

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

“The reason for living and working is to act, and the reason to act is to seek excellence in everything that you do. If you are going to run a business, then run it well. The most successful person is the person with the least desires. The successful individual is the contented individual.” Whose quote, do you think, this is? A spiritual master? What if we tell you these are actually the words of an internationally renowned gold and silver trader who called the top of the gold market in 1980. James Sinclair is today the Chairman and CEO of Tan Range Exploration Ltd, a prestigious mining company in the gold-rich region of East Africa.

Take another leader. Alvaro Cruz is the owner and CEO of a large construction company ICM Ingenieros Ltda. and also the Governor of Cundinamarca, a state in Columbia. He says, “Being spiritual means being able to listen to one’s intuition. Spirituality is something you must persist in everyday, every hour... It is a permanent attention to the inner self.” Now, many a skeptic would ask, what business do these prosperous and successful entrepreneurs have with spirituality? Some would even dismiss it out rightly – “It is all just words”, they would say.

Ask any graduate these days, “Do you think you can be spiritual and also be a successful businessman?” All you will get is a scornful look for asking a stupid question. And believe it or not, this is at the crux of all tragedies and trauma mankind is facing today - be it terrorism, global warming, pollution or poverty. In the name of secularity, rationality and what not, spirituality today is shunned in educational institutions. In corporate boardrooms, no one dares make a reference to it, lest they may be considered unfashionable; and in professional forums people are tight-lipped about it to save themselves from being branded as ‘not-in-tune-with-the-times’.

And as a result, what do we see today? Countries are spending currency in billions on defense and other allied projects when a large part of the population is still marginalized, without access to even minimum satisfactory healthcare; post-graduates and doctorates, without an iota of guilt or hesitancy, are joining terror networks and masterminding them; companies which originally started to serve people’s needs, are now only seeking to intensify their greed and maximize return at any cost; and divorces, which used to be the exception a few decades ago, are now as common as marriages. With the family system in peril, society can no longer hold together, for how long can a beautiful rosary last once the thread has become weak and beads are falling apart?

You may now ask, “So? Do you think spirituality can solve all these problems?” Our answer is an emphatic, “Yes!” And this is not just an emotional response or off-the-hat self-pleasing optimism. We are convinced about it because if spirituality can work in the dog-eat-dog world of business, and do wonders, it can and will deliver elsewhere and everywhere. Just look at the cover story of this issue. We have stories of as many as ten executives, leaders and top businessmen, who have made spirituality their way of life and

as a result have not only made great strides in their career and business, but also have travelled deep into their inner self and found tranquility. Now, they have inner peace and material prosperity. What more do you need? Actually adding to their bliss is also another facet, their spontaneous service to the community.

This happens only when man learns to broaden his vision. Spirituality is not an apron to be worn when one attends mass or a temple, or turns in the direction of Mecca to offer worship; it becomes real only when it encompasses our every thought and sphere of activity. Then, our personality blossoms, and we become invaluable assets to the community and world at large. And to understand, assimilate and be convinced about this aspect of integrating values into business and personal life, is the most important lesson that the youth of today need to learn, if the world has to change for better. To practically demonstrate to the world how this can be done, Swami set up the one-of-its-kind Sri Sathya Sai University in 1981, and just five years later, inaugurated the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance in the Prasanthi Nilayam campus of the University.

Today it is perhaps the only Institute in the world where spirituality permeates every aspect of secular learning and daily life. "Knowledge has to be skilled, not killed," Swami says. The management graduates of this University are among the most sought after in the industry today, even though the School has no campus placements. What difference are these students making in the corporate world? Read the experience of one of the alumnus, Sri Dayasindhu, in the Swami and Me section and you will know what makes them such unique change-makers.

What is needed today, Swami says, is a fine balance of the heart and the head. All the problems faced by mankind today have their origin in the mind - but they can be solved only through the heart. And every student of this University is trained to have this right balance directly under the care of the Divine Manager. It is to pay tribute to Bhagavan for bestowing the management course to the Institute 22 years ago in August that we are carrying our cover story on the theme of "Enlightened Leadership" this month. And of course, you will agree that it is most relevant in the present times.

Even during the inaugural function of the just-concluded Youth Conference, Swami said, "Today's youth have immense intelligence, enormous common sense, but absolutely no discrimination." This discrimination comes only when we learn to silence our minds and open our hearts. For, that is the seat of compassion and all divine virtues that are hidden in man as a spark of the divine. "You are God," Swami said in the Valedictory discourse of the Youth Conference. If only we always remind ourselves that we are not different from God, that we are only love just as God is, then every second of our lives would be just bliss. For, the power of pure love is unbelievable. Imagine, devotees in hundreds and thousands, in the distant land of Peru feeling His love and living His message. Or, read the story of the little girl Ruby in the Healing Touch section. Isn't it a miracle of pure love that everyday, hundreds of deprived and destitute people who had nowhere to go and would have just

succumbed to their cruel fate are now walking out of Swami's Hospitals as if they were returning from an enjoyable stay in their best friend's house. Again it is the magic of this love that provided drinking water, unasked, to nearly ten million people in the state of Andhra Pradesh dying of drought and contaminated water. Swami says, when your desire is selfless, guided totally by your higher self, resources are never a constraint. The forces in the universe will come together to make your positive thought fructify. And how many times have we seen this miracle happen in our midst!

This world is nothing but a projection of the divine. And the divine, truly, is only love. When we realize and foster this spark of the divine in us, Swami says, we can conquer the world, within and without. May we all know and be convinced that we are God. Let us live every moment as if we are love, breathing in and out. And in the end, become - just love. That is the ultimate!

Loving regards,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Sweetness Invisible

Man alone has the chance to liberate himself from the wheel of birth and death, through the most pleasant means, that of serving God. But, as a result of ignorance, or what is worse, perversity, he lets the opportunity slip from his hands, and suffers grief and pain, fear and anxiety, *ad infinitum*.

By escaping from the clutches of the fascination exercised by material objects and physical pleasures, man can succeed in his efforts to liberate himself. He has travelled long enough on the wrong road; it is time now to turn back and move steadily towards the goal. The love that he has cultivated for men and things has to be sublimated into pure, divine worship. Then it gets transmuted as *Bhakthi* (Love of God).

Convince yourself that the Lord is in you, as the charioteer, holding the reins of the five horses (the senses) and giving you constant counsel, as He did when Arjuna (in the epic Mahabharata) prayed to Him, to lead and guide. Then, it becomes easy for you to convince yourself that the self-same charioteer is leading and guiding all other men and even all other beings. When you are established in this faith firmly, you become free of hate and malice, greed and envy, anger and attachment.

Pray to the Lord to strengthen this conviction and this faith; He will open your eyes to the Truth and reveal to you that He is the *Sanaathana Saarathi* (Eternal Charioteer) in all. That revelation will confer on you incomparable bliss, and grant you kinship with Creation's manifoldness. That is the reason why Lord Krishna told Duryodhana (in the epic Mahabharata), who pleaded with Him for help against the Paandavas, on the eve of the battle, "If you hate the Paandavas, you are hating Me, for, they have recognised Me as the Breath of their Life." Know Him as your strength, your breath, your intelligence, your joy - He becomes all that and more. No more can any faculty of yours hinder your progress. He will direct all of them towards the highest Goal; the senses, the mind, the subconscious, the unconscious, the intelligence - all. Grace will confer all you need.

Seek Grace, It Confers All Else

A mother-in-law was complaining against the new daughter-in-law that she stealthily consumed quantities of milk, curds, cream, butter and ghee. The girl's brother who heard this story from the lips of the old lady, called her into his presence, and after reprimanding her for her malfeasance, advised her to give up stealing all the items, except milk. "Milk, you can drink any quantity you like; but, why steal these other by-products?" The mother-in-law, it is needless to say, was not very pleased with advice! So, seek Grace, that is enough; it confers all else.

You must cultivate love towards every one, however distinct the character

and capacity of each may be. Though the same blood flows through the entire body, the eye cannot smell, the ear cannot taste, the nose cannot see, do not over-emphasise the distinctions and quarrel. Emphasise the basic brotherhood and love. As sugar that has dissolved in the cup of water is invisible, but patent to the tongue in every drop, so too the Divine is invisible but immanent; capable of being experienced, in every individual, whether he is at bottom or on top. Do *Naamasmarana* (repeated remembrance of the Lord); taste the sweetness that is in the heart of every one; dwell on His Glory, His Compassion, which those names summarise. Then, it will be easier for you to visualise Him in all, to love Him in all, to adore Him in all.

- *Divine Discourse in Anantapur, 31-7-1967*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
- Part 35
(Continued from the previous issue)

The Teachings of Buddha

H: What were the mistakes, if any, in the teachings of the Buddha?

SAI: One mistake he made was to allow women to come close to him in the Sangha. It was a woman who gave him the meat, the poisoned meat which killed him.

H: It was his custom to accept whatever was given into the begging bowl, even if it was meat.

SAI: That was a second mistake. Here he failed to put his teaching into practice - his teaching was Ahimsa - total non-violence to all creatures.

H: The Buddha taught that Nibbana (Nirvana) was the ultimate goal. Is that different from the liberation of which Swami speaks?

SAI: It is the same. Nirvana, Liberation, Realization are just different words.

Contentment and the Need for Spirituality

(Note: On the road to Anantapur, we came upon a woman beggar who was blind. Baba gave her money and she responded with "Sai Ram, Swami". It had been two years since He had been to Anantapur, but without Baba even speaking, she recognized Him.)

H: The woman seems to be happy.

SAI: She was born blind but is always happy. She has no worries.

H: How could that be? Look at her life. It must be a life of misery.

SAI: Why? She has no desires and is content. She does not know the life of the person who has eyes. She does not think that others are different from her. Her family is worried about her condition, but she has no worries.

H: How could she not want a life different from that of a beggar?

SAI: Desires arise from the tendency of the mind to compare. It is chiefly the eyes, the vision, which presents to the mind opportunities for comparison. She is blind, her mind is not busy with comparison, so desires do not arise.

H: If she continues happy and content, will she be finished with life and death and be free at the time she dies?

SAI: No. That requires spirituality.

Vipassana Meditation

H: It is very important to know what Swami said, that the ground from which desires arise is the mind making comparisons. Before I had the good fortune to meet Swamiji, my wife and I went to Burma every year for the practice of Vipassana meditation. It starts with Anapana.

SAI: I know, the at the point where nose and lip meet.

H: After the mind got concentrated enough to sit there, the Meditation Master directed the concentration to the top of the head.

SAI: Then there was a sensation like ants crawling on the scalp.

H: Yes, Swami. Wherever I placed my attention, there was intense burning. That fire is said to be the direct perception of the arising and immediate disintegration of the smallest particles of matter which comprise the body. The conscious perception of the fire burns up all impurities. Was the Meditation Master correct in what he said?

The Important Role of Faith

SAI: It does not matter if the Meditation Master knew correctly or not. You did the work and you got the result. This is illustrated by a story. There was a guru and he had a woman disciple. The guru worshipped Krishna, and he had a lingam which required daily puja. Each day at the time for puja, the disciple would bring the required milk. However, guru and disciple lived on opposite sides of the river. Heavy rains came, and the river rose to a flood. The disciple had to wait for a boat, and this made her late with the milk for the guru. He became angry that the puja could not be performed at the proper time and told the disciple, "You are late because of lack of faith in the sacred Name of Krishna. With faith in Him and reciting His sacred Name, you could walk across the surface of the river and not have to wait for a boat".

The next day, the disciple, accepting the word of her guru as the word of God Himself, walked across the surface of the river and delivered the milk on time. After two or three days of this, the guru became curious and asked the disciple how she had arrived on time even though the river was still in flood. The disciple replied that she did as instructed by the guru and walked across the river, constantly chanting the sacred Name of Krishna.

The guru could not accept this story and secretly followed her as she departed. To his astonishment, the woman never hesitated, but walked directly across the river. Instantly resolving to try it himself, he pulled up his *dhoti* above his knees and ventured to step on the water. The water failed to sustain him and he was instantly immersed.

This story illustrates the vital role of faith. The woman enjoyed full faith, and it never occurred to her to even lift the hem of her sari for fear of the water; whereas faith was lacking in the guru.

Dealing with Conflict

H: Swami, conflict between people appears to be inevitable. What to do?

SAI: Conflicts do come about, but they should be limited to that point, to the fact of conflict and should not be allowed to spread into additional words and feelings. If the conflict is allowed to expand, anger will deepen, bitter feelings will arise, and strong hatred will develop. On the other hand, love also starts as a point, and if allowed to do so, will expand until it fills one's entire life. This is spiritual truth. If there is conflict and disharmony between two people, and if they will leave it at that and not allow it to move further, then before long both parties will soften and harmony can again come into the relationship. At the worst, the conflict will remain dormant and will not grow to involve other people.

The practice of limiting disharmony and allowing love to freely expand will bring an organization to a harmonious unity. That harmony will attract public admiration and make possible great accomplishments in the large, wealthy country of America.

Each member of the organization would do well to do each and every action for Sai. If every action is done for Sai, then Sai will be added to every action and will bring success with that action. If every action is with Sai, then the actor is with Sai. The actor will then not be different from Sai. He will be Sai. He who becomes like Brahma is Brahma. Sai divided into *Jiva* (individual soul) becomes *Jiva*. Sai divided into infinity becomes infinity. *Jiva* divided into Sai becomes infinity.

In spiritual life, the first point of approach for any problem is to observe the situation in respect to oneself, and first improve that situation. If, after that, the other person continues to offend, he may be warned once, twice, or three times. If there is still no improvement, the person may be removed from organization office. Then, the person should be forgiven. This act of forgiving will bring about a change in the person, and also in the one who forgives. Suppose, for example, someone does something which brings severe pain into Swami's heart. What is the medicine which will cure the pain? The medicine is forgiveness. Forgiving is the medicine which will totally remove the pain from Swami's heart.

People who have developed a big intellect use it to entertain many ideas, and in this soil doubts grow. The humble, ordinary person knows much truth directly and does not cultivate as many doubts. Best of all is to have faith like a mountain of ice or a mountain of fire which does not provide soil for even a single doubt to germinate and grow. Where energy has been stored as intellect, that energy must be channeled into constructive activity.

H: In the America Sai Organization, we presently require all Officers to pay for all the expenses of their office (*i.e. there is no expense reimbursement*).

SAI: That is correct. Additional expenses must come from the American Sai Organization.

H: There could be 50,000 or more people in the U.S.A. who are Sai devotees, but less than 1,000 who are in the Centres. The Organization seems to be of minor importance.

Why bother with it? Even the United Nations has dozens of non-organizational Sai devotees.

SAI: The Organization gives a chance to people. In America and other countries, there are large numbers of people who know about Sai, have faith in Him, talk about Him, His *leelas*, and His teachings, but who do not join the Organization. The Organization imposes some discipline and requirements which these people do not wish to take on.

The Sai Organization may be limited in size now, but as time goes on, it will attract so many people that the general public will not be able to be accommodated in the Sai gatherings. All available spaces will be assigned to the people within the Sai Organization. Thus, the Sai Organization membership affords a chance.

For example, you are Chairman of the American Sai Organization, and Bozzani is the Officer of the Foundation (*i.e. Sathya Sai Society of America*). Because of this, you are in the car with Swami, having some nine hours of interview instead of half an hour in the interview room.

Faith and Doubt

SAI: Faith is like a fire mountain. It is like an ice mountain. There is nothing else. There is no doubt.

H: What is doubt?

SAI: Doubt is confusion. When reading books, one writer says one thing and another writer says another thing. Take one idea and follow it. Rama had one will, one arrow, one mind. The arrow is intelligence.

H: Where, then, does discrimination play its part?

SAI: Discrimination is to look to conscience.

H: In choosing a path to follow, one should not decide amongst ideas by the use of logic?

SAI: No. Not by ideas. By conscience, by self-confidence, do not follow another. Follow yourself. To follow another is to be a slave. Who are you? "I am not body, not mind, not even *Atma*". For, "I am *Atma*" is two - "I" and "*Atma*". *Neti, neti, neti* – not this, not this, not this - that is the way of the Vedas. Swami is in Your heart. Think of Him there.

The Light of God

H: What is God's Light, Swami - what is the light of God?

SAI: When Truth is joined with Love. That is the light of God. It is not outside light, like the electric light bulb. It is inner light.

H: Swami, how to be in that Light? Everyone here would like to be in that Light and stay all day in that Light.

SAI: When in a dark room you are looking with a torch, everything can be seen except one thing. Yourself - you do not see yourself. With your eyes you are seeing, but if the torch is turned on you, the objects of the room are not seen. As long as your attention is on the light which lights the world, you will not be enjoying God's Light.

H: To be in God's Light, the union of truth and love, how is that to be approached?

SAI: Meditation. Meditation is looking inward. It is light. *(Note: The implication seems to be that as long as our attention is centered on our worldly life, we will be seeing the world and not seeing God).*

SAI: I see good only. Everyone is God. There are some bad actions only.

H: That is very hard to understand, Swami.

SAI: No. Not hard. Easy, *(to Malaysian group):* All of you are God. There is only He. *(To Barbara)* Who are you?

Bb: Barbara.

SAI: No! That is only body name. Body is not you - Body has relatives, but soul has no relatives. There is only one Soul, and that is God.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

The Divine and His Dear Devotee

There was in Bengal a devotee named Madhavadasa, who, when his wife died, realised that he had lost his “home,” for his *grihalakshmi* (goddess of prosperity) had passed away. So he gave all his riches to the poor, donned an ochre robe and wandered alone as a pilgrim to the shrine of Lord Jagannath (another form of Lord Krishna) of Puri in the state of Orissa, India. There he did such deep penance that the Concrete Image soon became the Abstract Reality and the Abstract Reality became a perpetual Vision. He lost all sense of time and space, of *chith* (awareness) and *achith* (non-awareness). Then the Lord, with Mother Subhadra, His Energy Aspect, moved towards him and placed before him the gold plate used by the priests to keep food in front of idol of Lord Jagannatha in the sanctum sanctorum. When Madhavadasa awoke to his gross surroundings, he saw the gold plate with the pile of delicious food upon it. He ate his fill and returned to his inner paradise which he had left for a while.

Meanwhile, the plate was reported lost, assumed to be stolen, and discovered by the seashore near Madhavadasa, who was promptly arrested and led to the lockup by some very efficient policemen. He was beaten mercilessly but did not seem to mind it a bit. The chief priest that night had a dream in which Lord Jagannatha asked him not to bring food for the Lord again into the shrine, “You bring food for Me, and when I eat it, you start beating Me!” Then he realised that it was the entire *Leela* (sport) of the divine to demonstrate the devotion of Madhavadasa and teach others the real nature of *Bhakthi* (devotion).

Some scholars and pundits of Puri did not feel happy at this sudden rise to fame of a stranger from Bengal. So they called Madhavadasa into their midst and challenged him to an intellectual duel. Madhavadasa was not a pundit of that type. He had learnt the Sastras only as a staff to help him walk, as a guide to action; not as a stick to beat others with. So he accepted defeat even before the bout began and signed a statement to that effect, which the leading pundit was only too glad to accept because Madhavadasa had a reputation for scholarship which was really frightening. The pundit hurried to Kasi with that token of victory. He waved it before a gathering of scholars and demanded that they should all pay him homage as superior even to Madhavadasa.

But the Lord will not allow His devotee to be humiliated. When the signed statement was opened and read, they were all amazed to find that it was a

statement declaring that it was Madhavadasa who had achieved victory and it was the pundit who had signed underneath acknowledging his own defeat! The Lord will not be silent when His *Bhaktha* (devotee) is insulted or harmed.

COVER STORY

ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP: A MATTER OF HEART, MIND AND SOUL.

Dr Peter Pruzan is Professor Emeritus at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. He is internationally known for his work on business ethics, values-based leadership, corporate responsibility and spirituality in business. He has been the president of a successful, international business and has authored 11 books and over 100 articles in international scientific journals.

Kirsten Pruzan Mikkelsen is an eminent journalist and former newspaper editor at Berlingske Tidende, a major daily national newspaper in Denmark. As a journalist she has worked on assignments in more than 50 countries reporting on the human aspects of development politics as well as interviewing politicians, presidents, kings, spiritual masters, authors and business executives.

By Peter Pruzan and Kirsten Pruzan Mikkelsen

An international leadership-authority we interviewed didn't hesitate for a moment when asked about the purpose of business organizations: "It is to serve human needs. Period!" He added, "Spiritual-based leaders respect others. They are guided by the fundamental ethic: Service to others comes before serving one's self. Individuals and organizations grow when they give themselves to others, and relationships improve when there is a focus on serving the other." And this is exactly how Baba has summed up the role of not only leaders, but of all of us, in the unforgettable words: "Love all – serve all".

Such perspectives on leadership are not yet mainstream; but if you look for them, you can find an increasing number of inspiring and compassionate leaders who have a consciously held spiritual view of life and who lead their business from that basis. We know this to be a fact, since for the past five years, together with two research colleagues, in connection with an international research project, we have been interviewing executives from all around the world – from North and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe. They are all "top leaders" such as CEOs, Chairmen, Executive Vice Presidents, etc. In this article we will introduce you to leaders, all of whom are inspired by the teachings of Bhagavan Baba.

The leaders we interviewed come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, but their spiritual views may or may not be connected with an organized religion. Some of them are devotees of Baba, most of them are not. Common to them all, transcending the boundaries of nation, culture and tradition, is a deep awareness of what is truly important in life and a dedication to integrate this

awareness and sensitivity into their leadership. They search for meaning, purpose and fulfillment in the external world of business as well as in the internal world of consciousness and conscience. Their external actions and their internal reflections are mutually supportive - so that spirituality and rationality go hand in hand, rather than being each other's competitor.

We have found that spirituality is alive and well in the world of business, though in a subtle and often tacit way: not yet is it part of the common business vernacular; seldom is it explicitly expressed in corporate mission statements, policies, PR and reporting; and it is taught at only a small minority of MBA programmes throughout the world, significant amongst these being the Sri Sathya Sai University in Prasanthi Nilayam.

Many business executives are becoming workaholic human-doings, longing to be full and integrated human-beings. They aspire to live with integrity, where their thoughts, values, words and deeds are in harmony. The problem is that they don't know how to do so in a business world that is increasingly characterized by complexity, turbulence and greed.

To lead from a spiritual basis means to lead with your heart, your mind and your soul. Our research shows that leaders of all kinds – not only in business, but also in government, public and private administration, hospitals, NGOs, etc. can achieve success, recognition, peace of mind and happiness, while at the same time serve the needs of all those affected by their leadership, when they lead with wisdom, from a spiritual basis. The question, however, is how do they do that? You will receive an impression of this when you meet ten down-to-earth spiritual based business executives who share their experiences with us. They are all inspired by the teachings of Bhagavan Baba and clearly demonstrate how these teachings are just as applicable in the turbulent world of business board rooms as in the silence of a meditation room.

You will meet: **G. Narayana** as Executive Chairman of Excel Industries, India; **Francisco Roberto Canada**, Director of and Partner in Errepar S.A., Argentina; **Amber Chand** as co-founder and VP of Vision at Eziba, USA; **John Behner**, former Country Manager of Nabisco, El Salvador; **Parantha Narendran** as Director of Strategy at Eurotel Telecom, Czech Republic; **Rajan Govindan**, former Senior Managing Director, Bankers Trust, USA; **V.V. Ranganathan** as Senior Partner in Ernst & Young, India; **Alvaro Cruz**, owner and CEO of I.C.M. Ingenieros Ltda., Colombia; **James Sinclair**, Chairman of Tan Range Exploration, Ltd., USA/Tanzania; and **Ananth Raman** as Chairman of Graphtex, Inc., USA.

First, however, you will meet a missile scientist, the Honourable President of India, Dr. **A.P.J. Abdul Kalam**, whom we interviewed in the majestic Indian "White House", Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. President Kalam was interviewed as a shining example of spiritual-based leadership beyond business. He shows that you can be a spiritual-based leader no matter what kind of an organization you lead.

Defeat Your Problems and Succeed!

The story of the 11th president of India, **A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** is truly inspiring, particularly in these times characterized by religious strife and tension between scientific and humanitarian world-views. Dr. Kalam is a Muslim in a predominantly Hindu society. He is a rocket scientist with a deeply spiritual message. Throughout his career he has held highly responsible technical and scientific leadership positions. His experiences in leading such systems, however, did not shake his spiritual foundation; just the opposite. He told us: "The path of science can always wind through the heart. For me, science has always been the path to spiritual enrichment and self-realization."

What initially inspired us to try to obtain an interview with him was this unusual quote from Dr. Abdul Kalam in his book *Wings of fire*:

"Each individual creature on this beautiful planet is created by God to fulfil a particular role. Whatever I have achieved in life is through His help, and an expression of His will. He showered His grace on me through some outstanding teachers and colleagues, and when I pay my tributes to these fine persons, I am merely praising His glory. All these rockets and missiles are His work through a small person called Kalam, in order to tell the several-million mass of India to never feel small or helpless. We are all born with a divine fire in us. Our efforts should be to give wings to this fire and fill the world with the glow of its goodness."

Aside from the large majority of Hindus, India also has the world's second largest Muslim population and a minority of Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis and Jews. President Kalam is the inspiring leader of this amazingly heterogeneous multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-lingual democratic nation – the world's largest democracy.

When we asked Dr. Kalam about the relationship between religion and spirituality in such a complex society, he provided us with a clear and concise reply: "When religion transforms into a spiritual force, people become enlightened citizens with a value system. It is therefore most important that, for the happiness, peace and prosperity of mankind, we transform our religious forces into spiritual forces."

President Kalam's passion is to meet with and speak with young people all around India, inspiring them with his vision of the future of India and of the role of values and spirituality. Indeed, on 22 November, 2006, he addressed the students, faculty and guests of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (now Sri Sathya Sai University) with the words:

"I am indeed honoured to deliver the 25th convocation address in the presence of Sri Sathya Sai Baba in this divine environment. My reverence to Baba and greetings to Vice-Chancellor Dr. A.V. Gokak, Professors, faculty members and staff who have been responsible for shaping not just graduates

but human beings with great value systems drawn from our civilization's heritage. At this point, I would like to quote a message from Baba: 'Today people think that spirituality has no relationship to mundane life and vice versa. This is a big mistake. True divinity is a combination of spirituality and social obligations. National unity and social harmony are founded on spirituality. It is the divine that links spirituality and social existence.'

This energetic and optimistic leader of more than a billion people told us: "I learnt in my life, that if you don't do anything, you won't have any problems. But if you do something, suddenly something will pull off. Problems should not become your master. You have to become the master of the problems. God gives us the opportunity to grow through problems. You have to concentrate on what can be done, not what you think cannot be done. If I could, I would remove the word 'impossible' from the dictionary. Defeat your problems and succeed."

When we then asked him about the core competence of business, President Kalam poetically replied: "The most important thing is righteousness, *dharma*. When there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. When there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world. You see the beautiful connectivity between these. The question before all of us today is, how do we get righteousness in the heart?"

A business leader who has for years focused on righteousness in the heart is G. Narayana, lovingly and respectfully referred to as 'Guruji' by those he inspires with his words of wisdom and his loving, generous behaviour. As you will now see, however, it took a crisis to awaken him to the beauty of his character.

The Miracle of the Bhagavad Gita

At the time of the interview, G. Narayana was the Executive Chairman of Excel Industries, Pvt. Ltd., India. Excel is a highly respected manufacturer of agrochemicals, industrial chemicals and pesticides. In recent years the company has received special recognition for its focus on developing environmentally friendly bio-pesticides and solid waste management as well as for its spiritual-based leadership.

G. Narayana told how, as a young man, after successfully leading a number of companies, he had also established a computer services company called Prism which specialized in information systems. "In Prism, we purchased a hard disk computer. I invested all of my savings in Prism and my friends invested 50% of the capital. Within six months of our purchasing the hard disk computer, the personal computers (PCs) came into the market. PCs were much less expensive and had much more capability. Our then outdated

system could not compete with PCs and the people whom we trained had many opportunities outside because of the IT boom. As a result, people started leaving Prism. Prism had yet to pay a considerable amount of loans and at this point, my ego started melting. I realized that it was not my greatness that made things successful at Voltas and New India (companies he had led earlier), it was the greatness of those organizations.”

Experiencing fear, doubts and confusion, he went to his native village. “The situation at Prism was so critical that suicide became one of the alternatives,” he said. “But that alternative was not correct as our children were very young. While at my native place, we went to the Godavari River, and there was an old temple nearby. While my wife and I, my cousin, and his wife were in the waters of the Godavari, I asked my cousin if we could go to the temple and get a memento from the ruins of the old temple. He said, ‘Wait! Something is touching me in the river!’ He reached down and brought out two Shivalingams (elliptical stones representing the cosmos and that are worshipped as the ‘form’ of Lord Shiva in the Hindu religion) attached to a common base. He gave them to me. The two lingams represented Kaleshwar (death) and Mukteshwar (liberation). The message was clear: Liberation from my death-like situation was in the offing! I thought it was a fantastic day.”

“In the afternoon, my wife Sujana and I reached her parents’ home where my brother-in-law was reading a book. I asked him ‘What is that book?’ He showed it to me and it was the *Gita Makarandam*, which is a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Till that time, I had not read even the first three verses of the *Gita* and I did not know Sanskrit. I always thought, ‘What is the need for *Gita*, when one is working 14 hours a day? In 18 chapters *Gita* is teaching about karma yoga (the spiritual practice of selfless work) and that’s what I am already doing!’ I was about to return the book to my brother-in-law; then I remembered the good omen of the Shivalingams in the morning. I thought this book, the *Gita*, was another blessing and I should not lose the opportunity. I opened the book at random and the following verse was present.”

Narayana quotes from memory: “Whoever works with full dedication and offers everything to me, who works relentlessly, him, I will take out of the river of death and put him on the bank.’ This was the best guarantee I had ever heard,” he exclaimed.

Narayana then took the book to his home and studied the *Gita* for 18 days. “Now, I had the *Gita*. Since the Guru (teacher) did not come, but only the book, with its commentaries on the *Gita* came, I took it to Baroda where I lived. The author was a well-respected swami, so I thought of him as my Guru and I did an 18-day Yoga (spiritual exercise) of studying the *Gita*. What I did then, I now call ‘*Gita* yoga’. I read one chapter every day, eating only one time a day, and completely avoiding alcohol, non-vegetarian food (which I was not taking anyway), tobacco ... I observed silence while studying the *Gita* and I underlined whatever appeared wonderful, although everything looked wonderful in the *Gita*! I practised celibacy during all those 18 days.”

“It was a fantastic experience. At the end of 18 days, I stood up and the world stood up along with me. I went back to the bank and assured them that I would pay back every rupee of the loan. I told my partners that I would pay back their investment. During those 18 days, new understandings flowed in my thought and consciousness. My fear was gone. My mind frames changed. Then I did Vipassana yoga (a special type of prolonged meditation) and it helped me to further develop my qualities.”

“When I took responsibility with this new spirit, things started occurring that turned around my situation. With the new confidence and consciousness, solutions were shining and problems were dissolving. Then companies approached me and I became a management and turn-around advisor.”

“In 1985 I got the *Gita* yoga and the rest all flowed from that. Before 1985 my wife and I were enemies. My children would not give me a birthday card; they would give to my wife, but not me. After 1985 everything changed with my family, it was the change in me, not in them. We now have a fantastic relationship.”

Today spirituality permeates G. Narayana's entire being. He says: “Spirituality is experiencing divinity in others and self. Spirituality is inspired responsibility towards people, other living beings, and the world... seeing and relating with divinity in every aspect. Being responsible is being divine. Self-improvement plus world service equals spirituality.”

“Being aware of all, inside and outside, reaching the hearts of others through love, and becoming a model... this is what Divinity is – reaching the hearts of others. Jesus is this kind of model, so is Buddha; and now, Sai Baba. They never hurt; they have done so much for society. They have reached our hearts. This is what I strive for in my own life and leadership.”

Life has taught Narayana that man can be what he chooses to be. According to him, this freedom to choose opens the door of immense potential within each of us. “The first measure of success is the happiness of all stakeholders. The customers must be happy, the suppliers must be happy, employees must be happy, all must be happy. The *Gita* says, ‘If you do good work, you will get the returns, so do not worry about them.’ If you go for the returns, the work will not get done. You must do excellent work and not worry about your individual return.” In this connection Narayana says that his spiritual purpose is: “to return added value to the world; to be a being of love; to contribute, endeavour, excel, and assist others to excel.”

“Whenever any person comes to me, in each transaction I evaluate: ‘When he leaves from my office, has he become small or has he become tall?’ I measure. If he has become small, I will not let him go; I make him sit. Only when he becomes tall he can go. Only when he becomes happy he can go. I may fight with him for eight hours, but I keep at it until he is happy. Only a

happy man can escape from me. And everyone can judge whether the man is happy or not.”

While G. Narayana is a vivacious, outgoing spiritual-based leader always on the go, the next person you will meet is on all these counts the opposite; he is quiet, introverted, and contemplative; he even refers to himself as ‘a man of silence’. Yet, in spite of the fact that he never wanted to become a leader, he is today a modern *karma yogi*, leading four companies in Argentina.

The True Value of Business

Francisco Roberto Canada is Director of and Partner in Errepar S.A. in Buenos Aires, the major Argentinean publisher of books and other materials for accountants. In addition, he has in more recent years also been a director and partner in three other publishing and manufacturing companies, all of which are co-owned with his two partners in Errepar S.A.

His entire career seems to have been an expression of his love and his search for true happiness, which he equates with spirituality. As he told us, “My spiritual principles and values can be summed up in one word: Love.” He has continually attempted to unite the spiritual and the material dimensions of life. As an expression of that love, and in spite of his having to deal with periods of severe illness, he has considered it to be his leadership responsibility to help others find their own true fulfilment. He told us, “The concept for business we work with, our goal, is to make people aware of their inner potentials, to help bring out these potentials, and to always strive for excellence. Excellence is the way that God made the world. I also think this should be the purpose of business in general.”

Since his childhood Francisco Roberto Canada has been strongly influenced by the prevailing Catholicism in South America. While still practicing his Catholic faith, he now also finds spiritual upliftment, both in his private life and in his work life, in the teachings about religious tolerance and the underlying unity of all religions of Bhagavan Baba, whom he visits in India. He cited Swami: “There is only one religion, the religion of Love. If you are a Christian, go home and be a better Christian; if you are a Hindu, go home and be a better Hindu; if you are a Muslim, go home and be a better Muslim; if you are a Buddhist, go home and be a better Buddhist.”

“For me, being a businessman has not always been easy, as I am a man of silence. All of my life, I have rejected the material world, and still I have become a big entrepreneur. It is not easy for me to be the head of four companies as a member of their boards. It’s difficult, it’s a problem; it’s not my nature. But I have been guided to do my work, so that I am able to live in the material world and combine work and business with spiritual growth. On some occasions I want to make myself little. I used to think that expansion was a

sin, both as to business activity and status. But then I remember that Sathya Sai Baba says that expansion is not a sin; expansion is God."

Three themes kept reappearing in our interview with Francisco Roberto Canada: "Hard work", "Doing your duty with love and care", and "Loving God." For example, he said, "I pray that all people can do their duty with love and care. Therefore, as a leader, I make an effort that all our companies do good business, do good work, and make good products in the way of God, without breaking His law."

"In the beginning, work was a burden for my spirituality. But in the last ten years I have come to realize that happiness in life is to do all the work for God, to take part in God's creation, and to leave the fruits of my actions, my products, to God. In doing this, I hope that my products in some way or another send people to Him."

Francisco Canada speaks about the influence that Sathya Sai Baba has had with his partners and their business, "All the three owners, who are also the three board members, have the same spiritual teacher. In fact, I took Sathya Sai Baba as my spiritual teacher when the partner who is the major owner of our companies introduced me to his teachings. At that time this partner went to visit him in India, and in a letter from the three of us, symbolically turned over the company to him. After that, we realised which direction to take.

"Like all difficult things, leading a business becomes easier as time goes by. Seven years ago we developed some principles of action in our company. We began to hold weekly meetings where we discussed leadership according to the principles of Sai Baba, as we read about them in a book on management, *Sai Baba's Mahavakya on Leadership*, by retired Lieut. General in the Indian army, Dr. M.L. Chibber. In these meetings we discussed how to grow the company using spiritual principles.

"When the company went through hard times for a period of roughly three years, the weekly meetings stopped. The difficult times arose when the company was being split from just one firm into four companies, each with its own newly hired general manager and with the three partners as the board for each of these companies. Recently we have taken up the weekly meetings again, but have changed them. Now the meetings are being run by trainers in each company and on different levels - with the managers, with the middle management, and with the employees. These trainers have been trained in working with human values, and the first results of the meetings are beautiful.

"We talk about how to apply the teachings and principles of spiritual leadership, both at work and in our daily life. In these weekly meetings we focus on principles based on the human values of truth, right action, love, peace and non-violence - not on religion. We use examples from all

religions, but each person has his own spiritual way. The employees accept this in a wonderful way.

“But not everyone finds working with us to be so beautiful. Sometimes it happens that an employee doesn’t get on well with the company. They find that with the family spirit and the spiritual orientation which permeate our way of doing business, it has a different vibration than they are used to, and so they leave.

“We are working to include the principles of the human values that are so central on our spiritual paths in the books we are publishing for primary and secondary schools. Our evaluation committee is working on this, contacting our authors and trying to integrate the human values into our books - not only into books about societal affairs, but also in books about mathematics, biology or history. And in all our publications we want to produce products recognized for their high quality. We aim at excellence in everything we do.

“On some occasions we have had to refuse publishing a book if it did not align with our principles, even if the book would obviously sell many copies and give financial success to the company. The managers are very focused on earning money, and in many cases they have proposed publications which were not *dharmic* - meaning in these cases that they would not inspire people to act in a proper way. Such books we have turned down.

“In the beginning, this attitude sometimes created confusion, but slowly the employees understood that their work was to lead them, and those affected by their work, in the direction of spiritual growth. When we select a book for publication, we focus on quality, in the broad, spiritual sense of the word. One of our activities is publishing spiritual, cultural, and educational books. These kinds of books are a reflection of the view of life, shared by all three of us partners. We look upon this activity as a possibility of helping to make a better world.”

Amber Chand, whom you will now meet, shares Francisco Canada’s ideal of work being a spiritual practice that can make the world a better place. However, her story of the ups and downs of Eziba reminds us that while spiritual-based leadership provides no guarantee of business success, it can be the source of peace of mind and courage, even amidst cataclysmic events that would otherwise shatter most business leaders.

Balancing Success and Failure

Amber Chand was the co-founder and VP of Vision at Eziba in the USA, when she was first interviewed about her being a spiritual-based leader. At that time, Eziba was a flourishing internet-based retailing company selling high quality crafts from poor artisans around the world. This anthropologist and international businesswoman reflected on her spiritual purpose: “When I think of my spiritual purpose in life, I think of ways in which it allows me to connect, both internally and externally. In quiet moments, I look to

strengthening this place of internal refuge... an inner sanctuary where I go to connect with my spiritual teacher, Sathya Sai Baba, The other is the outer place of action and activity. In the world as a spiritual woman, I see my purpose as trying to find a way to put love into action. The company I have created is very much an expression of my sense of service, allowing me to use business as an important and purposeful platform for my spiritual practice, knowing that our work with artisans around the globe – many of whom are talented craftswomen – helps to support, sustain and strengthen their lives. I always felt that in founding this company I was following Swami's guidance and finding a way to bring together my spiritual perspective into a more worldly business arena. This was to be a practice in humility in which I saw myself as simply the flute – His instrument – through which He would play.”

Amber Chand narrated how her spiritual-based leadership unfolded with the help of very practical and down-to-earth examples, such as ‘Tea with Amber’. “As a co-founder of Eziba, I have tremendous amount of influence. I know when I walk through this company employees look to me sort of like a mother, a nurturing spirit. So I try to continually find ways to be that nurturing, reassuring, loving spirit for them.

“About a year ago I created a new initiative and called it ‘Tea with Amber’. I was inspired to do this when, one day, my heart sank when I realized that the company had grown to such a degree that I no longer knew everybody. I could not see how I could be in the nurturer role if I didn’t know everyone by name. I began to search for a way that I could connect with everyone in the company.

“So the idea came to me to just begin to have a cup of tea with every person. I rearranged my office completely, I created a little sitting area where I have some lamps and plants, I got out my lovely Mexican tea set and began to invite people to tea. Some people were very nervous because they were sitting with the co-founder. I would make them a cup of tea and what I noticed was that once they began to sip their tea, they would start to relax physically. Once we could both relax with each other, then we could actually open ourselves up to the ‘art of conversation’.

“This is definitely something that the employees look forward to. It has become seen as a very important part of my work and as a way for us to continue to highlight Eziba as a company with a social conscience.”

Another initiative Amber Chand started early on at Eziba was to speak to the customers who were dissatisfied. This was inspired by her spiritual background. She grew up in a Hindu household in Uganda, Africa, went to the Church of England while in boarding school, and has a strong interest in Buddhism. “In my childhood my mother and father taught me to treat a guest who came to our house as God. You do everything you can to make their time with you happy and satisfying and comfortable. During our first customer training, I told our people that at Eziba I like to feel that the customer is God.

“We have a fabulous customer service group and yet I still want to speak with all of the unhappy customers. I pick up the phone and call them. I begin by apologizing to them: ‘I am so sorry that we have dissatisfied you in some way.’ I must tell you that customers are amazed; they cannot believe that one of the founders is taking the time to call them. From this call, I always end up with a happy customer; we usually end up feeling a lot of joy and laugh together. I tell them to call me again if they ever have any problems and I give them my direct line. So it is another way of being thoughtful. And it works.”

But while things worked for Amber Chand, they did not work for the company, which now had a board that was more focused on the bottom line than on selling high quality crafts from poor artisans around the world as “a way to put love into action”. With its loss of purpose, the company ran into great financial difficulties.

When Amber Chand was next interviewed in spring 2006 – roughly a year after Eziba, the company she had invested her heart and soul in, went bankrupt – we were struck by how her engaged spirituality had enabled her to maintain peace of mind and courage in the face of Eziba’s demise. She told us, “Without the anchor of my spiritual practice, I could not have weathered this personal tsunami. For at some level, I knew that Eziba’s meteoric rise and fall were part of a larger archetypal story. That there were to be many lessons learned and that somehow I would find my way, guided by a sense of profound trust in life and the truth of who I am and what I believe in.”

Amber Chand had by then founded a new business, The Amber Chand Collection, and reflected on her experiences with Eziba and her new endeavour: “I am grateful to Eziba for teaching me important lessons and in illuminating for me that one can indeed create successful businesses that are spiritually inspired – only when this becomes one’s singular mission and clear intent. I have no doubt that armed with patience, trust, focused clear effort and humility, the ‘Amber Chand Collection’ will grow successfully.”

Like Amber Chand, John Behner, whom you will now meet, also practices his leadership as an expatriate in a foreign culture. He too faced great crises, both in the form of a devastating earthquake and a civil war; his faith in God enabled him to transform such experiences into personal and organizational spiritual growth.

Just Love and Serve

John Behner, for 20 years, was the Country Manager in El Salvador of the huge USA-based multinational food-company Nabisco, which started as a major producer of cookies and snacks, but over the years expanded into many types of food products. Although born and raised in the USA, he has for the major part of his life lived in the Central American country of El Salvador where his wife Rose was born.

Spirituality has been the focal point of his leadership. “Spirituality” he told us “is trying to see God in everyone and trying to interact with everyone on a very loving basis - being humble and trying to help.” What is most important to John Behner is “to realize my oneness with God. I see spirituality as having a personal relationship with God. What is my goal? It is to become one with God; in my personal life as well as at the workplace.”

Shortly before starting to work for Nabisco, John R. Behner went to India, where he met Sathya Sai Baba, who became his spiritual teacher. A strong work ethic from his youth now became part of a spiritual quest. “Realizing God by serving others – and trying to see God in everyone” had become the guiding light on his search for self-realization.

“Spirituality to me is the application of the human values - truth, right conduct, peace, love and non-violence - in your way of doing things. But it’s also more than that. It’s trying to see God in everyone and trying to interact with everyone on a very loving basis, seeing everything as being perfect, and not pointing your finger at anyone or anything. Each of the human values that you are trying to live and put into practice comes out in reflections of what you are doing. Being spiritual is being humble and trying to help. We had a beach house that used to be part of our ‘God’ before we knew our spiritual teacher, Sathya Sai Baba. The beaches in El Salvador are very beautiful, and every weekend we were at the beach with the kids at the swimming pool. Almost immediately after coming to know Sai Baba, we sold the beach house, because we realised that weekends were the only times we had when we could do service. So we got rid of it and tried to devote our time to doing service activities.

“The purpose of business is to make other people happy - serving your customers and making sure that your customers are happy is the reason for your business and the reason for your being there. But not only your customers, your employees too should be happy. There should be a lot of employee enthusiasm and satisfaction, and this should be made part of this energy of trying to do the best they possibly can. I tried to instil in the employees the idea of serving, and that the reason for them to be there was to serve our clients and to do the best possible job. For example, if they were in manufacturing, they were told to look at the quality of the products as if they themselves were going to eat them.

“After I met Sathya Sai Baba, I started looking more closely at the products we were dealing with. Nabisco had a big plant in Ecuador where all the subsidiary companies like ours would buy the raw gelatine for their factories. The gelatine was made out of the skins of animals. I started experimenting with a vegetarian gelatine from a company called Kelko, and found out that if we used this instead of the animal gelatine, it would not form mould in the refrigerator after two or three days. To me, that was enough reason to stop

buying gelatine from our company's plant, and instead buy it from Kelko." Citing another revealing incident, he says,

"In 1986, there was a big earthquake in San Salvador, so we got a little experience in dealing with a crisis. One of the first things we saw was that all the supermarkets, which were our biggest clients, were affected; all their merchandize was all over the floor. They had a tremendous job of trying to clean what was saveable and to throw out what was broken and maybe take some kind of inventory of it. We also saw that our production lines were useless, because if the supermarkets could not put our products on their shelves, what good was it to produce it? So we shut down our production lines and sent the salesmen to all the major supermarkets. We offered them a team of our production people to help them clean up. We did this very successfully, and we were the only company that did it. All the supermarkets were happy to get this kind of service, which didn't cost them anything. It only took about a week of very concentrated effort. It got them on their feet faster, so we could start selling faster.

"We took stock of our employees, and we had nine employees who had lost their homes. Since we had shut down the production, our maintenance department wasn't doing anything. So we asked these guys to go and rebuild the homes of these nine employees. Temporary structures were put up in the nine homes, and the employees were very grateful. El Salvador gets earthquakes periodically. In 1994 when we had another earthquake, we were all prepared, because we had already gone through the big one in 1986.

"At a certain time, we decided to do some combined publicity for the company and Human Values-training. We went to local high schools and offered them an opportunity for the students to come to the plant. We had an auditorium, and I had each of my managers talk about one of the five human values: truth, right conduct, peace, love and non-violence, and how it affected his area.

"The Controller would talk about truth, how truth is important in doing the bookkeeping, the accounting, paying the taxes, etc. The Sales Manager would talk about right conduct, how you have to treat the customers correctly. The Plant Manager talked about love, because he had to keep everybody in harmony, so the production would be good. The Quality Control Manager would talk about peace, that if you do your work right, you will be tranquil, because you'll know that the quality of all the products is fine. The Maintenance Manager would talk about non-violence, that if you weren't polluting and contaminating, then you would have non-violence.

"The amazing thing was that the students would come in batches of a hundred, filling the auditorium. The managers were the ones who benefited the most, because they had to learn about these values to talk about them. Then they started seeing how the values worked in their job. The students would also understand the values in relation to a work ethic. As a result, some of the young people would apply to work with us, because they liked what

they saw.” It was not only the young people who liked what they saw; under the many years of John Behner’s spiritual-based leadership, Nabisco in El Salvador was a highly successful and innovative company with dedicated workers and customers.

While the spiritual-based leaders you have met so far have had long careers, and were at least in their 50’s at the time they were interviewed, the next person you will meet was only in his 30’s. He tells how spirituality challenges him and makes him grow as he works on the cutting edge of ICT (information/communications technology).

Going Beyond Fear

Parantha Narendran was Director of Strategy at Eurotel Telecom in Prague in the Czech Republic, and 34 years old when we met him. Eurotel is the highly profitable and largest mobile telephone operator in the Czech Republic. In spite of his young age, Parantha Narendran had already considerable international experience; he was born and raised in Sri Lanka, educated in Holland and the UK, received spiritual inspiration in India, and worked in several parts of Europe.

Prior to his top leadership position in the Czech Republic, due to his high ethical principles he had left a hi-tech consulting company and then co-founded Boon Consulting in London. There he had raised \$40 million for a start-up company to be based on his own patented technology for improving the performance of the Internet when the ‘IT bubble’ was punctured and the market crashed in the beginning of this century. This brought an abrupt end to his plans of collecting the final \$20 million that was necessary to establish the start-up and led him, after a period as consultant in the UK, to accept his top management position in Eurotel in early 2002.

“The first time I went to India I visited an ashram and met the spiritual teacher Sathya Sai Baba. For the entire time I spent at the ashram, it was as if I could see the whole inter-connectedness of life, and I was aware of everything as I moved through my daily routine. It was effortless. I was aware of people’s thoughts and ideas. I was aware of everything going on in the background. I had no stress or anxiety. I just had awareness and contentment. I was changed quite a lot by that encounter by the time I came back to London.

“I think the world needs spiritual-based leaders. I don’t openly talk with people about my spirituality, but I think they respect me as someone who is ethical, someone they can trust, and someone who works hard in a selfless way. I don’t have to talk about it. I just live it and people appreciate it, partly because in companies there are always political camps and I am seen as a neutral. Often when I talk, I do not say that this is the right thing to do. I will say, ‘It is in Eurotel’s best interest if we do this or do that.’ I think this helps me, and people respect this.”

Parantha Narendran shared how being a leader helps him to grow spiritually: "I used to meditate as a child of about 10 or 11 and continued to do this until I was 16. After that I studied a lot of books dealing with spiritual matters. Recently I have felt that I don't really need to do all of that; I just need to be open to myself. I've learned a lot about my spirituality and myself in the commercial world by having to make hard decisions. In these everyday challenges that I come across, I find that I grow and learn much more than if I were to read about spirituality or meditate.

"If I think of how spirituality affects me at work, it would be that spirituality challenges me and makes me grow. For me, spirituality is how you live your life. When you view your life as spiritual, you do start to make certain choices. For example, I choose to be a vegetarian because I respect life. I am aware of violence when it appears in my thoughts, words, and deeds and I try to control that. There are certain positive values that I have accepted, and I try to be aware of all of those values in everything that I do.

"I've learned a lot about my spirituality and myself in the commercial world by having to make hard decisions. I feel I have been forced to become a leader, something I had always wanted to avoid in my life. In these everyday challenges that I come across, I find that I grow and learn much more than if I were to read about spirituality or meditate."

Parantha Narendran not only reflected on responsibilities and success at work. He told us "I would say that success in my life would be learning to conquer my fears," adding that what he seeks is "awareness and contentment."

"When I do not have an active ego, I am able to help get things done far more effectively. Essentially, it is like a game, and I am actually benefiting the most from the whole exercise. If my ego is active, then I tend to think, 'I can't do this and I can't do that' - a bit like when I was trying to raise money and didn't have faith in myself. In that case I was forced into a position where I had to do what I thought I couldn't do. I had to make something happen for the benefit of everybody. I had no time to step back and say, 'I can't do this' because my ego was afraid of failure. I just had to get it done. And I've done this and realized that I was a lot more capable than I gave myself credit for.

"I want others to learn the same thing. So I try to pass these lessons about ego and fear on to others when I speak to them. And I do this in a straightforward, down to earth manner. I look to see why they are motivated to achieve the goals they are speaking about and what inhibits them in achieving their goals - it makes them think more about their life.

"Now that I am in this company as a leader and not as a consultant, a principle I have, is to try to help the people I work with to achieve their best potential. This is an area where I think that spirituality and the objectives of an organization happily coincide. I think that when a leader believes in

empowering individuals, he has the best interests of the company at heart, and can use the empowerment as a vehicle to this end. Having the individual realize his potentials along with the spiritual aspects, and having the organization develop itself at the same time, are my primary and secondary goals.”

Today Parantha Narendran has left Eurotel; he is involved in private equity investments in a number of European markets as well as an investor and shareholder in several new mobile operators in the central European market. Although he now works all over Europe in the telecom sector, he still maintains his base in Prague.

The next spiritual-based leader you will meet demonstrates that even leaders in the world of finance, where the typical mantra is that ‘the business of business is business’, can find strength and deeper meaning in life and work by leading from a spiritual basis. Rajan Govindan relates how visionary leaders “can integrate their analytical mind with their heart where the spirit resides ... the spiritual heart that enables us to make decisions that we will never be sorry about.”

Doing Best and Leaving the Rest...to Him

Rajan Govindan, a former Senior Managing Director, Bankers Trust, USA, was 56 years old when he was interviewed for the research project. After a university education in India, the land of his birth, he followed his postgraduate studies in New York. Rajan stayed in the USA and has worked and lived there ever since, although he still has strong ties to India. He has a very clear view of his spiritual view of life and continually referred to the concept of being a good human being:

“To me, spirituality in the workplace means two things: One is you have to be ‘correct and righteous.’ I hesitate to use the word ‘righteous’ because it has many connotations, but you have to be very correct in how you conduct yourself at work. I think this is one of the most important things and it can apply to everyone. The second is more personal to me and that is God has given me the work to do and I must leave the results up to God. It has taken me 35 years to really understand this. Work is an activity that has been given to me to do by God and I must do it well.

“Spirituality to me is also that people should behave as human beings; this is actually what I mean when I say ‘correct and righteous,’ or ‘correct behaviour.’ To me this means that you must be honest, fair and objective. My personal goal is to become more human, not to be an animal as my spiritual teacher, Sathya Sai Baba, says. To me being a human being means to act with right conduct, to act with moral character in everything that I do. Being here in the USA for 36 years, it has taken all of this time to continuously focus on ‘How do I become a better human being?’

“All of my spiritual exercises are about how I spent my day. I think that when it comes to determining how well a job you have done, you must ask yourself, ‘Did I do the best I could?’ The only person, who really knows whether I did a good job or not is me. I don’t have the ability or desire to do all of the things that other more spiritually evolved people do. My path is to focus on acting from love each day, each moment, and not reacting. When I pray in the morning and at night, I do not ask for things for myself or my family. Instead, I ask to be able to think of love towards all. I try to think about the times that I have not spoken with love or when I got upset, so that I can learn from them. If I know I have something tough I am going to face that day, I pray that I will not lose control. Then in the evening, I look at what happened and see if I lost control or not and most importantly thank God for a wonderful day and a great life.”

When asked about the purpose of business, Rajan Govindan replied: “The purpose of business is to make money through proper values. There is so much corruption today in business, and all of it represents an absence of values and an absence of character. Spirituality is clearly needed in business today. I think it is the business leaders’ purpose to ensure that the employees do things well for the company; it is their job to develop these values and character in people. You need to lead them so that they behave properly toward their customers and co-workers and so that the company is a wholesome place. When a company environment is wholesome it will be quite productive.

“I sometimes feel that there is an inherent conflict between spirituality and being an investor – most investors want maximum return on their investments as quickly as possible while spirituality aims at the greater good for all. But without investors there are no opportunities for anyone!

“Decision making that can be made using black and white analytical facts, mostly having to do with economic impact, is what our minds do best. But the best visionary leaders have been those who can integrate their analytical mind with their heart where the spirit resides – the spirit that always seeks the greater good for society and not personal gain; the spirit that is our moral compass and never lets us stray too far. It is the spiritual heart that enables us to make decisions that we will never be sorry about; it is the compassionate heart that makes our priorities right.”

As of today Rajan Govindan is Chief Operating Officer at another major American financial institution, Bear Stearns Asset Management in New York. “As I have matured”, he said, “I have started to realize that it is not management that decides my destiny, but rather God. Unfortunately it is only when you get older that you see that everybody gets their just rewards, and the ones with principles and integrity are usually the happiest and most content, if not the richest.

“After taking the COO position of Bear Stearns, I have realized that the only reason I am in this job is because God wanted me to be here, and now I am not worried or stressed out. I work hard and do my best, but now for the first time in my life, I am not worried about the results.”

Like Rajan Govindan, V.V. Ranganathan, the next spiritual-based leader you will meet, has a long experience in a field that focuses primarily on finances. He tells about how, as the auditor of large multinational corporations, he has been “confronted on almost a daily basis with situations where I have to pass transactions through my internal ‘ethics’ system” – a system that is “driven by consciousness ... a consciousness that has its own existence. It comes into the mind; it is not a product of the mind or societal influences.”

Ethics and Selfless Service

V. V. Ranganathan was 53 years old and Senior Partner in the India branch of Ernst & Young at the time of the interview. At that time he was handling very few clients, most of whom were international and multi-national companies. He was also a member of the executive team that helped manage the Ernst & Young in New Delhi as well as the national risk management partner for the firm, whose services include accounting and auditing, tax reporting, business risk services, etc.

“Yes,” he said, “this is quite a handful, but I have learned, over a period of time, not to get panicky. I have a firm belief that God Almighty will take care of things and that things will happen with or without me. I feel that my spiritual purpose is to be a person who performs selfless actions. Yes, God has given me the equipment to pursue my desires, but I must do so in such a manner that I remember the principles of *karma* (cause and effect) and that my decisions are not fuelled by selfishness or egoism. What I mean is that my effort and involvement in doing something is not determined or driven by what I get in return. And I know from my own experience that this works.

“I heard someone telling me this a long, long time ago: The first thing to realize is: There is God, God is on earth, God is in you, and God is in everyone.’ If you are able to work in that context, it completely changes the way you look at people and then you start sharing that invisible bond.

“If you are able to run any enterprise without selfish motives and with selfless service then I believe that success will fall into place. When the motive of running an operation is selfless service that does not mean you are running a charitable institution. It does not mean you give things away free and people come and go. It also does not mean that you cannot make profits. At an organizational level, success must be measured by the wealth that is created for all people.

“Yes, we must make a profit; but most importantly, we must ask, ‘How did we make this profit?’

“As an auditor of large multi-national companies, I have been confronted on almost a daily basis with situations where I have to pass transactions through my internal ‘ethics’ system and see if they pass my litmus test: the *Lakshman Rekha* (the line that Lakshmana drew in the epic Ramayana delineating the limits within which Mother Sita would be safe). This is the imaginary boundary line that every individual has that he will not cross.

“I think the current boundary line that has been dictated by ethics is driven largely by human knowledge, meaning that somebody tells you this is not right or that is not right. This is something you usually get from your childhood. When I refer to the *Lakshman Rekha*, I am talking about the invisible line that is within everyone’s system that is driven by consciousness. This is a consciousness that has its own existence. It comes into the mind; it is not a product of the mind or societal influences. It is something that can stand on its own. It has an independent standing of its own and is capable of influencing you. It is like a direct knowing, rather than a belief system.

“Some people are afraid to contaminate their careers with ideas that do not have a scientific basis. So it is important to articulate spirituality very carefully in the business world. I am very careful and particular that I do not breach the trust I have developed with an individual when I relate to him at the spiritual level. You see a reflection of yourself in that other person and connect with him with utmost trust and truth. So never ever use this trust and confidence you have gained in that other person in the same way you use your ability or skill for achieving your ends or someone else’s.

“I feel that my spiritual purpose is to be a *karma yogi*, a person who performs selfless actions. Yes, God has given me the equipment to pursue my desires, but I must do so in such a manner that I remember the principles of karma and that my decisions are not fuelled by selfishness or egoism. In my mind, being a yogi means to immerse myself in the work that I have been entrusted to do and perform it with devotion, without being driven by expectations and calculations of something in return. What I mean is that my effort and involvement in doing something is not determined or driven by what I get in return. And I know from my own experience that this works. I believe that anyone who is moving towards this path of being a karma yogi will get more than they deserve.

“I have always sought the help of my spiritual gurus... This is a continuous effort and the harder I try, the more juice I get. Spiritual gurus provide the focus and anchor your faith. It is like climbing a mountain with no summit or destination. It is a long journey and you have to struggle and enjoy every moment of that trek.”

V.V. Ranganathan recently stepped down as a Senior Partner of Ernst & Young India to give more time to matters that are closer to his heart. These include founding a non-profit organisation that helps build capacities and accreditation to non-profits that run projects in rural education, health and employment, and chairing a product-incubation company, designed to help

budding entrepreneurs to develop and grow their ideas into products or solutions.

Alvaro Cruz, our next spiritual-based leader, comes from Colombia in South America, a country that for many years has been a scene for bitter internal conflict and great suffering by the population. Like the Honourable President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Alvaro Cruz told us of the great impact of a search for righteousness of the heart and how this can lead to peace in the world – and how this wisdom, so often taught by Swami, has paved the way for him to serve his country.

Spirituality as a Permanent Way of Life

Alvaro Cruz straddles two worlds, business and politics. He is the owner and the CEO of a large construction company, I.C.M. Ingenieros Ltda. in Colombia, South America, and he has been the Governor of Cundinamarca, the major state in Colombia, shifting his time and energy between these two activities.

He told us that in both of these leadership positions, as well as in his private life, his spirituality is continually guiding him. “Spirituality is a permanent attention to the inner self: To be able to perfect one’s behaviour and attitudes, both inwardly and externally with others, basing one’s conduct on fundamental human values such as love, truth, peace, right conduct and non-violence. Being spiritual also means being able to listen to one’s intuition. Spirituality is something you must persist in every day, every hour. Together with my wife, I have worked on being able to apply and reflect on this every day.

“Spirituality is a permanent way of life where you are working towards attaining two main principles or goals; these goals are love and happiness. At work, if you have a spiritual outlook, you will have a wider outlook, you will be more patient and you will have greater respect for and a better understanding of the people you work with. Spirituality is very applicable to my work as a business leader in a construction company, as I have seen how much love, happiness, and smooth working spirituality brings to the recipients.

“Sometimes I have given up major contracts or possibilities of business in order to be happy and peaceful. There have been a number of occasions where the government invited bids for different contracts. I studied the situations and found that there would be a lot of potential difficulties connected with it. It might be difficulties in getting the right supplies or doing the work in the right way in a certain area of the city or state, or there might be problems arising from employees, and so I wouldn’t go for it. Even though there might have been a lot of money involved, I would avoid giving bids in such situations. It would only have given me a lot of trouble; it wouldn’t have made me happy. “

Sharing how Sathya Sai Baba has impacted his life and work, Alvaro Cruz explained, "I will tell about an event, which happened when I was about to enter into the competition for governorship, when I was running against very traditional and very strong political forces: I was visiting Whitefield in South India. One day the people there were singing a devotional song speaking of righteousness, truth, harmony, family, order, and peace. At that moment, when I received the essence of this, I adopted it to be my slogan for my election campaign. I applied it and talked about it in all my programmes and presentations thereafter. In no political campaign before had any politician ever come up with a spiritual slogan describing a moral situation. Adopting this poem really made me win. I always began my campaigns with these words, and I swept the voters":

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the family.

If there is harmony in the family, there will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

"I took this message to 69 municipalities out of the 116 there are in the State. In many of these municipalities one of the main ideas in my campaign was a mural painted by children where these words would be inscribed."

Alvaro Cruz shared with us that he tries to select individuals who are ethical, righteous, honest and loyal to work for him, "I tell them this when I hire people. The world is the sum total of every part. Just as at work, if you make a good team, it is a very positive beginning. If you have individuals who are not working as a team, you cannot achieve anything. We can achieve meaningful betterment, in Colombia, in my state, and in my company, if we daily perform positive actions, framed in spiritual principles. This applies as well to your family and your colleagues at work, as well as anyone you are associated with, or any person you interact with during the day.

"Women have a pre-eminent key role to play in participation in society. As the Governor, I had a high percentage of women working at all levels. The main posts were given to women: they were heads of Education, Planning, Finance, Press and Communication. In my private company the main general administrator is a woman.

"I would advise aspiring spiritual-based leaders not to offend others, not to judge them, and to try to understand that if another person takes a decision, he is acting in good faith, even though he might have been mistaken. I would also advise them to be ethical and righteous in their actions and to be able to forgive and forget. Above everything, I would stress non-attachment to the material results and rewards of one's deeds and the practice of love; love for oneself and love for others."

One may think it highly unlikely that a person who has spent much of his life buying and selling gold could be deeply spiritual. But the next leader you will meet, James Sinclair, is just such a person. He tells how to protect righteousness he became a warrior in a battle of ethics, and how important it is to find equanimity via detachment: "The most successful person is the person with the least desires. The successful individual is the contented individual. So success could be as much about planning a garden as it is about running a major corporation."

The Power of Perseverance with Principles

James Sinclair is the Chairman of Tan Range Exploration, Ltd., USA/Tanzania. He is known internationally for calling the top of the gold market in 1980. Being a trader came naturally to him, he told us. "My father was a man of extraordinary discipline and extraordinary human capacity, and was one of the greatest traders ever on Wall Street. As a result, I already knew what I wanted to be when I was six or seven years old."

"Even as a kid I always wanted to know God, and I prayed, 'I don't know where you are or who you are, I just know you are. So you've got to find me 'cause I don't know how to find you'. My mother was a strong Catholic, but I wasn't too much into church. However, I did know that there was something out there making it all happen," he confided.

"My spiritual practice has matured since I've known my spiritual teacher, Sathya Sai Baba. For me spirituality is a constant event within the human experience. It is included in our thoughts and activities that take place in our day-to-day lives. Creativity can materialise through any individual anywhere at anytime. But the means of that is what Sathya Sai Baba has taught and it is very simple: it is to "watch" and be happy. Whenever Swami teaches, he will always define a word in the meaning that he intends to communicate, so it may not necessarily be in the dictionary. "Watch" is to watch your words, actions, thoughts, character and heart. 'Happy' he defines as unity with Divinity. Be brave, don't lie, do your job, quiet your mind and at the end of the day fold the cards. Wake up the next morning, see what's dealt and play it the best you can, don't worry about it. See the job, do the job and stay out of the misery. If there's anything that attracts God, it's having courage and having courage is doing what falls in your lap and doing it right, no matter what it is."

"At one time, when looking deeper into the subject, I found one thing in common among the more successful people: introspection. What is introspection? It is quietude, a period of time for reflection. This quiet time is a period of retreat because it is sort of a ceremony. It is a period of time where I reflect upon the teachings of spiritual masters. I consider it to be a critical part of anyone's life to seek this quietude. So in my organisation, everyday we start here with meditation, right in this office. Previously, I had an office with hundreds of people and even then we started exactly the same way. I tell them, 'Take your time and be quiet; begin all activity in silence. Before or after lunch, however you do it, be silent. And before you leave the office at the end of the day, be silent.'

“When I was the Chairman of the Board of a public company in the late 80’s/early 90’s, their stock price grew from US 19 cents to US \$56 and was then bought by a major corporation. How did we do this? We raised our corporate profile by our personal behaviour. I went to Tanzania, Africa and lived with the people and we acted as responsible citizens, undertaking the needs of an area of a developing country that was within the scope of our economic impact and environment. We saw to the needs of the people and their health; we built a hospital. My influence with this company was from 1989-1995.

“But then after this level of success, the management began to act in extremely unethical ways. They were doing some very wrong things like stealing money from the stockholders for themselves and hurting people. I first went to my management and said, ‘Can I convince you not to act in this way?’ ‘No.’ ‘Can I plead with you not to act in this way?’ ‘No.’ ‘Can I pay you not to act in this way?’ ‘No.’ So I fired the management. The problem with this was, the management was also on the board, so they turned around and fired me. Then I called a special meeting of the shareholders to determine what to do with all of this, and that is called a proxy.

“In all of this, I became a warrior and fought against them. I asked them to cease and desist and change their policies and asked them to liquidate their major asset, which was a piece of land that they were going to build a mine on to extract gold. When they refused I executed the public proxy against them, which cost me personally US \$5 million. Even though this was a modest company, the legal battle reached the level as if it were between two of the largest corporations in America.

“The management immediately began to throw dirt at me, but through all of it, I never deviated from the high road. The way I handled this publicly was to say that they weren’t capable of building a mine and therefore the asset should be sold. I knew if you put US \$300 million in these guys’ hands, it would have been a disaster. So that’s why I executed a proxy to force the sale of the company.

“Do you know what hell is like? Hell is having 21 lawyers working for you. I put every cent I had in the world into it. No one paid me anything to do this. I did this because following God through my spiritual teacher and my sense of ethics had made me a warrior.

“I was drinking 16 double espressos every day just to stay awake with all of the tension and fatigue, and eventually I went blind in one eye. They attempted to ruin my reputation. They sued my wife, they had detectives trailing my children, they said I was part of the mafia. They took my money on three different occasions using legal manoeuvres, but even after all of that I ended up beating them.

“Initially I lost the proxy because they paid one of the stockholders to get his votes, but even then I still got 47.3% of the total vote. But that didn’t stop me.

They had so many lawsuits that they couldn't get financing to build the mine. What won in the end was nature. Nature was on my side. This property was so valuable that a company came in and bought it.

"Even during this extreme tension, I took the time to be quiet. I wouldn't miss that time for anything in the world. When I couldn't sleep at night, I went to my meditation room. Even if you can't meditate, you can pray. Prayer for me is not 'God help me.' Prayer for me is 'Give me courage, give me strength.'"

James Sinclair told us that life has taught him that "The business of business and the business of life are one. The reason for living and working is to act and the reason to act is to seek excellence in everything that you do. If you are going to run a business, then run it well. The most successful person is the person with the least desires. The successful individual is the contented individual. So success could be as much about planning a garden as it is about running a major corporation."

Just like James Sinclair, the next conscientious leader you will meet, Dr. Ananth Raman, focused strongly in his interview on the concepts of values and ethics: "Values such as justice, truth, and respect for others, equanimity, ability to take decisions, honesty and integrity are the core values that became very strong for me when I went into business. These are more on the ethical side, rather than on the spiritual side. Somewhere along the line however, these two kinds of values began to link. Now I think of ethical values as nothing but a reflection of my spiritual values."

Business Ethics - Spiritual Values in Action

Ananth Raman was the Chairman of Graphtex, Inc., USA when he was interviewed for the research project. He is of Indian origin and a true product of his multi-cultural background, moving with equal ease in the globalized world of big business and the villages in his native India. Both of these environments have exerted a strong influence on his spiritual development. As Dr. Raman related, "I was taught by my mother that ethical values were the way to maintain order in society, so I naturally used them in my working experience over the last 30 years. The ethical guidelines that my corporation set up guided me in the right direction. Once I started thinking along the lines of spirituality, these kinds of ethical policies became a part of me. I discovered deeper values within each one of them. I realized that it is not just a good business practice to be ethical. We all have a duty, a role to perform, that has been given to us by God.

"For me, spirituality is more of a matter of self-inquiry. I think that different people must take different routes. Some people do a lot of service to foster their spiritual growth. I prefer the path of knowledge, to learn more and to read more, has always been my path. Being a devotee of Sathya Sai Baba is largely responsible for my thinking in this way. In all activities, in all actions, whatever happens – whether I am successful or not – I can sit back and realise God's guiding hand through all of it. Even when I feel He is pushing

me into despair or into problems, I can see He is guiding me in all of it. I think that all of my self-inquiry has come about because of this spiritual teacher, Sai Baba. I can very easily see this.

“My spiritual development has helped me to institutionalize the principles of having a purpose, adding value, and setting an example. As a business leader I must set an example which others can follow. There is no point in me trying to get my organization to be truthful, unless I am truthful.

“There was a time when we were introducing ISO 9000, which was a system of quality control measures for our company. One of our companies was a job shop where we do specialty items for our customers. Since these products are made for specific applications it is extremely difficult to standardize things and is a very complicated process. This made it a difficult environment to introduce these types of quality measures, since they involve a lot of rigid procedures.

“The expert said, ‘This is all very simple. All you need to do is write down each of the procedures that you are already doing. You don’t have to make any improvement; you don’t have to say anything else except exactly the way you are doing it. This has nothing to do with right or wrong; you simply say what you are doing and do what you say.’ Even after he said all of this, my staff was still completely worried.

“One evening I was thinking about this while attending a study circle with my spiritual group. I saw that all of this was simply talking about unity of thought, word, and action. So, I called in my employees and told them, ‘This is nothing but the concept of having what you feel, what you write and how you act to be the same. This is all that ISO 9000 is about.’

“So we went all over the company and said, ‘The Company’s objective with ISO 9000 is to have unity of thought, word and action.’ If I had used the word spiritual to describe the basis of this concept, I would have probably gotten some negative reaction. To me it was truth and honesty. When I explained what unity of word, thought and action meant, they understood the concept very easily.

“They started raising all kinds of questions throughout the departments; I was amazed at the chain reaction that began. So I told them, ‘Let’s have a monthly meeting where we can discuss these problems where you find it difficult to be totally truthful.’ I tried to help them see the difference between telling a customer, ‘no, it won’t go tomorrow, we are having difficulties,’ which is the truth, versus ‘it will go the day after tomorrow,’ which is a lie. In this way they could still buy some time without promising something which was not going to happen. We continue to have these monthly meetings where we examine these difficult situations and look to see how we can solve them with a unity of thought, word and action.

“In a business sense, I like to talk about spirituality as ethical values. When I was in one of the West African countries, the country was full of corruption, and you couldn’t do anything without bribing someone. We were losing contracts and losing business. But the policy in my corporation was that you could not give bribes. At first, I wondered how I was going to get along without giving bribes. Ultimately, I chose to stay with the ethical values that the company ascribed to. Initially, I followed these ethical values because this was what I was taught. When I began thinking more spiritually, it gave me the reasons for why to behave this way.

“Values such as justice, truth, and respect for others, equanimity, ability to take decisions, honesty and integrity are the core values that became very strong for me when I went into business. These are more on the ethical side, rather than on the spiritual side. Somewhere along the line however, these two kinds of values began to link. Now I think of ethical values as nothing but a reflection of my spiritual values. For instance, in business you must respect yourself, your feelings, your customers, your employees. But then when you go deeper into spirituality, your self-respect begins to include respecting the inner Self. Then you try to understand: “What is meant by Self?” Self means ‘I’, it means awareness.”

Dr. Raman is now semi-retired and spends much of his time in his native India, where he has recently built a home in Bangalore, and where he is Honorary Professor at the Sri Sathya Sai University.

With Spirituality, Business Can Flourish!

Each of the spiritual-based business leaders you have met here is a product of their own unique experiences, and every one has developed a distinct spiritual perspective on life and, in particular, on leadership. Each has their own unique way of expressing this spirituality in words and in deeds. And every leader has developed their own way of leading from their spiritual basis.

When presenting our research results to audiences of MBA students and business leaders, however, we have at times met scepticism about leading from a spiritual basis. In particular, we have met two types of fears and doubts:

The first is the fear that one cannot be both spiritual and a successful leader. A reply to this fear is that all the executives that were interviewed for the research project have achieved their leadership positions while being spiritual. This in itself provides strong evidence that spirituality and obtaining a leadership position do not have to be mutually exclusive. Note that in saying this we are not implying that spirituality is the royal road to the top of the corporate pyramid - that the path is smooth and that personal success is ensured if you are spiritual. Some of the executives we and our two research partners have interviewed met great challenges. For example, one had to put his wealth at risk in order to stop harm, another had to deal with a painful downsizing, and the third had to face the challenges owing to business failure.

Just as jogging and eating organic food do not provide a guarantee of a long and healthy physical life, neither is a spiritual perspective on leadership a guarantee of a long-lived and healthy organization or a long-lived and successful career. But the stories presented here clearly demonstrate that it is possible to draw upon both rationality and spirituality in successfully leading a business and oneself.

The second source of scepticism we have met is the belief that in order to be spiritual one must renounce the world and its material wealth. If this were so, it would clearly be impossible to be a spiritual-based leader. This fear can be dispelled by the fact that some of the executives we have interviewed lead rather affluent lives, to put it mildly. Others live in modest dwellings with a simple lifestyle, all according to their values and aspirations. However, none of them indicated that wealth is an impediment to living a spiritual life or leading from a spiritual basis. In fact, many of the leaders we interviewed told how they had used their wealth to initiate humanitarian service projects – some even on a grand scale.

So the bottom line is faith - the strong conviction and belief that business can be successfully developed from a spiritual basis; and that you can be a successful leader if you practice your leadership from your heart, mind and soul... where success transcends traditional economic rationality and includes loving and serving all. This is what was so convincingly demonstrated by each of the ten spiritual-based business leaders you met above, all of whom were inspired by the teachings of Baba.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – 07

By Prof. G.VENKATARAMAN

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. About six months have passed since this series was started, and while many readers have commented appreciatively, there are also others who are wondering where exactly am I taking the readers. Perhaps I should begin the present instalment of the series with a few remarks related to this question.

The Four C's

You see, in today's world which is so heavily interconnected and where man is able, through science and technology, to exert influence all across the globe and indeed into the biosphere, we have to enquire deeply into Nature, its existence, and man's role in all this. To put it differently, more than ever before, it has become necessary for humans to reflect on what I would call the Four C's. They are:

- The Cosmic origin of man.
- Man's Cosmic connections.
- Man's Cosmic responsibilities, and
- Man's Cosmic Destiny.

Some of you who have followed my recent series of Musings talks over Radio Sai dealing with the *Gita* and Awareness would remember that I discussed this theme extensively over there. That said, many might still wonder: "What have these four C's got to do with the so-called 'search for infinity'?" Well, the answer is simple. In a few simple words, the 'search for infinity' is all about the search for God. That is where the four C's enter the picture, and what I am describing now is all a part of what we have to know about Nature. To put it differently, the present search/enquiry is a part of knowing something about our Universe, including the way it came into being – after all, we are a part of the Universe, and we have come into being as a part of the long evolution that the Universe itself is going through.

The Search for Infinity Within

Notwithstanding all this, some might continue to wonder and say: "Listen, I still don't get it. You say we have to search for God. But are you not aware that God is here right now with all of us? How can you be so ignorant of a fact that is known even to Bal Vikas kids?" Good point, but then, if that is the case, why does not Swami simply say: "Listen, I am God and that is the end of the road for you"? Does He not give innumerable Discourses raising the question: "Who am I?" In other words, God comes in human form to remind man to stop being limited in his thinking and realise the following:

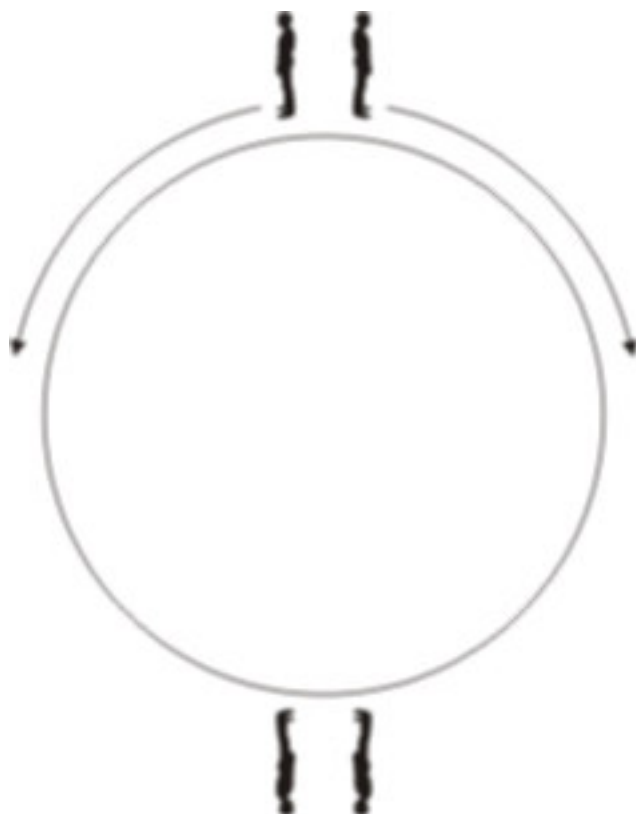
1. God is Eternal.
2. God is the Source of all that exists.
3. In Creation, God pervades everything, that is to say, He is Omnipresent.
4. To become one with God, ***man must broaden his vision, outlook and make his love pure as well as selfless.***

To put it differently, even the smallest entity in the Universe has infinity within it! Not only that; it is all a part of the drama of different beings serving each other. Remember what Swami says about Creation? He says: "I separated Myself from Myself so that I could love Myself!" If we take all these factors into consideration, then that makes the search so difficult, does it not? In a way maybe, but it also makes it so very fascinating. In short, there is an end for the road we are now traversing; might not quite seem that way right now, but don't worry, we will get there eventually. Meanwhile, I want you to appreciate that I am not exactly rambling but trying my very best to take you through the most fascinating tour you have ever undertaken. With that preamble, let me get back to business!

A Circular Issue

Last time, I said something about the four basic building blocks of inert matter and the four forces that mediate between them. I also pointed out that while today we talk of four distinct forces, when the Universe was born [through the Big Bang, of course], there was only **one** primordial fundamental force. However, most amazingly, within a fraction of a second, this one fundamental force became four, which, since then, have guided the further evolution of the Universe. In this instalment, I would like to begin by briefly referring to the two "directions" in which man has been journeying in his quest to understand the physical Universe, and then discovered that at the end of it all it is like going around a circle in two different directions!

FIGURE 1.



This figure symbolically illustrates the point that when two people go round the circle in seemingly opposite directions, they eventually meet! That exactly is what has been happening recently in the world of Physics.

Let me explain what I mean by exploring the Universe by going round the circle in two directions. The best way of doing this is by using what is called the powers-of-ten approach. I guess you are aware that the number $[1/10]$ can be written in different ways. In arithmetic, we often represent it as 0.1. In the same way, $[1/100]$ would be written 0.10 and so on. This is one way of doing it. A more economical way would be to write instead, 10^{-1} , 10^{-2} and so on. In this representation, a number such as $[1/1000000]$ can be simply written as 10^{-6} . When we get down to incredibly small fractions, this representation proves very convenient. Suppose you try to write 10^{-43} in the conventional way. Just try it, and then you would understand what I mean! Similarly, numbers like 100, 1000, 10000 etc., can simply written as 10^2 , 10^3 , 10^4 and so on. Keep all this in mind and get ready for a dizzying tour.

Let us start from some place on the surface of the earth, and go up. As we do so, we would start seeing more and more of the earth's surface, though of course, the objects would start appearing smaller and smaller. The point is that if on the earth we can look at only a few kilometres around us, when we go up, we can see many more square kilometres of the earth than from the ground level. I am sure you would understand what I mean, if you have gone up a tall mountain or even a hill and looked down.

The Unity of the Microcosm and Macrocosm

What has all this got to do with the search for infinity? Simply this: Man has been exploring the Universe in two different ways. One is by examining the Universe on **larger and larger scales of length**, which he does by looking at the sky and using more and more powerful telescopes. On the other hand, he has also been looking at matter **on smaller and smaller scales of length** by peering through more and more powerful microscopes. I must caution that where microscopes are concerned, we have of course the optical microscope and the electron microscope that provides even greater magnification. Beyond that, we do not use microscopes in the traditional sense. However, using the powerful tools of modern physics, man can and has explored matter on very small scales of length, going down at present to as low as 10^{-16} cm. The first kind of exploration is done by astronomers while the second kind of study and investigations are done by nuclear physicists and elementary particle physicists. While the astrophysicist explores the macrocosm, the particle physicist explores the microcosm. Figure 2 depicts this two-fold approach schematically. Table 1 conveys the same idea in more detail. Figures 3 and 4 which features movie stills from a popular science video presentation, convey the idea in a most understandable manner.

This figure illustrates schematically the interconnection between astrophysics and elementary particle physics. While the astronomer peers deep into space, the particle physicist looks deep into the atom. Through his investigations, the astronomer is able to look far back into time, which means he can get valuable clues relating to the early Universe. But the early Universe was small and that is precisely where the physics of matter at very small distances becomes very important. Thus it is that the astronomer/astrophysicist and the particle physicist have found new reasons to become very friendly!

TABLE 1

This table calls attention to the size of various objects in the Universe; physics deals with matter on all scales of length.

DISTANCE/SIZE [METRES]	ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF DISTANCE
10^{-18}	Quark?
	nucleus of an atom
10^{-15}	
10^{-12}	typical atom
10^{-9}	

10^{-6}	typical virus
10^{-3}	a grain of salt
1	height of a small boy
10^3	height of a TV tower
	height of Mt. Everest
10^6	radius of typical satellite orbits
	distance to the Moon
10^9	
10^{12}	distance to the Sun
10^{15}	radius of the orbit of Pluto
10^{18}	distance to the nearest galaxy
10^{24}	distance to a far-off galaxy
	?????

This figure presents some movie frames from the film *Cosmic Voyage* and it shows how the horizon becomes bigger and bigger as we go farther and farther away from the ground.

OK, all this is fine but what is the big deal? The big deal is this: Since the seventies of the twentieth century, it has become increasingly clear that the macro and the microcosm are intimately tied together; that is to say, physicists are discovering that the macrocosm is in the microcosm and vice versa! The tree is in the seed and at the same time, the tree contains thousands of seeds! But that precisely is what the sages of yore proclaimed and what the *Vedas* assert! I guess you are able to grasp [though perhaps only vaguely at present] that I am dragging you hither and thither in this amazing Universe merely by way of preparing you to journey **beyond the physical universe!**

Understanding Infinity

With that preamble, maybe I can get back to some more of popular physics. You would find at the end of it all, what an amazing Universe the Blessed Lord has created. This appreciation is very necessary for the next time we routinely say, “Oh Swami! You are the Creator,” and what not, we understand, at least in a rudimentary sense, what we are trying to say! Swami has a deceptively small form and acts very human, making us feel He is just one of us. In form and biological activity yes; but in terms of the awesome powers He commands, He is **beyond** description. Having said that, I must also point out that He has come in our midst with a deep purpose, and that purpose would be better understood, if we first get a feel for **infinity** – that really is the motivation for this series.

Revisiting the Big bang

Back to the physical Universe of which we all form a part, and let us now try to link it to what I have said thus far. You might recall that earlier I said that the Universe came into existence with an event called the Big Bang [see SFI – Part-2

]. In the beginning, the idea of a Big Bang was mere speculation but it gained some strength after the discovery of the so-called Cosmic Microwave background [see SFI – Part 5]. Soon many questions arose, the most important of which were: 1) What was it that “banged”, and 2) how long ago was the Big Bang? It is these and such other questions that brought the astrophysicists and the particle physicists together [in an earlier era, they hardly said ‘hello’ to each other!].

The idea of the Big Bang, in a rudimentary form that is, was born around 1950, and in the years that followed, the following facts emerged:

1. Galaxies formed sometime after the Big Bang, and they began to fly away from each other [see SFI – Part 2].
2. About 100, 000 years or so after the Big Bang [give or take a couple of hundred thousand years!], radiation began to fill the Universe. As the Universe expanded, this radiation filled more and more space; in the process, it also became more ‘dilute’; in quantitative terms, the temperature of the background radiation steadily decreased. At one time it was tens of thousands of degrees; currently, it is very cold and the temperature is just about 3 degrees above the absolute zero of temperature [which, by the way, equals minus, yes minus, 273 degrees Celsius! That is a hell of a lot colder than the Antarctic!].
3. The early Universe was a gaseous Cosmic soup of sorts, made up mainly by the light elements like hydrogen, helium and a bit of lithium may be, with hydrogen dominating all other elements.
4. Lumps of this Cosmic soup gave birth to stars which acted like Cosmic cauldrons; and in these cauldrons, the higher elements were cooked, one by one [see SFI – Parts 3 and 4].

All the above has been put together from patient observations and analysis made by thousands of physicists all over the world. In the process, people realised that the closer we go to the Big Bang, the more we would have to know about physics at small distances in order to be able to reconstruct the history correctly – that is what brought particle physicists, cosmologists and astrophysicists into the same team.

As a result of all this, the eminent particle physicist Stephen Weinberg [who by the way won the Nobel Prize], put together a picture of what he called the First Three Minutes of the Universe. In fact, he wrote a book entitled ***The First Three Minutes***, which became a runaway best seller and made more money for him than he earned as a professor, or got via the Nobel Prize!

Weinberg's book, sensational though it was, did not take the story to times smaller than 10^{-12} seconds, that is to say, Weinberg merely said: "Here is what happened between 10^{-12} s after the Big Bang and say 180 s after the Big Bang. To know what happened **before** 10^{-12} s, we must wait for particle physics to make further advances." All that was in the late seventies and early eighties; since then, enormous progress has been made, and that has led to breath-taking discoveries; which is what I now intend to give a glimpse of.

The Convergence of Science

As I indicated earlier, during the last thirty years or so, astrophysicists, cosmologists and elementary particle physicists have started actively working towards the same goal, and as a result, there is quite a deal of convergence.

FIGURE 5



This figure shows schematically how astrophysicists, cosmologists and elementary particle physicists are all marching towards the same goal. The important thing is that they are **not** moving forward independently but in a highly co-operative manner. This inter-disciplinary co-operation is one of the most satisfying aspects of modern physics.

So what we have we learnt from it all? Several things and I shall try to list a few of them later. But first, I should give you an idea of the strategy behind the new approach. To explain that, let me first present an imaginary conversation between the great Sherlock Holmes and his good friend Dr. Watson.

There has been an explosion, and Sherlock is summoned to the site by London police; of course, the famous detective takes his friend along with him. When the two reach the site, Sherlock first asks a few questions of the policemen gathered there in substantial numbers. He then whips out his pocket lens and starts going round the explosion site. Once in a while, he goes on his knees and intensely examines the ground. At other times, he picks up a piece of something, a torn bit of paper, a metal fragment and so on and peers at them through his pocket magnifying glass. All along, Sherlock is mumbling to himself. Watson is watching all this, but cannot follow what exactly his friend is trying to do or is saying to himself. After a while, the following conversation ensues:

Sherlock says to his friend, "Watson, do you know what happened?"

Watson replies, "How can I? I was not there!"

"That is true but still, one can figure out what happened!"

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I am; you know, Watson, I am seldom given to jokes."

"Right, but then how can you know because you too were not there!"

"Ah, my dear fellow, that is where observation, data collection, analysis, speculation, hypothesis testing etc., come into the picture. If we follow this iterative route, we can pretty well figure out what exactly happened."

I shall not go on with this imaginary conversation any further but shall make two key observations that would enable us to proceed further. First is that this is almost always what all detectives do – they did this for example in the recent London bombing. Secondly, and this is more pertinent to us, this is what scientists do while trying to figure out what exactly happened during and after the Big Bang. Let us take all this one by one.

First, the strategy for reconstruction. Let us start with observations. Astrophysicists make observations about the Universe using their telescopes. If you look at the Sun right now, you would be getting an image of the Sun as

it was eight minutes ago, for eight minutes is the time it takes for light to travel from the Sun to the Earth. If you look at say Neptune, your picture of the Neptune would be about a few hours old. But that is not bad. The point is that as telescopes get better and better, one is able to look farther and farther into space, which also means we are getting more and more information about things as they were a long time ago – billions of years in fact.

This is one side of the story. On the other side, physicists who are concerned with the Physics of fundamental particles, or the building blocks of matter if you prefer, are coming to grips with physics at extremely small distances. This is a very difficult and highly competitive subject by the way, where there is room only for the very smartest! Even so, an amazing amount of information has been gathered, all of which have deep implications for the history of the early Universe, in which, Cosmologists or people who study the Universe as a whole, especially its history and evolution, are very much interested. As a result of all these diverse and rapid developments, suddenly, the three tribes – the astrophysicists, the particle physicists and the cosmologists – have begun to actually collaborate with each other, instead of merely saying hello in the corridors as in earlier times.

Finding Common Ground

These days, their discussions, many a time conducted round a coffee table while consuming cup after cup of coffee, often goes like this:

Astrophysicist [Bob]: Listen guys, know what our team has found lately?

Cosmologist [Dick]: What is the earthshaking thing you fellows have discovered?

Bob: My dear chap, when you hear about it, you will not speak so dismissively!

Particle physicist [Tom]: Oh yeah? Then tell us about it.

Bob: We have been examining the spectra from galaxies that go really far, far back in time.

Tom: Like how long?

Bob: Like just two billion years after the birth of the Universe.

Tom: Two billion years? Listen, the real juicy part of the history of the Universe is all over in 10^{-12} seconds and you are talking of two billion years! Who wants to hear about that?

Bob: Hold on to your chair buddy, for when you hear what I am going to say, you are going to fall down!

Dick: Oh yeah? Try me!

Bob: Well, here it comes! Our studies show that the three fundamental constants of Physics that we all use all the time were not the quite the same in the past as we measure them to be today. To be explicit, their values were different in earlier times than what we now measure them to be!

Dick: Bob, you can't be serious.

Bob: No Dick, I **am** dead serious. Today, we all know that c the velocity of light is about 3×10^5 km per second. Two billion years after birth, it was substantially different.

Dick: My God! If this were true, then we have to recalculate the physics of the early Universe!

Bob: Well, Mr. Particle-physicist, I notice you are silent! What have you got to say?

Tom: Bob, if what you are saying is true, things could be even more different at very small times, and that could really change the whole ball game!

Dick: Of course Bob, you understand that what you have found is through **one** observation made by your group; it has to be confirmed by other observations by other independent teams.

Bob: Sure I understand that; I have been in this business long enough to know that. But what we must realise now is simply this: "What if this is true? In that case, where do we go from here?"

Dick: Bob, I tell you what. We need to do some serious thinking about this whole business of changing fundamental constants.

Tom: Absolutely, because physics in the early Universe could have been very different from what we presently imagine it to be, based on the idea that fundamental constants have the same value from the Big Bang all the way through evolution of the Universe. I agree with Dick about the need to do some serious thinking, and I suggest that next Thursday afternoon we have a small think-tank kind of session, bringing together a few sharp minds, from astrophysics, cosmology and particle physics.

Dick: I think it is a swell idea. I know some young cosmologists who are real sharp cookies. I think I can rope them in.

Bob: Well, let me see if I can get a few real smart astrophysicists I know to join us.

Tom: Good, I shall pitch in with some fellows from my crowd, and maybe we can have a big pile of sandwiches, cookies and of course lots of coffee to keep us going!

Dick: Sounds like a great idea, and I really look forward to this brain-storming session.

Well, that was no doubt a purely cooked up conversation but it **does** capture the current atmosphere when people of diverse interests come together to pool their expertise to deal with the greatest challenge in physics. Right now, we might not know very much about the early Universe but this much one can definitely say:

Infinity is somewhere in an infinite maze of infinite variety and infinite richness!

Yes, the Lord has His own way of playing games. The glory of the Lord cannot simply be described. At best, one can only use some representative words like Swami sometimes uses: *Chitarambulu*, *Vichitrambulu* etc. I leave you to find out what they mean!

See you again next month. Meanwhile, have fun speculating about and searching for infinity! To spur your thoughts, let me present a picture that illustrates a remark of Sheldon Glashow [who along with Abdus Salam and Stephen Weinberg won the Nobel Prize for discovering the unity of the electromagnetic and weak forces]. Glashow pictures the unity of the micro and macrocosm in physics via the image of a snake swallowing its tail! See figure below!

See you later! All the best in the meantime!!

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN PERU

The Land of Peru – Rich and Luscious

“I am proud and happy to be Peruvian, to have been born in the beautiful land of the sun, where the indomitable Inca preferred to die, and left our race an inheritance of courage... Rich mountains, beautiful lands, enchanting beaches, this is my Peru! Fertile fields, mountains snow peaks, rivers and streams, this is my Peru!”

This popular and beautiful song composed by the Peruvian Creole musician Manuel Raygada, describes the splendour of Peru, a mystical and magnificent country, replete with a diversity and richness uncommon in the world, and offering an infinite number of possibilities and opportunities to live by, with its unique history, culture, nature, adventure and the touching human warmth of its people.

Peru is located in South America, its coast bathed by the Pacific Ocean. The population is over 27 million people, whose diversity and mixture of different races provides a variety of cultural wealth that is priceless. Spanish is the most popular and the official tongue but there exist many native dialects like Quechua and Aymara. Shaped like California but three times its size, this third largest country in South America shares its borders with as many as five nations. While it is flanked by Ecuador and Colombia in the north, Brazil and Bolivia border it on the east and on the south begins the long strip of Chile.

The land of Peru is perhaps the most richly endowed by nature in the South American continent. While the 30 to 150 km wide and 1500 miles long coastline by the South Pacific Ocean has valleys and barren deserts; the Sierra (highlands) plows from north to south by the mountains of the Andes and displays high snow-peaks filled with countless lakes and lagoons; and the amazing Amazon jungle, on the other hand, characterized by extensive tropical forests and deep rivers with abundant vegetation, is home to innumerable species of wildlife. Thanks to these matchless triumvirate geographic regions, today Peru holds 80 of the 104 existing ecosystems in the world. No wonder it is in this land that the greatest South American civilizations flowered and flourished.

The Cradle of Ancient Civilisations

Though the Inca Empire that emerged and established itself on the Andes in the 15th century is the most famous, there were many other civilizations which existed thousands of years before the Incas. The semi-desert coastal strip of Peru which extends from the seaboard, to the foot of the mountain range of the Andes has been witness to the continuous flourishing of many pre-Incan cultures. First was the Sacred City of Caral, the oldest town of America, believed to be 5000 years old and the “Mother City” of the world’s first great civilizations. This metropolis of tens of thousands of people was a city of

pyramids and monuments at a time when Egypt and Mesopotamia were still in their infancy.

The Royal tombs of the Lord of Sipán were discovered on the north coast, in 1987, considered to be the richest haul found in the occidental hemisphere. These tombs are an expression of the Mochica culture, which was renowned for its pottery and metallurgy. The Lord of Sipán is a mummy found by Peruvian archaeologist Walter Alva; the tomb is in Sipán's Huaca Rajada. Some archaeologists hold it to be one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the world in the last 30 years, because the main tomb was found intact and untouched by thieves. The "huaca" is a mausoleum built by the Moche culture that ruled the northern coast of Peru from the time of Christ to 700 AD, again, many centuries prior to the Incas.

If that was in the north coast, in the south was the Chimú culture, whose greatest expression preserved to this day is the adobe construction of the Chan Chan urban complex. This 20 square kilometer vast mud city of Chan Chan (which in the ancient Mochica language means "sun-sun"), is the largest pre-Columbian city in South America built between 850 BC and 1740 BC, and was also the imperial capital until the Chimús were conquered by the Incas in the 15th century. It is estimated that 30,000 people lived in this world's largest pre-Hispanic mud-brick citadel.

The Sierra, a 'Stairway to Heaven'

But this is not even 10 percent of what this fascinating nation is made up of. They say, "The mountains in Peru are so pervasive that it is almost impossible to imagine a landscape without soaring peaks looming in the horizon." In one locality, straddling an area between 50-150 miles, there are 174 peaks over 16,000 feet high and 39 in excess of 19,000 feet, while the average is 14,000 feet!

Peru's Andes around Cusco, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the Americas, was once upon a time the centre of the earth for the Inca Empire. It is in these mountains that the powerful Inca civilization rose, its vast territory covering a portion of current Colombia, nearly all of Ecuador, a great part of what today is Peru, all of Bolivia, the northern part of Chile and northwest Argentina, encompassing a total area of nearly two million square miles. The empire was called "Tawantisuyo" in the Quechua language, which means 'Empire of the Four Regions'. And today, this city of Cusco is recognized as a Cultural Heritage of the world and an Archeological Capital of America.

The Incas left noteworthy examples of their labor, such as great impregnable fortresses, temples and palaces. They solved the agricultural problems set by their enormous population, by building terraces on the side of the hills, where cultivation was almost a miracle and their irrigation works, hanging bridges and roads exist even today! But question marks remain about the huge blocks of stone, perfectly cut under the Incan structures. For example, there is one such stone weighing an estimated 80 tons, and not native to the area, at

Sacsayhuaman. (Mind you, the largest modern crane can move at most 60 tons).

Some of the most remarkable buildings are at Sacsayhuaman, Tambomachay, and Ollantaytambo. And the most wonderful ruins are, of course, the world famous Machu Picchu, popularly known as the 'Lost City of the Incas' located over the majestic Urubamba Canyon, surrounded by savage and splendorous nature. In fact, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee called this stone city "an absolute masterpiece of architecture and a unique testimony to the Inca civilization". Till today, it remains a mystery how such huge stones were moved to this inaccessible site.

Also on these majestic mountain ranges is the highest peak of the Peruvian Andes, Huascarán, at 6768 m. There is also the Alpamayo at 5,947m, considered the world's most beautiful mountain at a show celebrated in Munich in 1966. The Titicaca Lake, the highest navigable lake in the world, at 3,821 meters above sea level, is located in the South of Peru, in one of the coldest areas of the country. At this altitude the lake shines an iridescent blue through the clear sunlight - a beautiful complement to the red and brown-hued hills of the altiplano (southern highlands).

Tiahuanaco and Chavín on the mountains and also Paracas on the coast, are some of the names of the other cultures that flourished thousands of years ago. They were masters in the arts of textiles and pottery. Some worshipped an unknown and all-powerful God, and others - the majority - worshipped mythological beings. They were also knowledgeable in the sciences of measuring time and astronomy.

Peruvian Jungles – Breathing for the World

Now coming to another most exciting natural treasure of Peru, the Amazonian Selva or rainforest. Covering an area of 756,866 square kilometers, it is one of the main lungs of the world, making up 10% of all the world's forests. In fact, it is responsible for 50% of the renovated oxygen on Earth, and its hydrographic basin contains over 1000 rivers and lakes, no less than one fifth of the fresh water reserves on Earth. The Peruvian Amazonia, truly, is a wild symphony day and night, and one of Nature's favourite shows, filled with the most exuberant flora and fauna known to man: millions of noble centuries old trees where nearly 15,000 species of animals live; among them 1,800 bird species; 2,000 kinds of mammals and 1,500 types of fish. It is a natural space full of color and enchantment inviting endless exploration and unlimited excitement.

The Amazon River, the largest river in the world by volume, with greater total river flow than the next eight largest rivers combined, has its source in these forests from the union of the Ucayali and Marañón rivers. With a jaw-dropping 16 km width, 30 m depth and a length of at least 6500 kms (of which 3,713 km are in Peruvian territory), this river is often referred to as 'The River Sea'. More than 1,100 rivers flow into its course and on the average, some 28

billion gallons per minute flow into the sea, about 10 times the flow of the Mississippi. The discharge is so great that it noticeably dilutes the salinity of the Atlantic's waters for more than 100 miles offshore. In fact, there are more fish species in the Amazon river system than in the entire Atlantic Ocean and one-third of the planet's bird species live in this rainforest.

Amazonia, undoubtedly, is a wonderland for botanists, bird watchers, scientists, ecologists, tourists, trekkers, anthropologists, archaeologists, gold-seekers, explorers and the curious. Sports enthusiasts here enjoy whitewater rafting, kayaking, jungle walks and fishing. Still, what is known of this colorful and pristine creation and preserved through reserves and national parks is very little; the unknown forest is natural, mysterious and magical.

Iquitos, the largest city in the Peruvian rainforest, is the most populous city in the world that cannot be reached by road. Located on the Amazon river, it can be reached only by airplane or boat. There is no end to the mysterious packed in this priceless terrestrial treasure on earth.

Lima – The Heart of Peru

Though Iquitos has long been a major port in the Amazon Basin, the most significant port-city of Peru has been Lima. It was the capital and most important city even during the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru (mid 1500's to early 1800's), which was an administrative area encompassing most of Spain's possessions in South America. In fact, the Spanish conqueror Francisco Pizarro, who founded this city, called it as the 'City of Kings'. In 1988, the Historic Centre of Lima was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, thanks to the large number of historical buildings dating from the Spanish colonial era, from the monumental Plaza Mayor, with the 16th century Cathedral and the Presidential Palace, to the catacombs of the Saint Francisco Convent and any number of awe-inspiring museums.

Today nearly one-third of the nation's population lives in this one metropolitan area which is undoubtedly the country's cultural and economic hub; not only this, it has also now become the culinary capital of South America with its most delectable cuisines which combines Inca and Spanish culinary traditions, including many African, Asian, French, Italian and Muslim cuisine features and dishes.

Not only Lima alone, indeed, the whole nation for centuries has revered food. Food is verily divine for all Peruvians and is part of every celebration, whether it is at birth, adulthood or marriage of a child or any other event of significance. Blessed with lands and seas of great abundance, Peruvians have appreciated this God-given gift for centuries by cooking, eating and creating just like the gods. But this alone is not what draws tourists to Peru in increasing numbers every year. (Tourism, by the way, is now the largest foreign currency-earner in Peru).

Gratifying Love for God

What truly fascinates people about Peru is actually a combination of various sublime elements from geographical remoteness to highly bio-diverse, self-sustainable microenvironments, from large numbers of indigenous peoples who maintain traditional beliefs and practices, to hundreds of festivals dedicated to the patron saints of Peru; and most importantly, the nations' precious wealth - the pleasing personality and mannerisms of Peruvians. The people of this ancient land have inherited sublime traditions expressed in their diverse cultural manifestations.

Each zone of the country stands out with a character and nuances of its own, full of joy and love for God. This predominantly Catholic country dances in ecstasy and agony with extraordinary color and great self-assurance. There are about 3,000 festivities that make up the annual calendar of celebrations of every region of the country. And every year, Lima, its capital city, enjoys a traditional holiday that lasts throughout October. This month, called the "purple" month, from the color of the rope used by the hundreds of thousands who worship the Lord of Miracles, a uniquely Peruvian image of Jesus Christ, is an unparalleled example of wholehearted faith and devotion when hundreds of thousands of devotees sing and dance on the streets of Lima (which has gradually spread to the whole of Peru) in devotional fervor.

And the divine, was perhaps, so touched with the pure love of Peruvians that He made Himself known to these groups of pious people nearly three decades ago when many countries in South America were still blissfully unaware of this descent of the same 'Lord of Miracles', albeit now in a different but delectable form.

So how did this actually happen? Were there any mysterious healings and visions? Who were the fortunate ones to be first touched by the love of Sai in Peru? And what impact did it have on them? Now you will relish this fascinating story, which we are sure is more thrilling than all that you have read about Peru till now.

Sai Baba Comes To Peru

It was 1978. A group of Sai Baba devotees formed a Sai association, completely oblivious of the existence of an International Sai Organization. Jorge Corrales, a fondly remembered devotee, made contact with the Sai Organization in India seeking guidance to formalize the small group of devotees into a recognised organisation. After a year of waiting, a letter informed them that someone was coming from India to help organize and form the Sai Organization of Peru - but this person never came.

In November 1979, Mr. and Mrs. Bravo-Figueroa, a devotee couple, traveled with their son to India to visit Sai Baba. They were given the responsibility of asking Bhagavan when He was going to send the person referred to in the letter. Mr. Luis Muñiz (who was president of the Sai Centre of México) was to be the interpreter. On 4 December, Baba called the Bravos and Luis Muniz for an interview. Towards the end of the interview, Luis started to say, "In Peru..."

but Baba immediately intercepted him saying, "I know, I know in Peru there are many devotees of Swami and they don't have a centre."

Then using both His hands, and blessing the Bravos, He said, "I authorize and bless you to form the first Sai Centre in Peru." What a grand beginning for the Sai movement of Peru! From then on, needless to say, Sai's glory in this land, on the other side of the world, only increased. Swami, in that historic interview, also directed Luis to assist and instruct the Bravos in setting up as well as functioning of the Sai Centre. Later, guidelines for the nascent group arrived too from the International Sai Organization.

All the devotees keenly studied the rules and understood their import, and then gladly signed up as the members. They started singing devotional songs and attending Sai meetings. Finally on May 27, 1980, there were 52 members who signed the constitutional act in the home of Senora Dina de Alessandrini. Filled with positive vibes and each member so enthusiastic and ecstatic, it was a sight to see when every devotee, with joy brimming on their faces, received a key to the house which was rented for the centre, so that they could visit at any hour convenient for them.

"Miracle in Lima"

While the Sai mission was just taking shape, in 1979, Bhagavan assured the Bravos that their small son, Walter Jr., would be cured of his sickness. He had in fact materialized a medal with His image, and also given vibhuti for their son. Mrs. Bravo asked Swami what they should do once the Vibhuthi is all used up. And Swami, in His inimitable way, responded, "Don't worry, you will never be without it." All she could understand from this message was that they would have to return to India to replenish it from Swami once the supply went low.

But the real meaning of Swami's assurance came to light in March, 1980, when vibhuthi started appearing from two photos of Swami that adorned their home. The Bravos, at first, were bewildered. They called their friends and other devotees to witness this strange event. Many of Dr. Bravo's colleagues working in a large hospital, who were not devotees, came too, and were confounded by the unusual occurring. It was so out-of-the-ordinary in this part of the world that the event came to be published in a local newspaper "Cambio" with the title, "Miracle in Lima."

There was another surprise awaiting the Bravo family a few days later. Now, the photos of Sai Baba had stopped oozing vibhuti; but it had begun, in large quantities, on a large picture of Jesus Christ. And this phenomenon continued with the sacred 'powdery signs of His Grace' now falling off from different pictures, including a large photo of Swami which rained vibhuti during a meeting of the Central Council in the home of the Bravos in the year 1997.

The devotion of the Bravos too was anything but ordinary. Little Walter Jr. was suffering a lot of pain, and one doctor traced it to his being a vegetarian. But such was the commitment of the 10-year old to follow Swami's ideals that,

after leaving the doctor's office, he said, "I would rather suffer the pain than start eating meat." His sickness was one of the reasons which brought his father, Dr. Bravo closer to Sai. Before he merged with Swami in 2006, Dr. Walter Bravo did mention that spirituality always fascinated him, and that before 'knowing' Swami, he was a member of a spiritual organization and enthusiastically distributed spiritual literature. In fact, it was only when the book "Sai Baba: Man of Miracles" came into his hands that his life changed.

Their group translated this book from English to Spanish and started discussing it in their regular study circles. Later, when they saw a film on Swami, their faith in the Divinity of Baba only strengthened. Dr. Bravo was now convinced; he had found his spiritual master. All he wanted from now was to understand and assimilate His teachings. He tried to identify with Bhagavan's message: "You are not the physical body, or the mind; you are verily divine." "The problems which you encounter should not allow your faith in God to diminish even a little. You should always strive for the bliss of being close to God, without worrying about the difficulties or the triumphs of life's journey." These inspiring words of Swami had an indelible impact on his life and thoughts, and that is how this founding member of the Sai Organization of Peru transformed into a beautiful being with strong faith in Swami and became a precious instrument in His divine hands for the Sai mission in Peru.

The Amazing Healing of Juana De Torres

Swami, personally, in His own mysterious ways, shaped every devotee in Peru. Juana de Torres, another founding member of the Sai Organization of Peru, who also served as the first president of the Sai Foundation of Peru, narrating her story, says,

"It was the end of February, 1990. A strange weakness overtook me. I was feeling tired; it was difficult to even walk a few metres. Several doctors examined me, but a definite diagnosis still eluded me. One doctor looking at the X-rays of my thorax detected liquid in my lungs and recommended immediate hospitalization. He concluded that I had malignant cancer, and that it was situated in a very critical area making it impossible to operate. 'It is untreatable', he clearly said. Another physician without mincing words, told my husband, three months is the maximum he would give me given my failing health. You can imagine how worried my family was!

"Many devotees started praying for me, even from other countries. They told me to visit India and see Swami, but I said, 'I will go only after I am well, to thank Him'. As the days passed, my health got from bad to worse, and now they were giving me oxygen as I was unable to even breathe comfortably. The doctors decided to do a bypass surgery to clear my liquid-filled lungs. I discovered that if they didn't operate immediately, I could die of asphyxia. But it was during these trying days that I felt closer to God than ever before. I just dedicated all day to my personal *sadhana*. I spent every moment with Him.

"And then, one morning during this difficult period, when I was in the hospital listening to bhajans, meditating and reliving my trip to Prashanti, I suddenly

felt His presence. He was looking at me with such tender loving eyes. It was completely suffused with bliss. With that one compassionate look, He had said everything, He had filled me with love that was powerful and peace-giving. I could not contain myself, I started to cry. Those were tears of ecstasy and bliss. It was at this time, that my brother came in with few others who had come to donate blood. When he saw me crying, he said, 'Little sister, please don't cry, you will soon be well.'

"I remember, I told him that those were not tears of sadness, in fact, I was radiating with happiness and joy. And then, in a few minutes the doctor came. 'The tests show you have Hodgkin's disease,' he said. 'No need to worry, it can be treated and we will start the treatment tomorrow.' I let the doctors treat me for a short time but I was anxious to return home and to be able to plan a trip to see Swami. I was sure that Swami had cured me.

"At the end of January, 1992, my long dreamt desire materialized, I was in Puttaparthi. In the first Darshan itself, I was able to give Swami a few letters, and in an instant His eyes met mine. What a moment it was! I could clearly see His eyes say, 'So, now you have come!' In a few days Swami called the Peruvian group for an interview. One from the group asked Swami in English about my health and Swami immediately said, 'Yes I know, she has nothing now; she is completely well, and I am taking care of her.' And such is His love that even now, in 2007, I am enjoying good health and so happy with my spiritual sadhana."

The First Centres in Peru

So, it was through such experiences of His pure love and compassion, that devotees started growing in number in Peru. It was He who was allowing His beautiful mission to unfold slowly and steadily. Devotees started singing bhajans, as a guideline they had in those days only one cassette which had songs sung by Baba Himself. Some started translating His discourses from books and many gave away these copies freely to anybody who was willing to listen.

And gradually after the first centre in Lima, the capital city, and many additional centres sprung up in the interior of the country, all started and run by self-inspired dedicated devotees. In 1991, the Central Council of Latin America decided to name the first Coordinating Committee. On 29 April, 1991, senior members of the Organisation - Leonardo Gutter, Nassin Michaan and Carlos Rivas - established the first committee in Peru. It was composed of the presidents of the Sai Centres of Barranco, Cercado de Lima, Cipreses, Jesús María y and Trujillo, as well as the groups of Salamanca, Monterrico, Arequipa, Trujillo, Talara and Chiclayo and Cajamarca. While Barranco is a beautiful district, Trujillo in the northwest is called the "City of Eternal Spring" because of its very sunny and pleasant weather year-round and Arequipa in Southern Peru is the nation's second most important city after Lima. Love for Sai slowly had blossomed along the whole stretch of the nation. And His miracles and presence were now felt more than ever before. Litu Daryanani recalling a life-saving incident from the early nineties, says,

Saved From Terrorists...By Sai

"It was 15 July, 1992, the day after the sacred festival of Guru Purnima was celebrated in our house. About two weeks prior to this day, I had a dream where I saw myself walking down a very lonely street. There were people peeping at me from their windows. Suddenly a person pointed a machine gun at my head and commanded me to kneel down. I quietly did so. And then he started shouting repeatedly 'I am going to kill you'. I did not know what to do, I just responded by shouting out loud 'Sai Ram! Sai Ram!' And surprisingly in the next instant, the man pushed me away and moved on. When I awoke the dream was vivid in my mind but soon I completely forgot about it.

"A few days before Guru Poornima when I walked from the kitchen to my bedroom through the sitting room and a bedroom, I saw an orange shadow, or you could even say, an orange figure, at the corner of each room. I felt Swami's presence. On July 14 we had Bhajans at our house celebrating Guru Poornima and the birth of my daughter Aarti. She was only 2 and half months old then.

"This was the period when terrorism was on the rise in Peru and the miscreants would harm innocent civilians by detonating car bombs. So, on the July 16, around 9.00 pm when I was in the kitchen preparing dinner while little Aarti was asleep on her cot placed just next to the big glass windows, I heard a small explosion. I immediately went to my room and looked out of the window to understand where the sound came from. But shockingly, there was another explosion, now a loud one, and it seemed as if it came from the hotel which was right across the street.

"I heard loud shouts 'Fire! Fire!' I thought the hotel has caught fire. Without wasting a second I turned around, lifted Aarti out of her cot and walked towards the main door of the house. As I ran out I could see all the big glass windows of our apartment breaking and falling in. I could hear the sound of ambulances, fire brigades and the most pathetic cries of people. It was so weird and frightening; I did not know what had caught fire. In a state of shock I hurried towards the entrance of the building just to be out of this whole scene and take Aarti to safety. And in the lobby, I saw my husband, who had just arrived.

"The scene outside was shocking, he said. It seemed like we were at war. There was glass everywhere from the buildings. He told me that a car bomb full of explosives had exploded in Calle Tarata, a street parallel to the street we lived in. And as a result, the building below which the car was parked was on fire and many people were injured. The explosion broke the windows of all the surrounding buildings. Nobody yet understood the extent of the damage and the number of lives that perished.

"When we went up to our apartment we found all the glass windows broken and my daughter's cot was full of tiny glass pieces! It was the presence of mind in that instant to take Arati out of her cot, that had saved our family, and

I thanked Swami immensely for taking care of me every second. The next day we heard that the terrorists had actually planned two car bomb attacks. One exploded, causing terrible trauma to many, but the other car-load of explosives that had been left outside my building at the same time, somehow had not gone off. Imagine, I was only a few steps away from the car bomb with my baby in my arms! Who else but Swami can protect us like this, guarding us every moment of our lives. He is our divine Mother. We owe our lives to Him.

“It was only some time later that I recollected the dream wherein just His name had saved me from terrorists. Even though He is there with us every moment of our lives, we sometimes do not realize this and He, in His own way, makes us aware of His presence, so that we may not ever forget Him, and redeem of our lives. I am ever grateful to my beloved Sai Maa for ever being on my side.”

Swami Always Answers

Once Sai enters our lives, we are never the same again. And Swami's love in Peru was doing wonders. So many – young and old, men and women, children and adults – by some mystical design were coming into the Sai fold. Narrating his experience, Billy Escalante, a young adult, says,

“Once I was on a visit to the home of my future wife, Mayte. Her brother got into an argument with her that day while I was present and, of course, I came to the defense of Mayte. And this upset my future brother-in-law and now there was a lot of tension between us.

“It was about this time that I discovered Sai Baba from a book. I was very much impressed but very apprehensive too. Being a catholic, I was worried if by following Baba's teachings, I would be unfaithful to Jesus. I felt I needed some guidance directly from Christ before accepting and learning more about Baba.

“After the argument with my future brother-in-law, whenever I went to visit Mayte, he never opened the door. Mayte's sister and brother-in-law too lived in the same house, but her brother would always answer the door and the moment he saw me, he would just shut the door. Then, I would knock again and finally Mayte would come and allow me in. And this was going on for quite some time and it was very frustrating for me.

“One night after I knocked on their door, I heard the brother-in-law coming to open the door, and then he slammed it right in front of my face. I was so upset. I did not know what to do except pray to Jesus in this way, ‘Oh Lord, if it is alright to study Sai Baba's teachings and to follow Him, have my brother-in-law look at me in my eye, embrace me and say that I am a good man.’ I had just finished this prayer, and to my amazement the brother-in-law returned to the door and opened it. Not only that, he looked at me, gave me a fraternal hug and said, ‘Billy, you are a good man.’ I was dumbstruck. It was

seeing something which I thought was surely impossible. At that instant, I had got my answer; I decided that I would love Sai Baba.”

After Billy and Mayte were married, they entered the Sai movement with vigour and were later blessed with their first child, a sweet girl. But as Billy was just getting started in his career, they did not have enough resources to lead a comfortable life. At times, it was so bad that there was not enough money even to buy milk for the baby. And during these trying times, as Billy was walking down the street, one day, he thought to himself, ‘How is it that the birds and animals don’t work and yet God provides for them, and here we, who are God’s children, don’t even have money to buy milk for our baby.’ And then, just as he was passing under a tree, several ‘soles’ (Peruvian bank notes) came drifting down to the sidewalk, just like dry leaves falling off the tree. Of course, they were exactly enough to buy just one large tin of canned milk for the baby.

The way Swami listens to the prayers of His devotees and answers each one of them so beautifully, is something that can never be understood or explained, it can only be felt and experienced. And every devotee of Sai has their own beautiful little story of His love and Grace. We read how Swami saved Aarti from terrorists when she was only few days old; now Aarti is a cheerful young adult in her early twenties with her own sweet experiences. This is what she narrates:

Guarded by the Gayatri Mantra

“This happened when I was fifteen. After five magical days in Puttaparthi in February 2001, it was time to go home. We decided to make a last-minute service and then catch the bus which would take us to the airport. As soon as we finished, we ran all the way to the bus; but it was too late, we missed it. Nervous and worried, we took a rickshaw to go to the airport, and on the way I was sad, unhappy that I had leave Puttaparthi. I felt safe in Swami’s town, completely protected from my worst fears: tremors and earthquakes. I asked my mum which mantra I could say to protect us from earthquakes, and she said that the Gayathri Mantra is the most powerful; it would protect me from everything.

“So I started reciting the Mantra, and after a little while we saw a herd of buffalos on the lonely road we were on. We were looking at them for less than a minute when suddenly, we realized one of the buffalos was coming towards us. Quickly, it trotted towards the rickshaw we were in. We were not in the safest of positions. With more than three big bags, we didn’t really fit in the rickshaw and my mum’s leg was jutting out of it. Horrified, I realized the buffalo was less than a meter away from us, and gaining speed. I didn’t know what was happening, but my mouth was suddenly open and screaming.

“The buffalo banged against the rickshaw, right were my mother’s leg was. Then, it moved away. In shock, we stopped the vehicle and got down to see the damage. To my astonishment, mum’s leg was intact and the only sign of the encounter was a deep dent in the rickshaw. The metal was bent inwards

like it had been made of cotton. My mom looked at me and saw tears in my eyes. She asked me what was wrong, and then the realization hit her, as to how we had been saved. I had been reciting the Gayatri Mantra.”

Motivated Sai Youth Show the Way

Like Billy, Aarti, Mayte, so many young souls felt His presence in their lives and the Sai youth movement in Peru gained momentum. In November, 1996, the first youth group of the Sai organization was formed. And from then on, they actively played a major role in all the activities of the Sai Centres. For many years now, they have adopted a marginal community called Virgen de Cocharcas, and everyone gets involved to serve in this project. They regularly offer a vegetarian lunch, present Human Values dramas, and on some festivals distribute clothes and toys.

The Sai youth of Peru have also organized regional retreats for young people from other countries in South America which has inspired everyone, and helped to gain experience in the organization of large events. Here are some pictures of this and other retreats for all age groups, in addition to public meetings.

Education in Human Values Captures Hearts

With the youth's active participation, as well as the growth and the commitment of members of the Organisation, Bal Vikas classes too started in 1996. There were also a few teachers from the Hogar del Niño Jesús college who participated in a seminar on Human Values that was offered by few members of the Organization. This seminar had a profound positive impact and the teachers seemed very interested to implement in their own settings. Some of them even named their classrooms by names of values like Truth Classroom, Love Classroom, etc.

Based on this success, workshops on Education in Human Values were now conducted not only in Lima, but also in the interior provinces. All the courses for teacher training are offered free, which continues till date. What is more encouraging is that the Ministry of Education of Peru has given their approval for this training, and with their support, there is now a solid group of teacher trainers. With requests flowing in from every part of Peru, seminars on EHV has become a continuous affair now in this country.

The Sai School in Arequipa

To help disseminate Swami's message in a more organized manner, the Sai Foundation of Peru was formed in 31 October, 2001 with Juana Torres as its first president. And four years later saw the blossoming of the first Sai School in Peru. In 2005, in the district of Tiabaya, about 1000 km to the south of Lima, the school embarked on its mission to hone young minds in the right direction. The whole project actually started in February, 2003, when 14 devotees from Arequipa, Southern Peru, were in Prasanthi Nilayam and they received a notice that a property that had been in litigation for 40 years had

been now returned to its owners. This building was destined to become the Sai School. Now, the free school also has a medical clinic which serves the children and their parents, without any charge. And one devotee from Arequipa who had undergone Human Values training in the Institute of Sathya Sai Education in Thailand became the director of the new school. Once the divine wills, all resources – men, money, and material – fall in place so wonderfully.

Today 'Educare' is being imparted in this school and the Sai youth are leading the way. To know to what heights the divine can raise man's consciousness once He touched his soul, here is the moving story of Walter Bravo Jr. whom we have mentioned earlier in this story.

A Touching Testimonial

Walter Bravo Jr., was a unique soul, who had grown up from a little boy who had gone to see Swami in 1979, and was able to attend university and graduate in spite of his difficult physical situation. He left this incredibly touching letter for his family and devotees prior to leaving his body and merging in Sai in 2006, which stands as a testimonial to the divinity within him and is a lesson for every devotee on self-surrender and self-realisation. The letter says,

"Dear brothers and sisters, and parents, and family.

Carmen confessed that I have autoimmune hepatitis and now the cirrosis has started, so I have decided to write to all so that you can understand how things are with me. First understand that I am tranquil, even more so than before. Sometime ago I wanted verification that I could unite with God. But don't worry, it is true that I am physically tired because of anemia and the typical pain that accompanies my illness, but I am happy. Carmen and the rest of the family see my expression of fatigue and this may be interpreted as suffering. But this is not the case. My body suffers, but as I would tell Fran and Ciro, one should not pay much attention because the mind wants you to believe that you are the body. But the truth is that I am happy.

Second, it is difficult to understand Him, but even if it seems cruel and hard in this life that He has given, it is really the love of God which is manifesting in all the circumstances. I thank Him for making me remember this. Our family can remember His message and it gives us hope, even if living this illness is difficult, He will not give more pain than what one can resist. I myself have asked Him to give me these trials while I have the blessing to know Him and when it is easier with His help to overcome them.

A little while ago I read where Baba says that if the separation is going to end, there should be no balance pending and no illness either. For me it is marvelous that an additional illness is manifesting because this signifies for me that God is accelerating my karma to make my separation even shorter.

Third, dear parents, brothers and sisters, you should know that this illness has come when I was prepared to receive it. For many years I have been preparing to receive strong pain and those things which I feared at one time, but am now ready to receive them with happiness. It is a wonder to have known all of you and this too makes me happy. My terminal illness makes me happy and when I think of death, it is like something natural that must happen to everyone. It makes me think of God all the time and now I realize how much time I have wasted up to now.

And finally, remember that Baba said I was going to get well and be completely normal, (*in the interview when I was a little boy*) and for this reason don't worry about something that will go away with the body. Baba is curing me of my ignorance and this will help others to believe in His grandeur and Divine nature. This is a motive for all to be happy.

Even if Baba does not cure my body, it is not that He is untruthful; it is because He speaks in Divine terms. It is quite possible that the cure which He offered me is not for the body, and if this is the case it is something to celebrate, because that means He will cure me of my ignorance and that I will know my true self.

I want to make it clear with all that I am writing, that I am not trying to imply that I am almost illuminated. I have been able to discover my defects and ego which are still very much a part of me. I am still much attached to my family and to my Sai family too. One can say that this is natural, but we must remember that this attachment comes from identification with the body. This love is because we believe them to be ours, that is their bodies and their minds. This is pure ignorance. So you can see that I still have a lot of changes to make before I can realize God.

But all these trials are appropriate for self improvement. We can take what we learn in the books of Swami's teachings and apply these to our lives and bring this learning inside our hearts. Then it is a blessing to know these things. We must always return to the truth that we are not the body, the mind or the intellect, rather we are *atma*, the Self. The *atma* does not die, or change or decline.

In this way we can always be happy despite what happens to our bodies. Use the body to practice non-attachment. I don't pray that Swami should cure me or for improved health. This is in Swami's hands. If you want to pray, and want your prayer to be effective, pray that at the end you will be closer to union with God than at the beginning.

Baba in an interview said to me, 'Don't worry, be happy'. What would you do if God ordered you to be happy? He doesn't ask you to do anything that is impossible. In other words the strength to be happy is inside all of us, no matter what might happen. One must try to discover it. The order from Swami was not just for me, it was for my father, who was in the interview, and for all of you who are reading this.

So always be happy, and let Baba bless you and protect you.”

Walter Bravo Jr.

Love All Through Selfless Service

The metamorphosis that Baba can bring about in an individual is mind-boggling. And everything happens because of His unconditional love and all-encompassing compassion. Once an individual is transformed, his ego begins to diminish and he wants to serve and that's how many service activities have started in this country. For many years now, there have been regular services like visiting the homes of the elderly, of the blind, as well as homes run by the sisters of Mother Teresa. Devotees also visit psychiatric hospitals, maternity hospitals, and the marginal communities of Balneario de Ventanilla and Virgin de Cocharcas.

The youth, especially for the last eight years, have been serving these poor communities in many different ways. They visit them every week and offer prepared food, distribute clothes, give baskets for new born babies, supply medicines, gift toys to the kids, arrange Christmas parties and recreational activities, also present tape recorders to the blind, furniture and school supplies for students, organize human values dramas, and also more importantly, educate them on personal hygiene such as bathing, hair cuts, trimming nails, and dental service.

Selfless service, their unflinching faith on the divine, their zeal to spread human values and spread His word and message through public meetings has what brought so many people into the Sai fold in this country and conferred them with comfort and peace. To date, the Peruvian Organization has been operating for three decades with its current headquarters in Lima. There are four centres in the capital city of Lima, and many others in important cities like Arequipa, Cajamarca, and Trujillo. But if there is one activity that the Sai group loves to do, that is - singing His name passionately. The Peruvians love Sai Bhajans, and they have been blessed with sublime experiences too.

Purity and Devotion – Peruvians Priceless Assets

One day at 10 am in Prashanti Nilayam, a group of devotees from Latin America had met in the shade of one of the round buildings in order to sing bhajans. And they were in bliss singing: “Sathya Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Baba...llora mi corazón por tener tu Darshan; el Padre de los Padres, Sathya Sai Baba”. And while they were singing, to their pleasant surprise, they saw Swami's little red car stop just where they were seated. Swami even got out of the car, and the devotees continued to sing in ecstasy. The Loving Lord then started keeping rhythm with His hand to the joy of the devotees. Swami then asked if they were from Argentina and when they replied that they were from Latin America and Spain, His face was radiant and He told them, “Be very happy, very happy.” Needless to say, they were filled with bliss. Swami even asked for their letters and gave them padanamaskaram, (the chance to touch

His feet). Not only this, He stood there singing photos for a few too! And finally, when He got into His car having blessed each one profusely, He smiled sweetly and waved good bye to all. What a blissful day that was for a chosen few. It is said in the scriptures that God installs Himself there, wherever His glory is sung with a pure heart. And it is this purity of their hearts combined with their perseverance to love and serve that has drawn upon them such priceless blessings.

Today Swami's glory is sung through the length and breadth of this divinely blessed country and one knows for sure in times to come every Peruvian will rejoice when he realizes that the 'Lord of Miracles' he has been worshipping for decades is now here on earth, and all they have to do is open their hearts to the Pure Love of Sai and fill themselves with inexplicable bliss.

ONCE UPON A TIME

By Mrs. Rita Bruce

The name of this chapter is not the beginning of a fairy tale but a remembrance of a lifestyle that existed when I was a child in the 1940/50's in the United States of America. It may read like a fairy tale to those who did not live in the pre-television era but nevertheless it was my reality. My childhood was carefree, happy, and fun.

There are two main reasons why I wish to share this moment with you. Soon the memory of those days will be lost. It is not that the period before television was perfect but there was a simpler and more moral style of living. While you read this try to feel the ease, modest, slower pace of living and think about what can we use from "then" and apply it to our "lifestyle now"? It is not possible to turn the clock back, nor do we wish to, but we can learn from the past to improve the future.

We have used this method of building on the past in many fields but not in our family lifestyle. Advancement has been focused on science, medicine, education, materialism and technology but the wholesomeness and togetherness of the family is being lost. Our family values, our heritage of commitment, caring, forgiveness and just plain selflessness is disappearing. When I was a child there was a stronger sense of religion, community, time for self, children, and family. Where is this today?

My family lived in the county of St. Louis, Missouri. It was a small town called Jennings. My parents were born and lived there until their death. My living environment extended to my home, church and school. I went to the Catholic Church and school which was just blocks from our home. My childhood world was small, intimate, easy to understand, yet large enough for a child. The familiarity of surroundings and the extended family gave emotional support.

A Peaceful and Secure Upbringing

When we compare "then" with "now" the child is exposed to many unfamiliar experiences, television, world-wide-web, changing schools and homes, day care providers, divorce, etc. Today the child lives in a persistently changing environment that can cause some insecurity and uncertainty. I sometimes wonder if the over stimulated reality in their life is too much for their nervous systems and they sometimes prefer to hide behind the screen of a computer, etc.

My grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and school friends lived within walking distance. My parents knew all the children and their parents that I played with. They went to the same church, had the same values and religious beliefs. There was no contradiction of these beliefs, no moral confusion, no isolation, only an atmosphere of dependability. My identity and security as a child was built on a solid emotional foundation. I knew what was

right and wrong, my religious beliefs were supported by all, and my family was an extended support system.

Some would argue that it did not allow for the challenge of new concepts. Emotional stability for children is essential. The ability to question new concepts can come later when we have enough experience to understand what needs to be questioned. Today children are given a good deal of conflicting information even in the school system and many do not have the safety net of the extended family/community that confirms the views of their parents. This can lead to confusion about their identity.

A Safe Environment Leads to a Stable Character

My day began with mass at church before school. The nuns taught me piano which I began at the age of 6 and the priest taught us sports after school. I took care of my own free time. It was clear from the beginning of my childhood that we are responsible for our own chores and activities. Self-responsibility was engrained. It was not the age of spoiling but building self-reliance.

All the children played and organized games themselves such as playing school, building towns in the sand, sports, creating plays, singing and dancing, etc. We used our imagination because we did not have many toys. Simple toys, yes. A ball and bat, jumping rope, a doll for the girls, a kick ball for the boys, it was like that. I did not receive my first bike until I was 12 years old. And it was a very big deal. I remember the years of waiting only increase my appreciation of the gift and the sacrifice my parents made to give it to me.

My grandmother came every day and when grandpa died she lived with us. My mom and grandma did everything together. Talk about the stability of routine in my life. They washed on Monday, ironed on Tuesday, baked on Wednesday, shopped on Thursday, cleaned house on Friday. Everyday, every meal was prepared by them. We ate dinner together at the same time everyday except on Sunday. Sunday dinner after church was a special event. We ate at home, all the family, together. We did not go out.

I wanted to learn to sew. Singer Sewing Machine Company gave lessons in downtown St. Louis. I took the bus into the city, received the classes and by the age of 13, I was sewing my own clothes. My mother did not have to take me because once upon a time we lived in a safe environment.

My parents stressed self-responsibility. There was a mental attitude in the 1940's, to Love God, Country and Family. It was important to serve and help others. During the Second World War young boys of 16 and 17 years signed up to protect our country. Later history recorded that even a 12 year old slipped by the authorities and joined the army. This would be unthinkable today.

Sai Baba says, One's nation and one's culture should be revered as one's parents. The nation is one's mother. One's culture is the father. This

profound truth was proclaimed by Rama when He declared: "The mother and the motherland are greater than heaven itself. Discourse 14/1/1995

Discipline Defines a Child's Healthy Limits

Discipline was the order of the day, in my house and school. If we misbehaved, we were corrected and disciplined. A few swats on the bottom, went a very long way for changing behavior when I was told to do something more than once. Today spanking is considered child abuse and parents can be reported. The child-abuse hot line is a very useful tool for the children who are being abused.

But there are always people who find a way to take advantage of whatever is good for society and then misuse and exploit it. The child-abuse hot line personnel assume parents are guilty until proven otherwise, thus giving our children parental control. Child and parent for the sake of justice need to be given equal chance and neither accepted as wrong before the investigation. Children with impure motives have used it for their benefit. When a child who wants to stay away from home for various reasons: sleepovers with friends, abusing alcohol/drugs etc., claims that the reason is child-abuse, as soon as the child calls this hot line number the parents are investigated and assumed guilty.

Sai Baba says, Women have a great responsibility which they have neglected; anxiety and worry are growing in the family and in society due to their neglecting the discipline that trains people to live self controlled lives. They do not distinguish between a cinema hall, a market or an exhibition, but talk and chatter everywhere, even in a temple, or a holy gathering. Children learn from them and they too when they grow up lose all reverence for elders and holy places.

Venkatagiri Prashanti Vidwanmaba Sabha 13/12/1994

Disciplining a child today is considered unloving. How far from this truth have we traveled? Without discipline a child or adult exhibits subhuman behavior. Discipline is love, the tough love that cares enough to teach us to control our negative tendencies. Negative habits just don't suddenly disappear when we become a teenager or adult.

Negative habits unless stopped with loving discipline when they first develop in a child, just continue to exist. Yes, it hurts us and our children when we have to be firm with them. We do not like to do this because we want them to like us. But when they become adults, and others reject their behavior, because we did not teach them politeness, manners, thoughtfulness, kindness, and moral conduct, how will they judge us as parents?

Presently, in classrooms and in our homes, children are not being corrected for mistakes because it will hurt their feelings and self-esteem. The modern thinking is, "If I hurt the child's feelings; I hurt their self-esteem." This concept is presently being used in some of our school systems that when we enforce discipline or correct a mistake, it will hurt someone and emotionally damage the child or persons self-esteem. In some of our school systems children are

not having their class work corrected. For example miss-spelled words are not being marked wrong.

Yes, we sometimes hurt but the emotional feeling of hurt is a caution signal that tells us that something is wrong inside and needs to be changed. It is not the correction that is hurting others but the manner in which it is spoken. If it is explained with truth, in a positive manner and a loving tone of voice, it can be accepted easily. It is both teacher and parent that have the duty to teach children what is right and wrong behavior.

Overcoming Challenges Creates Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is not achieved through words but through our own effort. Learning is in itself only half of the equation. Knowledge without application is wasted. If a child is taught through words and example the meaning of self-esteem, and then is not able to accomplish his assignments or tasks, how can this be acceptable or acknowledged as self-esteem? Self-esteem comes from something that you have achieved. Self means your deeds, not empty words. Yet this is the belief today.

Love is being defined as good feelings that come from being allowed to do as one pleases. The child is being taught selfish love. What has happened to the good feelings that we get from our performance of deeds? It doesn't need to be a perfect deed but the effort that our children make to achieve needs to be applauded.

Responsibility is what builds character and self-esteem. The equation is: Performing good deeds equals the building of self-esteem. It comes through effort and self-achievement. Self-esteem does not come from praise for tasks not performed. It is very good to praise a child but only if it is true, or encouragement, such as: "I know you will do a good job of cleaning the car."

The Importance of Correction

When the child reaches adulthood and is not able to cope with the world, or feels rejection because of bad behavior, and insufficient learning skills to attain a livelihood, then the little emotional child within the adult will hurt. This comes from ignoring what happened in the past, and it can be a troublesome, lingering hurt buried deep within us that can be passed on to our children. This circle of negativity can continue down the family chain.

How simple it would have been to correct the child's error immediately instead of allowing it to hang on and fester creating a behavior that is unexplainable in the unconscious for years. Isn't it more important to have a little hurt as a child, stop the negativity, and change the unwanted behavior that will improve the child's self-esteem? The practical solution will be an emotionally healthy adult.

Children know when they have done something wrong and they also know when we are telling a lie. Parents tell their child to do something. If the deed

was not performed, we sometimes ignore this fact because of many reasons. When our child does not carry out our instruction and we ignore it, then this message is sent. "I don't need to do what mom or dad said. I can do as I please." If we tell a child one thing and do not follow through to insure that the act was accomplished, we are speaking an untruth. Our thought, word, deed and consequence are not one.

Sai Baba says, *"Unity of thought, Word and Deed is needed. Thoughts, words, and deeds should be in harmony with one another. Normally, people tend to think one way, speak in another and act in yet another. This is unbecoming and hypocritical."*

SS March 1988

The Lesson of Pain

We cannot prevent all the hurt in this world. I ask you, "Why are we making a big issue out of hurting?" Why are we emphasizing pain, suffering or hurting by trying to ignore or prevent it? Isn't this a life experience that can teach us a lesson? The more we try to hide or prevent it; we are placing greater emphasis on it. This type of behavior that tries to evade discipline or correcting mistakes because it hurts, can lead us into a mistaken belief that we must avoid anything unpleasant at all expense. "I cannot acknowledge hurt because it is too painful." I will only seek pleasure and ignore what is unpleasant.

Sai tells us, *"Pleasure is a brief interval between two pains."*

Yes, we experience both pleasure and pain and isn't this the most important thing to teach our children? Reality is "To error is human; to forgive Divine."

When the physical body hurts it is a warning that something is wrong. It works the same way with the emotions. As long as we have a human form, we will hurt inside until we learn to face our issues, change our behavior and then let go of them. Changing our behavior will bring acceptance from self and others. Bad behavior brings rejection. If we want our children to be rejected, spoil them. Let them do as they please, not what will please others. This psychology is what has created the "Me" generation.

Sai Baba says, *"Human birth is not meant to eat, drink and be merry and act in an arbitrary manner. Wherever you go, people will respect you only for your qualities. People should talk about you in such terms: 'His behavior is exemplary; it gives us great joy to talk to him; if he just looks at us, we feel so happy.' It is only your good qualities that bring joy to you."*

SS February

2007 p 40

Invasion of 'Small Screen Values'

Can you imagine a society with fewer crime and divorce? In the past I could walk anywhere safely, even after dark. My parents did not worry as the parents do today. Divorce was not common and if this unfortunate event took place, it was serious and spoken in a whisper. We were taught that marriage was a Sacred Vow and that it was a permanent commitment. Divorce did not enter our consciousness. None of my family or friends divorced. When I was young, I thought it did not exist for real people; it only happened to the movie stars in Hollywood.

The frequency of divorce came from the movie stars in Hollywood. You would hear it on the radio, read it in movie magazines and newspapers. Years later their behavior was being expressed in movies, television, etc. When we see something over and over again, we begin to believe that it is the norm. It programmed the subconscious. Now we have a worldwide epidemic accepting divorce as normal.

After television, the values of the individual family were being overshadowed. Strangers entered into the home that spoke different values, beliefs, morality and showed unhealthy behavior, contrary to the parents. The value system of the parents were slowly being adulterated, drained out of their households because of the advanced technology transmitting shows and movies with horror, violence, permissiveness, murders, back talk and abuse to others.

When I was young, we would listen to the radio and the programs were humorous and entertaining. Today entertainment is sensationalism, gripping horror and frightening scenes that saturate the various forms of media creating fear and immorality. How can you relax when you see television shows and movies in this type of format? Where is the entertainment that we long for, the laughter and pleasure? Life in itself is overwhelming; who needs to be reminded of it 24-7 especially in our leisure time.

Spoiled by too Many Choices

There were no supermarkets or mega stores when I was a young girl. The fruit and vegetable truck came to our street; the milkman delivered our dairy products; the bread man delivered bakery goods. I being the eldest of three girls would walk to the nearest deli or corner grocery store when mom needed something. Life was simple. Now in our mega shopping markets, you walk forever until you find the one or two things that you really needed, and end up buying what you didn't need. Impulse buying is what the marketing people make every effort to gain.

In 1990, we spent nearly one year with Sai Baba. When we went into Bangalore to get a Birthday card, there were about 20 cards to choose from. It reminded me of the simplicity of my childhood days.

When we came home, and I had to get another card for one of my children, I went to one of the stores in the shopping mall. I stood in the store looking at

the aisles of cards for my selection. I suddenly became aware of my experience in Bangalore with only a 20-card choice realizing how easy it was. I thought how much time and energy it takes us to shop because of the numerous choices, price comparisons, styles etc. Since this is the norm for us now, I had forgotten the easiness in shopping as a child until I had this experience. I was standing there for 15 minutes instead of a few minutes. What an impact this had on me! How easy it was in Bangalore to select a card. Shopping today is a real brain drain. I know India is no longer the same, caught in the senses trap just like we were in America when television began in the 1950's and each year we become more and more ultimate consumers, as advertising and products are advanced.

Sai Baba says, *"Dharma (righteousness), Santhi (peace), Prema (love) and Ahimsa (non-violence) are internal. Forsaking his eternal and true internal qualities, man today is hankering after all that is worldly and transient. Man should instead internalize his vision and develop vision of the Self."*

SSS March 2007 p 115

Overloaded by the Media

The information that my family had to process on a daily basis was limited. Let's see - we had the church bulletin, the local paper, radio and family news. We did not have to use our mind to process what happened around the world every evening, only what was happening near us.

Imagine life without Internet, television, i-pods, and cell phones. Imagine the serenity of peace and quiet. Only, we cannot understand the quiet channel because ours has been stuck in the sprint mode. Our minds are in a torrent of stimuli bouncing off our senses and this creates a continuous thought processing pattern moving second by second. We are caught in a daily game of information gathering, driving us to keep up in order to appear informed. The outcome can make us feel restless, agitated, stressful and exhausted. We come home from work tired. No wonder.

When we got television I was a senior in high school. We have seen things that I did not know existed. We have seen lifestyles that I did not know existed. We have seen products to purchase that I did not know existed. But the question I ask is how could I miss what I did not know? The more we see; the more we want.

Sai Baba says, *"Morality goes down when Materialism goes up."*

My father went to work and came home every night. Traveling was done in a car or bus to work and return. Mom stayed home except for an occasional trip into St. Louis for shopping. The children stayed home and if we wanted to go somewhere we walked.

The nervous system had a button called "shut off" that was pushed after evening dinner. Dad would lie on the floor and listen to the radio. Mom, grandma and we three children would sit on the porch learning to knit or stitch

and watch the sunset and sometimes play with our friends. Life was simpler and yet very valuable. We had time to communicate to each other. We helped our family and friends; we knew our neighbors, the shopkeepers and church members. Life is so fast now that we hardly have time to know our self let alone our neighbor.

We did not have an air conditioner and the climate in the summer was hot and humid. Our occasional pleasure, on a very hot night was getting into the car and dad would drive in the country where it felt cooler. On the way home we sometimes would stop for an ice cream cone. This was a very special treat. My childhood expectations of pleasure were minuscule compared to the present generation and lifestyle.

Morality Comes From Values

A handshake was enough for many business deals. A man's word was his honor. Money was valued and not spent frivolously. A person's character and honor were more important than money. Neighbors were known and helped. Children stood on a bus when an adult did not have a seat. Children respected their parents and teachers. Children did not interrupt adults; they waited to speak. Children did not speak back to their parents. They may disagree but obeyed. Children did not complain or criticize their parents to their friends. To lie was to lose honor.

It is true that all was not perfect or good but the family was stronger because of our strong human values and our spiritual belief. We had a code of conduct that most of our community followed. There were no contradictions, interruptions and distractions in my childhood about our spiritual values or what was right or wrong behavior. The line was clearly defined. Our family culture and spiritual belief system was consistent. Our values seriously became challenged in the 1960's and everything began to change.

Sometimes people say the past generations are no different than ours. They had just as many hang-ups. Yes, people did have faults, problems and hang-ups but nevertheless our lifestyle, respect for others, and value system was entirely different. To deny this is an untruth.

I live in two different worlds, the one I fondly remember from my early life and now. To adapt to the changes is not an option for me but to understand them is. I so desire for mankind to transform the morality of today and improve on what existed years ago. It is possible to have a world where selfless service is popular but we will have to make many changes in the family. Our young and future children will need to be taught a spiritual lifestyle which practices the motto "Help Ever; Hurt Never."

I'll end this article with a quote from Dr. Laura Schlessinger who is the author of four New York Times bestsellers. She has the number one radio show in America, which is syndicated in 450 cities and is heard by 18 million people each weekday. In her most recent book "Parenthood by Proxy" subtitled "Don't Have Them If You won't Raise Them" states:

"I have personally come through the fifties, when family life was secure and healthy; through the sixties with its turmoil over authority, tradition, and overblown emphasis on the self; through the seventies, eighties, and nineties, watching great social experimentation bring forth some incredible advances, as well as devastating assaults on respect for authority, personal responsibility, religion, morality, and obligation to family and community.

"I am finishing my fifth adult book on the edge of a new century. Each of its predecessors stimulated various passions and moods, encouraged self-exploration, and precipitated philosophical struggles within me. And each was generated by a desire to explore, challenge, and inspire.

"This book is decidedly different. The genesis of this one was anger, which the process of researching and writing only heightened. I am angry with the historically esteemed professional organizations (medical, psychological, sociological, educational), so adamantly committed to secularism and total individual freedom that God, marital fidelity and holiness, marital vows and family obligations have all become targets of derision and destruction." Epilogue P. 263

Sai Baba says, *"Truth, righteousness, peace, love and non-violence are the five human values to be cultivated by a human being. You should learn all about these human values and put them into practice. Then your journey of life will surely become smooth and peaceful. This is my main message to you today. Truth is eternal. It is only when you follow this eternal truth that your name will remain in the annals of history forever. Eternal truth will earn eternal peace for you."* Christmas Message Dec. 25th 2006
Sanathana Sarathi

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 32

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT IX - SCENE 1

Sathya comes back home and ponders deeply. His teacher and classmates want Him to go with them to the Scout Camp. For that, He must have money. But His brother has told Him to tell the Teacher that there is no money. Is there any other way of generating at least some money? He hit upon an idea. He has just been promoted to the next higher class. He no longer needs His old books. They are in very good condition. Perhaps, He could offer them on sale and get some cash. He decides to go to the house of a boy He knows, who might like to buy His books.

SATHYA: [standing outside the house of the boy] Kondalu, Kondalu!

KONDALU: [comes out] Raju, what brings You here?

SATHYA: You wanted old books, didn't you? Look, I have brought them!

KONDALU: Old books? These appear to be new!

SATHYA: I don't use these for My study; that's why they are looking new.

KONDALU: What is the price?

SATHYA: I'll give it to you at half-rate.

KONDALU: Half-rate means?

SATHYA: Ten rupees.

KONDALU: Ten rupees?

SATHYA: Yes, only ten rupees. With ten rupees, I can go the Pushpagiri Carnival and do service. That is why I am selling these books to you.

KONDALU: I cannot afford that price. I have only five rupees that my father earned with great difficulty; and that too in small coins! Raju, I cannot give You ten rupees.

SATHYA: No problem; five rupees are enough, and take all these books.

KONDALU: Here are the five rupees *[offers the money]*.

SATHYA: Kondalu, study well.

KONDALU: Raju, I can never forget Your kindness.

SATHYA: See you soon!

SCENE 2

Sathya comes back to His house with the cash, which is in the form of small change. Trouble is in store for Him. As He enters, the coins slip and scatter all over. Seshama Raju's mother-in-law sees the money and becomes agitated.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Oh my! So much money, so much money, money, money! Where did You get all this money from? Did You steal it from here?

SATHYA: I did not steal. I got this money by selling My old text books.

M-I-L: Sold old books? To whom?

SATHYA: To Kondalu. He is very poor. If you want, I'll call him and you can check with him.

M-I-L: Oh, so you want me to ask him? You two are together playing a drama – You for him and he for You! My goodness, the mouse is the witness for the cat! Where did You get this money from? Let Your elder brother come, and we'll settle this business once and for all.

Seshama Raju enters the room.

SESHAMA RAJU: What's all this noise?

M-I-L: No noise, son-in-law; just that He is saying that He got the money by selling His books. I am asking whether it is true or not.

SESHAMA RAJU: Sathyam where did You get this money? I am asking you! From where did You get this money? Books are for studying and not for selling. We all are struggling so that You may study well and secure a very good job but You are selling Your books, pencils, and pens! We just don't know when You will change for the better!

SATHYA: It's not that way brother; what I am trying to say is.....

SESHAMA RAJU: Shut up! If You utter another word, I'll lose my temper and I don't know what I'll do then. Get lost!

Lady collects all the coins.

M-I-L: My money, my money!

SCENE 3

Sathya's plan has been scuttled; He now has no money and therefore cannot go to the Scout Camp. Soon, His friends would be coming to pick Him up. He must dodge them. So, when the boys come, He pretends to have a stomach ache.

SATHYA: Oh, pain, stomach pain, stomach pain, oh, oh,

BOY: Raju, what happened to You?

SATHYA: Stomach ache, severe stomach ache!

BOY: Oh dear! Why did You not take some medicine? Your pain would have come down.

SATHYA: No, I have not taken any medicine.

BOY: Raju, we are going to the Pushpagiri Carnival. It is time for the bus to leave. Aren't You coming?

SATHYA: No, I am not coming.

BOY: Raju, if You do not come, we too will not go.

ANOTHER BOY: That's right Raju, we will not go!

THIRD BOY: None of us will go!

SATHYA: You should not say that! All of you go to the Carnival, and I'll come somehow or the other.

BOY: You'll definitely come, won't You?

SATHYA: I'll come. I never break My promise. I always sustain those who have total faith and trust in Me. Now all of you go; I'll find a way of coming to the Pushpagiri Carnival.

CHORUS: Really? You'll come?

SATHYA: Definitely; I'll come.

BOY: OK Raju, we will go; come on, let's go.

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 33
(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 15

21. 'Arjuna, the body by itself is absolutely inert. It is My power that animates it in various ways and makes it do so many extra-ordinary things. Have you ever thought about that? Never! And do you know why? It is your ego that deludes you!'

22. 'This delusion, also called *Maya*, misleads and fools. You paint a picture and people praise it. You immediately begin to think that you, the body, have actually done it. No! It is I who put the idea for the picture, it is I who guided your hand, it is I who allowed you to make that picture beautiful. And yet you think that it is you, the body, which did it! Tell Me, who is responsible for this delusion, you or Me?'

23. 'This precisely is where the *Yogi* scores. He identifies himself totally with Me or the *Atma*, and keeps on saying he uses his body and mind as instruments of the *Atma*.'

24. Arjuna says, 'Yes Krishna, I remember the *Yogis* say *Aham Brahmasmi* or 'I am God'!'

25. Krishna replies, 'Yes, Arjuna they do. But you must be careful with this chant that the scriptures recommend. Much depends on the feeling with which and the spirit in which you say *Aham Brahmasmi*.'

26. 'You don't do this chant to proclaim to the world, "Listen fellows, do you know who I am? I am God!" No! Never in that spirit! That is vain boasting and God does not know what boasting is!'

27. Arjuna asks, 'Then what for do the scriptures recommend this chant?'

28. Krishna replies, 'Ah, with good reason! You see Arjuna, everything has a purpose. You know elders advise, "If you fly into a rage, tell yourself I am not an animal; I am man." That is a reminder. The chant *Aham Brahmasmi* also is supposed to be chanted in the spirit of a reminder. It is a reminder that you are expected to exhibit virtues like Compassion, Selfless Love, Forbearance, etc. Remember, all these are Divine qualities. They all are already in man, and all he has to do is to let them out. The chant is a reminder that he had better do the releasing!'

29. 'When you keep on chanting thus, slowly, unknown to you, the Divine feeling would envelop you completely. As you think, so you become; remind yourself constantly that you are God and God indeed you become!'

30. 'When you feel you are God, you will no longer see any differences. If someone is happy, you would feel that happiness. If someone is in pain, you would feel that pain and rush to help.'

31. 'Arjuna, in simple terms, going from the level of man to the level of God means giving up all this business of mine and thine, crushing ego, and wiping out all traces of worldly attachment.'

32. 'A man of the world may be good, but he still functions within the limits of *Swartham* or selfishness and *Swaprayojanam* or self-interest. A man who has risen to the level of the Divine does not.'

33. 'Just look at Me? Can you find even an atom of selfishness or self-interest in Me? Impossible! I am Divine because My Heart is full of nothing but *Daya* or Compassion, *Prema* or Pure and Selfless Love, and *Kshama* or Forbearance. These qualities are not switched off and on. They flow uninterrupted all the time. They are My very nature.'

34. 'Arjuna, in the physical Universe, there is the seen and the unseen. For example, you can see mountains but you cannot see air. You cannot see the mind; and so on. I am the basis for everything in the physical Universe, both the aspects that are seen and those that are not.'

35. 'But remember, these two aspects are nothing but the superstructure of something that is even more subtle and always is. That substratum is the Real Me. It is from that substratum that is the Ultimate that Space and Time are born, onto which the Universe gets projected. So, while living in the Universe and seeing all that goes on before you, you must go back all the way to the true fundamental basis. That alone would help you to become quickly united with Me.'

36. 'If only people would take a few minutes off and observe Me carefully, they would realise that My Life is My Message, every single second of it. But people do not, and that includes you too, I am afraid, despite our very long association! And that is why I have to tell you all that minutes before a major war is about to start!'

37. 'If man's life becomes the same as Mine, then man would become one with Me ever so easily! Why don't people understand that?'

38. 'I have drifted off from what I was saying a short while ago; let Me get back to *Yogis*. These blessed ones know who exactly I am, and what My true nature is. They understand fully that they have been gifted with the human form in order to rise to My level. They know fully well that man alone can rise thus and not an insect, bird, or animal.'

39. 'The *Yogis* know where exactly they are supposed to go at the end of life, and they get there too! This is the privilege of all who are smart enough to burn trash in the fire of Knowledge. Why don't you also do the same? What are you waiting for?!'

END OF CHAPTER 15

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

SAI SERVICE CENTRE BLOSSOMS IN THE SLUMS OF MEXICO

The inspiring story of a new healthcare initiative in Mexico City which, though small, could be the harbinger of a Sai Medicare Revolution in Latin America.

Inspired by Bhagavan Baba's personal example of universal love and selfless service, His Mexican devotees recently reached yet another milestone in their community outreach initiatives by starting a Sai Service Centre in the heart of an economically deprived neighbourhood on the fringe of Mexico City.

While free medical services have been successfully delivered by the Sai organization in Mexico City's Guanajuato Street Centre for over 15 years now, more recently, a group of devotees was inspired to take the outreach project right into the heart of a slum area on the outskirts of the sprawling metropolis.

The initiative proved to be an eye-opener for everyone involved. Apart from those that were served, it was the devotees serving in the camp that benefited the most from the experience, receiving Baba's priceless reaffirmation that the service to fellow beings is the shortest cut to reach and experience God and His pure love.

As with all things good and noble, the project began as a medical clinic and soon grew to provide a variety of services for medical relief, empowering and educating the poor and neglected Mexicans living in the squalor of the slum. Throughout the journey, from the time the idea was conceived till to its current success, the devotees experienced the loving guidance of the Lord in all their endeavours.

Taking Sai Service to the Slums

The initiative to move the service into the eye of the storm, so to speak, and deliver it to those in need in their home turf, the slum itself, was proposed by a Sai devotee, Luis Tovar and his sister, who live close-by. They offered to spare some space where one doctor and a nurse were able to discharge their duties. Little did they know then that with divine grace and blessings, the project would grow into a full-service Sai centre, meeting the physical, dental, mental, emotional, economic and spiritual needs of the slum dwellers – a gratifying experience made possible only due to the mysterious workings of the Divine Hand.

In January of this year (2007), Dr. Ociel Rodríguez Lundes, was invited to coordinate a medical team for a new Metropolitan Medical Service project under the wing of the Sai Organisation in Mexico City. This project was meant to offer Sai devotees new opportunities to serve in an area which includes Sai Centers in Toluca, Cuernavaca, Puebla and Pachuca.

Within a month, Dr. Rodríguez presented a 6-month plan to the Council, proposing to set up the centre, which would include professionals such as Social Workers, Dentists, Psychiatrists, and other therapists. One of the priorities then, was to prepare the new property to host the Medical clinic and to organize a team.

The group embarked on its mission, armed with the faith that God would guide their steps. Proving that the journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step, the team started small with three doctors, two dentists, one psychiatrist, a Gestalt therapist as well as some willing Sai workers coming forward to form the start-off group. Mr. Muñiz took up the challenge of ensuring the economic viability of the project. It was decided to carry out a one-day medical camp in the proposed area to assess the needs and composition of the client base.

However, before proceeding with the one-day camp, the nascent team decided to pay an exploratory visit to Masahua village and interview the villagers to find out about their health needs. The trip provided the volunteers with the much needed experience to bond with each other and develop the spirit necessary for working effectively for a higher purpose.

The travel time to and from the village proved to be an ideal *satsang* opportunity as team members shared experiences of how they were drawn by Swami to become His instruments and sang *bhajans* along the way. A common sense of purpose and love for Swami's universal teachings proved to be the uniting factor that brought about a sense of oneness to the otherwise diverse group.

Upon reaching the village, they were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Humberto Vilchis, a young Catholic couple, who played host to the group. The Vilchis are a broad-minded family who have embraced the universal teachings of Baba and His humanitarian service projects. They took it upon themselves to prepare and provide food for the group, and introduced them to the villagers in order to prepare them for the service activities. At the end of the first day, a bond had been forged between diverse groups – professionals and individuals, with their love and commitment to Sai teachings binding them all into one whole. As a result of this interaction, the team conceived the idea of holding a one-day service camp in the village itself before starting the proposed service centre in the slum.

One-Day Camp – The Perfect Prelude

April 28, 2007 saw the Vilchis family once again offering their love, support and services to coordinate the one-day service camp. They even attended planning meetings and offered a truck to transport all the clothes, food, and equipment as well as the medicines meant for distribution. A total of 16 Sai Workers, including the Vilchis family made up the harmonious team of:

- 3 General Doctors

- 1 Dentist
- 2 Social Workers
- 8 Sai Volunteers
- Mr. and Mrs. Vilchis and their children

Thanks to the spirit of unity and love that prevailed throughout the day, the small but cohesive group was able to achieve some impressive results:

- Nearly 90 families were served.
- 600 kilos of grains were distributed.
- Everyone received adequate clothing and other provisions.
- 90 medical check-ups were conducted and free medicines and vitamins were distributed.
- Topical fluoride application was provided for more than 100 children's teeth.
- Piñatas were broken to celebrate children's day.
- Most significantly, tons of unconditional love was in circulation, charging the atmosphere with joy and optimism.

All the villagers received enough grains such as beans, rice, lentils and chickpeas, clothes, shoes, toys, besides vitamins and medicines for their health problems.

What a valuable learning experience that one day proved to be for the volunteers! Every member realized that one need not to be rich or wealthy, a scholar or a Ph. D to serve those in need. A pure heart and the firm determination to serve others selflessly is all that is necessary. God provides the rest. One participant described it as "a divine experience, difficult to narrate, best to experience."

Participants were so moved by the experience that shortly thereafter, they visited the Sai youth at their annual retreat and made a presentation about the camp and the lessons received there. Dr. Rodriguez shared the pictures taken in the Sai clinic that was set up in the village and its surrounding areas to draw the youth's attention to the needs of the poor people and their problems, while acquainting them with the work done by Sai organization in the past 6 years to alleviate their suffering. The presentation undoubtedly touched the Sai youth and exposed them to the tragic face of rural poverty. Meanwhile devotees continued to work very hard to get the new clinic in shape for its inauguration inside the slum colony.

Auspicious Beginning

With Swami's grace, when the opening date of the new clinic, 26th May 2007, arrived, everything was ready and prepared with lots of love by the team. As a befitting start to a sacred project, Mrs. Gail Muñiz prayed first to Lord Ganesha, and then broke a coconut, offering everything to Swami, while guests sang some bhajans. Right after that Dr. Rodriguez addressed the gathering. Also present on the occasion were the President of the Trust, Mr. Muñiz, the President of the Sai Organization Metro-area of Mexico City, the

National Service Committee coordinator, Mrs. Maria De Lourdes Martínez, members of the three Sai Centers in the city, and the nurse. Swami's divine presence was felt palpably by all present.

Mr. and Mrs. Luis Muñiz brought with them the sacred Shiva Lingam that Swami had materialized for Mexico after the earthquake in 1985. He had told her to bathe it and give the water to the people as it would confer peace of mind. On another visit to Prashanti, Swami had changed the colour of the lingam, advising her that this would help with any health problems. It was truly a blessing to have it on that day.

With such an auspicious start, what began as a single room operation due to the generosity of the brother-sister team of devotees meant to accommodate one doctor and a nurse soon grew in its needs. After some time, another small room of the house was used as a classroom.

Ever since then, the Sai Clinic has been able to serve the needs of the poor more effectively. Those who receive the free medical check-up and medication describe the experience as truly great but the love and genuine concern they encounter here is actually the priceless gift they carry in their hearts, as they walk out smiling with satisfaction.

The original medical team that started it all comprised of a Sai devotee, Dr. Ma. Teresa Coria, and a nurse Laura, known as Laurita to the public. Currently, an average of 600 patients are availing this free service every month.

It's Not Only Medicare, It's All-Round Care

After carefully assessing the needs of the slum dwellers, the Sai organisation set up Education in Human Values classes in the same premises for children between 6 and 15 years of age. Using both the direct and the indirect method, the volunteer teachers are helping the young secondary school students to keep up with their school work, and teaching them about human values by narrating stories, and singing; children accessing the Education in Human Values classes also receive breakfast.

Two Sai Youth members, Alejandra and Patricio, run these classes every Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. They also hold regular meetings with the parents to explain the EHV program to them, and help them improve their parenting practices through effective communication with their children.

To further empower the slum dweller and render them employable, the Sai group has also been running classes for hair cutting and styling and provides free hair cuts to the users of the medical clinic every Thursday morning.

A handicrafts workshop is also conducted for women to acquire skills that will help them make a living. A devotee volunteer has been teaching the slum women to design and produce such items as fabric covers for small kitchen

appliances like blenders and toasters. They also make table accessories like table covers and napkins.

Seeing the slum population's need for education and awareness, the Sai volunteers have taken up a very special project which they conduct on Tuesday mornings. The Social Worker holds a session for the gathering that first addresses self-awareness issues such as: self-identity; motivation and intention and then moves on to Education in Human Values for adults. The next item on the agenda is typically related to mental health issues after which she educates them on physical health, covering topics such as: how to prevent strokes; nutrition; preventive techniques for HIV/AIDS; family health, etc. All the classes are well attended, proving the need for such awareness and education.

The bulk of the clients visiting the Sai Community Centre are young single mothers, living in poverty-stricken conditions with the various social problems that come with the package: risk of violence; health care problems; teenage pregnancy; drug-addiction; unemployment; illiteracy; lack of opportunities for study, etc.

Thanks to the early exploratory investigation into the needs of the community, the Sai team also provides twice a week services of a psychiatrist to the local population, again entirely free of cost.

Not only this, twice a week, a dentist is also on duty, offering free services that include fluoride applications for strengthening their teeth. The doctor's surgery is open from Monday to Saturday, from 10:00 a.m. and closes when the last person is served, usually around 3:00 p.m. In the summer vacation period, the number of clients increase and the doctors finish their work around 5 p.m.

The usefulness of the services is evident from the growing numbers of people who access the Sai Community Centre that is now committed to their physical, mental, dental, emotional, economic and spiritual needs.

What began as a single room operation has grown into a hub that supports an entire community. With a proper and permanent venue for the clinic, the venture is turning out to be the first Sathya Sai Hospital in Mexico and all of Latin America. With each passing day, the local population is gravitating towards it, well aware that it truly is a place where they can experience pure love in action. You can't hide a good thing for too long and the efforts of the Mexican devotees are bearing fruits as an entire community of slum dwellers is keenly seeking their support to live a life of dignity and self-respect where they can raise healthy and wholesome children, men and women.

Love Lives by Giving

Needless to say, those committed to the running and upkeep of the services at the Community Centre find the experience uplifting. After its inauguration, the Sai Center still had plenty of donations of clothes, shoes, and toys to give away to all the users of the Clinic and residents in the local area. The doctor and the nurse took it upon themselves to organize the distribution of the items in an orderly and loving manner. Tokens were distributed to the 150 people who were frequent users of the clinic's services in its initial stages and to another 50 needy people who had assembled there. Every adult woman was allowed to visit the clinic with her children and select up to ten items.

The joy of receiving these gifts was evident on every recipient's face and in the remarks that poured forth spontaneously from them. Everybody was very happy and on leaving, people said: "May God bless you all"... "Thanks to God"... "You all are so kind, thank you so much, God bless you,"... "May God be with you and take care of you"... "Thank you for helping us"... "God bless you". At the same time, inside the compound, the EHV teachers and children were celebrating a little girl's birthday and the end of the school year. Happiness was so beautifully evident and the kids were running and playing. They also received candies.

This day helped to inform all the new neighbours of the clinic's existence and the services it had to offer. Once again the team bonded in unity and enjoyed the bliss that comes from participating in such noble and soul-lifting exercises. The poorest people were able to take away things that they really needed. Everyone felt deeply gratified to have made a difference in the lives of so many who have so little.

Everything went on in perfect harmony there was no discord. There was only one incident where a woman complained that another lady had taken too many shoes and did not want to share with her and she had only one pair. One of the staff approached this lady and asked her whether her attitude was selfish, or kind? Spontaneously, the lady with the many shoes gave away a pair, smiling to the other woman and apologized, and both of them were happy. At the end, some of them helped clean the place, leaving the premises neat and tidy.

Being a part of such a euphoric and productive day was an experience in inner growth and bonding where the volunteers felt God's presence in the smiles and joy of those they served.

"Swami has most generously showered His blessings over Mexico and us by allowing us to be a part of His Love Revolution which is fast expanding all over the planet," say the Sai devotees in Mexico. "We are grateful to be part of this blessing from high heavens!" The bliss and beatitude on their faces says it all and makes one feel that this truly is only the beginning, a tiny start, which will one day, by His grace, envelop the whole of Latin America with its sublimity and selfless spirit.

PRASHANTI DIARY

July 2, 2007 – USA Programme: ‘Journey to Sai through SAI – Service, Adoration and Illumination.’

It was an evening to remember. At least for the American devotees it was an evening that made them go through the sweetness of all emotions - there were tears and smiles, fears and sighs! All the US devotees in blue scarves were seated from early in the afternoon. There was no sign of Swami coming till almost 4:15 pm. At 4:30pm when Bhagavan came out, fears converted to relief and there was a burst of joy on their faces. Swami completed His Darshan rounds and came straight out to the dais. As a member of the group recalls:

“The ‘*Journey to Sai through SAI*’ did not begin at the N3 or the N4 buildings. Rather, the train ride of July 2nd was a mere segment in the itinerary of this journey which commenced about a year ago in the Southeast region of USA (this region consists of the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and St. Thomas Virgin Islands). With an aim of bringing the entire region together as one big united Sai family, a few key individuals conceived the idea of organizing the first ever pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam. During the early stages of this journey, a conscious effort was made by the pilgrims to further identify the reasons for embarking on this pilgrimage. It was concluded that the real pilgrimage was towards the Sai consciousness, both at the individual and the group levels. Though a very important milestone, the outward journey to Prashanti Nilayam was only a complement to the real journey towards Sai consciousness which the pilgrims felt can only be achieved by means of Service, Adoration and Illumination. Thus, inspired by Bhagavan, an apt theme for this pilgrimage was adopted by the pilgrims as ‘*Journey to Sai through SAI – Service, Adoration and Illumination*’.

“Subsequently, as part of the journey towards the Sai consciousness at a group level, several activities involving Service, Adoration and Illumination, were designed. For service, the Sai brothers and sisters in this region, intensified their attendance and commitment to existing service activities and took up new projects at the local level. Medical camps, which were joint endeavors, were also organized and these service projects entailed participation from pilgrims all across the region. Towards adoration, the Sai centers took up group chanting activities and special bhajan sessions in addition to encouraging an increased participation in the weekly Sai center devotional singing. Towards Illumination, the Sai centers across the region took up activities such as special satsanghs and increased the participation in the periodic study circles. In some sessions, devotees shared their knowledge and the wisdom gathered from their experiences with Bhagavan. Other groups delved into His teachings, while some groups took up collective book reading (such as Tapovanam). Bhagavan blessed all these efforts by fostering unity and camaraderie in the entire Southeast region both at the regional and

local levels. Thus, after kindling the fire of sadhana for over a year, the pilgrims finally arrived at the auspicious abode of Lord Sai on June 24, 2007.”

This kind of preparation is something that only Swami can know. For all those who had assembled, it was another programme. But Swami had decided to make it very special. Bhagavan came to the front of the veranda, the program was announced, and children and members of the group approached Swami, one by one offering red roses and other tokens of Love. The announcer also cleverly invited Bhagavan to visit the USA, Swami chuckled out loud at this invitation. Then the programme began with great devotion and fervour. The mammoth group sang out in one voice and the power of their unison was evident. The whole audience too joined in the programme by clapping in rhythm to the songs. The songs were comprised of an eclectic selection of English, Spanish, Hindi, and Native American melodies. Most of the songs sung were medleys and had a blend of western music and bhajans. Swami's countenance was radiant and many smiles sparkled over His face. The programme lasted approximately 40 minutes.

As the programme concluded, Swami went into the interview room and came out with sarees and white cloth pieces. There was glee everywhere at this unexpected gesture. Swami descended from the stage to the block where the US devotees were seated. He sat in front of the ladies and started the distribution. As Swami sat watching, the devotees were thrilled. The ladies received sarees while the gents had white cloth pieces. He lavished His love on the group, calling two women to help distribute the beautiful red raw silk saris with blue border to the ladies and summoning a few other women also to help. He then went around these devotees and blessed everyone. After coming back on stage, He summoned a lady who had not been given a saree and presented one especially to her. He blessed all the gents with white cloth pieces. He ensured that there was a smile on every face. Thus blessing all, Swami received Aarthi and left.

July 5 – USA Group Interview

What more could the group have asked for? But the all-giving Swami wanted to give them more: a group Interview! From an initial 320 devotees, the group was merely a 70 or so during the last group darshan on the afternoon of July 5th. As usual, Swami waited until the last possible minute to grant their wish and called the group for an interview. Once the group was seated, Swami lovingly asked the ladies in the group “What do you want?” “We want You, Swami ...only You,” some women called out. Swami smiled.

“Where is God?” He asked the group. Various responses came forth - “with us”, “in us”, etc. Swami smiled and nodded!

After a while, with the love and compassion of a thousand mothers, He looked around and said, “Many people have gone from the group....they will be disappointed....you must make them understand that God is in you, with you, in front of you, around you....tell them....My Blessings are with them always!”

Someone asked, "Swami what message can we take back with us to the USA?" Swami repeated, "God is in you. He is not separate. I am with you, in you, around you!" The man added, "Swami, I know that I am God, but I do not feel it". Swami replied, "That is your imagination. You are thinking with your head, not your heart. You are not the body, you are not the mind. You are the atma. The one you think you are is the body. The one that others think you are is the mind. The one you really are is the atma."

After a couple of moments, Swami looked at one of the Spanish women, and asked "How is your leg?" He continued "Pain, in your leg?" In fact, this woman had severe pain in her hip and had recently undergone hip surgery. "OK, Swami," she replied. Swami later gave her vibhuti and told her to rub it on her hip and her pain will be gone.

"What is your name?" He asked a lucky lady in the group. "Gabriella", she answered. "Husband?" He asked. "Swami, David is my husband," she said. Swami asked Gabriella and David to come up and sit beside Him. Swami looked at her and asked, "What do you want?" "I just want You, Swami", she answered. He asked her again "What do you want?" She said, "Just You, Swami. I want Your love". "You have My love", Swami confirmed.

After asking them several personal questions, Swami raised His hand and started waving it around in the air. Through the fingers of His hands the group could see a chain materializing. Swami pulled out a beautiful chain, with a huge pendant encrusted with stones. At first, the chain was short, but Swami pulled it and it got longer, though the thickness remained the same. As the devotees peered at it, Swami saw them looking, smiled and held it up and said to all of them, "Can you see?" He looked at the woman and said softly, "Sai Geetha on both sides... It has everything there for you." He told David to put it on her neck. Then He put His hand on each of their heads, and said a mantra. What appeared to be unfolding in the mandir was a divine marriage being performed by the Lord of the Universe, Himself! "Are you happy?" Swami asked them, smiling lovingly. "Yes, Swami. Padnamaskar?" They asked. "Yes," He said. "Both together," He indicated, and then both husband and wife took padnamaskar together. Swami then gave each of them vibhuti packets and said, "Keep it for yourself, don't share it". He then asked the couple to return to their seats.

Next Swami indicated for the men to come one by one to take padnamaskar. When each person approached Swami, He would sometimes ask them personal questions and enquire about their profession. He waited patiently for each person to offer pranams. To the young boys, Swami would sometimes smile and say, "Come on, boy!" He would also ask them their names, how old they were, and what standard they were in. After the men were done, Swami asked the women to come up one at a time, sometimes talking to them about personal matters, and giving them vibhuti packets. When all the women were done, Swami blessed a couple of large bowls full of prasadam (strawberry flavored wafers) which were then distributed by a couple of volunteers on the men and women's side.

Swami then turned to the crowd and said "Are you happy?", "Yes, Swami, Yes!", "We love You", "Thank You, Swami", the devotees called out! Swami held up His hands, smiled and said "Very happy."

For the pilgrims from the Southeast region of USA, it was perhaps the culmination of prayers of life times. The Lord had blessed them beyond their imagination and filled them with boundless bliss.

July 8 – SSSIHL Programme: "Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye" and Devotional Songs from Anantapur campus.

Where God is concerned, the unexpected always happens. The beauty and reality of this statement was portrayed on Sunday, July 8 as Swami made it a very special day for everyone present. Swami says, "Love my uncertainty." Well most of the time, we don't like uncertainty. But that is the Lord. He makes us evolve from avoiding uncertainty to accepting it and finally to loving it!

As per the latest trend, the boys from the Prashanti Nilayam campus of the Institute had prepared a programme, "*Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*". Students from the Anantapur campus of the Institute also had arrived ready with a programme to be presented to their dear Lord. Swami came out for darshan at about 3:30pm but after completing the darshan rounds, went straight into the interview room to speak with devotees. The Bhajan hall had been occupied by the students so they could don their costumes for the programme, and after the interviews had concluded at 4:50pm, Swami went into the bhajan hall and in a few minutes, the bhajans began.

What nobody expected was that just as His students had prepared a drama for Him as a Sunday special, He too had prepared a 'drama' for them as His Sunday special! As the bhajans concluded, Swami called the vice chancellor and a small interaction took place. The next minute, there was a rush. Swami was going outside on stage! He had told the VC that the boy's programme must be performed! There was a lot of energy in the air as instead of the customary "winding up", everyone hurried for the unscheduled "setting up".

So at 5:35 pm, the programme began. The boys offered a card with the proceedings and their heartfelt messages to Swami. The programme highlighted the role of Education in life. It began with a masterly lecture by a top scientist on how man had learnt to swim better than a fish, fly better than a bird and do everything better than any other animal. He is stumped when a rustic gets up and asks, "Has it taught him to live like a man?"

The next day, this incident pops up in the discussion between this scientist and his colleagues. Their discussion on how man has begun to use education as a whip for grabbing power and exploiting everything was beautifully depicted by a mime where men are moving around in circles turning the wheel of success and fortune with tireless effort. Man doesn't realise a great law of the universe is that we can not always receive. For example, viruses keep taking nourishment from the host till the host dies out. Finally the viruses too die out with the host. Is man any better than a virus? If you want more the

only way to achieve it is by giving more. A small skit was performed to highlight this ethic.

God tells His children, both in hell and heaven, "I have arranged a feast for you all. The only condition is that you must not bend your elbows while eating. If you do so the feast will vanish." While the people in hell struggle selfishly to feed themselves and remain hungry, the people in heaven feed one another and there is joy everywhere. Be selfish, keep grabbing and earth becomes hell. Give and it will come back to you. Give and there will be heaven on earth. This is the way life must be lead and this message is to be taught by the education system. But where is this message to be found in today's education system?

Then came the depiction of Eashwar Chandra Vidyasagar's life. Truly educated that he was, he humbly carries the handbag of a western gentleman who calls him a "coolie". When the gentleman realizes his folly, he begs pardon of Vidyasagar but the humble soul that he was he tells everyone that he is nobody special. All his life he just wanted to make his two mothers happy - mother and motherland. When he asked his mother what ornaments she wanted, she said, "I want three jewels only. A school for all the children here, wells to yield sweet water for the people and a medical care unit for safeguarding the health of everyone." Vidyasagar says he did just that and nothing else. At this juncture, Swami must have become very nostalgic, for He was totally immersed in the scene being depicted. Emotion welled up in His sweet face as if He was right there experiencing the initial pain and the subsequent relief of the people.

The sight of the Lord in emotion is one of such profound beauty and significance. It goes deep into one's heart as if questioning our indifferent attitude to the pain and suffering all around. When we see people suffering, begging or in agony, we feel that they must be acting to elicit sympathy. Here the Lord feels the pain of the suffering even if it is only acting in a dramatic depiction. Oh! If only a fraction of that tenderness of heart becomes ours, our life would have found meaning.

The presentation concluded with the analogy of the student being the seed and the education system being the soil where the seed would germinate. If protected by the fence of discipline and weeded of bad qualities, nourished with the fertilizer of secular knowledge and watered with love, the plant would become a tree providing shade to one and all. But for any garden, a gardener is a must.

The students expressed they were all very fortunate to have Swami as their divine gardener. They then did something that surprised everyone - something that only the students could have thought of. They took a sapling in a pot to Swami and said, "Swami here we are your saplings. Nourish us with your Love." Then Swami did something that surprised them also - something that only Swami could have thought of. He put His hand into the soil. He mixed it as if pouring His love to nourish the sapling and said, "Yes, Yes." He then posed for a group photo with all His children. The time was almost

6:20pm.

But the evening was not over yet. Swami looked at the Anantapur sisters and told them to start their programme. There were audible gasps and excited whispers on the sisters' side. There was a sweet smile on His face. Oh! Everybody was enraptured by the day's uncertainties!

The girls sang their hearts out. The songs were mostly in Telugu. "Chhoda Chakkani Chinnodanta", sung in the folk style brought smiles on the faces of all those who understood Telugu as the glories of the cute boy Sathya were depicted. Five songs were performed and then Swami directed that prasadam be distributed. It was 6:50 pm when Swami received Aarthi and left.

July 11 – Drama from Medak region: “Amma”

More than 4000 devotees from Medak had arrived at Puttaparthi to have darshan of their dear Lord and also offer their gratitude for the sweet water He had given them on July 11. Prashanti Nilayam has been buzzing with these people and one could see them everywhere - in the mandir, canteens, accommodation blocks and roadways of the Nilayam.

The Kulwant hall was filled with people in orange scarves and their fervour could be felt from the fact that they were the first ones to flock to the hall when the gates opened for darshan. The stage had been set for a musical drama - "AMMA" to be followed by a rally. Swami arrived at 3:30pm and as He passed by the set stage and banners, He viewed them. Necks craned to have a glimpse of Swami as He passed by. The expression on every face was one of anticipation - "Will Swami see me?"

Swami came on stage and sat on the sofa. After a few minutes, He requested the Veda chanting to be stopped and the programme to begin. Two tiny tots came walking up to the stage and just seeing them a lovely smiled blossomed on His face. He accepted the rose and programme schedule that they offered and rewarded them by pulling their cheeks, much to the joy of everyone around. Swami then formally declared the programme open by lighting the lamp which, in a very innovative and traditional manner, had been placed on a *Poorna Kumbham*.

The programme began with rich and colourful dances. These were performed by both the little girls and boys. The main story of the drama was that of a young disillusioned lad, Ramu, who thinks that he can repay the debt to his mother by paying her money for all that she had done for him. He is a typical modern youth who feels that earning money with his sweat and blood is the greatest contribution he can make. On the other hand, there is Venkanna - a simple rustic lad with a pure heart and love for his mother. He spends his day singing glories of the Lord. Venkanna gets the shock of his life when his mother contracts a medical problem which requires huge hospital fees. The Lord's saving Grace descends on him in the form of the Sri Sathya Sai Hospital where his mother is treated. Meanwhile, Venkanna meets Ramu's mother and tells her that he would take care of her and that she should

consider him as her son. Ramu's boss, a former student of SSSIHL, comes to know of what Ramu has done. He makes Ramu realise his mistake and also demonstrates to him how much his mother loves him. Ramu realises his mistake, Venkanna's mother is cured and it's a happy conclusion. The conclusion dances were grand and synchronized too. Swami was very pleased with the theme and He walked down to pose with the group for pictures.

Swami then went into the interview room and arranged white cloth pieces for distributing to the boys. He had a beautiful saree which he gave to the boy who acted as the mother in the drama. Then He gave cloth pieces to all the participants starting with this boy. It was a double blessing for this boy who played the lead role of the 'mother' in the drama. Once the distribution was over, the rally began. It was really a huge one in terms of numbers. A girls' band followed by a large Veda chanting contingent of ladies holding *Poorna Kumbham* were the first to arrive. This was followed by a contingent of women carrying lamps on the *Poorna Kumbhams*. Lambadi dancers, children performing a Sarva Dharma dance and representations of the various services done in the villages were also presented. Then began the gents contingents. Veda chanting, various dances, children costumed as Hanuman, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were also part of the procession. The grand finale was brought up by a huge representation of the water supply project in Medak. As the vehicle was brought forward there was a loud applause and that brought a smile on Swami's face. Then there was a plethora of *Padanamaskar* taking as people came by the dozens and fell at His feet. Even the little kid who had come in the beginning to offer the flower, came up to Swami and offered His namaskar. Sri Ramana Rao, a respected elder in Prasanthi Nilayam, in his own inimitable style came up to Swami and said, "Swami everyone are so happy. It is all your Grace."

Swami then blessed all the ladies in-charge with sarees and padanamaskar. As Swami was leaving, the photographer gave Him copies of the group photos that had just been taken. Swami had a look at them and handed them to Smt. Geeta Reddy who was co-ordinating the programme. It was almost close to 6:00pm when Swami received Aarthi and left.

July 12 – Musical Programme from Medak region

The second part of the Medak programme was a Musical one. Once again, everybody had assembled in the Kulwant hall by 2:00 pm itself. Swami came out for Darshan at 3:30 pm. There was excitement in Swami's face as He came out on to the stage. The first indication from Swami was asking about the whereabouts of the little boy who had offered the flower to Him on the previous day! Then He also sent word for the little girl.

They were soon located - blissfully asleep in their parents' arms! After combing, straightening of dresses, wiping the faces of sweat and application of vibhuti, the tiny tots were sent ahead - as prepared as possible. Swami's face beamed with joy on just seeing the innocent little ones. Fortunate indeed

are those kids for they gave so much joy to the Lord. What greater thing can one aspire for in life than to make the Lord happy? And the mere sight of purity and innocence is enough to achieve that feat. That should be a reminder for all of us.

Swami circled His palms and there was a chain for the one who had chained Him with his innocence and love. Pulling his cheeks, Swami lovingly put the chain around his neck. Then like an encore, Swami materialised another chain for the little girl too. The hall clapped like mad at this spontaneous outpouring of Divine Love. It was on this joyful note that the programme began. The programme consisted of songs in Hindi, Telugu and Kannada. They were rendered by both the men and women. Throughout the programme, the little boy sat right in the front and Swami showed His interest in him throughout the programme. Each and every move the boy made elicited a smile from Swami. In the middle of the programme, the boy adopted the lotus posture. Swami immediately noticed that and remarked, "*Choodu, chinna pillavaadu padmaasanam pettakunnadu!*" ('Look, the little one has adopted the lotus posture!')

After about 45 minutes of songs, the programme concluded. Swami immediately asked, "*Mana Pillalu?*" (Our boys?) The students came streaming out of the bhajan hall. Then there were bhajans with *Aalap* and Meera songs by the boys. They sang wonderfully well and the whole hall clapped in unison and rhythm to the bhajans and songs. At about 5:40pm Swami received Aarthi. But before that, He blessed all the birthday boys and also sent prasadam for all that had gathered.

July 15 – Programme by Music College Students

Another Sunday had dawned and the students of the Institute - the Mirpuri College of Music this time- were ready with another programme to present before their Lord. Swami came out at about 3:35 pm. He alighted from the car and went straight out on stage. There was thunderous applause as Swami got up and walked slowly to the stage. He sat for a while listening to the Vedas being chanted. Then with a gentle wave of His hand He halted the Vedic chants and allowed the programme to begin.

Three students came up to Swami with a card carrying the details of the Carnatic programme to follow and also their prayers for Swami to bless them with an opportunity to present the same. Swami smilingly blessed them and then the programme began. There were a lot of Tyagaraja krithis and songs of other maestros too. Then there was a Sitar recital in the lilting notes of Raag Hamsadhwani. It was in the Madhyalay Gat and it lead to a "three tablas" jugalbandi. In one of the songs, there was also a jugalbandi between the mridangam and the tabla which was appreciated a lot by the audience. In this manner the programme went on for about 45 minutes. Swami was so happy with the student who played the mridangam that He called Him forward and with a wave of His hand materialised a gold chain for him. After that He also

graciously agreed to grant group photos to all the performers. After the photos, Swami went in and there were bhajans.

July 19 – Programme by Canadian Youth

On the evening of July 19, the devotees and youth from Canada were prepared with a programme entitled "The Sacred Bridge." Swami completed His darshan rounds and immediately came out on the dais. To the sweet surprise of everyone around, He went down in the wheel chair to bless all the devotees and participants specially. He took an entire round and there were youth dressed as *Devas* chanting the Vedas. As Swami came back to the dais after blessing all, an innovative welcome card was taken to Him.

The programme then began. God calls for a meeting of all in His creation - all except man- to discuss where to hide the greatest secret. After a lot of discussion it is agreed to plant the secret in man's heart. When the animals and birds tell God that it would be very difficult for man to discover it, God replies that with His name, the secret will stand revealed.

The episode from the Ramayana where the bridge to Lanka is built only by the power of Rama's name was then presented. Hanuman was exemplified as the ideal to be followed and the children stated that they too have started building bridges of the sacred name in their own lives. They exhorted everyone present to contribute in building this mighty bridge.

Though the programme was short, it was sweet. Swami liked it and He posed for group photos with different sections of the group. The ladies were very insistent for a group photo. Swami asked them what they wanted. "Group photos" was the unspoken answer. The mischief in Swami was aroused. Swami told them to sit in a group. Then He called the photographers and told them to take pictures of the group! After that, chuckling to Himself, Swami left. He also asked for prasadam to be distributed to the participants and then there were bhajans. After that, Swami received Aarthi and left.

July 20 – Inauguration of 'Prema Jyothi'

Swami had agreed to inaugurate the "Prema Jyoti" exhibition on the morning of July 20. The whole exhibition had been set up in the PoornaChandra Auditorium. The Light of Love is a grand spectacle celebrating the Pure Love of Bhagavan presenting through various stunning pictures, TV loops, audio and video clips as well as internet media.

Swami came into the PC auditorium at 8:10am on the wheelchair. As He came on the stage, He admired the huge wall that enclosed the exhibition, the wall that formed a formidable entrance to the exhibition. As Swami came down the stage, the boys from the studio offered jasmine flowers on His feet. He picked up a jasmine flower and putting it to His nose said, "There is no

smell!" Then He put the flower into the hands of another boy and moved on. At the entrance, a jasmine garland had been tied across instead of the traditional ribbon. A pair of scissors was handed to Swami and He gently cut the garland to mark the formal inauguration of the exhibition. As soon as He entered, a huge panel with a painting of Swami during the Uravakonda days greeted Him. There He was given the switch and as He pressed it, the panel lit up and so did the electric lamps that adorned the panel. Then Swami lit the two brass lamps that had been placed right in the beginning.

The whole exhibition had been divided into seven sections and at each section an old student from the Institute, now working in the organisation, was there to "guide" Swami around. The first section titled, "Prema Jyoti" captured the effulgence of Pure Love. It contained rare black and white pictures of Swami: Swami's visits to Venkatagiri, visits to many homes and places where He addressed gatherings. It also described many leelas of Swami. Swami spent time at each and every panel listening to the explanation being given. In this section there was also a video loop of Swami's wonderful materialisations at Kashi and the sands of Dwaraka. Swami watched that too.

The second section sought to delve into the radiance of Divine Compassion by bringing to the fore Swami's super specialty hospitals. Again, Swami was taken through a guided tour by another student as Swami listened with rapt attention. It was indeed a lesson in humility and concentration to see Swami lap up every word spoken with interest. At the end of that section was a video loop on patients' recollections at the hospital. Many of the patients were moved to tears at the Love that they received in the hospital. Swami too was touched seeing those pictures. Love is such a beautiful thing - it moves the hearts of both- those who give it and those who receive it.

The third section displayed how Swami's pure love exhibited itself as selfless concern by providing drinking water. Another student took up the mantle here and Swami was 'absorbing' every 'droplet' of information that was being 'poured' on Him! This was really a wonderful thing because on a previous occasion Swami had seen all the panels in this section and yet He went through all of them again. The section covered Swami's water projects in Anantapur, Medak, Mahaboobanagar, Chennai and in the Godavari districts. The video loop at the end was on the Godavari projects. It was an abridged version of the Godavari documentary that Swami had already seen earlier. So when a scene where ladies are singing a song in His praise came, He said, "Those ladies danced too."

The fourth section projected Swami as the Divine Potter, moulding students as a Sadguru. Swami spent the most time in this section. There were pictures of the opening of all the colleges and Swami's University, the interest He took in all the trivial details of it's functioning also and the various events like the Sports Meet, Convocation drama etc. where Swami becomes the Sadguru for His children. The section also powerfully drove home Swami's concept of Educare and showed how that is the only panacea for the many ills of today's world.

Adorning the central position in the exhibition hall was an exquisitely carved statue of the Vishwa Viraata Swaroopa. This beautiful statue could be viewed from all 360 degrees and it was an exhibition in itself. It carried the Bhagavad Gita being delivered, the scene from the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata where the grandsire Bheeshma preached to the Pandavas and also the different Avatars of Lord Vishnu. This statue has been gifted by Swami to be placed in the exhibition to enhance its grandeur.

The next sections were on Swami's service activities, Swami's glory and Swami's Love manifesting as the ultimate protection to everyone respectively. Swami was all ears to the next three boys who guided Him through. There were video loops on the mobile hospital that Swami has started and also on the grandeur of the 80th birthday celebrations. It was almost 9:30am when Swami completed seeing the entire exhibition. At the end, Swami said, "All the arrangements, both inside and outside are very good. The boys have done a very good job. Venkataraman has been a very inspiring leader to all of them." Swami also expressed His wish that the exhibition be viewed by all the students and also the youth who would be arriving shortly from the world over. He blessed all the people who had worked for the exhibition - the artists, the designing team and even the carpenters and electricians. Leaving everyone in that great bliss and joy of having spent such glorious moments with Him, Swami went to receive the Aarthi in the bhajan hall. It was 9:40am when He left.

July 21 – Swami's Visits His New Elephant

On the morning of July 21, at about 8:10am Swami came out for darshan. As He neared the mandir gate, He took a turn and drove out to the Gopuram gate. Swami headed towards the planetarium and surprise of surprises (!), there was a tiny female elephant waiting to welcome Him! The little one was about 4 feet high and had a trunk that was about 3 feet. She had arrived from the Bihar-Nepal border area.

As Swami came and got down from the car, Sri. Adi Kesavalu and his family, who had helped in getting the elephant, offered their salutations. Swami went to the elephant and she too rushed to Swami. Swami, remembering his dear Sai Geetha, began patting her calling, "Geetha....Geetha". She put her trunk on Swami's feet and began to massage it. Pictures were taken by the dozen. As the flashes went firing, the elephant turned to a photographer nearby and began pushing at his feet! Once clear of everything, she went back to Swami's feet. Swami was so happy and someone nearby mentioned to Him, "Swami she is doing Paadaseva." Swami continued to feed her and she ate merrily. He enquired as to what her favourite foods were.

"Raagi balls, cow grass and sugarcane, " came the reply. Swami immediately asked for sugarcane and gave it to her. She began to merrily crunch and chomp at it! She ate quite excitedly and Swami seemed to be amused by it. The sugarcane sticks were broken into small pieces so that she could eat

them easily. Swami was so content in just watching her eat. Swami asked what her name was. They said that it was Lakshmi but Swami must give her a new name. Swami said that He would do so in due course. Meanwhile, the family members of Sri Adi Kesavalu came closer to Swami. There was a little girl who seemed to be mentally challenged. She came to Swami and said, "Swami Kaapadu " (meaning Swami save me). Swami also echoed her words, "Kaapadu.....Kaapadu " and held her lovingly by the chin. The look in His eyes was so full of compassion. This girl is definitely redeemed for she has been the recipient of His benign glance.

When some old devotees had asked Swami as to when He would give them liberation, Swami had said that on some days, and those days are really special ones for, He will be in a very granting mood. On those days, on whomsoever His eyes fall upon, will be liberated. So it is our duty to just wait patiently! Today the way Swami looked at that girl, so full of motherly Love, Compassion and Empathy, we can just rejoice for her.

As Swami was leaving, everyone present was bowing to Him. A little baby was brought to Him and suddenly there was a surge of Love from Swami. He fondly patted the baby on its cheeks and all of those who witnessed the scene were very touched. After filling everyone with joy, Swami left for the Mandir where bhajans were on.

July 23 – Annapraasa Ceremony of the New Baby Elephant

July 23 morning Swami was to visit the new elephant to perform the *Annapraasa* ceremony (where the calf is fed rice for the first time!). The calf had been tied because, young that she was, she was very energetic! Swami had sent ornaments so that she could be decked up for the ceremony. It was so tough for the mahout to keep her quiet. Once when he bent down to apply *Kumkum* to her feet, she began to take in his head as though it was a coconut!

At about 9:15am Swami arrived at the planetarium where the calf was waiting. Swami came out of the car and the little one went near Him. There was a beautiful smile playing on His face as He saw her. He sprinkled *Akshata* (sacred grains) on her in blessing and benediction. She was then garlanded with jasmine. There was special sweetened rice for her in silver vessels. As she was fed the first rice, like any baby, the first reaction was to reject it. The mahout suggested to Swami that maybe she didn't like sweet things. Swami immediately took a sugarcane stick and gave it to her and she crunched merrily on it! (That seemed to be a silent answer to the mahout's observation!)

Swami then fed her with more sugarcane, bananas and apples. The apples had been nicely sliced and were not whole as they would be when Swami fed Sai Geetha. The calf seemed to go bananas over bananas! In fact, after a little while, she began to explore the basins with her tiny 3 feet trunk and gulp

down any bananas that she could 'lay her trunk' upon. Swami just sat watching her eat so hungrily. As He kept watching her from top to toe, he noticed a hole in the upper part of her right ear. He enquired about it and was told that it had been made to put an identification tag at birth. The calf had arrived from Bihar, almost near the Indo-Nepal border. Swami didn't seem to like that concept of tagging babies! He was told that it had been removed.

The elephant continued to blissfully gulp down sugarcane and bananas. After a while, she slowly moved her trunk and placed it on Swami's feet! (One was reminded of Swami Vivekananda's quote, "Feed a man and then teach him spirituality" and it seemed to apply for elephants as well!)

Swami was then asked to name the calf.

"I will tell...I will tell", was the reply. A bowl of water was given for Swami to wash His hands after which Swami received Aarthi and left. Before leaving, He blessed all the caretakers and the other helpers taking care of the elephant.

In the evening there was a programme scheduled by Sumeet Tappoo - a direct disciple of Shri Anup Jalota since the age of three. Swami arrived at 3:40 pm but after completing the darshan rounds, Swami went into the interview room. He came out again at 4:40pm and sat in the portico. The singer for the evening offered a rose to Swami after which he sat down to begin his recital. In a typical Anup Jalota manner, he began with Hari Om chant with shlokas. That was followed by excellent renderings of bhajans. The wonderful aspect of his singing was that it involved all the people and they too could identify with the songs. When he started singing "Maili Chaadar Oodhke Kaise" Swami began to keep beat and everyone seemed to be enjoying it. He sang for more than 40 minutes. After the concert Swami blessed all of them profusely and even granted them group photos. Then He received Aarthi and the days programme concluded.

July 24 – Talk by Sri Rituraj and Concert by Sri Hariharan

On the morning of July 24, the hall was filled by devotees from Maharashtra who had come for the Aashaadi Ekadasi celebrations. In the morning, was a talk by Sri Rituraj Maharaj. From the age of ten, Sri. Ritu Raj Ji Maharaj has been giving discourses on Upanishads, Ramayana, Bhagawad Katha and Bhagawad Geeta in his travels across North India. He was sponsored through UNICEF as "Bal Rajdoot" (Child Ambassador) to Holland and his lectures were lauded. He has been associated with the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation for the last four years. He sat on a carpet on the main stage next to Swami and discoursed in Hindi. The Hindi was flowing and so were his feelings for Bhagawan. He spoke on the great good fortune of having Swami in our lives. He displayed mastery over the Bhagawatam and the Bhagawat Gita too. Swami was very appreciative of his talk. Every time he said, "Swami...", Swami would look at him directly in the eye and nod to what he

said. It was an enchanting talk after which Swami blessed him and gave him Padanamaskar.

This was followed by an enthralling dance drama presentation by the celebrated Bharatanatyam Dancer Shri Deepak Mazumdar and his most distinguished disciple Shri. Pavitra Bhat. Shri Deepak Mazumdar is an awardee of the *Yuva Kala Vipanchee* and the *Kala Ratna* (Mumbai) awards. He is also the recipient of a *Gold Medal* from our Bhagawan for the masterly display of his art at Puttaparthi in the year 1970. The theme of the dance today was the leelas of Lord Krishna as a child at Gokul. All the songs were Purandaradasa's compositions and they were in Kannada. When Purandaradasa composed his songs, he was so immersed in them that he visualised himself as mother Yasoda and Lord Krishna appeared in his spiritual sight, and then, they relived those beautiful times in Brindavan. Through an aesthetic and expressive display, the dancers made Krishna's leelas come alive before the audience. The whole presentation lasted for about 40 minutes. After the presentation, Swami called both the dancers and spoke to them for a while. He posed for photos with them. After that He called Rituraj Maharaj too and granted him the privilege of a photograph with Him. Then Swami received Aarthi and left.

In the evening, there was a great sense of anticipation as there was a scheduled programme by the Padmashree awardee, Hariharan of the "Colonial Cousins" fame. Hariharan is well trained, both in Carnatic and Hindustani music and has had great success in his 'fusion' experiments. Though he started his career as a Ghazal singer, he found a grander following in fusion music with his albums in 1996. Since then he is much sought after in the light music world as well.

Swami arrived to the hall at about 4:25pm. He completed the darshan rounds and came to the dias. As Hariharan walked upto Swami, there was loud applause. He seems to be having devotees of his own! (and why not - after all as Swami says, talent is God.) He offered his salutations to Swami and began the concert sitting on the carpet that had been put. It was a nice experience to see the versatility that Hariharan embodies in his music. He sang ghazals, Carnatic songs, Hindustani songs and even light music. The music lovers were ecstatic and the non-lovers soon were converted into lovers! Hariharan then sang the famous "Krishna Nee Begane Baaro". When he started, Swami had a smile on His face and kept rhythm though the song has a slightly complicated beat. Then came the high pitched part in English (the one that Lezz has sung in the album 'Colonial Cousins'). Swami seemed startled at the change, but Hariharan did it so effortlessly. He kept shifting between the highs and lows with great ease. After the concert, Swami called him and blessed him. He also went in and got a saree for his mother who has been a long standing devotee. As Swami went into the interview room, the crowds became a little restless. Swami was inside for quite some time. In the meanwhile, Hariharan began to sing some bhajans. Starting with "Janani Maa", he sang 3-4 bhajans. The whole hall was now singing bhajans and that was very thoughtful on Hariharan's part to do what he did. When Swami came out with the saree, Hariharan hurriedly called his mother on to the stage and she

came up to Swami and received the saree. Then Hariharan requested Swami for a photo alongside Him and Swami graciously agreed. Both smiled and a beautiful moment was captured in digital format! Then Hariharan gave Aarthi to Swami.

July 25 - Ashadi Ekadashi

Nostalgic memories of the golden days of the past were brought to life with elated emotion and spiritual fervour in a jam-packed Sai Kulwant Hall on the auspicious morning of *Ashadi Ekadashi* in the immediate Divine Presence of Bhagavan Baba in Prasanthi Nilayam on July 25 morning. An aesthetically decorated Sai Kulwant Hall bore a festive look with the backdrop on the dais adorning images of spiritual giants from the Maratha state and hoardings with Divine Teachings and buntings were seen hanging, while flowers were strewn all around the dais and at the main entrance. Reminiscing the past, rallying behind the great traditions set by two of the greatest spiritual masters from the state, Sant Tukaram and Sant Jnaneshwar, Sai fraternity from the two states of Maharashtra and Goa thronged to Prasanthi Nilayam, rekindling those golden memoirs, to be in the Divine Presence of their *Vittal Rukumai* in physical frame, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Ashadi Ekadashi is the festival that marks the beginning of the *Chaturmasa* and that ends with *Karthik Ekadashi*. It is celebrated during the months of June - July (*Ashad Shukla Paksha*). People consider the two eleventh days, "Ekadashi", of every month to be of special significance. The eleventh day (bright) of *Ashad* is known as the great *Ekadashi* or *Maha Ekadashi*. This is the day on which people go walking in huge processions to Pandharpur, the abode of Lord Vitthal singing the *abhangas* (chanting hymns) of Sant Tukaram and Sant Jnaneshwar to have the darshan of their Lord Vitthal. The *Vaarkari sampada* is a time honoured cult and an important landmark in the colourful history in the state of Maharashtra. Large numbers of devotees from the city of Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra and from the state of Goa come every year to celebrate this festival at the Divine Lotus Feet of Bhagavan at Prasanthi Nilayam.

The morning programme on the 25th commenced with Bhagavan lighting the lamp shortly after His arrival in Sai Kulwant Hall at around 8:10 a.m. Then, it was the turn of the *Vaarkaris*, symbolising the traditional procession to the Abode of Lord Vittala at Pandarpur, who set started their journey on foot from Dharmavaram on 22nd July, doing service to the poor and downtrodden all along their journey, while spreading His Divine Teachings, before arriving at Prasanthi Nilayam carrying a palanquin with *Padukas* of Bhagavan.

The programme got underway with an emotional touch as two tiny-tots took the entire audience to a flashback into the morning programme, in the previous edition of the festivity in 2006. Referring to Sai Geetha, Bhagavan's pet elephant, the pachyderm who lived a life par-excellence, the children described her as a true devotee without animal traits. Equating Sai Geetha with the elephant God Ganesha, the children broke into a beautiful dance

sequence in adoration to Lord Ganesha to the tunes of the famous song *Ekadantaya Vakratunda*... Indeed a fitting tribute to Sai Geetha and a wonderful beginning with adoration to Remover of all Obstacles.

The programme then began. Designed along the lines of the very popular "*Kaun Banega Crorepati*" game show, it was called, "Master the mind, be a Mastermind." It was a quiz programme on the various aspects and facets of the mind. Very interestingly, the prizes to be won were not money but units of Love. They had been sponsored by a fictitious (yet very real for all practical purposes) Sathya Sai 'Mutual' Fund of Love - a fund to which anyone with heart full of love can register, a scheme with absolutely no risks! It was typical Mumbai creativity at work. The sets that had been created were massive and very well done.

The questions asked were all based on how to control the mind and nuances in mastering it. Aptly titled 'Master the Mind, Be a Master Mind', this masterly presentation was intertwined with musical offerings projecting man's eternal quest - "Who am I?" as the central theme. The lingering question allied with an array of relative questions from the Quiz Master to the participants obtained guidance from the rich experience of *Bal Vikas* students, who were cashing on all that they had learnt at the Divine Lotus Feet to help the contestants to find the right answer. The expert guest panel comprising four illustrious greats of the nation, namely, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Muthuswami Iyer and Rabindranath Tagore delivered their words of wisdom on different topics related to the Mind, helping the contestants to understand the vagaries of the Mind to reach the ultimate goal. It was indeed an innovative style of posing the much debated question, "Who am I?" and the much sought after answer "I am I".

The Quiz Master was seen summarizing the progress with an assessment of the good lessons learnt on the day. And the Quiz Master won special Divine Acclaim when Bhagavan chose to specially speak to him at the end of the programme before materialising a chain for him. It was also nice that Swami gave the pictures of Himself with him immediately. The programme concluded with Swami granting group photos. Swami walked down all the way and stood with the group. As the pictures were being taken, Swami enquired as to whether the whole group had been covered by the photographers! It was such overflowing Love that Swami displayed, unmindful of His standing for so long. Then there was Aarthi to bring the morning programme to a close.

The afternoon session too was to be a long and spiritual one. Bharat, the land that is acclaimed as the land of Avatars is equally rich with the presence of great masters of spiritual acclaim preaching words of Wisdom to the masses. Often Prasanthi gets introduced to these great lives in the form of dramas and presentations held in the Divine Presence as an offering during many of the festivities. The highlight of the afternoon session was a dance drama on Jhulelal who lived during the 10th century, the chosen God of the Sindhi community. It was performed by the Bal Vikas children from Thane District of Maharashtra.

Put to suffering at the hands of a tyrannical ruler, Mirkhshah, and his fanatical followers, the Hindus in the Sindh Province prayed to the Water God for protection, and yielding to their prayers came a prophesy stating that their saviour would come at the end of eight months in a town called Nassarpur. Born as Uderolal, under miraculous circumstances, Jhule Lal had to face the wrath of the tyrannical ruler who under pressure from fanatic Muslim leaders tried to persecute him. The altercation between the king and Jhule Lal and the subsequent sermon about Jhule Lal's Divine nature and the wrath the ruler had to face at the hands of nature were portrayed in changing scenes of rapid pace. Lost and defeated, a humiliated Mirkhashah sought Divine Mercy upon himself. He was forgiven by the merciful Lord who instructed him to treat Hindus and Muslims alike. After Jhule Lal's passing away, when there was an altercation between Muslims and Hindus about the construction of a proper monument, there came a voice from the heavens:

"Behold, make my shrine acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims; let its one part be like a temple and the other part be like a Dargah (shrine). I belong to all of you."

At a time when communal harmony is at stake and the world is reeling under violence over fanatic passion, the message of Jhule Lal is of absolute significance for one and all to receive and embrace in practice and precept. The punch line was delivered with a bottom-line towards the end of the Programme: Muslims believe that everything is God's and the Hindus believe that everything is God; the difference is an apostrophe s ('s) and that 's is nothing, but SAI. The day one realises this SAI principle, the world will be One with unity and religious harmony. A wonderful presentation on the inspiring life of the Lord of Sindh on the day of his 1000th birth anniversary at the very Lotus Feet of God walking on earth.

Immensely pleased with the presentation, Bhagavan gave away watches to all the participants before distributing Prasadam to the huge congregation of devotees. Bhagavan materialised a chain for a little boy who acted as a disciple of Uderolal and chose to speak to the boy specially calling him on the dais. Bhagavan retired to Yajur Mandiram after receiving Mangala Arathi at 5:30 p.m. after a short stint of Bhajans by the Maharashtra choir.

July 26 – World Youth Conference Begins: Morning Session

The morning of July 26 saw the inauguration of the 'Sri Sathya Sai World Youth Conference: Ideal Sai Youth - Messengers of Sai Love'. The event was an extremely grand affair, of such scale that only Bhagavan's meticulous organisation could have achieved. The day's proceedings began with the delegates taking out a grand procession from the Sri Sathya Sai Hill View Stadium to the Mandir where Bhagavan was eagerly awaiting them. The procession was a wonderful spectacle to witness - an endless army of young and bright men and women in white, donning orange scarves, marching forth towards the Lord. It was led by the Vedam group and the Sri Sathya Sai University, Prashanti Nilayam Campus Brass Band.

Following them were representatives of the various countries, each carrying their respective National Flag coming forth to pay their obeisance to Bhagavan. There were over six thousand participants from 86 countries across the world, including Sai Youth from the state of Karnataka, India and the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School and University. As the youth streamed into the hall, Swami was sitting in the veranda watching them. Many members of the youth were so overwhelmed that they began to prostrate on the ground as they neared Swami. Once the men came in, the women also streamed into the mandir. The hall seemed charged with the energy of Bhagavan and the youth whom Dr. Goldstein, in his keynote address, hailed as the 'Leaders of Tomorrow'.

Dr. Goldstein compared Humanity to a procession where the older guard must move on and the young must move in. For this, he repeatedly stressed, the youth must be ready (spiritually and not merely physically) and the older generation must be willing.

Dr. Goldstein was followed by Sri. Shitu Chudasama of U.K., the International Co-ordinator of Sai Youth and Sathya Sai Education. He said that our epics are full of stories of exemplary youth, worth emulation. But the most ideal model for all is Bhagavan, who as young Sathya, showed mankind how an ideal young person must act. According to him the term 'youth' did not refer to a particular age group of individuals, but to the qualities of Purity, Sacredness and Courage. The youngsters of today must cultivate these virtues in order to be effective leaders in tomorrow's world. At the end of his inspiring talk Bhagavan showed His Love and appreciation by materialising for him a beautiful gold chain.

But the best was yet to come. Applause filled the hall when Bhagavan arose to give to all present His Divine message. Given below in bullet form is the discourse that He delivered:

- Man is the pinnacle of Creation. That is why the scriptures declare: Jantunaam Narajanaman Durlabham, which essentially means that human birth is a rare blessing.
- Man being a part of Creation, is composed of the very same five elements that make up the Universe. However, man is special, because he has something beyond the five elements namely, the power of Spiritual Discrimination.
- Today, the slogan is 'Knowledge is wealth'. But how far can worldly wealth take a person? Not very far, because even as worldly knowledge is rapidly advancing, Spiritual Discrimination is diminishing rapidly at the same time.
- Is this good? Not at all, since man, having lost his power of Spiritual Discrimination, is not able to see clearly the difference between good and bad. And when discrimination is lost, the practice of human values also declines sharply.

- Discrimination is therefore very important for man because worldly knowledge without Spiritual Discrimination amounts to nothing! When man loses the capacity to appreciate the vital need for human values, he becomes a zero.
- Man today is busy multiplying his wealth. But what about Spiritual Discrimination? Is he doing anything at all to improve it? None at all!
- Man is not spending even one minute to ask: "Why should I seek more wealth? Is more wealth good for me?" Instead, he is busy accumulating more and more wealth, all to no purpose.
- The mind is the root cause of all these aberrations. The mind mirrors human personality and behaviour.
- The mind is very powerful and capable of enormous self-deception. When the mind drags man deep into the trap of illusion, man loses the capacity to go the basics.
- (Holding the handkerchief): What is this? This is a piece of cloth. Where does cloth come from? From yarn. Where does yarn come from? From cotton. In this way, if we enquire deeply, we can go the root, to the basics.
- These days, man is no longer bothered about enquiring about his true roots and his true nature. As a result, man becomes deluded and develops false notions about his identity. The degradation of the environment is one result of wrong thinking and the absence of real discrimination.
- Who are you? You are not one person but three: The one you think you are, the one others think you are, and the one you really are!
- In the Gita, the Lord says: Mamaivamso jeevalokhe sarvabutha sanathanaha, meaning essentially, "I pervade the entire Universe being immanent in every entity, animate and inanimate."
- Divinity is your real root! Divinity is latent in man but what is the use? Man is doing nothing to make it patent or evident through his actions!
- Many seekers today say they are searching for God. But do you realise that you yourself are God?! Why then search for God?
- Man is unable to understand that he is verily the Spark of the Divine because his Spiritual Discrimination has become blunted.
- Spiritual Discrimination becomes blunted when man develops strong body consciousness, that is to say when man identifies himself with the body.
- Is it correct to identify yourself with your body? No, because the body lasts only till death; thereafter, it is returned to the elements. You are not just the

body but something much more than the body! You are verily the embodiment of God and therefore eternal, immortal!

- People often say: "This kerchief is mine; this is my leg" and so on. What is the identity of this entity referred to via the words 'my' or 'mine'?

- The 'my' and 'mine' are not to be associated with ego or the lower self but your Real Self or the Higher Self. Ego is represented by 'i' while the Real Self is represented by 'I'.

- Man is not the small 'i' but the big 'I'! However, he wrongly identifies himself with the small 'i' because his Discrimination has become blunted.

- When Discrimination diminishes, ego asserts itself. But when Discrimination grows, ego diminishes. Thus, development of *Buddhi* goes hand in hand with the elimination of ego.

- Everything in the Universe is God. In fact, there is only God and nothing except God. This table is God, this object is God, this stand is God.

- When we lose the power of Discrimination, we forget the immanence of God in everything in the Universe and become overwhelmed by the apparent diversity.

- There is no doubt an empirical diversity in the physical Universe. However, man must see beyond the apparent diversity and go to the roots. If he does so, he will see nothing but Unity, Purity and Divinity. If, however, his discrimination becomes blunted, he would see only the diversity that is superficial, and from this illusory perception, many problems follow.

- People say the world is full of problems. All problems arise from the process of Reflection, Reaction, Resound.

- Reflection, Reaction and Resound originate from man making the wrong identification. Man is not 'i' but 'I'.

- When man makes the wrong identification of his nature, he becomes a prey to the senses, which then rapidly cause his downfall.

- Man must therefore not allow his senses to dominate his personality. Instead, he must ensure that the senses and the Mind follow his Heart, the seat of God within.

- There is a simple way of setting things right. First, have firm faith in God.

- Strong faith in God promotes Selfless Love.

- Where there is Selfless Love, there is Peace.

- Where there is Peace, there is Truth.

- And where there is Truth, there is God!
- You do not have to go here and there in search of God. You are yourself God! All you have to do is recognise that.
- Modern education encourages you to explore the outside world, in the process totally ignoring the infinite world within. Educare, on the other hand, takes you deep inside and helps you to bring forth what is latent within.
- People have all kinds of notions about Sadhana. In simple words, Sadhana makes patent what is already latent within.
- Many would tell you they are engaged in Sadhana. What is it that they do? They meditate, do Japam, and so on. All this is symbolism, not of much use except as a starting point. When overstressed, such drills become very artificial. Real Sadhana is that which helps to uncover your true nature as a Spark of the Divine.
- The artificiality of modern life has a lot to do with the excessive stress on Science. Science is below the senses whereas Spirituality is beyond the senses. When life is governed wholly by the sense-Mind combination, Buddhi becomes blunted. And when Buddhi is blunted, problems inevitably follow.
- To develop Buddhi, start with unshakeable Faith. If you do that, the road to God would automatically open up.
- Man today is busy wasting Time! Don't do that! Do not waste Time for Time waste is life waste!
- Use every moment of your life to realise and recognise your true nature.
- If you make Truth the goal of your life, all problems would melt away!
- Man falls when he becomes weak. Man becomes weak when he forgets human values. Man forgets basic values when he wrongly identifies himself with the lower self or 'I', which is wrong!
- Love is all important in life but with wrong identification, Love becomes fragmented. Such fragmented love ceases to be pure, and is tainted by desire, attachment and so on.
- Love is One and not many! The fragmentation of love, so very common, is due solely to man being bound by body consciousness; it is due to wrong identification. All this happens because of the absence of Spiritual Discrimination.
- Making the wrong identification, man allows ego to dominate and Love to be fragmented. That is the root cause of all troubles the world is facing today.

- Avoid wrong identification and identify yourself with your true nature 'I'. This would then help you to discover Peace, Love and Truth.
- Live always in Love. With the help of Pure Love, it is easy to experience God. No problem at all!
- There is nothing beyond Pure and Divine Love.
- Do not become a slave to ego and deny yourself the bliss offered by Pure Love. Do not fall for the false allure of fragmented love, desire and attachment.
- Divine Love is vast, like an infinite ocean. It is something that must be experienced rather than just talked about.

Towards the end of the discourse, Swami said that He was very eager to speak to all present on the easiest way to attain the Lord and Love. He said that He would be with all the devotees and youth in the Kulwant Hall at 4:00pm to speak to them. People around Swami told Him about the basketball match between India and Sri Lanka that had been scheduled for the evening. Swami had it announced that He had nothing to do whatsoever with the match and that He would like to speak to all. Everyone was thrilled at the prospects of receiving the nectarine words of Swami and that too He had promised 'the easiest way to attain pure love'. After that, Swami received Aarthi and left. However, during the youth session that followed, it was announced that all must assemble at the indoor stadium by 2:30pm.

July 26 - Afternoon Session

In the evening of July 26, all the Sai youth had gathered in the indoor stadium by 2:30pm. There was a lot of music and excitement. A friendship match in basketball was to be held between India and Sri Lanka. The teams arrived at about 3:30pm and there were cheers from an appreciative audience. Swami came to the stadium at 4:15pm. As He entered the stadium, there was loud applause and the master of ceremonies welcomed Swami. Swami slowly went around the students and youth in the wheelchair sofa and then sat to watch the match. Seeing the players standing on the court, Swami went around the players too. Many of them fell at His feet seeking His blessing.

In the beginning there was a dance by a professional team from Bangalore. The dance was a combination of graceful steps, aerobics and acrobatics. After that, the players came on court in their match dresses and the game got underway. For the first few minutes, there was no scoring at all. Swami was watching with rapt attention. After about two minutes, the Lankans made the first basket. Swami was overwhelmed. He clapped and seemed so happy. Watching Him exult so much for a small thing like putting a basket was really surprising. But that was not just an initial reaction. Throughout the game, whenever a basket was made, Swami celebrated - irrespective of the team that made it.

There is such a beautiful significance to Swami's celebration of the baskets. It looks like God celebrates whenever anybody reaches their aim, their goal. It does not matter who does it. For God, the game of basketball, like life, is not about a winning side and a losing side, but about individuals reaching their Goal. And so each time a player succeeded in putting the ball through the loop, He celebrated. He also was very appreciative of anyone who helped and participated in helping a player reach the goal too. Though it does not matter as to who puts the basket, how he does it is of paramount importance. Whenever a foul was committed, Swami didn't like it. In fact, while He appreciated the efforts of the "offence" to put baskets, He didn't like the concept of defending and preventing others from reaching their 'goal'. From a worldly point though it might appear as Swami was being innocent, a small change in our perspective and great wisdom lies hidden in His reactions.

At the end of the first half India was leading by 2 points. In the break, the dancers came on again. All the youth who were seated in the audience started making Mexican waves and Swami seemed surprised by it. As the match resumed, the second half became more closely contested. Swami sat watching it very patiently.

It was indeed very compassionate and loving of Swami to do what He did by attending the match in the stadium. After having announced that He would like to speak to everyone and that He had nothing to do with the match, He changed all His plans only for the sake of His children. He, not only cancelled His 4 pm discourse, He also arrived at that time to the stadium. It was such a beautiful lesson in humility and compassion. God knows everything - yet He acts as though He knows nothing. Man, on the other hand, knows nothing and yet acts as though he knows everything.

The match concluded with India winning by 6 points. Once the match finished, Swami rose to leave. He asked for the wheelchair to be taken amidst the boys. As He moved amongst them, He blessed all with *Abhayahasta* and His smiles. At the car, Aarthi was performed and at about 5:45pm Swami left.

July 27 – Second Day of the Youth Conference

On the morning of July 27, there were three speakers scheduled to speak in Swami's presence as part of the proceedings of the youth conference. Swami arrived and went around granting darshan. Then He sat on the ladies side of the dais and blessed the proceedings to begin. There was first a talk by Mr. Shashank Shah, a research scholar of the Sri Sathya Sai University. He made a beautiful speech, narrating experiences and filling everyone's hearts with Swami's Love. The second speaker was Ms. Alma Berra from Argentina. She recapitulated her experiences with Swami at Prashanti Nilayam and at her place too. The third speaker was Mr. Jeremy Hoffer. He spoke very inspiringly to the youth to get up, dust away their mats and dive into action. He concluded with the Telugu song, "Sai Maata Biddalam". It was with amazing

diction and clarity that he sang that song. One could notice tears in the eyes of some of the students sitting in the first rows and they said, "Oh! He sang so well." Swami too was very touched. In fact, Swami was speaking with Michael Goldstein, when suddenly the song attracted His attention. From then on He remained riveted on the speaker. He rewarded Mr. Jeremy with a beautiful gold chain at the end of his speech.

The speeches were followed by an international music programme. After that, Swami had Prasadam distributed, received Aarthi and left for Yajur Mandiram.

The afternoon session was again the story of three speakers. The first was Mr. Ivan Bavcevic from Croatia. He spoke powerfully on the concept of surrender. He said that each day we must feel that we haven't surrendered enough the previous day. Swami blessed him with a ring after his speech. The next speaker was the well-qualified Dr. Shaun Shetty who said, "My greatest qualification is that I have come to Swami". The final speaker for the session was Ms. Chetana Raju, who in her spirited speech quoted extensively from the Upanishads, Swami and other religious texts and contributed to spiritual uplift and understanding of all who had assembled. The session came to an end after that when Swami received Aarthi and left.

July 28 – Valedictory Function of Youth Conference

The last day of the youth conference had three youthful speakers - two from the gents and one lady, in the morning session. The first talk was by a Russian youth, Mr. Dimitry Udovikin. He had a translator by his side and he spoke on how Swami's teachings were so practical. The second speaker was Ms. Rita Chudasama. The highlight of her speech was the trials and tribulations that she had to undergo before delivering her baby boy - Achintya (named by Swami) - and the magnificent manner in which everything turned out to be fine only because Swami had said in an interview, "That child is my responsibility. Don't have any fear." Everyone present was touched by her speech. The third speaker was Sri. Sanjay Mahalingam, a research scholar in the Sathya Sai University. He spoke very powerfully on how the only aim of human life was to attain God. All other pursuits are at best mere distractions. He said that the mind and senses, when under control, lead to liberation, while if one gets enslaved to them, then that becomes a sure shot path to ultimate ruin. The final talk of the session was delivered by Ms. Phyllis Krystal. She was wheeled up to the dais and she spoke softly yet with conviction. She made all the youth go through the motions of a simple meditation technique that she had been inspired by Swami to learn and practise. After her talk, the clock read 10:45 am. Swami received Aarthi and the left.

The evening of July 28 saw the concluding session of the Youth Conference. Swami completed the darshan rounds and took His seat on the dais. The proceedings began and the first to speak was Mr. Shitu Chudasama. The Ideal Sai Youth has the head of Shankara, the heart of Buddha and the hands

of Janaka, said Mr. Shitu Chudasama expressing grateful thanks to Bhagavan for the wonderful opportunity the Youth have been blessed to have during the three day conference in Prasanthi Nilayam. Commencing the proceedings of the valedictory function for the three day conference Mr. Shitu Chudasama summarised the collective wisdom shared by eminent speakers during the three day conference.

Dr. Narendranath Reddy, a practising endocrinologist from the United States, Director of Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation and President of Sri Sathya Sai Society of America, while profusely thanking Bhagavan for all the guidance and in-depth detail involvement right from the conception of the idea six months before the scheduled conference through to the successful completion of the same urged the Youth quoting the famous aphorism delivered by Jesus, "Many are called, Few are chosen. You are the blessed and fortunate one's who have been chosen". Calling the entire event a unique exposure of Unity in Diversity, he thanked all who associated and helped during the run-up to the conference and during the conference to make the same a grand success. Dr. Michael Goldstein, Chairman, Sri Sathya Sai World Foundation in his short but inspiring rhetoric exclaimed to the Youth:

"It is essential that we enquire, what is the purpose of being here in His Divine Presence? What is the purpose of being? Is human life nature's accident or is it God's plan? From time to time, from age to age mankind is bent upon self-destruction... The Lord comes...He comes as Avatar...He is here now as Kaliyuga Avatar Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba....He is the embodiment of Divine Love and Divine Truth...the Same Divine Love and Truth that is ever present and always accessible, deep in sacred spiritual heart of every man and every woman...every single individual...ever there...waiting for the realisation of our true being..."

Nothing can be a coincidence in the divine presence. Dr. Goldstein concluded his talk with the statement, "Swami, these youth have gathered here. Fill them with joy just as you please." A smile came on to Swami's face and He seemed so radiant. It was as if He had decided to make all happy on this day.

It was then that the moment all had been waiting for arrived. Amidst the silence, there was a sweet smile dancing on Swami's face. He very gently beckoned for the mike and table. It appeared as though even Swami had been waiting for this opportunity to speak. He rose to a grand applause. At the very outset, He materialised a beautiful silver Lingam about 5 inches in size. He declared, "It is only with this Sathya that there is Sathya. If you hold on to Sathya, even you can do what I have done." Given below in bullet form are salient points in the discourse:

*) You think that you are human. As you think so you become. You are all God. Keep that in mind always.

*) Love all equally. All are Divine. Do not concentrate your love on a few

individuals. Nowadays we see boys loving boys and girls loving girls. This is not pure Love. Pure Love can be got from God and God alone.

*) Always be conscious. If you forget yourself, it amounts to forgetting God. That's why the ABC of life is Always Be Careful.

*) Keep pondering "Am I forgetting who I am?" I am not these hands, not the body, not the mind, not the intellect. I am I. Bhagavan is Bhagavan. Have this realization. All those present in this gathering are God. This is the cosmic form of God.

*) I am present in each one of you. Your hearts are fruits of Love that must be shared with everybody. Never hate or harm anyone.

*) You may think that mind is the cause for all sorrows. But it is the mind that is the cause for all joys too. If you are able to consider the mind as Divine, then alone can you attain permanent bliss.

*) The mind changes based on two factors - food and friends. Keep both of them pure. How do you know if it is pure and good? Good company and good food must lead to detachment.

*) This body has been gifted to you only for the purpose of realising your true nature. So whenever any bad thoughts arise, keep telling yourself, "They are not mine. They are not my property. Only Love is my sole property. Only good thoughts belong to me."

*) All of you have pure thoughts. It is only once in a while that pollution enters. It must be your Sadhana to ensure that no pollution takes place.

*) "Swami is in me. I am Swami." This thought must be enshrined in you. It must not be done mechanically. You must feel it.

*) Do you want liberation? Hold your mind steady for 11 seconds. That is enough. The problem is that you are not able to keep the mind steady even for 11 seconds. You are wasting a lot of time, money and energy on Sadhana of many kinds. There is no need to do that. All that will give you only rheumatic and arthritic pains! 11 seconds of steady mindedness is more than enough for liberation. You will get pains only if the 11 seconds limit is transgressed.

*) Any free time you get, think of Swami. I promise you that I will come and give you darshan. Not only that, I will talk to you too. Keep that faith firm and proceed. You will definitely be blessed with that experience. All of you want to see and talk to Swami right? Just do as I say. 11 seconds are enough. Keep the mind one pointed for 11 seconds - You will get that Darshan.

*) Have meals at regular intervals. Non-veg food must be strictly avoided. That leads to cancers. Many people assembled here have their mouths

watering at the thoughts of cheese. Cheese makes you weak. Don't take thick milk also. Dilute it 50% with water.

*) Bliss cannot be obtained from hotels or shops. It is attained only by reducing worldly attachments. Less luggage, more comfort. The body also will remain healthy that way.

*) Worry is very bad for your health. Do not entertain worry. If at all worry comes, have the confidence, "This too will pass."

*) Love for God should be constant and permanent.

*) People think that Swami is in pain. I am as I was. I am healthy. My weight has always been the same. The doctors tell me that I should give them just 5 minutes and they will treat me. I told them, "If it is for spiritual uplift, I shall give them 5 hours also. But for the body, I will not yield even 5 minutes."

*) Keep smiling always and there will be no problems. Doctors cannot cure me. It is only the devotees who can cure me with their Love. Your Love makes me feel painless.

*) So many have assembled here and Swami feels so happy looking at all of you. I love you and you love me. That makes me most happy. Your Love is the medicine for me and My love is the medicine for you. It is indeed your fortune that Swami feels so happy looking at you.

*) Listen to what I say. You will definitely see God and experience Him.

Any eye that was not moist after that discourse must have been dried up due to all the tears flowing out already! Everyone was so happy and the whole atmosphere seemed to be surcharged with Bliss.

The Grand finale was an enthralling music concert by musicians from 6 nations - Germany, Russia, Poland, Latvia, Italy and Czech Republic. Swami sat enjoying the music and the youth sang in all fervour and devotion, charged up by the discourse.

July 29 - Guru Poornima Celebrations, Morning Programme

July 29 was the sacred day of Guru Poornima - a silent reminder to man of his foremost duties towards his Guru. There was a huge crowd that had gathered at Parthi. In fact the ladies darshan lines extended till the shopping complex! Slowly people were squeezing themselves into the mandir. People sat so closely to one another that one could practically realize the Oneness of creation! The hall, the lanes and by lanes in Prashanti Nilayam were all jam packed. Any sheltered area, such as the corridors of the residential blocks, had been populated by people who had spent the whole night there. There was an air of devotion and a thrill of anticipation among all.

To add to all this, was the presence of the new baby elephant. There was also a procession of students chanting Vedas and singing bhajans to escort Swami. Swami came out of the Yajur Mandir and oh! how beautiful He looked! Dressed in yellow with a smile dancing on His face - truly our dear Guru always seems to be in Poornima (full moon phase). Swami blessed the little elephant calf and also named her Sathya Geetha. Swami climbed into the Lamborghini car (where the driver takes a back seat - literally and figuratively!) and then blessed the procession to proceed.

He noticed that there were some people holding ceremonial umbrellas and walking right in front of the car. The next statement was so lovely, "No need for the umbrellas. The devotees will not be able to see me." Glorious indeed is Swami's Love. He never seems to get angry or hurt. He lives for us and loves us. Everyday of His life, He has been consuming His time, energy, love and even His tiny 5 feet frame for our sake. He never seems to tire of loving us. Why should He love us anyway? What have we given Him? We only receive. That's why He says that His Love is without reason or season.

But how do we love Him back? All of us depend on Him. Nothing special in depending on Him for everything, and mistaking that as a sign of our Love for Him, because whether we accept it or not, all of us depend on Him for everything. The question is whether He can depend on us. When our going gets tough, we look up to Him and see Him saying, "No matter what happens. I am with you. I love you." Can we confidently say that if the roles were reversed too, it would be the same case? Let us start loving God this Guru Poornima.

But on the devotee's request, finally, He let the umbrellas continue in the procession. His heart melts so fast. He lets everybody to get their chance and be happy. The procession moved on with little Sathya Geeta, brightly caparisoned for the occasion, at the lead. The people were thrilled at the beautiful darshan. The huge crowds were on their feet to look at Swami on this special day. Swami too didn't disappoint them. He moved so slowly and ensured that all received His blessings. Swami alighted near the interview room and took His seat on the dais. The first thing He did was to beckon to Sathya Geeta. She was led to Swami and He fed her bananas. After eating more than a dozen, she was blessed by Bhagavan again and then taken back to her place.

For the morning programme, Swami had blessed the Malladi brothers - Sri Rama Prasad and Ravi Kumar - to perform. Bhagavan sat through the entire forty minute session during which they sang some compositions on Bhagavan's Avatarhood and Mission followed by the famous Pancharatna Kriti of Saint Thyagaraja, *Endaro Mahanubhavulu Andariki Vandanamul*, a gem of a rare composition, describing the greatness of the devotees through the ages, paying tribute and salutations to the great men living in all ages. The rendering was done impeccably and everyone voiced their appreciation by applause. After their performance, Swami told them that He wanted them to

perform in the evening too. Then, He called a few students from the Institute who were holding cards and blessed them. What followed next was an entire convoy of Primary School kids with various cards to show Him. Swami blessed them all - about 25 students must have been there! Then He received Aarthi, and blessed the prasadam to be given and left. Before getting back onto the car, He cut a massive cake that had been made specially for the occasion. A soul-filling morning programme came to a close.

For the afternoon session, the youth from Mexico and other Latin American countries were ready with a music and dance programme. Swami came and sat on the dais. Another sweet surprise that He sprung on all of us was that He was once again dressed in yellow! Bright yellow to clear away the blues! Two girls and two boys dressed in richly coloured costumes, came on stage and offered flowers to Swami. The programme then began. It started with a musical in the Mexican language. The next was a kind of tap dance performed on a board and as the song went on, the gentleman did a lively dance keeping rhythm with his feet. In the meanwhile, Sri Deve Gowda, former Prime Minister of India, also came.

Then began a display of the creation of the universe with the 5 elements according to their tradition. The dresses were really so colourful and bright, and the 'elements' were really in their elements! Different dances ensued. A huge cloth was used as a canopy or the source from which all the creation emerged. Even the girls did some smooth flowing dances in smooth flowing dresses. The final one was a pineapple dance which is generally performed during the Mexican equivalent of Sankaranthi. Again it was a very colourful spectacle. After they had finished with their performance, Swami, much to their delight, told them to come near for group photos. Every member had a smile on their face as Swami posed happily with them.

When our feathered friends went up to Him, He must have been reminded of His days on Garuda - so many feathers all around! But not only was He immersed in feathers, He was also immersed in joy and His smiles said it all. Then the international choir sang a few songs, in beautiful harmonies between the gents and ladies and in various languages which really enthralled the packed hall. Swami then made a request to the conductor of the choir and said that He wanted to listen to the Malladi brothers and so requested them to stop. Again, His humility was so touching. If everything we are arranging is for His happiness alone, why should He request. But that is where we have to be alert and learn from Him.

The Malladi brothers took over from where they had left off in the morning. They delighted the audience and Swami with more Tyagaraja kirtanas. Swami almost turned towards them and sat listening. The wonderful part came when Swami joined them in singing the *swaras* of a particular song. That was a sight to be seen - Swami going through the vocal gymnastics that the trained artistes were performing. Swami behaves so human that when He reveals His Divinity once in a while, we are all so surprised. This feature of Swami singing

along with them continued even for some of the other songs too. All our hearts prayed that He clears the veil of illusion that hides our Sadguru behind the frame of our Swami. May we always see His divinity - not only on Guru Poornima, but always.

The programme concluded and Swami was so happy. He materialised two rings simultaneously and gifted them to the Malladi brothers. Then He also posed with them for group photos. After that, He draped gifted shawls around them and group photos for all the performers together followed. Then as Swami received Aarthi and left, the pictures of the Malladi brothers were given to Him. He smiled and presented them to the brothers who were delighted and they bowed down again to Him.

Thus concluded a glorious Guru Poornima.

This month has been like a river literally- beginning as a small stream and growing with activities as the days passed by. The last week was a real spiritual feast. There were programmes both in the mornings and in the evenings on every single day and Swami was fully engrossed in the proceedings. May our lives too be this way where like rivers we grow in our magnitude and intensity in our Love for Him and like this month, let us culminate as the Poornima.(Fullness of Pure Love- the Prema Jyoti).

SWAMI AND ME

FINDING THE SECRET OF BLISS

By Dr. John S Hislop

Dr. John Hislop, an extraordinary spiritual seeker, was one of the very first devotees to come to Swami from the West. Later, he authored many books on Baba, popular among them being "My Baba and I" and "Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba." He was also instrumental in establishing the Sai Organisation in United States in 1975 and toured the length and breadth of America giving talks on Swami. Below are extracts from a talk he delivered on August 28, 1990.

Pranams at the Lotus Feet. Sai Ram Dear Devotees!

The Bhajans were very nice; I thoroughly enjoyed them - and I am sure that Swami also enjoyed them - since He is here even more real than me; more real than you.

God Loves Giving

In my early days, Swami used to take me with Him wherever He went – wherever Swami would go in the car, I would go with Him. And one time we came from Bangalore to Puttaparthi and we stopped at the State of the Division District Chief of Police, a friend of Swami's and a good devotee. And Swami often stopped off there for lunch on the way to Puttaparthi. We went to Puttaparthi and after 2-3 weeks we returned to Bangalore. And again we stopped at the house of the Chief of Police.

Well, as you probably know – many of you do at least – you follow Swami in your car and you've seen what happens! When Swami leaves Puttaparthi and starts for Bangalore, there are people lined up on the road along the way till the hill. Then He comes to a village and enters through the back of the hamlet, all the children rush to the car and usually Swami will stop and call one of the mature men and give him some money to buy sweets for the kids.

Well, on this occasion, Swami gave away all the money He had; and there was still some distance to go! So I had a roll of rupees in my pocket – some small stuff like 2's, 5's and 10's – so I said: "Swami, please accept this – it's a gift from me!" So He said: "All right!" And took the money – which is all His, mind you, not mine – and gave it around until we finally passed all the people who were waiting for money.

Then, when we finished giving the notes; He said: "Put it in your pocket!" Mind you, it's His money not my money – so I put it in my pocket. Then we came to the Police Chief's house again and stopped.

Now, perhaps you have noticed that the protocol with Swami in the car is that when the car starts, you get in first – the guests get in first – Swami gets in last. But when we come to the destination this reverses. Swami gets out first because the people want to see Swami and not the passengers! Later, when Swami is well clear out of the car, the passenger gets out.

So Swami got out of the car. He was in the back seat as He always was and I was in the front seat with the driver as I always was. So He gets out of the back seat and walks and there is a whole bunch of people lined up in front of the house of the police man. And Swami walks off with them. Then I see Him giving the servants fistfuls of money! We thought: “He’s giving money! He doesn’t have any money! How is He giving money?”

So I reached into my pocket – no money! He never came within ten feet of me; I never came out of the car; yet in my pocket there was no money; He handed it to give to the servant. Every time I think of that; it amuses me!

The Divine and His Deities

Today, it is Ganesha’s birthday. Do these deities really exist? First of all, according to Swami, there’s life in every place – every level of existence is just chock-a-block with life! Every level – the entire Cosmos is filled with life; filled with beings! And one time the philosophers asked Swami if these Mahatmas; these Gurus; these Masters were real. And He said: “Yes! They are just as real as you are – they are no more real!” Now what did He mean by that? They are real – as real as you are – that is they actually exist; the same as these bodies exist here!

Now, I wonder how many of you know Mr. Zakir Hussein - the ex-governor of Goa, a small state in India. There is the Zakir Hussein Palace in Goa, where Swami had this horrible appendicitis when all the doctors from all over India had come and Swami had said: “I am going to go down in a couple of hours and talk!” And the doctors said: “Swami we are the best doctors from all of India and we are sorry to tell you that in a half an hour You are going to be dead!” But of course, Swami did exactly what He had said – He got off the bed, walked downstairs and gave a talk!

Well, Mr. Zakir Hussein was telling me one time that he had somebody in Goa that he always invited to come to the Palace when there were visitors. And this person could stand in a circle of 25 people and he could move his hand like that and create 25 different objects! That is – whatever was in the mind of the person in the circle; this man could create something for them - just exactly like Swami does!

But Dr. Hussein told me that he could do that only after praying to the Goddess Durga! So Swami has said that just like the executive of a big Corporation – the Chief Executive Officer – He does not deal with every sub-manager; or every customer; or every prospective customer. He has heads of departments who take care of production, distribution, advertising and so on.

So Swami said, in the same way, He has a great executive staff! And these Divinities then exist – like Durga, Ganesha and so on. And they have a function – that is they play a part in this world of Maya; this world of make-believe which doesn't exist really at all – except in our imaginations! So, what is that capital for us? Swami says: "I am always in Bliss! I never worry about anything! Nothing ever bothers me! I am always in Bliss – Ecstasy!"

Hold on to That Bliss!

So, who can say that? I don't see a lot of hands. So, then why are we here? Why do we come to these meetings? Because if we had that fountain of Bliss; that fountain of Beauty; of Love, of Bliss and Ecstasy rising up – always new and ever-fresh as Swami says - then we would be happy; not looking for this or looking for that!

So, at the basis – that is the basis of our worldly existence - we are always looking for something. We want to enjoy, we want to be prosperous, we want to be happy; we want family, we want importance – all these things we want. Because of the vast emptiness that is within us – we want to fill that emptiness.

All these things that we have to do with the physical world – with the satisfaction of our desires and so on - all that we find is that what we are really striving for or long for is that fountain of ecstasy; that fountain of Bliss coming up from within!

One person called Swami Rama – maybe you have seen some of his books - he wrote about his life in the Himalayas – he has a big organization in the Mid-West; very nice man. And he grew up as a boy in the Himalayas Mountains – living with the yogis and the people there, wandering around as a boy.

He wrote a very interesting book about his experiences as a young man. And in one instance, I remember he came to a well-known yogi. He had somebody with him who wanted to talk to this yogi. They waited and made some noise and finally the yogi came out of where he was (meditation) and said: "What do you want?" So Swami Rama said: "This man wants to talk to you!"

And he said: "Alright; but why did you do it?" He said: "I was in such bliss with my Guru – my God – and now you called me out of that to talk." So he found that source of Bliss when he was in deep meditation in his Samadhi.

But with Swami, there is no Samadhi necessary. He has that fountain of Bliss coming up within His heart every moment of the day and night.

It was the same with Sri Ramana Maharshi – he had that fountain of Bliss with him all the time! You remember this great sage? Ramana had cancer coming out of his arm. And the devotees wanted to operate, but he didn't want to. So the operation wasn't successful and the tumor kept coming out again. And

someone asked him: "Swami! There must be terrible pain with that tumor pushing through your arm?"

And he stopped for a moment and said: "Yes, there is pain, but I am not in pain." He made a clear distinction between the body and himself. He knew from his early experience as a young boy when suddenly he had felt that he was going to die and he lay down on the floor and felt his body as though he were dead! And then he realized that: "Body is dead; I am lifeless and yet I am still there!"

So he became conscious of this 'I' – this Self. And never for one moment for the rest of his life did he let loose that thought; that consciousness; that 'I'. And Swami says the same thing: "Once you realize that fear of death; that reality; grasp it! Never, ever let it go! Even if you feel some temporary happiness; some temporary Bliss, grasp it! Don't let it go! Hold on to that Bliss! That's the only Real thing! The rest is all imagination!"

So that is what we really are striving for! And we would like everybody else to have it too, of course. But how are we going to reach that culmination; that satisfaction of that fundamental desire?

The Fundamental Steps to God

We do it according to Swami's instructions. Now you know this already but every time we talk; before we get to other topics, we should recapitulate the basic fundamental things. So, what are the steps? How do we go about finding ourselves – that which we really are? How do we contact and be that Source from which everything comes and flowers and arises?

Swami tells us that it can be done by purifying the mind and purifying the heart. The only reason now that we are subject to this Maya is because our heart and mind are not pure – filled with desires and disappointments, hatred and anger. But if we can purify these two faculties – by seva, by prayer to God, by meditation, by watching ourselves and seeing what we are doing - because if we see ourselves doing an ugly act, that's all that's necessary; it will fade away and disappear!

And we can also purify our mind and heart by reciting God's name – whichever name of God appeals to us – Sai Ram; Aum Sai Ram – because, Swami has told us that there is no separation between the Name and the Form. You say God's name – God's Form is there. Aum Sai Ram! Swami is here; His Form is here beside me; every moment. And likewise, with yourselves - if you repeat the name of God, Swami is with you! You can take His hand and walk through the day with Him – holding His hand.

Now, if you are walking down the street holding Swami's hand; how are you going to let feelings of hatred, anger and cruelty arise? It's impossible! Likewise, sitting at home – maybe Swami is sitting on your chair – part of your chair. As Swami says: "When you are home; you should imagine Mother Sai -

be seated at Her feet and treat Her more lovingly, more gently, with more open affection than you would even with your own mother.”

There was a lady – she came there one time. She was in the same interview as I, and Swami told her: “Don’t hug me so tightly! You’re hurting my knees!” So then we asked the lady later on: “What did Swami mean?” Well, it turns out that at her home she would be there and imagined Swami was there and she would see Swami’s feet and she would hug Him – in her home; so far away in India! And Swami in the interview said: “You’re holding Me too tight!”

So, if we can conceive or imagine that Swami is with us every moment of the day; then the task is done! Our mind and heart will automatically be purified - hatred, anger, and all these cruelties that are going on through this world; are flowers of the dark – flowers in the night. They can’t survive in the light of the Sun! And Swami is that light of the Sun! If you have Him with you; then they can’t survive! They wither away by themselves without any effort on your part. No effort is needed; they just disappear and you never feel them again!

It is a task we set for ourselves; we have to figure it out ourselves; if we are quite satisfied with the world as it is; we, Sai devotees set ourselves a task – of finding the secret of Bliss; the secret of ecstasy; the secret of freedom!

And for that, Swami said: “So say all the scriptures - right through Ashtavakra and the other great sages - that it is extremely important to take the Form of God that you have chosen – personal God – and keep it in your mind all the time!”

Do you remember the story of the two guardians of heaven? They committed some sin and were to be expelled from heaven and God gave them a choice. He said that: “You can incarnate as My devotees and have 15 or 20 rebirths and then you can come back. Or, you can incarnate as My enemies and you only have to take two births.”

Why was that? Because how much throughout the day – those of us who Love Swami - how often do our minds wander off to this and that and memories and friends and anticipations and some even remember Swami and then the mind goes away again! So the mind is not on the Lord all the time. But how about on your enemy? “Oh! How I hate that guy! What he did to me! I’ll get even!” We are thinking all the time of the enemy.

So these two who came as enemies – as enemies of God; they were thinking of Him all the time! That was enough to dispel all the ignorance and bring them back! So, that is the heart of our task – to remember Swami all the time; dedicate every action to Him!

When you come here; instead of getting in the car, you say: “I dedicate this action to You Swami, I am not the doer Swami; You are the Doer. I am just the witness. All my life goes by like a picture – like a moving picture in front of me – all caused by karma; that which has been thought, or felt, or done – it has its effect! And here is this show that is going on in front of me Lord; but I

have nothing to do with that; I am separate from that; I am I and I am my Self and therefore I dedicate everything that I do to Thee - Oh Lord!"

Swami has said that again and again: "Krishna and His instructions to Arjuna as to how to reach liberation; and of course due to the English language, we can't say it correctly – we say how to reach liberation – that is quite wrong! We are already liberated; we have a fear because of the language; that we are human beings striving to live up to God; to freedom, to liberation – quite untrue according to Swami and according to the sages.

Playing Our Roles in the Drama

God has come down and taken human form – it's not that we have to ascend to God – we are God! Swami said in so many words that when somebody asks you who you are; instead of saying: "I am Hislop"; you should say: "Oh, I am God playing the role of Hislop."

You are God playing the role of all these people. And so He says that you should always think as though you were an actor in a play. Playing your part; even picking your part; feeling your part with all your might - but you never forget who you really are; that when the play is finished you go home. You should always think of yourself as just a player in this drama of life that goes through everyday in front of us. We are just playing that part; we are on our way to go to God.

And He said that: "If this drama ever seems to become real to you, then deny its reality!" You are not his body or this mind or this personality – that is just a part that we are playing in the Divine drama of the Lord; we must play it to the best of our ability, but never forget who we really are!

A lady – millionaire, big home, lovely family - in the play she plays the part of the street lady. Too much sorrow and anguish, and when she weeps the audience weep with her. Even though she is playing her part so dramatically and so realistically; do you think she ever forgets who she really is?

But when the play is over, she will take off the paint and the wig and get in her Rolls Royce and go home! She never forgets that! Likewise it should be with us. No matter how much we get involved in this *maya* (illusion) of the world; we should never allow ourselves to believe that it is really we who are involved – we are God; we are the witness of all this. We are God playing a particular part on the way back to Him.

So if we wish to find this fountain of Bliss; this ecstasy ever fresh; then we must think these things through and reach the firm conclusion that we are Divine. Swami says: "This 'I'; without anything added to it – I am a man; I am a woman; I am big; I am small; I am young; I am old – just 'I'; that 'I' is God. That is God."

So we should watch our own life. We can see that as we go through life, no matter what happens to us, 'I' remains the same. Day in and day out, you go back into yourself, sit back into yourself as all you can and you will see this 'I'

hasn't changed one iota since your earliest memory as a small child. It's the same 'I' precisely – it hasn't learnt a thing; it hasn't forgotten a thing; hasn't changed – exactly that 'I'! That's God!

So we should see that, feel that and not allow ourselves to be caught up and carried away by the rest of the events in our daily lives and get lost. That's for us - the Sai devotees; how lucky we are to be born at this time; and know of the Lord; know our Swami; hear the wonderful teachings of Swami and be in a position to put it into practice!

The Only Real Thing is He

Q: In the light of what you said what is the point of all this knowledge that we accumulate in all our lifetime and when we die what happens to all this knowledge?

A: I said to Swami one time: "Swami I want to understand something?" He said: "Hislop; you are fine. As you get along you will be less and less interested in understanding because you see, in understanding there is he who understands and that which is understood – duality; therefore false; unreal. Only reality is God – Everything is God! Nothing else is God! So all this understanding; all this learning has to do with duality."

When we merge in God, we lose this imaginary individuality and become God. Now, to understand God, you have to be God, because the mind with which you are thinking came after, not before; therefore the language can't go over the mind. And God is before the mind.

So therefore Swami says: "We shouldn't worry too much about the mind; but we should practice and practice being detached." It is impossible to understand and realize the Divine without detachment. And detachment comes about through thinking these things through.

See, Swami says that human beings have special powers given by God. One of the special powers given to a human person by God is the ability to think things through – reason things through. That's a God given trait to a human being. We have the ability – every person here – to sit down quietly and think these problems through and see the Truth.

Now if we see the Truth, Swami says: "None of this *sadhana* is necessary." You can forget the whole thing – forget bhajans; forget seva; forget prayers; forget meditation - forget the whole business - because all that is simply in gaining the Truth; seeing the Truth! So we can think things through.

Then we have the strength and the will-power to put them into practice in our daily lives. That will-power is Divine Will-Power – we all have it! We call upon the will-power of the Divine to change our life according to our deep understanding of the situation as it is. We stop allowing our life to be managed by our senses or even by the wanderings of the minds. But the intelligence is

in charge of the mind; in charge of the senses and will operate if you call on your own will-power – call on your God.

And as far as our daily world is concerned; our actions in our daily world – What should we do? What shouldn't we do? We can always get the answers by acting consciously. Swami tells us again and again that God resides in me; He is the only real thing there is – everything else about me is our imagination. But He resides in me as consciousness and therefore as we ask our consciousness, we ask God directly and our consciousness will give us a correct answer.

Thank you very much for your time.

WATCHING THE CORPORATE WORLD – THE SAI WAY

By Mr N Dayasindhu

Mr Dayasindhu is a former student of Sri Sathya Sai University having completed his Masters in Business Administration (MBA) in the year 1995. Currently, he is serving in Infosys, one of India's largest and prestigious Information Technology services company.

Among Swami's teachings, the one that is special to me is WATCH - Watch your Words, Action, Thought, Character and Heart. This was among the earliest messages that He blessed me with and not surprisingly the one that always gets played and replayed inside me. A few years after His instruction to WATCH, He graced me with the unique, once-a-life-time opportunity to enroll in the MBA course at the Sri Sathya Institute of Higher Learning. I cherish and will continue to cherish the years I spent in His Divine abode.

While praying to Him to guide me on a topic to pen a few lines on the relevance and practicality of His teachings with specific focus on management, I was guided to share what I strongly believe in. Something based on personal experience rather than those He dismisses as "bookish knowledge". This is my humble attempt to share a few experiences where I have been guided by His message to WATCH.

Watch Your Words

Many believe that it is good to have some arrogance and often confuse arrogance with self respect. In fact, there are now scholarly research papers that indicate that nice guys finish last in the corporate world! I find it hard to believe that this is true. A year back, I had the opportunity to present a paper at a premier international conference. This opportunity had been given after a team of leading academicians in the field had selected my paper after a rigorous blind review process. I was overjoyed and also proud of my achievement. And with this mind-set I reached the conference.

In one of the discussions, an elderly gentleman was keen on knowing more about my paper. I went on to summarize the research with enthusiasm. I dismissed some of his questions as banal and from one who sounded like a novice in the subject. The gentleman had left the discussion there.

When I later thought about it, it appeared that the questions made enormous sense and that I had made a mistake in dismissing them. I remembered our beloved Swami's command of watching my words. I waited for this gentleman the next day and apologized for having dismissed his questions and told him what I had discovered. He was smiling now and said that he had liked my enthusiasm in the previous discussion and was happy that I had been thinking. After our discussion I gave him my business card since I had realized that we had not introduced ourselves. My jaws dropped when I saw

his card; he was one of the pioneers in the field and an authority on the subject. I apologized for my ignorance.

During my presentation, the session chair introduced my presentation as something that all should look forward to since he had observed my “pioneer” friend having a lengthy discussion with me. I was nervous when I started. But when the presentation was over and before any questions were asked, my “pioneer” friend mentioned that he thought it was a good piece of research. Needless to add, the paper was well received by all the others and by His Grace is now being used as teaching material in some of the most prestigious universities in the world.

Watch Your Actions

In a consulting assignment that I was a part of, there was an important manager in the client organization who was haughty. He would often taunt us with near abusive language. Our team was getting fed up with this attitude and meetings with this manager were a dreaded ordeal. Some of my colleagues were getting impatient and wanted to give it back to the client manager in the same coin. Some complained about the client within our company and wanted to be shifted out of the project. I was also thinking that this was probably the only way out. Then one morning I had a flash that maybe we could try to be extra nice to this manager and see if this helps in sobering his attitude. My colleagues dismissed this as an absurd idea. However, I felt there was nothing to lose if it could be tried for a day. Instead of avoiding this manager, I was smiling and wishing him well. He was taken aback at first and then responded with muted acknowledgement.

A few days later we were to meet him late evening, and I suggested that we could possibly do that next morning since he may want to spend the evening with his young son. The next morning there was a sea change in this manager’s interaction with us. He turned out to be very supportive and cheerful. My colleagues felt that someone had cast a spell on the manager.

In a figurative sense it was true that our beloved Swami was the one who could have orchestrated this. We later realized that he was frustrated with us since our project meant additional work for him that translated to spending less time with his young son. Since we were now sensitive to his personal time, he started treating us like trusted colleagues.

Watch Your Thoughts

In most of our careers, we must have come across instances when we often question the rationale of the decisions of our managers. Quite a few times we would have heard our colleagues mention that the eighth wonder in the world is someone being a manager! Many a times there is a tendency among MBAs, especially early on in their careers, to dismiss non MBA managers as aberrations. I used to have a manager who was a graduate but very well experienced in the industry. Sometimes I used to wonder why he had been given the responsibility of heading our division. Though I was very polite and respectful to him, I always had this lingering thought that he was probably not

as good as me in analytical ability. I guess he probably read my mind since in one management meet he announced that I would develop a business case for a new service that the company was contemplating. I was thrilled at the opportunity and thought that it was an acknowledgement of my analytical skills.

In quick time I had collected data and had a business case ready. I was happy with the outcome and was ready to present it to the manager, more as a formality rather than getting his advice, since I was not sure if he could add any more value to my analysis. The manager was genuinely happy with the rigor of analysis that I had done and appreciated my efforts. I was basking in the acknowledgement of the praise when he added that I may want to rethink on presenting this, since in reality the illustration for the business case was at best a theoretical extrapolation. It then dawned on me that I had assumed that application of the technology would be applicable to the largest market segment without checking if they had a compatible technology infrastructure in place. I would have made a fool of myself, if it had gone along and presented this business case to senior management.

When I did present the business case, the manager ensured that everyone got to know that it was entirely my effort. I was overwhelmed and was chiding myself for not obeying His command to watch my thoughts earlier when I felt I was superior to my manager. Even though I have changed organizations, this manager is still one of my well wishers. And I still respect his judgment and advice.

Watch Your Character

There are instances in our corporate careers when we are privy to confidential information pertaining to our employers. Often such information is useful to other competing organizations. I was once invited to a dinner at a relative's residence. He mentioned that this was a dinner for relatives and friends and not his work group. I wanted to be sure since this relative was working for a competitor company and it always made me uncomfortable when he got inquisitive about my work.

At the dinner, I was surprised to find that his manager and his entire work team were there. In fact, I was introduced as the person who his manager wanted to meet. This was like walking into a hungry lion's den! I was at a loss on how to act and had to come up with something that was polite but firm. When introduced to the manager, I mentioned that it was possible for professionals working with well respected companies like ours to be friends and to meet socially in spite of being direct competitors. I made it a point to mention that it was nice to read that their company had won some international awards. The manager was proud and mentioned that it was indeed hard work and dedication that had won them the recognition.

Now the manager and the work team were on the back-foot and would find it hard to stoop down even to broach the sensitive competitive information. Though one or two of the team members tried bringing that up, the manager

would quickly change the topic since he had earlier given an eloquent exposition of integrity, hard work and dedication. The evening was enjoyable since the tables had turned and we ended discussing only neutral subjects.

While leaving the manager commended me on my integrity and mentioned that he would always prefer someone with integrity in his team since information will not leak from his company. It was entirely His Grace that I was able to get away from a very tricky situation not only unscathed but also with a compliment.

Watch Your Heart

The trials and tribulations in the corporate world today are extremely stressful. It is easy to just go with the wave and not stop to think about what one is doing as long as the going is good. We find it difficult to stop and take stock of what we really are pursuing in a career. I have had the good fortune of interacting with a few who have a very clear idea of their ultimate goal. For instance, I know a professor with impeccable qualifications from the best universities that would have got him the pick of careers in both academic and corporate positions in any part of the world. Inspired by our beloved Swami he has chosen an academic career in India. He is among the few who have the will to follow their true heart instead of getting swayed by the pulls of mammon and power. Similarly, there were busy executives who diligently visited the Tsunami affected areas every weekend for a few months to help in relief operations. It was what their hearts wanted to do but they were also aware of their responsibilities to their employers. These friends were typically the most energetic on a Monday morning when one assumed that they would be the most tired. How often do we have the courage truly to follow our heart and balance those pursuits with a career?

To conclude, I offer my humble prayers at the Lotus Feet of our beloved Swami to grace us all with the strength to continue to WATCH ourselves so that we remain worthy instruments of His mission.

This article expresses the personal opinion of the author and not necessarily those of the organization to which he is affiliated.

THE PERFECT GUARDIAN

By Ms. Arunima Pant

Ms Arunima studied in the Anantapur campus of Bhagavan's university from 1982 to 1990, and later served as a lecturer in the same college for sixteen years till 2006. Presently, she is a Devotional Coordinator at the South Center, Miami, Florida (USA).

Swami is the greatest healer who treads this earth. He can heal with His look or touch, a mere brush of His robe, and also when He ignores you. He often says, "My love flows out to everyone for I see everyone as Myself. If a person reciprocates My love from the depth and purity of his heart, My love and his, in unison, cures the affliction. Where there is no reciprocation, there is no cure."

The Strength of Unflinching Faith

This is an incident that happened to my uncle a couple of years back. He had developed some problem with his kidney and was suffering from severe pain in his lower abdomen. He consulted the local doctors in his home town. Unable to diagnose him correctly, they suggested that he go to some experienced urologist. My uncle is an active member of the *Seva Dal* and also a great devotee of Bhagavan. After hearing what the local doctor said, he immediately decided to come to Prashanti Nilayam and get himself checked in the Super Specialty Hospital.

I was working as a lecturer in the Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur Campus, at that time. I too went along with my uncle and aunt to the Super Specialty Hospital for his first check up. After the preliminary tests were done, he was asked to see the concerned urologist. As the doctor looked through my uncle's reports, he became quite serious and thoughtful. Finally, after a while he disclosed that my uncle had a malignant tumor in his kidney and it was in the third stage! The doctor also insisted that the tumor had to be operated immediately; otherwise it would lead to more serious problems leaving even thinner chances for his survival. On hearing what the doctor said, I was extremely shocked! But to my utter surprise, I found that my uncle was absolutely unperturbed about what he had heard from the doctor. We brought him back home. He merely said that now that his days were numbered, he would like to do more and more service at the Sai Center once he went back home. After two days, my uncle underwent the surgery and the doctor told him to come back within a month's time to check up on his condition depending on which, they would be able to tell him about the chances of his survival.

"The Lord Has Come"

Next month, once again he came for the check up. He looked quite hale and hearty and one could hardly guess that he was a cancer patient. The day before he was supposed to be admitted to the hospital, he bought a small 10"

by 10" laminated photograph of Swami and hung it on the wall of his room. It was a beautiful bust photograph of Bhagavan with a smiling face, and in the evening I got a nice garland made for the same. As we had few flowers, it was a blend of white flowers and *tulsi* leaves. When I put the garland on Swami's photo, it was so short that it was touching Swami's chin. Though I was not very happy to keep the garland, still I let it be.

Next day, early in the morning I heard my aunt knocking at my room door. As I opened the door I found her very excited as she called me to her room. What I saw amazed me. The garland on Swami's picture which was so short the previous night had grown more than four times its size without any gap between the flowers and was swaying with the fan breeze! I could not believe my own eyes! I told my uncle that it was a good indication that Swami had shown concern regarding his health. After sometime, I went for Swami's Darshan still thinking about the whole incident.

We love to hear and enjoy such experiences of other people but when it happens to us we become a doubting Thomas. Such was the case with me. Somehow I was not able to believe the miracle. I had a book titled "The Lord Has Come" written by Ms. Kalyani Sundararajan, which was a birthday gift from my father. I had carried this book that day for darshan. As I sat for darshan I narrated the incident to one of my colleagues sitting in front of me. On hearing this, she too narrated a similar incident which took place in her house in Delhi. She, in fact, assured me that I should not be worrying as Swami had blessed my uncle with a "long life", symbolized by the long garland. Believing in her words, though not fully convinced yet, I stopped the conversation and opened the book that I had with me and started reading. I opened a page at random and something caught my eye there in that page. By an amazing coincidence, it was an incident written by a devotee in whose house the garland had grown and coiled itself on the altar like a snake, which was an indication that Swami had visited her house as promised! I was so surprised and happy that I immediately prayed to Swami to pardon me for having such doubts in my mind.

A Beautiful Dream and a New Life

My uncle was once again hospitalized on that day. He had a beautiful dream in the night. In his dream, Swami came close to his bed and hit him very hard on his lower abdomen thrice and vanished! As he was taken for operation the next day, the doctors found that the place from where the tumor was removed was fully dried and there was no sign of any cancer!

He was discharged from the hospital the following day. He looked quite hale and hearty as if he never had any problem with his health. He took the garland back to his home and even after he reached home it continued growing for one full month. Later when he measured the garland it had grown 13 feet long! Swami had really blessed him with a new life, a long life. My uncle is still an active member of the *Seva Dal* and visits Prashanti Nilayam every year.

The fact that our lives revolve around Swami is itself the greatest miracle. All we have to do is forget all knowledge, leave all preoccupations behind, forget everything and surrender ourselves completely at His Lotus Feet as He is the only caretaker of our lives. Swami says,

"It is not in struggling that the process precedes. It is in surrendering that the victory is won."

H2H SPECIAL

"HE IS MY SWAMI."

CONVERSATION WITH MRS. PADMA KASTURI PART - 4

In the last issue we had the final part of the over one-hour long conversation between Mrs. Padma Kasturi (commonly called as Padmamma), daughter of Sri N Kasturi, Swami's biographer and Ms. Rajeshwari Patel, an alumna of Swami's University and now a faculty member in the Anantapur campus of Sathya Sai University, which was aired on Radio Sai a few weeks ago. Now we have the first part of the second interview with her.

RP: Aum Shri Sai Ram! Welcome to Radio Sai Global Harmony. Smt. Padmamma is once again with us today to share some more of her own memorable experiences with Beloved Bhagavan. Welcome Ma'am to the studios of Global Sai Harmony.

PK: Thank you Rajeshwari.

RP: Last time when we met here, after the interview in which you spoke very fondly about your father, as we were going together, I asked you if I should walk you back to your house as it was late - and your reply on that occasion still rings in my ears. You said: "No! This is my Prashanti Nilayam! I know the place better than you."

I felt a joyous sense of belonging in your voice. I realized that your life is so very much tied to Bhagavan and to this place. So, I would like to begin this session with a question relating to this. Please tell our listeners about 'your Prashanti Nilayam' as you called it. What was it like in those days? What was the daily routine?

PK: It was just like a bungalow and not like this mandir. In front there was a huge garden with coconut palm trees, and mango trees too. There were tiled houses on both the sides and there was some space in between.

In those days, there was a big problem to reach Puttaparthi. To reach Puttaparthi from Bangalore, first we had to travel for 3 to 4 hours by train, to a station called Penukonda. Then from there we had to take a jhatka (horse-cart) to go from the railway station to the bus-stand in Penukonda. Then we had to travel in the bus to reach Bukkapatanam which is about 3 to 4 miles away from Puttaparthi. Then, we had to take a bullock-cart from there! The bullock-cart was something interesting now when we think about it, but it was really hard when we had to come.

RP: With all your baggage and everything...

PK: Yes, with all the baggage going through the sands...

RP: So you had to cross the hot sands?

PK: Yes. And whenever the bullocks were to go through the sands, the bullock-cart guy would ask us to get off because the bullocks would find it very hard to walk on the sand with the luggage and all that heavy load! And walking on the sand is very difficult because it is very hot and our feet would go in! We had to pull our feet out and people who were from the cities were not used to all this!

RP: So how many hours of journey is it from Bangalore to Puttaparthi with all these different stops?

PK: We started Bangalore at 9 o'clock in the morning and we used to reach Puttaparthi by 5 or 6 in the evening. And the best thing was that Swami would be there waiting for us. Whenever any bullock cart would come, He would be near the bullock cart to receive us.

RP: Oh! So He was giving you a very warm welcome!

PK: Yes, then we never felt hot from the journey at all! We would get His *namaskar* immediately and if there were any small children in the bullock cart, He would Himself hold them and take them out of the cart and He would immediately come to the house and even ask us: "What have you brought for Me?" like a small child, a relative, you know!

RP: How would Swami come to know that you were arriving? Or did He always know?

PK: He always knew of course, but whenever some bullock cart came, He was always there to receive. So it was always a wonderful experience coming to Puttaparthi.

RP: What was the daily routine like? I mean what time would Darshan begin or there was no such timing?

PK: When we would come here, there was no *suprabhatam* or *nagarsankeertan* or anything like that. We could get up late in the mornings and there were not that many people for interviews either. There were no token lines, and people who wanted to leave that same day would be seated in the veranda.

RP: Nowadays, there are thousands of people even on ordinary days!

PK: Yes! So people would sit on the veranda and the ladies would sit there and Swami would come down by 8 or something.

RP: Are you talking of the new mandir or the old one?

PK: The new one. He would come at around 7:30 or 8:00 and He would stand near the interview room and it would be on a first-come-first basis in those days.

RP: So everybody got an interview?

PK: Everybody got an interview mostly. And we would make sure we got the interview the day we left because then we could take the prasadam too.

RP: On a regular basis, how many people used to be there everyday on an average?

PK: Average about 200 to 300, that's all.

RP: Everyday?

PK: Yes, everyday.

RP: But on festivals?

PK: Oh! On those festive days the mandir hall would be full then! We used to say: "Oh! So many people! The hall is full!" and now everyday the hall is full!

RP: Yes! More than full! So there was no routine as such?

PK: No, no routine. Everyday the bhajans would be over by 11 or 12.

RP: So you had Darshan all the time!

PK: Since there were not too many people, He didn't have to go around. He used to come down and walk from the garden and place to place.

RP: So you could have Darshan almost all the time!

PK: Yes. And we could get *namaskaram* too – He used to allow *namaskaram* whenever He was walking around in the garden; or He would come home and sit with us and talk.

RP: So there was a garden there?

PK: There was a big garden with flowers and coconut trees and we ladies used to water the plants everyday - it was a routine. Since there were no taps or electricity in those days, a petromax light was used for the bhajans inside the hall.

RP: But that was in the morning; what about the evening bhajans?

PK: There were evening bhajans.

RP: What time?

PK: It was in between 6 and 7.

RP: Oh! Were there interviews in the evening too?

PK: No, not many. Interviews were in the morning mainly or during bhajans – as He wished. It was not a planned routine like these days. Since we didn't have electricity, we had to draw water from the wells – there were two wells there – and we ladies used to gather between 4 and 6 in the evenings and we used to water the plants. Some strong ladies used to draw the water and we young ladies used to stand in lines and pass on the water pots from one to another. And some old ladies who could not carry the water, used to collect the empty vessels and put it away. It was a daily routine; from 4 to 6.

RP: So only the women did the watering of the plants?

PK: Yes, and Swami used to sometimes walk around in the garden and come and talk to us and after the watering would be done, sometimes He used to give us some fruits or some *prasaad* – so we would really enjoy it.

RP: You know, last time when you were talking about your father, you were saying that you were unfortunately not present when Bhagavan was going to take a picture of your father; and the photograph of course turned out to be a joke that He wanted to play on Prof. Kasturi. Were you at any time ever involved in any similar kind of incident?

PK: Yes, I will tell you that! You see, there was another daily routine where after dinner we were allowed to go to His dining room. He used to come to the eastern side of the mandir for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And one of His sisters used to serve Him. After dinner, we ladies used to go to garland Him. When jasmine season would be there, we would make beautiful garlands and He used to allow us to garland Him.

One day, somebody had made a very beautiful garland and He liked it very much. He said: "I wish somebody would take a picture with the garland on Me." Suddenly He said: "Ah! There's an idea! You all are watering these plants anyway, so tomorrow morning, you all come to the terrace; we will all sit together and I will wear the garland, and we will take a photograph."

Oh! We all were so excited! In those days, there was no colour film; so it was a problem for us to choose the saris to wear since the photograph would be just black and white. We were all ready by 8 o'clock in the morning and He had asked us to bring the pots too.

RP: Just so that you can have the pots in front of you?

PK: Yes. And He asked us to bring a big brass pot too and He wanted to sit on that in the center; He didn't want a chair! We all went in - we were about 25 of us. My eldest son who was just 3 years old then, used to water the plants with a small brass pot. Swami asked me to bring him too and He asked him to sit in front of Him and we all were standing around Him.

RP: Was he holding the pot too?

PK: Yes, a small pot. Then the problem was there was only one photographer in Puttaparthi and he was a young man. Swami didn't want some young man to come and photograph all these young ladies, so he asked my father to come and take a picture. My father said: "Swami! I don't know how to focus or to even hold the camera!"

RP: So Swami didn't even want the young photographer to look through the camera-box and take your picture?

PK: Yes! Then Swami said: "No! Don't worry! I will help you with the focusing of the camera and I will show you everything. You just hold the camera; I will come back and sit on the pot and when I say 'ready', you just click it!"

So the same thing happened; Swami went and focused it and adjusted everything and He came back and sat on the pot and said 'ready!' and my father clicked!

RP: Oh! Then what happened?

PK: It was a disaster! Swami said: "Oh this Kasturi has spoiled everything! No photo has come!"

RP: Oh no!

PK: We were all disappointed! But though we could not get the photo, the impression of that opportunity just remained imprinted in our hearts. We do remember that day and we were so happy that we got the opportunity.

RP: That's a beautiful experience! It is rather humorous, but it's also very educative. What sort of message do you think Bhagavan was conveying? Because, apparently Bhagavan has not changed some of His view points of protection of women from the eyes of men; and that's a very beautiful lesson.

I heard that you had several opportunities to have moonlit night dinners with Bhagavan?

PK: Yes.

RP: Please tell us about that!

PK: Swami liked moonlight dinners very much. Whenever it was a full moon day, He would ask everybody: "Oh, let's just go and have dinner in the open mandir terrace!"

RP: Oh! Mandir terrace? What about the sands of the River Chitravati? Did He take people there too?

PK: No. These dinners were usually just on the terrace.

RP: Oh! That's good! So these were terrace-dinners?

PK: Yes. Each family would cook their food and bring it and we would all go upstairs and sometimes Swami would order some people to prepare more in larger quantities – some savouries or sweets.

RP: What were the favourite dishes of Swami?

PK: Oh, some *wadas* or *bhajis*.

RP: He liked that?

PK: Yes, and so those people would prepare that in larger quantities. In those days, there were hardly 25 or 30 families, and we - our families - used to sit in groups. Swami would serve that extra *wada* or *bhaji* or whatever they had brought. He used to serve it to everybody. And He used to bring His plate and whatever specialty we had prepared; we would serve it to Him too. He used to sit in the center, and we would all sit in a circle.

In those days, there were no tape-recorders; but He had a gramophone record player, and He used to play some old Telegu drama songs.

RP: Oh! There was music in the background too – like a party! What songs were they? Do you remember any songs?

PK: No, I am sorry. They were all old drama songs.

RP: Were they mythological ones?

PK: Yes, mythological ones.

RP: I am sure you all liked that!

PK: Yes. And after dinner would be done, we would do *aarti* to Swami. Once, He asked for an empty plate. Somebody gave Him an empty silver plate. He just hit the empty plate from the bottom and the whole plate was full of vibhuti!

RP: Oh my God! And then He gave it to all of you?

PK: Yes, He gave it to all of us. And we enjoyed the opportunity! I think I had these moonlight dinner parties at least twice or thrice; all are memorable!

RP: With all these old songs playing in the back ground! That must be fun! What about on Ekadashi days? Were you with Bhagavan when He created *amrita* and all that?

PK: Yes! I was with Him many times – 3 or 4 times at least. There was one special Vaikuntha Ekadashi. It was in 1957 – I remember that year because Swami celebrated my father's 60th birthday in the mandir that year. And because my father was born on Christmas day, it was in December; and

Vaikuntha Ekadashi usually falls in the end of December too. Swami took us all to the Chitravati River and said: "We will have moonlight dinner at Chitravati!" - It was very rare but sometimes we would have it. We all prepared food and took it there and Swami held some bhajans.

RP: And the petromax lamp was taken along too?

PK: Yes. We took that because by the time we would return, it would be dark and late; so we took torches because the roads were not like what they are today!

PK: So after doing bhajans and giving some formal discussion – not a discourse – He would tell a story or someone would ask some question and it would go on. Then He asked my father to give Him a tumbler - which he always took because sometimes Swami asked for some water; so they would always carry water for Him.

So when Swami asked for the silver tumbler, my father thought that Swami wanted some water and so he started to fill the tumbler with water. Swami said: "No. Give Me the empty tumbler!" Father gave it to Him and Swami held the empty tumbler near His mouth and then we just heard a sound of burbling!

RP: Oh! Like a gurgling sound?

PK: Yes.

RP: Oh! Did He take *amrita* out of His mouth?

PK: Yes! That was the only time that I had heard of such a thing! Immediately there was a fragrant smell all over.

RP: We have heard about Him taking the *linga* out from within but this is something rare!

PK: He would take out some things from a silver tumbler or silver container or sometimes He would take out a conch-like thing from the sand and He would pour *amrita* from that container. But this time He took it out from His mouth. And He asked my father: "Have you noticed what is there in My stomach? It is the *amrita-kalisha*!"

RP: Oh! He said that?

PK: Yes!

RP: So the nectar container is in His stomach!

PK: Yes. I think we were all very fortunate to get the real *amritam* from Him. A real *amrita-kalasha*!

RP: And that too from Maha-Vishnu! And that too on such an auspicious day!

PK: Yes. And He gave it too all. He never used to give *amritam* in our hands. He would pour it Himself in our mouth with a spoon! It was really difficult because we had to open our mouth wide right in front of Swami!

RP: And then He would pour it! That's good! Now, do you have any mementos of those early years?

PK: Yes, I do have some. In 1954, for Shivaratri, Swami created 9 shivalingas and they emerged from His mouth; they were small but He had given one to my grandmother and she used to worship it and do *abhishekam*.

RP: So is that with you?

PK: Yes, that's with me now.

RP: Do you then also do the *abhishekam*?

PK: Yes, I worship it everyday and do *abhishekam*.

RP: So that's the legacy that you have!

PK: And you must also be knowing that when Swami went to Badrinath, He took out the lingam from the shrine which was installed by Shakaracharya and the lingam was worshipped with golden bilva leaves created by Swami.

RP: Yes, we read about that in Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram.

PK: Also, when Swami went to Somanath, He created golden flowers and showered it on the lingam there. You must have read that too in the Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram?

RP: Yes.

PK: And there, He distributed the golden bilva leaves and the golden flowers to the devotees who had followed Him there. My father was one of the lucky recipients of that; I have both – one bilva leaf and one golden flower.

RP: What have you done with them?

PK: I kept it in my shrine. I stuck it into some photos in my shrine in my house. And in those early days, Swami used to chew paan and during His 60th Birthday, when the ceiling on desires was enforced on the devotees, to be an example for it, He too gave up that habit.

RP: Yes! He used to eat paan a lot, but I think on that occasion when the theory of ceiling on desires was evolved, for practical application in all the households of the devotees, He also wanted to set an example and He gave up eating paan.

PK: Yes. And then He gave that paan box to my father. He said: "It is of no use for Me now because I have sealed the desire on paan!"

RP: Swami is always like that; first He sets an example and then He wants others to follow.

PK: Yes. And my father used it as a vibhuti container and I am fortunate to have that with me now.

RP: Oh, so you have that too!

PK: Yes.

RP: You have a small photograph too?

PK: Yes, He created one for me in 1954 when I had some problems in my life. He said: "I will give you this picture and whenever you are in agony or despair, you can pour out your sorrows in front of this picture and I will give you solace and peace."

RP: So you have that too?

PK: Yes.

RP: That's great! What else do you have that He maybe gave to your father that you have now?

PK: See, we have heard of Swami creating rings, lockets, vibhuti etc. but once, He created a small monkey! Not a real monkey but a stone monkey for my father. Would you like to hear about it?

RP: Yes! Please tell us about it because that is very unusual. What was the occasion?

PK: It seems one day there was some discussion about the evolution of man - Darwin's theory - with Swami and some devotees there and since my father was an anthropology professor, he was very interested in it.

RP: Oh! So he was in anthropology too? I thought it was just history!

PK: No! He was in anthropology too. He was studying it and so he was interested.

RP: So he was an expert then?

PK: Yes! He started telling Swami: "Swami, I know about anthropology and the evolution of man!" Then he said: "Swami, the monkey would live on the ground. They are so near to the man in evolution."

RP: They are the ancestors to man.

PK: Yes, the closest. Then Swami said: “No! There was one species of monkeys that used to live on the trees but which had no tail; they were the closest relation to man.”

RP: Ok.

PK: Then father argued: “No Swami! That cannot be, because monkeys live on the trees and they need a tail for jumping and balancing on trees.”

RP: So there was an argument between the two of them.

PK: Then Swami said: “No! No!” and to convince him, He created a stone monkey – it was about 3 inches and it had no tail. And He showed him: “See! It was this type!” father was so astonished! He never knew that; it had beautiful twinkling eyes and it was holding a fruit in its hand.

RP: What colour was it?

PK: It was a stone; brown colour not dark brown but beige - kind of a biscuit colour. It was sitting with a fruit in its hand and it was without a tail; but the eyes were so expressive.

RP: Is that with you now?

PK: No. Father said it would be better if it was kept in a museum so that the people can see too. If it was at home, then only those who come to our home can see it. But if it is kept in a public place like a museum – I think it's in the University Museum.

I also have some mementos of letters which Swami wrote to me.

(To be continued.)

GET INSPIRED

WHAT GOOD DOES THE BHAGAVAD GITA DO?

An old farmer lived on a farm in the mountains with his young grandson. Each morning Grandpa was up early sitting at the kitchen table reading his Bhagavath Gita. His grandson wanted to be just like him and tried to imitate him in every way he could.

One day the grandson asked, "Grandpa! I try to read the Bhagavath Gita just like you but I don't understand it, and what I do understand I forget as soon as I close the book. What good does reading the Bhagavath Gita do?"

The Grandfather quietly turned from putting coal in the stove and replied, "Take this coal basket down to the river and bring me back a basket of water."

The boy did as he was told, but all the water leaked out before he got back to the house.

The grandfather laughed and said, "You'll have to move a little faster next time," and sent him back to the river with the basket to try again. This time the boy ran faster, but again the basket was empty before he returned home.

Out of breath, he told his grandfather that it was impossible to carry water in a basket, and he went to get a bucket instead.

The old man said, "I don't want a bucket of water; I want a basket of water. You're just not trying hard enough," and he went out the door to watch the boy try again.

At this point, the boy knew it was impossible, but he wanted to show his grandfather that even if he ran as fast as he could, the water would leak out before he got back to the house. The boy again dipped the basket into river and ran hard, but when he reached his grandfather the basket was again empty.

Out of breath, he said, "See Grandpa, it's useless!" "So you think it is useless?" The old man said, "Look at the basket."

The boy looked at the basket and for the first time realized that the basket was different. It had been transformed from a dirty old coal basket and was now clean, inside and out.

"Son, that's what happens when you read the Bhagavath Gita. You might not understand or remember everything, but when you read it, you will be changed, inside and out. That is the work of Krishna in our lives!"

Spiritual Commentary

Why should we read the Bhagavad Gita, even if we can't understand even one Sanskrit word? Why it is that such an ancient book as the Bhagavad Gita has become so popular today?

It only proves the strength of the noble teachings that are involved in it, and that these universal principles endure even though they are expressed in different ways in the various philosophic scriptures of the world. It is an intensely practical book, and in many ways one of the most beautiful. It helps us to understand how we can live in society and still make spiritual values the real motivation of our lives. Because what the Gita enjoins is the importance of the inner life; that this is what motivates us, and what motivates all life in the universe.

Each of us must find his way, each of us his own path in life. So many are asking questions: what is this business of living all about? How can we come to terms with ourselves and add richness and meaning to our daily lives?

One delightful analogy, which actually came from the Mahabharata, from which the Gita is taken, points out the folly of anyone accepting the teachings in blind faith, for we cannot know the true nature of things if we just listen without really reflecting and questioning, any more than the spoon can have any idea of the taste of the soup. This is where the reason must come in, but more than that, the intuition and the power of discrimination. When Arjuna was so despondent, Krishna urged him to "seek this wisdom by service, by intense searching, by inquiry and by humility."

May the Bhagavad Gita become an integral part of our lives and clean the charcoal of our inner divine spirit and may Lord Krishna polish our hearts and minds to shine bright like the perfect diamond!

THE BEST RELIGION

There was once a king who ruled over his subjects well. All his people were happy and his kingdom prospered. One day the King called all the religious heads of his land. Some were well renowned and well versed in Vedas and Puranas and some in the Bible, and yet others in the Koran and other scriptures. When all were gathered together, the King asked, "Oh holy ones! Today, at the request of my subjects, I wish to declare one particular religion as the religion of my land. I leave it to you O learned ones, to decide amongst yourself and to arrive at a unanimous decision as to which religion deserves royal patronage. However I feel only that religion should be chosen whose teachings are not refused by anyone."

Years rolled past, but no decision was taken. Each felt that his religion was the best, but none of the others agreed.

One day a traveling saint arrived in the kingdom. Upon learning about the king's unfulfilled desire, he immediately went up to the king and said "O! Mighty one! I am willing to show you the religion whose teachings nobody can refute."

The king was delighted. At last after long years of waiting an answer was at hand. "Please tell me soon my dear saint. I am impatient. I have waited for many long years." The saint replied "Be patient my king. I shall reveal the name of this religion to you, only at a quiet, secluded spot. Tomorrow at twelve noon, I shall be waiting for you near the banks of the holy River Ganga. We shall go across to the opposite shore and then I will reveal the best religion."

As decided, the saint and the king met at 12 noon the next day. The king ordered a boat to take them across the river. Immediately a boat was brought. Before the king could step inside, the saint expressed the desire to inspect the boat. "No this boat will not do as one wooden plank at the bottom of the boat is loose," he complained. Another boat was brought. After close inspection, the saint observed that a few nails were missing along the side of the boat. The king ordered another boat to be brought. After close scrutiny, the saint rejected the boat saying that the paint was chipped. This was repeated many times over and over again. The king was slowly losing his patience and could not stand it any longer.

"Respected sir!" he said, "For the past so many hours you have been inspecting one boat after another. You have rejected each one of them. After all, what does it matter whether the paint is chipped or a few nails are missing or a plank is loose? As long as the boat is capable of taking us across the river, I feel that these minor faults should be overlooked."

The saint turned towards the king and smiled. Softly he explained "You have finally discovered that no boat is incapable of taking us across. The religions prevalent in our land are like the boats. Each one of them is capable of taking you to the Lord. To find faults in each other's faith is mere foolishness. Go

back to your kingdom and continue to rule wisely, giving each religion as much respect as your own. Live in unity."

The king fell at the saint's feet. When he got up again, he felt himself richer - richer in knowledge and in wisdom, and better able to understand God's plan.

AN INSPIRED LIFE

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was born into an upper class British family in Florence, Italy, and was named after the city of her birth. Florence Nightingale's greatest achievement was to raise nursing to the level of a respectable profession for women, as till that time it was held in poor regard.

One day when still a child, she was walking through the woods with a friend when she came across a small homestead. A shepherd lived there with his dog named Cap. Cap was the only family the shepherd had and Cap loved his master. Florence saw the shepherd without his dog and asked the shepherd, "Where's Cap?"

"Poor dog. I may have to kill him."

"Kill poor Cap!" cried Florence. "Why would you want to do that? I know you love him so and he is a good dog."

"Oh, his leg was broken when some boys hit him with a stone."

The shepherd looked very sad. With Cap gone, he would have no family at all.

"I am very sorry for you," said Florence. "But listen, at my home I have many animals and I take care of them. May I see your dog?"

The shepherd told Florence and her friend to follow him. He led them to where the dog was. Florence got some water and bathed Cap's leg gently. She found that it was not broken after all - just badly bruised. She took care of Cap with love and devotion, until he was well enough to guard the shepherd's sheep again. The shepherd was so happy that he had his dog back. This story of Florence Nightingale's concern for the sick epitomises the thread that ran through her life.

When 17 years old, she had a strong spiritual experience, which directed her to a life of service to God. She was drawn to the field of nursing and received training at a nursing school in Germany in 1850.

During the Crimean War (1853-1856) fought by the British in Turkey, the temperatures were biting cold where the soldiers were fighting. Many of them were very sick and without nursing care because few ladies wanted to go. Florence decided to go and help the ailing soldiers. After many days of traveling she reached the far-away battle-zone with 38 other nurses and found the wounded soldiers receiving inadequate care by overworked medical staff. Medicines were in short supply, hygiene was being neglected, and mass infections were common, many of them fatal. There was no equipment to process hygienic food for the patients.

Florence and her compatriots began by thoroughly cleaning the hospital and equipment and reorganizing patient care. However, during her time there the death rate did not drop; on the contrary, it began to rise. The death count would be highest of all other hospitals in the region. During her first winter, 4077 soldiers died. Ten times more soldiers died from infectious diseases such as typhus, typhoid, cholera and dysentery than from battle wounds. Conditions at the temporary barracks hospital were so fatal for the patients because of overcrowding and the hospital's defective sewers and lack of

ventilation. A sanitary commission had to be sent out by the British government in March 1855, almost six months after Florence Nightingale had arrived, which ordered the flushing out of the sewers and improved ventilation. As a result death rates were sharply reduced.

Nightingale continued believing the death rates were due to poor nutrition and supplies and overworking of the soldiers. It was not until after she returned to Britain and began collecting evidence before the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army, that she realised that most of the soldiers at the hospital were killed by poor sanitary conditions. This experience would influence her later career, when she advocated the importance of sanitary living conditions. Consequently, she reduced deaths in the Army during peacetime and turned attention to the sanitary design of hospitals.

Nightingale played the central role in the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Health of the Army. She wrote the Commission's 1,000-plus page report that included detailed statistical reports (she was a talented statistician), and she was instrumental in the implementation of its recommendations. The report of the Royal Commission led to a major overhaul of army military care, to the establishment of an Army Medical School and of a comprehensive system of army medical records.

In 1855, a public meeting to give recognition to Florence Nightingale for her work in the war led to the establishment of the Nightingale Fund for the training of nurses. There was an outpouring of generous donations and by 1859 Nightingale had £45,000 at her disposal from the Nightingale Fund to set up the Nightingale Training School at St. Thomas' Hospital on July 9, 1860.

Nightingale also wrote *Notes on Nursing*, which was published in 1860, a 136 page book that served as the cornerstone of the curriculum at the Nightingale School and other nursing schools. *Notes on Nursing* also sold well to the general reading public and is considered a classic introduction to nursing. Nightingale would spend the rest of her life promoting the establishment and development of the nursing profession and organizing it into its modern form.

Nightingale would spend the rest of her life promoting the establishment and development of the nursing profession and organizing it into its modern form. Her life is one of selfless service, inspired and incessant. And it is because of people like her, some known and many unknown, that the world is still a beautiful place in this modern world. Let us learn from her that life is not all about me and myself, it is fulfilling and complete only when we reach out to our fellowmen with love and joy.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1) In Bhagavan's *Ramakatha Rasavahini*, Sage Viswamitra narrates the story to Sri Rama about the sacredness of the bow King Janaka owns. Which God is the bow named after?

- A. Lord Vishnu.
- B. Lord Shiva.
- C. Lord Brahma.
- D. Hanuman.

2) An essential aspect of Jainism is the ascetic lifestyle. Monks and nuns undertake the ascetic life full-time and take the "Five Great Vows": Non-violence (*ahimsa*), Truth (*satya*), Non-stealing (*asteya*), Celibacy (*brahmachanga*) and

What is the 5th Vow?

- A. Righteousness (*dharma*)
- B. Tonsuring (*cuda karma*)
- C. Non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*)
- D. Peace (*shanti*)

3)



In which religion is this symbol used, which means The Greatest Name?

- A. Zoroastrian
- B. Islam
- C. Judaism
- D. Bahá'í

4) Jews, Muslims and Christians are all:

- A. 'Children' of Abraham.
- B. Originally Christians.
- C. Originally from Israel.
- D. From the same racial group.

5) The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Christian denomination which, as its name suggests, is best known for its teaching that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is the Sabbath and that Jesus Christ is to return.

The members of the Seventh-day Adventist church:

- A. Originated in Jamaica.
- B. Are vegetarians.
- C. Celebrate Advent for seven days.
- D. Keep silence every Saturday.

6) In Buddhism what does the term *arahant* mean?

- A. A person who attends to the needs of the monks.
- B. One of the fourteen hells.
- C. The stage of enlightenment.
- D. An enlightened person.

7) If a Muslim says to you, "Salam-u-'Alaikum", it means:

- A. They think you should reconsider your position.
- B. They are wishing you a good trip.
- C. They are wishing you peace.
- D. They want you to accept them as friends.

8) The epic 'Ramayana' was written by the famous poet Valmiki. What was his profession before he became a poet?

- A. Carpentry
- B. Acting
- C. Musicianship
- D. Robbery

9) In chapter one of Swami's *Bhagavatha Vahini*, He relates the purpose behind the writing of the Bhagavatha. What does the Bhagavatha contain?

- A. Teachings.
- B. Stories relating to Incarnations.
- C. Stories of great saints.
- D. A compilation of many scriptures.

10) The Christian Orthodox Church began as the eastern half of Christendom, the site of the former Byzantine Empire. Today, the highest concentration of Orthodox Christians remain in this area, as well as in Russia, although Orthodoxy can be found in countries throughout the world. Approximately 225 million people worldwide are Orthodox Christians. Orthodox Christians generally:

- A. Fast on Fridays and Wednesdays.
- B. Fast on Fridays.
- C. Fast on Fridays and Saturdays.
- D. Fast on Sundays.

ANSWERS:

1B: Lord Shiva.

Bhagavan tells us that:

At this, Rama asked how the bow happened to reach Janaka and Viswamitra answered. "Listen son! Years ago, the Emperor of Mithila named Devaratha celebrated a great Yajna the like of which no mortal could dare to perform, a Yajna which can confer vast spiritual benefits; a Yajna which pleased the Gods so highly that they gifted him this Divine bow; as a mark of appreciation. It is the Bow of Siva. It is being worshipped with due rites by Janaka every day. He offers flowers and sandal paste, and waves camphor flame and incense in its honour. He places eatables and fruits before the Divine Presence in the bow, in reverential homage. The bow is so loaded with Divinity that no one can raise it and string it, be he God, demon, angel or spirit. Many princes who attempted to string it have met with disgraceful disappointment.

Ramakatha Rasavahini chapter 7

2C: Non-possessiveness (aparigraha)

In Jainism monks and nuns follow the vow of non-possessiveness renouncing greed and material possessions mentally, verbally, and physically. They only keep physical items which are needed on a daily basis. The householder keeps this vow to a more limited degree, ensuring that earning for material possessions and any greed for collecting them are as limited as possible.

3D: Bahá'í

The inscription of the Greatest Name of God, is a calligraphized Arabic rendering of "Yá Bahá'ul 'Abhá" (or "O Glory of the Most Glorious!"). It was originally done by the eminent early Bahá'í calligrapher Mishkin Qalam, and later adopted by Bahá'í's everywhere. It is generally used to depict the sacred in paintings and buildings.

4A: 'Children' of Abraham.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are sometimes referred to as the "Abrahamic religions", because of the role Abraham plays in their holy books and beliefs. In the Jewish tradition, he is called "Abraham, our Father". God promised Abraham that through his offspring, all the nations of the world will be blessed. Jews, Christians, and Muslims consider him father of the people of Israel through his son Isaac. For Muslims, he is a prophet of Islam and the ancestor of Muhammad, through his other son Ishmael.

5B: Are vegetarians.

Since the 1860's when the church began, wholeness and health have been an emphasis of the Adventist church. Adventists present a health message that recommends vegetarianism and expects abstinence from pork, shellfish, and other foods proscribed as "unclean" in the Old Testament. The church discourages its members from the use of alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs. In addition, some Adventists avoid coffee and other beverages containing caffeine.

6D: An enlightened person.

An arahant has reached the goal of nirvana and is liberated from the cycle of birth and death. This Pali word means "worthy one" or alternatively "foe-destroyer". It also has the same connotation in Jainism.

7C: They are wishing you peace.

"Salam-u-Alaikum" means "May the peace and the Mercy of Allah be upon you". Muslims will greet each other in this way, and will sometimes greet others with this sign of peace, as well.

8D: Robbery.

The Poet of Poets, of India, who gave the world the immortal epic, the 'Ramayana' was in his previous profession, a highway robber. He came under the spell of Maharshi Narada and became a 'Brahmarshi'. He not only sang the matchless greatness of Sri Rama, but gave shelter to his wife Seetha Devi, and taught the epic to Sri Rama's sons.

9 B: Stories relating to Incarnations.

Swami tells us:

The name Bhagavatha can be applied to every account of the experiences of those who have contacted God and the Godly (Bhagavan and Bhaktha). God *assumes many Forms and enacts many activities. The name Bhagavatha is given to the descriptions of the experiences of those who have realised Him in those Forms and of those who have been blessed by His Grace and chosen as His Instruments...Unless you have a taste for Godward thoughts, you will not derive joy therefrom. To create that taste, the Bhagavatha relates stories relating to incarnations to the earnest inquirer. Then, one develops the yearning to experience the thrill of God, through all the levels of consciousness. He who has this intense yearning can be a true Bhagavatha.*

Bhagavatha Vahini, chapter 1

10A: Fast on Fridays and Wednesdays.

From the apostolic times the Orthodox Church observed Wednesday and Friday as fast days. The Wednesday fast was connected with the betrayal of Christ by Judas, while the Friday fast was connected with the death of Jesus on the cross. Both events reflect the travail of this world. Today there is a broad variance in the observation of these traditional practices. The fasts are not generally regarded as a complete absence of food; some items, such as meat, cheese and eggs are eliminated from the diet during these weekly fasts.

QUIZ ON H2H

1. In the article 'The Avatar on Himself ' from the Nov 15th 2003 edition, Swami explains the meaning of the word 'Avatar' by saying:

The word Avatar means descent. It is not coming down from the peak of a mountain or the top story of a tall building. It is a descent from....

- A. the Supreme mind to the soul.
- B. the state of the Atma to the level of the body.
- C. heaven to earth.
- D. the super soul to the supra body.

2. In the Chinna Katha section of our Jan 2005 issue, we narrated the story 'The Donkey Died', where Swami recounted how an entire city began to weep out loud on learning of the queen's distress.

What was the moral of the story?

- A. Always be loyal to the authorities.
- B. Compassion can be contagious.
- C. Do not be led away by hearsay.
- D. Royalty rewards complete obedience.

3. In the Dec 1st 2003 edition we carried an article, *What Is the Centre of Our Lives*, where a student recollected how Swami tested him by one day asking him to jump from the terrace, but then caught his arm to stop him from doing so. The next day Swami asked him to eat a bucket-full of brinjal rice, but then said:

"Bangaru (Golden one), if you want to make Swami happy, you need not jump from the terrace or eat buckets of brinjal-rice..."

What did Swami say next?

- A. Just do your studies well.
- B. Just respect your parents.
- C. Just be happy.
- D. Just be good.

4. On June 19th 2002, Bhagavan inaugurated a new orphanage located just outside Prashanti Nilayam, called Deena Jannordharana Pathakam. It held sixty boys from the poorest families in the surrounding areas, and includes ten

of the boy's mothers who are widowed. What surprise announcement did Bhagavan make concerning the orphanage later that year, on the eve of the birthday?

- A. Swami has already found jobs for all boys.
- B. Swami will gift one lakh rupees to each boy.
- C. Swami will open another orphanage in Bangalore.
- D. There will be another orphanage for girls in Puttaparthi.

5. In the Jan 2007 issue cover story, *Sai Geetha ...A Mystifying Tale Of Unmatched Love*, we learnt many intimate and heart warming anecdotes about Swami's divine pet elephant, Sai Geetha. Which particular display of intimacy did Sai Geetha only show towards Bhagavan? She would only allow Bhagavan:

- A. To put food into her mouth.
- B. To sit on her back.
- C. To fondle her.
- D. To sing to her.

ANSWERS:

1B: The state of the Atma to the level of the body.

Swami goes on to say:

No blemish attaches to the Divine as a result of the descent. There is no diminution in Divine power either. Let us say there is a child playing on the ground. If the mother feels it is beneath her dignity to bend and tells the child to leap into her arms, the child cannot do so. The mother does not ask the child to do such an impossible thing. Instead, full of love, the mother stoops and lovingly picks up the child. Likewise, the Lord incarnates assuming a human form to bless and rescue those who cannot rise to the level of the Divine. Incarnation is an act of benediction.

2C: Do not be led away by hearsay.

The full Chinna Katha is below:

You must take every step in Sadhana or in Samsara, only after deep deliberation and satisfying yourself that it will be for your good. Otherwise, it will be like the story of the weeping city. One day, a close female attendant of the Queen came to the Palace weeping in great sorrow, and so the Queen

began to shed tears. Seeing the Queen in tears, the entire zenana wept and the weeping spread to the male attendants too. The King, finding the queen inconsolably sad, also wept profusely in sympathy, and the sight made the entire city weep loud and non-stop. At last, one sensible fellow set in motion an inquiry, which passed through person after person until the Queen herself was accosted. She said that her attendant was in sore grief. When she, a washerwoman by caste, was interrogated, she confessed that it was all due to the sudden demise of her favourite donkey! When the news spread the weeping ceased and there was widespread laughter and shame.

Reason out, discriminate. Do not rush to conclusions or be led away by mere hearsay.

3D: Just be good.

The full account goes as follows:

It was a day in Kodaikanal. Swami asked me, "Are you ready to do whatever I say?" "Yes Swami, I am ready," I replied. With a smile, Swami said, "All right, are you sure?" I said, "Sure. Swami, I will do whatever You say." "Then go to the terrace and jump down," said the Lord. I was stunned. Swami had asked me to do something which I would never do in my senses. I looked into Swami's eyes, I had given my word to Swami, I had to do whatever He commanded me. I got up and made a dash to the stairs. But before I could get to the foot of the stairs, Swami grabbed me in His arms. He looked at me and said, "Bangaru, I will never ask you to do such a thing. Even if you jump down, before you reach the ground, I will come with My arms to catch you." Dear brothers and sisters, we need a centre that will never let go of us. We need a centre whom we will never let go of. The incident did not stop there. The next day we were serving breakfast in the dining hall. That day, the item for breakfast was brinjal rice. Swami came to me with His mysterious smile and asked, "Are you ready to do whatever I say?"

This time, I was silent. I didn't have the courage to speak out. "I won't ask you to jump from the terrace, will you do whatever I say?" I said, "Swami, I will." The events of the previous evening had given me much confidence. Swami looked at me, pointed to the bucket of brinjal-rice kept there and said, "Sit down and eat the entire bucket of brinjal-rice." Brinjal was not exactly my favourite vegetable. I looked pleadingly at Swami. Swami smiled, everyone around had a hearty laugh. Then He stopped. The chutney was being added to my breakfast when He said, "Bangaru, if you want to make Swami happy, you need not jump from the terrace or eat buckets of brinjal-rice. You need not do anything great. Just be good.... Just be good... That's all I want from you."

4B: Swami will gift one lakh rupees to each boy.

Later in the year, on 22nd November 2002, the annual convocation of SSSIHL, Bhagavan handed over a cheque of sixty lakhs to Sri Paramahansa, the project in charge, in the presence of the president of India Shri A P J Abdul Kalam. The money was to be used, Bhagavan declared, for making a fixed deposit of one lakh rupees in the name of each boy!

5A: She would only allow Bhagavan to put food into her mouth.

One by one, Swami would put each apple (her favourite) in her mouth and she would want to be fed no other way. "Even to this day," Sri Pedda Reddy says, "she will not accept fruits from Swami on her trunk, she will insist that Swami put it personally in her mouth. But if it were anybody else, she will either refuse it or accept it only in her trunk." Just like a child who is most comfortable and secure with her mother, Sai Geetha is in 'peace and bliss' only with her Swami.

HEALING TOUCH

OVERCOMING FATE WITH FAITH

Those eyes. They shone. They shone with innocence and purity. They shone like rubies, set in marble. “Is that why she was named Ruby,” you wonder. Resting her head shyly in her father’s lap, she gives you a gentle smile. And you wonder, “How could such an innocent child go through the trauma of a heart surgery?” Her father answers for her, “Vishwaas hi sab kuch Hein” (‘Faith is everything’).

For the last few days Nepal Singh Yadav has been able to breathe easy. He is relieved of the pain and mental torture which have been haunting him for the past four years — agony brought about by the fact that his sweet, ruby-eyed daughter had a hole in the heart.

Fate seems so cruel at times, bringing pain at an age where you would expect only fun and frolic. But faith is wonderful in its ability to endow us with the strength to overcome all the difficulties posed by fate.

Nepal Singh’s Beautiful Yet Gloomy Family

Nepal Singh Yadav is a farmer hailing from Piprai, a small town tucked away in Guna district in the northern corner of Madhya Pradesh in central India where he and his younger brother cultivate wheat, lentils, and soy beans on their farm. The lands were inherited to which Nepal Singh made modest improvements and his latest acquisition being a tractor, which he bought on loan a few months ago. He was living a happy and content life, with his wife, his parents and their three little children. Ruby was the eldest, born in 2000 and Sanju and Ajay were the two sweet little boys who completed the family.

As is with many things, it started in a small way. Neither Yadav nor his wife could comprehend why Ruby fell ill so frequently. Not a fortnight passed by without an episode of fever, cough or cold. They used to fuss over her till she got well.

Sometime in 2004, Yadav met with an accident and sustained some injuries to his collar bone. Yadav received treatment at a clinic at Piprai run by one Dr. Vinod Jain. While recovering his health, he left the farming to his younger brother. Inspired by the noble service the doctor was rendering, he started offering his services at the clinic purely on a voluntary basis, assisting the doctor in dispensing medicines to the patients, coming to his clinic. With time Yadav and Dr. Jain developed a good rapport. Yadav felt more and more drawn to the profession, and though not highly educated, he picked up his job of dispensing medicines very well and could confidently rattle off the names of many medicines.

It was here, at Dr. Vinod Jain’s clinic, that Yadav brought his precious daughter, Ruby to find out what was wrong with her and why she fell ill so frequently. One look at her was enough to tell Dr. Jain that she was suffering from a congenital heart defect. Further investigations proved he was right. She was suffering from two disorders: a ventricular septal defect (VSD) and PDA (patent ductus arteriosus).

Understanding Ruby's Malady

The ventricular septum is the wall between the left and right ventricles (lower chambers) of the heart. A hole in the ventricular septum is called a VSD. Small defects usually close on their own, but those which don't within two years require surgical closure. Large defects or those causing heart failure require surgical repair with a synthetic patch.

Patent ductus arteriosus (PDA) is the other heart problem which Ruby had. PDA occurs soon after birth in some babies. Before birth, the two major arteries—the aorta and the pulmonary artery – are normally connected by a blood vessel called the ductus arteriosus, which is an essential part of the fetal circulation. After birth, the vessel is naturally supposed to close within a few days. In some babies, however, the ductus arteriosus remains open (patent). This opening allows blood to flow directly from the aorta into the pulmonary artery, which strains the heart and increases the blood pressure in the lung arteries.

Diagnosis Confirmed But No Hope

Dr. Jain directed Yadav to take Ruby to a Sindhi Trust Hospital in Anandpur, 35 kms from Piprai. The doctors there confirmed the heart defect and advised them to get the treatment done at their unit in New Delhi. "The doctors here prescribed some medication for 21 days. They told we should go to Delhi and get her operated as early as possible. And that it would cost me two lakh rupees (US \$5000). How could I afford such expenses?" asked Yadav.

Yadav then took her to the Lifeline Express, the Hospital Train, introduced by the Indian Railways that conducts medical camps free of cost. Yadav was accompanied by his neighbour in Piprai, Harbhajan Singh, whose sister too was suffering from a heart ailment. The diagnosis by the mobile medical camp once more confirmed Ruby's condition. The doctors recommended a private hospital in New Delhi. "Can you afford it?" the doctors asked him. It pained Yadav to answer, "No" but not more than the pain he felt when he looked into Ruby's eyes that day.

They Find Their True Lifeline

Well, God has a plan for all of us. And He did have one for Ruby too. It so happened that Harbhajan Singh was seeking medical attention for his sister who was also a heart patient. In course of time, he heard about Swami's Hospitals and the free service they render. He brought his ailing sister to Bangalore. In 2006, she was admitted at Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital at Whitefield and operated upon for a condition similar to Ruby's. As always, Harbhajan's sister's treatment cost the family no money. Today, she is hale and hearty, living a full life. When Harbhajan Singh told Yadav about the Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospital, Whitefield the latter couldn't quite believe his ears.

Very soon, Yadav and Ruby were on a train to Bangalore. After consultation with the doctors at the Institute, Ruby was put on medication and asked to report after six months. Though the previous doctors had prescribed some

medication, it was only after following the medicines prescribed by the doctors here that she stopped having her frequent bouts of cough and fever. Except for one or two spells during the 6 month period, Ruby remained healthy.

June 2007 found Ruby and Yadav in the hospital again. This time, Ruby was admitted and the surgery was performed and both the defects in her heart were corrected. As this article was being written, she was in the ward, recuperating from the surgery. It seemed amazing how the little child bore it all, so calmly.

“Ruby’s septal defect was a circle of 3 cm in diameter. Normally, a synthetic patch is sutured at the site to cover the defect. In her case however, we used a piece of her pericardium (double-layered serous membrane that surrounds the heart) itself, which has lesser complications than the synthetic patch. The PDA was about 6 mm dia. This was ligated (tied) to curtail the cross flow of blood. Ruby’s heart is now as perfect as any other child’s of her age,” says Dr. Bharat Dubey, the cardiac surgeon who operated on Ruby. “After the course of medication for three months, she will go on to live a normal life,” he assures.

So concerned Yadav’s family was about Ruby’s health that Yadav felt it best to let the news of her surgery not be broken to them till he and Ruby reach home.

“There is so much love here” – Nepal Singh

Yadav now is all praise for the hospital. “Ye humare liye ek Mandir hein samajiye. Muje yaha koi dikkat nahi hui” (This Hospital is like a Temple to us. I didn’t feel any problem whatsoever here). “There is so much love being shared in this place,” he says appreciating the caring attitude of the doctors, nurses and all the support staff. “Even if I had paid five lakhs rupees to a private hospital, I wouldn’t have received so much for free. We are ever grateful to Swami for this wonderful Gift of Life,” he adds shedding tears of gratitude.

So shy is Ruby that she only answers “Theek Hoon” (‘I am well’) in Hindi in response to queries about how she feels now. As Ruby returns home hale and healthy, even the mention of her father’s new tractor brings a sparkle to her eyes as she is so looking forward to a tractor ride with her younger brothers that her father had promised her.

One Thursday, July 19, 2007 Ruby was discharged and she left the hospital, happy and whole. And life goes on at the Hospital. Day in and day out, hundreds of patients, young and old, are treated, are healed and go back whole, ever grateful to the Being who has created this wonderful Temple of Healing.

When God Injects Hope in a Billion Hearts...
Spiritual activism – solution to modern healthcare woes

As citizens of a first-world nation, all Canadians enjoy access to a universal healthcare system. While our wealthy friends south of the border depend on private insurance to cover their hospital, diagnostic and drug expenses, the Canadian constitution assures each of us access to doctors and treatment by the virtue of our citizenship or permanent residence. Our tax dollars are directed to ensure equitable and accessible medical care, a privilege often taken for granted by many.

Lopsided Development

Despite the stronger muscle of the US economy, American law makers have repeatedly debated the issue of universal healthcare but the political will and vision to legislate it through the road blocks set up by private healthcare lobbyists and vested interests remains weak and dismal. Opponents of the idea point to the enormous economic burden it will place on the federal and state budgets and the possibility that its universal access will dilute the quality and efficiency of the medical facilities that are available for payment under the current system. When it is a question of one's health, no one minds paying, they argue, for speedy and effective treatment.

While Americans pride themselves in their world-class surgeons who offer state-of-the-art diagnostic services, even if for payment by private insurance companies, Canadians boast of the universal access to their healthcare system by all its citizens, be it a millionaire or a homeless person.

Recently, I found myself face-to-face with a system that combined the best of both the American and Canadian systems while far surpassing their combined worth due to an element entirely missing in either. It also was short on a feature common to both the North American systems, namely the frequent swiping of cards, be it for billing the government or private insurers or for access to facilities by only bona fide personnel.

Interestingly, I received the ultimate lesson in spiritual activism and the practice of humane and compassionate medicine, where the patient is treated as an 'embodiment of God' in the heart of rural South India and an urban suburb nearby.

Sai Healthcare System – A Model for Mankind

Many who have closely studied the Sathya Sai Model of holistic healthcare see it as God's personal response to the cry for help from India's billion helpless souls, barring the select wealthy Indians who can afford exorbitant facilities in the private sector in urban India or abroad.

In the daily workings of the Sathya Sai healthcare system, spiritual activism finds its voice as the ultimate equalizer of opportunity to serve and be served, bringing to full circle the cyclical rotation of the "isms" of political and social

systems. The playing field is level for all, be it the healthcare providers, hospital administrators, volunteer chaperones or patients who represent India's cultural, religious and social diversity.

People from far-off places come here seeking the best possible medical attention that is available to everyone regardless of their age, race, religion, cultural or economic background. This should hardly surprise a Canadian yet my recent tryst with the Sathya Sai healthcare system has left me in awe.

The Puttaparthi Experience Begins...

On June 26, 2007 my connecting flight from Heathrow to Bangalore arrived 4 hours behind schedule, landing my taxi in the eye of the chaos that is Bangalore traffic during rush hour, as well as at most other times. I had chosen this flight on purpose as it was supposed to arrive at 4:30 am giving me a reasonable window of opportunity to beat the traffic and drive off speedily to Puttaparthi, on my four hour car ride from Bangalore airport. My parents had arrived in Prasanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi ten days earlier and my father had taken quite ill shortly thereafter.

The following day, Dr. Safaya, the Director of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences gave me a patient hearing as I told him of my concerns regarding my Dad's condition and also my Mother's health as I noticed how ill she looked, being the sole caretaker of my father in his sickness. Both of them had undergone surgeries at this hospital several years ago, but I was not present then. My mother had her polycystic kidney problem resolved by surgery while Dad had had a prostate operation some years ago.

This time around, within 40 hours of my landing in Puttaparthi, my parents and I were led into the cardiac ward by the friendly young gentleman from the Director's office. Seshu Prasad handed us over to the lady who filled out the pre-screening information for us as we waited in a clean and quiet ward, outside the doctor's office.

You Step in and Healing Begins...

Living in Canada, I have seen hospitals with waiting areas of compatible cleanliness and order, but the environment here was quite unique. Polite and pleasant *seva dal* volunteers were guiding the patients in rows. Despite the large number of people waiting, the decibel level was unusually low. Patients and their families seemed calm, quiet and relaxed. A sense of peace and serenity seemed to seep into one's soul. By this time, even my parents seemed reassured that they were in safe hands and everything was going to turn out fine. This sense of hope and optimism seemed to pervade through all parts of the hospital. Walking through the corridors I realized how peaceful the environment in the hospital was despite the large number of patients and personnel inside the building. Also conspicuous by their absence were the jam-packed parking lots one would expect at a facility of such magnitude.

Looking around I noticed most of the clientele was from rural backgrounds or out-of-towners and had therefore accessed the hospital by public transport, explaining the absence of parking nightmares typical of such super-specialized hospitals elsewhere. In Toronto, one would have to struggle to find a parking spot in a hospital vicinity and the typical charge for every 30 minutes of parking being upwards of \$6!

Around us were men, women and children from all parts of India, most of them quite oblivious of who Sri Sathya Sai Baba is, except the provider of their free healthcare. An unusually peaceful environment pervaded the space as people sat patiently for their turn. In some places, television monitors were showing glimpses of the Sports Day Meet of the Sri Sathya Sai University, located a few kilometers away.

Parents with children, Muslim women in *burkhas*, men smelling of *beedis*, with *paan*-stained teeth sat calmly, waiting for their audience with the cardiologists. The general mood in the hospital evoked a sense of civility among the patients including those from rural background with little or no formal education. Everyone seemed to be on their best behaviour.

Despite the packed halls, the hospital did not have the usual smell of disinfectant I have come to associate with such places since my childhood. The floors were polished clean and so was the furniture – neat, tidy and comfortable. The seating was arranged in rows, keeping the crowd in order. To my surprise, I learned, all custodial, janitorial, crowd management and chaperoning duties at the facility are performed by the dedicated *seva dal* volunteers on a rotational basis year-round from every state of India.

Spontaneous Empathy All Round

Soon, we were called by a doctor who looked young enough to be a student of the local university, dressed as he was in the students' unofficial uniform of white untucked shirt and trouser. He was most patient and proved to be an excellent listener. He read through the list of my parents' symptoms that I had prepared and asked them detailed questions. He was in no rush and examined them thoroughly. He came across as a thorough professional but what moved me most was his mannerism. He seemed very accessible to both my parents, most patient as he listened to and examined them and even more respectful as he explained what he wanted them to do and why.

Like most medical professionals in the facility, he was multi-lingual, facilitating effective doctor-patient communication. He spoke to my Dad in English and to Mom in Hindi and was extremely polite and respectful to both. I also heard him speak to other patients in Telegu, the local language. I had not met a doctor with such fine human qualities, especially humility, before. As we left his office to go for the diagnostic testing he had recommended, I could not help but ask him his name. Just interacting with Dr. Sunil Agarwal during the assessment proved therapeutic for both my parents and quite reassuring for me. We could use such calm and respectful doctors to soothe a nerve or two in our Canadian health-care system, I thought to myself. Aren't our doctors generally rushed between patients?

Professional technicians put my parents through a battery of diagnostic tests for their respective cardio assessments. The *seva dal* volunteers from the state of Gujarat were on duty at that time and the lady volunteer overseeing the flow of patients was most polite and understanding when my absent-minded Dad left the facility leaving his shirt behind. She gave me enough time to bring him back to get dressed properly.

When we returned in the afternoon to collect the results and discuss the next course of action with the doctor, we had some time on our hands. We visited the central foyer of the hospital, to gawk in silence at its awe-inspiring architecture and décor. Spotlessly clean, quiet and breezy, the space is the spiritual heart of the hospital that heals patients with the love that blows in its soothing breeze and the consideration that flows from its staff. The *seva dal* volunteer on duty by the reception desk advised us where to place our footwear for safe keeping, as he watched it for us. It was yet another calming experience to just stand in the hallowed cathedral, staring silently at its high-ceiling and dome and bowing to the statue of Lord Ganapathi, the personification of the inner will within each of us to overcome all obstacles.

At the end of the day, when I returned home with the cardiac assessment for both my parents, I felt deeply gratified that they had received the best possible medical attention where the doctors were driven by their overall welfare, not billing issues which often prompt uncalled for surgeries and procedures. And funny enough, I had not swiped any credit cards or health insurance cards to foot the bill for the consultation, diagnostic procedures or any other medical attention that had come our way and was on par if not better than anything I have experienced in the Canadian healthcare system of which most of us in Canada are quite proud. And yes, I have had my share of hospital visits and stays and can compare the experience quite objectively.

A few days into the cardio assessment and treatment, we were ready for the trip to the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Whitefield, on the outskirts of Bangalore city for a Neurological check-up. Waiting in the reception area, I struck a conversation with a Muslim lady, who had, just like my parents and I, traveled a long distance to be there. She hailed from rural Orissa in Eastern India and she spoke to me in a smattering of Hindi and Oriya. She was waiting there as her son was completing some paper work in the office. She explained how she had a heart problem and had gone from one district of Orissa to another, seeking medical treatment for her problem. Finally, a kind doctor in one of the bigger towns had told her that she needed an expensive surgical procedure which she could avail free of cost at this hospital.

Some are Blissfully Unaware of the Source

During the course of our conversation, I told her about my parents and their health concerns and I assured her that neither she nor my parents could receive better medical attention anywhere in the whole wide world and it wasn't going to cost anyone a single penny. She seemed pleased and

reassured to hear it. I then casually asked her if she knew who was behind this huge blessing of free world-class healthcare and she confessed she had no idea. I pointed to the large picture of Bhagavan Baba behind the reception desk and suggested that she visit Puttaparthi to behold this loving being after her successful surgery and before the long trip back to her native Orissa.

Some time later, when I was preparing to take my parents for their pictures for the registration procedure, I brushed shoulders with some Catholic nuns in their black and white habits, who were also in line for medical attention. Soon a stranger approached me and asked for directions to see Him, pointing to Baba's big picture behind the desk. He explained that his mother, the lady from Orissa had told him about our tête-à-tête earlier on and was keen to see Sai Baba. I wrote some details on a piece of paper and advised him to seek more information from the hospital staff once his mother had successfully undergone the heart surgery. He seemed determined to seek the source of all the consideration and care his mother was receiving.

We had arrived on a Tuesday morning and were told to return on Thursday to see the Senior Consultant and Head of Department of Neurology, Dr. Suresha Kodapala. Initially I was concerned about ensuring my parents' well-being at a local hotel till the appointed date. As their anticipation mounted, so did the consequent sense of relief that followed our meeting with the Neurologist Dr. Kodapala.

It's the Personal Touch, More Than Professional Finesse

Thorough, meticulous, patient, multi-lingual, respectful and most humble, the doctor by the sheer power of his personality proved to be the soothing balm my parents needed to feel reassured and hopeful. He examined my father's records from his doctor in Delhi and followed through on all previous diagnostic assessments. He also conducted a number of simple tests on each of them for their respective problems. Two medical students from France joined us during the consultation as observers. I sure hope that along with Dr. Kodapala's professional insights, the two young ladies will emulate his finesse in patient interaction. That is the priceless lesson that will make their internship here worth every bit of the effort. I, for one, would never have expected such sobriety, love and care from a doctor who had just finished his rounds in the neuro ward and had a hall packed with patients awaiting his attention for the rest of his very long day. There was no dearth of either patients or patience in this doctor's practice.

Here too, we went through halls packed with patients waiting calmly for their diagnostic and blood tests. The silence was almost deafening as there was an unexplained paradox between the large numbers seated in various areas and the silence that pervaded around them. Of course, you could almost hear a gentle "shhh..." from the picture of Bhagavan Baba pointing a finger to His lips that is posted around the hospital. It is a constant reminder to practice silence for He reminds us that it is only in the depths of silence that the voice of God can be heard. Who could deny the calming impact of the outer silence on the patients' inner anxiety?

As I juggled between my parents through separate areas, for their individual procedures, we met and spoke to families from as far as Gwalior, Delhi and Mathura in central and north India and a majority from the four south Indian states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the state in which this facility is located. Everyone was there for a different reason but the common thread that ran through all the accounts we were privy to was this sense of satisfaction that they had finally reached the ultimate ‘temple of healing’ where anything that could possibly be done for their problem would be made available to them—the very best the medical world had to offer. And nobody was worried about the suitcase full of money they would need to pay for it. What a reassurance! Half the cure lay in that freedom from worry about the expense and the rest in knowing they were in such good hands.

Looking at the many patients waiting for MRI’s, CT Scans, EEG, ECG, ECHO and blood works, I could not help but wonder if any of them even realized that for such diagnostic procedures, operations, consultations ... they or their insurance company would be paying thousands of dollars to a healthcare system that is driven by profit elsewhere in the world. Most patients and their families appeared pleased to have found this oasis of medical care where they can leave worries about payments outside the gate of the hallowed premises.

During our follow-up appointment with Dr. Kodapala, I found myself groping for words to express my gratitude to him for the sensitivity he had shown to my father in particular, while assessing his condition and in discussing it with me alone, while my parents had stepped outside. Despite the bleak prognosis, he had assured us that Bhagavan is known to reverse such cases and we should continue the medication and write to Him for divine intervention. His concerned and reassuring tone and sensitivity moved me immensely and I felt this lump in my throat preventing me from articulating my appreciation to him for being a good human being apart from being a great neurologist.

Everyone from the young lady, Dr. Sumona Paul, who examined my parents during pre-screening to the many young men and women, most of them former students of the Sri Sathya Sai University, practice and personify the qualities of selflessness and universal love that have become synonymous with Bhagavan Baba.

‘Patient Devo Bhava’ – The ‘Patient is God’

The system is rare not only because it engages medical professionals of only world-class professional qualifications, and has the state-of-the-art diagnostic facilities that bring relief to the ailing patients in the heart of rural or suburban India at \$0 cost to those who receive it, but more so because of the love, respect and dignity that each patient is treated with.

Next time I hear a divine discourse of Bhagavan Baba begin with the words “Divyatmaswarupalaras” (meaning, embodiments of divine *atma*) I can stand

tall and say yes, my parents and hundreds of thousands of others have been treated as just that, the embodiments of the divine at His hospitals.

As I told Bhagavan Baba in my note of gratitude, His doctors and hospital staff emulate His nobility. By the sheer power of its purity, the holistic healthcare system started by Him can bring around a spiritual revival around the globe by eradicating disease and suffering – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual among all peoples, especially the poorest of the poor. His is the only healthcare system that infuses such confidence and hope among India's hapless and helpless poor. It truly brings those on the very fringe of the decision makers' peripheral vision into the spotlight, addressing their concerns, fears and problems with love, respect and dignity. This outreach and accessibility alone is worth the entire mammoth effort.

Secondly, it is the healthcare system that truly practices, day in and day out, the holistic concept of treating the whole person, not just an ailment. This came through loud and clear in the manner in which my parents were dealt with by every lab technician, receptionist, and volunteer and of course, the doctors.

Freedom from the anxiety of having to mortgage one's property, life and family to foot the bill for such sophisticated tertiary care is half the cure. What would have amounted to a six figure payment stub in dollars for compatible medical attention in Canada cost my parents Rs.0. Hard to believe but we made no payments, and paid for absolutely nothing except for the beverages, snacks and meals which were also highly subsidized. I think an entire day's meals and snacks at the hospital bakery and canteen cost all 3 of us less than \$1 in total. The generosity of the system is overwhelming. It makes you search your soul deeper for more goodness within. This no-cost to patient approach definitely helps fast track patient recovery at a mental and emotional level.

Heavenly Healthcare on Earth and It's Replicable

To sustain such an enormous project, apart from effective hospital management, the key to its success lies in its altruistic vision driven by spiritual activism. An incredible sense of sacrifice and social responsibility by those who have much to share is canalized to bring healthcare to those who lack it and this indeed is spiritual socialism at its best.

The size of the world's economy, the budgets of the UNO, the WHO and NGO's suggests that there is enough wealth in the world to facilitate such models in every city and town around the globe. What is lacking is the will and motivation to undertake such projects and mobilize dedicated and professional men and women to execute it. In case of the Sathya Sai healthcare model, it is Bhagavan Baba who is the sole motivator, role model and inspirer of millions of devotees who have willingly made personal sacrifices to be a part of His mission to uplift mankind through loving service. Through His personal example, Baba has taught His staff to put their heart and souls into their work and consider it as their ultimate worship.

The West may have its hospitals with advanced technologies and qualified doctors, but it still has much to learn from the Sathya Sai healthcare model. The greatest lesson I received through my experience is the system's spiritual wisdom to deliver the relief in the awareness that each time you lead in a patient into the consultation room, you are interfacing with God and more importantly, money or profit has no place in such a sacred relationship.

If there is a model worthy of replication all around the globe, be in the American heartland where millions of poor Americans and illegal immigrants lack access to tertiary healthcare, or in the poverty-stricken and disease-ridden Africa, or war-torn Iraq or Afghanistan, it is this.

Upon our return, my parents and I are more grateful than ever before to Bhagavan Baba and see Him as the one force behind this ultimate altruism that has made such unparalleled healthcare accessible to all – from India's poorest to its elite and everyone in between, absolutely free of cost. There are no barriers of any kind – economic, social, racial, religious... it is pure pluralism at its best. Here there is no two tier system in place. All is One, and everything is universal, including access to the system. What the great masters of the past propagated as *Advaita-Vedanta* (non-dualism), Baba has translated into action through His healthcare model, a reality that is overwhelming to grasp, leaving those it touches, gasping in awe and gratitude.

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(Statistics from inception till 31-03-2007)

From SSSIHMS, PG

1	Total number of patients who attended Cardiac OPD	716117
2	Total number of Cardiac Surgeries	16450
	Cardiology Catheterisation	17924
3	Total number of patients who attended Urology OPD	325932
4	Total number of Urology Surgeries	29675
5	Total number of patients who attended Ophthalmology OPD	323170
6	Total number of Ophthalmology Surgeries	31157

From SSSIHMS, WF

1	Total number of patients who attended Cardiac OPD	277334
2	Total number of Cardiac Surgeries	7437
	Cardiology Catheterisation	16347
3	Total number of patients who attended Neurology and Neuro Surgery OPD	147693
4	Total number of Neurology Surgeries	6928

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the July issue

Feedback on the Cover Story - *The Legend of Sai Geetha... Insurpassable and Eternal.*

I am not able to say the impact in words. In fact words fails to explain the impact of the article on me about the love of the saint elephant Sai Geetha towards God.

Even if you add a million pages more, it will be too short. If you can collect more love stories about Sai and Geetha it will be awesome. And if you can publish a series as part - I, II etc each month about Sai Geetha it will be great, but I can understand the practical difficulties. Thank you so much for this lovely and wonderful article. Thank you so much for your time dear heart to heart.

Jai Sairam,
Ashitha.

Dear H2H Team, Sai Ram.

I just read the cover story of Sai Geeta and her relationship with Swami. You cannot imagine the inner inspiration that it brings me, and I gently wept at my work desk as I finished reading this incredible story of love. I live and work in Perth Australia and have known of and followed Swami since 1986, but have never seen Him physically. (But I have been blessed many times of His darshan in my dreams). He has also saved my life (literally) from 2 motorcycle accidents and a drowning as a youth, but that is another story! I only want to let you know thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for printing these amazing stories of love and devotion because they are very inspiring.

Sai Ram,
Paul Bachman.

Dear H2H Team,

I just finished reading the above story. For me it is marvellous that Swami gives us the opportunity to participate in the life of this little Princess and that He allows us to know about the bond between Him and Sai Geetha. Non stop tears were flowing while reading about the Divine Love between Him and Her. But this is not the first time. It happened to me before, concerning the preceding article about Sai Geetha from February: "A Mystifying Tale of Unmatched Love".

Last Christmas time, when I was in Prashanti I spent some time with Sai Geetha and before I left again for Germany, I went to Her to tell Her goodbye and that I will return - but She is no more. This hurts my heart very much. The lesson Bhagavan gives us with all that concerns this pure celibate Soul is

obvious and apparent. My personal longing is to experience a fraction of Her devotion and love for Swami. And this depends on Swami's Divine Will.

Loving regards,
Hannelore, Germany.

Dear brothers, Sairam,

I had the wonderful opportunity to be in Swami's school and college between 1983 and 1992. We also had a great blessing of having Sai Geetha in front of the hostel the whole of the stay there.

The cover story on Sai Geetha is a wonderful ode to her legacy. The story was touching and heart rending - Swami Himself mentioned that Sai Geetha was the epitome of love and devotion and most of us need to imbibe that from her. Her soul rests in peace.

With warm love,
M Nagesh Babu.

Dear H2H Team,

The cover story was superb! Though it took me two days and several sittings to finish the reading, it was worth the effort. Sai Geetha was indeed a true "devotee in action". I was fortunate to touch and feed her at least six or seven times. Let me, join all of you and other devotees, to pay my last respect and prayers to our departed dear Sai Geetha.

Sai Ram,
Venugopal, Canada.

Sai Ram,

Thank you so much for this wonderful story about the relationship between Swami and His elephant. It moves you to tears. It is a pity, that many photographs didn't come through. May be there is another possibility to show them? I hope so. From this story I learned that Sai Geetha could read our minds, which I also noticed during Swami's 75th Birthday celebrations. I was sitting on my wheelchair in the stadium, not far from the dais and the path along which Swami was expected to come. It was a cloudy day. Finally the procession came with Sai Geetha in front. When she was coming close to us patients, I thought: 'Oh, Geetha, you look beautiful! Isn't it nice to see your Lord again? You must be as happy as we are!' Immediately Geetha stopped walking, looked at me and lifted her trunk, sniffing the air. I kept communicating mentally with her. Her caretaker tried to persuade her to move on, but she didn't obey, still standing there with her trunk high up in the air. Understanding that this situation must have been somewhat awkward for her caretaker I decided to try to persuade her my way, by thinking: 'Geetha, I think it is better to walk on to your place from where you can welcome our beloved Lord better. He will surely be pleased with you.' Right after I had been thinking this, she lowered her trunk and continued majestically her way to her place.

For me it was clear, that she had read my mind, but I didn't tell anyone until reading a similar story in your tale. Now I know for sure that it was true and not my imagination carrying me away.

Although Swami says that He is not grieving, I can't help for feeling sorry for Him, for on the human side, it must be a loss to miss the only creature that loved Him so directly, with no nonsense, and that simply couldn't lie to Him, because she was an animal. For her there were no doubts, just unconditional Love and Faith. We will remember her with great loving respect and awe.
With Sai Love, Henriette N.M. Schakel

Dear H2H,

What a great article! Sai Geetha's devotion and Love for Swami brought tears and I was overwhelmed when I finished reading the article. The article was written extremely well and I forgot myself and stayed by Sai Geetha. Thank you so much. May Swami Bless you all.

In Loving Sairams,
Jay Ram, Toronto, Canada.

This article about Sai Geetha and her love for Swami has clearly depicted what true love is. Sai Geetha has made me feel really small in front of her. A few words to her:

My Dearest Sister Sai Geetha,

I have no words to express my wonder at your pure and unsullied love for Swami. I guess the tears that fell from my eyes when I was reading this article would've told you all that I felt about your relationship with Swami. I bow down before you from the bottom of my heart.

Sai Ram, Your Loving sister,
Roshni R.

Sai Ram Dear brothers,

I'm extremely thrilled to read your article on The Legend of Sai Geetha. You all have done a marvellous job – unsurpassed by any I've read so far! Sai Geetha, an inspiration in itself, has indeed left a legacy of its devotion to our Swami, unrivalled by any in this day and age. Thank you once again for this beautiful offering to Swami's beloved Sai Geetha.

May Swami bless you all.
Shobhna Maharaj

Dear H2H team,

I have carefully gone thru the whole Cover Story about Sai Geetha. Not only that I am impressed but totally moved after reading the detailed information and wonderful description of all the events after she left the body.

No doubt, she was and will continue to be an example of "devotion in action"--an eye opener for many of us to follow this example in our lives. Of course,

Bhagavan's love for us all, including for Sai Geetha, will continue to be a motivating factor in our lives.

The continuity of events is so well maintained that reading interest continues all thru. The whole story had a very long lasting impact on us. Myself and wife will surely talk about Sai Geetha between our friends and relatives, having known and understood so much about her after reading this story, which we would not have done otherwise.

Great job done! Our congratulations to all.

JK Dewan.

Sai Ram!

I have just completed your cover story on Sai Geetha. How touching and inspirational! An example of devotion chosen to teach us via the costume of an elephant. May I become a devotee like Sai Geetha! This is my prayer and yearning today.

Jai Sai Ram.

Wilbert M. Stephenson, New York, USA.

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

The cover story on Sai Geetha was excellent. Tears were hiding my vision when I was reading. I really felt very much moved. I now know what Pure Love and Devotion is.

I have very little knowledge on Shri Sai as a divine form. I got this article from my friend as an email. Now I feel very bad for missing His darshan when He came to Chennai. Maybe I'll get it some day if He blesses me. Keep up the good work of enlightening people like me who have very little exposure to Shri Sai's love and greatness. Sarvam Krishnaarpanam.

Spiritually Yours,

Ramya

Sai Ram to H2H team,

It was just wonderful, I have no words to explain at all. I could not read the entire article in one go, as I was choked and my eyes filled with tears, so I had to read it bit by bit to complete it. There was so much love and devotion depicted through her life which we were fortunate to witness in this Kaliyuga. We only read of Lord Hanuman but now we have seen her before our very own eyes. Dear Swami you have one true Devotee. Thank you for presenting Sai Geetha's Love in such a wonderful form.

With Regards,

Manjula C.K.

Om Sai Ram,

I am very much inspired with this story; really it is a source of inspiration for

me. I can't express more than this. Really my eyes are filled with water while reading this story. No words to express Swamy's love.

OM SAI RAM,
G. Vineeth.

Aum Sri Sai Ram!

The cover story on Sai Geetha was wonderful and touching! I couldn't hold back my tears as I read about her love and devotion for our Swamy. It was such a detailed account that though unfortunately I have not seen her, I could feel her through your article. Thank you so much!

Love,
Radha N.

I was so moved by the story of Sai Geetha and her devotion and relationship with our beloved Satya Sai Baba. Today is the first of July 2007 and I was drawn to find my beloved Sai Baba.....for a long time I had lost touch as I could find no website. It was meant to be this day that I found you and am so grateful for now I can once again share in the glory and abundance of love and wisdom that emanates from the Lord. A most beautiful story, wonderful photographs, thank you so much.

With great love and blessings,
Isabel Morris, Philippines.

**Feedback on: *He Is My Swami - Conversation with Mrs. Padma Kasturi*
Part - 3**

Sai Ram Dear Members of the H2H Team,
I live in the UK. I really liked the articles on Padma Kasturi, and am looking forward to the next edition. I really would like to read more such conversations with Sai devotees.

Loving Regards,
Nimish Ubhayakar.

Sairam Dear H2H,

This article by Mrs.Padmini Hundy in July H2H is very good and inspiring. One thing I came to know from this article is we can serve our beloved Swami not only with this body but without also. The author says Swami took her father because He has work to do with him. Please keep publishing more life time experiences of our dear Swami's devotees.

Sairam,
Usha.

Om Sai Ram,

I really enjoyed reading all the articles of Padma Kasturi. They are all very touching and bring to light the love and affection Swami has for His devotees. Articles of this nature would be welcome definitely.
Thiru Thirumalai, Canada.

Sai Ram!

Can we please have more lovely interviews with Padma Kasturi – it is so lovely to read and she has so much precious information.
Josephine Meister.

Feedback on: *Amazing Grace In Africa*

Sai Ram,

I am so happy to have read this article, I will keep it as a treasure in my heart and I believe it is thanks to the grace of the Lord that I am able to read this and be happy.

With love, Sai Ram,
Mariette Sentobin, Belgium.

Feedback on: *Gita For Children*

Dear Heart 2 Heart team,

I have just happened upon 'Gita for Children' and am looking forward to reading all the previous 31 parts I have missed. I am a student studying to become a yoga teacher as well as an educational teacher. These articles are perfect for me to learn from, as I study the history and philosophy behind yoga. Many thanks. Om Shanti,
Suzie Leadabrand.

Feedback on: *The Sai Movement In Puerto Rico*

Sairam,

Thank you for wonderfully inspirational articles, such as this one, from around the world. I particularly enjoy reading how people have put into practice Swami's spiritual education/educare programs in various ways. Thank you again for your service.

Om Sairam.

Veena Sundararaman, Sai Spiritual Education Coordinator, Palm Bay/Melbourne, Florida, USA.

Feedback on: *A Life Time of Love*

Sairam,

A Life Time Of Love is fantastic. It shows the acquired merit of the person. Not all are so fortunate. Swami is protecting me also in the same way.

Rgds,

R.Dattatri.

I felt very much moved by your article mentioned above. Our beloved Bhagavan Baba is a unique Avatar, that His devotees are blessed and granted so much bliss in this Kaliyugam. My whole hearted thanks to the Radiosai for conveying such good experiences of the devotees.

With love and regards,

BCRamanna, Hyderabad, India.

Om Sai Ram,

Thank you for posting this miraculous article, it is so amazing and wonderful to read the leelas and miracles of Baba. On reading this my faith in Baba, that He is always watching us and protecting us and without His will nothing can happen, has increased.

Thank you Padminiji, for posting your experiences with Baba, so that all of us can read and share the joy and increase our faith in Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. May God be with everyone.

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Padma Somavaram, California, USA.

Feedback on: *Prashanti Diary*

Dear team, Sai Ram,

Wishing to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your achievements: reading the Prashanti Diary of June moved me to tears. "Chaala Santosham", as Swami would say. Go on with this wonderful service of yours, it brings love and light in

the hearts of those who are not longer able to come to Prashanti in their physical form.

Hein Vink, Holland.

Feedback on: the series *Search For Infinity*

Dear Prof. G. Venktaraman,

I have gone through the series of articles written by you under the title *Search For Infinity*. They have been really informative and clarified various difficult concepts in a very easy way. These articles would really enhance the clarity of presentation of astro physics option to my IB Diploma students.

I have a request for you sir: If there is an article interlinking the Bhutakasa, Chidakasa and Chittakasa which Swami quotes quite often. I thank each and every one at the Heart2Heart team and also Radio Sai Global Harmony for the wonderful articles and programmes that are being put up.

With regards and love,

Jaisairam,

CVK Sastry, HOD Physics, Good Shepherd International School, Ooty.

Feedback on: Sai Inspires

Sairam, Dear "Heart2Heart" Team!

Sai Inspires is truly a wonderful inspirational service. When I read one of the points in the nine-point Sadhana program outlined for Sai youth, regarding reading Baba's discourses daily, a thought came to me as to how nice it would be if I could receive excerpts from Baba's discourses daily in my email (since I access email daily). Further, it would be just perfect if that is accompanied by an image of Baba. It also came to my mind that maybe I could try writing a computer program to do this.

But then Baba immediately put another thought in my mind about checking the RadioSai.org website to see if any such service exists already. And when I checked, sure enough, I immediately found "Sai Inspires" which fulfilled all of the above ideas plus added more! I am truly amazed at how carefully this service has been designed. Thank you so much for performing this wonderful service for all Sai devotees.

Jai Sairam!

I enjoy reading all the messages from Baba and trying to make my life much better to be a good human being and love all. Thanks a lot for all the nice and beautiful messages of Baba.

kabhi alvida na kehna.

Love, Sunila.

Feedback on the Get Inspired Story *The Ultimate Solution* and the Sunday Special from 8th July *What Kind Of Bliss Is Ours*

Sai Ram Dear Members of the H2H team,

I really liked the story "The Ultimate Solution". It has struck a chord within me. Please do keep on putting more such inspiring stories on the H2H website. I also liked the Sunday Special article "What Kind of Bliss is Ours?" I had heard that there have been incidents of former students of the institute standing up against corruption in their professions - I would very much like to read about such incidents in Sai Inspires.

Jai Sai Ram,

Nimish Ubhayakar.

Sai Ram,

The Sai Student in his article painted before the readers an appropriate and profound analogy yet in simple terms. It was an eye opener for me and it could not have been in more simple terms. As he rightly points out, let us not be Dick, Tom and Harry and lose no further time in understanding the Sai comet, for we do not know when it will appear again.

Regards,
Kartik.

Feedback on the Sunday Special from 22nd July: *Hamlet And The Dreamliner*

Om Sai Ram, Dear Heart to Heart team,

This article makes you think. It occurred to me that as Sai devotees, we are beholden to set an example. Consider the amount of time, energy and money we spend visiting Prashanti Nilayam. Don't you think that with less visits to actually "see" Swami in the flesh, could we not develop a better ability to see Him in spirit? Swami has indeed pointed out that we do not need to travel to see Him, as He is with us all the time. If we concentrated on this don't you think it would be more beneficial to the rest of humanity because, as minds are joined, we would be actually transmitting our thoughts to the collective unconscious, and thereby, to the collective consciousness. I am carrying out experiments with patients demonstrating to them the power of their thoughts and how these affect their environment.

So what I am saying is this: we can set an example of "ceiling on desires" and, in the same token, contribute to the consciousness raising of humanity.

Although I am not one to often quote from the Bible, I would like to remind you of the story of Lot and his request to "God" to save Sodom (or Gomorra).

Allegedly, God said to Lot: "Find me 10 just men and I shall spare the city".

Lot couldn't find these just men, so God destroyed the city. It seems that the message is the following: Only a small number of people are needed to effect a change in the consciousness of the larger population. Of course, the change needed has to be radical and profound. Isn't that why Swami is here?

Much love,

Jacqueline Trost MA, Australia.

Sairam,

The article clearly puts forward the truth that is in my mind also. The western culture places more emphasis on acquisition and enjoyment. Can the world support or sustain that style for all its billions of residents? Swami's advice of simple living and less desires is verily the answer. But how to spread this to

the masses is the crux of the problem. There is no other way; we have to take Swamiji's teachings to the masses. The article is timely and thoughtful and truthful. First I will change myself and try to stand as an example. Thanks to H2H team.

Om Sairam,

N.Balasubramanian.