moreover, the quote the next day was the icing on the cake. Reflecting on those two quotes changed me so much that I was able to act

completely differently in the situation. It is hard to remember a time that I have felt so protected and cared for by the Lord.

Sai Ram and thank you for this seva,

Rosi

Dear H2H Team,

Swami's saying today had me laughing with delight. Yes, rejoice when people derive pleasure from talking ill of you. Of course, I know from professional and personal experience that when we criticise another, we are in fact criticising ourselves subconsciously. So we derive temporary relief when we perceive others, through projection, as being worse than we are. Not only relief, but exultation and joy, says Swami! I shall remember that.

In my office, on the wall, I have Swami's saying: "When you point one finger at someone, remember that three fingers are pointing at you"

I have also another saying on the wall: "Change yourself and the whole world changes with you." Which brings us to your Sunday message. For quite some time now, it has occurred to me, and I share this with my patients, that there is only one person you can change, it is yourself; and also, as pointed out above, if you discover the love that is you, then you will project it around you. Not only will that affect your perception of the world, but it will also affect the world's perception of itself. This is well illustrated in Swami's Jyoti meditation.

Thank you Swami, the Ineffable Truth!

Jacqueline Trost, MA, USA

Response to the Sunday Special, 15 October 2006

Hello,

I was moved after reading, "Remembering an Important Anniversary." Just wanted to write and say thank you. This coming week will be spent in contemplation of dear Swami's words of truth that he has been telling us for so long. How patient he is.

Love in Sai,

Heather

Response to the Sunday Special, 8 October 2006

H2H team,

Sairam,

The Sunday Special of this week, is really wonderful, though every day it is something special in the form of a message. I really feel blessed for the reason that I am one among those who receiving daily capsules for the benefit of our soul and mind, in the form of Sai Inspires. It is very true that these messages help in solving many problems. Believe it or not, but sometimes it so happened that whatever problem I got in the previous evening, the next morning I got the best solution – a message describing how to tackle the problem! It seems that Swami is directly conversing to resolve the problem and make me happy. It is really a wonderful gift for all.

One thing more about Sarat Babu, that if I am not wrong, some months ago the story of his hard work was also highlighted in the News on various TV channels, isn't it? However, the determination he showed is indeed a lesson for others. So, please keep the pace with which you people are providing us such wonderful material in the future also.

Sairam
Deepak Kumar Singla

